

WORKSHOP

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**No Conflict, No Trust, or Why Democrats and
Populists are Not Equally Trustworthy**

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Abstract

Both populists and democrats resort to the notion of trust to justify their political agenda. While at first sight they seem to share a conceptual understanding of trust – namely that trustworthy politicians are those who act in the name, and for the sake, of the people – I argue that democratic and populist understandings of trust differ, in that the latter is unpolitical and therefore inadequate to inform political relationships. The populist approach is unpolitical because it overlooks the role of conflict in shaping the object of trust, the context in which trust relations are demanded and established, the purposes of trust relations, and the reasons that ground justified trust. As an alternative, I propose a democratic conception of trust that is politics-sensitive, according to which trust relations are established despite and, to a certain extent, thanks to the pervasiveness and endurance of institutionalized conflict.