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28. Populism and the Media. Cross-National Findings and Perspectives

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Introduction

European media systems have gone through major changes in the last few decades, and these changes have included increased opportunity structures for the dissemination of populist messages. Chapter 12 ('Switzerland') rightly states that the disappearance of the traditional party press, increased media ownership concentration, dependence on advertising, and a stronger orientation toward news values have worked in favor of a growing populist discourse. The newly established online media are seen as having a high affinity to populism's rhetorical persuasion because both aim for the "quick kick/click" with a broad audience. As was stated in Chapter 1 in this volume, the role that the media play in the dissemination of populism is largely under-explored. In the classical research literature dealing with populism (see, e.g., Canovan, 1981; Taggart, 2000), communication and media are not addressed at all. When political scientists make the media their subject, they see the media mostly only as a neutral platform for populist leaders' appearances and messages. One exception is Mudde (2007), who dedicates at least a few pages to this topic in his book *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (pp. 248–253). He elaborates in particular on the assumption that tabloids and commercial television share a close relationship with populist communication.

This chapter is intended to provide information and insights that will make it easier to understand the media's role in populist political communication. Although many observers agree that the media are of central importance, a "striking paradox" (see Chapter 2 in this volume) is that very little empirical research is done on this subject. The 24 chapters that deal with specific countries in this volume (Parts II–IV) confirm the weak state of research. Only a few chapters mention studies that are dedicated primarily to the media and that have reached consistent results withstanding scrutiny. In this concluding chapter on populism and the media, we have tried to systemize and synthesize the core statements made in the country-specific chapters (Parts II–IV) regarding the media, despite the unsatisfactory state of the research literature.

Three Patterns of Media Coverage of Populist Parties

The few systematic studies dealing with the relationship between populism and the media discuss how intensely the media cover populist actors and how the media evaluate them. We recognize three patterns from these discussions.

The first pattern is that a populist party seems to receive less coverage than other parties if its electoral strength and standing in the polls is low and if the other parties jointly install something like a *cordon sanitaire* (formally or informally) to exclude a populist party from power. This happened in Belgium, for instance. Once the populist party passes a certain threshold of success, however, media coverage becomes more intense and nuanced.

Accordingly, the framing of the political party Vlaams Belang shifted from “controversial outsider” to that of an “established outsider.” A similar effect could be observed in the Netherlands, where the newspaper coverage on right-wing populist parties was first predominantly negative but with time became more versatile and increasingly understanding of populist ideology. This first pattern confirms the basic assumptions underlying Mazzoleni, Stewart, and Horsfield’s (2003) phase model of media support during the life cycle of populist parties.

The second pattern reflects the idea that negative coverage cannot be all bad. In Sweden, for instance, the Sweden Democrats were covered more and more intensively over time until the party received more media attention than several of the established parties, some of which were even in government. The growing amount of media coverage had a positive effect on the Sweden Democrats’ poll numbers, in contrast to those of other parties. Although much of the coverage was negative, it nevertheless benefited the Sweden Democrats. The positive effect of increased visibility appeared to have trumped the negative effect of the tone of the coverage. A similar trend could be observed with regard to the Swiss People’s Party. It became the party with the largest voter base in Switzerland and is given by far the greatest attention by the media—a development that might have been mutually stimulating. But its news coverage in national newspapers and particularly on public broadcast television has often been unfavorable. Nonetheless, the party seems to actually benefit from this negative coverage because it allows the Swiss People’s Party to accuse other parties of receiving preferential media treatment. By using this “us against the mainstream” rhetoric, the party tries to turn the negative media coverage to their advantage by accusing the media of being part of the established elite and of being hostile to the Swiss People’s Party’s conservative, country-loving cause.

The third pattern is a critical media tenor toward populist parties out of concern for the healthy state of democracy. In Germany, right-wing populist parties can without exception expect critical media coverage. The same general reservations about right-wing populism are held by German courts and educational institutions. This shared attitude arises from a consensus among the elites and is explained by Germany’s history. Because this consensus was very actively conveyed by the media, right-wing populist parties in Germany had no long-lasting success. A similar consensus on populism’s negative effect on democracy exists among the elites in Portugal. Whether in editorials or news analyses, the Portuguese quality press equates populism with simplemindedness, lack of sophistication, and an overly emotional and moralistic approach to politics. If mentioned at all, populism is used as an insult among opposition politicians to delegitimize and degrade their opponents’ plans. In Israel, the explanation for the media’s sharp and unanimously critical view of conservative party leader Avigdor Liberman was journalists’ pro-democratic motivation rather than simple partisanship. Many Israeli journalists perceived Liberman’s plans regarding the Arab population as illegitimate and anti-democratic, and therefore found it necessary to respond with disapproval.

Although a lot of information is provided in Parts II–IV on how the news media tend to cover populist parties, little of this information is based on solid and systematic research. The patterns outlined here, and the patterns outlined in the remainder of this chapter, shall be subject to the conclusions and potential corrections of subsequent research.

Three Perspectives on Media Populism

The term media populism lends itself to three distinct perspectives: populism by the media, populism through the media, and populist citizen journalism.

Our inspiration for this threefold differentiation came from the Chapter 5 and 11 ('Norway' and 'Netherlands'). According to Plasser and Ulram (2003), whether the media is really disseminating populism in these three ways is dependent on the scope of the "populist newsroom logic"—a market-based approach to newsmaking that is open to these three means of dissemination. Even though only relatively few media outlets will intentionally construct populist resentments, many others may provide windows of opportunity for populist actors and populist citizens, thereby multiplying and magnifying their messages in a professionally produced environment. As explained in Chapter 7 ('Austria'), this populist newsroom logic is not limited to tabloid newspapers; it also appears in other types of outlets. Media organizations characterized by populist news logic are expected to present elections as personal plebiscites or competitive games using sports and war metaphors. In their public affairs coverage outside elections, these outlets rely on emotive stimulus words and dramatic visuals, and portray politics using sensationalized terms or with a sense of indignation. Finally, journalists in these newsrooms would define their role as mobilizers aiming to mobilize latent moods, resentments, and populist feelings (Plasser & Ulram, 2003).

The first perspective is *populism by the media*. It refers to media organizations actively engaging in their own kind of populism. Several chapters of this book indicate that something like a media-generated populism exists in several European countries. As with political populism, it seems useful to distinguish between ideological and stylistic elements.

With regard to journalistic ideology, the free press holds an anti-establishment attitude, which is reflected in its self-conception of the so-called "fourth estate." As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) write in their highly referenced work, *The Elements of Journalism*, journalists are to act as independent controllers of the elites in power. And journalists gain their strength from their close connection to the audience or people. Journalism has a built-in antagonism vis-a-vis political elites. But as discussed in Chapter 13 ('United Kingdom'), this antagonism has morphed into cynicism. British media have given up their previous deferential attitude toward politicians and revel in generally criticizing politicians' competence and integrity, which has become the permanent reporting mode. Substantive issues and policy deliberations are avoided or downplayed, whereas personalities, popularity, conflict, and strategy and tactics are emphasized. Politics is said to be displayed either as a game of winners and losers or as a remote spectacle of drama and corruption, of which the public should be suspicious (see Wayne & Murray, 2009).

An anti-establishment stance that simultaneously seeks to identify with the interests of the common people is ascribed to some Norwegian media organizations. Chapter 5 ('Norway') illustrates this point with its descriptions of the commercial broadcaster TV2, which often tries to create a dichotomy between those "up there" and those "down here" (see Waldahl, Andersen, & Ronning, 2003).

The media's efforts to align themselves with the common citizens is evident in several different ways. In Italy, as Mastropaolo (2011) shows, the media has a representative function that is in competition with conventional political representation. To ensure their centrality and audience orientation, the media relish exposing injustices suffered by individual citizens that result from the political elite's privileges and inefficiency. In Poland, the close alliance

with common citizens is reflected by an increasing popularization of news coverage. Favorite stylistic devices include personalization of political leaders at the expense of issue deliberation, reduced distance between journalists and politicians expressed by a more informal and personal conversational style, and reduced willingness to include experts and their more complex statements (Piontek, Hordecki, & Ossowski, 2013). According to Chapter 14 ('France'), the close alliance between the media and the people is demonstrated by the concentration on self-initiated opinion polls. The media use the rhetorical stylistic device of the opinion poll to insert themselves into the political process as presumed public representatives (Becker, 1997).

According to Swedish researcher Andersson (2010), the central ideological connecting element of media populism and political populism is the anti-establishment bias. The question why this bias mutated into a general cynicism toward politicians in Great Britain was answered by Wayne and Murray (2009), who pointed to two factors: the British media market's intensifying commercialism and journalists' overreaction to the professionalization of political communication management by the parties themselves. These views are compatible with Mazzoleni's (2008) understanding of media populism. Key indicators are, on the one hand, "cynicism of particular media outlets" and their exaggerated campaigns against alleged political shortcomings and, on the other hand, the "sweeping popularization" of news coverage due to highly commercialized media production that yields to general popular tastes (Mazzoleni, 2008, pp. 50–51).

As mentioned in Chapter 2 in this volume, the discursive construction of "anti-elitism" and "appeals to the people" by and through the media are of vital importance for the understanding of populist political communication. With regard to populism by the media, journalists' advocative attitude on behalf of the people and their critical attitude toward the elites usually remain vague and superficial. Journalists' main intention for using these strategies seems to be community building through processes of discursive construction according to media-specific professional and commercial goals.

The second perspective on media populism refers to *populism through the media*. Mazzoleni (2008) sees the main guilt of the media not in the dissemination of their own media-specific populism but rather in the strengthening of politicians' populist messages. In his opinion, populist parties and movements can count on some sort of "media complicity." When the media report on these actors' slogans, arguments, and ideological perspectives, they heighten their public visibility and perceived legitimacy. "In other words, the media, intentionally or not, may serve as powerful mobilization tools for populist causes" (Mazzoleni, 2008, p. 50).

Key to populism through the media is the assumption that there is a convergence of goals, which is usually unintentional, between the "production logic" of commercialized media and of populist political movements (Mazzoleni, 2008, pp. 54–55).

Populism through the media differs from populism by the media in three ways. First, it assumes that congruence between media logic and political populism is stylistic but not ideological. Second, media logic creates a favorable structure that is susceptible to populist messages and their seamless integration into editorial considerations and news content—without any conscious intention of the journalists themselves. The reason for this easy blending—which brings us to the third point—is that populism is of high news value.

Charismatic leaders, harsh rhetoric, and stirring issues hit all the right keys of newsworthiness. For this easy blending, Taguieff coined the term *télépopulisme* (2007, pp. 211–216) and thus explained the media successes of several political actors from Ross Perot (United States) to Silvio Berlusconi (Italy). They reached the visibility they craved in many media, including public service broadcasters.

This last point is important and leads us back to Mazzoleni’s statement that media support can exist *without* conscious intention. One can assume that many decision-makers in Europe’s newsrooms are critical of populist parties and populist movements. This attitude is often reflected in editorials that express reservations about populist actors. The official distancing in lead commentaries (although possibly countered by news items giving priority to populist issues and serving as positive amplifiers) explains why “mainstream” media outlets can become the target of populist attacks—for instance, for being part of the establishment or of a media conspiracy against a populist party (more on this below).

In Chapter 11, our Dutch colleagues argue that the media are more likely to be receptive to populist rhetoric than to be actively engaged in populism themselves. Most empirical evidence reviewed by them indicates that the media create favorable opportunity structures for populist actors to ventilate their ideas. This assessment is also shared by the authors of Chapter 9 (‘Germany’). They point out that features of a populist style such as the simplification of complex political issues correspond especially well to media logic. In Chapter 6 (‘Sweden’) the argument is made that—to the extent that populists can frame messages so that they fit storytelling techniques following media logic (simplification, personalization, polarization, confrontation, etc.)—it may be difficult for the media to resist covering populists. Certainly, the coverage might be negative, but it need not be damaging; Negativity has not hurt the Swedish Democrats, for example.

Several of the chapters dealing with Eastern Europe—such as Chapter 22 (‘Czech Republic’), Chapter 24 (‘Poland’), and Chapter 25 (‘Romania’)—emphasize that the congruence of stylistic elements between media logic and political populism is very strong—in the tabloids, in particular. This supposition has already been stated by Mudde (2007, p. 249); a conclusive empirical analysis, however, has not yet been undertaken. Other chapters addressing Eastern Europe stress a completely different but no less significant aspect. So far, the importance of media logic—largely based on a high degree of professionalism and independence in journalism—has been emphasized. However, Chapters 23 and 26 (‘Hungary’ and ‘Slovenia’) demonstrate that even a lack of media logic (i.e., a lack of professionalism and independence) can greatly ease the “passing on” of populist messages from the political side. In Hungary, the strength of the right-wing populist parties is seen to have led to a brutalization of the media discourse, and in Slovenia, voices are heard lamenting that the local media are disseminating xenophobic messages from the political side without their problematization.

Authors from Western Europe stress that political talk shows in particular play a key role in this regard. Cranmer (2011) investigated a variety of speaking situations in Switzerland involving political actors and found that television talk shows offered the highest degree of congruence between political and journalistic objectives. These media formats would therefore be the most effective tools to apply strategies such as “taking an anti-establishment position” or “demonstrating closeness to the people.” As for the Netherlands, Bos and Brants (2014) concluded that media formats that rely on including viewpoints of the people and on gaining broad public appeal will inherently be more populist than other formats. They found a great many populist messages in talk shows.

As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this volume, the media play a key role because they serve as important dissemination channels for politicians and important sources of information for citizens. The contributions from the country-specific chapters in Parts II–IV summarized here clearly illustrate that the way the media fulfill this intermediary role serves to spread populist political communication.

Populist citizen journalism is the third way in which populist newsroom logic can be observed. It occurs when media organizations open the gates to populist messages by audience members—usually in the form of reader comments on their websites. In Chapter 21 (‘Czech Republic’) we see that, although the editorial content of established news outlets may pursue a calm and sober approach to populist parties, the very same outlets may give, in their online editions, space for readers’ comments and blogs—many of which are not only populist in the general sense but apparently often actively incite hate against Roma or Muslims. Some of these blogs are written by populist politicians themselves. The authors of Chapter 21 call this approach on the part of newspapers hypocritical; the newspapers may formally abstain from populism on the editorial level but allow dissemination of populist and even racist discourse through the blogosphere, with the presumed intention of increasing the website’s viewership and profits from the accompanying online ads. The authors of Chapter 21 conclude that some of the biggest Czech news media are not just silent conveyors but, in fact, accomplices in the spreading of populist ideology through citizen journalism. Along the same lines, the authors of Chapter 11 (‘The Netherlands’) have observed that populism is strongly represented in readers’ comments in the online forums of tabloid newspapers.

One more aspect that is worth addressing in this context is the question of whether citizen discourse, on the one hand, and journalistic discourse, on the other, are increasingly decoupled. Unfortunately, this subject has so far not been studied, according to the authors of the various chapters in this volume. Some authors hint at anecdotal evidence, where elite-oriented “media viewpoints” and uninhibited “public resentments” seem to have diverged on sensitive issues such as immigration or Europe (e.g., in Germany). Others argue that no type of media can afford to go against public opinion, and all media are united with their central aim of engaging the ordinary citizen in the debate.

From a theoretical viewpoint, this three-way division of thinking about media populism seems beneficial. Which perspective is more relevant can only be answered empirically and will be left to future research.

Favorable Discursive Opportunity Structures: Five Factors

If one wants to advance theory formation with regard to the relationship between populism and the media, then the general conditions of “media business” that favor the dissemination of populist messages must be clarified. The authors of the 24 chapters in this volume that address individual countries emphasize five factors in particular.

The first factor is *media logic*. As has already been discussed above, many country-specific chapters in Parts II–IV point to the compatibility of media logic and populism. Mazzoleni (2008, p. 52) also stresses this connection when he speaks of unintended media complicity. To him, media logic is *the* necessary background for understanding populist political communication. This was a central outcome of the first, and for a long time only, cross-national study of the relationship between populism and the media (Mazzoleni

et al., 2003) and can be taken as a reliable indicator of the importance of media logic as a favorable factor.

The authors of the chapters in this volume point to three aspects of media logic that are especially favorable to the dissemination of populism: the media's interest in (a) conflict framing, (b) strategic framing, and (c) personalization. With respect to conflict framing, researchers from Denmark have determined that the news media tend to cover issues such as immigration or religion (especially Islam) by using a conflict perspective (e.g., immigrants being in conflict with Danish culture), which opens the news gates to populist parties by giving them an opportunity to express their views. In reference to strategic framing, the Chapter 14 ('France') emphasizes that it was mainly the French media's strong interest in opinion polls, "horse racing," and strategic implications that catapulted Marine Le Pen onto the national agenda as early as two years before the presidential election—which also contributed to her party's momentum. Similar findings are reported from Sweden, where much of the coverage of the Sweden Democrats was driven by the framing of politics as a strategic game. Gradually, the earlier *cordon sanitaire* gave way to more extensive coverage, and as the coverage of the Sweden Democrats increased, their poll numbers went up, suggesting that they had passed a threshold of electoral relevance. Finally, with regard to personalization, Chapter 25 ('Romania') reports findings from studies suggesting that the over-exposure of populist leaders has had a positive impact on their success in Romanian elections.

The second factor is *politically motivated media ownership*. The analyses of several countries, in particular those in Eastern Europe, explain media populism by pointing to the importance of politically motivated media owners. In Romania, the electoral success of the People's Party Dan Diaconescu can be partly attributed to exclusive exposure through a television channel owned by the party leader (Gherghina & Soare, 2013). A skilled and versatile media entrepreneur, Dan Diaconescu has chosen to use a tabloid-style TV station to convey his message and gain visibility and popularity. A similar situation can be observed in the Czech Republic, where Tomio Okamura, former leader of the Dawn of Direct Democracy, for a long time took advantage of having free space for his self-promotion on the largest Czech online news site, Idu.cz. Another blatant case from the Czech Republic is Andrej Babi, the leader of ANO 2011, who has served as deputy prime minister since 2014. In 2015, Babi's corporation, Agrofert, controlled two national newspapers, a chain of free regional weeklies, a national commercial radio station, and a cable music TV station. Having acquired the national newspapers less than five months before the 2013 parliamentary elections, he has been frequently accused of instrumentalizing these media to advance his own political goals and ambitions.

In Poland, the ultra-Catholic broadcaster Radio Maryja is described as aiming at mobilizing "excluded and disappointed people" and promising them to gain an adequate position in an idealized "heartland" that needs to be restored. The station is owned by a politically conservative religious movement and run by "Father Director" Tadeusz Rydzyk. As the Chapter 24 ('Poland') explains, Radio Maryja draws heavily on populist discourse in its support of political parties on the radical right. Finally, the Swiss People's Party (an example taken from a non-Eastern European country) benefits from supportive coverage in the nationalist bi-weekly *Schweizerzeit* as well as in the conservative weekly *Weltwoche*, the chief editors of which are both parliamentarians of the Swiss People's Party.

The third factor is *commercially motivated media ownership*. This factor not only applies to forms of ownership but also to related editorial missions. Two distinctions are of particular interest: first, between commercial broadcasters and public broadcasters and, second, between mass-market tabloid newspapers and upmarket quality newspapers.

Convincing findings that commercial television stations make stronger populist statements than public television stations seem to have been put forward only by scholars of one country. According to Chapter 5 ('Norway'), the private station TV2 uses an anti-elite communication style, whereas the public service broadcaster NRK applies a journalistic style that accepts the premises of the political system. In addition, the analyses of Poland and Romania (Chapters 24 and 25) demonstrate that previously state-owned television stations have abandoned their old party line in favor of a more popularized or populist communication style.

The assumption that tabloids are more susceptible to populism than quality newspapers (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2007) has been systematically examined in only two countries: the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The chapters discussing both of these countries (Chapters 11 and 13) show that no conclusive evidence could be found in support of this assumption. Either no differences were found or elitist tendencies were observed in tabloid news coverage and populist tendencies in quality coverage. In contrast, anecdotal evidence is reported upon in Chapters 22 and 25 from the Czech Republic and Romania that the tendency toward populist news reporting is stronger in these countries' tabloids. The state of the findings seems to be ambiguous and in need of further empirical examination.

To round out this point, we need to briefly address a related factor—the dependence on advertising. In Chapter 7 ('Austria') findings are presented from an Austrian study that demonstrated a significant positive relationship related to populism in free newspapers. The higher the proportion of print advertisements by a populist party in a free newspaper, the better the party's overall evaluation in the paper's news coverage. An Austrian study found a significant positive relationship between the amount of print advertisements and overall candidate evaluation in the free newspapers *Heute* and *Österreich*.

The fourth factor is *party issue ownership*. Mudde (2007) pointed out that issue ownership is another imperative factor that must be considered in order to understand the incidental symbiotic relationship between the media and populist parties. The media can unintentionally support political parties when emphasizing topics where a party has the issue ownership. Examples are reported in Chapter 3 ('Denmark') (Danish People's Party), Chapter 4 ('Finland') (True Finns Party), Chapter 8 ('Belgium') (Vlaams Belang), Chapter 12 ('Switzerland') (Swiss People's Party), and Chapter 14 ('France') (Front National). In addition, the most important topic across all media is immigration, often combined with national identity, crime, and loss of sovereignty. The focus of attention—both in the media and by researchers—is therefore clearly directed toward right-wing populist parties.

Finally, the fifth factor is *event environment and national issue culture*. Macro-societal factors such as scandals, political malaise, national crises, and right-wing political culture are favorable environments for the creation of populism conveyed by the media. (It should be noted that Chapter 27 in this volume lists further real-world conditions favoring the rise of populist political actors.) Studies in Finland (see Chapter 4 in this volume) indicate that the True Finns Party benefited from the intense media scrutiny of campaign finance regulations that had been violated by established parties. For several years, specifically between 2008 and 2011, the agrarian and the conservative center-right parties were exposed to fierce media

criticism. An even more extreme example from Italy is the massive “Clean Hands” corruption scandal of the mid-1990s, which exposed bribes made to Italian parties in excess of \$4 billion (U.S.) every year by companies hoping to receive government contracts. The judicial investigation led to the dissolution of many national parties and city councils. More importantly, it led to a form of political news reporting that questioned the basic principles of the Italian state and took on anti-systemic characteristics. Until the present day, Italian election coverage is characterized by high levels of negativity, cynicism, and adversarialism (focusing on political scandals and conflicts, shortcomings and failures). This kind of issue culture proved beneficial to populist challengers, as Chapter 17 (‘Italy’) argues.

The current national crisis in Greece favors the spread of conspiracy theories and radical viewpoints, a situation which drastically improves the chances for populist movements to flourish. Both the media in Greece and the media abroad played a key role in the success of Alexis Tsiparas’s SYRIZA movement. The foreign media had accused Tsiparas of a populist strategy even prior to his first election, without having had any negative influence on his position at home. Mazzoleni has argued that political malaise is a common condition for the growth of anti-political sentiments: “The media do play a role in disseminating it, either by simply keeping it on a country’s public agenda, or by spreading political mistrust and a mood of fatalistic disengagement—all elements that can be easily and promptly exploited by populist politicians” (2008, p. 50).

In Hungary, the editors of leading news outlets report symptoms suggesting that the discourse in the general public and the media is contaminated by radical right-wing rhetoric. In Chapter 23 (‘Hungary’) it is argued that the media’s simplification of problems and stereotypical selection of topics help to spread extremist narratives. Although the mainstream news media take a condemnatory position toward the right-wing populist Jobbik party (and perceive it as anti-democratic and extremist), critical analyses are published relatively rarely. Mainstream media reacted to Jobbik with outright rejection without argumentation, which the authors of Chapter 23 see as a plausible explanation of why the mainstream quarantine of Jobbik was ineffective.

Knowing about these context-sensitive factors is important since it helps us to contextualize our theorizing about the relationship between the media and populism. We take this opportunity to refer back to Chapter 2 in this volume, where Figure 2.2 emphasizes the need to take “situational factors” into account for an adequate understanding of populist political communication. We hope that our previous comments contribute to this end with regard to the link between populism and the media. But we have not yet told the full story.

Populism and Media Criticism

In Chapter 8 (‘Belgium’), it is mentioned that quality news outlets have sometimes used “exposure” strategies to show the “true face” of Vlaams Blok, particularly during election periods. For instance, the public broadcaster VRT explained in a special note on its democratic role why it treated the party differently. Also, newspapers occasionally distanced themselves from the party’s extreme ideas. For instance, on the day before the 2003 election, the newspaper *De Standaard* gave five potential reasons to vote for each political party but explicitly mentioned that there were no reasons to vote for the Vlaams Blok. Swedish scholar Andersson (2010) has argued that such antagonism is mitigated or disappears if a neo-populist party itself becomes part of the establishment due to electoral success. The antagonism will be strengthened, however, if a neo-populist actor is isolated and denied

any collaboration with the established parties.

A sure method for a populist actor to attract criticism from all media is to announce legislative initiatives that could be perceived as restricting the freedom of the media. For instance, in Chapter 25 ('Romania'), it is mentioned that several news outlets changed their position from allies to enemies of populist leader Vadim Tudor in the pre-election period of 2000 for fear that his victory would have negative consequences for freedom of speech (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001).

Mazzoleni (2008) saw the critical stance often held by quality media outlets toward populists as a double-edged sword. Because quality media are closely integrated into the elite structure of a society, they would first and foremost defend the status quo against attacks by anti-establishment forces, such as protest groups and populist movements. Political communication scholarship has labeled this attitude "sacerdotal" (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995), arguing that the mainstream media in particular tap primarily into the interests of the ruling political, economic, and cultural classes, even when they engage in criticism or conflict.

However, populist actors retaliate in their fight against the media. The chapters on Belgium (Chapter 8), Finland (Chapter 4), France (Chapter 14), Germany (Chapter 9), Italy (Chapter 17), Norway (Chapter 5), and Switzerland (Chapter 12) stress unanimously that criticism against dominant media belongs to the standard repertoire of populist parties. The media are discredited by allegedly being part of the elite and being servants of the political establishment. Populists enjoy playing up the argument that the established parties have not given up their attempts to influence public broadcasters by squabbling over influential positions; they paint the mainstream media as closely interlinked with the political and business elites, with the media receiving information and striking deals. These ties are seen as undermining the media's legitimacy, trustworthiness, and claims to objectivity.

An increasingly frequent allegation mentioned in Chapter 9 ('Germany') serves as an illustrative example—namely, the allegation of the "liar press," a phrase harking back to the Nazis and regularly shouted by protesters at rallies of the populist anti-immigrant movement PEGIDA. The Italian 5 Star Movement and the French Front National are described in Chapters 14 and 17 as overtly adversarial toward journalists. In Norway, the most successful Facebook posts of the Progress Party's leader are those in which she criticizes the mainstream media for misrepresenting her party's agenda (which allegedly puts ordinary people first). With regard to Switzerland, we have already mentioned how the Swiss People's Party takes advantage of media criticism by, in turn, criticizing the media itself. A popular measure by Belgium's Vlaams Belang is making legal complaints against public broadcasters, whereas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the threats against unfavorable media seem to go even further. In sum, criticism of the media is an important rhetorical element of populist actors. Little is known of how news organizations effectively counter populist rhetoric.

New Media and Populism

Due to the disapproving attitude of many right-wing populist parties toward the so-called established journalism of the mainstream media, new online platform services and social media networks continue to gain in importance. They make it possible to directly communicate with sympathetic audiences while sidestepping traditional news channels. In order to minimize dependency on journalism as a dissemination medium, the Front National in France has expanded its own website and created a highly professional information hub for

interested visitors. The right-populist Freedom Party of Austria has also increasingly turned to new web-based media as its main channels of political communication. The party runs an official blog called *Uncensored* as well as various web pages, and it maintains an extensive presence on Facebook and YouTube. The British National Party is counting strongly on web offerings, where it cultivates an “authoritative populism,” as described in Chapter 13 (‘United Kingdom’). Chapter 19 (‘Spain’) elaborates on the central role that Twitter and Facebook play in Podemos’s dissemination of populist messages and its connection with supporters. No party in Norway uses Facebook as extensively as the Progress Party; its current leader has one of the highest numbers of Facebook likes and shares of all Norwegian politicians.

The Italian 5 Star Movement, led by Beppe Grillo, communicates primarily over the Internet and also demands a stronger consideration of the Internet in Italian politics. It argues that given the disintermediation of society, classical institutions such as political parties and journalism are no longer needed. A web-based, network society no longer requires any political party leadership, because the Internet allows direct relationships between the citizens and the state—the citizens become the state. That is why the 5 Star Movement makes do with no party leader. According to the party, another benefit of the Internet’s increasing dominance is that authorities’ activities become more transparent for citizens. Improved transparency should clarify the central position held by new media technologies within the party’s populist discourse. In Italy, many media are seen to be losing their independence and coming under the influence of the ruling party class.

Another aspect of the relationship between media and populism is how extensively they are being used for the education of communities among followers. A British research team (O’Callaghan, Greene, Conway, Carthy, & Cunningham, 2012) examined international relationships established through Twitter among far-right groups across eight European countries. Most of the users tended to be connected to formal populist groups—for example, the United Kingdom Independence Party in Great Britain. The findings suggest the existence of stable communities. New media networking sites have also become a vital tool for the English Defence League. However, while its main Facebook page tends to maintain a strict “party line,” other websites and blogs that are more indirectly associated with the group’s organization send out a more diverse set of messages.

This brings us back to Chapter 1 in this volume, in which Aalberg and de Vreese asked whether online media in particular are eager “to pander to populist reactionary political agendas and adopt populist frames.” Overall, there is much to suggest that online media are more receptive to populism, but it has not been conclusively proven with systematic empirical research that they are actually more populist than mainstream media.

Conclusion and Outlook

In this chapter, we first identified three cross-national patterns of how the news media cover populist parties across Europe: from limited to increased coverage spurred by rising poll figures; “negative” coverage that is not necessarily negative for populist actors; and critical coverage of populist actors out of concern for democracy. We then presented three dimensions of media populism and explained their occurrence in the countries under consideration: populism by the media, populism through the media, and populist citizen journalism.

These discussions led us to carve out five favorable conditions that facilitate the diffusion of populist political communication in European media systems. Sometimes, however, the media

take a public stance against populists, and we therefore also discussed when and how the media criticize populist actors as well as when and how populist actors attack the media in return. Finally, we briefly looked at the link between populism and new media technologies.

One should be careful not to draw conclusions too boldly, however. Evidence from several countries suggests that the media, for reasons discussed above, function as important dissemination platforms for populist messages and that established media in particular are critical of populist actors while simultaneously providing them with dissemination platforms. And we have reported several examples of how populist actors use social media to bypass established media outlets. Yet, at the same time, the majority of the chapters in this volume dealing with specific countries (Parts II–IV) highlight the limited systematic research on populism and the media. For several countries studied, there is virtually no systematic research to which to refer.

This chapter therefore ends with a call for further research on populism and the media. The chapters discussing specific countries point at numerous research gaps within their respective countries. To truly understand the interplay between populist political actors and the media within countries, however, we need comparative research that takes into account the historical developments of political systems and media markets. The questions to be addressed include the following: (a) How do the historical backgrounds of populist parties influence their media coverage? (For instance, the Swedish Democrats have an explicitly racist background, while the Danish People’s Party does not.); (b) What role does the electoral system play in the news coverage of populist actors? (For instance, the British first-past-the-post system makes it difficult for new parties to win seats); (c) What role does the commercialization of the media market play in the dissemination of populist arguments? (For instance, Austria has two free newspapers whose news coverage is colored by those who advertise through them; Germany has no free newspapers.); (d) What role does media ownership play in the dissemination of populist arguments? (For instance, the publisher of one of the most prominent Swiss weeklies is a prominent member of the Swiss People’s Party.); (e) What role does the reaction of other parties to populist actors play? (For instance, the *cordon sanitaire* in Belgium seemed to have worked with respect to Vlaams Belang, but a similar attempt to create a *cordon sanitaire* around the Sweden Democrats failed.).

Exactly how different systemic factors influence the link between populist political actors and the media, we have yet to investigate in more detail. By pointing out how we can conceive of media populism and which factors are particularly likely to influence when and how the media report on populist political actors, we hope to have provided a fruitful starting point for such research on populism and the media.

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