

Populism in the Mainstream Media

Germany, Austria, and Italy in Comparison

by *Günther Pallaver*

1. *Introduction*

Anyone who believes that right-wing populism currently forms on the fringes of a society has been taken in by a false picture and a false empirical analysis. That holds true in any case for some countries in Europe. As early as the rise of the Nazi Party, it could be easily observed that it was precisely the middle class that had helped that party rise. Chafing between the proletariat and the upper class had radicalized the middle class, which felt threatened in its existence, and made fascism acceptable¹. To stay within the picture: society does not change from the fringes, but rather the center radiates its right-wing populist signals, words, messages, and ideologemes toward the fringes of society.

The political scientist Cas Mudde supports the thesis—and not for the first time—that the political contents of right-wing radical parties are also presented by other parties that are not right-wing radical, but rather also by conservative and other parties. But while right-wing radical parties have as a rule been found in the opposition, conservative parties are found as mainstream parties in the government. And for that reason, according to Mudde, liberal democracies are threatened by right-wing radical parties because they make their way into the living room through the back door of the mainstream parties².

Thus we have returned to an old question—with all the problem areas of conceptualization—as to whether the political center is right-wing

Translation by Philip Isenberg

¹ R. KÜHNEL, *Formen bürgerlicher Herrschaft*, pp. 80-84.

² C. MUDDE, *Victor Orbán*.

or even right-wing extremist³. The fact that an anti-democratic body of thought is found not only on the fringes, but also in the center of society is not a new finding, as Seymour Martin Lipset already wrote about the extremism of the center as early as 1960⁴.

When Mudde speaks of the danger of this populist body of thought splashing over into the political center, then it is obvious that such developments and trends also permeate political communication.

In all democratic countries, there are two types of media: the elite media and the tabloid media. The elite media ideally attempt to present themselves as impartial and equidistant, to report fairly and responsibly, and to be less attached to the logic of ratings and the humor of the audience or readers. On the whole, it is assumed that the quality media is less willing to be the megaphone of populist movements.

The popular media, on the other hand, to a large extent take up rather populist demands, concentrate far more on the political personality, give preference to entertainment, emphasize the conflict, and give gossip priority over reputable analysis. This type of media is very sensitive to ratings and a wide readership, dramatizes things, loves a sensation, and is superficial⁵. On top of that, the thesis is presented again and again that “yellow journalism, sensationalism, exaggerated curiosity, hunting prominent figures, and incitement” spreads through the Internet like “stinking mushrooms”⁶.

While the contribution by the tabloid media to the rise in popularity and support of populist parties and movements has already been studied in many cases, the elite media have been contemplated somewhat less under this aspect, in no small part because their “natural” support by the mainstream parties is assumed⁷.

³ V. NEU - S. POKORNY, *Ist “die Mitte” (rechts)-extremistisch?*, p. 3.

⁴ S. M. LIPSET, *Political Man*.

⁵ J. RAABE, *Boulevardpresse*, pp. 33-34.

⁶ M. BRAUCK - I. HÜLSEN, *Noch einmal mit Gefühl*, p. 74.

⁷ G. MAZZOLENI, *Media e Populismo*, p. 134. With regard to the question of tabloidization and media, there is a broad scholarly debate and correspondingly comprehensive literature.

As far as the relationship between the media and right-wing populism is then concerned, different comparative studies⁸ go to show that the media—with different levels of intentionality—have supported the rise in popularity of populist leaders and, in turn, have exploited the media presence for their own purposes.

This goes back to a “concordance of needs”, to the need to reach and the interest in reaching the attention of the “civil masses”, to quote Gianpietro Mazzoleni⁹, even if there is a dissonance with regard to politics. That means that the media and the populists mutually need each other in order to achieve their own goals, even if they are not the same goals. The result of this “concordance of needs” consists of visibility and publicity for the latter and more copies, higher ratings, and Likes for the former.

Even if with the information about the populist parties, movements, and leaders, the mainstream media reports to a certain extent “more moderately”, more balancedly, and more critically, such movements nevertheless receive publicity and visibility. But as we can observe, the boundaries and differences in the reporting on populist activities between the tabloid media and the quality media are becoming more and more planed away, they resemble each other more and more, and in many cases they differ only in style, but no longer in content.

This trend has been—and continues to be—supported by the development of the variety of multimedia options available, by a greatly concentrated and even overheated media market, by the competition for information, and by offensive attempts by the political elite to control topics and emphasis in editorial reporting¹⁰. In spite of national differences, it can be established that transnational macro trends have formed, which shape media-centered democracies and their communication systems¹¹. Within that context, television, in spite of increasing

⁸ G. MAZZOLENI et al. (eds), *The Media and Neo-Populism*; T. AKKERMAN et al. (eds), *Populist Political Communication in Europe*; L. BOS et al., *An Experimental Test of the Impact of Style and Rhetoric on the Perception of Right-Wing Populist and Mainstream Party Leaders*, pp. 192-208.

⁹ G. MAZZOLENI, *Media e Populismo*, p. 134.

¹⁰ F. PLASSER - G. PALLAVER, *Österreichische Medien und politische Kommunikation*, p. 249.

¹¹ P. NORRIS, *A Virtuous Circle*.

competition by the new media, continues to be the leading medium which, in the meantime in connection with new technologies and forms of communication, influences, changes, and controls the communicative processes, and the logic of action and views, as well as the styles, contents, and practices of political communications¹².

In media-centered democracies in which party identification is being eroded more and more and voting behavior is becoming less and less predictable, election campaigns have won even greater attention. In the wake of the transformation of election campaign logic, which itself competes for attention with the media, the media logic has also changed. Thus, a high degree of the personalization of reporting can be noticed, as can a tendency away from central themes and toward negativism and emotionalization, just like with sports dramatization¹³. On top of that, the pluralization of the media landscape increases the chances of addressing voters by bypassing the classic intermediaries¹⁴.

It would consequently be obvious to deal with the populist reporting of the big popular media such as the “Bild Zeitung” in Germany or the “Kronen Zeitung” in Austria, while there is no comparable classic popular newspaper in Italy. The period when the attempt was made with “L’Ochio” to also have a local popular publication in Italy now dates back many years. After only two years, from 1979 to 1981, the newspaper had to cease publication.

Studies have provided the empirical proof of the lasting effects of the reporting of the two large popular newspapers on decision-making and on the electoral behavior of its readers. Challengers such as right-wing populist parties and their leaders rely on media that shape public opinion¹⁵. The more these right-wing populist topics are taken up, the more potential voter resonance these parties can expect. Thus, for example, the rise in popularity of the Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche

¹² F. PLASSER - G. PLASSER, *Globalisierung der Wahlkämpfe*; F. PLASSER, *Politik in der Medienarena*.

¹³ G. LENGAUER - G. PALLAVER - C. PIG, *Redaktionelle Politikvermittlung*, p. 104.

¹⁴ F. DECKER, *Die populistische Herausforderung*, p. 18.

¹⁵ P. SHEETS - L. BOS - H.G. BOOMGAARDEN, *Media Cues and Citizen Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties*, pp. 307-330; L. BOS - W. VAN DER BURG - C. DE VREESE, *How the Media Shape Perceptions of Right-Wing-populist Leaders*, pp. 182-206.

Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) in Austria under Jörg Haider would not have been so easy without the influential “Kronen Zeitung”. The same also holds true—although somewhat less so—for the success of the Party for a Rule of Law Offensive (Partei Rechtsstaatlicher Offensive), also known as the Schill Party, in Hamburg, which was written about in the media by the potent Springer press, as Frank Decker (2012) was able to establish. But once Schill lost the sympathy of the tabloids, things went downhill with him very quickly. The phenomenon of Umberto Bossi of the Lega Nord can be classified as similar. Even though no tabloid newspaper was present, both the print media and the electronic media in Italy opened up a playing field that was in part folkloric, guaranteeing the Lega Nord a broad public. But the popular media also take on a function of focusing a central theme independently of the parties, which can serve and absorb the right-wing populist opinions. But in this respect, how do things look with the “center” media?

It is my thesis that the competitive battle in the media market for ratings and readership, surfers and users, and thus for advertising income—just like in very general terms the development toward a media-centered democracy—has also led to the increasing tabloidization of the quality media. Elements and manners of representation that originally fell within the domains of the tabloids are today used by the media which views itself as mainstream as if they were to be taken for granted. Personalization, trivialization, a loss in differentiation, the replacement of elements of information by elements of entertainment, graphic presentation, abbreviated argumentation, a tendency toward populism, and the like are evidence of this trend¹⁶.

Drawing on several case studies, this populist trend in the mainstream media in Austria, Germany, and Italy will be shown without making the claim of analyzing these thrusts toward development in the three comparison countries through the use of a common design.

2. *Austria*

In a study of populist campaign and editorial styles in the Austrian election campaign of 2008 for the Nationalrat (parliament), Georg

¹⁶ T. MEYER, *Populismus und Medien*, p. 87.

Winder¹⁷ studied populist communication patterns in media reporting. Aside from the transregional popular papers that had the greatest media presence (the data refer to the period of the 2008 elections for the Nationalrat), which were the “Kronen Zeitung” (around 46.8% penetration) and “Österreich” (9.5% penetration), the two quality newspapers “Der Standard” (6.3% penetration) and “Die Presse” (6.1% penetration) were analyzed¹⁸.

On television, the two news broadcasts in prime time programming with the greatest media presence were included in the analysis. These were “Zeit im Bild” (39% penetration) of the public broadcaster ORF and ATV “aktuell” (around 15% penetration) from the private channel ATV. Since 2008, those penetrations have in part collapsed to a large degree¹⁹.

In his study, Winder starts out from three analysis dimensions. First, from the dimensions of exclusion. Within that context, the vertical exclusion primarily encompasses feelings of resentment against the established elites or against the establishment, while the horizontal dimension encompasses all of the dissociations that are oriented against groups in the population that are portrayed as not belonging to the “people”. Secondly, from the dimension of inclusion with an identificational/advocating reference to the people which portrays the other side of the coin of the exclusion dimension. Thirdly, the frequently described centrality of a “charismatic leader figure” is taken into consideration in the analysis. More than a few authors do in fact start out from the premise that populism or populist communication have a direct connection with the increased presence of charismatic leader personalities.

The result is informative for our matter. The highest result with the inclusion dimension is currently achieved by ATV. In the next place is “Zeit im Bild 1” (“ZiB 1”), followed by the daily newspapers “Der Standard”, “Die Presse”, “Kronen Zeitung”, and “Österreich”. This result is astonishing—particularly since with both “ZiB 1” and with the media “Die Presse” and “Der Standard”, they all consist of quality media. The author substantiates this with the assertion that the reporting in the quality media tends to be more multilayered than that in the

¹⁷ G. WINDER, *Populist Framing*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁹ MEDIA-ANALYSE, <http://www.media-analyse.at/table/2683>.

popular media. What is meant by “multilayered” is the presentation of different perspectives in which heterogeneous opinions and views also tend to find a balanced space.

With the exclusion dimension, ATV once again takes on the highest score of all of the media that were studied at the level of the addressing of external/elite or fringe groups, followed by “Die Presse”, “Der Standard”, and “ZiB 1”. The results suggest the conclusion that in media reporting, exclusion-centered communications content is included in party communications. The scores that are at times even slightly higher in comparison with party communications indicated that journalists do not just absorb the exclusion-centered impulses of the party communications, but even expand it within the framework of their journalistic work.

The dimension of leader-centering takes on the highest expression out of all three of the dimensions that were studied. In the study of this leader-centering, it becomes clear that the concentration on the top candidates in the two audiovisual news broadcasts is significantly higher than the average of all of the print media that were studied. We find a significantly higher expression of leader-centering in the popular media. In his comparative, transnational study, Hanspeter Kriesi comes to the conclusion that popular-type media are shaped significantly more by leader-centered reporting than the quality media is²⁰.

With reference to a total populism index that is calculated, which is intended as a mean value of all three dimensions of populism, the author arrives at the conclusion that the quality newspapers in particular react to the populist communications impulses of the popular media. Within that context, quality newspapers achieve scores that are similarly as high as those of the popular media itself²¹.

3. *The Federal Republic of Germany*

In 2012, a group of researchers with the Bielefeld pedagogue Wilhelm Heitmeyer presented its findings after ten years of systematic empirical social research. The group had worked with a concept of “grup-

²⁰ H. KRIESI, *Personalization of National Election Campaigns*.

²¹ G. WINDER, *Populist Framing*, pp. 243 ff.

penbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit” (group-focused enmity), which encompasses the following twelve items: sexism, homophobia, privileges of the established, xenophobia, racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, rejection of the handicapped, debasement of the homeless, debasement of the Sinti and Roma, debasement of asylum-seekers, and debasement of the long-term unemployed²².

The empirical results of this work group are extremely disquieting because they show developments whereby in upper-class circles, obvious attempts were made to protect and safeguard privileged positions. There is apparently a “locked and loaded bourgeoisie”, which—as a result of both economic and societal crises—feels threatened and also vents its attempts for protection through the liberal daily and weekly newspapers, and therefore through the quality media. And thus it is necessary that when considering the relationship between right-wing populism and the media, one must not concentrate on media at the politically right-wing edge, and thus not on the “Bild Zeitung”, the “Kölner Express”, the “Münchner Abendzeitung”, or “Junge Freiheit”. Instead of that, what is concerned is right-wing populism in the big national newspapers, such as the “Süddeutsche Zeitung”, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, “Die Welt”, “Handelsblatt”, “Frankfurter Rundschau”, or the “Tageszeitung”.

One example out of many: a research group from the University of Tübingen analyzed the reporting on the so-called “Döner-Morde” (“Kebab Murders”) in the German press (“Unwort des Jahres”, the ugliest word of the year of 2011). In an unprecedented series of murders between 2000 and 2006, nine foreign-born small business owners were killed with the same handgun. Since two of the victims sold kebab, the crimes were often called the “Kebab Murders”. The results of the media analysis:

“[The media reporting] contributed to the ostracizing of the victims, it stigmatized the members of their group, and in addition it in part even participated in the extensive speculation with the search for the Perpetrator ... Among the [deficiencies of the reporting] are a continued distance from immigrant life, the insufficient representation of the immigrant perspectives, and a ‘mob behavior’, which ... can contribute to the intensification of discriminatory reporting”²³.

²² W. HEITMEYER, *Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit*, pp. 34 f.

²³ F. VIRCHOW - T. THOMAS - E. GRITTMANN, “*Das Unwort erklärt die Untat*”, pp. 10-11.

For this, the authors studied a series of newspapers, but the big national newspapers and magazines such as the “Süddeutsche Zeitung”, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, “Die Welt”, “Frankfurter Rundschau”, “Tageszeitung”, “Spiegel”, “Stern”, and “Focus” in no way stood out in a positive way from the corresponding reports in the tabloid press.

A very strong trend toward right-wing populism can currently be seen in the reporting of the entire press on refugees and asylum seekers, and incidentally also and specifically in quality newspapers. To cover this here, the essay which was published in 2015 by well-known immigration researcher, Klaus Bade, *Zur Karriere und Funktion abschätziger Begriffe in der deutschen Asylpolitik* is quoted here. Bade speaks of “lexically manifested defensive attitudes”:

“Over the long run, the measures of deterrence in fact did not bring about any reduction in the immigration pressure; but in large circles of the population, they increased the defensive attitudes with respect to refugees and asylum seekers. In particular during the periods of electoral campaigns, they were pushed by incessant political and media agitation against the ‘abuse of the right of asylum’ by alleged ‘social swindlers’, ‘social freeloaders’, and asylum-seeking ‘social tourists’ (Unwort des Jahres [ugliest word of the year] of 2013) ... Even [with the term ‘economic refugee’], denunciatory intentions are at the root. In contrast to the German Asylanten, which on the whole insinuates a skeptical distance from Asylbewerber [both of which would be rendered into English as ‘asylum seekers’, although the latter literally translates as ‘asylum applicants’], the term Wirtschaftsflüchtling [economic refugee] was aimed at a special form of ‘asylum abuse’. What was concerned were supposedly only political reasons that were put forward for fleeing ... with alleged motives for immigration that were primarily economic and social”²⁴.

That balance was already negative twenty years ago. Because with a view toward the content of the reporting of press organization in Germany on the topic of integration, it was provided about people of non-German origin in a discriminatory manner not only in the tabloid press, but also not rarely in the so-called “quality media”, as, for example, Georg Ruhrmann²⁵ of the Jena Institute of Communication Research was able to determine as early as the late 1990s.

Just as in Austria, the expression of leader-centering in the German media is also significantly high. Thus, for instance, media researcher Uwe Krüger established as early as the beginning of 2000 for Germany in an analysis of the television evening news that approximately half

²⁴ K. BADE, *Zur Karriere und Funktion abschätziger Begriffe*, pp. 5 f.

²⁵ G. RUHRMANN - D. SONGÜL, *Wie Medien über Migranten berichten*, pp. 69-81.

of all mentions of political figures were limited to a small group of a total of twenty individual figures²⁶. Other studies, such as Genz²⁷, for example, arrive at similar results.

While in 2005, Donsbach and Büttner established yet another trend toward tabloidization in German television news²⁸, Leitenberger, in his study of news broadcasts from the years 1992, 2001, and 2010, which included the main editions and evening editions of the “Tagesschau” (ARD), ZDF “heute”, RTL “aktuell”, and SAT.1 “Nachrichten”, came to the conclusion that typical features of tabloidization such as sensationalization and scandalization did not play any role in German television news, and that the tendencies toward tabloidization that were asserted by Donsbach and Büttner for the late 1990s had significantly weakened and, in some points, were even declining²⁹.

4. Italy

In comparison to Germany and Austria, we are dealing with some special features with the media system in Italy. As has already been mentioned, in Italy there is no typical tabloid newspaper. As a substitute, the famous pink newspaper “Gazzetta dello Sport” is referred to from time to time, and in any case, Italy has three daily sports newspapers (“Gazzetta dello Sport”, “Corriere dello Sport/Stadio”, and “Tuttosport”). Or else the “omnibus newspaper” is spoken of, which offers something for all layers of readers, from the tabloid level to the discriminating quality article. But while in Austria and Germany, the print media are more in the center of populist reporting, in Italy this role is taken on by television. This is closely connected to the situation that is not comparable with the other democratic countries in which a media tycoon was at the same time the head of the government and dominated the political life of Italy for twenty years.

In any case, even before Berlusconi’s entry into politics, television in Italy brought completely new basic conditions to the development of

²⁶ U. KRÜGER, *Meinungsmacht*.

²⁷ A. GENZ - K. SCHÖNBACH - H.A. SEMETKO, “Amerikanisierung”?, pp. 401-413.

²⁸ W. DONSBACH - K. BÜTTNER, *Boulevardisierungstrend*, pp. 21-38.

²⁹ J. LEITENBERGER, “Boulevardisierung” von Fernsehnachrichten?, pp. 317, 320.

political competition. The weakening of social divisions for the generating of political identities and the process of erosion of the political parties that was associated with this led to a deficit in political communication and political representation, a deficit that was filled by television. In TV-based politics, an extreme personalization of politics and of media reporting was practically predestined. This is also because the personalization of Berlusconi's leadership with the duopoly of RAI as the public radio and television company and Berlusconi's private media company Mediaset were connected, since as the owner of one and as head of the government, Berlusconi had access to both TV companies. The competition between the two companies led to the public RAI more and more approaching the TV logic of the private Mediaset, getting further and further away from information and closer to entertainment and talk-showification³⁰. This is completely aside from the fact that as early as the 1990s, the American journalist Wolfgang Achtnr³¹, in his book still worth reading today, *Penne, antenne e quarto potere*, knew to report on the weak autonomy of Italian journalists who encouraged this populism even with quality newspapers in hurried obedience.

The data provided by the Osservatorio di Pavia media research center on the leadership centering of political TV reporting in the Berlusconi era, especially during the parliamentary elections, furnish eloquent information. The *par condicio* that was adopted in Italy for the purpose of a balanced media presence of political figures is likewise a special feature in Europe, but it did not do any damage to the dominance of Berlusconi in the television broadcasters. Sergio Fabbrini³² thus also speaks of a teleleadership of Berlusconi and of the party Forza Italia or the People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) as a teleparty.

This tendency toward personalization and leaderization also remained after the twenty-year era of Berlusconi. If we take as an example the video presence of the head of the Northern League (Lega Nord, LN) Matteo Salvini, in the evening news broadcasts of the three RAI channels from January 1 to September 15, 2015, then thanks to the recording by the Osservatorio di Pavia, we see that the person in second place, Lega

³⁰ G. MAZZOLENI - A. SFARDINI, *Politica Pop.*

³¹ W. ACHTNER, *Penne, Antenne e Quarto Potere.*

³² S. FABBRINI, *When Media and Politics Overlap*, pp. 345-364.

Nord member Roberto Maroni, president of the Region of Lombardy, came in at around ten percent of the video presence of Salvini (577 to 67, direct quotes 125 to 16).

When Lega Nord head Umberto Bossi entered the political arena and provoked, and at times shocked, the political establishment with his statements, he immediately received broad media attention and coverage³³. At the same time, the ambivalence of the quality media in the print and TV sector came to light. The media attention concentrated on Bossi's anti-politics and his crude speech. At the same time, the broad media coverage of the Lega Nord helped it address a broader public. This is a phenomenon that we can also ascertain with the Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S) of Beppe Grillo³⁴.

The Lega Nord and Bossi viewed themselves as a movement against institutions, against Rome, and against the South; and today, with Matteo Salvini as Bossi's successor, against foreigners and immigrants, but also against the European Union.

Berlusconi, on the other hand, presented himself as a politician against the establishment, against the "old parties", against the old political class, or against the "democracy tourists", as Berlusconi provocatively assessed and called the members of the EU parliament.

As a final example, reference is to be made to the reporting on refugees. According to the Osservatorio di Pavia in June 2015, the RAI prime time television news marked an exceptional situation that arose from refugees who were associated with criminality, an image which portrayed the country on the verge of collapse, about to be overrun by thousands upon thousands of refugees. But the reality was completely different³⁵.

The increase in sound bite news, the high degree of personalization, and the trust in TV personalities provided the populist parties with a great upswing. The populist parties such as the Lega Nord or Forza Italia/PdL profited from a cyclical process of mutual influencing on the part of the media and political spheres, which strengthened the anti-establishment and anti-party mood. Gianpietro Mazzoleni and

³³ R. BIORCIO, *The Lega Nord*, pp. 71-94.

³⁴ G. PALLAVER, *The Extensions of Television*, pp. 159-180.

³⁵ *Notizie di confine*.

Anna Sfardini very concisely defined this development as *pop politics* when they wrote,

“Once television discovered that politics can increase audience and politicians understood that broad publicity can be achieved if it is subjected to the logic of the spectacle, then pop politics arises from this, a media environment in which politics and culture, information and entertainment, the comic and the serious, the real and the surreal run together in a new, expressive mixture”³⁶.

5. Digression: The role of the new media

In the literature, it is generally established that populism has an especially close relationship to the modern mass media in order to reach the “people” as quickly and directly as possible and in order to mobilize them politically. New electronic media, “as multimedia and hypermedia, additionally offer widely varied possibilities of individualized multimodal addressing and speech”³⁷. The success of populist parties and movements in the media-centered democracies of the West is very much based upon the systematic use of new media: the social media. Text messages (SMS), e-mail, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are among the basic populist media of the day³⁸. In contrast to television and the popular media, whereby the quality newspapers are also to be cited, the conditions have changed for the political parties. The ability to reach the citizens is no longer a technical problem these days, starting out from enormous growth in multimedia and multimodal offerings on the web connected with the possibility of increasing networking of the recipients with each other³⁹. This leads to a continuous *Stimmungsdemokratie* (democracy based upon popular moods) with stagings, symbolic politics, politainment, the ritualization of power⁴⁰, and “post-factual manipulations”, all of which are potent feed for “those ruled by emotions who scorn facts”⁴¹.

³⁶ G. MAZZOLENI - A. SFARDINI, *Politica Pop*, p. 14. Regarding leaderization and populism in Italy, cf. R. BIORCIO, *Il populismo nella politica italiana*.

³⁷ F. JANUSCHEK - M. REISIGL, *Populismus – Editorial*, p. 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ U. SARCINELLI, *Symbolische Politik*.

⁴¹ C. GEYER, *An der Leine der Moral*, p. 11.

The new media are suited for more direct, more participatory forms of democracy. That is one side. But they can also be instrumentalized in order to suggest through fictitious participatory processes that the “true people” and their (populist) leaders make unadulterated decisions beyond parliamentary representationalism in a sort of *direttissima* [supreme directness].

If we look at the use of new media by right-wing populist parties in Germany, Austria, and Italy, then in addition to a series of commonalities, we can also establish some relevant differences.

In an essay, Marcel Lewandowsky analyzes the media practice—namely, Twitter and Facebook—of the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) and the Pro Deutschland party shortly before the 2013 parliamentary elections. Both parties have obviously used the media in question to stimulate a direct democratic movement and to articulate the populist protest against “the ones up above” and against “the ones out there” (the others), even if, for instance, the dissociation from the others during the study period was hardly demonstrable with the AfD⁴². Overall, Lewandowsky comes to the conclusion that both parties have feigned broad support throughout the new media and, in so doing, have presented themselves as the voice of the people. Both practiced provocations and stagings with respect to the political elites, with respect to “the ones up above”, while above all else Facebook and Twitter served as support for the analogous campaigns⁴³.

For Austria, Martin Reisigl shows how the Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ), under the modern terms of political communication, “selectively and with a target group in mind drew up a right-wing populist conception of the world according to all of the rules of stimulating media attention by means of provocative surprise, polemical attacks, dramatic exaggeration, and emotional personalization”⁴⁴. Under its new leader Heinz Christian Strache, the FPÖ also uses the new media to stage the proximity of the populist leader to the people in an instrumentalizing manner. Within that context,

⁴² M. LEWANDOWSKY, *Populismus in sozialen Netzwerken*, pp. 42-43; F. JANUSCHEK - M. REISIGL, *Populismus – Editorial*, pp. 14-15.

⁴³ M. LEWANDOWSKY, *Populismus*, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁴ M. REISIGL, *Österreichischer Rechtspopulismus*, p. 96.

communication formats that are atypical for politics are also used, such as music videos of rap songs, comics, and caricatures, in connection with legends and fairy tales. Clicking the Like button has turned into a sports competition and has been built up into a pseudo election. Along those lines, with the fictionalization and narrativization of the inflammatory politics of Islamophobia, the attempt has been made to elude the presence of incitement under criminal law⁴⁵.

The use of the new media in Italy is different from that in Germany and Austria. Populist parties such as the Lega Nord under Umberto Bossi and Forza Italia under Silvio Berlusconi, who made use of different populist emphases, operated with the traditional media, with Berlusconi having his own available. In contrast to these parties, Beppe Grillo's electoral success also came about through the extensive use of the new media. But while neither Bossi nor Berlusconi were capable of adapting their communication style to the new media (although Bossi's successor, Matteo Salvini, has arrived in the digital age), the Movimento 5 Stelle is a product of the web world. This birth began in 2005 with the blog www.beppegrillo.it, which soon grew to be one of the most influential blogs and by 2008 was already ranked by "The Guardian" in ninth place among the most powerful blogs in the world⁴⁶. At the same time, he asked his blog followers to organize themselves independently of the [beppegrillo.meetup](http://beppegrillo.meetup.com) platform. The philosophy, at least originally, was to formulate the conveying activity by and in parties in a web-centered manner, in the sense of post-representationalism. And while with the 2013 electoral campaign, the traditional parties still used the Internet almost exclusively as an information platform, Grillo and his movement played on all of the keys of the digital piano, above all else against the political establishment, but also against immigrants or even, in isolated cases, against women. In many cases, the Grillo movement was compared with civic populism⁴⁷ and was also called a "post-modern populist party"⁴⁸ or "web-based populism"⁴⁹, because this movement did not use

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-97.

⁴⁶ *The world's 50 most powerful blogs*, in "The Guardian"; <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2008/mar/09/blogs>.

⁴⁷ M.E. LANZONE - D. WOODS, *Riding the Populist Web*, pp. 54-64.

⁴⁸ M.E. LANZONE, *The "Post-modernist" Populism in Italy*, pp. 53-78.

⁴⁹ G. CORBETTA - E. GUALMINI, *Il partito di Grillo*.

the traditional media to mobilize its electorate and sympathizers, but rather first and foremost the new media.

6. *Populism as a variable of the media system*

If we draw a comparison between the three countries, then roughly speaking we can determine that there is a differing intensity with the populist penetration of the quality media. In this regard, Italy appears to have the greatest penetration, followed by Austria, and then Germany. According to my thesis, this qualitative ranking is also associated, among other things, with the corresponding media systems, an association that substantially influences, among others, the practice of the mass media conveying of politics.

Hallin and Mancini developed a theory-driven, historical-explorative differentiation of Western media systems along four dimensions whereby their typology differentiates the media systems according to four influence factors⁵⁰: the degree of commercialization, measured by the presence of mass-oriented, high-circulation press; the degree of political parallelism between editorial lines and positions of individual party figures; the degree of professionalism, measured by the institutional autonomy and independence of the professional group of journalists; and the degree of state interventionism, measured by the regulatory influence of the state on the regulation of the media⁵¹.

Within that context, the authors differentiate between the Mediterranean polarized-pluralistic model, the Northern European or democratic-corporatist model, and the Northern Atlantic or liberal model.

It is apparent that the Mediterranean polarized-pluralistic model in which Italy is categorized is more susceptible to populist penetration of the media in general and the quality media in particular than the democratic-corporatist model in which Austria and Germany are classified.

What is characteristic for the Mediterranean model are low circulation of the daily newspapers, extensive consumption of TV and the paramount significance of television as the primary news medium, a high

⁵⁰ D. HALLIN - P. MANCINI, *Comparing Media Systems*, p. 21.

⁵¹ F. PLASSER - G. PALLAVER, *Österreichische Medien*, p. 260 f.

degree of political parallelism, which is expressed in distinct ideological and relational connections between politics and journalism, and limited journalistic autonomy as a result of the direct exertion of influence by the political elites.

The type of Northern European or democratic-corporatist model distinguishes itself through the high circulation of the daily newspapers and a comparatively moderate consumption of television. Public radio and television companies continue to occupy a market-dominating position. The degree of professionalization is high, and in spite of the strong state influence on the public media sector, political parallelism in these media systems is even declining.

On the other hand, the Northern Atlantic or liberal system, with the prototype of the USA, is characterized by moderate print media circulation, a great centering of television, a highly commercially organized media system that, at the same time, is deregulated, and great autonomy of the news editorial staff⁵².

Since Hallin and Mancini have carried out their categorization into typologies, both they themselves and others have supplemented and refined their approach⁵³. Brüggemann et al., for example, come to the conclusion that the liberal model according to the categorization into typologies by Hallin and Mancini is no longer empirically tenable. In their new classification into four empirical models (nordic, central, western, and southern types), Austria is categorized with the Federal Republic of Germany and Switzerland but also with the United Kingdom in the central type, which essentially corresponds to the democratic-corporatist model. Italy is then classified with France, Greece, and Spain in the southern type⁵⁴.

More than a few leaders of traditional parties as well as representatives of governments enjoy riding the discontent and dissatisfaction of the citizens, use populist language within that context, and make demagogic statements that the media gladly and greedily pick up. In any case, though, this phenomenon is not a new one. What is new, however, is

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

⁵³ R. BLUM, *Bausteine zu einer Theorie der Mediensysteme*, pp. 5-11; M. BRÜGGEMANN et al., *Hallin and Mancini Revisited*, pp. 1037-1065.

⁵⁴ M. BRÜGGEMANN et al., *Hallin and Mancini Revisited*, p. 1056.

this diffused populism of the “center” that is also present in the media, which attacks and erodes the mainstay of democracy, as well as the fundamental values of such a democracy⁵⁵.

Bibliography

- ACHTNER W., *Penne, Antenne e Quarto Potere. Per un giornalismo al servizio della democrazia*, Milano 1996
- AKKERMAN T. et al. (eds), *Populist Political Communication in Europe*, New York 2017
- BADE K., *Zur Karriere und Funktion abschätziger Begriffe in der deutschen Asylpolitik*, in “Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte”, 25, 2015, pp. 3-8
- BIORCIO R., *The Lega Nord and the Italian Media System*, in G. MAZZOLENI et al. (eds), *The Media and Neo-populism*, pp. 71-94
- *Il populismo nella politica italiana. Da Bossi a Berlusconi, da Grillo a Renzi*, Milano - Udine 2015
- BLUM R., *Bausteine zu einer Theorie der Mediensysteme*, in “Medienwissenschaft Schweiz”, 2, 2005, pp. 5-11
- BOS L. - VAN DER BURG W. - DE VREESE C., *An Experimental Test of the Impact of Style and Rhetoric on the Perception of Right-Wing Populist and Mainstream Party Leaders*, in “Acta Politica”, 48, 2013, pp. 192-208
- BRAUCK M. - HÜLSEN I., *Noch einmal mit Gefühl*, in “Der Spiegel”, February 2, 2008, pp. 72-74
- BRÜGGEMANN M. et al., *Hallin and Mancini Revisited: Four Empirical Types of Western Media Systems*, in “Journal of Communication” 64, 2014, pp. 1037-1065
- BURG W. VAN DER - DE VREESE C., *How the Media Shape Perceptions of Right-wing-populist Leaders*, in “Political Communication”, 28, 2011, pp. 182-206
- CORBETTA G. - GUALMINI E., *Il partito di Grillo*, Bologna 2013
- DECKER F., *Die populistische Herausforderung. Theoretische und ländervergleichende Perspektiven*, in F. DECKER (ed.), *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 9-32
- DONSBACH W. - BÜTTNER K., *Boulevardisierungstrend in deutschen Fernsehnachrichten*, in “Publizistik”, 50, 2005, pp. 21-38
- JANUSCHEK F. - M. REISIGL (eds), *Populismus in der digitalen Mediendemokratie* (Osnabrücker Beiträge zur Sprachtheorie, 86), Duisburg 2014

⁵⁵ G. MAZZOLENI, *Media e Populismo*, p. 133.

- FABBRINI S., *When Media and Politics Overlap: Inferences from the Italian Case*, in "Government and Opposition", 3, 2011, pp. 345-364
- GENZ A. - SCHÖNBACH K. - SEMETKO H.A., "Amerikanisierung"? Politik in den Fernsehnachrichten während der Bundestagswahlkämpfe 1990-1998, in H. KLINGEMANN - M. KAASE (eds), *Wahlen und Wähler. Analysen aus Anlass der Bundestagswahl 1998*, Wiesbaden 2001, pp. 401-414
- GEYER C., *An der Leine der Moral. Was heißt hier postfaktisch? Warum Trump Clinton schlug*, in "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", November 10, 2016
- HALLIN D. - MANCINI P., *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 21-45
- HEITMEYER W., *Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit (GMF) in einem entsicherten Jahrzehnt*, in W. HEITMEYER (ed.), *Deutsche Zustände*, series 10, Frankfurt a.M. 2012, pp. 15-41
- JANUSCHEK F. - REISIGL M., *Populismus in der digitalen Mediendemokratie – Editorial*, in F. JANUSCHEK - M. REISIGL (eds), *Populismus in der digitalen Mediendemokratie*, pp. 7-17
- KRIESI H., *Personalization of National Election Campaigns*, Edinburgh 2010
- KRÜGER U., *Meinungsmacht. Der Einfluss von Eliten auf Leitmedien und Alpha-Journalisten – eine kritische Netzwerkanalyse*, Köln 2013
- KÜHNEL R., *Formen bürgerlicher Herrschaft. Liberalismus-Faschismus*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1971
- LANZONE M.E., *The "Post-Modernist" Populism in Italy: The Case of the Five Star Movement*, in D. WOODS - B. WEINERT (eds), *The Many Faces of Populism: Current Perspectives*, London 2014, pp. 53-78
- LEIDENBERGER J., "Boulevardisierung" von Fernsehnachrichten?: eine Inhaltsanalyse deutscher und französischer Hauptnachrichtensendungen, Paris 2013
- LENGAUER G. - PALLAVER G. - PIG C., *Redaktionelle Politikvermittlung in österreichischen Wahlkämpfen*, in F. PLASSER (ed.), *Wechselwahlen. Analysen zur Nationalratswahl 2006*, Wien 2007, pp.103-151
- LEWANDOWSKY M., *Populismus in sozialen Netzwerken: Das Beispiel AfD und pro Deutschland*, in F. JANUSCHEK - M. REISIGL, *Populismus in der digitalen Mediendemokratie*, pp. 19-46
- LIPSET S.M., *Political Man. The Social Bases of Politics*, Garden City NY 1960
- MAZZOLENI G. - SFARDINI A., *Politica Pop. Da "Porta a Porta" a "L'isola dei famosi"*, Bologna 2009
- STEWART J. - HORSFIELD B. (eds), *The Media and Neo-Populism. A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, Santa Monica CA 2003
- Media e Populismo*, in "Comunicazione Politica" 2, 2003, 4, pp. 133-139
- MEDIA-ANALYSE, <http://www.media-analyse.at/table/2683> [accessed February 25, 2017]

- MEYER T., *Populismus und Medien*, in F. DECKER (ed.), *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 81-96
- MUDE C., *Victor Orbán and the Difference between Radical Right Politics and Parties*, 2015, <http://eutopiamagazine.eu/en/cas-mudde/speakers-corner/victor-orb%C3%A1n-and-difference-between-radical-right-politics-and-parties#sthash.GLvJKVLX.dpuf> [accessed September 14, 2016]
- NEU V. - POKORNY S., Ist "die Mitte" (rechts)-extremistisch?, in "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte", 40, 2015, pp. 3-8
- NORRIS P., *A Virtuous Circle. Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*, Cambridge 2000
- Notizie di confine. Terzo rapporto Carta di Roma 2015 (rapporto di P. BARRETTA dell'Osservatorio di Pavia), http://www.osservatorio.it/wp-content/uploads/Rapporto_2015_-_cartadiroma.pdf [accessed February 14, 2017]
- PALLAVER G., *Österreichische Medien und politische Kommunikation in komparativer Sicht*, in L. HELMS - D.M. WINEROITHER (eds), *Die österreichische Demokratie im Vergleich*, Baden-Baden 2012, pp. 249-268
- *The Extensions of Television: Die italienischen Parlamentswahlen 2013 im Zeichen des Movimento 5 Stelle*, in F. KARLHOFFER - S. JESCHKE - G. PALLAVER (eds), *Medienzentrierte Demokratien: Befunde, Trends und Perspektiven. Festschrift für Univ.-Prof. Dr. Fritz Plasser*, Wien 2013, pp. 159-180
- PLASSER F. - PLASSER G., *Globalisierung der Wahlkämpfe. Praktiken der Campaign Professionals im weltweiten Vergleich*, Wien 2003
- (ed.), *Politik in der Medienarena. Praxis politischer Kommunikation in Österreich*, Wien 2010
- RAABE J., *Boulevardpresse*, in G. BENTELE - H.-B. BROSIUS - O. JARREN (eds), *Lexikon Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaft*, Wiesbaden, 2013, pp. 33-34
- REISIGL M., *Österreichischer Rechtspopulismus im Zeitalter von Mediendemokratie und medialer Erlebnisgesellschaft*, in F. JANUSCHEK - M. REISIGL (eds), *Populismus in der digitalen Mediendemokratie*, p. 71-99
- RUHRMANN G. - SONGÜL D., *Wie Medien über Migranten berichten*, in H. SCHATZ - Ch. HOLTZ-BACHA - J. - U. NIELAND (eds), *Migranten und Medien. Neue Herausforderungen an die Integrationsfunktion von Presse und Rundfunk*, Opladen 2000, pp. 69-81
- SARCINELLI U., *Symbolische Politik*, Opladen 1987
- SHEETS P. - BOS L. - BOOMGAARDEN H.G., *Media Cues and Citizen Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties*, in "International Journal of Public Opinion Research", 28, 2016, pp. 607-630
- STEWART J. - HORSFIELD B. (eds), *The Media and Neo-Populism. A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, Westport CT - London 2003
- THE GUARDIAN, *The World's 50 Most Powerful Blogs*, March 9, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2008/mar/09/blogs> [accessed February 9, 2017]

- VIRCHOW F. - THOMAS T. - GRITTMANN E., “*Das Unwort erklärt die Untat*”. *Die Bericht-
erstattung über die NSU-Morde – Eine Medienkritik*, Frankfurt a.M. 2015, pp. 10-11
- WINDER G., *Populist Framing. Eine Vergleichsstudie populistischer Wahlkampf- und
Redaktionsstile im österreichischen Nationalratswahlkampf von 2008*, PhD-thesis
Innsbruck, 2015
- WOODS D., *Riding the Populist Web: Contextualizing the Five Star Movement (M5S) in
Italy*, in “Politics and Governance”, 2, 2015, pp. 54-64