

Routledge Studies in Media, Communication,
and Politics

Digitizing Democracy

Edited by Aljosha Karim Schapals, Axel Bruns, and Brian McNair

Communicating Populism

Comparing Actor Perceptions, Media Coverage, and Effects on Citizens
in Europe

*Edited by Carsten Reinemann, James Stanyer, Toril Aalberg, Frank
Esser, and Claes H. de Vreese*

Communicating Populism

Comparing Actor Perceptions,
Media Coverage, and Effects
on Citizens in Europe

**Edited by Carsten Reinemann,
James Stanyer, Toril Aalberg,
Frank Esser, and Claes H. de Vreese**

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2019
by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2019 Taylor & Francis

The right of Carsten Reinemann, James Stanyer, Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, and Claes H. de Vreese to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-39272-4 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-40206-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	x
<i>List of Tables</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiv

1 Introduction: Comprehending and Investigating Populist Communication From a Comparative Perspective	1
CARSTEN REINEMANN, JAMES STANYER, TORIL AALBERG, FRANK ESSER, AND CLAES H. DE VREESE	

PART I Populism and Communicators	15
--	-----------

2 Perceptions of Populism and the Media: A Qualitative Comparative Approach to Studying the Views of Journalists and Politicians	17
SUSANA SALGADO AND JAMES STANYER	

3 Journalists' Perceptions of Populism and the Media: A Cross-National Study Based on Semi-Structured Interviews	34
JAMES STANYER, SUSANA SALGADO, GIULIANO BOBBA, GERGŐ HAJZER, DAVID NICOLAS HOPMANN, NICOLAS HUBÉ, NORBERT MERKOVITY, GÖKAY ÖZERIM, STYLIANOS PAPATHANASSOPOULOS, KAREN B. SANDERS, DUSAN SPASOJEVIC, AND LENKA VOCHOCOVÁ	

4 Politicians' Perceptions of Populism and the Media: A Cross-National Study Based on Semi-Structured Interviews	51
SUSANA SALGADO, JAMES STANYER, GERGŐ HAJZER, DAVID NICOLAS HOPMANN, BENTE KALSNES, GUIDO LEGNANTE, ARTUR LIPÍŃSKI, NORBERT MERKOVITY, STYLIANOS PAPATHANASSOPOULOS, AND KAREN B. SANDERS	
PART II Populism in the Media	69
5 Dimensions, Speakers, and Targets: Basic Patterns in European Media Reporting on Populism	71
SINA BLASSNIG, PATRICIA RODI, KEREN TENENBOIM-WEINBLATT, KINGA ADAMCZEWSKA, LILIA RAYCHEVA, SVEN ENGESSER, AND FRANK ESSER	
6 Journalistic Culture, Editorial Mission, and News Logic: Explaining the Factors Behind the Use of Populism in European Media	102
PETER MAURER, NICOLAS HUBÉ, VÁCLAV ŠTĚTKA, CRISTINA CREMONESI, ANTONELLA SEDDONE, SIGNE RINGDAL BERGAN, JAMES STANYER, MARIAN TOMOV, NAAMA WEISS, SVEN ENGESSER, AND FRANK ESSER	
7 Event-, Politics-, and Audience-Driven News: A Comparison of Populism in European Media Coverage in 2016 and 2017	123
FRANK ESSER, AGNIESZKA STĘPIŃSKA, ONDŘEJ PEKÁČEK, ANTONELLA SEDDONE, STYLIANOS PAPATHANASSOPOULOS, DOBRINKA PEICHEVA, ANA MILOJEVIC, SINA BLASSNIG, AND SVEN ENGESSER	
PART III Populism and Citizens	141
8 The Persuasiveness of Populist Communication: Conceptualizing the Effects and Political Consequences of Populist Communication From a Social Identity Perspective	143
MICHAEL HAMELEERS, CARSTEN REINEMANN, DESIRÉE SCHMUCK, AND NAYLA FAWZI	

9 Investigating the Effects of Populist Communication: Design and Measurement of the Comparative Experimental Study	168
MICHAEL HAMELEERS, IOANNIS ANDREADIS, AND CARSTEN REINEMANN	
10 Cognitive Responses to Populist Communication: The Impact of Populist Message Elements on Blame Attribution and Stereotyping	183
NICOLETA CORBU, LINDA BOS, CHRISTIAN SCHEMER, ANNE SCHULZ, JÖRG MATTHES, CLAES H. DE VREESE, TORIL AALBERG, AND JANE SUITER	
11 Attitudinal and Behavioral Responses to Populist Communication: The Impact of Populist Message Elements on Populist Attitudes and Voting Intentions	207
IOANNIS ANDREADIS, CRISTINA CREMONESI, EVANGELIA KARTSOUNIDOU, DOMINIKA KASPROWICZ, AND AGNIESZKA HESS	
PART IV Conclusion	233
12 Adapting to the Different Shades of Populism: Key Findings and Implications for Media, Citizens, and Politics	235
CLAES H. DE VREESE, CARSTEN REINEMANN, JAMES STANYER, FRANK ESSER, AND TORIL AALBERG	
<i>Appendix A: Comparative Experiment: Stimuli for All Eight Conditions</i>	253
<i>Appendix B: Comparative Experiment: Background Characteristics of Respondents (Entire Sample vs. Cleaned Sample)</i>	261
<i>Appendix C: Comparative Experiment: Blame Perceptions (Overall Means by Country; 7-Point Scale)</i>	264
<i>Appendix D: Comparative Experiment: Stereotypes (Overall Means by Country; 7-Point Scale)</i>	266
<i>List of Contributors</i>	268
<i>Index</i>	271

2 Perceptions of Populism and the Media

A Qualitative Comparative Approach to Studying the Views of Journalists and Politicians

Susana Salgado and James Stanyer

Introduction

This chapter provides background on the methodological approach adopted in the study on politicians' and journalists' perceptions of populism in the next two chapters of this collection. One of the two chapters presents and discusses politicians' perceptions (Salgado et al.) and the other, journalists' perceptions (Stanyer et al.). This research had several aims. The first was to understand populism from the perspective of politicians and journalists. Few, if any, studies have sought to try and understand the phenomenon from this standpoint. The second was to give voice to our data subjects, allowing them to express themselves in their own words, without constraint. And, third, was to determine the extent to which perceptions were shared (or not) across borders. Few, if any, studies have tried to understand this phenomenon in a comparative context.

Our approach aims to identify the most commonly held views on populism in countries in different European regions and to explore the reasons underpinning those views. This type of research agenda has potential to further illustrate the relationships between populism and media, and between populism and democracy. The present chapter outlines the main procedures adopted in our approach to studying perceptions of populism. Before concluding with a summary on our findings, the chapter explains the main outcomes of the research and provides contextual data for the study, as well as providing insight into reasons for the methodological design adopted by our research approach. It also examines some of the challenges faced by comparative studies in gathering and analyzing qualitative data.

Why Study Perceptions of Populism? And Why Include the Media?

The general purpose of our approach to studying perceptions of populism is broadly inspired by Blumer's (1986 [1969]) symbolic interactionism, which is based on three main premises: Actions towards things are heavily

influenced by the meaning of those things to the actors; meaning itself results from different types of social interactions; and meanings are construed and modified through interpretive processes. Furthermore, in our view, the media are deeply involved in all of these processes, especially when we consider complex phenomena such as populism. This line of reasoning substantiates the relevance of comparatively investigating perceptions of populism and what journalists and politicians—two groups which usually take on the role of leading public opinion—consider populism to be, and what are its causes and consequences.

Making sense of political information and events, in a similar way to political socialization more generally, is influenced by what we consider others to think. Additionally, research has pointed to the influential role of opinion leaders in opinion formation (e.g., the two-step flow of communication by Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2017 [1955] which draws attention to the influences of opinion leaders on citizens, and of media on both). Other influential media research has also empirically supported the impact the media have on perceptions and attitudes (e.g., Gerbner & Gross, 1976; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Scheufele, 1999).

Contemporary political and media environments also suggest the centrality of both opinion-makers and the media in the formation of perceptions. For example, populist rhetoric itself implies the importance of the media: Some populist politicians openly criticize journalists and mainstream media and portray them as ‘enemies of the people’, while most populists try to bypass all kinds of representation, including that provided by the news media coverage of current events. A prime example is Viktor Orbán in Hungary. This also means that there are commonly intentional distortions of news and reality which result in misinformed beliefs that have potential to impact on the different actors’ perceptions of events.

Populism has been seen both as a negative and positive feature of democracy (see Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012, 2017; Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Salgado & Stavrakakis, 2018). It might be that this apparent contradiction is linked, not only to the different experiences countries have which is driven by the different types of populism they have first-hand experience of, but also to the discourse by and about populists that are produced and conveyed in the different types of media by opinion-makers in general, and in particular by politicians and mainstream journalists.

A study such as this also provides important subsidiary information about democracy, its quality, and the role of the media in democracy. By talking about populism, its causes and consequences, politicians and journalists are indirectly assessing the quality of democracy in their own countries and worldwide, and making inferences about the role of different types of media (e.g., news media coverage and social media) both

in democracy and in these phenomena. Establishing the most common views on populism and on populist actors also sets the tone for further understanding citizens’ evaluations of the country’s values, and signals the behaviors and attitudes that are expected of politicians, journalists, and citizens in general.

This relationship between opinion-makers’ ideas and the overall political environment is largely assumed in research, but it has not been consistently and systematically examined and documented. Our research approach fits within this scope and is a first attempt to look at these issues systematically, but taking advantage of the added value of qualitative research regarding the richness and complexity of the data collected. Only a qualitative approach permits such a detailed study of these elements.

Why a Qualitative (Comparative) Approach to Studying Populism?

The main goal of this research project is to try to understand how actors in the media and politics make sense of the current ‘populist zeitgeist’. There is a long tradition in communication and media studies, and in the social sciences more generally, of interpretivist research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, qualitative comparative analyses in this vein have been less common. Indeed, most spatially comparative research has paid less attention to questions of human understanding, preferring instead to focus on causality and empirically observable facts. This positivistic methodological approach has advantages (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994), but it is not the only one and is not always the most suitable for addressing certain research questions (see Brady, Collier, & Seawright, 2010).

From existing quantitative research on populist political communication, we know an increasing amount about what populist politicians and parties say and what is said about them in the media and, from this, the views of such actors might be extrapolated, but as far as we know, few have gone beyond media texts and political manifestos to explore meaning making in relation to populism. So why do we need to examine journalists’ and politicians’ understanding of populism? And why comparatively? We do not know exactly what sense politicians and journalists in different countries make of the rise of populism. Is it, for example, connected to racism, nationalism, popular participation? What assumptions, associations, and prejudices are most commonly held? It is precisely these views that shape the production of political and media texts and are an important part of shaping public opinion and political attitudes. Politicians and journalists are considered important opinion-makers and have privileged access to media outlets, which allows them to spread their views and influence others. Knowing the substance of their opinions about important issues such as populism, and its causes and consequences, is therefore key to comprehending what is understood by populism in different places,

which type of discourse, arguments, and issues are usually associated with it, and what explains variations across countries.

We also wanted to give voice to our data subjects to allow them to express themselves in their own words, to explain what they understood about populism, and then to see the extent to which perceptions are shared (or not) across borders. That is, to try to understand meaning making in the context in which it happens, in particular, national political and media contexts. While there have been some attempts to explore the meaning making activity of data subjects, this tends not to be comparative. Therefore, we wanted to know the extent of shared perceptions across borders given the different contexts. Existing research provides a series of possible reasons for why perceptions might be different or similar between countries, and these reasons are discussed in the respective chapters on journalists' and politicians' perceptions.

Qualitative comparative research faces several hurdles, especially when involving more than two or three national contexts (Brady et al., 2010). However, having a team of scholars from 15 European countries, with knowledge of the political and media systems and cultures, presented a golden opportunity for a qualitative comparative analysis of understandings of populism. Beside the immediate linguistic advantages, such a team can provide an in-depth culturally nuanced insight that cannot be gained otherwise, and rarely by one or two scholars. It is only with this knowledge that qualitative comparative research can be carried out thoroughly and any reliable patterns identified.

It is important to note that from the outset the project was a collaborative exercise. The working group was committed to the principle of inclusive research. All members were given the opportunity to provide input into each stage of the research process and the discussions took place at key meetings organized by the COST Action, with further work conducted in the periods between meetings.

In sum, we believe that a qualitative comparative approach has the advantage of drawing on the substantive knowledge of researchers situated in the countries under examination. This allows a more culturally nuanced account of the journalists' and politicians' understanding of populism across countries.

Method

Since the focus of the project was to examine how politicians and journalists make sense of populism and its causes and consequences, it was important that the chosen research instruments allowed these two target groups to express their views and provide detailed responses to the questions. We could have used an instrument such as a closed survey with pre-defined responses (e.g., yes/no, or multiple-choice sets), but it was felt among working group members that this would limit the scope

for interviewees to be able to express themselves. It was deemed crucial to allow the interviewees to articulate their views and not be limited to box-ticking.

It is well documented that qualitative research interviews allow in-depth examination of views, although they do have well-acknowledged limitations (e.g., very context-specific data could elicit processes of 'double hermeneutic'; for a synoptic account, see King & Horrocks, 2010). However, this choice needed to be offset against the need to be able to compare interview findings. The need to produce material that was directly comparable across countries, media outlets, and political parties meant that the interviewers needed to use the same questions and have the exact same guidelines regarding how questions should be posed, and additional information requested when needed. To overcome this tension, the working group used semi-structured qualitative research interviews. These enabled there to be a balance between, on the one hand, giving voice to the interviewee, and, on the other, providing a clear focus on a number of agreed topics. It also afforded interviewees the space to talk but provided material that was directly comparable.

Countries Included and Contextual Information

As noted earlier, we were interested in identifying discernible patterns across countries, type of media outlets and political parties, and between left and right on the political spectrum. In total, researchers from 13 countries took part in the study of journalists, and 11 countries in the study of politicians (see Table 2.1 below). This means that some countries only appeared in one of the studies. The country sample was self-selecting, determined by membership of the COST Action, and by interest in and ability to participate in the research being developed at the working group. The nature of all COST Actions means that as long as a country meets the qualifying criteria, researchers from that country can join the Action. The working group chairs ensured as much as possible that the country

Table 2.1 Country sample for the interview studies with journalists and politicians

<i>Country</i>	<i>Journalists</i>	<i>Politicians</i>
Eastern Europe	Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Hungary; Romania; Serbia	Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Hungary; Poland; Romania
Northern Europe	Denmark	Denmark; Norway
Southern Europe	France; Greece; Italy; Portugal; Spain	Greece; Italy; Portugal; Spain
Western Europe	—	—
Other	Turkey	—

sample included countries that corresponded to all the different European regions (see Aalberg et al., 2017), but this could not be enforced, and some countries had to withdraw from the study due to lack of means to conduct the research (see also the introduction to this volume). There was ineluctable tension between what was desirable in theory and what was feasible in practice. In each country a minimum of four journalists and four politicians were interviewed. This followed a long discussion about the feasibility of adding additional interviewees vis-à-vis the value added to this with the possibility of introducing sample imbalance in the data analysis stages.

The politicians included in the study were required to be elected politicians in national or regional assemblies, or party leaders' representatives. The sample needed to include left and right or center political parties, and one populist party as defined by country chapters included in the edited volume by Aalberg et al. (2017), in which the different cases of populist actors in the several European countries were identified and discussed by the country chapters' authors. The selection of populist actors included in our study was thus based on the selection previously made by the participants in their country chapters which were published in the first COST Action edited book (Aalberg et al., 2017), namely on Bosnia (Džananović & Karamehić, 2017), the Czech Republic (Císař & Štětka, 2017), Denmark (Bächler & Hopmann, 2017), France (Hubé & Truan, 2017), Greece (Papathanassopoulos, Giannouli, & Andreadis, 2017), Hungary (Csigó & Merkovity, 2017), Italy (Bobba & Legnante, 2017), Norway (Jupskås, Ivarsflaten, Kalsnes, & Aalberg, 2017), Poland (Stępińska, Lipiński, Hess, & Piontek, 2017), Portugal (Salgado & Zúquete, 2017), Romania (Corbu, Balaban-Bălaș, & Negrea-Busuioc, 2017), and Spain (Sanders, Berganza, & de Miguel, 2017). Table 2.2 gives an overview of the parties from each country represented by our interviewees (approximately 50 politicians).

To be interviewed in our study, journalists had to be established and experienced professionals who report on politics and who work for a known media outlet, preferably with national or international reach. Where this was not possible, news media outlets with regional reach could also be included. The country teams were asked to include one journalist from a popular/tabloid media outlet that conformed to the above, whenever possible. Overall, more than 50 journalists were interviewed. An overview of the news media outlets they worked for can be found in Table 2.3.

In the event that country teams were unable to meet the criteria for selection, their countries were excluded from one or both studies. While in most countries access to interviewees was unproblematic, this was not always the case for both politicians and journalists. In some countries, despite repeated requests, it was impossible to achieve the quota of interviews and/or the minimum required balance in the sample within the given time frame and so these countries were excluded from the study.

Table 2.2 Political parties of the interviewed politicians

Country	Type of party		
	Left and center-left parties	Right and center-right parties	Populist parties
Bosnia	The Democratic Front	Serb Democratic Party; Party of Democratic Action (SDA)	SBB (Alliance for Better Future)
Bulgaria	Coalition Bulgarian Socialist Party for Bulgaria	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (CEDB)	Ataka; Volya
Denmark	Social-Democrats; Alternativet	Venstre (Right-Liberal Party)	Danish People's Party
Greece	Potami	Nea Dimokratia (New Democracy)	Golden Dawn; Syriza
Hungary	LMP	(an independent MP)	Fidesz; Jobbik
Italy	Democratic Party	Forza Italia	Northern League; 5 Stars Movement
Norway	Socialist Left Party; Centre Party	Conservative Party	The Progress Party
Poland	Modern (Nowoczesna); Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	Civic Platform (PO)	Law and Justice (PiS)
Portugal	Communist Party (PCP); Socialist Party (PS)	Social Democratic Party (PSD)	PNR (National Renewal Party)
Romania	PSD (The Social Democrat Party)	PNL (National Liberal Party); UDMR (The Democratic Union of the Hungarians from Romania)	USR (Union to Save Romania)
Spain	PSOE; Citizens (C's)	Popular Party (PP)	Podemos

Asking Questions

The interview guide covered the key questions to be asked by all researchers involved in the project (see section below for further details on the actual questions and their specific purpose). The questions were designed to be open and not leading. It was agreed the interviewers should not lead the interviewees' responses, but instead allow them to speak. Follow-up questions for clarification could be asked when necessary but it was important to allow the interviewees to respond without prompt and to freely speak their minds. With these strict procedures, we were trying to ensure that we were collecting responses to the actual questions posed and

Table 2.3 Media outlets of the interviewed journalists

Country	Type of media outlet	
	Broadsheet/serious	Popular/tabloid media
Bosnia	Numanović; Karup-Druško; Mavrak; TV Čubro	Daily Avaz
Bulgaria	Panorama Bulgarian National Television (BNT); media regulatory body; freelance journalist and political blogger	Gallery
Czech Republic	Czech Television; Týden (The Week); Respekt; Právo	–
Denmark	Politiken; Jyllands-Posten; TV2	Ekstra Bladet
France	Le Monde; slate.fr; www.lesjours.fr; freelance journalist	–
Greece	Kathimerini; Efimerida ton Syntakton; cnn.gr	Democratia
Hungary	Heti Világ Gazdaság (World Economy Weekly); TV2	888.hu; RTL Klub
Italy	Corriere della Sera, Il Giornale; Il Fatto Quotidiano	–
Portugal	Público; Expresso; Observador; SIC	Correio da Manhã
Romania	Adevarul; Sinteza; clujcultural.ro	Romania TV
Serbia	Radio Television of Vojvodina; Deutsche Welle Radio; NIN	Blic
Spain	El Mundo; COPE; Libertaddigital.com; el diario.es	–
Turkey	Hurriyet; anonymous national newspaper x2; Gozlem (regional)	–

that we were gleaned the respondents' first impressions without inducing any bias via the interviewer.

The resort to prompts and probes during interviews was also considered and it was deemed that these interventions were important to ensure that the interviewees reflected on and addressed the questions asked (see King & Horrocks, 2010, for a discussion of the issues). This type of action by the interviewer was limited, though, to situations where the interviewee had not properly addressed a question or when further clarification was needed. Specific recommendations were made for interviewers to avoid leading the interviewees' answers and to intervene only in case the actual question had not been answered or when further clarification was deemed necessary.

Finally, it was decided that all interviews should either be conducted in person or over Skype call, and not by email or a social media medium

such as Facebook (see Opdenakker, 2006, for a discussion of the issues involved in this type of decision). In-person interviews were favored and encouraged, but in case these were not possible due to distance or the unavailability of respondents to meet in person, interviews were conducted through Skype.

Translation

There were 15 different countries included in the study, each with a different language. The challenges of translating qualitative interviews have been well documented elsewhere (Bogusia & Young, 2004). One of the main challenges of conducting qualitative comparative research in multiple languages is the issue of accurate translations that take account of cultural and linguistic differences. This challenge was amplified by a limited budget. While there was no money for professional translators, all working group members spoke English fluently in addition to their native language. The translations were thus conducted by members of the COST Action and of the working group. This had the added advantage that those who translated the interviews were the same people working on the research, ensuring that they were familiar with the project, its guidelines, and objectives (Bogusia & Young, 2004).

Each research question was also translated from English into the various native languages by participating researchers. Any queries with the original English questions were followed up with the project leaders. Any potential follow-up questions not included in the interview guide, but deemed necessary to clarify the respondents' answers, had to be clearly signaled and fully translated and explained in the interview transcripts. Once complete, all the interviews were transcribed into English or, in the event this was not possible, into their native language with all the relevant passages relative to the research questions translated into English. While it would have been ideal to translate each interview in its entirety into English, the cost of doing this and the practicalities of timing meant that this could not be done at this stage in all countries. The translated responses to each of the questions were then made available for the research team to use.

Explaining the Questions

The questions were designed not only to capture the most relevant perceptions of populism from these two target groups, but also to attempt to unravel what could be underpinning some of their ideas, always considering the comparative dimension, as previously explained. This means that the questions had to be simple and straightforward and had to make perfect sense to both groups, that is to say, they could not be focused merely on journalistic culture issues or on polity-related subjects, but they had

to be meaningful to both target groups. There were five main questions which, in some cases, additionally included short follow-up questions. The questions were devised to illustrate the key themes that are usually related to the formation of perceptions of populism: The broad *meaning* of populism for each of these two target groups in different European countries; the *perceived consequences* of populism in their country and in democracy in general; the *reasons for the popularity* of populist political actors; the *social issues* that are most related to populism (if any, in their opinion) in their own country; and, finally, the *role of the media*, both mainstream media outlets and social media, in spreading or containing populist ideas and discourse. These questions were thus also related to the issues addressed in other parts of this volume.

The specific aim of the first question, 'What do you understand by populism?', was to determine what the interviewees recognized as populism and to take note of the examples of populist political actors, both national and international, that were mentioned by them (specific instructions were given to the interviewees to specifically ask for at least two examples of populist politicians and populist political parties, one national and one international, in case respondents had not referred to any specific examples in their answer). Linking specific examples to the interviewees' understanding allowed us insight into the coherence of their views about populism and, at the same time, to explore whether there were mainly differences or similarities in what journalists and politicians in different countries consider prime examples of populist political actors (both individuals and institutions, such as political parties). From this question, we were also interested in noting whether the interviewees had a clear idea about what populism is and means, or whether they gave a vague appreciation of these developments and phenomena (country teams were asked to consider whether the interviewees provided a clear definition or not). In addition, the study aimed to ascertain if populism was perceived by the interviewees as something mainly positive, negative, or both, or indeed neutral, and if they perceived it as mostly dependent on the political actors and the specific context.

The second question dealt with the *consequences of populism*, both in the interviewees' own countries and more generally for democracy worldwide ('What do you think the consequences of populism are for your country? And what are, in your view, the consequences of populism for the health of democracy in general?'). The objective of including this topic was to ascertain what the two groups, politicians and journalists, thought about the effects of populism. We considered it important to determine the types of effects that were named, and whether there were differences in Europe regarding the prevalence of negative versus positive effects of populism. Associating populism with a specific valence and to a determined type of effect also conveys important information regarding what the main perception of populism is, and could even, in some

cases, conflict with it. For example, a person considering populism to be the people participating in democracy and, at the same time, seeing it as something negative.

In question three we addressed the reasons for the success of populist political leaders and parties ('In your opinion, what are the reasons for the popularity of populist leaders and parties?'). The aim here was to understand what the interviewees thought about what explains the appeal of populist political parties and leaders and whether those causes were related to international versus national factors (e.g., society, politics, culture, media), or to political leaders' personal characteristics (charisma, clarity in communication, and so on).

Question four was aimed at exploring the *social issues* that these two target groups usually relate to populism in the 15 different countries ('Which social issues are most related to populism in your country?'). Interviewees received instructions to note the most important social issues (e.g., immigration, migration crisis, unemployment, cuts in welfare benefits, and so on), as well as specific measures and policies implemented by the national governments or the European Union, and to only ask for further information in cases in which clear examples had not been provided by the interviewee.

Finally, the last question on our list was related to the role played by the media ('In your country, to what extent are leading media outlets supportive or critical of populism? Do any media outlets behave in a populist manner? If so, which ones?'). The objective was to understand whether the interviewees saw populism as a broader phenomenon that could involve the media and explore these perceived connections: What is the general stance that media outlets take towards populism, do they cover populist ideas and actors, or are the media openly against populism and therefore refuse to cover populist ideas and actors or campaign against them? The interviewees received special instructions to ask specifically for examples of media outlets that acted in a populist manner and to try to understand why the interviewee considered those media outlets to be populist. This information is key to evaluating the role that is attributed by politicians and journalists to the media in spreading or containing populism in these different European countries.

Analyzing the Material

The richness and effectiveness of any interview study depends in part on the analysis of the material gathered. After the interviews were held and transcribed, the objective was to provide a coherent overview of the material collected from the multiple countries by systematizing the interviewees' responses and by deriving further information about the perceptions captured in the qualitative interviews. It was decided that the best way to achieve this within the budget and time frame was by using thematic

analysis. 'Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). While there are various approaches (see Braun & Clarke, 2006), it is an ideal method for analyzing qualitative data such as interviews. The strengths and pitfalls of using the method have been widely discussed (see Aronson, 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006), but this type of approach provides a workable and cost-effective way to make sense of a potentially large amount of data produced from the interview process and, as such, was suitable for this study. The data collected through the interviews was then analyzed by the country teams in order to deconstruct and retrieve both direct quotes from the respondents' answers and meta-information, inferences that could be made from the way in which they answered the questions.

The researchers used the procedures outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006) and the actual national thematic analyses were conducted in two stages. Stage one involved the researchers from each country going through the responses to each question and identifying the key themes. This material was sent to the project coordinators together with the translated key passages from the manuscript of each interview. After this procedure, country teams were asked to further analyze the data by completing predetermined forms that contained specific information requests.

Namely, in the first question, which was related to the definition of populism from the point of view of the respondent, the additional information that was withdrawn from the interviews was based on the following guidelines: Does the interviewee provide a clear, or vague, definition of populism? Is the definition provided explicitly based on an individual politician (yes/no, who)? Is populism seen as negative, positive, or both? With regard to question two, which focused on the consequences of populism, researchers were asked to interpret the valence (positive, negative, or both) of the effects that had been named by the respondents, and to categorize them into specific types of effects, namely: social effects (e.g., citizen participation, increased racism and intolerance, etc.); party system effects (e.g., new political parties, unexpected electoral success of populist parties, etc.); policy effects (e.g., new policies focusing on issues raised by populist political actors). Similarly, the further analysis of question three also included some degree of categorization. In addition to identifying the main idea of what explains the appeal of populist leaders and parties according to the interviewee, researchers were asked to discern between different options and to illustrate with examples or quotes provided by the respondents. The following options were included: personal characteristics, political factors, social factors, media, or other reasons that should also be explained by researchers. In the supplementary analysis of question four, in addition to identifying the main issues that the interviewee had linked to populism, researchers also had to assess whether one issue had been prioritized over others (in the case more than one issue had been

referred to), to name the specific examples that had been provided, and to determine whether the social issues referred to by the respondents had been presented mainly as a cause, or a consequence, of populism. Finally, in the analysis of question five, which was related to the media and to the objective of ascertaining whether leading media outlets were supportive or critical of populism, researchers were asked to note the examples provided (populist media outlets and media that cover certain issues in a populist manner) and to retrieve the following meta-information: What is the perspective of the interviewee regarding whether leading media outlets cover populist political actors in his/her country?; if there is news coverage of populism; what is the interviewee's view on whether the media are predominantly critical or supportive of populism?; and the explanation behind that media stance.

Use of Terms in the Text

Given the sample size, composition, and selection, it was decided that it would be of little value to provide the exact number of people who responded in a particular way to each question. Such an approach was also deemed to run counter to a qualitative investigation of this nature. Instead, throughout the chapters we often use the terms 'many', 'a lot', 'mostly', 'a majority'. These words were chosen carefully to convey the scale of a particular response to questions. They are ambiguous in nature, used here in the following way. 'Minority': less than 50 percent. 'Few or not many': less than 30 percent. 'Majority': more than 50 percent of those responding but not more than 70 percent. 'Mainly or a lot': between 70 and 90 percent. 'Most': more than 90 percent of those interviewed.

Use of Direct Quotes

The inclusion of direct quotes was not deemed necessary for the research coherence, but it was deemed they would provide a useful insight into the views of interviewees in certain contexts. Once the interview material had been analyzed, it was agreed in the working group that the contributing authors would review the transcripts and identify possible quotes that could clearly illustrate a particular point of view. These quotes were provided together with an explanation of where they could fit best and what they best illustrated, and were included in the two chapters on the politicians and journalists' perceptions of populism whenever possible.

Ethical Considerations

Finally, considering the topic and the characteristics of the research approach, ethical considerations were of utmost importance to the project. Clear guidance was sent to all those involved in the research project.

Those unfamiliar with ethical research principles or those responsible for researchers that were unfamiliar were required to ensure that adequate training was undertaken and that all were familiar with guidelines and possible violations. There are numerous research ethics guidelines and in our case, the researchers adhered to the European Science Foundation's code of conduct on research integrity, which is available at <https://tinyurl.com/y6uo6ahu>.

In addition to this, country researchers needed to comply with their own university's ethical guidelines, ensuring prior ethical clearance from their own universities (documentation confirming this ethical permission was provided for the COST Action's records), and obtaining any further permissions from necessary committees for the research and the realization of the interviews with politicians and journalists. The interviewers required the explicit authorization of the interviewee to use their name and professional position. In cases where this permission was not granted, full anonymity was given as an alternative, provided that the national research team was directly and fully involved in the interview to avoid any potential use of false information. The political situation in some of the countries included in the study meant there was a need to safeguard certain interviewees, especially those who only felt safe to express their views anonymously. Each country team was responsible for securely storing the interview material and ensuring this complied with national and EU-wide data legislation.

Conclusion

This chapter provided background on the methodological approach adopted in the study of politicians' and journalists' perceptions of populism further explained in the next two chapters. The following two chapters are the product of a large-scale piece of qualitative comparative research involving researchers from 15 countries, conducting and analyzing some 96 interviews in 15 different languages. The study includes countries from Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern Europe, which have experienced different ideological versions of populism and different levels of success of populist actors and ideas. Such large-scale qualitative projects tend to be the exception in comparative research, which is often largely quantitative in nature, in no small part due to the logistical and financial challenges such a large qualitative undertaking involves. The COST Action provided a unique opportunity to assemble a knowledgeable research team with the skills to make such an undertaking a reality. Besides the immediate linguistic advantages, such a team provided an in-depth culturally nuanced insight that could not be gained otherwise, and rarely by quantitative research. It is only with this knowledge that qualitative comparative research can be undertaken thoroughly and any reliable patterns identified. Indeed, without this it would have been very difficult to conduct a research project of this kind.

As noted from the outset, the project was a collaborative exercise. All working group members had the opportunity to provide input into each stage of the research process, from design through to the analysis and writing up. When designing the project, the approach taken was subject to much discussion. Members were committed to an interpretivist approach that gave voice to data subjects and examined and agreed on the sampling and analysis techniques as outlined. A project of this kind poses several challenges. For example, there was no budget to conduct research or pay professional translators, and these activities had to be conducted by team members.

Ethical considerations were of utmost importance to the project. Clear guidance was sent to all those involved in the research project, and those who were unfamiliar had to ensure that adequate learning was undertaken and that all were then familiar with guidelines and possible violations.

The qualitative approach to research adopted here results in very rich and complex datasets that have only started to scratch the surface in the next chapters. A lot is still left to investigate and disentangle in the data. Different research approaches based, for example, on critical discourse analysis or other forms of narrative analysis, could point to the existence of meaningful underlying differences across countries, not detected through thematic analysis (even though several layers of analysis were performed in the current study). This was a first exploratory approach to a highly complex phenomenon aimed at describing and explaining perceptions and variation across countries. The role of journalists and politicians in interpreting and framing populism is not insignificant considering that their perceptions' impact on politics might, in turn, influence matters as important as the acceptance of democratic rules (freedom of expression, etc.), for example.

References

- Aalberg, T., Esser, E., Reinemann, C., Strömbäck, J., & de Vreese, C. H. (Eds.). (2017). *Populist political communication in Europe*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Aronson, J. (1995). A pragmatic view of thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 2(1), 1–3.
- Bächler, C. M., & Hopmann, D. N. (2017). Denmark. The rise of the Danish people's party. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 29–41). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Blumer, H. (1986[1969]). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bobba, G., & Legnante, G. (2017). Italy. A breeding ground for populist political communication. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 221–234). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Bogusia, T., & Young, A. (2004). Quantitative research and translation dilemmas. *Qualitative Research*, 4(2), 161–178.
- Brady, H. E., Collier, D., & Seawright, J. (2010). Refocusing the discussion of methodology. In H. E. Brady & D. Collier (Eds.), *Rethinking social inquiry: Diverse tools, shared standards* (pp. 3–20). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Císař, O., & Štěrka, V. (2017). Czech Republic. The rise of populism from the fringes to the mainstream. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 285–298). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Corbu, N., Balaban-Bălaș, D., & Negrea-Busuioc, E. (2017). Romania. Populist ideology without teeth. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 326–338). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Csigó, P., & Merkovity, N. (2017). Hungary. Home of empty populism. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 299–310). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction. The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1–20). London: Sage.
- Domke, D., Shah, D., & Wackman, D. (1998). Media priming effects. Accessibility, and activation. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 10(1), 51–74. doi:10.1093/ijpor/10.1.51
- Džananović, N., & Karamehić, M. (2017). Bosnia and Herzegovina. Populism in transition. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 263–273). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television. The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 26(2), 172–194. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01397.x
- Hubé, N., & Truan, N. (2017). France. The reluctance to use the word populism as a concept. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 181–194). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jupskås, A. R., Ivarsflaten, E., Kalsnes, B., & Aalberg, T. (2017). Norway. Populism from anti-tax movement to government party. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 54–67). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. (2017[1955]). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1993). The evolution of agenda-setting research. Twenty-five years in the marketplace of ideas. *Journal of Communication*, 43(2), 58–67. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993

- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (Eds.). (2012). *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017). *Populism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Opdenakker, R. J. G. (2006). Advantages and disadvantages of four interview techniques in qualitative research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 7(4), 11.
- Papathanassopoulos, S., Giannouli, I., & Andreadis, I. (2017). Greece. Populism between left and right. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 195–206). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Salgado, S., & Stavrakakis, Y. (2018). Introduction. Populist discourses and political communication in Southern Europe. *European Political Science*. Advanced online publication. doi:10.1057/s41304-017-0139-2
- Salgado, S., & Zúquete, J. P. (2017). Portugal. Discreet populisms amid unfavorable contexts and stigmatization. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 235–248). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sanders, K. B., Berganza, R., & de Miguel, R. (2017). Spain populism from the far right to the emergence of Podemos. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 249–262). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49(4), 103–122. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x
- Stepińska, A., Lipiński, A., Hess, A., & Piontek, D. (2017). Poland. A fourth wave of populism? In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 311–325). New York, NY: Routledge.