Populist Communication
In the Context of the European Parliament Elections 2014

Franzisca Schmidt
COST ESR Think Tank
January 2015
Research questions

> What different types of populist communication styles emerged during the EP election campaign 2014
   – and under which conditions are populist communication styles selected by political parties?

> Is a populist communication style a successful strategy to attain presence in the print media?
   – and if yes, under what conditions?

> In what way is this populist party communication handled by the different kinds of print media?
> Germany, Austria, Greece

> 8 weeks prior to the EP elections

> quantitative content analysis of press releases

— all political parties that reached more than 3% in the last national or European elections (and are running again for EP elections 2014)

— Europ* europ* EU (2x)
Definition
Populism

> “Populism is conceived of as a political style essentially displaying proximity of the people, while at the same time taking an anti-establishment stance and stressing the (ideal) homogeneity of the people by excluding specific population segments”

(Jagers & Walgrave 2007: 319)

> 3 components:

— alleged proximity to and identification with the population

  appeal to the people, homogeneity

— criticism of and distrust in the (political) elites

  elite-critique

— ostracism of 'the others'

  exclusion
## Types of populism

**Jagers & Walgrave (2007)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Thin populism:</strong></th>
<th>(1) people reference</th>
<th>empty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Medium 1” populism:</strong></td>
<td>(1) people reference and (2) elite critique</td>
<td>anti-elitist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Medium 2” populism:</strong></td>
<td>(1) people reference and (3) exclusion</td>
<td>excluding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thick populism:</strong></td>
<td>(1) people reference and (2) elite critique and (3) exclusion</td>
<td>complete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

> All constitutive traits of populism are considered as features of a political style rather than being bound to a distinct ideology (Jagers & Walgrave 2007)

> Populism is conceived as the property of a message rather than the property of the actor sending the message (Roodujin et al. 2012).
Theory

Populism and Euroscepticism

> general assumption: Euroscepticism provides a particularly favourable environment for populism

> process of (European) integration:
  — allocation of competences
  — enlargement, membership

> activated issues within Es. discourse:
  — democratic deficit of the EU
  — distance EU elite – citizens; bureaucracy of EU institutions
  — EU accession negotiations, free movement of persons

> Harmsen (2010): Euroscepticism is not a subset of populism
Theory

The inverted U-curve

Positioning on selected EU Policies, by Left/Right dimension, all parties in 1999 (N = 125)
Source: Hooghe et al. (2002)

Left-right ideologie and EU position in 1999 (EU 15)
Assumption

H0: Parties settled either on the right or left pole of the traditional political spectrum use more populist communication styles than mainstream parties.
Results

\(H_0\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>% Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grüne</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEOS</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZÖ</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPÖ</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Austria

people reference

N = 689; V = 0.17; p < 0.010
Results

$H_0$

N = 689; V = 0.24; p < 0.001
Results

$H_0$

$N = 212; V = 0.28; p < 0.001$
Results

H0

N = 212; V = 0.28; p < 0.001
Results

$H_0$

N = 330; $V = 0.37; p < 0.001$
Results

H0

N = 330; V = 0.37; p < 0.001
# Theory

## Forms of Euroscepticism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eurosceptic Left</th>
<th>Eurosceptic Right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>political dimension</strong></td>
<td><strong>political dimension</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • political critique of the EU's democratic deficit | • rejection of further political integration  
  ➤ driven by the established political class |
| • criticism is directed to political elites | • criticism is directed to EU politicians  
  ➤ social & political corruption, bureaucracy |
| **economic dimension** | **cultural dimension** |
| • socio-economic criticism of the EU’s neo-liberalism | • opposition to  
  ➤ (more) immigration  
  ➤ free movement of persons  
  ➤ prospective enlargement to the East |
| • criticism is directed to economic elites | • demand for stricter European border controls |

(e.g. Bartolini 2005; Heine 2010; Hooghe et al. 2002; Reunngot 2010; Scharpf 1996, 1999)  
(e.g. Betz 1994; Börzel & Risse 2000; Hooghe et al. 2002; Kitschelt 1995; Risse-Kappen 1996; Taggart 1998)
Assumptions

> H1a: In the populist communication of left-wing eurosceptic parties the element of 'exclusion' is neglected and a 'medium 1' (or 'thin') type of populism is predominant.

> H1b: In the populist communication of right-wing eurosceptic parties the element of 'exclusion' is overbalanced and they are therefore applying a 'medium 2' or a 'thick' type of populism.
Results

$H1$

- N = 264; $V = 0.40; p < 0.001$
Results

$H1$

N = 264; V = 0.40; p < 0.001
Results

H1

N = 64; V = 0.55; p < 0.001
Results

\[ H1 \]

\[ N = 64; V = 0.55; p < 0.001 \]
Results

H1

N = 228; V = 0.43; p < 0.001
Results

H1

N = 228; V = 0.43; p < 0.001
> transnational nature of the EU
> multi-level governance
> question of identity

> What identity perception do the political parties represent?
> How does this identity perception influence populist party communication?
Q03: Do you see yourself as...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land</th>
<th>(NATIONALITY) only</th>
<th>(NATIONALITY) and European</th>
<th>European and (NATIONALITY)</th>
<th>European only</th>
<th>Total 'European'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


exclusive national identity
right-wing Eurosceptics

inclusive European identity
mainstream parties

left-wing Eurosceptics: „pro-European communitarian“ (Heine 2010)
Assumptions

> H2a: Eurosceptic parties from the right address their people reference to their own nation.

> H2b: Mainstream parties and Eurosceptic parties from the left rather appeal to the citizens of the EU.
Results

$H2$

N = 264; V = 0.28; p < 0.001
Results

H2

N = 64; V = 0.27; p < 0.010
Results

$H2$

Greece

N = 228; V = 0.30; p < 0.010
Conclusion

- Eurosceptic fringe parties do not use populist communication more often than mainstream parties, but there is a tendency to use more medium or thick populism than mainstream parties.

- Left-wing parties: anti-elitist populism

- Right-wing parties: anti-elitist populism & excluding populism

- Parties that represent an inclusive European identity are more often appealing to the community of Europeans than to the people of the national state:
  - (exception I: all Greek parties have a strong national focus)
  - (exception II: conservative mainstream parties)

- Parties that represent an exclusive national identity are more often appealing to the people of the national state than to the people of Europe.
Thank you!