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FULL PAPER

Populist communication in talk shows and social media
A comparative content analysis in four countries

Populistische Kommunikation in Talk-Shows und Social Media
Eine vergleichende Inhaltsanalyse in vier Ländern

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Abstract: To understand populism, it is crucial to understand populist political communication. We investigate how politicians across the political spectrum employ populist communication in different non-institutionalized communication arenas. Populism is defined as a thin ideology and three dimensions of populist communication are distinguished: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and exclusion. We analyze politicians' statements in talk shows and social media (Twitter and Facebook) in four Western democracies. The analysis shows that populist communication is context-dependent and that the use of the three dimensions varies across political systems, media channels, and party types.

Keywords: Populism, political communication, talk show, social media, political parties

Zusammenfassung: Um Populismus zu verstehen, ist es essentiell populistische politische Kommunikation zu verstehen. Wir untersuchen, wie Politiker entlang des politischen Spektrums populistische Kommunikation in verschiedenen nicht-institutionalisierten Kommunikationsarenen verwenden. Populismus wird als dünne Ideologie definiert und drei Dimensionen populistischer Kommunikation werden unterschieden: Volks-Zentrismus, Anti-Elitismus und Exklusion. Wir analysieren Aussagen von Politikern in Talk-Shows und sozialen Medien (Twitter und Facebook) in vier westlichen Demokratien. Die Analyse zeigt, dass populistische Kommunikation kontextabhängig ist und dass die Nutzung der drei Dimensionen über politische Systeme, Medienkanäle und Parteitypen hinweg variiert.

Schlagwörter: Populismus, politische Kommunikation, Talk-Show, soziale Medien, politische Parteien

1. Introduction

Populism has been highly topical in the mass media and the scientific debate (i.a. Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Taggart, 2004; Torre, 2015). A crucial aspect to understand political populism is to understand populist political communication (Stanyer, Salgado, & Strömbäck, 2017). Political communication is the central mechanism in the articulation of political interests, their aggregation, as well as their implementation and the legitimization of political decisions.

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The role of politicians as communicators has become increasingly important (Sheafer, Shenhav, & Balmas, 2014). Moreover, empirical research shows that populist messages can have far-reaching effects on citizens such as reinforcing populist attitudes or contributing to opinion polarization (Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017; Müller et al., 2017). Therefore, we follow a *communication-centered approach* (Stanyer et al., 2017) and address the first research question: *How do politicians employ populist communication?*

Many studies have investigated populism in the mass media (e.g. Akkerman, 2011; Bos, van der Brug, & Vreese, 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn, 2014b), party or election manifestos (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017; Rooduijn, De Lange, & van der Brug, 2014), or political speeches (Hawkins, 2009, 2010). Yet, only very few have examined populist communication in talk shows (Bos & Brants, 2014; Cranmer, 2011) or social media (Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017; Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017; Groshek & Engelbert, 2012; Van Kessel & Castelein, 2016).

These communication channels are, however, the perfect arena to investigate politicians' self-presentation because they are hybrid forms of mediality (Chadwick, 2013): They combine different media logics and offer different degrees of freedom for politicians' self-presentation. Due to this hybridization, these communication channels provide the ideal combination between outreach and control to politicians. This may be especially attractive for populist actors who try to reach a large audience as unmediated as possible.

Research on political populism – especially in Europe – has often focused on radical right-wing parties (see Mudde, 2007) and pre-defined populist political actors. However, in theory, populism has been described as "chameleon" (Taggart, 2000, p. 5) or "empty shell" (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, p. 324) that "lacks core values" (Taggart, 2004, p. 274). This implies that populism is not constrained to a specific political camp and can be complemented with different ideological elements, resulting in varying types of populism. This is especially relevant with regard to populist communication. Indeed, previous research has shown that both right-wing and left-wing, and even mainstream politicians, use populist communication (Cranmer, 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Therefore, this study investigates populism in the communication of politicians across the political spectrum.

We consider *populist communication* as the expression of *populist ideology* and analyze *populist key messages* that are related to the content (the *what*) of populist communication (in contrast to populist communication style, which refers to the *how*) (Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017). Following a communication-centered approach, political actors can be described as *more* or *less* populist (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017) "based on the extent to which they engage in populist communication" (Stanyer et al., 2017, p. 353). If we assume that political actors are not *either* populist *or* non-populist but *more* or *less* populist, this raises the second research question: *How does the use of populist communication depend on the contextual setting?*

The aim of this study is to assess how politicians of different party families employ three dimensions of populist communication – people-centrism, anti-elit-

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ism, and exclusion – in their self-presentation across different contextual settings (country specifics and media setting). The analysis is based on a quantitative content analysis comparing politicians' self-presentation in political talk shows and on social media (Twitter and Facebook) in Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

2. Defining populism

Populism was long seen as a "notoriously vague term" (Canovan, 1999, p. 3). It has been defined as an ideology, a political strategy, a style, or a discourse (Hawkins, 2010; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Laclau, 2005; Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001). Despite this lack of consensus and conceptual clarity, in the last few years scholars have increasingly agreed to conceive political populism as a *thin* ideology (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Kriesi, 2014; Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008; Wirth et al., 2016) and to understand it as a "set of ideas" (Hawkins, 2009; Rooduijn, 2014b; Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017; Taggart, 2000). Currently one of the most popular and most applied definitions of political populism is by Mudde (2004, p. 543), who describes populism as

> an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups – 'the pure people' versus the 'corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people.

Following this definition, populist ideology first states the existence of a homogenous and 'good' people and demands its empowerment and sovereignty. Second, populist ideology juxtaposes the people to the elite in a normative and moralistic manner. It presents a Manichean worldview in which "the Good people are exploited by the Evil elite" (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017, p. 2). Third, these first two aspects of populist ideology are dependent on a monolithic conception of 'the people' with a common understanding of the world. Thus, populism treats 'the people' as a homogenous category, a discrete entity, or a corporate body that is capable of having common interests, common desires, and a common will. This monolithic conception also implies that there are some specific segments of the population – "the dangerous 'others'" (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 3) – that do not share 'the people's' 'good' characteristics, values, and opinions. These out-groups are excluded from 'the people' and seen as a threat or a burden to society (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

We conceive populism as a thin ideology that can be combined with different ideological positions from the left to the right, thus, with more substantive, thicker ideologies like nationalism or socialism. It has been disputed where the line is to be drawn between the thin populist ideology and the add-on ideologies, in particular with regard to the exclusion of 'others' (see Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017). While some authors see it as a constitutive element of populism (e.g., Hameleers, Bos, & Vreese, 2017) and argue that there is a type of *excluding populism* (where exclusion substitutes anti-elitism) (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), others

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consider the exclusion of 'others' only as a part of right-wing populism (Rooduijn, 2014a; Wirth et al., 2016). We assume an intermediate position. Following Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, and de Vreese (2017), we argue that the construction of specific out-groups is inherent in the populist construction of a monolithic 'people' as a favored in-group. Depending on the conception of the people each type of populism holds, the respective out-groups vary. However, not all types of populism necessarily exclude specific social groups from the people and not all types of populism are equally explicit in their exclusion. In this regard, it is valuable to include exclusion as a dimension of populism in our theoretical model to differentiate between different types of populism.

3. Populist communication

The definition of populism as an ideology is not without its critics (see Aslanidis, 2016). Other authors have conceived populism rather as a communication style, discourse or frame (Aslanidis, 2016; Bos et al., 2011; Canovan, 1999; Cranmer, 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Laclau, 2005). We argue that these approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive (see also Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017). While the ideological core of populism often remains hidden, populist communication is open to our observation and may be used to identify populist actors empirically (Kriesi, 2014; Stanyer et al., 2017).

Based on our definition of populism as an ideology, we focus on the *content* of populist communication or *populist key messages* (*What?*) – in contrast to *populist style*, which is interested in the *form* of populist communication (*How?*) (Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017). Building on the theoretical considerations on populist ideology and the existing literature discussing populist communication (Cranmer, 2011; Ernst, Engesser, Büchel et al., 2017; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Reinemann et al., 2017; Wirth et al., 2016), we derive three dimensions of populist key messages: *people-centrism*, *anti-elitism*, and *exclusion*.

People-centrism relates to the first core element of populist ideology, the homogenous 'pure' people. However, not all references to the people are populist. We consider five key messages as populist: If a political actor 1) speaks in the name of 'the people' and claims to defend its will (*advocacy*); 2) claims to be accountable to 'the people' and refers to the importance of responding to 'the people's' will (*accountability*); 3) uses a reference to 'the people' to legitimize certain claims (*legitimacy*); 4) demands the sovereignty of 'the people' *(demanding popular sovereignty);* or 5) describes 'the people' as homogenous (*stating a monolithic people*) (Cranmer, 2011). The first three key messages relate directly to the in-group favoritism of the 'good' people. By way of populist communication, political actors try to appeal to the people, identify with the people, and justify their actions with the will of the people (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). *Demanding sovereignty of the people* captures the ideological element of the primacy of 'the people'. It entails the idea that 'the people's' will should have priority over other regulatory mechanisms such as laws or morals (e.g. human rights or supranational law). Consequently, only what is decided by the popular will is right (Kriesi, 2014). *Stating a monolithic people* means treating 'the people' as a united and indivisible entity with

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common feelings, common desires, and a common will, which is also central to populist ideology. It is in direct contrast to a pluralist vision of the people with many diverse values and opinions (Abts & Rummens, 2007).

The second dimension, *anti-elitism*, refers to the vertical differentiation between the people and the elite. First, populist anti-elitist key messages emphasize the distance and estrangement between the people and the elites. The elites are differentiated and excluded from the people by depicting them as being above ordinary citizens, out of touch with reality, and ignoring the people's will. Second, the elites are denounced as corrupt or incompetent. Third, they are blamed for any failures, problems, and undesirable developments in politics and society. The elite can thereby not only be political but also economic, cultural, or the media elite (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

The third dimension of populist communication is the rhetorical *exclusion* of specific social out-groups from the people. This refers to a differentiation along the *horizontal* dimension. As mentioned earlier, a typical element of populism is that the people are seen as a homogenous and monolithic body, while some specific population segments are excluded (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). In contrast to the elite, these out-groups are not above but within the people, thus subject to a horizontal differentiation. Although, according to Abts and Rummens (2007) it can also be seen as a second vertical antagonism since it is often a downward comparison between the people and groups that are considered the "bottom of society." Similarly to the elites, these out-groups can take on various forms depending on the constitution of the people as a nation, class, or ethnos (Canovan, 1999; Mény & Surel, 2000; Pasquino, 2008).

As these dimensions are directly derived from populist ideology, it is assumed that populist communicative content expresses the core ideas of populist ideology and translates them into typical claims, attributions, accusations, and demands that are conceived as populist key messages. However, the political actors do not have to be aware of the key messages they use. As mentioned above, following a communication-centered approach, it is seen as an empirical question to what degree a political actor is populist. Furthermore, political actors' communication can be more or less populist depending on the situational context.

4. Contextual factors and hypotheses

The first aspect investigated in this study refers to specific factors on the country level that may influence the occurrence of populist communication in politicians' self-presentation. Political communication is highly dependent on the contextual setting of different political systems (Pfetsch & Esser, 2012). Therefore, structural and situational macro-level factors are also expected to influence the use of populist communication (Reinemann et al., 2017). In this study, we focus primarily on more formal and long-term structural factors. Different systems of government and different electoral systems may provide different incentives and constraints for political actors to communicate in a populist manner. With regard to the system of government, we expect that in presidential systems, politicians have more incentives to speak populist than in parliamentary systems due to a higher per-

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sonalization and the "plebiscitarian legitimacy" of presidents (Linz, 1990; O'Donell, 1994). In a directorial system, in contrast, political communication is expected to be less populist. According to Lijphart (1999, p. 274), consensus democracies are overall "kinder" and "gentler". The collegial government and consensus orientation lead to a low concentration of media attention on national leaders or specific politicians (Kriesi, 2012), a need to form mandatory catch-all coalitions, and, thus, to lower incentives for politicians to use populist communication. With respect to the electoral system, drawing on Swanson and Mancini (1996) and Esser, de Vreese, and Hopmann (2017), we expect that majoritarian systems encourage more people-centrist and anti-elitist rhetoric due to unlikely coalitions, higher personalization, lower need to negotiate compromises, and a plebiscitarian legitimacy of the members of parliament. In proportional systems, on the other hand, politicians are less encouraged to adopt populist communication since the prospect of likely coalitions is expected to constrain anti-elitism, and elections via party-lists may provide fewer incentives for a people-centrist rhetoric.

Of course, additional historical, cultural, or situational factors may contribute to the extent of populist communication in a given political system (Reinemann et al., 2017). These factors are confounded with aspects of the political system and, thus, cannot be controlled for. Therefore, we formulate a hypothesis that is based on the formal structures of the political systems, in order to test whether these aspects alone can explain variations in the extent of populist communication. Based on these theoretical considerations, we would expect the self-presentation of politicians to be most populist in the United States (presidential, majoritarian), followed by the United Kingdom (parliamentary, majoritarian) and Switzerland (directorial/direct-democratic, proportional), and lowest in Germany (parliamentary, proportional). This leads to our first hypothesis:

H1: Politicians' communication is most populist in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom and Switzerland, and lowest in Germany.

Our second level of comparison is the communication channel. In a hybrid media system, political actors rely on a variety of different communication channels, whose logics complement each other (Chadwick, 2013). Comparing populist communication across different media platforms acknowledges this reality of the contemporary media environment (Bode & Vraga, 2017). Furthermore, it allows analyzing whether and how the context and affordances of different platforms influence the use of populist communication. This is highly relevant, because earlier research shows that the amount of populist communication is influenced by characteristics of the public setting and the communication channel (Cranmer, 2011; Ernst, Engesser, Büchel et al., 2017). The incentives to apply populist communication are higher in a media context compared to non-public settings, since the media provide a perfect stage for populists to present themselves and win voters (Mudde, 2004). This is connected to the assumption that populist communication complies with news values and media logic (Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017; Mazzoleni, 2008, 2014). Thus, intentionally or not, media can provide a

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conducive platform for populist communication. Political actors may of course also anticipate and exploit this.

Talk shows are often associated with a "tabloidization process" that fosters media logic and therefore could encourage the use of populist communication (Albertazzi, 2008). First, political discussions in talk shows follow a highly audience-oriented logic, which is favorable for populist communication (Landerer, 2013). The frequent presence or even participation of a live audience could specifically trigger people-centrist key messages. Second, the direct confrontation of political adversaries may foster the conflictive dimensions of populist communication (anti-elitism and exclusion). The sharp language, negativity, and taboo-breaking that are often inherent to anti-elitist and excluding statements also perfectly fit media logic and news values (Esser, Stępińska et al., 2017; Mazzoleni, 2008). Third, the apprehension of media logic as well as the competition for attention could make politicians more prone to use populist communication. Thus, talk shows may provide specific incentives for politicians to adopt a more populist communication. This assumption is also supported by the empirical results of Bos and Brants (2014), who show that populism is more prominent in talk shows compared to various other news media outlets.

New media such as social media, on the contrary, provide new platforms for politicians where they are less dependent on news media logic and are potentially less influenced by processes like mediatization (Sheafer et al., 2014). However, there are also indications that the network logic of social media may be an opportunity for populists to circumvent media institutions and journalistic gatekeepers (Engesser, Ernst et al., 2017). Furthermore, it has been observed that new media platforms such as Twitter may be used by populist politicians as a tool of permanent opposition against mainstream parties (Van Kessel & Castelein, 2016). In turn, theoretically, talk shows could also act as pluralist communication arenas that promote a rather deliberative than populist dialogue (Kessler & Lachenmaier, 2017). However, Kessler and Lachenmaier (2017) show that, empirically, politicians' speeches in political talk shows are mostly focused on dominance, allegations, proclamations, personalization, and the creation of closeness to the audience. Thus, contextual aspects of talk shows such as their immediacy, staged informality, confrontation, and audience-orientation may foster the use of populist communication in the heat of an interview situation or panel discussion. Deduced from these arguments, the second hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Politicians' communication is more populist in political talk shows than on social media.

Finally, differences in the usage of populist communication are expected in connection with party association. Although, following Cranmer (2011), it is assumed that the use of populist communication is not exclusively bound to politicians of specific parties, we expect the extent of populist communication (respectively of its three sub-dimensions) to be different for politicians of different types of parties. Specifically, politicians of pole parties are more prone to employ populist communication than moderate or center party politicians (Ernst et al., 2017). Similar to opposition parties, pole parties often oppose the governing and

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'mainstream' parties, denouncing them as "cartel" or as being "indifferent to the desires of ordinary citizens" (Katz & Mair, 2009, p. 759) thereby emphasizing responsiveness to voters' demands over responsibility (Mair, 2002, 2009). Moreover, populism has become an attractive alternative for radical political actors to overcome the stigma of being associated with fascism, Nazism, or communism (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017). The assumption that politicians of radical parties on both extremes of the political spectrum are particularly inclined to employ populist communication is also supported by comparative content analyses of party manifestos (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017; Steenbergen & Weber, 2015), press releases (Bernhard, 2016), and social media (Ernst et al., 2017).

Following these theoretical considerations and empirical findings, we argue that political actors across the whole spectrum of political ideology employ populist communication but that the extent of populism depends on how extreme political actors are positioned. We expect that political actors on both opposite ends of the political left-right spectrum use more populist key messages than moderate and center political actors. Thus, follows the third hypothesis:

H3: Politicians of pole parties use more populist key messages than politicians of moderate or center parties.

5. Data collection and sample

The four countries – Switzerland (CH), Germany (DE), the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US) – are chosen because they are broadly similar but distinguish themselves in several dimensions of their political systems. This allows to explain differences and similarities in the use of populist communication through different contextual settings and to reach insights beyond a single country (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012). All four selected countries are established Western democracies and they have seen a rise of populist actors or movements in the last few years. Yet, the strength and the institutionalized success of these actors varies between the four selected countries. Moreover, the countries differ in crucial aspects of their political system. First, they represent different systems of government: The United Kingdom and Germany have a parliamentary system, the United States has a presidential system, and Switzerland – being an exception – a directorial system with direct-democratic elements (Lijphart, 1999; Powell, 2000). Second, the selected countries have different electoral systems and therefore different candidate selection modes: While the United States and the United Kingdom have a majoritarian election system (first-past-the-post; in the US with caucuses and primaries), Germany and Switzerland have a system of proportional representation (Lijphart, 1999; Powell, 2000). This permits us to investigate populist communication in varying political and electoral settings.

Politicians' statements are analyzed in political talk shows, Facebook posts, and Tweets. These communication channels are chosen deliberately: Since this study focuses on politicians' self-presentation, thus, on how politicians communicate and present themselves and not on how they are represented by the media, it is useful to select media channels with as little journalistic influence as possible.

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Talk shows and social media suit these needs perfectly: They are used by politicians not only to discuss current topics and issues, but also for self-presentational reasons such as connecting with their voters, mobilizing supporters, and shaping their image (Lee, 2013; Schütz, 1995). In that sense, both talk shows and social media can be conceived of as hybrid media in which different media logics coincide (Chadwick, 2013). In such formats, political actors can present themselves with a stronger situational control than in traditional mass media outlets or press releases. Nevertheless, the degree of publicity and control by the politicians varies between social media and talk shows – with the latter showing a slightly higher amount of journalistic control and a higher influence of news media logic than the former. It is therefore interesting to compare the use of populist key messages in these different formats.

Since the politicians under scrutiny in this investigation must be kept equal across both talk shows as well as social media, the most pragmatic approach is to sample the relevant talk shows first, then list all politicians appearing in these talk shows and add their social media account.[1] To do so, two political talk shows are selected for each country and four episodes in March through May 2014 are investigated (see Table 1). This three-month routine period was deliberately chosen in order to investigate the exact same time frame across all four countries. This way, we ensure that we capture debates on a variety of political issues – possibly also on transnational issues – and do not only analyze the communication of the main candidates or frontrunners, as it would be the case during election times. Moreover, most comparative studies investigating populism focus on election times. We therefore contribute to the field by analyzing the daily communication in a routine period. The chosen political talk shows are normal, routine time shows that are broadcast weekly and on a regular basis. To ensure comparability between the political talk shows in each country, several selection criteria have been identified in order to create functionally equivalent research objects across the countries. They represent the two most influential and highest market share talk shows[2] per country that cover political content, incorporate some sort of panel or roundtable discussion with politicians and other experts, focus the discussion mainly on current and crucial political issues, and have a duration of about 60 minutes. Only talk show episodes in which at least one politician appeared are incorporated in the sample. In general, only statements by politicians that are present live in the studio and part of the main discussion panel are included in the study.[3] Statements by the moderator, non-politicians in the panels,

1 There is an inherent selection bias in this sampling procedure in that politicians that regularly appear in talk shows are likely to show a certain media affinity and be popularly known. They also might be more controversial, provocative, and outspoken and, thus, more interesting for the media narrative. However, we argue that this is not problematic in the study at hand: Firstly, this selection bias is held constant across all politicians and thus affects all individual sampling decisions. Furthermore, such vocal politicians are also more likely to maintain a social media account.

2 Whenever possible, public as well as private channels have been selected. The shows themselves do not show a clear, explicit political bias (left or right).

3 Some exceptions had to be made for *The Andrew Marr Show, Meet the Press,* and *This Week* due to their different program designs and country specifics. In these shows, one-on-one interviews and video-interviews were also coded in addition to panel discussions.

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and members of the audience are not coded. A new statement is coded if there was a change in the speaker, topic, or speaking situation.[4] Overall, 74 politicians appear in the selected talk show episodes (CH: 21, DE: 14, UK: 18, US: 21).

Table 1. Investigated talk shows

Country	CH		DE		UK		US	
Show	Arena	SonnTalk	Günther Jauch	Maybrit Illner	Andrew Marr Show	Question Time	Meet the Press	This Week
Channel	SRF 1	Tele Züri	ARD	ZDF	BBC 1	BBC 1	NBC	ABC
Public/ private	public	private	public	public	public	public	private	private

In a second step, official Facebook and Twitter profiles for each of the 74 appearing politicians are identified. Overall, 47 of the 74 politicians are present on one or both of these social media channels and their Tweets and Facebook status updates are analyzed for the same time period as the aired talk shows. By implementing this individual matching procedure on the micro level of politicians, the study ensures the comparability of communication on the two different media channels and thus avoids ecological fallacies. For each politician, a random sample of 20 Tweets and 20 Facebook posts is drawn from March 1st through May 31st, 2014. For those who have less than 20 Tweets or posts, the time period is extended to the whole year or, if necessary, to all of their Tweets and posts. Only Tweets and Facebook posts that include sufficient written content are taken into the sample. This excludes for example posts that only contain a link or a profile picture update. Tweets and Facebook posts are regarded as single statements, regardless of their length.

The time period is chosen so as to represent normal routine time. There were no national elections or extraordinary referendums in any of the investigated countries between March and May 2014. However, the United States had its midterm election on November 4th of the same year, and the European parliament election was held from May 22nd to May 25th. In Switzerland, one of its four annual popular votes took place on May 18th. Thus, the chosen material may contain statements that are connected to electoral or voting campaigns. All talk shows were recorded. Social media posts from Facebook and Twitter were obtained via Facepager (Keyling & Jünger, 2013). Both audiovisual and text files were manually coded and the intra-coder reliability is satisfactorily high: For all variables, Cohen's Kappa and Krippendorff's Alpha is above .60 and the agreement above 90 percent (overall average: .85, α = .85). Overall, the final sample comprises 926 statements by 74 politicians in talk shows, 648 Facebook posts, and 880 Tweets (N = 2,454).

4 The speaking situation refers to the addressee of a statement. Does the politician address the moderator/journalist, another politician, non-political panel members, the present audience, or the disperse audience (the camera)?

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6. Operationalization of populism

The main dependent variable is the extent of populist content in politicians' communication. Populist communication is operationalized building on previous literature (Cranmer, 2011; Engesser, Ernst, et al., 2017; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Wirth et al., 2016), distinguishing the three dimensions discussed above: 1) people-centrism, 2) anti-elitism, and 3) exclusion.

People-centrism, comprises references to 'the people' that take the meaning of *1) advocacy, 2) accountability, 3) legitimacy, 4) demanding sovereignty of the people,* or *5) stating a monolithic people* as described in the theory section. References to the people can be made with words such as '(the) people', '(the) public', '(the) citizen(s)', '(the) voter(s)', '(the) taxpayer(s)', '(the) resident(s)', '(the) consumer(s)', '(the) population', or '(the) nation' (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). However, only references to the people that adhere to one of the five people-centrist key messages are coded. *Anti-elitism*, is coded if a political actor blames or denounces an elite, their behavior, values etc., and/or detaches them from 'the people'. The elite can be political (parties, government, the state, institutions, etc.), economic (banks, multinationals, oligarchs, employers, etc.), cultural (intellectuals, universities, writers, etc.), or media elites (Canovan, 1999; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). The third dimension, *exclusion,* is coded if a political actor denounces or blames specific societal groups or population segments – such as foreigners or religious groups – and excludes them from 'the people' (Cranmer, 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

The operationalization of populist communication, its three dimensions and sub-dimensions are summarized in Table 2. Each item is coded as a dummy variable. For all three dimensions of populist communication, maximum indices are constructed. This means that at least one item of the respective dimension has to be present in order to be considered people-centrist, anti-elitist, or exclusionist. The three dimensions are looked at separately, since earlier studies suggest that populist communication, especially in social media, occurs in a fragmented form (Engesser, Ernst, et al., 2017).

Table 2. Operationalization of populist communication strategies

People-centrism: Politician makes an explicit reference to 'the people'
Advocacy: politician talks in the name/on behalf of 'the people', referring primarily to its will
Accountability: politician refers to the importance of responding to what is portrayed as 'the people's' will
Legitimacy: use of 'the people' to legitimize certain claims
Demanding sovereignty of 'the people'
Stating a monolithic people: 'the people' is understood/depicted as a homogenous/monolithic construct with common feelings, wishes and opinions
Anti-elitism (vertical differentiation): denouncing, blaming or detaching of the elite
Political elite (e.g. "classe politique", the government, the administration)
Economic elite (e.g. banks, companies, "oligarchs")
Cultural elite (e.g. intellectuals, Universities, artists)
Media (e.g. "Lügenpresse", "Staatsfernsehen")
Supranational or foreign institutions (e.g. the EU or foreign governments)
Other elites or not specified

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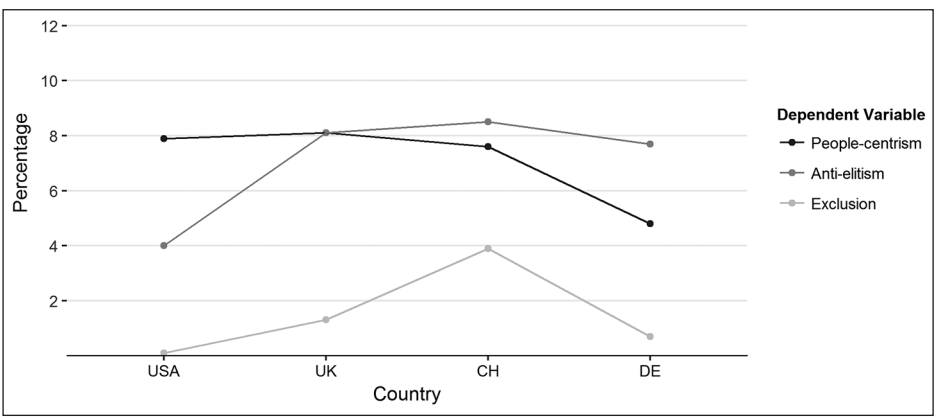
Exclusion (horizontal differentiation): denouncing, blaming or criticizing of specific social groups
- Foreigners (e.g. immigrants)
- Religious Groups (e.g. muslims, jews)
- Other countries or people in other countries (e.g. USA, Germany if not explicitly against the elite)
- Other groups or not specified

7. Results

Overall, the findings show that 12.5 percent of all statements contain at least one element of the three populist communication dimensions. People-centrist (7.2%) and anti-elitist (6.8%) statements are almost equally common, whereas exclusion (1.4%) is much less frequent. Thereby, statements containing only one of the three dimensions (9.7%) are most common, followed by statements combining two of the three dimensions (2.6%), while the simultaneous occurrence of all three dimensions is almost absent (0.1%).

To answer our hypotheses, first, we analyze differences in populist communication across the four investigated countries. In this respect, we expect political communication to be more populist in countries with presidential and majoritarian systems and less populist in countries with parliamentary respectively directorial and proportional systems. Looking at the frequencies of statements which include at least one reference to the different dimensions, people-centrism occurs most often in the United Kingdom but closely followed by the United States and Switzerland (see Figure 1). The other two dimensions, anti-elitism and exclusion, occur most often in Switzerland. Swiss politicians tend to most often blame, denounce, or exclude some elite or a specific social group. The frequencies of the three dimensions also reveal that politicians in all countries refer to the people or make anti-elitist statements much more frequently than they exclude certain social groups on the horizontal dimension. Figure 1 compares the country means, which simultaneously correspond to the share of statements that contain at least one reference to the respective populist dimension.

Figure 1. Shares for each dimension by country



Notes: See also Table 3.

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To investigate whether these country differences are significant, analyses of variance (ANOVA) are conducted with the maximum indices for people-centrism, anti-elitism, and exclusion as dependent variables (see Table 3)[5]. With regard to people-centrism, there are no significant country differences. However, the countries differ significantly with regard to anti-elitism and exclusion. The United States scores significantly lower than Switzerland, Germany, and the United Kingdom on the anti-elitism index. Exclusion is significantly higher in Switzerland compared to the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States. Other country differences are not statistically significant. This means that, overall, there are no significant country differences with regard to people-centrism, although people-centrist key messages tend to be used more in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Switzerland than in Germany. Anti-establishment or anti-elitism is quite common among the three European countries, but not as much in the United States. The exclusion of immigrants, foreigners, religious, or other social groups is relatively common in Switzerland, but practically irrelevant in the other three countries. These results mostly dispute our assumptions with regard to influences of the system of government and the electoral system on populist communication. As Figure 1 illustrates, levels of people-centrism come closest to the hypothesized pattern with higher shares in the United States and the United Kingdom, followed by Switzerland and lowest in Germany. However, these differences are not statistically significant. Furthermore, the country levels for anti-elitism and exclusion are contrary to the presumed pattern, with the highest shares in Switzerland, followed by the United Kingdom and Germany and the lowest shares in the United States. This refutes our first hypothesis and suggests that other context factors besides the political system are more crucial for the extent of populism in politicians' communication.

Table 3. Country differences with regard to the three dimensions of populist communication

	CH		DE		UK		US			
	n = 485		*n* = 542		*n* = 670		*n* = 757			
	M	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*F*	η^2
People-centrism	0.08	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.08	0.01	0.08	0.01	2.05	.003
Anti-elitism	0.08[a]	0.01	0.08[a]	0.01	0.08[a]	0.01	0.04[b]	0.01	4.73**	.006
Exclusion	0.04[a]	0.01	0.01[b]	0.01	0.01[b]	0.00	0.00[b]	0.00	10.58***	.013

Notes: $N = 2454$. Single-factor variance analyses (post-hoc test: Games-Howell). $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$. Groups with different identification letters (a, b) are significantly different at the 5% level.

The second hypothesis claims that politicians' communication is on average more populist in talk shows than on social media. Figure 2 shows that the means for all three dimensions are higher for talk shows than social media. Single factor ANOVAs confirm that the levels of people-centrism, anti-elitism, and exclusion are

5 Since our dependent variable is a dummy variable, we have verified all results with logistic regressions. However, due to reasons of comprehensibility and illustration, we have decided to focus on the results of the ANOVAs in the paper.

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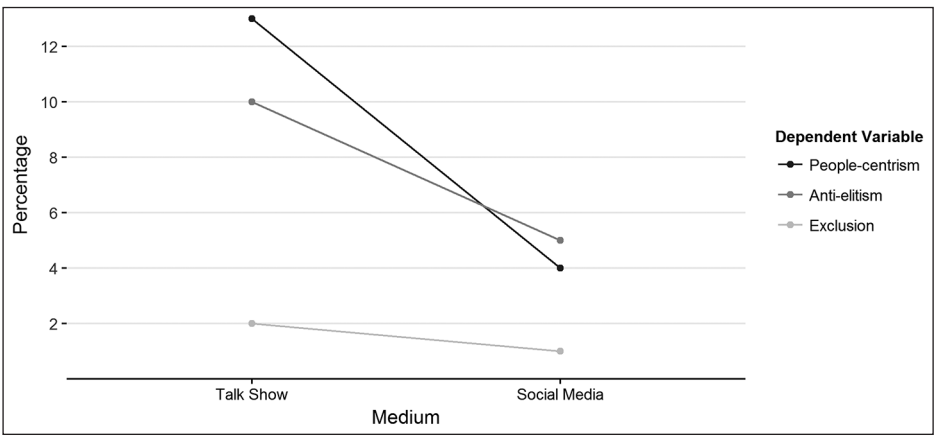
significantly higher in talk shows than on social media (see Table 4). To ensure that these results are not due to a sampling bias, the same calculations are replicated with just the 47 politicians that are actually present on both channels. The significant differences between talk shows and social media can be confirmed for people-centrism ($F(1, 2079) = 94.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .044$) and anti-elitism ($F(1, 2079) = 42.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .020$). For exclusion, however, the difference is not significant with this reduced sample ($F(1, 2079) = 3.52$, *ns*). Overall, these results indicate that the channel through which politicians communicate does indeed have an influence on the level of populist communication. In our analyzed samples, the investigated politicians use more references to the people, a stronger anti-elitist discourse, and a higher exclusion of social groups on talk shows than on Facebook and Twitter, which supports H2.

Figure 2. Shares for each dimension by medium



Notes: See also Table 4.

Table 4. Differences between communication channel with regard to the three dimensions of populist communication

	Talk Show $n = 926$		Social Media $n = 1528$			
	M	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*F*	η^2
People-centrism	0.13	0.01	0.04	0.01	75.57^{***}	.030
Anti-elitism	0.10	0.01	0.05	0.01	28.27^{***}	.011
Exclusion	0.03	0.00	0.01	0.00	13.19^{***}	.005

Notes: $N = 2454$. Single-factor variance analyses. $^{***}p < .001$.

To answer H3, politicians are placed on a left to right scale according to their party association based on the Chapel Hill expert survey (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2012; Ladner, 2014; Wagschal & König, 2015). To investigate the differences between pole parties and center respectively moderate parties, a dummy variable is

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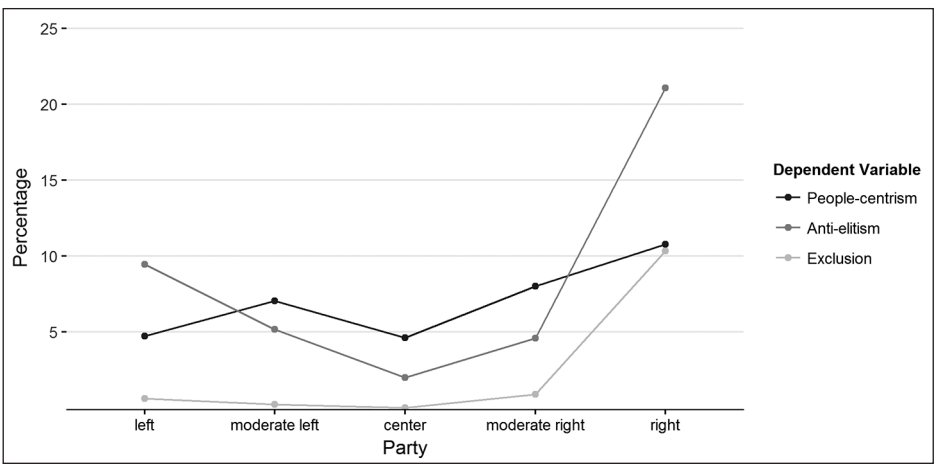
created for pole party politicians that comprises politicians of the two categories at the extremes of the left-right scale. Single factor ANOVAs for the three sub-dimensions of populism reveal that while there are no significant differences with regard to people-centrism ($F(1, 2452) = 0.01$, *ns*), the mean differences for anti-elitism ($F(1, 2452) = 61.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .025$) and exclusion ($F(1, 2452) = 51.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .020$) are highly significant. Thus, while pole parties' communication is not more people-centrist than center or moderate parties' statements, they employ the two conflictive dimensions associated with populism – anti-elitism and exclusion – more often. H3 is therefore only partially supported.

To further investigate empirical patterns with regard to differences along the political spectrum, Figure 3 plots the mean values of the different party families of the investigated politicians on the left-right scale for the three dimensions. The graph shows that in our sample right-wing politicians have the highest mean values for all three dimensions of populism. However, there is also a clear 'bathtub' shape for the second dimension: not only right-wing, also left-wing politicians score higher on anti-elitism than moderate and center parties. Exclusionist communication, in contrast, is almost only used by right-wing politicians.

Figure 3. Shares by party types on the left-right scale



Notes: See also Table 5.

One-way ANOVAs confirm that party ideology along the left-right scale has a significant effect on people-centrism, anti-elitism, and exclusion (see Table 5). According to post-hoc tests (Games-Howell), however, no party types differ significantly from each other in their level of people-centrism. With regard to the second dimension, right-wing politicians communicate significantly more anti-elitist than politicians of all other parties. Yet, left-wing politicians also show a significantly higher degree of anti-elitism in their communication compared to politicians of center parties and moderate-right parties. With regard to exclusion, right-

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wing politicians use significantly more excluding key messages in comparison to all other parties, while no other party types differ significantly.

Table 5. Differences between party types with regard to the three dimensions of populist communication

	Left		Moderate left		Center		Moderate right		Right			
	n = 339		*n* = 952		*n* = 152		*n* = 788		*n* = 223			
	M	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*F*	η^2
People-Centrism	0.05	0.01	0.07	0.01	0.05	0.02	0.08	0.01	0.11	0.02	2.42*	.004
Anti-Elitism	0.09[a]	0.01	0.05[a,b]	0.01	0.02[b]	0.02	0.05[b]	0.01	0.21[c]	0.02	23.65***	.037
Exclusion	0.01[a]	0.01	0.00[a]	0.00	0.00[a]	0.01	0.01[a]	0.00	0.10[b]	0.01	38.41***	.059

Notes: $N = 2454$. Single-factor variance analyses (post-hoc test: Games-Howell). *$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$. Groups with different identification letters (a, b, c) are significantly different at the 5% level.

To summarize, these results show that although parties across the political spectrum use populist key messages to some extent, the level of populist communication, or rather the level of its different dimensions, in politicians' statements is in fact dependent on party membership. While politicians on both extremes of the political spectrum exhibit higher levels of anti-elitism, they do not refer to the people more often than other parties do. Furthermore, in our sample, only right-wing party affiliation leads to a more populist communication with regard to all three dimensions, and especially with regard to exclusion.

8. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this paper was to investigate populist communication in the self-presentation of politicians and to examine possible contextual variations for different countries, media settings, and party families. In particular, possible differences in the use of populist communication in different non-institutionalized communication arenas of politicians across the political spectrum were of interest. We defined populism as a thin ideology and derived three dimensions of populist communication: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and exclusion. These dimensions were looked at separately in order to account for a possibly fragmented form of populism on social media and to investigate differences as well as similarities in their use.

Our hypothesis with regard to the influence of the political system on populist communication is not supported. This implies that formal structures of the political system cannot alone explain differences in the levels of populist communication across countries. Nevertheless, interesting differences are found between the four countries that may rather be explained by cultural, historical, or situational contexts. The levels of anti-elitism and exclusion are highest in Switzerland, followed by the United Kingdom, while people-centrism is highest in the United Kingdom and the United States. Although not all differences are statistically significant, this provides interesting insights.

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Populism in Swiss politicians' communication seems to come closest to a *complete* populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). While it is contrary to our expectation that directorial and proportional systems constrain populist communication, the high level of populism in Switzerland is not entirely surprising. Albertazzi (2008) even labeled Switzerland as "another populist paradise." On the one hand, this has to do with the prominent role and success of the right-wing *Swiss People's Party (SVP)*. On the other hand, some features of the Swiss political system that have previously been seen as impediments to the rise of populism may actually provide favorable opportunity structures for populist actors. These include direct democratic instruments and the logic of consociationalism (Ernst, Engesser, & Esser, 2017). In fact, the regular popular votes may promote a permanent populist campaign and, thus, override constraining effects of the directorial and proportional system. This may have been especially relevant since our investigation took place shortly after a widely discussed popular initiative against mass immigration. In addition, the Swiss political culture with its 'militia system', pronounced localism, and Euroscepticism provides fertile ground for populist rhetoric (Albertazzi, 2008). Moreover, in multi-party parliamentarian systems, some parties may also use populist communication to set themselves apart from all the other parties in the competition for attention.

In Britain, the extent of populism in politicians' communication had been expected to be quite high based on previous research. Not only has the United Kingdom seen the rise of the populist right-wing *United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP)* in recent years (Dennison & Goodwin, 2015; Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2014), British mainstream parties have also been known for their populist rhetoric (Fella, 2008). Furthermore, the majoritarian electoral system was expected to promote populist communication. In comparison to Switzerland, horizontal exclusion of specific social groups is, however, much lower. Hence, populist communication in the United Kingdom seems to correspond more closely to *anti-elitist* populism with high levels of people-centrism and anti-elitism but low levels of exclusion (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

The lower levels of populism in Germany confirm the existing literature and our theoretical expectations. Due to restrictive institutional conditions such as Germany's parliamentary system of proportional representation and federal structure, as well as due to the historical burden of the Nazi past, right-wing populism has long remained a peripheral matter in Germany. Left-wing populism has been slightly more successful, yet also to a limited extent (Decker, 2008; Fawzi, Obermaier, & Reinemann, 2017). Horizontal exclusion of specific social groups is indeed very low. Hence, similarly to the United Kingdom, populist communication in Germany seems to match *anti-elitist* populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), although with a lower degree of people-centrism.

Finally, based on our assumptions regarding government and electoral systems, politicians in the United States were expected to have the highest use of populist communication. References to the people are relatively common and strong in the United States. Anti-elitism and exclusion are, however, the lowest among the four countries. Thus, populism in the United States seems to come closest to an *empty populism* (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). In contradiction to the previous literature,

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there may be fewer incentives for populism in two-party systems, because they already have an inherent antagonism between the ruling party and the opposition. Ware (2002, p. 104) also notes that populism in the United States "lacks much of the anti-regime character evident in other countries" and that "'the confrontational element' is often, though not always, muted." However, with the election of Donald Trump and his explicitly divisive rhetoric against the political elite as well as specific social groups a more complete or confrontational populism is also on the rise in the US.

To summarize, while our expectations regarding the influence of the government and electoral system could not be confirmed, there is evidence that different political settings lead to different levels and forms of populist communication. However, other contextual aspects such as the media setting may influence politicians' use of populist communication more directly.

The study demonstrates that the amount of populist communication is dependent on the specific characteristics of different communication channels. In our sample, politicians tend to speak more populist on talk shows than on social media. Aspects of talk shows such as their immediacy, staged informality, and direct interaction with the audience, as well as a strong media logic may provoke a more populist tone. Furthermore, political talk shows often stage conflicts between invited political actors intentionally in order to present both sides of an argument and to provide a lively debate – which might incentivize the politicians to utter populist messages. The present live audience may further foster the potential that politicians directly address the people by using people-centrist key messages. However, the extent of populism may vary greatly from show to show depending on the topic, the actor constellation, and the context. In our sample, one episode of the Swiss talk show *Arena* about a popular initiative on mass immigration, featuring politicians of both left- and right-wing parties, and including members of the audience in the discussion, was found to be especially populist. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings may be limited.

Populist communication was found in the self-presentation of politicians of all party families across all four investigated countries. This confirms the theoretical assumption – as well as findings of earlier studies (Cranmer, 2011; Ernst, Engesser, Büchel et al., 2017; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) – that populist content may be employed by any politician regardless of his or her position along the ideological spectrum, although not necessarily to the same extent. In fact, differences between party families were found with regard to the use of populist communication. Politicians of pole parties are more anti-elitist and excluding but not more people-centrist than moderate or center parties are. It makes sense from a theoretical perspective that pole party politicians are more prone to challenge the current political elite. However, they seem to do so more by attacking the elite instead of by identifying and siding with the people as Jagers and Walgrave (2007) suggested. It could also be shown that although politicians across the political spectrum adopt populist communication from time to time, their ideological position has an influence on which dimensions are used. While people-centrist key messages are distributed most evenly across party families, anti-elitist key messages are applied to a greater extent by pole politicians on both sides, and exclu-

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sionist key messages are almost only used by right-wing politicians. This empirically supports the often-made assumption that right-wing populism is more exclusionist than left-wing populism.

This study has certain limitations. From a theoretical perspective, as discussed above, it is disputable whether exclusion is a core aspect of populism. However, we included it as a populist communication dimension, first, because we consider the construction of specific out-groups as inherent in the populist construction of a monolithic people. Second, exclusion is an important feature of current populism trends in Western Europe as well as in the United States. Third, by investigating the three dimensions separately, exclusion (as well as the two other dimensions) is not defined nor empirically tested as a necessary feature of populism. This allows for the comparison of the three dimensions and the identification of different types of populism across contextual settings.

More generally, our sampling strategy may lead to some selection bias with regard to the countries, selected talk shows, politicians, and time frame. Although historically, in the United States and in Germany left-wing populism has been more prevalent (Fawzi et al., 2017; Ware, 2002), mostly right-wing parties or movements have stood out as populist in the analyzed countries in the last few years: the *SVP* (Albertazzi, 2008; Ernst, Engesser, & Esser, 2017), the *Alternative for Germany (AfD)* (Häusler, Teubert, & Roeser, 2013), *UKIP* (Fella, 2008), and the *Tea Party Movement* (Groshek & Engelbert, 2012), among others. This may explain why in our sample populism is highest in the communication of right-wing politicians. While there are individual representatives of left-wing parties such as *Die Linke* in Germany or the *Green Party of England and Wales* included, right-wing politicians are overrepresented in our sample. Thus, we expect that if our study would be expanded to other countries and deliberately include more extreme left-wing parties, populism and especially anti-elitism would also be higher at the left end of the political spectrum.

Another constraint is that only 47 of the 74 politicians in the investigated talk shows were also active on social media. We were able to show that politicians who are present on both channels talk more populist in talk shows than on social media. However, our sampling strategy may exclude politicians who do not have access to the main political talk shows but instead – or maybe as result – are more active and populist on social media. Furthermore, it is possible that politicians who appear in talk shows more often are more populist than the average politician is because their populist rhetoric matches well with media logic. However, we expect this to be similar across countries. Moreover, this would not affect our findings with regard to our second hypothesis. Nevertheless, the dominant role of the right-wing populist *SVP* in Switzerland as the largest party and the consequential high presence of *SVP* politicians in Swiss talk shows may partly explain the high levels of populism in Switzerland.

It also has to be kept in mind that social media messages – especially Tweets – are usually much shorter and condensed than statements in talk shows. Social media posts themselves often do not contain much content. Instead, they may include links to videos, news articles, websites, or other platforms. Thus, it is possible that the text of a Tweet or Facebook post itself is not populist, but the linked

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content does contain populist elements. This could not be captured in this investigation, since only the actual content of the posts was coded. Although this study deliberately put the focus solely on direct statements by politicians, it would be interesting for future research to investigate the shared and linked content as well.

Finally, we are looking at a short period of routine time in 2014. The political circumstances in general and specifically with regard to populism have since already changed quite a bit – especially in the United States but also in the other three countries. It would therefore be necessary to investigate how the use of populist communication has changed in the meantime. Another important aspect for future studies would be to investigate the specific role of populist communication in election campaigns – especially since we expect the electoral system to influence the use of populist communication.

To conclude, by taking a communication-centered approach this study shows that populist communication is not applied uniformly in the self-presentation of politicians across four established democracies, media channels, and party affiliation. It reinforces Cranmer's (2011) argument that populist communication is context dependent and demonstrates that political TV talk shows tend to be specifically populist communication arenas.

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