Mediated Campaigns and Populism in Europe

Edited by Susana Salgado
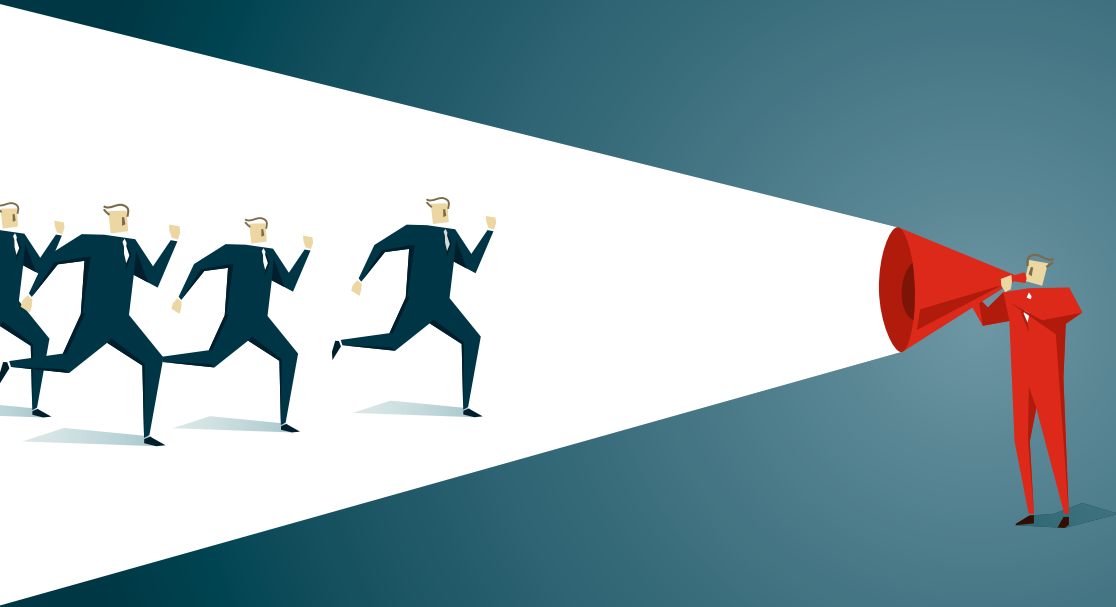
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Preface

This work results from an interest in further understanding the links between politics and media in Portugal in relation to other countries in Europe. The research approach was first designed to focus on the study of the news media coverage of elections in the countries that had been the most affected by the Euro Crisis (Portugal, Greece, Spain, and Ireland). The main objective was to check whether a similar crisis and the implementation of heavy austerity measures had induced similar features in the news coverage of politics and elections in these countries, namely in regard to the levels of negativity, journalistic interpretation, attention to the same issues, or interest in anti-establishment political actors, for example.

Given that except for Ireland, the other countries were from Southern Europe, I also considered this an excellent opportunity to check empirically the presumed similarities of Southern European countries, as seminal literature often tends to suggest (e.g., according to Hallin and Mancini (2004), these countries share similar characteristics and links between their media and political systems, which justify their inclusion in the same model, the "Polarized Pluralist Model").

The project eventually grew and Croatia and Poland were also included in the study and empirical analysis. One of the requisites for this study was the holding of elections in the same time frame, which happened in the case of these two countries. It was considered that including understudied Eastern European countries (at least in regard to these issues), that were also newer democracies, would enrich the sample and had potential to add new and interesting elements to the study.

I would like to thank my colleagues Stylianos Papathanassopoulos (Greece), Jane Suiter (Ireland), Óscar G. Luengo (Spain), Marko Mustapić and Ivan Balabanić (Croatia), and Agnieszka Stępińska (Poland) for their interest in this project and their availability to join the research, which as any empirical research was very time-consuming and challenging at times.

I would like to thank Palgrave for the interest shown in this project and in the research results. I also want to thank Darren Lilleker for including this book in the Political Campaigning and Communication series.

Lisbon, Portugal   Susana Salgado
18 May 2018

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Comparing Election News Coverage in Europe: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of the Approach

Susana Salgado, Eileen Culloty, and Agnieszka Stępińska

CONCEPTS AND COUNTRIES

Across Europe, there have been profound upheavals in politics, society, economics, and media in the past decade. The "populist zeitgeist" identified by Mudde in 2004 has further developed as traditional party systems are fragmenting and populist actors are entering mainstream politics in many countries. The Euro Crisis destabilized Europe and brought severe, and highly contested, programmes of austerity to the worst-affected countries: Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain. Meanwhile, the transition to democracy and to European Union membership in countries such as

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Poland and Croatia has further highlighted issues of national sovereignty and immigration. At the same time, media systems have undergone rapid digital transition, which calls into question many previous assumptions about how media function in relation to political coverage in general and in relation to elections in particular.

The impact of media and election campaigns on voters has been subject of controversy for almost as long as citizens have been voting to elect their governments. Even though elections have been the focus of many studies over the last few decades, there is still much to investigate and learn about how exactly media effects work in election campaigns. One important aspect of this gap in knowledge concerns the manner in which news media outlets in different countries cover election campaigns.

Through existing research, we already know that media coverage is not neutral and that news selection and news framing does affect voters' perceptions and, potentially, their attitudes and beliefs. In addition, when covering politics and elections, the process of news media priming not only steers citizens towards criteria to consider in their evaluations of democratic governance but also frames the performance of politicians positively or negatively against these standards (Norris 2011). There are also several changes in politics that are believed to have been caused or amplified by news media coverage, such as increase in interpretive journalism and negativity towards politics (Patterson 1993, 1996), dramatization and an increased media focus on competition and the strategy of politics (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Bennett 2007), and the growing personalization of politics (McAllister 2007). This research empirically investigated how these elements were manifest during elections in six European countries (see Table 1.1).

The elections took place against a backdrop of rising scepticism about the European Union and rising populism across Europe. Populist actors

Table 1.1 Countries and national elections

Country	Election Day
Croatia	8 November 2015
Greece	20 September 2015
Ireland	26 February 2016
Poland	25 October 2015
Portugal	4 October 2015
Spain	20 December 2015

have encroached on support for traditional parties of the centre-right and centre-left and thereby weakened traditional political party systems. Although the degree or intensity of populism varies from country to country (see e.g. the 24 country chapters in Aalberg et al. 2017), the rise of populism is broadly linked to the fallout from the Euro Crisis, concerns about mass immigration, and a perceived loss of national sovereignty. Surprisingly, however, the role that media play in the advancement of populism has been largely ignored or, at the very least, under-researched.

Within the scarce literature on media and populism, there is a general assumption that tabloid newspapers and commercial TV are closely tied to populist communication. However, in the absence of systematic research and amid profound changes in media systems, it is necessary to interrogate not only the relationship between media and politics in general but also the relationship between media and populism. To this end, Esser et al. (2017) identify three scenarios that may be usefully applied to the relationship between media and populism during elections: the media enable populist messaging, the media create populist content, and the users of participatory online media create populist content. In researching the role of news media outlets in elections across countries that were deeply impacted by the Euro Crisis, and thus susceptible to populism, this study represents an important step towards understanding how populism is manifest in election news media.

The idea for this study emerged from an interest in comparing Portugal with other European countries that were also directly affected by the Euro Crisis and that were holding national elections around the same time as Portugal (i.e. from September 2015 to February 2016). Among other objectives, the study aimed to identify whether the fallout from the economic crisis played a role in the positions and the arguments used by different political actors during the election campaigns. For example, the study assesses the prevalence of radicalization in the positions on issues due to the crisis and consequent austerity measures and, more generally, assesses the ways in which different types of news media covered the election campaigns.

This resulted in an initial research design that included Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain. Two other countries that were holding elections in the same time period were also added to the sample: Poland and Croatia. Their inclusion in the study was judged to be of interest because they represent relatively new democracies (Poland and Croatia became democratic republics in 1989 and 1991, respectively) that are rarely included in

comparative research designs relating to these topics. Moreover, the study's concerns with positions on a crisis involving the European Union and populism are also significant issues for both countries.

With the exception of Ireland, the media systems of the countries studied are all categorized by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as belonging to the Polarized Pluralist Model. However, there are many significant differences regarding, for example, the structure of their media systems and the actual content of their news coverage. Taking the examples of Portugal and Spain for instance, there are differences in how the printed press operates in each country: in Portugal, this is partly due to legislation, but mainly due to the small scale of Portugal's advertising market and audience. As a result, newspapers do not assume their political leaning as this risks alienating a large portion of the available audience and reducing the outlet's market share. In Spain, however, the endorsement of political parties and candidates by newspapers is usually more explicit. As to the news content, attention to issues seems to be more prevalent overall in Portugal, while news coverage in Spain is often more focused on political strategy. In fact, Hallin and Mancini (2012) have drawn attention to some limitations of their original models and have attempted to clarify the conceptual framework that was proposed in 2004.

Within Hallin and Mancini's (2004) categorization, Ireland represents the North Atlantic or Liberal model. Consequently, in Hallin and Mancini's view, the links between media and politics in Ireland may be different when compared to the Polarized Pluralist Model. For example, journalistic autonomy is more likely to be limited by commercial pressures than by political instrumentalization and journalism tends to be more information-oriented and descriptive (2004: 74).

The selected six countries thus provide a varied sample within Europe to study the news coverage of elections. To facilitate comparison, the country chapters follow a similar structure and address a set of common analytical issues in election news coverage, such as negativity, interpretative journalism, news framing, and populism. The rationale for selecting these issues as common reference points is outlined below. Although the country chapters are broadly similar in their structure and subject, there are variances in the weight afforded to each issue to allow consideration of the particularities of the media system and political system in each country. All chapters include the analysis and discussion of all the aspects mentioned above, but then they highlight different topics. For example, the

chapter on Ireland places emphasis on the absence of media populism in the context of enduring journalism norms and values, which was considered the most significant result of the data analysis. The chapters on Portugal and Greece are much more concerned with the impact of the Euro Crisis on election news coverage than the chapters on the remaining countries, simply because this issue was salient in these two countries, but was absent or almost absent in the other countries. In the chapters on Croatia and Poland, a great deal of attention was given to the impact of populist political actors on the campaign political debates.

A Comparative Content Analysis Approach

Although elections are highly suited to cross-national studies of political communication, comparative research on news media coverage of elections has been sporadic and much of the research that focus on these topics has been concentrated on the United States and the United Kingdom (Kaid and Strömbäck 2009). A comparative view on the role of media also brings empirical attention to the differences that may exist within countries that share common theoretical conceptions of their political and media systems. For example, existing research indicates that even in countries with relatively similar media and political systems, there are notable differences in patterns of framing and media bias (Strömbäck and Aalberg 2008).

Within the European context of this study, we may consider whether the general mediatization of politics and the articulation of specific issues, such as the Euro Crisis, are manifest in similar ways across European countries and whether there are any characteristics of contemporary media coverage that are evident cross-nationally. Identifying the occurrence or the absence of these trends may also help to advance greater insight into what constrains or enables certain types of news media coverage of elections, such as media populism or interpretive journalism for example, in some countries but not in others.

The study content analysed all news stories published and broadcast during the formal campaign period (two weeks before the election day) in a total of 51 news media outlets in the six countries. The selection of news media outlets was based on the following criteria:

Media types: three types of media were selected for analysis—newspapers, television, and digital-only news publications (Table 1.2).

- *Newspapers*: two reference or quality daily newspapers were chosen in each country whereby one represents a centre-left orientation and the other a centre-right political orientation. In addition, one tabloid newspaper was chosen from each country. As Spain does not have tabloid newspapers equivalent to those found elsewhere, the tabloid requirement was excluded for Spain. For each newspaper, all election news stories and opinion articles found in the front page and inside pages were monitored for content analysis.
- *Television*: the prime-time television news programmes from three television channels were chosen from each country: one public broadcaster and two private, open-signal television channels. The study included all news stories about the election and the campaign that were broadcast during the duration of the selected news programmes.
- *Online newspapers*: three digital papers that are only published online were included. Online outlets were only included if they provided daily coverage of national politics and political issues. In Ireland, only one online outlet met this criterion. The data was collected daily during the campaign period and the study included all news stories, with the exception of repeated news stories, about the election.

Table 1.2 Media outlets included in the study

	Newspapers	*Television*	*Online newspaper*
Croatia	Jutarnji list	HTV	Index.hr
	Večernji list	RTL	net.hr
	"24 Sata"	NOVA TV	t-portal.hr
Greece	Καθημερινή	EPT 1	protothema.gr
	Avgi	Mega	newsit.gr
	Espresso	ANT1	in.gr
Ireland	The Irish Times	RTÉ	thejournal.ie
	The Independent	TV3	
	The Star	UTV	
Poland	Gazeta Wyborcza	TVP 1	gazeta.pl
	Rzeczpospolita	TVN	wp.pl
	Fakt	Polsat	onet.pl
Portugal	Público	RTP1	Expresso online.pt
	Jornal de Notícias	SIC	Observador.pt
	Correio da Manhã	TVI	Notícias ao Minuto.pt
Spain	El País	La1	Público
	El Mundo	Antena 3	Europa Press
		T5	El Diario

Table 1.3 Total news items per country

Countries	News items
Croatia	880
Greece	1689
Ireland	790
Poland	837
Portugal	1659
Spain	1197

Table 1.4 News items per type of media

Type of media	News items (total sample)	
	Total	*%*
Newspapers	2666	38
Television	1581	22
Online newspapers	2803	40
Total	7050	100

Finally, in terms of political candidates, the study included all parties and all coalitions running for elections. To examine issues of personalization, the study also included the main party leaders.

A codebook (Salgado et al. 2015) was previously prepared and tested to guide the content analysis stage. A total of 7052 news stories were analysed with the following distribution per country and per type of media (Tables 1.3 and 1.4). The levels of agreement in the intercoder reliability tests ranged from 98.7 to 87.55 resulting in a Cohen kappa scale reliability coefficient of 0.6696 above the often used limit of 0.6 for a good fit (Cicchetti 1994; Stemler 2001). All national coders were asked to code a set of news items in English drawn from the Irish sample, which represented approximately 10 per cent of the entire sample.

The research approach was designed to include a wide variety of elements in the content analysis of the elections news coverage. The objective was to have different variables from which to assess each case and all cases comparatively. The analysis of the results of the coding in the different variables would therefore enable a comparative perspective of the news coverage of elections in these six countries. An overview of the major analytical categories is summarized below.

An Empirical Approach to Populism

A central concern driving this study was to analyse the prevalence of populism in the six election campaigns. In most of the countries covered by this study, the elections followed a major economic crisis (Euro Crisis). In some cases, the economic crisis and deteriorating financial conditions, including austerity measures, created political crises, which had the potential to enable the advancement of populism. Even though the existence of a crisis does not necessarily lead to the emergence and/or success of populism, various kinds of crises (e.g. economic, financial, political, and migration) are often significant triggering mechanisms for different forms of populism (see, e.g. Taggart 2004; Kriesi 2014; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Roberts 2015).

To study news media and populism empirically, the present study applied an operationalization of populism that was previously tested in a study that focused on the discussion of immigration and corruption in Portuguese online media (Salgado 2018). This approach assesses the prevalence of populist communication in politics in general and therefore it includes parties and politicians that are usually considered populist, as well as the capacity of non-populist political actors to engage in populist communication. For a detailed discussion on the distinction between "political actors as populist communicators" and "populist political actors as communicators", see Stanyer et al. (2017). As populism is a steadily growing, if contested, area of research, the study draws on references from extant literature about the specific features of populism (e.g. Canovan 1999; Mudde 2004; Taggart 2004; Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Moffitt and Tormey 2014; Rooduijn 2015).

Cas Mudde's much quoted definition of populism characterizes the phenomenon as a thin ideology, which "considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'" (2004: 543). The primacy of antagonistic group distinctions is also evident in the main features of populist communication, which Jagers and Walgrave (2007) outline in their operational definition of populism: references to, identification with, and appeals to "the people"; anti-elite, and sometimes also anti-establishment, sentiment; exclusion of specific out-groups that are not part of "the people", which also implies the construction of "the people" as a monolithic group.

To support comparative empirical analysis and following Jagers and Walgrave's proposal (2007), this study considered populism as a political

style of communication that can be used in different degrees by all political actors. Consequently, we conducted a content analysis of all election news stories published and broadcast during the official election campaign period covering all parties competing in the election and not just the coverage of those that are usually considered populist. This allowed us to assess the prevalence of elements of populism in the news media coverage and indirectly in the candidates' political discourses. In this way, we could test whether populism is also used by non-populist actors as a communication strategy to convince voters, as previous literature has suggested (e.g. Mair 2002; Aalberg et al. 2017). In addition, we further address the existing gap in research regarding the role of the media in spreading or containing populist messaging (e.g. Mazzoleni et al. 2003; Esser et al. 2017). Specifically, we examine this issue in relation to three different types of media—newspapers, television, and online-only newspapers—to check whether the tendency to engage in populism is dependent on the intrinsic nature of different kinds of news media outlets. The analysis identified some limited, but nevertheless, noteworthy differences, which point to online news media as the main type of outlet that provides support for populism. This type of media was more prone to convey the populist actors' messages and to include populism in general in news reports.

The content of news stories was coded to check for the prevalence of different dimensions of populism: the use of the word "people" and its intended meaning, as well as expressions of closeness to, or speaking on behalf of, the people; the division between "us" and "them" and the identification of "them"; criticism of the elite and identification of which elite being criticized (e.g. political, economic, European Union, media, elites in general); anti-establishment and anti-system (the party/party leader identifying themselves as being outside the system); the idea of idealized nation; and references to out-groups as being bad for the country and identification of which out-groups were mentioned (e.g. immigrants in general, specific nationalities of immigrants, religious groups, political groups, racial and/or ethnic groups). In addition to these specific features of populism, the research also coded other characteristics of populist discourse, such as Manichaeism and the oversimplification of issues and proposed solutions (see also Canovan 1999: 5–6), as well as the use of blame shifting and scapegoating strategies.

The data analysis has not shown any clear patterns regarding the use of these features of populism in the six countries under study: both populist strategies and populist rhetoric change according to the country, very

likely as a result of conditions surrounding the election and the political context in general (for further details please see Chap. 8 in this book).

Sources of Information and Personalization of Politics

Among the first elements considered by the study were: the overall weight of different types of sources of information (in addition to politicians) and the levels of personalization of politics evident in the six countries. The sources of information, and the weight afforded to them, are key elements in the news coverage of politics because, as Gans explains, "journalists obtain the news from sources they observe or interview" (1979/2004: 116). In reference to typical news practices, Bennett et al. (2007) observe that official actors are deemed more newsworthy and, consequently, official voices are often the main constructors of news frames.

News sources are therefore key in determining both the content and the tone of the news story. The choice of specific sources of information to the detriment of others also carries insightful implicit information about how journalists interpret the relative importance of each party and candidate in that election and in national politics. The selection of sources also allows us to draw inferences about the degree of independence of journalists and the levels of political parallelism in a given country or news media outlet.

It is expected that official political actors would be the most prevalent voice in the news; after all, it is the coverage of election campaigns. However, the coverage of elections and political campaigns can also include other sources of information, such as civil society (citizens, trade unions, interest groups), experts, political actors from a number of different quarters and parties not running for that election (e.g. foreign politicians, representatives of institutions), and journalists themselves as commentators and interpreters. Journalists are often included as sources of political news stories accounting for specific events that they witnessed as observers and as providers of analysis and context (see also section "Interpretive Journalism" in this chapter).

All news stories with politicians were specifically coded for personalization, to check whether the party leader or the party as a whole received more salience in the news coverage of the campaign, and the overall levels of preponderance of political leaders over their own parties. The study analysed the prevalence of news stories focusing on the party leader versus

the party as a whole, as well as the presence of visual depictions of party leaders and direct quotations of the party leaders' statements in the news coverage. It was also assessed whether the party leader was the main source of information in each news story. All of these are elements that communicate a greater or lesser personalization of politics.

Extant literature suggests that political leaders have become increasingly visible at the expense of parties, including in parliamentary systems (McAllister 2007). According to McAllister (2007), the phenomenon was also described as "presidentialization of politics" (Mughan 2000; Poguntke and Webb 2005), "institutional presidentialization" (Maddens and Fiers 2004), and "presidential parliamentarism" (Hazan 1996).

Mughan (2000) refers specifically to the role of the media in this process. He describes it as a movement over time away from collective to personalized government whereby electoral politics is dominated by party leaders and this is boosted by media coverage. Although there is a debate on whether presidentialization and personalization of politics refer to the exact same processes (see, e.g. Ohr 2011; Passarelli 2015), among the consequences of this trend is the design of election campaigns around the figure of the party leader, which could be a response to the growing mediatization of politics, but either way has an impact on news media coverage of elections. The election news coverage could thus be entirely focused on the party leader with the party portrayed only in the background or it could include the coverage of the party as a whole, that is, giving space to other party members and covering their statements and campaign events as well.

The evidence is far from conclusive, partly due to the lack of systematic comparative approaches, but mainly because conceptual clarity is still missing in literature. Overall, we may summarize that personalization of politics basically means that political leaders are given greater prominence than political parties and organizations (Van Aelst et al. 2012). It denotes a process in which individual politicians (political leaders) become the main anchor of interpretation and evaluation in the political arena (Balmas and Sheafer 2016). And as a process it encompasses changes and effects on institutions, citizens' perceptions of politics, and voters' electoral choices (Karvonen 2010).

The media, and especially electronic media, are also usually considered a key factor in the personalization of politics (Glaser and Salmon 1991; Bowler and Farrell 1992; McAllister 2007), because they have been shaping political communication and they tend to focus on individuals rather

than on institutions, as this makes it easier to "tell the story" (McAllister 2007; see also on news values, Galtung and Ruge 1965) and political leaders maximize media visibility as a way to convince voters. Bennett (2012) draws attention to social fragmentation and the decline of group loyalties as other important factors giving rise to an era of personalized politics, in which individuals are mobilized around personal lifestyle values to engage with multiple causes.

In the present study, data analysis indicates high levels of personalization of politics in the election news coverage in all countries included in the sample apart from Ireland. In Ireland, coverage of party leaders was relatively low, although certain high-profile political figures are more likely to be personalized.

News Framing, Issues, and Strategy

The concept of news framing, originally inspired by Goffman's frame analysis (1974), is key to further understanding news media coverage. Entman defines the overall framing process as "culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (1993, 2007: 164). The news framing of issues, actors, and events can therefore be considered as a specific type of bias. Entman (2010) refers to three major meanings: (1) *distortion bias* that can be applied to news that purportedly distorts reality; (2) *content bias* that relates to the news that favour one side rather than providing equivalent treatment to all sides; or (3) *decision-making bias* that might be applied to motivations and the mind-set of journalists.

The coverage of political competitions, such as elections, is more prone to the inclusion of bias in news content. When covering opposing views, proposals, disagreements, or confrontations, journalists can present the arguments of all sides or focus more, or only, on one position. Biased content may also occur when one side of the debate gets favourable coverage while the other is represented in a negative light. The framing and presentation of events in the news can thus affect how audiences understand these events (Price et al. 1997).

Connected to potential effects on citizens, one of the most prominent discussed news frames in literature is the strategy frame or game schema/frame (Patterson 1993; Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Aalberg et al. 2012). The strategic frame is characterized by "a focus on questions related to who is winning and losing, the performances of politicians and parties,

and on campaign strategies and tactics. This framing is often contrasted with a focus on political substance and issues" (Aalberg et al. 2012: 163). Although there is some consensus on the definition, scholars are not in agreement when it comes to the effects of this type of news frame on citizens. Both negative effects, such as political distrust and cynicism (e.g. Cappella and Jamieson 1997), and positive effects, such as increasing citizens' interest in politics (e.g. Iyengar et al. 2004), have been put forward (on the effects of news framing, see also Scheufele 1999).

To assess the level of coverage of the candidates' proposals regarding issues and the weight of elements related to strategy in the media coverage of the elections, all news stories were coded for their dominant news frame: issue frame or strategy frame. The decision as to which news frame was dominant was made in consideration of the overall space dedicated to one or the other frame, as well as the headline and the lead of the news stories.

News stories were coded as having a dominant issue frame, if they were focused on issues or on the positions of candidates and parties regarding issues. In addition, relevant background information for specific issues and social problems, such as reports or statements of stakeholders, was also considered as issue frame. The main issue of the news story was then coded from a list with several options, including economy, governance, party politics and elections, emigration, immigration, opinion polls as an issue (e.g. discussions about the release of opinion polls results during the campaign and/or discussion about the effects of opinion polls in the campaign or in the election), and the Euro Crisis.

In fact, special attention was given to the Euro Crisis issue, as investigating its repercussions in national politics and elections was one of the most important motivations of this study. The coding options were mainly related to the presence or absence of issues related to the Euro Crisis and the austerity measures in the news item (dichotomous variable), and to identifying the main topic mentioned from a pre-defined list that included topics such as the consequences and causes of the Euro Crisis, or democratic deficit in the European Union, among other options (on content analysis of the news coverage of the Euro Crisis, see also Picard 2015; and Salgado and Nienstedt 2016). However, contrary to initial expectations, the Euro Crisis was not overall a dominant issue. It did have some prominence in the campaign debates and news coverage mainly in Portugal and Greece, but it was almost absent in Spain and particularly absent in Ireland.

In addition, while most of the studied countries share a recent history of economic recession and austerity, the focus of their news coverage on

economic issues does vary. Immigration, another significant issue in respect of populism, also received variable treatment in the media coverage of each country, but always lower than initially expected, especially in countries such as Croatia, Greece, and Poland, the countries most affected by this crisis in our sample.

The variables relating to strategic news frame were adapted from extant literature, particularly from a study that proposed a conceptualization and an operationalization of "strategic game frame" (Aalberg et al. 2012), as news stories that do not include issue positions, but instead frame politics as strategy, a game, a contest (e.g. horse race coverage), campaign tactics, and that focus on the image of the candidates or on the relationships between political actors. Other important elements considered as evidence of a strategic frame include: references to opinion polls and to the results of parties and candidates in the polls; references to winning or losing (elections, debates, campaigns, etc.); references to the candidates and parties' strategies and tactics to be successful in their goals (e.g. these might include not only winning the election or a debate, but also to ensure favourable media coverage or citizen participation in the campaign events); or references to the politicians' performance in elections, in office, or as opposition (for further information about the strategic news frame, see also Cappella and Jamieson 1997; and for another empirical study in which this operationalization was implemented, see de Vreese et al. 2017).

Across the country studies, we find that the issue frame was more common in Greece and Portugal, whereas the election news coverage in the remaining four countries was mainly framed through the strategy logic. Given the existing literature and the fact that the study was focused on election campaigns, the prevalence of the issue frame in these two countries was at first rather surprising. However, the impact of the economic crisis in these two countries and the overall tendency of Portuguese news media outlets to closely follow and highlight specific issues, such as economic growth and public finances, may contribute to explaining these results (for further details, see Chap. 8 in this book).

Negativity in the News Media Coverage of Politics and Elections

Another important concept that has been increasingly related to the news coverage of politics and elections is negativity (Patterson 1993; Gulati et al. 2004; Lengauer et al. 2012). There are several arguments supporting

the study of "negativity" in election news media coverage. Election campaigns are quintessentially moments of dispute and conflict. They are a formal period in which the different competing parties and candidates present their proposals and try to look more appealing in the eyes of the electorate when compared to their opponents. The strategies to achieve this objective often include negative campaigning, confrontation, exchange of accusations and attacks, which might be focused on policy and proposals or on the candidates' personal characteristics and political background.

Negativity can also be interpreted as a journalistic trend, for example, in forms of "critical journalism" (Westerstahl and Johansson 1986; Neveu 2002; Lengauer et al. 2012) in which journalists assume the role of watchdogs and scrutinize political decisions and politicians in general. A higher prevalence of negativity in news about politics has also been linked to increasing commercialization and competition (Cohen 2008; Lengauer et al. 2012). Negativity in political news can thus be initiated by the candidates themselves or dramatized by journalists in the news coverage, for instance to build a dialogue between political opponents (Salgado 2010). Moreover, different types of research approaches in several disciplines indicate that people in general tend to pay more attention to negative news when compared to positive news (for more information see, e.g. Soroka 2012, 2014).

In addition, negativity has long been recognized as an important news value (Galtung and Ruge 1965). In Shoemaker et al.'s (1987) and Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) revisions of this authoritative approach to newsworthiness, "conflict and controversy" was included by the first authors and "bad news" by the latter, thus supporting the idea that negativity holds a significant role in shaping news media coverage.

Patterson (1993) and Cappella and Jamieson (1997) have drawn attention to the effects of negativity. Negativity in news media coverage of politics influences citizens' perceptions of politics, candidates, and election campaigns (Patterson 1993), and contributes to "spirals of cynicism" (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). Cappella and Jamieson (1997) focus specifically on strategic coverage, but they include conflict and negativity as characteristics of strategic coverage and link citizens' disinterest, distrust, and non-participation in politics with the manner in which news media cover political events and issues. However, there are some notable criticisms of this proposed link between negativity and disinterest in politics. For example, other authors point to connections between political mobilization and healthy scepticism (see e.g. Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Lengauer et al. 2012).

Drawing on previous studies that examined the concept of negativity in the news (in particular Lengauer et al. 2012), the current approach includes specific variables on conflict and tone in the content analysis. To assess the prevalence of these two dimensions of negativity in the election news coverage, the analysis included variables intended to capture conflict in the news items (i.e. news portraying or dramatizing controversy, and open confrontation, dispute, or disagreement); and to register the presence of a negative tone (e.g. cynicism, failure, crisis, pessimism, scepticism, disillusion) or a positive tone (e.g. success, celebration of victory, accomplishment, optimism, hope) in news media coverage.

Overall, the present study found that negativity is indeed prevalent in election news coverage, even if it is more prevalent in some countries (e.g. Portugal). However, the source of the negativity varies according to the country, for example in some cases negativity was initiated by journalists themselves when covering particular politicians and parties (e.g. Croatia, Greece, Poland, and Ireland), while in other countries it was the tone of the debate between the political candidates that most added to negativity in the news media coverage (e.g. Portugal and Spain).

Interpretive Journalism

Closely related to both strategic news framing and negativity is the concept of interpretive journalism. According to Patterson, "facts and interpretation are freely intermixed in election reporting" (1993: 67), which raises concerns about the potential impact of this type of election coverage on voters. To avoid any normative assumptions about what interpretive journalism entails, Salgado and Strömbäck (2012) suggest the following definition: "interpretive journalism is opposed to or going beyond descriptive, fact-focused and source- driven journalism. On the story-level of analysis, interpretive journalism is characterized by a prominent journalistic voice; and by journalistic explanations, evaluations, contextualizations, or speculations going beyond verifiable facts or statements by sources. It may, but does not have to, also be characterized by a theme chosen by the journalist, use of value-laden terms, or overt commentary." (2012: 154)

To assess the level of interpretive journalism in political news coverage, it is important to examine both the extent to which the "journalist" is present in the news report and the prevalence of journalistic interpretation and contextualization that is not labelled as such in the news stories. The

approach in this study follows Salgado and Strömbäck's (2012) proposal on how to operationalize interpretive journalism, which was later tested empirically in a comparative analysis that assessed the prevalence of journalistic interpretations in the political news coverage of routine periods (Salgado et al. 2017). Specifically, the present approach coded the presence or absence of three different types of interpretative journalism (explanations, speculations, and commentary) in the elections news coverage.

Although journalistic interpretations might be implicit in the choice of topics to report, in the news angle, or in the sources and statements that are selected to include in the news story, the objective of our content analysis was to check for evidence of explicit journalistic interpretation in the news coverage, without clear support from facts or statements by the sources of information; in other words, the journalist's perspective of what has happened.

The analysis included three types of indicator for interpretative journalism and coded their presence or absence: journalistic explanations of the reasons behind events (e.g. why something has happened); journalistic speculations about the future as a consequence of something that is being reported; and open journalistic commentary and opinions (i.e. subjective and non-neutral commentary) included in the news report of facts.

The country analyses show that interpretive journalism was present in all the election news coverages, but there were considerable differences in the levels of journalistic interpretation in each country, namely the lowest was in Poland (15 per cent) and the highest in Ireland (35 per cent). In Ireland, for example, the presence of interpretive journalism may be linked to the growth of political commentary and a general anti-politics bias in Irish media (Brandenburg 2005).

Conclusion

Election campaigns are pivotal events within political communication as political candidates seek to influence how voters exercise their political choices. Within this process, a key normative goal of news media is to inform the public by disseminating political messages. However, the news media are not neutral conduits of information; they operate according to various commercial and industry pressures, as well as cultural norms. To date, research indicates that election news coverage is influenced by certain media trends such as the personalization of politics, an emphasis on strategic frames over issue frames, increased negativity, and the growth of

interpretative journalism. Of course, these trends are not uniformly evident in news coverage; they vary across national contexts and across types of news media including newspapers, television, and digital publications, as the present study has shown.

The principal aim of this study was to further research on elections and news media coverage by identifying contemporary tendencies across different European countries. If a key normative goal of news media is to inform the public, then it is important to understand how varying political systems and varying media systems and cultures of journalism influence coverage of elections. This book contributes with an evidence-based assessment of election campaign coverage in six European countries (Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, and Spain).

The selection of these six European countries has allowed the inclusion of different political and media systems, different levels of consolidation of democracy, different levels of support to the European Union membership, different levels of success of populist political actors, different levels of impact of the Euro Crisis on politics and society, and so on. Consequently, this assorted sample of countries increases the potential explanatory relevance of this approach to the understanding of election news coverage in Europe.

This book is organized into eight chapters. The first, this introductory chapter explains the overall research approach and the main concepts included in the content analysis. The succeeding six chapters focus on each country and present the main results of the content analysis in terms of the variables described above. Finally, the concluding chapter discusses the data analysis and provides some explanations for the most important results.

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Media Coverage of Greece's September 2015 Election Campaign: Framing and Interpreting the Issues at Stake

Stylianos Papathanassopoulos and Iliana Giannouli

INTRODUCTION

The financial crisis has put Greece on the international map of the news industry. It has also provoked fundamental changes in the economic as well as rhetoric/symbolic space, resulting in an unprecedented readjustment of the established party system in the country (Zartaloudis 2013). The major parties of the Greek political system lost a significant portion of their electoral base when forced to implement austerity measures and break faith with their clientelist past. At the same time, new political actors from the left and the right wings of the political spectrum, by employing a populist strategy, aligned with what people wanted to hear and managed to establish themselves as a "new alternative" to the old political system. The decision of George Papandreou, then President of the Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK), to ask for a bailout back in 2010 signified the era of austerity for the Greek people and the triumph of populism in Greek politics. As Aslanidis and Kaltwasser (2016: 1078) put it,

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When left-of-centre parties undertake substantial economic reforms nega-
tively affecting their core constituencies, they foster a process of political
dealignment and potentially pave the way for populist entrepreneurs who
succeed by castigating the establishment and mobilizing "betrayed" voters
who feel abandoned or deceived.

Indeed, SYRIZA's triumph in the elections of January 2015 established
the re-emergence of nationalist populism in Greek politics (Exadaktylos
2015). SYRIZA's victory was based on a political narrative that united the
"people" suffering from austerity policies against a common enemy: "the
establishment" and the Troika (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014:
130–131). According to Moschonas (2015), SYRIZA's rise to power was
paved long ago, since the "critical elections" of May and June 2012.
Pappas also suggests that the elections of 2012 signified a landmark for the
Greek political scene, "revealing new trends that will eventually shape the
country's newly emerging party system" (2014: 99). The 2012 election
outcome must be seen as a result of the delegitimation of the old political
system (Boukala and Dimitrakopoulou 2016: 4), which under the burden
of the bailout agreements could not anymore satisfy the fallacies of its
populist constituency (Pappas 2015), or as Sotiropoulos puts it "couldn't
anymore perform their traditional patronage functions" (Sotiropoulos
2012: 44). However, when in office SYRIZA made a U-turn and was
forced to implement a new Memorandum under the same pressures of the
preceding governments. The new election of September 2015 was a mile-
stone for Greek political history. It was the fifth ballot over a period of six
years and the only one in which all the contenders for the premiership
were bound by a prearranged Memorandum's obligations. Although in
this campaign there was not much space for promising privileges to their
political clientele, the political parties still opted for a populist discourse,
incorporating a blame-shifting strategy.

The unique context of the September 2015 election provided an oppor-
tunity to examine how the domestic media covered the campaign, using
analytical tools from agenda-setting and media-framing theory. During
election campaigns, citizens do not get first-hand political information
through their participation in political rallies but rather rely on news media,
mostly on television in order to shape their opinions on issues at stake
(Papathanassopoulos 2000). Therefore, news media provide the "informa-
tional environment" in which citizens shape their opinions on politics and
politicians. Framing is the most overt manifestation of media's power to
influence politics and it is well documented to have consequences on elec-
toral behaviour (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Trimble and Sampert 2004;

Hopmann et al. 2010). We investigated nine media outlets' coverage of the September 2015 election campaign in Greece. Our sample included three newspapers (two politically affiliated and one tabloid), three TV stations (two privately owned and the public broadcaster Elliniki Radiofonia Tileorasi [ERT]), as well as three online newspapers. Through content analysis of 1668 election news stories, we looked into news frame use among different types of media and within them. The results showed that strategic framing often still prevails in the press, but not in television and online newspapers. This strategy was also correlated with the interpretative function of journalism in the press (for further information on the links between strategic news framing and interpretive journalism see Salgado and Strömbäck 2012). Populism and "attack politics" also emerged as dominant rhetoric of this election campaign, captivating the media's attention.

Political Context of the 2015 Elections

Continuity and Stability in the Greek Two-Party Political System

The Greek political system has remained relatively stable after the country's transition to parliamentarism in 1974 (known as *metapolitefse*). For four decades, two parties, the PanHellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) on the centre-left, and New Democracy (ND) on the centre-right, had dominated the Greek political scene, cultivating a "deep-rooted" polarization firmly along the left–right axis (Featherstone 1990; Hamann and Sgouraki-Kinsey 1999; Karyotis and Rudig 2015a). Apart from this stable two-party system, another well-documented characteristic of the Greek political status quo is populism, described as the "bedrock ideology" which penetrates the rhetoric of politicians from both the left and the right wings of the political spectrum (Pappas 2013; Pappas and Aslanidis 2015).

Populism was initially presented to the Greek political system by PASOK, which managed through its indisputably charismatic leader, Andreas Papandreou, to forge "the people" as a distinct political entity sharing the same ideological beliefs and turned that entity into a powerful constituency (Pappas 2013: 35). The major implication of PASOK's populism was the creation in large parts of the electoral constituency of fallacious beliefs about politics and economics that no ambitious politician could afford to neglect (Pappas and Aslanidis 2015: 185). ND learnt this lesson the hard way, when after gaining power in 1990 they attempted to implement structural reforms of the Greek economy and faced strong resistance, which resulted in the collapse of the ND government in 1993.

After this defeat, ND decided to "rebrand" itself, succumbing to the same populist strategy as PASOK; instead of promoting the general welfare, it tried to satisfy popular demand. Pappas (2013: 36) notes that this is the beginning of a new era when populism contaminated Greece's two-party system. In the following two decades PASOK and ND alternated in power, aggregating over 80 per cent of the total vote, while the political "horse race" had been broadly characterized by an antagonistic dichotomy that separates "the people" and the "other", both defined in terms that reflect the traditional cleavage between the left and the right (Papathanassopoulos et al. 2016; Boukala 2014).

During the *metapolitefse*, Greek society experienced a generalized climate of prosperity, characterized by the reinforcement of civil liberties and the welfare state, where a consumerist culture prevailed, supported by high levels of economic growth (Gerodimos 2013: 16). The major political parties in Greece have been attempting to satisfy their "political clientele" by engaging in an endless policy of giving benefits to their electoral bases in exchange for their votes. In the long run, these policies resulted in a dramatic increase of the public debt (Mylonas 2011).

In October 2009, George Papandreou, PASOK's leader, won the election under his successful campaign slogan "the money is there", implying that the former ND government preferred to allocate economic resources to the few and powerful. But soon after his election, in May 2010, the socialist government introduced a bailout agreement (known as Memorandum) and was forced to take austerity measures, causing great frustration among its electoral base. However, the first bailout was not enough and led to a new agreement (a second, more painful Memorandum), which triggered the replacement of the PASOK government by a coalition of "national unity" (PASOK, ND, LAOS) under the technocrat Lucas Papademos.

New elections were held in May 2012, when all the parties supporting the national unity coalition saw the collapse of their electoral support. PASOK especially was severely punished by the electorate, paying the price for the implementation of the austerity measures, and most importantly because the voters felt that these measures affected social groups in an unequal and unfair way (Karyotis and Rudig 2015b: 138). While ND had experienced some significant vote loss, it managed to maintain its parliamentary representation better than PASOK. In the meantime, government formation talks were unsuccessful, resulting in a new electoral round in June 2012. The election's outcome was the formation of an ND government, supported by PASOK and Dimokratiki Aristera (DIMAR).

Against this background, SYRIZA—a radical leftist party—continued its upward dynamic, receiving an unprecedented 26.89 per cent of the vote. During these electoral contests, Golden Dawn, an extremist right-wing party, managed to pave its way to the Greek parliament for the first time, by receiving about 7.0 per cent of the people's vote.

The financial crisis not only has challenged voters' confidence in the major parties to handle the crucial issues of economy (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014; Salgado and Stavrakakis 2018), but has also put under question the well-established "clientelist social contract", which had reproduced and preserved for decades the two-party system in the modern Greek state, signifying the "beginning of the end for the post-1974 political system" (Gerodimos 2013).

SYRIZA in Power: The Rise of a Leftist Populism

The 2009–2012 period was stigmatized by the weakening of the traditional left–right cleavage and the emergence of a new division around the bailout agreement. This nodal point also mobilized extremist and populist parties that had been for decades on the margins of the Greek political system. On the one hand, the pro-Europe camp supported the economic reforms necessary for securing the European future of Greece and, on the other, the anti-Memorandum camp opposed austerity measures proposed by the European Union (EU) (Katsanidou and Otjes 2016: 270). The pro-Europe camp attracted the two poles of the old two-party system (ND and PASOK) as well as the populist party (LAOS) and the new left-wing party (DIMAR). Opposition to the bailout agreement came both from radical leftist parties (SYRIZA and the Communist Party—KKE) and nationalist and xenophobic parties from the right (Independent Greeks—ANEL) and the *infamous* Xrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn). As Gerodimos argues, the "division regarding the bailout negotiations was an expression of a much more established social cleavage between modernizers (who favour extensive public secure reforms and an extrovert foreign policy, including deep engagement with the EU) and populists (who favour a return to an imagined past of prosperity and/or national purity)" (Gerodimos 2013: 16–17).

During the election campaign of January 2015, the main rivals for the premiership (SYRIZA and ND) structured their rhetoric on the basis of a politics of fear and a politics of hope (Rori 2016: 6). As Boukala and Dimitrakopoulou (2016: 13) suggest, "three social actors dominate the rhetoric of the two political leaders, the Greeks, Europe and the political

'Other'". For ND, SYRIZA's potential rise to power would entail dangers for the stability and the European future of the country. According to ND's communication strategy, the proven track record of responsibility of the ND government was the only solution to secure the country's prosperity. On the other hand, Tsipras emphasized his party's fights against European and domestic elites, while suggesting that SYRIZA's electoral win would signify the end of the austerity era. Tsipras also tried to downgrade fears about "his secret plans of a Grexit" by stressing his goal to restructure the EU on the basis of democratic values and solidarity (Boukala and Dimitrakopoulou 2016: 13–14).

The elections of January 2015 expressed emphatically the decline of the two traditionally dominant parties; ND lost the election to SYRIZA, while PASOK imploded electorally. SYRIZA constituted more than 36 per cent of Greek votes and formed a coalition government with the right-wing, populist party, Independent Greeks (ANEL). Here, Gerodimos and Karyotis make a noteworthy observation: The reason for the electoral collapse of the pro-Memorandum parties could be traced to the failure of There Is No Alternative (to austerity) (TINA) logic, which was the salient frame at the beginning of the crisis. More precisely, the TINA "dogma" was effectively accepted during the first years of the crisis by a relative majority who were convinced of the necessity of fiscal austerity, especially since there was no counterargument from the opposition parties (2015: 265–266). However, as the recession deepened and the voters began to realize that there was no tangible end to their sacrifices, the anti-austerity camp found the ideal opportunity to capitalize on popular fatigue and anger, even though it lacked a clear plan for economic regrowth. SYRIZA's leader, with his populist rhetoric, united heterogeneous identities and demands under the common "enemy" (the Troika, the external and domestic elites) and managed to establish SYRIZA as a new major political force in the Greek political system. SYRIZA's narrative offered a new portrait of society divided in two parts; us ("the people") versus them ("the establishment") (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014: 130).

SYRIZA's leader promised to put an end to austerity policies, "tear up the Memorandum", and secure the restructure of Greece's debt and all without having to leave the EU. However, once in office SYRIZA, after months of failed negotiations with the lenders, and a controversial referendum taking place on 5 July 2015, finally signed the third bailout package. Still, the difference from the previous ND and PASOK governments was that SYRIZA "didn't fall without fighting" (Kiapidou 2015). SYRIZA

framed the negotiations as the "ultimate national fight" against the European elites who blackmailed the country and with this strategic move managed to maintain its popular appeal, since the Greek people liked to hear that this new political force "did not surrender without a fight". As Kiapidou (2015) notes, SYRIZA survived its U-turn politically by combining the following three components: "distancing itself from the old political system, presenting itself as a fighter against Europe, and yet remaining pro-European".

On the other hand, SYRIZA's dramatic U-turn provoked a seismic shift in the intra-party balances, with the radical fraction of the party starting to rebel against the bailout agreement, resulting in the exit from SYRIZA of a core group of prominent MPs, who then formed a distinct party named Laiki Enotita (Demotic Unity). Given this situation, SYRIZA, after securing the opposition's support for the third bailout package, led the country to elections on 20 September 2015.

The electoral campaign that followed was a distinguished case, since it was the first time in this five-year period of subsequent elections that Greek people went to the polls knowing that whatever the outcome, the new government had to comply with the obligations arising from the Third Memorandum. In addition, according to pollsters, due to the controversial referendum of July, which resulted in a very unstable political climate, the voters decided what to vote at the very last minute, which means that the electoral campaign period determined the outcome of the September 2015 elections (Mavris and Symeonidis 2016: 434). Both contenders for the premiership, SYRIZA's leader, Alexis Tsipras, and ND's leader, Vangelis Meimarakis, did not deny that the implementation of the new Memorandum was a perquisite for Greece's participation in the European Monetary Union (EMU). However, Tsipras utilized his "moral advantage" since he was a new, young, promising leader and tried to highlight that during his incumbency he had attempted to secure a better deal with the creditors (Rori 2016: 15). The party's main rhetoric emphasized that although the stability pact is a one-way ticket, once in power SYRIZA would try to alleviate the burden on the shoulders of the less well-off (Chatzistavrou and Michalaki 2015: 3). In this context, one might argue that once again politics triumphed over economics, since major economic issues were approached through a populist rhetoric, while "the political debate retained populist elements, was based on vague terminology and focused on quasi-moral arguments on the past" (Triantopoulos 2015). Independent Greeks (ANEL), SYRIZA's coalition partner, invested in the

same strategy by avoiding talk of the new austerity measures and the economic future of the country in the political dialogue, raising the dichotomy between the "new" and the "fair" political system versus the "old, corrupted one", at the heart of this election campaign.

SYRIZA's main opponent, ND, also chose to run a personalized campaign after its leadership change (Rori 2016: 16). With the urge of its new leader, an experienced and quite popular politician, ND invested its electoral campaign with an effort to portray SYRIZA as a "neo-Memorandum" party and its leader as an irresponsible, amateur politician who, with his "proud negotiations", aggravated the fragile economic climate of the country, leading to capital controls. In the meantime, ND's leader promoted his image as a conciliatory leader who was willing to cooperate with SYRIZA, so that the country would finally return to stability. As the election outcome proved, this "double rhetoric" cost him electorally.

Laiki Enotita (Demotic Unity), SYRIZA's splinter faction, making its "political debut" during this election campaign, maintained an "anti-Memorandum" frame, without rejecting the idea of a "Grexit" and a return to the drachma, in case the lenders continued with their "blackmail". In the anti-Memorandum camp remained the neo-Nazi Xrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn), which during this campaign had been broadly marginalized by the media for a number of reasons, mainly because various Golden Dawn members were in prison for the murder of Pavlos Fyssas. The admission of Nikolaos Michaloliakos, Golden Dawn's leader, that Golden Dawn had taken "political responsibility" for the murder of Pavlos Fyssas, seems to be the only moment throughout this election campaign that triggered the media's attention. The Greek Communist Party (KKE) also maintained its anti-austerity stance, while rejecting the idea of cooperation with the other parties of the anti-Memorandum camp.

Regarding the centre parties, Potami (River), as well as PASOK, kept an old-fashioned modernization rhetoric, while stressing the need for stability in the country that would secure its European future. Finally, the Enosi Kentroon (Centrist Union), under the leadership of Vasilis Leventis, kept its highly populist rhetoric, hoping to find its way into the Greek parliament after 25 years of constant effort.

POLITICAL AND MEDIA SYSTEMS IN GREECE

As mentioned above, the Greek political system after the fall of the junta remained quite stable with the two major parties, PASOK and ND, governing the country for 38 years and enjoying an overwhelming majority of

almost 80 per cent of the Greek peoples' vote. As Pangratis suggests (2008: 14), "Greece since 1980 has moved to a de facto party-system", while the small parties from the left and right wings of the political spectrum did not constitute a threat to two-party rule. However, Siaroff (2003) identifies Greece as a "two-and a half-party system", implying that the "half" party can play a potentially deciding role in the formation of government. Siaroff suggests that in the Greek case, the Greek Communist Party plays the role of the "half party", although he concludes that KKE's potential to act as a regulatory factor in Greek politics was hampered, since "most elections have yielded a majority of seats for either socialist PASOK or the conservative New Democracy" (2003: 276) and due to the fact that the party has been "hesitantly coalitional", more "interested in ideology than in office-seeking" (2003: 285).

According to Lyrintzis, patronage and clientelism have been the operative tools of the reproduction of two-party rule in the Greek political scene (2011: 4). Statism and clientelism, combined with the role of the public sector as employer, had been the mechanism through which the political elites had managed to satisfy their political clientele by securing a seat in the public sector (Zartaloudis 2013). However, the "democratic malaise" of the Greek political system seems to be populism, a phenomenon highly correlated with every aspect of the political life of the modern Greek state (Pappas 2013). As we mentioned earlier, the appearance of populism—largely attributed to PASOK—has penetrated the entire political spectrum with different political actors claiming to be the carriers of "the people's voice". The financial crisis has triggered a new wave of populism, which has resulted in two big "winners", namely SYRIZA and Golden Dawn, who managed to capitalize on popular resentment by campaigning on a populist anti-austerity anti bailout strategy. Although some analysts argue that the crisis signifies the "end of *metapolitefse*" and the rise of a new era in the political life of Greece, others claim that we are rather witnessing continuity instead of change in Greek politics; SYRIZA's discourse maintains the same populist traits of PASOK's slogans in 1981 (Zartaloudis 2013). By promising to increase salaries and pensions to pre-crisis levels and abolish harsh taxation, SYRIZA secured its victory, but once in office had to face the consequences of its own populist strategy.

Between the state and the media in Greece, there has been an interplay which has largely arisen from the tensions within Greek society in contemporary history. Direct authoritarian control of the years of dictatorship is presumably a thing of the past, but some remnants have carried over into the democratic period. Second, the state has also played an important role

as an owner of media enterprises. The electronic media have traditionally been under the total and tight control of the state. Third, in a more indirect but nonetheless effective way, the state has enforced its policies on ownership as well as the unwritten rules of power politics by using a wide range of means of intervention. These means include sizeable financial aid to the press, on which individual enterprises have become dependent. Finally, the central role of the state in the Greek media system has no doubt limited the tendency of the media to play the "watchdog" role so widely valued in prevailing liberal media theory. The financial dependence of media on the state has combined with the intertwining of media and political elites within a highly centralized state polity. This has led to a journalistic culture which has historically been cautious about reporting news which would be embarrassing to state officials.

Indeed, the interlinkage between the state and the media affects the development of the news media in many ways (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002). First, it encourages the use of news media for other purposes than the balanced provision of news stories. The politicization of business is a result not only of the important role the state plays in the economy but of the nature of the political process. Second, this modus vivendi has made the media systems less self-regulatory and the regulatory bodies less independent compared to their counterparts in liberal countries. Third, politics has also affected the content of the media, especially newspapers, making it a means of negotiation among conflicting elites rather than a means for the information of the public and, therefore, mass circulation. It forces the logic of journalism to merge with other social logics—of party politics, for instance. And it breaks down the horizontal solidarity of journalists as it does of other social groups.

As far as the Greek media system is concerned, one could say it is primarily characterized by excess of supply over demand. This oversupply appears to be logical, since a plethora of newspapers, TV channels, magazines, and radio stations have to compete for a small-country audience and advertising market share (Papathanassopoulos 1999). Although developments in the Greek media sector may not entirely respond to the needs of its advertising industry, it has been surprisingly adaptable to swings in the economic business cycle (Papathanassopoulos 2014). The fiscal crisis, however, coupled with the crisis of the economy, brought major losses of advertising revenues for the media industry (Korderas 2012). Today, all media outlets are facing their most difficult period ever, but it is the print media (newspapers and magazines) which are suffering the most (Papathanassopoulos 2014).

News Coverage of the 2015 Election Campaign: Data Analysis

This study examines the election news coverage during the official campaign period of September 2015 through Salgado et al. (2015) framework. Our sample includes news stories and items from 6 to 18 September 2015, covering two weeks prior to election day. The research is based on the election coverage in the print editions of three daily papers: *Kathimerini* (centre-right), *Avgi* (left), and *Espresso* (tabloid paper). In addition, the main newscasts of three television stations (MEGA, ANT1, and the public broadcaster, ERT) were also analysed for the scope of this research, as well as the election news found in three online newspapers with high popularity, namely www.in.gr, www.newsit.gr, and www.protothema.gr. The unit of analysis was the news story. Every story, which referred to the election, the campaign, and/or parties and party leaders running for this election, was included in this study, resulting in a sample of 1668 articles.

The Media Focus during the Election: Personalization

Personalization refers to "the notion that individual political actors have become more prominent at the expense of parties and collective identities" (Karvonen 2010: 4). In media coverage, this trend is manifested in the form of increased visibility of candidates and more precisely of party leaders compared to their parties. In fact, many surveys have pointed out that the political power the candidates hold affects the amount of coverage they receive, with party leaders and the candidates of the party in office becoming more prominent during the election campaign (Tresch 2009; Schönbach et al. 2001; Wolfsfeld and Sheafer 2006; Hopmann et al. 2011).

According to our results, party leaders dominated in the news stories at a rate of 57.3 per cent, compared to the focus on the party as a whole (25.2 per cent). More specifically, the media coverage of the election campaign of September 2015 focused on the two main "gladiators" for the premiership of the country, Alexis Tsipras (11.8 per cent) and Vangelis Meimarakis (11.2 per cent) (see Fig. 2.1). The heightened visibility of party leaders echoes the findings of a previous study regarding the media coverage of the election campaign of January 2015 (Giannouli and Karadimitriou 2015).

Regarding the party leaders of smaller parties, Stavros Theodorakis (River) seems to have attracted media interest to a significant extent (6 per cent). Remarkable is the strong presence of Panagiotis Lafazanis (3.8 per
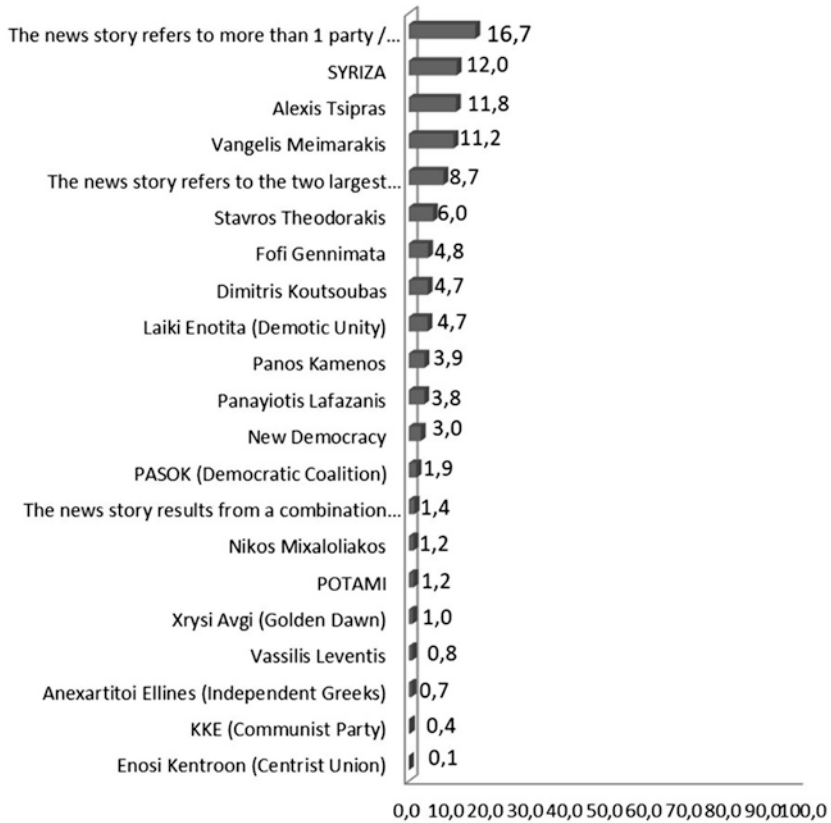
Fig. 2.1 Political leaders and parties in the media (percentages) during the September 2015 election campaign

cent) and his newly formed party, Demotic Unity (4.7 per cent), who won a significant share of media coverage compared with the leaders of the other smaller parties. Interestingly, Vasilis Leventis, leader of the Centrist Union, seems to be marginalized by media, receiving a media coverage share of 0.8 per cent, which is far smaller even than that of the leader of Golden Dawn, Nikos Michaloliakos, who received 1.2 per cent and experienced media marginalization due to the extremist nature of his political speech.

However, personalization does not only refer to the visibility of individuals. It goes beyond than that, referring to an increasing focus on

their "character" or "personality traits" (Holtz-Bacha et al. 2014: 156). Studies have also shown that the personal traits of candidates have become more salient than their policy plans (Aalberg et al. 2012: 172; Benoit et al. 2005).

As most pundits suggested, the election campaign was a contest between the two main contenders. More precisely, 16.2 per cent of the stories referring to SYRIZA's leader nominally commented on his political competence, while 12.1 per cent raised the issue of his trust-worthiness. As far as concerns his major opponent, Vangelis Meimarakis (ND leader), 19.1 per cent of the stories referring to him nominally highlight his political competence and 11.2 per cent made references to his credibility.

Issues

Debates and party politics emerged as the most prominent issue of this campaign (72.7 per cent). In the public discourse, emphasis was given to macroeconomics and taxes (8.9 per cent). Issues relating to the governance of the country and in particular the multi-alleged need for a coalition of national unity, which would secure the future of Greece in the European Union, were also salient in the media (3.2 per cent). Finally, news stories on polls and the standing of political parties and party leaders in these were also dominant in the coverage of this campaign (5 per cent) (see Fig. 2.2).

The economy has always been high in the pre-election agenda (Denmark 2005; Brandenburg 2006: 170). During the financial crisis, the economy seems to have become a nodal point, setting the voter's behaviour and provoking turbulences in the current political regime of Greece (Dinas and Rori 2013). The new bailout agreement emerged as a highly controversial issue among political leaders, captivating media attention, and all debates on economic policy were structured around a crucial question: whether Greece would respect its agreement and remain in the Eurozone or whether it would opt for setting its own financial policies and leave the European currency (16.8 per cent). The budgetary discipline and compliance to the obligations arising from the structure of the Euro system were seen as prerequisites for Greece's permanence in the Eurozone and comprised the main argument of the parties supporting the new bailout, receiving 22.6 per cent of media coverage.

The new antagonistic dichotomy of anti-Memorandum/pro-Memorandum penetrating the entire Greek society had not reflected the
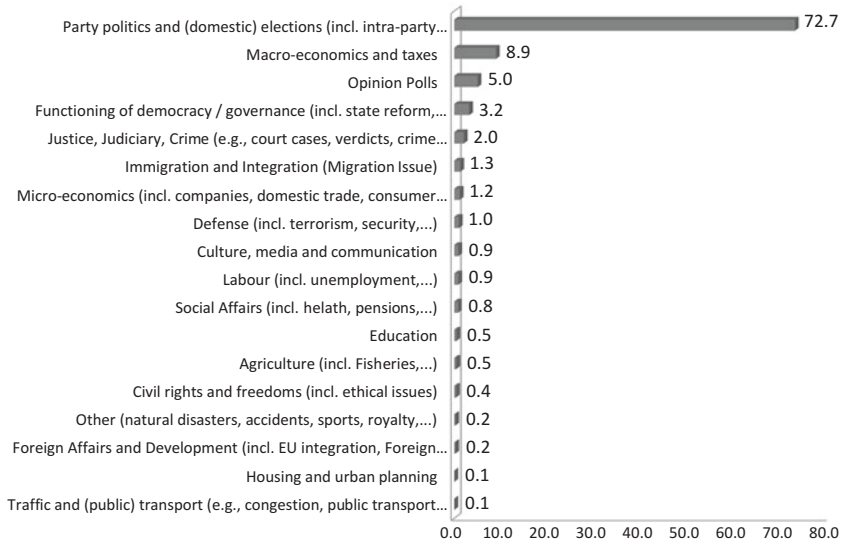
Fig. 2.2 Issues of the election campaign

traditional cleavage between left and right anymore, and most importantly had broadened its scope beyond economic policies, including a pro-/anti-European dimension (Katsanidou and Otjes 2016).

The negative consequences of the austerity measures and bailout agreement became salient in 36.6 per cent of the news stories in our sample. The political leaders from the so-called anti-Memorandum camp tried to deconstruct the pro-Memorandum parties' narrative regarding the benefits of the new agreement with the creditors by highlighting the rates of poverty and unemployment in the country. It is worth noting that the majority of news stories concerning the negative effects of the austerity measures are highly correlated (21.4 per cent) with the General Secretary of KKE, Dimitris Koutsoumpas. The side effects of austerity policy were also highlighted by the leader of Golden Dawn, Nikos Michaloliakos (4 per cent)—a percentage not at all negligible, given the very low volume of news stories about Golden Dawn's political rallies. As expected, Panagiotis Lafazanis, the leader of Demotic Unity, also pointed out this issue (14.4 per cent), proclaiming the country's right to decide about its economic policies, and favouring the option of leaving the European currency (13 per cent).

The shift in SYRIZA's political agenda, which won the election of January 2015 based on an anti-austerity campaign, and then transformed to a pro-bailout party, is reflected in the amount of stories where Alexis Tsipras is portrayed as holding a pro-Memorandum position, emphasizing the positive effects of the bailout agreement for the country (53.8 per cent). News stories referring to the bailout agreement with an emphasis on the positive aspects of the new bailout package are also correlated with the presence of River's leader, Stavros Theodorakis (23.1 per cent). Theodorakis during this campaign adopted an old-fashioned modernization discourse, proclaiming the need for radical reforms that would safeguard the European course of the country. ND's leader, Vangelis Meimarakis, as one of the two main contenders for the premiership, keeping in mind that if elected, he would be bound by the bailout agreement, highlighted the issue of budgetary discipline. As a result, more stories on this issue are highly correlated with Meimarakis's visibility (13.1 per cent). Also stories referring to the possibility of a Grexit are highly correlated with the ND leader, since his narrative was built on the need to keep Greece in the European family (16.3 per cent).

Populism

It seems that the financial crisis provided the ideal field for populism to flourish in Greece, as more and more politicians try to attract voters by promoting the nodal point of "the people", whose meaning may vary, according to the political leader. SYRIZA's leader, Alexis Tsipras is by far the party leader who uses the term "the people" to the greatest extent when he addresses his voters (66 times) (see Fig. 2.3). SYRIZA and its leader were the focus of analysis for both international and domestic journalists and academics. The view held by the majority of them is "that SYRIZA constitutes a *populist* movement, articulating a *populist* rhetoric" (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014: 120). In our sample, the General Secretary of KKE, Koutsoumpas, was also depicted often as making references to "the people" (38 times). On the contrary, the leader of the main opposition party, Meimarakis, does not often address his voters using the word "the people" (15 times).

The results are significantly different as far as it concerns the use of the division "us" and "them", which seems to be frequently used by the majority of political leaders. Alexis Tsipras used this dual scheme quite often (85 times), adjusting his discourse in the main slogan of his campaign, "Let's
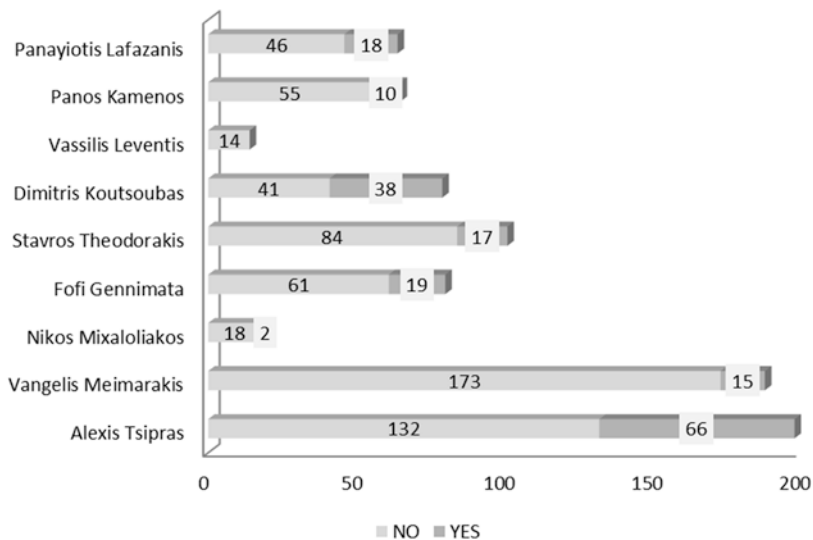
Fig. 2.3 Use of the term "the people" by political leaders

get over the past". In SYRIZA's rhetoric, the term "they" is used to describe the old and corrupt political system, as represented, according to SYRIZA's discourse, by ND and PASOK.

Stavros Theodorakis (River) is the party leader with the second most frequent use of this dual scheme (54 times). Theodorakis used the term "they" to refer to the "new old" (SYRIZA) and the "old old" (ND and PASOK). Theodorakis during this election campaign implemented a severe strategy of personal attacks on SYRIZA's leader, regarding his populist rhetoric. To a considerable extent the leaders of the smaller parties also made use of this rhetorical scheme (see Fig. 2.4). ND' s party leader also used this division in his rhetoric (48 times) and in most cases he refers to SYRIZA by name, in an attempt to highlight the difference between the realistic and responsible politics of ND and the "irresponsible promises" provided by SYRIZA.

Regarding criticisms of "the establishment" by political leaders, these are more common by the SYRIZA's leader (56 times), followed by the General Secretary of KKE (36 times) and the leader of Demotic Unity (30 times).
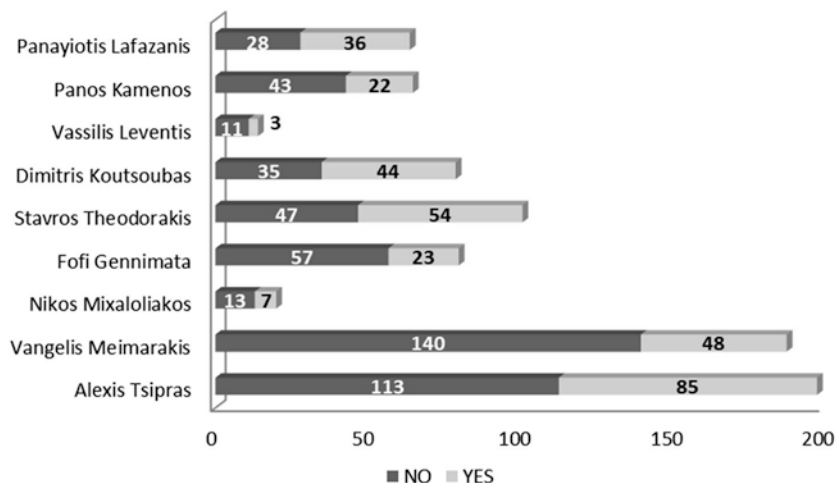
Fig. 2.4 Use of "us" and "them" by political leaders

Analysing the use of the term "elite", it became apparent that most references concern the political elite (48.4 per cent), while the EU elite also emerged as a common source of criticism among political leaders (17.2 per cent). Besides, the attribution of responsibility for economic conditions to exogenous factors (blame-shifting), in order for governments to minimize political costs, is also manifested in the international literature (Vis and van Kersbergen 2007: 167).

SYRIZA's leader refers to himself as a "system outsider" more times (39) than his political opponents, often stressing that SYRIZA is a party that differs from the existing party apparatus, aiming at eliminating inter-weaving in politics. Stavros Theodorakis also identifies himself as an "outsider to the system" (27 times), often emphasizing that his party members are not "children of the partisan political tube", but capable and hard-working people, promising to struggle to safeguard the "people's interests". Similarly, Lafazanis and Koutsoumpas ranked third in terms of frequency of self-perception as "system outsiders" (18 times), separating themselves from the "pro-Memorandum parties".

Analysing other specific characteristics of populism in the Greek political leaders' discourse, one observes that a higher proportion of the blame-shifting strategy prevailed in their rhetoric. This trait is mainly apparent in the ND leader's discourse (77 times), as well as in smaller parties' discourse

(see also Vasilopoulou et al. 2014). Regarding Tsipras's discourse a quite prominent characteristic is the simplification of issues (24 times), as SYRIZA's leader often adopts the dualistic division of "us" and "them", where SYRIZA represents by default the "new", the "meritorious", and the "fair", and his political opponents (mainly ND) the "vicious", the "old", and the "corrupt". SYRIZA's leader claimed that he knows better the "needs" and "rights" of the people (16 times) and battles more for them when compared to his opponents, particularly compared to ND. As far as smaller parties' leaders are concerned, the Secretary of the Communist Party stressed that he belongs to "the people" (11 times), Theodorakis (River) seems to have a better understanding of "people's needs" (11 times) and Panagiotis Lafazanis presented simplified interpretations (13 times) of complex political issues, particularly that of the return to the national currency.

News Framing

A noteworthy amount of political communication research is concerned with the notion that the media, rather than simply covering "just the facts" of elections and the candidates running in them, often carry their own personal biases, political affiliations, and opinions into their coverage through the way they choose to report on these facts. In other words, the media influence the public opinion by "framing" the news. As Entman noted the media "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (1993: 52). According to Norris (1995: 357), the idea of "news frames" refers to interpretive structures, which set particular events within their broader context; interpretation and evaluation of new information is thus achieved by slotting the new into familiar categories. One of the most often-cited criticisms of media's coverage of political campaigns is that the media rather than providing coverage with a main focus on the candidates' political platform and policy issues, prefer to present stories that focus on candidates' performance and image during the campaigns (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Valentino et al. 2001). The framing of election news stories can be broadly classified into two main categories: the "issue frame" and the "strategic game frame". The issue frame applies to new stories that focus on the substance of political issues, descriptions of parties' policies as well as on their ideological differences. On the other hand, the "strategic game frame" is defined as focusing on

politics as a game and personality contest, by placing emphasis on who is winning or losing in elections, candidates' standing in the polls as well as on candidates' strategies and tactics for winning the elections (Aalberg et al. 2012).

In the Greek sample, newspapers hold the lion's share in framing the election campaign as a strategic game (71.1 per cent), followed by TV (33.6 per cent) and online newspapers (32.4 per cent) (see Fig. 2.5). Online newspapers adopted the issue frame to a high extent (67.6 per cent), since in most cases online media presented the programmatic positions of parties on different issues, yet without any attempt to put them in a critical context.

Discussions of candidates' poll standing, outcome predictions, and commentary on tactics that each campaign team was currently using to win over new voters were common themes for the two politically affiliated newspapers (*Avgi* and *Kathimerini*). Regarding the television stations analysed in this study, MEGA takes the lead in framing politics as a strategic game (43.3 per cent), since political pundits and pollsters were quite often invited in the studio to discuss the candidates' standing in the polls and interpret the parties' strategies and tactics for attracting votes. ANT1 used the strategy news frame at a rate of 36.5 per cent, while ERT made use of this frame at a rate of 23.1 per cent, proclaiming the issue frame (76.9 per cent).
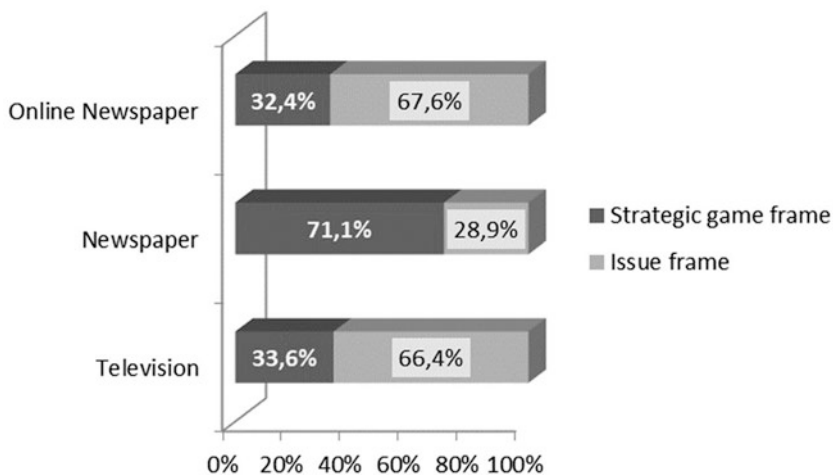
Fig. 2.5 Dominant framing of politics per type of media

These findings echo the market-driven orientation of privately owned media that invest in "horse race" coverage, since strategy reports proved far more popular than reports about the issues (Hahn et al. 2002). On the other hand, the state broadcaster ERT provided more thorough coverage on the issues at stake, defending its public service mission.

When polls dominated news stories, they were presented with a strategy frame at a rate of 85.9 per cent, followed by stories on the functioning of governance (68.5 per cent) and party politics, with a total amount of strategy frame coverage of 46.7 per cent.

Interpretive Journalism

"Horse race" campaign coverage is correlated with interpretative journalism in our sample, and newspapers once again seem to have presented more opinionated stories compared to the other type of media. Overall, newspaper stories included journalistic interpretations (explanations, comments, speculations; for additional information on this operationalization of interpretive journalism, see Salgado and Strömbäck 2012) about politics at a rate of 79.9 per cent, followed by online newspapers (27 per cent) and television (24.3 per cent) (see Fig. 2.6).
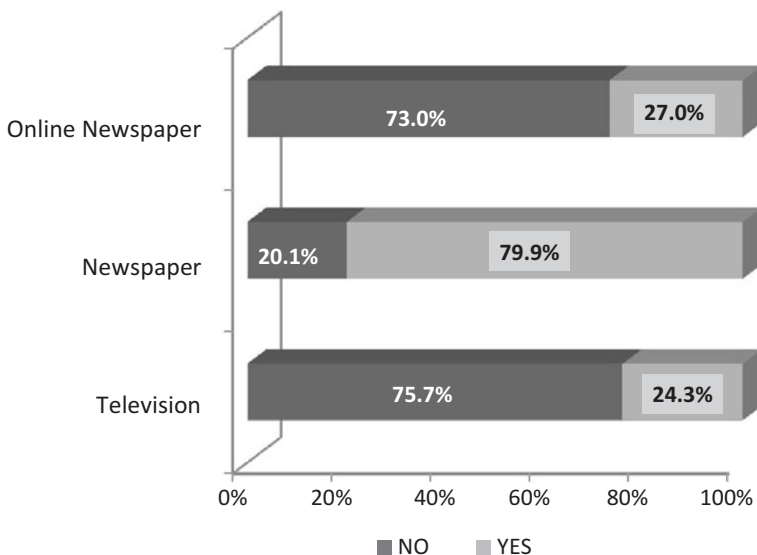
Fig. 2.6 Journalistic interpretation (explanations, speculations, commentaries) per type of media (percentages)

Newscasts and online newspapers focused mostly on the juxtaposition of events and even when some sort of explanation or interpretation accompanied the news stories, this was primarily in the form of a comment (19.5 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively). Among television stations MEGA provided the most explanatory news stories, presenting interpretation on politics and tactics at a rate of 18.6 per cent, while the other two television stations had significantly lower results (ERT 8.5 per cent and ANT1 7.4 per cent). Newspapers provided election news stories with a high rate of overt commentary (77.4 per cent) and a high percentage of analysis of political tactics and interpretations of the reasons behind events (44.4 per cent).

As expected the tabloid newspaper (*Espresso*) presented far fewer news stories with an interpretative angle (34.6 per cent) than the other two daily newspapers (*Kathimerini*, 50.6 per cent and *Avgi*, 40.4 per cent).

Conflict and Negativity

Another finding in our analysis that is in line with previous studies is the increase in attacks in election campaigns. Geer (2010) provides a thorough examination of the media's role in the rise of "attack politics". The coverage of the September 2015 election campaign was marked by the "clash" between the two main contenders Alexis Tsipras and Vangelis Meimarakis, as well as by the intense conflict among the political leaders competing for third place. This was reflected in the confrontational impression of politics that prevailed in 42.7 per cent of the analysed news stories. This finding is quite surprising, given that ND's leader was trying to portray himself as a conciliatory leader, referring to the need of consensus among politicians for the sake of the country.

Television took the lead in conveying a primarily conflictual impression of the political campaign (45 per cent), since most news stories were framed in a way that presented the race for the premiership as a "fight" between the two main "gladiators". More precisely, key points from the two main candidate's speeches were aired in a way that put the two political leaders in constant debate, where chosen quotes from Tsipras seemed to provide an answer to Meimarakis's allegations and vice versa.

This trend is also reflected in the overwhelming percentage of television news stories which gave opportunity to all the relevant parties involved in a conflict to present their arguments (67.6 per cent), compared to the newspapers, which due to their clear political affiliation in most cases, presented a biased, one-sided view of politics (18.9 per cent).

In studies that examine the overall tone of political and election news stories, a tendency for negative media coverage is often reported (O'gara 2009: 2; Hopmann et al. 2012: 246; Lengauer et al. 2012), especially on the way that politicians choose to run on the campaign trail (Lichter 2001: 17). Bias and negativity of political news stories are often examined in the light of political affiliations between certain media and political candidates or parties (D'Alessio and Allen 2000; Niven 2001, 2003; Gunther et al. 1999). In the 2015 Greek election campaign, the media seems to have covered election news stories in a neutral tone in the majority of cases (68.2 per cent), while stories with a negative tonality hold 27.8 per cent.

Of particular interest is the tonality that each type of medium adopted, with newspapers holding the lion's share of negative reports (51.1 per cent), which is partly due to more opinionated articles that allow frequent evaluations of political actors and tactics by journalists. In addition, the newspapers included in the study maintain a distinct political affiliation, resulting in the harsh criticism of the views and the actions of politicians from the other side of the political spectrum.

Avgi, the daily newspaper of the left, presented stories about SYRIZA with a negative tone at a rate of 16.9 per cent, balanced stories at a rate of 62.3 per cent, and positive tonality prevailed in 20.8 per cent of news stories. Stories on ND were significantly of negative tonality (90.9 per cent), while neutral coverage prevailed in 9.1 per cent of the coverage. The same picture is depicted in the results regarding the leaders of the corresponding parties; Alexis Tsipras (SYRIZA) dominated in stories with a negative tone at a rate of 39.4 per cent, while his opponent Vangelis Meimarakis was portrayed negatively in 85.7 per cent of the news stories.

In *Kathimerini*, SYRIZA was reported with an overall negative tone at a rate of 64.9 per cent, while a more neutral coverage was adopted in 35.1 per cent of the news stories. In effect, SYRIZA had zero positive coverage in this newspaper. On the other hand, ND was reported with a neutral tone in the majority of the news (75 per cent), while negative and positive tonality prevailed in the same amount of stories, that is, 12.5 per cent. Tsipras received negative coverage at a rate of 61.5 per cent and was portrayed in a neutral tone in 38.5 per cent of news stories. Meimarakis received 75 per cent neutral coverage, while negative and positive coverage prevailed in 16.7 per cent and in 8.3 per cent of the news items, respectively. These findings, despite echoing the obtrusively partisan character of the Greek press (Zaharopoulos and Paraschos 1993: 96), reflect Brandenburg's findings (2006) that the media's affiliation with parties and party leaders is not expressed in the form of blatant positive comments for

their "affiliates", but rather takes the form of severe criticism of the tactics of political opponents.

On the contrary, newscasts adopted a primarily neutral tonality (79.5 per cent), with ANT1 showing the highest rate of "balanced" news (85.1 per cent), followed by state television (80.2 per cent). "Neutral" news stories also prevailed in online newspapers (81.3 per cent), which often published excerpts of political leaders' speeches, without presenting an analysis of the political leaders' strategy and performance. The online newspaper *in.gr* presented most election news in a neutral style (82.3 per cent), followed by *prothothema.gr* (80.9 per cent) and *newsit.gr* (78.3 per cent).

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this study provide evidence that the news framing of the candidates in the September 2015 election campaign was largely consistent with previous research focusing on the national elections of January 2015 (Giannouli and Karadimitriou 2015). Personalization of politics prevailed once more, with the leaders of the two main parties fighting for the premiership of the country receiving far more coverage than their counterparts.

The populist discourse of some party leaders seems to have captivated the media attention. Populist leaders are media-savvy. They know exactly what to say and how to attract the media's attention. Since the emergence of the financial crisis, two poles in Greek society quickly crystallized in the media and politicians' discourse; the Memorandum supporters and the anti-Memorandum front (*antimnemoneake*). However, during the September 2015 election campaign, party leaders' narratives have shown that this dichotomy could not reflect any longer the traditional cleavage between left and right. As Verney suggested the "sleeping giant" of Euroscepticism was awoken in Greece (2015: 292). The importance of the strategic frame in Greek newspapers proves that the "horse race still sells". However, this has side effects for political life (see Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Valentino et al. 2001). The emphasis on strategy framing, supplemented by the focus on the personalization of politics, not only increases voters' apathy, but also leads to a lack of knowledge about the issues at stake and the candidates' stands.

Negativity and conflictual portrayals of politics emerged as a common theme in the media's coverage of the September 2015 election campaign. Previous studies have also shown that the establishment of "telepolitics" with increased focus on contradictions and drama, since

both elements seem to appeal to the public, have changed politics, deteriorating people's chances for participation in the democratic process (Papathanassopoulos 2000).

Our study shows a notable correlation of the increased use of strategy frame with the rise of interpretative journalism. The "hot" question for the media today is not merely "who's winning" but "why". In order to address this question, election campaign news has shifted away from their traditional descriptive mode towards a more interpretive and analytic style (Zaller 1999: 24–26). Nevertheless, this may not be the case for the Greek media system. The Greek media, the press in particular, continues to be an instrument of negotiation among political, cultural, and economic elites, but, in the age of the social media, this negotiation is in danger of having no audience, especially among the younger generation. It is not a coincidence that populist leaders heavily use social media to communicate with their voters and at the same time dispute "traditional" media.

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CHAPTER 3

Journalism Norms and the Absence of Media Populism in the Irish General Election 2016

Eileen Culloty and Jane Suiter

INTRODUCTION

If populism thrives on discontent, then the Republic of Ireland would seem ripe for a proliferation of populist politics. Following a period of unprecedented economic growth, the global financial crisis of 2008 exposed Ireland to a twin banking and fiscal crises culminating in an €85 billion bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Union (EU). The subsequent programme of economic austerity brought considerable disruption to Irish politics and exasperated public hostility towards mainstream politicians and so-called elites. The consequences are evident in the fact that the 2016 Irish general election marked a historic low point in support for established political parties (Farrell and Suiter 2016). In a record for Irish politics, 23 independent or non-party candidates were elected and it would appear that anti-political sentiment contributed to the success of these candidates.

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Research on populism in Ireland is scarce and primarily reflects a broad tendency towards left-wing populist sentiment. Existing work identifies the presence of anti-elitist tendencies and anti-politics bias (Brandenburg 2005) as well as growing anti-party sentiment (O'Malley and Fitzgibbon 2015; Suiter 2016). Following the financial crisis, these tendencies coalesced around a narrative of unjust austerity whereby corrupt Irish politicians were deemed to serve the interests of international bankers and EU officials rather than the interests of the Irish people. Although definitions of populism vary, there is broad agreement that the overarching theme or ideology of populism posits a homogeneous public against a set of elites and 'others' who collectively seek to undermine the sovereignty and values of the traditional public (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). In Ireland, the anti-establishment narrative that arose in opposition to austerity reflects an understanding of populism as a style of communication (Jagers and Walgrave 2007). As a communication style, the post-crisis narrative offered 'ostentatiously intelligible and plain-spoken' opposition to complexity, political routine, and bureaucracy (Krämer 2014: 45). This narrative was already evident prior to the 2011 general election with many independent candidates and small political parties beginning to portray themselves in a more populist manner (Fitzgibbon and Guerra 2010; Kitching 2013; O'Malley and FitzGibbon 2015; Suiter 2016).

Given the noted challenges in defining populism (Weyland 2001), it is important to recognize that not all criticisms of austerity and the political establishment in Ireland are necessarily populist. Setting out the complex distinctions and overlaps between populist and, for example, left-wing criticisms of austerity is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, we are interested in the extent to which the commercially driven logic of the news media constrained or enabled a populist communication style through, for example, the use of game frames and personalization. As the news media's capacity to influence politics is most obvious in terms of how elections are covered by journalists, the 2016 general election allows us to assess the extent to which populist sentiment has entered the mainstream of mediated political debate in Ireland.

Although there is broad agreement that the media play an important role in the dissemination of populist messaging (Mudde 2004), the precise nature of the media's role remains open to debate (Esser et al. 2017). Lacking the organizational structures of established parties, independents and small-party candidates would appear to be more dependent on attaining media coverage (Aalberg and de Vreese 2017). Consequently, it may

be that the media enable independent and small-party candidates to reach a wide audience (Mazzoleni et al. 2003; Bos et al. 2011) and thereby broaden the appeal of populist messaging by these actors (Ellinas 2010). At the same time, professional journalism practices may unintentionally enable the rise of populist actors because the media are incentivized to give coverage to actors that meet the demands of producing newsworthy or attention-grabbing content (Mazzoleni et al. 2003).

Within political science, there has been a somewhat reductive tendency to equate populism with particular types of media. Typically, populism is equated with commercial television and the tabloid press while public sector broadcasters and quality broadsheets are equated with more substantive policy coverage. Given the pronounced commercial pressures faced by news media, there is a further assumption that quality media are increasingly incentivized to moved towards tabloid-style coverage (Mazzoleni et al. 2003). On this view, we might expect to find that we might expect to find that particular types of media, specifically tabloids and new entrants to the news media market, enable anti-elite populist messaging by reflecting a higher tendency towards strategic game frames and personalization.

However, our study finds that although the strategic game frame dominates coverage, only 2 per cent of stories reference any form of elitism and only 12 per cent manifest a definite populist rhetoric. Moreover, the performance of difference types of media confounds stereotypical platform expectations. In this regard, the findings support a previous study of newspaper framing during the 2011 Irish general election, which cast 'doubt on simple stereotypes of game-oriented tabloids and issue-oriented broadsheets' (McMenamin et al. 2012: 183). The authors of this newspaper study suggest that greater attention needs to be afforded to the specific commercial contexts of media outlets and the specific political context in which elections are covered. Towards this end, we suggest that industrial contexts and the prevailing professional values and norms of Irish journalism are an important influence on election coverage and may partly account for absence of media populism in 2016 general election coverage.

POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE 2016 ELECTIONS

The 2016 Irish general election, held on 26th February, was required under electoral law as the outgoing coalition government served a full five-year term in office. Much like Greece, Portugal, and Spain, the global

financial crisis brought deep disruption to Irish politics and this crisis continued to resonate over the 2016 campaign. Although the IMF-EC-ECB bailout in 2010 stabilized Ireland's financial position, the accompanying austerity programme gave rise to a series of social crises and encountered widespread popular opposition (Murphy 2016). Following Ireland's first post-austerity general election in 2011, the outgoing government, led by Fianna Fáil, suffered substantial losses and a coalition government was formed by Fine Gael and Labour.

Over the next five years, the Fine Gael-Labour government had some notable achievements including reducing unemployment, increasing economic growth, and a successful referendum on same-sex marriage. However, social crises, most notably in housing, drew popular opposition and the introduction of household water charges gave rise to the largest protest movement since the foundation of the Irish state. Members of both government parties resigned in opposition to public expenditure cuts and the introduction of limited provisions for abortion. A former Labour minister went on to join the new Social Democrats party and four former members of Fine Gael formed the Renua party. The two government parties also encountered significant losses at the local and European elections in May 2014. By 2016, public trust in political institutions fell into the region of all-time lows (Quinlan 2016).

Within the literature, there is broad agreement that a clear populist narrative emerged in the wake of the financial crisis, which centred on anti-austerity and anti-elite sentiments (McDonnell 2008; O'Malley and FitzGibbon 2015; Suiter 2016). Among established parties, populism has traditionally been associated with Sinn Féin; a nationalist and left-wing party which advocated a clear anti-austerity agenda following the financial crisis. O'Malley (2008) argues that radical right-wing populism, of the kind found across Europe, failed to make progress in Ireland because Sinn Féin have traditionally dominated the space for disaffected voters and the party espouses a pro-immigration philosophy of equality. Consequently, despite the socially transformative inflow of labour immigrants since the 1990s, the space for anti-immigrant right-wing populism has been constrained by the prominence of the left-wing Sinn Féin party.

The financial crisis, however, expanded the platform for other anti-austerity voices and opened up the prospect of a new populist party emerging (McDonnell 2008). A number of new political alliances were formed to contest the 2016 election. These included a left-leaning Right2Change alliance of parties and independent politicians opposing water charges; the

Independent Alliance of non-party candidates, and a socialist alliance between the Anti-Austerity Alliance and the People Before Profit party. In January 2016, one month prior to the general election, focus group research for *The Irish Times* found that voters believed independent and small-party candidates were more principled than established party candidates, but respondents also believed that these political actors were unlikely to take on a role in a future government (Collins 2016). Here, the focus group respondents reflected some of the noted contradictions that arise from anti-political establishment candidates seeking to join the political establishment through elections (Schedler 1996).

Concerns about crime, health, homelessness, and water charges featured throughout the campaign. However, economic recovery was the dominant issue and Fine Gael's election slogan 'Let's Keep the Recovery Going' was widely perceived as an alienating misrepresentation of economic recovery. Election results were particularly damaging for the established parties: Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and Labour. Their combined vote share fell to its lowest levels in history and the outgoing government parties lost 56 seats. Labour party seats fell from 37 to 7 making it the worst election result in the party's 104-year history. Despite losing 26 seats, Fine Gael remained the largest party and went on to form a coalition government supported by independents. However, the record election of 23 independent or non-party candidates raises significant questions about the growing role of anti-party sentiment within Irish politics and the role of the media in enabling or constraining this sentiment.

Political and Media Systems in Ireland

Ireland's parliamentary democracy operates an electoral system that is a form of open Proportional Representation (PR), specifically a single transferable vote form of proportional representation within multi-seat constituencies. Members of Dáil Éireann are directly elected at least once every five years. At the 2016 general election, 157 members of parliament (TDs) were elected from 40 constituencies with each constituency returning on average four parliamentarians. Following the 2012 introduction of gender quotas as a requirement for state funding, at least 30 per cent of the candidates put forth by each party were women (Buckley et al. 2016). Since the 1990s, no single party has held a majority resulting in coalition governments formed with one of the two major historical parties: Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. These two nationalist parties have dominated Irish

politics since independence from Britain in the 1920s. The two other independence era parties, Sinn Féin and the Irish Labour Party, have remained relatively small in comparison with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

Ireland's single transferable vote system encourages representation by small parties and independents and there is a strong incentive for candidates to seek personal votes because voters can choose between candidates and parties (Marsh 2007). Traditionally, Ireland's liberal and nationalistic tradition has produced a consensual political culture. However, the Irish party system is currently in an advanced state of fragmentation with established parties now receiving less than 50 per cent of the vote; in contrast to over 90 per cent in the 1980s (Farrell and Suiter 2016). The rise of extra-systemic voter volatility—that is, the proportion of voters switching to non-established parties and politicians—is particularly notable. Extra-systemic volatility accounted for over two-thirds (70 per cent) of total voter volatility in the 2016 election (Farrell and Suiter 2016).

Ireland, along with Britain, Canada, and the United States, is one of four countries which have a North Atlantic or liberal media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004). This system is primarily exemplified by the early development of the commercial press, a strong orientation towards professionalization and information-oriented journalism, and the dominance of market-driven media. However, the latter is offset in Ireland and Britain by the presence of a robust public service broadcasting sector. The Irish media environment is further characterized by a strong indigenous sector and the widespread availability of British print and broadcast media.

Ireland's print media sector is highly competitive and has traditionally been dominated by the *Irish Independent*, a conservative leaning broadsheet, and *The Irish Times*, a left-leaning broadsheet that is also regarded as the newspaper of record. All newspapers in the Irish market are privately-owned, either as publicly quoted companies or as private entities. *The Irish Times* is owned by a charitable trust and the *Irish Independent* is owned by a publicly quoted company that represents the country's largest newspaper group. In line with global trends, Irish newspaper circulation has fallen into sharp decline and the economic crisis has placed much greater pressure on the advertising revenues of all media outlets. In addition, newspapers now compete with new online entrants to the news market such as *TheJournal.ie*. In keeping with traditional norms, Irish newspapers did not endorse any particular political party or prospective coalition government.

Broadcasting in the Republic of Ireland is dominated by *RTÉ*, a public service agency that is dual funded by a licence fee and advertising. The commercial station *TV3* began broadcasting in 1998. A new commercial station, *UTV Ireland*, began broadcasting in 2015 but has since been acquired by the *TV3* Group, a subsidiary of Virgin Media Ireland. Broadcast coverage of elections is regulated by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, which requires all broadcasters to comply with impartiality guidelines and codes of practice.

A survey of news consumption conducted during the period of the election campaign (Kirk et al. 2016) indicates the changing nature of Irish news consumption. Although television remains a dominant source of news, online sources such as new digital-only outlets and the digital versions of traditional media are increasingly gaining audience share. With the adoption of digital technologies, Irish media exemplifies the trend towards hybrid media (Chadwick 2013) whereby traditional news cycles are replaced with more dynamic and highly competitive information cycles. The imperatives of hybrid media coupled with the economic pressures encountered by all media would seem to indicate that previous assumptions about the influence of professional journalism norms and values are no longer certain. Consequently, within the context of intensified mediatization (Mazzoleni 2014), industry economic pressures, and widespread public disaffection with political institutions, we might expect to find that some outlets, especially tabloids and recent market entrants, are incentivized towards enabling anti-elite populist messaging by reflecting a higher tendency towards personalization and strategic game frames.

News Coverage of the 2016 Election Campaign

The researchers coded 791 election news items in the two weeks prior to the general election on 26 February 2016 following Salgado et al. (2015) framework. All parties, leaders, and groups of independents running for election were included. To reflect the diversity of a changing media landscape, a variety of platforms were included which include long-established media outlets as well as recent entrants to the market. The study included the two largest circulation broadsheets—one centre-left (*The Irish Times*) and one centre-right broadsheet (*Irish Independent*); one tabloid (*The Irish Daily Star*); the major digital-only platform (*TheJournal.ie*) and the main nightly news bulletins of the public sector broadcaster (*RTÉ*) and two commercial television broadcasters—*TV3* and the new market entrant *UTV*.

Print circulation figures for the newspapers examined in this study during the period of the election were: *Irish Independent*—102,537; *The Irish Times*—72,011; and *Irish Daily Star*—53,945 (Newsbrands Ireland 2016). According to the 2016 Reuters Digital News Report (Kirk et al. 2016), the audience reach, during the period of the election, for each of the outlets covered by this study breaks down as follows: *RTÉ TV News* (64 per cent); *Irish Independent* (44 per cent); *The Irish Times* (37 per cent); *TV3 News* (27 per cent); *UTV News* (15 per cent); *TheJournal.ie* (12 per cent); and *Irish Daily Star* (8 per cent).

In what follows, we first contextualize results in terms of the professional journalism norms and values manifest in election coverage. Here we may assess the extent to which the evolving hybridized media system is changing expectations about the performance of different media. Results relating to populist messaging are then discussed in the context of Irish journalism norms and values.

Journalism Norms and Values

The professional norms and values of journalism refer to the informal principles or guidelines that inform journalism practice including processes of news selection and framing (Bennett 1996). Journalists learn to adopt and internalize professional norms and values through periods of formal training and through induction into newsroom practices (Vos 2012). Overtime, these practices give rise to a national journalistic culture, which takes shape within broad political, economic, and social contexts (Archetti 2010: 18). Traditionally, impartiality, balance, and fairness have been upheld as the ideal values of journalism practice. However, many critics point to an inherent bias that can arise from journalistic efforts to remain impartial. Specifically, journalists may survey a narrow range of established political views and efforts to produce a fair or balanced representation of competing political views may distort the representation of an issue (Maras 2013).

The professional values of Irish journalists, including the political implications of these values, have not received substantial attention. Previous sociological research suggests that Irish journalists are 'a mainstream group with liberal tendencies' that go beyond the attitudes of the general population (Corcoran 2004: 39). However, the same study indicates that Irish journalists maintain a separation between their personal views and the editorial values of the outlets they work for. Regarding editorial values

during election campaigns, the regulation of broadcasting enshrines values of fairness and impartiality. Moreover, in declining to support particular parties, Irish print media generally reflect a broad adherence to the value of impartiality. As Harry Browne (2016) observes, 'election seasons have always seen journalists at their most pompous and self-important: in the better class of newspaper the consequence is an obsessive-compulsive commitment to "fairness"'.

With the advent of digital media, there has been much reflection on the changing context of professional norms and values in journalism (Agarwal and Barthel 2015; Hermida 2010). Agarwal and Barthel (2015) argue that online journalism is changing professional norms because journalists are now trained to meet the demands of online information provision, which, they believe, prioritizes a faster turnaround and higher volume of stories per day. At the same time, Mazzoleni (2014) suggest that increased mediatization is leading to the tabloidization of the information industry, which renders the media more susceptible to populist strategies. Thus, we might expect to find evidence for a decline in the values of fairness and balance identified by Browne.

However, in Ireland it appears that the traditional norms and values of professional journalism remain strong across all media outlets. Hard news (news stories and reportage) is the predominant form of coverage making up 70 per cent of all stories and over 80 per cent of all stories exhibit a balanced tone. Moreover, contrary to platform expectations, the new digital outlet exhibits a strong tendency towards professional news values with the highest level of hard news coverage (over 88 per cent across news stories and reportage) and the highest level of balanced coverage (90 per cent). The performance of traditional media is more varied. Among broadcasters, the volume of editorial commentary is notably higher for the public broadcaster (31 per cent) making it comparable to the two broadsheets at 35 per cent and 37 per cent. Overall, much of the coverage was neutral in tone with the exception of coverage relating to Sinn Féin and the negative tone here is largely attributed to the right-leaning broadsheet. The general absence of a positive tone in coverage, with the slight exception of one broadsheet, reflects the enduring non-partisan role of Irish news media and the general anti-politics bias of Irish media (Brandenburg 2005) (Table 3.1).

Thus, it would seem that intensified competition in the news media market has reinforced rather than undermined traditional journalism values. In part, this may be due to the strategic significance of elections

Table 3.1 Type of news by media outlet (percentages)

	PSB: RTÉ	TV: TV3	TV: UTV	Broadsheet: Irish Times	Broadsheet: Independent	Tabloid: Star	Online: Journal
News Story	35.9	43.4	50	41.2	41.5	41.5	58.5
Reportage	17.1	26	21	19	19	38.4	30
Editorial/ Comment	31.2	8.7	26.3	34.6	36.5	16.9	10.5
Portrait	0	0	0	4	1.7	0	0.8
Interview	15.6	21.7	2.6	0.5	1	3	0

for individual media outlets and journalists. As election campaigns dominant the news and public agenda, they represent an important opportunity for media outlets to compete for audience attention. The Reuters Digital News Report indicates that Irish interest in news increased during the election campaign (Kirk et al. 2016), which means the election presented an opportunity for news media to attract new consumers and subscribers. This competition between media outlets takes on additional significance in the context of declining advertising revenues and audience fragmentation across established and digital media. In this context, it would seem that recent and new entrants to the Irish media market, such as *TheJournal.ie* and *UTV Ireland*, are able to affirm their status as serious media by strongly adhering to traditional news values.

Interpretive Journalism

With interpretative journalism, the role of the journalist shifts from an observer of events to an expert analyst of events (Salgado and Strömbäck 2012; Fink and Schudson 2014). As such, the rise of interpretive journalism has been linked to increased media negativity towards politicians (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull 2008). In Ireland, the presence of interpretive journalism needs to be further understood within the general anti-politics bias of Irish media. For example, in a study of 2002 general election coverage, Brandenburg (2005) identified the tendency of Irish media to exhibit a homogenous anti-politics bias in place of polarized partisan division. Moreover, coverage of Irish politics changed significantly in the post-2000 era with increased numbers of political commentators. Consequently 'whereas traditionally readers and viewers received hard political reporting

and straight coverage of parliament, they are now treated increasingly to political reporting as commentary and adversarial political journalism which entertains as much as it informs and educates' (Rafter 2009: 101).

At the same time, complex stories, such as those involving economic matters, increase demand for more explanatory and interpretative reporting (Rafter 2014). Assessing coverage of Ireland's 2008 financial crisis, Rafter (2014) identified strong supporting evidence for the presence of interpretative journalism across public and commercial media. More broadly, Barnhurst (2003) conceptualizes interpretive journalism in terms of the trend towards analytical or long-form journalism. Arguably, this trend has gained a significant strategic value within contemporary media. That is, in a fast-paced and highly competitive news cycle where much breaking news is available for free, long-form and interpretative journalism allow media companies to distinguish the quality of their news brand by going beyond the reporting of facts to offer contextual analysis and opinion. Consequently, given the confluence of trends towards interpretative journalism, we would expect to find similarly high levels across all outlets.

With the exception of the digital outlet, similar levels of interpretative journalism are evident across all outlets. However, it is notable that much of the interpretative content involves journalistic explanations (41 per cent) rather than overt commentary (29 per cent). The breakdown of interpretative characteristics again points to the new digital outlet's close adherence to traditional journalism values. Particularly striking are its comparatively low levels of speculative interpretation (15 per cent) and overt commentary (17 per cent). Speculative content is most prevalent on the new commercial broadcaster (52 per cent) and the tabloid (49 per cent). Surprisingly, the public broadcaster has slightly higher levels of overt commentary (16 per cent) than the commercial broadcasters, *UTV* (10 per cent) and *TV3* (13 per cent) (Table 3.2).

News Framing

Across Europe and North America, one of the most prevalent criticisms of the news media is that they frame elections as a strategic game of tactics among winners and losers. The resulting horse-race coverage then diminishes substantive coverage of policy issues. The trend towards game frames is typically explained in terms of both the political system and media industry contexts. In terms of political systems, some scholars suggest that in a

Table 3.2   Interpretative journalism by media outlet (percentages)

	PSB: RTÉ	TV: TV3	TV: UTV	Broadsheet: Irish Times	Broadsheet: Independent	Tabloid: Star	Online: Journal
Interpretative journalism	54.6	56.5	57.8	55.7	55.2	56.9	32.5
Explanations	45.3	43.8	42.1	46.2	45.5	20	30
Speculations	43.7	39.1	52.6	34.6	36.9	49.2	14.6
Overt commentary	15.6	13	10	35	37.9	23	17

system in which there is a noted tradition of coalition governments, rather than clear majorities, one might expect to find less-media emphasis on winning and losing (Dimitrova and Kostadinova 2013). Others argue that a game frame might be expected to dominate in countries where there are narrow ideological and policy differences between parties (Strömbäck and van Aelst 2010). Following these hypotheses, Ireland's tradition of coalition governments would appear to discourage game frame coverage while the traditionally centrist nature of Irish politics, including the historical absence of a pronounced right-left divide, would seem to favour game frame coverage.

Analysis of Irish media coverage of elections before 2002 is intermittent. Nevertheless, research indicates that the proportion of election coverage framed as policy decreased from 59.2 per cent to 30.7 per cent between 1973 and 2007, while the level of game frame coverage increased (O'Malley et al. 2014a). The prevalence of the game frame is partially explained in terms of Irish political media norms; specifically the norm of non-partisanship that has prevailed in Irish print media and is enforced by regulation in Irish broadcast media. In this context, game frame coverage is likely to be preferable to journalists as it negates the possibility of revealing any political or policy preferences (Rafter et al. 2014). From a media industry perspective, the commercial pressures of the 24-hour news cycle may incentivize game frame coverage because journalists have less time to assess policy positions (Conboy 2011). At the same time, the increased volume of opinion polls and televised leaders' debates make it easy to provide game-oriented coverage. In this regard, previous research on Irish election coverage identifies a greater propensity towards the game frame in commercial media (Rafter et al. 2014).

These commercial concerns endured as a context for coverage during the 2016 election. However, in terms of political and policy divides, the election represented a shaper divide between political parties and candidates regarding their support or opposition to austerity as well as major contentious issues such as the introduction of water charges and reform of Irish abortion laws. Thus, while we would expect to find the continued dominance of game frames, these frames should be offset somewhat by an increased emphasis on policy positions.

Consistent with international trends in election coverage, the strategic game frame is a clear feature of Irish election coverage. Apart from the public broadcaster and the new commercial broadcaster, issues frames are subordinate to strategic game frames in all outlets.

However, although the public broadcaster exhibits the lowest overall levels of game framing (46.8 per cent), its coverage is comparable to that of the new commercial broadcaster at (47.3 per cent). This would appear to support the thesis that the new market entrant is establishing its position by reinforcing traditional journalism norms and values.

Similarly, the new digital outlet produces significantly less game frame coverage than traditional print media. With the exception of the tabloid, the particular manifestation of game frames across outlets reveals a tendency to emphasize political performance and conduct. The rhetoric of winning and losing is most prevalent among broadcasters and the tabloid but is comparatively weak in the digital outlet. These findings indicate that expectations about ownership models and media types need to be contextualized in terms of changing market positions (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Strategic frames by media outlet (percentages)

	PSB: RTÉ	TV: TV3	TV: UTV	Broadsheet: Irish Times	Broadsheet: Independent	Tabloid: Star	Online: Journal
Game frame	46.8	60.8	47.3	74.3	82	83	67
Public opinion	56.2	39.1	63.1	45.7	47.3	60	50
Winning and losing	62.5	73.9	76.3	51.2	55.9	64.6	41.4
Strategy and tactics	54.6	73.9	65.7	62.3	59.1	38.4	43
Performance and conduct	60.9	60.8	65.7	65.3	75.2	36.9	73.1

Issues

Regarding the dominant issues in election coverage, the emphasis on the game frame clearly marginalized engagement with wider policy issues. Party politics dwarfs coverage of all other issues by a substantial margin and coverage of opinion polls (6 per cent) is comparable to the levels of attention given to policy issues such as social affairs (7 per cent) and macro-economics (7 per cent). Considering the breakdown of coverage across outlets, the results further challenge expectations regarding the performance of different types of media. Party politics is most prevalent across the tabloid newspaper (71 per cent) and the commercial broadcasters *TV3* (74 per cent) and *UTV* (68 per cent), but the lowest level of party politics coverage is found on the digital outlet (53 per cent).

Previous research indicates that Ireland's financial crisis increased coverage of issues during the 2011 general election with a significant increase in the proportion of newspaper coverage devoted to the economy and an increase in issues and policy coverage from 32 per cent in 2007 to almost 60 per cent in 2011 (O'Malley et al. 2014b). By the 2016 election, however, only the public broadcaster devotes a substantial portion of its coverage to macro-economics (20 per cent).

Perhaps the most striking finding regarding issue coverage is the absence of high-profile European issues. While the Euro Crisis and austerity did receive some coverage (6 per cent), foreign affairs and immigration did not register on the news agenda of any outlet. Marsh and McElroy (2016) argue that the absence of immigration as an election issue is possibly a reflection of the fact that Irish respondents are among the most positive among EU nationals in their attitudes to immigrants from both inside and outside the EU. Nevertheless, the lack of foreign affairs coverage is particularly surprising as the UK's EU referendum carries significant consequences for Ireland and the European refugee crisis was a foremost concern across Europe at the time of the election. Consequently, issues that have been associated with a significant rise in political and media populism elsewhere failed to penetrate coverage of the Irish election.

The uniform absence or low coverage of certain issues is somewhat puzzling given the diversity and independence of the Irish media sector. We may conclude that, despite some variances in levels of coverage, there is a strong tendency towards homogeneity or herd journalism (Ho and Liu 2015) in Irish political media. The findings reveal a few isolated exceptions to this trend. For example, some isolated attention is given to

Table 3.4 Dominant issues and euro crisis/austerity coverage by media outlet (percentages)

	PSB: RTÉ	TV: TV3	TV: UTV	Broadsheet: Irish Times	Broadsheet: Independent	Tabloid: Star	Online: Journal
Party politics	54.6	73.9	68.4	60.3	62.7	70.7	52.8
Social affairs	10.9	4.3	7.8	5	3.9	4.6	18.7
Macro-economics	20.3	0	2.6	8	7.1	6.1	4.4
Opinion polls	1.5	0	0	4.5	8.2	1.5	6.5
Governance	1.5	13	2.6	4	5	1.5	4
Foreign affairs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Immigration	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Euro Crisis	12.5	8.7	2.6	5.3	7.1	3	5.6

macros-economics on the public broadcaster (20 per cent) and to governance on one commercial broadcaster (13 per cent). In general, however, the trend towards homogeneity in issue coverage may go some way to explaining the failure of new populist or anti-elite voices, and the issues they prioritize, to resonate with Irish journalists (Table 3.4).

Personalization

Elements of personalization are deeply embedded in Irish political culture as the electoral system produces relatively candidate-centred competition (Marsh 2007). This has been heightened by television coverage (O'Brien and Ó'Beacháin 2014) as well as the increase in big-budget campaigning by the major political parties (Marsh 2009). Here, we may distinguish between two distinct forms of personalization: the first represents a move towards emphasizing individual politicians—party leaders in particular—as the chief actors in the political sphere while the second form represents an emphasis on politicians as private individuals (see Van Aelst et al. 2012). Following O'Brien and Ó'Beacháin (2014), increased personalization in Irish politics is closely linked to the visibility of the party leader in campaigning, particularly through television broadcasts of party political messages and party conferences.

Yet, in terms of election coverage, Irish media tend not to concentrate on the party leader, with an average of 16 per cent of stories doing so. This ranges from 8 per cent on the public broadcaster to 13 per cent on the

Table 3.5 Personalization by media outlet (percentages)

	PSB: RTÉ	TV: TV3	TV: UTV	Broadsheet: Irish Times	Broadsheet: Independent	Tabloid: Star	Online: Journal
Party leader	7.8	8.7	13.1	17.5	26.5	20	19.5
The Party	78.1	82.6	71	24.1	24	12.3	25.2
Other	14	8.7	15.7	58.2	49.4	67.6	55.2

new commercial broadcaster. Among traditional newspapers and online sources, the elite broadsheet exhibits the least emphasis on party leaders at 17 per cent; in contrast to 20 per cent for both the tabloid and digital outlet and 26 per cent for the right-leaning broadsheet (Table 3.5).

While the coverage of party leaders is relatively low at 21 per cent, the breakdown of coverage is interesting in terms of which outlets tend towards personalization and which leaders are more likely to be personalized. Unsurprisingly, Prime Minister Enda Kenny receives the highest plurality of mentions at 31 per cent. However, Gerry Adams, leader of the largest anti-austerity party Sinn Féin, is the next most frequently mentioned leader at 19 per cent. A high-profile and controversial figure in Irish politics due to previous associations with the Northern Irish conflict, he is referenced more frequently than the leader of the outgoing junior coalition party (13 per cent) and the leader of the opposition (11 per cent). This high volume of coverage—particularly evident in the tabloid (31 per cent), the digital outlet (25 per cent), and the right-leaning broadsheet (22 per cent)—is notably out of step with the party's share of parliament seats, which stood at 10 per cent at the time of the election.

Moreover, references to leaders of other small parties are in single figures. The small party leader closest to Gerry Adams in terms of personalized coverage is Lucinda Creighton, leader of a new centre-right party, who received 10 per cent of all mentions. This party ultimately failed to win any parliamentary seat and it is notable that much of the personalized coverage of Lucinda Creighton was negative in tone with the right-leaning broadsheet adopting an oppositional stance. Other leaders that may be considered populist to some degree, principally leaders of small left-wing and independent alliances, received almost no coverage. The exception here is the public broadcaster, which is notable for giving coverage to the leaders of the Anti-Austerity Alliance and the Green Party.

In general, there is not a strong pattern of personalization in Irish media. The broadcasters, given their regulatory obligations, offer balanced coverage in different ways. Among newspapers, we can see that the right-leaning broadsheet places some negative emphasis on the left-leaning populist leader of Sinn Fein and on the leader of the new centre-right party (Table 3.6).

Populism

Ireland has not experienced the rise of radical populist parties akin to those found elsewhere in Europe. However, the financial crisis clearly gave rise to conditions conducive to the rise of populism with pronounced opposition to austerity measures as well as growing anti-elite and anti-party sentiments. As McDonnell (2008) argues, the financial crisis opened up the prospect of a populist party emerging for the first time. He characterizes populism as the 'dog that hasn't barked' for want of a strong populist leader who will exploit the weaknesses of Irish political culture (McDonnell 2008: 215). Yet, while Ireland's first post-austerity election in 2011 was the third most volatile in west European post-war history it did not disturb the fundamentals of Irish politics as power was again passed from one established party to another (Mair 2011).

Nevertheless, growing support for anti-establishment parties indicates a deeper change in Irish politics, which is exemplified by the record election of 23 independent or non-party candidates in 2016 as well as the emergence of new political alliances and small parties. Elsewhere, extra-systemic volatility trends indicate the destabilization of Western Europe's party systems with voters punishing established parties and rewarding the populist parties of opposition (Hernandez and Kriesi 2016). Yet, findings indicate little evidence of populist messaging in Irish election coverage. Only 2 per cent of stories refer to any sort of elitism and almost all of these are anti-political elite. In fact, the occurrence of this framing is so low overall that any differences between outlets are statistically insignificant. We can thus reject the hypothesis that industry pressures in a hybridized media environment enable populist messaging.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that anti-elite framing is most prevalent in the public sector broadcaster, at 3 per cent. This is in contrast to the absence of anti-elite framing in the commercial broadcaster *TV3*. In addition, the tabloid newspaper has lower occurrences of this frame than the newspaper of record and the new digital outlet. It would appear then

Table 3.6 Party leader personalization by media outlet (percentages)

Leader	Party	PSB: RTÉ	TV: TV3	TV: UTV	Broadsheet: Irish Times	Broadsheet: Independent	Tabloid: Star	Online: Journal	Total
Enda Kenny	Fine Gael	20	33.3	33.3	34.3	27.4	38.4	33.3	30.5
Michael Martin	Fianna Fail	10	16.6	33.3	15.6	10.9	0	4.1	11.3
Gerry Adams	Sinn Fein	10	0	11.1	9.3	21.9	30.7	25	18.5
Joan Burton	Labour	10	16.6	11.1	12.5	10.9	23	12.5	12.5
Donnelly/Murphy/ Shorthall	Soc Dems	0	16.6	0	6.3	8.3	0	8.3	6.6
Richard Boyd Barrett	PbF	0	16.6	0	3.1	2.7	0	0	2.4
Paul Murphy	AAA	10	0	0	0	2.7	0	4.1	1.2
Lucinda Creighton	Renua	10	0	0	9.3	15	0	8.3	10.1
Shane Ross	Indep Alliance	0	0	11.1	3.1	0	0	0	1.2
Eamon Ryan	Green	30	0	0	6.2	2.7	7.6	4.1	5.3

that the emphasis on game frames and party politics, characteristics which appear to arise from norms of impartiality, greatly diminished the presence of anti-elite populist framing.

Conclusions

Given the social and political background to the 2016 election as well as the commercial pressures encountered by contemporary media, we might expect to find evidence for growing media populism in Ireland. Yet, findings indicate little evidence of media populism in Irish election coverage. Only 2 per cent of stories refer to any sort of elitism and almost all of these are anti-political elite. In part, the lack of populist messaging appears to reflect the enduring role of professional news values in Irish journalism. Hard news, in the form of news reports and reportage, constitutes almost 70 per cent of all stories. Over 80 per cent of stories exhibit a balanced tone and the predominant sources of information are facts and events. Although the role of journalists as interpreters of political events is evident in over half of all stories (52 per cent), much of this content involves journalistic explanations (41 per cent) rather than overt commentary (29 per cent).

In addition to the influence of news values, the issues most likely to enable populist messaging, such as immigration, did not receive substantial media attention. With party politics the dominant issue across all outlets, representing 61 per cent of stories, coverage of issues is thin. The Euro Crisis features in only 6 per cent of stories and coverage of immigration and foreign affairs is absent across all outlets. This absence is particularly striking given the contemporaneous context of the UK's referendum on EU membership, the European refugee crisis, and the ramifications of the Euro Crisis.

Given this somewhat insular emphasis on party politics, it is perhaps unsurprising that the strategic game frame dominants coverage, making up some 73 per cent of all stories. Such coverage emphasized candidates' performance and conduct (67 per cent), party strategy and tactics (56 per cent), winning and losing (55 per cent), and the latest opinion polls (50 per cent). However, despite the emphasis on performance and conduct, there is not an overly strong tendency towards personalization, which accounts for just 20 per cent of all stories. To the extent that there is a populist leader it is Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin, but his controversial past

often overshadows his coverage, particularly in the right-leaning broadsheet newspaper.

We may conclude that if a strong populist leader emerges in Ireland in the near future, he or she will encounter a paradox of Irish political media culture: on the one hand, there is an established tendency towards an anti-politics bias among journalists (Brandenburg 2005), but, at the same time, Irish journalism is rooted in a consensus of professional norms, which inhibit populist or anti-elitist candidates gaining traction in election coverage.

While adhering to traditional norms in terms of hard news coverage and balance, Irish journalists also exhibit a herd journalism tendency to focus on the political game rather than policy issues. This is manifest in the close attention paid to opinion polls, to internal party politics and the general obsession with who is 'up' or 'down' and 'in' or 'out'. The by-product of this is that relatively little attention is paid to the often polarizing issues, such as immigration and the EU, that are typically the focus of populist messages.

Despite increased market competition in the form of a new broadcaster and a relatively new digital outlet, professional journalism values largely hold firm across the Irish media system. However, this system is not static. Within the new hybridized news environment, expectations about the performance of different types of media are less certain. Results indicate that distinctions between different media sectors are not as clear as they were in the past. Moreover, social media provides new opportunities for populist politicians to communicate directly with the public and to bypass the gatekeeping instincts of Irish journalists. For now, however, the mainstream media continue to dominate political coverage and the norms, values and routines of Irish journalism appear to hinder the ability of populist actors to use the media to their own advantage.

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The 2015 Election News Coverage: Beyond the Populism Paradox, the Intrinsic Negativity of Political Campaigns in Portugal

Susana Salgado

INTRODUCTION

Following the 2011 bailout and the implementation of severe austerity measures, the 2015 election was seen as an important test both to the mainstream political establishment and to the support for the country's European Union (EU) membership. The election result briefly plunged the country into uncertainty due to the incumbent right-wing coalition's very thin victory (36.86 per cent of the votes and 102 members of parliament (MPs) with no absolute majority in parliament). However, a quick reaction from five parties that had not won the election, but that held together a majority in parliament, allowed the formation of an alternative government solution. The unprecedented alternative solution was a socialist government supported by a parliamentary agreement with the left-wing political parties represented in parliament.

This research looks into how the election campaign, which preceded these political negotiations and took place after the bailout and its ensuing

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austerity, was portrayed in the news media. This was a challenging moment for Portuguese politics, with strong potential for further polarization and for the emergence of populist actors and ideas. Populism is often perceived as a reaction to crisis (e.g. Mudde 2004; Taggart 2004; Kriesi 2014), and, at the time, in Portugal, there was not only disillusion with elites and political representation but also great economic uncertainty. Given that the news media can play an important role either in underpinning or in counteracting populism, this study of the news coverage of the 2015 election campaign will hopefully contribute to the further understanding of the relationship between mainstream media and populism.

The chapter describes the context of the 2015 election and provides background information on the country's political and media systems. It also explains the sample, which includes different types of news media outlets: printed newspapers, prime-time television news programmes, and digital-only news publications; centre-right and centre-left leaning outlets; as well as private/commercial and public service news media outlets. The data analysis that follows is, whenever possible, contextualized with previous research on elections and media in Portugal. The analysis addresses several features in the news coverage that are believed to impact on politics: political actors' media exposure and journalistic genres, interpretive journalism, news framing and coverage of issues, negativity, and populism. Special attention was given to the prevalence of the Euro Crisis in the news coverage of the campaign and in the political candidates' campaign messages.

Context of the 2015 National Election

The 2015 national election in Portugal was unique in many aspects. It was the first election after the implementation of a severe austerity programme that started in 2011, which was contingent to the 78 billion euro bailout funds lent by international creditors. This programme ended successfully in May 2014 with the country's economy finally showing some signs of improvement, which very likely benefited the incumbent coalition (PàF— *Portugal à Frente*, in English *Portugal Ahead*), first in several opinion polls carried out during the campaign and then in the election results. The incumbent coalition led by former Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho, was formed by the two same parties that had ruled the country in coalition from 2011 to 2015: the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Democratic and Social Centre-People's Party (CDS-PP). The coalition

won the election, but its result was not enough to maintain the absolute majority it had previously in Parliament (PSD and CDS-PP had nearly 51 per cent of the votes in the 2011 election).

The 2015 election results caused a deadlock and almost a political crisis in the days that followed the election. The Socialist Party (PS) leader, António Costa, had always ruled out the possibility of any coalition with PSD and CDS-PP claiming fundamental differences. The new minority government led by Pedro Passos Coelho could not find parliamentary support, whilst the votes for all of the left-wing parties were reinforced in 2015. The centre-left PS recovered from 28 per cent in 2011 to 32 per cent in 2015, but could not form a stable government on its own. CDU (Unitary Democratic Coalition—an electoral alliance between the Communist Party (PCP) and the Green Party (PEV) led by the communists' leader Jerónimo de Sousa) and the left-wing BE (Left Block) also increased their votes: from 7.91 to 8.25 per cent in the case of CDU, and particularly BE, from 5.17 to 10.19 per cent almost doubled its voting.

Even though these results confirm the idea that many Southern Europe voters turned preferably to the left after the implementation of the austerity programmes, they also highlight important differences between Portugal and Spain and especially Greece. All in all, Portuguese mainstream parties were still able to secure more than 70 per cent of the votes in 2015, and Portugal is a rare case of a bailed-out country re-electing the government that was responsible for implementing the austerity measures.

Despite of the frailties of a minority government resulting from the PàF coalition, Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho was sworn by the then President Aníbal Cavaco Silva to form government. This government only lasted 11 days, because the left-wing parties (the majority in parliament), together with PAN's (party "People, Animals and Nature") representative, totalling 123 MPs, voted a motion to reject the PàF government programme, when this was presented in parliament. This was the first time in the history of Portuguese democracy that an elected and appointed government fell immediately through a rejection of its programme in Parliament. It was also the first time that PCP, PEV, and BE jointly supported the socialists to provide an alternative government solution with the objective of preventing a second PSD/CDS-PP coalition government.

The new parliamentary configuration that resulted from the 2015 election and the rejection of the PàF coalition government programme has

thus created an unprecedented situation in Portugal: the coalition that won the election could not actually rule. The president finally had to appoint the PS leader, António Costa, to form another government, one that had guaranteed parliamentary approval, and a new government was sworn in. The left-wing parties' agreement became known as the "geringonça", after derogatory comments by the then CDS-PP leader, Paulo Portas. There is no exact translation of the term "geringonça" into English language, but basically it means a flawed contraption, a ramshackle coalition.

The state of the economy and the consequences of the austerity measures were important issues in the campaign. In its first years, the government led by Pedro Passos Coelho implemented state spending cuts and an overall increase of taxes, but started to ease these measures as the election year was approaching, and during the electoral campaign both PSD and CDS-PP (the two parties in the PàF coalition) argued that Portugal was finally recovering from economic recession and low market credibility due to the reforms that had been implemented by their government. For its part, the Socialist Party, led by António Costa, campaigned against the austerity measures and on the promise of easing immediately the most painful measures and reverting the PSD/CDS-PP government reforms over time.

Most of these measures were part of the bailout memorandum of understanding, but Pedro Passos Coelho decided to go beyond the agreement the country signed with the international creditors (European Commission, European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) and implemented even harsher measures in some cases. Given the sacrifices that adopting the Euro had already entailed for Portuguese citizens, the 2015 election was therefore not only a test for these political parties, but to some extent also for the EU membership and the idea of further EU integration.

A parliamentary election taking place after major economic and financial crises can also be considered a barometer of the level of satisfaction with the way democracy is working in general, especially in a country where turnout has been declining sharply over the years. In fact, turnout in parliamentary elections has been decreasing in Portugal since the first democratic election took place in 1975, when it was 91.5 per cent. In 2015, was only 55.9 per cent and in the previous election, in 2011, had been 58.1 per cent.

Portuguese Political and Media Systems

Portugal is a semi-presidential political system, in which a government led by a prime minister (usually the leader of the most voted-for party in parliamentary elections) coexists with a president elected directly by the people in presidential elections. The president appoints the prime minister, taking into account the parliamentary election results and after consulting all political parties with parliamentary representation. The president has the power to dissolve the parliament in extreme crisis situations.

Portugal's parliament has a single chamber of 230 members with a four-year mandate. MPs are elected through electoral constituencies (18 administrative districts, plus the autonomous regions, Azores and Madeira, and 2 others for Portuguese citizens residing abroad, in European countries, and in the rest of the world), but after being elected MPs represent the entire country. To be able to rule with the support of a majority in parliamentary, a party (or coalition) needs to secure at least 116 seats. The representation of political parties in parliament after the 2015 national election included the two largest parties, one centre-right (PSD) and one centre-left (PS); a right-wing conservative party (CDS-PP); three left-wing parties (BE, PCP, and PEV); and the first-timer party PAN.

Mainstream politicians and journalists maintain close ties in Portugal; and given that investigative journalism has become more and more rare mainly due to the lack of resources, journalists overly rely on politicians as sources of information (e.g. Mesquita 2003; Salgado 2010). Overall, the media agenda is what journalists think is the audience demand, news values, but it also takes into account the political agenda and occasional partisan political pressures. The government, the president, and the parties with the most votes (PSD and PS) have a stronger negotiating power with the news media and usually they also receive more media coverage (Salgado 2007), which means that they are strong influences on how issues and political developments are interpreted and framed in the news. It is also common to see journalists accepting invitations to work with politicians, and many mainstream politicians are regular commentators in news media outlets. It was, for example, the case of the current President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who became well known to the public due to his regular commentaries in prime-time television since the 1990s (for more details on this case, see Salgado 2018a). All of this results in mainstream journalists being often perceived as belonging to the elite and being in fact too close to the political class.

Despite of these close links, Portuguese news media outlets do not express directly their party preferences (a noteworthy exception is the daily newspaper *Correio da Manhã* that has occasionally endorsed local elections candidates) and their ownership is independent from political parties. This is explained by specific media legislation that was prepared in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution to ensure media independence, but it is also part of a commercial strategy by news outlets to not drive readers/viewers away. Nevertheless, it is often possible to detect partisan bias in news content through the salience that is attributed to certain issues, events, and actors; the commentators who are selected to contextualize and interpret current events; and in opinion articles, which can potentially affect the public's political perceptions.

Despite the growing importance of the Internet for access to news, particularly among the younger generations (Mitchell et al. 2018), television is still the main source of political information for most citizens in Portugal (Newman et al. 2016; Salgado 2018a). Throughout history, television has actually been a reflection of the political regime, and politicians have always tried to use it to their advantage. The objectives have varied from, for example, using television as an instrument to shape public opinion and mobilize supporters, as entertainment to distract public attention from problematic issues, or as a tool to campaign against and attack opponents.

The climate of political confrontation that followed the April 25th democratic revolution in 1974 has deeply influenced the media system: ideological competition replaced the old regime's censorship, but paved the way to an explosion of politically biased publications, which transformed journalism in Portugal and promoted a greater diversity of media outlets and more plurality of information. However, at the time, as Mesquita (1994) explains, more than informing about facts, news media outlets mainly conveyed political propaganda and ideology from political parties and interest groups. This explains why one of major concerns in the post-revolution period was to provide legislation in support of the liberation of the media sector from the direct influence of political parties, in order to ensure not only independence and freedom, but also impartiality.

The wave of nationalizations in the media system in the 1970s that was initiated with the objective of controlling the media in the new context of freedom of opinion and expression was followed by the strong privatization of the sector from 1985 to 1995, which was decided by conservative governments. One of the most important changes in the media landscape

was the licencing of two private commercial television channels (with open signal and national reach). Today, the Portuguese media system is regulated by specific laws, which include guidelines for plurality both in the media environment as a whole and in the media content of each news outlet, especially in the case of public service media. An independent regulatory body for the media (*Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social*) was created to oversee the media activity and ensure that excesses are not committed.

The type and degree of influence of the State in the media system have varied according to the moment in history; but overall the State has always maintained an important presence in the media system, whether through the direct holding of the most important news media outlets or through a strict regulation of the sector. Currently, the State still owns two open signal national television channels, several radio stations and is a major shareholder in *Lusa* news agency. Private companies own the two remaining open signal national television channels, several radio stations and print news media, including some of the most influential in shaping public opinion, such as newspapers *Expresso* and *Público*.

For this reason, both *Expresso* and *Público* were included in the sample selected for this study. Due to its increasingly important readership levels, the online and daily version of *Expresso* was coded, as well as two other papers that are published only online, *Observador* and *Notícias ao Minuto*. These online news media outlets were considered the most relevant for national politics at the time this sample was selected. Taking into account levels of readership, the sample also included three printed daily newspapers, *Público* and *Jornal de Notícias*, and the tabloid *Correio da Manhã*. Regarding television, the research focused on the prime-time news programmes of *RTP1*, the most important public service television channel, and on the two private television channels, *SIC* and *TVI*. These three television channels have national reach and are transmitted in open signal.

THE NEWS COVERAGE OF THE 2015 ELECTION CAMPAIGN: DATA ANALYSIS

The content analysis of these nine news media outlets overall confirms the salience that politics has in the news coverage of current events in Portugal and more specifically the salience that journalists usually attribute to election campaigns. During the two weeks of official campaign, 1659
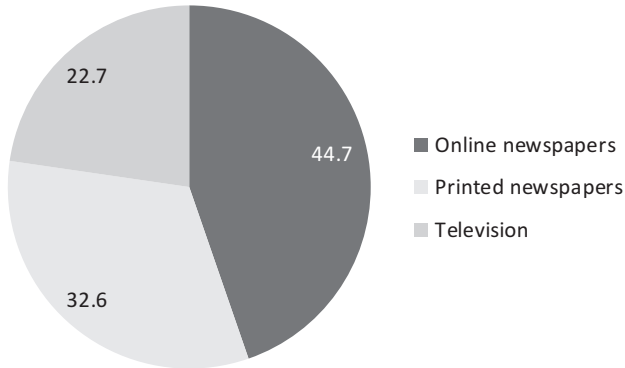
Fig. 4.1 News coverage of the 2015 election campaign per type of media (percentages)

election news stories were published and broadcast in these news media outlets (Fig. 4.1).

Almost half of these news stories (44.7 per cent) were published in the online newspapers, mainly in *Notícias ao Minuto* (20.4 per cent) and *Expresso* online (15.4 per cent), and slightly less in *Observador* (8.6 per cent). These results do seem to substantiate the assumption that the Internet has increased the amount of political information available (e.g. Graber and Smith 2006). The remaining news stories were published in the daily newspapers (32.6 per cent), in particular in *Correio da Manhã* (11.8 per cent) and *Público* (11.7 per cent), and slightly less in *Jornal de Notícias* (9.2 per cent); and broadcast on television (22.7 per cent), almost equally distributed among the three channels (SIC: 8 per cent; RTP1: 7.7 per cent; TVI: 7.3 per cent). Open signal television news programmes tend to cover electoral campaigns very similarly during the official campaign period, showing an overview of the candidates' daily campaign initiatives and statements (Salgado 2007, 2010).

The election campaign was mostly reported through news stories (73.9 per cent). The remaining genres were less frequent in the news coverage; however, it should be noted that opinion articles (12.1 per cent), reportage (6 per cent), and television live broadcast pieces (5.7 per cent) also had a noteworthy relevance. The journalistic genre in which more negativity was found was opinion: 62 per cent of the opinion articles on the campaign were coded as conveying mostly a negative tone; however, the

prevalence of negativity in plain news stories was also considerable: 40.9 per cent. Negativity here includes both negative tone and conflict, which can be initiated by the candidates (e.g. negative campaigning, attacks on opponents that are simply reported in the news) or by the news media and journalists (negative assessments and interpretations of the candidates, the election campaign, or of politics in general).

Substantial differences in the selection of journalistic genres with which to cover the competing political parties and their leaders usually mean that journalists introduce some implicit differentiation between parties in the news coverage, which in itself hints voters of the varying importance of each party and candidate. For example, opting for an interview, reportage, or a live coverage of a party's campaign requires more resources and time/space and indicates that journalists are attaching a greater importance to that political party and/or party leader, especially if the journalistic treatment is not exactly the same for all parties and leaders. This is a form of underlying journalistic interpretation that is fulfilled by the selection of news formats and includes hints on how to perceive political reality (Salgado 2014: 281–282); in this case, the election campaign and the chances of success of the different political parties in the election. Journalistic genres may thus be a way of indirectly informing voters about the different degree of political importance and eligibility of candidates and parties.

Sources of Information and Personalization

The political parties and candidates with more chances of winning or achieving a good result in the election (considering previous election results and opinion polls) motivated more opinion articles, reportages, interviews, and television live coverage. These were the PSD and PS, and their leaders, António Costa and Pedro Passos Coelho. Parties already represented in parliament, such as CDS-PP, PCP, and BE, followed in terms of overall media exposure and salience. PàF (the incumbent coalition, PSD and CDS-PP) and PSD had more news media attention, in terms of amount of news stories; however, the PS and its leader António Costa motivated more opinion articles and more live broadcasts than the incumbent coalition (PàF) and its leader Pedro Passos Coelho. It is also interesting to note that Pedro Passos Coelho completely outshined his coalition partner Paulo Portas and the same happened with their parties, PSD and CDS-PP.

Regarding the levels of personalization in the election news coverage, 65.9 per cent of all news pieces focused on the party leaders, as the main political actor. However, it is important to note that the parties' campaign is usually organized taking into account the media coverage and party leaders usually take on the leading role in conveying the party messages and in leading the campaign initiatives. Directly linked to personalization are the levels of the party leaders' depiction and the insertion of their direct quotations in the news coverage, that in this case were only slightly lower than the news story focus, 62.3 and 60.2 per cent, respectively. Party leaders were also the main source of information for journalists covering the campaign, 58.6 per cent; while other party members were considered only in 17.2 per cent of the news coverage. The third and fourth most important sources of information for journalists were experts (8.7 per cent), a group that includes political pundits and economists, for example, and opinion polls (6.8 per cent). Citizens were included in 3.8 per cent of the election news.

Although usually high, the levels of personalization in the news coverage are not exactly the same for all political parties. The PS leader, António Costa, had more news coverage (17.1 per cent) than his party (5.1 per cent). Conversely, Pedro Passos Coelho motivated slightly less news coverage focused on him (16.1 per cent), but his coalition motivated more news stories (10.14 per cent) than PS. António Costa had thus slightly more coverage than the incumbent prime minister (Pedro Passos Coelho), but his level of personalization in the news was also higher in general, showing that overall the media outlets were more interested in the leader than in the party, and/or that, at the time, António Costa's political capital was higher than that of his own party, at least from the journalists' point of view.

The political leaders' personal characteristics were also present in the news coverage of the 2015 election campaign. The simple mention or the discussion of personal characteristics, such as competence, leadership, credibility and trustworthiness, morality and truthfulness, rhetorical skills, physical appearance, ideological stances, charisma, or aspects of the candidates' personal life were found in 30.1 per cent of the news items. The most recurrent personal characteristic was credibility (15.7 per cent), which is likely related to the simultaneous political scandals in which allegations of corruption involved prominent national political figures, including the former socialist Prime Minister José Sócrates. The candidates' ideological stance (4.3 per cent), competence (3.6 per cent), and truthfulness (2.6 per cent) were less discussed in the news media.

When journalists referred to the candidates' personal features, they focused mainly on the PS leader, António Costa (105 news items), and on the leader of the incumbent coalition, Pedro Passos Coelho (92 news items). Catarina Martins, the Left Block (BE) coordinator, and Jerónimo de Sousa, the communists' leader, had 55 and 47 news items, respectively, including these elements. In all of them, the personal characteristic that was most discussed by journalists was "credibility".

Issues and Euro Crisis in the Election Campaign

If, as Cohen (1963), we consider that the news media are "successful in telling the people what to think about", we assume that Portuguese citizens made their voting decisions mostly having the state of the country's economy in their minds. This issue has recurrently been a concern for most families over the past few years and became even more relevant with the 2011 bailout and the ensuing austerity (cuts in salaries and pensions, and strong decrease in the public investment in health, education, social security, etc.).

Looking at the data closer, it is possible to observe that, although these issues were included in most of the political parties' campaigns, journalists themselves have also introduced these topics in the agenda and in the campaign news coverage, for example, through comparisons of the different political parties' proposals on economic issues or covering the consequences of austerity (news focusing on "social affairs" represented 11.6 per cent of the election news coverage). Nearly 40 per cent of the news coverage referred to the state of the economy, and addressed topics such as the country's external financial dependence, the international creditors and financial markets, and the measures that should be implemented to stimulate economic growth and reduce unemployment. Given that the state of the economy has been recurrently a key issue in election campaigns in Portugal (e.g. Salgado 2009) and this was the first election after the 2011 bailout, the interest in this topic is not surprising.

The Euro Crisis was thus also a strong topic in the election campaign; it was included in 25.2 per cent of the news coverage. Most of these news items dealt with the austerity measures and their consequences (15.9 per cent); but they also referred to the consequences of the single currency for the Portuguese economy, to the sustainability of the country's debt and its impact on economic growth, to the speculation against the countries with

sovereign debt problems and the euro in general, or to the future of the single currency and of the EU. Overall, online news media outlets addressed the Euro Crisis issue more often (30 per cent) than printed newspapers (24.9 per cent) and television (18.7 per cent).

In absolute terms, the Euro Crisis was introduced in the election campaign (and thus reflected in the news coverage) mainly through the two largest political parties (PSD and PS) and their leaders (Pedro Passos Coelho and António Costa). However, it is important to note that proportionally other parties and candidates made a greater effort to discuss the Euro Crisis and its consequences, especially the leaders of fringe left-wing parties, such as Garcia Pereira (PCTP/MRPP—Portuguese Workers' Communist Party/Reorganizing Movement of the Party of the Proletariat), and Rui Tavares (Livre/TDA—Free/Time to Move Forward), who had 60 and 42 per cent of their news coverage focused on this issue, respectively.

The two other issues that received the most news media coverage were party politics (13.3 per cent) that includes topics related with the political parties' strategy, intra-party competition and conflict, or the parties' internal organization; and opinion polls (10.3 per cent), which refers to news that report the opinion polls results, but also to news stories that were focused on opinion polls as an issue, that is, discussions about the effects of releasing opinion polls during the campaign and about the actual impact of opinion polls on the campaign and on the election outcome.

News Framing of the Election Campaign

Overall, issues were very important in the news framing of the 2015 election campaign: 57.4 per cent of the news coverage was mainly focused on issues (issue news framing), while the remaining 42.6 per cent were dominantly devoted to strategy (strategic news framing) (Table 4.1). Considering that literature suggests that there is a general prevalence of strategic news framing in the coverage of politics and elections in particular (Patterson 1993; Cappella and Jamieson 1997) and because this was a very competitive election, this result may seem surprising at first sight; however, it is not totally unexpected if we consider previous content analysis studies that focused on the coverage of politics in routine periods, and in which the Portuguese political news coverage was included in the group of countries with the least prevalence of "strategic game framing" (Aalberg et al. 2017).

Table 4.1 Dominant news framing per type of media

	Dominant framing of politics		Total
	Strategic	Issue	
Television	159	218	377
Printed newspapers	242	299	541
Online newspapers	305	436	741
Total	706	953	1659

Strategic news framing implies that politics is framed by journalists mostly as a game, a competition (also known as "horse race coverage"), in which the political actors' strategy is considered more newsworthy than their policy proposals. News items thus focus mainly on tactics and strategies for the campaign and the election, opinion polls, and on the candidates' motivations and personal features. Even though the strategic frame can also be used in the coverage of issues (e.g. Lawrence 2000), in this study the "issue frame" refers to the type of news coverage that is focused on issues and on the political actors' issue positions, and it can also include substantial information about social problems, such as official reports and statistics, for example.

The specific elements of strategic framing found in the 2015 election news coverage were mainly related to "strategy and tactics" and "winning and losing", which means references to politicians and parties' strategies for winning the election or for achieving political success in general, and direct references to winning or losing (e.g. elections, debates, and polls). The use of strategic news framing in the news coverage varies between 41 and 44 per cent in the three types of media considered in the sample (television, newspapers, and online papers), being just slightly more prevalent in newspapers, very likely due to the greater amount of analysis and opinion pieces.

Except in the case of the PS and its leader, António Costa, the coverage of all political actors (both political parties and political leaders) was more focused on issues than on strategy and tactics. Interestingly, this happened with the incumbent coalition (and most voted for) and the smaller parties, both the parties with parliamentary representation (BE, PCP, and PEV) and the fringe parties not represented in parliament. In the case of PS and its leader, a plausible explanation for the exception relates to the fact that they were the real challengers in this election, singled out in several opinion polls as the most likely winners of this election.

Negativity in the Media and in the Parties' Election Campaign

Previous studies have concluded that the tone of the news media coverage of politics and elections in Portugal tends to be more negative than positive (Salgado 2010; Esser et al. 2017). Different reasons explain the prevalence of negativity in the Portuguese political news in the past years, among which is very close and competitive elections and high-profile national politicians involved in corruption scandals. But negativity can also stem from the coverage of controversies and conflict between political opponents, which is a common feature in the Portuguese journalists' way of reporting politics, as a "dialogue" between competitors (Salgado 2007, 2010).

The 2015 election confirmed this tendency. Most news items on the election had a neutral or negative tone (including conflict and failure) and very few were positive (i.e. focused on political success, and progress). The most negative were the online-only news media outlets, while the news coverage in television and newspapers was more neutral than negative, although with small differences (Table 4.2). News items with positive tone accounted only for 13 per cent of the entire news coverage. News items were coded as neutral when they did not contain any indicators of negative or positive tonality or when the presence of both tones was balanced. It is also important to note that the most negative journalistic genre was opinion: 62 per cent of this type of news items had mainly a negative tone, while only 2.5 per cent were positive.

Negativity has been often linked to an interpretive style of political journalism (for more details on extant literature and main arguments, see Salgado and Strömbäck 2012). This was confirmed in the Portuguese case: the prevalence of journalistic interpretation was slightly higher in news items that were coded as having a negative tone, 34.3 per cent,

Table 4.2   Tone of coverage per type of media

	Tone			Total
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	
Television	134	196	47	377
Printed newspapers	230	255	56	541
Online newspapers	324	302	115	741
Total	688	753	218	1659

compared to 31.6 and 29.7 per cent in positive and neutral news items, respectively. Although further studies and content analysis would be necessary to confirm this trend over time, it seems quite plausible to relate the absence of journalistic interpretation with neutral news coverage.

Interpretive Journalism in the Election News Coverage

Following Salgado and Strömbäck's (2012) proposal on how to conceptualize and operationalize interpretive journalism, the present analysis ascertained the presence of three different types of interpretive journalism in the election news coverage: journalistic explanations, journalistic speculations, and journalistic overt commentary. More specifically, "journalistic explanations" refer to explanations included in the piece without any support by verifiable facts and news sources, which may, for example, aim at explaining the reasons behind events (retrospective speculations) or explanations about what was meant by a politician's statement; "journalistic speculations" about the future include potential future consequences of events and statements; and "journalistic overt commentary" refers, for example, to the inclusion of non-neutral expressions of opinion by the journalist who is covering the story, which cannot be supported by verifiable facts (Salgado and Strömbäck 2012).

The overall prevalence of interpretive journalism in the 2015 election news coverage was 31 per cent. It was slightly higher than the results obtained in previous studies that found values between 15 and 20 per cent (Salgado 2010; Salgado et al. 2017). The fact that this was a very competitive election happening during a particularly challenging context might help to explain why journalists felt the need to provide more interpretation, or used the opportunity to expand their own influence on politics.

In the 2015 election news coverage, interpretive journalism was overall more common in television (35.5 per cent); but the difference between the prevalence of journalistic interpretations in television and in the other types of media is not pronounced: 32.1 per cent of the coverage in newspapers was coded as having some kind of journalistic interpretation (explanations, speculations or commentaries) and in online papers, the percentage was 29.8.

Regarding journalistic genres, journalistic interpretation was, as expected, virtually always present in commentary and opinion by journalists and editorials, but it was also very common in reportages (71.7 per cent) and in televised live coverage (35.7 per cent). And most importantly,

Table 4.3 Prevalence of interpretive journalism per type of news item

	Interpretive Journalism		Total
	No	Yes	
News story	1013	213	1226
Reportage	28	71	99
Opinion	2	198	200
Portrait	5	6	11
Interview	6	5	11
TV live broadcast	61	34	95
Other	15	2	17
Total	1130	529	1659

the prevalence of journalistic interpretation in plain news stories was 17.3 per cent (Table 4.3). This is important because in news stories, the presence of interpretations and opinions by journalists is not signalled.

Populism in the Election Campaign and in the Media

It is not uncommon to see candidates toughening their rhetoric and resorting to populism in election campaigns, as these are periods of intense political debate and competition, in which political communication is thoroughly staged to convince voters and to induce media coverage. In spite of this, and even though there is reference to conflict in 53 per cent of the news coverage and 42 per cent of the news items were coded as having predominantly a negative tone, the results of the content analysis do not point to high prevalence of populism in the 2015 election campaign, as it was covered by the news media.

In fact, the analysis revealed the almost complete absence of populist features of political communication in the news media coverage. The few exceptions are the very scarce news stories that covered the campaign initiatives of populist parties, such as the extreme right National Renewal Party (PNR), which is inspired by the French Front National, and the Democratic Republican Party (PDR), a newly created centre-left party, led by António Marinho e Pinto.

Although expanding its importance throughout Europe, right-wing populism has been virtually absent in Portugal. The far right populist PNR has grown only marginally in recent years, it had 0.50 per cent of the votes in the 2015 election (it had had 0.32 per cent in 2011, 0.2 per cent in

2009, and 0.16 per cent in 2005). António Marinho e Pinto illustrates a very different type of populism. This politician was elected in the 2014 European Parliament Election with an anti-elite and anti-establishment populist discourse focused on the need to change the political system, in order to root out corruption. He presented himself as belonging to the people and as someone who understood the needs of the people, unlike the other candidates. In the 2014 European Parliament election, António Marinho e Pinto ran as the head of the Earth Party (MPT) list, but after disagreements with the MPT party leader, he decided to create his own political party (PDR) just before the 2015 election. However, a number of internal strives, political scandals, and even criminal issues involving other PDR members affected the party credibility and its campaign performance, and the first PDR electoral result did not go beyond 1.14 per cent (António Marinho e Pinto's result with MPT in the European election was 7.14 per cent).

The content analysis looked for the expression of specific features of populism that had already been identified in extant theoretical literature and in previous empirical research (e.g. Canovan 1999; Taggart 2000; Jagers and Walgrave 2007), namely "references to the people", distinction between "us and them", exclusion through the identification of one or several "out-groups" (e.g. immigrants or religious and ethnic minorities), anti-elitist stance in politics, anti-system positioning, and the notion of an idealized nation.

The analysis of the 2015 election news coverage has shown that politicians used the expression "the people" to address voters in approximately 6 per cent of their statements. Of all the features of populist political discourse, the use of the expression "the people" was by far the most common in Portugal. And although its use was more common in the PCP, which was mainly a synonym for working class and proletariat, it is not an intrinsic characteristic of political party discourse during the election campaign. The resort to this rhetorical strategy in PCP's case does not entail an (ideal) homogeneity of the people or the denial of the legitimacy of political opponents, and therefore it does not reject the social and political legitimacy of different groups and interests within what is considered "the people", which is an inherent characteristic of populism. The resort to the word "people" was instead mainly a rhetorical strategy employed by some party leaders to engage voters in their speeches and to address their political constituencies directly, especially when these are mainly composed of the most disadvantaged social classes (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Populism—References to "the people"

Political actors (parties and leaders)	Populism—People		Percentage of references to the people in each party and party leader discourse
	No	*Yes*	
PàF (Portugal Ahead coalition)	157	4	2.48
PS (Socialist Party)	81	4	4.70
PPM (People's Monarchist Party)	3	2	40
PDR (Democratic Republican Party)	0	1	100
Juntos pelo Povo (Together for the People)	3	1	25
MPT (Earth Party)	7	1	12.5
PNR (National Renewal Party)	0	2	100
Pedro Passos Coelho (PàF coalition leader)	261	6	2.24
Paulo Portas (CDS-PP leader)	58	3	4.91
António Costa (PS leader)	266	18	6.33
Jerónimo de Sousa (PCP—Communist Party leader)	117	44	27.32
Catarina Martins (BE—Left Block leader)	153	1	0.64
António Marinho e Pinto (PDR leader)	42	8	16
Joana Amaral Dias (movement We the Citizens)	8	5	38.46
Rui Tavares (LIVRE party)	18	1	5.26

Legend: The table presents the results in terms of absolute coverage of each party/party leader; the results were not weighted taking into account their different media exposure

The prevalence of the "us and them" argumentation in the election news coverage was 2 per cent. The identification of what was meant by "them" in these cases revealed that "them" referred mainly to international creditors (EU institutions, International Monetary Fund, etc.) and to the political parties that have been ruling the country since the 1974 democratic revolution (PS, PSD, and CDS-PP). Here too, it was PCP that mostly used this type of argumentation in the election campaign.

Directly related to this, is the anti-elitism positioning, which was found in 5.4 per cent of the coverage: 3.5 per cent referring to European and economic elites and 1.9 per cent to the national political elite. The resort to "anti-elitism" rhetoric was more scattered: it was found in several

left-wing parties, including PCP and the Left Block (BE), but also in even smaller, fringe parties. Anti-system views of politics were only found in 1.9 per cent of the election news, and mainly through the fringe political parties, not represented in parliament, that were asking for deep political system reforms. Overall, this result also suggests a rather considerable cross-party consensus over the political system as it stands.

Similarly, mentions to an "ideal nation" were present in 1.9 per cent of the campaign news coverage. And references to "out-groups" were even less: 0.6 per cent: these were mainly references to immigrants in general and 0.1 per cent to a religious minority (Muslims by the far right PNR). Portuguese society is accustomed to both emigration and immigration. Nearly 22 per cent of Portuguese citizens lived abroad in 2017 (Cordeiro 2017) and many immigrants from the former African colonies (Cape Verde, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe, Mozambique), Brazil, China, but also from other European countries live currently in Portugal.

Adding other elements of populist discourse to the analysis, the prevalence of populism in the news coverage was 5.7 per cent. These elements are mostly related to a "popularist" approach to politics, in the sense of politicians adjusting their messages to the understandings and preferences of the majority of the population, and include, for example, oversimplifications of issues, and the use of strategies, such as dichotomous approaches to issues and scapegoating.

It is interesting to note that the news excerpts coded as containing populism were direct or indirect citations of the politicians' statements, which means that these news media outlets apparently do not engage in populism themselves directly (i.e. media populism; for further information on this concept, see e.g. Mazzoleni 2003, 2014; Moffitt 2016). In the cases under study in this approach, the news media merely covered and replicated the politicians' messages. It is also important to highlight that hitherto news media outlets in Portugal seldom and only very reluctantly cover the campaign initiatives of the extreme right-wing PNR (National Renewal Party).

Conclusion

The low levels of populism in the election news media coverage are a reflection of the overall failure of populist political actors in Portugal. The 2015 election has put the political system resilience to test. However,

despite the crisis and a trend towards the growth of different types of populism in Europe (including anti-establishment political actors—which could be particularly appealing in a country that had recently undergone a severe austerity programme), thus far there is in Portugal a persisting citizen support to mainstream parties, as the 2015 election results have shown. On the one hand, mainstream parties seem to have integrated in their political discourses and proposals much of what could be considered fuel for populism, and, on the other hand, the few populist political actors that have emerged in the political system have not been able to build a sufficiently coherent ideological alternative and to convince Portuguese voters.

Lack of charisma of its leaders (Marchi 2013) and the strong weight of a fascist political past (1926–1974) seem to be important obstacles to the success of extreme right parties, such as PNR (Salgado 2018b). António Marinho e Pinto did not, however, lack political charisma and although he positioned his party (PDR) at the centre of the party system and presented himself as someone who thinks and acts like the "people", he was not particularly fortunate in his party allegiances.

Left-wing populism also did not flourish in Portugal as it did in Spain with Podemos and in Greece with Syriza. Although the left-wing parties with parliamentary representation (BE, PCP, and PEV) combined result of 18.4 per cent in the 2015 election was their strongest record in the democratic period, it did not compare the most dramatic successes of Podemos or Syriza. In the case of Portugal, these left-wing parties were already integrated in the system and had previously occupied the political-ideological space that Podemos and Syriza took in their respective countries. The Portuguese government solution that placed the socialists governing with the parliamentary support of these three left-wing parties has also served to further integrate these left-wing parties into the political system.

The consistency of the political system averted the likely strong disruptions that were expected due to the hardship that Portugal had faced before the 2015 election and especially considering what had happened in other European countries in a similar situation. In Portugal, the political parties with parliamentary representation were successful in integrating divergence in their political discourses, which in turn prevented radical positions and the emergence of anti-system political stances.

Although there is no direct control over the media, the political system and the media system are very closely linked to each other. More than being adversaries, journalists tend to often cooperate with the political

elite, and especially with the two most voted-for parties (PSD and PS). However, this does not mean that there is no space for a media agenda in election news coverage in Portugal. While a news coverage that is primarily issue-framed may at first suggest that journalists are merely reporting the candidates' proposals, the salience that was attributed to the economy and to the consequences of the Euro Crisis in this election campaign was, to a certain extent, promoted by journalists, and the level of journalistic interpretation has increased when compared to other periods in time. But, on the other hand, there are also cases of media's implicit support to certain political stances and political candidates by giving them more attention.

The news media usually select as most newsworthy the highest polling political candidates and the incumbent, especially if there are chances of re-election. This is a recurrent news pattern in election coverage in Portugal (see also Salgado 2007, 2010). However, it is interesting to note that, taking the distribution of votes into account and comparing the salience attributed to the two major political parties with that of the remaining parties, especially the ones with parliamentary representation, the latter tend to have proportionally more media exposure than they have electoral weight in the political system. This may have also contributed to prevent utmost polarization and more inflammatory political discourses.

Overall, the news coverage of the 2015 election campaign was mainly negative due to accusations between candidates and to the opinion and the journalistic interpretation present in the news. The coverage was also strongly personalized into the figure of the candidates competing for the prime minister position. These features of news coverage can be viewed as traces of the media's influence in the construction of election discourses and although other type of research approach would be necessary to evaluate the actual impact on electoral behaviour, this data analysis already provides important information regarding the significant role that the news media currently have in election campaigns.

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Campaign Coverage in Spain: Populism, Emerging Parties, and Personalization

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Introduction

The December 2015 general elections had no precedent in the recent democratic history of Spain. They witnessed many changes, regarding voting behaviour, the configuration of party systems, the development of new political actors, and the consolidation of new cleavages and subsequent campaign issues. Therefore, since 2015 the political context has developed into an open, volatile, unstable, and multiparty system, which has involved an authentic political earthquake.

This chapter analyses the coverage of the Spanish general election campaign in 2015 in various media outlets (television, print, and online press) following a number of research dimensions in political communication: the tone of the campaign, the identification of issues, the main actors, the populist features, and the news frames, using Salgado et al. (2015) framework. The results show that the most frequently covered issues were party politics and domestic elections, as well as the performance of democracy and governance; the irruption of two emerging parties (Ciudadanos and Podemos); the

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presence of populist features in the media; the personalization of political information; the prominence of the strategic game frame; and the negative tone and conflict in media coverage of the campaign.

POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE 2015 ELECTIONS

Developments in Spanish politics at the end of 2015 pointed to a change in electoral trends; their duration and consequences are still debated today. New political parties, electoral volatility, party system fragmentation, and the inability of parliamentary groups to agree on the appointment of a prime minister all compelled the head of state to call yet again for new elections. These were held in June 2016.

The political context in Spain has been profoundly transformed in the last decade, and especially following the last general elections of 2015 and 2016. The situation in which Spanish politics finds itself is one unheard in recent history. The structure of party competition has been eroded and new sociopolitical cleavages have appeared across traditional party lines. One of the main campaign issues had to do with the economic crisis, its consequences for citizens, and the obvious inability of the conservative government to sort out the situation for ordinary citizens. Those discussions were also integrated with a more general dispute about the so-called old political style which was challenged by the new political parties.

Podemos ("We can") was successful in framing this discussion in a very favourable way, by incorporating the concept of political "caste" to refer to politicians of traditional parties. The fight against the establishment was included in its agenda. Party leaders reported cases not only of systemic corruption, but also of morally questionable issues that mainly affected the Partido Popular (Popular Party; hereafter, PP) and Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Party; hereafter, PSOE), the traditional parties. It is interesting to note how the traditional cleavages of electoral competence were found to be quite blurred or absent, since the confrontation was built around new issues. The ideological approach and the regional tensions with the nationalists of Catalonia and the Basque Country remained in the background, which caused some problems for traditional parties in adapting to the new circumstances, especially for the social democrats of PSOE who were in the middle of a leadership succession process. Therefore, the principal issues manifested in the campaign

were democratic regeneration, institutional and constitutional reform, and the nationalistic challenge faced in Catalonia.

Hence, the electoral campaign was constructed around a multifaceted struggle for the first time between the traditional political parties, PP and PSOE, and the new ones, Ciudadanos and Podemos, and also between the new and old left, and the new and old right. The result was a highly complex electoral panorama that has created problems of adaption for even more rooted organizations.

Nevertheless, PP obtained 28.7% of the votes and 123 out of 350 seats, and consequently won the elections in 2015. Its lead over PSOE was relatively slight (less than 7% and 33 seats) but enough to avoid a social democrat government: the leader of PSOE, Pedro Sánchez, tried to find parliamentary support among the other parties (Podemos with 43 seats and Ciudadanos with 40) with no success. After two months of multilateral negotiations, the political process remained blocked by the inability of the parties to agree on a government. Given the difficulties described and following the regulations established by the Constitution, for the first time in Spanish history the head of state was forced to call again for new elections, which were held a few months later in 2016. At that point, PP's electoral support increased by 14 seats and it was able to create a government with the support of Ciudadanos.

Spanish Political and Media Systems

Spain is a parliamentary monarchy. Political representation is structured in two chambers, the Congress and the Senate, where the former prevails over the latter. The electoral system established to elect the Congress, which appoints the prime minister, is proportional. Political parties present their candidacies in closed lists. The country is politically and administratively decentralized in a model that has been labelled "effective asymmetric federalism" or, in other words, a complex constitutional framework that combines the notion of Spain as a single political nation with the existence of Autonomous Communities. This configuration provides a structure for a joint decision-making process characteristic of a federal model. At the same time, it lays the foundation for a bilateral dialogue, especially with the so-called historical nationalities: Andalusia, the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia (Strömbäck and Luengo 2008: 551).

After a short period of adaptation and transition to democracy at the end of the 1970s, political structures, actors, institutions, and processes

became increasingly rooted and established. Political scientists have pointed out several areas of stability in the general political realm during the 1980s and 1990s. For decades, we could talk about a moderate multi-party system in Spain, although during periods of overall majority (1982–1993, 2000–2004, 2011–2015) we could also characterize it as an imperfect two-party system (Cotarelo and Bobillo 1991).

Electoral competition has been organized around two main political parties at the national level, the social democrats of PSOE and the conservatives of PP, and a minor one, the communists, grouped together with the greens and other left minority formations (Izquierda Unida, or United Left). Those political parties represented the traditional ideological struggle. However, considering that Spain includes specific regions with different coexisting national realities, there are also several nationalist parties competing at the regional level, where they become determining actors, principally in the Basque Country and Catalonia. Therefore, in Spain we could traditionally find not only an ideological cleavage but also a centre–periphery one.

Nonetheless, PP and PSOE have held power since 1982: between 1982 and 2008 the two parties controlled no less than 81% of the seats in Congress, and in some cases more than 90%. This trend was considered by scholars as a very clear symptom of political stability. This concentration of electoral support disappeared in 2015 with the irruption of new political actors, and particularly the growth at the national level of the regionally founded Ciudadanos (Citizens) and the establishment of Podemos. Recently PP and PSOE jointly obtained 63% of the seats, but only 56% of the votes, which means a decrease of more than one-third. The economic straits led to general distrust of the political representation system, and this situation opened up possibilities for new political parties which attracted waves of upset voters from traditional deep-rooted parties. Ciudadanos and Podemos are challenging the long-standing two-party dominance (Luengo et al. 2016; Simón 2016; Oriols and Cordero 2016). This transformation is illustrated in the following data.

According to the Effective Number of Parties (Eff N), a well-known index that illustrates the fragmentation of the system, Spanish records were situated at around 3.3 on average between the 1980s and the first decade of the 2000s at the level of votes. This figure reached 5 in 2015. At the seats level, the same value was never above 3 between 1977 and 2011, but reached 4.1 in 2015. It is interesting to note that in the Spanish parliament the number of parties

with representation has never been below ten (1982 and 2008), with a maximum of 14 (1979). Accordingly, Spain is one of the most fragmented party systems of Europe, a dynamic fuelled by the development of not only regional political forces but also recent emerging parties.

The electoral volatility points out a clear pattern in this open process. With the exception of 1982, the aggregate volatility before 2011 ranged between 4.9 and 16.4%, a quite moderate record. The same index for the 2015 elections was more than double (35.4%), when a huge number of voters changed their ballots. With regards to electoral behaviour, there are indications that the Spanish electorate has become more volatile, with increasingly blurred party identification. Consequently, the traditional two-party system has given way to a multiparty system, but it is still too soon to determine whether we have reached a situation of stable equilibrium, or whether we are still in a transitional phase (Castillo-Manzano et al. 2017). It is impossible to understand the electoral process under analysis without an explanation of the role played by Podemos. The beginning of this political formation can be traced back to the aftermath of the 15-M, the well-known movement of outrage that in 2011 organized demonstrations in major Spanish cities against corruption and the crisis in political representation, and in opposition to the austerity measures imposed by the so-called Troika (Luengo and Marín 2016: 60). Podemos generated high expectations among citizens, scholars, and journalists, since this very young political organization attained impressive and unexpected electoral results in several secondary elections, obtaining five seats at the European Parliament, increasing its electoral support in the Andalusian elections (attaining the third position, with 14.8% of the votes and 15 seats at the regional chamber), and gaining the mayoralty of the two principal Spanish cities, Madrid and Barcelona, among others (Luengo et al. 2016: 206).

To some extent, Podemos could be labelled an anti-establishment party deeply critical of mainstream parties and based on a quasi-biological binary perception of the world as "us" versus "them", good versus evil, or, at the least, positive versus negative (Luengo et al. 2016: 256). Thus, Podemos emphasizes substantial doubts about the credibility of political, economic, and social elites.

The media system in Spain cannot be understood without taking into account the country's recent authoritarian past. Until the 1970s, mass media had to work according to the guidelines imposed by the dictator, making the conditions for its development tightly controlled. Due to four

decades of dictatorship and the lack of press freedom during that period, the professionalization of journalism started later in Spain than in other neighbouring democracies (Strömbäck and Luengo 2008: 550). These processes have led analysts to point to its "incomplete professionalization", which has had clear consequences, for example, the low degree of associationism among Spanish journalists (Ortega and Humanes 2000: 162–168).

Normatively speaking, it would perhaps be possible to say that Spanish journalism is independent, but it is also clear that Spanish newspapers tend to have a clear ideological orientation and that they are, to some extent, quite belligerent (Cotarelo 2002: 191). This pluralist, polarized model (Hallin and Mancini 2004) reproduces social divisions in the structures of Spanish journalism, which frequently covers political events in a biased way. An increasing number of Spaniards do not trust their journalists to deliver honest reporting. Journalism is the second least-respected profession, and journalists are distrusted almost as much as politicians. In addition, following the latest Reuters Digital News Report (RISJ 2016), the Spanish media have the lowest credibility in Europe: over half (53%) of users in Spain do not think that the media are independent from undue political influence (Negredo et al. 2016: 43).

The Spanish media system has traditionally been quite television-centric, although with the irruption of new information and communication technologies trends in media consumption have been transformed, especially among the youth. These patterns are illustrated by the data presented by the European Social Survey (7.0) for 2014 (ESS 2014). The proportion of Spaniards watching television for more than two hours on an average weekday is 18.6%, which is below the average (19%) of the 21 countries included in the sample. Twelve years earlier, the same value was above the average. Regarding newspaper consumption, in 2016 around 30% of Spanish people declared that they never, or almost never, read newspapers, including free sheet and digital versions (CIS 2016).

The media landscape in Spain is broad and diverse. There are around 85 newspapers to choose from and there is an increasing market in free dailies in Spain; excluding sports papers, the third most widely read newspaper in the country is *20 Minutes*. Sports papers are very popular, probably bolstered by the fact that there are no daily tabloid newspapers in the country. Instead there is a huge catalogue of magazines published weekly or monthly which provide similar content to what tabloids do in other countries.

Concerning broadcast media, there was a public service monopoly in Spain both nationally and regionally until the late 1980s, as there was in other parts of Europe. It was not until 1989 that private companies were allowed to broadcast, and it was not until the late 1990s that satellite technology was introduced. Currently, Spain also has a dual model of public service and commercial TV. Almost three decades after the introduction of private television in Spain, the media landscape has become more competitive and commercialized, likewise dominated by a few private corporations. A wide swathe of commercial networks exists alongside publicly funded channels, both national and regional, with commercial channels commanding about 80% of the market. In accordance with the European trend, paid political advertising is prohibited on television in Spain.

The apparent variety mentioned is only illusory, since most of the market is controlled by no more than a dozen conglomerated media corporations. Data collected in 2016 reveals that two private operators dominate broadcasting, while newspapers increasingly find audiences online, where they face strong competition from a mix of new and long-running digital natives (Negredo et al. 2016: 42).

Since 2003, dwindling advertising revenues have put these corporations under heavy pressure. Regarding circulation, there has been a continuous loss of sales in the paid-for press, including national, regional, and specialized, since 2007. After 2015, it seems there has been slight growth in advertising revenue, particularly visible in the areas of internet, radio, and television, whereas print has managed to remain flat after several years of falling income (Salaverría and Gómez Baceiredo 2017).

Regarding the sample taken into account in this chapter, we have to point out that we selected the most popular generalist newspapers, including those published exclusively online. Since 2013, the major source of news has been online, growing from 79% to 86%, values even higher than those for television (72–79%). In 2015, social media reached the printed press in the same sense, and passed the latter afterwards, with a value of 60% versus 56%. Those trends are explained to a great degree by variable ages, since social media use is far more common among those under the age of 35 (Luengo and Fernández-García 2017). The success may be driven by the ongoing loss of human capital at all levels of many traditional newsrooms and the user's desire to access a broader spectrum of views and news (Negredo et al. 2016: 43).

Concerning newspapers, we included in the study *El País* and *El Mundo* (both traditional newspapers), as well as *Público*, *Europapress*, and

El Diario (online newspapers). Apart from the sports papers,[1] *El País* is Spain's number one print and online brand, with a net circulation average of 210,034 and some 1.2 million readers per day, closely followed by *El Mundo*, with a circulation of 116,657 and 0.8 million readers (OJD 2016). We can say that *El País* is centre-left, traditionally associated with the Socialist Party, and long considered the paper of record in Spain, but it has seen a decline in readers (ten years ago, it had more than two million readers), resources, and reputation (AICM 2006). *El Mundo* is the main voice on the free-market right, as opposed to the traditionalist, Catholic right. *El Diario* has quickly become one of the country's most read, originally digital, news venues, with 17% of weekly use, and *Público* has reached 14%. *El Diario* is only one of a large number of progressive start-ups that are rejuvenating Spain's media landscape (Negredo et al. 2016: 42).

Regarding television, we have analysed Antena 3 (A3) and T5, both private channels, and La1 (the general state public channel of Televisión Española, TVE). Following the Ranking of Spanish Television Channels, *A3* shows the highest share (16.5%), followed by La1 (11.7%) (AICM 2006). The most viewed television channel in Spain is A3 with an accumulated share during January 2017 of 13.3%, followed by *T5* with 13%, and La1 with 10.5% (El Economista 2017). In recent months, the difference between the first channels has been very tight, which illustrates the high level of competition in the sector. *A3* news is showing 55% of weekly use, La1 news 42%, and *T5* news 36% (Negredo et al. 2016: 43).

The News Coverage of the 2015 Election Campaign: Data Analysis

Undoubtedly, the most relevant aspect of the 2015 elections was the increase in political and electoral importance of two new parties, Ciudadanos and Podemos. Speculation about government coalitions and the risk of repeating elections occupied much of the parties' campaign and media agendas. Indeed, Podemos and Ciudadanos and their party leaders, Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera, had a significant presence in the media during the 2015 electoral campaign (see Fig. 5.1). They were the main political actors, with 8.5% and 10.5% of the total news stories, respectively. This coverage was detrimental to other political parties that had parliamentary representation

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[1] According to Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión, Marca is the most consumed newspaper, with almost 2.2 million daily readers (Retrieved from www.ojd.es, February 2017).
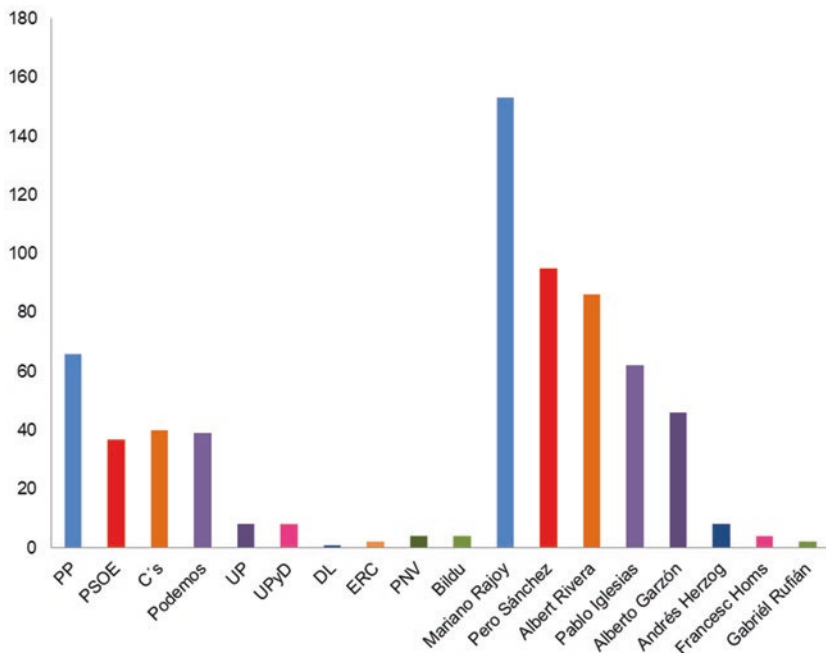
Fig. 5.1 Main political actors in the news stories ($N = 1191$)

in the previous legislature, including Unión Progreso y Democracia (Union, Progress and Democracy), Unidad Popular (Popular Unity), Esquerra Republicana per Catalunya (Republican Catalonian Left), Democracia y Libertad (Democracy and Freedom), Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Nationalist Basque Party), and so on. Together, these political actors only appeared as the main subject in 3.5% of the sample. Regarding major parties, the president of the government, Mariano Rajoy, and PP, were the most covered political actors (18.4%), followed by Pedro Sánchez and PSOE (11.1%). Finally, 19.2% of news stories were about more than one political party/party leader equally.

Analysing the media included in the sample, Chi-square tests indicate that the differences in coverage of political actors are statistically significant. La1 was the most conservative in its coverage of political actors. PP and PSOE together received 41% of the coverage by La1. This is also the media outlet that paid the least attention by far to the new parties,

Ciudadanos and Podemos (they were the main actors in only 3.6% of the news stories on La1). T5 also covered PP and PSOE in depth (41.8%), but unlike La1, T5 paid more attention to the new parties (Ciudadanos and Podemos were the main actors in 27.9% of the news stories). In all the media outlets, PP was the most covered party. On La1, T5, publico.es, eldiario.es, and europapress.es, PP was the main political actor in more than 20% of news stories. The Socialist Party received almost the same amount of coverage as Ciudadanos (a new party without representation in parliament before the 2015 elections) in europapress.es and A3: both parties were the main actors in 13.8% of news stories on these media outlets. PSOE received slightly more attention than Ciudadanos and Podemos on eldiario.es (12.1%, 9.6%, and 11.1%, respectively), *El País* (9.9%, 8.9%, and 7.5%), and T5 (16.5%, 15.2%, and 12.7%, respectively). In general, Ciudadanos was the third most popular party in terms of media attention (as main political actor), followed by Podemos. Only eldiario.es paid a little bit more attention to Podemos than Ciudadanos (11.1% and 9.6%, respectively). Although Popular Unity had representation in parliament in the previous legislature, it was the fifth party in coverage. The media outlets that paid more attention to Popular Unity were publico.es and eldiario. es (8.1% and 7.1%, respectively).

Those results are quite consistent with the idea of political parallelism stated by Hallin and Mancini (2004). Firstly, on the Spanish public TV channel (La1–TVE), general directors are political posts allocated by the parliament, enormously influenced by the actual conservative government of PP but in agreement to some extent with the social democrats of PSOE. In addition to this political reality, the fact that Spanish Electoral Law[2] requires that public news broadcasts implement a proportional logic of visibility helps to explain the dynamics seen here. Secondly, the sample does not include *La Sexta*, another private channel belonging to the same media group as A3 (Atresmedia); the style and editorial line adopted by this channel could have reflected a more balanced news coverage.

Issues

Compared with the 2011 elections, when the eurozone crisis and the threat of a bailout agreement took centre stage in the campaign agenda, the effects of the eurozone crisis in the country were left in the background in the 2015 campaign. Only 5.1% of the news referred to the

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[2] Ley Orgánica 5/1985, de 19 de Junio, del Régimen Electoral General (LOREG).

eurozone crisis and the austerity measures requested by the European Union. It should also be noted that only 9.6% of this news referred to the positive consequences of the austerity measures for the country, in contrast to 37.7% that showed the negative effects on the country.

Regarding dominant issues during the campaign, the most covered topic by the media was "party politics and elections" (66.8%). This topic included electoral debates, campaigns and party events, intra-party conflicts, discussions about electoral programmes, and other closely related issues. The second most covered topic was "functioning of democracy and governance", which includes, for example, state reform and internal cabinet problems (8.8%). This category also includes "peripheral nationalisms" since it relates to state reform in Spain. Nationalisms and the "Catalonian referendum" were largely present in the media agenda during and after the elections. Although this topic only appeared in 1.4% of the news stories as a dominant issue, it was present in much more news as the second and third most dominant issue. In fact, the disagreement between PSOE and Podemos regarding how to face the independence challenge made it impossible to reach a government agreement between them and nationalist parties after the elections.

These results show that the main topics had to do with local issues: the political conflict in Catalonia and the televised debates. The former was a clear indication of the subsequent notable political developments during 2017 and 2018. The latter was a result of the unprecedented media attention for this political communication format, considering that in 2015 we witnessed many different debates in Spain with several configurations (even between four candidates). We can conclude in that sense that the situation regarding the debates was quite unique in view of the fact that there has been neither an established nor a regulated dynamic in past campaigns (precedents can only be found in the 1993, 2008, and 2011 general elections).

Personalization of Politics

According to the results, party leaders were important protagonists in the 2015 electoral campaign. Figure 5.1 also shows that Mariano Rajoy, Pedro Sánchez, Albert Rivera, Pablo Iglesias, and Alberto Garzón were the main political actors in news stories above their respective political parties. Party leaders were the main actors in more than half of the cases (51%), which

was a bit more than those concerning the party structures (25%). The rest (24%) was the residual category (none of the previous).

The party leaders also were also the main sources of information for news stories (35%), followed by facts, events, and figures (21%), other party members (13.3%), other media outlets and journalists (6.5%), and experts (6.2%). In almost half of the news items, the party leaders were represented in visuals (49.4%) or had their direct quotations included in the news coverage (49.3%).

Regarding the characteristics of candidates (see Fig. 5.2), 26.3% of news items addressed them in some respect. The most mentioned characteristics were "Leadership" (4.8%), "Competence" (4.5%), and the "Candidate's appearance" (4.5%).

If we distinguish the results by candidate, we find that when the media focused on Mariano Rajoy's personal traits, it mentioned his appearance (34%), his competence (20%), his leadership (14%), and, finally, his credibility (10%). His appearance was frequently mentioned during the coverage of the aggression that the president suffered in Galicia as well as during the coverage of the electoral debate against Pedro Sánchez (especially his nervous tics).
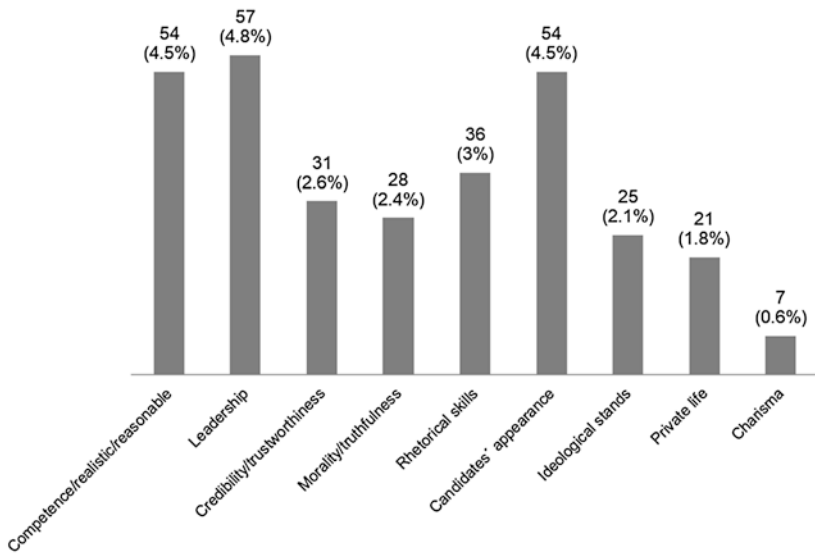

Fig. 5.2 Characteristics of candidates/party leaders ($N = 1191$)

Concerning Pedro Sánchez, his leadership was the characteristic most often mentioned by the media (23.8%), followed by his appearance (19%), his rhetorical skills (14.3), and his competence (11.9). His leadership as the Socialist Party leader was questioned intently during the elections, as was his performance in the "four candidates debate" and in his debate against the president, Mariano Rajoy. The characteristics most frequently mentioned about Albert Rivera and Pablo Iglesias were their leadership (21.7% and 28.6%, respectively) and their appearance (17.9% and 19%, respectively). Finally, Albert Garzón was also characterized by his appearance (19%) and competence (19%). It is also notable that the media highlighted the youth of Sánchez, Rivera, Iglesias, and Garzón, as well as their handsomeness.

It is interesting to note that the candidates' private lives is not very relevant for the Spanish media, in opposition to trends seen in surrounding countries, as pointed out by the concept of "peopleization" (Maarek 2015; Desterbecq 2015).

Populism

As Fig. 5.3 shows, the Spanish media emphasized some populist features of the parties' and candidates' discourses. The most common point had to do with the division between "us" and "them" (8.4%), followed by the
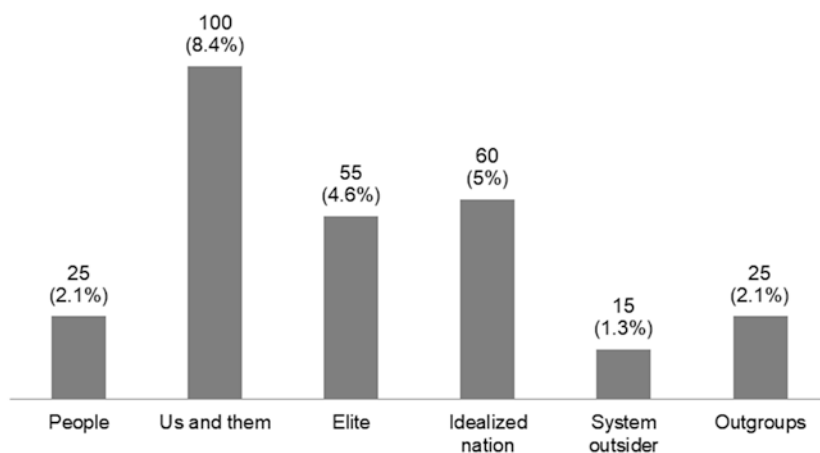

Fig. 5.3 Populism in the news stories (*N* = 1191)

idea of an idealized nation (5%), criticism of the elite using words such as "caste" and "establishment" (4.6%), the use of the expression "the people" to address the voters (2.1%), the identification of out-groups considered bad for the country (2.1%), and the self-identification of politicians as outside the system (1.3%). On the one hand, the most criticized elite was the political one (63.4% of mentions), followed by elite in general (18.18%), and the economic elite (10.9%). In the first case, they pointed mostly at mainstream parties (PP and the Socialist Party). In the second case, they referred to bankers and big companies within the energy industry. On the other hand, the out-groups targeted as bad for the country were political groups (76% of the mentions), alluding mostly to nationalists and "separatists" who were seeking the "breakdown of the country". The visibility of the "idealized nation" could be explained by the repeated allusions by PP to the unity of the state, against independence movements, particularly referring to the growing tensions in Catalonia regarding the then-forthcoming referendum.

Regarding the meaning of "them", it varies according to the actor. Firstly, for Popular Unity and Podemos (leftist parties), "them" means the elite (political, economic, undetermined, "la casta", etc.) and "us" refers to the common citizen. Secondly, Ciudadanos and PP (centrist and rightist parties) had in common the use of this kind of division against the parties/actors who seek to "break the unity of the country" (nationalists and other parties who support the holding of the Catalonian referendum), but they differ in some aspects: Ciudadanos also used this kind of rhetoric to refer to mainstream parties (including PP) and the widespread corruption within the system, whereas PP alluded to an alleged "coalition of losers" or "coalition of the super-red" (communists and socialists) that posed a threat to the stability of the country. Thirdly, PSOE used this kind of rhetoric to refer to the conflict between "the right" and the interests of the citizens. Finally, the nationalist parties used the division between "us" and "them" to narrate the conflict between Catalonia and Basque Country interests ("us", "our people") and the Spanish state ("them"). They also used the idea of an idealized nation to speak about the independence of Catalonia and the Basque Country.

Examining political actors in depth, 21.7% of these populist features were found in news items in which Podemos and Pablo Iglesias were the main actors; 15% in the news items about Popular Unity and Alberto Garzón; 14.29% for Ciudadanos and Albert Rivera; 10.71% for PP and Mariano Rajoy; and 7.5% for PSOE and Pedro Sánchez. The most common populist

features of Podemos and Popular Unity (both left-wing parties) were the division between "us" and "them" and criticism of the elite (Pablo Iglesias popularized the term "the caste" in Spain). In the case of Ciudadanos (centre-right), the division between "us" and "them" was most frequently used to refer to nationalists and traditional parties. Regarding the PP (traditional right-wing party), the most common populist feature in their news was the "idealized nation", normally in reference to the unity of Spain against actors who try to break or destabilize the country. Finally, in the case of PSOE (traditional left-wing party), the most present feature was the division between "us" and "them" to allude mainly to "the right" as a prominent danger to the interests of common citizens.

News Framing of Politics

The media coverage of the 2015 Spanish electoral campaign was mainly characterized by a strategic news frame. Some 62% of news items framed the elections as a game, focused on tactics and strategies of the campaign, on intra-party conflicts, or on a personality contest. The remaining 38% of news items were centred on issue positions, substantial discussions about best policies for the country, or citizens' real-life conditions.

In Fig. 5.4 we can observe different elements of the strategic news frame. The most relevant element had to do with the strategy and tactics

Fig. 5.4 Strategic news framing (*N* = 1191)

employed by candidates and parties to win the election and the electoral debates, to attract favourable news coverage, and so on (40.1%). Next, we find the logic of winning or losing or the "horse race" frame (33.8%), news referring to the performance of candidates, parties, politicians, and campaigns (32.4%), and, finally, mention of public opinion supporting different candidates and parties (22.7%). These frames were very present in news stories about the televised debates (four debates took place during the campaign), the electoral events of political parties, the publication of opinion polls, and so on.

Analysing these dynamics by media outlet, we can observe that the strategic news frame was slightly more common in online newspapers (63.4%) and television (63%) than in newspapers (59.8%). However, the Chi-square test indicates that these differences are not statistically significant.

Negativity and Conflict

Spanish politics is characterized not by consensus but by conflict between major parties (especially PP and PSOE). It is polarized on most important issues (education, peripheral nationalisms, anti-terrorism policy, the role of the Catholic Church in society, macroeconomic policy, minority rights, etc.), with the notable exception of European integration (both parties are pro-European Union) and just a few other issues. The irruption of new parties has not transformed this political scenario but has probably increased even more the polarization of political parties. This reality is perfectly reflected in how the media covers politics in Spain.

On the one hand, coverage of the 2015 Spanish campaign was dominated by conflict between parties, candidates, and politicians (39%), in contrast to news stories that showed consensus, agreement, accordance, and so on between political actors (4%). Those findings are coherent with previous studies that point to a clear gradual transformation in the direction mentioned (to an increasing visibility of conflicts) since the 1990s, and particularly since 2008 (Martínez Nicolás et al. 2014). There were only two moments during the campaign when the candidates and political parties showed consensus and agreement. The first moment was when Mariano Rajoy was hit by a young man in Galicia during a rally. All the candidates showed solidarity with the president and condemned the use of violence. The second was following a terrorist attack on the Spanish embassy in Kabul in which two Spanish police officers were killed. All the

candidates showed solidarity with the families of the victims and affirmed their commitment to the anti-terrorism fight.

On the other hand, data shows that the tone of 60% of news stories was neutral, ambivalent, or balanced. Some 26% of news was characterized by a negative tone, framing the stories as political failure, crisis, cynicism, and so on, and only 14% of news was dominated by a positive tone, emphasizing achievements, political success, solutions to problems, enthusiasm, hope, and so on.

If we analyse the same topics distinguishing by media outlet, we see that conflict was more present in online newspapers (40.5%) and print newspapers (40%) and less so in television (36.2%). Consensus was present in the same proportion in television (4.1%) and newspapers (4%) and less so in online newspapers (2.8%). The Chi-square test indicates that these differences between tone and media outlet are statistically significant.

Regarding negativity in media coverage, it was more present in newspapers (32.1%) and online newspapers (27.1%) than in television (14%). In proportion, television was the outlet that covered the news using a balanced/ambivalent/neutral tone (64.6%) and positive tone (21.4%) the most. By contrast, only 9% of news items in print newspapers were covered with a positive tone, and 13.3% in online newspapers. The Chi-square test indicates that these differences between media outlets and negative tone are statistically significant.

Interpretative Journalism

As shown by the analysis, interpretative journalism was very present in the media coverage of the 2015 Spanish electoral campaign (47.2% of the news items). Following Salgado and Strömbäck's (2012) proposal that distinguishes three different types of interpretative journalism, the most common type of interpretative journalism in news items had to do with explanations or interpretations of the reasons for events or actions (32.3%), followed by explicit commentary by journalists (29.7%) and speculation about future consequences of events (27.4%).

If we select only the news stories and exclude the other types of news items (which include more subjective pieces such as editorials, columns, commentaries, etc.), the presence of interpretative journalism drops from 47.2% to 34.1%, explanations to 20.8%, speculations to 18.2%, and open commentaries to 18%.

Table 5.1   Interpretative journalism per type of media[a]

| | | Presence of Interpretative Journalism | | Total |
		No	Yes	
Media Outlet	Television	133	57	190
		70.0%	30.0%	100.0%
	Newspaper	95	82	177
		53.7%	46.3%	100.0%
	Online newspaper	289	128	417
		69.3%	30.7%	100.0%
Total		517	267	784
		65.9%	34.1%	100.0%

Chi-square = 15.358[a] / p-value < 0.001
[a]This analysis does not include all types of news items; it only includes news stories

Table 5.1 introduces the distinction by media outlets in the study. It can be observed that the presence of interpretative journalism was greater in print newspapers (46.3%) than in online newspapers (30.7%) and television (30%). In this analysis, we only include news stories, excluding other types of news items (opinion, editorial, column, reportage, etc.). We exclude this type of news item in order to not bias the results, since the print newspapers in our sample have far more opinion items than television and online newspapers. The Chi-square test indicates that these differences between media outlet and interpretative journalism in news stories are statistically significant.

CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the media coverage of the 2015 Spanish electoral campaign. The results show that the most covered issues were party politics and elections, as well as the performance of democracy and governance. Compared with the previous general elections in 2011, when the eurozone crisis and the threat of a bailout were the prominent topics of the campaign, in 2015 those issues were in a secondary position.

The second significant finding is related to the two emerging parties: Ciudadanos and Podemos were the third and fourth most covered parties by the media (at levels very close to the coverage of PSOE). The

coverage of new parties was to the detriment of other minority parties with preceding parliamentary representation (Popular Unity, Unity, Progress and Democracy, and the nationalist parties). Private media outlets covered these two emerging parties much more than other minority parties, that is, disproportionally. The public television channel (La1) was an exception. We might find the explanation for this dynamic in the legal framework. Because the Spanish Electoral Law imposes proportional coverage of parties during campaigns for news broadcasts, based on the criteria of previous parliamentary representation,[3] the public channel is held more accountable in that sense. In addition, in this specific case, and given the electoral expectations of Podemos, the Electoral Court decided to reinterpret the criteria and make a slight exception. The first and second findings could be connected to the fact that the main issues taken up by the two new parties (Bakker et al. 2015), Ciudadanos and Podemos, were the performance of democracy and governance (corruption, anti-elitism, democratic regeneration, and territorial organization of the state). In that sense, some authors have suggested a positive relationship between the visibility of the issues of anti-establishment parties and their electoral performance, although the direction of the relationship needs further clarification (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007; Walgrave and De Swert 2004; Rooduijn 2014).

The research also shows that the media coverage of the campaign focused on candidates more than on political parties, that is, on individuals over structures: candidates and specific party leaders were the main actors in more than half of the news items of the sample; they also were the first source of information of news stories; and they were represented in visuals and direct quotations in almost half of the news stories. The media also addressed several personal characteristics of the candidates, especially their leadership, their appearance, and their competences. This trend reflects a clear pattern of personalization of politics in the news media. This distinctive feature could have privileged the two emergent parties in electoral terms on account of their candidates, characterized by persuasive and visible leadership, in comparison with the traditional parties, especially PSOE, which has been unable to establish a credible and unquestioned leadership since 2011 (Delgado-Fernández and Cazorla-Martín 2017).

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[3] The Electoral Law (Ley Orgánica 5/1985, de 19 de junio, del Régimen Electoral General) guarantees social and political pluralism in television coverage (Article 66).

Other relevant findings shown by our research results are related to the presence of populist features in the media. The division between "us" and "them" was a prominent dimension, followed by references to an idealized nation and anti-elitism. These populist features were found mostly in news stories in which Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Popular Unity were the main actors. Although we also found some populist features in the news items about the two major parties (PP and PSOE), it was much less in proportion to their total coverage. These populist features normally referred to the conflict between the political elite and the common citizen (left-wing parties), the conflict between the Spanish state and Catalonian and Basque interests (right-wing parties vs nationalist parties), as well as the confrontation between the new and old politics (new vs traditional parties). This dynamic is consistent with other recent studies where it has been stated that political debates in Western European countries have become more populist, finding a positive correlation between this and the electoral performance of populist parties (Rooduijn 2014).

Finally, the results also reveal other interesting dimensions: the dominant framing during the electoral campaign was the strategic news frame; conflict between political actors was much more frequently covered than consensus; a negative tone was more present than a positive one. In terms of the media outlet, the results suggest that conflict and negative tone were more often displayed in newspapers and online newspapers than on television. Regarding interpretative journalism, we found it in almost half of the news items of the sample. But when we distinguish between opinion and information (facts), we find that interpretations are mostly concentrated in editorials, columns, commentaries, and so on. In addition, interpretative journalism was more commonly found in print newspapers than in the other types of media.

Spain is going through very uncertain times in political and social terms. The new dimension of political disaffection among Spaniards, the development of new communication technologies, the consolidation of innovative repertoires of collective action, the creation of new political demands, the permanent movements in the media landscape, the crystallization of new political parties, the questioning of the traditional party system, and the widespread distrust of the present political representation arrangements, all have led to a very unpredictable context with no precedent in Spanish democracy. Moreover, those recent dynamics have also had an impact on electoral campaigns and thus have altered the way

media in general depict electoral struggles. It is nevertheless too soon to predict whether this situation is part of a new era or if it is just part of a temporary political earthquake that has altered the traditional development of electoral campaigns and, consequently, the regular performance of media.

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Political News Coverage of the 2015 Election Campaign in Croatia: Populism and Media

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INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of Yugoslavia, the Croatian political and media systems have become more vibrant and are now a more interesting object of research. The main reason for this is the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic society, and from a planned economy to a capitalist economy. In only a few decades, Croatia developed from a one-party system to a multiparty system, and from a country with state-owned and -controlled media to a society with both public and varied private media outlets.

The history of Croatian democracy is short, so the country has only witnessed a few election campaigns. Despite this, there is a growing number of scientific papers related to election campaigns and electoral behavior. Existing research suggests strong influence by the authorities on media reporting about political events in the campaigns of the 1990s. This resulted in the overwhelming dominance of the ruling Croatian Democratic

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Union (HDZ) in the reporting of media outlets during the campaigns—particularly in the media of which the state was the majority owner (Baranović 1995, 1999; Lalić 1995). However, at the beginning of the 2000s, the semi-central system in Croatia changed to a parliamentary system, and a process of "consolidation of the young democracy" started (Čular 2005). Milas and Burušić (2004) examined the connection of ideological and status determinants with the citizens' voting intentions. They found that parties, according to their attitudes and the social features characteristic of their own electoral bodies, can only partially dissociate from one another on the basis of the conservative–liberal ideological continuum. On the one side are voters of HDZ, the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), and the Croatian Party of Law (HSP), and on the other side are voters of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Croatian People's Party–Liberal Democrats (HNS). Henjak (2011) finds that electoral support for HDZ has been fairly stable since the first elections in 1990, while support for the left and centre parties has been quite variable. Henjak (2011) concludes that stable support for the parties is most affected by the voters' relation to religion, history, and traditional values. The "consolidation of the young democracy" is also manifested in the balanced media coverage of the leading parties during election campaigns (Balabanić and Mustapić 2008). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, research confirmed the strong "personalization" of the campaigns through the party leaders (Lalić and Kunac 2005), as well as the "packaging of politics" (Lalić 2004), "privatization of politics" (Grbeša 2010), "Americanization" of the campaign (Balabanić et al. 2011), and recently the radicalization of the ideological division of Croatian society on the "left and right" political spectrum (Lalić and Grbeša 2015).

Considering the development and growth of internet usage in political communication (Balabanić and Mustapić 2010), as well as the appearance of populist rhetoric in media communication (Grbeša and Šalaj 2014; Mustapić and Hrstić 2016), we analyse the key determinants of the news coverage during the 2015 electoral campaign, as well as the presence of elements of populist rhetoric in Croatian news media.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE 2015 ELECTIONS

Since the collapse of socialism, Croatian society has undergone a transition process from a totalitarian to a democratic society and from a planned economy to a capitalist economy, including all the sociocultural processes

brought by these two transitions. Holmes (1996) states that the difficulties brought by the post-communist transition have arisen from a weak state, or more precisely, from weak institutions that are unable to ensure the elementary public goods the citizenry relies on to make life in society bearable. The experiences of Croatia's transition were even more dramatic and radical than those in the majority of other post-socialist countries, as the key moments of this transition unfolded under conditions of war.

Despite the ravages of war, the early 1990s saw marked enthusiasm among the Croatian people because of their high expectations of Croatian statehood. However, situational factors such as the war and the destruction it caused resulted in a shift of the public focus from economic issues towards politics and issues of survival. Franičević (2002) points out that this enabled what has come to be known as "tycoon privatization" and the establishment of crony capitalism. Županov (1995) posits that a new class of wealthy individuals was formed in Croatia overnight—a handful of individuals who had no capital of their own in 1991 became enormously wealthy within just a few years. As this is impossible under normal circumstances, the author (1995: 146) considers there to be no other explanation than the "theft and plunder of state property, and the unjust accumulation of wealth".

In this context, we consider it exceptionally important to point out Županov's thesis (1995) concerning rearrangements in the old Yugoslav political elite and the establishment of the new, Croatian political elite in the early 1990s. A significant number of leading members of the Yugoslav League of Communists joined the new political elite, mostly as members of opposition parties with national influence, and it can be thus said that there was a certain *symmetry between the new and old elite.* On the other side of the social stratification pyramid after the 1990s, we find a group referred to as "transition losers". In addition to citizens in the lower part of the social stratification pyramid, transition losers are citizens whose aspirations during the transition period are at odds with their personal achievements.

Trust in state institutions is one of the key sociocultural potentials of democratic societies. Unfortunately, public opinion research in Croatia shows that the trust of Croatia's citizens in the State and in political institutions has declined since the early 2000s. According to Karajić's research (2000), nearly half of Croatia's citizens trusted in the government and parliament in 1998. However, the Eurobarometer's *National Report on Public Opinion in Croatia* (2009) confirms the existence of deep mistrust

in state institutions and political parties only a decade later—citizens' trust in the government was equal to their trust in the Croatian parliament, at roughly 12%, only 15% of citizens trusted Croatia's judicial bodies, and trust in political parties had fallen to an all-time low of only 4%. Subsequent research has shown similar results (Balabanić and Rihtar 2015).

Mustapić (2017) considers that since the election campaign in 2011, in which Zoran Milanović (the leader of SDP) promised "zero tolerance for nepotism and corruption", we have not witnessed a dramatic political and economic turnaround in the mandate of the SDP government (2011–2015). In 2015, after six years of recession, Croatia enjoyed positive macroeconomic indicators and signs that it was on the way out of its economic crisis. Despite this, and the high unemployment rate (third in the EU after Spain and Greece), under Milanović's SDP government (2011–2015), with the opposition led by Tomislav Karamarko from HDZ, political communication and public debates were dominated by ideological themes and issues from Croatia's traumatic modern history. Besides those ideological themes and issues mostly related to the Croatian War of Independence, the main debates of the 2015 election also concerned the remains of the economic crisis together with various social and demographic problems related to it, such as a high unemployment rate and the emigration of youth. Those debates shaped the election campaign.

The electoral campaign began on 21 October 2015 and lasted 16 days. The elections for the 8th Assembly of the Croatian Parliament were held on 8 November 2015, and 2,304,403 citizens, or 60.82% of the voter population, turned out to 6687 polling places to vote. Voters elected a total of 151 representatives: 140 from the ten electoral units of the territory of Croatia, three representatives for the diaspora, and eight representatives of national minorities.

Pre-election surveys and exit polls both showed that this was the closest election in the short history of Croatia's democracy. The final results were in accordance with these predictions. The "Patriotic Coalition" (Domoljubna koalicija) led by HDZ won 59 mandates (i.e., a parliamentary seat won in the elections), the "Croatia is Growing" (Hrvatska raste) coalition led by SDP won 56 mandates, the Bridge of Independent Lists (MOST) won 19 mandates, the Istrian Democratic Party (IDS) won three mandates, the Croatian Democratic Union of Syrmia and Baranya (HDSSB) won two mandates, the coalition surrounding Zagreb mayor Milan Bandić won two mandates, while Human Shield (Živi zid) and

Successful Croatia (Uspješna Hrvatska) each won one mandate. In addition to this, three representatives of the Serbian national minority were elected, as were five representatives of other national minorities.

The constituting session of the 8th Assembly of the Croatian Parliament was held on 3 December 2015,[1] but parliament was only constituted successfully after a second attempt on 28 December 2015. In January 2016, HDZ, which led the "Patriotic Coalition", established a coalition government with MOST, and their leaders, Karamarko (HDZ) and Božo Petrov (MOST), became vice-presidents of the government. Surprisingly, Croatian-Canadian businessman Tihomir Orešković became prime minister. He was the first non-party prime minister in Croatian history. This unstable government was also the first in Croatia's history not to sit out its entire term. On 20 June 2016, the Croatian Parliament took the decision of dissolving the assembly, a decision that was supported by 137 of 151 representatives. The parliamentary session was dissolved on 15 July 2016, and two days later, Andrej Plenković was elected president of HDZ. After elections for the 9th Assembly of the Croatian Parliament, held on 11 September 2016, he formed a majority in coalition with MOST and became prime minister in the government that followed.

Political and Media Systems in Croatia

Croatia is a republic with a democratically elected parliament, which is the highest representative body, and a democratically elected president as head of state. The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia was adopted on 22 December 1990 after the first democratic multiparty parliamentary elections, which were held in the spring of 1990. The Republic of Croatia declared independence on 25 June 1991. The constitutional decision on the sovereignty and independence of Croatia was preceded by a referendum, held on 19 May 1991, with a voter turnout of 83.5%, of which 94.1% voted for a sovereign and independent Croatia.

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[1] Even before the constituting session of parliament, the Bridge of Independent Lists (MOST) was struck by two setbacks within the party. Four days after the election, one representative (Drago Prgomet) was thrown out of the Bridge, and he then formed his own party with two other Bridge representatives—the Croatian Initiative for Dialogue (HRID, Hrvatska inicijativa za dijalog). Shortly after this, one more representative left Bridge and became an independent representative. In the end, Bridge had 15 representatives at the parliamentary session on 3 December 2015.

After this, in the summer of 1991, the Yugoslav National Army and paramilitary units composed of members of the Serbian national minority began war operations in Croatia. The war lasted four years, after which the occupied territory was finally liberated. A change in the Constitution in November of 2000 ended the semi-presidential system and introduced a parliamentary system with the Croatian government and prime minister playing a stronger role, while a change in March of 2001 abolished the lower house of parliament (the County House, Županijski dom), making the Croatian Parliament a single-house parliament. Croatia has been a member of the European Union since 1 July 2013.

More than half a century has passed since McLuhan's thesis that communication technologies have made the world a "global village". However, in the 1960s, Croatia was part of a one-party, socialist, and totalitarian system. The media, especially electronic media, and their actions were under the strict control of the Communist Party until the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia. A certain liberalization began in the early 1970s, when the media in Croatia underwent a phase of notable development in the technological and professional sense (Mihaljević 2015). However, a more comprehensive democratization of the media system in Croatia only truly began in the 1990s.

Bilić (2012: 829) divides the liberalization process of the media space after the Croatian transition into three phases: the first (1990–1999) was marked by a national television monopoly, when only the print media market was liberalized; the second (2000–2003) saw telecommunications and the television market liberalized, changes in public television management taking place, and the influence of the internet and new media growing consistently; and the third (from 2004) has seen media laws harmonized with EU acquis and the significance of the internet continuing to grow.

Peruško (2012) also points out that consolidation of ownership in the media scene brought a weakening of pluralism in the media system. Considering the typology of the Croatian media system, Bilić (2012) confirms that it consists of roughly 870 print media outlets (of which ten are daily newspapers), 30 television channels (of which nine hold a national concession), 168 radio stations (of which five hold a national concession), 66 internet service providers, 20 cable television operators, two satellite television operators, and four internet operators.

As in most European countries, television is still the leading medium in Croatia, used by 83% of the population, followed by the internet (52%), radio (50%), and printed press (29%) (Eurobarometer 2014). Although

internet access in Croatia grew from 41.5% in 2007 to 77% in 2015, this is still below the average of the 28 EU member states, which is 83% (Eurostat 2016). The development of internet media outlets represents a special chapter, as the number of frequent or regular adult internet users has risen sharply since the early 2000s. Parallel with this process, there has also been a decline in newspaper publishing and profits, resulting in the firing of journalists, the cutting of expenses, and the closing down of certain daily newspapers (Peruško 2012; Vozab 2014). In addition to this trend, the Croatian media is subject to widespread press tabloidization (Vilović 2003), and articles on leading web portals also display this trend (Benković and Balabanić 2010).

Research on political communication in the Croatian media in the 1990s, especially in pre-election periods (Baranović 1995, 1999), confirms the thesis that the government exerts a strong influence on media reports of current political happenings. But political information in Croatia during election campaigns since the early 2000s has shown less influence of government on the media, as well as trends such as: intense media focus on the two leading political parties, HDZ and SDP, while other political parties are ignored (bipolarization); a focus on party presidents (personalization); negligible discussion of party programmes and projects; and the generally negative relationship of non-party actors with party actors (Lalić 2004; Balabanić and Mustapić 2008). These processes have been accompanied by numerous political corruption affairs, such as the 2009 arrest and lengthy subsequent trial of former Croatian Democratic Union president (2002–2009) and prime minister (2003–2009) Ivo Sanader. These frequent scandals damaged the reputation of politics in Croatia as a profession that tends to the general welfare. One example displaying the (in)efficiency of Croatia's judicial institutions and their influence on citizens' trust in the Croatian judiciary is the fact that, after nearly seven years, the public still has not been presented with a binding court judgment against Ivo Sanader.

News Coverage of the 2015 Election Campaign: Data Analysis

The analysis focused on the period of the official electoral campaign for representatives in the Croatian Parliament, from 21 October to 6 November 2015. Following Salgado et al. (2015), the sample includes

all news items published by leading newspapers, online media and television channels in which the elections for the 8th Assembly of the Croatian Parliament was the prevailing topic. The criteria for selecting the three leading media outlets were the readership of newspapers, visits to websites of online outlets, and ratings of television news programmes. Led by these criteria, the following media outlets were included in the sample: daily newspapers *Jutarnji list*, *24sata*, and *Večernji list*; television channels with national concessions HTV1, RTL, and NOVA TV; and online media Index.hr, Net.hr, and T-Portal.hr.

The Croatian print media market is divided between two large media corporations, Hanza Media and Styria Media Group AG. Hanza Media was founded in 1990 under the name Europapress Holding, and a change in its ownership structure in 2015 brought the current name. Today, Hanza Media publishes five daily newspapers and 30 magazines. The highest-circulating periodical published by this media corporation is *Jutarnji list*, which had an average daily circulation of roughly 50,000 in 2013 (Vozab 2014: 3). The second largest publisher is Styria Media Group AG. This publisher is majority-owned by foreign capital, and it entered the Croatian media market when it purchased *Večernji list* in 2001. Styria Media Group publishes the two highest-circulating daily newspapers in Croatia, *Večernji list* (52,000) and the tabloid *24sata* (108,000) (Vozab 2014: 3).

Only three television broadcasters in Croatia have a national television concession—Croatian Radiotelevision (HRT), RTL, and Central European Media Enterprises (CME), which broadcasts the NOVA TV channel. HRT is a public media service, while RTL and CME are commercial television companies owned by foreign capital.[2] The three most visited internet portals which do not have a print version in Croatia are Index.hr, Net.hr, and T-portal.hr. Index.hr and Net.hr are owned by what can be described as small domestic firms (Index Promocija and Telegram media grupa),[3] while T-Portal.hr is owned by the largest telecommunications operator in Croatia, Hrvatski Telekom, which is a part of the Deutsche Telekom group.

Our sample encompasses 119 television news items from prime-time news programmes, 359 news items from the three leading daily newspapers,

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[2] According to data from the Electronic Media Agency (AEM 2017), viewership of the main news programmes consists of up to 45% of the public over the age of 18.

[3] Research performed by Gemius in 2017.

and 402 news items from the three leading internet portals.[4] The sample includes all news items published or broadcast by these media outlets that reported on the activities of political parties during the parliamentary campaign. It should be mentioned, however, that only prime-time news programmes were taken into account from television broadcasters, and that news pieces may have been broadcast as part of other informative programmes, which were not encompassed by our sample.

Media Framing of Politics

The selected media covered the election and politics as a strategic game in 73.4% of the news items during the election campaign, at the expense of issues or topics related to real social problems. In three of every four news items, the media spoke of the relationship between the parties, the popularity of individual politicians, and the private lives and personalities of politicians. In the remaining 26.6% of the news items the media reported on specific real social problems and the solutions proposed by the parties and politicians involved in the campaign.

The media frequently expressed negative attitudes toward politicians in the campaign. In 33.4% of the news items, a negative tonality was expressed towards politicians and/or the political system in general. On the other hand, in 13.4% of the news items, a positive tonality was expressed, while a balanced tonality was recorded in 52.7% of the news items. If we cross the data of *dominant media framing of politics* and *tonality of the news items*, we can see that during the election campaign, the media reported about politics mostly within the framework of the strategic news framing, and very often through a predominantly negative tonality towards politicians and/or the political system in general.

In 68.8% of the news items, the media did not report equally on different politicians and parties involved in the election campaign. Most of the news items were reported from just one perspective, without seeking answers and explanations of alternative political options.

Personalization

In 49.3% of the news items, the focus was on the president of the party. The parties personified themselves through the figure of their leader. A similar situation occurred during the 2007 parliamentary elections, when the strongest Croatian political parties also presented themselves mainly through the figure of their president, thereby personalizing their campaigns (Balabanić et al. 2011). In 35.1% of the news items, the focus was on the party as a whole, and in 15.9% on other party members.

Aside from when the accent was on the actor, situations in which the president of the political party was also the main source of information were equally noted. In nearly a third of the news items (29.2%), the president of the party was also the main source of information. For the sake of comparison, all other members of political parties were the source of information in slightly less than one-fifth of news pieces (19%). These two results indisputably point to the fact that during the parliamentary elections in 2015, political parties decided to present their programmes and their work through one person. When this person was discussed, the focus was often on his or her knowledge and skills. In 19.2% of the news pieces, the personal characteristics of competence, realism, and rationality of the party leader and of other party members were discussed.

Issues

As is apparent from Table 6.1, the subject of the vast majority of news items (67.8%) was tied to various party issues, the general activities of the political parties, or the electoral process itself. In addition to issues related to political parties, the subjects of macroeconomics and taxes were also partially represented (6.4%). Other topics were mentioned only sporadically during the campaign.

We also checked that mentions to the eurozone crisis were present in 4.1% of news items. However, discussions about austerity measures were mostly focused on accenting the good and bad characteristics of particular parties, and not on a discussion of particular thematic areas of life (social problems).

Table 6.2 shows which political parties stressed which topics, and the differences between the leading political parties. Political parties were mostly focused on commenting on and criticizing the other political

Table 6.1 Issues in the news items

Dominant issue in the news item	Frequency	%
Party politics	597	67.8
Economy	68	7.8
Democracy	33	3.8
Social affairs	22	2.5
Opinion polls	21	2.4
Culture	19	2.2
Labour	17	1.9
Immigration	17	1.9
Education	14	1.6
Justice	14	1.6
Civil rights	10	1.1
Other	8	6.6
Total	880	100

Table 6.2 Issues and political parties (percentages)

Issues	Political Parties							Total of news items
	HDZ	HNS	HSS	MB365	MOST	SDP	Other	
Democracy	70.1	86.9	62.5	75.0	86.9	71.2	80.1	**72.8**
Economy	6.4	1.6	25.0	1.5	1.7	6.4	5.1	**5.7**
Foreign affairs	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.1	2.0	2.1	**3.2**
Defence	2.7	0.0	0.0	4.6	1.7	2.3	1.8	**2.5**
Agriculture	0.3	0.0	12.5	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.7	**0.5**
Party politics	1.5	0.0	0.0	3.1	1.1	2.7	2.2	**2.0**
Labour	3.0	1.7	0.0	2.3	0.0	2.9	0.3	**1.8**
Immigration	3.3	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.1	**1.5**
Other	8.6	3.2	0.0	11.9	2.8	8.0	7.4	**9.1**
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

parties and the Croatian government. HSS has focused significantly more on macroeconomic themes and problems in the agriculture sector.

Populism

Considering the frequency with which the concept of "the people" was used, party leaders and other party members referred to voters using the words "the people" in more than one-sixth of news items (16.1%). In

Table 6.3   Elites mentioned by political candidates

	Frequency	%
Political elite	67	80.7
Media elite	7	8.4
Undefined elite	4	4.8
Economic elite	4	4.8
EU elite	1	1.2
Total	83	100

nearly one-fifth of news items (19.7%), parties and their leaders emphasized a division through the terms "us" and "them".

This fairly high share of news items in which politicians made a clear distinction between particular social groups points to elements of populist rhetoric and to the fact that politicians are frequently placed in the role of a tribune of the people. Among these statements, politicians placed various elites who stand opposed to the people among the "others" in nearly one-tenth of news items (9.2%). As we can see in Table 6.3, in a great majority of cases, they accented the opposition between the people and the political elite (80.7%). In 4.8% of cases, the opposition between the people and an undefined elite was used. It is also interesting to note that, in nearly one-tenth of news items (8.4%) in which politicians spoke against the elite, an opposing relationship was emphasized between the general public and the media elite.

Only 23 of the 880 news items analysed mentioned particular minority groups, and 18 of them were politicians' references to migrants. Other minority groups (religious, ethnic, etc.) were mentioned in only two news items. Considering this issue, Table 6.4 shows whether there were differences among the leading political parties. In their criticisms of the elite, all leading political parties mainly criticised the political elite. The most criticism came from those parties that had not been involved in parliamentary elections before, such as MOST and Milan Bandić 365 (MB365), the party of Zagreb mayor Milan Bandić. The only party that criticized the political elite and was already established before these elections was HSS (one of the oldest Croatian political parties). The two largest parties, HDZ and SDP, mainly refrained from any criticism of the elite.

In addition, politicians very rarely idealized the nation, and mainly refrained from referring to characteristics, events, and phenomena that

Table 6.4   References to elites by political parties (percentages)

Elites	Political Parties							Total
	HDZ	HNS	HSS	MB365	MOST	SDP	Other	
Undefined elite	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	**0.2**
Political elite	4.4	1.7	12.5	14.7	15.2	4.7	10.9	**7.0**
Economic elite	0.1	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.6	0.5	1.4	**0.7**
EU elite	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	**0.1**
Media elite	1.0	0.0	0.0	2.3	0.6	0.4	0.3	**0.8**
No elite mentioned	94.4	98.3	87.5	81.4	83.7	93.6	87.4	**91.1**
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

could elevate their nationality above others. Only 29 news items (3.3%) described situations in which politicians placed special or greater value on their nationality. Somewhat more often than this, politicians presented themselves as opponents of the political and economic systems. Out of 880 news items, 37 (4.2%) recorded politicians emphasizing their criticism towards the system in general. But in most cases the characteristics of populist discourse were not apparent (58.1%).

Table 6.5 shows the presence of populism according to the type of media. The most commonly used feature is the division between "us" and "them". It was present in nearly 20% of the news items from newspapers and online papers and in more than 30% of the television items. It is also noticeable that all categorized populist features are more commonly observed in television than in newspapers and online media.

There were differences between political parties in the use of other elements of populist discourse. The two leading parties, HDZ and SDP, mainly refrained from using populist rhetoric. Both the Croatian Democratic Union and Social Democratic Party shifted blame onto other political actors and parties relatively often. HSS expressed its greatest closeness to the "people", while HNS used a simplified rhetoric that referred to a choice between two polar opposites, "us or them", emphasizing that "us" involves good things and "them" involves bad things, more frequently than the other parties. They wanted to emphasize that they are the "honest" part of the political establishment, unlike HDZ, which they consider to be "immoral".

Oversimplification, blame-shifting and scapegoating, and emphasizing one's own knowledge of the needs of the people and closeness to the

Table 6.5   Presence of populism in the different types of media (percentages)

Presence of populist features		Type of media		
		Television	Newspaper	Online
"The people"	No	93.3	83.8	81.1
	Yes	6.7	16.2	18.9
"Us" and "Them"	No	68.1	81.9	82.6
	Yes	31.9	18.1	17.4
Anti-elitism	No	79.0	95.0	90.5
	Yes	21.0	5.0	9.5
Idealized nation	No	89.9	997	96.0
	Yes	10.1	0.3	4.0
Anti-system	No	84.9	98.6	96.5
	Yes	15.1	1.4	3.5
Out-groups	No	97.5	98.1	96.8
	Yes	2.5	1.9	3.2

people were also present. It should be stressed, however, that blame-shifting and scapegoating was not aimed at minority groups or elites during the electoral campaign—instead, political parties mostly blamed and attacked each other for various activities or errors during their time in office, which is a common feature of Croatian politics in general.

CONCLUSION

We have presented and discussed the results of a content analysis of the news items released by leading print, online, and television news outlets focusing on the elections for the 8th Assembly of the Croatian Parliament. Nearly half of the news items analysed were published by online media outlets, which points to the growth of the role of the internet in political news in Croatia. The results indicate the presence of the trends already apparent in the findings of previous research. This primarily refers to a predominantly negative tonality of news items, and a focus on strategy. Politicians were only marginally dealing with social problems and were primarily focused on defying political opponents. In addition, half of the news items focused on party leaders, showing continuity in the communication strategy of key parties, which resort to high levels of personalization.

The content analysis of the news coverage of Croatian political parties during the electoral campaign in 2015 points to the significant presence of populist political rhetoric. One-sixth of the news items showed politicians addressing voters through the term "the people", and in one-fifth the "us–them" distinction was used, while one-tenth were aimed at criticisms of various "elites". MOST, MB365, and HSS led in criticisms of the political elite. Elements of populist rhetoric were present in 40% of news items and many were "over-simplified messages" and used "scapegoating" rhetoric. HSS and MB365 had overall more news items with these features than the other political parties.

Mudde (2004) points out that it is wrong to dismiss populism as a merely pathological phenomenon, as it is simultaneously part of mainstream politics, and it can thus be said that the "spirit of the times" in modern society is populist. The rise and spread of populism in the past few decades has indisputably assisted in a transformation in dominant media forms, and especially in their commercialization. Academic research on this subject in Croatia is in its beginning stages (Mustapić and Hrstić 2017). The first empirical works have just started to be published (Milardović 2004; Šalaj 2012a, b, 2013; Derado 2014). Grbeša and Šalaj (2014) and Matić (2014) have confirmed the use of populist rhetoric by several mainstream politicians, including Milan Bandić, while Mustapić and Hrstić (2016) found the same in Ivan Vilibor Sinčić's communication during the 2014 election campaign. This research confirms the persistence of populism in the communication of MB365, and its appearance in that of MOST and partially of HSS. Regarding the impact of the use of populism in elections on the existing political dynamics and on potential changes in the parties' leadership, only further research can reveal what the trends in Croatia will be in the future.

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The 2015 Parliamentary Election in Poland: A Political *Déjà vu*

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Introduction

In 2015, Polish political actors and society faced the challenge of "double elections" due to the simultaneous end of the president's and parliament's terms of office. While the presidential election was set for May 19, 2015 (first round) and May 24, 2015 (second round), the parliamentary election was set for October 25, 2015. It was the second instance of double elections since the transformation of the political system in 1989. The first one occurred in 2005, when the parliamentary election was set for September 25, 2005, and the presidential election for October 9, 2005 (first round) and October 23, 2005 (second round).

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The accumulation of two elections in one year was not the only similarity between the 2005 and 2015 elections in Poland. We would argue that the 2005 elections provided many contextual factors determining the course of the campaigns before the 2015 elections. In fact, those journalists and citizens who still remembered the 2005 "double elections" could have had a sense of *déjà vu*, since neither the major political rivals nor their strategies had changed much. Hence, in order to understand political parties' performance and the media coverage of the 2015 parliamentary election, we need to go back in time and provide a broader political context from the preceding decade, as well as the characteristics of the Polish media.

CONTEXT OF THE 2015 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

In 2015, the competition between Platforma Obywatelska (PO, *Civic Platform*) and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, *Law and Justice*) dominated the campaigns during both the presidential and parliamentary elections. The fierce rivalry between these two political parties has been pivotal for all elections since 2005. At that time, they were targeting similar groups of voters and their leaders: Donald Tusk (the leader of PO) and Lech Kaczyński (the "Honorary Chairman" of PiS) were running for the presidency. The 2005 campaigns led to the so-called post-Solidarity divide that substituted the previously dominant "post-communist divide" between the former communist party Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD, *Democratic Left Alliance*) and the right-wing, post-Solidarity political parties (Grabowska 2004).

The "double elections" in 2005 resulted in a "double victory" for PiS and its presidential candidate Lech Kaczyński. At the same time, the results marked the fate of the post-communist SLD, one of the biggest and most influential parties after 1989. The winning formula of PiS was based on the idea of "The Fourth Republic," which was presented in opposition to "The Third Republic": a term coined in 1989 and introduced by the Polish Constitution in 1997 to name the re-established democratic regime in Poland. PiS consistently envisioned "The Third Republic" as being corrupt and allegedly ruled by a "network" of former communists and their collaborators. However, such a revolutionary agenda, based on an extremely critical definition of reality, coupled with an antagonistic style of politics, led to the PiS government being rejected in the early parliamentary election in 2007 (Lipiński 2016).

PO was able to secure a majority of the votes in the 2007 and 2011 parliamentary elections and establish a government in coalition with the Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL, *Polish People's Party*). During both election campaigns PO presented itself as a moderate, civilized, and competent party that strongly opposed the idea of establishing "the Fourth Republic." One of the strategies employed by PO was the use of the rhetoric of fear against PiS, portraying it as a revolutionary, irresponsible, backward, and nationalistic party. During the 2011 election, after the Tu-154 plane crashed in Smoleńsk on April 10, 2010 (where President Lech Kaczyński, his wife, and 94 other people were killed), the political discourse of PiS became even more antagonistic, and PO started portraying PiS as a radical populist right-wing political party.

In 2015, again, the competition between PO and PiS dominated the campaigns during both the presidential and parliamentary elections. This time, however, there was an unexpected result in the presidential election, namely, the victory of the PiS candidate, which provided an important political context for the parliamentary election. The PO candidate—Bronisław Komorowski, who held the office of president at that time, was defeated by Andrzej Duda—a PiS candidate.

Undoubtedly, the results of the presidential election surprised the political leaders of PO, because Komorowski's popularity rates were at the level of 63 percent at the beginning of 2015 (Cybulska 2015), while Duda had a rating of around 15 percent in the opinion polls at that time. Hence, the media and experts speculated whether Komorowski would be able to win the election in the first round. Assuming that optimistic scenario, PO decided to limit the amount of money for the presidential campaign, in order to save it for the parliamentary election campaign (Stankiewicz 2015). Komorowski's defeat negatively affected the morale of PO and substantially contributed to the mobilizing and legitimizing efforts of PiS during the parliamentary election campaign. Still, the results showed that the Polish electorate was polarized at that time: while Duda gained 51.55 percent of the votes in the second round, Komorowski gained 48.45 percent of the votes.

Once the parliamentary campaign was launched, right after the presidential election, both political parties, PO and PiS, continued their fierce competition. While the former decided to mobilize voters by frightening them with the alleged radicalism of PiS (Kopacz 2015), the latter provided an extremely negative diagnosis of the reality: Poland was portrayed as a country "in ruins" with huge economic inequalities, governed by an

oligarchy dependent on Russia and Germany (Kaczyński 2015; Szczerski 2015). At the same time, both political parties adopted a strategy of tailoring the party's image to the expectations of more centrist voters. In order to achieve that goal PiS moved second rank politicians, such Beata Szydło (assigned as prime minister-to-be) into the foreground and withdrew much more controversial and divisive figures like Jarosław Kaczyński (the leader of the party) or Antoni Macierewicz. Not surprisingly, PO repeatedly referred to that strategy as clear evidence of the hidden intentions and duplicity of their rivals. At the same time, PO invited politicians from other political parties, such as Ludwik Dorn (PiS) or Grzegorz Napieralski (SLD) to join the party (Grochal 2015).

The visible polarization of the election scene in 2015 did not leave much space for other political actors. PSL, the junior governmental coalition partner of PO, was balancing on the electoral threshold of 5 percent in the public opinion surveys (Pieńkowski 2015). It attempted to overcome the division and suggested the idea of "a grand coalition" between PSL, PO, and PiS (W Polityce 2015a). The concept, however, was ignored by the politicians of PiS and PO, and ridiculed by the media.

Nevertheless, several new political actors entered the stage. One of them was Nowoczesna (*Modern*)—a political organization launched in May 2015 by an economist, Ryszard Petru. Trying to exploit the liberal center abandoned by PO leaning to the left, it positioned itself as the only defender of liberal values. Nowoczesna portrayed PO as a party without a positive agenda, interested merely in pure power, colonizing the economy, and limiting the freedom of entrepreneurs (Petru 2015). The political party targeted younger, well-educated, and urban voters. However, it was stigmatized by its political competitors as a grouping representing mostly the interests of the banking system (Szacki 2015).

Another important newcomer was Kukiz'15, a political party started by Paweł Kukiz, a rock star, who was able to secure third position in the first round of the presidential election in 2015 with 20.7 percent of the votes. He introduced himself as a right-wing, anti-systemic candidate who contested the allegedly "partocratic" and "oligarchic" features of the Polish political system and called for a change of the current list-based proportional electoral system for UK-style single-mandate constituencies and wider use of referenda as an expression of the citizens' will (Majewski 2015).

The results of the parliamentary election held on October 25, 2015, confirmed the institutional and discursive domination of right-wing

parties on the Polish political scene. PiS emerged as the winner of the election. It gained 37.5 percent of the votes, which translated into 235 seats in the 460-member Polish parliament. For the first time since the political transformation in Poland in 1989, the victor gained an outright parliamentary majority and established a one-party government. PO suffered a defeat: it gained 24.09 percent of the votes (in comparison to 39.18 percent in 2011). Markowski (2016) argues that PO lost some of its voters to PiS and some to Nowoczesna, which attracted 7.6 percent of the electorate. Kukiz'15 gained as many as 8.81 percent of the votes (42 seats), while a former governmental coalition partner—PSL only 5.1 percent.

Political System and the Media in Poland

The extraordinary accumulation of two elections in 2005 and in 2015 provided an opportunity to examine how political actors prioritize elections when they are forced to conduct two campaigns almost simultaneously. For political actors a parliamentary election seems not be only more challenging but also of a higher significance than the presidential one (Dziemidok 1998; Stępińska 2004, 2007). This is a consequence of the political system of Poland. Being a multiparty democracy with a strong role of the bi-cameral parliament, Poland represents the middle ground between a parliamentary and semi-presidential regime. The 1997 Polish Constitution grants a number of important prerogatives to the president, supplemented by a strong electoral mandate gained in a direct election (Glajcar 2013; Milliard 2010). However, it is the government that has real executive power.

Until 2015 political parties had played a predominant role in the Polish public sphere (Wiatr et al. 2003), while other social or political movements were quite marginal political actors. Political parties not only provide financial and logistical support for their candidates, but also play a crucial role in the process of candidate selection and nomination in every single type of election (Stępińska 2004, 2007, 2010). The 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections showed, however, that a political movement like Kukiz'15 may achieve electoral success as well.

In order to understand the media coverage of elections, one should also consider the relations between the media and politics in Poland and the Polish journalistic culture. In the 1990s, the media in Poland experienced a transformation from a state-owned organization to a dualistic model, with private and public electronic media, accompanied by a free market in

print media. Still, some features of the media remained the same, including the politicization of public electronic media. The process of politicization is reflected in the influence on the content of public TV and radio, which might be achieved through the procedures of media personnel appointment (Dobek-Ostrowska and Głowacki 2008: 13–14). Furthermore, politically oriented daily newspapers and weekly or monthly magazines make up a significant segment of the Polish media market. Hence, the Polish media system may be classified as one with a high level of political parallelism and external pluralism (Dobek-Ostrowska and Głowacki 2008).

Polish journalists are deeply involved in politics as commentators and publicists, presenting their own opinions on political events and politicians' statements. The presence of an interpretative attitude (Culbertson 1983; Weaver and Wilhoit 1996), or the interventionist model of journalism (Hanitzsch 2007; Mellado 2015), among Polish journalists is supported by studies on role perception (Stępińska and Ossowski 2012; Dobek-Ostrowska et al. 2013) and role performance (Stępińska et al. 2016; Jurga-Wosik et al. 2017). While some journalists investigate and interpret politicians' activities, others share particular worldviews and orientations with political actors (Bajka 2000: 58–59) that are then presented in both interpretative and informative journalistic genres (Jurga-Wosik et al. 2017).

The Polish media system is television-centric. According to the Eurobarometer Report (2015), 78 percent of Polish people watch television every day, and an additional 17 percent two or three times a week, while only 12 percent of Poles read newspapers every day. Furthermore, television is still the most important source of information about politics in general, and elections in particular. As many as 79 percent of potential voters find out about political parties and candidates from TV broadcasts, while 66 percent obtain information from political adverts broadcast on television or radio stations. Almost half of the population (49 percent) receives information about elections from the radio and one-third of citizens (32 percent) receive information about political events such as elections from online media (CBOS 2015). Online media seem to be an important source of political information mostly for the youngest voters: 40 percent of the youngest eligible voters (between 18 and 24 years old) said that they found out about candidates from social media (Nowina Konopka 2015).

DATA ANALYSIS

Sample

The study was conducted on a sample of the content of several media outlets following Salgado et al. (2015) framework. First, we selected three TV newscasts with the highest ratings in 2015 broadcast on TV stations based on a type of ownership: public (TVP1) and private (TVN and Polsat):

1. "Wiadomości" is the most popular news program on a public broadcaster (TVP1) with an average number of viewers of 3.83 million and 24.7 percent of market share in 2015 (KRRiT 2015; Wirtualne Media 2015a). The main evening edition is broadcast at 7:30 p.m. and lasts 30 minutes, including sports news and weather forecasts.
2. "Fakty" is the most popular news program among all the private broadcasters. It is broadcast by the private TVN station, owned by Scripps Networks Interactive (majority interest of 52.7 percent) with an average number of 3.37 million viewers in 2015 (KRRiT 2015; Wirtualne Media 2015a). The main evening edition is broadcast at 7:00 p.m. It lasts 30 minutes, including sports news and weather forecasts.
3. "Wydarzenia" is a newscast broadcast on the private TV channel Polsat, owned by the Polish businessman Zygmunt Solorz-Żak. It was watched by 2.62 million viewers on average in 2015 (KRRiT 2015; Wirtualne Media 2015a). Its main evening edition is broadcast at 6:50 p.m. It lasts 30 minutes, including sports news and weather forecasts.

Then, we selected three print daily newspapers. The choice of the media organizations was based on: (a) a type of media organization (quality newspapers and tabloids), (b) average sales, and (c) political orientation (center-left and center-right). We collected and analyzed news items from the following newspapers:

4. "*Gazeta Wyborcza*" is a nationwide, sociopolitical, moderate liberal news daily, owned by the Polish media company—Agora S.A. "*Gazeta Wyborcza*" is among the leading daily newspapers in Poland. According to the 2015 data, average sales reached 163,255 issues (Wirtualne Media 2015b).

5. "*Rzeczpospolita*" is a nationwide news daily of a sociopolitical, economic and legal profile. It defines itself as "the only conservative-liberal newspaper in Poland." The daily has enjoyed a strong market position for many years. It is still among the leading daily newspapers in Poland, although it has recently noted a sales drop. Average sales in 2015 exceeded 56,500 issues (Wirtualne Media 2015b).

6. "*Fakt*" is a nationwide daily tabloid, printed since 2003 by Ringier Axel Springer Polska, a part of the Ringier Axel Springer Media AG concern. "*Fakt*" is the leading daily newspaper in Poland. Average sales reached 319,944 issues in 2015 (Wirtualne Media 2015b).

Finally, we collected election news from three online media outlets, which were selected based on the average numbers of their users:

7. "Onet.pl" was launched in 1996. Now it is majority owned (75 percent) by Ringier Axel Springer Polska, the company that also owns the tabloid "Fakt." The number of readers in November 2015 was 9768.801 and the average number of views 467,069.784. The share of the platform amounted to 40.54 percent and the average time spent on this platform was 1 hour 12 minutes (Gemius 2015).

8. "Wirtualna Polska" (wp.pl) was the first Polish online platform, launched in 1995. First it was owned by Telekomunikacja Polska S.A., then by France Telecom, and now it is owned by the o2 Group and a private equity fund, Innova Capital. The number of individual readers in November 2015 was 7522.068 and the number of views as high as 366,782.564. The share of the platform amounted to 36.38 percent of the market and the average time spent on this platform was 59 minutes (Gemius 2015).

9. "Gazeta.pl" is owned by Agora S.A.—a Polish media company that also owns the print newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" and its online version: wyborcza.pl. The number of individual readers of Gazeta.pl in November 2015 was 6546.182, while the number of views was 115,508.568. The share of the platform amounted to 9.12 percent and the average time spent on this platform was 1 hour 28 minutes (Gemius 2015).

All election news found in the aforementioned news media organizations between October 11 and 23, 2015, were collected and analyzed. The total number of items is 836. Not surprisingly, there are significant

differences in the number of items devoted to the topic of the parliamentary election in different types of the media due to their technical features. However, there are also differences among media outlets of the same type.

For example, Onet.pl published 235 items—that is as many as the two other online news media together. Among the TV newscasts in the study it was "Fakty" (TVN) that broadcast the highest number of news items (48), while "Wiadomości" (TVP1) and "Wydarzenia" (Polsat) broadcast 35 and 38 items, respectively. Among print daily newspapers it was the quality daily newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" that published the highest number of items (99) devoted to the parliamentary elections in two weeks prior to the Election Day. Interestingly, the daily tabloid "Fakt" published the exact same number of items as the other quality newspaper "Rzeczpospolita." This supports the earlier observations that "Fakt" is highly interested in political topics (Piontek and Hordecki 2010, 2011).

Media Coverage of the Election

As mentioned above, Polish journalists do not make a strict distinction between informative and interpretative journalistic genres. As Table 7.1 shows, even the news stories included some indicators of interpretive journalism (for further information on the variables of interpretive journalism see Salgado and Strömbäck 2012). This trend is visible across all types of the media: the indicators of interpretative journalism were found in almost 20 percent of the news items published by the online media outlet "Gazeta.pl," in around 16 percent of the news stories published by the tabloid print newspaper "Fakt," and around 10 percent in the quality newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" and broadcast by the public TV station—"Wiadomości" (TVP1).

Two media organizations: "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Gazeta.pl," owned by the same media company (Agora S.A.), published the highest amount of items providing opinions (43.3 and 74 percent, respectively) and in both these media organizations journalists prevailed as the sources of these opinions (33.3 percent in "Gazeta Wyborcza" and 10.4 percent in "Gazeta.pl"). A smaller percentage of items providing opinions was found in another quality newspaper "Rzeczpospolita" (31.1 percent), while the percentage of such items was significantly lower (4.1 percent) in the tabloid "Fakt." Against the expectations based on the newspaper's focus on law and economics, "Rzeczpospolita" provided politicians' and journalists' opinions more frequently than experts' opinions. It may therefore be concluded that the findings support earlier observations that Polish

Table 7.1 Frequency of interpretative journalism (percentages)

	Presence of interpretative journalism (in general)		(1) Explanations/ interpretations		(2) Speculations		(3) Overt commentary	
	In all items	In news stories	In all items	In news stories	In all items	In news stories	In all items	In news stories
Television								
Wiadomości	11.4	9.1	0	0	2.9	0	2.9	3.0
Fakty	6.3	6.3	0	0	0	0	4.2	4.2
Wydarzenia	2.6	2.6	0	0	0	0	2.6	2.6
Newspapers								
Gazeta Wyborcza	46.5	10.6	10.1	0	17.2	0	35.4	4.3
Rzeczpospolita	14.9	0	5.4	0	2.7	0	16.2	0
Fakt	14.9	16.2	2.7	2.9	1.4	1.5	10.8	11.8
Online news media								
Wp.pl	14.5	4.9	0	0	10	2.4	13.6	3.7
Gazeta.pl	26.0	19.8	4.1	2.3	7.3	4.7	18.7	12.8
Onet.pl	0.4	0	0	0	0.4	0	0.4	0
TOTAL	15.0	7.3	2.5	0.7	5.0	1.2	11.7	4.6

journalists perceive their role not as detached observers and reporters only, but also as commentators (Table 7.2).

While covering the elections, all the electronic media outlets under the study focused almost exclusively on party politics and the domestic campaign, while other issues such as economics, education, justice, judiciary and crime, culture, or labor were significantly less frequently covered. The findings show no significant differences between public and commercial TV stations: three quarters of their news items were devoted to rivalry between the political parties. A similar tendency can be observed across all the online media.

Print newspapers covered a broader scope of the topics raised during the election campaign in 2015. Still, in "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Fakt" most items were devoted to party politics and the domestic campaign (60.6 and 71.6 percent, respectively). "Rzeczpospolita" covered that topic in 41.9 percent of the items, while almost 18 percent of the items were devoted to macro-economics and taxes. The attention paid to that topic by "Rzeczpospolita" fits its profile: a quality newspaper with a high interest in law and economics. At the same time, "Gazeta Wyborcza"

Table 7.2   Sources of opinion

Media outlet	Yes (%)	Journalist	Expert	Politician
Television				
Wiadomości (N = 35)	5.7	5.7	1 (2.9%)	1 (2.9%)
Fakty (N = 48)	0	0	0	0
Wydarzenia (N = 38)	0	0	0	0
Newspapers				
Gazeta Wyborcza (N = 99)	43.4	33 (33.3%)	9 (9.1%)	1 (1.0%)
Rzeczpospolita (N = 74)	31.1	10 (13.5%)	4 (5.4%)	9 (12.2%)
Fakt (N = 74)	4.1	1 (1.4%)	2 (2.7%)	0
Online news media				
Wp.pl (N = 110)	20	8 (7.3%)	10 (9.1%)	4 (3.6%)
Gazeta.pl (N = 123)	74	13 (10.4%)	2 (1.6%)	17 (13.6%)
Onet.pl (N = 235)	16.6	1 (0.4%)	12 (5.1%)	26 (11.1%)
TOTAL	19.6	67 (8%)	40 (4.8%)	57 (6.8%)

devoted a lot of attention to topics closely related to the elections, namely opinion polls (11.1 percent of the items) and the functioning of democracy and quality of governance (5.1 percent of the items). The tabloid "Fakt" paid more attention than any other newspaper to social affairs (6.8 percent of the items).

Not surprisingly, then, it was the strategic game frame, not the issue frame, that was the dominant frame of politics employed by most of the media outlets in the study (for further information on the strategic game frame see Aalberg et al. 2012). In particular, most of the news stories framed politics as a game and personality contest. The only exceptions were the two quality newspapers: "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Rzeczpospolita" and one online news media outlet: "Onet.pl."

Among the items framing politics as a game, stories focusing on opinion polls were the most frequently published. As findings collected in Table 7.3 show, two TV newscasts, "Wiadomości" (TVP1) and "Fakty" (TVN), broadcast the highest percentage of news stories including references to generic "polls" or "the opinion." Furthermore, most of the media outlets focused on news stories that referred to politicians' or parties' strategies or tactics for winning the elections, except "Gazeta.pl" that published more items on the actual performance of political actors than on their strategies and tactics.

At the same time, a significant amount of news items in each news media outlet was predominantly conflict-centered. The highest percentage of such items was broadcast by the newscast "Wydarzenia" (Polsat): as

Table 7.3 Types of news frames (percentages)

	Issue frame	Strategic game frame	Game frame		Strategy frame	
			Public opinion	Winning vs. losing	Strategy & tactics	Performance & conduct
Television						
Wiadomości	34.3	65.7	54.3	8.6	65.7	31.4
Fakty	20.8	79.2	54.2	8.3	54.2	35.4
Wydarzenia	23.7	76.3	23.7	7.9	68.4	13.2
Newspapers						
Gazeta Wyborcza	61.6	38.4	21.2	1.0	24.2	10.1
Rzeczpospolita	52.7	47.3	17.6	0	25.7	25.7
Fakt	28.4	71.6	13.5	8.1	45.9	9.5
Online news media						
Wp.pl	24.5	75.5	34.5	25.5	28.2	9.1
Gazeta.pl	26.0	74.0	25.2	13.1	21.3	28.7
Onet.pl	54.9	45.1	15.3	0.4	30.2	23.8
TOTAL	40.7	59.3	24.3	7.4	33.5	20.4

many as 50 percent of the items on this TV station covered conflicts. In the other media outlets the number of such items was lower, but still substantial: 40 percent in "Wiadomości," 35 percent in "Gazeta.pl," 33 percent in "Fakty," 17 percent in "Onet.pl," and around 15 percent in "Gazeta Wyborcza," "Fakt," and "Wp.pl." The only exception was "Rzeczpospolita," where only 2.7 percent of the items were conflict-centered. Consensus-centered items were very rare and they were published only in "Rzeczpospolita" (1.4 percent), "Gazeta.pl" (1.6 percent), and "Onet.pl" (0.9 percent).

The findings regarding the tonality of news (see Table 7.4) revealed a highly critical approach of Polish journalists toward politicians and their performance during the election campaign. Around one-third of all the items included an indication of negative tonality. The most negative picture of politics during the election campaign was drawn by the newscasts broadcast on two private TV stations: "Fakty" (TVN) and "Wydarzenia" (Polsat), and by the quality newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza." The most positive image of politicians and the elections was found in the online news media: "Gazeta.pl" and "Onet.pl."

While covering the parliamentary election campaign, the Polish news media focused mostly on the leaders of political parties (see Table 7.5).

Table 7.4 Predominant tonality of the news items (percentages)

	Predominantly negative	*Balanced, ambivalent, neutral*	*Predominantly positive*
Television			
Wiadomości	37.1	62.9	0
Fakty	41.7	58.3	0
Wydarzenia	39.5	57.9	2.6
Newspapers			
Gazeta Wyborcza	39.4	60.6	0
Rzeczpospolita	18.9	71.6	9.5
Fakt	32.4	67.6	0
Online news media			
Wp.pl	31.8	68.2	0
Gazeta.pl	28.5	52.8	18.7
Onet.pl	26.0	54.9	19.1
TOTAL	30.6	60.3	9.1

Table 7.5 Personalization in the election campaign news coverage (percentages)

	Personalization: party leader	*Depiction of leader*	*Quotation of party leader*	*Leader as a main source of information*
Television				
Wiadomości	57.1	91.4	85.7	71.4
Fakty	72.9	89.6	79.2	64.6
Wydarzenia	68.4	94.7	86.8	65.8
Newspapers				
Gazeta Wyborcza	35.4	5.1	27.3	17.2
Rzeczpospolita	20.3	14.9	17.6	12.2
Fakt	55.4	39.2	47.3	43.2
Online news media				
Wp.pl	65.5	71.8	44.5	40.0
Gazeta.pl	68.3	81.3	51.2	34.1
Onet.pl	44.7	54.0	49.4	36.6
TOTAL	51.8	55.3	48.3	37.2

First of all, in most of the media outlets the party leaders were the main actors in most of the items: their statements were often quoted and on TV they were also depicted in visuals. The only exceptions were the two quality newspapers: "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Rzeczpospolita" and one online

news media outlet "Onet.pl." Both "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Rzeczpospolita" provided more opportunities to other politicians (party members), to present either information or opinions. Both newspapers used other sources of information such as other media, journalists, experts, or opinion poll data more frequently than the other media outlets.

In "Wiadomości" (TVP1), "Wydarzenia" (Polsat), and "Rzeczpospolita," a majority of the items presented more than just one political actor (70.6, 81.1, and 69.5 percent, respectively). Other media outlets, however, provided a less balanced picture of the Polish political scene. In "Wp.pl" and "Gazeta.pl" around half of the items included more than one actor (51.5 and 46.3 percent, respectively), while in the other media organizations the number of such items was around 40 percent, or less.

The findings of the media content analysis clearly mirrored the situation on the political scene before the parliamentary election and the results of the opinion polls. While covering just one political actor, the media focused mostly on PiS or PO and their leaders (Jarosław Kaczyński or Ewa Kopacz, respectively), as well as on Beata Szydło, the prime minister-to-be in the case of PiS' victory. Although PiS accused the public television (TVP) of favoring PO in terms of the amount of coverage, in fact "Wiadomości" (TVP1) paid more attention to PiS than to PO. Namely, among the items devoted to just one political party, 5.9 percent of the items were covering PiS, while 2.9 percent were covering PO. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the content of the newscasts of the private station TVN.

Two news media outlets owned by Agora S.A.: "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Gazeta.pl" also paid more attention to PiS than to PO. In "Gazeta Wyborcza" 18.9 percent of the items were devoted exclusively to PiS, 16.7 percent to Jarosław Kaczyński, and 6.7 percent to Beata Szydło, while PO was covered exclusively in only 3.3 percent of the items. In "Gazeta.pl" the number of items dedicated to Jarosław Kaczyński (PiS) was double (11.1 percent) in comparison to the items devoted to Ewa Kopacz (prime minister at that time; PO). The coverage of PiS was, however, mostly negative, due to the political orientation of these two media outlets (opposition to PiS). Similar proportions could be found in another online media outlet: "Wp.pl" (Kaczyński: 14.1 percent, Kopacz: 6.1 percent).

In contrast, in "Rzeczpospolita" more attention was paid to Kopacz (9.2 percent) than to Szydło (6.2 percent) or Kaczyński (3.1 percent). The media coverage in "Onet.pl" was more balanced: 5.7 percent of the

items were devoted to PO, 6.7 percent to PiS, 10.8 percent to Kopacz, 9.8 percent to Szydło, and 8.2 percent to Kaczyński.

At the same time, the media did not focus that much on covering other political actors. Among those who managed to attract some media attention were Paweł Kukiz (Kukiz'15) and Ryszard Petru (Nowoczesna). While the former was present in 7.7 percent of the items published in "Rzeczpospolita" and 5.1 percent in "Wp.pl," the latter was covered in 7.1 percent of the items published in "Wp.pl" and 5.9 percent of the items in "Gazeta.pl."

Despite the high frequency of political party leaders' presence in the news media, most of the news items (98 percent in the entire sample) did not address any characteristics of these politicians. On two newscasts: "Wiadomości" (TVP1) and "Fakty" (TVN), as well as in "Gazeta Wyborcza," none of the news items included any material about the candidates. On "Wydarzenia" (Polsat) and in "Rzeczpospolita" a few items included references to the political candidates' private life (2.6 and 1.4 percent, respectively). The tabloid "Fakt" and the online news media only occasionally focused on the personal features of politicians. The rare cases of ascribing features to political leaders covered political actors, such as Paweł Kukiz (ideological stance and private life), Ewa Kopacz (private life), Adrian Zandberg (ideological stance and private life), Janusz Korwin-Mikke (competence), and Jarosław Kaczyński (leadership).

Populism in the Media Coverage of the 2015 Election

Finally, we traced the presence of populist features in news stories, such as (1) addressing voters with the word "the people"; (2) using the division into "us" and "them"; (3) criticizing the "elite" and using other equivalent words such as "caste," "privileged," "establishment"; (4) referring to the idea of an idealized nation; (5) identifying oneself as being outside the system or against the system; and (6) referring to immigrants or other minorities as something inherently bad for the country (out-groups). Table 7.6 shows the frequency of each of these features in the news items in the study.

Our findings show that television newscasts and online news media covered more populism than print newspapers. Furthermore, against the assumptions that the tabloid press would be more focused on populist political communication than quality newspapers (Mazzoleni 2008), the differences between these two types of press outlets were rather small.

Table 7.6   Presence of populism in the news stories (percentages)

	People	Us and them	Elite	Idealized nation	b	Immigrants— Out-groups
Television						
Wiadomości	0	22.9	0	0	5.7	14.3
Fakty	6.3	18.8	8.3	0	0	22.9
Wydarzenia	5.3	26.3	5.3	0	5.3	13.2
Newspapers						
Gazeta Wyborcza	2.0	5.1	0	0	1.0	4.0
Rzeczpospolita	0	4.1	0	0	1.4	8.1
Fakt	0	8.1	0	0	1.4	2.7
Online news media						
Wp.pl	9.8	13.6	3.6	0	2.7	10.9
Gazeta.pl	6.4	16.3	1.6	0	0	7.3
Onet.pl	0.4	3.0	1.3	0	2.6	13.2
TOTAL	3.2	9.9	1.8	0	1.9	10.2

Making reference to immigrants or other minorities was the most frequently covered populist strategy in a total sample. Interestingly, most attention to these types of populist statements was paid by all three of the TV newscasts and all online media, while print newspapers seemed to be more resistant toward reporting anti-immigrant sentiments. The findings revealed that PiS politicians made references to immigrants or other minorities as out-groups that are inherently bad for the country most frequently (Kaczyński: 15 times, Szydło: 5 times). They were followed by another right-wing populist political actor Paweł Kukiz (4 times). In fact, the exclusion of "the others," alongside the critique of the elites, was the main strategy employed by Kukiz. Hence, the above-mentioned number does not fully reflect his negative opinion on immigrants expressed in public and on Facebook (Kukiz 2015; W polityce 2015b).

The second most frequently covered populist feature was the use of the division between "us" versus "them." It was present in around 20 percent of news items on all three of the TV newscasts, and 13–16 percent of the items in two online news media outlets ("Wp.pl" and "Gazeta.pl"). At the same time, in the print newspapers less than 10 percent of the items included that feature of populism.

The prime minister at that time, Ewa Kopacz, and other PO politicians used the "us" versus "them" division as often as PiS politicians did (PO: 17 times; PiS: 18 times). Interestingly, the right-wing populist political

actor Paweł Kukiz used the "us" versus "them" division very rarely in statements covered by the media (only two times). Still, he made a few critical references to the "elite" or "system." The same strategy was used by Kaczyński (PiS). Furthermore, all politicians of the opposition parties shifted the blame to the current government.

The reference to the people was less frequently covered by the news media before the 2015 parliamentary election. However, once analyzed in detail (by measuring the presence of particular messages), approaching the people seemed to be covered mostly by online media. For example, expressing closeness to the people was covered 21 times (8.9 percent of the news items), while knowing the needs of the people 19 times (8.1 percent of the news items) in the online news media outlet "Onet.pl."

Politicians representing PiS (Kaczyński and Szydło) were covered as political actors using the strategy of addressing voters as "the people." Furthermore, Kaczyński claimed having knowledge about the needs of the people and closeness to the people, while Szydło portrayed herself in the statements covered by the media as a politician belonging to the people. At the same time, politicians of PO hardly ever addressed voters explicitly as "the people" (they preferred terms: "voters" and "citizens"). Kopacz, however, emphasized belonging to the people, while other PO politicians expressed their closeness to the people and knowledge of the needs of the people. Kukiz, on the other hand, made references to "the people" rarely in the media coverage.

Conclusions

The study of the media coverage of the 2015 parliamentary election campaign in Poland has revealed that the media content mirrored the situation on the political scene dominated by the fierce competition between two political parties: PO and PiS and their respective leaders. The rivalry between these political actors determined not only the topics of the news but also the frame media used to cover the election.

Namely, journalists focused almost exclusively on the inter-party relations and the election strategies used by PO and PiS to win the election. In addition, one of the most frequently covered populist strategies was the use of the "us" versus "them" division. Such an approach eventually led to a predominantly conflict-centered image of politics and a negative tonality of its coverage across the media.

The findings of the study supported earlier observations on the journalistic culture in Poland. The high amount of interpretations, commentaries, speculations, and opinions provided by journalists themselves showed that Polish journalists indeed have a tendency to engage in public debate. This tendency was the most visible among the journalist working for the quality press.

The design of the sample provided an opportunity to compare the content of the different types of the news media outlets. The findings lead to a conclusion that traditional electronic media (television) and online news media share some of the characteristics, including the dominant frame (strategic game frame), the coverage of populism (high level of coverage of the "us" vs. "them" division and exclusion populism), and the personalization of the election campaign. The quality press differs from the other types of news media in the aforementioned matters, except for interpretative journalism. The quality newspapers not only covered a broader range of topics but also provided more opportunities to political actors other than just the leaders to present their points of view. Finally, journalists in the quality press more often than journalists from other types of media used the issue frame while covering the election and were less prone to cover populism.

On the other hand, a comparison of the content analysis of the media organizations owned by the same company (Agora S.A.): "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Gazeta.pl" revealed that despite the type (print press and online news outlet) they both share a journalistic culture (interpretative journalism).

Finally, the examination of the media coverage of populist political communication showed that populist strategies were used not only by anti-system actors such as Kukiz, but also by the leaders of two mainstream parties: PO and PiS. In particular, both political actors used the references to the people and their needs, as well as the distinction between "us" and "them." In fact, both these strategies were used by most of the political actors during the campaign. Thus, we would argue that the dichotomous concept of society was employed here as an element of the strategic game frame used by politicians and the media during the election campaign rather than as an indicator of the populist discourse.

At the same time, the findings of the content analysis revealed a significant presence of exclusion populism (against immigrants) in the news items across all types of media. The refugee crisis that broke out during the electoral campaign in 2015 and the negative attitude toward immi-

grants among Polish society (CBOS 2015) provided a highly fertile ground for the right-wing political actors, who then employed rhetoric strategies such as victim perpetrator reversal, us-them dichotomy, equating refugees with terrorists, and catastrophic scenarios.

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CHAPTER 8

Not All about Trends: Persistent Singularities in Election News Coverage

Susana Salgado

INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter provides an overview of the main features of election news coverage in these six European countries. It intends to address questions such as how is the media coverage of elections done in different countries today? Is there a heavy coverage of elections everywhere? When and why do issues change and how are they covered by the news media? In what ways is news election coverage similar and different in these countries? Are there discernible patterns of election news coverage in these six countries?

This research project was aimed at investigating how the news coverage of national elections looks like in different European countries—in a specific moment in time, when the background international context is similar, much like a snapshot in time—and at identifying the main issues and actors covered by the different types of news media outlets considered in the content analysis (television, newspapers, and papers published only online). This approach allows a characterization and an informed discussion of what election news coverage is in these countries, which could lead

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to the identification of potential patterns of news coverage. For example, are there discernible trends of election coverage regarding the prevalence of negativity, interpretive journalism, or populist features of political discourse in the news? Finally, this concluding chapter also addresses the implications of the news coverage of elections, as they are made nowadays, on the results of the elections.

All these different elements gain particular relevance when we bear in mind that elections are very important moments in the political life of any country, and in these cases this importance was reflected, for example, in the amount of news coverage devoted to the election campaign. Even though it was slightly greater in some of the countries in the sample (Greece, Portugal, and Spain), which is likely explained by the news outlets' internal editorial criteria, the amount of journalistic attention and of news coverage dedicated to these elections during the official campaign period was considerable in the six countries.

POLITICAL ACTORS AND PERSONALIZATION OF POLITICS IN ELECTION NEWS COVERAGE

The first significant conclusions are related to personalization and to the political actors that were perceived as the most newsworthy by journalists in Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, and Spain. There are important differences regarding the way similar types of news media in these six countries cover what they consider to be the most newsworthy and the most important political actors in the election.

The data analysis shows that, in general, journalists pay more attention to the campaign initiatives and messages of the main parties and their leaders (i.e. the most voted for party in the last election and the parties with more voting intentions in election polls), which therefore receive more news coverage during (at least) the official period of electoral campaign. This was confirmed in all countries included in the sample. However, there are some cases in which the novelty of some parties and candidates is particularly appealing to journalists as it happened in Spain in this election. Although the incumbent Popular Party (PP) and its leader, Mariano Rajoy, had the most media exposure, a considerable degree of attention was also given to the two new parties, Ciudadanos and Podemos and to their leaders, Albert Rivera and Pablo Iglesias, almost the same media coverage that the second largest political party, the Socialist PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Partido Socialista Obrero Español) and its leader Pedro Sánchez have received. The uncertainty about the result that these two

new parties would be able to achieve in their first parliamentary election, especially after the impressive result of Podemos in the 2014 European Parliamentary election, and speculations about potential future post-election government coalitions motivated a great deal of journalistic coverage (for further details, please see Luengo and Fernández-García in this book).

The journalists' reaction to the uncertainty of the election results and of the political situation that would follow can also be explained by Galtung and Ruge's (1965) news values theory. In short, news values are characteristics of events that determine whether these events become news and trigger audience reactions (Gehrau 2017). News values therefore influence the relative attention and prominence that specific issues, events, and people receive from the news media. Unexpectedness, conflict, and dramatization are among those firstly identified by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and provide background explanation to further understand the reasons why both Podemos and Pablo Iglesias, and Ciudadanos and Albert Rivera received more news media coverage than a larger party, PSOE and its leader Pedro Sánchez, in Spain.

Another potentially important reason for the salience attributed to Ciudadanos and Podemos in the news media has to do with these parties' rapid rise in voting intentions, and with the expectation that they could achieve even more prominent positions in Spanish politics. In fact, in May 2018, opinion polls placed Ciudadanos in first and Podemos in second in the voters' preferences, while the incumbent PP and PSOE (the parties that form the Spanish bipartisanship since 1982) were only in third and fourth place, respectively (for further details, please see Nieto 2018). According to opinion polls carried out in May 2018, the political parties that are openly critical of the system, Ciudadanos and Podemos, represented almost half of the electorate, while PP and PSOE represented less than 40 per cent.

It is also important to note that although we are analysing parliamentary elections—in which political parties are the main players—the focus of most news items, in practically all the countries that were included in the analysis, was on the party leader and not on the political party as a whole. The exception to this trend is Ireland where although there is an overall stated trend towards personalization in election news coverage (for further information, please see Culloty and Suiter in this book), the Irish news media outlets focused less on the party leaders (16 per cent on average) than on parties as a whole in this election in particular. Potential

explanations for this exception could be related with the organization of the parties' campaigns, the specific personal characteristics of these party leaders, or even with choices made by the journalists when covering the election; however, an additional and different type of research would be necessary to further investigate and explain all underlying reasons behind this result.

In the remaining countries, Croatia, Greece, Portugal, Poland, and Spain, the percentage of news items that focused on the party leaders was always higher than the percentage of journalistic coverage that focused on political parties as the main actor in the news story. For example, the figures range from 66, 54, and 50 per cent in Portugal, Greece, and Croatia, respectively (for further details, please see Salgado; Papathanassopoulos and Giannouli; Mustapić et al. in this book).

Political party leaders were also the preferred source of information for journalists in Croatia, Portugal, and Spain, but not so much in Poland and Ireland where journalists resorted more often to their own professional class as source of information about the election, thus mostly covering the parties' campaign with reports of facts and events rather than giving more space to political party leaders and to their direct quotes on the election campaign actions, policy proposals, ideological stances, and so on (for further details, please see Stępińska et al. and Culloty and Suiter in this book).

The increasing concentration of election news media coverage on a limited number of political actors and the preference to report the political leaders' actions and statements instead of the political parties as a whole is well documented in research and has been referred to with different concepts, including personalization of politics (McAllister 2007; Kriesi 2012), or as presidentialization of (parliamentary) politics (Mughan 2000; Poguntke and Webb 2005). The high visibility of personalities in the news media can also be tied to leadership focused strategies and potentially to some specific forms of populism.

In fact, populism has been linked in research to media logic and personalization (Kriesi 2015) and to strong leadership strategies (Weyland 2001). However, despite these indications, the present study did not point to any direct connection between strong personalization of politics in the media and populism. Except in Ireland, the levels of personalization of politics in the election news coverage were high in all countries, but this was observed in countries where populist actors were successful in elections (e.g. Poland and Greece) and in countries where the exact opposite has happened (e.g. Portugal).

The Election Campaigns' Most Salient Issues

The variables intended to study the issues discussed during the election campaign were focused on the journalistic report of the campaign and were designed to identify and code the dominant issue in each news item. Therefore, this also means that other issues could also have been present both in the political parties' messages and in the news items, but the content analysis only coded the ones that received greater prominence in the news story and that were thus highlighted more often in the news coverage.

Election campaigns are usually pivotal moments for candidates to explain their ideological stances and their policy proposals to tackle the existing problems, so it would make sense that this would be somehow reflected in the journalistic coverage of the election campaign. However, in many cases the space attributed to specific policy issues is marginal when compared to the attention dedicated to campaign strategy and events, to the candidates' performance in electoral debates, or to opinion polls, for example. In fact, topics related to "party politics and campaigning" were by far the most prevalent in the news media coverage of the Croatian, Irish, Polish and Spanish elections.

Portugal and Greece were interesting exceptions, as issues had more preponderance and the issue frame overcame the strategy frame in these two countries' election news coverages. Greece and Portugal were severely affected by the Euro Crisis and this challenging conjuncture had a huge impact on both their societies and politics. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Euro Crisis as an issue was particularly salient in the Portuguese and Greek election campaigns. More surprising, however, was the fact that the Euro Crisis was not important in Ireland and Spain, which is possibly explained by the different framing (and management) that the Euro Crisis issue had in Spain and to the fact that Ireland had exited the financial assistance programme more than three years before the 2016 election, in 2013.

Although the differences between the two types of news framing were not substantial both in Portugal and in Greece, they are still noteworthy because they run counter the trend, often presented as transnational, of politics in general and elections in particular being mostly reported by journalists through a strategy news frame. In Greece, the percentage of news items in which the issue frame was considered by coders to be the dominant news frame was 54.4 per cent, and in Portugal it was slightly higher, 57.4 per cent.

In Portugal, the results should be partly related to the 2011 bailout, the recent economic reforms and the austerity measures that the country underwent, and the overall impact that the Euro Crisis had on Portuguese society and politics. In this country, public finances, the state of the economy, social affairs, as well as the Euro Crisis itself (e.g. the effects of austerity and the way to move forward) had a special prominence in the news coverage of the 2015 election campaign and preceded in salience news items that were mainly focused on party politics and on campaign strategy. Although the state of the economy and the slow economic growth have been a prevalent issue in most recent elections in Portugal (Salgado 2007, 2009), the context of a serious economic crisis seems to have further emphasized the prevalence of both these topics and of actual policy discussion in the 2015 election campaign, thus confirming their major importance both for politicians and for journalists.

As Culloty and Suiter (this book) and Luengo and Fernández-García (this book) have explained in their chapters, something similar occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Euro Crisis in Ireland and Spain. In Ireland, for example, almost 60 per cent of the newspaper coverage of the 2011 election campaign was devoted to policy, economy, and issues in general; but the interest in these topics dropped substantially in the general election that followed in 2016. In Portugal, given the lingering economic stagnation and hardship, the economic affairs have maintained their importance in political and public debates over the last few years, and have emerged as particularly significant during election campaigns.

Situations of crisis thus seem to impact on the type of news media coverage that is made of election campaigns. As economic crises drive the political debate and the news coverage towards economy and finance-related issues and policies; a major defence challenge, such as terrorism, should inflect attentions towards international relations, foreign policy, and defence issues; and political crises should instead boost debates and coverage focused on party politics, party conflicts, the functioning of democracy and political system reforms, government and parliamentary coalitions, and democratic governance in general. When there is no specific and pressing social or political problem, substantiated in a major crisis, the news coverage of the election should end up being less focused on issues and policy and more on the political candidates' competition and each one of them chances of winning, in other words, based on strategy and game news framing (i.e. "horse race" news coverage).

As noted, the most common news framing used in the journalistic coverage of elections in the majority of the countries included in this study (Croatia, Ireland, Poland, and Spain) was the strategic news frame. This type of news coverage focuses specifically on the logic of competition, namely the election "horse race", the winning versus losing dynamics; on the candidates and political parties' strategies and tactics to win the election or to gain advantages over their opponents; and on the overall support that political candidates and parties have managed to gather among public opinion, including their standing in opinion polls (for further details on the strategic news framing, see Aalberg et al. 2012).

The figures have shown that the prevalence of the strategic news frame ranged from 75 per cent in Croatia and 73 per cent in Ireland to 46 per cent in Greece and 44 per cent in Portugal. The percentages in Spain and Poland were 62 and 59 per cent, respectively. This means that in four of the six countries under analysis, election news stories were mostly framed through the logic of strategy in politics. An explication for the Portuguese and Greek exceptions was already put forward, but it should also be explained that the study coded the dominant news frame, which basically means that when the issue frame was dominant, the strategic frame could also be present, and vice versa. In other words, in some cases, news items could contain both types of news frames, but only the dominant (the one included in the lead of the news story and/or taking more space or time overall) was coded.

Another interesting finding is related with the type of media that seems to be less prone to cover elections and electoral campaigns focusing on strategy: the prevalence of the strategic news frame was overall lower in online news outlets. The fact that the online news media outlets have fewer limits in terms of space allows them to publish not only longer news stories but also more news pieces about specific issues, as well as on topics and political actors that are not usually covered by mainstream newspapers and television channels. For example, it was not unusual to find news items published in the online news media containing all (or at least most of) the political parties' main positions on specific issues and their policy proposals. This allows us to conclude that the online news media have broadened the space dedicated to issues and policy discussions, at least during election campaigns, which is the time frame of this study.

Moreover, during the official campaign period, both mainstream newspapers and television channels typically prepare daily summaries of

the campaign that tend to favour the focus on the winning and losing logic, which is believed to attract the interest of a wider audience. The online news media outlets do not have these limitations and can publish all the news items they want around the clock (of course within the limits of their human resources). All of these reasons contribute to explain the greater focus of online news media on issues and their greater use of issue news frame. The differences between strategic and issue frame vary according to countries, but are far more substantial in some cases, for example, Greece, where the difference is between 29 per cent of news items focusing mainly on issues in newspapers and 68 per cent in online news media outlets.

Also included in the logic of the strategy news framing, the publication of opinion polls during the election campaign was analysed separately in the study in order to check its own specific salience in the news coverage of elections in the different countries. This variable in particular was designed to capture any potential self-reflection of journalists regarding the impact of opinion polls in the election campaign (on meta-communication about media manipulation in general see e.g. Esser et al. 2001). The coding of this variable in particular was thus intended to assess the prevalence of opinion polls as an issue in the news media coverage, and refers, for example, to discussions about the release of opinion polls during the campaign and/or to discussions on the effects of opinion polls on the election campaign (e.g. on the relations between political opponents or on the overall campaign momentum), and even on the potential outcome of the election.

The impact that political opinion polls may have on elections has been raising concerns in democracies throughout the world over the last few decades. Alongside the opinion polls' immediate purpose of measuring the voters' opinions lays also its controversial potential to influence opinions (see e.g. Bogart 1988; Price and Stroud 2006). In addition, as opinion polls might also include some degree of bias (the polling companies or news media's political bias, but not only), the release of their results can, on some occasions, be aligned with specific political agendas that have interests in influencing the voting behaviour and/or the voters' political perceptions.

News items discussing the opinion polls results and effects (e.g. contextualization and interpretation) had a relatively important presence in the election news coverage in some of these countries. These specific elements were prevalent, for example, in 10 per cent of the news coverage in

Portugal; in 6 per cent of the news items in Ireland (interestingly, almost as much as news items that focused on macro-economics and social affairs, which were 7 per cent); and in 5 per cent of the Greek news stories, which, in this case, was more than the news items that were focused on discussing the much needed national unity and the potential government coalitions that could result from the election results (3.2 per cent).

Different *Expressions* of Populism

The time frame of this study coincided opportunely with some significant populism-related events in Europe. In 2015, political parties and party leaders considered populist were re-elected in Greece (the left-wing political party Syriza and its leader Alexis Tsipras) and elected in Poland (the right-wing political party Law and Justice, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS). In the Polish case, the victory of the right-wing Populist Party Law and Justice in the 2015 parliamentary election was also the first parliamentary majority in the country's democratic history since 1989.

Greece has not been strange to populism and long before Alexis Tsipras and Syriza's election, Greek politics had already a long record of populist political parties and of populist political leaders (see e.g. Vasilopoulou et al. 2014; Vasilopoulou and Halikiopoulou 2015; Papathanassopoulos et al. 2017; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2018). In addition to Syriza and Alexis Tsipras, other examples of Greek populist political actors include the ultra-nationalist Golden Dawn, the conservative right-wing ANEL (Independent Greeks), or Andreas Papandreou's PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) in the 1970s. In Poland, extant literature has identified populist political actors and waves of populism almost since the beginning of its democracy (see e.g. van Kessel 2015; Stępińska et al. 2017). Polish examples include Self Defence (*Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej*, SO) since 2001, Law and Justice (PiS) since 2005, as well as the most recent (2015) political movement Kukiz'15 (led by Paweł Kukiz). The far-right The League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR) is often considered to be a populist political actor as well.

Also noteworthy and particularly interesting for research is the fact that the 2015 election was the first parliamentary election in Croatia after the country joined the European Union in 2013. The election happened while Croatia was simultaneously facing the two crises that have been mostly associated to the recent surge of populism in Europe: the country was experiencing economic hardship and the challenge of the migration or

refugee crisis in its own territory (the Croatian government allowed refugees to cross the country in their journey to Western Europe). The decisions of the Croatian government regarding the migration crisis ended up having less impact on the election than on the country's relations with the neighbouring countries, Hungary, Slovenia, and Serbia. In fact, this crisis and the government policy did not seem to favour the right-wing arguments and position: the right-wing populist Croatian Civic Party lost the two-seats parliamentary representation that it had secured in the previous election (2011) as part of the pre-election coalition with the Croatian Democratic Union.

Whereas some countries in the sample seem to have been somehow immune to Europe's recent populist wave (e.g. Ireland and Portugal)—at least considering the electoral success and the actual election of populist political parties and leaders—and to the destabilization of their party systems (Hernández and Kriesi 2016); other countries have often been presented as prime examples of Europe's turn towards populism (Greece and Poland), even if they illustrate very different types and different degrees of populism (for further discussion about the manifestation of different types and degrees of populism, see e.g. Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Salgado and Stavrakakis 2018; Salgado 2018).

The fact that citizens in some countries do not vote for populist parties and populist political leaders to rule the country does not mean, however, that we cannot find elements of populism in the election campaign and in the news coverage of the election. It is thus very relevant to compare the type and degree of populist messages in the coverage of election campaigns in countries where populist parties were elected with the countries where populist parties did not have any electoral success.

This approach assessed the prevalence of populism in the election news coverage through a content analysis that comprised different elements of populist rhetoric. The analysis included the most common features of populism: references to the people (expressing closeness and belonging to the people; speaking on behalf of the people); a divide between the "us and them"; references to anti-elitism, anti-establishment, and anti-system; and exclusion of out-groups. In order to get a more complete picture of the different dimensions of populist rhetoric, the analysis has also included other typical elements of populist political discourse, such as the oversimplification of issues, which involves for example the resort to Manichaeism (e.g. good vs. bad, right vs. wrong) and scapegoating and blame shifting discourse strategies.

The content analysis results did not point to any discernible common trends in these six countries regarding the populist elements that were most used by political actors in their campaign messages and that were covered by the news media. The exclusionary discourse, substantiated in the division between "us" and "them", was overall the most common feature of populism in the election news coverage; it was used by the majority of politicians in Poland, Spain, Croatia, and Greece. A superficial analysis might suggest an overall greater success of this type of representation of society as populist political actors that have resorted to the "us versus them" rhetoric have experienced some degree of electoral success, while in the countries in which this strategy was less prevalent, populist political actors had less or no electoral success at all (e.g. Portugal and Ireland).

Typically, news media outlets reproduce the political discourses, but they also contribute to construct ideas and perceptions when certain assumptions about reality (and in this case about exclusion and the otherness) are reaffirmed discursively through the news coverage. This basically means that even in the cases when the news media outlets are simply reproducing the politicians' political messages, they can still be, in part, (indirectly) responsible for the deterioration of election debates. This certainly raises important ethical challenges to journalism's duty to report.

The use of the word "people" by political candidates to express closeness and belonging to the people, and as a rhetorical tool to emphasize their differences compared to other candidates, for example, was the most common feature of the populist discourse in Portugal. In Ireland the main populist feature was anti-elitism; although it was not often used (it was found in only in 2 per cent of the news items). The anti-establishment view was a strong component of electoral discourse in Greece, and it was a strategy used mainly by new political actors to distinguish themselves from the political leaders who had ruled the country before the crisis. In Poland, the exclusion of out-groups was the most prevalent feature, and ostracization was mainly directed towards immigrants. Finally, the notion of an idealized nation had greater prominence in Spain (5 per cent), which is explained by the ongoing debate on the independence of Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country, and is directly linked to the contrasting identification of nationalists and separatists as political out-groups menacing Spain's stability and unity.

It is also worth noting that newer political parties in general tend to frame their political communication and political strategies around the use of anti-establishment rhetoric (these cases were found in Spain, Croatia,

Greece, and Poland). This is not surprising if we consider that although these political parties are running for elections (and therefore implicitly accepting the system or attempting to change the system from the inside), it is easier for them to maintain an anti-establishment stance because they have no government experience and therefore they are not viewed as part of the establishment. If and when they are elected, these political actors have to adjust their discourse or at least redefine what the establishment is, in their view.

The other specific features of populist communication and rhetoric that were included in the study, such as the over-simplification of issues, and blame shifting and scapegoating were also more prevalent in the newer political parties. One possible explanation for this is the fact that these parties were attempting to deliver a different approach to politics, but one that could also be understandable by all those who do not feel represented by mainstream politics and who are distrustful of political elites. Presenting the issues and the corresponding solutions as simpler than they are in fact might well be a means of seeking an advantage over the opponents through the use of straightforward communication, as an attempt to engage and convince more voters.

The news coverage of these national elections in Portugal and Ireland reflects the low prevalence of populism not only in these countries' political systems but also in their news media outlets. In Portugal, for example, most of the news items coded as containing any of the features of populism resulted from the news coverage of statements by politicians. Although the sample only included a limited amount of news media outlets per country (nine in most cases, including centre-left and centre-right political leaning and reference and tabloid newspapers, public and private television channels, and newspapers that are only published online), it is diversified and complete enough to allow an overall picture of the news media coverage in each of these countries.

Ireland and Portugal challenge some generally accepted theses that sustain that the commercialization in the media sector tends to boost populism in the media (e.g. Mazzoleni 2008; Meyer apud Krämer 2014). Populism in the media is seen as a consequence of news media outlets that pursue higher circulation and ratings above all else. Even though over-simplification of reality and sensationalism are intrinsic characteristics of media grammar, which have been further enhanced by the commercialization trend in the media sector, they are not necessarily synonym with populism, or at least with the features of populism addressed in this research.

Portugal and Ireland also challenge the premise that situations of crisis lead to the success of populist political actors and ideas (e.g. Kriesi 2014, among others). Portugal and Ireland were among the countries that have suffered the most with the Euro Crisis; however, both the levels of electoral success of populist political parties and the prevalence of populist discourses in politics and in the news media in these two countries were in general very low when compared with the other countries in the sample. These two cases confirm McDonnell's (2008) interpretation in regard to the Irish case and Salgado and Stavrakakis's (2018) analysis, as well as the "fuzzy relationship" between crisis and populism that Tappas and Kriesi (2015) have suggested; but most importantly this also draws attention to the fact that Southern Europe should not be treated as an unique entity, as Southern European countries (the ones that were included in our sample: Portugal, Greece, and Spain) display many important differences among them.

Regarding the type of media that seems to be more prone to disseminate populism, the content analysis has shown that online news media were more likely to include news containing populist features. Different factors might enhance specific characteristics of journalism, such as oversimplification or over-personalization of politics, which are more conducive to the diffusion of populism, among them, for example, the following: news are produced and consumed much faster now when compared with just a few years ago; online news stories are often written to be clicked, "liked" and "shared" as much as possible; journalistic content is aimed at gaining a fast and wide distribution to reach more audience, including outside national borders, which often means the use of simple, appealing language and more visuals; and finally news items are often linked to other news stories and especially to comments sections to be used by the general public (the people) that is presumably populist by nature.

It is also important to stress that in addition to the type of media, the prevalence of populist features in the news coverage is, in some cases, also related with the ownership of news media outlets. Although our sample does not illustrate these examples sufficiently, Italy (e.g. with Berlusconi) and the Czech Republic (with Andrej Babiš) are cases of media ownership being determinant in the definition of a populist style of news coverage of politics (regarding the Italian case, see, e.g. Mancini 2011; and for the Czech case see, e.g. Císař and Štětka 2017).

The Croatian case presents a different but interesting singularity regarding the links between media and politics in populism. From the six

countries analysed in the study, Croatia was the only one illustrating a situation in which the media elite was clearly identified in anti-elitism rhetoric, which points to a clear divergence between some politicians and journalists. This type of open dispute between a few politicians and some journalists has potential to cause the enhancement of some specific features in the media coverage of politics, namely it might increase negativity in the political news, as well as the prevalence of journalistic interpretation in the news reports, for example.

Interpretation and Negativity

The journalistic coverage of these six parliamentary elections was mainly neutral and negative. However, there are important cross-country variations regarding the prevalence and the source of negativity. For example, it can originate in journalists through opinion and analysis pieces for example, or in negative and confrontational attitudes of the political candidates in the election campaign, which journalists merely report in their news coverage.

For example, in Croatia, where nearly 30 per cent of the news items had a predominantly negative tone, most negativity came from the news media outlets themselves that expressed criticism towards the campaigning political candidates and towards the political system in general (Mustapić et al. this book). Similarly, Stępińska et al. (this book) observed in Poland that nearly one-third of the election news coverage had mainly a negative tonality, which the authors explain with the highly critical approach of journalists to the election campaign and politics in general.

Focusing on Ireland, Culloty and Suiter (this book) explain the overall absence of political news coverage with a positive tone in a similar manner, because of the widespread anti-politics bias and of the enduring non-partisan role of the Irish news media. But in Portugal, for example, although an important share of negativity comes from opinion and analysis (Salgado this book), which suggests that the sources are either journalists or columnists; the overall higher prevalence of negativity in plain news stories points to the confrontational nature of the political campaign as a relevant factor in intensifying negativity in the news, which is a type of negativity that journalists are merely reporting and that is not initiated by them personally.

As to the type of news media outlets that have covered the election campaign in a more positive or in a more negative manner, the data analysis

did not show any clear similarities in these countries. In some countries, it is mainly the online news media outlets that cover politics with a positive tone (e.g. Poland), while in others it is exactly the opposite (e.g. Portugal). In addition, whereas Greek and Spanish newspapers were the most negative in their countries, in Portugal, both mainstream newspapers and television channels covered the political campaign mainly with a neutral tone. The prevalent tone in the news coverage thus seems to be more linked to the media outlets' ownership and to their political leaning than to the type of media (online, printed press, television).

Negativity is often related to the presence of journalistic interpretation in the news: the journalists' more prominent role in the news coverage of politics often results in more negativity (for a summary of research specifically focused on this topic, see Salgado and Strömbäck 2012). The prevalence of journalistic interpretations in the media coverage of the election campaigns in these six countries ranged from 15 per cent (the lowest percentage) in Poland to 53 per cent (the highest percentage) in Ireland (some intermediate values were e.g. Spain 47 per cent, Portugal 31 per cent, and Greece 22 per cent).

The content analysis did not show any clear trend regarding the type of media that tends to include more interpretive journalism in the election news coverage. While in Portugal and Ireland the media with the highest percentage of interpretive journalism was television, in Greece and Spain, newspapers had overall the most prevalence of journalist interpretations in the election news coverage.

There are, however, some important similarities in all of these countries. One is the fact that journalistic interpretation is also present in plain news stories. Another similarity is related to the type of journalistic interpretation, that is, journalistic explanations, journalistic speculations, or overt commentaries. In the six countries, the most common type of journalistic interpretation was, according to this data analysis, journalistic explanations or interpretations of the reasons behind events or actions.

Although it is not possible to argue that interpretive journalism is growing or decreasing in the news coverage of elections on the basis of this study, as it is not longitudinal, it is still possible to conclude that even though in differing degrees, interpretive journalism is present in election news coverage in all these countries. Quite probably it is present, to a lesser or greater extent, in election news coverage in most European countries, as previous research has shown in the news coverage of politics during routine periods (Salgado et al. 2017).

Conclusion

This research approach was designed to investigate how elections are covered by journalists in different European countries, in a similar time span, by testing specific concepts and trends that were previously put forward in relevant, existing literature.

News values that are used in the selection and framing of political news have been pointed out as features of political news coverage by some authors. These are for instance some of the concepts that have guided this approach. The construction of political news as conflict and drama (Bennett 1996), an overall emphasis on the idea of competition (e.g. horse race, see Broh 1980; Mutz 1995) rather than on substantive issues, negativity (e.g. Patterson 1993; Cappella and Jamieson 1997), over-personalization of politics (even though contested by some authors as, e.g. Karvonen 2010; Kriesi 2012), and an increasing interest in the political candidates' image and in their personal characteristics (Nimmo and Savage 1976; Hacker 1995) put the emphasis on political leaders rather than on institutions and parties, and shift the manner in which political candidates are evaluated by journalists and voters.

It is thus not uncommon to read and hear that local political and journalistic cultures have been replaced by transnational trends. There are, in fact, important global trends and features influencing national political and media systems and thus impacting on the news coverage of politics and elections (e.g. Swanson and Mancini 1996; Swanson 2004). However, as the present data analysis has shown, significant local specificities remain relevant and should also be given proper attention, to avoid ignoring potentially enlightening information that could contribute to the further understanding of the links between politics and media in the coverage of election campaigns.

The attempt to infer general knowledge and generate a greater level of generalization based on this data analysis was often hampered by the singularity of these countries in many respects, as we have seen. It was not possible to identify clear regional (or other) patterns on the concepts that were tested empirically. The research results were often mixed, did not point to clear regional patterns, but they have illustrated relevant country specificities (see e.g. the results of the data analysis on personalization of politics, populism, or the dominant news framing, just to mention a few cases). However, this does not mean that the research results cannot inform knowledge on election news coverage in Europe. In fact,

this draws attention to the continuing need to rethink concepts and to adjust our theoretical models to constantly changing media and political environments.

Although the salience of some transnational trends in today's news media coverage of politics and elections has emerged in the analysis (e.g. personalization of politics, negativity), there was always an outlier or exceptions that pointed to the importance of the countries' specific political, social and cultural context. These often conflict with the transnational trends of news coverage that are presented as global (e.g. the Portuguese and Greek exceptions in the dominant news framing). This suggests relevant varying gradations and, in some situations, even important exceptions that should be identified and explained whenever possible.

Singularities should therefore be acknowledged in order to complement our understandings of how and why different news media cover election campaigns the way they do. This is a field of studies that although has already seen important contributions, it is still lacking systematic empirical research to test the many theoretical assumptions that underpin most current knowledge on the links between media and politics. But within this effort to further advance empirical research, the presence and relevance of singularities should also be assessed, as it can contribute to a better understanding of these issues.

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