



Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe

Appendix to Working Paper: "Populism and Social Media. A comparative analysis of populists' shared content and networks on Facebook"

National Case Studies

September 2021

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822590. Any dissemination of results here presented reflects only the consortium's view. The Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

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Bosnia and Herzegovina

Information Sources Shared on Facebook and Networking by Populist Leaders and Populist Parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dejan Matic (PEM)

1. Introduction

This report focuses on Milorad Dodik, leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata - SNSD) and Bakir Izetbegovic, leader of the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije SDA). These two parties have been selected for the analysis because current political field in Bosnia and Herzegovina is mostly dominated by nationalist populist actors for more than two decades and these two actors actively participated in the recent elections on all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina and could be identified as employing populist appeals. They are also the most politically relevant parties in the contemporary political context in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since the last elections that was held last year in October 2018, his political party, SNSD, is in power in the Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina at all levels. Milorad Dodik, who was the former President of the Republika Srpska, won the recent elections for the presidency on federal level and became a member of Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the rank of the Serbian People. SNSD is a political party which grew from the Independent Members of Parliament Caucus, which acted as such in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska, ever since the dissolution of Yugoslavia. From the beginning, Milorad Dodik was undisputed leader of the party. Starting from 1998, with the exception of the opposition activities in the period from 2001 to 2006, this political party has been in power in Republika Srpska. Bakir Izetbegovic was, from 2010 to 2018, the Bosniak member of the tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and is the current President of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), which is pleading to express the authentic political will of the Bosniak people. The SDA achieved considerable success in elections after the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. The party remains the strongest political party among the Bosniak population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of the goals of the SDA, outside Bosnia and Herzegovina, is to represent and defend the interests of Bosniaks and other Muslim South Slavs in the entire Balkan region. The party is an observer member of the European People's Party (EPP). After the 2018 elections, SDA, once again, became the largest party in Bosnia and Herzegovina among the Bosniaks.

Media consumption and populists in Bosnia and Herzegovina

We have chosen to focus on analyzing Facebook posts rather than Twitter because Facebook is the most important social media outlet in Bosnia and Herzegovina, having the largest number of users. There were 1,6 mln. Facebook users in Bosnia and Herzegovina in January 2019, which

amounts 43% of its entire population. A major part of them were male (53%) and adults (52%) (Digital Global 2019). Twitter does not have any major significance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although almost all political actors usually have Twitter accounts, but with very small number of followers. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are 109000 of Twitter user accounts, from which 69% is male (Digital Global 2019). It should be noted that, according to Report on Researching media freedoms in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2019 prepared by Bozo Skoko, PhD, and Marko Custic for the needs of the “Friedrich Ebert” Foundation and the Association of BH Journalists, trust in media fell from 77% in 2018 to 66% in 2019, while confidence in religious communities, institutions of power, and politicians increased. The decrease of trust in traditional media are, according to the study, balanced by the increasing trust in the capability of the Internet to strengthen pluralism. For instance, internet is considered as important, or important for the public and citizens by 73% of the polled. A vast majority admits internet’s role in democratization of communication and enabling pluralism of opinions (75%), but at the same time 59% does not feel as being informed with more quality due to high increase in number of internet portals and publicly accessible information (Skoko, Custic, 2019, p. 3-8). A bit paradoxically, the role of social media in political campaigning in Bosnia and Herzegovina has not received due attention because politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina make little or no use of social networks. For instance, Milorad Dodik does not even have Facebook account at all, so the Facebook account of SNSD had to be analyzed instead. Bakir Izetbegovic, on the other hand, has Facebook account, and so does the SDA. Unfortunately, this has led that the assumption of a significant amount of personalization in political life in Bosnia and Herzegovina can only be seen in the case of Bakir Izetbegovic, as his Facebook page has significantly more followers than the Facebook page of the political party he chairs. Off course, it could be argued that Milorad Dodik embodies the party he leads, to such an extent that he does not even need a special separate Facebook account, but such a conclusion cannot be empirically confirmed.

Table 1: Number of followers on Facebook among the main Bosnia and Herzegovina politicians and their party (January 2021)

	Individual	Party
Milorad Dodik (SNSD)	-	31247
Bakir Izetbegovic (SDA)	53878	35150

2. Methodology

Even though that political life in Bosnia and Herzegovina at times seems turbulent and chaotic, in the last two decades the dominant influence, without exception, have political parties that,

regardless of how they ideologically position themselves in their legal and political acts, act as protectors. and representatives of the dominant national communities in the country. When it comes to the Serb community, the SNSD and its president Milorad Dodik undoubtedly have a dominant position, while in the Bosniak community, the SDA and its president Bakir Izetbegovic have that role. They maintained this position even after the last election cycle in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

After the General Elections held in 2018, SNSD remained the strongest political party in the Republika Srpska, and achieved even better results than in the elections held in 2014. The candidate of that party for the President of the Republika Srpska, Zeljka Cvijanovic, won with 47.04 % of votes. SNSD candidate for the Serbian member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, won a record number of votes of 53.88%. In the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska, the SNSD remained the strongest political entity with 31.87% of the votes and 28 seats. In the competition for the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the SNSD won by far the most votes from the political parties from the Republika Srpska (39.10%).

Almost identical data speak of the political success of the SDA. The candidate of this political party for the member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sefik Dzaferovic, won the most votes (36.31%), and in the competition for the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, the SDA won by far the most votes of political parties from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (25.48%), and won 8 seats.

As regards to the period covered by our analysis, we covered three different moments: a) an electoral one, b) a routine period and c) the Covid-19 emergency. It must be noted that there were no elections for European Parliament in Bosnia and Herzegovina as it is not a member of the EU. Accordingly, the 2019 European parliament elections did not have any political or social repercussions, or meanings in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, during the analyzed period, there were no other elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The analysis was carried out on Facebook data (Mancosu et al., 2020; Marincea, 2020), downloaded with the CrowdTangle API developed by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team, 2020)

3. Results: Classification of sources shared by populist leaders (based on coding)

Types of media sources preferred or ignored by populists.

In general, as reported by Table 2, most links outside the leaders' Facebook pages is composed of digital sources, precisely 68.39%, while TV account for only 25.55% of the sources. Newspapers and Radio are instead marginal, respectively 5.08% and 0.98%.

It should be also pointed out that as regards the ownership most of the sources are private, precisely 78.54% of the sources linked by the leaders.

Table 2. Source type

Source	Percentage
TV	25.55
Radio	0.98
Newspaper	5.08
Digital sources	68.39
Total	100.00

As shown in Table 3, almost all of the sources are national (98.79%), while less than 1% is local (0.98%). A negligible number of sources have a European, i.e., supranational character (0.23%). It looks like that national news are more in accordance with main political issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina around which political actors in question build their narrative. Furthermore, marginal use of European sources can be explained with the fact that EU sources do not address issues that are of importance to people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, since the country is not the member of the EU. Linking news from national sources is objective interest of the populist actors.

Table 3. European, national and local sources

Source	Perc
European	0.23
National	98.79
Local	0.98
Total	100.00

In Table 4 it can be seen the information about the ownership transparency of media outlets linked by populist political actors in question. More than one third (38,38%) of the sources can be defined as fully transparent in terms of their ownership. Little less than two thirds (60.01%) of the sources linked by the political actors in question are only partly non-transparent, while 1.51% of the

sources are non-transparent at all. The information available about the owners of shared sites is, however, quite often transparent since in most cases the information is readily available. This is largely because the pages link to media owned by large groups or associations whose leaders' profiles are made public.

Table 4. Source transparency

Source	Perc
Non-transparent	1.51
Partly non-transparent	60.01
Fully transparent	38.48
Total	100.00

In Table 5 it can be seen the information about the kind of linked sources. Both political actors in question share mostly digital sources. Percentages are similar.

Table 5. Kind of source per party leader

Source type	SNSD	Bakir Izetbegovic
TV	24.09	26.41
Radio	1.17	0.88
Newspaper	7.53	3.69
Digital sources	67.21	69.02
Total	100	100

The political orientation of the shared links corresponds to the political orientation of the two actors. It is generally hard to assess a left-right placement of the sources that politicians share. In the case of SNSD, 21.15% of the links correspond to sources that we classified on the center left,

45.36% on the center, 22.64% in the center-right and 10.85% in the right. In the case of Bakir Izetbegovic, 19.85% of the sources can be classified as center-left, 40.22% as center, 25.76% as center-right, and 14.17% as center. It is quite clear that the distribution among both political actors is remarkably similar. The explanation probably lies in the fact that both dominant political factors that are the subject of this analysis emphasize national issues as their basic narrative, with the ideological sign playing a small role, which is reflected in the political orientation of the shared links.

Table 6. Sources political leaning

Political pos	SNSD	Bakir Izetbegovic
Center-left	21.15	19.85
Center	45.36	40.22
Center-right	22.64	25.76
Right	10.85	14.17
Total	100	100

Similar situation can be seen in Table 7 in which we can see information about European, national and local sources per political actor in question. As mentioned before, it looks like that national news are more in accordance with main political issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina around which political actors in question build their narrative.

Table 7. European, national and local sources per party leader

Source charact.	SNSD	Bakir Izetbegovic
European	1.16	0.68
National	97.41	98.13
Local	1.43	1.19

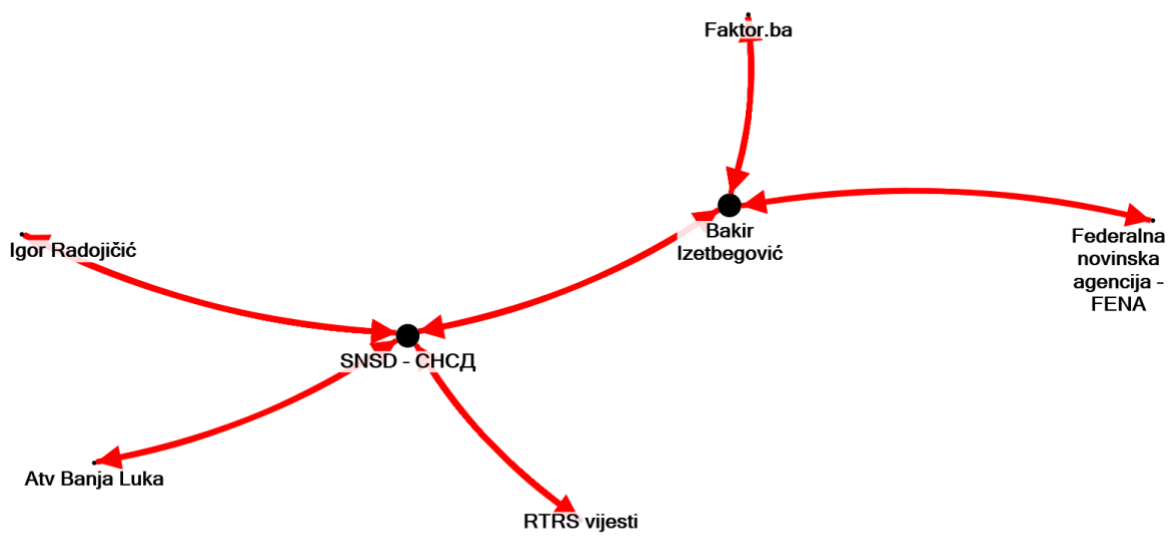
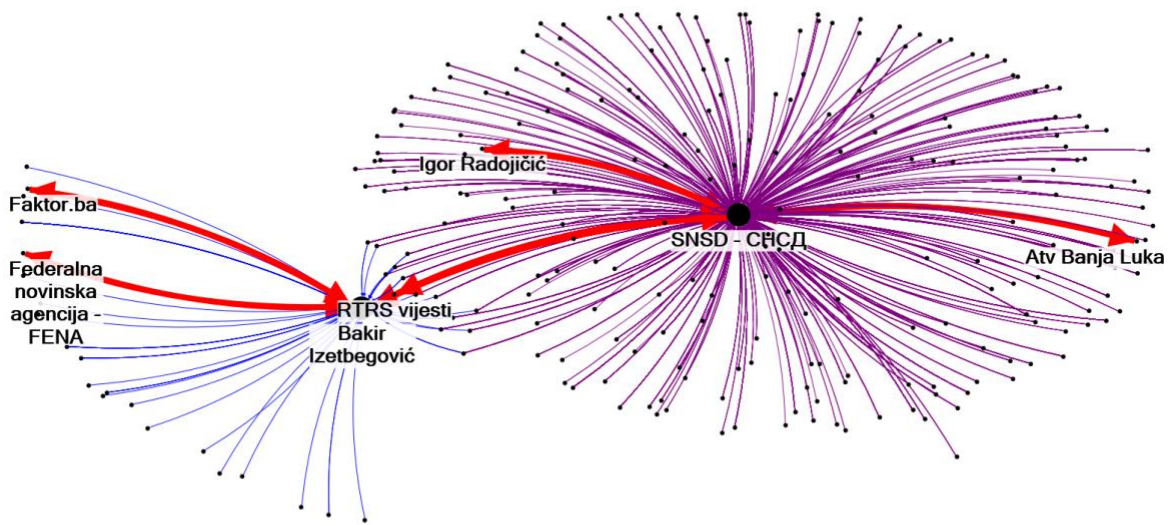
Total	100	100
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Electoral vs. non-electoral coverage, event vs. regular

The qualitative analysis shows that there are no remarkable differences in the distribution and nature of the sources in different periods. That means that the political actors did not change their social media activity, nor the kind of sources linked during the three different periods covered by our analyses. Reason for that lies in the already mentioned fact that there were no elections for European Parliament in Bosnia and Herzegovina as it is not a member of the EU. That means that the 2019 European parliament elections did not have any political or social repercussions, or significant meanings in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, during the analyzed period, there were no other elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

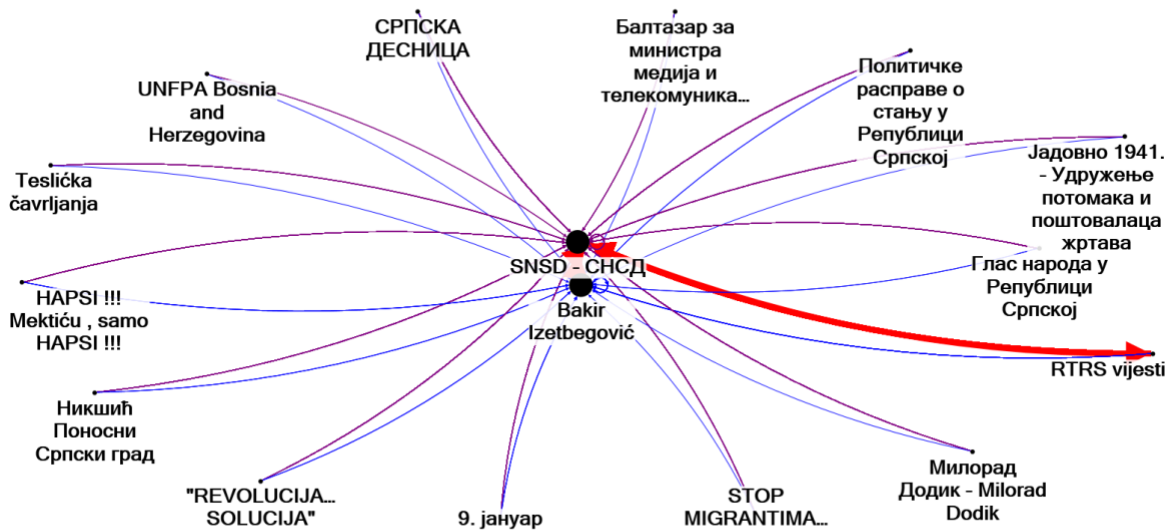
4. Results: Network analysis of sources that share populist leaders' posts.

Focusing on the network structure derived from the FB public pages of the two political actors reveals that their networks are quite different and unrelated. SNSD network is a little bit bigger than Bakir Izetbegovic's, but not significantly. That, in our opinion, confirms that both parties are not identical, no matter how similar their political strategies may look like. It is obvious, again, in our opinion, that populism can't be a definitive and only way to classify these political actors. The analysis of reciprocity shows that the two subjects have similar communication strategies, because they both have reciprocal networks with mainly elected officials and political organizations, but these officials and organizations are never the same, as shown in the graphs below:



Two networks obviously do not overlap or do in totally insignificant measure. It is possible to conclude that the reciprocal networks are mostly isolated. Reason for that, in our opinion, resides in the fact that two pages seem to have a quite differentiated audience that interacts and debates very rarely.

The analysis of the Facebook pages sharing more than ten times each political actor shows that here too, two quite different networks can be observed without any doubt. It must be noted that in Bosnia and Herzegovina only once Facebook page shared each profile at least 10 times.



5. Discussion, limits of the study and possible future research directions

It noticeable that the networks formed by the two populist political actors faithfully reflect their ideological orientation expressed in dominant national narrative. Each one thus maintains relations with close elected officials or members of his party, while excluding his opponent. We can also notice that both actors that were analyzed use same mainstream news sources to sell their arguments and topics to their followers. That implies the source from which they derive the story is of not any significance, because the interpretation that the actors give to the same fact represents the most important thing.

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France

TWO SEPARATE POPULIST PARTIES; TWO SEPARATE NETWORKS AND ONE GO-BETWEEN GROUP

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Introduction

By looking in detail at populists' social media discourse in comparison with that of non-populist candidates, we may be more nuanced: populists are not always only populists and/or do not defend the same ideology (Maurer, Diehl, 2020). We have therefore chosen to focus on analyzing Facebook posts rather than Twitter for two other main reasons. Facebook is more popular and socially mixed (Duggan et al., 2015) and allows more interactions (Trieu et al., 2019) than Twitter. In France, 74% of internet users also use Facebook but only 28% of them used Twitter in the second half of 2018 (Global Web Index, 2019). Unlike Twitter, Facebook does not have a character limitation, allowing users to develop longer arguments and affording more space to an extended populist discourse (Ernst et al. 2017). As shown in the table below, the very high degree of personalization of French political life where leaders have more followers than their party encourages us to focus on these elected officials rather than on their organization. It should also be noted that the RN is the most followed French party on Facebook, ahead of the party of the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, La République en Marche (see table 1).

Table 1: Number of followers on Facebook among the main French politicians and their party (January 2021)

	Individual	Party
Jean-Luc Mélenchon (LFI)	1 227 100	217 119
Marine Le Pen (FN/RN)	1 613 262	450 167
Emmanuel Macron (LREM)	3 840 839	250 311

After having studied the way Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen communicate discursively during Facebook in routine and campaign time (Baloge and Hubé, 2019), we want to better understand their network. We know that we are dealing here with two leaders labelled under the category of populist but who are opposed in many ways. Indeed, while both refer to the people in similar proportions, none of them really tries to define in an ideological or philosophical way the people. Above all, Mélenchon criticizes more often national and international political elites, while Le Pen refers more frequently to "others" as enemies of the people. Additionally, it seems that populism is "political communication style of political

actors” (Jagers, Walgrave, 2007, p. 322) used differently. For Jean-Luc Mélenchon, populism is the preferred style during a campaign but that has to be less used during the routine period. On the contrary, the process of “de-demonisation” of Marine Le Pen and her party is a campaign strategy: the populism is much more milder during this period. But when she’s less into the media loop, she’s much more populist in her Facebook public positions.

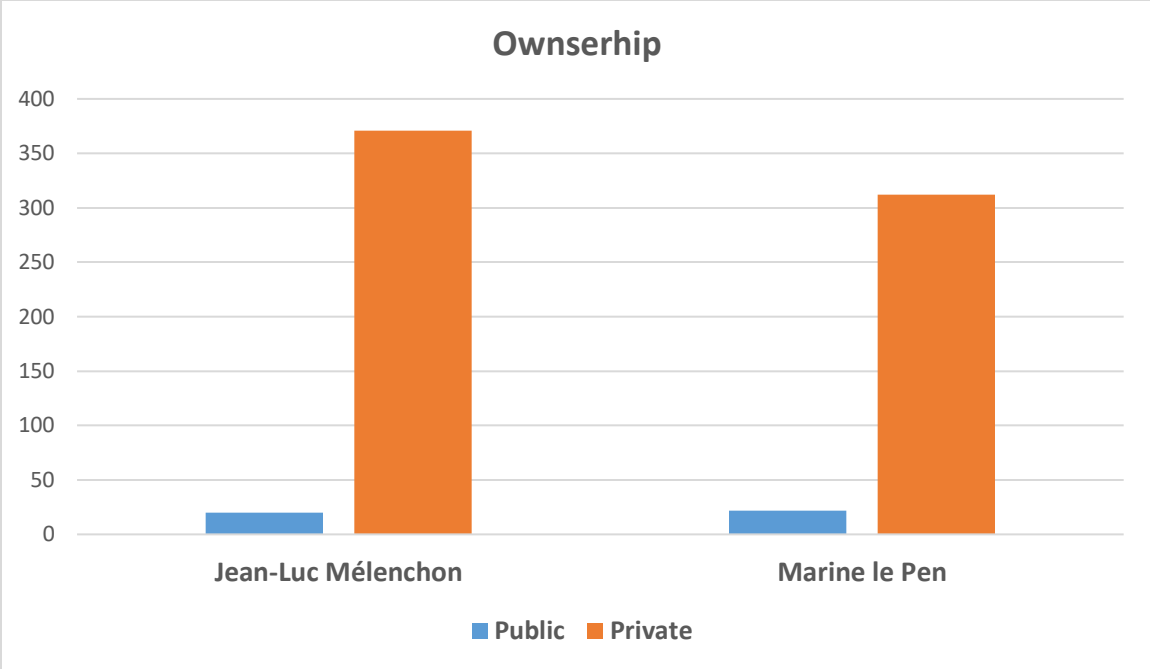
In politics, to complement Austin's theory, "to say is to do", i.e. to make people believe that one can do what one says, and in particular to make known and recognize new principles of division in the social world (Bourdieu, 1983). The here presented study aims to understand not only their direct communication, but the way they are using a two- or multiple step flow of communication. Talking to their electorate is not only a matter of discursive stance but is only a matter of using some media with whom activists can identify themselves (section 1). Our hypothesis is that their source might be more prompt to follow their public position. Following the same line, we aim to understand how connected are populist leaders with some followers (section 2). The hypothesis is that their followers are more radical than the leaders. The analysis was carried out on Facebook data (Mancosu et al., 2020; Marincea, 2020), downloaded with the CrowdTangle API developed by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team, 2020).

1. Classification of sources shared by populist leaders:

- a. What type of media sources seem to be by and large preferred by populists? (Source type, registered or not, public or commercial, transparency ownership)

In both cases, the leaders privilege social networks which constitute in the case of J.L Mélenchon 77.1% of its interventions against 53.7% for Marine Le Pen. Television constitutes a minor media in the volume of interventions (respectively 2.2% and 6%), as does radio (3.1% and 6.9%). The main difference between the two leaders is that Marine Le Pen makes much more reference to magazines and newspapers than J.L. Mélenchon (33.4% versus 12.1%). This can be explained by the fact that Jean-Luc Mélenchon is very critical of the media in normal times (see Baloge, Hubé, 2019), hence a more frequent use of social networks.

In the vast majority of cases, these media are private, with the public occupying only a marginal place:



One notable difference between the two leaders, however, is that Jean-Luc Mélenchon cites many more sources that are not registered on the official list of press publications. The Leader of France Insoumise cites only 21.7% of registered titles, compared to 48.7% for Marine Le Pen, and 71.4% unregistered against only 20% for Marine le Pen. Thus, Marine le Pen cites many more officially recognized sources than his far-left counterpart. This is probably part of her de-demonisation strategy: attracting private mainstream media in order to better criticize them, whereas Jean-Luc Melenchon strategy is to gather young (online) activists.



The information available about the owners of shared sites is, however, quite transparent since in most cases the information is readily available. This is largely due to the fact that the pages link to media owned

by large groups or associations whose leaders' profiles are made public. However, we note that Jean-Luc Mélenchon refers to a larger number of sources whose owners are not identifiable (8.7% versus 0.6%).

The pages most shared by the two populist leaders are facebook pages related to themselves, their party or other members of their organization. In the case of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, 52% of the links are to his own page or to his party (190 posts and 26 posts out of a total of 414). These proportions are lower in the case of Marine le Pen since she shares a total of 36% of posts related to her party (91 posts) or her protégé Jordan Bardella (30) out of a total of 335 posts.

- b. What type of media sources seem to be ignored by populists?

Surprisingly, Jean-Luc Mélenchon makes no mention of it in the daily newspaper *L'Humanité*. This newspaper is clearly linked to the French Communist Party and is not an extension of France Insoumise. Jean-Luc Mélenchon also never mentions the historical daily newspaper of the French extreme left. But one may still be astonished that reference is made to *Le Figaro*, *Les Echos* or *Le Point*, newspapers of the right or center-right.

- c. Are there significant differences between the different populist leaders/parties in their media preferences? To what extent do they draw on the same media sources and/or share sources connected with each other's profile/party?

The two leaders cite a combined total of 158 different sources. Of these 158 sources, only 24 are common to both leaders. These are mainly mainstream media. The source most shared in common is *Le Monde*, one of France's leading general daily newspapers, cited 10 times by Jean-Luc Mélenchon and 12 times by Marine le Pen. The smallest differences are found in media that are rather centrally ranked, such as *Le Journal du Dimanche* (4 and 6 times) or the public 24hours-informations radiochannel France Info (twice each). Large gaps exist on media ranked on the right of the political spectrum, since Marine le Pen quotes *Le Figaro* (15 times against 1) or BFM TV (8 times against 1). These elements thus confirm that the media preferences of populist leaders logically overlap with their political positioning.

Apart from these sources mobilized in common (but in varying proportions) the two political leaders mobilize very different sources. It is indeed two opposite galaxies that can be explored. Jean-Luc Mélenchon cites 77 unique sources and Marine le Pen 57, for a total of 134 unique sources. One will notice that each leader cites exclusively certain press titles close to their political positioning. Jean-Luc Mélenchon refers five times to Médiapart (a journalistic website positioned on the left) while Marine le Pen refers six times to *Valeurs Actuelles*, a weekly classified on the extreme right. In addition, each leader refers to a set of political figures who are members of their party, sometimes of local importance, which partly explains the fact that each develops very different digital networks. Finally, Jean-Luc Mélenchon seems to refer more frequently to associations, collectives, or alternative media than his far-right counterpart. On the other hand, Marine le Pen quotes the local and regional press more often. She mobilizes seven single press titles against three for her far-left counterpart.

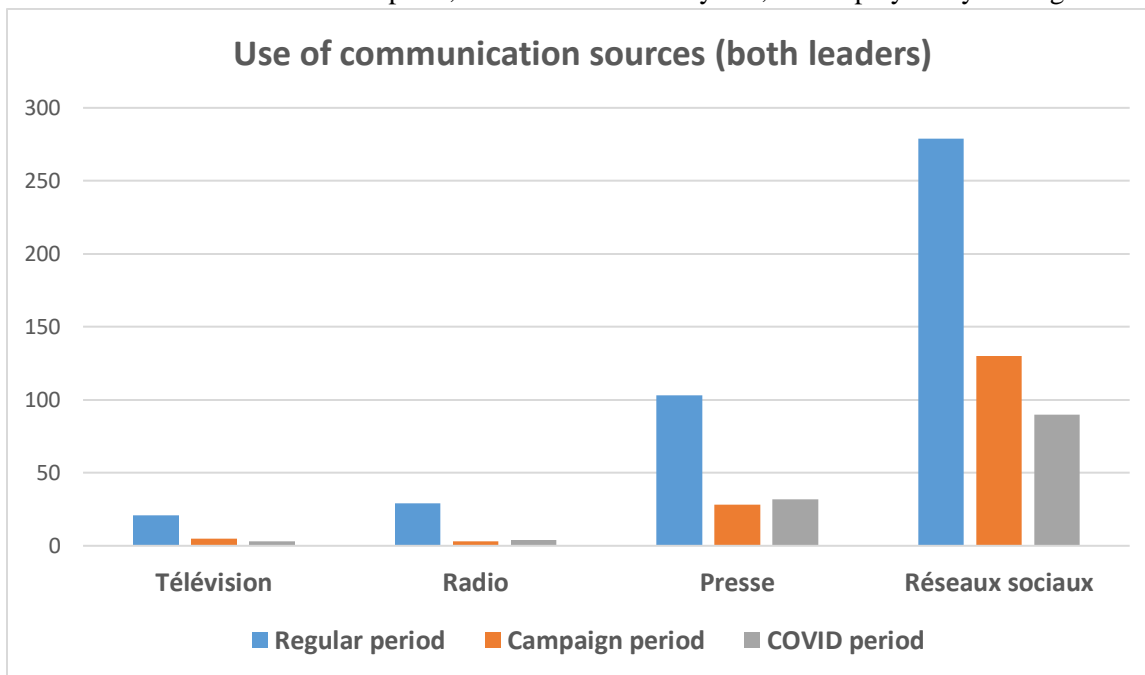
- d. What is the dominant political/ideological orientation of the media sources shared and does it match that of the party/leader?
- e. Is there any logic/pattern behind the sources linked/preferred, or does it just reflect by and large random selection?

The political orientation of the shared links corresponds to the political orientation of the two leaders, confirming our hypothesis. In the case of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, 68% of the links correspond to sources classified on the far left, 5.1% on the center left and 7.2% in the center. In the case of De Marine Le Pen, 50.4% of the sources can be classified as far-right, 17.9% as right and 24.2% as center. It can therefore be seen that proportionally, the leader of La France Insoumise shares a greater number of sources close to his political camp, proof of the will to radicalize his discourse. Conversely, the fact that Marine Le Pen mobilizes almost a quarter of sources that can be classified in the center seems to confirm the strategy of de-demonization engaged for several years now in order to broaden the audience and the electorate of the party. As Alexandre Dézé points out; "the electoral development of the party has always been coupled with a work of normalization of the frontist enterprise aimed to attract new support. It is this work that Marine Le Pen has decided to revive following her election in 2011, seeking to "transform the National Front" to make it a "renewed, open, effective party," a "powerful instrument [...] for the conquest of power" (2012).

We notice that Marine Le Pen carefully avoids referring to extreme right-wing sites with a non-negligible audience such as Français de Souche, Riposte laïque or Le Salon Beige. However, these sites have a non-negligible audience. According to Médiametrie (the institution in charge of measuring the audience of the uses of audiovisual and digital media), the French site "Français de Souche" received, for example, in February 2017, nearly 315,000 visitors.

f. Electoral vs. non-electoral coverage, event vs. regular

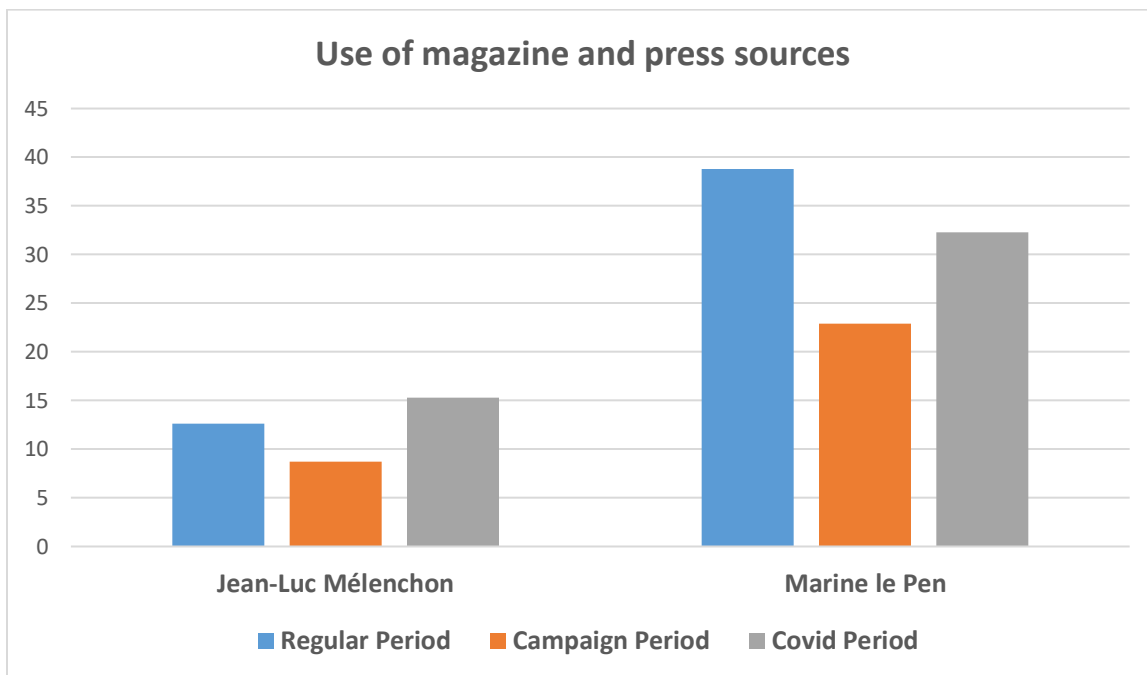
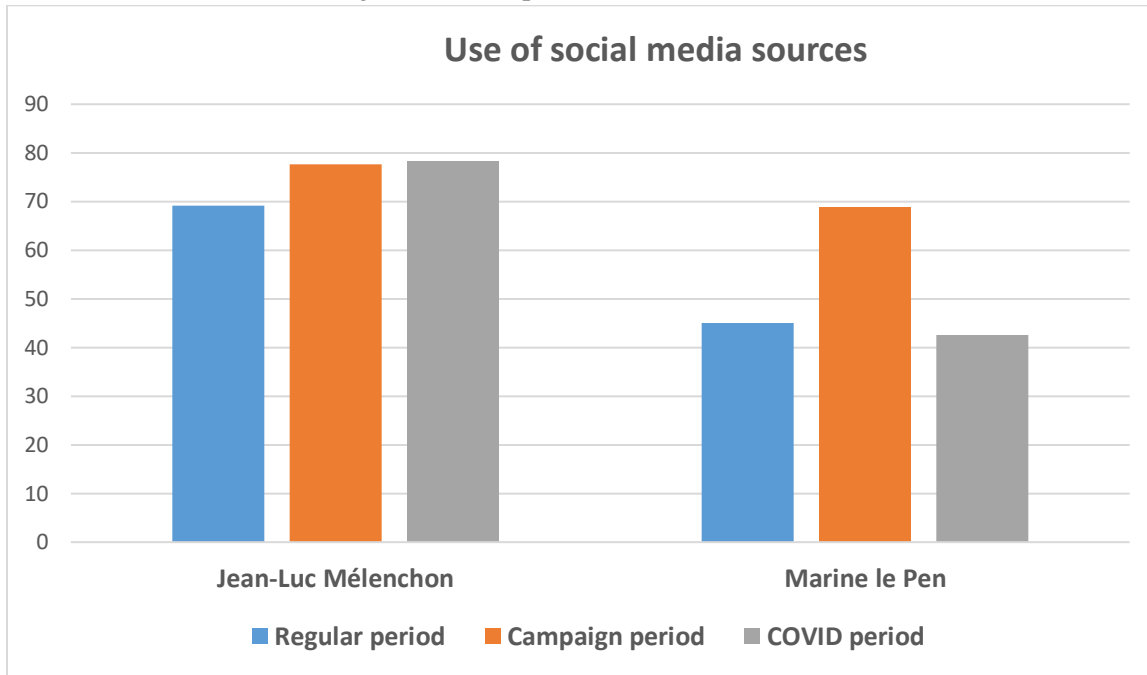
Cross-analysis of the different periods reveals several elements. First of all, whatever the period chosen, social media is the preferred mode of communication for both leaders, but even more so in the case of Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Then come the press, then radio and finally TV, which plays only a marginal role:



By focusing on the two main media used, we see two very different strategies. On the one hand, Marine Le Pen uses the press much more than Jean-Luc Mélenchon, while the latter focuses mainly on social networks.

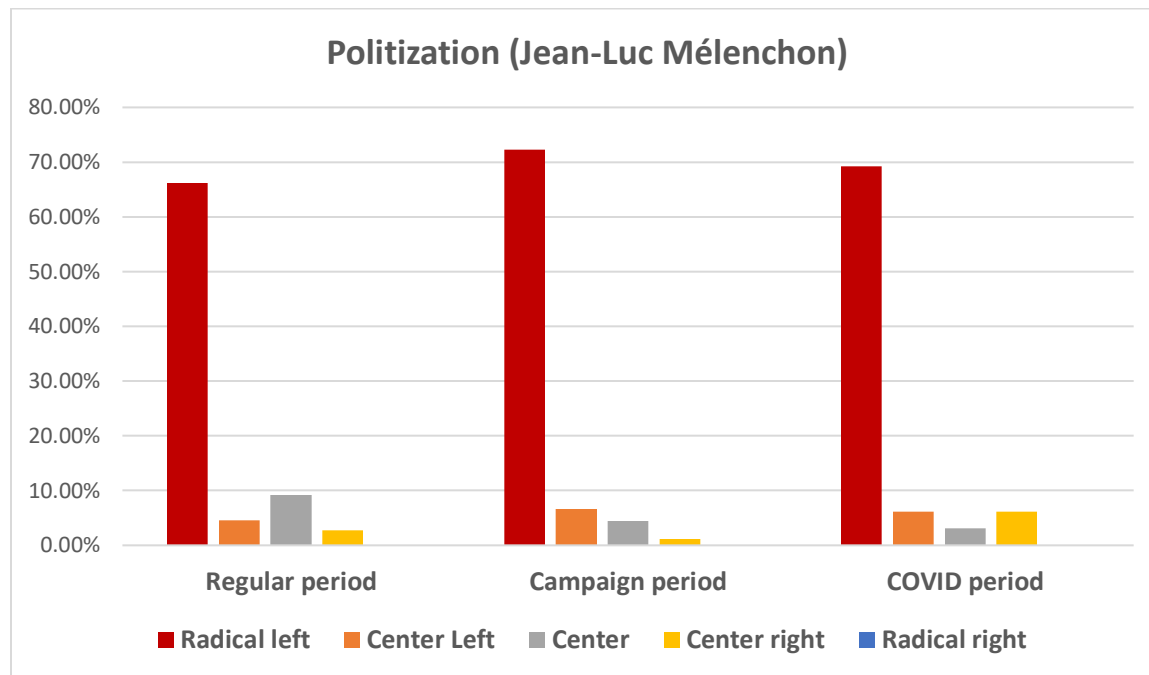
Marine Le Pen uses these much more during the campaign period. On the other hand, Jean-Luc Mélenchon mobilizes them in similar proportions whatever the period studied. The COVID period seems to play a rather weak role in comparison to the regular period. Neither of the two leaders seems to take advantage of the period to communicate more (Marine le Pen makes greater use of social networks during the campaign period. Jean-Luc Mélenchon uses social networks slightly more, but in similar proportions).

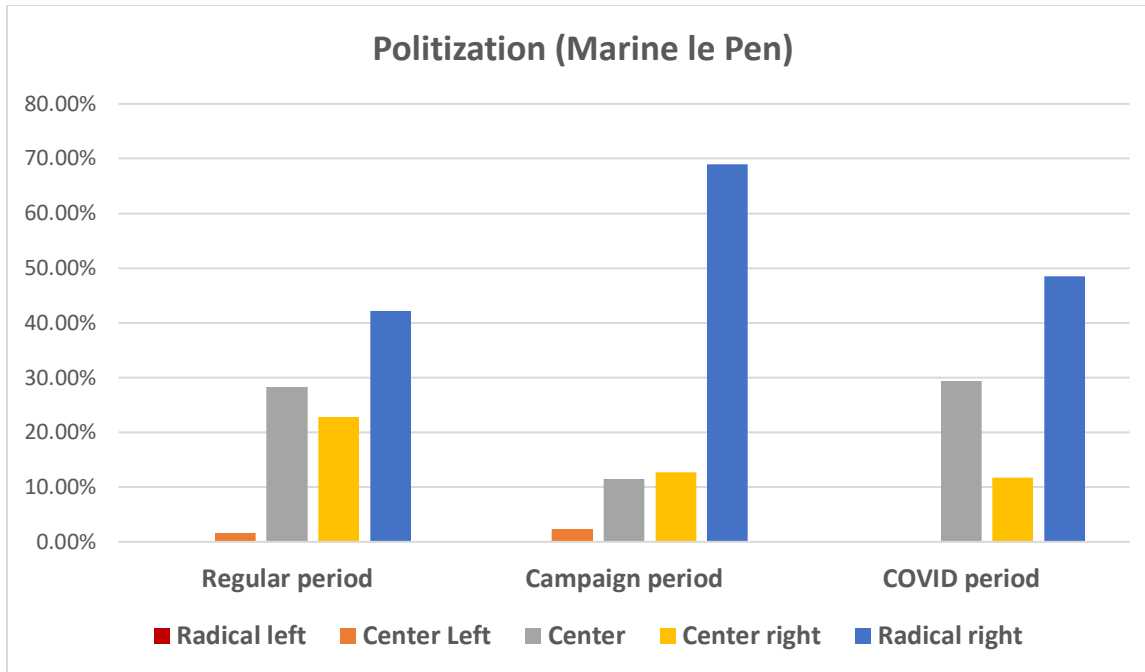
It is interesting to note that Marine le Pen uses the press less during the campaign period, while Jean-Luc Mélenchon uses it more during the COVID period :



Finally, one of the main differences between the two leaders lies in the politicization of their communication. It is very interesting to note that in both cases the campaign periods constitute moments when the affirmation of partisan cleavages is visible. During these periods, the two leaders share the most sources from the extreme left and the extreme right.

However, it should also be noted that Marine le Pen is much more centrist than his far-left counterpart during normal and COVID periods. To put it another way, in her media and source uses as like as her direct communication studied before (Baloge, Hubé, 2019), Marine Le Pen has a less divisive communication strategy. This again confirms the strategy of de-demonization and normalization outside of election periods. The use of mainstream magazines in greater proportions than for Jean Luc Mélenchon also confirms the strategy of broadening its audience, seeking to capture voters from the right and centre-right, especially during the regular period.



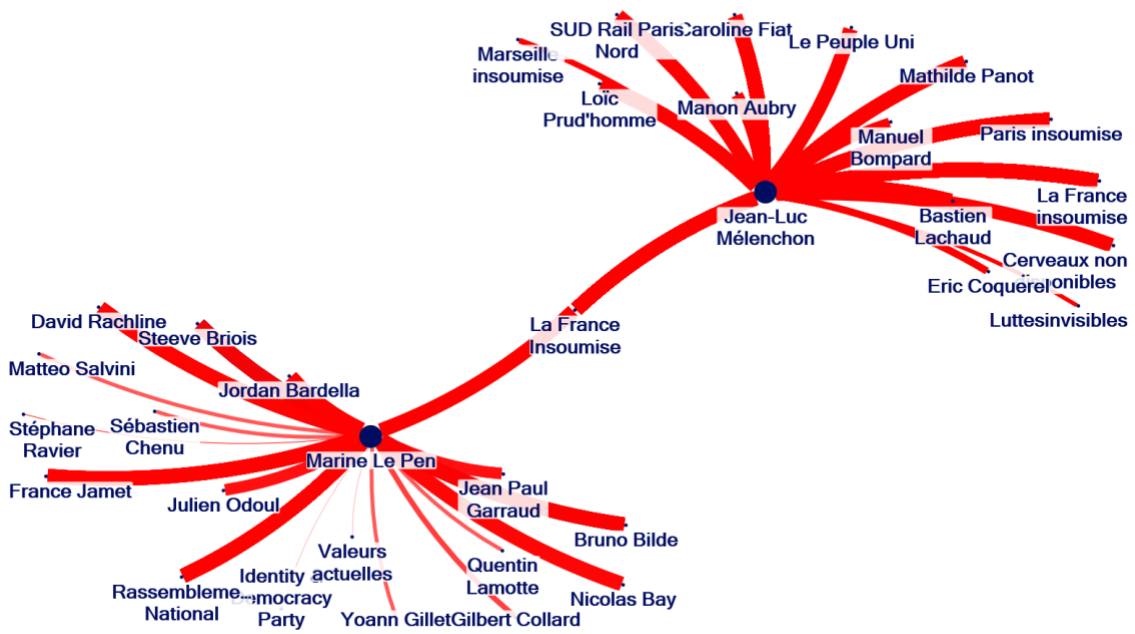
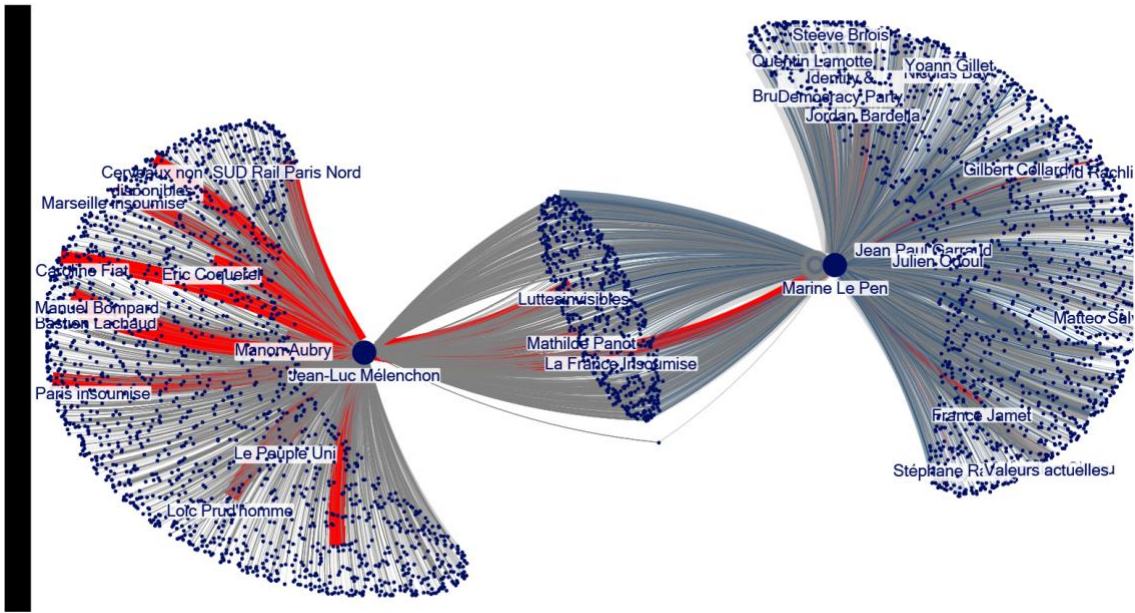


Finally, it should be noted that Marine le Pen radicalized her discourse much more than her opponent during the campaign period, while the leader of France Insoumise remained stable over the three periods studied. This over-politicization on the extreme right is achieved, as we have seen, by a more frequent use of social networks during the campaign period. We can therefore assume that this medium is the most conducive to strategies of radicalization and appealing to far-right voters.

2. Network analysis of sources that share populist leaders' posts

- a. *Network Reciprocity*: are there disproportions between the 2 reciprocated networks (ex. one much bigger than other)? How much do they overlap (which would mean that Reciprocal pages are also Central)? What reciprocal pages are the connectors between the two, can you say something about them, based on the previous coding/classification? If the reciprocal networks are isolated (like the UK case), why could that be?

Analysis of the networks of the two populist leaders reveals that their networks are very different and unrelated, confirming that both parties aren't similar and that populism is not a definitive way to classify political parties. The analysis of reciprocity thus shows that the two leaders have similar communication strategies, since they both have reciprocal networks with mainly elected officials and political organizations, and at the same time they are very different, since these officials and organizations are almost never the same, as shown in the two graphs below:



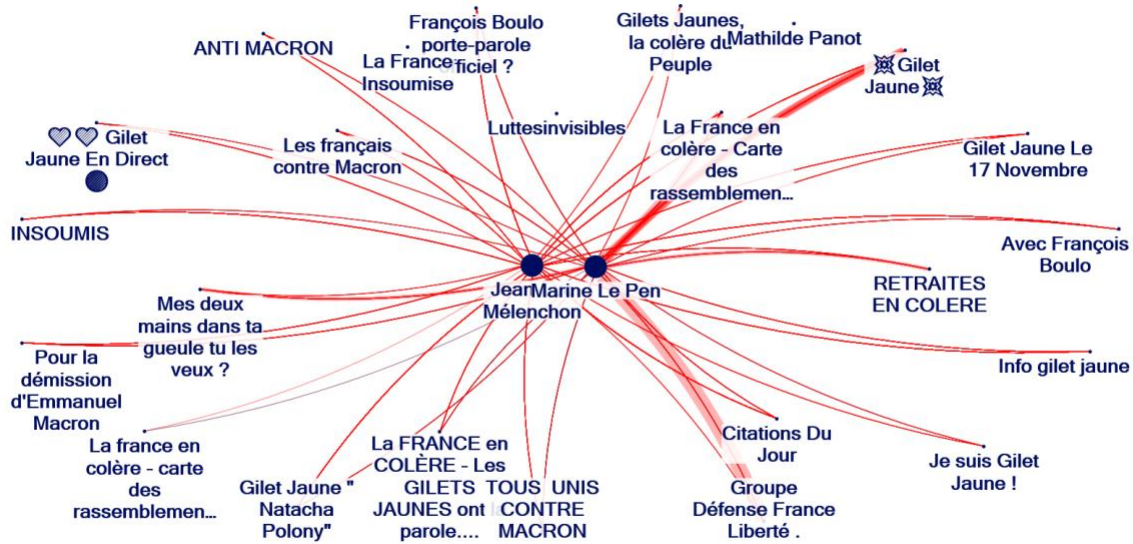
On each side of the graph appear central personalities of the Rassemblement National and the France Insoumise. The main difference between the two parties lies in the fact that Jean-Luc Mélenchon is part of reciprocal networks leaving more room for organizations. This is the case of "Marseille Insoumise" and

"Paris Insoumise", two local branches of the party, "Sud Rail", a trade union, and "Cerveaux Indisponibles", "Luttes invisibles" and "le peuple uni"; online protest groups. This result is well illustrating the strategy of Mélenchon to create a movement against the left traditional parties; Marine Le Pen refers reciprocally only to her party, the National Rally, Identity and Democracy, a political group in the European Parliament, and Valeurs Actuelles, an extreme right-wing newspaper.

As mentioned before, it should be noted that the two political leaders also very frequently refer to similar sources, mainly traditional media well established in the French media landscape: *Libération*, *Le Monde*, *20 Minutes*, France Info. It is only on this point that the media practices of the two elected officials come together: both share sources that criticize the government's actions. For example, on February 29, they both shared an article in the free daily newspaper *20 Minutes* about the use of article 49.3 of the constitution and the motion of censure launched by the left and the right. Earlier in the year, on January 16, they both shared an article on the France Info website, dealing with the municipal elections and how a circular could favour the results of Emmanuel Macron's party. Finally, on several occasions, they quoted the same article from *Le Monde* about the resignation of Jean-Paul Delevoye, the High Commissioner for Pensions in the Government of Edouard Philippe, after a series of revelations targeting him (suspicions of conflicts of interest, cumulation of activities forbidden).

- b. *Network Centrality: How many Facebook pages share each profile at least 10 times? Which are the main disseminators for each of the two (biggest number of shares) and how equally or disproportionately do they share each of them? What can be said about these pages (type, ownership, registration, political orientation etc.)?*

The analysis of the facebook pages sharing more than ten times each leadershows that here too, two very different networks can be observed. 297 facebook pages shared 15960 posts by Jean-Luc Mélenchon. This is much more than in the case of Marine Le Pen who has 187 facebook pages sharing 7540 posts of Marine Le Pen. An even more precise analysis shows that only 20 facebook pages share both Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, but in very different proportions (718 posts for the former, 2995 for the latter), as shown in the graph below :



Pages that share more than ten times the posts of each leader have very specific profiles. A large proportion of them claim to belong to the Yellow Vests movement, a critical social movement against Emmanuel Macron, affiliated with no organization but whose two leaders seek to present themselves as the best representative. The table below identifies and then quantifies the pages shared more than 10 times by the two leaders. We have categorized these pages into five categories: page affiliated with LFI ; page supporting or close to the RN ; Yellow Vests Support Page ; groups opposed to Emmanuel Macron ; and finally Other (website proposing famous historical, intellectual and funny quotes).

Most central (shared both pages at least 10 times each)	Shared Melenchon	Shared Le Pen
Page affiliated with LFI		
INSOUMIS	820	10
Page affiliated with the RN		
Mes deux mains dans ta gueule tu les veux ?	11	30
Groupe Défense France Liberté .	10	29

Yellow Vests pages		
François Boulo porte-parole officiel ?	135	30
Avec François Boulo	101	18
Info gilet jaune	98	34
Gilet Jaune " Natacha Polony"	94	18
La FRANCE en COLÈRE - Les GILETS JAUNES ont la parole....	48	21
Gilet Jaune En Direct	35	11
Gilet Jaune Le 17 Novembre	24	16
Je suis Gilet Jaune !	14	14
Gilets Jaunes, la colère du Peuple	10	29
Groups opposed to Emmanuel Macron		
La France en colère - Carte des rassemblements	719	153
Pour la démission d'Emmanuel Macron	54	34
TOUS UNIS CONTRE MACRON	41	25
ANTI MACRON	29	19
RETRAITES EN COLERE	28	15
Les français contre Macron	27	38
Other		

Citations Du Jour	162	33
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We can observe that some groups of Yellow Vests are almost in a balance between the two leaders. But in the majority of cases, the centrality of the two pages seems unbalanced, once again testifying to two very distinct networks, confirming that we are dealing with two political families with little in common in their communication and relationship strategies.

An interesting result here is the attempt to capture the movement of the yellow vests. This movement claims independence from traditional political parties. Its protest dimension and opposition to the government of Edouard Philippe and Emmanuel Macron has however made it a target for many parties. The studies and surveys available on the political preferences of Yellow Vests do not make it possible to decide who is preferred by individuals close to this movement. Political science research, carried out by questionnaire during mobilizations, shows a greater identification of participants with the left (44% against 15% for the right, 52% with no affiliation to the right nor the left) (Bedock et al. 2019). Conversely, surveys (conducted among supporters and not participants) reveal a frequent RN vote (44% against 12% for the LFI). The network analysis of each party allows us to note at the very least that Jean-Luc Mélenchon is more active on the internet and social networks than Marine le Pen in his desire to be the spokesperson of this mobilization, without however having succeeded in embodying and gathering in his name, in a consequent way, those who identify with this movement. But a specific study on the Yellow Vests galaxy is needed.

Discussion, limits of the study and possible future research directions

The two leaders have quite different media practices. Jean-Luc Mélenchon mobilizes traditional and alternative sources, while Marine Le Pen quotes only traditional sources, generally well established within the French journalistic field. This can be seen as a sign of the normalization strategy of the extreme right-wing party, which seeks to absolutely avoid relaying openly racist, homophobic, anti-Semitic or Islamophobic sources. islamophobes. In the case of Marine Le Pen, we thus see a militant division of labor in terms of the radicalization of discourse confirming our hypothesis.

While the leader euphemistically supports her communication strategy on mainstream sites, her supporters invest in facebook groups where much more radical statements are made (Hobeika, Villeneuve, 2017; Villeneuve, 2020), frequently going beyond the limits of freedom of expression by making racist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic statements. As mentioned before, it is therefore surprising to note that Marine Le Pen never relays extreme-rights sites (Égalité et Réconciliation, Français de Souche, Le Salon beige or Boulevard Voltaire) which are part of her party constellation (Hobeika, Villeneuve, 2017).

It is also noticeable that the networks formed by the two populist leaders faithfully reflect their ideological orientation. Each one thus maintains relations with close elected officials or members of his party, while excluding his opponent. From this point of view, network analysis confirms the very great impermeability of the two types of populism observable in France.

It is also noteworthy that Jean-Luc Mélenchon invests much more in social networks and maintains a denser network than his far-right opponent. An unexpected result therefore lies in the frequency with which Marine Le Pen refers to traditional media, whereas his opponent more often mobilizes alternative sources, whose owners are less easily identifiable.

The role of PSM and "alternative" media in this sample

Thus, in the case of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the proximity to a range of alternative sources confirms his criticism of traditional media. Reviews such as "Frustration La Revue", "le bon sens", "Mémoire des luttes", "Lundi AM", "Investig'Action" or even "Osons Causer", testify to the variety of leftist' sources mobilized by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, in parallel with more classical media. These media can be qualified as alternative, due to the fact that they are generally not registered in the official register of French media, by an online presence and by hybrid forms of journalism, at the crossroads of information and activism.

Policy recommendations?

Because of their online practices, the two leaders seem to respect the limits set by freedom of expression in France. By avoiding quoting openly racist, islamophobic or anti-Semitic sources (however, the magazine Valeurs Actuelles has already been convicted of inciting hatred) Marine Le Pen manages to prevent her speech from exceeding the limits set by the law.

Our recommendations therefore focus less on the sources cited than on data protection, since many of the sources mobilized are hosted by Facebook. Indeed, let us recall that Facebook has been condemned several times by the American justice system on this subject. It would therefore be entirely conceivable to force the GAFA to make the use of personal data even more transparent, or even to allow users of these platforms to have a right of control over the use made of this data.

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Greece

Information sources shared by populist leaders and parties in Greece

Emmanouil Tsatsanis and Dimitri Sotiropoulos (ELIAMEP)

Introduction

The analysis of communication practices of populist leaders in Greece focuses on the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) and its leader Alexis Tsipras. Tsipras and Syriza are selected as the main populist political actors in Greece due to the fact that they constitute the most visible and successful political actors in the country, and are arguably among the most successful in Europe. There is widespread agreement in the relevant literature (e.g. Mudde, 2015; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014), that SYRIZA constitutes a populist party, particularly so since the onset of the economic crisis in Greece. The analysis does not include the junior partner of SYRIZA in the two successive coalition governments of 2015 and 2015-2019, the right-wing populist ANEL, due to the fact that in the period covered in the analysis ANEL had already exited government and had been consigned to a status of electoral irrelevance. ANEL performed so poorly in the 2019 European Election, capturing only 0.80 percent of the vote, that its leader Panos Kammenos decided not to compete in the July parliamentary election. The party of Kyriakos Velopoulos, Greek Solution (EL) eventually replaced ANEL as the main right-wing populist actor in the Greek party system but that happened only after the surprise result of the May 2019 European Election. For that reason, our analysis focuses solely on Alexis Tsipras, whose party went to both the European Election in May 2019 and in the parliamentary election in July 2019 as the only party in control of the Greek government.

Methodology

As is the case with the rest of the countries analysed in the present deliverable, the analysis of populist communication in Greece covers three different periods, corresponding to different moments in the Greek political cycle: an electoral one, b) a routine period and c) the Covid-19 emergency. The electoral period corresponds to the electoral campaign period prior and a few days after the European Elections in late May 2019, namely from April to June 2019. The routine period refers to the following 8 months, namely from July 2019 to February 2020. It should be noted however, that in the case of Greece, unlike other countries, this period covers also the very brief electoral period of the national snap election that took place very soon after the European Election, specifically on 7 July 2019. The last period, the so-called Covid-19 period, stretches from March 2020 to April 2020. So it is important to keep in mind that the routine period covers a much larger time period compared to both the electoral and the Covid-19 periods. The analysis was carried out

on Facebook data (Mancosu et al., 2020; Marincea, 2020), downloaded with the CrowdTangle API developed by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team, 2020).

Source type

Question: What type of media sources seem to be by and large preferred by Alexis Tsipras? (Source type, registered or not, public or commercial, transparency ownership)

Alexis Tsipras prioritized sharing content from digital sources (mainly own created content such as comments or videos posted on his facebook page) and occasionally articles from the websites of newspapers or links from the Syriza website or facebook account. There were no links shared from radio or TV stations, whereas digital sources accounted for about 93 percent of all posts. However, the type of content shared by Tsipras can be broken down to organic content created by Tsipras himself (about 77 percent of all posts), whereas the rest included posted links to articles posted in newspaper websites and news web portals or to the Syriza website. Among the posts, there were two links to songs uploaded on youtube.com, which were unlike his other postings in tone and content. There was little differentiation during the electoral period. The sample from that period is smaller but the distribution of sources is not changed to any meaningful degree. The main difference is that content of the posting is more oriented to Tsipras reporting from the campaign trail, as one would expect.

Figure 1. Diversity of channels

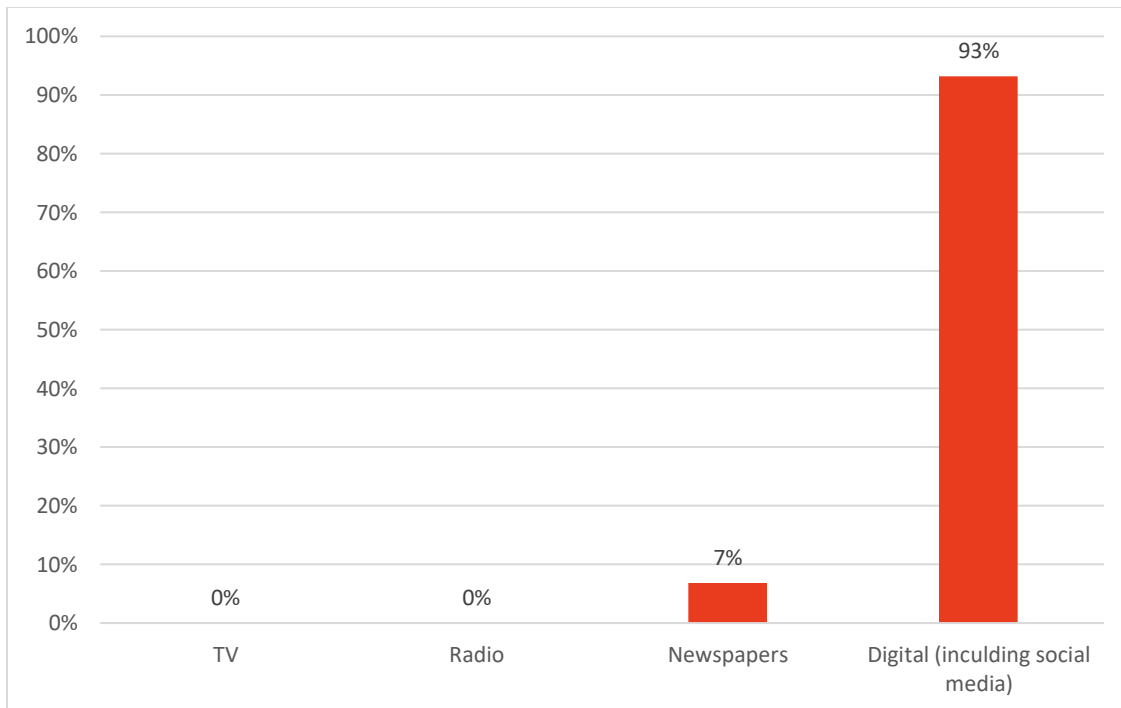
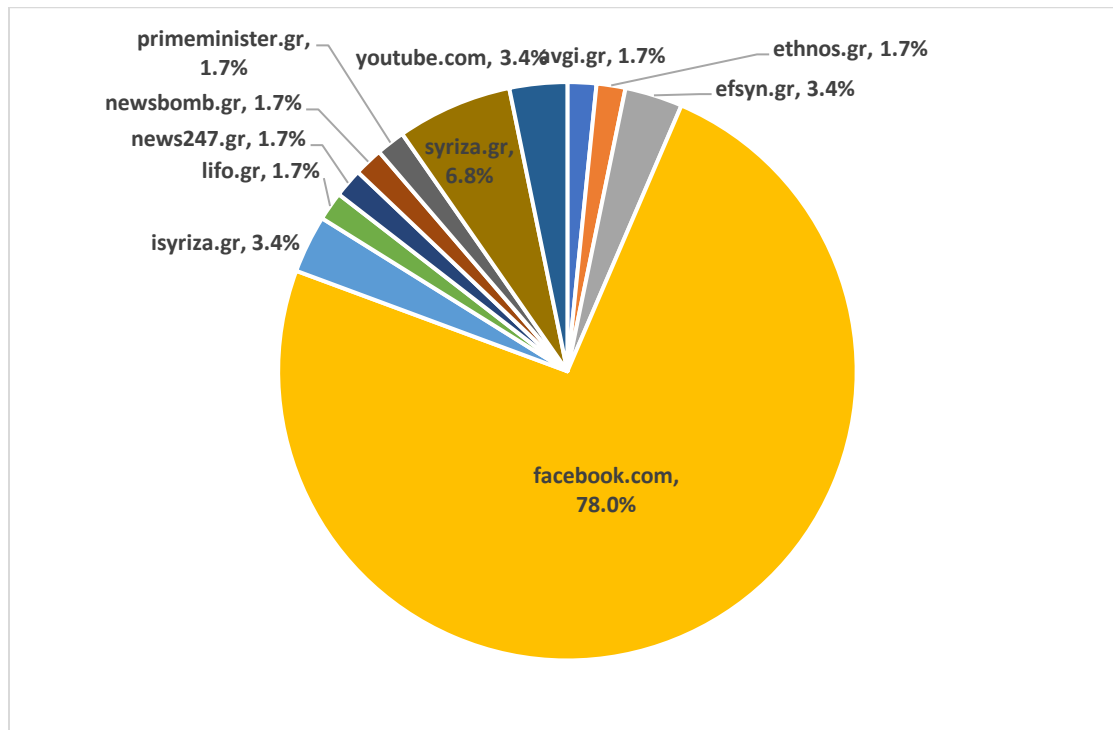


Figure 2. Main sources shared by Alexis Tsipras



Media registration

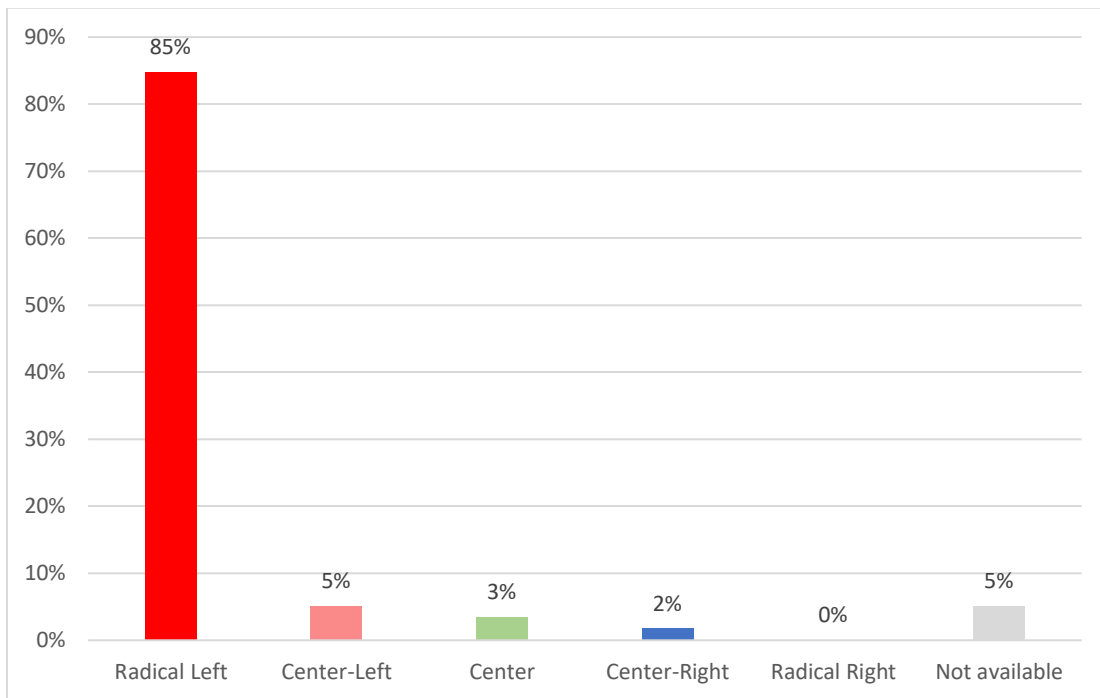
Practices of registration of media sources varies in Greece, ranging from the regulated and concentrated market of nation-wide TV stations to the unregulated and fragmented market of news websites. However, the media sources shared by Tsipras include well known newspapers and news websites, whose status as news media is not in question regardless of the respectability of the source (which ranges from legacy newspapers to tabloid-like popular news websites). Non-journalistic sources are limited to party (Syriza) or government sources, such as the webpage of the prime minister.

The dominant political/ideological orientation of the media sources shared

The content shared by Alexis Tsipras, other than his own messaging which constituted the vast majority of his posts came from predominantly left or centre-left publications, even though a small number of articles from newspapers and news websites with a centrist (Lifo), non-ideological (news247) or even right-wing conservative (newsbomb.gr) orientation were shared. The

overwhelmingly leftist orientation of Alexis Tsipras is not surprising given the explicitly leftist identity of Syriza and of its leader.

Figure 3. Political/ideological orientation of media sources shared by Alexis Tsipras



Electoral vs. non-electoral coverage, event vs. regular period

According to the sample collected between the three period (regular period, electoral period prior to the May 2019 European Parliament election and in 2020) there seems to be far more social media activity by Alexis Tsipras in the regular period compared to the other two periods. Nearly 4 out of 5 posts took place in the regular period but the distribution of the posts by source do not significantly change in each period. However, this should come as no surprise given the fact that the so-called “routine period” covers more calendar months in relation to the other two period. Most posts correspond to digital sources (mainly social media but also links to articles from news portals). It is also noteworthy that there is no noticeable differentiation in terms of either the source of the posts, their ideological orientation or their general characteristics over the three periods.

Digital sources (own facebook content and links to articles coming from mainly left-center media sources) dominate the communication practices of Alexis Tsipras (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Percentage of sampled posts by period (Regular, EP election, 2020 Covid)

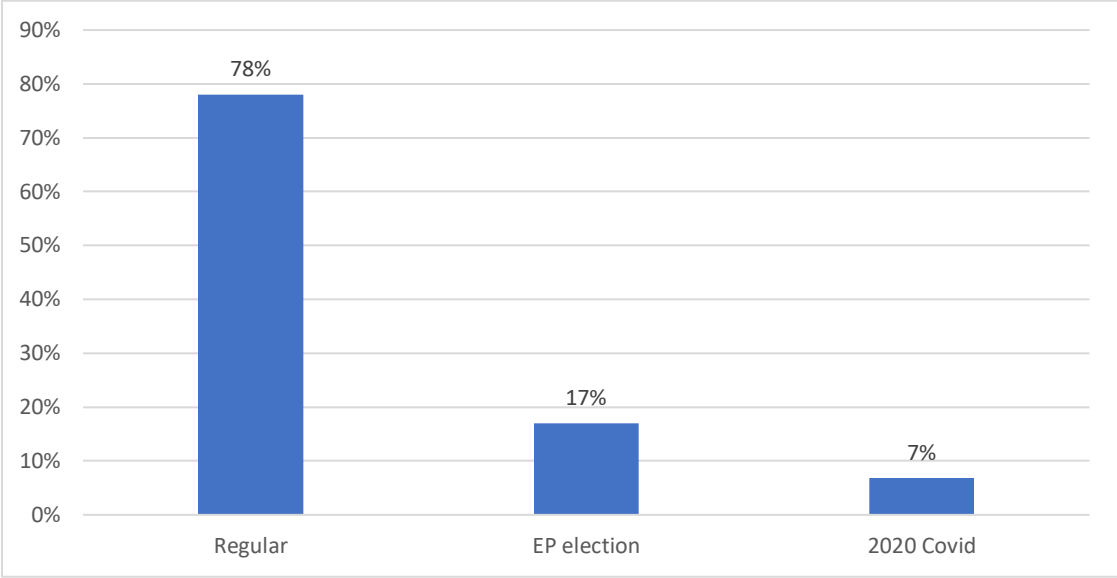
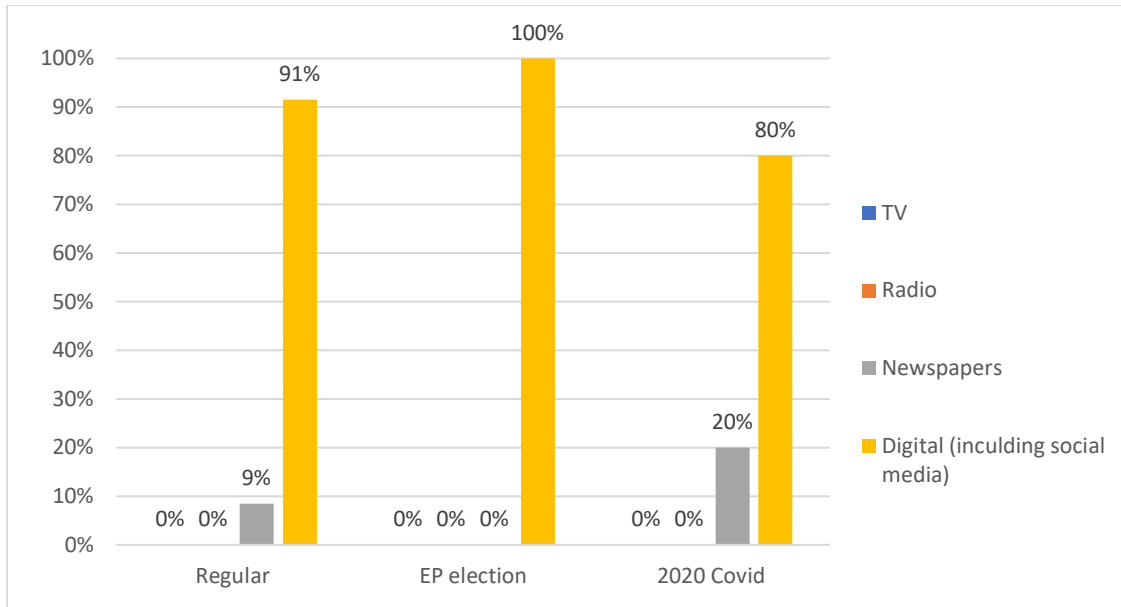


Figure 5. Source of sampled posts by period (Regular, EP election, 2020 Covid)



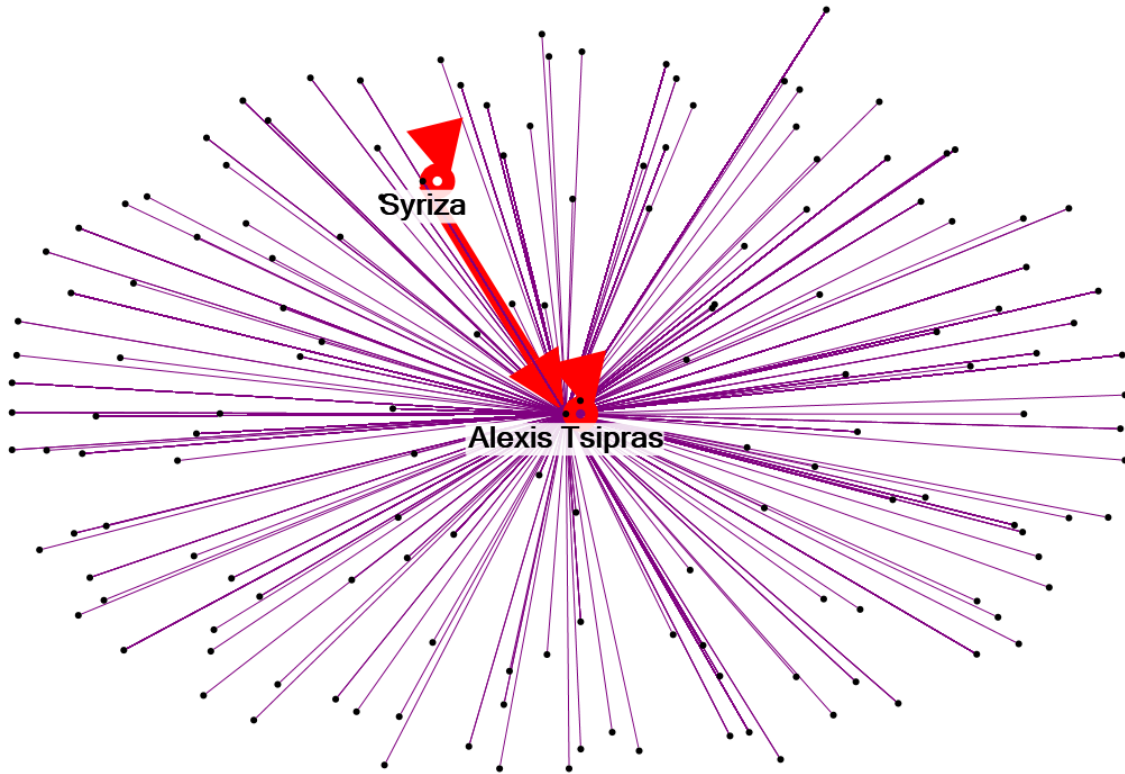
What role did the public media play in each of these periods, compared to commercial /private sources?

The role of public media was absent in the communication of Alexis Tsipras as only 1 out of 61 posts originated from a public media source, which was the webpage of the prime minister. Some of his own facebook posts included excerpts from interviews or speeches that Alexis Tsipras had given which aired on the public TV station (ERT). However, the format was video files created by Tsipras himself, making it difficult to categorize separately from the rest of communication in the message and hard to quantify. When sharing articles or other external links, Tsipras relied almost exclusively on privately owned newspapers or news portals.

Network analysis of sources that shared posts by Alexis Tsipras

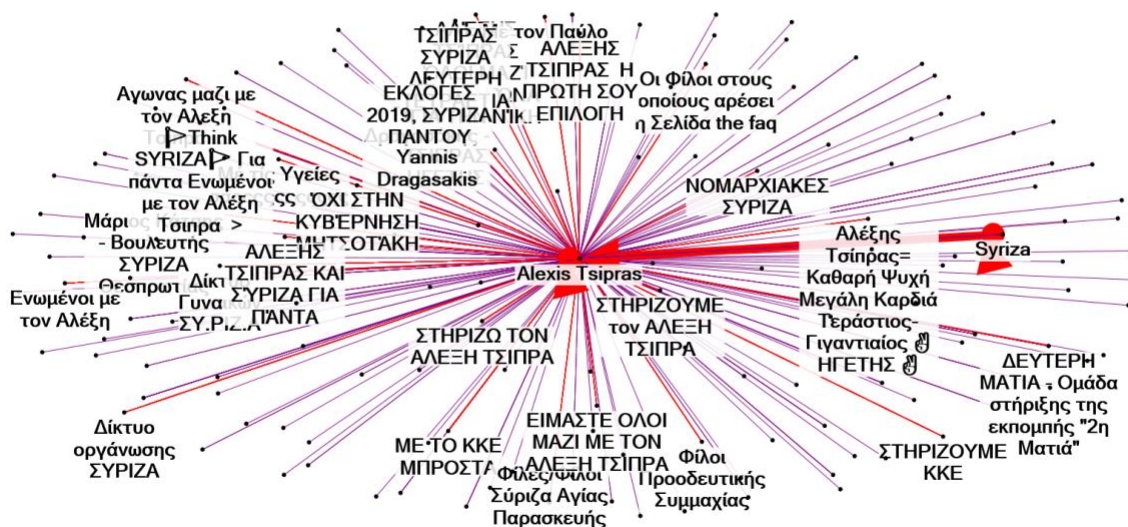
Figure 6 shows that the reciprocity network of Alexis Tsipras is limited to post shared between the account of Alexis Tsipras and the official account of his party, Syriza. So in effect, there is no reciprocity between Tsipras and external, non-party accounts. The accounts that shared posts made by Alexis Tsipras were not really in a reciprocal network with Tsipras, as he only shared back content posted by the official Syriza account.

Figure 6. Reciprocity facebook network of Alexis Tsipras



Taking a look at the accounts that shared the posts of Alexis Tsipras, we detect from their names that these were either accounts or pages dedicated to Alexis Tsipras or Syriza (see Figure 7). For example the page that shared most times posts of Alexis Tsipras (107) is named “Struggle with Alexis Tsipras”. Others had similar names, such as “ALEXIS TSIPRAS LEADER” (69) or “ALEXIS TSIPRAS AND SYRIZA FOREVER” (64). The only surprising result is that the only non-Syriza affiliated pages that appear to routinely share posts coming from Alexis Tsipras’s account are connected to the Greek Communist Party (KKE). For example, the page responsible for the second most posts from Alexis Tsipras’s page is called “Forward with KKE” (97), and there is another similarly named page (“We Support KKE”) that features on the list (with 27 posts). What is noteworthy that no other populist actors or pages seem to participate in the network of Alexis Tsipras. The facebook network of Syriza’s leader seems to be confined within his own party and – to a lesser extent – the wider social media ecosystem of the Greek Left.

Figure 7. Pages sharing posts of Alexis Tsipras more than 10 times



Conclusions

One could say that the communication strategy of Alexis Tsipras lacks a discernible “populist pattern” of communication, at least in terms of the types of sources shared and the type of social media network that the leader of Syriza participates in. Tsipras shares mostly direct forms of communication, prioritizing excerpts from speeches or interviews, and when he linked to external sources these were either party-related sources or standard national media sources. This does not preclude the use of populist language in the communication of Tsipras, but it does not follow the pattern of either sharing content from dubious sources or creating networking links to other populist actors in the country. In this sense, one could argue that the style of communication observed on social media is more “mainstream” than “populist”.

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Italy

Information Sources Shared on Facebook and Networking by Populist Leaders in Italy

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1. Introduction

This report focuses on the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) and the Lega - formerly Lega Nord. These two parties have been selected for the analysis for two main reasons. First of all, literature agrees to recognize them as populist (Bobba and Legnante 2017; McDonnell and Bobba 2015; Tarchi 2015) even if with some differences as the Lega represents a clear example of right-wing populist, with its specific focus on blaming outgroups (e.g. migrants) while the Movimento 5 Stelle, instead, has a more social-inclusionist approach, focusing more on the ideals of people's participation in political decision making. Besides, they are also the most politically relevant parties in the contemporary Italian context. M5S and Lega have been the most voted party in Italy respectively during the 2018 Italian General elections (in which M5S obtained 32.68%) and during the 2019 European Parliament Elections (in which Lega obtained 34.3% of votes). It should be also noted that from June 2018 until the late summer of 2019, they also shared the government of the country (the so-called green-yellow government). The government experience shared by the League and the 5 Star Movement was secured thanks to a firm agreement between the two about a common policy platform. The set of policy proposals was built around the cornerstones of the two parties. Accordingly, the Lega took ownership of government actions fighting illegal immigration - in line with the anti-immigrant claims of the party. While the Movimento 5 Stelle focused on the universal basic citizenship income and in particular on the reduction of the number of parliamentarians - in line with the anti-elite and pro-people claims of the party. The experience of the coalition government between the Lega and the M5S ends on the initiative of Salvini. In fact, in the aftermath of the 2019 European elections that certified a growing consensus for the Lega and thus a change in power leverage within the government. Salvini opens a government crisis that is resolved with the passage of the League to the opposition and the birth of a new coalition government formed by the 5 Star Movement and the Democratic Party.

Media consumption and populists in Italy

According to Reuters Institute (2020), Italian data signal that newspaper readership continues to fall steadily (and it should be noticed that this pattern is consistent with previous years). As pertains instead the television news viewership data are more stable, especially when compared to other countries. Interestingly, the Reuters Institute found that smartphones are the main device used to get online news. Indeed, two-thirds of the Italians use them at least once a week. (Reuters Institute, 2020, p. 75). However, when looking at the trust in news, data are particularly low if compared to other countries. Notably, less than 30% of the population states to trust the news overall. At the same time, the quota of Italian citizens getting political information from untrusted sources is rising. More precisely, 52% of respondents of Reuters Institute's survey reported relying on Facebook for news, while about 29% use WhatsApp, and almost 1 out of four respondents gets information from Youtube (24%).

These general trends in information and media consumption emerging from the Italian contexts are actually consistent with the kind of use that populists make of social media. As stressed in previous research social media represent a quite convenient environment for populists (Ernst et al. 2019; Enli and Rosenberg 2018; Engesser et al. 2017). Therefore, it not surprising to see that this kind of pattern is confirmed in Italy as well. Populist parties and their leaders have a quite prominent and effective presence on social media, and Facebook in particular. Interestingly, one could also point out that to some extent the internet and social media too are crucial elements of the organizational structure of these parties. The M5s is renowned to be born on the internet and it fits exactly the paradigms of the digital party (Gerbaudo 2019), but it is also extremely active and followed on the most important social media in the country (Facebook). For instance, the former leader of the Movement, Luigi Di Maio, has 2.3 million fans on Fb. On the other hand, it should be also underlined that Matteo Salvini invested a lot in social media as well. More precisely, his transformation of the Lega is based exactly on a strategic use of social media (Facebook in particular) that allowed to put aside some of the regionalist claims that were traditionally supported by the party for shifting towards a more nationalist message (Albertazzi et al. 2018). Remarkably, in terms of fan and engagement, Salvini is one of the most prominent politicians on Facebook in Europe (with 4.4M likes on his official fan page). Also, it should be pointed out that Salvini's social media communication is characterized in particular for attacking and blaming towards professional politicians, the European Union, Italian media, and the intellectuals (e.g. Bobba and Roncarolo, 2018; Bobba, 2019).

2. Methodology

The Italian political landscape has always been particularly lively and hectic. In particular, in the last decade, the entry on the scene of the 5 Star Movement with its unexpected landslide electoral results in 2013 has turned upside-down Italian politics. At its first electoral test, the M5S obtained indeed about a quarter of the valid votes, then 5 years later it proved to be not a one-hit-wonder. In fact, at the 2018 general election, the party consolidated its consensus by achieving over 33% of the votes. Nowadays, although the party is going through a phase of organizational restructuring (and despite the polls signal some criticism), the M5S is still in government and it remains one of the most relevant political actors in the Italian political scenario.

Likewise, the Lega - after a deep organizational and ideological transformation - has been able to increase its consensus at the polls (as already mentioned, it is the most voted party in the 2019 European Elections) and stands - despite in opposition - at the top of the electoral preferences of Italian citizens. Accordingly, since the political situation did not change in the last year, with the two main populist political parties maintaining their relevance within the Italian political landscape, we decided to keep the two parties as case studies. Precisely, we focused on the Facebook public pages of their leaders: Luigi di Maio¹ and Matteo Salvini.

As pertains to the period covered by our analysis, we covered three different moments: a) an electoral one, b) a routine period and c) the Covid-19 emergency. More in detail, as concerns the election campaign we focused on the European Elections period, namely from April to June 2019. The routine period refers to the following 8 months, namely from July 2019 to February 2020. Finally, the Covid-19 period goes from

¹ Di Maio resigned as “capo politico” (political leader) of the M5s in January 22, 2020. His post has been taken over by Vito Crimi. However, especially on social media like Facebook, Di Maio is still the leader de facto of the Movement, as well as the most influential member of M5s in the Government

March to April 2020. It is needed to underline that during the last phase covered in our analysis (Covid-19 period) all elections have been postponed due to the pandemic, so any electoral event has been held. Conversely, during the routine period and precisely in late January 2020, regional elections were organized but de-facto only two regions were involved (Calabria and Emilia Romagna).

The analysis was carried out on Facebook data (Mancosu et al., 2020; Marincea, 2020), downloaded with the CrowdTangle API developed by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team, 2020).

3. Results: Classification of sources shared by populist leaders (based on coding)

Types of media sources preferred or ignored by populists

In general, as reported by Table 1, the large majority of links outside the leaders' Facebook pages is composed of digital sources, precisely more than 65%, while newspapers account for only one-third of the sources. TV and Radio are instead pretty marginal, respectively 2.83% and 2.12%.

It should be also noticed that as pertains the ownership most of the sources are private, precisely more than 95% of the sources linked by the leaders.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

One interesting fact is that, as stressed in Table 2, more than half of the sources is local/regional (about 53%), while 44% is national. Only a residual portion of the sources is genuinely European/supranational (less than 2%). One possible explanation is that local news are more likely to have a focus on people's stories as the main business (as well as a greater appeal over the public on social media). Furthermore, previous research has also underlined that the event proximity is a driving factor for engagement on FB events (Salgado and Bobba 2019). Accordingly, it is not surprising that populist actors have a greater interest in linking news from local and national sources.

Table 3 provides information about the ownership transparency of media outlets linked by populist political actors. Interestingly, only about 14% of the sources can be defined as fully transparent in terms of their ownership. Almost 70% of the sources linked by the two Italian leaders are indeed not entirely transparent (67.91%), while about 17% of the sources are non-transparent at all.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

In general, Salvini and Di Maio's pages share contents that are not exactly analogous but still they present some similar characteristics.

As concerns the kind of source linked, figures provided in Table 4 report that both the two leaders tend to share mainly digital sources. Yet, while this portion for Di Maio accounts for about 82% of the sources, for

Salvini the quota is lower (about 62%). These differences are mirrored in data about newspapers, indeed while for the M5S leader they account only for about 15% of the sources, about one-third of the sources shared by Salvini come from newspapers. TV and Radio are instead confirmed as marginal.

Other distinctions between the two leaders emerge when looking at Table 5. More than half of the sources linked by Matteo Salvini are local (55.39%), while for Di Maio this portion accounts only for slightly more than one-fifth (21.43%). Conversely, the M5S leader is more active in linking national sources (64.2%) and European ones (14.29%). Only 43.63% of the sources linked by Salvini are national, while the Europeans are virtually absent (0.98%). Finally, it is generally difficult to assess a left-right placement of the sources that politicians share. The few outlets that have been coded in a clear political way show that Di Maio provides content coming from non-ideological sources (80.77%), while, on the contrary, Salvini is more prone to link right-wing and centrist outlets. As concerns the Lega's leader, indeed, we see from Table 6 that more than one-third of the sources are right-wing (27.9%).

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE]

It is worth to mention that a qualitative analysis of the sources revealed that both Salvini and Di Maio's pages share contents from the same sources when these are extremely popular in Italy. In particular, they both share *ansa.it*, which is the main press agency in Italy, and *Corriere.it*, one of the most relevant newspaper in Italy.

Electoral vs. non-electoral coverage, event vs. regular

The qualitative analysis shows that there are no remarkable differences in the distribution and nature of the sources in different periods. The two leaders did not change their social media activity nor the kind of sources linked during the three different periods covered by our analyses.

4. Results: Network analysis of sources that share populist leaders' posts

Focusing on the network structure derived from the FB public pages of the two leaders, it emerges with great evidence that Salvini's page network is far more vast than Di Maio's. Also, as shown in Figure 1, the two pages do not seem to overlap much. In this respect, the only exception is represented by the FB page of the *Corriere della sera* page. As mentioned above, this is not surprising, as the *Corriere della Sera* is the main newspaper outlet in Italy in terms of readership and it is also one of the most followed FB pages.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

All in all, the two networks are quite big. As underlined this is not a surprising output, as the two pages are similar in terms of engagement and they are both particularly prominent within the Italian Facebook. During

the analyzed period, Di Maio's contents have been shared by about 530 pages, while this quota is even higher for Salvini: over 680 share his contents (see Figure 2).

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

As it was to be expected, for both Di Maio and Salvini the pages more active in sharing their contents are precisely fan pages directly linked to the leader or the party pages. It is the case of pages/groups called, for instance, 5 STAR MOVEMENT - LET'S GOVERN ITALY for what concerns Di Maio and SALVINI PREMIER for Salvini). A qualitative analysis of the pages shows that groups and pages sharing Di Maio are mainly organized as bottom-up initiatives by small groups of militants that are not directly or formally linked to the M5S. Conversely, those pages and groups more prone to share Salvini's contents tend to perceive themselves as local sections of the party. More detailed analyses revealed that the number of pages sharing contents from both the two leaders are few in absolute number. Indeed they are just 40 and they can be defined as generic populist groups in which probably the two "souls" of the former green-yellow government remained and spam one against each other.

5. Discussion, limits of the study and possible future research directions

Being the numbers of engagement quite large, there are no big surprises in the analysis of the network of the two pages, nor in terms of what the pages share.

The two pages seem to have a quite differentiated audience that interacts and debates very rarely, or in very small and peripheral situations (such as the groups we talked about above).

Salvini and Di Maio use news sources to sell their arguments and topics, it is thus not important the source from which they derive the story, but rather the interpretation that the two leaders give to the same fact. A signal of this is the fact that both the leaders tend to share the two most important press agency and newspaper in Italy (ANSA and Corriere della Sera).

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List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Source type

Source	Percentage
TV	2.83
Radio	2.12
Newspaper	29.33
Digital sources	65.72
Total	100.00 (n=283)

Table 2. European, national and local sources

Source	Perc
European	1.83
National	44.95
Local	53.21
Total	100.00 (n=218)

Table 3. Source transparency

Source	Perc
Non-transparent	17.21
Partly non-transparent	67.91
Fully transparent	14.88
Total	100.00 (n=215)

Table 4. Kind of source per party leader

Source type	Di Maio	Salvini
TV	0.00	3.38
Radio	2.17	2.11
Newspaper	15.22	32.07
Digital sources	82.61	62.45
Total	100 (46)	100 (237)

Table 5. European, national and local sources per party leader

Source charact.	Di Maio	Salvini
European	14.29	0.98
National	64.29	43.63
Local	21.43	55.39
Total	100 (14)	100 (204)

Table 6. Sources political leaning

Political pos	Di Maio	Salvini
Center-left	3.85	18.60
Center	11.54	30.23
Center-right	0.00	11.63
Right	3.85	27.91
Other	80.77	11.63

Total	100 (26)	100 (43)
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Figure 1.

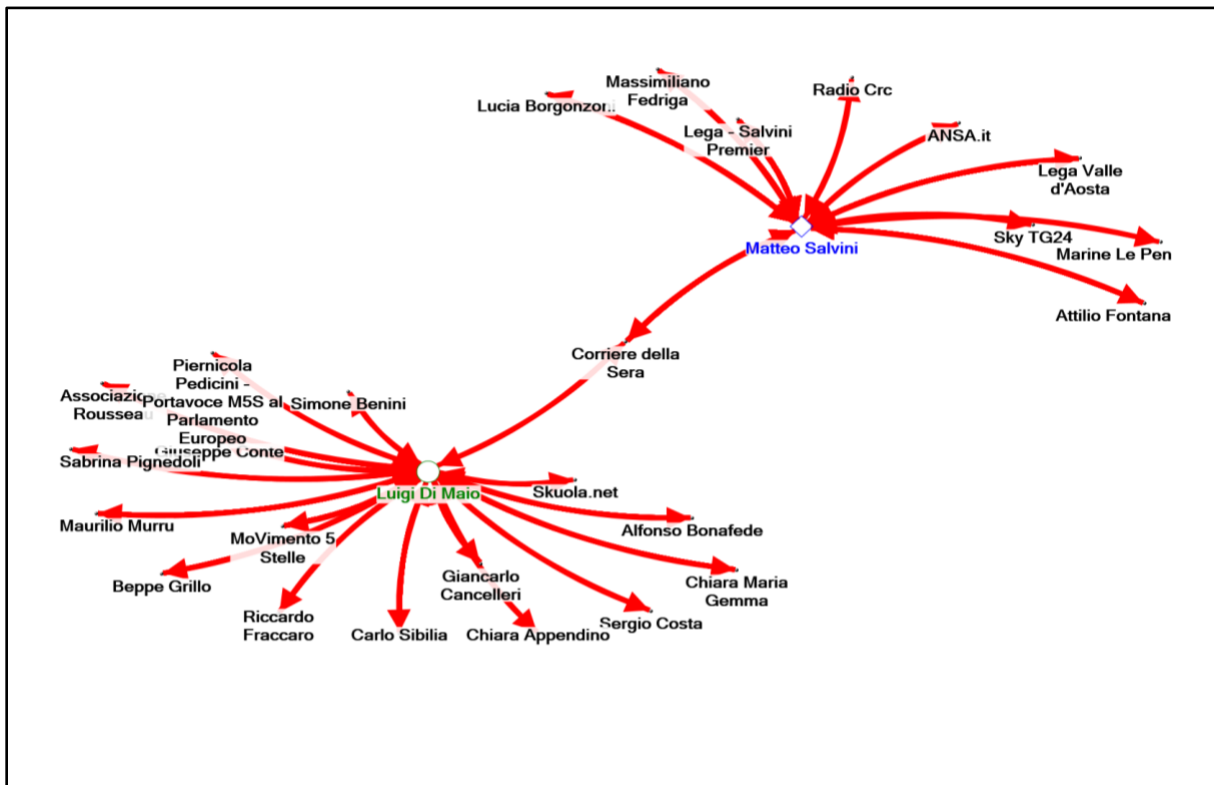
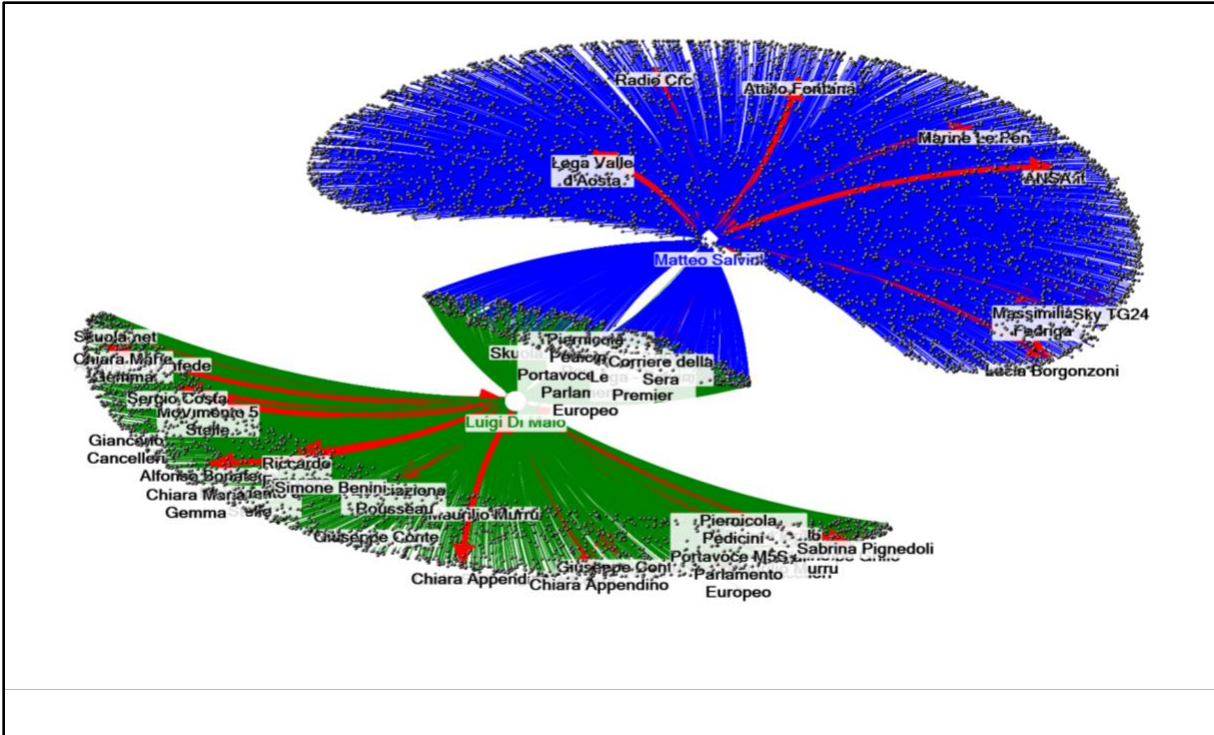


Figure 2



Poland

Information Sources Shared on Facebook and Networking by Populist Leaders and Populist Parties in Poland

Artur Lipiński

The study is focused on two politically relevant populist actors: Law and Justice and Confederation. According to the majority of national and international scholars of populism, Law and Justice Party (in Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) constitutes very typical example of populist right-wing party. Although populism as a feature of political discourse was particularly salient during victorious 2015 electoral campaign to the Polish parliament, populist discursive strategies were employed already in the 2005 electoral campaign and with the lapse of time it gradually became more prominent in the party manifestos and speeches of leader Jarosław Kaczyński and other important politicians. In the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections and in the subsequent parliamentary elections later that year, PiS and its minor coalition partners (the United Right) secured a dominant position (45.4% of votes, and 43.59% of votes with 235 seats, accordingly) thanks to a campaign filled with homophobic slogans and criticisms of ‘gender ideology’, assisted by generous social spending framed as a people-oriented ‘revolution of dignity’.

Another important result of the October 2019 elections was the relative success of Confederation, a radical right-wing grouping founded at the beginning of 2019 on the eve of an electoral campaign for the European and national parliaments, with 11 seats won in the latter (6.81% of votes). Confederation took shape of the right-wing coalition consisting mainly of conservatives and libertarians from KORWIN party and radical right National Movement. The party promotes homophobic, pro-life, eurorejectonist and nationalist views articulated together with the radically free market ideology. The party showed its ability to surpass PiS from the right flank and succeeded in forcing PiS to radicalize its message. PiS in its attempts to eradicate all the possible actors on its right side of political spectrum resorts to the radical discourse without any direct references to Confederation and at the same time uses friendly public and private media for direct attacks on the grouping. On the other hand, PiS is one of the most criticized parties by Confederation which strives to undermine PiS right-wing identity and collect support from the groups of PiS supporters disappointed with the policies of the incumbents.

The fall in many indexes of freedom and democracy (including Freedom House which since 2020 classifies Poland as semi-consolidated democracy) is to large extent triggered by the breadth and significance of changes in the media system. Indeed, the institutional aspects of the media system in Poland have changed since Law and Justice (hereafter: PiS) came to power on 2015. It’s important to notice however that the party strengthened certain tendencies already present in the Polish media system. According to many scholars it was close to polarized pluralist model characterized by political parallelism, high level of politicization of public media by the government and political parties and commentary-oriented journalism with the clear ideological divisions between various media outlets (Dobek-Ostrowska 2012). Nevertheless, the political control over media had significantly increased with the amendments of the media law which

transformed public media into the mouthpiece of the government. On 30 December, PiS adopted an amendment which allowed to terminate the contracts of the members of management and supervisory boards of the Polish Television and the Polish Radio. Moreover, on June 2016 the Parliament created a new state organ, National Media Council which took a lot of constitutional prerogatives of National Broadcasting Council (KRRiTV). In the years that followed one could observe the increasing partisanship of the public television and radio. The imbalance of the public service media affects also the visibility of political actors. Moreover, there is a significant difference in the amount of time in the public media devoted to PiS in comparison to other political actors. For example, according to the research conducted by KRRiT PiS was afforded 59 percent of airtime and oppositional Civic Platform only 16 percent (mk 2016). Another study conducted before 2019 elections confirmed extreme imbalance of public television in respect of favorability (“almost complete lack of criticism towards PiS and complete negation of the opposition”). According to the research, in the flagship news bulletin of TVP pro-government opinions were represented three times more often than other opinions (Towarzystwo Dziennikarskie 2019). The same results were brought by the close monitoring of TVP before 2020 presidential elections (Kozielski 2020). Further, more than two hundreds of employees of public broadcasters were fired and exchanged for employees charged with the task to produce support for the government and depreciate the opposition and other actors opposing the incumbents and their policies.

All the abovementioned changes which led to the actual public media capture by the government of the United Right contributed to the radical polarization of the media system. Although Poland still has diverse media landscape political changes affected also private broadcasters. First, a number of private media (particularly the biggest daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* and influential TV channel TVN) were consistently attacked by state media and PiS officials quoted in their programmes. Secondly, state-owned companies ceased to buy advertisements in critical media. At the same time the advertising revenues improved significantly the situation of right-wing publication. For example, two liberal journals *Newsweek* and *Polityka*, experienced a fall in their advertisements revenues by 7.9 percent and 14.6 percent, respectively, between June 2015 and June 2016. At the same time, advertisement revenues rose at right wing weeklies *Do Rzeczy* (14.4 percent) and *wSieci* (38.5 percent) (Goczał 2016). In other words, revenues were reallocated to the media loyal to the ruling party. Thirdly, the access to the information became more difficult, journalists have reported troubles with collecting the information as politicians and institutions controlled by them limited access to sources of information for the critical media using favorable public service media or social media instead (Chapman 2017). Fourthly, since its coming to power PiS was consistently speaking about two new laws which would “re-polonise” and “deconcentrate” private media companies. Ultimately, on December 2020 Orlen, a state-controlled energy company announced the acquisition of a media company Polska Press with more than 20 regional dailies, 120 weekly magazines and 500 online portals across the country (Czuchnowski 2021). Importantly, in the recent weeks the incumbent party occasionally express their will to control the online sphere claiming that companies such as Facebook are limiting the freedom of speech.

The Polish media landscape

According to the Reuters International report media in Poland have become deeply polarised due to media policy of Law and Justice party supporting institutionally and financially pro-government media and attacking critical media with a wide range of means, including article 212 of criminal code, under which

journalists can be sent to prison for defamation. According to the report online and television are the most important sources of news. The tendencies are clear, there is a growing importance of social media as a dominant source of information which enjoyed steady increase from 84% in 2015 to 87% in 2020. Television as a source of news occupies second position as it dropped from 81% on 2015 to 75% in 2020. Interestingly there was a steep increase of the social media as a source of information from 52% in 2015 to 66% in 2020. Interestingly, the smartphone became more important device than computer in respect of accessing news for the first time. As to the online media, internet user penetration rate increased from 2015 to 2020. The rate of people with access to the internet increased and reached 84.9 percent in 2019 with the largest group of internet users aged 16 to 44 (Statista 2020). Importantly for our study, there were 19 million social media users in Poland in January 2020 and this group increased by 7,8% between April 2019 and January 2020. The social media penetration was at the level of 50% in January 2020 (Kemp 2020). Moreover, the most popular and engaging social media platform for Poland is Facebook. Also, it overtakes other types of social media and messaging platforms in respect of news consumption.

Table 1: Social Media Consumption in Poland

Rank Brand	For News	For All
1 Facebook	65% (+4)	83%
2 You Tube	36% (-3)	75%
3 Facebook Messenger	24% (+2)	73%
4 Instagram	12% (+3)	34%
5 Twitter	11% (+1)	21%
6 WhatsApp	10% (+1)	31%

Source: Reuters 2020

Interestingly, trust in news has declined by three percentage since 2019 and remains at the level of 46%. It seems that the growing belief of the radical bias of the public media pushes people towards private media or online media. They score higher in terms of trust than the public service broadcaster TVP perceived as a mouthpiece of the government. Despite significant advertisement revenues from state-controlled companies, right-wing media are failing to increase audience or trust (Makarenko 2020). It does not mean however, that right wing media are not trusted at all or their trust stays at the very low level. The polarization of the media system entails rather the strong division between those trusting and not trusting the specific media outlets. „Gazeta Polska”, right-wing weekly explicitly supporting the government provides very interesting example of this polarization with 43% of trusting respondents and 31 not trusting (Reuters 2020).

The abovementioned trends in media consumption, political parallelism of the media system and growing polarization are perfectly reflected in the behaviour of two party actors under scrutiny. First, PiS was able

to skilfully use social media during 2015 parliamentary and presidential campaign and change the image of the traditional, conservative and technologically backward party. The success in the social media was the result of the deliberate strategy to credit the online campaign to the “zealous team of PiS supporters in their 20s” (Chapman 2017). PiS was more active, able to mobilize more supporters and produce more activity on its social media profiles than the biggest oppositional party, liberal Civic Platform (Chapman 2017; Chapman, Cienski 2015). In the subsequent years the media strategies were two-pronged. On the one hand PiS directed its messages to the older groups of the electorate through public media generously financed from the budget, on the other, it targeted the younger voters through the messages and paid advertisements in social media (Wanat 2019; Mierzyńska 2019). Paradoxically, the radical pro-PiS bias of public media which led to silencing any information about Confederation or strong attacks on the grouping from all pro-PiS media strengthened the credentials of the party as the excluded and real anti-establishment force persecuted by the elites. Moreover, it pushed the party to focus its communication strategy on social media. Accordingly, in terms of the level of interactivity and fans on Facebook, Confederation is one of the most prominent political forces in social media. Its profile is liked by 476,000 fans, outdoing bigger and much more politically relevant PiS (287,000) or Civic Platform (251,000). It should be noted that contrary to the 2019 European election campaign when the party promoted anti-Semitic and homophobic messages, the grouping significantly moderated its discourse before the October 2019 parliamentary elections and 2020 presidential elections (Sitnicka 2019).

The aim of this report is to analyse the type and other aspects of media links shared by Facebook profiles of these two populist actors. The sample covers four periods, three standard periods adopted for the analysis of other cases of this Working Package plus additional period preceding 2019 parliamentary elections (13 September 2019- 13 October). The analysis was carried out on Facebook data (Mancosu et al., 2020; Marincea, 2020), downloaded with the CrowdTangle API developed by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team, 2020)

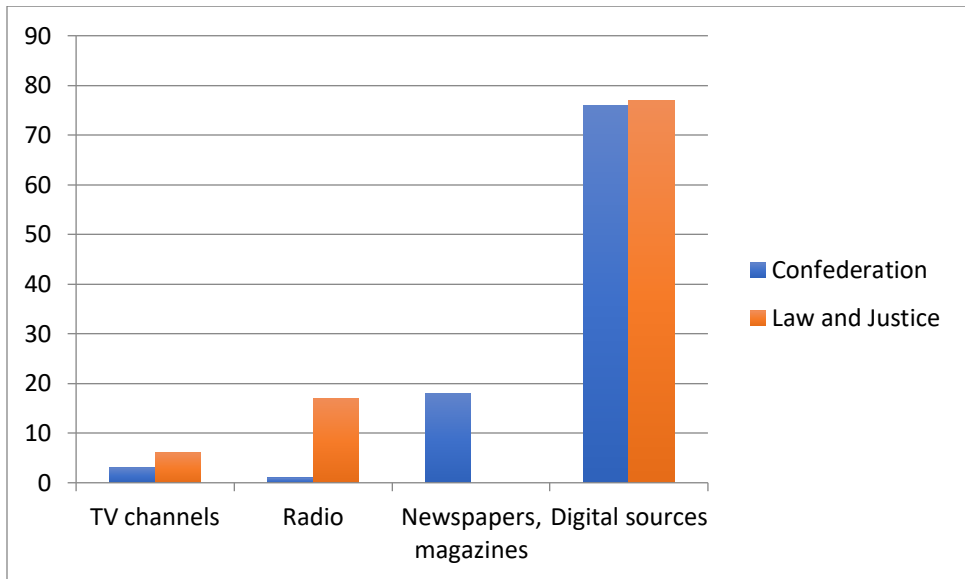
3. Classification of sources shared by populist groupings:

- g. What type of media sources seem to be by and large preferred by populists? (Source type, registered or not, public or commercial, transparency ownership)
- h. What type of media sources seem to be ignored by populists?

As regards the type of media sources, the analysis of the media links posted on Facebook allows to detect very clear tendency. In both cases, the preferred source of information are digital sources which were used at almost same level by PiS and Confederation (77% and 76% respectively). The rest of the sources are marginal in comparison to digital sources. Even though the links to these media are relatively insignificant one can still discern a few differences between the analysed profiles. First, TV is the most rarely linked media outlet for PiS and radio for Confederation. Apparently, PiS decided to follow two-pronged strategy, targeting the older segments of the electorate through television and younger cohorts through social media. Secondly, radio appears more frequently among the linked media outlets on PiS profile and its marginal on Confederation profile. Thirdly, PiS did not post any links to newspapers despite the number of weeklies and dailies explicitly supporting the party, with its politicians having important voice in these media either

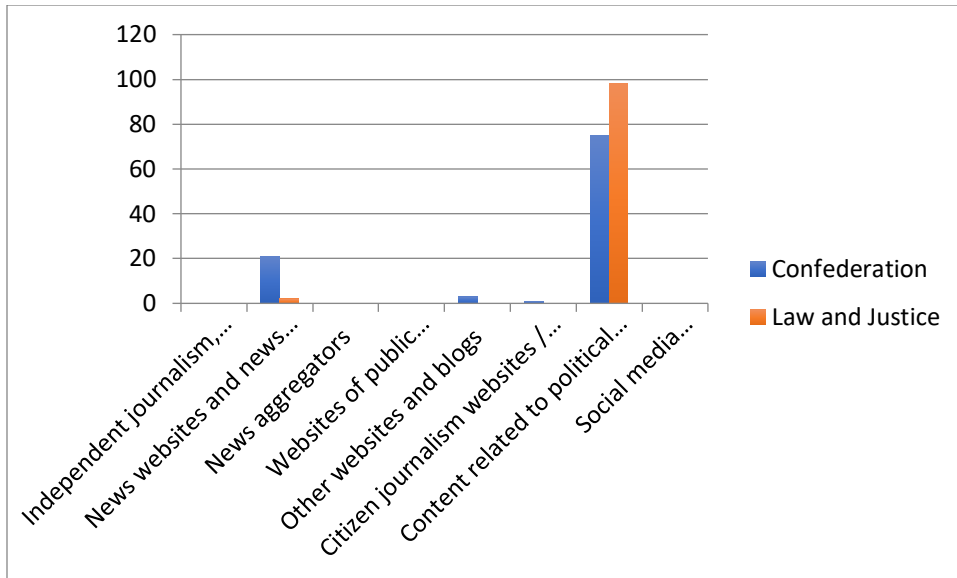
as permanent authors or in the role of interviewees. Fourthly, Confederation’s profile is the most diversified in respect of the media types. It posted links to all types of the media, whenever there was any information on the grouping or its leaders involved or information or whenever the information was in line with the party agenda. It is in line with the recent literature on media and populism emphasizing the affirmative usage of traditional media to support own’s agenda despite the frequently radical criticism of the mainstream media (Haller, Holt, 2019). Fifthly, all the linked media are national or mixed, there are no links to European/supranational media.

Figure 1. Types of sources



The analysis of the types of digital sources reveals very clear patterns. Virtually none of the profiles shared official or expert sources. Only in case of Confederation the website devoted entirely to economic issues was linked once. Confederation was also more willing to post links to news websites more frequently (21%) in comparison to PiS (2%). It included mainstream news websites like *natemat.pl* or *wp.pl*. Moreover, Confederation incidentally posted links to other websites which were opinion websites or blogs promoting radical right views or being in line with Russian propaganda like *konserwatyzm.pl* or *kresy.pl* or citizen journalism (for example, radical right *medianarodowe.pl*). However, the overwhelming majority of links are websites and social media accounts of Confederation and PiS, their individual politicians or YouTube materials produced by these two groupings (75% and 98%, respectively). It is clear that the social media and websites of these two groupings create separate bubbles which mutually reinforce their messages inside and support each other.

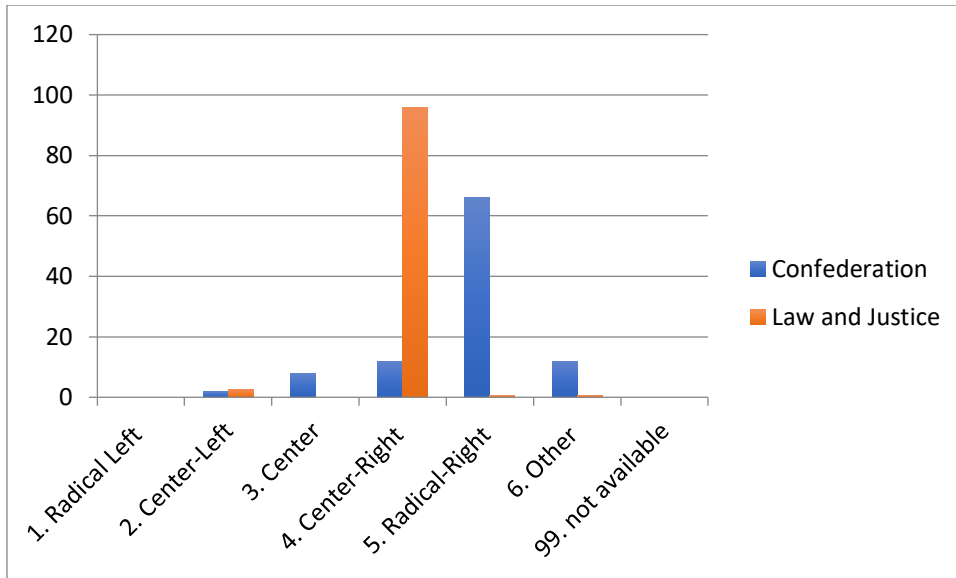
Figure 2. Types of digital sources



Among the media which are systematically ignored and very rarely linked to are left and liberal media representing the mainstream of the public debate like daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, weekly *Polityka* or TV channel *TVN*. Interestingly, it is the Confederation that introduces more variety of media types on its profile, rather than PiS, strongly focused on its own social media environment. Current research notices frequently traditional, non-interactive usage of social media by populists (for example: Grill, 2016, 92; Waisbord, Amado, 2017, 1337). Virtual lack of links to citizen journalism or blogs in the Polish sample provides additional contribution to these findings.

The political orientation of the shared sources reflects the inclination of populist groupings to promote right-wing discourses (Figure 3). Moreover, it reflects the ideological difference between PiS and Confederation, where PiS as a large party oriented towards centre represents centre right and Confederation represents radical right. One has to remember however that both parties, but PiS in particular, in order to capture the support of specific segments of the electorate strategically shifted between centre and the margins on the ideological field. In general, however, the references to the media classified as centre right constitute 96% of PiS sample and 66% of Confederation sample. Again, one can find more ideological diversity and some source which can't be classified on the left-right axis on Confederation profile. For example, Confederation posted links to the centre-left media (2%), centre (8%), centre right (12%) or non-ideological media (12%), whereas PiS only to centre left (2,7%) and incidentally to the radical right (*wpolityce.pl* - website supporting PiS with very radical, Eurosceptic, anti-gender, ideological leanings).

Figure 3. Political orientation of sources

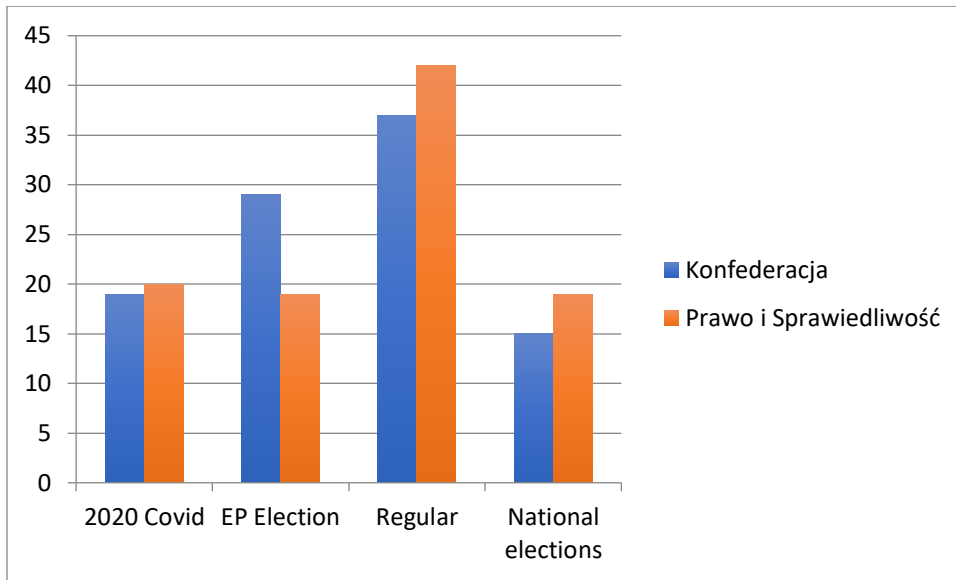


2. Are there significant differences between the different populist leaders/parties in their media preferences? To what extent do they draw on the same media sources and/or share sources connected with each other's profile/party?

The analyzed profiles referred to total number of 60 sources. Around 10% (7 sources) were common to both profiles, including Facebook. These were mostly mainstream media of diverse type (news websites, YouTube, radio, TV) and left, centre and centre right ideological leanings. The most important difference between two profiles is the number of unique sources, 17 for PiS and 36 for Confederation confirming again the bigger differentiation of the radical right's profile. Secondly, significant number of the unique sources referred to by PiS profile is constituted by public media supporting the party. Thirdly, Confederation referred to the radical right-wing media which were not mentioned by PiS, but also to a number of websites focused on economic issues. That reflects not only radical right but also neoliberal ideological agenda of one of the groups constituting Confederation.

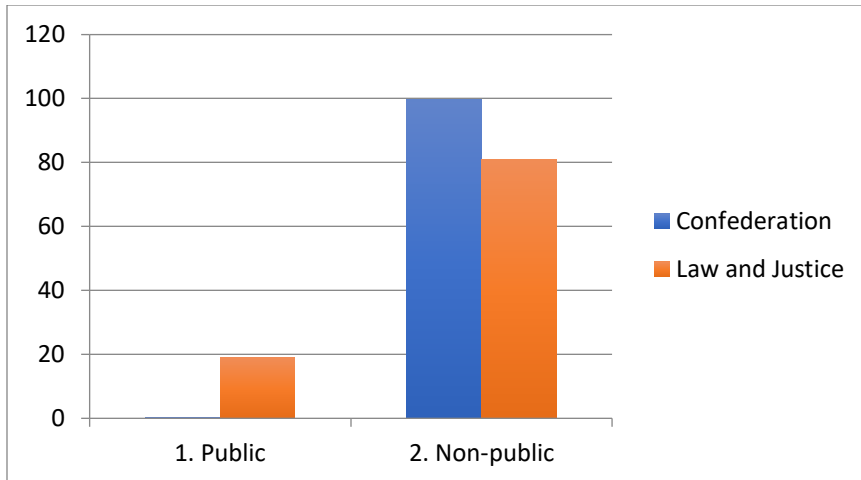
The analysis of the distribution of the links to the media across four sampled periods does not reveal significant differences among them (Figure 4). Contrary to the expectation the number of sources in the regular period was higher than in the electoral period. The difference is relatively moderate in Confederation and more visible in case of PiS. As regards Confederation, the sources posted during regular period constituted 37% of all the sources whereas in the national election period and COVID-19 pandemic period 15% and 19% respectively. The numbers were higher (29%) in the European elections period. These figures were even more differentiated across analyzed periods in case of PiS. Here, the number of posted sources in the regular period is twice as high (42%) as from the other three periods.

Figure 4. Distribution of sources across sampled periods



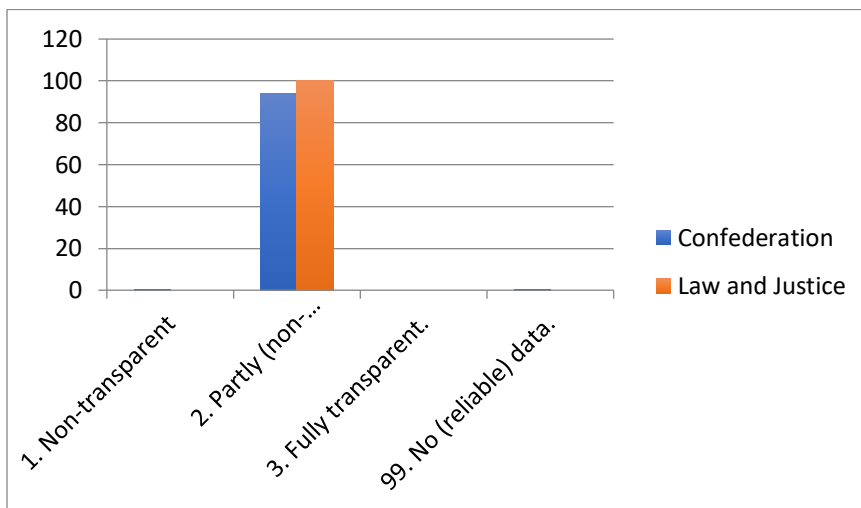
In the majority of cases, both profiles used non-public sources. There is however, a difference between PiS and Confederation profiles. As regards PiS, links to public media constitute 20% of all the links whereas in case of Confederation it accounts only for 0,4%. As mentioned before, subjugation of the public media by PiS led to their extreme bias towards the governing party. Consequently, public media were particularly important for PiS, providing the favourable space to promote its agenda and systematically criticizing or silencing the opponents. Accordingly, the reluctance of Confederation towards public media resulted from their negative representation or, most frequently, complete silencing. Another reason of high presence of non-public media is the domination of digital sources, mainly Facebook accounts of individuals, parties or discussion groups.

Figure 5. Ownership



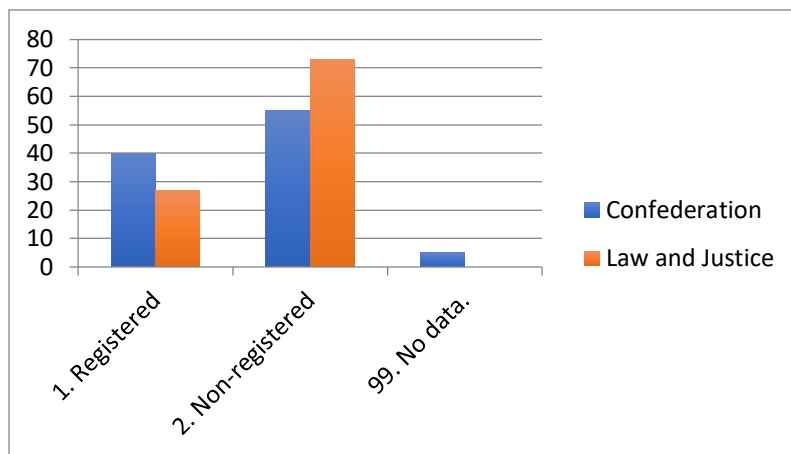
As far as the transparency of ownership is concerned, Polish situation represents partly non-transparent case. According to B. Klimkiewicz (2017: 8), it results from three factors. First, changes in the media ownership are fast and continuous. Second, foreign media companies do not have to comply with the Polish laws. Thirdly, there is no aggregating register which would provide complete data about media ownership in one place. Accordingly, additional effort is needed to collect relevant information. In the analyzed case in the PiS the entire sample represents only partially transparent information on the ownership of the specific media outlet. In case of Confederation its 94%, as there are some media outlets which are non-transparent or there is no reliable data. For example, there is no reliable data on some extreme right websites promoting anti-Semitic, xenophobic, homophobic, and most recently anti-vaccination messages (for example: *narodowcy* or *Media narodowe*).

Figure 6. Transparency of ownership



The practices of registration in Poland are quite strict. According to the article 20 of the Press Law there are only two formats (daily newspapers and magazines) which are required to register in court. Nevertheless, Polish courts frequently assume that online outlets fulfilling criteria stipulated in the Press Law should automatically be classified as daily newspaper or magazine and registered. Consequently, as there is no official register, the coding of the analyzed sample was based on the assumption that besides social media the rest of the media outlets linked to by two populist profiles under analysis are registered. Accordingly, 27% of PiS and 40% of Confederation are registered and 73% and 55% non-registered for the respective political actors. In case of Confederation there are some marginal cases where the information is difficult to obtain.

Figure 7. Registration

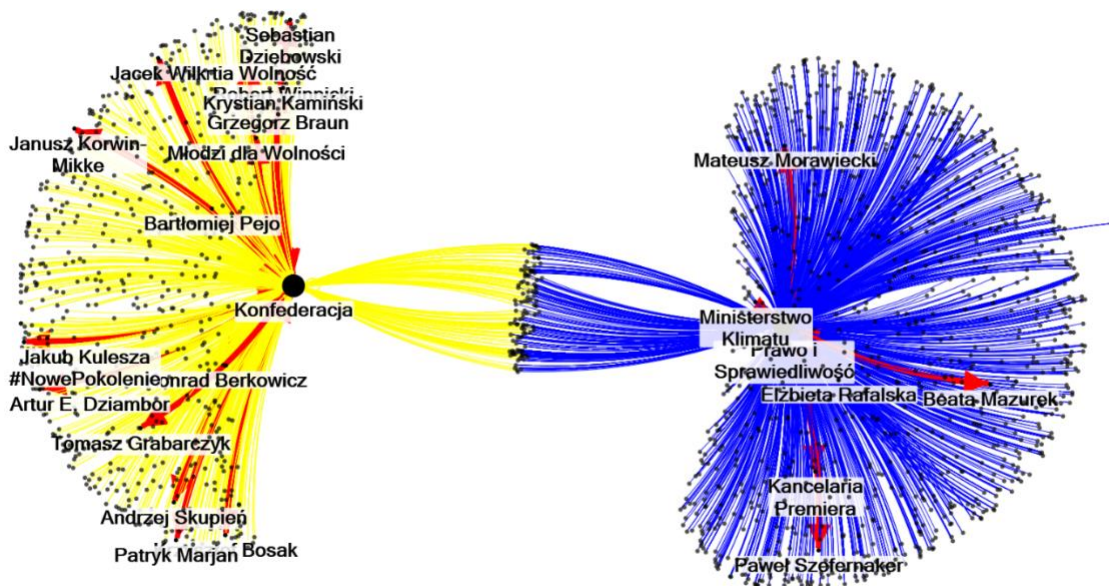


3. Network analysis of sources that share populist leaders' posts

3.1. Network Reciprocity:

- are there disproportions between the 2 reciprocated networks (ex. one much bigger than other)?
- How much do they overlap (which would mean that Reciprocal pages are also Central)? What reciprocal pages are the connectors between the two, can you say something about them, based on the previous coding/classification?

There is the disproportion between two profiles in terms of network reciprocity which reflects the relevance, structure of political organization and social embeddedness of the two political actors under consideration. Moreover, both parties are embedded in two almost separate bubbles which are linked together by very limited set of sources being shared by and shared mutually by two profiles. They stay in reciprocal relations mostly with their own separated structures, organizations, politicians or Facebook discussion groups. In the period under consideration 143 pages shared Confederation profile and 277 shared PiS profile. The discrepancy between profiles is even bigger in terms of the number of posts sharing PiS profile, with 1963 posts for Confederation and 5784 posts for PiS. In both cases the type of pages sharing two actors profiles were profiles of the local branches of party organization from specific geographical locations (for example: PiS Piekary Śląskie, PiS, Piotrków Trybunalski), local branches of the organizations constituting Confederation (Ruch Narodowy Starachowice, Wolność Kłobuck), youth organizations (Młodzi dla Wolności, Forum Młodych PiS Konin), party politicians (Beata Mazurek, Janusz Korwin-Mikke) or even public institutions (Ministerstwo Zdrowia) or public media (TVP) in case of PiS. Importantly, among the accounts sharing Confederations posts were extreme right profiles of individuals (S. Michalkiewicz) or discussion groups (Polska to MY Rdzenni Polacy nigdy goście !!, Nie dla obcej dominacji w Polsce, Polonizacja, Polscy patrioci, Polska a nie Polin) confirming, disseminating and articulating with other ideological elements the radical agenda of this grouping.



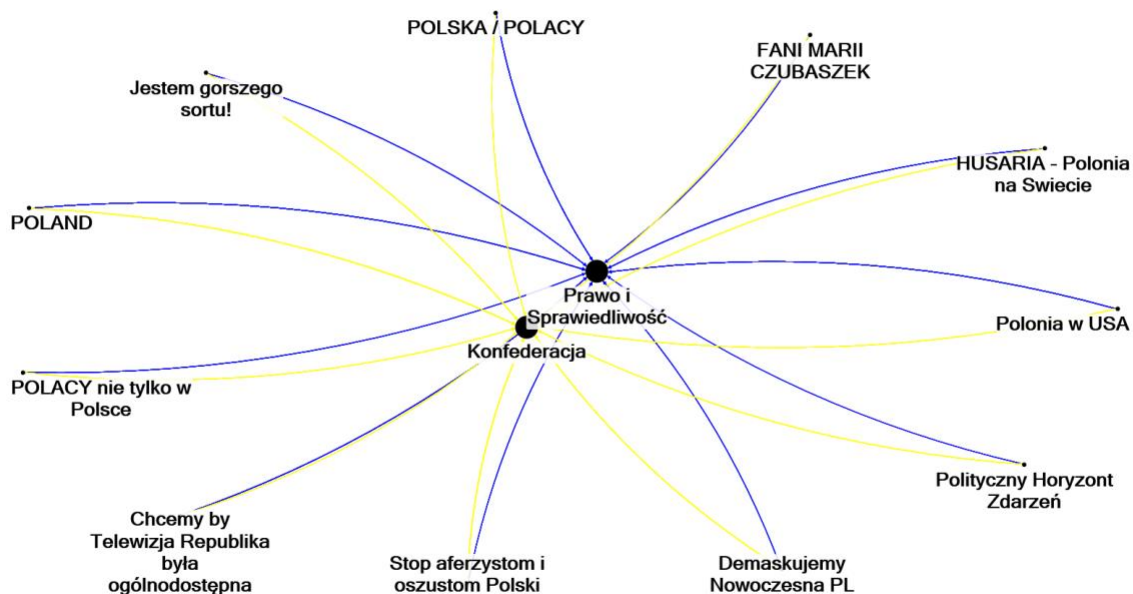
3.2. Network Centrality: How many Facebook pages share each profile at least 10 times?

- Which are the main disseminators for each of the two (biggest number of shares) and how equally or disproportionately do they share each of them?
- What can be said about these pages (type, ownership, registration, political orientation etc.)?

There are only 11 Facebook pages which share both analysed profiles in the periods under consideration. Interestingly, although PiS has more widespread network than Confederation, the Facebook pages shared by both parties were posting material from Confederation profiles almost twice as frequently as PiS posts (243 and 133). These Facebook pages are public or closed discussion and fan groups. At least four provide platform for the Polish diaspora living abroad, what is explicitly stated in the name of one group (Polonia w USA). At least eight of them more or less frequently promote radical right agenda close to Confederation, expressing xenophobia, homophobia, anti-Semitism, but also very strong Ukrainophobia that might indicate Russian influences emphasized by the analysts following radical right social media (Mierzyńska 2018). Interestingly, one of the pages is a fan page of Polish writer and satirist Maria Czubaszek, and another one (Jestem gorszego sortu!) provides a platform for disseminating oppositional, anti-PiS information.

Table 2. Most central FB pages (shared at least 5 times each)

1.	POLAND
2.	Stop aferzystom i oszustom Polski
3.	Polonia w USA
4.	POLSKA / POLACY
5.	Jestem gorszego sortu!
6.	Chcemy by Telewizja Republika była ogólnodostępna
7.	Demaskujemy Nowoczesna PL
8.	HUSARIA - Polonia na Swiecie
9.	POLACY nie tylko w Polsce
10.	Polityczny Horyzont Zdarzeń
11.	FANI MARIII CZUBASZEK



Conclusions

The two political profiles constitute separate spheres connected together through very narrow number of Facebook pages. That reflects very well polarized character of Polish public sphere and strong divisions on the right side of political spectrum. Despite radicalisation of PiS agenda and populist language of communication, PiS network does not contain most radical or extremist pages. On the other hand, much smaller and definitely less politically relevant Confederation uses all the opportunities to inform about its agenda and disseminate the messages about other media and groups disseminating its agenda. Secondly, in both cases, the preferred source of information are digital sources which were used at almost same level by PiS and Confederation, but the latter one refers to the much more diversified sources than PiS. It might be explained by the fact that Confederation has to use every opportunity to present its messages, contrary to PiS which can always count on public media. Interestingly, but in line with the tendencies in the Polish society, TV as a source does not constitute very important part of the sample. Thirdly, references to citizen journalism were not important at all. Fourthly, two groupings were embedded in the network of the local branches of parties and party members mainly. In case of Confederation there is some leaning towards more spontaneous grassroots fan groups or Facebook discussion groups which share much more extreme content than the party itself. That allowed the party to move strategically from the radical position towards more moderate stance, what was noticeable particularly well during 2019 parliamentary elections.

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Slovakia

Information Sources Shared on Facebook by Populist Leaders and Populist Parties in Slovakia

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Intro & Methodology²

This report provides in the first part classification of sources shared or ignored by populist leaders in Slovakia in two selected periods in 2020. It focused at (if available) significant differences between the different populist leaders/parties as reflected in their media preferences. Finally, it asks to what extent did they draw on the same media sources and/or share sources connected with each other's profile/party.

In the second part, this report offers the network analysis of sources that shared populist leaders' posts. In addition to research subjects analysed in the first part (Boris Kollár and OĽaNO), we added here also We are a Family movement led by Kollár.

For the purpose of our research we selected FB profile of a populist leader (Boris Kollár) and movement/party of another populist leader, Igor Matovič. The selected party was *Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO)*³ Boris Kollár, was leader of *We are a Family (WAF)*.⁴ While until general elections in February 2020 Matovič (with private Facebook profile only) was less popular than this movement, in case of Boris Kollár and WAF it was the opposite situation. Kollár was more popular than his party on Facebook.

Regardless of this difference, both parties/movements and their leaders showed high level of populism. According to the 2018 Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey (POPPA) dataset, *OĽaNO* showed 7 degrees magnitude of populism at 10 points scale, while *WAF* showed 7.8 magnitude of populism at 10 points scale (key indicators: Manichean, indivisible, general will,

² The data was coded by two Slovak coders - Viera Zuborova and Lubica Adamcova and then checked and an agreement was reached between the two coders. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822590 (DEMOS). Any dissemination of results here presented reflects only the consortium's (or, if applicable, author's) view. The Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

³. The full name is OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti, NOVA, Kresťanská únia, ZMENA ZDOLA. It has changed its name three times since its founding. This change reflects legal requirements of electoral law in case of coalitions.

⁴We used typically used abbreviation in the former case, and our own suggested abbreviation in the latter case. There is no established local abbreviation for Sme rodina, and occasionally used foreign abbreviation „SR“ does not seem to be clear enough. In the Slovak language, „SR“ means abbreviation of the official name of the state.

people centrism and antielitism).⁵ Both parties and their leaders (Igor Matovič and Boris Kollár respectively) just happened to move from their long-term role in opposition to being members of the government or in executive positions (as the Prime Minister or Speaker of the Parliament respectively, since March/April 2020). Thus, the key research question – do they “like” alternative or any other (mainstream) media on their FB pages - is even more relevant.

Moreover, selection of these two parties for further analysis was also relevant from the perspective of social media use in political communication. *OLaNO* had highest number (3 201 755) of all types of interactions on FB among political parties throughout 2020. *WAF* was third (1 102 550), the second place was occupied by *SMER-SD* (1 232 700). Even more impressive was the total number of interactions of Igor Matovič in 2020 - 6 370 753 – more than all other members of the Cabinet combined.⁶ The highest engagement of the followers during 2019 campaign to the European Parliament was recorded on the FB page of *OLaNO* (52,000), followed by *WAF* (29,000). Similarly, the highest number of posts on FB was presented by *OLaNO* (129), followed by *WAF* (88)⁷. Both parties were among the first (*OLaNO*) or third (*WAF*) most popular parties on FB based on interactions during the six weeks of campaign before 2020 general elections.⁸ Just for providing a complete picture, *Smer-SD* (Direction-Social Democracy) was the second most popular party on FB. However, *OLaNO* was clear leader, having about the same popularity on FB as three next political parties combined. As one could have expected, *WAF* published 22 times more contributions on FB than on its website during the official 2019 election campaign before elections to the EP.⁹

The analysis was carried out on Facebook data (Mancosu et al., 2020; Marincea, 2020), downloaded with the CrowdTangle API developed by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team, 2020)

⁵ <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/8NEL7B>, see more in Maurits Meijers and Andrej Zaslove, “Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey 2018 (POPPA)”, (2020) <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/8NEL7B>, Harvard Dataverse.

⁶ Gabriel Tóth, “Analýza interakcií politikov na Facebooku” [Analysis of Interactions of Politicians on FB], *etrend*, (2021, January 5), <https://www.trend.sk/nazory-a-komentare/kto-je-najuspesnejším-slovenským-politikom-facebooku>

⁷ Veronika Oravcová, Peter Plenta and Radka Vicenová, “Slovakia,” in *2019 European Elections Campaign. Images, Topics, Media in the 28 Member States*, ed. E. Novelli and B. Johansson, (Brussels: EEMC 2019), 224-230.

⁸ Katarína Klingová et al., “Slovenské voľby 2020 v informačnom priestore” [Slovak Elections in Information Space], Bratislava: Globsec, (2020). <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Slovenske-volby-2020.pdf>

⁹ Pavol Struhár, (2019). “Odpor k establišmentu v kampani k voľbám do Európskeho parlamentu 2019 – prípad politickej strany SME RODINA - Boris Kollár” [Resistance towards Establishment in Campaign Before 2019 Elections to the European Parliament]. in *Jazyk a politika. Na pomedzí lingvistiky a politológie VI.* [Language and Politics. Between Linguistics and Political Science VI. (Proceedings of the 4th Annual International Scientific Conference), ed. R.Štefančík, (Bratislava: Ekonóm, 2019), 245-254.

PART 1

Source type

Boris Kollár and *OLaNO* prioritized digital sources (including social media). This list included first of all Facebook pages, accounts or groups, irrespective of the period of posting (event or non-event intervals). The preference for digital sources was identical both for *OLaNO* (91% of all posts sharing a link were digital sources) as well as for Boris Kollár (89% of all posts sharing a link were digital sources).

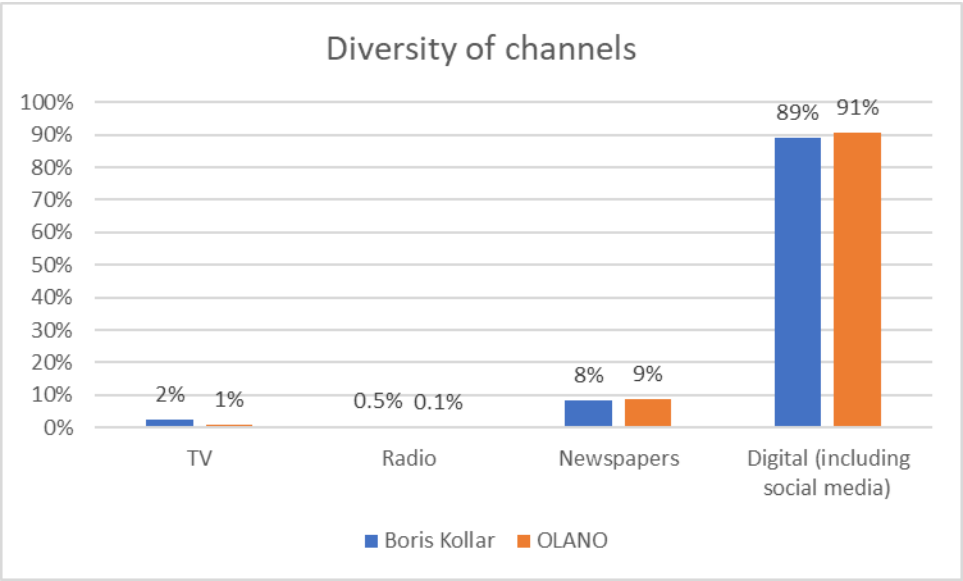
The hierarchy of media channels was the same for both: newspapers and magazines were the second most often shared source but with big distance from digital sources (with 8% by Kollár and 9% by *OLaNO*) followed by TV channels (2% in Kollár's posts and 1% in *OLaNO*'s) and with almost total absence of radio: less than 0.5% for each.

Overall, it would seem that the diversity in terms of type of media channel, or better said lack of diversity, is surprisingly similar for both political opponents (Fig. 1).

There also was common the clear preference for other Facebook content over other types of digital information. Both Boris Kollár and *OLaNO* prioritized Facebook sources over any other, irrespective of the period of coverage, with a similar frequency varying from over half of all posts sharing a link to over 80%, depending on the period analysed.

Overall, both Kollár and *OLaNO* shared Facebook pages in 73% of all their posts with a link. However, the diversity of sources was clearly higher in Boris Kollár's case. Despite posting lower number of links, it was almost half compared to *OLaNO*. Among all 438 such posts, besides other Facebook pages, Kollár shared 39 unique sources. This was almost identical if compared to *OLaNO* – with 33 unique sources in addition to Facebook, out of 754 posts.

Figure 1 Diversity of channels



Many of the most frequently shared sources overlapped: liberal-centre newspaper and portal sme.sk was the second most often shared (after Facebook sources) by Kollár – 5% of all posts, and the 5th most shared by OLaNO – with 3% posts.

Then there was liberal-centre newspaper and portal dennikn.sk which was the 3rd most often shared media source by Kollár – 2% posts and the 3rd by OLaNO – 5%, respectively.

This sample was followed by online only centrist news portal with investigative team aktuality.sk (foreign owned) that was the 4th most shared by OLaNO – 4% posts, and the 8th by Kollár – in 1% posts. It had actually same level of sharing as for conservative Christian news and current affairs postoj.sk and channel youtube.com (1% each of them for each of the two political actors).

However, there were sources that only one of them shared during the 13 months under study. The “alternative” news site hlavnydennik.sk was shared only by Boris Kollár, in 2% of his posts, another alternative news site hlavnespravny.sk was also shared minimally – just in 1% posts.

As for OLaNO, the 2nd most shared source was the party website - obycajniludia.sk (7% posts), which Kollár did not share (being a political adversary). A little known online only commentary weekly tyzdennikkoment.sk and centre-right business weekly website etrend.sk – there were two other examples of websites that only OLaNO shared, in less than 1% posts.

Figure 2 Main sources shared by Boris Kollár (in at least 1% of all posts with a link)

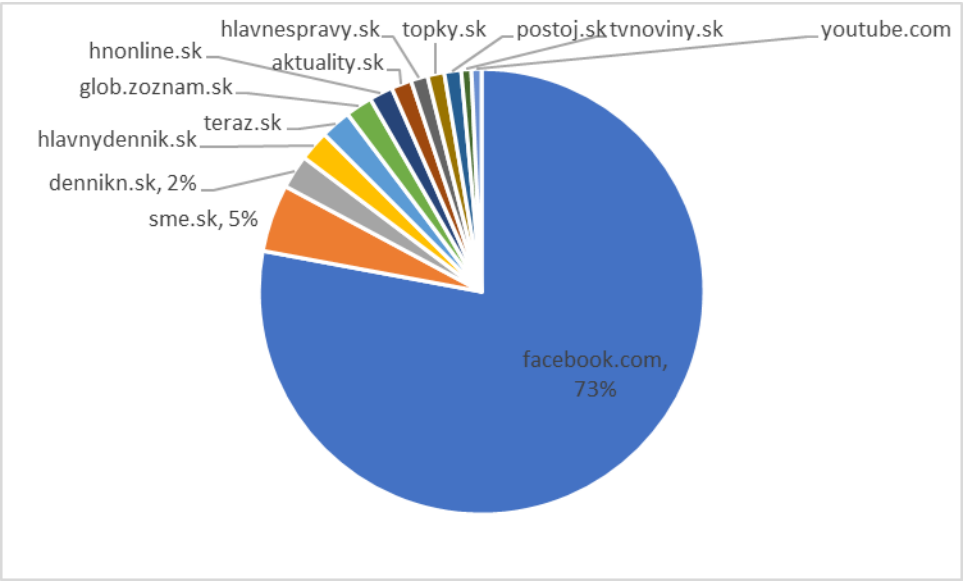
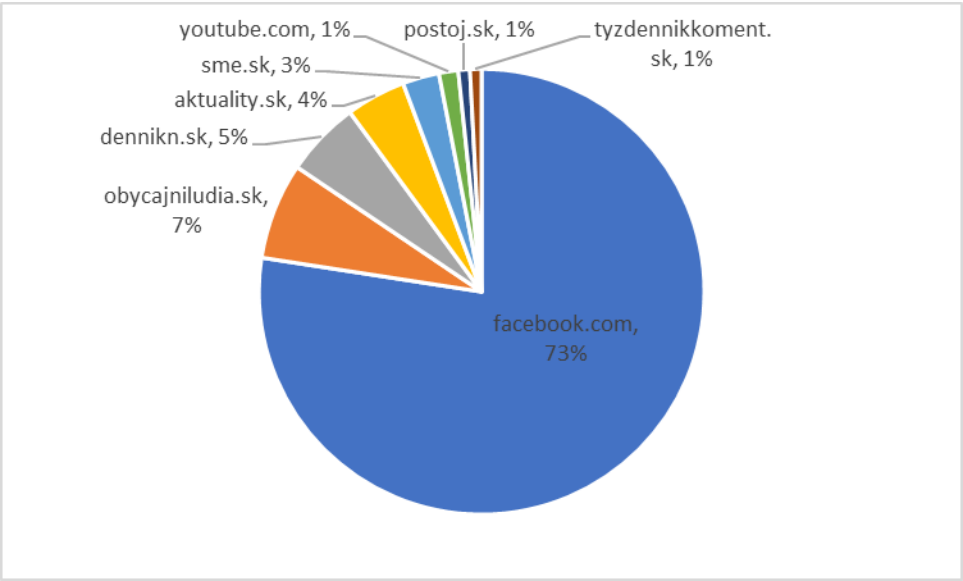


Figure 3 Main sources shared by OĽaNO (in at least 1% of all posts with a link)



A more in-depth analysis of the *type of digital sources* shared by each analysed subject shows similarities and differences that occurred (Fig. 4). There was a clear, shared, preference for content from the political party or members of the political party of each political actor analysed. This was more pronounced for OĽaNO – 86% of all digital sources, and less so for Boris Kollár – 67%.

The second most favourite source of digital information for Boris Kollár were different websites and blogs (14%) followed, for both, by the more specific category of news websites and blogs (10% Kollár, 8% OLaNO).

Public authorities' websites or expert sources were not very popular, not even during the COVID crisis. They were almost entirely missing on Kollár's Facebook (1%) and on OLaNO Facebook they made up only 2% of all posts. Nonetheless, it seems that Kollár used a higher variety of digital sources compared with OLaNO. He also shared citizen journalism (2%) and other types of sources (5%).

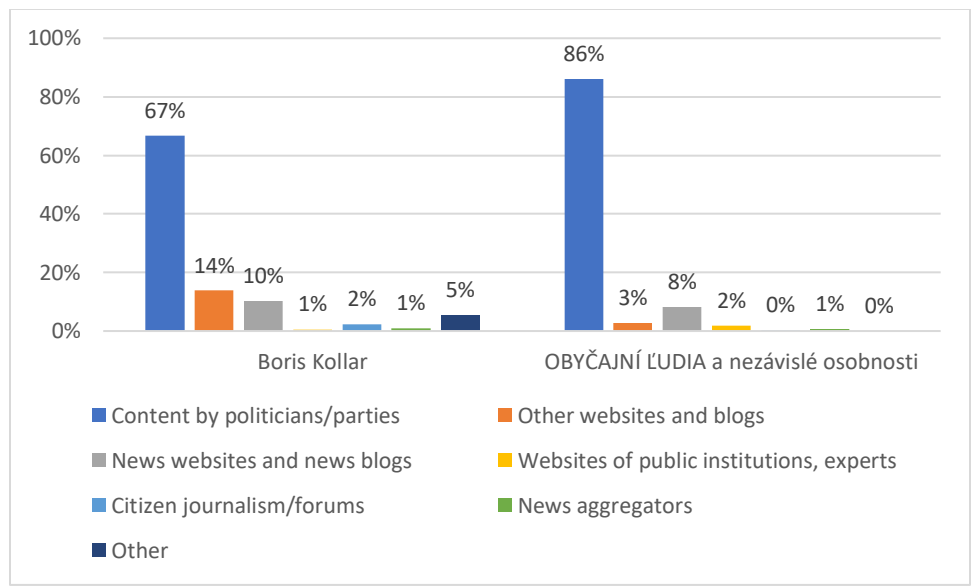
It is also important to note that in 10% cases (Kollár) and only 1 % of cases (OLANO) information sources did not fit the categories in the codebook, being difficult to code.

Overall, the two populist actors have used their Facebook pages in all three analysed periods more as a self-promotion tool, make themselves, their party and colleagues visible rather than inform people on different issues.

The populist actors' appeal to news websites was very low. In Kollár's case it was even lower than to other non-news media. It was strikingly common for both that it was less frequent than expected presence of independent or "alternative" and investigative journalism, non-profit or crowdfunding-based journalistic initiatives.

In case of Boris Kollár, he has explained his attitude towards alternative news sources: "If these portals such as "Hlavné správy" will bring a truthful information, I have no problem to share it. However, I definitely won't share hate and fake news" (in Kern, 2020).

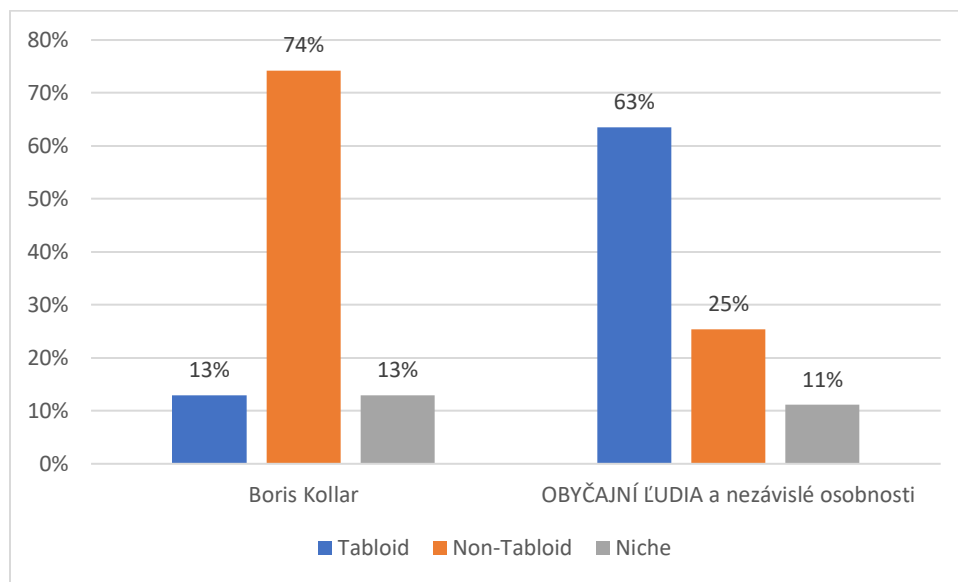
Figure 4 Types of digital sources shared



In terms of *newspaper type* (Fig. 5), as mentioned, there seemed to be a slight difference in

preferences. Boris Kollár favoured quality or at least non-tabloid newspapers and magazine (74% of all newspapers and magazines shares), while OĽaNO shared tabloid content more frequently (63%), and non-tabloids much less often (25% for non-tabloids).

Figure 6 Printed type (newspapers and magazines, including their websites)



Media registration

In terms of media registration, this proved to have been difficult research task. Only about a quarter of the links were coded as registered media for each of the two political actors.

Only 3 sources shared by Kollár were identified as not registered officially as news media. However, most sources (around 70%) either could not be classified as such (for example because many were Facebook pages of different kinds – like politicians’ pages) or because there was no easily available, transparent and free of cost access to data in this regard.

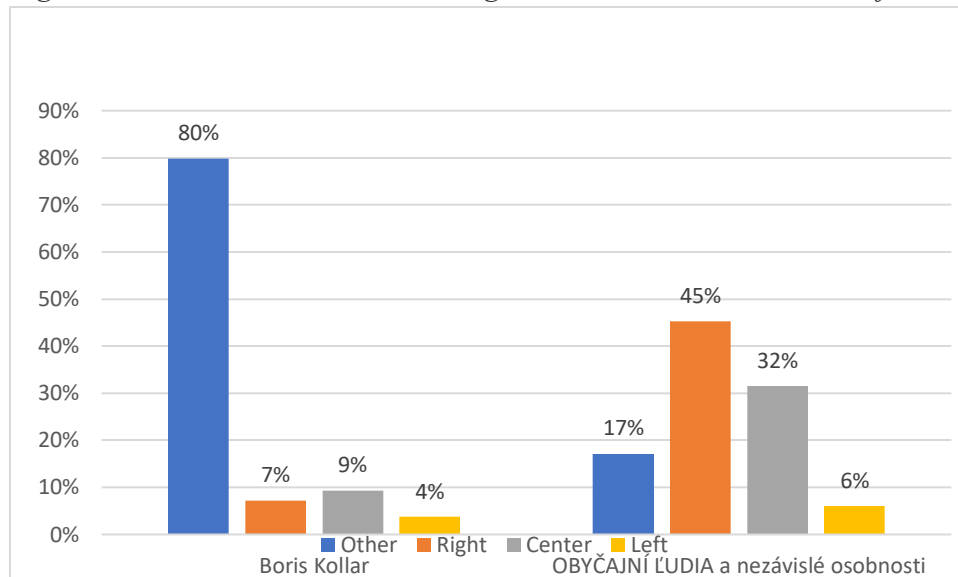
The dominant political/ideological orientation of the media sources shared

A similarity between the two political actors analysed was that they seemed to share information sources **that lean more towards the right side of the political spectrum (Fig.7)**. However, there were also important differences. Boris Kollár seemed to show a much more ambiguous political and ideological leaning, not captured by the standard left-right spectrum. Those sources coded largely as “other” (80% posts) were mostly right-wing populist and anti-immigration, conservative, but some sources were also considered *disinformation* or, as they call themselves, “alternative” websites (ex. hlavnespravy.sk, hlavnydennik.sk, napalete.sk, parlamentnelisty.sk,

denniks.sk, napalete.sk). These widely seen (there is a certain liberal bias in Slovakia here) disinformation sources made up to 4% of the sources shared by Boris Kollár, and were usually shared regularly, but also appeared once during EP elections (hlavne.sk) and during the COVID crisis (hlavnespravy.sk).

Kollár also showed a preference for the black humour / satiric Zomri page, which OĽaNO also shared, but only once.

Figure 7 Political/Ideological orientation of sources shared



OĽaNO leaned more towards the conservatives, rather than populist or anti-immigration sources. Its sources were more traditionally center-right defined (45%).

The only sources considered center-left shared was newspaper *Pravda* (Kollár).

Considering the (rather disputed) political / ideological orientation of Kollár and OĽaNO, the sources they shared seemed to by and large mirror it. There was not much preference for pluralistic media resources landscape. In addition, only 21% of the sources shared by OĽaNO were considered fully transparent, and 44% for Boris Kollár. There was also the issue of the difficulty to assess transparency of ownership in the absence of data (especially in the case of the sources shared by Boris Kollár).

Electoral vs. non-electoral coverage, event vs. regular period

In terms of frequency of posting in different time periods, both political actors shared information sources more often during regular political time periods (an average of 37 sources shared per month by Kollár and 60 by OĽaNO). A difference between them was that OĽaNO kept a similar frequency during the COVID crisis (59 sources shared per month), while Boris Kollár shared significantly less sources (29 per month), identical to the EP electoral campaign (30

sources/month). This could reflect his new role of Speaker of the Parliament during this period. OĽaNO shared other information sources the least often during the EP campaign (51/month).

What stands out is that both Kollár and OĽaNO over-relied on Facebook in all three periods. Boris Kollár shared information from other Facebook pages, accounts or groups especially during the start of COVID2020 crisis (in 82% of all posts), in 72% during the regular coverage and slightly less during the EP campaign (67% posts).

OĽaNO followed the same pattern, slightly more pronounced, sharing other Facebook sources in 89% of all COVID-related posts, 74% during regular coverage and 60% during the election campaign.

Analysis of Facebook pages prioritised by each of them during the COVID crisis, Boris Kollár shared his party's page (Sme Rodina) in 38 out of 57 posts, while all other Facebook sources were shared three times (the case of Kollár's personal public Facebook account¹⁰) or just once: Igor Matovič's page, a car rental company's page¹¹, the page of Police of the Slovak Republic - Banská Bystrica Region¹², regional news from Dlhé nad Cirochou a okolie, his political fellow Milan Krajniak's page¹³ and Regionportal.

Other sources in addition to Facebook that Kollár shared once or twice during the COVID months were also mostly of digital type, like: public wire agency portal teraz.sk, news and current affairs online only portal aktuality.sk, online news portal of private TV Markíza tvnoviny.sk, controversial – alternative news portal hlavnespravy.sk, pomahameludom.sk (we are helping the people), portal of private wire agency webnoviny.sk, one TV channel's website - prezenu.joj.sk and two newspaper websites business newspaper slovensko.hnonline.sk, and video section of liberal centre right newspaper Sme – video.sme.sk.

In other words, it was a mixture of quality and „alternative” as well as other types of media sources. This implies that, overall, Boris Kollár clearly prioritized digital sources (especially social media) over mainstream news. This is natural, considering how Facebook and other social media function.

This pattern is even more clear in the case of OĽaNO, that prioritized digital only sources in 105 out of all 117 posts that shared a media source during COVID crisis, and 101 out of these were from Facebook. However, the diversity of these pages was bigger for OĽaNO than Kollár. Similar to Kollár, most posts shared were from the party leader - Igor Matovič (24 out of 101), followed by other more known party members or candidates for being MPs: Jaro Nad' – 12 posts, Kristián

¹⁰<https://www.facebook.com/boris.kollar>

¹¹<https://www.facebook.com/AVISworld/>

¹²<https://www.facebook.com/KRPZBB>

¹³<https://www.facebook.com/poslednykriziak/> which in the meantime changed its URL to <https://www.facebook.com/krajniakmilan/>

Čekovský – 6 posts, Eduard Heger – 7 posts, Gábor Grendel – 4 posts, Michal Šipoš – 4 posts, etc.

Less frequently, OĽaNO also shared digital news sources like quality news portal aktuality.sk (5 times), beta.ucps.sk, international news websites like bloomberg.com (1 post), newspaperers' websites: quality liberal newspaper dennikn.sk (6 posts), quality liberal newspaper domov.sme.sk (1 post), tabloid magazine with political and current affairs news and commentaries www1.pluska.sk (1 post) or TV channels pages: public television spravy.rtvs (2 posts), public wire agency video portal TV.teraz.sk (1 post).

OĽaNO shared its party website once during the COVID crisis. There seemed to be slightly more diversity in the sources shared by OĽaNO compared to Boris Kollár, which may also be due to the difference in the types of pages: one is a party page and one is a more personal (but publicly available), individualized party leader page.

A similar tendency was kept during regular coverage, with somewhat more diversity due to the longer time interval and different topics approached.

On Kollár's FB page, 211 out of 292 posts that shared a media source originated from public pages: from his party Sme Rodina (138 posts), content made by himself (like videos) or from his other, personal account (34 posts), other pages: a native Slovak living in Italy and supporting also Matteo Salvini -Luboš Hrica (3 posts), Martin Petriska (3 times), Patrick Linhart (2 times), Petra Krištúfková (M.P) (3 times), Matteo Salvini's page (Italian right wing populist politician, 1 time) and other party colleagues or supporters. Among his other preferred Facebook pages seemed to be the black humor *zomriofficial* page, regional state police pages (*KRPZBB* – also shared during the COVID period, and *policiaslovakia*).

Other digital sources outside Facebook included a mixture of quality, tabloid and alternative media sources: hlavnydennik.sk (9 posts), teraz.sk (5 posts), topky.sk (5 posts), hlavnespravy.sk (4 posts), aktuality.sk (2 posts), tvnoviny.sk (2 posts), blog.postoj.sk (1 post), postoj.sk (2 times), and others (about half alternative, and half serious media), shared only once during the eight months studied: lekom.sk, lifenews.sk, magazin1.sk, napalete.sk, omediach.com, parlamentnelisty.sk, regionportal.sk, skslovan.com, webnoviny.sk.

Then there were TV channels - mostly quality and liberal news outlets, including both Slovak and Czech public television stations: political current affairs discussion programme *NatelosMichalomKovacicomTVMarkiza*, *novatelevize*, *spravy.rtvs*, *TelevizneNoviny*, *videoarchiv.markiza.sk*, *ct24.ceskatelevize.cz* and *rtvs.sk* (all shared only once).

Among newspapers, the most often shared were quality liberal (centre-right) media, and occasionally tabloids, conservative weekly and business newspaper: dennikn.sk (8 times), sme.sk (8 times), blesk.cz (once), cas.sk (twice), shared only once: slovensko.hnonline.sk, tyzden.sk,

www1.pluska.sk.

OĽaNO's source sharing during standard political time period was somewhat similar to that during COVID crisis. 356 out of 483 posts shared other Facebook pages, most often two MPs: Miroslav Sopko (61 posts), Eduard Heger (41 posts), then different Facebook events (39 posts), chairperson Igor Matovič (34 posts), Jaro Nad (politician)(34 posts), Ján Marosz, MP, (25 posts), Erika Jurinová (head of self-governing region for OĽaNO) (17 posts), Jožo Pročko – page (entertainer who ran in elections and became an MP (17 posts), Peter Pollák, MEP (15 posts), Jaroslav Nagy (14 posts), Marek Krajčí, MP (9 posts), Natália Milanová, MP (7 posts), Romana Tabak (activist, 7 posts), Martin Fecko, MP (5 posts) and others.

Other digital sources commonly referred to were: quality online only news portal aktuality.sk (19 posts), general affairs registered online weekly tyzdennikkoment.sk (4 posts), blogs on conservative Christian website blog.postoj.sk (2 posts), portal on European affairs euractiv.sk (1 post), public wire agency portal teraz.sk (1 post), tabloid portal topky.sk (2 posts), alternative news portal europskenoviny.sk (2 posts), glob.zoznam.sk (2 posts), commercial TV portal tvnoviny.sk (1 post), and the party website obycajnuludia.sk was shared in 26 posts. The black humour zomriofficial shared by Kollár was also shared by OĽaNO, but only once.

For OĽaNO, digital sources were again clearly prioritized, especially social media, but newspapers were also a somewhat common reference source, though 10 times less often than digital sources. The newspapers shared by OĽaNO were: quality liberal newspaper (both print and online version) dennikn.sk (27 posts – including 1 from Youtube), liberal newspaper (both print and online version) sme.sk (17 posts), business magazine etrend.sk (3 posts), business newspaper hnonline.sk (2 posts), conservative weekly magazine tyzden.sk (2 posts), tabloid newspaper www1.pluska.sk (2 posts).

The only video (formally called TV) channel shared was TV.teraz.sk (1 post) on public wire agency website.

The radio was the least favourite source of shared information: Kollár draws info from only one radio: traffic RadioExpres (twice, via Facebook and Youtube), during the regular period. The same radio – RadioExpres was shared once by OĽaNO during the standard period.

We could see so far that there were some overlaps and similar tendencies during regular reporting period and special reporting period during COVID crisis.

For the elections period, 60 out of 89 posts sharing a media source on Boris Kollár's page made reference to another Facebook page/account, just like in previous cases. In most cases, Kollár shared his party's page (24 posts), uploaded content from his own page or personal account (18 posts), or shared his colleagues' (and MPs) posts: Ľudovít Goga (3 posts), Milan Krajniak (2 posts), as well as Matteo Salvini's official page and his fan club page (2 posts), and one time: Identity & Democracy Party, Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom, Luboš Hrica, Ivan Lučanic, Peter Pčolinský (MP) and Miloš Svrček.

Other digital sources included the same varied mixture of quality sources, tabloid sources and alternative sources: *aktuality.sk* (3 posts), *teraz.sk* (2 posts) and others appearing only once: Máme rádi Karla Gotta- fanclub of famous Czech pop singer, Mukli SK¹⁴ (about persons in jail), black humour page *zomriofficial*, blog on used cars shopping *blog.autobazar.eu*.

As for newspapers, only quality, mostly center-right, liberal, such as *sme.sk* (5 posts), *hnonline.sk* (4 post), *dennikn.sk* (2 posts) and centre-left *spravy.pravda.sk* (1 post) were shared during the electoral campaign. It appears that Boris Kollár limited the diversity of sources shared the most during the EP campaign, where he prioritized party-related sources, European allies from the radical right (Salvini, IDP, Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom -MENF), mainstream newspapers and two digital news websites which were common information sources for all periods and both Kollár and OĽaNO.

Kollár's communication during the EP campaign seemed to be somewhat more formal, though his preference for the dark humour website *Zomri* remains constant and visible even during these times.

As for OĽaNO, the diversity of the sources seemed to be even more restricted during the campaign. For example, 93 out of all 154 links shared were from other Facebook pages: 14 from different Facebook events, Miroslav Sopko, MP for OĽaNO (11 posts), Jaro Nad', MP for OĽaNO (9 posts), Marek Krajčí, MP for OĽaNO (6 posts), Ján Marosz, MP for OĽaNO (9 posts), Igor Matovič, MP for OĽaNO and then P.M. (4 posts), Jaroslav Nagy (5 posts), Veronika Remišová, previously MP for OĽaNO (4 posts), Eduard Heger, MP for OĽaNO and later minister of finance (4 posts), Erika Jurinová, head of self-governing region for OĽaNO (4 posts), Michal Šipoš, MP for OĽaNO (3 posts), Peter Pollák, MEP for OĽaNO (3 posts) and others shared only once or twice.

Other digital sources shared by *OĽaNO* during the EP election campaign included mixture of online only media: *aktuality.sk* (10 posts), *tyzdennikkoment.sk* (2 posts) and shared only once: *blog.etrend.sk*, *blog.postoj.sk*, *jaronad.sk*, *navody.digital*, *redflags.slovensko.digital* and the party website was again shared 23 times.

Only one TV website was shared by *OĽaNO* during the electoral campaign: *bbc.com* (1 post), and four newspapers: *dennikn.sk* (9 posts), *sme.sk* (10 post), *cas.sk* (1 post), *independent.co.uk* (1 post). Similar to Kollár, *OĽaNO* also seemed to have formalized its communication and source-sharing during the EP elections.

Overall, there were common tendencies in the type of sources prioritized during each interval by both Kollár and *OĽaNO*, with a clear predominance of digital sources (including social media), that can be found in 88% to 95% of all posts during each period. This can be explained by the fact that the media platform used for communication is itself digital (Facebook pages of the two political actors), but it also seems to support the literature that emphasises that social media and

¹⁴<https://www.facebook.com/odsudeni>

digital media are indeed a vehicle for promoting populists.

Interestingly, Kollár draws on digital sources especially during the COVID crisis (95%), while during both regular and electoral times, digital sources were slightly less frequent (88%). However, these differences can be seen as negligible.

For *OLaNO*, the differences were smaller: digital sources were shared in 92% of the electoral campaign sample, 90% in COVID-related interval and 89% during regular coverage. Similarly, *OLaNO* draws on newspapers almost equally often irrespective of the period: 9% in non-events times, 8% during the COVID crisis and 7% during elections.

On the other hand, the discrepancies for Boris Kollár were more clear but still relatively marginal: newspapers were shared mostly during elections (12% posts), less often regularly (8%) and, somewhat surprisingly, the least often during the pandemic (2%). This last low number can be perhaps explained by the fact that Kollár became too busy in his post of Speaker of the Parliament.

A very clear tendency that emerged was the big absence of radio as source of information for both political actors. Only one radio channel was shared by both – traffic radio RadioExpres, two times by Kollár and once by *OLaNO*, and all were within regular reporting period.

TV channels were also very infrequently used during all analysed periods. When they did represent a source, it was mostly during the COVID pandemic: in 4% of Kollár's posts and 3% of *OLaNO*'s. **These findings are most probably also due to the nature of the communication environment: digital communication draws on other digital sources, due to proximity.** Further studies could delve deeper by checking whether these political actors' communication via TV or radio is similar or different to their online presence. If there is substantial difference in what and how news are reported on digital versus traditional media, this could potentially generate two separate public spheres that have very different views on the surrounding political realities.

Figure 8 Types of sources by sample - Boris Kollár

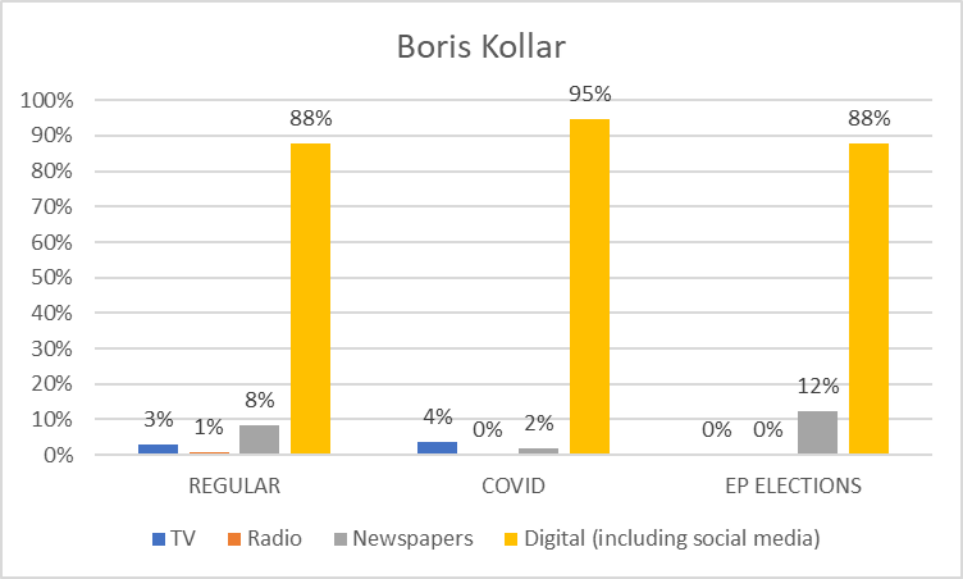
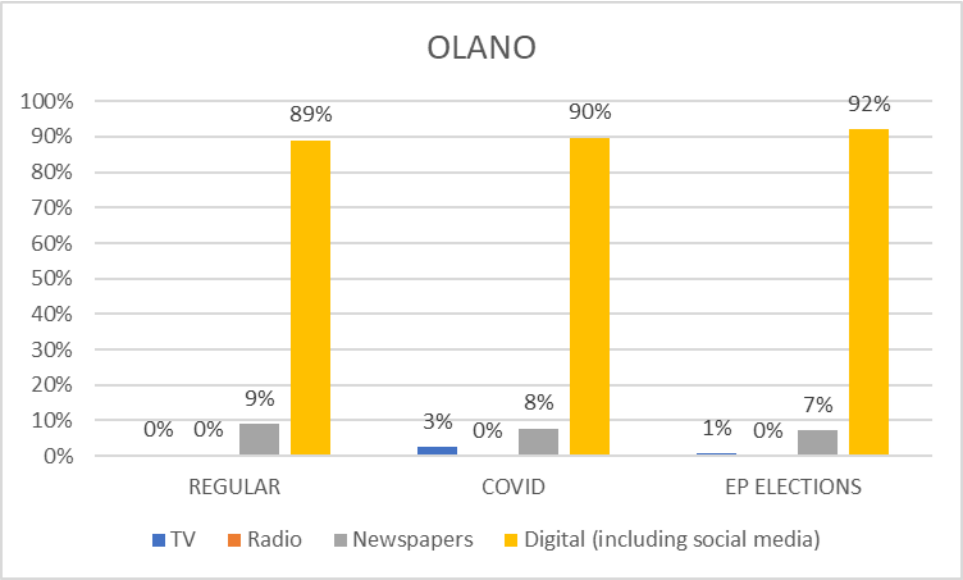


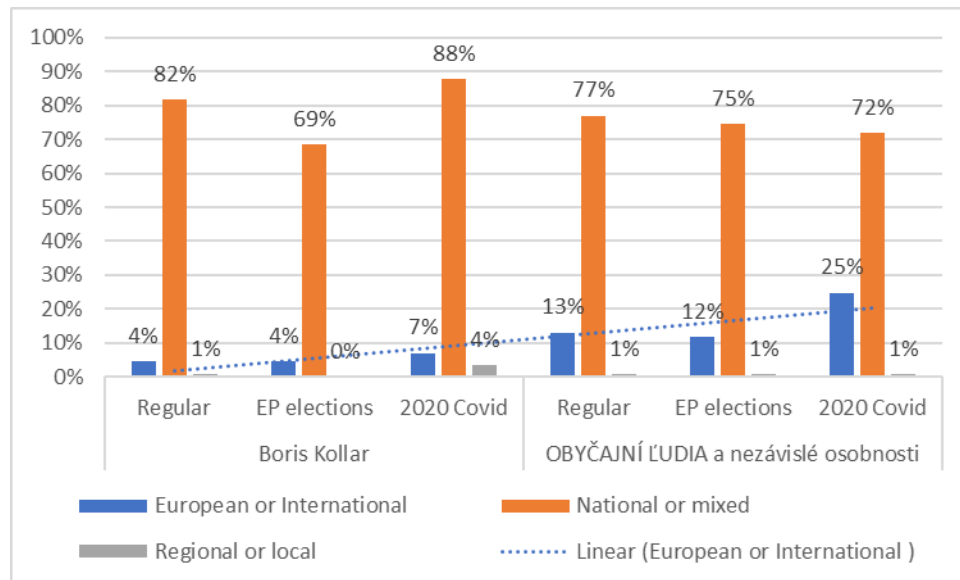
Figure 9 Types of sources by sample – OlanO



Another difference that would be expected, drawing on Europeanization literature (Koopmans, Erbe & Meyer, 2010; Koopmans, 2010), is that events with a European or international dimension should draw more Europeanized or globalized coverage. To test this, we checked what types of media sources were more often cited during the three time intervals. The results seem to confirm this hypothesis (Fig. 10). During regular coverage it was the least common that European or

international sources were shared. This was valid for Boris Kollár (4% of all posts) and to some extent, for *OLaNO* (14% of posts).

Figure 10 Level of coverage of the news source



Interestingly, EP elections generated only slightly more Europeanized coverage (6% - Kollár) or almost the same size as during regular coverage (13% for *OLaNO*). But where the tendency becomes obvious it was with the pandemic-related information, which draws the most international coverage for both political actors (7% Kollár, 25% *OLaNO*). Remarkably almost absent during all periods were regional and local sources, which only become somewhat more frequent in Kollár's posts during the COVID crisis (4%). Among the European or international sources shared by the two political actors were Matteo Salvini, Czech media sources, BBC, Bloomberg, Euractiv, Independent or Greenpeace.

What role did the public media play in each of these periods, compared to commercial /private sources?

In absolute numbers, the role of public service media was very low, almost negligible, in the communication of both populist actors, who each shared links to public information sources in around 1% of their posts. Common references were made only to the (PSM) Radio and Television of Slovakia (*spravy.rtv*s), cited by *OLaNO* during the COVID crisis and by Kollár during regular coverage. Kollár also shared a link to the ČT24 (PSM Czech language news TV channel) and to the Facebook page of the Slovak police (*policiaslovakia*), all during regular coverage.

OLaNO, on the other hand, showed a clear tendency of drawing on publicly owned sources of information during the COVID crisis (8 out of all 10 such references are during this time). They

shared the Facebook pages or website of the Government Office, Parliament and other public institutions (Ministry of the Interior under political influence of *OLaNO*, National Council of the Slovak Republic/ Parliament, Trnava self-governing region under political influence of *OLaNO*). During the regular and elections periods, *OLaNO* shared the page of Žilina Self-governing Region (where it had its political representant). These differences may be explained only by different positions of both actors – while *OLaNO* was more prominently represented in the government, Kollár became Speaker of the Parliament.

Conclusions

Clearly, in both cases there were prioritised digital sources, and first of all Facebook's sources. This is hardly surprising considering digital nature of social media based communication.

As one could have expected, both FB pages prioritized party-related sources (mostly selected MPs) and in case of Kollár, European allies from the radical right (Salvini, IDP, MENF).

However, it was a bit surprising to find that both FB pages of populist leader/party respectively, clearly gave a slight preference to the mainstream liberal newspapers and digital news websites (including of tabloid type), during all examined periods. We could identify “alternative” news sources only in very limited numbers.

Among somehow by and large ignored media types sources one could identify both radio and TV channels. Instead, more often but still marginally, there were utilised video produced by a public wire agency.

A similarity between the two political actors analysed was that they seemed to share information sources that lean more towards the right side of the political spectrum.

However, *OLaNO* leaned more towards the conservatives, rather than populist or anti-immigration sources.

In absolute numbers, the role of public service media was very low, almost negligible, in the communication of both populist actors.

There were only negligible differences in results for selected political periods.

Fundamentally, neither populist actors show any significant connection to *alternative media sources*. Both populist actors preferred a mixture of quality, tabloid and alternative media sources. The two populist actors have used their Facebook pages in all three analysed periods more as a self-promotion tool, to make themselves, their party and colleagues visible rather than to inform people on different issues. Nonetheless, it seems that Kollár used a higher variety of digital sources compared with *OLaNO*.

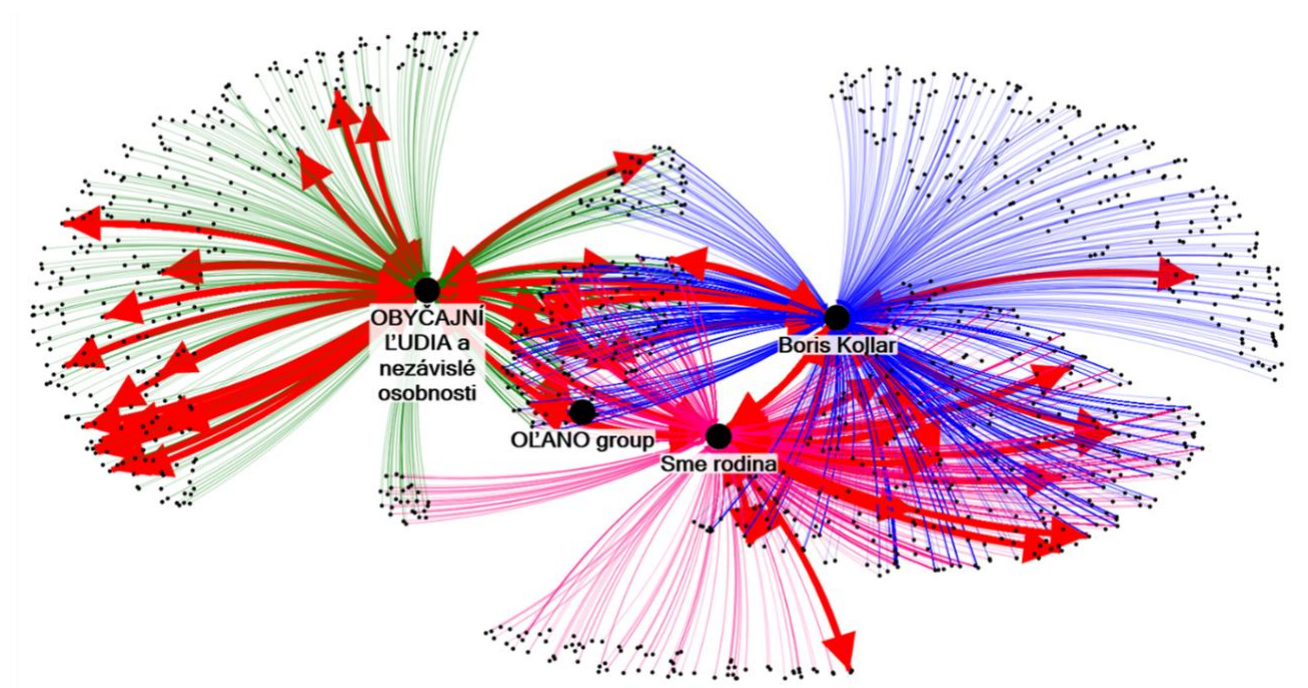
PART 2

Network analysis of sources that share populist leaders' posts

We conducted the network analysis adding also the public page of *Sme Rodina*, Boris Kollár's party. We were interested seeing the overlap between the two. Moreover, we were interested to see which were the sources that were uniquely connected to one or the other.

Based on the CrowdTangle data (CrowdTangle Team, 2020; Mancosu et al., 2020) analysed with NodeXL¹⁵ (Marincea, 2020), we constructed a directed graph with 1022 vertices (nodes) and 1035 unique edges (unique connections between nodes) out of a total number of 11,161 edges¹⁶. In the center were three main vertices: the public pages of *Sme Rodina*, Boris Kollár and OĽaNO (Fig. 11). The network represents all public pages that have shared posts from the three pages, between January 2019-April 2020 and the red arrows show reciprocity in connections.

Figure 11 Facebook Populist Network in Slovakia



¹⁵ Version 1.0.1.418.

¹⁶ The total number of edges represents each time one public page shared a post from one of the 3 pages under study. This also includes the pages shared by the 3 pages, in order to identify reciprocity.

Additional graph metrics: graph density - 0.0016, Average Geodesic Distance - 2.34, Maximum Geodesic Distance (diameter) - 3, Reciprocated Vertex Pair Ratio - 0.034 and Reciprocated Edge Ratio - 0.065.

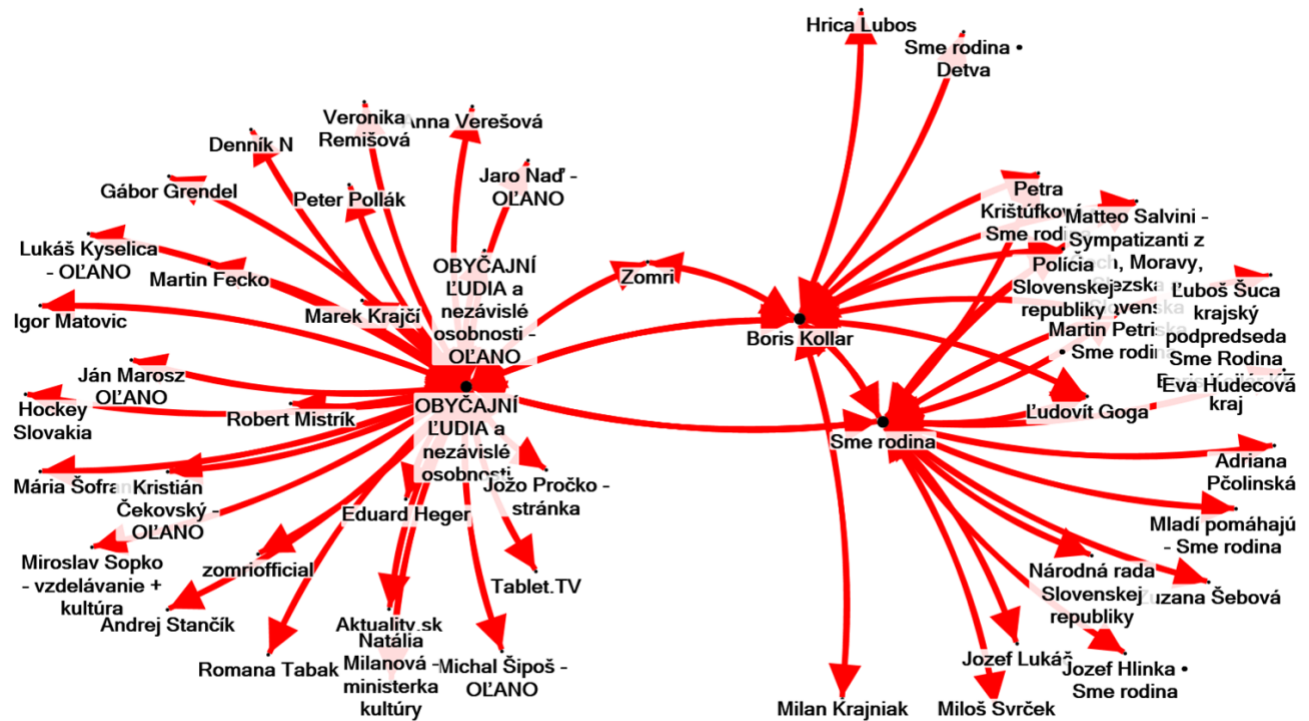
The general overview (Fig. 11) shows that among the three pages, Boris Kollár had the most intensive dissemination network¹⁷, while Sme Rodina and *OLaNO* were very similar in terms of size of their network. This seems to confirm the literature on populist communication which argues that personalization through charismatic leaders is often a successful strategy in gaining visibility.

Reciprocity Network

In the entire network, there were 56 reciprocal connections, meaning that each of the three pages shared posts from pages that also shared them back. In Fig. 10, reciprocal connections were the ones marked by the red arrows. In Fig. 12, these were zoomed in to be seen more clearly. While previously it was shown that Boris Kollár had a bigger dissemination network (number of pages sharing his posts), the reciprocity was lower for him and his party than from *OLaNO*. This means that there was more reciprocal promotion among *OLaNO* party members than among *Sme Rodina*. Kollár seemed to endorse back very few of the people or pages that promoted him (only 11, compared to *OLaNO* – 29 and *Sme Rodina* - 16). This might paint him as a more individualistic leader and his part as having less strong ties among its members.

Figure 12 Populist Pages' Reciprocity Network

¹⁷ Kollár was shared 4721 times by 639 different public pages, while his party *Sme Rodina* – 3399 times (by 472 unique Facebook pages) and *OLaNO* – 2985 (by 472 unique Facebook pages).



In most cases, reciprocal connections were between party members or party pages supporters like Lubos Hrica (supporter of the movement and Salvini, living in Italy), Ludovit Goga, *Sme Rodina – Detva* (regional hub), etc. (for *Sme Rodina* and Boris Kollár), but also the Slovak Police page, interestingly enough. There was also cross-posting between all the three pages, and the link between them was also made by the dark humour satire Facebook page *Zomri*, which posts about *OLaNO* and Boris Kollar, and both of them shared *Zomri* as well. There was also direct link between Kollár and a prominent party member Milan Krajniak (MP, later minister of labour). There was a curious connection with “sympathisers from Moravia (region in the eastern part of the Czech Republic).

As for *OLaNO*, the same pattern can be observed – namely reciprocity is mostly with party members or rather representatives (*OLaNO* had for a long time only 4 members), as well as with the *OLaNO* public group¹⁸. Yet while *OLaNO* shared and was shared by *Sme Rodina*’s leader - Boris Kollár, the same cannot be said about *OLaNO*’s leader - Igor Matovič, who shared posts by Kollár and *Sme Rodina*, but wasn’t shared back by them.

However, unlike *Sme Rodina* and Boris Kollár, *OLaNO* also had reciprocal connections with different media channels (which might suggest more endorsement from media) like *Dennik*,

¹⁸ OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti – OĽANO, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/obycajniludia/>. The public group has 6,426 members (August 2020) who are pretty active, posting around 20 posts daily. It was created in Jun 18, 2009 and changed it’s name several times since 2018. The group is managed by the Facebook [STOP Štátnej MAFIi](#) (liked by 62,498 people).

Aktuality.sk (two of the most popular again, *Zomri* satire page. *Aktuality.sk* is professional a news portal with investigative journalism sources for both political actors, as the first part of the research showed), *Tablet.TV* and, *asm* but also with daily news and current affairs. *Denník* was online only newspaper that is no longer in operation. *Tablet.TV* is video channel of public service news agency. Since October 2020 it has changed its name to *TASR TV* (*TASRTV.SK*) and expanded its activities to live online broadcast both from regions and for commercial subjects.

Network Centrality

As expected, there was a wide overlap between the Facebook pages that shared Boris Kollár and those that shared *Sme Rodina* (Fig.12 and Fig.13). Only 97 out of the 472 pages sharing *Sme Rodina*'s posts shared only the party, and not the leader as well, while the rest - 80% shared both. Most of these pages were either party branches or members, and some were also reciprocal connections (see above). But there were also pages like *OLaNO Sympatizanti* (*OLaNO*'s Sympathisers) or *ANTIFICO* a *ANTISMER* (two groups targeting negative sentiments towards the major political party and its leader in Slovakia at that time). Some signalled common concerns like *Saving Slovakia*, *Active Citizens* and *For Sovereignty of Slovakia* – all that could be seen as having populist overtones.

Interestingly enough, there was also quite some overlap with *OLaNO*'s public Facebook page (Fig. 10). 162 out of the 462 (35%) pages sharing *OLaNO* also shared Boris Kollár at least once (Fig. 13), and almost the same number was valid for *Sme Rodina*: 142 out of 462 - 31% (Fig. 14). As could be expected, these pages largely overlapped and tended to be pages of party members or party branches. This shows that these types of pages, pertaining to the populist parties, play a central role in the dissemination network on social media.

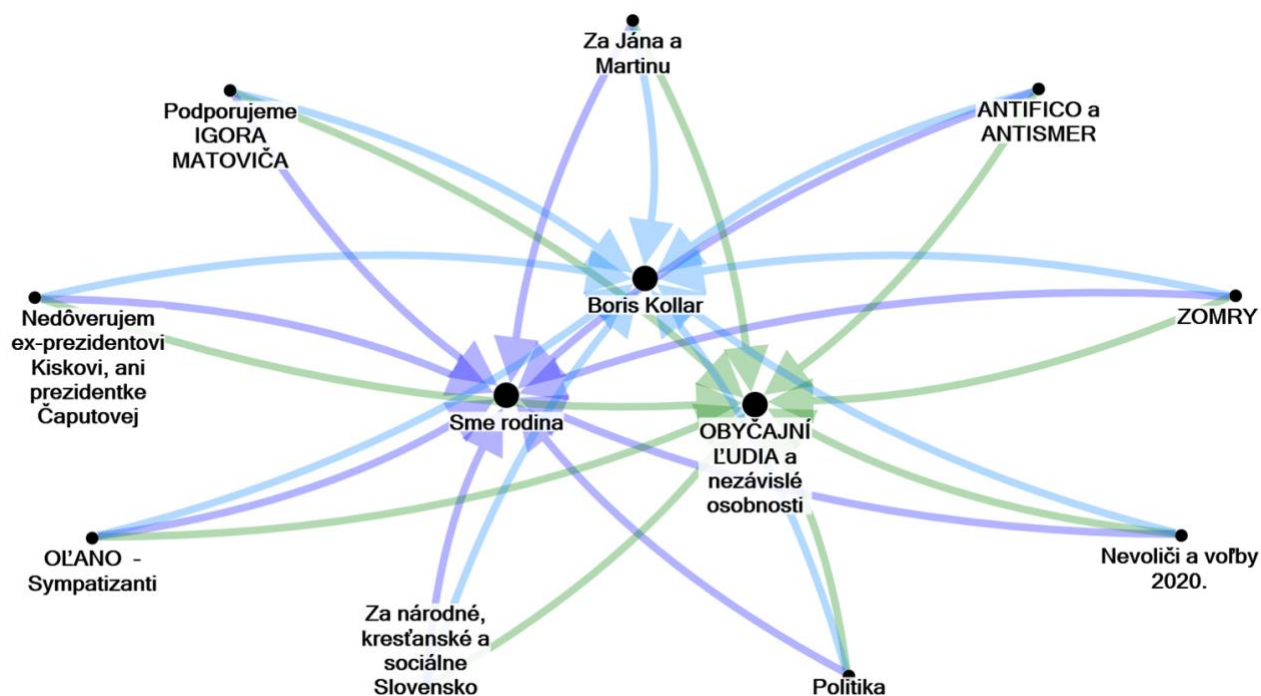
Figure 13 Pages sharing¹⁹ Boris Kollar and Sme Rodina

¹⁹ In the graph are shown only the pages that share each of the two pages at least 10 times.

What can we say about the main connectors within the populist network? The analysis found that there were only nine public pages that seemed to share all three profiles (Fig. 15), although with different frequency. These can be considered bridges between these different political actors and their different publics or some might be channels that either a) aim for more political pluralism and a somewhat more balanced position or b) pages that support one of the parties and frequently oppose the other, as a result.

They shared opposition towards until March 2020 main party in the government (*Zomri, Politika, Antifico a Antismer, OLaNO Sympatizanti, Za Jana a Martinu*).

Figure 16 Pages sharing²² all three profiles (3 degrees centrality).



Quantitative analysis of shared pages by each of the three political actors showed some interesting patterns. First, only three of them shared all three FB pages a somewhat substantial number of times each (in this case we chose the threshold of 10 times each). Moreover, these were distributed very differently: *OLANO - Sympatizanti* (Sympathisers) shared the *OLaNO* page 250 times, which

²² Irrespective of the number of times each page is shared.

is natural, while it shared Boris Kollár only 15 times and *Sme Rodina* 12 times. This makes it obviously biased approach to sharing and therefore in the secondary category. This is to be expected from a group that explicitly contains party supporters.

Similarly low frequently shared, but overall much more balanced was group (Non-voters and 2020 Elections) *Nevoliči a voľby 2020*. This group shared *OLaNO* 32 times, while it shared Boris Kollár 11 times and *Sme Rodina* 10 times. On the other hand, page “I do not trust either ex-President Kiska or President Čaputová (*Nedôverujem ex-prezidentovi Kiskovi, ani prezidentke Čaputovej*) was biased toward Boris Kollár (65 shares) and *Sme Rodina* (31 shares) compared to *OLaNO* (22 shares), but the difference was less striking.

Somewhat more balanced was the satirical *ZOMRY* (13 shares Kollár, 10 shares *Sme Rodina*, and 19 *OLaNO*). Obviously, political satire was popular among opposition parties and leaders.

Similar patterns become visible when we compared the number of times certain pages that promoted only two of the competing political actors that shared each of them²³. The pages that clearly gave more visibility to *OLaNO* than Boris Kollár were: *Za Jána a Martinu* (220 – *OLaNO*, 22 Kollár), We support Igor Matovič *Podporujeme IGORA MATOVIČA* (209 – *OLaNO*, 11 Kollár), *ANTIFICO a ANTISMER* (57 – *OLaNO*, 10 Kollár), and somewhat more balanced: *ZOMRY* (19 – *OLaNO*, 13 Kollár) and *Politika* (21 – *OLaNO*, 10 Kollár).

At the opposite end was For National, Christian and Social Slovakia, *Za národné, kresťanské a sociálne Slovensko* which seemed to favour Boris Kollár (43 Kollár, 13 – *OLaNO*). However, we cannot tell only from this data alone if the visibility was positive or negative. This needs further, more qualitative and in-depth exploration. What can be said, it is that *OLaNO* supporters were more appreciating efforts by murdered journalist, as well they seemed to be more focused against then government’s main party. In contrast, Kollár was more associated with pro-Christian, national and social rhetoric.

Main promoters

We also analysed as who the main promoters were for each of the three political actors. Considering that in order to ensure some level of visibility and consistency, each page should be shared several times, we kept the 10 times threshold for each. This resulted in 97 unique pages sharing Boris Kollár at least 10 times, 79 for *Sme Rodina* and only 24 for *OLaNO*. This suggests that the former two political actors had a wider network of “loyal” disseminators. In most cases, with very few exceptions, this network was made of pages of the party branches or members²⁴. Other specific Facebook non-party pages were: For National, Christian and Social Slovakia) *Za národné, kresťanské a sociálne Slovensko* (43 shares), For Sovereignty of Slovakia), *ZA*

²³ Keeping the threshold of min. 10 shares each

²⁴ ex. *SME Rodina - okres Trnava* shares Kollár the most – 120 times, followed by *Sme rodina • Detva, Sme rodina - Boris Kollár, okres Dunajská Streda, Sme rodina – Myjava, SME RODINA-Boris Kollár Vranov n/T* etc.

SUVERENITU SLOVENSKA, Against NATO Bases, PROTI základniam NATO (27 shares) or Save Slovakia – Active Citizens, *ZACHRÁŇME SLOVENSKO - AKTÍVNI OBČANIA* (18 shares) among others. More or less the same pages shared Sme Rodina with a similar frequency.

OLaNO followed a similar pattern of sharing. However, the reason for it being shared less overall is, most probably, that it has much less pages of party branches (or rather circles of supporters) of party members (indeed, OLaNO had only 4 members in almost 10 years of its existence) in its social network. This made it more diverse and, as we showed in the first part, stronger in terms of mutual support (reciprocity) or less centered on one figure. Unlike their competitors, the top disseminators for OLaNO were not other party members or branches per se, but the “fan” group *OLANO - Sympatizanti* (250 shares) started by the STOP Štátnej MAFIi (Stop State Mafia – related to perceived state capture) page, followed by For Jan and Martina - killed investigative journalist and his fiancée) *Za Jána a Martinu* (220 shares), We support Igor Matovič - *Podporujeme IGORA MATOVIČA* (209 shares), *OBYČAJNÍ LUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti – OLANO* – the OLaNO public group (182 shares), OLaNO - Trenčiansky kraj - Trenčín region) (74 shares), Great Anti-Corruption March - *Veľký protikorupčný pochod – sympatizanti* (70 shares), *ANTIFICO a ANTISMER* (57 shares) etc. As identified earlier, these pages suggest key ideas that are behind political activism – protest against then government, especially the key governing party Smer-social democracy, represented by its leader Robert Fico, and believed to be responsible for captured state.

It stands out from these results that, even though Boris Kollár clearly had a wider network on social media (Facebook), this was mostly due to the multitude of party-related Facebook pages and did not necessarily say much about support from citizens or media institutions. In fact, the media did not seem to give him much visibility.

On the other hand, OLaNO had a smaller party network, but more support from non-party sources, including citizens and media outlets – which refrained less from giving visibility to OLaNO than to Kollár.

Conclusions

Boris Kollár had the most intensive dissemination network²⁵, while movements WAF and OLaNO were very similar in terms of size of their network.

There was a rather low reciprocity of cross-promotion. Kollár but also WAF endorsed back very few of the people or pages that promoted them (only 11, and 16 respectively), while OLaNO endorsed 29 pages.

²⁵ Kollár was shared 4721 times by 639 different public pages, while his party Sme Rodina – 3399 times (by 472 unique Facebook pages) and OLaNO – 2985 (by 472 unique Facebook pages).

In most cases, both Kollár and OĽaNO's reciprocal connections were between party members or party (pages) supporters. However, unlike WAF and Boris Kollár, OĽaNO also had reciprocal connections with different media channels. Thus, OĽaNO was seen as more acceptable among the mainstream media.

To certain degree, there is a connection to emigrant-based support base as well as to the Czech – paradoxically – anti-Babiš (then P.M.) and anti-Zeman (then President) pages.

Among media sources, two of them appeared here: alternative online magazine DAV DVA – culture-politics revue, and little known online Facebook discussion group Politika (Politics).

DAV DVA is self-defined as “civic initiative that promotes notion about alternatives towards current economic-political system.”²⁶ It is follow up to interwar intellectual leftist group DAV and associated journal (1922-1937).

Facebook group Politika (Politics) had less than 400 members as of August 2020. It was created in January 2017. It was self-defined as “Free portal for political opinions and public issues opinions of narrower but somehow similar spectrum (for time being). Some opinions are strongly worder, others we would like to become familiar with.”²⁷ Based on overview of key postings, it was pro-OĽaNO and against-Fico (former Prime Minister) group.

There were only nine public pages that seemed to share all three profiles. They shared opposition towards Smer -SD party - until March 2020 the main party in government, low trust towards then and later President of the state and, finally, represented non-voters. In other words, low trust in selected political structures/actors could be identified as common factor here.

OĽaNO supporters were more appreciating efforts by murdered journalist, as well they seemed to be more focused against then government's key party. In contrast, Kollár was more associated with pro-Christian, national and social rhetoric.

In conclusion, neither populist subject has any close relationship to alternative media. In fact, OĽaNO was actually endorsed by some legacy liberal media.

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²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1666426526989340>

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Turkey

Media Sources Shared on Facebook and Networking by Erdoğan and the AKP in Turkey

Osman Sahin

Introduction:

In Turkey, the mainstream media is under complete control of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government (Coskun, forthcoming). The AKP government acquired the control of the mainstream media using a carrot and stick policy. Those supported the AKP government and its agenda were rewarded with lucrative state contracts and advertisements in their newspapers while those following a neutral or a more critical line were punished via censorship, tax penalties and even prison terms. One of the most illustrative cases happened in 2009 when the Dogan Media Group was punished with 6.8 billion TL (USD 4.5 billion in 2009 exchange rates) as the newspapers and broadcasts owned by this media group continued criticizing the government (Hürriyet, 2016). This harsh penalty forced the Dogan Media Group to sell two of its major newspapers, Milliyet and Vatan, to the pro-government Demiroren Group. As the pressure on the Dogan Group had continued over the years, it was forced to sell the remaining newspapers (foremost Hürriyet) and the broadcasts (CNNTurk, Kanal D) to the Demiroren Group for only USD 916 millions in 2018. Accordingly, the AKP government's control over the mainstream media has been undisputed since 2018.

It is under these circumstances that the social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook acquired more significance for actors opposing the government and its policies. Reuters for the Study of Journalism (2020) reports that digital media are widely used and have become an alternative venue for critical voices though television is still the most important source of news for the majority of Turkish citizens. As of 2020, 83% of the people in Turkey have access to the Internet and 72% of the society uses smartphones to access to the news or social media in Turkey. These figures show the changing landscape of journalism in Turkey.

Methodology

This research investigates the AKP's and its leader Erdoğan's use of media resources with a specific focus on the official Facebook pages of the Turkish president Erdoğan and the AKP. The analysis was carried out on Facebook data (Mancosu et al., 2020; Marincea, 2020), downloaded with the CrowdTangle API developed by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team, 2020)

The AKP has been in power since 2002 in Turkey. This fact makes the AKP the longest ruling populist party in Europe (Yabancı and Taleski, 2018). Scholars argue that populism has been integral to the AKP government and its leader Erdoğan's policy-making since the party was founded in 2001 (Ozpek and Tanriverdi Yasar, 2018; Yabancı and Taleski, 2018). The literature also suggests that the AKP and its leader Erdoğan exhibit characteristics strongly associated with populist politics. These characteristics include (1) anti-institutionalism (Esen and Gumuscu, 2016; Castaldo, 2018), (2) anti-establishment discourse (Park, 2018; Ozpek and Tanriverdi Yasar, 2018); (3) antagonization through mobilizing existing divisions within the society (Selcuk, 2016; Park, 2018), (4) an emphasis on national will and association of national will with the leader (Selcuk, 2016; Yabancı, 2016; Castaldo, 2018), and finally (5) the mobilization of masses for political goals of the movement (Castaldo, 2018; Ozpek and Tanriverdi Yasar, 2018).

This research covers 12 months between April 2019 and April 2020. Studying the social media posts of Erdoğan and the AKP Facebook accounts in these 12 months allows us to capture and cover a variety of events that had profoundly influenced the Turkish national context. First and foremost, the time span covers the most recent and probably the most contentious local elections of modern Turkish history. In March 2019, Turkish citizens went to the ballot box to elect new mayors throughout the country. The results were disappointing for the AKP government and Erdoğan as the AKP candidates lost the elections to the opposition candidates in Istanbul and Ankara, which were two major strongholds of political Islamists since the 1994 local elections. The winning margin in the case of Istanbul was too close (a little more than 20,000 votes in a city with 8.6 million eligible voters). The AKP, however, rather than conceding, asserted that the elections in Istanbul were ridden and consequently pushed for snap elections. The High Election Council accepted the AKP's plea for snap elections despite the lack of hard evidence. The High Election Council scheduled the new elections for June 2019²⁸. This move polarised a political landscape that was already one of the most polarised in the world (Somer, 2019). The government also used the mainstream media as well as various social media platforms to disseminate the discourse that the election in Istanbul was ridden while the opposition and its supporters mostly turned to social media platforms to voice their views as they had little to no access to major media outlets.

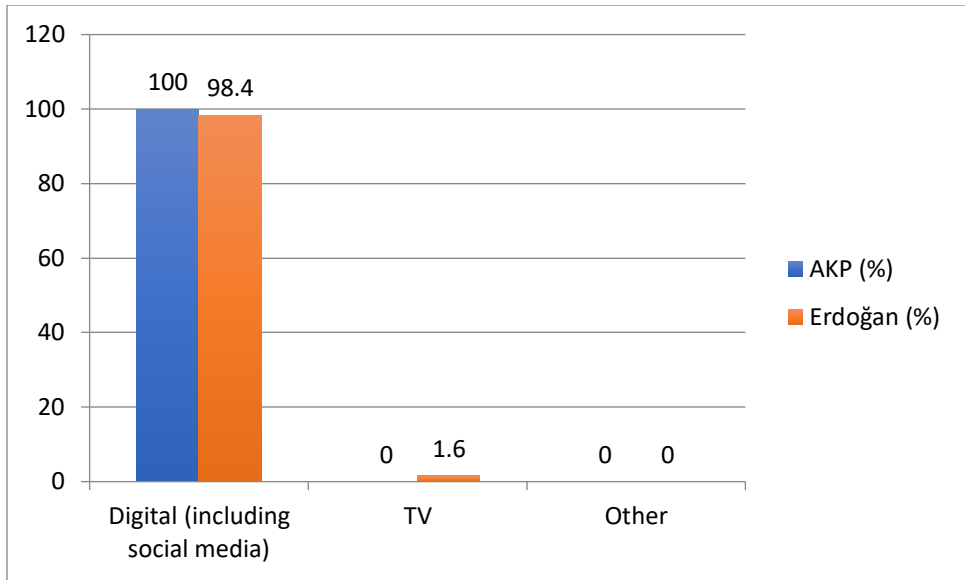
The second major event of the period was the Covid-19 pandemic, which have started to spread across the world by early 2020. On 11 March 2020, the Turkish Minister of Health announced the presence of the first positive Covid-19 case in Turkey. The discussion on the Covid-19 pandemic started weeks before the announcement of the first positive case. While the mainstream media and the pro-government accounts on social media platforms defended the view that the government had been extremely successful in its fight against the pandemic, the opposition, through social media and also through some media outlets that were marginalised by the government, argued that the AKP government was hiding the true scope of the pandemic in Turkey. Therefore, the pandemic in Turkey characterised by a polarised media landscape where the pro-government media and social media accounts defended the government actions as well as argued for its success regarding the Covid-19 crisis while the opposition asserted the view that the government was not transparent about the severity of the pandemic in Turkey.

Results: Classification of sources shared by populist leaders

Source Type

Figure 1: Diversity of Channels

²⁸ The opposition candidate Ekrem Imamoglu increased the margin of victory in the snap elections in June 2019. The difference between the AKP candidate and the winning candidate was now 806,456 votes, which was probably a reaction to the AKP's unlawful annulment of the March 2019 election results.



Analysis demonstrates that the media sources preferred by the AKP government and Erdoğan do not represent any diversity. The analysis reveals that the great majority of the content shared by these two Facebook accounts belong to Erdoğan’s or the AKP’s own media production teams, which is digitally produced and broadcasted on their Facebook, Youtube or Twitter accounts. That is Erdoğan and the AKP frequently benefit from their own media production teams to disseminate their views. This finding is actually in line with Weyland’s (2017) main argument, which suggests that populist leaders prefer direct communication with the people by bypassing traditional media instruments.

Figure 2: Main sources shared by the AKP

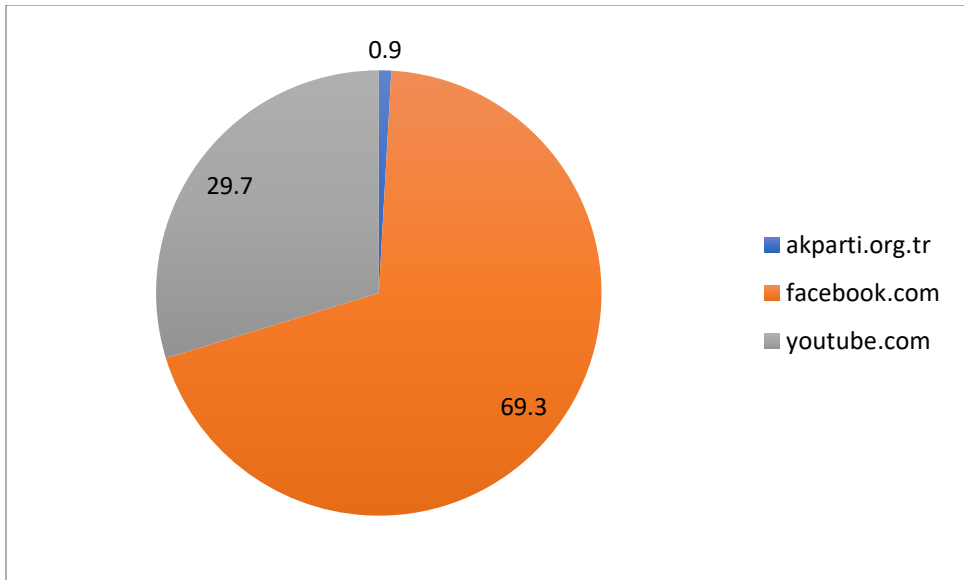
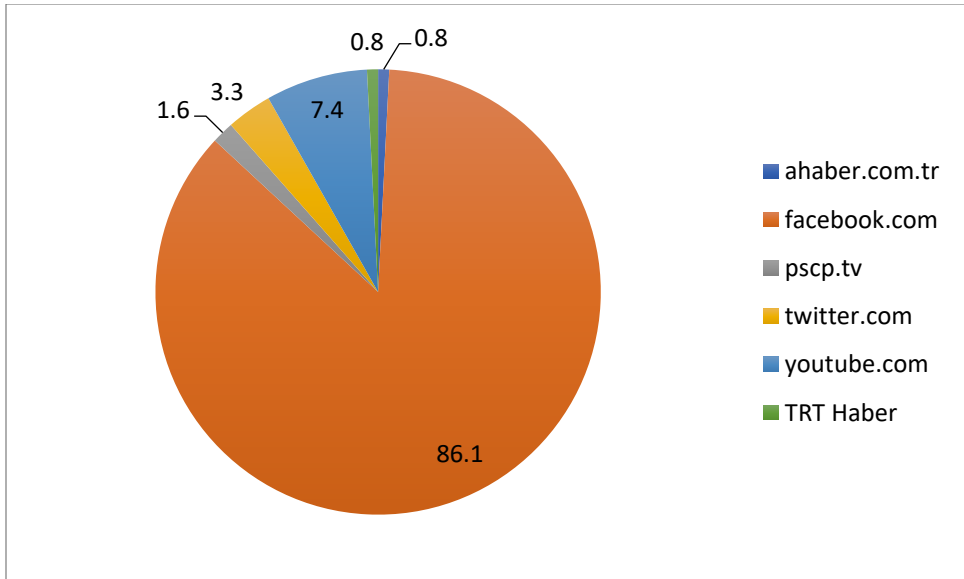


Figure 3: Main sources shared by Erdoğan

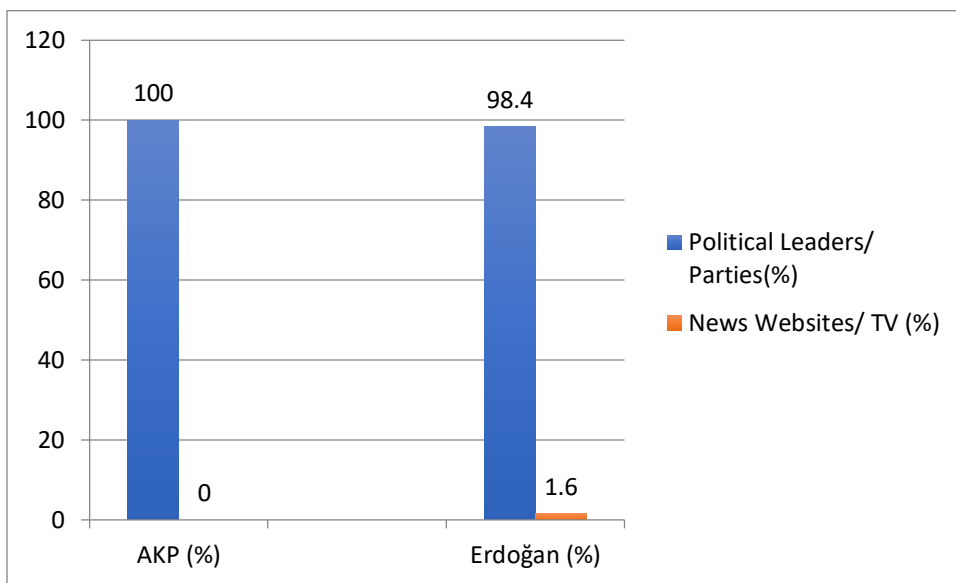


Indeed, when you explore the diversity of channels used by the AKP social media accounts, there is no variety as all media content is digital, which is produced either by the AKP media team or accounts associated with the AKP. In fact, there are only three links that is not produced by the AKP media team. The first one belongs to Binali Yildirim who was the previous AKP leader and handpicked by Erdoğan himself to lead the party after Erdoğan forced resignation of Davutoğlu, the previous leader of the AKP. The second one was Mehmet Ozhasaki's account. Mr. Haseki was the AKP candidate for Ankara in March 2019 municipal elections. The last one belongs to the Ministry of Treasury and Finance, which is controlled by the AKP government. Accordingly, one can conclude that the AKP social media account abstained from sharing media content produced by private or public media companies.

Analysis demonstrates that the situation is not radically different for Erdoğan’s Facebook account. There are only two external links that the Erdoğan Facebook account has shared, one belongs to A Haber and the other one belongs to TRT Haber. A Haber and the owner of A Haber are strictly pro-Erdoğan. In fact, the CEO of the media company that owns A Haber is Erdoğan’s son-in-law’s brother. TRT Haber is the public television broadcast, which lost its constitutionally protected impartiality and became pro-Erdoğan under the AKP government. The rest of the media sources shared by the Erdoğan social media account are digital and produced by Erdoğan’s own media team, who always follow Erdoğan in his daily chores.

Please see the figure 4 below for types of digital sources shared by the Erdoğan and the AKP social media accounts.

Figure 4: Types of digital sources shared



Media Registration

As the great majority of media content shared by the AKP and Erdoğan social media accounts are produced by their own media teams, they are not officially registered as media companies. The only exceptions to this rule are TRT Haber and A Haber that were shared by the Erdoğan Facebook account, which only comprise 1.6% of 122 posts of all his posts.

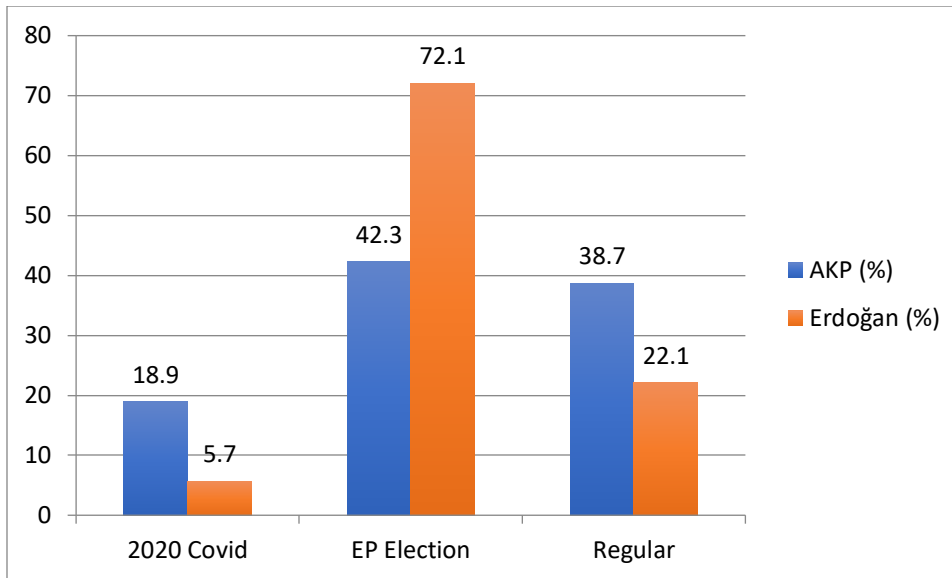
The dominant political/ideological orientation of the media sources shared

In terms of ideology of the media sources shared by the AKP and Erdoğan social media accounts, it would be difficult to make an assessment. It is clear that A Haber shared by the Erdoğan social media account is a right-wing broadcast, which has been generous in its promotion of conspiracy theories allegedly targeting Erdoğan. TRT Haber, which was supposed to be impartial according to the Turkish constitution, has also lost its impartiality under the AKP government. Therefore, it would not be wrong to assume that TRT Haber has become an increasingly Islamist right-wing public broadcast.

Nevertheless, the rest of the posts shared by the AKP social media account (111 posts) and the Erdoğan social media account (120/122) are the content produced by their own teams. As these social media

teams are responsible for disseminating the propaganda of their patrons (Erdoğan and the AKP), it would be safe to assume that they are also ideologically right-wing oriented media sources.

Figure 5: Electoral vs. non-electoral coverage, event vs. regular period



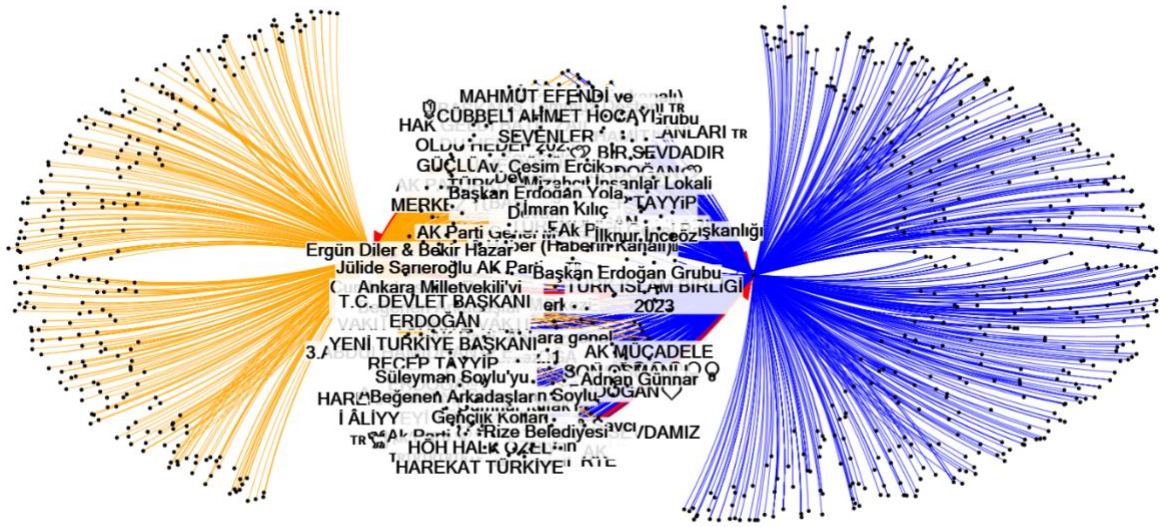
Neither the AKP nor the Erdoğan social media accounts had changed their primary sources in the electoral period when compared to the periods without elections. Similarly, they continued to share digital sources produced by their own teams after the Covid-19 pandemic. Two exceptions to this rule (A Haber and TRT Haber sources shared by the Erdoğan social media account) were shared in the regular period where there was neither the municipal elections nor the pandemic. Furthermore, the role that the public media plays is quite marginal in these two Facebook accounts. Only one post shared by Erdoğan included content produced by the public broadcast TRT Haber.

The only notable finding is that both the AKP and Erdoğan social media accounts share substantially more media content during the EP elections. Turkey does not participate in these elections but as explained at the beginning of this report, this period coincided with the snap elections in Istanbul after the AKP government declined to accept the election results in March 2019. The new elections were scheduled for June 2019 and the AKP organization and Erdoğan were campaigning hard to win the snap elections.

Network analysis of sources that share populist leaders' posts

We conducted the network analysis with the Facebook pages of Erdoğan and the AKP. Based on the CrowdTangle data (CrowdTangle Team, 2020; Mancosu et al, 2020) analysed with NodeXL, the research team led by Skolkaj and Marincea constructed a directed graph (Marincea, 2020). In the center of the analysis were two main vertices: the Facebook pages of Erdoğan and the AKP (See Figure 6 below). This network represents all public pages that have shared posts from these two social media accounts between January 2019-April 2020. Red arrows, though very few in numbers refer to reciprocity between accounts.

Figure 6: Facebook Populist Network in Turkey



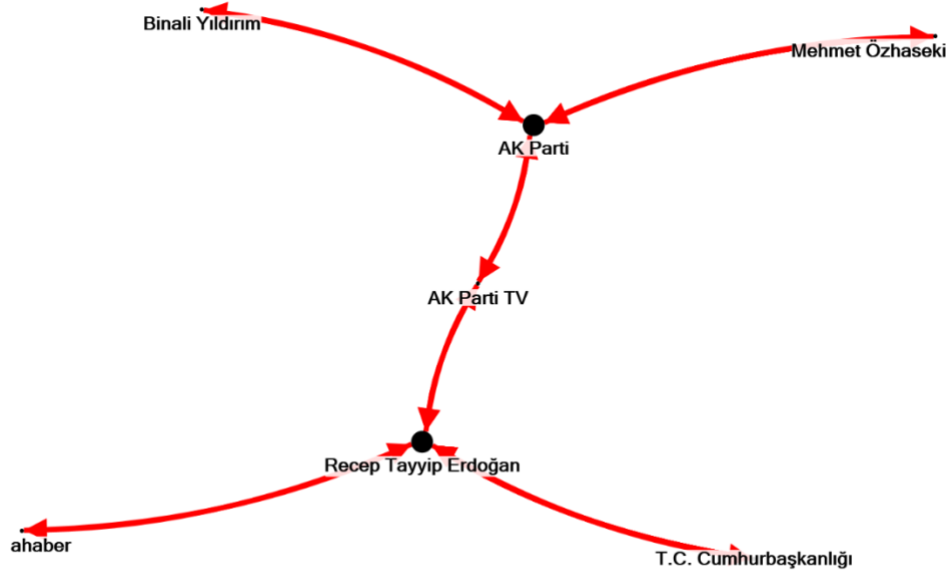
An exploration of Figure 6 reveals that the Erdoğan Facebook account has a more intensive network than the AKP Facebook account. This finding is in line with the literature on populist communication, which argues that charismatic leadership is central to populist strategy (Weyland, 2017). This finding also confirms the research claiming that Erdoğan is the most important figure of the populist movement in Turkey (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018).

Reciprocity Network

In the entire network, there are only 6 reciprocal connections. The Erdoğan Facebook account has three reciprocal connections with the AK Parti TV, T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı and AK Parti TV accounts. Please note that these three accounts are affiliated either with Erdoğan himself or the AKP. Therefore, the Erdoğan Facebook account only reciprocated with accounts closely associated with his social media team and his party.

Similar to the Erdoğan account, the AKP Facebook account has also 3 reciprocal connections. Again, the AKP Facebook account only reciprocated with Facebook accounts affiliated with the party. AK Parti TV is the social media account, which shares media content produced by the AKP itself. Binali Yıldırım is the ex-leader of the AKP, who was handpicked by Erdoğan himself to look after he fell foul of the then party leader Davutoğlu, who was also chosen by Erdoğan to lead the AKP after he was elected as the new president. Mehmet Ozhasaki served as a minister in the previous AKP Cabinets and he was the AKP candidate in Ankara in the March 2019 municipal elections. Currently, he is the deputy leader of the AKP.

Figure 7: Populist Pages' Reciprocity Network



Network Centrality

There is a wide overlap between the pages sharing the Erdoğan and the AKP social media posts (see Figure 8 below). For example, the account named REIS2023 shared the AKP posts 102 times while sharing the Erdoğan posts 178 times. This overlap between two accounts is not unexpected given that Erdoğan is the most important figure of the AKP, who enjoys a complete control over the party organs as well.

Figure 8: Pages Sharing Erdoğan (Blue) and the AKP (Orange)

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United Kingdom

Information Sources Shared on Facebook and Networking by Nigel Farage and the UKIP Party in the UK

Lena Karamanidou, Osman Sahin

Introduction

The UK media landscape is considered pluralistic and with a high level of commercialisation, with both public and private TV broadcasters, a range of national and local print newspapers (Binderkrantz et al 2017; Craufurd Smith and Stolte 2012). According to the Reuters International report, most adults rely on online media for news consumption, while TV channels as source of news has declined from 75% in 2019 to 55% in 2020 (Reuters 2020; Ofcom 2020a). The use of print media for news has similarly declined steeply from between 2013 and 2020, from 59% to 22% in January 2020, although the Reuters report notes a subsequent rise in consumption of TV news in following months due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Reuters 2020). News consumption differs among age groups, with younger people (16-24) more likely to use internet sources while older groups remaining attached to TV, radio and print media as news sources (Ofcom 2020a).

Social media penetration in the UK was estimated at 71.64% in 2020, with 50.89 million users spending on average 102 minutes a day on social media (Statista 2020). 72% of all UK adults have at least one social media profile. Usage is higher in the 16-24 and 25-34 age groups, with 95% and 93% having at least one social media profile but remains above average in the 35-44 (88%) and 45-54 (82%) age groups (Ofcom 2020b). 45% of adults use social media for news consumption (Ofcom 2020a). As table 1 shows, Facebook is the most used for this purpose.

Table 1: Social Media Consumption in the UK

Rank Brand	For News	For All
1 Facebook	24% (-4)	65%
2 Twitter	14% (-)	29%
3 YouTube	7% (-3)	51%
4 WhatsApp	7% (-2)	56%
5 Facebook Messenger	5% (-1)	46%
6 Instagram	3% (-1)	30%

Source: Reuters 2020

Trust in media has declined since 2015 by 20 percentage points (Reuters 2020), possibly reflecting the dynamics of Brexit and broader polarisation on controversial issues. Nevertheless, some established media score relatively high for brand trust (Reuters 2020), with the BBC being the most trusted source. UK media have been characterised as Eurosceptic and many established newspapers and other media sources supported Brexit (Reuters 2020). While social media are used for news consumption, trust in them as news sources is low – 6% according to the Reuters International report (2020). Yet, in 2019 26% of users reported that they do not fact-check news content accessed through social media (Ofcom 2020b).

Populist actors and the media

While the populist actors selected for the Demos project (UKIP and Nigel Farage) have been critical of some established media – in particular the BBC –, their views and agendas have been supported by many UK media, in particular national newspapers (Cushion, Thomas, & Ellis, 2015; Hughes 2019; Kelsey 2016; Murphy and Devine 2020). Hughes (2019) and Murphy and Devine (2020) suggested that UK media have given UKIP coverage disproportionate to their electoral support, especially on EU-related issues and in advance of the Brexit referendum. Conversely, UKIP and the Brexit Party has also been regarded as effective in using traditional media to promote their messages (Reed 2016; Hughes 2019). Media interest in UKIP appears to have declined after Nigel Farage stood down as a leader after the referendum in 2016 and left the party in 2018 (Tournier-Sol 2020; Usherwood 2019). Nigel Farage controversially had a slot in London Radio Station LBC, allowing him a further venue to disseminate his political message and populist rhetoric (Chichon 2020).

UKIP and the Brexit party have also been adept at using both traditional and social media to disseminate their political agendas and messages (Davidson & Berezin, 2018; Gonawela et al 2018; Loucaides 2019; Savage 2019; Tournier-Sol 2020). Social media platforms have been instrumental in the manner both parties communicate with supporters, disseminate party messages within supportive communities while avoiding direct challenges from political opponents, but also for attracting supporters from other political groups and maintaining links to cognate political parties and groups (Davidson & Berezin, 2018; Loucaides 2020; Klein and Pirro 2020; Reed 2016; Ridge-Newman 2020). Nigel Farage, both as the leader of UKIP and later The Brexit Party has been adept at using both conventional – not limited to news formats but also for example entertainment shows - and social media for reaching out to his followers and disseminating his agenda (Gonawela et al 2018; Chichon 2020; Savage 2019). Preference for social media usage is also linked to avoidance of fact-checking requirements of the more conventional media, resulting in the possible dissemination of ‘fake news’ (Kramer 2017).

Methodology

The case selection for this task remains the same as in WP2, with the Facebook pages of UKIP and Nigel Farage being selected for analysis. While the electoral success of UKIP has been limited – for example Nigel Farage, even as the leader of the party, never succeeded in getting elected – they attracted significant attention from the media and had an influence on shaping political agendas in the UK, in particular on immigration and Brexit (Bale et al 2018; Tournier-Sol 2020; Usherwood 2019). The Facebook page of the

party rather than that of the leader was selected as the key social media profile as following the departure of Nigel Farage and in the period of data collection there were continuous leadership crises in the party (Klein and Pirro 2020; Tournier-Sol 2020). Nigel Farage was selected as a case because of his significance as a quintessential populist leader both of the UKIP and the Brexit Party (Kelsey 2016; Tournier Sol 2020).

The selected electoral period for this research is the European Parliament elections of May 2019. This was dominated by the process of Brexit, and in particular issues around the negotiation of the withdrawal agreement with the European Union and its impact on the domestic political landscape, divided at the time over the potential of a ‘no-deal’ Brexit (Vasilopoulou 2020). The regular period selected for this research included the snap national elections of December 2019, triggered by the governing Conservative Party in order to address difficulties, due to its lack of Parliamentary majority, in managing the Brexit process (Prosser 2021). The Brexit Party opted not to contest seats likely to be won by the Conservative Party, due to its waning support since the strengthened Conservative Party was in a stronger position to pursue Brexit – the key issue for both UKIP and the Brexit Party – to its completion (Prosser 2019). During the ‘COVID’ period, media coverage in the UK was dominated by issues related to the pandemic, and preoccupation with the pandemic led to increased consumption of TV news and online media (Ofcom 2020a; 2020c). The analysis was carried out on Facebook data (Mancosu et al., 2020; Marincea, 2020), downloaded with the CrowdTangle API developed by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team, 2020).

Findings: Classification of sources

Print media – mainly national newspapers account for 50% and 39% of all sources used by the two profiles respectively. Digital sources, such as websites and social media are also a preferred source type of both profiles (Figure 1). 39% of all coded sources used by Nigel Farage are digital, with in the case of UKIP the percentage is even higher (45%). The second most used source type is Radio stations are the least used source by UKIP, while TV channels the least used source by N. Farage. The higher use of radio sources by N. Farage (18%) concerns links to LBC Radio, where he presented a show between 2019 and 2020. Nevertheless, one observation we can draw from the findings is that TV channels and radio are largely ignored by both profiles as sources, while the also low presence of links to print media reflects the broader decline of consumption of print news in the UK (Reuters 2020; Ofcom 2020a). Further, 68.55% of all sources shared by N. Farage and 77.40% shared by UKIP have a national focus in terms of coverage, which international and regional sources being shared considerably less (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Types of sources

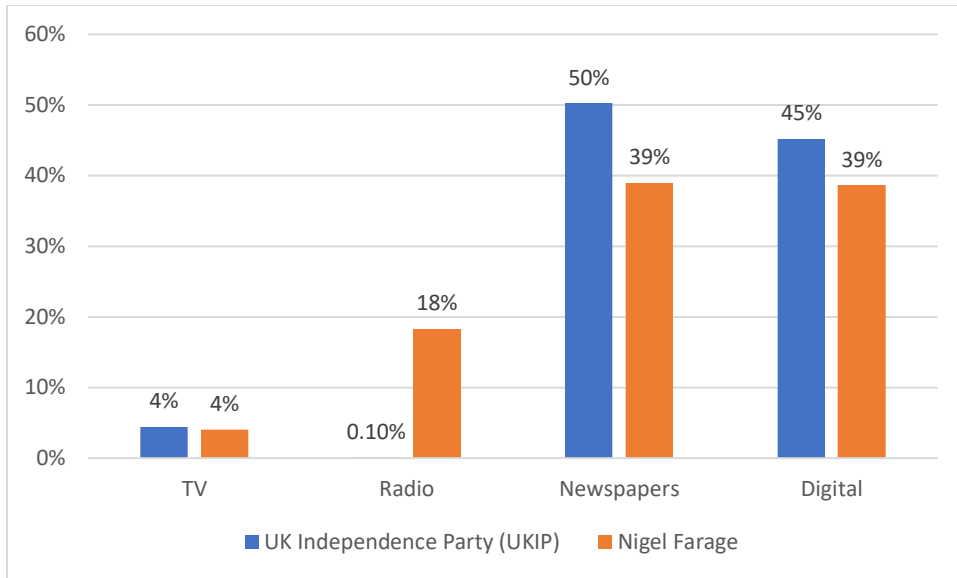
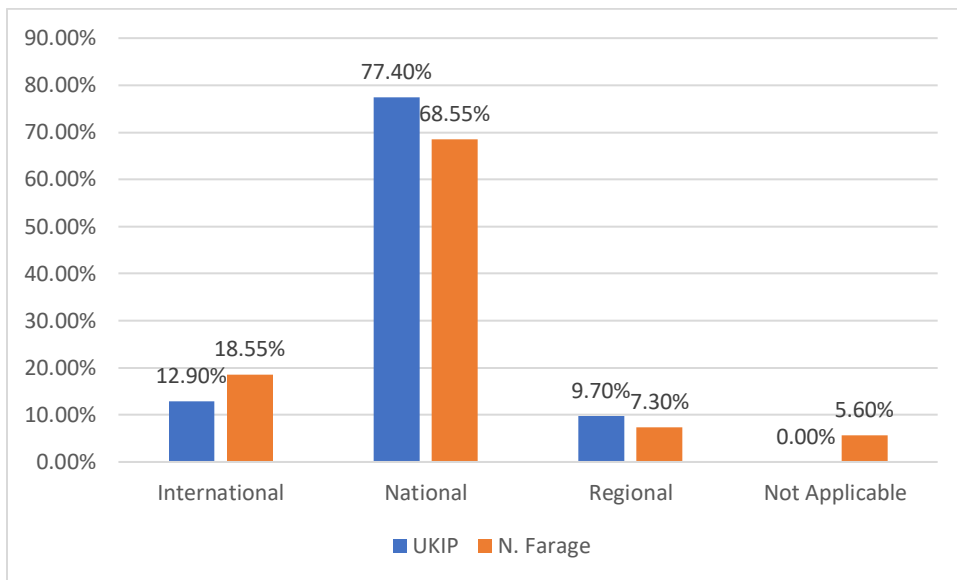


Figure 2: Coverage of sources



In terms of ownership, sources used by either profile are in their vast majority private (Figure 3). One reason for the extremely high percentage of sources coded as private is the predominantly private and commercial character of media in the two national contexts of most sources used by the two profiles, the UK and the US (Binderkrantz et al 2017; Craufurd Smith and Stolte 2012). In the UK, for example, only two broadcasters, the BBC and Channel4 can be characterised as public, while most print and online media are privately owned. A further reason is the presence of mainly Facebook and YouTube social media accounts of individuals or groups, and in particular of their own profiles and the UKIP party. The high use of social media sources also accounts for a relatively high proportion of sources that are not registered as media or news sources, constituting 32.2% of all sources used by UKIP and 33.9% by N. Farage.

Nevertheless, this has little bearing on the transparency of ownership of shared sources (Figure 4). Most UK-based news sources such as print newspapers and online news are registered as companies or are owned by media groups. This information is stated as rule in their webpages and can be further confirmed through a government website²⁹. US and European media sources also contain similar information on ownership and editorial personnel. Further, other websites and social media sources shared by both profiles are on the whole clear in terms of ownership, either belonging to named individuals or groups such as, for example, various UKIP branches in the UK. Less transparent sources – especially in terms of funding - tend to be associated with conservative and alternative right websites and social media accounts such as the website *Brexit Central*, the YouTube channels of *Prager U* and *Brexbox* (a news site associated with the Brexit party but with no information on funding sources or key personnel), the webpages of political commentator Guido Fawkes and the *Conservative Woman* blog.

Figure 3: Ownership of sources

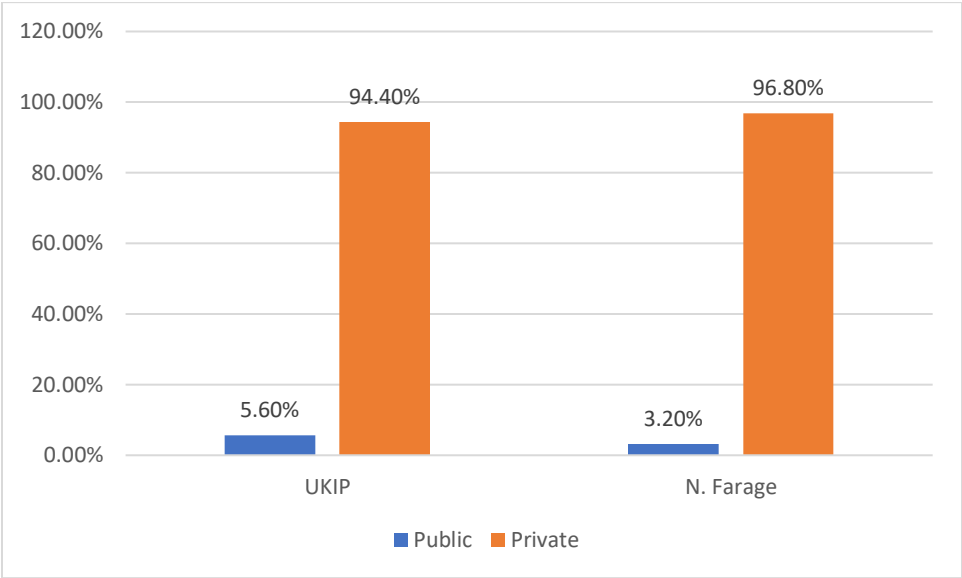
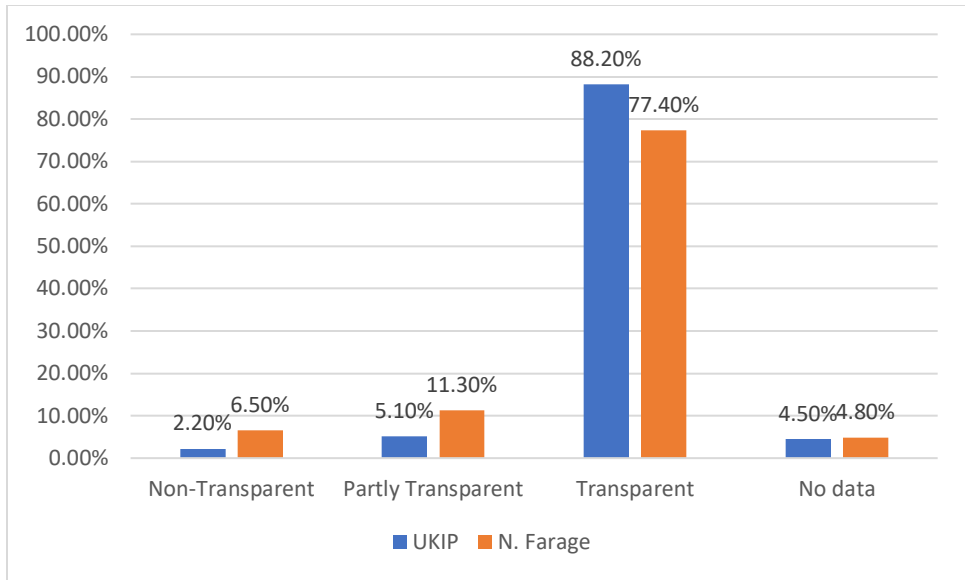


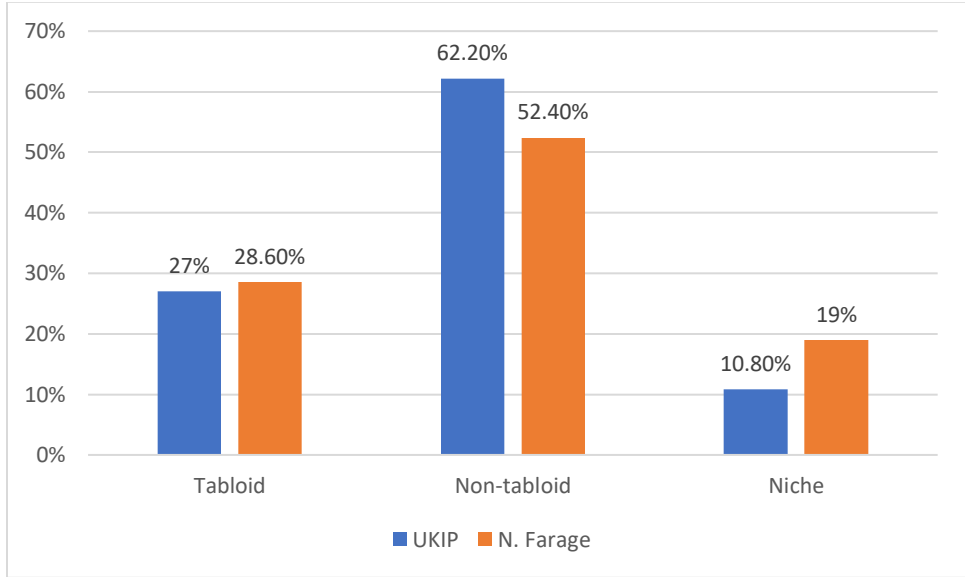
Figure 4: Transparency of Ownership

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house>



Further analysis of the print and digital sources also reveals some interesting patterns. Both profiles rely more on quality newspapers and magazines (62.2% for UKIP and 52.4 for N. Farage) rather than tabloid³⁰ ones (27% and 28.60% respectively) (Figure 5). While this could be interpreted as an effort to rely on respected mainstream media not identified as populist, it should also be noted that in some cases links to such newspapers are accompanied by posts critical of the news contained in the linked source³¹.

Figure 5: Types of Print Sources



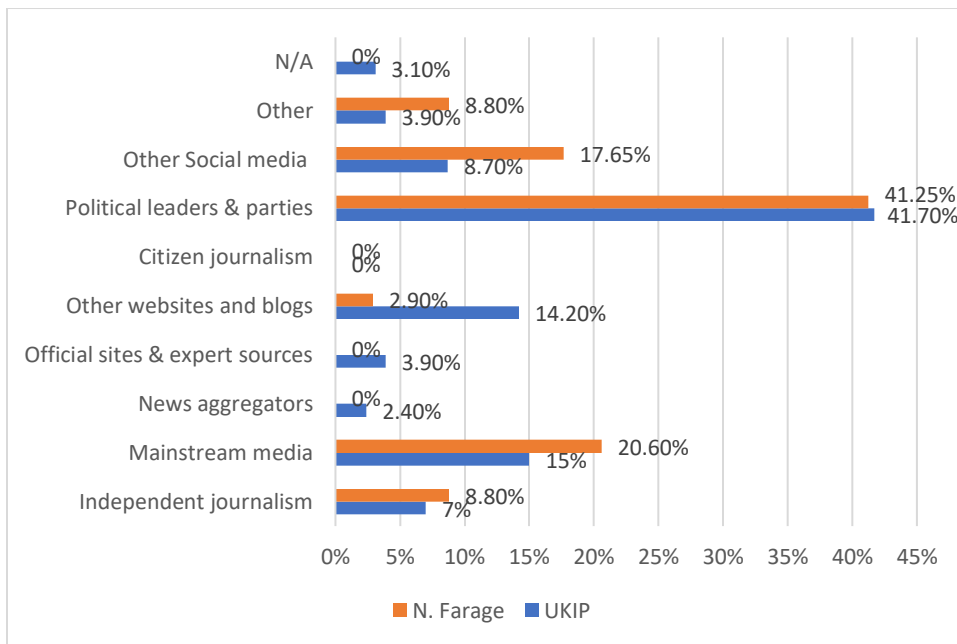
The analysis of types of digital sources shared also reveals some interesting patterns (Figure 6). None of the profiles share citizen journalism sources, and only UKIP shares a very low number of official or expert

³⁰ The distinction between ‘quality’ and ‘tabloid’ newspapers here relies on the content and journalistic style of the newspapers used by the two profiles.

³¹ For example, <https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/2659403670748173>

sources (3.9%). Shares of news aggregators are equally limited. Both profiles share nearly twice as many mainstream media sources than independent journalism or alternative media sites. The most shared digital content of both profiles is websites and social media accounts of their political parties. This accounts for 41.25% of all digital sources shared by N. Farage and 41.70% of those shared by the UKIP profile. Both profiles also share almost exclusively such digital content that concerns their own party. In the case of the profile of N. Farage, all sources shared correspond to his own YouTube channel and Facebook page as well as Facebook posts by other Brexit party candidates and the official Brexit party account. Similarly, nearly all sources – with the exception of two Labour party sites - shared through the UKIP account correspond to web pages and social media accounts linked to the party and its election candidates. Therefore the use of digital sources confirms existing research findings that UKIP and Farage use social media to amplify their message (Gonawela et al 2018; Klein and Pirro 2020; Reed 2016; Ridge-Newman 2020). The relatively high (17.65 %) use of other, non-party, social media accounts and other websites (14.2%) by UKIP also appears to amplify populist messages: among such sources are several right wing commentators some associated with alternative right views, such as UK commentators Katie Hopkins, who was banned from Twitter for promoting hate speech and YouTube commentator Sargon of Akkad (real name Carl Benjamin), an unsuccessful UKIP candidate and far-right activist eventually banned from YouTube for advocating the rape of a MP³² (Klein and Pirro 2020).

Figure 6: Types of digital media

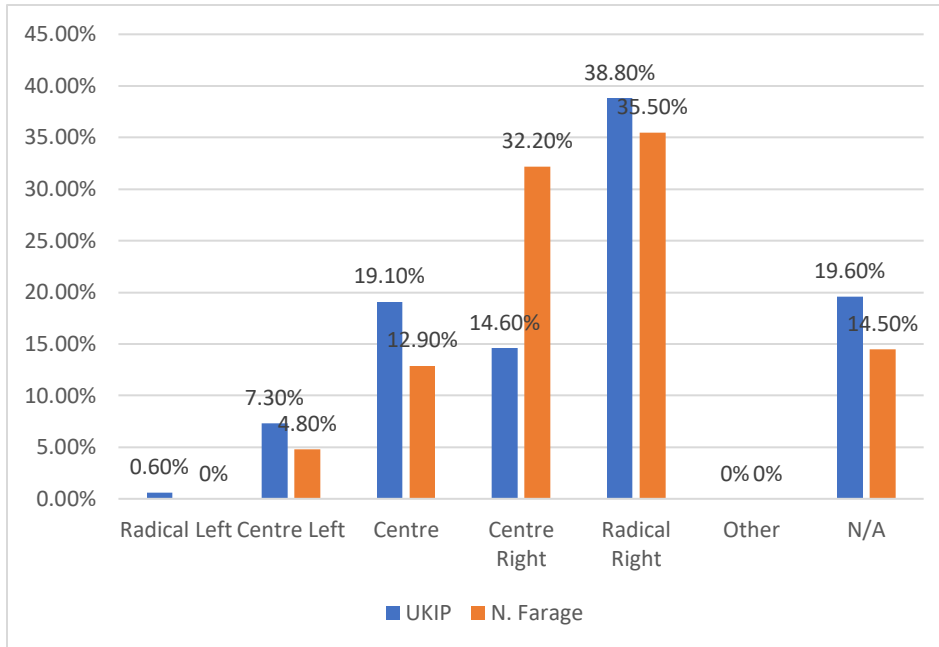


The political orientation of the shared sources (Figure 7) also suggests a similar pattern of amplification of centre-right and right-wing ideologies and discourses. Sources with a radical right orientation were the most frequently shared by both UKIP and N. Farage (38.8% and 35.5% respectively), although in the case of the

³² <https://www.buzzfeed.com/markdistefano/youtube-says-sargon-of-akkad-has-been-suspended-from-being>

latter profile there is a near even split with sources of a centre right orientation. In the case of UKIP, the remainder of shared sources split mostly between centre right and centre orientation. It is difficult to draw strong conclusion on the basis of this finding, but the use of more centrist sources by both profiles suggests an effort to appear moderate. N. Farage, in particular, is thought to have distanced himself from UKIP over the latter’s increasingly extreme political agendas (Klein and Pirro 2020; Tournier-Sol 2020), while UKIP has tried to attract Conservative voters, although under the G. Batten leadership it increasingly associated itself with the far right political spectrum (Klein and Pirro 2020; Ridge-Newman 2020; Weaver et al 2018).

Figure 7: Political orientation of sources



Electoral v. non electoral coverage

Some differences in the way sources are used by the two profiles can be observed during the three selected periods. Unlike UKIP, which used a similar number of sources during the election and regular periods, N. Farage shared approximately half the number sources during the election period than in the regular one (Figures 8 and 9). In the case of UKIP, digital sources remain the most shared type among all three periods, with a slightly higher use of print sources during the regular period (Figure 8). Similarly, digital sources are the most shared by the profile of N. Farage in the electoral and regular periods, but print sources are the most shared during the Covid period (Figure 9). Two conservative daily newspapers, the Daily Mail and the Telegraph, have the highest number of shares (six each) during this period, suggesting again the positioning of N. Farage in the right of the political spectrum. A further difference from the profile of UKIP is again that shares of radio sources are the 3rd highest in the profile of Nigel Farage, again due to sharing content exclusively by LBC radio. A limitation, however, is that both profiles share considerably fewer sources during the Covid period (Table 2).

The pattern of ownership of sources in the three periods, by both profiles, remains the same as in the overall results: the overwhelming majority of shared sources are privately owned (Charts x & x).

Figure 8: Use of Sources during selected periods- UKIP

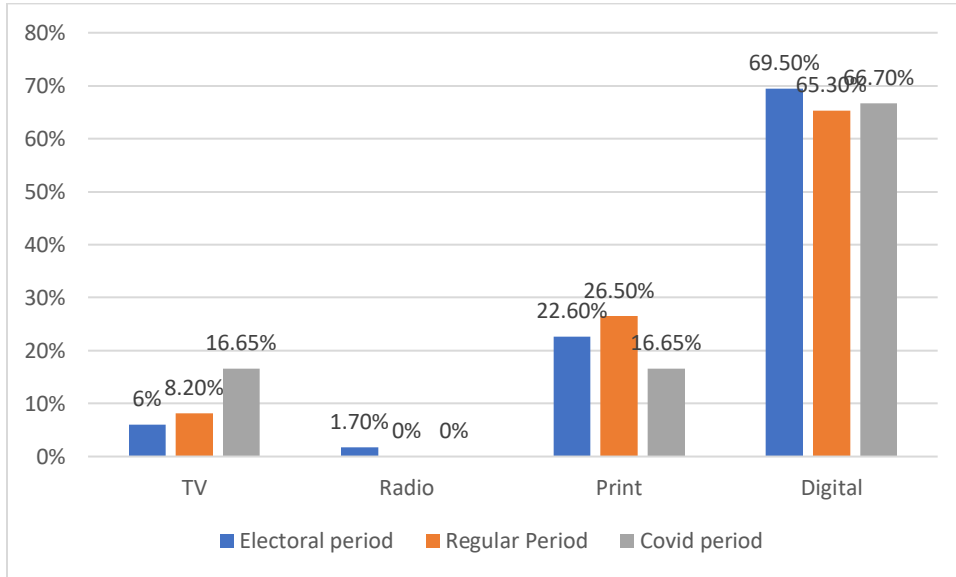


Figure 9: Use of Sources during selected periods- N. Farage

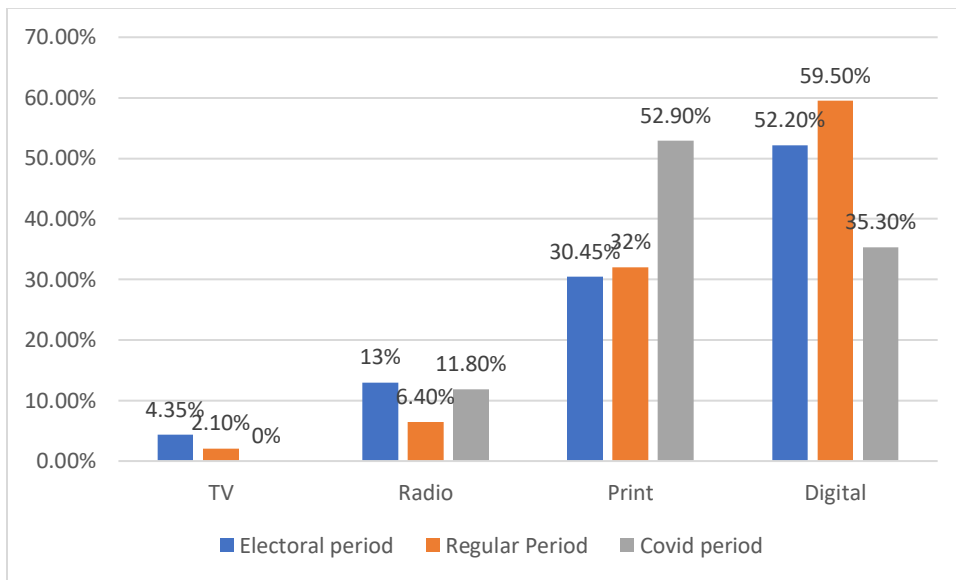


Table 2: Shares of sources in the selected periods

		<i>UKIP</i>			<i>N. Farage</i>		
	Electoral period	Regular Period	Covid period	Electoral period	Regular Period	Covid period	
TV	7	8	1	1	1	0	
Radio	2	0	0	3	3	2	
Print	26	26	1	7	15	9	
Digital	80	64	4	12	28	6	
Total	115	98	6	23	47	17	

Network analysis and sources that share populist leaders' posts

Network reciprocity

One striking difference between the two networks concerns the number of reciprocal connections with other profiles. The analysis found that profile of N. Farage has only four reciprocal connections: with The Brexit Party, which he is leading, the newspaper the Daily Telegraph, the radio station LBC where he presented a programme and the MEP candidate Michael Heaver (Table 3, Figure 10). The latter also run a website – Westmonster.com – that features among the sources shared by N. Farage. All other three reciprocal profiles were also among the sources shared a significant number of times by N. Farage: the Brexit Party 66 times, LBC Radio 54, and The Telegraph 47.

In contrast, UKIP has a much larger reciprocal network of 25 different profiles. The scope of these reciprocal connections is however rather narrow. They include UKIP local branches and specific groups - youth, veterans and War Plan Purple, the 'cultural wing' of UKIP (Klein and Pirro 2020), UKIP MPs, MEPs and candidates and a former UKIP advisor, and an unofficial campaign group, *I'm voting UKIP in the next elections*³³. The Brexit campaign website, Leave.eu also features among the reciprocal connections, suggesting the affinity of UKIP with support for Brexit. Only one news profile, RT UK, features among the reciprocal connections. However, the strength of reciprocal connections is variable – for example, the two profiles of Mike Hookem, one of the UKIP MEPs, were shared a total of 99 times during the election period, but the profiles of some other candidates just once or twice (Mancosu et al 2020).

One factor explaining the discrepancy in the sizes of the reciprocal networks of the two profiles might be the relatively recent establishment of the Brexit Party, which was founded in April 2019, soon before the European Parliament Elections in May. For example, some of the branch Facebook pages – which in the case of UKIP constitute a considerable part of the reciprocal network – were set up between May and September 2019³⁴, some after the election on May 23 2019. However, the limited reciprocal network of the

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/ukipman/>

³⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/Jackstreeterbrexitparty/>, <https://www.facebook.com/CoventryWarwickshireBrexitbranch/>, <https://www.facebook.com/TheBrexitPartyMK/>

Nigel Farage profile could also suggest a strategy of orienting his campaign towards other resources or keeping a tighter but stronger social media network.

A last observation is that the two reciprocal networks do not overlap. This can be attributed partly to electoral competition, since both parties in the 2019 EP election were competing in attracting the Brexit-supporting, right wing, nationalist electorate, as well as to the distance between N.Farage and UKIP from which he resigned (Klein and Pirro 2020; Tournier-Sol 2020).

Table 3: Reciprocal connections

Reciprocity	Page
<i>The Brexit Party</i>	<i>Nigel Farage</i>
<i>Michael Heaver</i>	<i>Nigel Farage</i>
<i>LBC</i>	<i>Nigel Farage</i>
<i>The Telegraph</i>	<i>Nigel Farage</i>
<i>UKIP Oldham Branch</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>UKIP Wales</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Richard Braine, Brexit Now</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>David Kurten AM</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Elizabeth Jones for Brexit.</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Gareth Bennett</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Leave.EU</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Mike Hookem</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Neil Hamilton MS/AS</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Raheem Kassam</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Robert Hill UKIP</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>UKIP Rotherham</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>RT UK</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Sargon of Akkad</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>Ernie Warrender UKIP</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>UKIP Gravesham</i>	<i>UKIP</i>
<i>UKIP Scotland</i>	<i>UKIP</i>

The analysis of the use of information sources used by the two populist profiles in the UK both suggests the significance of the national context and exemplifies some already observed trends in their political communications, and those of populist actors more broadly. The low use of publicly owned sources, for example, reflects a media landscape dominated by privately owned and commercial outlets, both in the UK and the US, where many of the sources used by the two profiles are located. Similarly, the high levels of transparency of the sources, both media and otherwise, reflect oversight arrangements in the UK (and to an extent the US) where information on both businesses and charities is easily accessible. Further, while the use of digital and social media sources has been associated with populist parties, it should be observed that in the UK context this might reflect a broader trend of the declining use of TV, radio and print media as news sources (Reuters 2020; Ofcom 2019).

Two areas of the analysis seem to be particularly significant for understanding the strategies of the two profiles: the types of sources used, in particular digital ones, and the political orientation of such sources. First, while digital sources are the key source of information shared by both profiles and in particular by UKIP, print media shares account for one quarter of the shared sources of UKIP and one third for those shared by N. Farage. Secondly, both profiles show a preference for sharing content from ‘quality’ over ‘tabloid’ newspapers. This could be interpreted as an effort to maintain an image of reliability and moderation and a distance from tabloid newspapers with controversial or politically extreme content – for example on migration or Brexit. Both UKIP and Nigel Farage have made efforts to distance themselves from extreme right views in the past. Hence, their use of reliable, establishment sources can be seen in the context of strategies to present themselves as politically mainstream political actors, different from more extreme ones – for example groups such as EDL and Britain First - in the UK political environment.

However, it is the use of digital sources that seems especially revealing of the strategies of the two profiles, particularly in the case of UKIP, where it accounts for just over 70% of all sources shared. While mainstream and independent media content, as well as social media content not linked directly to the two profiles or their parties is shared by the two profiles, it is digital content produced by the two profiles or their party mechanisms such as local party branches profiles on Facebook that is most frequently shared by both profiles. This is consistent with the arguments of existing research on the strategies of UKIP and N. Farage as well as on other populist parties (Kramer 2017; Reed 2016; Ridge-Newman 2020; Savage 2019; Weaver et al 2018). In the case of N. Farage, his sharing of content linked to LBC Radio, where he was a presenter during the selected time periods, illustrates the same tendency. Further, while the reciprocal network of N. Farage is limited, UKIP’s reciprocal network consists almost exclusively of accounts connected to the party, further suggesting a strategy of amplifying the party’s political message within a network positively disposed towards UKIP.

The political orientation of the sources shared by the two profiles also provides some insights into their political communication strategies and agendas. While both profiles share content from sites that can be classified as centre left and centrist, most of the shared sources are within the ideological spectrum of the right. In particular, sources with a radical right orientation are the most frequently shared by both profiles. Whereas this classification covers their party-generated content, other prominent alt right sources feature among those shared by either or both profiles, such as news outlets like Breitbart, Guido Fawkes, Fox News, YouTube channels such as Prager U and commentators such as Katie Hopkins. In short, both profiles disseminate far right alt-right views (Klein and Pirro 2020) and appear to support the view that UKIP has ‘filled discursive gap after the BNP, Britain First, and EDL were censored from social media platforms’ (Klein and Pirro 2020:14; also Hern 2019). The findings support Klein and Pirro’s (2020) argument that

after the Brexit referendum, UKIP's political communication strategies tried to target alt-right audiences active in particular online, insofar that the sources shared by the party's profile reflect this ideological space.

However, the analysis of reciprocity suggests that this effort was not reciprocated by influential alt-right or right-wing media as none feature among the party's reciprocal network. The analysis suggests strongly that the main disseminators of the two profiles' messages in the selected periods were other profiles supporting the 2016 referendum vote for leaving the EU, including Facebook groups with Brexit as their key focus and appreciation groups of politicians who supported Brexit, and secondarily groups representing party branches or supporting either UKIP or the Brexit Party.

However, more research would be required to explore the relation between the findings of this research on social media networks and electoral success. The profile of N. Farage has a much smaller reciprocal network and the number of shares of the two profiles by the central groups disseminating their messages was roughly equal – 3406 for N. Farage compared to 3347 for UKIP. Yet, the Brexit Party and N. Farage were the more successful political actors in the period of interest to this study – in the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, it elected 29 MEs, while UKIP failed to elect any (Fella, Uberoi and Cracknell 2019). Hence, while online networks and strategies are important in understanding the impact of populist parties, other factors need to be taken into account when considering their electoral impact.

Annex 1

Centrality	Shared N.Farage	Shared UKIP	TOTAL
I'M A BREXITEER	431	288	719
Jacob Rees-Mogg Appreciation Group	441	274	715
UKIP - Sutton Surrey	13	390	403
UKIP Warwick and Leamington	44	334	378
Brexit Newsgroup	207	115	322
THE SILENT MAJORITY (UK)	174	114	288
Ex-UKIP Supporters	53	122	175
Reunite EU - British European Rejoiners	31	139	170
Forever Europeans (Remain in the European Union)	12	141	153
UKIP Brent and Camden Branch	19	132	151
The Bruges Group	86	50	136
UKIP Bury, Lancashire	56	64	120
BRITAIN BEYOND BREXIT	76	35	111
THE EU IS A FAILED 'STATE'.	77	29	106
The (unofficial) Jacob Rees-Mogg Appreciation Society	71	32	103
We are the British People	67	34	101
Police Alerts UK & News reports	78	20	98
The Brexit party: Supporters	85	13	98
Brexit, Great Britain & Beyond: The Right Way Forward	67	27	94
BREXIT PARTY SUPPORTERS UK	79	12	91
Sir Iain Duncan Smith appreciation group	53	38	91
Fishing For Leave	76	14	90
Sack Remain Rebels From Parliament	61	24	85
UKIP Central Suffolk and Ipswich	14	71	85

Boris Johnson Appreciation Group	46	38	84
The People's Voice UK	45	34	79
Anti EU - Pro British	51	27	78
Campaign for bringing Tony Blair to Justice	40	36	76
Jacob Rees-Mogg Back-up Group	48	28	76
Brexit Christchurch	18	57	75
Concerned of the United Kingdom & our freedom from the EU.	57	17	74
The Brexit Central HQ: Public	44	24	68
We Love Our Country, Vote Leave	56	11	67
Brexit: The future of Britain – Daily Express group	39	24	63
We Support Jacob Rees-Mogg!	39	22	61
The Very Brexit Problems club	13	46	59
The List - An Active Voice	37	20	57
THE 17.4 MILLION WANT NO DEAL The Nick Simon Group	34	20	54
National English Unity	28	25	53
The Brexit Party Yorkshire & North Lincolnshire	34	19	53
Pro United Kingdom-Anti E.U.	27	25	52
Cannock Chase Open Discussion Group	15	34	49
YELLOW VEST HULL	17	31	48
The List	35	11	46
I hate the BBC	14	30	44
UK Brexit.	21	19	40
OFFICIAL BREXIT PEACEFUL BUT LOUD AND PROUD RALLIES	11	28	39
Bassetlaw Coronavirus Covid-19 Support Group	26	12	38
BREXIT NEWS	26	12	38
BREXIT PARTY North West Supporters	26	12	38
Britain's Got Brexiteers	27	11	38

UKIP West Hertfordshire	12	25	37
The independent britain north east group	17	18	35
All Politicians Are Self Serving Bastards	12	20	32
Why leave the EU?	14	18	32
Brexit - Daily Mail group	17	14	31
Operation Overlord	15	14	29
Battle for Britain	18	10	28
Leavers of Yorkshire	14	12	26
Politics & Beyond. The Fightback!	15	10	25
PROUD TO BE BRITISH	14	10	24
Bin the BBC	12	11	23
Total Shares	3405	3347	6752

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