The Media as Part of a Detached Elite?
Exploring Antimedia Populism Among Citizens and Its Relation to Political Populism

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Populism research usually addresses politicians as part of the criticized elite, but neglects the media. This study explores populist attitudes against the media and their relation to political populism. The study validates the proposed antimedia populism scale and shows that antimedia populist attitudes apply to a specific and small group of German society. Confirming a relationship between political populism and antimedia populist attitudes, the results indicate that citizens who have developed a populist worldview tend to evaluate the media in congruence with this overall ideology and include the media in their conception of a detached elite. Moreover, antimedia populist attitudes are more common among individuals with feelings of relative deprivation and those with antipluralist and authoritarian submission attitudes.

Keywords: antimedia populism, populist attitudes, media elite, media performance, media trust

From a theoretical-normative perspective, the mass media play a significant role in modern democracies. They are expected to create a public sphere, criticize and control the political system, act as citizens' mouthpiece by communicating their interests to political actors, and mediate between civil society and the political system (Graber, 2003; Schudson, 2008). However, in many Western democracies, one can observe a decline in the public's trust in the media and the fulfillment of their political functions and, consequently, an increase in the criticism of the media (Hanitzsch, van Dalen, & Steindl, 2018; Ladd, 2012; Müller, 2013). This criticism is especially voiced by populist political actors who have recently gained increasingly greater attention in various countries. They often depict the mainstream media as part of the "bad establishment" that is detached from the "good people" and attempt to undermine the media's credibility and legitimacy (Lischka, 2019; Reinemann, Matthes, & Sheafer, 2017; van Dalen, 2019). Populists tend to portray the media as an institution that is supporting established politics and that fails to fulfill its

political and social functions in democracies—a form of criticism or hostility that has been labeled "antimedia populism" or populism against the media (Krämer, 2018, p. 453; as we explain below, we use *antimedia populism* as shorthand for populist anti-elitist attitudes toward the media).

Until previously, populism research has focused mainly on populist criticism of the *political elite*. The media have been identified as another possible elitist group (Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017, p. 1117; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, p. 324; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 11; Rooduijn, 2014a, p. 575), but have received less attention in empirical studies. But is antimedia populism a new concept, or can these attitudes be captured by already existing ones such as media skepticism (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003), media cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), or media bias perceptions (Lee, 2005)? We argue and show that the introduction of a new concept and scale is reasonable as populist attitudes toward the media are different from these established concepts. These attitudes are based on a very specific understanding of the media's role in society, of media representation and journalistic norms, and of the media–politics relations. Moreover, as populist media criticism—especially voiced by political actors—is on the rise (van Dalen, 2019), it is worthwhile investigating whether a connection between antimedia populism and populist attitudes toward political actors can also be found among recipients.

Research recently has pursued the idea that populism on the supply side can be transferred to the demand side in what is manifested as populist attitudes (Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014; Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Against this backdrop, this article explores the concept of antimedia populism from an audience perspective based on a survey of a representative sample of the general German population. The goal is to develop and introduce a scale for measuring antimedia populist attitudes and to analyze their prevalence as well as their connection to political populist attitudes: Are these two concepts completely distinct? Are politics and the media perceived as part of the same indistinguishable elite? Or are they distinct but related? Finally, this article shows which sociodemographic factors and political predispositions are associated with antimedia populism.

The theoretical reflections are applicable, as is the empirical study, to media and political systems where the media are independent from the state. In the following, the term *media* refers to the mainstream legacy media—press, radio, TV, online outlets—that are edited by professional journalists; alternative media are neglected. Germany was selected because it serves as a relevant case for the present research interests. In the last federal election and in several state elections, Germans voted for both a left-wing and partly populist party as well as a right-wing populist party in parliaments; however, both parties differ with regard to their relevance and degree of radicalism. Populist attitudes have been identified among one fifth of the German population (Vehrkamp & Merkel, 2020). Moreover, public media criticism is currently omnipresent in Germany, and a substantial segment of the population does not trust the media (Reinemann, Fawzi, & Obermaier, 2017a). Germany's media system is characterized by a high degree of media freedom and independence from the political system (with a relatively low degree of ideological parallelism and polarization), a rather decentralized structure (with widespread use of regional newspapers and a federalized structure of public service broadcasting), and almost equal market shares of private and public service broadcasters (the latter are attacked particularly often by right-wing populists). Although some of established media are more or less clearly associated with certain ideological positions (in particular, the national quality newspapers) and citizens' media choices are of course linked to their attitudes, media use

is not strongly polarized in the general population. There is still a large overlap between groups with different political positions in terms of their use of television channels, regional and tabloid newspapers, or news websites (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019, p. 46).

Populism and Populist Attitudes

Scholars have proposed an analysis of populism on the demand side in the form of populist attitudes (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012; Schulz et al., 2017). To address citizens' populist attitudes, we draw on the understanding of populism as a (thin) ideology and a set of ideas (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2019; Hawkins et al., 2012; Jacobs, Akkerman, & Zaslove, 2018). Even if ordinary citizens do not necessarily use a populist rhetoric or voice their ideology, they can be said to adopt it as individual attitudes (Hawkins, Rovira Kaltwasser, & Andreadis, 2020).

With regard to a populist ideology, research mainly agrees that populism comprises several subdimensions (e.g., Schulz et al., 2017). However, there exists, again, no consistent understanding regarding which dimensions should be included. Many authors agree that a populist ideology assumes a large gap between "the pure people" and the "bad, corrupt elite" and considers both groups as homogeneous (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). This leads us to the first dimension of populism: the perception of a uniform will of a *homogeneous people* (Canovan, 1981; Müller, 2016).

The second dimension, *populist anti-elitism*, is widely accepted as a central element of a populist ideology. Populists portray the elite as betrayers of the people's sovereignty who act in their own interests, while they present themselves as advocates of the people who restore their sovereignty (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Mudde, 2004). Depending on the different forms of populism, the perceived elite can include political, economic, or cultural actors, or, less concrete, refer to "the system" in general. In addition to this vertical comparison between "the elite" and "the people," a third dimension of populism represents a horizontal exclusion of parts of society that are differentiated from "the people." These *anti–out-group attitudes* or exclusive element (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) has been described by some authors as part of an added right-wing ideology (Schulz et al., 2017); others argue that this is a constitutive part of populism, as the perception of a homogeneous in-group is accomplished only by contrasting them from an out-group (Reinemann et al., 2017b). As exclusionary populism is a core idea of many European right-wing populist parties and their voters (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013), we include it as a third dimension of our populism concept, and mostly focus on right-wing populism in the following.

The call for sovereignty of the people is at the core of the populism concept as populists take the stance that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Mudde, 2004; Wirth et al., 2016). However, populists' call for sovereignty is based on their specific understanding of the people and of representation (Jacobs, Akkerman, & Zaslove, 2018), and the conception of the people as sovereign is only part of a populist ideology in combination with the assumption of the people as a homogeneous group or their anti-elite stances.

Antimedia Populism and Its Relationship to Political Populism

Previous populism research has focused mainly on opposition to the political elite. All studies analyzing populist attitudes refer to politicians (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017; Rooduijn, 2014b). They have shown that (right-wing) populist attitudes and populist voting are more widespread among less educated people, men, and individuals who experienced relative social deprivation. Ideological positions also a play role as do authoritarian and antipluralist attitudes (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Dunn, 2013; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016 Giebler & Regel, 2018; Oesch, 2008; Spierings & Zaslove, 2017; Spruyt, Keppens, & van Droogenbroeck, 2016). However, studies have seldom analyzed anti-elite attitudes toward other groups, such as the media, as well as their correlates. Against this backdrop, in the following, we will elaborate the concept of antimedia populism and theorize on its relationship to political populism (Krämer, 2018).

Following authors who understand populism as a (thin) ideology implies that antimedia populism can be regarded as an individual's set of anti-elitist ideas about the media's role in society. Antimedia populism can be maintained both by political (populist) actors and by citizens. As with populist anti-elitist attitudes toward politics, we assume antimedia populism to be an element of an overall ideology that perceives a great divide between a "bad elite" and "the good people" (Krämer, 2018). Journalists are portrayed as self-serving, corrupt, and detached from the people, and are accused of using their positions to indoctrinate people against their interests.

This anti-elitism can be considered populist because it implies that the media do not represent the people and their will. Thus, antimedia populism is not a populism in the same way as right-wing populism, agrarian populism, and so on, are types of populism, but a more concrete attitude: Antimedia populism reflects only the anti-elitist dimension of populism and, thus, should be one dimensional. Antimedia populism is, then, shorthand for populist anti-elitist views of a specific elite within a more general anti-elitist ideology, a "populist anti-elitist antimedia attitude."

Due to a very negative perception of mainstream media, antimedia populism might be closely related to media cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). However, it should be distinct as it includes a very specific (populist) ideology of the media's role in society. Thus, it should also be distinct from related concepts analyzing media attitudes such as media trust or media performance evaluations (e.g., media bias perceptions; Ladd, 2012; Lee, 2005; Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999), which also lack this specificity, the opposition of "good people" as a homogenous group and "bad, corrupt journalists," or imply other expectations toward the media than the populist idea of representation.

What theoretical arguments can be drawn on to analyze whether such attitudes toward the media go hand in hand with political populism? Populism in general demands that both elected and unelected elites act as representatives of the people. Consequently, the function of journalists is also to advocate for the people's interests even if the media cannot represent "the people" by actually implementing its will. Despite these differences, political and antimedia populism share a common understanding of representation and the role of elites and imply a similar type of criticism or hostility as, in their points of view, these expectations are not being met by the actual elites.

Thus, given their common features, it is highly plausible to assume a strong connection between all dimensions of political populism and antimedia populism. It has been shown that citizens' attitudes and preferences are more stable and consistent than earlier research had assumed (e.g., Ansolabehere, Rodden, & Snyder, 2008). They often think in terms of broad ideas within particular domains, but do not necessarily recognize a higher-order connection between them (Feldman & Johnston, 2014). This should be applicable to the perceptions of politics and the media, although it can be assumed that some citizens tend to develop consonant perceptions of society and its institutions and evaluate the media in congruence with their assessment of politics, whereas others hold much less consistent views. We determine the actual degree of consistency between political populist and antimedia populist attitudes empirically.

The strongest relation can be assumed between political anti-elite attitudes and antimedia populism. A populist ideology perceives intermediates and processes of deliberative public opinion formation not essential, as the true will of the people is naturally apparent to populists (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Müller, 2016). Thus, the media, as the most important intermediaries between the political elite and civil society, would not even be needed because the populist party would represent the people as a whole and speak to the population and intuit its will (Krämer, 2014; Taggart, 2000). However, most populists do not actually draw this ultimate conclusion that the media are superfluous, but rather simply express their dissatisfaction with the media as nonrepresentative and, thereby, illegitimate elite institutions. While usually demanding the direct and uncompromising representation and implementation of the allegedly homogeneous popular will, they turn pluralist norms against journalism and politics. They often accuse the media of being biased against the populist political camp and treating populists unfairly, of acting as supporters of the political elite, and thus of violating norms of objectivity and diversity (Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017; Fawzi, 2020; Mazzoleni, 2003). Thus, the media are ultimately criticized as antipluralist even if populism is ultimately antipluralist itself.

The exclusionary populist dimension should also be related to antimedia populist attitudes. Exclusionary populists believe that the elite discriminates against the people in favor of out-groups. In their ideology, a group of "others" is defined as those who do not belong to "the people." Like the political elite, the media are assumed to favor this out-group over the people, for instance, by reporting too positively about them or concealing negative aspects related to certain groups such as immigrants (Krämer, 2018). Exclusive populists demand prioritizing the demands of the in-group. The media are normatively expected to represent the diversity of society and take into consideration minorities and groups who are discriminated against to promote the social integration of all citizens (Schudson, 2008). Even if these norms are only partly fulfilled, citizens with exclusive populist attitudes will have the impression that the media treat out-groups too favorably, which then might further their antimedia populism.

The antipluralist character of populism also manifests itself in the perception of a homogeneous people. If a wide spectrum of diverse social and political interests and actors in media coverage as well as minorities are represented in media coverage, this contradicts the assumption of a uniform will of the people (Fawzi, 2019). The relative diversity of groups represented in established media is seen by (exclusive) populists as a distraction from the perspective and commonalities of ordinary citizens.

Research on this aspect of the media–populism relationship is scarce. Some models and studies analyzing this relationship theoretically and empirically do exist (e.g., Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017; Krämer, 2018; Mazzoleni, 2003; Stanyer, Salgado, & Strömbäck, 2017); however, they rarely take the perspectives of (populist) citizens. This only recently growing research strand has indeed shown that populist citizens do form more negative attitudes toward the media than do nonpopulist citizens. People who are disappointed by the political elite have less trust in the media, are less satisfied with the performance of the media, and have stronger hostile media perceptions (Fawzi, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2018; Schulz, Wirth, & Müller, 2020). They also differ from nonpopulist citizens in their media use. However, despite their negative attitudes toward the media, they do use mass media more often than nonpopulist citizens and they seem to prefer commercial TV, tabloid newspapers, and entertainment media (Hameleers et al., 2017; Schulz, 2019). We want to expand this research by empirically analyzing the antimedia populism concept and its relationship to political populism.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To evaluate the quality of a measure for antimedia populism (AMP), we needed to ensure that our scale actually measures what we claim (construct validity; Miller & Lovler, 2019). In a first step, we tested whether the AMP scale correlates with other constructs with which it should be correlated (convergent validity). It is reasonable to expect a connection to trust in media (H1a), perceived media performance (H1b), and media quality (H1c), as well as media cynicism (H1d), which we have identified as the most relevant and most closely related (but not identical) attitudes toward the media in the literature. At the same time, AMP should be statistically distinguishable from these constructs as they are less specific and/or imply different criteria of judgment, as we have argued. Correlations that are too strong would question the utility of the AMP scale. Accordingly, AMP should demonstrate discriminant validity in relation to trust in the media (H2a), perceived media performance (H2b), media quality (H3c), and media cynicism (H2d).[2]

After testing the validity of our new measurement, we were interested in identifying how widespread antimedia attitudes are to provide the basis for further analysis (RQ1).

As we have argued above, populist anti-elite attitudes can be directed toward both the political and the media elite. Hence, we first analyzed the relationship between antimedia and political populism by determining whether AMP and political anti-elite attitudes are distinct from each other (RQ2) because both may be the outcome of a more general populist anti-elitist attitude, but attitudes toward the media may also

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[2] Beyond the short remarks above, we cannot theoretically discuss whether these are actually distinct constructs, and, within the confines of this article, we are not be able to demonstrate statistically in detail that they are (however, exploratory factor analyses show that performance and cynicism are distinct from the other constructs and among each other, and items for trust and quality can form a single factor, depending on the chosen solution). As the purpose of our analysis was merely to analyze that antimedia populism is not the same as other relevant constructs in the literature, we can remain mostly agnostic on the merits of these constructs and the corresponding scales, except that we treated them as unidimensional in our analyses.

3298 Nayla Fawzi and Benjamin Krämer   International Journal of Communication 15(2021)

be the outcome of more complex judgments on the relation between in-groups and out-groups, politics and the media, as we discussed above.

Based on our theoretical reflections on this relation, we assumed that antimedia populism would be associated with all three political populism dimensions: homogeneity of the people (H3a) and anti-elite (H3b) and anti–out-group attitudes (H3c). We further assumed that this relation would be strongest for the political anti-elite dimension (H4) given the anti-elitism underlying the concept of antimedia populism.

Populism research has shown that populist attitudes are rooted in specific sociodemographic and political predispositions. Analog to this, we analyzed whether these predispositions also determine antimedia populist attitudes (RQ3). Thus, we drew on predispositions known from populism research and refer to political interest and ideology and relative deprivation, as well as antipluralist and authoritarian attitudes.

Method

Sample

A representative computer-assisted telephone survey among Germans 18 years of age and older was conducted in December 2016 and January 2017 (N = 1,005; dual-frame sampling, 70% landline network, 30% cell phones; response rate: 13.1%[3]). A polling agency was appointed to administer the survey. The respondents were an average of 53 years old, and 50% were men; 43% of the respondents had a lower education, and 14.5% had a migration background.

Measures

Political Populism

Different measurements of populist attitudes exist in survey research (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Schulz et al., 2017; for an overview and validity tests, see Castanho Silva, Jungkunz, Helbling, & Littvay, 2020). All studies integrated the anti-elite dimension, but were distinct with regard to whether the dimensions "anti–out-group populism" or "sovereignty of the people" should be included. In our view, existing measurements of populist attitudes tend to equate sovereignty with support for direct democracy instead of grasping the specifically populist understanding of democracy and representation. However, both populist and nonpopulist actors emphasize the sovereignty of the people in its broader sense (Engesser et al., 2017a, p. 1116). We are, therefore, faced with the decision of whether to develop a new measurement of populist conceptions of sovereignty or to omit the dimension. We opted for the latter because we were mainly concerned with the measurement of antimedia populism.

Furthermore, we felt that some aspects of populist conceptions of popular sovereignty are already implicit in the measurements of anti-elitism and homogeneity we rely on (see below for more details). If

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[3] This response rate represents the ratio between the net sample and the gross adjusted sample. Response Rate 1 = 5.8%, Response Rate 2 = 6.1%.

the elite is criticized for ignoring the assumed will of the people instead of implementing it, this already points to an essentialized idea of the *volonté générale* that is to be followed unconditionally.

Consequently, this study measured the three dimensions (populist) anti-elite attitude, anti–out-group attitude, and the perception of a homogeneous people. The items for the anti-elite dimension were derived from Schulz and associates (2017) and Hameleers and colleagues (2017). Five items were chosen but slightly adapted, and the following item was added: "There is a large gap between the people and politicians" (ranging from 1 = *does not apply at all* to 5 = *fully applies*[4]; $M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.80$, Cronbach's α = .79). Anti–out-group populism items were inspired by items used in the European Social Survey as well as by Hameleers and associates (2017) and slightly adapted. The dimension of homogeneity of the people was based on the measurement by Schulz and colleagues (2017) and extended by two items to convey important aspects of populist attitudes (e.g., "If they wanted to, politicians could make politics that are in the interest of all ordinary citizens"). These items were adapted or added to ensure that they actually ask about populist anti-elite and populist anti–out-group attitudes rather than simply anti-elitism or anti-immigrant attitudes.

However, one item that was assumed to be an indicator of the perceived homogeneity of the people ("We need a strong head of government who enforces what the people in Germany really want") was excluded on the basis of a previous exploratory factor analysis. This led to a slight improvement of the measurement model for populism in a subsequent confirmatory factor analysis ($\chi^2 = 568.36$ vs. 618.44, comparative fit index = .84 vs. .80, root mean square error of approximation = .10 vs. .11), although the model fit was not very satisfactory and homogeneity still could not be measured as reliably as the other aspects of populism. The otherwise satisfactory to high coefficients of the measurement model (see Figure 1 for the final coefficients) showed that political populism has the subdimensions of anti-elitism and anti–out-group attitudes. For lack of a better measurement of perceived homogeneity and to test whether the existing subscale (in its slightly improved form) is related to antimedia attitudes, we nevertheless included it in our further analyses as another dimension of political populism.

Trust in Media

Trust in media was measured with the short version of the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale (five items, $M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.84$, Cronbach's α = .87).

Media Performance Evaluation

We used 11 items that asked respondents to assess how well the media fulfill their political and social functions (e.g., their watchdog or information functions; Hanitzsch, 2011; van der Wurff & Schönbach, 2014; 1 = *do not succeed at all*, 5 = *succeed very well*; $M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.66$, Cronbach's α = .88).

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[4]Unless otherwise noted, all following items were measured on 5-point scales from 1 = *does not apply at all* to 5 = *fully applies* plus a "don't know/no answer" category.

Perceived Media Quality

The quality measure consisted of the following five quality criteria: comprehensible, fair, balanced, accurate, and credible (Jandura & Friedrich, 2014; $M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.79$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

Media Cynicism

We refer to five items including cynical media criticism (e.g., "The media purposely report untruths" or "the media conceal important events from the public"; $M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.77$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

Antimedia Populism

The political anti-elite dimension of populism served as a reference for measuring antimedia populism. As we aimed to test whether the scale is transferable from politics as an elite group to the media, the five political anti-elite items simply were adapted to journalists: (1) "There is a large gap between journalists and citizens," (2) "Journalists very quickly lose contact with their readers," (3) "People like me do not have an impact on journalists' decisions," (4) "Journalists report in a way that harms the interests of ordinary citizens," and (5) "Journalists are corrupt" ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.78$). The five statements yielded satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$). A principal component analysis suggested a single-factor solution, explaining 50.4% of variance. With the exception of Item 3 (.43), all factor loadings were >.7. In a next step, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to examine the fit of the one-factor solution ($\chi^2 = 16.95$, comparative fit index = .98, root mean square error of approximation = .06), which confirmed the one-dimensional structure of antimedia populism.

Sociodemographics

Age, gender, and education (recoded as 0 = lower education, 1 = higher education) were included.

Political Predispositions

Political interest was measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very strong*). To analyze political ideology, we asked respondents to assess their political positions on a left–right scale ranging from 0 = left to 10 = right. Relative deprivation was measured with the following item: "I belong to those who stay behind, while many others in Germany are doing better and better." Approval of the item "In Germany, so much consideration is given to minorities that my own freedom is restricted" indicated antipluralist attitudes. Authoritarian attitudes were measured with one item per subdimension: authoritarian aggression ("Social rules should be enforced without pity"), authoritarian submission ("We need strong leaders so that we can live safely in society"), and conventionalism ("Well-established behaviors should not be called into question"; Beierlein, Asbrock, Kauff, & Schmidt, 2014).

Results

The first two hypotheses address the construct validity of our new measurement, that is, convergent and discriminant validity. To analyze the convergent validity of the AMP scale, we correlated it with logical similar concepts measuring media attitudes and perceptions. The correlations were estimated in a latent variable measurement model in which the indicators of the two factors in each model were allowed to load only on their latent variable. As indicated in Table 1, analyses offer support for AMP's convergent validity because of positive correlations with trust in the media, perceived media performance, media quality, and media cynicism, confirming Hypotheses 1a–d. Based on confirmatory factor analysis, we analyzed whether the AMP scale is statistically distinct from these constructs (discriminant validity). A single-factor solution in which the AMP scale and the particular constructs were included in one factor was compared with a two-factor model in which the items loaded only on their respective factors. As Table 1 shows, for all four comparisons, the two-factor model fit the data better than the one-factor model. Chi-square and the comparative fit index were always larger and the root mean square error of approximation was always smaller in the two-factor solution, which indicates that AMP is distinct from trust in the media, media performance, and quality evaluations and also from media cynicism and is not redundantly measuring one of these previously established constructs.[5] These results confirm Hypotheses 2a–d. However, with regard to media cynicism, it should be noted that the high correlation of .79 indicates a strong overlap between both concepts, but they still do not measure the same attitudes.

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[5] A model with all media-related constructs (antimedia populism, trust in the media, media performance evaluation, perceived media quality, and media cynicism) as separate latent variables seemed quite acceptable, $\chi^2(454) = 1093$, $p < .01$; root mean square error of approximation = .05; standardized root mean residual = .04; comparative fit index = .94. This indicates that, despite some room for the improvement of the measurements, it was not completely unjustified to group the items into five distinct scales.

Table 1. Convergent and Discriminant Validity of the Antimedia Populism Scale.

Variable	Correlation with antimedia populism	Single-factor model				Two-factor model				Improvement in fit from single- to two-factor model		
		χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	$\chi^2(1)$	ΔCFI	ΔRMSEA
Trust in media	−.56	506.21	35	.80	.15	100.11	34	.97	.06	−406.10***	.17	−.09
Media performance evaluation	−.51	833.88	104	.79	.11	355.84	103	.93	.06	−478.04***	.14	−.05
Perceived media quality	−.62	520.07	44	84	.13	146.77	43	.97	.06	−373.30***	.13	−.07
Media cynicism	.79	231.64	35	.91	.10	103.29	34	.97	.06	−128.35***	.06	−.04
Political anti-elite attitudes	.60	472.38	35	.76	.14	185.83	34	.92	.09	−286.55***	.16	−.05

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.
***$p < .001$.

Even if the scale in its current version is certainly not perfect, we can be confident that the scale is sufficiently reliable to use and it seems to be a valid approximation of a construct that is quite distinct from similar concepts. We can thus provide a first estimate of the frequency of antimedia populist attitudes as well as populist attitudes based on our representative sample of the German population (RQ1; see Table 2). The following results are based on all respondents who answered the Likert scale (n = 898–993) and did not choose the "don't know" category (n = 12–107).

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Antimedia Populist Attitudes.

Item	M (SD)	Agreement (%)
"There is a large gap between journalists and citizens" (n = 951)	2.55 (1.09)	17
"Journalists very quickly lose contact with their readers" (n = 898)	2.49 (1.01)	14
"People like me do not have an impact on journalists' decisions" (n = 971)	3.54 (1.31)	55
"Journalists report in a way that harms the interests of ordinary citizens" (n = 972)	2.11 (1.05)	10
"Journalists are corrupt" (n = 917)	2.10 (0.98)	8
Index (n = 1,000)	2.58 (0.78)	11

Note. The percentages of agreement summarize the two scale points 4 (*applies*) and 5 (*fully applies*) or, in the case of the index, the values >3.5 (with the indices ranging from 1 to 5).

With regard to antimedia populism, more than half of the sample thought that ordinary people do not have an impact on journalists' decisions (55% agree or strongly agree), but most participants did not agree that journalists are out of touch with their audience (14%) and 17% perceived a gap between journalists and citizens. Only a minority of the respondents can be characterized as strict antimedia populists who think that journalists are corrupt (8%) or that their coverage actually harms ordinary citizens (10%). Taken together, 11% of our sample held antimedia populist attitudes.

Based on the indices for the three dimensions of political populism, 32% of the sample agreed with anti-elitist statements, 20% tended to consider the German population to be homogeneous, and 15% held anti–out-group sentiment (based on scores >3.5 on the 5-point indices). All in all, 4% of the sample would be classified as complete populists who do not only hold anti-elitist attitudes toward politicians, but also anti–out-group attitudes and consider the people to be homogenous. Ten percent scored higher than 3.5 on the indices for anti-elitist and anti–out-group sentiment. By the same criteria, 26% of respondents who positioned themselves on the left, 33% of those who located themselves in the center, and 39% on the right held anti-elite attitudes; and 5% on the left, 11% in the center, and 21% on the right held antimedia populist attitudes. Thus, we were dealing with more right-wing than left-wing (antimedia) populists in our sample.

In a next step, we were interested in whether antimedia and political anti-elite attitudes are distinct from each other. We proceeded in a manner similar to that of the discriminant validity checks above, and the results can be seen in the last row in Table 1. Again, we found significant differences between the single-factor and the two-factor model, with a better (but far from perfect) fit of the latter model, which indicates that recipients do distinguish between the media and the political elite.

Building on this, the question now arises how AMP is connected not only to political anti-elite attitudes, but also to the other two populism dimensions: homogeneity of the people and anti–out-group attitudes. To analyze this, we established a structural equation model (see Figure 1). Concerning the model fit, there is certainly room for improvement, although the model does not completely misrepresent the structure of the data according to usual standards (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003).

Based on this model, anti-elite and anti–out-group attitudes, the assumption of a homogeneous people, and media populism were all significantly correlated among each other, confirming Hypotheses 3a–c. However, the strength of the relationships varied. Anti-elite and anti–out-group attitudes formed a strongly related complex within a populist ideology, whereas their relationship with the assumption of a homogeneous people was weaker. Antimedia populism was connected most strongly to populist anti-elitism, followed by anti–out-group attitudes, which confirmed Hypothesis 4. Moreover, it was as strongly related to political populism as these elements themselves were connected to each other.
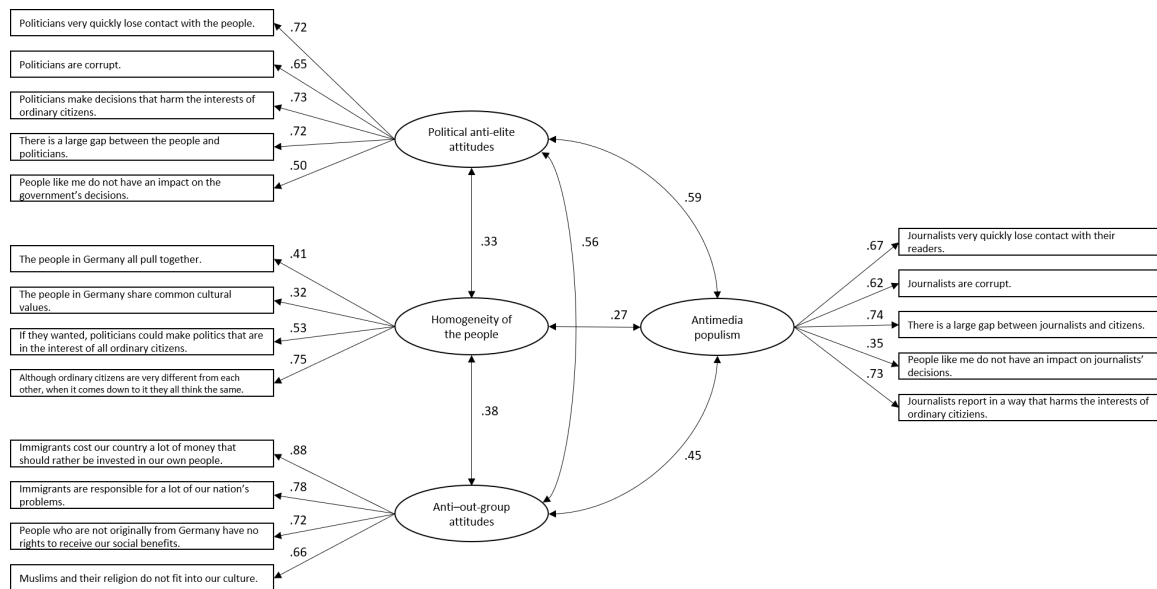
Figure 1. The relation between antimedia populism and the three dimensions of political populism. Standardized coefficients. χ²(129) = .527, p < .01; root mean square error of approximation = .07; standardized root mean residual = .07; comparative fit index = .90.

If populist anti-elite attitudes toward politics and the media are distinct but related, they may also be modeled as different manifestations of a more general underlying anti-elitist attitude (as theorized above) but with components that are specific to each field. A bifactor model fit the data only satisfactorily, but showed that, with one exception, the items for both constructs can be explained partly by a general factor of populist anti-elitism and by domain-specific factors representing more specific attitudes toward politics and the media (see Figure 2).
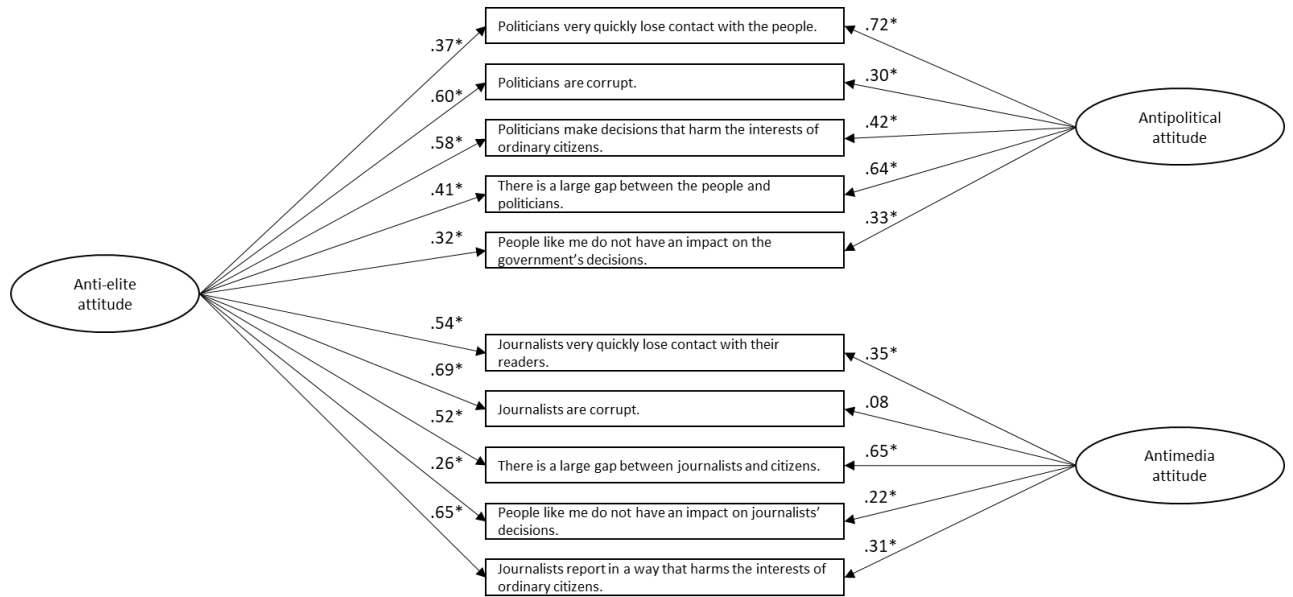
***Figure 2. Bifactor model of general and specific anti-elite attitudes. Standardized coefficients.
χ²(25) = 129, p < .01; root mean square error of approximation = .07; standardized root mean
residual = .05; comparative fit index = .96.***

Finally, this study was interested whether antimedia populist attitudes are not only related to political populism, but also to other political attitudes as well as sociodemographic characteristics. A multiple linear regression analysis showed that antimedia populist attitudes were more widespread among less educated individuals, but age and gender did not play an important role (see Table 3). Among the political predispositions, antipluralist attitudes were the strongest predictors of antimedia populism. With regard to authoritarian attitudes, only the subdimension authoritarian submission was associated with populism against the media.

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Explaining Antimedia Populist Attitudes.

	Model 1 B (SE)	Model 2 B (SE)
Constant	3.127***	2.440***
Age	−.001 (.002)	.000 (.002)
Gender	.025 (.051)	.031 (.05)
Education	−.342*** (.052)	−.188** (.054)
R^2 (adjusted)	.045***	
Left–right self-placement		.036 (.019)
Political interest		−.053 (.027)
Relative deprivation		.053* (.022)
Antipluralism		.120*** (.021)
Authoritarian submission		.055* (.023)
Conventionalism		−.005 (.022)
Authoritarian aggression		.001 (.021)
ΔR^2 (adjusted)		.069***
Total R^2 (adjusted)		.114***

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Discussion

        Although scholars have often noted that the elite in populist discourse include not only politicians, but other actors such as elites from business, religious institutions, or the media, it has neither rarely comprehensively analyzed these other forms of populism nor its reciprocal relationships. Against this backdrop, we analyzed populist attitudes toward the media—what has been labeled antimedia populism—and its connection to political populism on both a theoretical and empirical level. Antimedia populism is defined as a set of attitudes that perceives journalists as part of a bad, self-serving elite that is detached from the people and that disregards the people's interests. Our theoretical reflections show why a strong connection to political populist attitudes in the narrow sense is evident. Therefore, antimedia populism is eminently political instead of being simply a symptom of an apolitical lack of interest or distrust in institutions such as the media. Ideal-typical populists should subsume politics and journalism to their moralizing anti-elitist attitudes and conceptions of direct representation that, ultimately, have antipluralist and authoritarian implications. In the case of exclusionary populism, hostility toward the media will also be driven by anti–out-group attitudes if many or all of the established are perceived as liberal or proimmigration (as seems to be the case in Germany where antimedia populism is also related to anti–out-group attitudes).

        Based on the political anti-elite measurement, we tested the most straightforward approach to an antimedia populism scale and analyzed its reliability and validity in a representative survey in Germany. As a first attempt at measuring AMP, we transferred the political anti-elitism scale one to one to journalists. Although our approach already produced important insights, more specific formulations of the items and a statistically superior scale are certainly possible. Future research should investigate in more detail (e.g., based on qualitative interviews) whether other aspects of populist criticism of the media are voiced as well (Fawzi, 2020),

and possibly include them in new measurements. The differentiation from related constructs might then also be further investigated.

However, our scale already has helped us identify those recipients with this specific populist idea about the media's role in society as we described it above. We showed that more than every 10th respondent has such antimedia populist attitudes. The results indicate an association between antimedia populist and political populist attitudes. In line with our theoretical assumption, the strongest relation was found for the political anti-elitism dimension. A negative opinion of politicians clearly goes hand in hand with a perception of the media as a detached elite, yet citizens continue to distinguish between the media elite and the political elite as the two measurements are empirically distinct from each other.

Antimedia populism is also connected to the anti–out-group dimension of populism and, less strongly, with the assumption of a homogeneous people. Both exclusionist, anti-immigrant attitudes and the idea of a unified people conflict with the pluralistic and integrating coverage that is expected of mass media. Consequently, this study could show that those with antipluralist and authoritarian views of society perceive the media to be detached from the people and as an irresponsible institution. These results expand on previous research that has found that the stronger an individual's partisanship and the more cynical he or she is about politics, the more likely he or she is to mistrust the media or perceive media coverage as biased (e.g., Gunther, 1988; Ladd, 2006; Lee, 2005).

This is not to say that populist citizens' impressions that the media are critical of their political camp is completely unfounded and driven only by a biased perception of coverage (although a hostile media bias can play an important part in this perception). Content analyses do show that populist politicians are evaluated more negatively than nonpopulist politicians in many European countries and that journalists do actively challenge them more by contradicting their positions (Wettstein, Esser, Schulz, Wirz, & Wirth, 2018). However, from a normative perspective, it is debatable whether the statements of certain populist actors should be covered in the same way as other positions, in particular given the radical and racist statements of right-wing populists in many countries, including Germany.

This study also indicates that antimedia populism is not only strongly connected to political populism, but as strongly as these dimensions themselves are related to each other. Again, this demonstrates that there are citizens who perceive a significant connection between elites from the media and the political sphere and, thereby, include the media as part of a detached and irresponsible elite. Future populism studies may use our measure to gain a more comprehensive picture of a populist worldview. Moreover, studies may measure populist anti-elitist attitudes toward a broader range of institutions. This would allow for even more complex models (e.g., more extensive bifactor measurement models) that would be able to differentiate more systematically between general and specific anti-elitist attitudes.

To simplify matters, we assumed theoretically that individuals evaluate the media based on their populist perceptions of societal issues. In reality, however, one can assume that these perceptions influence each other mutually or grow out of common roots. Based on previous research on the development of political discontent (Kemmers, van der Waal, & Aupers, 2016), further analyses should theorize and investigate how

people acquire and cultivate populist hostility toward political elites and the media and how the intimate relationship between such attitudes emerges.

Conclusion

These findings have important implications. A substantial segment of populist citizens who are disappointed by politics are also disappointed by the media. They do not feel represented by the media and do not consider them as their mouthpiece to mediate their interests to politicians. Consequently, from their point of view, the media are not able to fulfill their central political functions. This might result in a further decline of media and political trust, and these societal groups will presumably turn away increasingly from traditional media toward partisan or alternative media, which are easily accessible online. The online environment is said to be particularly compatible with the populist political logic (Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017). Here, new intermediaries, nonprofessional journalistic sources, and the functioning of social media carry the risk of increased polarization of society, the risk that populist attitudes will become more extremist and that conspiracy theories about the media–politics relationship will grow.

On the other hand, the media themselves must be held accountable. Journalists should self-critically ask themselves why it is that a considerable number of recipients do not perceive them as representative of their interests, but rather as detached elites and supporters of the establishment. They should reflect on their selection of sources, the variety of presented opinions, and their relation to the political elite, and make them more transparent. Moreover, they should think about the way they cover populism, which is indeed a difficult task. Journalists should not cover populism with a disproportionate frequency and unduly promote it because of its high level of compatibility with the media logic (Mazzoleni, 2014). Neither should they neglect it and automatically position it on the political fringe, in particular when it is not exclusionary. However, it is also their responsibility to point out when populism threatens liberal democracy and its fundamental principles, even if— or precisely because—populist actors and citizens will not agree.

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