

Far-Right Parties in the European Union and Media Populism: A Comparative Analysis of 10 Countries During European Parliament Elections

LARISA DOROSHENKO¹
University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

The increasing popularity of far-right parties in Europe since the beginning of the 21st century has occurred alongside the commercialization of media markets, the proliferation of online news sources, media populism, and the mediatization of politics. This article advances an understanding of the relationship between media populism and voting for far-right parties by comparing the effects of traditional and online media outlets as well as using panel data to establish a causal relationship between consumption of particular news outlets and the propensity to vote for far-right parties. Analyzing 10 European Union countries with well-established and emerging far-right parties, this research also accounts for peculiarities of media systems. Results demonstrate that mass-market newspapers and online media increase voters' propensity to support far-right parties, while upmarket newspapers and public broadcast service have the potential to mitigate this effect, especially in countries with high standards of journalistic professionalization. A discussion of differences in media effects among countries and directions for future research concludes the article.

Keywords: far-right parties, voting behavior, media populism, media commercialization, media system models, cross-country comparative analysis, European Union

The presence of far-right parties in European politics has become more prominent, creating favorable conditions for Euroscepticism, xenophobia, and intolerance. Since 2013, the United Kingdom, France, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine have witnessed far-right parties sweeping both national and local elections. All these victories came in addition to the established presence of far-right parties in the legislative bodies of Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland.

Larisa Doroshenko: doroshenko@wisc.edu

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Several factors can explain the popularity of far-right parties, such as election legislation and party coalitions, levels of immigration and unemployment, gender and education level of voters, and dissatisfaction with the functioning of mainstream parties and democratic institutions (Givens, 2005;). Recently scholars have been exploring the impact of citizens' media diet on their voting for far-right parties (Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2011; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017; Müller et al., 2017; Sheets, Bos, & Boomgaarden, 2016).

The ongoing proliferation of media channels and their commercialization have prompted scholars to start discussing the phenomenon of "newsroom populism" (Plasser & Ulram, 2003) or "media populism" (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2003), when market forces impel media organizations to attract viewers by relying on sensationalist coverage, expressed emotionalism, personalization, and blatantly plainspoken discourse (Krämer, 2014). This dynamic creates favorable conditions for promoting the agendas of far-right parties, which often resort to a similar populist style of communication, using emotional language and emphasizing the distinction between "the people" and some out-group. These parties also bypass the devalued elites and institutions as well as rely on a charismatic leader who masterfully manipulates media logic. Coverage of far-right parties increases their legitimacy in the eyes of supporters (Bos et al., 2011), and reactivating an "us-versus-them" schema in media reinforces populist sentiments, especially among predisposed audience members (Hameleers et al., 2017; Müller et al., 2017). The Internet and social media also contribute to direct interactions between far-right parties and their constituencies, removing the gatekeeping function of established mass media institutions (Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017; Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann, 2017).

These media effects are not created equal across European countries. In southern countries such as France, Greece, and Italy, news coverage is more strategic and negative and focuses more on political actors than on issues. In northern countries, including Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Norway, news is more issue-oriented and less strategic (de Vreese, Esser, & Hopmann, 2017). Although all these findings contribute to our understanding of media processes in Europe, little systematic comparative research has investigated the effects of these differences on people's support for far-right parties. Lack of uniform individual-level data that include an extensive battery of media habits from various European countries hinders cross-national exploration of media effects on the popularity of far-right parties.

This study seeks to fill these gaps in the research by using individual-level data from countries with well-established populist far-right parties (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, and Italy) as well as countries with emerging populist far-right parties (e.g., the United Kingdom, Hungary, and Sweden). This analysis considers the peculiarities of mass media systems and compares the impact of traditional media outlets with online news sources. Finally, addressing the difficulty of testing media impact on the electoral success of the populist far-right parties (Mudde, 2007), this article uses panel data to establish causal relationships between a reliance on specific media sources and an increased likelihood of voting for a far-right party.

Vox Populi, Vox Dei: Media Populism and Its Effect on Citizens' Support for Far-Right Parties

To avoid conceptual ambiguity, this review begins by distinguishing between populism expressed *by* media and *through* media and by analyzing why commercial media outlets have more favorable conditions for promoting far-right parties. *Populism by media* (Esser et al., 2017), or media populism, is a style of communication that is characterized by an antiestablishment attitude toward political elites and a reliance on emotionalization and sensationalism to attract attention (Krämer, 2014; Mudde, 2007; Plasser & Ulram, 2003). This style is meant to bring media outlets closer to the audience and demonstrate their separate status as the "fourth estate." Recent content analyses conducted across 16 countries during nonelection periods demonstrated that strategic news coverage is as prevalent in Europe as it is in the United States; about one-quarter of news stories used a game frame, regardless of whether these stories came from mass-market and upmarket media outlets (de Vreese et al., 2017). The amount of strategic coverage increases before election campaigns, and empirical evidence suggests that it benefits the agenda of far-right parties.

For instance, a content analysis of French elections found that horse-race coverage brought populist leader Marine Le Pen into the national agenda (Hubé & Truan, 2017). A conflicting perspective on issues related to immigration in Denmark unintentionally brought popularity to the Danish People's Party (Bächler & Hopmann, 2017), while strategic coverage also put Swedish Democrats in the media spotlight (Strömbäck, Jungar, & Dahlberg, 2017). Simplification of issue coverage and stereotypical selection of immigration issues also favored the spread of extremist narratives in Hungary (Csigó & Merkovity, 2017).

Populism through media (Esser et al., 2017) occurs with the commercialization of mass media, which creates economic incentives to attract an audience through personalization and dramatization of news coverage, devoting more attention to the worldview of ordinary citizens and thus inadvertently playing the populists' game whose agenda often fits these criteria (Albertazzi, 2007; Bos et al., 2013; Mazzoleni, 2003; Mudde, 2007). Content analysis of Nordic countries' newspapers has revealed that populist movements receive more positive coverage in tabloids, even though the amount of such coverage is similar to that of quality papers (Herkman, 2017). Certain tabloids even create a symbiotic relationship with far-right parties—for instance, such symbiosis occurs between the Austrian newspaper *Krönen Zeitung* and the far-right Austrian Freedom Party (Plasser & Ulram, 2003) and between the Dutch *De Telegraaf* and the far-right Party for Freedom (Van Holsteyn, 2014).

However, it is important to note that recent empirical systematic studies indicate that the division between commercial and public/elite media due to "production logic" (Mazzoleni, 2008, pp. 54–55) is less clear-cut. Comparative research across 10 countries demonstrates that there is less difference between upmarket and mass-market newspapers (Engesser et al., 2017), and news items usually do not contain more than one reference to any element of populist ideology, such as anti-elitist or nativist sentiments (Müller et al., 2017). Among 24 European countries, there is little support for the assumption that commercial television makes stronger populist statements than public broadcasters, and there is no conclusive evidence about tabloid newspapers being more susceptible to populism than quality newspapers (Esser et al., 2017). Populist public debates have been growing in both elite and tabloid outlets over time

(Rooduijn, 2014), suggesting that the division between mass and upmarket media with regard to populist rhetoric has become blurred.

In addition to the content of commercial and elite media, it is important to consider the audience's selection of one media type over another as well as how the style of media coverage reinforces these choices and preexisting support of far-right parties (Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003). For instance, in the Netherlands, voters of the far-right Party for Freedom are more likely to use tabloid media than are those who vote for mainstream political parties (Bos, Kruikemeier, & de Vreese, 2014). Exposure to soft news in media leads to more political cynicism and antiestablishment sentiments (Hameleers et al., 2017), and this type of mind-set is positively related to one's susceptibility to populist viewpoints (Bos et al., 2013). Another empirical study finds that readers of tabloids have stronger exclusionist populist attitudes, stemming largely from these outlets' framing of issues in a monocultural way (Hameleers et al., 2017). There is also evidence that citizens associate antiestablishment and nationalist ideas with each other (Hameleers & Schmutz, 2017), creating a spillover effect when one idea mentioned in media evokes another without explicitly mentioning it. Experimental research confirms that right-wing populist cues in newspapers affect anti-immigrant attitudes and political cynicism, which in turn increase the probability of voting for such parties (Sheets et al., 2016).

Summing up arguments about the contribution of commercial media to both political and media populism, this study tests the following hypothesis:

H1: Consumption of mass-market newspapers and commercial television news increases citizens' propensity to vote for a far-right party.

On the other hand, elite and public broadcast news media take a different stance when covering far-right parties because of different reporting styles. These outlets flesh out issues surrounding these parties and are more likely to discuss the consequences of their policies and manifestos. Broadsheet newspapers rely more on expert sources and pay substantially less attention to the opinions of ordinary people than do tabloids (Esser & Umbricht, 2013). The coverage of quality papers also demonstrates a negativity bias toward populist leaders (Bosman & d'Haenens, 2008). Thus, while both mass and upmarket news media do not demonstrate differences in terms of the amount of populist coverage (Esser et al., 2017), the quality of this coverage is not the same. Elite news media tend to consolidate support for ruling political elites and garner hostility toward their opposition, which often includes far-right parties (Mazzoleni et al., 2003).

As with tabloid newspapers, citizens who choose quality papers are already predisposed to be more supportive of the political establishment than readers of tabloids (Aarts & Semetko, 2003), so they might self-select into media use that aligns with their political worldview (Hameleers et al., 2017). Although empirical studies have not confirmed that hard news programs and elite newspapers align with weaker populist attitudes, the consumption of elite news does correspond to significantly weaker exclusionist attitudes (Hameleers et al., 2017), which creates resistance to far-right appeals. Additional evidence indicates that people who oppose populism reinforce their position when exposed to populist messages, suggesting a reactance response among opponents of populist parties (Krämer, 2014; Müller et al., 2017).

Thus, people who share antipopulist attitudes are more likely to turn to elite news with more serious coverage and negative portrayals of populist far-right parties. This idea leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: Consumption of upmarket newspapers and public television decreases citizens' propensity to vote for a far-right party.

Far-Right Parties Online: Eschewing Traditional Media Gatekeepers

The proliferation of online media makes it possible for far-right parties to promote their ideas more freely, avoiding the political correctness of traditional media gatekeepers. Unlike in traditional media outlets, online far-right populist politicians have direct access to people's grievances (Kriesi, 2014) and the opportunity for crafting more personalized messages, creating like-minded online groups, and establishing closer connections to supporters (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). Surviving in the World Wide Web requires focusing on content that maximizes attention, so online news relies more than commercial media on negativity, emotions, and less complex descriptions of events (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). All these factors create fertile ground for the populist style of far-right political actors who can simplify complex issues into an us-versus-them rhetoric and include more dramatic appeals and visuals.

Across European countries, there is evidence that far-right parties have seized an opportunity to build online communities and are successful in spreading their messages. For instance, in France, Front National has expanded its website and created a professional informational news hub for people who support this party and share its worldview (Hubé & Truan, 2017). Similarly, the Austrian Freedom Party has increased its online presence and uses online media as its main channel for communication with constituencies (Schmuck, Matthes, & Boomgaarden, 2017). In the United Kingdom, the British National Party has a very active online presence and provides multiple opportunities to engage with its campaign on the Web page, where it cultivates an "authoritative populism" (Stanyer, Archetti, & Sorensen, 2017). Empirical analysis of relationships established through Twitter among far-right groups reveals the existence of like-minded stable communities across eight European countries. Not surprisingly, most of the users in these communities are connected to formal populist groups—for example, to the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) (O'Callaghan, Greene, Conway, Carthy, & Cunningham, 2012). Previous research also shows that Swedish Democrats, through the savvy use of social media, successfully spread their audiovisual ads during 2010 elections (Stjernholm, 2014).

Summarizing research about opportunities that the World Wide Web presents for direct communication with constituencies as well as the growing presence of far-right politicians online, this article proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Consumption of online information increases citizens' propensity to vote for a far-right party.

**Media Systems Revised:
Country-Specific News Media Effects on Far-Right Voters**

Even though far-right parties share common issues and agendas, they operate in countries with different media systems, which in turn affects the way these parties are portrayed in commercial and elite news media. Hallin and Mancini (2004), in their seminal work, distinguished between three Western models of media systems—liberal, democratic corporatist, and polarized pluralist—based on the criteria of press market inclusiveness, political parallelism, journalistic professionalization, and the role of the state. A study based on quantitative analysis of standardized measurements validated the first three of these measures but divided the role-of-the-state dimension into three subdimensions: national support of government broadcasting, direct or indirect press subsidies, and media-ownership regulation (Brüggeman, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, & Castro, 2014). As a result, four media system types were proposed according to their geographical location: northern, central, western, and southern.

The northern type, which includes Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, is characterized by highly professional journalism practices, an inclusive press market, powerful public broadcasting, and generous press subsidies. The central type, represented by Austria, Germany, Great Britain, and Switzerland, also has strong public broadcasting and a low level of political parallelism, but unlike northern model, these features come with strict ownership regulation and low press subsidies. The southern type, which includes Spain, France, Greece, and Italy, is characterized by a polarized pluralist media system, with the highest degree of political parallelism, the lowest level of professional journalism, and the least inclusive press market. Countries in the western model, which is represented by Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, the United States, and Portugal, share medium levels of all six dimensions (Brüggeman et al., 2014).

Comparative content analysis of news coverage across European nations (de Vreese et al., 2017) confirmed traces of a north-south divide, where southern Europe stands out for having more strategic, interpretive, and actor-focused news. In contrast, northern countries, represented by parts of Scandinavia, Germany, and the Belgium-Netherlands nexus, have more issue-focused news coverage and less strategic news coverage. Notable exceptions to this dichotomy are Spain and Sweden. The former has a high focus on issues and a low focus on actors and strategy framing, and the latter has less hard news and more interpretive and actor-focused coverage (de Vreese et al., 2017).

In light of these findings as well as the previous discussion about elite and commercial news media, we might expect stronger upmarket resistance to media populism in northern Europe due to more serious news coverage and higher journalistic standards. At the same time, political parallelism and more strategic news coverage in southern countries can make even elite newspapers, especially those on the right side of the political spectrum, prone to promoting the agenda of far-right parties. To better understand media system differences, this study tests the following hypotheses:

H4a: Consumption of upmarket news media decreases citizens' propensity to vote for a far-right party in countries in the northern and central media systems.

H4b: Consumption of right-leaning newspapers increases citizens' propensity to vote for a far-right party in countries in the southern media system.

Methods

This study employs data from a unique panel survey conducted in 21 countries of the European Union during parliamentary elections in 2009. Survey respondents were interviewed about one month prior to and immediately after the elections (98% of questionnaires were completed within five days after the elections). The questionnaire was developed in English and then translated by TNS (a market research and market information group) into other European languages and then back to English. Irregularities and problems arising from this process were resolved by deliberation.

The survey was conducted using computer-assisted Web interviewing. A sample for this survey was drawn from the TNS databases and those of its partners with quotas enforced on age, gender, and education to ensure representativeness and compatibility with census data in each country. A total of 32,412 respondents participated in the first wave, which had an average response rate (AAPOR RR1) of 23%. All the respondents were contacted to participate in the second wave, of which 22,806 did, providing a retention rate of about 70%. Before analysis, the data set from the second wave was weighted according to sociodemographic characteristics and turnout of respondents.

Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom were selected for subsequent analysis because they either had more than 5% of the seats in their legislatures taken by far-right members in 2009 or far-right parties gained prominence in the political arena during the next year.

Measurement: Controls

Scholars argue that far-right political parties attract people who share their negative attitudes toward political establishment and have strong feelings of political resentment (Lubbers, Gjisberts, & Sheepers, 2002; Norris, 2005). Similarly, far-right parties propose halts to immigration (Mudde, 2007), and their constituencies share these anti-immigrant sentiments (Azrout, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2012;). Empirical research also demonstrates that citizens with higher levels of political interest and political knowledge have stronger ideological and partisan affiliations (Claassen & Highton, 2009) as well as stronger political attitudes (Stroud, 2010). Additionally, younger and older individuals, men, and people with less education are more susceptible to right-wing populist campaigns (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006). Because of these trends, this analysis controls for demographic characteristics, political attitudes, and knowledge.

Measurement: Media Exposure

The survey included self-reported measures for news exposure across major media outlets: online media, television, newspapers, and radio. In each country, respondents were asked how many days they read each of three major newspapers (one mass-market and two popular upmarket newspapers—one politically left and one politically right of center) and how many days they watched two television news

programs (one from public broadcasting and another commercial) (see the Appendix for the full list of media outlets, their political leanings, and ownership). Respondents also estimated their exposure to online news: how many days per typical week they read about politics on the websites of traditional newspaper or television channels, on other Internet sites, and on blogs or discussion forums ($\alpha = .74$).

My classification of traditional media outlets closely follows the example of previous comparative studies across eight countries (de Vreese et al., 2017), and in two nonmatching and two new cases I aimed at sample equivalency across countries. Thus, in Finland, neither of the upmarket newspapers have a political affiliation, so I randomly assigned them to center-right or center-left when creating a pooled sample that included all the countries. In Hungary, three newspapers aligned well with previously established classifications. Given the absence of a mass-market versus upmarket distinction in Italy (de Vreese, 2017), I assigned the right-leaning *Il Giornale* to mass-market newspapers because it was the only right-leaning newspaper and, according to H4b, it should create an effect on the propensity to vote for far-right parties similar to that of mass-market newspapers. The same adjustment was made for France (*Le Figaro* was treated as a mass-market paper).

Measurement: Propensity to Vote for Far-Right Parties

In both waves of the study, respondents were asked to identify their propensity to vote for each party participating in the European Union parliamentary elections on a 10-point scale. Each country had its own list of parties that were shown in random order to prevent primacy or recency effects. As shown in Table 1, about 40% of the respondents in each country did not exclude the possibility of voting for such a party, and their responses were almost equally divided between each point on the scale, usually with a small peak at the highest value of 10. Because this study aims to determine a causal relationship between media exposure and propensity to vote for far-right parties, I used a lagged dependent variable, which means predicting postelection voting probability controlling for the pre-election value.

Table 1. Distribution of the Propensity to Vote for Far-Right Parties at Wave I and Wave II per Country.

Country	Far-right party	% of voters with propensity of voting for the party		% of voters who became <i>more likely</i> to vote for the party	% of voters who became <i>less likely</i> to vote for the party
		Wave I	Wave II		
Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	41.3	37.4	14.6	19.1
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	39.8	38.9	16.1	17.0
Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti	38.6	46.7	25.9	12.8
Finland	Perussuomalaiset	59.8	59.6	30.1	22.7
France	Front National	25.6	26.0	16.2	11.8
Hungary	Jobbik	40.9	49.4	28.6	13.7
Italy	Liga Nord	36.3	44.7	28.6	13.7
Netherlands	Partij voor de Vrijheid	38.0	39.1	23.6	13.2
Sweden	Sveriedemokraterna	20.6	22.4	12.4	10.6
United Kingdom	United Kingdom Independence Party	47.5	58.0	41.6	18.0

Analysis: Negative Binomial Regression and Hierarchical Linear Modeling

Since about half of the respondents either excluded the possibility of voting for far-right parties or refrained from giving an answer, this dependent variable is highly skewed toward a value of 0. Poisson and negative binomial regression models are designed to control for highly skewed distributions of dependent variables using maximum likelihood procedures for parameter estimation. However, Poisson models assume that the conditional mean and variance of the distribution are equal. Negative binomial regression models do not have such an assumption and are particularly well suited for overdispersion in the data, which occurs when the variance is greater than the conditional mean. After measuring the distribution of the data as well as comparing the model fit for both Poisson and negative binomial regression models using Bayesian information criteria, the choice was made in favor of the latter model (Raftery, 1996).

When testing the hypotheses across all 10 countries, I also used negative binomial estimates within hierarchical linear/nonlinear modeling with random intercepts. This analysis allows the estimation of not only the individual-level but also country-level effects. The final variance component analyses indicated that the value for the intercept ($\tau = 1.1, p < .001$) was significant, which means that the intercept for the

outcome variable, propensity to vote for far-right parties, was significantly affected by the level 2 effects of media systems. In addition, in explaining the propensity to vote for far-right parties, the variance components were smaller than the residual variance components. All these factors indicated that multilevel modeling was appropriate and necessary to correct for the nested structure of the data.

Results

Support for far-right parties increased closer to elections in seven countries; the exceptions were Austria, Belgium, and Finland. In France, the Netherlands, and Sweden, this increase was less than 2%, while in Hungary, Italy, and the United Kingdom, it was around 10%. I also assessed how each individual became more or less likely to vote for a far-right party in each country between the two waves of the survey. Overall trends remain similar: in Austria and Belgium, more voters became less likely to support far-right parties, whereas in Hungary, Italy, and the United Kingdom, the number of far-right supporters doubled. A similar substantial increase also occurred in the Netherlands and Denmark, while in Finland, France, and Sweden it was between 2% and 8%.

I start testing hypotheses with a pooled sample model, which includes individual-level data from all 10 countries. When combining media categories, I used the classification discussed in the Methods section and visually represented in table format in the Appendix. I also created a dummy variable for all media systems, leaving western as a contrast case because it had average scores across all four media system categories (Brüggeman et al., 2014). Table 2 displays the results of the final negative binomial model of the hierarchical linear modeling analysis, predicting the likelihood to vote for far-right parties across the 10 countries.

In line with previous research, the second strongest predictor of the propensity to vote for far-right parties was a negative attitude toward immigrants; its effect was almost as strong as that of a lagged dependent variable. Among demographic characteristics, only age significantly predicted a propensity to vote for far-right parties, where younger respondents were more likely to do so. When it comes to media consumption, as predicted by H1, mass-market newspapers and commercial television increased the propensity to vote for far-right parties. The effect of television news was larger than that of newspapers, which is not surprising given that television is a primary source of news across European countries (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011). Reading left-leaning upmarket newspapers decreased support for far-right parties, but reading right-leaning upmarket newspapers increased this support. The influence of public television news was negative, but only marginally significant given the large sample size. All these findings provide weak support for H2, which postulates that upmarket news media decrease the propensity to vote for far-right parties.

The effect of online news is in the predicted positive direction, which supports H3, but it is only marginally significant and weaker than the effect of mass-market media. Finally, all three media system models are significantly different from one another and from the western system, providing overall support for H4. However, to understand whether a positive effect of right-leaning upmarket newspapers exists only in countries from the southern media model (H4b) and whether all upmarket news media decrease the

propensity to vote for far-right parties in the northern and central media systems (H4a), I need to conduct additional comparative analysis across countries.

Table 2. Hierarchical Linear Modeling Analysis Using Negative Binomial Estimates Predicting the Propensity of Voting for a Far-Right Party by Demographics, Political Involvement, Anti-immigrant Attitudes, Pre-election Voting Propensity, and Media Exposure.

Predictors		B (SE)
γ_{00} Intercept		-1.34 (0.19)***
<i>Level 1 predictors</i>		
Demographics	γ_{10} Gender	-0.026 (0.05)
	γ_{20} Age	-0.009 (0.00)***
	γ_{30} Education	-0.021 (0.02)
	γ_{30} Income	-0.008 (0.01)
Political attitudes	γ_{40} Political interest	-0.030 (0.02)*
	γ_{50} Political knowledge	-0.016 (0.02)†
	γ_{60} Political cynicism	-0.020 (0.02)
	γ_{70} Anti-immigrant attitudes	0.237 (0.02)***
Media exposure	γ_{80} Voting propensity before elections	0.287 (0.01)***
	γ_{90} Online news	0.017 (0.01)†
	γ_{100} Public TV news	-0.016 (0.01)**
	γ_{110} Commercial TV news	0.077 (0.01)***
	γ_{120} Mass-market newspaper	0.034 (0.01)***
	γ_{130} Center-right newspaper	0.057 (0.01)***
	γ_{140} Center-left newspaper	-0.040 (0.02)**
γ_{150} Radio	-0.009 (0.01)	
<i>Level 2 predictors</i>		
Media system	γ_{01} Central	0.954 (0.09)***
	γ_{02} Northern	0.495 (0.07)***
	γ_{03} Southern	0.649 (0.07)***
<i>Variance components</i>		
τ_0^2 Intercept		1.10 (1.05)***

Note. $N = 6,321$. Estimates are restricted maximum likelihood estimates. For variance components statistics, standard deviations are in parentheses.

† $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3 presents the results of negative binomial regressions, which were conducted separately for each country. Mass-market newspapers increased the propensity to vote for far-right parties in four countries, lending support to H1. Readers of the Austrian newspaper *Kröner Zeitung* and of the Dutch *De Telegraaf*, which openly support far-right parties in their countries, along with readers of the Danish *Ekstra Bladet* and Swedish *Aftonbladet* were more likely to cast ballots for far-right parties during the last month of the election campaign. Additionally, in Italy, where there are no mass-market newspapers, right-leaning *Il Giornale* demonstrates the same positive effect, providing support for H4b, which postulates that due to high political parallelism in countries of the southern media type, even upmarket right-leaning newspapers increase support for far-right parties. However, prominent tabloid newspapers in Finland and the United Kingdom did not have a significant effect on such voting preferences. Commercial television news had a positive effect on the propensity to vote for far-right parties only in Italy, and in Austria this effect was negative, which contradicts the theoretical expectations in H1. Thus, this hypothesis receives partial support with regard to only mass-market newspapers at a single-country level.

Upmarket newspapers, in line with H2, decreased the propensity to vote for far-right parties in Austria (*Der Standard*), Denmark (*Politiken*), Hungary (*Nepszabadsag*), and Italy (*La Repubblica*), while public television news had a similar effect in Austria, Finland, Italy, and Sweden. Additionally, radio news programs had a negative effect on support for far-right parties in Austria and France. Thus, in five countries, the findings support H2, which predicts a lower propensity to vote for far-right parties after consuming news from elite newspapers and public television. However, in Hungary (*Magyar Nemzet*) and Italy (*Il Corriere della Sera*), upmarket newspapers demonstrate positive effects on support for far-right parties, which contradicts H2 but supports H4b. This finding suggests that in countries in the southern media system, high political parallelism makes right-leaning newspapers likely to exhibit an effect similar to that of mass-market newspapers. Online news increased the propensity to vote for far-right parties in Austria, Belgium, France, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, lending support to H3 in half of the analyzed countries.

Table 3. Negative Binomial Regression Analysis Predicting the Propensity to Vote for a Far-Right Party by Demographics, Political Involvement, Anti-immigrant Attitudes, Pre-election Voting Propensity, and Media Exposure.

	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Hungary	Italy	Netherlands	Sweden	United Kingdom
	<i>B (SE)</i>									
<i>Demographics</i>										
Gender	-0.186 (0.18)	0.019 (0.11)	0.069 (0.11)	-0.242* (0.12)	-0.512*** (0.15)	0.075 (0.12)	0.165 (0.11)	0.171 (0.17)	0.228 (0.16)	0.042 (0.12)
Age	-0.022*** (0.01)	-0.010* (0.00)	0.002 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	-0.037*** (0.01)	-0.024*** (0.00)	0.004 (0.00)	-0.013** (0.01)	-0.007 (0.00)	-0.006 (0.00)
Education	0.309*** (0.09)	0.039 (0.07)	-0.128* (0.06)	-0.087 (0.06)	-0.365** (0.14)	-0.197 (0.14)	0.008 (0.09)	0.027 (0.08)	0.042 (0.08)	-0.089 (0.08)
Income	-0.015 (0.04)	-0.040 (0.03)	0.046 (0.02)	0.019 (0.03)	-0.034 (0.04)	-0.043 (0.03)	0.007 (0.03)	0.051 (0.04)	-0.052 (0.03)	0.030 (0.03)
<i>Political attitudes</i>										
Interest	-0.213*** (0.07)	-0.065 (0.04)	0.007 (0.04)	-0.073 (0.04)	0.067 (0.06)	0.067 (0.04)	-0.056 (0.04)	0.038 (0.06)	-0.019 (0.06)	-0.080 (0.04)
Political knowledge	-0.031 (0.08)	0.129* (0.05)	-0.040 (0.07)	-0.102 (0.07)	-0.048 (0.08)	-0.092 (0.06)	0.022 (0.05)	-0.006 (0.07)	0.139 (0.08)	-0.016 (0.06)
Political cynicism	-0.088 (0.08)	-0.043 (0.05)	0.004 (0.04)	0.106* (0.05)	0.006 (0.07)	0.030 (0.05)	-0.086 (0.04)	0.188** (0.07)	0.025 (0.07)	-0.016 (0.04)
Anti-immigrant attitudes	0.449*** (0.06)	0.275*** (0.04)	0.267*** (0.04)	0.098* (0.04)	0.259*** (0.06)	-0.002 (0.04)	0.194*** (0.04)	0.326*** (0.06)	0.420*** (0.05)	0.152*** (0.04)
Voting propensity before election	0.274*** (0.02)	0.298*** (0.02)	0.234*** (0.02)	0.248*** (0.02)	0.350*** (0.03)	0.241*** (0.02)	0.228*** (0.02)	0.284*** (0.02)	0.313*** (0.03)	0.182*** (0.02)
<i>Media exposure</i>										
Online news	0.150** (0.04)	0.062* (0.03)	0.010 (0.03)	-0.039 (0.03)	0.183*** (0.04)	-0.006 (0.03)	-0.030 (0.03)	0.005 (0.03)	0.10** (0.04)	0.076* (0.03)
Public TV news	-0.079* (0.03)	—	0.021 (0.02)	-0.075* (0.03)	0.022 (0.03)	0.047 (0.03)	-0.047* (0.02)	0.024 (0.03)	-0.124** (0.04)	-0.044 (0.03)
Commercial TV news	-0.127** (0.05)	0.027 (0.02)	-0.025 (0.02)	0.034 (0.03)	-0.002 (0.03)	0.020 (0.02)	0.055* (0.02)	-0.002 (0.03)	0.067 (0.04)	0.032 (0.03)
Mass-market newspaper	0.094** (0.03)	0.023 (0.02)	0.059* (0.03)	-0.022 (0.03)	-0.014 (0.05)	0.009 (0.03)	0.115*** (0.04)	0.058* (0.03)	0.059* (0.03)	0.026 (0.03)
Center-right newspaper	-0.032 (0.07)	-0.062 (0.03)	0.013 (0.03)	0.037 (0.02)	0.046 (0.08)	0.142*** (0.03)	0.065* (0.03)	-0.079 (0.07)	0.041 (0.05)	0.047 (0.04)
Center-left newspaper	-0.224*** (0.07)	0.040 (0.03)	-0.089** (0.03)	0.033 (0.03)	-0.002 (0.08)	-0.131** (0.04)	-0.100*** (0.03)	-0.106 (0.07)	0.031 (0.04)	-0.062 (0.05)
Radio	-0.124*** (0.04)	-0.027 (0.02)	0.002 (0.02)	0.014 (0.02)	-0.071** (0.03)	0.021 (0.02)	0.003 (0.02)	-0.019 (0.03)	0.000 (0.03)	0.055 (0.02)
Intercept	0.526 (0.68)	-0.943* (0.42)	-1.312** (0.44)	0.314 (0.43)	1.079 (0.62)	0.872* (0.46)	-0.554 (0.43)	-2.72*** (0.58)	-2.571*** (0.52)	0.337 (0.47)
	<i>N</i> = 452 LR χ^2 = 458 BIC = 1,292 <i>p</i> = .00	<i>N</i> = 858 LR χ^2 = 778 BIC = 2,729 <i>p</i> = .00	<i>N</i> = 715 LR χ^2 = 590 BIC = 2,527 <i>p</i> = .00	<i>N</i> = 491 LR χ^2 = 264 BIC = 2,035 <i>p</i> = .00	<i>N</i> = 529 LR χ^2 = 470 BIC = 1,339 <i>p</i> = .00	<i>N</i> = 496 LR χ^2 = 309 BIC = 1,956 <i>p</i> = .00	<i>N</i> = 605 LR χ^2 = 396 BIC = 2,265 <i>p</i> = .00	<i>N</i> = 489 LR χ^2 = 505 BIC = 1,492 <i>p</i> = .00	<i>N</i> = 612 LR χ^2 = 573 BIC = 1,321 <i>p</i> = .00	<i>N</i> = 491 LR χ^2 = 138 BIC = 2,163 <i>p</i> = .00

Note. BIC = Bayesian information criteria.

LR χ^2 = Likelihood Ratio chi-square

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .00

In Belgium only exposure to commercial television news was recorded in the survey

Summarizing the findings in light of the differences among countries from three media systems, I find support for H4b in Hungary and Italy, suggesting that in countries of the southern media type, upmarket right-leaning newspapers increase support for far-right parties. However, there are no significant effects of any newspapers on support for Front National in France. H4a predicts that in countries from the northern and central media systems, upmarket news media decrease the propensity to vote for far-right parties. Such an effect is indeed found among Nordic countries, such as Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, which are known for their strong public broadcast system, high journalistic standards, and high newspaper readership (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Strömbäck, Ørsten, & Aalberg, 2008). Austria, which belongs to the central media system, demonstrates a similar effect in its upmarket news media, but this effect is absent in the United Kingdom. A negative effect of left-leaning newspapers and public television news is also found in Italy, which is part of the southern media system. Thus, while H4a is largely supported by the data, Italy and Hungary are notable exceptions, which are addressed in the following discussion.

Discussion

This study contributes to the growing literature about the effects of media populism on the increasing presence of far-right parties in European parliaments. By using panel data and a lagged dependent variable, this study demonstrates that reliance on media outlets can shift individual preferences, even during the last month of an election campaign, and increase the propensity to vote for far-right parties. Analysis across 10 countries showed that mass-market news sources, such as tabloid newspapers and commercial television news, increased support for far-right parties, as did upmarket right-leaning newspapers. Left-leaning upmarket newspapers, however, reduced such support.

A detailed examination of each country revealed important differences among media systems. The influence of mass-market newspapers was pronounced in countries where such newspapers have an affiliation with far-right parties (such as in Austria and the Netherlands) and in newspaper-centric countries (such as Denmark and Sweden). Commercial television news showed a positive significant effect on the propensity to vote for the far-right party only in Italy. This aligns with previous empirical studies that found no effect of commercial television on support for populist parties (Esser et al., 2017). The presence of this effect in Italy can be explained by the geographical location of commercial Canale 5, which is based in Milan, a headquarter city of the far-right party Lega Nord. This channel also belongs to Berlusconi's media empire Mediaset and favors its owner's right-wing political sentiments.

Upmarket news media are not created equal; they decrease the propensity of voting for far-rights in countries from the northern and central media systems, which are characterized by high journalistic standards, strong support for public broadcasting, and high newspaper readership. Thus, the consumption of upmarket newspapers in Austria and Denmark, as well as public television in Austria, Finland, and Sweden, decreased people's preferences for far-right parties during the last month of election campaigns. However, in Italy and Hungary, which are characterized by high political parallelism, left-leaning newspapers (and, in the case of Italy, also public television news) had a negative effect on support for far-right parties. At the same time, right-leaning upmarket newspapers in these two countries had a positive effect on such voting preferences. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that a center-right political alignment of upmarket news media can favor far-right parties but can also hurt them if such news outlets are affiliated with left-

leaning political forces. One notable exception among the northern and central media system countries is the United Kingdom, where no negative effect of upmarket media was detected. This can be explained by the novelty of the UKIP at the time, which would prevent traditional media outlets from paying much attention to it.

The UKIP, nevertheless, gained popularity on the Internet (O'Callaghan et al., 2012) because reliance on online news sources increased the propensity of British voters to cast their ballots for this party. Similar effects were observed in Austria, Belgium, France, and Sweden. All these findings are fully in line with existing research, discussed earlier, which noted that the French party Front National (Hubé & Truan, 2017), the Austrian Freedom Party (Schmuck et al., 2017), and Swedish Democrats (Stjernholm, 2014) used online media to promote their issues and create communities of supporters. Previous studies have shown that challengers are more likely than incumbents to adopt innovative online campaigning (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2007), so it is not surprising that online media effects were pronounced in countries where far-right parties were outside the parliament, such as UKIP, Front National, and Swedish Democrats.

This analysis contains several important limitations. First, the size of media effects found in the models is relatively small. However, it is important to keep in mind that the data were obtained during election campaigns with many competing messages; therefore, effects are expected to be much smaller than they would be, for instance, in experimental settings. Additionally, both pre- and postelection surveys were only one month apart, making it hard to detect small changes in voters' preferences during last weeks of the campaign. Thus, significant, albeit small, results obtained in such adverse circumstances demonstrate strong support for the discussed findings. Second, this study did not measure and analyze content of consumed mass media, relying only on empirical findings about upmarket and mass-market news outlets as well as on their influence on far-right political preferences. This study also did not consider voters' full media repertoires, which obviously span beyond two major television news programs and a handful of newspapers.

There are also limits to the generalizability of the conclusions made in this study. The data were collected during European parliamentary elections, and future research should test whether these results can be generalized to other contexts. The turnout for parliamentary elections in 2009 was 43% of eligible voters, but the national elections in the analyzed 10 countries are almost double that figure. Therefore, media influence during national elections can be stronger because they are more prominent in the news, and more people follow the campaigns due to their proximity and immediate effect on national affairs. Finally, only exposure to commercial television news in Belgium was recorded in the survey. This country belongs to the western media system, whose public broadcasting service is not as strong as it is in countries of the northern and central systems. Therefore, according to the fourth hypothesis (H4a), public television would not have a negative effect on the propensity to vote for a far-right party, just as it did not have effect in the Netherlands, which also belongs to the western media system. Thus, it is very likely that the omission of public broadcasting in Belgium did not affect the overall results.

Despite these limitations, this study makes several contributions to the literature. It includes both well-studied countries such as Austria, Italy, France, and the Netherlands as well as understudied cases such as Sweden, Finland, and Hungary. This study also analyzes the impact of online news on voters' support

for far-right parties, which is still a novel approach in the literature, especially in cross-country comparative studies. As technology rapidly evolves, parties adopt and expand their use of online tools in election campaigns; therefore, scholars need to pay attention to the impact of the Internet on increasing ideological extremity. Moreover, this study considers the peculiarities of various media systems and establishes that these unique features of media environments can override or strengthen predictions made in previous cross-country analyses of media populism. Finally, using panel data and a lagged dependent variable, this study establishes a causal path from reliance on particular news media outlets to the impact of these news sources on support for far-right parties. Foremost, the results of this study give hope to European democracy by showing that adherence to the traditional journalistic norms of objectivity, issue-based reporting, and well-researched substantial analyses can mitigate the effects of tabloid and online media on the popularity of far-right parties.

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Appendix

Control Variables

Demographics

- Gender: 54.2% women; higher values indicate women
- Age: $M = 43.89$, $SD = 14.92$
- Education: range = 1–3; higher values indicate more schooling; $M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.87$
- Income: measured as an interval variable using roughly equal values in national currencies with 12 intervals; $M = 6.93$, $SD = 2.29$

Political interest: measured by the question "How interested are you in politics?"; range = 0–6; higher values indicate more interest; $M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.51$

General political knowledge: Four questions in the pre-election survey asked about (1) the name of the minister of foreign affairs at that time, (2) the formal length of a single term of a member of the national parliament, (3) how many seats the European Parliament would have after the 2009 election, and (4) the current number of member states of the European Union. Since the first two questions were country-specific, an additive index was created separately for each country (Austria: $\alpha = .54$, $M = 1.59$, $SD = 1.2$; Belgium: $\alpha = .4$, $M = 1.8$, $SD = 1.07$; Denmark: $\alpha = .41$, $M = 1.25$, $SD = 0.84$; Finland: $\alpha = .47$, $M = 2.18$, $SD = 0.91$; Hungary: $\alpha = .4$, $M = 1.77$, $SD = 0.97$; Italy: $\alpha = .49$, $M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.08$; Netherlands: $\alpha = .5$, $M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.05$; Sweden: $\alpha = .35$, $M = 1.94$, $SD = 0.94$).

Anti-immigrant attitudes: Five items in the pre-election survey asked respondents to agree or disagree with the following statements: (1) immigrants abuse the country's social welfare system because they take more out than they put in ($\alpha = .78$); (2) immigrants are a threat to the security of people in a country ($\alpha = .76$); (3) religious practices of immigrants are a threat to the national way of life and its traditions ($\alpha = .8$); (4) immigrants are an important cause of crime in a country ($\alpha = .77$); (5) immigration is good for the national labor market ($\alpha = .87$, reverse-coded). All items were measured on 7-point scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. An index was created by adding the values of all five items and then dividing this sum by 5 ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 3.3$, $SD = 1.62$).

Political cynicism: Four items in the pre-election survey asked respondents to agree or disagree with following statements: (1) almost all politicians will sell out their ideals or break their promises if it will increase their power ($\alpha = .73$); (2) most politicians are in politics for what they can get out of it personally ($\alpha = .7$); (3) most politicians are truthful with the voters ($\alpha = .73$, reverse-coded); (4) most politicians are dedicated and we should be grateful to them for the work they do ($\alpha = .72$, reverse-coded). All items were measured on a 7-point scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. An index was created by adding the values of all four items and then dividing this sum by 4 ($\alpha = .78$, $M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.28$).

Table A1. Classification of News Media Outlets.

Country	Media system type	Newspaper	Political alignment	TV news bulletin (channel)	
				Commercial	Public
Austria	Central	1. <i>Krönenszeitung</i> 2. <i>Die Presse</i> 2. <i>Der Standard</i>	Right Center-right Center-left	<i>Aktuell</i> (ATV)	<i>ZiB</i> (ORF1)
Belgium	Western	1. <i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i> 2. <i>De Standaard</i> 2. <i>De Morgen</i>	ND Center-right Center-left	<i>VTM-Nieuws</i> (VTM)	
Denmark	Northern	1. <i>Ekstra Bladet</i> 2. <i>Jyllandsposten</i> 2. <i>Politiken</i>	ND Center-right Center-left	<i>Nyhederne</i> (TV2)	<i>TV-avisen</i> (DR1)
Finland	Northern	1. <i>Iltasanomat</i> 2. <i>Helsingin Sanomat</i> 2. <i>Aamulehti</i>	ND Center Center	<i>Kymmenen uutiset</i> (MTV3)	<i>TV-uutiset ja sää</i> (YLE TV1)
France ^a	Southern	1. <i>Le Figaro</i> 2. <i>Libération</i> 2. <i>Le Monde</i>	Right Left Center-left	<i>Le Journal 20.00</i> (TF1)	<i>Le Journal 20.00</i> (F2)
Hungary	ND	1. <i>Blikk</i> 2. <i>Magyar Nemzet</i> 2. <i>Nepszabadsag</i>	ND Right Left	<i>Esti Híradó</i> (RTL Klub)	<i>Híradó</i> (M2)
Italy ^b	Southern	1. <i>Il Giornale</i> 2. <i>Il Corriere della Sera</i> 2. <i>La Repubblica</i>	Right Center Left	<i>TG5</i> (Canale 5)	<i>TG1</i> (RaiUno)
Netherlands	Western	1. <i>De Telegraaf</i> 2. <i>NRC Handelsblad</i> 2. <i>De Volkskrant</i>	Right Center-right Center-left	<i>RTL Nieuws</i> (RTL4)	<i>NOS Journaal</i> (NED1)
Sweden ^c	Northern	1. <i>Aftonbladet</i> 2. <i>Svenska Dagbladet</i> 2. <i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	ND Center-right Center-left	<i>Nyheterna</i> (TV4)	<i>Rapport</i> (TV2)
UK	Central	1. <i>The Sun</i> 2. <i>Daily Telegraph</i> 2. <i>The Guardian</i>	ND Center-right Center-left	<i>News at Ten</i> (ITV)	<i>News at Ten</i> (BBC)

Note. For newspapers, 1 = mass market; 2 = upmarket; ND = not determined.

^a In France no mass-market newspaper was included in the survey.

^b In Italy there is no distinction between mass market and upmarket.

^c In Sweden there is no major center-left upmarket newspaper; *Dagens Nyheter* is considered liberal and slightly right of center but nearer the center than *Svenska Dagbladet*.