



Research Article

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Received: 16 May 2024 / Accepted: 26 August 2024 / Published: 05 September 2024

Journalists' Perceptions and Experiences of the Media's Role in the Growth of Political Populism in Kosovo

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2024-0131>

Abstract

This research aimed to analyze the perceptions of journalists regarding political populism and the role of the media in its growth. The lack of research on these variables has been an impetus to do such research. Also, the research aimed to examine the differences in perceptions in relation to the type of media, traditional media - online media. The methodology used in this research is mixed methodology. Both the instruments for data collection are a structured questionnaire and semi-structured individual interviews. Participants in this research were 112 journalists working in traditional media and 179 journalists working in online media. Since the research has two samples, one served for the collection of quantitative data and was selected randomly, while the other served for the collection of qualitative data and was selected purposefully. Quantitative data analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistics (ANOVA). Whereas, the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of this research show that, according to journalists, the media plays an important role in the growth of political populism. The findings also show that journalists had different experiences and statements regarding their experiences with populist reporting. Traditional media journalists were more exposed to attacks, political sabotage, and links, while online media journalists were more exposed to internal pressure to leak information and events of a populist nature. Also from the obtained results, the type of traditional or online media was not a distinguishing factor for the perceptions of journalists regarding political populism and the role of the media in its growth.

Keywords: Populism; Politics; Journalists; Traditional Media; Online Media

1. Introduction

Populism has become an increasingly prevalent issue in contemporary politics worldwide. Its presence is evident in daily media coverage, with political parties adopting harsh approaches to bolster their political power. However, understanding what populism truly represents and defining it as a concept remain crucial questions. Populism is currently in its nascent phase, lacking precise definitions, yet it is evolving into a distinct field within political science. Consequently, it is often likened to phenomena such as religious radicalism, racism, and the idealism of nationalist dominance (Kaltwasser et al. 2018). This suggests that populism operates on three interconnected levels: first, within political parties themselves; second, in how the media portrays populist narratives; and third, in the mobilization of different population segments. However, it's important to note that academic analyses are lacking in this regard, as the media tends to prioritize sensationalism over scholarly debates.

In this context, populism appears to have expanded beyond its conventional bounds of influence. This is evidenced by the electoral success of parties like the extreme left party Self Determination (Vet Vendorsje) in the 14 February 2021 elections (NDI 2021).

In Kosovo, populism has emerged as a relatively recent phenomenon, primarily associated with left-wing political factions. However, the roots of populism in Kosovo can be traced back to the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, during which ethnic tensions escalated, leading to the Kosovo War (1998-1999). Before the Kosovo war political leaders using nationalist rhetoric position themselves as defenders of Kosovo's sovereignty and rights against external threats, particularly perceived Serbian aggression. Also, populist elements were evident even in the early stages of political party formation, dating back to 1999 after Kosovo's liberation from Serbia following the war. At this time, Kosovo faced significant economic difficulties, including high rates of unemployment, especially among young people, and widespread corruption. In this context, political populists capitalized on public dissatisfaction with economic conditions, offering them the opportunity to promise sweeping reforms and anti-corruption measures. Such a situation in Kosovo creates fertile ground for populism. At this time, the political scheme in Kosovo has been fragmented, leading to a proliferation of parties often focused on populist agendas. This fragmentation has enabled populist leaders to gain traction by presenting themselves as an alternative to other parties such as the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), as the two main post-war parties in the country, which did not fulfill their promises. The leader of the Vetëvendosje Movement, Albin Kurti, a former political prisoner during the war in Kosovo, uses such a situation to create a populist party idea which has significantly deviated from the main political landscape in Kosovo. The media extensively covered officials from this party, providing ample attention to both their policies and occasionally to the violent actions associated with the party (Russell 2017). Despite more than a decade of existence, the party struggled to secure electoral victories or establish itself among the major political players in Kosovo. However, the party forged alliances with certain far-left European parties in recent years, marking a significant shift. These efforts culminated in the most recent national elections, where the *Vetëvendosje* Movement achieved unprecedented success, securing over 50 percent of the vote and ultimately ascending to power (KQZ, 2021). On the other hand, given the fact that the media plays a critical role in the distribution and shaping of populist messages, the growth of populism in Kosovo can clearly be addressed to the way the media has functioned since the post-war period until today. This functionality can have negative implications such as: reinforcing populist narratives, challenging traditional media, media polarization, public perception and misinformation.

2. Literature Review

Populism today is a phenomenon mentioned for democratic language (Kaltwasser et al. 2017); populism especially is a widespread phenomenon in many countries of the world, which is characterized by pronounced rhetoric and in combination with emotions it tends to mobilize the

masses against certain groups of power, perhaps even helping to exalt marginalized groups or vulnerable categories (De Cleen 2021).

Political populism often uses the media, especially social ones, to reach its audience and the filters of traditional media. It also combines traditional and social media to move as close as possible to the public (Esser et al. 2017). It can also be said that populist rhetoric fits quite well with the nature of social media communication. Social media is based on the logic of stimulation, and in this context, politicians publish messages that will appeal to their followers by sharing them to gain popularity (Ernst et al. 2017). The advancement of information technology has made groups and political parties of the extreme left use this technology to increase the discontentment of the masses by trumpeting all the conditions for their extreme approach. In this context, social media is an open and more interactive platform for political communication, but it also presents a risk of misinformation, manipulation, and polarization (Kubin and Sikorski 2021). These kinds of populist groups exist all over the world, living in many countries, and hold great influence over populations.

Traditional media, such as television, radio, and print, also play a role in reporting political populism, but not always in a positive respect, in countries where traditional media transmit populist messages unbiasedly or treat them as sensational news. This is due to the provocative nature of the populist rhetoric of politicians, as its success is linked to media attention (Herkman 2018). Journalists of the traditional media can find themselves under double pressure or influence from either political populist actors or from economic interests linked to populist politicians (El-Ibiary and Calfano 2022). Traditional media may no longer be able or qualified to deal with the challenges posed by today's political populism. In some cases, they find themselves in financial difficulties, therefore rendering them liable to fall under the influence of populism.

3. Political Populism

Populism is a political style for political parties and their leaders who aim to have only their own political and individual interests; that's why they use sensitive causes with nationalist, religious, and ideological characters. With this, they quickly manage to convince certain sections of the people. According to Mudde, populism is an ideology that considers society divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" against "the corrupt elite". He also emphasizes that populism has its argument, as it is a fact that politics should express the people's general will (Mudde 2004, 548). Political populism is also an ideology characterized by anti-establishment rhetoric, the mobilization of "the people" against "the elite", and a desire for direct forms of democracy (Müller 2017, 10). According to Cox, populism is not an ideology but a strategy to come to power (Cox 2018). In this context, it can be said that populism is identified by three defining features: a moralistic discourse that pits "the people" against "the corrupt elite", a leadership style characterized by personal charisma, and a redistributive policy agenda. (Weyland 2001). Populism is showing growth everywhere in the countries of Europe, but also in the USA and other countries, where leaders of the extreme right and leaders of the extreme left are growing as a political factor (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Akkerman, Lange, and Rooduijn 2016; Mudde 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2018). In different countries, parties with a populist approach adapt their mottos according to the situations in the respective countries, while the goal is always to come to power, even when they can harm the state's interests (Panievsky 2021). In countries with a new democracy, such as the case of Kosovo, political populism is seen as something the country needs to balance political forces and maintain a strategy for political stability. Populism presents a challenge to established elites, serving as a mechanism for holding state leaders accountable and compelling them to align their actions closely with the interests of citizens. From this perspective, populism is viewed positively as it functions as a corrective force in governance, ensuring that leaders remain responsive to the needs and concerns of the populace. Postel (2019) sees populism both as a concept and a challenge through this lens, emphasizing its potential to foster a more direct and inclusive form of governance that prioritizes the welfare of the people. Until the emergence of the self-determination political party in

Kosovo, populist approaches were not commonly utilized by political parties in the region (Kelmendi 2023). This raises the pertinent question: What drives leaders and political parties to adopt populism to gain power? The motivations behind this strategy appear to be multifaceted, stemming from strategic considerations, practical necessities, and the allure of rapidly accruing political influence (Reinemann et al. 2019). However, the populist motivation depends on the fact of how the news or topics with a populist character are distributed or better said framed. This plays a crucial role in portraying them in ways that either validate or delegitimize populist appeals (Entman 1993, Geer 2006). An example of how media portrayal of populist leaders in Latin America leads to increased public support is found in a comparative analysis conducted by Esponda and Hinojosa (2018).

4. Factors Leading to the Politics of Populism

Political populism has emerged as a significant phenomenon in contemporary politics, with populist movements gaining momentum in various regions of the world. To comprehend its implications for democratic systems and political stability, it is imperative to recognize the factors contributing to the rise of political populism. These factors include economic conditions, religious influences, media and communication channels, and the interaction among these factors within different socio-political contexts (Aiginger 2020).

The economic aspect – The economic downturn, continued problems with rising unemployment, and losses in financial markets have political consequences, increasing support for a wide range of populists, candidates, parties, and causes in the United States and Europe (David et al. 2017; Dippel et al. 2017; Italo and Stanig 2018).

The religious aspect – the growth of ethnic, cultural, and religious divisions can be well used by populist parties or groups. Nationalist divisions in all liberal democracies in the Western world are fuelling the success of right-wing populist parties (Bonikovski 2019). Religion is often used to determine who can be part of a group and who cannot. So, fundamentalist communities who feel threatened by such divisions are exploited by populist parties and such groups (Marzouki et al. 2016).

Media and communication channels - in recent years, the media has been seen as a key factor in the success of populism. The fragmentation of media sources and the growth of social media platforms have contributed to the rise of political populism. This has enabled politicians to articulate populist discourses and disseminate them directly through Web tools such as social networks on the Internet. The mediatization of politics is influencing the growing success of political populism (Manuci 2019). The use of media to disseminate effective communication by populist politicians influences the growth of populism (Reinemann et al., 2019). Populist leaders have effectively used media strategies to gain support and influence public opinion. Referring to the fact that the media plays a decisive role in shaping public opinion and political discourse, it is more important to explore not only its impact on the growth of political populism but also the exploration of the role of media in the growth of political populism, especially examining the perceptions and the experiences of journalists. Therefore, this research focuses on the latest pillar.

5. Methodology

The methodology of this research is well-structured and adopts a descriptive approach, focusing on delineating the perceptions and experiences of journalists concerning political populism and the media's role in its ascent. The research encompasses two primary objectives. Firstly, it seeks to identify and analyze journalists' perspectives regarding the role of political populism and the media's utilization to amplify its influence. Secondly, the research aims to explore disparities in perceptions among journalists based on the type of media they are affiliated with, namely traditional and online.

To ensure the attainment of the research objectives, three specific research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: What are journalists' perceptions of the role of political populism and the use of the media

in increasing its role?

RQ2: What are the differences in perceptions of traditional or online media?

RQ3: What experiences bring differences in the perceptions of journalists?

5.1 Population and Sample

In this research, 291 journalists participated, comprising 112 journalists who work in online media and 179 who work in traditional media. The selection of this sample was done randomly, including the main media in the country. Additionally, as a purposive sample, 10 journalists participated, with 5 from online media and 5 from traditional media. Selection of journalists for the interview was done in a purposeful way by selecting the 10 best journalists of the media that were included in the research. The collection of quantitative data was conducted through a questionnaire containing 20 questions, while the collection of qualitative data was carried out through semi-structured interviews. The second category includes questions related to political populism and the role of the media in its growth. The questions in the second categories are of Likert Scale nature, where 1 = "Absolutely agree", 2 = "Agree", 3 = "Neutral", 4 = "Disagree", and 5 = "Absolutely Disagree". The questionnaire underwent reliability testing, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.837, indicating that it effectively measured its intended constructs. Ethical considerations were followed throughout the research process.

Table 1: Reliability of the Questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha (Spurce: Authors' depiction)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.837	20

Table 2: Descriptive Characteristics of the First Sample (Spurce: Authors' depiction)

Traditional Media	N	Gender	
		M	F
Radiotelevizionii Kosoves	20	11	9
Radiotelevizioni 21	15	7	8
Koha vision	17	9	8
ATV	20	8	12
Klan Kosova	16	7	9
Kanal 10	10	6	4
T7	8	3	5
Radia Televizioni Dukagjini	10	5	5
TEVE 1	7	4	3
RTV Mitrovica	7	5	2
Radio KFOR	6	3	3
Radio Prishtina	7	4	3
Radio Vala Rinore	3	1	2
Radio Kosova	11	4	7
Radio 21	7	3	4
Radio Peja	3	1	2
Syri TV	4	3	1
TV Gjakova	4	2	2
TV Prizreni	4	1	3
Total:	179	89	90
Online Media	N	Gender	
		M	F
Koha.net	8	5	3
Botasot.info	8	4	4
Zeri.info	6	3	3
Telegrafi.com	9	5	4
Kallxo.com	2	1	1
Lajmi.net	7	3	4
Gazetaexpress.com	8	5	3
Gazetablic.com	5	3	2
Indeksonline.com	5	3	2

Paparaci.com	3	2	1
Kosova-sot.info	7	4	3
Insajderi.com	9	5	4
Gazetametro.net	3	2	1
Drejtësi anekosove.com	3	3	0
Reporter.net	5	3	2
Ballkani.info	3	2	1
Epokaere.com	5	3	2
Infosot.com	5	4	1
Kultplus.com	2	2	0
Observerkult.com	4	2	2
Sinjali.com	5	2	3
Total:	112	66	46

6. Results and Discussions

After collecting the quantitative data, descriptive and inferential analysis was done. At the same time, the qualitative data were analyzed based on thematic analysis. In the descriptive analysis of the results, we used the categorization according to Gagne (1991), which classifies the average result of 4-5 points as a high positive result (LP), the average result of 3.25-3.99 points classified as a positive result (P), the average result of 2.75-3.24 points is classified as an ambivalent result (A), the average result of 2-2.74 points is classified as a negative result (N), while the average result below 2 point classifies it as a high negative result (LN). In the table below, the corresponding results of the journalists' statements are presented as average, standard deviation, and evaluation according to Gagne's categorization.

Table 3: Journalists' Perceptions of Political Populism and the Role of the Media in its Growth (Spurce: Authors' depiction)

Number	Statement	Average	DS	Assessment
1	Journalistic work with politicians with a populist approach undermines journalistic impartiality.	3.23	1.02	A
2	I cannot do my journalistic work properly because populism dilutes the truth, because organized structures influence it.	3.30	1.11	P
3	Broadcasting populist opinions in the media increases visibility and readability and thus affects the growth of political populism.	3.24	1.13	A
4	When I report on events that are presented with a populist approach, I am followed more by the audience.	3.87	1.15	P
5	Another approach that argues the opposite of what is said by populism is missing because it can be the object of populist attacks.	4.02	1.01	HP
6	I felt attacked by populists whenever I presented information objectively.	3.29	1.23	P
7	I was treated as a person who works against the interests of my people when I did not give space to events of a populist character.	3.18	1.29	A
8	Reporting on populist issues is difficult and stressful.	3.65	1.15	P
9	Political populism gives me uncertainty in the professional work I do.	3.47	1.06	P
10	Informing with a populist approach does not diminish professional journalism.	2.72	1.24	N
11	The pressure from political populism on the media has the effect of increasing the power of political populism.	3.41	1.15	P
12	During reports with a populist character, I was seen/heard more than during reports of other types.	3.57	1.09	P
13	Populist media are more influential than professional media.	4.23	1.03	LP
14	Populist leaders and groups use the media very well for their growth.	3.75	1.02	P
15	The focus of the media is more on growing the audience than on maintaining the professional aspect.	3.14	0.92	A
16	I usually feel unmotivated when dealing with topics where populism is the key approach.	2.78	1.20	A
17	I treated populism and other aspects equally during my journalistic work.	2.56	1.18	N
18	The populist approach to the media is the same both in countries with developing democracies and in countries with developed democracies.	1.89	0.94	LN
19	As a journalist, I face more challenges when reporting populist events than during events of a real nature.	3.23	1.11	A
20	The media do not present populist events when these events highlight a danger for some social categories.	1.79	1.10	LN
Total		3.22		A

From Table 3, it is evident that journalists' perceptions regarding political populism and the role of the media in its growth were generally ambivalent, as indicated by the average score on the scale (M = 3.22). Notably, two statements received notably negative responses from journalists. They strongly rejected the notion that the media entirely overlooks populist events, particularly when such events

threaten certain social groups ($M = 1.89$). Additionally, journalists held the contrary belief that the populist approach towards the media remains consistent across developing and developed democracies ($M = 1.89$). Furthermore, journalists disagreed with the idea that adopting a populist approach to reporting undermines professional journalism ($M = 2.72$) and that they treat populism and other aspects equally in their journalistic work ($M = 2.56$). Conversely, two statements received notably positive responses from journalists. They strongly agreed that media outlets with populist tendencies wield more influence than professional media ($M = 4.23$) and that there exists a lack of alternative perspectives that challenge populist narratives, potentially making dissenting voices susceptible to attacks from populists and other groups ($M = 4.02$).

To see the differences between Journalists' perceptions depending on the type of media where they work, traditional media - online media, an inferential analysis was made, and a one-way ANOVA was executed on each questionnaire statement. The only difference according to the media type variable is observed in the fifteenth statement, namely concerning the fact that the media focuses more on increasing the audience than maintaining the professional aspect.

Table 4: Results of One-Way ANOVA between Media Groups (Spurce: Authors' depiction)

	F	P value	F crit
Declaration 15	8.89	0.02	3.47

Based on the results presented in the table above, where $F > F_{crit}$ and the probability value of 0.02 is less than 0.05, we conclude that there is a significant difference between the averages of the two groups. Specifically, the average perception score of the traditional media group ($M = 3.10$) is higher than that of the online media group ($M = 2.70$).

6.1 Thematic Analysis

After collecting qualitative data from semi-structured interviews to explore the perceptions and experiences of journalists regarding political populism and to address the third research question aimed at identifying the experiences that contribute to differences in journalists' perceptions, the data underwent coding. A thematic analysis followed this to investigate further and understand the emerging themes and patterns within the data. In this way, themes were extracted through careful reading and re-reading of the data. The experience of journalists during the reporting and treatment of political topics with an emphasis on political populism emerges as the main theme after repeatedly analyzing the responses of journalists' interviews. First, the classification was done in two categories: 1) positive experiences and 2) negative experiences.

Further, these two categories were divided into three and ten subcategories, respectively. So, there are thirteen subcategories: popularity, truth-telling, balanced narrative, external pressure, internal pressure, attacks, the rise of political extremism, insults, class blackmail, lack of means, links, political sabotage, denigration, and labeling. The results of the interviews with journalists are presented in the following table, where the thematic categories and subcategories are given as a list. In contrast, the perceptions of journalists that coincide with the category or subcategory are presented utilizing the interviewer's code. In this case, the code G1MT refers to the first journalist interviewed by traditional media, G2MT to the second journalist interviewed by traditional media, and so on. In contrast, the code G1MO refers to the first journalist interviewed by online media, the code G2MO refers to the second journalist to online media interviewees, and so on.

Table 5: Journalists’ Experiences in Reporting and Addressing Populist Issues (Spurce: Authors’ depiction)

Categories	Subcategories	The Interviewed
Positive Experience	Popularity	G1MT, G2MT, G3MT, G4MT G5MT, G1MO, G2MO, G3MO, G5MO
	Sharing the truth	G1MT, G3MT, G5MT, G2MO, G4MO
	Balanced narration	G1MT, G3MT, G3MO, G5MO
Negative Experience	External pressure	G1MT, G2MT, G3MT, G4MT G5MT, G1MO, G2MO, G3MO, G4MO, G5MO
	Internal pressure	G2MT, G3MT, G1MO, G2MO, G3MO, G5MO.
	Attacks	G1MT, G2MT, G3MT, G4MT, G5MT, G3MO, G4MO
	The rise of political extremism	G1MT, G2MT, G3MT, G4MT G5MT, G1MO, G2MO, G3MO, G4MO, G5MO
	Insult	G1MT, G3MT, G5MT, G1MO, G2MO, G3MO, G4MO, G5MO
	Blackmail	G1MT, G2MT, G3MT, G4MT G5MT, G2MO, G3MO, G4MO
	Lynching	G1MT, G3MT, G4MT, G2MO, G3MO, G4MO, G5MO
	Political sabotage	G1MT, G2MT, G3MT, G4MT, G5MT, G1MO, G3MO, G4MO
	Denigrating	G1MT, G4MT, G5MT, G2MO, G4MO
	Marking	G2MT, G3MT, G5MT, G1MO, G3MO, G4MO

As can be seen from the results presented in Table 5, the interviewed journalists rated popularity as the most positive aspect. Most of them (G2MT, G3MT, G4MT, G5MT, G1MO, G2MO, G3MO) has stated that “Reports and topics with a populist character are followed more or liked by a large amount of our audience, so this affects their popularity”. Regarding sharing the truth, half of the interviewed journalists (5 of them) perceive it as a positive experience. “Fair, correct reporting and without political bias, partisanship, or towards certain groups, is an added value in terms of professional reporting”, was a summary of the journalists’ statements for the subcategory of publishing the truth. Journalists also saw balanced narration as a positive experience. Their statements described it as the “golden means”, which ensures stability in the exercise of the journalist’s profession. External and internal pressures have been described as negative experiences that journalists have had when reporting in a populist role. All the journalists interviewed from the two types of traditional and online media have stated that the external pressure is immense against them. According to them: “Journalists do their work under great pressure from many factors, political parties, groups of certain partisans, ideological interests, etc., who want the reporting to be in line with their interests and not realistic” (G2MT), “The news that breaks in most cases contains elements that are a consequence of external pressure, namely populist influence” (G4MO). Whereas, regarding the internal pressure, most of the interviewed journalists of the traditional media said that they do not have internal pressure for reporting with a populist character. “We are not bad in this direction, we have a little internal pressure during the preparation of news, the biggest pressure comes from outside.” (G3MT), “I wouldn’t call it pressure, sometimes we are asked for a populist nuance in the form of a suggestion to increase the audience; otherwise we do not have continuous and stressful pressure” (G2MT). According to the statements of the journalists, the internal pressure is slightly greater in the online media. Four out of five interviewees of the online media have declared similar to the statement: “Yes, we have internal pressure, especially for topics of a political nature where the introduction of a populist nuance is required to serve on the one hand the party line and on the other hand the growth of the audience which in the case of portals can be profitable”.

Regarding attacks, especially physical ones, traditional media journalists have declared that they have experienced physical attacks themselves as well as their colleagues. They stated that physical attacks mostly come from: “extremist groups inspired by certain political ideologies”. At the same time, online media journalists have suffered fewer physical attacks during their work. “I would say that we had an obstacle in the realization of the journalist’s work, especially when we wanted to get some answers from those who are in a hot predicament as we say of journalists from the state structures” (G4MO). Harassment, slander, lynching, political sabotage, denigration, and labeling, according to the statements of journalists of both types of media, “are part of everyday life”, “every day we face Harassment, there are even cases that are very personal and affect not only me as a journalist but also my family. This is very disturbing”, declared a journalist. “Frequently, I am labeled as a political opponent, or I am labeled as a supporter of certain political groups, even going so far as

to call me a paid political mercenary”, declares another journalist from the traditional media. What was considered the most disturbing from the journalists’ statements was the growth of political extremism. “It is extremely worrying, this growing interest for political extremism can be destructive for the values of democracy and the democracy of the country itself”, declared a journalist from the traditional media. The journalists think that the populist elements that are gaining political parties are a threat for a prosperous future of the country. “The pronounced populist nuances in political parties and the great influence of the populist spirit in certain groups are destructive for a democratic society. While the media in this context must be balanced because, unfortunately, populist opinions are present”, declares another traditional media journalist.

7. Conclusion

The first goal of this research was to identify and analyze the perceptions of journalists regarding political populism and the role of the media in its growth. The results show that journalists had different experiences and statements, as some of the experiences were positive. Others were negative, and this finding is consistent with Stanyer et al.’s (2019) research results. The highest positive perception had to do with the fact that media with populist tendencies have greater influence than professional media ($M = 4.23$) and that the lack of another approach that argues the opposite of what is stated by populism is a consequence of the fact that you can be the object of attacks by populists and other groups ($M = 4.02$).

Such a result is in full agreement with the results of the study by Koliska et al. (2020) regarding the confrontation of journalists with the populist attack. That journalists are exposed to physical attacks, extortion, blackmail, lynching, and political sabotage can also be seen from the thematic analysis of the interview with them, where they stated that all of this is part of their daily work that comes from: “extremist groups inspired from certain political ideologies”. Journalists have denied the statement that the media do not present populist events at all, when these events highlight a danger for some social categories. Even from their answers received through the interviews, their main concern is for the fact that the media gives a lot of space to populist events, thus influencing the growth of political extremism, which can be destructive for the democratic values of society as well as for the society itself. Such a result is in line with Weyland’s (2020) findings.

The second goal of this research was to examine the differences between the perceptions of journalists depending on the media where they work: traditional media and online media. From the results, we note that there are no significant differences in the perceptions of journalists about political populism and the role of the media in increasing this. However, differences are observed in political sabotage and blackmail, where traditional media journalists are more exposed to them. These differences are also to be seen through the internal pressure that comes to journalists. In this context, from the interview with the journalists, it can be seen that the online media journalists have more internal pressure than those of the traditional media to publish information and events with a populist character. Referring to these findings, it can be concluded that journalists think that the media play an important role in terms of the spread of populism and the growth of political extremism in the country. Populism is seen as a tool that destroys the truth. So that the media does not serve political populism and its growth, we have issued some recommendations:

For journalists-The ethical standards of journalism must be respected. Ensure that all news stories, particularly those related to political figures and movements, are rigorously fact-checked. Misinformation and sensationalism fuel populist narratives. Strive for balance in reporting by providing context and presenting multiple perspectives on an issue. This helps audiences understand the complexity of political issues and prevents the oversimplification that populism often exploits.

For Media organizations-Media organizations should be cautious not to give undue attention to fringe populist figures, which can legitimize and amplify their messages. Develop expertise within newsrooms to monitor the rise of populist movements, understanding their causes and potential impacts on society. Media organizations should invest in investigative journalism that holds both

populist and traditional political figures accountable. Exposing corruption and deceit across the political spectrum can reduce the appeal of populist leaders who claim to be "anti-establishment."

For policymakers- Policymakers should support legislation that ensures the independence of the press, protecting it from political and commercial pressures that could skew reporting. Advocate for increased funding for public media, which can provide high-quality, impartial news coverage that is less susceptible to the commercial pressures that drive sensationalism.

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