

REPORTING ON RIGHT-WING POPULISM:
EVOLVING JOURNALISTIC ROLES AND PRACTICE IN CANADA, GERMANY,
AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

by

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Abstract

Over the last five years, many European and North American democracies have experienced a significant resurgence of populist politics. Mostly situated on the right side of the political spectrum, these movements, parties, and politicians combine a strong appeal to the people and anti-establishment rhetoric with nationalist and even xenophobic sentiments. In addition, right-wing populist politicians commonly develop an ambiguous relationship with political journalists: they attempt to use newsmaker as mouthpieces for their political message and as amplifiers of their popularity; but they also accuse the news media of lying and being biased against them. Together with their controversial political agenda, this ambiguous communication strategy sets right-wing populists apart from other politicians and parties.

What are the implications of such right-wing populist politics for the production of political news? Informed by discursive institutionalism, a conception of journalism is advanced that emphasizes the discursive field in which journalists, political elites, and audiences compete for discursive authority over the role of political journalism in today's democracies. By gathering evidence by means of in-depth interviews conducted with political journalists from Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom, a better understanding of how the presence of right-wing populist politicians and parties challenges and potentially alters journalistic roles and practices is offered.

Right-wing populism triggers a discursive reorientation of journalistic roles as normative and cognitive understandings of journalists' roles diverge. Moreover, right-wing populism has a stronger impact on journalists' self-understanding and daily work than other political ideologies or communication strategies. When reporting on right-wing populism, journalists furthermore take on a more active role than in other political contexts. At the same time, political

journalists remain committed to objectivity in their news making. Experienced journalists are able to react to the right-wing populist challenge in a way that allows them to deliberate and reflect upon their professional work. However, journalists' ability to perform their role in society is restricted by a "crisis of political journalism". This state of crisis results from financial cuts in the media industry and becomes evident in the loss of public trust in political journalism.

Lay Summary

Contemporary democracies in Europe and North America have recently witnessed a resurgence of a particular kind of politics. Amongst other characteristics, these so-called right-wing populist movements, such as Donald Trump’s presidential campaign or the “Vote Leave” campaign during the United Kingdom’s European Union referendum, exhibit an ambiguous relationship with the news media. Given this unique relationship, this paper assesses the implications of right-wing populism for the production of political news.

By proposing a conceptual framework capable of explaining the dynamic evolution of journalistic roles and practices, the goal is to contribute to a better understanding of the underpinnings of journalists’ self-understanding. Based on in-depth interviews with political journalists, the study finds that contemporary right-wing populism challenges the role of journalism in today’s democracies. Moreover, the study reveals that political journalists’ ability to enact their professional role is restricted by structural issues that add up to a state of crisis.

Preface

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Introduction

One of the phenomena of contemporary politics in many established democracies is the success of so-called populist parties. Mostly situated on the political right, these movements and groupings provide the voter with an alternative policy program predominantly directed against the political elite or establishment and paired with some nationalist and even xenophobic attitudes. The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America, the Brits' decision to leave the European Union, and the success of political parties such as the *Front National* in France, and the *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany are oft-cited examples of this political development.¹ Given its salience in the political arena, it is not surprising that (right-wing) populism has come to the fore of academic work as becomes evident in a number of recent research collections (e.g. Panizza, 2005; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Wodak et al., 2013; Pauwels, 2014; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015). Most of these works take a critical approach toward populism and especially the renaissance of right-wing populism is widely seen as a danger to democracy (Müller, 2016; Roth, 2017).

The media are treated as one of the factors that are likely to play a significant role in determining the success of (right-wing) populist parties (e.g. Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Meyer, 2006; Mazzoleni, 2008). In this vein, one group of scholars assesses news coverage of right-wing populism in traditional media formats and its impact on the public perception of right-wing populist politicians (e.g. Bos et al., 2010; 2011; Sheets et al., 2016), while others study the relationship between the online (news) media and right-wing populist parties (e.g. Downey & Fenton, 2003; Atton, 2006; Cammaerts, 2009; Alvares & Dahlgren, 2016). In addition, researchers are

¹ In addition to these right-wing populist phenomena, populism does also exist on the political left in contemporary democracies as becomes evident in the politics of Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders, and Martin Schulz.

interested in the way in which populist politicians communicate their political messages and the effect of that communication style (e.g. Bos et al., 2013; Hameleers et al., 2016; Aalberg et al., 2017; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017) as well as in so-called media populism, that is populism within the news media (e.g. Krämer, 2014; Hameleers et al., 2017).

While acknowledging the relevance of these strands of research, this paper takes a different approach: instead of asking how news coverage of populism might affect public opinion, the aim is to better understand the implications of right-wing populism on journalism and especially on journalists' perception of themselves and their role in society.² For that purpose, the paper builds on a number of semi-structured interviews with newspaper journalists in Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

Research into the factors that are likely to challenge and potentially change journalists' perception of their own role in society as well as the values that guide their daily work is relevant for political science and other social sciences. As mediators of political elites' messages for the electorate, the news media are believed to play a central role in the political process. Research on agenda setting, framing, and priming has produced evidence that strongly supports this claim (e.g. Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007). The production of (political) news is determined by a wide range of factors including journalists' self-perception and their understanding of the media's position in society. Consequently, if journalists' role conception shifts in reaction to the renaissance of right-wing populism, this is

² It is important to note that the approach taken here is fundamentally different from the literature on media populism (e.g. Mazzoleni, 2008; Bos & Brants, 2014). Media populism refers to "populism among the media themselves [which is] independent of any relationship to populist movements" (Krämer, 2014: 42) – it is populism by the media as opposed to populism for the media (Bos & Brants, 2014: 707). As Stewart et al. (2003) find, media populism is sometimes supportive of and sometimes contrary to political populism. Moreover, media populism can be the outcome of the media's susceptibility to political populism or of journalists' populist attitudes (Bos & Brants, 2014). The study of media populism is an important part of any research agenda on populism but lies outside the scope of this thesis.

likely to impact the news that is being produced and might therefore influence the way in which the public perceives the political reality and turns out in elections. Following this logic, the central argument that this paper advances is that contemporary right-wing populism necessitates a repositioning of journalists' self-understanding with respect to their role in democratic societies. The characteristics of right-wing populist populism challenge established processes of news decision making in political journalism and create tensions as public expectations and journalists' professional values diverge. Moreover, the presence of right-wing populist politics prompts political journalists to find a balance between objectivity and activism in their news reporting and journalists' emerging role conceptions vary from country to country. The way in which journalists deal with the right-wing populist challenge depends largely on their professional experience and the extent to which newsmakers are able to fulfil their role is conditioned by structural issues that political journalism faces at large.

The paper has the following structure: the next section looks at contemporary right-wing populism and its relation to the news media; this is followed by a discussion of common conceptualizations of journalism and the development of a discursive-institutionalist approach to the study of journalistic roles and practice; building on this literature review, the fourth section outlines the theoretical underpinnings that shed light onto the implications of right-wing populism for political journalism; the fifth section introduces the case studies this paper builds upon; the paper then turns to the presentation and discussion of the research findings; the paper concludes by summarizing the research findings and suggesting new avenues for future research.

Contemporary Right-Wing Populism and the Mediatization of Politics

As mentioned in the introduction, far-right populist politics has recently been on the rise, particularly in North America and Europe. Despite – or maybe because of – its salience and frequent use in the media and in public discourse as well as its discussion in scholarly work, populism is a concept that is notoriously difficult to define (Priester, 2011; Müller, 2016)³. The working definition one chooses depends on the theoretical approach one employs to study populism. Hawkins (2009) identifies four such approaches: a structural approach which is concerned with sociological explanations of the emergence of populism during the third wave of democratization; the economic study of populism focussing on policy outcomes that benefit the (poor) people; a political-institutional approach which understands populism in terms of the struggle for power in democratic regimes and the institutions that relate to populist movements; and a discursive understanding according to which populism is “a set of *ideas* rather than a set of actions” (Hawkins, 2009: 1043). It seems that the discursive approach is best suited to discuss the populist phenomenon of the 21st century as it can account for the various forms in which it appears, while avoiding the pitfalls of conceptual ambiguity (Aslanidis, 2016).⁴ Within this discursive tradition, scholars differentiate between populism as ideology and populism as strategy (Rydgren, 2006).⁵ On the one hand, populism is seen as a thin “ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic

³ Based on Sartori’s (1984) insight on concepts, Reinemann et al. (2017: 13) summarize the definitional issue eloquently when they write that “problems like collective conceptual ambiguity, lack of precision, and the widespread use of different terms for describing the same phenomena (*synonymy*) or of the same term for describing different phenomena (*homonymy*) can ... hamper scientific discourse and communication between science and society ... [and] endanger the comparability of findings and, as a consequence, impede the accumulation and integration of research results, theory building, and the thorough explanation of the social phenomena at hand”.

⁴ See Wodak et al. (2013) and Wodak (2013) for collections of studies that take the discursive approach to studying populism.

⁵ Other scholars propose to differentiate between ideas, style, and policies as components of populism (Ruzza & Fella, 2011).

groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *Volonté Générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2004: 543). Rydgren (2006) argues that, in addition to the dichotomous juxtaposition of “the pure people” and the “corrupt elite”, populist ideology is characterized by a strong aversion against representative democracy paired with a strong support for direct democracy as well as the idea that only the populist party or leader can speak and act on behalf of “the people”. Nonetheless, populist ideology remains thin because the content of the populist message depends largely on the political context as the characteristics of the antagonistic relation between the corrupt elite and “the people” vary over time and space (Canovan, 1999).⁶

On the other hand, populism can be conceived of as strategy (e.g. Weyland, 2001; Betz, 2002).⁷ Along this line, Jagers and Walgrave (2007: 322, italics removed) define populism “as a political communication style of political actors that refers to the people” (see also Moffit, 2016). Here, populist rhetoric serves as a communicative device that carries a specifically framed message to the electorate. In this way, strategic populists are interested in “a symbolic representation of the ‘real people’” (Müller, 2016: 102). In comparison with thin populist ideology, populism as political strategy is even less specific and even more dependent on context in that populist strategy only exists in relation to the established parties or political system (Rydgren, 2006).

⁶ On the matter of populist ideology, Blokker (2005: 378) argues that “[p]opulism can be understood as both more and less than an ideology: more in the sense of constituting a kind of trans-ideological phenomenon which can be incorporated in ideologies at both the left and the right end of the political spectrum, less in that it does not form a coherent, fully developed ideology in itself”.

⁷ In contrast, scholars like Laycock (1990), Kitschelt (1995), and Barr (2009) argue that populism must be conceived of as more than mere strategy or style to capture all facets of the phenomenon.

Since populism does not have a predefined ideological core, it lends itself well as an addition to “grand” ideologies such as liberalism, conservatism, feminism, and socialism (Taggart, 2000). Due to this “chameleonic quality” (Decker & Hartleb, 2007: 435), populism can be paired with both leftist and rightist ideologies (Golder, 2016). On the right side of the political spectrum, neo-populist actors combine populism with nativist, xenophobic, and authoritarian sentiments (Mudde, 2007). Neo-populist politicians and parties make use of an exclusionary form of populism, whereas leftist populists have an inclusionary understanding of “the people” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). Characterizing right-wing populist parties, Kitschelt (1995) identifies the populist antistatist appeal as one of the strategies political parties on the right use to attract voters. He argues that such a populist strategy is especially appealing to voters in contexts where the established parties protect the *status quo* and converge at the centre of the political spectrum. Moreover, right-wing populist parties are seen to be appealing to a broader electorate than non-populist right-wing parties as the populist strategy allows them to offer a credible alternative to voting for established centre-left parties (Kitschelt, 1995).

Whether it occurs as ideology or strategy, one defining feature of populism is its close relation to the (news) media (Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Meyer, 2006; Mazzoleni, 2014; Moffit & Tormey, 2014). It therefore does not come as a surprise that populist politics is on the rise as the media become more and more influential in all aspects of daily human life – a process which is commonly called mediatization (e.g. Lundby, 2009; Hjarvard, 2013). The media have a particularly strong impact on the ways in which political decisions are reached, political actors communicate, and political parties represent their electorate (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). Strömbäck and Esser (2014: 6) define the mediatization of politics as the “long-term process through which the importance of the media and their spill-over effects on

political processes, institutions, organizations and actors have increased”. As Kriesi (2014) points out, the increasing effect of the (news) media on politics forms a challenge to the established political process and the functioning of the mainstream parties. In turn, populist leaders seem to be more successful in using the changing media landscape to their own benefits (Mazzoleni et al., 2003). In fact, it is right-wing populists’ ambiguous communication strategy that sets them apart from other political actors (Mazzoleni, 2014; Moffit & Tormey, 2014). On the one hand, populists attempt to politicize the media by using them as instruments for the distribution of their political messages. On the other hand, populists perceive journalists as members of the corrupt elite and they accuse them of biased and unfair news coverage. Acting within this ambiguity, populist politicians “have often shown themselves to be truly media-savvy, to perfectly understand the imperatives of the media, what is newsworthy and what is not” (Mazzoleni, 2014: 52).

These defining features of contemporary right-wing populism give reason to study its effect on the processes of news making. As Deuze (2005) suggests, challenges to the production of news can arise from four broad areas: sociocultural, technological, economic, and political.⁸ The existence of a populist political force on the far-right clearly falls within the last category: the fact that a new political group emerges, organizes itself as a party or movement, gains public support, and achieves electoral success fundamentally changes the political reality that determines the news political journalists make and in which political journalists make news decisions. This impact of a changing political landscape on political journalism only increases

⁸ Deuze (2005) elaborates on the first two of these four types of challenges by illustrating how multiculturalism and multimedia challenge and question journalists’ professional self-understanding. In addition, he mentions political and economic factors as sources of potential challenges to established ways of news making.

if the new party is one that employs an anti-establishment rhetoric, proposes controversial policies, and by doing so attracts a segment of the electorate that feels unrepresented by the established parties. Populists' distinct relationship with the news media furthermore intensifies the challenge right-wing populism poses for political journalism as it makes it necessary for journalists to defend the role of the news media as providers of a public good, guardians of the public interest, and advocates for the right to information. The populist challenge becomes evident by asking journalists a number of questions. How much news coverage should be granted to right-wing populist politicians and their movements? How should right-wing populists' potentially anti-democratic demands be dealt with? Should right-wing populists be treated differently compared to other political actors? Based on these theoretical considerations and in the context of mediatization, this paper seeks to study the implications of right-wing populism for political news making. For that purpose, the following three questions guide the remainder of the paper. First, *how does contemporary right-wing populism challenge the role of journalism in society?* Second, *what kind of journalistic roles emerge in reaction to right-wing populism?* And finally, *how do political journalists react to the challenges of right-wing populism?*

Conceptualizing Political Journalism: Ideology, Culture, and Discourse

To answer these questions, it is necessary to develop a conceptualization of the professional reality in which political journalists report on right-wing populism. To make sense of the values, norms, and routines that condition journalists' professional work, journalism is often conceptualized as ideology or culture. The notion of a single "journalism ideology" (e.g. Schlesinger, 1978; Golding & Elliott, 1979; Soloski, 1990) that governs the production of news around the world is grounded in evidence for "a convergence in journalistic orientations and practices" (Hanitzsch, 2007: 367). In this context, ideology is understood as a shared set of values and a process through which this set of values is constantly challenged, contested, and redefined. Moreover, this strand of research seeks to define journalism "in terms of how journalists give meaning to their newswork" (Deuze, 2005: 444). In an attempt to delineate journalism as an occupational ideology, scholars commonly identify five ideal-typical strands of values shared by journalists across countries and media types: public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Deuze, 2005).⁹

An alternative theorization of journalism suggests that it is best described as culture composed of "a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists, consciously and unconsciously, legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful for themselves and others" (Hanitzsch, 2007: 369). Hanitzsch (2007) identifies three constituents of journalism culture:

⁹ The first group of values relates to the notion that journalism provides a service for society as journalists function as disseminators of information, watchdogs, partisan advocates, or entertainers. Secondly, the idea that journalism ought to be objective, impartial, and unbiased seems to be a widely-shared value of journalism around the world. The third value refers to journalists' autonomy or the power distance between them and the individuals or groups they report on. The fourth strand of values concerns the notion that journalism inevitably deals with "news" which gives journalists a sense of immediacy. Finally, there is a shared understanding of what is ethically right and wrong in journalistic research and news making. See Deuze (2005) for an in-depth discussion of these value strands.

first, institutional roles that describe the function of journalism along three dimensions (interventionism, power distance, and market orientation); second, various, and at times conflicting, epistemologies that define what constitutes knowledge and how that knowledge can be arrived at; and finally, ethical ideologies which determine what practices are ethically right or wrong in specific situations of journalistic work. As becomes evident from this brief description, Deuze's (2005) journalism ideology and Hanitzsch's (2007) journalism culture share some important features. However, they are not synonyms. As Hanitzsch (2007: 370) stresses,

professional ideologies [of journalism] occupy specific positions within the space of journalism culture; they live in journalism culture and articulate themselves against other ideologies relevant to the conduct of journalism. Journalism culture is more than ideology; it is the arena in which diverse professional ideologies struggle over the dominant interpretation of journalism's social function and identity.

Within an understanding of journalism as a cultural institution, journalism ideologies are "crystallizations of distinctive arrays of journalism-related values, orientations, and predispositions that articulate themselves as dominant professional culture ... or as a counterhegemonic set of values" (Hanitzsch, 2007: 370). In this way, a cultural understanding of journalism is able to encompass a broad range of different occupational ideologies that govern how political journalists perceive themselves and make news.

Building on an understanding of journalism as culture, scholars have recently begun to conceptualize journalism as discursive field (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Such an approach to journalism draws on the theoretical insights of discursive institutionalism and pays close attention to different and at times conflicting interpretations of the role of journalism in contemporary democracies. Ideational-discursive analyses of institutions are grounded in the realization that ideas and discourse matter as they influence the formation and evolution of the values and preferences that condition the performance of individuals and institutions in the political arena

(Schmidt, 2008; Béland & Cox, 2011; Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016). However, the view that ideas, discourse, meaning, and interpretation matter in institutional analyses is not new but has been embedded in many institutionalists' work (e.g. Geertz, 1973; Sikkink, 1991; Selznick, 1992; Hay, 2001; March & Olsen, 2008; Thornhill, 2011). What discursive institutionalism adds to the study of institutions is the conception of ideas as flexible dynamic constructs shaped and challenged in processes of discursive communication (Schmidt, 2008; Panizza & Miorelli, 2013). Consequently, discursive institutionalism understands social institutions as both structures and constructs (Schmidt, 2011): as structures, "institutions influence behavior by providing the cognitive scripts, categories and models that are indispensable for action" (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 948); as constructs, they are given meaning through human interaction and discourse (Schmidt, 2008). According to this school of thought, institutions are discursive fields in which various actors compete for ideational power over the meaning and interpretation of rules, roles, and practices (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016). Based on an understanding of power as "the ability of actors ... to have an effect upon the context which defines the range of possibilities of others" (Hay, 2002: 185), discursive approaches to the study of institutions advance a notion of ideational power "as the capacity of actors ... to influence other actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements" (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016: 321). In short, discursive institutionalism holds that "institutions do not just provide rules and incentives ... they also define roles and offices; supply justifications for action, norms of appropriateness, principles of right and duty; and provide meaningful narrative frames and expectations about relationships between means and ends" (Cameron, forthcoming: 2).

The discursive institutionalism of journalism has its roots in the works of Zelizer (1993), Hanitzsch (2007), Nerone (2013), and Carlson and Lewis (2015). Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) advance the most comprehensive discursive-institutional theory of journalism. Such a theory incorporates both structural and constructivist conceptualizations of journalism: a structural understanding of journalism as institution incorporates political, legal, and organizational characteristics that condition the production of political news, while a constructivist understanding encompasses the ideological and cultural aspects of journalism as occupation. Rather than defining a single ideology of journalism, this school of thought takes a cultural approach and perceives journalism as a discursive field in which various actors “struggle over discursive authority in conversations about the meaning and role of journalism in society” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017: 122). In other words, rather than a fixed set of values that constitute an ideology, what conditions journalists’ work is the continuous contestation of their role in society and the meaning of journalism. Thus, in the discursive field of journalism, journalists, political elites, audiences, and other social actors compete for ideational power or discursive authority that allows them to define dominant discourses about journalism. Such are the characteristics of the professional reality in which journalists make political news, including news about right-wing populism.

The Implications of Right-Wing Populism for Political News Making

Following a discursive institutionalist approach to the study of journalism, this paper aims at answering three interrelated questions. First, *how does contemporary right-wing populism challenge the role of journalism in society?* Second, *what kind of journalistic roles emerge in reaction to right-wing populism?* And finally, *how do political journalists react to the challenges of right-wing populism?* This section outlines the theoretical reasoning behind each of the three parts of the analysis.

THE DISCURSIVE CONTESTATION OF THE ROLE OF JOURNALISM IN SOCIETY

In order to understand the impact of right-wing populism on the role of journalism in society it is important to shed light on the nature and evolution of journalistic roles. Journalistic roles “can be defined as generalized expectations of society towards [journalists’] profession, and as actions and beliefs that the professionals see as normatively acceptable” (Donsbach, 2015: 316). It is widely acknowledged that they influence journalists’ professional behaviour by determining “what the communicator thinks is worth transmitting to his or her audience and how the story should be developed” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996: 103). Hanitzsch and Vos’s (2017) process model of journalistic roles illustrates how such roles emerge and evolve in the discursive field of journalism culture.¹⁰ The model stipulates that journalistic roles manifest themselves in two different ways: as orientations, they become evident in public expectations and attitudes toward journalism as well as in journalists’ self-perception; as performances, they are enacted in the ways in which journalists make news decisions and produce news content.¹¹

¹⁰ See Appendix A for Hanitzsch and Vos’s (2017) process model of journalistic roles.

¹¹ Mellado et al.’s (2017) recent publication provides great conceptual and methodological insight into the relationship between journalistic role orientations and performances.

Instead of the entire cycle of journalistic roles, this paper exclusively focusses on role orientations.¹² Role orientations are either normative or cognitive with the former describing the norms with which the public expects journalists to comply, while the latter refer to the values and attitudes journalists embody themselves. Normative role orientations determine “what journalists *ought to do*” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017: 124). Summarizing public expectations, they represent what people outside the newsroom deem normatively correct journalistic work. In contrast, cognitive role orientations refer to “what ... [journalists] *want to do*” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017: 124). They are the outcome of an internalization process through which journalists adopt and change the public’s normative expectations as to their role in society.

Of course, it is possible that normative and cognitive role orientations overlap. However, depending on the political context, it is conceivable that normative understandings of how journalists should report political news differ from how they want to report on the political reality. For instance, members of the audience might hold that journalists should be more critical of specific political parties or movements or should not report on them at all. Alternatively, some people might think that news coverage unrightfully carries a negative bias against certain ideologies or points of view. In contrast, some political journalists might want to cover all parties and politicians with an equal measure of criticism, while others might prefer to take a clear stance on a given issue. In addition, political elites might have differing and plausibly conflicting expectations of journalists’ role in democratic societies. Thus, in the discursive field of journalism culture, members of the audience, political elites, and journalists compete for discursive authority over normative journalistic roles. Moreover, these normative expectations

¹² This is not to say that right-wing populism does not have an impact on the other parts of the cyclic model of journalistic roles. To the contrary, the influence of right-wing populism on the discursive field of journalism culture is likely to become evident in journalists’ role performance, too. However, this influence lies outside the scope of this study.

can conflict with journalists' cognitive role conceptions. Within this dynamic framework, journalistic roles are the outcome of continuous tension and conflicts between different interpretations of journalism's role in society.

Due to the characteristics of right-wing populism, the presence of right-wing populists in the political arena challenges and potentially alters the understanding that audiences, political elites, and journalists themselves have of what political journalists *ought to do* as well as journalists' conceptions of what they *want to do*. As outlined above, right-wing populism's capacity to influence discourse about journalistic roles stems from its distinct relationship with the news media and the significance of its political message. As right-wing populists question the very essence of political journalism, journalists are prompted to define their professional values and defend their role and self-understanding which makes them antagonists of right-wing populist politicians and supporters. In addition, as right-wing populist politics are comparatively controversial, it can be assumed that the reorientation of journalistic roles results in a growing tension between normative and cognitive journalistic roles.

In sum, it is arguable that the presence of right-wing populism repositions journalistic role orientations as political elites, the public, and journalists themselves adapt their expectations of the role of journalism in reaction to the changed political reality. The discursive reorientation as well as the tension between expected and assumed roles are likely to become evident in journalists' reflections upon their own work, in their discussion with colleagues, and in communication with audiences, political elites, and other actors outside the newsroom.

THE DISCURSIVE REPOSITIONING OF JOURNALISTIC ROLES

How do political journalists make sense of their own role in the context of right-wing populist politics? To answer this question, it is necessary to shed light onto the theoretical underpinnings of journalists' self-understanding. With respect to specific journalistic roles that journalists assume, the literature is rather incoherent. Identifying ideal types, early research differentiates between a "neutral" or "gatekeeper" role and a "participant" or "advocate" role (Cohen, 1963; Janowitz, 1975). More recently, Donsbach and Patterson (2004) identified two dimensions of journalistic roles: the passive-active dimension describes the degree of autonomy that shapes journalists' work; the neutral-advocate dimension refers to the degree to which journalists take a position on the issue they cover. Hanitzsch (2007) identifies three dimensions: interventionism (the degree to which journalists take a stand on a given issue), power distance (the extent to which journalists work autonomously), and market orientation (whether journalists perceive their audience predominantly as consumers or as citizens). Another study proposes to distinguish between four roles of the news media: monitorial, collaborative, facilitative, and radical (Christians et al., 2009). Moreover, van Dalen et al. (2012) identify a pragmatic-sacerdotal, an impartial-partisan, and an information-entertainment dimension of journalistic roles.

What all these typologies of journalistic roles have in common are two dimensions. On the one hand, there is an *objectiveness* dimension along which journalistic roles range from *neutral* to *advocate*. "The neutral journalist is one who does not take sides in political debate ... [whereas] the advocate journalist takes sides and does so in a consistent, substantial, and aggressive way"

(Donsbach & Patterson, 2004: 265).¹³ On the other hand, there is an *activeness* dimension with an *active* and a *passive* extreme. “The passive journalist is one who acts as the instrument of actors outside the news system ... [whereas] the active journalist is one who is more fully a participant in his or her own right, actively shaping, interpreting, or investigating political subjects” (Donsbach & Patterson, 2004: 265).¹⁴

In the context of right-wing populism, the difference between the two dimensions might pan out as follows. An active journalist is one who thoroughly investigates right-wing populist politics, checks facts, and gathers background information. If he or she assumes a neutral role, he or she remains objective in his or her evaluation of the news and does not take a stance on the issue of right-wing populism. In turn, if an active journalist performs the role of an advocate, he or she either clearly and aggressively criticizes right-wing populists and condemns their political message or defends right-wing populism against its critics. In contrast, a passive journalist merely passes on right-wing populists’ political message without undertaking much fact checking or background research. If the passive journalist is neutral, he or she does not take a stance in his or her news reporting on right-wing populism. In turn, a passive advocate journalist is one whose evaluation of right-wing populist politics is either clearly supportive or clearly critical of the right-wing populist political message.

¹³ It is important to note that an advocate journalist is understood here as a newsmaker who chooses a particular side in the political debate, openly aligning with a party’s or politician’s political agenda. This is to say that an advocate journalist is not one who advocates for the public right to information.

¹⁴ Activeness is not to be mistaken for activism or even advocacy here. As becomes clear below, an active journalist is not inevitably an advocating one and *vice versa*. The terminology used here may not score high in terms of clarity. However, as the language of active, passive, neutral, and advocate journalists is common in the journalism literature, the same terminology is used in this paper.

To conclude, the extant literature suggests that the discursive repositioning of journalistic roles due to the existence of right-wing populist politics happens along two dimension – objectiveness and activeness. Moreover, given right-wing populists’ critical attitude toward the news media, it seems likely that political journalists take on a more active role when reporting on right-wing populism in order to defend their professional values and their democratic role against right-wing populists’ accusations. At the same time, there is little reason to assume that political journalists would move away from the professional norm of objectivity when making news about right-wing populist politics.

REACTING TO THE RIGHT-WING POPULIST CHALLENGE: REFLECTION AND DELIBERATION IN JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE

The third part of the analysis is concerned with journalists’ reaction to the right-wing populist challenge. The ambiguous relationship between right-wing populism and the news media is likely to create professional situations that political journalists are not familiar with. As agents of the discursive institution that journalism represents, journalists act and perform their role in the pursuit of a good – the provision of information, the clarification of political reality, or the rectification of political messages, for example. This activity requires reflection and deliberation.

Cameron (forthcoming) suggests to draw on the concept of practical wisdom to study individual and institutional performance. Practical wisdom involves “the virtues or excellences – like discernment, judgment, or capacity to deliberate – necessary to act in pursuit of the right aims ... of an activity” (Cameron, forthcoming: 22). The modern concept of practical wisdom is grounded in Aristotle’s work on the virtues. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle identifies five

distinct ways of knowing truth: craft knowledge, scientific knowledge, practical wisdom, theoretical wisdom, and philosophic wisdom (Bartlett & Collins, 2011; Reeve, 2013).¹⁵ While all five virtues are important in their own right, practical wisdom or *phronesis* plays the most important role in Aristotle's work on the virtues as it is required to successfully use the other virtues in pursuit of a greater good. For instance, scientific knowledge or theoretical wisdom are only useful if they are meaningfully applied to the context at hand. As Flyvbjerg (2001) argues, the capacity to act practically wise requires situational knowledge. Such knowledge of case-specific settings cannot be accumulated through training or studying textbooks. Instead, situational knowledge is the outcome of extensive experience as a practitioner. In the literature, professionals who are able to draw on practical wisdom in their daily work are called "reflective practitioners" (Schön, 1983) or "deliberative practitioners" (Forester, 1999). Such practitioners' deliberations about and reflection upon their professional experiences allows them to accumulate situational knowledge that facilitates practically wise decision making.

While a growing number of scholars have begun to use *phronesis* as an academic approach to study social and political phenomena (e.g. Schram & Caterino, 2006; Flyvbjerg et al., 2012; Cameron, forthcoming), the concept offers insights for the study of journalistic practices, too. In the context of right-wing populism, the question is if journalists' professional practices in reaction to right-wing populist challenge show signs of reflection and deliberation. In other words, is political journalists' news coverage of right-wing populism informed by practical wisdom? As shown above, the literature on practical wisdom suggests that more experienced journalists find it easier to deal with the challenges of right-wing populism than less experienced journalists. Assuming that journalists strive to be successful practitioners, this school of

¹⁵ Note that there are diverse translations of these five types of knowledge.

thought furthermore leads to the expectation that political journalists' reaction to the right-wing populist challenge is characterized by exercises of self-reflection and deliberation. In this sense, references to reflection, deliberation, as well as the role of experience in the profession of journalism can be seen as indicators of practical wisdom.

The Context: Right-Wing Populism in Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom

In order to study the effect of right-wing populism on journalistic roles, this paper looks at cases of right-wing populist politics in Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom. The three cases exemplify that contemporary right-wing populist politicians and parties combine the appeal to “the people” with nativist and xenophobic sentiments. In addition, the politicians and parties discussed adopt a communication strategy that is typical for populist parties. The Canadian case relates to the most recent leadership race of the *Conservative Party of Canada*. During the run-up to the 2017 leadership election, it became evident that two candidates, Kellie Leitch and Kevin O’Leary, were using a right-wing populist communication and campaign strategy. Leitch’s campaign took a right-wing populist turn when she introduced the idea of a Canadian value test for immigrants and openly sympathized with Trump’s political message during his presidential campaign. In O’Leary’s case, the campaign was being compared to Trump’s stereotypical right-wing populist campaign due to the candidate’s background, affluence, and route from business into politics.

The second case refers to the new right-wing populist party in Germany, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). Formed in 2013, the party quickly gained considerable electoral support, won significant vote shares in several state elections, and entered the regional parliaments of all but three German states. This electoral success stems from the party’s right-wing populist policy program and campaign strategy: anti-immigration, nationalist policy proposals are paired with an anti-establishment, anti-elite rhetoric painting the party’s leaders as the only righteous representatives of “the German people”. With the next federal election due to take place in September 2017, it remains to be seen if the AfD can translate this success to the national level.

Within the context of the British news media, this study looks at the *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP). Founded in 1993, the party entered mainstream politics following the 2014 local elections and the 2014 European Parliament elections in which UKIP received the largest vote share of all British parties. The party and its then-leader Nigel Farage received increased media attention and news coverage during the campaign of the 2016 referendum on the United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Union. Following the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union and Farage's subsequent resignation, UKIP was internally divided and experienced significant vote losses in the 2017 local and general elections. Despite these recent defeats, the UKIP's right-wing populist agenda and communication strategy framing the party's policies as defending "the people" against the "corrupt" elite in Brussels led to the remarkable pre-referendum success.

These examples of right-wing populist politics represent the contextual settings this paper builds upon. As an ideational-discursive approach to the study of institutions demands, this paper makes use of interpretive practitioner-centred methods, namely elite interviews with political journalists. In awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of this method, nine political journalists – three from Canada, four from Germany, and two from the United Kingdom – were asked questions about their professional work in the context of right-wing populism.¹⁶ The interviews were conducted over phone or video chat between June 2nd and June 25th, 2017. The journalists interviewed are reporters, correspondents or columnists who make news for regional or national newspapers in the three countries. Most of the interviewees are male.¹⁷

¹⁶ See Appendix B for an in-depth discussion of the methodological implications of using elite interviews as research method. Due to the timing of the study which coincided with the 2017 General Election in the United Kingdom, it was difficult to find British journalists willing to participate in the study.

¹⁷ See Appendix C for the questionnaire used in the interviews.

Newsmakers' Take on Political Journalism in the Context of Right-Wing Populism

This section presents the evidence gathered by means of conducting in-depth interviews with political journalists. The first part takes a closer look at the tension between normative and cognitive journalistic role orientations in the context of right-wing populism. The second part discusses the discursive repositioning of journalistic roles along the dimensions of activeness and objectiveness. Then, the section turns to a discussion of journalists' responses to the right-wing populist challenge and perceived obstacles in successfully dealing with this challenge.

THE DISCURSIVE TENSION BETWEEN NORMATIVE AND COGNITIVE JOURNALISTIC ROLES

As outlined above, merging the works on political populism and journalistic roles suggests that the role of journalism in society might be subject to discursive contestations in the face of contemporary right-wing populism. In fact, right-wing populists' ambiguous relationship with the media and their controversial message might create a discrepancy between normative and cognitive journalistic roles.

The evidence from the interviews clearly indicates that the role of political journalism is being challenged and redefined as a consequence of right-wing populist politics. The evidence furthermore shows that this discursive repositioning takes place at two different locations. On the one hand, almost all interviewees mentioned discussions amongst their colleagues about how to cover right-wing populism and its advocates in the news. These discussions were predominantly about aspects of newsworthiness and relevance – “vague” concepts related to “a feeling developed during year-long discussions in the newsroom” and dependent on “context, content, the new, the unusual, the spectacular, and [political] developments”. Most of these conversations about the role of political journalism did not lead to the formulation of binding guidelines

or recommendations on how to cover right-wing populists. Instead, in most cases it was up to the news makers themselves to decide how to conduct research, how to write the news stories, and how much coverage to give right-wing populists. In contrast, one of the German interviewees mentioned that “there is a template that dictates how the AfD should be portrayed in the news”. Whether being restrictive or giving journalists professional liberty, these conversations represent intra-media processes of discursive redefinitions of journalistic roles. These processes of discourse indicate that journalists’ cognitive role orientations are being challenged and repositioned due to right-wing populism.

On the other hand, evidence from the interviews shows that journalistic roles are being contested in discursive communication involving political journalists on the one side and members of the audience as well as political elites on the other. For instance, one of the British journalists mentioned that some readers could not understand why UKIP was being covered in the news at all. Likewise, many ordinary citizens demand newspapers to be more critical of right-wing populist parties and politicians, according to a German interviewee. In turn, political journalists also have to deal with right-wing populist sympathizers’ accusations of lying or being biased. Whether they reveal consensus or disagreement, these debates between political journalists, political elites, and the public are discursive challenges to the meaning of political journalism that occur outside the media organization. Moreover, cases where the public – or at least some members of the audience – have expectations regarding the role of journalism that differ from journalists’ professional attitudes and values indicate that there seems to be a divergence of normative journalistic roles and their cognitive counterparts. In other words, people outside the media might have an understanding of how the news media should react to right-wing populist politics that is different from political journalists’ self-understanding.

Right-wing populism challenges journalistic roles and practices due to its distinctiveness. According to the interviews, right-wing populism is unique with respect to its political message, the parties' internal structure, and the politicians' relationship to the news media. Regarding the political message of right-wing populism, one German journalist described the uniqueness of the AfD and similar parties as follows.

Right-wing populism is not just a rejuvenation of the far-right. Right-wing populists delegitimize other parties and the whole political system. They claim to be the only true representatives of the people. They are anti-democratic, outside the left-right spectrum ... [right-wing] populism is a new, unknown phenomenon difficult to classify. It is not extreme right but too radical and liberal to be classified centre-right.

These distinct characteristics of right-wing populism led one British interviewee to conclude that covering UKIP "is a funny one" as the party is "populist but also mainstream".

Most of the journalists interviewed said that the internal divisions and controversies that are typical for these parties made their coverage in the news more complicated. One British interviewee mentioned that politicians had requested to speak off record during interviews, while German journalists said that "the AfD does not have a professional PR office [making it] ... difficult to get in touch with politicians" and that the party "is more oriented toward its Twitter and Facebook presence."

Supporting the discussion above, the findings suggest that the relationship between right-wing populists and the news media is indeed ambiguous as these politicians attempt to use journalists as multipliers of their message while accusing them of lying and being biased. Most interviewees feel that there is a danger of being used as disseminators of the right-wing populist message. However, "[journalists] cannot not cover the AfD [and similar parties] in the news.

At the same time, one ought to be careful not to be instrumentalized by politicians.” Interviewees argued that “covering the AfD in the news is different from covering other parties because the AfD politicians try to stage you, they try to turn you into an actor”. Right-wing populists use “the news media to provoke. [Journalists] must decide between being a multiplier of the message and being critical of it.”

Moreover, interviewees observed a “coarsening of public communication” especially regarding the relationship between populists and journalists, which becomes evident in the establishment of the term “Lügenpresse” (press of lies) used by right-wing populists to describe the news media in Germany. The hostility of the relationship “is getting annoying at times”. Speaking about the AfD, one journalist said that “Ordinary party members are either angry at the news media or eager to get journalists to cover them in the news. Party elites are less willing to interact with journalists; they do not respect the media’s role in society”. In this vein, another German interviewee mentioned that Björn Höcke, the leader of the AfD in Thuringia, “does not speak to any journalists anymore”.

One journalist suggested that experienced political correspondents ignore populist politicians’ provocations, while inexperienced journalists working for smaller papers sometimes fall victim to incitements. In this context, several interviewees said they felt like political journalism was in a dilemma as it is generally seen as important to cover right-wing populism but by doing so the media might contribute to the popularity and success of right-wing populist parties. One participant furthermore realized that extended news coverage of right-wing populism “makes it seem legitimate, and look mainstream” which might cause people to “take it seriously”. An interviewee working in the United Kingdom illustrates this dilemma nicely:

For example, if there is a small UKIP demonstration, do you make a major report out of it taking up the chance to challenge the party's political position, or don't you cover it at all thereby ignoring and withholding the news? Or do you do something in between?

In addition to the challenges that stem from this dilemma, right-wing populists are distinctive in that "negative news doesn't seem to harm the party or even bother it".

Thus, their political message, their internal structure and organization as well as their approach to the news media render right-wing populist parties unusual. Taken together, these pieces of evidence suggest that right-wing populism does not only trigger a discursive repositioning of journalistic roles but does so in a unique and particularly strong way as covering right-wing populists is not the same as covering other political elites.

In conclusion, right-wing populism gives rise to a new discourse about the role and position of journalism in society. In addition to political journalists, members of the audience and political elites engage in this discursive contestation. At times, the emerging normative expectations as to the role of journalism differ from journalists' self-understanding. Moreover, the evidence shows that the distinctiveness of right-wing populist parties and their communication strategy make right-wing populism an especially strong trigger of the discursive contestation of journalistic roles.

BETWEEN OBJECTIVITY AND ACTIVISM: REPOSITIONING JOURNALISTIC ROLES

The evidence from the interviews suggests that journalistic roles are being repositioned along the dimensions of objectiveness and activeness. Most interviewees stated that the content of their news stories on right-wing populist politics was not much different than that of news stories about other political parties and politicians, which indicates that political journalists enact a neutral role. The journalists interviewed do not understand this neutral role in terms of

impartiality, but in terms of objectivity. As one interviewee put it, political journalists “always look for mistakes politicians make, for information they omit, for lies they get entangled in. So, being impartial is not a good description of a journalists. Journalists are always critical.” In this context, objectivity stems from treating different political actors critically in equal measure. One interviewee referred to this objective style of reporting as “360-degree journalism” which takes into consideration all possible perspectives on a given subject. Another feature of objective news making is to cover right-wing populism in the news with a particular emphasis on facts.

Moreover, most interviews revealed that journalists take on an active role when covering right-wing populist parties and politicians in the news. This is to say that the interviewees try not to be politicized or used by right-wing populists as mere mouthpieces. Several interviewees spoke about the “responsibility to drill down to the reality [and] to understand and express to the reader what is going on”. Interviewees perceive it as their tasks to decide “what’s on the menu and how it is presented, how [populists’ political message] fits within the political context”. This style of news reporting, investigative journalism, is clearly on the active-side of the activeness dimension.

As interviewees emphasized the importance of active news making and investigative journalism in the context of right-wing populism, it seems that journalists take on a more active role when reporting on populist politics. Grounded in scepticism of the right-wing populist political message, this role becomes evident in journalists’ emphasis on practices such as fact checking, background research, and investigative methods of political journalism. As one interviewee argued,

The problem with right-wing populism is that people do not understand how complex democracy really is and when populist politicians offer an alternative, simple solution to existing problems, people are vulnerable to that message. It is the role of the media to expose the simplistic message, to expose the charlatan, to expose the claims made by populists, to dig deep beyond rhetoric, and to point out that democracy is more complicated than that.

Most interviewees were aware of the unique communication strategy of right-wing populist politicians and the danger it brings about for political journalism. As mentioned above, they commonly described this situation as a dilemma as they cannot not report on populist politics but by doing so they might function as instruments used by populists to spread their message. In this situation, interviewees argued that all political journalists can and should do is to “put the news in the political context without evaluating it”, and to clarify and render transparent the political message. Moreover, “the rise of social media, especially the issue of fake news, requires that [political journalists] engage in fact checking, clarify the political context, and rectify wrong political messages. These are some of the tasks of journalism.” Another participant in the study said it was important not to be a mere messenger but rather a gatekeeper who ensures that right-wing populists do not distort the political reality. In other words, journalists have a responsibility to act as interpreters of populists’ political message who provide the reader with the political context that helps to clarify the meaning of the message.

While these aspects of investigative journalistic work are relevant in relation to making any political news, interviewees made it clear that these tasks become more pressing with right-wing populism. Moreover, several interviewees realized that such active journalism is close to political activism. In the words of one interviewee from Germany, “some people expect us to write against populists. But that would be activism, not journalism.” It was clear in most inter-

views that political journalists ought not to engage in such biased news making. Hence, political journalists are cautious not to prioritize active and investigative journalism over objectivity. To conclude, right-wing populism triggers the redefinition of journalistic roles along two dimensions – objectiveness and activism – and journalists assume a more active role when covering right-wing populist politics.

The specific journalistic roles that evolve in reaction to right-wing populism are subject to cross-national variance. In fact, the evidence gathered suggests that political journalists in Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom adhere to differing degrees to the norm of objectivity. It appears that while all journalists interviewed take on an active role related to investigative journalism, the idea of objective journalism seemed less important for British interviewees than for German ones, with Canadian political journalists residing between the two.¹⁸ Reflecting on the role of the news media, German journalists emphasized the importance to remain a neutral observer of the political discourse without interacting with right-wing populists. This appeal to objectivity seems to guide their research and write-up of all political news stories including those covering the AfD. The German interviewees appear to believe that too much influence on the process of news making could turn their journalistic work into political activism. In contrast, British journalists made fewer references to the notion of objectivity and they were more supportive of taking a clear stance against right-wing populism in general and UKIP in particular. They perceived it to be their responsibility to argue against right-wing populists' messages. Since the interviewees from Canada made numerous references to both objectivity and activity in news making, their journalistic role conception seems to lie somewhere between

¹⁸ It is important to note that the relatively small number of interviews does not allow for any conclusive statements. Nonetheless, the evidence gathered indicates a certain tendency that is worth testing in future research.

that of German and that of British journalists. While this is only one aspect of journalistic roles, it is exemplary for the cross-national differences that emerge during the discursive contestation of the role and position of journalism in society.

JOURNALISTS' REACTION TO THE CHALLENGE AND THE "CRISIS" OF JOURNALISM

The findings discussed above show that the presence of right-wing populism affects political journalism in at least two ways: on the one hand, it leads to a reorientation of journalistic roles which, at times, results in the divergence of public expectations and journalists' self-understanding; on the other hand, right-wing populism triggers the repositioning of journalistic roles along the dimensions of objectiveness and activeness with journalists taking on a more active role when covering right-wing populism while remaining committed to the norm of objectivity. Drawing on the concept of practical wisdom, this section discusses if political journalists are reflective and deliberative practitioners in their professional responses to these challenges of right-wing populism.

As mentioned above, many interviewees referred to discussions with their colleagues about covering right-wing populism in the news. Such discussions suggest that journalists are aware of the right-wing populist challenge and make sure to reflect upon and deliberate about their professional values, roles, and practices. Regarding the dilemma journalists are exposed to due to the right-wing populist communication strategy, one interviewee said that he does usually not report immediately on right-wing populist news. Instead, he waits to see how the story develops and whether or not other journalists decide to cover it in the news. This strategy gives journalists more time to reflect upon their professional behaviour and to make decisions regarding their news work.

Right-wing populists' approach toward the news media requires journalists to change their professional routines. As discussed above, many interviewees have become more active and critical in their news making about right-wing populism, which indicates that their practices are informed by practical wisdom. In contrast, journalists also spoke about instances in which they did not know what to do, found the situation "annoying", or reacted haphazardly to right-wing populists' provocations. These instances exemplify journalistic practices that lack the input of reflection, deliberation, and practical wisdom. The way in which journalists deal with the challenges of right-wing populism furthermore depends on their professional experience. As one interviewee suggested, experienced political journalists successfully ignore populist politicians' provocations, while inexperienced colleagues sometimes fall victim to incitements. The importance of professional experience becomes also evident in determining the newsworthiness or relevance of a given news story. Moreover, the tendency to remain objective while undertaking investigative journalism, checking facts, and obtaining background information instead of engaging in personal arguments with right-wing populist politicians speaks about the practical wisdom journalists possess.

While the interviews provide evidence that journalists are reflective and deliberative practitioners in the face of right-wing populism, the extent to which they are able to draw on their practical wisdom is restricted by organizational guidelines and structural factors. For instance, the interview with one of the German participants indicates that there is a "template" for news coverage of the AfD. Such restrictions prevent reflection and deliberation, obstruct the accumulation of situational knowledge and professional experience, and thus hinder the development practical wisdom. Moreover, most interviewees referred to a state of crisis when speaking

about potential obstacles that hinder the news media to perform their role in today's democracies.¹⁹ This crisis of political journalism becomes evident in two different ways. On the one hand, interviewees mentioned that the public is now less trusting of the news media than before. A German participant claimed that "journalists have never been especially respected in society, but now even the occupation as a whole is being disrespected". Looking for causes of distrust, another interviewee suggested that "people do not trust the media anymore because the media are a traditional source of power that is seen as corrupt". Moreover, "populism accentuates the tension in the news media between elite opinions and what the people think [as] there is a possibility that the media's critique of populists may not be reflective of the public opinion". Because of this discrepancy, one interviewee thinks journalists need to do a better job at understanding the political reality of the electorate in order to "regain public trust".

On the other hand, financial cuts in the media sector, especially in the print media, render journalists' daily work more difficult. One journalist stated that "the press is having a hard time financially with readers being less and less willing to pay for the news and increasingly looking for the news online". According to the interviewees, cuts to the personnel at news organizations has led to a situation in which journalists are asked to cover more political news than they can which affects the quality of research and news content. In the words of a Canadian interviewee, "There are almost no local newspapers' reporters in Ottawa anymore. Less journalists are covering the same amount of news." As a consequence, "only a narrow range

¹⁹ Another additional finding concerns the question whether populism *per se* has an adverse effect on democracy. Here, most journalists argued that it "is not necessarily a bad thing for democracy; it's a challenge, a tough test. But also an opportunity for discourse." One interviewee suggested that "the AfD represents long-existing political views in the political debate" and that "it is good that these views are now being represented". In general, interviewees suggested that "the impact [of populism] on democracy is not that worrying. More worrying are nationalism and anti-Islamic movements. Trump [for instance] is a popular nationalist, an amalgam of populism and nationalism."

of opinions and issues are represented in the media. There is a need to diversify as newsrooms are mostly white, male, prosperous, and urban”. This diversification should take place with respect to “ethnicity, gender, and social background”. With respect to the contemporary political reality, right-wing populism “functions as a prism that concentrates the issues of journalism” and cuts to personnel and equipment mean that “there is less time to reflect and think about the relationship between the media and populism”.

While the issue of mistrust and the financially precarious situation of the press are linked to one another, this crisis of political journalism raises the question if newsmakers are able to fulfil the role of the news media, independent of normative and cognitive understandings of what that role actually entails. These structural issues restrict journalists’ ability to reflect upon and deliberate about their professional work; they disallow the use of practical wisdom in news decision making. Hence, what are the implications of this state of crisis for democracy, especially in the context of right-wing populism?

Conclusion

Grounded in an understanding of journalism as a discursive institution, it was the aim of this paper to better understand the implications of right-wing populism for political news making. More precisely, the research sought answers as to the ways in which right-wing populist politics challenge normative and cognitive journalistic roles, facilitate the repositioning of journalistic roles, and influence journalists' daily news work. For that purpose, nine journalists from three countries were interviewed about their day-to-day journalistic work in the context of right-wing populism. The findings suggest that the emergence of right-wing populist politics has indeed triggered discourses amongst journalists as well as between journalists, political elites, and the public that reshape the meaning and role of political journalism. It appears that journalists, politicians, and members of the public have at times differing understandings of the news media's role, indicating a potential conflict between normative and cognitive journalistic role orientations. Moreover, the unique characteristics of populist political communication and populists' relationship with the news media make right-wing populism an especially strong factor in this process of discursive repositioning.

The evidence from the interviews furthermore indicates that journalistic roles are being redefined in relation to two dimensions: activeness and objectiveness. The interviews revealed that journalists perceive a responsibility to challenge right-wing populists' political message by checking facts, putting the message into political context, and exposing the right-wing populists' agenda. While journalists enact an active role, there are cross-national differences with respect to objectiveness. The findings suggest that British journalists are less objective than their colleagues in Germany, with Canadian news makers covering the middle ground.

The way in which journalists deal with the right-wing populist challenge depends on their professional experience. The findings suggest that experienced journalists approach right-wing populism in a way that allows them to deliberate and reflect upon their professional work. However, another theme that clearly emerged from the interviews was that of a journalism crisis. In the interviews, journalists argued that recent financial cuts in the newspaper industry paired with the pressures of social media and online news challenged the production of high-quality political news. In addition, political journalism faces the issue that the public appears to be less trusting in the news media than before. Attempting to use journalists as distributors of their messages, right-wing populist politicians and parties only accentuate this state of crisis. In sum, it is difficult for political journalists to fulfil their role with respect to covering right-wing populist politics. This state of crisis indicates that the relationship between the media and populism cannot be studied without taking into account the changing environment of the (news) media.

While this study offers valuable insight into the discursive processes that lead to the contestation and repositioning of journalistic roles, as exemplified in the context of right-wing populism, there is need for large-scale comparative studies to get a better understanding of cross-national differences in journalists' reaction to right-wing populism in particular and the evolution of journalistic roles in general. In other words, the scope of this study is too narrow to make strong inferences as to systematic differences between journalistic cultures in Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom. While the vast majority of academic work on right-wing populism focusses on the effect of the media on right-wing populists' electoral success, it is time for the scholarly community to study the impact of right-wing populism on the processes

of news production. News makers continue to be the producers of the public's political information which grants them a central role in all political processes. Consequently, it is important to understand the factors that condition journalists' professional routines and news decisions.

This need for further research on the impact of populism on news decision making is only elevated as recent political events and election campaigns appear to indicate that the populist communication strategy begins to spread to the left side of the political spectrum. In fact, politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders, and Martin Schultz exemplify that an appeal to "the people" paired with a new communicative strategy is on the rise, not only on the political right. As one interviewee stressed "a pinch of populism is in every party ... they always seek media attention and are always campaigning." In order to understand the implications of this development for political journalism and democracy at large, it is necessary to study the impact of populism on journalistic roles and practice as well as other factors of news decision making. By offering a valuable conceptual framework and indicative findings, this study makes a small step in the right direction, but more research is needed.

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Appendix A: Hanitzsch and Vos's (2017) process model of journalistic roles.

Hanitzsch and Vos's (2017) model illustrates how journalistic roles evolve in the discursive field of journalism culture. The authors differentiate between role orientations and role performance: as orientations, roles become evident in public expectations and attitudes toward journalism as well as in journalists' self-perception; as performances, they are enacted in the ways in which journalists make news decisions and produce news content. Role orientations are either normative or cognitive with the former describing the norms with which journalists are expected to comply, while the latter refer to the values and attitudes journalists embody themselves. Cognitive role orientations are the outcome of an internalization process through which journalists adopt normative expectations about role of journalism in society. Role performances include journalistic practices and narratives of these practices. Journalistic roles are being practiced when journalists enact cognitive role orientations. After a process of reflection, practiced role performances are transformed into their narrated counterparts when newsmakers and other actors in the discursive field speak about journalists' work. Narratives of journalistic roles subsequently condition normative and cognitive role orientations.

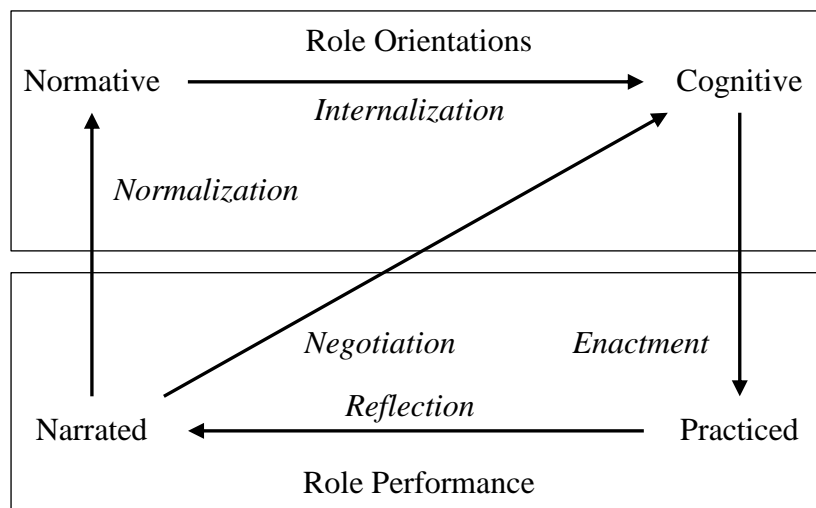


Figure 1: Hanitzsch and Vos's (2017) process model of journalistic roles.

Research findings on factors of news decision making suggest an adaptation of the process model of journalistic roles. The discursive field of journalism culture in which different discourses about the role of journalism compete is conditioned by a web of personal, intra-media, and extra-media influences on role orientations and role performance. Personal factors include journalists' professional values and ideological beliefs. Intra-media influences refer to the news organization's economic condition, political affiliation, and professional routines. Extra-media factors comprise legal restrictions on news making, characteristics of the political landscape, and other structural conditions. Taken together, these groups of influences determine the possibilities of journalistic role orientations and role performance.

Appendix B: Methodological Considerations of Elite Interviewing

Discursive institutionalist approaches to the study of institutions require an interpretative practitioner-centred methodology as opposed to models of cause and effect (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Schaffer, 2016; Cameron, forthcoming). Consequently, such an approach to the study of journalism suggests an interpretive methodology that perceives journalists as practitioners and considers their understanding of their own role in the context of right-wing populism as the most valuable source of data.²⁰ Conducting interviews with political journalists meets these methodological requirements. Along with observations, content analysis, and other ethnographic and interpretative methods, interviews belong to the most commonly used qualitative methods in both political science (e.g. Burnham et al., 2004; Pierce, 2008; Brians et al., 2011; Halperin & Heath, 2012; Kapiszewski et al., 2015) and communication and media studies (e.g. Möhring & Schlütz, 2010; Meyen et al., 2011). Interviewing methods include diverse research procedures such as in-depth interviews, oral history interviews, and focus group interviews (Kapiszewski et al., 2015).

This study employs a method that is widely known as elite interviewing. In contrast to expert interviews or surveys, elite interviewing is not concerned with the expertise and specialized knowledge of experts who are otherwise distant from the phenomenon or event of interest (Halperin & Heath, 2012). Instead, elite interviews are targeted at those whose actions or role in society give them a position that is central to the phenomenon or event itself which grants them situational knowledge as practitioners (Forester, 2008). According to Leech (2002: 663),

²⁰ These methodological considerations are in line with recent research by Hanitzsch and colleagues (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011) who assess perceived factors of news decision making as opposed to objectively defined ones. Moreover, Moffit (2016) argues that the strategic characteristics of populist rhetoric are best studied by means of interpretive methods.

“elite interviewing can be used whenever it is appropriate to treat a respondent as an expert about the topic in hand”. Methodologists in political science define elites as “people who exercise disproportionately high influence on the outcome of events or policies in your research area” (Pierce, 2008: 119). Hence, who counts as a member of the elite depends on the research question (Brians et al., 2011). Given the focus of this study, journalists and other news makers can clearly be categorized as elites.

Elite interviews are usually seen as highly valid research procedures because the personal interaction between participant and researchers allows for the clarification of potential misunderstandings. Moreover, interviews are the only valid methodology for the assessment of opinions, knowledge, and attitudes (Möhring & Schlütz, 2010).²¹ Given these characteristics, in-depth elite interviews with political journalists are the most suitable method to assess if right-wing populism causes journalists to reconsider their professional role in society. Only through interviews can researchers gather information about journalists’ reflections upon their own work and the position of their occupational field within society. Conducting in-depth interviews with experts, researchers take on the role of a “provocateur” who asks specific questions with the aim to trigger responses or reactions that reveal relevant information (Kapiszewski et al., 2015: 194). As Forester (2008) highlights, the ways in which the researcher enacts this role determines the nature and the quality of interview outcomes. In fact, an interview is “a form

²¹ In turn, interviews are less reliable than other methods as the interviewing procedure is not standardized and therefore more difficult to replicate (Berry, 2002; Halperin & Heath, 2012). Despite high scores on validity, interviews are furthermore subject to challenges that can adversely affect the quality of research findings. Möhring and Schlütz (2010) differentiate between influences on the interview results that stem from the interviewer and those that stem from the interviewee. The former include visible (sex, gender, race, socioeconomic status, delivery of questionnaire) and non-visible characteristics (attitudes and expectations) of the interviewer, whereas the latter refer to predefined answer types and the phenomenon of social desirability. It is best practice to be aware of these challenges and to mitigate these effects by conducting multiple interviews and by verifying obtained information with information from outside sources (Brians et al., 2011).

of relationship” and the extent to which this relationship is built on trust and rapport conditions the participant’s responses to the researcher’s questions (Forester, 2008: 149; Seidman, 2006). Moreover, wording and intonation of the questions asked predetermine what responses and reactions are triggered (Bradburn et al., 2004). Thus, “excellent interviewers are [not only] excellent conversationalists” (Berry, 2002: 679), but also need to be sensitive and considerate to the interviewee’s situation as well as the power relations and presumptions that condition his or her situation.

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Note: The following questionnaire was approved under the UBC Research Ethics Certificate number H17-00718 to conduct interviews with political journalists for this paper. The German version of the questionnaire can be requested from the author.

1. To begin with, I would like to take a closer look at one of the news stories that you wrote recently about populism if you don't mind. On _____, you wrote an article about _____. Do you remember researching for this story and writing it?
2. What can you tell me about the decisions that you had to make when you worked on this news story?
3. Did the article achieve your goals? Why (not)?
4. Would you mind telling me more about how you gathered information for this article, how it was written, edited, or changed?
 - a. Did you speak with _____ personally?
5. Comparing your research and writing of this news story to articles you wrote about other politicians or parties, do you think there is any difference in your work?
6. Do you recall any discussions, conversations, or feedback from colleagues, readers, editors, or politicians in reaction to this news story?
7. What challenges does populism pose for democracy in general, and in relation to the news media in particular?
8. Broadly speaking, there are two different views of the relationship between the media and populism. On the one hand, some people argue that the success of populism around the world is closely linked to the way the media present political news in newspapers, on radio, and on TV. On the other hand, the news media are being criticized for being too critical of populist parties and politicians. What is your opinion about this?
9. So then, in your opinion, what should be the news media's role in the context of populist politics?
10. Can the news media play this role? Why (not)?

11. With respect to [interviewee's news organization], how do editors and reporters relate to this role?
12. How do you as an individual journalist fit into this role of the media?
13. Do you recall speaking with colleagues about how to cover populism?
14. Thinking back of the news story that he spoke about a couple of minutes ago, do you think you were able to incorporate that role in your work on the article? How did your role become evident in the research and write-up of the article? Is it visible in the news content itself?