VU Research Portal

Delegitimizing the media? Analyzing politicians' media criticism on social media

Egelhofer, Jana Laura; Aldering, Loes; Lecheler, Sophie

published in

Journal of Language and Politics
2021

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1075/jlp.20081.ege](https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.20081.ege)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

document license

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Egelhofer, J. L., Aldering, L., & Lecheler, S. (2021). Delegitimizing the media? Analyzing politicians' media criticism on social media. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 20(5), 653-675.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.20081.ege>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

Delegitimizing the media?

Analyzing politicians' media criticism on social media

Jana Laura Egelhofer, Loes Aaldering and Sophie Lecheler
University of Vienna | Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam | University of Vienna

A growing literature on the impact of “fake news” accusations on legacy news outlets suggests that the use of this term is part of a much larger trend of increased and delegitimizing media criticism by political actors. However, so far, there is very little empirical evidence on how prevailing politicians' delegitimizing media criticism really is and under which conditions it occurs. To fill these gaps, we present results of a content analysis of media-related Facebook postings by Austrian and German politicians in 2017 ($N = 2,921$). The results suggest that media criticism, in general, is actually rare and that about half of it can be described as delegitimizing (i.e., characterized by incivility or absence of argumentation). Most often, media criticism is used by populist politicians, who accuse “the media” in general of bias and falsehoods.

Keywords: media criticism, delegitimization, social media, content analysis, populist communication, fake news

1. Introduction

Having trusted news media is fundamental for political decision-making and, therefore crucial for the well-being of democracies (e.g., Tsfati and Cohen 2005). However, journalism is increasingly met with distrust (e.g., Newman et al. 2019) and even outright hostility, with more and more politicians openly attacking news media (Reporters without Borders 2018). While media criticism by politicians is not new, through social media – where politicians can communicate their media criticism directly to their audiences – it has reached an unparalleled presence (Carlson 2017).

Media criticism has an essential democratic function, and politicians have every right to criticize inadequate media coverage. However, some use media criticism as a strategy to delegitimize journalism as the fourth estate in democratic societies as well as to impact the audience's media perceptions. One example that has received much attention is the term "fake news", which is now often used by politicians to delegitimize critical news media (Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019; Farhall et al. 2019; Lischka 2019; Solis and Sagarzazu 2020). These accusations and anti-media sentiments, in general, are often connected to the populist ideology which deems the media as part of the evil elite (Hameleers 2020a). However, while a populist worldview likely plays a key role in increasing verbal attacks on journalism, non-populist politicians also make use of (harsh) media criticisms (Solis and Solaris 2020).

While worries about this delegitimization of journalism are increasing (e.g., Van Dalen 2019), we lack empirical evidence of how prevalent (delegitimizing) media criticism by politicians actually is, as well as under which circumstances it is expressed. We aim to fill these gaps through a content analysis of media-related Facebook postings by Austrian and German parties and leading party candidates in 2017. We go beyond the much-debated term "fake news" by analyzing all instances of both legitimate as well as delegitimizing media criticism posted by political actors. This allows for a more nuanced picture of politicians' references to news media and journalists on social media and the suggested prevalence of negative sentiments.

2. Media criticism in a digital age: From "good" to "bad"?

Media criticism is part of a metajournalistic discourse, which comprises all public expressions about journalism, its definition, boundaries, and legitimacy. As such, media criticism "either legitimizes or delegitimizes journalistic practice" (Cheruiyot 2018, 1009; see also Carlson 2016; 2017). Thereby, media criticism has a crucial democratic role: it serves as a mechanism of journalistic accountability and evaluates how the press fulfills its democratic functions. It does so by identifying specific cases that violate journalistic norms and practices and characterizing these as deviation from what constitutes "healthy" journalism (Carlson 2009, 261). Thereby, media criticism indirectly "controls" the media without direct control in the form of regulation or censorship (Wyatt 2019, 1; see also Carey 1974; Carlson 2017; Cheruiyot 2018; 2019; Figenschou and Ihlebæk 2019). The aim of media criticism is then to evaluate journalistic performance and the quality of its outcome to bring about positive change in journalism (Wyatt 2007). Media criticism thus protects the legitimacy of journalism as a democratic institution. Therefore, all

actors are invited to participate in critical discourses about media coverage and practice. In the same vein, journalistic actors are expected to listen and respond to criticism (Cheruiyot 2018).

However, recent years have seen a surge of public concern about media criticism in several (western) democracies. This research suggests that media criticism today has become overly prevalent and has reached a toxic level (Cheruiyot 2019). Also, professional journalism organizations increasingly worry about growth in uncivil attacks and threats towards journalists in countries previously rated as having a free press (Reporters without Borders 2018). In research, this increase of media criticism and hostility towards journalists is most often connected to the emergence of social media (Carlson 2016; 2017; Cheruiyot 2019; Wyatt 2019). News consumption increasingly takes place on social media (Newman et al. 2019), where shared news stories are often accompanied by criticism (Wyatt 2019). These are often “short, direct attacks rather than sustained argument” (Carlson 2016, 920). The use of the term “fake news” against news media is a prime example of the current criticism on social media (e.g., Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019; Farhall et al. 2019). Furthermore, social media allow politicians to directly communicate with the public and act as a platform for expressing criticism and antipathy that would not pass journalistic gatekeeping (Engesser et al. 2016).

In this context, it is argued that some politicians use media criticism *strategically*. That is, their media criticism does not address journalists and media actors to evaluate and improve journalistic quality but is aimed at the public to influence citizens’ media perceptions (e.g., Farhall et al. 2019; Solis and Sagarzazu 2020). Studies suggest that this strategy can be effective. For example, exposure to Donald Trumps’ fake news accusations decreases media trust for Trump-supporters (Guess et al. 2017). This way, media criticism can be an influential tool that requires almost no resources and does not directly interfere with press freedom (Solis and Sagarzazu 2020).

3. Characteristics of delegitimizing media criticism

Simply put, there is “good” media criticism that fulfills important democratic functions, and there is “bad” media criticism that is used to delegitimize journalism. Similarly, the literature on political conflicts stresses that conflict is not bad per se but has an important democratic value. However, when combined with certain characteristics, it can have negative consequences (Otto et al. 2020). So, the question is, which characteristics make media criticism delegitimizing? To answer this question, scholars have been guided by the framework of deliberative democracy (e.g., Cheruiyot 2019; Wyatt 2007). Deliberation emphasizes free debate between

citizens, which enables them to participate in collective decision-making. This is particularly relevant in “today’s digital age (...) as the number of voices has multiplied” (Masullo Chen and Lu 2017, 109). Deliberation as a type of communication is characterized by *reasoning* and *civility* (e.g., Friess and Eilders 2015; Prochazka et al. 2018). Accordingly, scholars have identified media criticism as ongoing discourse between the media and their audience, which should be characterized by civil language and substantiated with reasoned arguments (Carey 1974; Cheruiyot 2019; Fawzi 2020; Wyatt 2007; 2019). Based on this, the *absence of reasoning* and the *presence of incivility* can be perceived as characteristics of delegitimizing media criticism.¹

3.1 Absence of reasoning

Reasoning is one of the most important characteristics of deliberation, and, constructive and rational arguments are vital for moving the conversation forward and reaching consensus (e.g., Friess and Eilders 2015). Media criticism as a discourse about journalistic quality is also dependent on reasoned argumentation (Cheruiyot 2018; Fawzi 2020). Ideally, criticizing actors should strive to encourage dialogue and improve the performance of the press (Wyatt 2019). To do so, they need to explain why a journalistic practice or product is disapproved. Criticizing actors do not have to present a correction or solution. However, the criticized actor (i.e., the media outlet or journalist) has to be able to understand what exactly is criticized and for what reasons. That is, which expectations of journalism have not been met. Only then, journalistic actors are able (and *willing*; see Cheruiyot 2018) to understand and react to the critique, which is necessary to enable improvement.

3.2 Presence of incivility

Civility as a characteristic of deliberate discourses points to the necessity of “mutual recognition of the participants” (Friess and Eilders 2015, 330), which ensures that opposing views are not silenced but respected (Jamieson et al. 2017).

1. Some scholars define emotionality as part of incivility (Sobieraj and Berry 2011), and emotionality is seen as contrary to rational reason in early deliberation literature (see Bickford 2011). In line with this, the earliest theorists on media criticism have suggested that media criticism should be expressed in an unemotional language (Carey 1974). However, more recently, emotionality is increasingly recognized as an important part of political communication (Bickford 2011), and deliberation is criticized for its “rationalist bias” which neglects emotionality as a democratically important form of communication (Dahlgren 2005, 157). Therefore, we do not include emotionality in our conceptualization of delegitimizing media criticism.

Its counterpart, *incivility*, is understood as an “unnecessarily disrespectful tone” which does not “add anything of substance to the discussion” (Coe et al. 2014, 660). These hyperbolic expressions of disrespect might inhibit actors from communicating their own opinions as well as listening to others. Thereby, incivility is impeding a constructive debate (Prochazka et al. 2018). Importantly, in the context of media criticism, it has been shown that uncivil language in media criticisms causes journalists not to respond to complaints (Cheruiyot 2018).

In sum, media criticism is delegitimizing when it is characterized by at least one of the above-discussed features, *absence of reasoning*, or *presence of incivility*. Having clarified what entails delegitimizing media criticism, we wonder how prevalent it actually is in politicians’ social media communication. Therefore, we pose the following research question:

RQ1: *To what extent is media criticism in politicians’ social media communication delegitimizing?*

4. The importance of the “fake news” label

Scholars are increasingly interested in the weaponization of the phrase fake news by politicians as a label to express media criticism (e.g., Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019; Farhall et al. 2019). In general, accusations of factual incorrectness are pervasive (e.g., Hameleers 2020a). These accusations can be connected to what has been termed “post-truth” communication, or “relativism towards facts” – referring to an observed trend in political communication where facts are seen as debatable and are “often downgraded to mere opinion” (Van Aelst et al. 2017, 14). As a consequence, dismissing information that does not align with one’s worldview as false has become a popular strategy, which is especially used against news media as providers of such information. Importantly, political actors increasingly claim not only that media content is incorrect but *intentionally* incorrect. That is, they accuse news media of spreading *disinformation* compared to *misinformation*, the latter being false information that is spread unintentionally. Blaming the media for spreading fake news counts as a disinformation accusation (Hameleers 2020a). We understand this usage of the term fake news as a label to delegitimize news media, as the prime example of delegitimizing media criticism as it fulfills both of the above-suggested characteristics (see also Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019). Politicians often use it to delegitimize news media without explaining why a medium or its coverage is “fake” (i.e., *absence of reasoning*). Furthermore, some definitions of incivility include lying accusations (e.g., Coe et al. 2014). Apart from that, stating that news coverage is not “false” but “fake” is indeed *unnecessarily*

rude. Labeling something as “fake” negates its function and indicates that its only purpose is to deceive (Lakoff 2017). Thus, we characterize the fake news label as inherently *uncivil*.

Recent discussions give the impression that these fake news attacks are currently the most prevalent theme in politicians’ media criticism – however, empirical evidence to support this claim is lacking. Thus, we pose a research question on the prevalence of the fake news label in comparison to other possible issues that politicians might criticize. So far, *partisan media bias accusations* (i.e., unfair coverage of politicians, parties, and ideologies) are the most researched context of politicians’ media criticism (e.g., Eberl et al. 2017; Ladd 2012). However, in recent years, also *non-partisan bias accusations* emerged (i.e., unfair coverage of topics and non-partisan actors). For example, in Germany, mainstream media have been criticized for too positive coverage of refugees (Maurer et al. 2019). Furthermore, there are discussions about a possible decline in *journalistic quality*. This discussion runs under keywords such as tabloidization, emotionalization, scandalization, game-framed news or softening of the news (Van Aelst et al. 2017).

RQ2: *How prevalent are fake news accusations in politicians’ delegitimizing media criticism?*

5. Determinants of delegitimizing media criticism

Next, we highlight factors that likely determine whether delegitimizing media criticism occurs. More specifically, we discuss which political actors may *use* delegitimizing media criticism, and how and *when* journalistic actors *may be addressed* through delegitimizing media criticism.

5.1 Political actors: Populist politicians and parties

Populism is often described as a communication style or thin ideology, which emphasizes an opposition of the elite and a homogenous people (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Mudde 2004). In its anti-pluralistic worldview, news media are seen as part of the elite (together with other established institutions, such as politics and science), communicating on behalf of these ‘corrupt’ establishment institutions and neglecting the interests of the ‘good’ people. In a populist understanding, telling the truth is, therefore, to expose the lies of the establishment (Waisbord 2018). Accusations of “fake news” and disinformation as well as general anti-establishment media discourses are therefore often understood as fixed characteristics of populist rhetoric (Hameleers 2020a; 2020b; Fawzi 2020). Indeed,

content analyses repeatedly find media criticism and hostility towards journalists as regular features of populist communication (Aalberg et al. 2016; Engesser et al. 2016). Moreover, recent audience surveys demonstrate a relationship between populist views and negative attitudes towards the media (Fawzi 2019; Schulz et al. 2018).²

Based on the above, we thus expect that *delegitimizing media criticism is predominantly expressed by populist politicians (H1)*.

5.2 Journalistic actors: Generalization of addressee

Media criticism can be expressed at an individual level (i.e., towards journalists), an outlet level, or an institutional level. Anecdotal evidence suggests that much criticism that is characterized by the delegitimizing features is expressed at an institutional level. That is, public expressions of criticism are often generalized against “the media” (Meeks 2020). Similarly, the fake news label is frequently used by politicians against the media in general (Egelhofer et al. 2020). Thereby, politicians are targeting journalism as a democratic institution and are “challeng[ing] the media’s claim to legitimacy” (Van Dalen 2019, 13).

Accordingly, we expect that *delegitimizing media criticism is mostly addressed towards the media in general (H2)*.

5.3 Time period: Election campaigns

Politicians’ rhetoric likely varies between times of routine politics and election campaigns (Solis and Sagarzazu 2020), which might also affect their usage of delegitimizing media criticism. It seems likely, for example, that politicians might refrain from harsh media attacks during election campaigns as they are then particularly dependent on (positive) news coverage. In line with that, Meeks (2020) found that Donald Trump attacked the media less often on Twitter during the campaign period than after being elected as president. Thus, one can expect that *delegitimizing media criticism is less prevalent during election campaigns (H3)*.

2. Current research on the connection of populism and the delegitimization of journalism often focuses on right-wing populists (Haller and Holt 2019; Meeks 2020), which can be explained by the popularity of these actors in western countries. However, theoretically, the anti-elitist characteristic relates to both right- and left-wing populism, which is why we will analyze the connection between delegitimizing media criticism and populism as a whole.

6. Methods

6.1 Case selection

We study the use of media criticism by politicians in Germany and Austria, two multi-party systems with similar party families. Both countries have experienced growing political hostility towards journalism in recent years (Reporters without Borders 2019), especially by populist politicians who have become increasingly successful (Newman et al. 2018). In Germany, the media are especially confronted with *lying press* (“Lügenpresse”) accusations by the far-right movement Pegida (Holt and Haller 2017) and the right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD) frequently attacks the mainstream media, for example, using the term “Pinocchio press” (Holt and Haller 2017). In Austria, members of the far-right populist Freedom Party Austria (FPÖ) were involved in harsh attacks towards the media and journalists several times (Newman et al. 2019).

6.2 Sample

The sample of our manual content analysis consists of Facebook postings by all major parties and their main candidates, which consider the news media in one way or another between 01.01.2017 and 20.12.2017 ($N = 2,921$).³ Both countries held national elections in this period (Austria: October 15, Germany: September 24). The analyzed data was scraped in the context of another project (Gründl 2020). We chose Facebook as it is the most popular social media platform for news use in Austria and Germany (Newman et al. 2019). What is more, on Facebook, there is more populist communication compared to Twitter, which is a relevant factor for this study (Ernst et al. 2017).

6.3 Coding procedure

The content analysis consisted of two steps: First, to capture those postings that refer to news media and journalism, we developed an extensive search string, consisting of general terms (e.g., “media”, “news”, “journalism”), the names of specific media outlets and formats in Austria (e.g., *ORF*), Germany (e.g., *ARD*), and a selected number of international outlets and formats (e.g., *CNN*, *BBC*), as well as the names of popular journalists in Austria, Germany, and several international journalists. Furthermore, we also included terms that are prominently used in attacks on journalism, such as “fake news” and “lying press” (the complete search

3. An overview of all analyzed actors can be found in Appendix A.

string can be found in Appendix B). We ran this search string over a sample consisting of all postings by the relevant actors in 2017 ($N=16,619$), which resulted in a sub-sample of 6,818 postings. As the search string consisted of various terms that are often used in contexts unrelated to news media (e.g., two of the Austrian news outlets are called *Heute (Today)* and *Österreich (Austria)*), this sample was then manually evaluated for the presence of references to journalism, resulting in the final sample of 2,921 postings.

In the next step, the final sample was analyzed manually by four coders. The coders were all native speakers, two from Germany and two from Austria. We developed an extensive codebook to capture possible ways how politicians can refer to journalists and news media.

6.4 Measures

The codebook contained a number of variables to capture how politicians deal with journalistic actors (i.e., journalists and outlets) and products.⁴ First, we coded the *addressed journalistic actor* in the social media posting. When a posting mentioned several news media or journalists, the first two mentioned were coded. All mentioned news outlets, formats, and journalists were coded as open texts, which were grouped in four categories after coding was finalized: (a) *media in general*; (b) *public service broadcasting and quality newspaper*, (c) *commercial broadcasting and tabloid newspaper*, and (d) *alternative news outlets*.

Next, we coded the *context of references to the media*. Here, we distinguished between the following contexts in which journalistic actors or products were mentioned: (a) *promoting own appearance in journalistic coverage* (i.e., announcements of interviews or talk shows with the politician themselves or a member of their party); (b) *mentioning the appearance in journalistic coverage of other political actors*; (c) *media criticism* (i.e., any negative evaluation about journalistic actors or products), (d) *positive evaluation of media coverage*, (e) *emphasizing the democratic relevance of journalism* (e.g., arguments for press freedom); or (f) *demand for abolition or reform of broadcasting fees*.

When a posting included media criticism, several additional variables were coded. First, it was dichotomously coded whether one of the following *issues was addressed in the criticism*: (a) *partisan bias accusation* (i.e., any argument stating that parties/ politicians/ ideologies are presented unfairly/ unsuitably/ insufficiently); (b) *non-partisan bias accusation* (i.e., it is argued that any other actors (such as immigrants) or topics (such as climate change) are presented unfairly/

4. A translated version of the codebook (from German to English) can be found in Appendix C.

unsuitably/ insufficiently), (c) *quality of journalistic coverage* is criticized (i.e., criticisms relate to triviality, emotionalization or sensationalism); and (d) *attribution of falsehood* (i.e., it is said that coverage is at parts or completely factually incorrect). When attributions of falsehood were present, we additionally coded whether the political actors claim that this *factual incorrectness is intentional* (to distinguish between accusations of *mis* – and *disinformation*). Lastly, we coded whether political actors used the *fake news label* against journalistic actors and products.

For the *characteristics of delegitimizing media criticism*, it was dichotomously coded whether the critique is accompanied by any *argumentation* (i.e., somewhat additional explanation on why the journalistic actor or product is being criticized). The presence of *incivility* towards journalistic actors was dichotomously coded; based on selected incivility characteristics of Sobieraj and Berry (2011), namely “insulting language”, “name-calling”, “character assassination”, “belittling”, and “obscene language”.

Other relevant variables for our analyses are the *election campaign period* (defined as the two months preceding each election; e.g., Aaldering and Vliegenthart 2016) and whether a politician can be characterized as *populist* (based on Rooduijn et al. (2019), we characterized eight actors as populist, i.e. the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and its then leader Strache, The Alternative of Germany (AfD) and its then leaders Gauland and Weidel, the German Left (DIE LINKE) and its then leaders Wagenknecht and Bartsch. Furthermore, we included the following control variables in our analyses: the *ideological stance* of each party (based on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2017; Bakker et al. 2020);⁵ *incumbency* (whether actors were holding office at the time of each posting), the *country* (German vs. Austrian), the *total number of postings* an actor created in 2017, the *total number of media references* an actor posted in 2017, and *the month* in which the posting was created.

6.5 Intercoder reliability

Intercoder reliability scores (Krippendorff’s α) ranged from 0.75 to 0.92, except for three variables that rarely occurred (i.e., fake news accusation: 0.58; intentionality of factual incorrectness: 0.58, and incivility: 0.42). However, these variables have very skewed distributions, in which case Krippendorff’s alpha is likely too conservative (Lombard et al. 2002). Thus, we also calculated Brennan and

5. As the Austrian party „Liste Pilz” is not included in CHES, we used the estimate provided by the AUTNES Multi Model Panel Study 2017 (Kritzinger et al. 2018) and rescaled this to comparable CHES scores.

Prediger's kappa, a measure that is more robust for assessing agreement of variables that are not well-distributed (Quarfoot and Levine 2016). Here, coefficients showed acceptable scores (0.69; 0.82, and 0.84 respectively). Percentage agreement ranged from 0.79 to 0.99.⁶

7. Results

7.1 Descriptive results

Of all 2,921 postings, about nine percent of the postings ($n = 276$) mentioned a second media outlet, resulting in a total of 3,197 references to a media outlet or a journalist. Of these, 54% stem from Austrian and about 46% from German politicians.

Of all 3,197 references to the media, only 6.1% ($n = 195$) included media criticism. As seen in Figure 1, in the majority of the cases (65.2%), politicians mentioned the media in the context of their own appearances in news coverage, followed by postings mentioning the media appearance of members of other parties (28.1%). Interestingly, the analyzed social media postings more often included a positive evaluation of journalistic performance (16.7%) compared to a negative evaluation (i.e., media criticism). Very rarely, politicians emphasized the democratic relevance of journalism (2.9%) or discussed the abolition or reformation of public service fees (0.9%).

Figure 1. Overview types of references to the media ($N = 3,197$)

6. All scores can be seen in Appendix D.

7.2 Delegitimizing media criticism

Our first interest was the extent to which media criticism by politicians can be characterized as delegitimizing (RQ1). Of the 195 posts including media criticism, about 41% count as delegitimizing (2.5% of all references to the media). Most of these expressed criticisms (93.7%) were delegitimizing on one level: media criticism was either characterized by incivility (56.3%) or absence of argumentation (50%), while 6.3% were delegitimizing on both levels.

Next, we looked at the prevalence of fake news accusations in comparison to other issues raised in politicians’ delegitimizing media criticism (RQ2). As seen in Figure 2, when politicians use delegitimizing media criticism, they most often accuse the media of being biased towards specific parties or ideologies (65%), followed by attributions of disinformation (35%), accusations of non-partisan bias (27.5%), and criticism concerning journalistic quality (23.8%). Attributions of misinformation, on the other hand, are rarely used (2.5%). In 19 postings (23.8%), politicians use the fake news label specifically against news media. Mostly it is used by populist politicians (18 out of 19 cases), directed at the media in general (9 cases), or public service broadcasting and quality newspapers (7 cases). In only three postings, politicians used it to attack commercial TV and tabloid newspapers, while it is never used against alternative news.

Figure 2. Issues of delegitimizing media criticism and media criticism in general

Overall, media criticism is rather rare in politicians’ references to the media and of the present criticisms, not even half count as delegitimizing. The fake news label is scarcely expressed and almost exclusively by populists.

7.3 Determinants of delegitimizing media criticism

To assess the influence of the discussed determinants on the presence of delegitimizing media criticism, we calculate penalized logistic regression models. Additionally, we analyzed whether these factors also determine the usage of media criticism in general. Models are presented in Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix E.^{7,8,9}

We predicted that populist politicians are more likely to use delegitimizing media criticism (H1). The populist actors in our sample indeed used significantly more delegitimizing media criticism ($b=1.34$, $SE=.49$, $p<.01$), as well as significantly more media criticism in general ($b=1.11$, $SE=.27$, $p<.01$), than non-populist actors, as is shown in Figure 3 (see also model 4 in Table 1 and 2). We, thus, find support for H1. Furthermore, as these results show that populist actors are a strong determinant of (delegitimizing) media criticism, we also consider how populist actors matter for the two other determinants and include interaction effects between populist actors and addressed media types and campaign period, respectively.

Next, we hypothesized that most delegitimizing media criticism is expressed towards the media in general (H2). The results indicate that the media in general were significantly more often addressed with delegitimizing media criticism as well as media criticism in general than specific media types. More specifically, as seen in Figure 3, compared to the media in general, public service broadcasting (PSB) and quality newspapers (delegitimizing: $b=-1.84$, $SE=.28$, $p<.001$; general: $b=-2.31$, $SE=.21$, $p<.001$), commercial TV stations and tabloid newspapers (delegitimizing: $b=-3.25$, $SE=.50$, $p<.001$; general: $b=-3.51$, $SE=.34$, $p<.001$) and alternative news outlet (delegitimizing: $b=-2.04$, $SE=.60$, $p<.01$; general: $b=-3.30$, $SE=.53$, $p<.001$) all received significantly less (delegitimizing) media criticism (see also model 4 in Table 1 and 2). Thus, the findings lend support for H2.

7. As there are only 80 instances of delegitimizing media criticism in our sample (compared to 3,117 references to the media not including delegitimizing media criticism), we used penalized logistic regression analysis, a method to calculate logistic regressions for rare events (King and Zeng 2001).

8. We tested each determinant separately as well as controlled for the other determinants. Presented are the coefficients of the model controlling for all determinants.

9. Our research focus was not to investigate country differences. However, to test for robustness, we analyzed both countries separately. For media criticism in general the results are almost completely the same. For delegitimizing media criticism – probably due to a statistical power problem – we see that the direction of the effects remains the same, however, the effects are mostly not significant anymore. All analyses can be found in Appendix F.

Figure 3. Effect plot of determinants of delegitimizing media criticism and media criticism in general (based on Model 4 of Table 1 and 2, Appendix E)

Furthermore, we tested whether there are differences between populist and non-populist actors in the media outlets they criticize. Figure 4 shows the marginal effects of populist actors for the different media outlets (based on the analyses in model 5 of Table 1 and 2). It shows that populist actors significantly more often criticize the media in general (delegitimizing: $b = 1.89$, $SE = .76$, $p < .05$; general: $b = 1.70$, $SE = .44$, $p < .001$) and the quality media and PSB (delegitimizing: $b = 1.34$, $SE = .53$, $p < .05$; general: $b = .99$, $SE = .30$, $p < .01$), while they significantly less often express (delegitimizing) media criticism towards alternative media than non-populist actors (delegitimizing: $b = -2.31$, $SE = 1.13$, $p < .05$; general: $b = -2.01$, $SE = .95$, $p < .05$). There are no differences between populists and non-populists in their use of media criticism against tabloid news (delegitimizing: $b = 1.83$, $SE = 1.54$, $p > .05$; general: $b = .75$, $SE = .73$, $p > .05$).

Lastly, we expected that politicians use less delegitimizing media criticism during campaign periods (H3). As Figure 3 shows, the presence of a campaign period does not have a significant effect on either delegitimizing media criticism ($b = .36$, $SE = .30$, $p > .05$) or media criticism in general ($b = .003$, $SE = .20$, $p > .05$). This means that politicians equally often criticize the media (in a delegitimizing way) during campaign periods as in times of routine politics. These findings do not lend support for H3.

Figure 4. Effects of populist actors on delegitimizing media criticism and media criticism in general for each media type (based on Model 5 of Table 1 and 2, Appendix E)

We additionally tested whether the effect of campaign periods on (delegitimizing) media criticism is moderated by populist actors. Figure 5 shows the marginal effects of campaign periods on (delegitimizing) media criticism for populist vs. non-populist actors (based on the analyses in model 6 of Table 1 and 2). The figure shows that the impact of the campaign period of the expression of (delegitimizing) media criticism is not significant, both for populist (delegitimizing: $b = .46$, $SE = .33$, $p > .05$; general: $b = .17$, $SE = .23$, $p > .05$) and non-populist actors (delegitimizing: $b = .1$, $SE = .57$, $p > .05$, general: $b = -.39$, $SE = .38$, $p > .05$).

Figure 5. Effects of campaign period on delegitimizing media criticism and media criticism in general for populist and non-populist actors (based on Model 6 of Table 1 and 2, Appendix E)

8. Conclusion

Media criticism plays an essential role in democracies. Recently, however, worries about the nature of publicly expressed media criticism by politicians have been growing (Reporters without Borders 2018). To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first systematic analysis of media criticism expressed by populist and

non-populist politicians. We find that media criticism is rather rare – compared to positive and neutral references to the media – and that less than half of it is delegitimizing. However, most media criticism (delegitimizing or not) is voiced by populist politicians and directed at the media in general. The presence of an election campaign does not affect the amount of (delegitimizing) media criticism, both for populist and non-populist actors. The most frequently used grounds for (delegitimizing) media criticism are partisan bias accusations and accusations of mis- or disinformation. The fake news label itself is rather rarely used by German and Austrian politicians.

This paper contributes to existing research in several ways. First, our findings show that in relation to all media references, Austrian and German politicians do not use delegitimizing media criticism – as well as the much-discussed phrase “fake news” – very often. This suggests that harsh media criticism and the usage of the fake news label by politicians may be less prevalent in the western European context than in the US. This finding is consistent with comparative research that suggests that the US represents a very specific case, characterized by relatively low levels of media trust, high levels of polarization and fragmentation, where media are not only regularly confronted with hostility by their political leader but also by social media users in general (Humprecht, Esser, and Van Aelst 2020; Humprecht, Hellmueller, and Lischka 2020). Thus, our findings suggest that worries about increasing delegitimizing media criticism by politicians might rather be a result of the salient discussions of US events than actual growth of attacks outside the US context (Egelhofer et al. 2020). Importantly, in this context, two incidents where Austrian politicians indeed have used the fake news label against news media resulted in lawsuits (Die Presse 2017) – demonstrating that acceptance for these forms of media criticism is low in the German-speaking context.

However, while politicians’ delegitimizing media criticism is relatively low on social media, it still might have consequences. For example, harsh media attacks by populists likely generate a lot of media coverage (Denner and Peter 2017; Egelhofer et al. 2020) – thereby reaching a large audience. As research indicates that citizens are influenced by media criticism of other social media users (Naab et al. 2020) as well as the news coverage of politicians’ criticism (Guess et al. 2018), even a few incidents of delegitimizing media criticism might decrease levels of media trust and foster polarization of media diets between citizens with populist and non-populist attitudes. Future research on the (long-term) effects of politicians’ delegitimizing media criticism is thus urgently needed (see also Fawzi 2020). Furthermore, we see a need for research on the effects of such media criticism on journalists. More specifically, studies are needed that investigate to which forms of media criticism journalists are willing to respond to and act on (considering that the goal of media criticism should be improving journalistic coverage;

Fawzi 2020; Wyatt 2007; 2019) and to which forms journalists react with coping strategies that are harmful to journalism such as self-censorship (e.g., Chen et al. 2020; Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring 2016).

Second, our findings show that *when* delegitimizing media criticism occurs, it is mostly populist politicians who use it. Here, our findings are in line with research that suggests that populists use more media criticism than non-populist actors and especially express negative views towards public service broadcasters, quality news media, and importantly against the media in general, while they barely criticize alternative news outlets (Engesser et al. 2016; Meeks 2020; Van Dalen 2019). Furthermore, our findings indeed indicate that the fake news label can be considered populist terminology. This complements research that suggests that populists have an inherently ideological view about truth – in which they (and the people) know and tell the “real” truth while the establishment or elites spread lies, disinformation – and “fake news” (Hameleers 2020a; 2020b; Waisbord 2018). At the same time, our results also show that the populist actors in our sample more often refer to the media neutrally or positively than they criticize them – underlining the populists’ “paradoxical” relationship with the media (Fawzi 2020; Haller and Holt 2018).

Lastly, we provide an operational definition of what forms of media criticism may be considered harmful in democratic politics and apply these to empirical data. In doing so, we follow previous calls in the field to strengthen the normative orientation of empirical political communication research (see Althaus 2012). Moreover, we embed the much-debated fake news label into the broader framework of delegitimizing media criticism. Thereby this study adds to the literature on fake news, which is heavily focused on disinformation (Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019), and complements research that acknowledges the importance of studying the discursive use of the term “fake news” (e.g., Farhall et al. 2020; Farkas and Schou 2018). In this context, we show that the rallying cry “fake news” coined by Donald Trump has indeed been appropriated by politicians outside the US – however, only rarely and by a limited group of actors (see also Farhall et al. 2020).

Naturally, our study has caveats. First, we present findings of politicians’ media references on Facebook. While we consider Facebook a most likely case to find politicians’ media criticism – being the most used social medium for news in Austria and Germany (Newman et al. 2018), providing politicians with unfiltered direct communication possibilities – we cannot make comparisons with other social media platforms or other digital forms of communication where politicians might voice their media criticism. It might also be the case that delegitimizing media criticism in Austria and Germany is not primarily expressed by politicians directly – but more so by hyper-partisan media (e.g., Figenschou and Ihlebæk 2019; Van Dalen 2019). Furthermore, our analysis focused on the con-

tent of politicians' social media postings and did not consider the user reactions. Future research could analyze how delegitimizing media criticism on social media engages users – for example, whether incivility in elites' media criticism leads to more uncivil user comments or even hate-speech towards journalists.

In sum, this study offers new insights on the discussions about the politicians' relationship to the media and represents an important building block for future studies on delegitimizing media criticism.

Funding

This research was funded with a Supporting Grant from the University of Vienna ("Förderungsstipendium")

Acknowledgements

We thank Johann Gründl for kindly providing us with the Facebook data.

References

- Aalberg, Toril, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck, and Claes De Vreese, (eds). 2016. *Populist political communication in Europe*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623016>
- Aaldering, Loes, and Rens Vliegenthart. 2016. "Political leaders and the media. Can we measure political leadership images in newspapers using computer-assisted content analysis?". *Quality & Quantity* 50, no. 5: 1871–1905. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-015-0242-9>
- Althaus, Scott L. 2012. "What's good and bad in political communication research? Normative standards for evaluating media and citizen performance." In *The SAGE handbook of political communication*, ed. by Holli A. Semetko, and Margaret Scammell, 97–112, London: SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446201015.n9>
- Bakker, Ryan, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Vachudova. 2020. "2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey". Available on chesdata.eu. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
- Bickford, Susan. 2011. "Emotion talk and political judgment." *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 4: 1025–1037. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381611000740>
- Carey, James W. 1974. "Journalism and criticism: The case of an undeveloped profession." *The Review of Politics* 36, no. 2: 227–249. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500022579>
- Carlson, Matt. 2009. "Media criticism as competitive discourse: Defining reportage of the Abu Ghraib scandal." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 33, 3: 258–277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859909333693>

- Carlson, Matt. 2016. "Embedded Links, Embedded Meanings: Social media commentary and news sharing as mundane media criticism." *Journalism Studies* 17, no. 7: 915–924. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1169210>
- Carlson, Matt. 2017. *Journalistic authority: Legitimizing news in the digital era*. Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/carl17444>
- Cheruiyot, David. 2018. "Popular Criticism That Matters: Journalists' perspectives of 'quality' media critique." *Journalism Practice* 12, no. 8: 1008–1018. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1494511>
- Cheruiyot, D. 2019. *Criticising Journalism: Popular Media Criticism in the Digital Age* (Doctoral dissertation, Karlstads universitet).
- Coe, Kevin, Kate Kenski, and Stephen A. Rains. 2014. "Online and uncivil? Patterns and determinants of incivility in newspaper website comments." *Journal of Communication* 64, no. 4: 658–679. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12104>
- Dahlgren, Peter. 2005. "The Internet, public spheres, and political communication: Dispersion and deliberation." *Political Communication* 22, no. 2: 147–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600590933160>
- Denner, Nora, and Christina Peter. 2017. „Der Begriff Lügenpresse in deutschen Tageszeitungen.“ [The term lying press in German newspapers]. *Publizistik* 62, no. 3: 273–297. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-017-0354-4>
- Die Presse. (2017, July 3). "Pröll-Privatstiftung: Zivilprozess um 'Fake News'-Vorwurf" [Pröll Private Foundation: Civil Suit Over 'fake News' Accusation]. https://www.diepresse.com/5245707/proell-privatstiftung-zivilprozess-um-fake-news-vorwurf?direct=5252669%26_vl_backlink%3D%2Fhome%2Finnenpolitik%2F5252669%2Findex.do%26selChannel%3D
- Farkas, Johan, and Jannick Schou. 2018. "Fake news as a floating signifier: Hegemony, antagonism and the politics of falsehood." *Javnost-The Public* 25, no. 3: 298–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1463047>
- Eberl, Jakob-Moritz, Hajo Boomgaarden, and Markus Wagner. 2017. "One bias fits all? Three types of media bias and their effects on party preferences." *Communication Research* 44, no. 8: 1125–1148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215614364>
- Egelhofer, Jana Laura, Loes Aaldering, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Sebastian Galyga, and Sophie Lecheler. 2020. "From novelty to normalization? How journalists use the term 'fake news' in their reporting." *Journalism Studies* 21, no. 10, 1323–1343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1745667>
- Egelhofer, Jana Laura and Sophie Lecheler. 2019. "Fake news as a two-dimensional phenomenon: a framework and research agenda." *Annals of the International Communication Association* 43, no. 2: 97–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2019.1602782>
- Engesser, Sven, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser and Florin Büchel. 2016. "Populism and social media: How politicians spread a fragmented ideology." *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 8: 1109–1126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1207697>
- Ernst, Nicole, Sven Engesser, Florin Büchel, Sina Blassnig, and Frank Esser. 2017. "Extreme parties and populism: an analysis of Facebook and Twitter across six countries." *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 9: 1347–1364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1329333>
- Farhall, Kate, Andrea Carson, Scott Wright, Andrew Gibbons, and William Lukamto. 2019. "Political Elites' Use of Fake News Discourse Across Communications Platforms." *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019): 4353–4375.

- Fawzi, Nayla. 2019. "Untrustworthy news and the media as 'enemy of the people?' How a populist worldview shapes recipients' attitudes toward the media." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 24, no. 2: 146–164. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161218811981>
- Fawzi, Nayla. 2020. "Right-Wing Populist Media Criticism." In *Perspectives on Populism and the Media*, ed. by Benjamin Krämer and Christina Holtz-Bacha, 39–56. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845297392-39>
- Figenschou, Tine Ustad and Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk. 2019. "Challenging Journalistic Authority: Media criticism in far-right alternative media." *Journalism Studies* 20, no. 9: 1221–1237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1500868>
- Friess, Dennis, and Christiane Eilders. 2015. "A systematic review of online deliberation research." *Policy & Internet* 7, no. 3: 319–339. <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.95>
- Guess, Andrew, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2017. "'You're fake news!' The 2017 Poynter media trust survey." Retrieved from <https://poyntercdn.blob.core.windows.net/files/PoynterMediaTrustSurvey2017.pdf>
- Gründl, Johann. 2020. "Populist ideas on social media: A dictionary-based measurement of populist communication." *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820976970>
- Hameleers, Michael. 2020a. "My Reality Is More Truthful Than Yours: Radical Right-Wing Politicians' and Citizens' Construction of 'Fake' and 'Truthfulness' on Social Media – Evidence From the United States and The Netherlands." *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020): 1135–1152.
- Hameleers, Michael. 2020b. "Populist disinformation: Exploring intersections between online populism and disinformation in the US and the Netherlands." *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 1: 146–157. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i1.2478>
- Haller, André and Kristoffer Holt. 2019. "Paradoxical populism: How PEGIDA relates to mainstream and alternative media." *Information, Communication & Society* 22, no. 12: 1665–1680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1449882>
- Holt, Kristoffer, and André Haller. 2017. "What Does 'Lügenpresse' Mean? Expressions of Media Distrust on PEGIDA's Facebook Pages." *Politik* 20, no. 4: 42–57. <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v20i4.101534>
- Humprecht, Edda, Frank Esser, and Peter Van Aelst. 2020. "Resilience to online disinformation: A framework for cross-national comparative research." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 25, no. 3: 493–516. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219900126>
- Humprecht, Edda, Lea Hellmueller, and Juliane A. Lischka. 2020. "Hostile Emotions in News Comments: A Cross-National Analysis of Facebook Discussions." *Social Media+ Society* 6, no.1: 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120912481>
- Jagers, Jan and Stefaan Walgrave. 2007. "Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*" 46, no. 3: 319–345. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00690.x>
- Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, Allyson Volinsky, Ilana Weitz, and Kate Kenski. 2017. "The political uses and abuses of civility and incivility." *The Oxford handbook of political communication*, ed. by Kate Kenski and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, 205–218, Oxford University Press.
- King, Gary and Langche Zeng. 2001. "Logistic regression in rare events data." *Political analysis* 9, no. 2: 137–163. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.pan.a004868>

- Kritzinger, Sylvia, Julian Aichholzer, Nico Büttner, Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Thomas Meyer, Carolina Plescia, Markus Wagner, Davide Morisi, Hajo Boomgaarden and Wolfgang C. Müller. 2018. "AUTNES Multi-Mode Panel Study 2017" – Documentation. Vienna: AUSSDA. <https://doi.org/10.11587/NXDDPE>
- Ladd, Jonathan M. 2012. *Why Americans hate the media and how it matters*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400840359>
- Lakoff, George. Interviewed by Kurtzleben, Danielle. 2017 (February 17). "With 'Fake News,' Trump Moves from Alternative Facts to Alternative Language." <https://www.npr.org/2017/02/17/515630467/with-fake-news-trump-moves-from-alternative-facts-to-alternative-language>
- Lischka, Juliane. 2019. "A badge of honor? How The New York Times discredits President Trump's fake news accusations." *Journalism Studies* 20, no. 2: 287–304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1375385>
- Löfgren Nilsson, Monica, and Henrik Örnebring. 2016. "Journalism under threat: Intimidation and harassment of Swedish journalists." *Journalism Practice* 10, no. 7: 880–890. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1164614>
- Lombard, Mathew, Jennifer Snyder-Duch, and Cheryl Bracken. 2002. "Content analysis in mass communication: Assessment and reporting of intercoder reliability." *Human communication research* 28, no. 4: 587–604. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00826.x>
- Masullo Chen, Gina, and Shuning Lu. 2017. "Online political discourse: Exploring differences in effects of civil and uncivil disagreement in news website comments." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 61, 1: 108–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2016.1273922>
- Masullo Chen, Gina, Paromita Pain, Victoria Y. Chen, Madlin Mekelburg, Nina Springer, and Franziska Troger. 2020. "'You really have to have a thick skin': A cross-cultural perspective on how online harassment influences female journalists." *Journalism* 21, no. 7, 877–895. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918768500>
- Maurer, Marcus, Pablo Jost, Jörg Haßler, and Simon Kruschinski. 2019. „Auf den Spuren der Lügenpresse.“ [On the trail of the liar press]. *Publizistik* 64, no. 1: 15–35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-018-00466-y>
- Meeks, Lindsey. 2020. "Defining the Enemy: How Donald Trump Frames the News Media." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 97, no. 1: 211–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699019857676>
- Mudde, Cas. 2004. "The populist zeitgeist." *Government and opposition* 39, no. 4: 541–563. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>
- Naab, Teresa K., Dominique Heinbach, Marc Ziegele, and Marie-Theres Grasberger. 2020. "Comments and credibility: how critical user comments decrease perceived news article credibility." *Journalism Studies* 21, no. 6: 783–801. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1724181>
- Newman, Nic, Richard Fletcher, Antonis Kalogeropoulos, David Levy, and Rasmus K. Nielsen. 2018. "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018."
- Newman, Nic, Richard Fletcher, Antonis Kalogeropoulos, and Rasmus K. Nielsen. 2019. "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019."
- Otto, Lukas P., Sophie Lecheler, and Andreas RT Schuck. 2020. "Is context the key? The (non-) differential effects of mediated incivility in three European countries." *Political Communication* 37, 1: 88–107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1663324>

- Prochazka, Fabian, Patrick Weber, and Wolfgang Schweiger. 2018. "Effects of civility and reasoning in user comments on perceived journalistic quality." *Journalism Studies* 19, no. 1: 62–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1161497>
- Quarfoot, David, and Richard A. Levine. 2016. "How robust are multirater interrater reliability indices to changes in frequency distribution?" *The American Statistician* 70, no. 4: 373–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00031305.2016.1141708>
- Reporters without Borders (2018). RSF Index 2018: "Hatred of journalism threatens democracies." Retrieved from <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-index-2018-hatred-journalism-threatens-democracies>
- Reporters without Borders (2019). "2019 World Press Freedom Index."
- Rooduijn, Matthijs, Stijn Van Kessel, Caterina Froio, Andrea Pirro, Sarah De Lange, Daphne Halikiopoulou, Paul Lewis, Cas Mudde, and Paul Taggart. 2019. "The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe." www.popu-list.org
- Schulz, Anne, Werner Wirth, and Philipp Müller. 2018. "We are the people and you are fake news: A social identity approach to populist citizens' false consensus and hostile media perceptions." *Communication Research* 47, no. 2: 201–226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650218794854>
- Sobieraj, Sarah, and Jeffrey B. Berry. 2011. "From incivility to outrage: Political discourse in blogs, talk radio, and cable news." *Political Communication* 28, no. 1: 19–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2010.542360>
- Solis, Jonathan A., and Iñaki Sagarzazu. 2020. "The Media Smells like Sulfur!!! Leaders and Verbal Attacks against the Fourth Estate in Unconsolidated Democracies." *Political Communication* 37, no. 1: 20–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1660440>
- Tsfati, Yariv and Jonathan Cohen. 2005. "Democratic Consequences of Hostile Media Perceptions: The Case of Gaza Settlers." *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 10, no. 4: 28–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X05280776>
- Van Aelst, Peter, Jesper Strömbäck, Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Claes De Vreese, Jörg Matthes, David Hopmann et al. 2017. "Political communication in a high-choice media environment: a challenge for democracy?" *Annals of the International Communication Association* 41, no. 1: 3–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2017.1288551>
- Van Dalen, Arjen. 2019. "Rethinking journalist–politician relations in the age of populism: How outsider politicians delegitimize mainstream journalists." *Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919887822>
- Waisbord, Silvio. 2018. "The elective affinity between post-truth communication and populist politics." *Communication Research and Practice* 4, no. 1: 17–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2018.1428928>
- Wyatt, Wendy. N. 2007. *Critical conversations: A theory of press criticism*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Wyatt, Wendy. N. 2019. "Press criticism" *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*, ed. by Tim P. Vos and Folker Hanusch, 1–9, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Address for correspondence

Jana Laura Egelhofer
 Department of Communication
 University of Vienna
 Kolingasse 14-16
 A-1090 Vienna
jana.laura.egelhofer@univie.ac.at

Biographical notes

Jana Laura Egelhofer is a PhD candidate in political communication at the Department of Communication, University of Vienna. Her research interests include fake news and disinformation, media criticism, political journalism, and populist communication. Her work has been published in international journals such as *Annals of the International Communication Association* and *Journalism Studies*.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7090-8319>

Loes Aaldering is an assistant professor in Comparative Politics at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of the VU Amsterdam. Her research mainly focuses on issues related to gender and politics, political leadership, political representation and electoral behavior. More specifically, she studies, among other things, how politicians are discussed in the media in terms of their leadership traits; gender differences in media coverage of politicians; (mediated) leadership effects on voters; political gendered stereotypes; fake news, news avoidance and polarization.

Sophie Lecheler is Professor of Political Communication at the Department of Communication Science, University of Vienna. Her research focuses on political journalism, digitalisation of news, emotions, and experimental methods. She previously worked at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR) and the LSE's Department of Government. Her work has been published in a wide range of international journals, such as *Political Communication*, *Political Psychology*, *Communication Research*, *Journal of Communication*, and *New Media & Society*. She is currently Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Press/Politics* and editorial board member of several high-ranking journals.

Publication history

Date received: 5 August 2020
 Date accepted: 12 May 2021
 Published online: 15 June 2021