MIHNEA S. STOICA

POPULIST POLITICAL ADVERTISING IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC: FRAMING ELITES AS ANTI-RELIGIOUS

Mihnea S. Stoica
Babes-Bolyai University, Department of Communication, Public Relations, and Advertising, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: mihnea.stoica@ubbcluj.ro; stoica@fspac.ro

Abstract: Scientific literature has repeatedly shown that populism feeds on crises, exploiting divisions which grow within societies. Populist narratives that flourished during the COVID-19 pandemic argued that the health crisis is yet another pretext for the "corrupt, globalist elites" to strip "the honest citizens" of their fundamental values, amongst which those of religious nature. In Romania, the nationalist conservative Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) won 9 percent of the votes in the parliamentary elections held in December 2020. A newcomer in Romanian politics, AUR vowed to rest its political action on four main pillars, i.e. family, nationhood, faith and liberty – all of them strong religious symbols. Moreover, in its political programme, AUR claims to fight against the persecution that Christianity has allegedly been subjected to in recent decades. The current paper looks into how AUR used political advertising in social media to frame elites as anti-religious, thus illegitimate to represent Romanians or to influence national politics. It is usually that the party's scapegoating strategy targets high-profile national or supranational political figures (most often European Union officials or institutions), blamed for their loose, if not severed, connections with ordinary citizens. The study also shows that during a crisis, populist political advertising makes extensive use of its religious dimension.

Key words: populism, political advertising, pandemic, Euroscepticism, framing, religion, social media, content analysis, ATLAS.ti.

Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies, vol. 20, issue 60 (Winter 2021): 115-127..
ISSN: 1583-0039

1. Introduction. Populism during crises

It has become a commonplace that populism performs exceedingly well during times of crisis (Stavrakakis et al. 2018, 6), and the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Despite its inconsistencies and paradoxes (Brubaker 2021, 74), the populist narrative has gained yet again adherents around many countries in the European Union. With very few exceptions, parliamentary elections organized during 2020 (after the outburst of the pandemic) and throughout 2021 had either reinforced support for existing populist parties, or had allowed new political forces with a strong populist rhetoric to gain an important number of votes. The latter was also the case of Romania, where an almost obscure party, entitled "The Alliance for the Unity of Romania" (AUR) received 9 per cent of the votes during the elections organized in December 2020.

The success of AUR was mainly attributed to popular discontent with the poor management of the health crisis by national authorities, but other factors also contributed significantly to the surprising electoral support for this new party. It is important to note that AUR managed to fill a political void: ever since Greater Romania Party (PRM) and Partidul Poporului Dan Diaconescu (PPDD) succumbed, and the Social Democratic Party (PSD) has shifted towards a more pro-European discourse, the radical conservative and Eurosceptic electorate was left without political representation. As such, AUR seemed to be the natural choice for that part of the electorate who tends to accept the populist narrative presenting politics as conflict between the ordinary 'People' and the elites (Stoica et al. 2021). Moreover, AUR conducted an unprecedented campaign in Romanian politics, using social media as its main vehicle for political advertising. In fact, the party was almost totally absent from mainstream and traditional media throughout the entire electoral campaign, which only added to its staggering electoral result. However, its aggressive, systematic and regimented use of social media allowed AUR to target its potential voters, with whom the party would engage in lively discussions either through the comments section or via personal messaging, thus giving voters the feeling of empathy, in sharp opposition to how political communication was conducted by mainstream parties.

Several studies pointed out that the electorate of AUR is strongly conservative, opposing same-sex marriage and abortion rights, and exhibiting a critical attitude towards the European Union. Moreover, recent academic research also shows that those who casted their ballot for AUR are also positively associated with the belief that churches should be kept open during the pandemic (Stoica et al. 2021).

2. Populist Political Advertising during the Pandemic

Populism is a political communication super-strategy (Stoica 2017, 19) that presents politics as a struggle between the many, honest but powerless People on the one side, and the few, diabolical and powerful elites on the other side (Hawkins & Kaltwasser 2017, 523). It is a super-strategy because populism employs not one, but a variety of communication practices to ensure that its messages reach the desired publics, many a times by touching a chord with the disenchanted electorate, whom it promises to empower. But despite claiming to fight for the many, populism is considered to represent a threat for liberal democracy (Rummens 2017, 19) given its commitment to remove intermediary structures that ensure political representation, its inclination towards rejecting diversity, and its worship for a Messianic leader. It is in this sense that scholars consider populism to be a political pathology (Taggart 2002; Akkerman 2003, 155), or even a nonsense, a dangerous illusion (Pantazopoulos 2017, 209).

Political advertising is defined as a form of communication that allows political actors to exert total control over how their ideas are exposed to the electorate (Kaid 2004, 155). This type of advertising gives political actors the possibility to promote symbols that appeal to both individual and collective memories, by presenting themselves as genuine representatives of the community (Frunză 2014, 149), and thus legitimising their ideological discourse (Costea 2021, 52). Perceptions over political advertising divide the scientific community: while some researchers celebrate political advertising for its ability to enhance voters' knowledge on political competitors and interest in the campaign (Altkin & Heald 1976, 217), other scholars warn about its dangerous effects. Most of the criticism refers to the non-sophisticated messages that political advertising conveys, its often lack of accuracy, as well as its temptation to lean on negative stereotyping, which can create an advantage for populist narratives (Arendt et al. 2015, 183). In general, the most relevant aspect that lies at the heart of advertising is the narrative, which is anything but neutral, and the reality it depicts is as important as the one it chooses to leave aside (Frunză 2015, 75). Therefore, political advertising can represent the perfect embedding for the oversimplification practiced by populism. Based on previous research related to populist narratives (Stoica 2017), we consider populist political advertising to represent a specific form of political advertising that heavily relies on anti-elitism, with an implicit or explicit reference to conspiracy theories.

Growing on the already-existent pre-pandemic frustration and even cynicism related to politicians and decision-making processes, the COVID-19 pandemic has further altered perceptions over the performance and efficiency of national or supranational political structures (Flinders 2021, 483). In many cases, poor public communication fuelled disbelief in the

competence, fairness or even honesty of authorities. In addition, perceptions over the life-threatening nature of the pandemic and the spread of the virus were influenced by a growing number of alternative lines of knowledge circulation, often contradicting official statements and thus adding to the anti-elite sentiment (Abraham 2011). Thus, the unfolding of the crisis pulled together a favourable context for the emergence of new populist narratives, which depicted the pandemic as yet another situation that divides society in two antagonistic groups, i.e. „the People" on the one side and "the elites" on the other. More specifically, the pandemic resurfaced what scholars referred to "medical populism" – a form of populism advancing narratives that oversimplified the effects of the pandemic, forged new divisions within society, dramatized the crisis, or invoked knowledge claims that often legitimized fake news (Lasco 2020, 1419).

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed political advertising to rely heavily on online channels of communication, and social media proved to be an absolute favourite in this sense. But even before the current sanitary crisis, there has been much debate over the affinity of populist narratives for social media. Populism was considered to be twice hybrid, in the sense that it makes use of an interaction between old and new media, as well as between online and offline sites of communication. However, the experience of AUR in Romania is blatantly at odds with the pre-pandemic belief that populists do not operate in a vacuum or a bubble (Postill 2018, 762). Quite on the contrary, AUR used social media almost exclusively to communicate its main ideas during the electoral campaign of 2020, having been completely absent from national (traditional) media. Facebook penetration in Romania is significant: 12 million users in a country with a population of roughly 19 million. As such, AUR's focus exclusively on social media proved to be the safest bet, confirming yet again that populist narratives find a propitious space on social media (Gerbaudo 2018, 747).

Using largely Facebook, AUR sent implicit anti-system messages, victimizing itself for not having access to national media. In fact, through Facebook, AUR did nothing but to gather and grow a very disciplined political community, an online crowd used for multiplying its messages (Garbaudo 2018, 751). Throughout 2020, the Facebook fan page of AUR reflected their efforts of setting up local organisations in many counties around Romania, as well as recruiting new members - mostly figures with little notoriety, but with a strong anti-system rhetoric and willingness to fight the cause of the party. Calls to action were also very frequent, either to join the party organisations around Romania, to join protests against governmental restrictions or to announce the party caravan around the country. Social media was also frequently used to organize live chats, in which the party leader George Simion would "answer any question" of users who would call in, usually people who fit the general profile of the AUR voters.

3. Political framing of the elites in populist narratives

Framing has been extensively researched and therefore scientific literature abounds in definitions (Neuman et al. 1992; Entman 1993; Price et al. 1997). What political framing does is to present a specific event or the general political context in such a way that it promotes a particular view that is beneficial to the political actor advancing it. Political frames are intended to alter public perceptions over who is responsible for the political situation that is discussed. In fact, scholars in the field consider framing to be inevitable for "mediated democracies" (Nisbet et al. 2003, 38) and have even identified the most prevalent frames used in the media, i.e. the conflict frame, the economic consequences frame, the human interest frame, the morality frame, and the responsibility frame (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 96).

Scholars have also recently coined the concept of *anti-elitist populism*, which represents a political communication phenomenon that features intense appeals against elites (De Vreese et al. 2018, 426). Much more than other types of populism, this one constructs the image of the elites as the establishment that holds together the existing "corrupt" political system. Scientific literature points to the fact that anti-elitist populism is used especially by political actors trying to make a name for themselves (De Vreese et al. 2018, 428), which is exactly what AUR looks for, given its almost unheard of existence before the elections of 2020.

Moreover, by constantly criticising the President, the Prime-Minister and other Members of the Cabinet, as well as Members of the Romanian and European Parliament, mainly representatives of mainstream or progressive parties, AUR seeks to create for itself an aura of political saintliness, characterised by a selfless engagement in fighting societal injustice - in sharp contrast with national and supranational elites. Therefore, the party poses as a whistleblower, allegedly uncovering truths that are hidden from public opinion, the ignoring of which is very harmful for the wellbeing of the People. The implicit argument is that removing these elites through popular upheaval or at the voting booths will give way to Romania's "golden age", a synonym of the populist heartland (Taggart 2004; Priester 2012; Engesser et al. 2017).

4. Anti-elite populism in Romania: consolidating the Eurosceptic narrative

Romanian populism has had a particular historical development after the fall of communism. While in many former socialist countries populism championed anti-EU discourse, Romanian populist narratives were rather

favorable towards the European Union (Corbu et al. 2017, 328). Until 2016, the most relevant populist parties were *Greater Romania Party* (PRM) and *Partidul Poporului Dan Diaconescu* (PPDD) - both of which rode the popular wave of Euro-enthusiasm in Romania. In fact, so favorable was PRM towards the EU that for a few months it had changed its name to *Greater Romania People's Party* (PPRM), in an attempt to befriend and then join the *European People's Party*, a plan that eventually failed. The favorable tone of Romanian populism towards the EU became rather *passe* once the *Social Democratic Party* (PSD) decided to engulf the nationalist discourse of these parties after 2016 and enhance it with an anti-European dimension which grew stronger by the year. PSD had actually tested its Eurosceptic narrative to a breaking point during the 2019 elections for the European Parliament, when it claimed "Romania deserves more respect from the EU". In line with his party, the former leader of PSD Liviu Dragnea described the European Union as a colonial power aiming to "drain Romania of its resources". Soon after losing both the EU elections and the race for the President of the Republic, PSD changed its leadership, loosened its nationalist discourse and dismissed its Eurosceptic stances. This left enough space on the political arena for a new populist nationalist party to pick up Euroscepticism, and this new party was AUR.

In contrast to its predecessors (i.e. PRM and PPDD), AUR exhibits a violent Eurosceptic discourse. The party builds its anti-elitism by pointing fingers at EU institutions: for example, AUR considered that the European Commission should be held accountable for the restrictions put in place during Christmas and thus "forcing Romanians to celebrate Christmas online". In fact, the Eurosceptic discourse seems to be directly connected to AUR's objective of protecting Christian values. In its manifesto, the party claims to rest its doctrine on four main pillars: family, homeland, faith, and freedom. In accordance with the party's manifesto, *faith* is a symbol that encompasses Christianity, the church, traditions and the Romanian nation. Therefore, AUR poses as a relentless defender of Christian values, openly declaring its conservative political orientation. As such, AUR opposes the European Union as it is today (and especially the federalist tendencies of the EU) and favours what their manifesto calls "a Europe of nations". The party strongly positions itself against "a federal superstate with a single capital, a single government and a single Parliament", which in the eyes of AUR resembles "a socialist empire", "a utopia", and "a harmful hegemony" that paves the way for a "colonization of Europe with foreign population". Moreover, AUR declares itself totally against "political correctness, gender ideology, egalitarianism or multiculturalism", concepts that the party debunks as nothing but neo-Marxist concepts that aim to undermine values and traditions.

In fact, each of the four main pillars of the AUR doctrine (i.e. faith, family, freedom and nationhood) are strong religious symbols. They all represent a sort of an obedience towards a traditional authority (Ludeke et

al. 2013, 378) - one that many elites are presented as profoundly disrespectful of. Moreover, given the fact that religion, especially in connection to politics, is conceptualised as participation, belief and identity (Grzymala-Busse 2019), the four pillars mentioned above and representing the AUR doctrine fit perfectly into the overarching concept of religion. "Belief" is already mentioned as a core value, while "freedom" is an indispensable component of religious participation, and identity is what both "family" and "nationhood" strive for. Therefore, the hypothesis of the paper is that AUR presents national and supranational elites as being anti-religious by framing them either as anti-faith, anti-family, anti-freedom, anti-nationhood or a combination of these frames.

5. Methodology

The current study taps into how supranational and national elites were framed in AUR's political advertising materials on social media. The paper specifically tracks the anti-religious dimension that AUR attached to three categories: national elites, supranational elites and a combination of the two. Content analysis was used as the basis for the study, a method considered to be suitable for the scientific analysis of advertising messages (Kassarjian 1977, 11). The sample consists of 78 political advertising materials under the form of social media posts on the AUR official Facebook fan page spanning between December 2020 (immediately after the Parliamentary elections) and September 2021. The analysis was conducted through ATLAS.ti, a tool designed for qualitative analysis that allows researchers to code the data, arrange, reassemble, and manage it. ATLAS.ti also allows researchers to more sophisticated ways of exploring the data. However, the software does not perform automated data analysis, thus allowing the researcher to remain a critical analyst in all stages of the research (Soratto et al., 2020).

For purposes related to the visualisation of the data, the results were represented in a Sankey diagram that displays the association between data elements, as well as their "coupling strengths" (Schmidt 2008, 184).

6. Results and discussion

The results indicate that in the narrative of Romania's new populist party, both national and supranational elites (either separately or together) exhibit anti-religious attitudes. However, what sets them apart is their disproportionate focus on the four aspects that constitute the main pillars of the AUR doctrine. While national elites are blamed for primarily undermining nationhood, supranational elites (most often European Union officials or institutions) are framed as being predominantly preoccupied with eroding the very essence of the traditional family.

Elites / Frames	National and supranational elites		National elites		Supranational elites		Totals
	Absolute	**Relative**	**Absolute**	**Relative**	**Absolute**	**Relative**	**Absolute**
● **Anti-faith**	4	33,33%	17	27,42%	9	26,47%	30
● **Anti-family**	6	50,00%	9	14,52%	11	32,35%	26
● **Anti-freedom**	1	8,33%	10	16,13%	4	11,76%	15
● **Anti-nationhood**	1	8,33%	26	41,94%	10	29,41%	37
Totals	12	100,00%	62	100,00%	34	100,00%	108

Table 1. *Code-document table representing the relation between political advertising materials analysed and codes.*

As *Table 1* shows, in almost 42 percent of its political advertising materials aimed against national elites, AUR claims that key political figures of Romania are the exact opposite of what is expected of them: instead of defending nationhood, they do everything they can to undermine it. For example, AUR accuses Romanian Members of the European Parliament of having transformed into enemies of the nation once they moved to Brussels. The party also depicts the President of Romania, Prime-Minister and Ministers as being disconnected from the real problems of ordinary citizens, but instead busy with issues such as "gender", "multiculturalism" or "political correctness". Moreover, educational or social reforms proposed by the Government, as well as strategic decisions taken in high-level meetings are considered by AUR to be in the disadvantage of the Romanian nation. The anti-faith frame comes in second (27 percent), anti-freedom third (16 percent) and anti-family last (14 percent).

When referring to supranational elites, the political advertising employed by AUR uses the four frames quite differently. Almost one third of the advertising materials aimed against supranational elites frame them as the main enemies of the "traditional family". AUR was scandalized by the European Commission's infringement procedures launched against Poland and Hungary for their anti-LGBTIQ legislation. In a similar social media post, AUR warns against sanctions that will be put in place against Romania for the same reason, and describes the European Union as being led by "bureaucrats with no morals and no God". To show how much they differ from these elites, AUR prides itself (and advertises it accordingly on social media) for joining other European parties that have a strong conservative rhetoric (such as Spain's VOX, Poland's PiS or Fratelli d'Italia) and the party family of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), all of which fight for a Europe of nations and declare themselves to be "pro-family". The anti-nationhood frame is a close second (29 percent), while the anti-faith frame comes in only third (26 percent), and the anti-freedom frame last (a little less than 12 percent).

Some of AUR's political advertising on social media does not discriminate between national and supranational elites, which are altogether considered to represent a threat for Romanians. In the party's

narrative, it is sometimes useless to set them off in contrast because it is either that the two collaborate strongly (and are together as one), or supranational elites exert such a strong influence over national elites that the latter have only the role of blindly executing orders. In this context, national elites are depicted as working not only against the interest of the country, but also as being so weak that they cannot resist the political pressure from foreign political forces. Such narratives only buttress the belief in conspiracy theories according to which national and (most often) European political actors - the powerful others - have joined forces in secret agreements to achieve a goal that is against the interests of the powerless citizens (Van Prooijen et al. 2015, 571). Among the conspiracies for which national and supranational elites seem to be working together is an international plan that seeks to change perceptions of children over their biological sex by introducing school books presenting transgender people; according to AUR, this is already happening in Scotland and is on the verge of being implemented in Romania. The same party blames elites for hastening a cultural revolution that wishes to eradicate Christian precepts, i.e. the „political correctness" revolution. AUR also labels movements such as pro-LGBTIQ, Antifa and Black Lives Matter as „extreme left-wing" and accuses them of religious intolerance for allegedly having vandalized a church in Bucharest. The main charges against the „alliance" between national and supranational elites refer to their anti-family attitudes, but in quite a number of political advertising materials AUR explains how this has negative effects over freedom, nationhood and faith.

Figure 1. *Sankey diagram representing the associations made in AUR's political advertising between (1) National and supranational elites, (2) National elites and (3) Supranational elites on the one side, and (a) anti-faith, (b) anti-family, (c) anti-freedom and (d) anti-nationhood frames on the other.*

In comparison to political advertising materials that refer solely to national or supranational elites, the ones which make reference to both types of elites are quite rare (see *Figure 1*). Even so, with half of them AUR framed these elites as being anti-family, and in another third anti-faith. The anti-freedom and anti-nationhood frames are only marginal (less than 9 percent each of them).

7. Conclusions

The current paper brings a contribution in further understanding populist political advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it looks at the Alliance for the Unity of Romania – a newcomer in Romanian politics, so far understudied, but very relevant in the context of the re-emergence of populism around the European Union. In only a couple of months, AUR grew from less than 1 percent to almost 10 percent in votes, thus becoming the fourth largest political force in the national Parliament, which is an exceptional case at least in Romanian politics. The results of this study indicate that AUR resembles an anti-elitist populist party that embraces religious nationalism (Grzymala-Busse 2019), perfectly superimposing two identities: the religious identity and the national one, in fact a combination in different proportions of religious and secular symbolism (Rauszer 2020, 478). In doing so, the party uses religion to define boundaries between what is good and evil, and acts as a moral authority. As such, by framing elites as anti-religious, AUR entails that they represent the greatest enemies of the Romanian People. The party does not only frame national and supranational elites as dangerous, but many times AUR poses into a guardian of the four main pillars that shape their doctrine and that are presented as fundamental for Romania's survival: faith, family, freedom and nationhood.

Through its political advertising, AUR creates a somewhat paradoxical image for the elites it scapegoats: Romania's nationhood is under threat not because of political forces from outside the country, but primarily because of national elites, who are presented either as ill-intentioned or too weak to protect the nation. Supranational elites, however, are blamed for corrupting the essence of Romanian traditionalism: the family – a sacred institution, the foundation stone of the Romanian nation. Like populist parties in other countries, AUR employs the discursive framework of sacred familialism, with deep religious roots (Akkan 2018, 2).

For populism, framing is a practice that is not specific only to its political advertising strategies, but might actually represent a survival practice. Populism uses frames to meet its end of effortlessly naming and presenting the enemies of the People and of explaining, in a very facile fashion, why they represent a threat and should be eliminated. Framing is

therefore essentially useful for populism to construct and reconstruct the politics of insecurity, i.e. a state of shared anxiety over the actions of perceived internal or external threats (Béland 2020, 164).

Especially when dealing with a crisis that threatens the very life of people (as is the COVID-19 pandemic), issues related to religion become very sensitive. Recent studies related to the ongoing health crisis underline that when people experience fear, suffering or illness, they often turn towards prayer and experience spiritual renewal (Kowalczyk et al. 2020, 2676). The political impact of such behaviour is not yet studied. But in general, despite the fact that the religious dimension of populist political communication (and populist political advertising for that matter) is rather evident, research related to populist movements and religion has still remained quite marginal. According to Zúquete (2017), by analysing these political movements, scholars must highlight the features of the sacralization of politics. This would be especially valuable for comparative research, which can identify relevant similarities and differences between the religious "flavour" of populism (Zúquete 2017) from one country to another, from one political culture to another.

References

***. 2021. "Programul Partidului Politic Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor". https://bit.ly/3CUTguw

Abraham, Thomas. 2011. Lessons from the pandemic: the need for new tools for risk and outbreak communication. *Emerging Health Threats Journal*, 4(1), 7160.

Akkan, Başak. 2018. The politics of care in Turkey: Sacred familialism in a changing political context. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, *25*(1), 72-91.

Akkerman, Tjitske. 2003. Populism and democracy: Challenge or pathology?. *Acta politica*, *38*(2), 147-159.

Arendt, Florian, Marquart, Franziska, and Matthes, Jörg. 2015. Effects of right-wing populist political advertising on implicit and explicit stereotypes. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 27, 178-189.

Atkin, Charles, and Heald, Gary. 1976. Effects of political advertising. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *40* (2), 216-228.

Béland, Daniel. 2020. Right-wing populism and the politics of insecurity: how president Trump frames migrants as collective threats. *Political Studies Review*, *18*(2), 162-177.

Brubaker, Rogers. 2021. Paradoxes of Populism during the Pandemic. *Thesis Eleven*, *164*(1), 73-87.

Corbu, Nicoleta, Balaban-Bălaș, Delia, and Negrea-Busuioc, Elena. "Romania. Populist Ideology Without Teeth". In Aalberg, Toril, Esser, Frank, Reinemann,

Carsten, Stromback, Jesper, and De Vreese, Claes H. (Eds.) *Populist Political Communication in Europe*. Routledge: New York, 2017.

Costea, Ionuț. 2021. Publicity and Socialist Advertising in Romania. The Ideology and the Legitimising Discourse. *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, 26 (1), 49–81.

De Vreese, Claes H., Esser, Frank, Aalberg, Toril, Reinemann, Carsten, and Stanyer, James. 2018. Populism as an expression of political communication content and style: A new perspective. *The international journal of press/politics*, *23*(4), 423-438.

Engesser, Sven, Ernst, Nicole, Esser, Frank, and Büchel, Florin. 2017. Populism and social media: How politicians spread a fragmented ideology. *Information, communication & society*, *20* (8), 1109-1126.

Entman, Robert. 1993. Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43 (4), 51-58.

Flinders, Matthew. 2021. Democracy and the politics of the coronavirus: trust, blame and understanding. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 74 (2), 483 – 502.

Frunză, Mihaela. 2015. Advertising, gender stereotypes and religion. A perspective from the philosophy of communication. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, *14* (40), 72-91.

Frunză, Sandu. *Advertising constructs Reality*. Tritonic: București, 2014.

Gerbaudo, Paolo. 2018. Social media and populism: an elective affinity?. *Media, Culture & Society*, *40* (5), 745-753.

Grzymala-Busse, Anna. 2019. Religious nationalism and religious influence. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

Hawkins, Kirk A., and Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira. 2017. The ideational approach to populism. *Latin American Research Review*, *52*(4), 513-528.

Kaid, Lynda Lee. "Political advertising". In Kaid, Lynda Lee (Ed.) *Handbook of Political Communication Research*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers: London, 2004.

Kassarjian, Harold H. 1977. Content analysis in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 4 (1), 8–18.

Kowalczyk, Oliwia, Roszkowski, Krzysztof, Montane, Xavier, Pawliszak, Wojciech, Tylkowski, Bartosz, & Bajek, Anna. 2020. Religion and faith perception in a pandemic of COVID-19. *Journal of religion and health*, *59*(6), 2671-2677.

Lasco, Gideon. 2020. Medical populism and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Global Public Health*, *15* (10), 1417-1429.

Ludeke, Steven, Johnson, Wendy, and Bouchard Jr, Thomas J. 2013. "Obedience to traditional authority:" A heritable factor underlying authoritarianism, conservatism and religiousness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *55* (4), 375-380.

Neuman, W. Russel, Just, Marion R., and Crigler, Ann N. *Common knowledge. News and the Construction of Political Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Nisbet, Matthew C., Brossard, Dominique, and Kroepsch, Adrianne (2003). Framing science: The stem cell controversy in an age of press/politics. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, *8*(2), 36-70.

Pantazopoulos, Andreas. 2017. The National-Populist Illusion as a "Pathology" of Politics: The Greek Case and Beyond. *Telos*, *2017*(178), 202-216.

Postill, John. 2018. Populism and social media: A global perspective. *Media, Culture & Society*, *40*(5), 754-765.

Price, Vincent, Tewksbury, David, and Powers, Elizabeth. 1997. Switching trains of thought: The impact of news frames on readers' cognitive responses. *Communication Research*, 24, 481–506.

Rauszer, Michał. 2020. "What nation? Peasants, memory and national identity in Poland." Nations and Nationalism, 27 (2), 467-481.

Rummens, Stefan. "Populism as a threat to liberal democracy". In Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira, Taggart, Paul, Ochoa Espejo, Paulina, and Ostiguy, Pierre (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2017.

Schmidt, Mario. 2008. The Sankey diagram in energy and material flow management: Part II: Methodology and current applications. *Journal of industrial ecology*, *12*(2), 173-185.

Semetko, Holli A., and Valkenburg, Patti M. 2000. *Framing European politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News. Journal of Communication, 50 (2), 93–109.*

Stavrakakis, Yannis, Katsambekis, Giorgos, Kioupkiolis, Alexandros, Nikisianis, Nikos, & Siomos, Thomas. 2018. Populism, anti-populism and crisis. *Contemporary Political Theory*, *17*(1), 4-27.

Stoica, Mihnea Simion. (2017). Political myths of the populist discourse. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, *16*(46), 63-76.

Stoica, Mihnea Simion (2017). *Populismul în Europa: dezvoltare istorică, discurs politic și susținători ai dreptei radicale*. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Stoica, Mihnea Simion, Krouwel, André, and Cristea, Vladimir (2021). Stealth populism: explaining the rise of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians. *LSE European Politics and Policy (EUROPP) blog*.

Soratto, Jacks, Pires de Pires, Denise Elvira, and Friese, Susanne. 2020. Thematic content analysis using ATLAS. ti software: Potentialities for researchs in health. *Revista brasileira de enfermagem*, *73*.

Taggart, Paul. 2002. Populism and the pathology of representative politics. In *Democracies and the populist challenge* (pp. 62-80). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Van Prooijen, Jan-Willem, Krouwel, André, and Pollet, Thomas V. (2015). Political extremism predicts belief in conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *6*(5), 570-578.

Zúquete, Jose Pedro (2017). Populism and religion. *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 445-466.