Textual Analysis of Populist Discourse in 2014/2015 Presidential Election in Croatia

Research Article

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Marijana Grbeša and Berto Šalaj[*]

Populism has been vastly present in Croatian media discourse as a common point of reference but it has been almost completely left out from scientific inquiry. Building on the premise that populism is reflected in communication practices of politicians, parties and movements, this paper uses content analysis to examine interviews of the four presidential candidates during election campaign in Croatia in 2014 (first round) and 2015 (second round). We apply a two-level approach to measure populism on two distinct but related levels - as a thin-centered political ideology and as a political communication style. Populism as ideology is examined through the presence of positive references to the people, relationship to political elites and references to 'dangerous others'. The analysis of populism as political communication style is primarily set to determine efforts of the candidates to use populist cues to resonate with the voters. The presence of populist style is here examined through three categories: politicians' explicit referencing to the people, their attempts of displaying proximity to the people by using language that typically belongs to the private sphere and their use of 'empty signifiers'. The results of this study indicate that populism was present in 2014/2015 Croatian presidential election on both examined levels - as an ideology and as a communication style.

Keywords: populism, presidential elections, political ideology, political communication style, Croatia

Introduction

Presidential election in Croatia in 2014/2015 was primarily a contest between incumbent Ivo Josipović, the candidate of the governing Social Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske*, SDP) and another sixteen parties of the left and centre and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, the candidate of the right-

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wing Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ) and another seven right-wing parties. The election was won by the challenger Grabar-Kitarović by an extremely narrow margin, making her the first Croatian female president.

The two front-runners were challenged by the two underdogs, Ivan Vilibor Sinčić, young leader of the Human Wall (*Živi zid*), a non-governmental organisation whose main objective is to obstruct the evictions from people's homes and Milan Kujundžić, the candidate of the rigid right-wing coalition led by the Croatian Dawn - The Party of the People (*Hrvatska zora - stranka naroda*). Although neither of them made it to the second round, Sinčić, who was completely unknown until few weeks before the election, made a remarkable result winning 16,4 percent of the votes.

In the course of campaign media often addressed communication of the candidates as 'populist'. This study is designed to examine 1) to which extent, if at all, has populism really been present in the discourse of the presidential candidates in the 2014/2015 race and 2) is it possible to distinguish between different *types* of populism exercised by the candidates.

Building on the premise that populism is reflected in communication practices of politicians, parties and movements, the study uses content analysis to examine interviews with the four presidential candidates published in the country's leading newspapers and magazines in the period between 1. November 2014 and election day (11. January 2015). It applies *a two-level approach* to measuring populism which was first developed in the benchmark study of populism in Croatia that analysed 192 interviews of eleven Croatian politicians.[1] This approach measures populism on two distinct but related levels - as *a thin-centered political ideology* and as *a political communication style.*

In the theoretical section, we first dismantle the definitional clutter related to the notion of the word 'populism'. Then we question the potential of populism to be treated as an 'ideology' and finally, we look at the distinction between populism as a *thin-centred ideology* and populism as a *political communication style,* which we further develop in the empirical section of the paper.

Conceptualized as a political ideology, populism is here understood as a thin-centred ideology that has its central core, but lacks additional values and content present in other 'true' ideologies. The defining idea of populism is that society is divided into two homogenous and mutually conflicted groups: honest people and corrupt elites. In addition to elites, people are often believed to be endangered by the 'dangerous others' who are commonly identified among minorities, financial institutions and the media. In this paper populism as an ideology is examined through the presence of positive references to the people, relationship to political elites and references to 'dangerous others'. The presence of references to the people and the presence of anti-elitism are a

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[1] See Grbeša, Marijana and Berto Šalaj. 2014. *Faces of Populism in Croatia.* Paper presented at the IPSA Conference, Montreal, July 2014.

necessary condition for someone to be labelled populist, while the presence of 'dangerous others' is not considered central to populism, but it is quite common and may be useful in defining different types of populism, such as left-wing populism or right-wing populism.

The analysis of populism as a political communication style is primarily set to determine efforts of mainstream politicians to use populist cues to resonate with the citizens. The underlying assumption is that populism as a political communication style is certainly expected to be present with populist politicians but that it may also be present with mainstream politicians. However, mainstream politicians never share true populists' resentment towards elites and their dual understanding of politics as a conflict between 'us' (the people) and 'them' (elites). For the purpose of this study, the presence of a populist style is examined through three categories: politicians' explicit positive mentioning of the people, their attempts of displaying proximity to the people in a variety of more refined ways than explicit verbal references (such as the use of informal language) and finally, through their use of *empty signifiers* that are typical of populist discourse.

The origins and contemporary understanding of populism
Over the last few decades in Europe, populism has been predominantly linked to and identified with the rise of right-wing and radical right-wing political movements.[2] However, the term *populism* was initially used to describe a left-wing movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century in the United States under the name The People's Party.[3] The party advocated greater rights for farmers and workers and criticized the political system as one favourable towards the interests of well-networked and corrupt political and business elites from Washington and New York. It was an attempt to introduce a third political force into the U.S. political system, suggesting that the two dominant political options had become alienated from the people and betrayed the original ideas of the American Revolution.

The use of the concept spread after the Second World War from the U.S. to other parts of the world, first to Latin America, where it was used to denote the mode of government of Juan Peron in Argentina and Getulio Vargas in Brazil. Back then the concept was frequently and uncritically used to denote unusual political phenomena or movements that were difficult to categorize according to the then dominant classifications. Systematic scholarship dealing with the phenomenon began relatively late, in the 1960s. The first studies of the phenomenon dealt with particular populist movements and made no attempt to make wider inferences about the meaning of populism. They provided detailed descriptions of a certain number of empirical cases that were recognized as examples of populism, but did not assume any wider overviews or typologies. Certain progress in this respect was made by British political theorist

[2] Cf. Betz, Hans-Georg. 1994. *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. London: MacMillan; Betz, Hans-Georg and Carol Johnson. 2004. Against the Current - Stemming the Tide: the Nostalgic Ideology of the Contemporary Radical Populist Right. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(3), 311-27; Rydgren, Jens. 2007. The Sociology of Radical Right. *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, 241-62.

[3] Kazin, Michael. 1995. *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. New York: Basic Books.

Margaret Canovan in her study *Populism* (1981).[4] This study marked the beginning of the author's systematic dealing with the phenomenon.[5]

A new incentive for scientific discussion about populism came in the 1990s, when political movements, commonly labelled 'right-wing populism', gained strength in a range of European countries. Scholars mostly relied on the tradition established in 1960s to describe these movements. They focused on detailed descriptions of particular cases, but with no attempt to make any theoretical inferences based on the insights acquired from these cases. However, in recent years new approaches have emerged. These strive to theoretically grasp the meaning and nature of populism, to identify common features of populist movements, to establish causes for the rise of populism and to define its relation to democracy.[6] What then is the dominant contemporary understanding of populism? The Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde offers one of the most influential contemporary definitions of populism arguing that populism is "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus the 'corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonte generale* (general will) of the people."[7] Albertazzi and McDonnell likewise see

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[4] Canovan, Margaret. 1981. *Populism*. New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

[5] See Canovan, Margaret. 1984. 'People', Politicians and Populism. *Government and Opposition* 19(3), 312-27; Canovan, Margaret. 1999. Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy. *Political Studies* 47(1), 2-16; Canovan, Margaret. 2002. *Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy*, in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Meny, Yves and Yves Surel. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 25-44; Canovan, Margaret. 2004. Populism for Political Theorists?. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(3), 241-52; Canovan, Margaret. 2005. *The People*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

[6] Abts, Koen and Stefan Rummens. 2007. Populism versus Democracy. *Political Studies* 55(6), 405-24; Akkerman, Tjitske. 2003. Populism and Democracy: Challenge or Pathology?. *Acta Politica* 38(1), 147-59; Albertazzi, Daniele and Duncan McDonnell. 2008. *The Sceptre and the Spectre*, in *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, edited by Albertazzi, Daniele and Duncan McDonnell. New York: Palgrave, 1-11; Canovan, Margaret. 2002. *Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy*, in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Meny, Yves and Yves Surel. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 25-44; Decker, Frank. 2003. The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy. *International Politics and Society* (3), 47-59; Gidron, Noam and Bart Bonikowski. 2013. *Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda*. Cambridge: Harvard University; Jansen, Robert S. 2011. Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism. *Sociological Theory* 29(2), 75-96; Kessel Van, Stijn. 2015. *Populist Parties in Europe: Agent of Discontent?*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Kriesi, Hanspeter and Takis S. Pappas. 2015. *Populism in Europe During Crisis*, in *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*, edited by Kriesi, Hanspeter and Takis S. Pappas. Colchester: ECPR Press, 1-22; Mudde, Cas. 2004. The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition* 39(4), 541-63; Mudde, Cas and Rovira C. Kaltwasser. 2012. *Populism and (Liberal) Democracy: a Framework for Analysis*, in *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?*, edited by Mudde, Cas and Rovira C. Kaltwasser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-26; Meny, Yves and Yves Surel. 2002. *The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism*, in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Meny, Yves and Yves Surel. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1-21; Pasquino, Gianfranco. 2008. *Populism and Democracy*, in *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, edited by Albertazzi, Daniele and Duncan McDonnell. New York: Palgrave, 15-29; Taggart, Paul. 2000. *Populism*. Buckingham: Open University Press; Taggart, Paul. 2002. *Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics*, in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Meny, Yves and Yves Surel. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 62-80; Taggart, Paul. 2004. Populism and Representative Politics in Contemporary Europe. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(3), 269-88; Weyland, Kurt. 2001. Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics. *Comparative Politics* 34(1), 1-22; Zaslove, Andrej. 2008. Here to Stay? Populism as a New Party Type. *European Review* 16 (3), 319-36.

[7] Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*, 543.

populism as "an ideology that pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous others who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people their rights and values."[8] In an attempt to provide a concise definition Abts and Rummens see populism as "an ideology which advocates the rule of the people as a united sovereign body."[9] Canovan in similar vein points out that populism presents a movement which emphasizes the people against established structures of power and dominant ideas and values in society.[10] According to all these authors, the defining features of populism are references to the people and anti-elite sentiment. But should populism, as Mudde initially suggests, be treated as political ideology like liberalism, socialism or conservatism? Or, is it too eclectic and diverse to be treated as a political ideology? In the next chapter we look at two different but related approaches to populism: populism as an ideology and populism as a political communication style.

Populism: between style and ideology
Building on the assumption that the only common feature of different populist movements is relating to the people, one group of authors argues that populism should be treated as a political style available to different social and political groups rather than an ideology.[11] They argue that populism comes down to political language and rhetoric which insists on simplicity and directness. Populists, by appealing to the common sense of average people and rejecting the intellectualism of elites, offer simple solutions for complex social and political problems. They further argue that populism cannot be viewed as a political ideology because populist movements do not have clearly and coherently expressed attitudes on the majority of important contemporary political issues and above all, they lack core values - such as freedom, equality or social justice.

Nevertheless, another, larger, group of scholars argues that there are reasons to treat populism as a coherent political ideology.[12] They seek to identify common features of different populist movements which allow for populism to be treated as a political ideology. For instance, Meny and Surel stress that populism is permeated by the idea of the good, honest and simple people who are deceived and manipulated by the corrupt, incompetent and mutually networked elites.[13] In this respect, populists claim that it is necessary to carry out a radical social and political change which would abolish the domination of elites and revive the idea and practice of politics as an expression of the will of the people.

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[8] Albertazzi and McDonnell, *The Sceptre and the Spectre*, 3.
[9] Abts and Rummens, *Populism versus Democracy*, 409.
[10] Canovan, *Trust the People!*, 3.
[11] Cf. Taguieff, Pierre-Andre. 1995. Political Science Confronts Populism: from a Conceptual Mirage to a Real Problem. *Telos* 103, 9-44; Tarchi, Marco. 2002. *Populism Italian Style*, in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Meny, Yves and Yves Surel. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 120-38; Jansen, *Populist Mobilization*; Moffitt, Benjamin and Simon Tormey. 2014. Rethinking Populism: Mediatisation and Political Style. *Political Studies* 62(2), 381-97.
[12] Cf. Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*; Stanley, Ben. 2008. The Thin Ideology of Populism. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13(1), 95-110; Kaltwasser, Rovira C. 2014. The Responses of Populism to Dahl's Democratic Dilemmas. *Political Studies* 62(4), 470-87.
[13] Meny and Surel, *The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism*.

Another distinguishing feature of populism which occurs in some (but not all) cases is the opposition towards 'dangerous others' who are perceived to threaten the unity and homogeneity of the average people because they promote certain particular interests. These 'dangerous groups' pose a threat to the efforts to bring power and government back to the people. For instance, immigrants are often identified as a threat because they might take away jobs from the domestic populace; ethnic and religious minorities can also threaten the way of life and culture of the domestic people. In such circumstances, right-wing populism arises, which is intolerant of the rights of minorities and immigrants. On the other hand, if big foreign businesses and entrepreneurs are perceived as a threat, then populism reaches for left-wing political messages and policies, such as the nationalisation of the property of foreign companies. In other words, populism may vary from left to right depending on the identity of the 'dangerous others' and the values and characteristics of the ruling elites it opposes. If these elites are predominantly liberal, then populism will be reactionary, as has largely been the case in Europe over the last two decades. If, on the other hand, dominant elites are conservative, populism will be based on leftist political values and it will advocate the rights of workers against the interests of rich entrepreneurs, as exemplified by the recent cases of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Populism, therefore, can be left-wing and right-wing, both authoritarian and libertarian, both progressive and reactionary, depending on the values of the elites and the 'dangerous others' which it opposes.

It is exactly this huge diversity of empirical manifestations of populist politicians and movements that has led some scholars to conclude that it is not possible to talk about populism as a coherent political ideology. On the other hand, Taggart proposes an approach that is less restricted.[14] He argues that it is necessary to differentiate between the generic and contextual characteristics of populism. Generic characteristics refer to the fact that all populist movements set the good and honest people against the corrupt elites, while the contextual characteristics depend on particular political, social and cultural conditions under which specific populist movements develop. Consequently, the argument advocated by Canovan (2002), Mudde (2004) and Stanley (2008) that populism can be viewed as a political ideology, but a 'thin' one, because it does not have the same level of intellectual consistency and refinement as socialism or conservatism, seems plausible.[15]

To sum up, today's approaches to populism are commonly twofold. Populism is conceived either as an ideology or political communication style, although the distinction is far from clear-cut. As an ideology it relies on displaying proximity to the people, while at the same time demonstrating resentment towards political elites and occasionally, in some cases, antagonizing specific segments of the population. It may take different guises, depending on the specific context of the country and its position towards elites and dangerous others. It is latently present in the structure and practice of contemporary liberal

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[14] Taggart, *Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics*.
[15] Canovan, *Taking Politics to the People*; Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*; Stanley, *The Thin Ideology of Populism*.

democracies and it gains power in situations of great social, economic and political crises. As a style, populism relies on familiarization with the people, and this may take different forms. Conceived as a style, populism may occur with any politician and is primarily a matter of political communication strategy rather than ideology or coherent politics.

The context of the 2014/2015 Croatian presidential election
The presidential election was held on 28. December 2014 (first round) and on 11. January 2015 (second round). It resulted in a tight victory of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović over the incumbent Ivo Josipović. This is the first time in the history of Croatia's presidential elections that the incumbent who was running for the second term lost the election. Josipović lost to Grabar-Kitarović despite the fact that he was, according to the public opinion polls, the most popular Croatian politician. This university professor and a renowned composer of classical music had significant lead in the polls and was predominantly portrayed as the certain winner of the election even though the social context - determined by six years of economic crises - was unfavourable for him.[16] Failure to improve country's economic record has for the most part been blamed on the governing SDP who, along with three other parties of the coalition, has been leading the country since 2011. Lalić and Grbeša argue that such disappointment with the Government among the citizens has been a burden for Josipović, whose favourable image started to dissolve in the campaign.[17] He was mostly criticised for not addressing the incompetence and inefficiency of the Government. His main challenger and eventual election winner, Grabar-Kitarović, who declared herself a "modern conservative", focused most of her campaign efforts on attacking incompetence of SDP's Government and ignorance of their candidate Josipović.

Aside from Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović, two other candidates took part in the presidential race: Ivan Vilibor Sinčić, rebellious leader of the Human Wall (*Živi zid)* and Milan Kujundžić, renowned doctor and the candidate of the right-wing coalition. University student Sinčić, who was completely unknown before the election, presented himself as the spokesperson of the deprived and avoided questions that would position him ideologically on any side of the political spectrum. His social appeals and strong anti-elitist rhetoric resonated well with the politically disenchanted and economically exhausted voters, turning him almost overnight into a prospective political star. The media labelled him 'the moral winner of the first round' and 'the biggest surprise of the election'. He had no advertising campaign and relied mostly on media attention. Kujundžić campaigned on rigidly conservative messages with a strong nationalist slant. His performance and rhetoric became increasingly aggressive towards the end of campaign which probably pushed away some of his voters. His prospects additionally dropped with the appearance of the young Sinčić, who was more successful in articulating antipathy towards the two dominant parties, the SDP and the HDZ.

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[16] Lalić, Dražen and Marijana Grbeša. 2015. The 2014/2015 Croatian Presidential Election: Tight and Far-reaching Victory of the Political Right. *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 2(1), 45-54.
[17] Lalić and Grbeša, *The 2014/2015 Croatian Presidential Election*, 47.

Methodology and research design

This study examines to which extent was populism - as a political ideology and political communication style - present in communication of the four candidates. The starting assumption was that campaign communication would be especially prone to populism because of its mobilising power. Another goal of the study is to examine whether it is possible to differentiate between different types of populism demonstrated by the candidates. Building on the premise that populism is reflected in communication practices of politicians, parties and movements, the study uses content analysis to examine population of 39 interviews, which is a total number of interviews that these four candidates gave in the country's leading newspapers and magazines between 1. November 2014 and election day (11. January 2015).[18] The unit of analysis is a single interview (excluding the words of the journalists and coding only politicians' answers/statements).

Most research on populism resorts to qualitative analysis of particular cases, while studies that use classic content analysis remain rare.[19] We made the decision to use content analysis because it seemed suitable for this type of research, primarily for the reasons of reliability and replication. Reliability assumes consistency which means that the data should mean the same thing to everybody who uses them.[20] Replication allows standardized comparisons that may result in a larger number of national and transnational comparative studies and may lead to more solid categorizations that can be helpful in researching elusive theoretical concepts such as populism.

Populism is in this paper conceptualized on two levels - as a political ideology and as a political communication style. Conceived as a *thin-centred* ideology, populism is here examined through the presence of two inseparable dimensions of populism - references to the people and anti-elite sentiment - and in addition, through the presence of references to 'dangerous others'. Conceived as a political communication style, populism is examined through three categories: politicians' explicit referencing to the people, their attempts of displaying proximity to the people by using private and informal language,[21] and their use of 'empty signifiers' that are typical of populist discourse.[22]

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[18] *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list*, *Novi list*, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Globus* and *24Express*.

[19] For researches based on content analysis see also: 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(3), 319-45; Hawkins, Kirk A. 2009. Is Chavez a Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective. *Comparative Political Studies* 42(8), 1040-67; Rooduijn, Matthijs and Teun Pauwels. 2011. Measuring Populism. A Comparison of Two Methods of Content Analysis. *West European Politics* 34(6), 1272-83; Approach pursued in content analysis-based studies is epistemologically different from discursive approach that is more common in analyzing populism. CA studies see populism as a measurable concept and are more interested in developing quantifiable categories that point to presence of populism than in contextual interpretations, typical of discursive analyses.

[20] Krippendorff, Klaus. 2004. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. London: Sage Publications.

[21] Cf. Jagers and Walgrave, *Populism as political communication style*.

[22] Cf. Kumar, Anup. 2014. Looking Back at Obama's Campaign in 2008: "True Blue Populist" and Social Production of Empty Signifiers in Political Reporting. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 38(1), 5-24; Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

Analytical categories
Categories used in this study are derived from the first empirical study of populism in Croatia.[23]

The first dimension used as indicator of populism on both levels (as an ideology and a style) is the presence of explicit references to the people. The interviews were first coded for the presence of references to the people as homogenous collectivity (explicitly, 'the people' or by using other words that were treated as its synonyms such as 'the citizens', 'Croats' etc). References to certain segments of the population, such as youth, pensioners or women were not treated as a reference to the people as collectivity and were not included in the analysis. Each reference was then assigned its valence (positive, negative or neutral). The predominant valence of all references to the people was then recorded as the overall sentiment of the interview towards the people.

Aside from explicit references to the people, politicians may seek to connect with the people in other, more refined ways. Therefore, the decision was made to devise another category that could measure efforts of politicians to appear close to ordinary people in more subtle ways - by introducing language and content from the private sphere that is usually treated as a strategy of the 'privatisation of politics'.[24] It may be explicit, such as the use of family for gaining voters' sympathy or subtle, such as the use of informal or colloquial language that brings politicians closer to 'common people'. Finally, building on Kumar's analysis of Obama's 2008 campaign, we introduce the concept of 'empty signifiers' as the final indicator of 'reaching out to the people'.[25] The notion of 'empty signifiers' was originally coined by Laclau and it refers to a word, an idea, a phrase that is elusive and to which people with different ideologies may assign different meanings.[26] Words like *justice, equality or freedom* illustrate the case quite well.[27] Kumar demonstrates how Obama in

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[23] Grbeša and Šalaj, *Faces of Populism in Croatia.*

[24] E.g. Grbeša, Marijana. 2010. Privatisation of Politics in Croatia: Analysis of the 2003 and 2007 Parliamentary Elections. *Medijska istraživanja* 16(2), 57-79; Holtz-Bacha, Christina. 2004. Germany: How the Private Life of Politicians got into the Media. *Parliamentary Affairs* 57(1), 41-52; Langer, Ana I. 2012. *The Personalisation of Politics in the UK. Mediated Leadership from Attlee to Cameron.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

[25] Kumar, *Looking back at Obama's campaign in 2008.*

[26] Laclau, *On Populist Reason.*

[27] The notion of 'empty signifiers' is originally developed by Ernesto Laclau in his seminal study *On Populist Reason.* Although we borrow his idea of 'empty signifiers', our understanding of populism is significantly different from the one developed by Laclau. Our understanding of populism is based on its two defining features – resentment towards elites and positive assessment of the people. Laclau, on the other hand, believes that any other term (and not exclusively the people) can serve as the nodal point of populist mobilization. This means that populist discourse may be equated with political discourse which terminates any possibility of clear and precise operationalization of the term. Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis (Stavrakakis, Yannis and Giorgos Katsambekis. 2014. Left-wing Populism in the European Periphery: the Case of SYRIZA. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19(2), 119-42) criticize Laclau arguing that in this way "populism becomes synonymous with politics and any signifier can potentially become the nodal point of a populist discourse. If, however, this is the case, then how can we conceptually account for the difference between an antagonistic discourse articulated around 'the people' and any other such discourse? In other words, the risk here is to loose the conceptual particularity and operationality of 'populism' as a tool for concrete political analysis and thus to weaken the empirical applicability of this approach" (139).

his speeches successfully fostered empty signifiers such as 'change' or 'change we can believe in' and 'hope' that were later uncritically reinforced by journalists.[28]

The second dimension examines politicians' attitudes towards political elites and is first examined through two main indicators: the presence of references to political elites ('politicians', 'politics') and the valence of those references. References to specific politicians were registered only if a certain politician was mentioned as an example of politics or political elites as a whole. Each reference to political elites was assigned its valence (positive, negative or neutral) and predominant valence of all references to the people was then recorded as the overall sentiment of the interview towards political elites.

Two supporting indicators were then introduced to measure the attitude of Croatian politicians towards elites: their intention to identify with political elites and conversely, their efforts to be perceived as non-professional politicians. The identification with elites was introduced to examine the tendency of mainstream politicians to appear close to elites, rather than to the people. On the other hand, the second indicator was used to additionally examine politicians' efforts to reinforce the gap between 'us' and 'them' by suggesting that politics is not their core profession and that they should not be perceived as professional politicians, which is something that, according to Heywood and Fieschi,[29] all populists strive for. Finally, we introduced a control category which tests politicians' view of the relations between different groups in society (i.e. pluralist vs. dual vs. a technocratic view of the political system and processes): if the defining features of populism are present in a politician's communication discourse, his/her view of the political system is expected to be dual.

The third dimension looks at the presence of references to 'dangerous others'. The interviews were coded for the presence of references to 'dangerous others' in general and specifically to the presence of references to 'dangerous media', 'dangerous financial elites', 'dangerous minorities' (sexual, ethnic or other) and the 'dangerous EU'.[30]

The findings
References to the people
First dimension used as an indicator of populism - making references to the people - is present in 37 out of 39 interviews. Positive references to the people were present in 13 cases while neutral references were present in 24 cases.

Results presented in Table 1 suggest that presidential candidates, in terms of their references to the people may be divided into two groups. The first group entails two front-running candidates - Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović.

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[28] Kumar, *Looking back at Obama's campaign in 2008.*
[29] Heywood, Paul M. and Catherine Fieschi. 2004. Trust, Cynicism and Populist Anti-politics. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(3), 289-309.
[30] The coding was conducted by two independent coders. The agreement between coders was strong for all relevant categories, ranging from Cohen's kappa .739 to 1 .00.

Although they frequently mentioned the people, their references were mostly neutral and only rarely positive. The second group entails Kujundžić and Sinčić who referred to the people in all their interviews and whose references were predominantly positive (in 80 percent of Kujundžić's interviews and in 44 percent of Sinčić's interviews).[31]

Table 1: Overall sentiment towards the people

Candidate	Number of interviews	Overall sentiment towards the people			
		Total	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović	12	11 (92%)	2 (17%)	9 (75%)	0
Ivo Josipović	13	12 (92%)	3 (23%)	9 (69%)	0
Milan Kujundžić	5	5 (100%)	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	0
Ivan Vilibor Sinčić	9	9 (100%)	4 (44%)	5 (56%)	0
Total	**39**	**37 (95%)**	**13 (33%)**	**24 (62%)**	**0 (0%)**

Source: Authors

References to political elites
The second *sine qua non* condition that one needs to fulfil in order to be labelled true populist is to negatively refer to political elites. Results in Table 2 demonstrate that negative references to political elites were present in 49 percent of all cases with Sinčić being the harshest and attacking political elites in all his interviews.[32] He is followed by Kujundžić who made predominantly negative references to elites in 80 percent of his interviews.[33] Surprisingly, incumbent Josipović made primarily negative comments about political elites in 46 percent of his interviews,[34] while Grabar-Kitarović made no negative comment whatsoever.

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[31] E.g. "We are going to disturb political elites because the light that will be turned on in new Croatia is great; it is the light I am going to turn on as a president with Croatian people." Milan Kujundžić in *Večernji list* (29. November 2014).

[32] E.g. "Croatia needs to be liberated from rotten policies and rotten politicians, from corrupt people who have devastated this country in every possible way" (*Novi list*, 18. December 2014) or "As a young man I am well aware of the fact that we are heading for a long agony of collapse unless we take things in our own hands" (*24Express*, 19. December 2014).

[33] E.g. "If party elites once again reject cooperation and chose private instead of national interests, I shall not hesitate a minute; I shall call for a national referendum and I am going to ask the people to support me" (*Slobodna Dalmacija*, 14. December 2014).

[34] E.g. "Such political parties that have created the problems cannot offer solutions to these problems" (*Večernji list*, 09. January 2015) or "Reforms were not implemented because political elites did not want to implement them, because these elites were systematically working against the part of its party basis, against the will of the people" (*Jutarnji list*, 31. October 2014) or "Citizens are utterly irritated by numerous corruption affairs which involve politicians from all political parties" (*24Express*, 19. December 2014).

Table 2: Overall sentiment towards political elites

Candidate	Number of interviews	Overall sentiment towards political elites			
		Total	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović	12	2 (17%)	0	2 (17%)	0
Ivo Josipović	13	6 (46%)	0	0	6 (46%)
Milan Kujundžić	5	4 (80%)	0	0	4 (80%)
Ivan Vilibor Sinčić	9	9 (100 %)	0	0	9 (100 %)
Total	**39**	**21 (54%)**	**0**	**2 (5%)**	**19 (49%)**

Source: Authors

In order to establish presence of anti-elitism, two supporting indicators were introduced. The first one asked whether candidates identify themselves with political elites: the second one asked if they perceive themselves as professional politicians. Both indicators rely on the literature on populism which suggests that populist politicians refuse to be identified as professional politicians and hate to be related with political elites.[35] Results presented in the Table 3 show that explicit identification with political elites (e.g. 'we politicians') was not registered in any of the cases. All candidates clearly avoided any kind of explicit connection with political elites which may be explained by perceived distrust with political elites and institutions established in a number of researches.[36]

Table 3: Identification with political elites and self-perception of political professionalism

| Candidate	Number of interviews	Identification with political elites	Political professional
Kolinda Grabar- Kitarović	12	0	12 (100%)
Ivo Josipović	13	0	13 (100%)
Milan Kujundžić	5	0	2 (40%)
Ivan Vilibor Sinčić	9	0	0
Total	**39**	**0**	**27 (69%)**

Source: Authors

When it comes to political professionalism, on the one side of the spectrum are the front-runners - Grabar-Kitarović and Josipović - who entirely perceive themselves as political professionals; on the other side is Sinčić who consistently, in all his interviews, refuses to be labelled professional politician. Kujundžić positioned himself in the middle, indicating in 40 percent of his interviews that he is a professional politician.

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[35] E.g. Barr, Robert. 2009. Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics. *Party Politics* 15(1), 29-48.
[36] E.g. Dalton, Russell, J. 2004. *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. New York: Oxford University Press; Deth, Jan W.van / Montero, Jose Ramon and Anders Westholom. (eds.). 2007. *Citizenship and Involvement in European Democracies*. London: Routledge; Torcal, Mariano and Jose Ramon Montero. (eds.). 2006. *Political Disaffection in Contemporary Democracies*. London: Routledge.

In order for someone to be labelled true populist, both presence of anti-elitism and presence of positive references to the people need to be established. Results presented in Figure 1 demonstrate the relationship between these two necessary conditions, suggesting that, according to the rhetoric they used in analysed interviews, examined politicians may be divided in three separate groups.

Figure 1: Positive sentiment towards the people and negative sentiment towards the elite
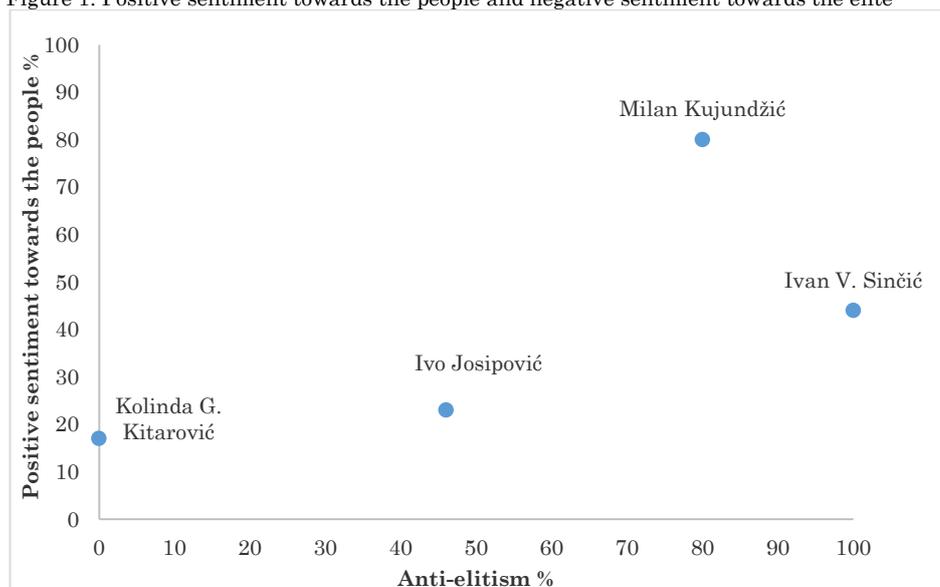
Source: Authors

Grabar-Kitarović belongs to a group of politicians who cannot be labelled populist. Her references to the people are rather rare and anti-elitist rhetoric is completely absent. This finding is additionally reinforced by her self-identification as a political professional. To the contrary Sinčić and Kujundžić may be labelled true populists or 'strong populists' because they fulfil both necessary conditions with anti-elitism being especially prominent with young Sinčić.[37] References to the people are in Sinčić's interviews less prominent but with 44 percent interviews that mention the people in a predominantly positive context, he is still above the average. His resentment towards elites is additionally emphasised by his vehement denial of his political professionalism. In Kujundžić's case, both indicators of populism are strongly present (in 80 percent of the interviews), although he was occasionally prone to identify himself as a professional politician. Finally, Josipović who entered the race as an incumbent, belongs to a league of his own. Although his overall positive references to the people and negative references to political elites are below the average, they are still surprisingly high for a mainstream politician. It is not entirely usual for a mainstream politician, who clearly perceives himself as a political professional, to be passionately critical about political elite. Given the results of previous research which did not register this type of

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[37] Cf. Grbeša and Šalaj, *Faces of Populism in Croatia.*

populist clues in Josipović's rhetoric,[38] his populist communication might be at least to an extent attributed to strategic campaign communication.

Such categorization is verified by another control variable which was set to examine dominant politician's understanding of political systems and processes. Coders had to decide whether politician's attitudes predominantly fit pluralist, populist or technocratic view of politics. The results presented in Table 4 reinforce the findings established within the two main dimensions of populist ideology.

Table 4: Populism, pluralism and technocracy

Candidate	Number of interviews	Populism	Pluralism	Technocracy	None
Kolinda Grabar- Kitarović	12	0	12 (100 %)	0	0
Ivo Josipović	13	6 (46%)	7 (54%)	0	0
Milan Kujundžić	5	3 (60%)	0	0	2 (40 %)
Ivan Vilibor Sinčić	9	8 (89%)	0	0	1 (11%)
Total	**39**	**17 (44%)**	**19 (49%)**	**0**	**3 (7%)**

Source: Authors

Populist view of politics was most strongly expressed in the interviews of Sinčić (in 89 percent of his interviews) and Kujundžić (in 60 percent of his interviews) which corroborates their position of true populists. To the contrary, Grabar-Kitarović was consistent in her pluralist understanding of politics which reconfirms her mainstream position. Finally, Josipović again represents a distinct case. In his interviews he combines pluralist and populist views, mostly by flirting with anti-elitism which represents a significant shift compared to his earlier, exclusively pluralist position.[39]

'Dangerous others'
So far we have analysed two dimensions that are commonly seen as the core features of populism. Let us now look at the third dimension commonly used to denote populism as ideology - the presence of 'dangerous others'. The findings related to this category are two-fold. First, the presence of 'dangerous others' in the rhetoric of examined presidential candidates is generally quite weak and was established only in the interviews of Sinčić (see Table 5).

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[38] Cf. Grbeša and Šalaj, *Facecs of Populism in Croatia*. Previous research included 47 Josipović's interviews published in the period between May 2009 and June 2013. In that period positive references to the people were present in only 13 percent of his interviews while anti-elitism was not present in any of them. Interestingly, the research included also period of the 2009/2010 presidential election campaign and registered no sign of anti-elitism on Josipović's behalf.
[39] In previous research pluralist view was recorded in 64 percent of his interviews while the remaining percentage contained no specific understanding of politics (Grbeša and Šalaj, *Faces of Populism in Croatia*, 17).

Table 5: Presence of 'dangerous others'

Candidate	Number of interviews	Presence of 'dangerous others'	Who are 'dangerous others'?
Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović	12	0	-
Ivo Josipović	13	0	-
Milan Kujundžić	5	0	-
Ivan Vilibor Sinčić	9	6 (67%)	Economic elites (6)
Total	**39**	**6 (15%)**	

Source: Authors

In Sinčić's interviews 'dangerous others' are always economic elites whose actions endanger wellbeing of the people.[40] This type of populism which despises powerful financial lobbies and banks (commonly owned by foreign companies) and identifies them as the biggest threat to a society, while at the same time avoiding any type of antagonism towards minority groups, is commonly described as 'left populism' or 'social populism'.[41] It is typical of Latin America but it has been increasingly present in Europe in recent years.[42] The second important finding relates to the fact that minority groups (ethnic, sexual, religious) were not identified as 'dangerous others' in any of the cases. Hostility towards minorities, along with evocation of the people and anti-elitism, has been common point of reference of numerous right wing populist in a number of European countries in the last two decades. However, elements of right wing populism where not detected in the rhetoric of Croatian presidential candidates. Results of this analysis underpin the findings from the previous study of populism in Croatia which did not detect presence of right wing populism whatsoever.[43]

Identification of 'dangerous others' in the rhetoric of populists is helpful when trying to determine different types of populism. This was the case with Sinčić whose focused resentment towards economic elites allows us to label him left wing or social populist. This, however, was not the case with Kujundžić whose strong demonstration of anti-elitism and evocation of the people indicate that he is a true populist but absence of 'dangerous others' complicates any inference about the nature of populism. Kujundžić most of the time uses expression "Croats" or adverb "Croatian people" when referring to the people. This implies that his understanding of the people is ethnically conditioned, which is a frequent feature of right wing populism. However, Kujundžić did not demonstrate any other, defining feature of right wing populism which is why his populism might be conditionally described as 'national populism'.[44]

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[40] E.g. "We need to dismiss corrupt political and bankers' oligarchy who has not done anything for this country in 25 years" (*Jutarnji list*, 06. December 2014).

[41] Mudde, Cas and Rovira C. Kaltwasser. 2013. Inclusionary versus Exclusionary Populism: Contemporary Europe and Latin America Compared. *Government and Opposition* 48(2), 147-74.

[42] Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, *Left-wing Populism in the European Periphery*.

[43] See Grbeša and Šalaj, *Faces of Populism in Croatia*.

[44] Cf. Stanley, Ben. 2011. Populism, Nationalism or National Populism? An analysis of Slovak Voting Behaviour at the 2010 Parliamentary Election. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44, 257-70.

Populism as a political communication style

In the second part of the research we tried to establish the presence of populism as a political communication style which may be present with mainstream politicians and which is undoubtedly present with populist politicians. Populism as a communication style is characterized by the use of positive references to the people and/or politician's attempt to identify with the people in other, more refined ways than explicit references. Therefore the decision was made to introduce a category that will measure politicians use of cues from the private sphere in their interviews, such as referencing to family members, use of informal or colloquial language that can be treated strategies of 'privatisation of politics'. In addition, we measured the use of 'empty signifiers' that are, according to Laclau,[45] typical of populist discourse, but seem to be increasingly present among mainstream politicians. The results presented in Table 6 suggest that candidates, except for Grabar-Kitarović, did not resort to private language. Challenger Grabar-Kitarović, who in the aftermath of the election became the first Croatian female president, used references to her private life in two interviews.[46]

Table 6: Populism as a political communication style

Candidate	Number of interviews	Strategies of privatization	Empty signifiers	What empty signifiers?
Kolinda Grabar- Kitarović	12	2 (17%)	2 (17%)	New unity Croatian unity
Ivo Josipović	13	0	6 (46%)	Second Republic Guardian of civic Croatia
Milan Kujundžić	5	0	2 (40%)	New Croatia National strategic consensus
Ivan Vilibor Sinčić	9	0	0	-
Total	**39**	**2 (5%)**	**10 (26%)**	

Source: Authors

The analysis of the use of 'empty signifiers' has revealed that they were modestly present in the discourse of the presidential candidates. They appear in ten analysed interviews, mostly by Ivo Josipović (in six of his interviews). For instance, he gladly spoke of the 'Second Republic' without ever explaining what this Republic actually entails.

In a nutshell, populism as political communication style was in examined interviews present mostly through explicit positive references to the people (see Table 1) and to a much lesser degree through the use of privatization strategies or the presence of 'empty signifiers'. Intensive positive referencing to the people was observed in the interviews of Sinčić and Kujundžić who, on the other hand,

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[45] Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.
[46] E.g. "I mean, it is wonderful to be in Rijeka, back home. I try to come as often as possible: people often don't see me because I am not walking down the Korzo but I go to see my friends and family, but I come here very often" (*Novi list*, 11. December 2014).

entirely avoided privatization and rarely used 'empty signifiers'. Although Grabar-Kitarović introduced references to private life and 'empty signifiers' here and there (e.g. 'new unity'), given her modest referencing to the people, it may be argued that she maintained clear mainstream position even in terms of populism as a political communication style. Josipović is a different case whatsoever. Perceived as a mainstream politician who entered the race as a president of the country and the candidate of the ruling SDP, Josipović demonstrated startling populist tendencies both in terms of populist style (primarily by using 'empty signifiers') but also in terms of populism as political ideology (mostly by negatively addressing his fellow political elite).

Conclusion
The goal of this paper was to detect presence and nature of populist cues in the campaign communication of the four presidential candidates in the 2014/2015 election in Croatia. In the theoretical section, we first tried to dismantle the definitional clutter related to the notion of the word 'populism'. We looked at the origins of populism and examined if it is justified to regard populism as a political ideology. Finally, we looked at the difference between populism as a thin-centred ideology and populism as a communication style. In the empirical part of the paper we used content analysis to study interviews of the four presidential candidates, trying to identify presence and nature of their populist appeals. Populism is thereby conceptualized on two levels - as a political ideology and as a political communication style.

The results point to three important findings. First, the analysis of the two dimensions that are central to populism - positive referencing to the people and anti-elitism - allowed us to identify Ivan Vilibor Sinčić and Milan Kujundžić as true populists. Their position of 'strong populists' is further reinforced by their dual understanding of political systems and processes and their refusal to be recognized as political professionals, which was particularly emphasised by Sinčić. Second, analysis of the 'dangerous others' revealed Sinčić's extreme resentment towards economic elites which allowed as to conditionally label his populism as left wing or social populism. His well-articulated criticism of political and economic elites apparently stroke the cord with the voters and translated into impressive electoral result. On the other hand, Kujundžić's strong national appeals, expressed most obviously in his specific references to the people ("Croatian people") were emptied from aversion towards minority groups and therefore did not translate into a true right wing populism. Therefore his populism was conditionally labelled 'national populism'. However, his national populist appeals had apparently significantly less success with the voters than Sinčić's social populism. Interestingly, this study revealed no signs of right wing populism in campaign communication of the presidential candidates which is in line with previous empirical research of populism in Croatia.

Finally, analysis of the two frontrunners showed that Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović maintained her mainstream position. She showed no signs of anti-elitism and resorted to populist style on rare occasions by introducing information from her private life or using 'empty signifiers'. To the contrary, Ivo Josipović transformed himself in the course of the campaign from a mainstream

politician into an 'almost true populist'. This was mostly visible in his strong criticism of political elites and his abundant use of 'empty signifiers'. Although he has a history of flirting with populist style, in this campaign he approached what we here defined as populist ideology. This is probably due to his attempts to win the game he felt he was losing. Yet, the race was won by the politician who stuck with the mainstream political discourse, and the only candidate who seems to have benefited from populism is the political outsider Sinčić.

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Appendix: Code sheet

Interview ID _____

1. Newspaper / Magazine:
    1. Jutarnji list
    2. Večernji list
    3. Novi list
    4. Slobodna Dalmacija
    5. Globus
    6. 24sata Express

2. Politician:
    1. Ivo Josipović
    2. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović
    3. Ivan Vilibor Sinčić
    4. Milan Kujundžić

3. Publishing date: insert the date

References to the people
4. What is the predominant sentiment of the interview towards the people?

1. There is no reference to the people.
2. Positive
3. Negative
4. Neutral

Note 1: <u>Include</u> and code all collective terms such as citizens, inhabitants, community, Croatian society, Croats, public, voters etc. <u>Do not include</u> references to particular segments of population (e.g. youth, women, pensioners).

Note 2: Write down all reference pertaining to the people on a separate sheet of paper. Assign valance to each reference (neutral, positive or negative). Count the references and their valance and record prevailing valance as the overall sentiment of the interview. Assign interview ID to your supporting sheet and attach it to your main coding sheet.

5. Does the politician spontaneously use references that make him appear closer to the people (such as the references to the members of the family, humour, colloquial language etc.)?
1. Yes
2. No

Note: <u>Do not code</u> if the reference was prompted by journalist instead of being spontaneously introduced (e.g. 'Your mother was sick during election campaign' or similar).

<u>Anti-elitism</u>

6. What is the predominant sentiment of the interview towards political elites?
1. There is no reference to political elites.
2. Positive
3. Negative
4. Neutral

Note 1: <u>Include and code</u> only if the reference pertains to elites as collectivity (politicians in general or 'politics'). References to actual parties, politicians or government should be included only if a certain party, politician or a group of politicians (government for instance) is used as a proxy for political elites.

Note 2: Write down all reference pertaining to political elites on a separate sheet of paper. Assign valance to each reference (neutral, positive or negative). Count the references and their valance and record prevailing valance as the overall sentiment of the interview. Assign interview ID to your supporting sheet and attach it to your main coding sheet.

7. Does the politician explicitly identify with political elites (e.g. 'We politicians should fight for the common good'; 'I am a member of a political party and I believe that politicians should …')?
1. Yes
2. No

8. Does the politician see himself/herself as a 'political professional'?
1. Yes
2. No

Note: 'Political professionals' are politicians who see their political activities as central to their professional life. 'Political non-professionals' are politicians who see their political activities as something occasional, something which is not

their core business and something that they will do for a limited period of time (because their core profession is something else, business or similar).
'Dangerous others'

9. Does the politician refer to 'dangerous others'?
   1. Yes
   2. No
Note: 'Dangerous others' are individuals or groups who do not belong to the people and who represent the threat to prosperity of the people.

10. Does the politician identify media elites as the dangerous others (e.g. media in general, editors, journalists, media corporations etc. but not an actual journalist, editor, media owner, publishing company etc.).?
   1. Yes
   2. No

11. Does the politician identify economic elites as the dangerous others (e.g. business in general, banks, bank owners, foreign companies, corporations but not an actual businessman, banker, bank etc.).?
   1. Yes
   2. No

12. Does the politician identify minorities as the dangerous others (e.g. sexual, religious, ethnical etc.)?
   1. Yes
   2. No

13. Does the politician identify EU and its institutions as the dangerous others?
   1. Yes
   2. No

14. Which of the following descriptions best represents the attitudes expressed in the interview:
   1. All political elites are the same. There are no real differences between them. Differences between political elites and political parties are only fictional. The real political differences are present only between political elites and the people.
   2. There are real, substantial differences between political elites. These are the most important differences in our society. These differences do not allow us to treat political elites as a unique and homogenous group.
   3. All political elites are incompetent and inapt and therefore politics should be in the hands of a strong leader who would be guided by his own competence and not by the will of the people.
   4. None of the above / it cannot be established.

15. Does the actor use 'empty signifiers' (e.g. justice, new justice, change, common good)? Write down all empty signifiers you were able to identify in the interview.
   1. Yes (which ones?)
   2. No