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Research Article

The Effects of Right-Wing Populist Communication on Emotions and Cognitions toward Immigrants

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Abstract

The persuasiveness of right-wing populist communication has become a widely discussed topic; it is often assumed that such messages might foster anti-immigrant attitudes among citizens. The present study explores the effects of the different components of right-wing populist communication—anti-immigrant messages, populist content, and populist style—on attitudes toward immigrants. By combining a media content analysis (N = 605 articles) with a panel survey (N = 1,968) in metropolitan areas of four Western European countries (France, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), this study analyzes how citizens' attitudes toward immigrants are influenced by the right-wing populist communication with which they are confronted in their individual media diet. The results show that anti-immigrant statements in the media lead to more negative cognitions toward immigrants, while populist content leads to more negative emotions. The study, thus, demonstrates that not only anti-immigrant rhetoric but also populism as a thin-centered ideology influence citizens' attitudes toward immigrants on top of pre-existing attitudes.

Keywords

populism, media effects, linkage analysis, panel survey, emotions, cognitions

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Right-wing populist actors remain on the rise in Western Europe.[1] Their success is often attributed not only to the programs they promote but also to how they communicate and how the media help them spread their messages (e.g., Mazzoleni 2008). Populist communication has been defined as a set of features that reflect the populist ideology on a communicative level (Aalberg et al. 2016, p. 14). These features can relate to either the content of a message or its form (Engesser et al. 2017; Wirth et al. 2016). On the content level (*what* is said), statements are characterized as populist when they refer to the people as a unified and positively connoted group, when they discredit the elite, and when they exclude certain societal groups (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Reinemann et al. 2016). With regard to the form (*how* it is said), scholars refer to emotional, dramatic, absolutist, or colloquial language (Bos et al. 2011, 2013; Wirth et al. 2016). Right-wing populist actors combine populist communication with an anti-immigrant rhetoric; this combination is expected to be particularly persuasive (Hameleers et al. 2016). The media are often accused of contributing to this persuasion (e.g., Mazzoleni 2008) as they may not only spread these messages but also might highlight their relevance or even construct right-wing populist messages on their own (Wettstein et al. 2018).

Only recently have scholars started to investigate the effects of (right-wing) populist communication on citizens' attitudes. Studies have shown that populist communication can influence the perceived legitimacy of political actors (Bos et al. 2011, 2013), reinforce populist (Hameleers et al. 2016; Hameleers and Schmuck 2017; Müller et al. 2017) attitudes, and strengthen negative stereotypes of immigrants (Matthes and Schmuck 2017). Most of these studies, however, focus only on the effects of populist content. The effects of populist style are considered less frequently, and the interaction of populist content and style is largely neglected. Moreover, while some studies differentiate between right-wing and populist messages, others do not. Furthermore, most studies conceptualize attitudes as cognitions; they investigate how populist content influences what people *think* about immigrants, the political elite, or political actors. However, attitudes also consist of an affective component, referring to what people *feel* about the attitude object (Abelson et al. 1982). Because populist actors are described as shifting the political discourse from reason to emotion (e.g., Canovan 1999), the affective attitude component is a relevant target of populist persuasion (Reinemann et al. 2016).

This study aims to improve the understanding of the effects of right-wing populist communication by addressing these research gaps. It combines a media content analysis with a panel survey in metropolitan areas of four Western European countries (France, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom). This design allows to analyze how citizens' attitudes toward immigrants are influenced by the right-wing populist communication with which they are confronted in their individual media diet. The content analysis assesses the prevalence of anti-immigrant statements, populist content, and populist style in newspaper articles on migration in a wide selection of news outlets. The panel survey, conducted before and after the content analysis, captures changes in cognitions and emotions toward immigrants as well as individual media

use. Because a year elapsed between the two panel waves, the analysis allows us to identify long-term effects of populist communication.

Our study starts from the assumption that individuals in different metropolitan areas are exposed to varying degrees of populist communication. However, we assume that the psychological processes that lead to attitude change operate similarly in individuals regardless of the metropolitan area they live in. Should this assumption prove to be correct, our internationally comparative design would provide an opportunity to draw conclusions about the generalizability of our findings and the overall structure of the underlying processes.

Right-Wing Populist Communication

During the last decade, research has mainly focused on defining which features classify messages as populist and how to identify these features in political speeches (e.g., Hawkins 2009), party manifestos (e.g., Rooduijn et al. 2012), the mass media (e.g., Jagers and Walgrave 2007), or on social media (Ernst et al. 2017). There is wide consensus that statements that depict the elite in a negative way (*anti-elitism*) and the people in a positive way (*people-centrism*) reflect core ideas of the populist ideology.

Considerably less research is devoted to the identification of stylistic features of populist communication (Bos et al. 2013; Bos and Brants 2014; Bracciale and Martella 2017). Although several scholars refer to the *emotionalized* (e.g., Betz 1993; Canovan 1999; Mazzoleni et al. 2003), *dramatized* (e.g., Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Mudde 2004; Taggart 2000), *absolutist* (Bos and Brants 2014; Engesser et al. 2017; Hawkins 2009), or *colloquial* (e.g., Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Stewart et al. 2003; Taggart 2000) nature of populist communication, theses style elements have rarely been included in measures of populist communication. One reason may be that such expressions can have causes other than the populist ideology of actors, such as the commercialization of a media system (Mazzoleni et al. 2003; Wirth et al. 2016). The accumulation of populist style elements is, therefore, not a sufficient indicator of populist communication. However, a recent study shows that the use of so-called populist style elements is positively correlated with populist content and that populist content is a stronger predictor of their presence than the type of media outlet (Wettstein and Büchel 2017). Because formal features of communication may have a persuasive impact on their own (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), it is crucial to include them when looking at the effects of populist communication.

Right-wing populist communication combines populist content and style with an anti-immigrant rhetoric. While some researchers see the exclusion of certain societal groups as a core element of populist communication (Aalberg et al. 2016; Jagers and Walgrave 2007), others argue that this feature is an add-on (e.g., Wirth et al. 2016). In any case, which groups are excluded from the people is defined by the ideology that is combined with populism. When populism is combined with right-wing ideologies, the people are defined as an ethnos or as a nation (Mudde 2004); accordingly, foreigners are excluded from the people, and immigrants are blamed for the people's problems.

The combination of anti-immigrant statements with populist communication is considered to be particularly persuasive (Hameleers et al. 2016).

Effects of Populist Communication on Affect and Cognition

In recent years, scholars have begun to investigate the effects of right-wing populist communication on citizens' attitudes. These studies indicate that populist communication may influence a variety of attitudes, such as the degree of support for the populist ideology (Hameleers et al. 2016; Hameleers and Schmuck 2017), the perception of political actors (Bos et al. 2011, 2013), and attitudes toward immigrants (Matthes and Schmuck 2017; Schmuck and Matthes 2017). They also show that populist content and populist style may affect attitudes individually and in combination. Although most studies have focused on the effects of anti-immigrant statements and populist content (Hameleers and Schmuck 2017; Matthes and Schmuck 2017; Schmuck and Matthes 2017), some studies have demonstrated independent effects of populist style (Bos et al. 2011, 2013) or amplifying effects of populist style when combined with populist content (Hameleers et al. 2016). These results reinforce the need to consider all three elements of right-wing populist communication to obtain a thorough understanding of the effects of populist communication.

Although the aforementioned studies have examined effects on diverse attitudes, the vast majority of them have one thing in common: a unidimensional understanding of attitudes. These studies conceptualize attitudes as cognitions toward objects and investigate how populist communication affects what individuals *think* about these objects. However, attitudes also consist of an affective component, reflecting how individuals *feel* about an object (Abelson et al. 1982), and it is well demonstrated that media-induced affect influences political judgments (see Kühne 2012 for a review). Although some researchers argue that spontaneous affective reactions precede cognitive evaluations (Zajonc 1984), the more popular approach is to conceptualize attitudes as a multicomponent construct consisting of a cognitive and an affective dimension (Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Rosenberg 1960; Steenbergen and Ellis 2006). The present study follows this approach and aims to complete the picture by investigating the effects of populist communication on both attitude components.

Political opinion formation, from a normative point of view, should be driven by reason rather than by emotions (Marcus, 2002). However, studies have shown that political information in the media influences cognition and affect and that both attitude components determine political attitudes (Kühne and Schemer 2013; Kühne et al. 2011; Schemer 2009). Which attitude component exerts a stronger influence on political judgments depends on numerous factors related to both the individuals who form a judgment and the object under consideration (Huskinson and Haddock 2004; Kempf 1999; Schemer 2009; Stangor et al. 1991). Furthermore, the message type may have an influence; the more vivid messages are, the more likely they are to evoke emotional reactions, whereas it is less likely that such messages will provide substantial new

information that would require a change to existing cognitive evaluations (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998).

Anti-Immigrant Attitudes

Attitudes toward immigrants are a central concept of political communication research in general and of populist communication research specifically. Several studies have shown that negative depictions of immigrants in the media foster prejudice and negative stereotypes (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009; Schemer 2012; Vergeer et al. 2000). Right-wing populist communication has a particularly strong influence on anti-immigrant attitudes due to the combination of stereotypical content with an emotionally arousing style (Hameleers et al. 2016). Research from social psychology has shown that attitudes toward immigrants consist of cognitions and affect (Haddock and Zanna 1999; Maio et al. 1996; Stangor et al. 1991; Stephan et al. 1999), but most studies in the field of populist communication have focused on cognition only (Arendt et al. 2015; Hameleers et al. 2016; Hameleers and Schmuck 2017; Schmuck and Matthes 2015). Exceptions are provided by Matthes and Schmuck (Matthes and Schmuck 2017; Schmuck and Matthes 2017), who consider intergroup-anxiety as an antecedent of anti-immigrant attitude. Their studies show that right-wing populist communication fosters not only stereotypes but also negative affective reactions; however, they do not differentiate between effects driven by anti-immigrant statements, populist content, and populist style. A study by Wirz (2018) suggests that populist content may elicit emotions even in the absence of populist style. However, it remains an open question whether populist style further increases emotional reactions and whether this short-term arousal transfers to long-term emotional evaluations.

Hypotheses

The goal of the present study is to disentangle the effects of anti-immigrant statements, populist content, and populist style on cognitions and affect toward immigrants. In a first step, however, we investigate whether exposure to right-wing populist communication depends on the region in which individuals live. All four metropolitan areas that are considered in this study have seen a rise of right-wing populist parties; yet the strength and especially the institutionalized success of these actors vary. While the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), and the French Front National were all very successful in past elections and were hence represented in their national parliaments at the time of this study (Dennison and Goodwin 2015; Ernst et al. 2016; Stockemer and Barisione 2017), the German AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) missed the electoral threshold in 2013 (Arzheimer 2015) and was not represented in the German parliament. It is expected that if populist parties have a higher institutionalized success, not only will their own populist messages be more dominant in the news media (Udris 2012), but also the communication of mainstream

parties may become more populist when they have to compete with populist parties (Rooduijn et al. 2014). These considerations lead to a first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The exposure to right-wing populist communication is higher in metropolitan regions with strong and influential populist parties (Zurich, London, and Paris) than in regions with weak populist parties (Berlin).

In a next step, we turn to the effects on emotions and cognitions. Based on the literature on anti-immigrant attitudes, we postulate that the valence of news coverage about immigrants will influence anti-immigrant attitudes. In line with previous research, we postulate that negative portrayals of immigrants in the news will increase negative cognitions toward this social group.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The more anti-immigrant messages individuals receive in their media diet, the more negative their cognitions toward immigrants will become.

We also investigate the effects of populist content, which we define as statements depicting the elite in a negative way and the ordinary people in a positive way (anti-elitism and people-centrism). Previous research has shown that such statements may contribute to negative attitudes toward immigrants (Hameleers et al. 2016; Hameleers and Schmuck 2017). Because anti-elitism and the exclusion of immigrants are closely related in right-wing populism, it may be that when one of these elements is addressed, the other one is *activated* as well (Hameleers and Schmuck 2017). However, because populist communication in its thin nature does not provide any substantial information about immigrants, it is less likely that cognitive evaluations will *change* in response to such statements. Rather, populist content may contribute to the vividness of an article related to migration and increase the relevance of the topic. Therefore, it will more likely evoke emotional reactions (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998). While anti-immigrant statements, thus, suggest what to think about immigrants, populist content provides a context that highlights the importance of the issue for the people and creates the sensation of personal relevance. We, thus, assume that the presence of populist content may increase negative emotions toward immigrants.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The more populist content individuals receive in their media diet, the more negative their emotions toward immigrants will become.

Next, we turn to the effects of populist style, which we define as consisting of emotionalization, crisis rhetoric, absolutism, and colloquial language. It has been demonstrated that populist style can influence attitudes independent of populist content (Bos et al. 2013). Furthermore, following the reasoning of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1998), we can assume that populist style does not provide substantial information but contributes to the vividness of the message and, therefore, influences the affective attitude component. Therefore, we postulate that populist style will influence negative emotions toward immigrants.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The more populist style individuals receive in their media diet, the more negative their emotions toward immigrants will become.

In summary, we expect that anti-immigrant messages may influence cognitions about immigrants, whereas populist content as well as populist style may both independently influence the affective component of attitudes toward immigrants. When all elements of (in this case right-wing) populist communication co-occur, we can expect the message to be particularly persuasive. However, it is unclear, if in this case emotions, cognitions, or both attitude components are affected. Therefore, we formulate a research question:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Which attitude component (emotions, cognitions, or both) is affected when all three elements of right-wing populist communication co-occur?

Method

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a content analysis and a panel survey and linked the data to trace media effects on the individual level. To ensure the highest possible overlap between the media diet of respondents in the survey and the outlets considered in the content analysis, the data collection was restricted to four metropolitan areas: Paris (France), Berlin (Germany), Zurich (Switzerland), and London (the United Kingdom). This focus allowed us to include regional and local media outlets in the content analysis while still having access to a diverse population for the panel survey. The metropolitan areas were defined to cover urban and rural areas; therefore, the next-largest political entities surrounding the cities were fully included. Paris was completed by Ile-de-France, Berlin by Brandenburg, and Zurich by the Canton of Zurich. Because Greater London does not comprise rural areas, we additionally included Buckinghamshire, an adjacent county.

Panel Survey

The two-wave panel survey was administered online in April 2014 and March 2015. Participants were recruited by a market research company from their online access panel. A quota procedure regarding gender and age was applied to ensure the sample reflected the local population. The first questionnaire was completed by 1,600 respondents each in the regions of Paris, Berlin, and London and by 2,000 persons in Zurich. Due to the long time span between the panel waves, the panel mortality ranged from 33 percent in Zurich to 58 percent in Paris. Furthermore, participants who reported that they did not use any of the media outlets included in our content analysis could not be considered for the present analysis (see Online Appendix Table A1). The remaining sample consisted of $n = 272$ in Paris, $n = 424$ in Berlin, $n = 461$ in London, and $n = 809$ in Zurich.

Measures

Attitudes toward immigrants. Attitudes can be considered global evaluations of an object consisting of a cognitive and an affective component (Petty et al. 1997). In both panel waves, we measured participants' attitudes toward immigrants with an adapted procedure (Crites et al. 1994) by assessing their emotions and cognitions with six items each on a five-point Likert scale. Because positive and negative items formed separate factors, the following analysis focuses on *negative cognitions* (ruthless, egoistic, responsible for problems) and *negative emotions* (fear, anger, contempt). Both components are considered latent endogenous variables in our model.

Media exposure. Participants were asked to indicate their media diet using the list-frequency technique (Andersen et al. 2016). In a first step, participants were presented with a list of newspapers (including those considered in the content analysis and other high-reach media represented in the regions under investigation) and were asked to select all outlets they used (in print or online) to obtain political information. In a second step, participants were presented with the previously selected newspapers and were asked to indicate the frequency of contact with each newspaper during a week (one to seven days). This information was gathered to match the data from our content analysis to the respondents (de Vreese et al. 2017; Scharkow and Bachl 2017; Wolling and Wirth 2012).

Content Analysis

The content analysis covered a wide range of printed newspapers during thirty days prior to the second panel wave. In addition to national quality and tabloid newspapers, we included regional newspapers of the metropolitan areas in which the survey was conducted to cover as much of the respondents' media diet as possible (see Table 1 for an overview of all included titles and Online Appendix Table A2 for the number of analyzed texts per title). All political articles on migration were considered for the analysis. Because their amount was very large, a random sample of approximately 33.4 percent (depending on the number of available texts per outlet) had to be drawn. Eventually, 605 articles were analyzed by an international team of forty-three trained coders. All variables were measured on the statement level and then aggregated onto articles. Statements considered for the analysis could be made by political actors, journalists, and other actors (e.g., citizens, experts). Coder reliability was measured in comparison with a gold standard established by the project leaders. Chance-corrected Brennan and Prediger's Kappa (Brennan and Prediger 1981) was above 0.90 for all but one variable on statement level (see Online Appendix Table A3). Only the recoded migration bias had a lower kappa of 0.665, which is still acceptable.

Measures

Anti-immigrant bias. Because the present study analyzes how media content on migration shapes attitudes toward migrants, it is essential to measure the valence of statements referring to migrants and migration policies. For each article, the number

Table 1. List of Newspapers in the Content Analysis.

	Berlin	London	Paris	Zurich
Quality news	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung	The Guardian, The Times	Le Monde, Le Figaro	Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Tages-Anzeiger
Tabloid news	Bild, B.Z.	The Sun, Daily Mirror	20 Minutes, Metro[a]	Blick, 20 Minuten
Weeklies	Der Spiegel, Focus	The Economist[a], The Spectator	L'Express, Le Point	Weltwoche, WOZ
Regional news	Berliner Zeitung, Berliner Morgenpost, Der Tagesspiegel, Märkische Allgemeine, Märkische Oderzeitung[a]	City A.M., London Evening Standard, Basildon & Southend Echo[a], Milton Keynes Citizens, MK News[a]	Le Parisien, Le Républicain (Essonne)[a], Paris Normandie	Tagblatt der Stadt Zürich[a], Winterthurer Stadtanzeiger[a], Winterthurer Zeitung[a], Zürcher Oberländer[a]

[a]Outlet did not include any article on migration during the time of the study, and thus, no content was assigned.

of favorable statements on migrants and claims for less restrictive migration policies was subtracted from the number of unfavorable statements on migrants and claims for more restrictive migration policies. Higher values for this variable indicate that the article had an overall negative stance toward migrants and migration. Because we consider populism a thin concept, anti-immigration statements were measured independently of populist communication.

Populist content. All statements reflecting the populist ideology as a thin concept were coded as populist; this included statements discrediting the elite (anti-elitism) and statements depicting a monolithic and pure people (people-centrism). Statements reflecting opposite ideas (i.e., statements favorable toward the elite and statements depicting a diverse population) were coded as anti-populist. For each article, a populist bias variable was computed by subtracting the number of anti-populist statements from the number of populist statements. Higher values indicated that populist content was dominant. It is assumed that populist content, in order to be persuasive, needs to have a dominant position in a news item (parallel to anti-immigrant statements, where we also assume that the valence of the portrayal is essential).

Populist style. For each statement, the use of populist style elements was assessed. These include references to emotions or the use of emotional language (emotionalization); exaggeration, emergency rhetoric, and references to morality (crisis rhetoric); the use of absolute claims or black-and-white depictions (absolutism); and the use of slang or vulgar expressions, sarcasm, or name-calling (colloquial language). It was

possible to code multiple style elements for the same statement. The number of all style elements present in one article was summed. Because the resulting variable had an extremely skewed distribution (most articles had no or few style elements), it was transformed by calculating its natural logarithm.[2]

Complete right-wing populist communication. This variable indicates whether anti-immigrant statements, populist content, and populist style occur in combination with each other. It is a dichotomous variable that has the value 1 for an article, when the anti-immigrant bias and the populist bias measure have a positive value as well as style elements are present. If any of these conditions is not met, the value is 0.

Individual Assignment of Media Content

For each media content variable, an additive score was calculated for each newspaper per day. This score represents the overall tone of the outlet regarding the characteristics of interest on that day. These values were assigned to the participants in the survey based on their self-reported media use. Values were weighted 1 for news outlets that participants used four to seven days a week and 0.5 for outlets used one to three days a week. Each participant was allocated a mean score of all daily values for all media outlets he used in the thirty days prior to the second panel wave. As a result, each participant received individual values for anti-immigrant bias, populist content, populist style, and co-occurrence of populist content and style, reflecting the personal media diet.

Results

Exposure

To test whether individuals in metropolitan regions with strong right-wing populist parties are exposed to more right-wing populist communication in the media, we compared the assigned media content across countries with a set of ANOVAs. The mean values of the assigned media content (displayed in Table 2) were significantly different in all regions. As we expected, average media users in Zurich and Paris and London were exposed to more right-wing populist communication than average media users in Berlin. The anti-immigrant bias was strongest in Zurich; the populist content bias and populist style were strongest in Paris. The co-occurrence of all three elements of right-wing populist communication was highest in London and Zurich. All in all, Hypothesis 1 is, thus, supported.

Effects on Emotions and Cognitions

To test our effects hypotheses, we computed a Structural Equation Model (SEM) with the R-package lavaan (Rosseel 2011) using a robust maximum likelihood estimation. The model is displayed in Figure 1. Cognitions and emotions at the time of the second

Table 2. Exposure to Right-Wing Populist Communication across Regions.

	Berlin			Paris			Zürich			London		
	M	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	Minimum	Maximum
Anti-immigrant bias	−0.39[a]	−1	0.5	−0.23[b]	−0.5	0.5	0.05[c]	−1	0.67	−0.07[d]	−0.57	1
Populist content bias	0.06[a]	−1	0.5	0.34[b]	0	1	0.15[c]	−0.5	0.8	0.27[d]	0	1
Populist styles	0.30[a]	0	0.8	0.85[b]	0	2.57	0.71[c]	0	2.44	0.61[d]	0	2.2
Complete right-wing populism	0.004[a]	0	0.49	0[a]	0	0	0.07[b]	0	0.43	0.71[b]	0	0.55

Note. All mean comparisons are based on Bonferroni post hoc tests. Means with different superscripts differ significantly from each other ($p < .001$).

Table 3. Regression Coefficients of Exogenous Variables on Cognitions and Emotions toward Immigrants.

	β	*p*
Cognitions *t*2 (R^2 = .65)		
Cognitions *t*1	0.861	.000
Anti-immigrant bias	0.055	.013
Populist content	0.027	.169
Populist style	0.017	.404
Complete right-wing populism	−0.021	.337
Emotions *t*2 (R^2 = .59)		
Emotions *t*1	0.864	.000
Anti-immigrant bias	0.014	.500
Populist content	0.046	.010
Populist style	0.002	.894
Complete right-wing populism	−0.008	.674

Note. *t*1 is the time of the first panel wave, *t*2 is the time of the second panel wave.

panel wave were used as latent endogenous variables, whereas cognitions and emotions in wave 1 were used as latent exogenous variables. The media content variables were also used as exogenous variables. Furthermore, emotions and cognitions were allowed to correlate.[3]

In view of the differences in media use repertoires across regions, the next step is to examine our previously formulated assumption that variations on the individual rather than on the aggregate level will drive changes in attitudes toward immigrants. This can be examined by comparing the model fit of a model with pooled data to a model with cases grouped by metropolitan region (multigroup SEM). According to the limits defined by Hu and Bentler (1999), the model has a very good fit to the pooled data (Chi^2 = 274.89, *df* = 84, comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.983, Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = 0.979, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.034, standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = 0.021), but the model fit decreases for the grouped data (Chi^2 = 486.20, *df* = 252, CFI = 0.977, TLI = 0.969, RMSEA = 0.041, SRMR = 0.062). This finding indicates that country-specific differences do not account for enough variance to justify the introduction of a grouping variable.[4] Furthermore, the grouped model had to be estimated without the participants from Paris, as there was no media content with all three elements of right-wing populism combined in this area. Therefore, all hypotheses are tested with pooled data.

Table 3 presents the regressions of all exogenous variables on cognitions and emotions at the second panel wave. First, the autoregressive effects of cognitions and emotions are significant and strong; attitudes toward immigrants were, thus, very stable over a year. Regarding our first hypothesis, there was an effect of anti-immigrant bias in the news on cognitions toward immigrants. The more anti-immigrant messages individuals received in their media diets, the more negative their cognitions became over time (β =

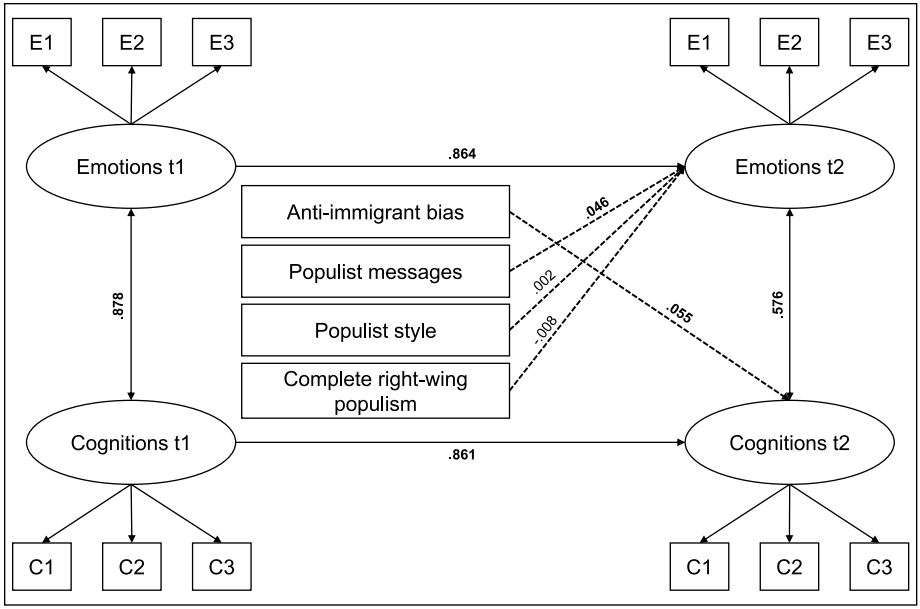

Figure 1. Theoretical model of media effects on emotions and cognitions toward immigrants including path coefficients and estimated covariances between latent variables.
Note. Dashed arrows represent the hypothesized effects (H1–H4).

0.055, $p < .05$). There was no effect of anti-immigrant bias on individuals' emotions toward immigrants. Hypothesis 2 is, thus, supported. The third and fourth hypotheses predicted an influence of populist content and populist style elements on individuals' emotions. In line with the expectations, the presence of populist content increased negative emotions toward immigrants over time ($\beta = 0.046$, $p < .01$), whereas cognitions were not affected. Hypothesis 3 is, thus, supported. Populist style had no effect on emotions or cognitions. Hypothesis 4 must, thus, be rejected. Furthermore, we assumed that the co-occurrence of all elements of right-wing populist communication would be particularly persuasive. A research question investigated if this would affect cognitions or emotions. However, no effect of complete right-wing populism was found. The combination of the elements of right-wing populist communication, thus, does not seem to be more persuasive than the elements on their own.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to improve the understanding of how right-wing populist communication influences citizens' attitudes by making a twofold contribution. First, we distinguished between statements reflecting populism as a thin-centered ideology, statements reflecting a right-wing ideology, and style elements as drivers of populist

persuasion. Second, we distinguished between effects on cognitions and effects on emotions. We assumed that right-wing elements would mainly affect what people think about immigrants, whereas populist elements would affect how people feel about them.

The results of our linkage analysis generally supports this assumption, although we only found significant effects of populist content but not of populist style. The finding that populist content can evoke emotional reactions is consistent with previous research (Schmuck and Matthes 2017). The present study demonstrated the emotion-eliciting effect of populist communication now in a nonexperimental setting. The finding that populist style did not influence emotions, however, is surprising. It is possible that style elements lead to immediate emotional arousal, which does not transform into long-term changes of emotional evaluations. Also, depending on the general tone of a newspaper, style elements may be perceived very differently across media outlets, and probably also across regions. Furthermore, populist style might be more present in other media types than newspapers.

The co-occurrence of all three elements of right-wing populism did not affect emotions or cognitions. However, because there were only weak biases against immigrants or toward populist content, and populist style was also a rare phenomenon, their co-occurrence was particularly rare. In Paris, we did not even find one article that would exhibit all three elements at the same time. Experimental research might be needed to better understand the interaction of anti-immigrant statements, populist content, and populist style. It is, however, noteworthy that we did find effects of anti-immigrant statements and populist statements, despite their relatively scarce presence in newspaper articles. Although right-wing populist communication is not as widespread as one might have thought (see also Hameleers et al. 2017), it still has an influence on citizens' attitudes and should, thus, not be disregarded as irrelevant.

To enhance the generalizability of the results and to balance the effects of specific local events that might affect attitudes toward immigrants, the study was conducted in four European metropolitan areas. Although we found that the media diets of individuals in these areas differed significantly regarding the biases toward immigrants and the presence of populist communication, our analysis confirmed that the changes in attitudes toward immigrants are better predicted by a model accounting for individual-level variation than by a model accounting for country differences. The psychological processes that are triggered by right-wing and populist communication seem to operate equivalently across the four surveyed communities and independently of reporting styles in the four news systems. With regard to scope conditions, it is of course worth remembering that we investigated only Western European metropoles, which might exhibit a lot of similarities.

The present study comes with limitations. First, linkage analyses, which combine a content analysis with a panel survey, are burdened with considerable measurement error. Scharkow and Bachl (2017) demonstrate how measurement errors of both involved data collections lead to an underestimation of media effects. This is mainly due to the fact that we cannot be sure that individuals really read the newspaper articles that were assigned to them based on their self-reported media diets and that populist communication was rare in the media content that we analyzed. Furthermore,

our media selection does of course not reflect the complete media diet of the participants in the study. First, we analyzed printed newspapers. While the lack of television broadcasts and web-only news sites is a severe limitation, it is noteworthy that the cross-platform reach of newspapers is still substantial (Newman, Levy, and Nielsen 2015). We disregarded digital-born publications because they have remained "relatively weak" in the countries studied, except in France, where they have become "more prominent"; however, the few relevant European digital natives "are similar in many respects to legacy media" (Nicoll, Shabbir, and Nielsen 2017). Second, we selected an equal number of quality, tabloid and weekly newspapers for all metropolitan areas. In some regions, this selection does not fully reflect the media landscape (e.g., we did not include the *Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* in London), and the total reach of the selected newspapers varies. Future research could aim at more inclusive media samples, and the selection of news media could be based on considerations of a comparable reach across countries instead of a comparable number of outlets.

Second, the control of autoregressive effects in our panel design makes our analysis more conservative. We analyzed the *change* of attitudes toward immigrants over the course of a year. Our data show that there was little change. In this context, it should be noted that our study was conducted before the so-called "refugee crisis" in Western Europe, and the debate on migration focused mainly on the free movement of persons within the European Union. The absence of major events in this debate might have contributed to the stability of attitudes. In contrast to previous research on the effects of populist communication on attitudes toward immigrants (Hameleers et al. 2016; Hameleers and Schmuck 2017; Matthes and Schmuck 2017; Schmuck and Matthes 2017), the present study investigates long-term effects caused by real-world media content in routine times rather than short-term effects of experimental stimuli. This may explain why we could not find strong effects across the board.

Finally, the present study does not differentiate between different sources of populist communication. It might be that populist messages have a stronger impact when they are voiced by well-known populist actors than when they come from actors that are unknown or usually not associated with populism. Furthermore, it could also make a difference if populist communication is linked to a political actor or comes from the media themselves. Future research could investigate this and also consider that populist content and populist style might more likely co-occur when populist actors have more control over their messages (e.g., on social media or when they are directly cited) than when the media edit the message.

Despite these limitations, our study is the first attempt at a systematic analysis of the effects of right-wing populist communication on cognitions and emotions toward immigrants in a real-world and comparative setting. It demonstrates that right-wing populist communication, despite its relative scarcity in the news, does influence citizens' attitudes toward immigrants. More precisely, we found that populism as a thin ideology increases negative emotions toward immigrants, while anti-immigrant rhetoric increases negative cognitions toward immigrants. The thin-centered populist ideology, thus, has a persuasive effect on its own, even on top of pre-existing attitudes.

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Notes

1. The French Front National and the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) achieved their best vote share in history in the respective 2017 national elections.
2. To avoid a high number of missing values on the transformed variable, we calculated +1 before the transformation. Values that had been 0 on the original variable are, therefore, also 0 rather than missing on the transformed variable.
3. We have conducted invariance tests for the measurement models tapping for emotions and cognitions. Multigroup confirmatory factor analyses (MGCFA) confirms metric invariance over time as well as across country samples for both constructs.
4. We also tested a model in which cases were grouped by populist attitudes, that is, their support of the populist ideology, because previous research (e.g., Schulz et al., 2017) suggests that individuals might show different reactions to populist communication depending on their predispositions. However, this grouping variable slightly decreased the model fit.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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