

Writing in Boxes

for scientific journals

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Writing the Introduction

Research question

I Are there peculiarities and differences in the media's political coverage of various parties during election campaigns?

Importance of the study / What the article adds

I In democracies, the media fulfill fundamental functions: They should inform the people, contribute to the formation of opinion through criticism and discussion and thus enable participation. In recent decades, however, the media have been increasingly criticized for influencing election results through their reporting and for helping populist parties in particular to flourish. After the 2017 federal elections in Germany, for example, the media were accused of contributing to the success of the right-wing populist AfD by increasingly including the party's content and language in their articles. Representatives of these media houses strongly opposed this accusation. The aim of this study is to investigate whether there is any evidence to support this accusation and to discuss which incentives might be the basis for biased reporting in this regard.

Topic sentence

I Structural similarities between the "logic of right-wing populism" and the attention economy of the mass media can result in the media being tempted to adopt the selection and framing of these topics by right-wing populist parties such as the AfD.

Brief summary / Literature review

In recent decades, concern has grown about the role of the media in politics in general and in election campaigns in particular. These concerns are also reflected in debates in various academic disciplines. A central topic in the field of media and communication studies is media logic (Takens, 2013). Media logic refers to mechanisms that the media use to compete in the constant battle for people's attention (Strömbäck, 2008: 233). When selecting topics, the media primarily focus on news factors, i.e. the factors that turn an event into news worth reporting. Populist parties such as the AfD use many of these news factors in their communication strategy: conflict, drama, negativity, surprise, proximity. In particular, the AfD uses the mechanisms of the media attention economy like no other party. Populist messages often co-occur with negative, emotionalized, or dramatized communication style (Ernst, Blassnig, Engesser, Büchel, & Esser, 2019). Therefore, it can be assumed that the occurrence of populist key messages may have a positive impact on the amount of comments an article receives. In fact, Blassnig (2019) shows that populist key messages by political and media actors in news articles provoke more reader comments under these articles. Media competing for the attention of readers therefore have an incentive to pick up on the key messages of these parties.

But does increased reporting also lead to rising survey results? Especially if this reporting is largely negative. In political science, several studies have examined at least the first aspect of this question (Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Eberl, 2018). In general, it is assumed that smaller, non-established parties in particular benefit from placing their topics in the media in order to get them into the voters' heads. Here, the tendency of the reporting is irrelevant but rather the quantity is decisive.

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