



Reporting right-wing populist governments in the EU: the news representation of Hungary and Poland in European leading press

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ENG Abstract. The European Union (EU) has traditionally been seen as a communicatively distant entity for most European citizens. After a strong integration, people's evaluations of the EU in some countries and regions have moved to a negative approach. At the same time, there is a sort of populist wave grounded on the use of digital technologies. The economic and political elite, including the EU, is highly criticized through social media. In a conflictive context, this research aims to explore the news coverage of the relationship between the EU and Poland and Hungary. Using a content analysis, we analyze the posts on Twitter referring to the heads of the Polish and Hungarian governments in the accounts of four leading European newspapers (*The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *La Repubblica*, and *El País*). Our research examines the thematic composition of the tweets (news items) published in 2022-2023, collecting also which leaders are referenced and the level of interaction of the digital audience. The results illustrate the presence of the Ukrainian war on political and media agendas together with classic populist topics. They also show a greater attention to Poland, but with a strong focus on national politics. Hence, the news provision on the EU is associated with geopolitical communicative elements.

Keywords: European Union, media representation, news coverage, populist rhetoric, Twitter.

ES La información sobre los gobiernos populistas de derecha en la UE: la representación mediática de Hungría y Polonia en la prensa de referencia europea

Resumen. La Unión Europea (UE) ha sido tradicionalmente vista como una entidad comunicativamente distante para la mayoría de los ciudadanos europeos. Tras una fuerte integración, las valoraciones de la UE por parte de la población en algunos países y regiones han pasado a ser negativas. Al mismo tiempo, existe una especie de ola populista basada en el uso de las tecnologías digitales. La élite económica y política, incluida la UE, es muy criticada a través de las redes sociales. En un contexto conflictivo, esta investigación tiene como objetivo explorar la cobertura informativa en torno a la relación entre la UE y dos estados miembros: Polonia y Hungría. Mediante un análisis de contenido, analizamos las publicaciones en Twitter que hacen referencia a los jefes de gobierno polaco y húngaro en las cuentas de cuatro periódicos europeos líderes (*The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *La Repubblica* y *El País*). Nuestra investigación examina la composición temática de los tuits (noticias) publicados en 2022-2023, recogiendo también a qué líderes se hace referencia y el nivel de interacción de la audiencia digital. Los resultados ilustran la presencia de la guerra de Ucrania en las agendas políticas y mediáticas junto con temas populistas clásicos. También muestran una mayor atención a Polonia, pero con un notable enfoque en la política nacional. Por ello, la oferta informativa sobre la UE se encuentra asociada a elementos comunicativos geopolíticos.

Palabras clave: Unión Europea, representación mediática, cobertura informativa, retórica populista, Twitter.

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1. Introduction

Over the last few years, Euroscepticism has become a key cleavage in European politics, but also in European political communication. After a strong integration, people's evaluations of the EU in some countries and regions have moved to a negative approach, jeopardizing the legitimacy of the European project (De Vries, 2018). Euroscepticism is defined as a new and probably long-lasting reaction to elite-driven integration. Citizens defend their specific economic or cultural traditions against the centralization imposed by the EU (Treib, 2021), which is seen as a threat for national identities.

The EU institutions have traditionally been considered as communicative distant and ruled by elites. This situation demands imaginative solutions to bring Europe closer to its citizens (Tuñón & Carral, 2019). However, a pattern towards progressive politicization has been found in recent years triggered by crises such as the euro crisis or Brexit (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Risse, 2015). Climate or social policy are the issues that receive a higher level of politicization (Justel-Vázquez *et al.*, 2023). These changes took place in the context of fragmented (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018), or even dissonant public spheres fueled by the spread of digital technologies (Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2023). The classic relationship between the public, democratic institutions and media system has led towards a disrupted scenario in which political leaders can implement less mediated communication through social media.

In Western democracies, and particularly in Europe, there is a sort of populist wave grounded on the use of digital technologies. Populist leaders apply emotions on social media to criticize the economic and political elite, including the EU (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2023). Despite the importance of digital platforms, contemporary political communication is still hybrid, mixing the digital and media logics (Chadwick, 2017). Therefore, the media representation of both populist parties and leaders is essential to understand the interrelation between politics and public opinion (Rafail & McCarthy, 2018).

Regarding the media system, extant research describes the problems of populism to introduce their messages in the agenda of legacy media (Mazzoleni, 2008). Consequently, populist parties, and especially the far-right ones, draw on social networks to share their ideology (Engesser *et al.*, 2017; Pérez-Curiel & Rivas-de-Roca, 2022). In the current EU-27, populism in some Eastern countries fosters a debate over the prevalence of EU or national law, which puts the idea of a strong and united EU at risk.

Concretely, Poland and Hungary have been developing modes of governance based on questioning the supremacy of EU Law as established over the time by the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union (Stubbs & Lendvai-Bainton, 2020), leading to the spread of messages that support their inherent ideology. Nevertheless, the Russian invasion of Ukraine reopened citizens' debate on Europeanism in the face of the Euroscepticism that has already been at the center of other crises. The solidarity with the Ukraine may have caused a paradigm shift in Eastern Europe as Poland is a strong supporter of Ukraine and a more EU-aligned stance, while Hungary, and particularly its Orbán's

government, is more skeptical of EU actions and maintains closer ties to Russia.

In line with the available research on framing political populism, our study aims to shed light on the news coverage of the relationship between the EU and Poland and Hungary as they were the main European right-wing populist governments until 2023. We also explore the responses of citizens in this context, focusing on social media as they are the preferred space for populist actors.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Reporting a populist conservative turn in Europe

East European Politics are currently shaped by a massive democratic backsliding connected with the breakthrough of illiberal approaches (Cianetti *et al.*, 2018). According to the authors, this regional trend prioritizes democratic stability and is based on oligarchical structures. The countries of the Visegrád Group, especially Poland and Hungary, are marked by the consolidation of a hegemonic right-wing populism that goes beyond the traditional anti-immigrant sentiments. These parties focus on the role of families or ethnic demography (Stubbs & Lendvai-Bainton, 2020), delivering a vision of what a proper citizen should be.

Most of European Eastern countries joined the EU in 2004, but this fact has not avoided the rise of a populist conservative turn in those states. Regarding Hungary, scholars such as Bozóki & Hegedűs (2018) points out that the illiberal Hungarian system has been supported and even legitimized by the European institutions. This paradoxical support has created a unique model, but the path of the EU integration towards supranationalism may change the assessment of membership.

One of the recent phenomena that blurs national boundaries is the possibility of political engagement through social media. Literature on public communication has portrayed that Twitter (currently named as X, although throughout the article we decided to use "Twitter" because the analysis was carried out prior to the platform's name change) was the most suitable platform to build a transnational conversation in which people share content and discuss topics of common interest such as European politics (Bossetta *et al.*, 2017). This huge use of digital technologies boosted optimism about the Internet as a chance to increase the feeling of European belonging. However, what occurs is the revitalization of nationalism and the polarization of politics as observed in Eastern Europe.

Literature underscores the alignment of interests between the social media ecology and populism over the last decade (Hopster, 2021). The information disorder is identified as the intervening variable that determines the nationalist and populist use of Internet (Kermer & Nijmeijer, 2020). Moreover, the working of platforms such as Twitter has been altered by the rise of algorithmic content curation, moving the online experience to social interest clusters in a process defined by Gerbaudo (2024) as 'TikTokification'. On this matter, the Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter in 2022 led to an ideological drift that is perceived as unfavorable for journalists (Claesson, 2024).

How are European journalists covering this populist right-wing movement within a disinformation scenario? A longitudinal analysis of articles of newspapers shows that there is an increase in terms of supranational coverage, but this is characterized by a negative tone (Silva *et al.*, 2022). Thus, the great media attention to the EU is not linked to a favorable Europeanisation of public debates. Conversely, reporting the EU focuses on the conflict between member states, being outstanding the democratic backsliding in some countries such as Poland and Hungary (van der Brug *et al.*, 2022).

News provision on the EU suffers from structural problems that overlap with the classic distance of the European project (Rivas-de-Roca & García-Gordillo, 2022). In this sense, media consumption seems to have no effect on responsibility attributions at the EU level (Goldberg *et al.*, 2022). Since providing information for defining causal responsibility is a key mission for the media, journalism on the EU level is far from enabling the necessary democratic accountability.

As stated, the erosion of institutions because of the emergence of populist nationalism has largely been explored with a strong focus on the Internet age (Persily, 2017). This links to the personalization of politics and the emergence of leaders designed for audiovisual platforms: social media, television, etc. For instance, previous studies illustrated how leaders have greater effects among citizens with a television media diet (Garzia *et al.*, 2020).

2.2. Media representation and social media

The media representation of populism is complex as this concept works as a thin-centered ideology that fills the empty places of democracy by advocating the sovereign rule of the people (Abts & Rummens, 2007). Furthermore, it is not easy to separate political populism oriented to the media from those populist contents developed by the media themselves (Bos & Brants, 2014). However, some studies found that the more news media reported about populist-related topics such as migration, the more these issues influence vote intention (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007).

The connection between media outlets and social media is seen on how politicians use these platforms to impact on electoral support (Kruikemeier, 2014). In the European framework, social media means an opportunity to shape a transnational conversation, but in a limited way (Ruiz-Soler *et al.*, 2019). Likewise, in Europe there is not an only sort of reporting on the EU, but many journalisms linked to national traditions (Picard & Salgado, 2015). This may be a problem to achieve the visibility of the European project as the EU requires a two-way street of communication to ensure its working as democracy.

Considering the effects of news on the EU, some authors detected that the knowledge of its events is related to negative EU performance evaluations (Marquart *et al.*, 2019). The criticism of this international project is fueled by the rise of populism, which defends a transformation of liberal democracy. The evolution of populism in America and Europe is quite similar, but one of the big differences is the focus of the latter on discrediting transnational integration

(Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012), represented by the European Union. Indeed, this organization is assessed as a ruling elite (McNamara, 2019), against which the populists present themselves as defenders of the people (Jones & Sun, 2017). Beyond that, the presence of elements of populist communication is wider in Europe compared to other contexts (Zulianello *et al.*, 2018). The communication strategies employed are different between social media, which have altered the news information cycle by enabling a kind of interaction that can contribute to the state of opinion.

The interrelation between the media system and populism is difficult as this fragmented ideology is tailor-made for digital technologies. Some prior research on global leading newspapers detected how they adopted populist categories to frame this kind of leader with Bolsonaro in Brazil (Araújo & Prior, 2021). In the United Kingdom, Brown and Mondon (2021) found how the reporting of the populist hype contributed to the mainstreaming of the far right as both concepts are usually conflated. Regarding the Euro Crisis, a previous study analyzed the news coverage of populist and non-populist candidates during national election campaigns (Salgado *et al.*, 2021), showing a negative tone against populism. Nevertheless, Europe as a single area remains little addressed. Concretely, there is scant empirical research on how quality newspapers in Europe are reporting on leaders of countries with a huge contestation against EU integration.

On this backdrop, we argue that an examination of the news coverage of the main right-wing populist governments (Poland and Hungary) is crucial to understand the media representation of a turbulent relationship with the EU. Our analysis focuses on Twitter as social media is a relevant arena for public opinion. Accordingly, three research questions are posed:

- RQ1: How is the media representation of Poland and Hungary performed?
- RQ2: In what ways are issues and leaders emphasized in the news coverage?
- RQ3: How is the interaction on Twitter impacted by these journalistic messages?

3. Method

To answer these research questions, our research used a content analysis methodology to the tweets of leading legacy media across Europe. This approach is followed because of the existence of a hybrid political communication, in which media platforms have become an essential tool (Chadwick, 2017). Furthermore, content analysis is a technique that gives in-depth knowledge of news items (Krippendorff, 2012), which is here reinforced by some qualitative descriptions that seeks to find patterns in the data.

Specifically, we analyzed for six months the posts on Twitter referring to the heads of the Polish (prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki) and Hungarian governments (prime minister Viktor Orbán) at that time. The sample is composed of all the tweets published by the accounts selected on the words "Poland" or

“Hungary” (“Poland OR Hungary”), including in the Boolean search the governments (“Polish government OR Hungarian government”) and the names of the leaders (“Morawiecki OR Orbán”) published by the accounts selected. This search on specific words allows us to obtain an overview of the digital conversation.

The Twitter accounts of four leading European newspapers (*The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *La Repubblica*, and *El País*) were chosen before the change of Twitter to X: @guardian, @derspiegel, @repubblica and @el_pais. These media outlets were selected since they are well-known in Europe in terms of press quality. Besides that, they agree with progressive and democratic ideology and belongs to different countries (UK, Germany, Italy, and Spain), which explains why these media outlets were also chosen in other media analysis across the continent (Ginesta & Viñas, 2023). All these newspapers are ideologically opposed to right-wing populism, ensuring a similar perspective that it is aimed at tackling. Therefore, the differences between these media would not be marked so much by ideology, but by their countries of origin.

We focused on Twitter due to its advantages for political communication in elections (D’Heer & Verdegem 2015), assessing whether there was a change covering the European establishment in 2022 and 2023. A data collection period was defined from 1 October 2022 to 1 March 2023. The reason for setting 1 October as the beginning has to do with the adoption of disciplinary procedures by the European Commission against both countries; whereas, in March 2023 is when legal action launched was en-

dorsed by the European Parliament, starting a new phase. This time frame was also a period of stabilization in the Ukrainian war.

After selecting the whole sample (N = 1 340), a manual content analysis was applied. 215 tweets clearly referred to the government of Poland and/or Hungary, making their content subject to a qualitative in-depth analysis. The data were processed with IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 28; meanwhile, the coding was carried out manually by two researchers. To evaluate the intercoder reliability, a test was conducted on the 215 tweets further analyzed, reaching acceptable levels ($\alpha = 0,87$ as average of all the variables) according to Krippendorff’s alpha values.

This study examines the thematic composition of the news items published on those tweets, collecting also which leaders (national or international) are referenced and the level of participation and response of the social audience in a crisis. The distribution of these categories is provided, along with a visual representation of their links. The variables employed for the quantitative study are mentioned countries, issues (thematic agenda), tone about the EU, main actor, and number of retweets.

Regarding the analysis of the thematic agenda, a list of topics is created following the main trends in European politics according to the issues addressed by the news releases of the European Commission in September 2022. Categories were developed to be exclusive and exhaustive. Hence, only one issue can be coded for each tweet. Table 1 gives further information on the items created which have also undergone recoding to combine very similar topics.

Table 1. Analysis categories of thematic agenda in media (Twitter).

Topic categories	Description
EU institutions	Mentions to the European Commission and the rest of EU institutions.
Rule of law	Approaches to ensure the crucial role of law in democracy.
Economy / commerce	Economic issues (GDP, unemployment, industry, etc.) and trade.
Energy	Issues related to energy with a special focus on the energy crisis or the electricity price.
Migration	Issues on the physical movement of humans to a new location, including refugees.
Security	Mentions to home affairs, crime, or terrorism.
War	Allusions to armed conflict, especially the Russian invasion of the Ukraine.
Environment	Environmental problems and challenges such as climate change.
Education / research	Policies related to common education and research projects such as Erasmus Plus or Horizon Europe.
Other	Unclassifiable news items in the previous categories.

Source: own elaboration.

It should be noted that elections to the European Parliament took place in 2024, which means that current narratives may influence the democratic shaping of Europe. The list of topics, together with the rest of categories and the data on whether the media refer to Poland, Hungary or both countries, will offer a representation on the news representation during a conflictive time frame. Additionally, the type of actors mentioned, and the number of retweets is helpful to understand the view of citizens when reporting on right-wing populism. Retweets imply a higher degree of support than likes, since a retweet means sharing content. That is the reason why they are defined as an impact variable.

4. Results

4.1. International newspapers facing Eastern populism

The analysis of the media outlets' accounts shows a quite similar distribution of the sample, with *Der Spiegel* being the only outlet that exceeds this trend and publishes up to 400 tweets. Germany is probably the country with a higher impact on EU politics, and particularly in the adoption of sanctioning procedures since it is the country with the most MEP/seats in the European Parliament. This may disclose why a German media outlet (*Der Spiegel*) pays greater attention to this topic. For its part, *The Guardian*, *La Repubblica*, and *El País* present close number of tweets. Based on the previous information, the percentual distribution of the sample per newspaper is the following: *The Guardian*: 19,1%; *Der Spiegel*: 37,2%; *La Repubblica*: 20,9%; *El País*: 22,8%.

Beyond little differences in the amount of news items through tweets, all the selected media outlets publish much more about Poland than about Hungary (Table 2). *The Guardian*, *La Repubblica*, and *El País* share a preference for Poland over 80% of the sample; whereas *Der Spiegel* is the one that publishes the most about Hungary (22,5%), but the frequency of Poland is much more outstanding.

Table 2. Distribution of the reporting by newspaper according to the country mentioned (% within newspaper).

	Poland	Hungary	Both
<i>The Guardian</i>	85,4*	12,2	2,4
<i>Der Spiegel</i>	76,3	22,5*	1,3
<i>La Repubblica</i>	82,2*	13,3	4,4*
<i>El País</i>	81,6	18,4	-

*Bold data with a significance level of 0,05. Also in other tables.

Source: own elaboration.

Our evidence suggests that the populist criticism of the EU rule of law is mostly framed by a Polish perspective. Media outlets from different European countries devote greater attention to news caused by the response of the Polish government against the measures imposed. This could be linked to a cultural nearness of the European leading media with Poland, or maybe also to a distance concerning Hungarian politics.

Moreover, only few tweets allude to both Poland and Hungary. On this matter, *La Repubblica* has the highest figure with only 4,4%. It seems that the approach for the two countries is not relevant to the media. As aforementioned, the news coverage of the Eastern right-wing populism seems marked by the Polish government. It should be acknowledged that the European Commission has launched several infringement procedures against this government in recent years, turning it into an object of media attention.

4.2. The thematic agenda of news coverage

The distribution of topics is considered as an indicator of the media agenda, delving into different issues depending on the country addressed (Table 3). There are two topics with the same percentages in Poland and Hungary: EU institutions and migration, which are key elements for the Eurosceptic narrative. However, most of the issues reveal a great level of divergence between countries. Environment (100%), war (96,5%), security (96,4%), energy (88,9%), rule of law (53,3%) and to a lesser extent the "other" category (50%), are more present when reporting on Poland.

Table 3. Thematic agenda by mentioned country (% within issue).

	Poland	Hungary	Both
EU institutions	50	50	-
Rule of law	53,3	33,3	13,3
Economy / commerce	25	75	-
Energy	88,9	11,1	-
Migration	50	50	-
Security	96,4	3,6	-
War	96,5	2,3	1,2
Environment	100	-	-
Education / research	33,3	66,7	-
Other	50	45,8	4,2

Source: own elaboration.

Hungary is prioritized considering economy/commerce (75%) and education/research (66,7%), which are likely topics not expected in Eurosceptic discourses. Besides that, rule of law is the most frequent issue on tweets that deal with both countries (13,3%). This finding shows how the management of law is a common challenge that obtains widely international media attention.

As the media outlets chosen belonged to different countries, it is noteworthy to analyze the thematic composition not only by country, but also by newspaper (Table 4). *Der Spiegel* is the media outlet with the highest number of tweets on environment (100%), energy (77,8%), migration (75%), economy/commerce (68,8%), rule of law (53,3%), and security (49,1%). By contrast, war and the "other" category are well divided between all the media of the sample.

Likewise, education/research has an outstanding presence in *El País* (66,7%). The Spanish newspaper also shows a great use of EU institutions (50%), at the same level of the mentions to these institutions in *La Repubblica*. Italian and Spanish news organiza-

tions act in the same way on this point. Together with the rule of law and war as a topic, they are the topics in which Mediterranean newspapers have a common behavior.

Table 4. Thematic agenda by newspaper (% within issue).

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Der Spiegel</i>	<i>La Repubblica</i>	<i>El País</i>
EU institutions	-	-	50	50
Rule of law	13,3	53,3	20	13,3
Economy / commerce	12,5	68,8	-	18,8
Energy	-	77,8	22,2	-
Migration	-	75	25	-
Security	16,4	49,1	16,4	18,2
War	27,9	15,1	25,6	31,4
Environment	-	100	-	-
Education / research	-	33,3	-	66,7
Other	16,7	37,5	29,2	16,7

Source: own elaboration.

Another highlighted use is thematic fragmentation. *The Guardian* deals with fewer topics when reporting about Poland and Hungary. In this sense, the news items on Twitter are related to issues connected to security or law, which are prominent newsworthy facts. This approach has implications as it shortens the scope of the media narrative. One of the possible reasons for this finding is that *The Guardian* comes from a country that has left the EU (the United Kingdom), which may explain the less interest in questions beyond security and law. On the other hand, *Der Spiegel* is the newspaper with the most plural agenda. Germany is the only country selected with borders with Poland, leading to a strong historical relationship.

Taking the findings into account, the agenda of *Der Spiegel* is plural, dealing with a wide range of topics, including typical ones in this framework such as rule of law or migration, but also environment. This result could lay on the environmental awareness of the German population. Against this backdrop, *The Guardian* refers to a few topics. The agenda in *La Repubblica* and *El País* is neither vast, but the figure for the category of EU institutions is high, revealing an interest for the relation of Poland and Hungary with those institutions.

4.3. Scope of the political personalization and user preferences

At this point, we consider analyzing the shaping of the news coverage in terms of personalization and assessment of the EU project, which can trigger a kind of interaction by the public. First, the distribution of tone about the EU (Table 5) shows how the combination of positive and negative approaches is usual for international (35,8%) and local actors (34,9%). Conversely, the neutral tone is predominant in European (58,3%) and national (41%) actors.

Generally, the fact that the negative tone is distributed in a homogeneous way between European, national, and local actors convey how this Eurosceptic approach is not associated with a specific geographical area. As national leaders are typically described as those supporting a more negative view of the EU, our finding is surprising, showing a particular reporting on the governments of Poland and Hungary. This should boost a reflection upon the reasons that explain the news coverage applied to these countries within the European context.

Table 5. Distribution of tone about the EU by main actor (% within tone).

	International	European	National	Local
Positive	-	25	75	-
Neutral	-	58,3	41,7	-
Negative	-	33,3	33,3	33,3
Both positive and negative	35,8	27,2	2,1	34,9

Source: own elaboration.

What happens to the positive tone? Data points to that 75% of the news items on Twitter with positive approach have a national leader as the main actor. This is remarkable since prime ministers or leaders at the national level are assessed in a more positive way than European ones such as those ruling the EU. Therefore, the mention to specific leaders does not necessarily have to be negative.

When it comes to interaction, the results reveal a scant number of retweets for all the actors considered (international, European, national, and local ac-

tors). Although the category between 1 and 49 retweets is the most frequent (Table 6), the distribution shows how national actors generate messages between 100 and 299 retweets (6,5%) and over 299 retweets (4,8%). There is a light trend to catch more attention in posts about national actors, followed by international ones. It is significant that tweets on European actors never get the highest interaction variables. Still, these findings need to be interpreted within low interaction practices.

Table 6. Distribution of main actor by number of retweets (% within actor).

	0	1-49	50-99	100-299	Over 299
International	-	91,3	1,4	5,8	1,4
European	-	90,9	9,1	-	-
National	-	83,9	4,8	6,5	4,8
Local	4,3	88,4	7,2	-	-

Source: own elaboration.

Since most of the news coverage was about Poland, the number of retweets is related to the interest for the issues on this country. The audience on Twitter tend to react positively to personalization based on a national approach. Indeed, national actors receive a little more attention. This means that the European project is associated with geopolitical communicative elements that prioritized nationalism in Western Europe. The discourses of leaders and the media is reshaped by this perspective applied through digital technologies, which can have impact on public opinion.

At the thematic level, there are no clear patterns to explain the interaction detected since most topics were placed between 1 and 49 retweets (Table 7). However, security, war and, to a lesser extent economy/commerce, have messages that receive greater attention. It seems that there is an increasing awareness of the importance of conflicts in current Europe, which leads to further dissemination of informative tweets on these topics (war and security).

Table 7. Distribution of main actor by number of retweets (% within actor).

	0	1-49	50-99	100-299	Over 299
EU institutions	-	100	-	-	-
Rule of law	-	100	-	-	-
Economy / commerce	6,3	81,3	12,4	-	-
Energy	-	100	-	-	-
Migration	-	100	-	-	-
Security	1,8	89,2	3,6	3,6	1,8
War	-	87,2	3,5	7	2,3
Environment	100	-	-	-	-
Education / research	-	100	-	-	-
Other	-	83,3	12,5	-	4,2

Source: own elaboration.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we analyzed the news coverage on the Polish and Hungarian governments, in a context marked by the war in Ukraine. These countries are probably the two most significant examples of the rise of nationalist populism in Central and Eastern Europe, which is characterized by criticism of EU legitimacy. Prior research on transnational public communication has extensively portrayed the media reporting about the European project as distant and national-oriented news coverage (Goldberg *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, previous literature has also studied how the democratic backsliding in East European politics is a consequence of a disinformation scenario (Kermer & Nijmeijer, 2020), but there is scant attention to the relationship between these two processes.

Accordingly, we examined the media representation of the Polish and Hungarian governments on the Twitter accounts of leading European legacy media. Three main contributions are provided in order to answer the research questions. First, our research furthers our understanding of how these media outlets report about two of the most representative right-wing populists in Europe. Within the sample, most newspapers present a quite similar number of news items through tweets (RQ1). The only exception is *Der Spiegel*, which illustrates a possible higher awareness of this situation in Germany. In addition to that, the four selected newspapers show a trend to publish more about Poland compared to Hungary. Thus, reporting on Central and Eastern right-wing populism is clearly oriented to the Polish government.

Our second contribution offers insightful information on the issues and leaders emphasized in the news coverage (RQ2). Regarding the thematic agenda, the results reveal a great level of difference between countries. Mentions to the Hungarian government focus on economy/commerce and education/research; meanwhile, Poland receives a higher attention in almost the rest of topics, including the war. The two issues with the same volume of news items in both countries are EU institutions and migration, which are classic items for Eurosceptic discourses (De Vries, 2018).

Moreover, some of the tweets posted refer to both countries simultaneously. In such cases, the position of the rule of law is outstanding, which evidences how the supremacy of EU law is a challenging question for conservative populists. Considering the distribution of the thematic agenda by news organizations, the agenda of *Der Spiegel* is rather more plural than in the other media outlets, being remarkable the presence of environment as a central topic. Surprisingly, the agenda diversity in the well-known newspaper *The Guardian* is low, which may overlap with Brexit and an increasing distance of the British public opinion to European politics. This finding also happens to a lesser extent in the rest of legacy press analyzed (Italy and Spain).

Reporting on the cited topics usually focuses on national leaders. They obtain a very positive perspec-

tive, which means that they are assessed better than international or European politicians. Still, these European leaders are journalistic considered through neutral lens. This contrasts with pure international and local actors, which are mostly reported following a mix of positive and negative approaches.

Third, our study sheds light on the interaction on Twitter with these contents (RQ3). The results show how the number of retweets is reduced for all the type of actors selected. However, national leaders trigger a slightly higher number of news items over 100 retweets. This sort of national actors seems to foster more interaction as the European ones do not achieve these figures. Additionally, war and security issues are those catching higher attention.

Taken together, our results show a strong media focus on Poland compared with Hungary, but with differences between newspapers that illustrate the predominant position of *Der Spiegel* in the European landscape. The interrelation between national and EU politics seems to be higher than expected since many topics are addressed and the European politicians are not framed from a negative perspective, despite of the divergence between Hungary and Poland that denote a greater sense of media concern in the latter. This discovery can be surprising as Poland generally aligns with other EU nations on key issues such as Ukraine, though there are tensions with the EU over the rule of law and judicial independence. In comparison, the Hungarian government frequently challenges EU policies, singularly on human rights and democratic standards, and has been accused of undermining EU values.

Finally, some limitations are acknowledged. The sampling method allows us to explore two specific case studies, but the research units are limited to the news coverage on Twitter. Other social networks could be considered together with additional leading newspapers across Europe. Future research should expand our scope by analyzing bigger samples during extended time frames to enable longitudinal studies on European narratives. Particularly, it would be interesting to analyze the allusions to Central and East European populism through more countries. Poland and Hungary are relevant cases because of their population and the consolidated position of their governments, but there are other countries that may develop a new wave of conservative populism.

In conclusion, our research contributes to a budding literature on the media representation of populism in Europe. This ideology does not only condition the global legacy media agenda (Pérez-Curiel & Rivas-de-Roca, 2022), but also their framing by adopting populist categories (Araújo & Prior, 2021; Hameleers & Vliegenthart, 2020). The empirical findings provided reveal how these representations reach the media presence of several countries on social networks. Consequently, the populist connection between legacy and social media should be further explored as they shape a citizen perception that goes beyond a single EU member state, impacting on the European public opinion.

6. Authors' contribution

Conceptualization	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.	Authors 1, 2, 3
Data curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later re-use.	Authors 1, 2
Formal analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyse or synthesize study data.	Authors 1, 2
Funding acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication.	Authors 1, 2, 3
Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection.	Authors 1, 2, 3
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models.	Author 1, 2, 3
Project administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.	Author 1
Resources	Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools.	Authors 1, 2
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components.	Author 1
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.	Author 3
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs.	Author 1, 2, 3
Visualization	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/data presentation.	Author 2
Writing / original draft	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation).	Authors 1, 2
Writing / review & editing	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision –including pre- or post-publication stages.	Authors 1, 2, 3

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8. Statement on the use of artificial intelligence

No artificial intelligence tools have been used in this article.

9. References

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