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# Journalism and Populism in Slovakia

## National Report<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This study attempts an analysis of the complex relationship between journalism and populism in Slovakia. In particular, the key research question is whether journalists support, challenge or are neutral in their approaches towards populist actors?

It is the first national study with such focus. It is based on 24 in-depth interviews with journalists from a wide spectrum of the media. I also illustrate positions and approaches of either journalists and/or the media to populism on representative examples – events. These events, however insignificant from a long-term perspective may be, represent current deeply symbolic issues that help to explain underlying moral and professional principles. The fundamental question that I try to explain is how is it possible that a strong presence of populism in politics coexists with the mainstream journalism that has for a long time been opposing passively, and occasionally actively, populism?

First, I briefly outline the local media ecosystem. I highlight those features of the media system that may help to uncover deeper causes of media and journalists' roles in populism. I also explain and illustrate as an example the key criticism of the mainstream liberal media and journalists by both the mainstream conservative and so called alternative illiberal media and journalists. I try to explain the birth and popularity of alternative media that form a special ecosystem in Slovakia.

Then I focus on explaining the criteria used for the sample selection and its specification. I point at sometimes ignored or unknown data such as contrasting ideologies of journalists and their respective media outlets, or (tentatively) in some cases, the variance between the journalists' self-declared ideologies and the results of more in-depth investigations in this area. This last section is mostly based on a limited sample of 14 journalists only.

Furthermore, I explore journalists' definitions and perceptions of populism as well as journalists' and media responses to populism.

In conclusion, relevant findings are discussed. The roles and approaches of the mainstream liberal, mainstream conservative and (almost exclusively) conservative alternative media/journalists are explained. It is showned that there is a contrast between media and journalists' usually normatively standard but professionally-technically more challenging approaches to populist politicians/parties and, in contrast, their normatively more transparent negative approach towards more radical political alternatives.

For terminology clarification, the words “journalism” as well as “media system” are used as encompassing words for both journalists and media. Obviously, a media system, has a broader meaning than either media or journalists (for example, it includes non-journalistic features or public and private regulations).

The text is rather extensive. This has to do with the complexity of the issues tackled here, as well as, related, a lack of any relevant comprehensive recent local analyses on the subject (save for related study by Baboš, Dolný, Vicenová, Világi, 2021). For example, there is no recent, reliable and relevant analysis of the media ecosystem. An in-depth analysis proves that many popular but also professional assumptions are wrong or at least confusing, terminology is fuzzy or evolving, and the interpretation of statistics or surveys is quite often challenging.

# 1. THE MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

In general, a national media system is as a result of history seen as similar to the Czech media system. However, due to a smaller market size and (especially in total value) lower GDP, the output (news and current affairs programmes, educational and entertainment programmes) of the Slovak media system (includes both media organisations and journalists) is locally (among journalists but also by the public at large) considered as being at a somewhat qualitatively lower level. In contrast, some comparative studies suggest that the Slovak media system and journalism is possibly in some key aspects at higher qualitative level than the Czech media system. For example, Herrero, Humprecht, Engesser, Brüggemann and Büchel (2017, 4810) argue that the Slovak media system structurally (and geographically) belongs to “the northern cluster which also includes Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania”, but not the Czech Republic. This cluster is characterized “by the lowest levels of political parallelism, the highest levels of press freedom, and the highest levels of foreign ownership, the highest levels of journalistic professionalism and online political information use and the lowest levels of ownership concentration”.

Also, it seems, based on available but limited and methodologically problematic data (discussed further) that the Slovak journalists are ideologically orientated towards the liberal left (by and large liberal in social values, and slightly to the left in economic dimension),<sup>2</sup> while in the Czech Republic there is prevailing more liberal-right orientation among journalists (Volek & Urbániková, 2017). Certainly, the Slovak media system is normatively different from both Hungarian and Polish media systems (with biased public service media – PSM in these two countries) and with more polarised values prevailing among the journalists in those two latter media systems. Such conclusion can be based on a number of ideologically-orientated journalistic organisations in those two countries.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, there is one large organisation of journalists (Slovak Syndicate of Journalists) with members in thousands, and a smaller, more elitist organisation, the Slovak Section of the Association of European Journalists (with around 50 members). Neither organisation is seen as politically affiliated, although the latter organisation is, by definition, more globally focused. There is a free and independent PSM (Radio and Television of Slovakia or RTVS) with a rather neutral (meaning impartial) political coverage from an ideological perspective.<sup>4</sup> Freedom of the media in general is high, the country ranking at 35th place according to RSF for 2020 year.<sup>5</sup> Comparatively, this was about the same level as for the Czech Republic, and much better results than either for Poland (64<sup>th</sup>) or Hungary (92<sup>th</sup>). In part, a minor drop in Slovakia’s ranking was caused by Igor Matovič’s<sup>6</sup> verbal conflicts with journalists whom he accused of irrational hatred towards him.<sup>7</sup> As a particular target of Matovič’s anger were explicitly

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<sup>2</sup> Policy preferences on economic issues do not follow an ideological left–right pattern; that is, citizens' economic policy preferences are ideologically inconsistent (Otjes, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> [Media Landscapes](https://medialandscapes.org/country/hungary/organisations/journalist-associations), <https://medialandscapes.org/country/hungary/organisations/journalist-associations>

<sup>4</sup> The PSM is, by the law, requested to provide, in effect independent, comprehensive and fair coverage. Representative survey from early 2020 suggested that the PSM news were trusted by 52% of respondents, and not trusted by 15% of respondents. Focus, <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/1745238/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2021#>

<sup>6</sup> A leader of populist anti-corruption movement OĽaNO, in period 2020-2021 serving as the Prime Minister and at a time of writing in position of a minister of finance.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.omeiach.com/blog/20063-igor-matovic-si-uctil-spomienku-na-jana-kuciaka-zneuzitim-jehomena-a-utokom-na-novinarov>

mentioned “ultraliberal” media (Tódoová, 2021b). However, major negative attitude towards journalists was noted as originating among the opposition.<sup>8</sup>

### **Too much Liberalism?**

Indeed, the major printed and audiovisual media outlets are liberal in their ideological orientation. This designation means that they support (or, at least, do not openly challenge) a political and social regime that promotes individual rights, civil liberties, human rights, democracy, and free but regulated enterprise. These media outlets include for example newspapers Dennik N (Newspaper N, liberal newspaper on record), Sme (We Are, liberal - center right), Pravda (Truth, liberal-left), Hospodárske noviny (Economy News, liberal business newspaper), Nový čas (New Times, liberal tabloid) and Plus Jeden Deň (Plus a Day, liberal tabloid).<sup>9</sup> The list of liberal friendly or liberal-neutral media includes PSM, major private TV Markíza, and news TV TA3 as well as online only news portal aktualita.sk. It should be noted that PSM attempts to be more ideologically balanced also in its news coverage which occasionally leads to revolt among its junior staff.

### **A few Libertarians and Anarchists as the Two Poles (of the same Sins)**

As it will be shown later on in a more detailed analysis, the mainstream liberal media pretend to be (politically-ideologically) “neutral” (or impartial) in their news and current affairs programmes. This is to a large degree true, with the exception of Sme and Denník N. In general, as mentioned, these two newspapers are open defenders of liberal democratic order. Yet there also are a few journalists there who show more libertarian vision of the world.

There is an alternative journal Zem & Vek (Earth & Age) that is on the opposite pole here. This journal is in its writing against liberal democracy (see Baboš, Dolný, Vicenová, Világi, 2021, 27-28, 30-31). One can call its ideology as anarchist – it does not offer a reasonable alternative.

In some cases of alternative media, one could find, after in-depth analysis, more problematic ideological features. Be that as it may, although marginal in total numbers, both libertarian journalists and anarchist journalists present reputational challenge to both the mainstream liberal media and to some of alternative media that try to transform themselves into a conservative mainstream news alternative. This is in particular case of the most popular Hlavnespravy.sk newportal that is between these two poles (but more leaning towards anarchism than towards professional conservative alternative especially due to COVID19 discussion), oscillating between criticism of liberal democracy and its open condemnation.

### **A Case Study of Libertarianism in Discourse**

The mainstream liberal media (especially the two last mentioned newspapers Denník N and Sme) have been for a long time criticised by “alternative” (generally considered as those promoting fake news and hoaxes) and increasingly by illiberal mainstream media as being hypocritical.

There is a symptomatic event that illustrates this issue rather well. In November 2021, illiberal (conservative) as well as alternative media (mostly conservative) picked up an exchange of opinions between two mainstream liberal (as I argue later on, these were actually “libertarians”) journalists (one of them was a regular producer of rather sarcastic humour)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.omeiach.com/tlac/20648-slovensko-v-rebricku-slobody-tlace-kleslo-v-hodnoteni-kritizuju-matovicove-utoky-na-novinarov>

<sup>9</sup> By tabloid it is understood content, not format.

onTwitter to point at this hypocrisy. The story included a popular female Christian singer who happened to have a husband employed in a conservative news outlet. The singer was ridiculed by the two libertarian journalists because of her gender, religion as well as artistic performance (see Appendix H). The story became (for a short time) criminalised when prosecutor general got involved publicly in commenting on it. This story, as irrelevant if seen from any perspective but symbolic one (of course, symbols are very important in communication), may actually contribute to drawing a more visible lines between the mainstream liberal and other media outlets (see discussion in Gašparovič, 2021b, Struhárňanská, 2021, Števkov, 2021a, infovojna, 2021, Kotian, 2021, Šimečka, 2021, Magušin, 2021, Kovačič-Hanzelová, 2021, Čobejová, 2021 and Balogová in Tódová, 2021b). Beata Balogová, editor-in-chief of the newspaper Sme where one of the actors involved in this scandal was employed as a commentator, and the other one irregularly published black humour cartoons/jokes, issued three reactions in her Facebook account within 48 hours (see Appendix F), including a delayed public apology. The story nicely illustrates and concentrates the key ethical-professional concerns of the mainstream conservative and alternative media with respect to (a part – those possibly defined as libertarians<sup>10</sup>) of the mainstream liberal or, as suggested, rather smaller part of libertarian journalism: (occasional or subtle) arrogance, bias and intolerance. Significantly, only a few liberal/libertarian authors somehow defended this controversial exchange of tweets.<sup>11</sup> The most primitive and radical opinions were presented by a former editor-in-chief of the business weekly Trend, a libertarian R. Baťo (see Appendix I).

In contrast, PSM but also the mainstream tabloid liberal media supported the singer.<sup>12</sup> Of course, the event also reflects tensions in a society due to pandemic as well as possible negative impact of communication opportunities provided by fast, cheap and widely available technologies (Bán, 2021). If seen from a longer perspective, the event points at the dubious belief that social media conversation by public actors can be perceived as a private affair. At the same time, it suggests that the journalists are seen as public actors even outside their office hours. Perhaps too quick and public reaction by the prosecutor general shows that he is uncertain about a proper redline between tolerated although disgusting criticism and criminal offence.<sup>13</sup>

### **Audiences and Ideology in the Media**

Even before this scandal, being a “liberal” had become a common negative accusation of the mainstream media and journalists, originating among those critical of the mainstream (liberal) journalism. It is no coincidence that there appears to be a general informal consensus as whom to include among the most important (often, at the same time, most controversial) liberal/libertarian journalists/media (see Appendix G in which this identification is made in a rather blunt and brutal form, but see also comments by Fico, Matovič and Kollár further in this text).

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<sup>10</sup> A political philosophy that upholds liberty as a core principle.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Bezák, 2021, or Harďoš, 2021 who called it “a shitstorm” or Leksa, 2021, who believed that this should have been understood as a private conversation and, moreover, moralism is more dangerous than politeness. Finally, Zala (2021) argued that sarcasm is a cornerstone of freedom in general, and he ended up with warning before “political Catholicism”.

<sup>12</sup> NECHUTNÝ ÚTOK na Simu Magušinovú: VEREJNÝ VÝSMECH a URÁŽKY za vieru v Boha! Reaguje aj RTVS, Niovember 16, 2021, <https://www1.pluska.sk/soubiznis/domaci-soubiznis/nechutny-utok-simu-magusinovu-verejny-vysmech-urazky-vieru-boha-reaguje-aj-rtvs>, Nechutný útok na Simu Magušinovú má svoju dohru: Prípado zobraľ do rúk Maroš Žilinko, November 17, 2021, <https://www.cas.sk/clanok/2610025/nechutny-utok-na-simu-magusinovu-ma-svoju-dohru-pripad-zobral-do-ruk-maros-zilinka/>

<sup>13</sup> See statements by lawyers in Mikušovič and Benedikovičová, 2021, and a statement by a journalists’ organisation in Lőrincz, Brada, Macák, 2021.

The population liked democracy (only about 15% had very low opinion on democracy) in European Social Survey 2014. However, in period 2019-2020 support for a democratic regime was declared by about a half of population, while about a quarter of respondents was ambiguous on the question whether there could be an alternative to democracy. Another quarter of respondents could imagine to live in another political system than democracy. Tellingly, 2017 survey showed that liberal democracy was seen as a close value to only 36% respondents, and as a distance value for 29% respondents, while 28% had a neutral attitude to a liberal democracy (Baboš, Dolný, Vicenová, Világi, 2021, 16-18).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the research shows that, based on six key dimensions of liberal democracy, there are about 50 % of liberal democrats in the country, and about 15% of non-democrats (Baboš, Dolný, Vicenová, Világi, 2021, 20-21). It appears that both popularity or long-term trust in either PSM news versus alternative media news, actually reflect the same key divisions.

### **News and Current Affairs Programmes**

Within this broader context, there are certain media programmes that play a central role in discussing political, social and economic affairs among those citizens who are more deeply interested in politics. This is the case of the evening current affairs discussion programme “Issue of the Day” (Mo-Thu)<sup>15</sup> on News TV TA3, together with the current affairs discussion programmes of TV Markíza, TA3 and RTVS, all broadcast Sunday at noon. The light entertainment format TV JOJ contributes to public discussions on current affairs with recently introduced programme *Analýza Na hrane* (On the Bordeline).

An important role in public discourse is played by radio current affairs discussion programmes such as *Braňo Závodský Naživo* (*Braňo Závodský Live*)<sup>16</sup> broadcast at noon by Radio Expres.<sup>17</sup> Radio Express is the most popular radio in Slovakia with 17% share (listened yesterday). There is also popular programme *Z prvej ruky* (First Hand) by PSM Slovak Radio, also broadcast shortly after noon every weekday. It is the second most popular radio in Slovakia, with 14% share (listened yesterday)(MML-TGI, 2021).

### **Professional Mainstream Conservative Alternative to both Liberal Mainstream and Alternative Media**

In Slovakia, there are some relatively recently established (less than a decade ago) conservative (usually based on Christian values but not defined as religious) media outlets such as online only news and current affairs portals *Postoj.sk* and *Dennikstandard.sk*. These are two relevant news and current affairs outlets considered to be accepted ideological alternatives to the liberal mainstream media. These online news outlets tend to give, occasionally, space to some uncritical commentaries or interviews with politicians whom mainstream media consider as populists. These include, for example, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. *Postoj.sk* managed to get a scoop – an interview with Viktor Orbán in May 2021.<sup>18</sup> This interview was criticised by the major liberal media in Slovakia as, in effect,

<sup>14</sup> This was cited from survey by Focus for Institute for Public Affairs, according to Bútorová and Gyarfášová, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ta3.com/tema-dna>

<sup>16</sup> It is named after the name of the moderator.

<sup>17</sup> For example, <https://www.omediach.com/blog/21557-fico-teatralne-zrusil-rozhovor-v-exprese-od-moderatora-a-radia-ziada-ospravdlnenie-video>

<sup>18</sup> See for example, Kernová, M. (2021, September 29). Fico teatralne zrusil rozhovor v Exprese, od moderátora a rádia žiada ospravedlnenie (VIDEO), *Matin Hanus* (2021, May 5) [Viktor Orbán.Dnes už neexistuje liberálna demokracia, s liberálmi vediem zápas o slobodu](https://www.postoj.sk/78144/dnes-uz-neexistuje-liberalna-demokracia-s-liberalmi-vediem-zapas-o-slobodu), <https://www.postoj.sk/78144/dnes-uz-neexistuje-liberalna->

uncritical support for Orbán's controversial national and geopolitical visions and policies.<sup>19</sup> It should be mentioned that, maybe as a reaction to this criticism, Postoj.sk asked for feedback, among others, also a Hungarian conservative news portal Válasz Online. Ironically, even the conservative Hungarian portal critically pointed out that Viktor Orbán's policies and ideology are less conservative and more authoritarian (see Bódis, 2021). Moreover, in the meantime, four former Slovak Prime Ministers were invited to comments on an interview with Orbán.<sup>20</sup> Obviously, Postoj.sk considered Orbán as conservative, not a populist politician. Some of the mainstream liberal media openly critically challenged the content of the interview – e.g. journalist Szalay (2021) from Denník N. This can be seen as – indirectly at least – a fight against populism. In contrast, an alternative online news portal Hlavnýdennik.sk (not identical with Hlavnespravy.sk) informed about this interview in a highly positive way.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, an alternative online news portal infovojna.sk re-published the full text of the interview.<sup>22</sup> Yet Postoj.sk faced also internal criticism. Its regular Austrian contributor, Leidenfrost (2021a) pointed out that Orbán was more often than not actually anti-Christian than Christian in his policies. The interview with Orbán presented a challenge for the Slovak conservatives. As put by Palko (2021):...there were many admiring reactions of Christian readers who, however, had voted for parties whose positions are contrary to those of Orbán.” Within this context it is instructive to listen to words of Jaroslav Daniška, editor-in-chief, how he explained the arguments for founding Postoj.sk.<sup>23</sup> In particular, he defined as its ideological opponents “liberal newspapers Denník N and Sme”. In the text accompanying the video, it is written that Postoj represents “an alternative to environment of propaganda and hatred disseminated by opinion-making media.....against followers of goodness of Evangelium and a common sense” as well as “a new alternative to opinion-making progressive neo-Marxist media in Slovakia.”

Similarly to Postoj.sk, Dennikstandard.sk defended Marine Le Pen in one of its commentaries (see Leidenfrost, 2021b). Furthermore, Dennikstandard.sk issued declaration – Open Letter (signed by the editor-in-chief) in support of Poland that “has been facing unfriendly media campaign for decades” in November 4, 2021.<sup>24</sup>

As can be seen, some uncritical or even positive approach to populists can be found in the mainstream illiberal conservative media (acknowledged by the mainstream liberal) mostly among conservative online outlets. However, this approach is more open in case of foreign populists only (who are seen as “true” conservatives, not populists) and who tend to be reported or commented or openly supported to a very limited extent only.

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demokracia-s-liberalmi-vediem-zapas-o-slobodu

<sup>19</sup> See the English language transcript at <https://miniszterelnok.hu/interview-with-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-the-slovak-internet-portal-postoj-sk/>

<sup>20</sup> Slovenskí expremiéři. Má Orbán pravdu, keď hovorí o EÚ a strednej Európe? (Slovak Ex-P.M.s. Is Orbán Right When HE speaks about EU and Central Europe?), May 7, 2021, Postoj,

<https://www.postoj.sk/78296/ma-orban-pravdu-ked-hovori-o-eu-a-strednej-europe>

<sup>21</sup> Peter Sulek (2021, May 6). VEĽKÝ ROZHOVOR Viktor Orbán: Žijeme v liberálnej nedemokracii, <https://www.hlavnydennik.sk/2021/05/06/velky-rozhovor-viktor-orban-zijeme-v-liberalnej-nedemokracii/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.infovojna.sk/article/orban-dnes-neexistuje-liberalna-demokracia-ale-liberalna-nedemokracia>

<sup>23</sup> Aby pravda a láska mala navrch nad nenávisťou médií na Slovensku - Jaroslav Daniška, Nov 12, 2020,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qw7BYX12w18>

<sup>24</sup> Vyhlásenie o solidarite s Poľskom, <https://dennikstandard.sk/133290/vyhlasenie-o-solidarite-s-polskom/>



## **Missing Left News and Current Affairs Alternative, Minority Media**

With exception of a hundred years old newspaper Pravda (Truth, with its focus on generation 50+), there are actually only limited left-wing media alternatives. The leftist current affairs online portal Noveslovo.sk is collection of individual contributions by leftist, pro-Russian, against-NATO and similar contributors. These contributions are often centralised from Facebook's posts or from individual blogs. In that sense, Noveslovo.sk can also be seen as an informal or a quasi-independent platform for (occasional) populist voices from the left. In addition, there are some bilingual Czech-Slovak leftist online outlets that are, however, more of intellectual platforms. Yet, as will be discussed further, social media seem to replace missing alternative and mainstream media spaces.

The long time ago established Uj Szó (New Word) or more recently established Ma7.sk, an online only newsportal in Hungarian language are media outlets focused only on the Hungarian national minority.

### **Alternative Media**

As mentioned, there are also some “alternative” (almost exclusively only online) media outlets such as Hlavnespravy.sk (that aims to be a competitor to the mainstream liberal media). It should be noted that Hájek and Carpentier (2015) suggest the notion of “alternative mainstream media”. Indeed, there is an ongoing discussion as to how much these media are “alternative”, and what does it mean actually. For example, hlavnespravy.sk used to be labeled as “pro-Kremlin” channel (Šnidl, 2016). It is true that there are quite many contributions of Russian origin, or with focus on Russia, disproportionately to others media coverage. Yet the outlet self-defines as “conservative-national.” Moreover, one can find there – rarely - articles critical towards Russia, too.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps, Hlavnespravy.sk portal is attracted to Russia that is seen as a new conservative-national model-to-follow, similarly to 19<sup>th</sup> century national movement that found inspiration in ethnically close but deeply conservative Russian empire. It is commonly believed that the current Russian political regime is based on conservative-national or conservative-illiberal ideology (Laruelle, 2021, Scherback, 2019). Perhaps even more importantly, considering negative attitude of the mainstream liberal media towards Russia, Hlavnespravy.sk by default (being alternative) turned its attention to Russia. Be that as it may, apparently, Hlavnespravy.sk likes to be seen as an “alternative to the mainstream media” (see Lehotský, 2021). This fits into above mentioned definition by Hájek and Carpentier. Apparently, alternative perspectives that are provided by “alternative media” include rejection of quite many major geopolitical and historical narratives presented by the liberal mainstream media (see Man, 2021). It should be noted that the general criticism - description and explanation of biases of the mainstream liberal media - are quite common for both Czech and Slovak media (see Šebestík, 2021).

### **The Rise of Alternative Media**

Among the public that was interested more frequently in news and current affairs issues (i.e. less than half of population)<sup>26</sup>, about one third (13%) preferred alternative websites, while

<sup>25</sup> Ruskom podporovaní hackeri napádajú cloudové služby, tvrdí Microsoft, 2021, October 21, <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/ruskom-podporovani-hackeri-napadaju-cloudove-sluzby-tvrdi-microsoft/2729274>

<sup>26</sup> Here it is assumed that those interested in politics more actively by and large overlap with those who read regularly newspapers. This number was 30% in 2019. Of course, this thus just an estimate. Median “MML-TGI národný prieskum spotreby, médií a životného štýluMarket & Media& Lifestyle-TGI. Základné



about two thirds (28%) preferred mainstream media in December 2019.<sup>27</sup> The origin of popularity of alternative media among relevant segment of population can be connected with the events of the late 2011- early 2012 years (Dobrotková, Chlebcová Hečková, Bekmatov and Kuciak, 2019). There was a key event that has impacted Slovak politics since then – the Gorilla scandal (Školkaý, 2018). It was about wiretappings that were leaked on the Internet and suggested grand corruption case involving political parties' representatives across political spectrum during the second Dzurinda's government. In fact, the mainstream media failed to provide relevant information (due to pressure from the legislation/courts, see Tódoová, 2019 as well as due to a lack of legally valid evidence, see Kostolný, 2021b) about this example of partially captured state and grand corruption case before it was anonymously revealed on the internet (Školkaý, 2019a). Obviously, follow-up events such as a crisis in Eastern provinces in Ukraine or a war in Syria (and sometimes questionable coverage of these events by the mainstream liberal media) contributed further to popularity of alternative websites. For example, both newspapers Sme and Denník N for some time incorrectly claimed (by giving space to such voices) that Georgia-Russia war was launched by Russia (see e.g. Bardiovský, 2018). It seems that further expansion of alternative media was facilitated by Facebook (that appeared about the same time) through its algorithms.<sup>28</sup> The key liberal media, Denník N, and Sme, also played a more political role during internal nation-wide political crisis after the murder of data journalist Ján Kuciak in February 2018 (Školkaý, 2019b,c). These two newspapers tried to shape political events, not just to report about them. This was a transformative event both for Slovak politics and for journalism.

### The Current Debates

There are two ongoing ethical-professional trends and quite many associated public debates. I have already presented one of these current debates. First, terminology, regulation and understanding of alternative media within national media ecosystem has been discussed in the last few years.<sup>29</sup> The most recent debate (December 2021) was focused on regulatory proposal concerning production and dissemination of fake news. Within this debate, both conservative alternative and non-alternative (in a negative framing) news outlets criticised this legislative draft, while newspaper Sme was probably the only news outlet that somehow welcome this type of regulation.

Second, the proper role of the mainstream liberal media is also discussed within context of both past Gorilla case and new leaks (this will be tackled later on) and its alleged moral superiority. In particular, the role of mainstream liberal media is criticised not only by alternative media, but also by the mainstream illiberal (conservative) media as a self-defined moral standard-bearer. Both issues are intertwined with the fight against populism. I discussed the latter issue earlier, therefore, let us turn to the other ethical-professional (and increasingly political-legal) double-issue.

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výsledky za rok 2019" [National Opinion Poll on Media Consumption, Media, and Life Style], *Median*, 2020, <https://www.median.sk/pdf/2019/ZS1914SR.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> TIS, "Dezinformačné weby pravidelne číta každý siedmy" [Disinformation Webs are Regularly Read by Every Seventh Person], *Sme*, February 2, 2020, <https://transparency.blog.sme.sk/c/526887/dezinformacne-weby-pravidelne-cita-kazdy-siedmy.html>

<sup>28</sup> Šnídl in CenPress, Alternatívne médiá, Aug 26, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUnJ90UMUWg&t=2633s>

<sup>29</sup> See for example, M.Mazurek, an MP, who interpreted new draft media bill as an attempt to destroy alternative media, Aktuálne na Slovensku, November 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkj1eZgvAI&t=14s>, or discussion by local experts, CenPress, Alternatívne médiá, Aug 26, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUnJ90UMUWg&t=2633s>

There is a changing terminology among fact checkers and fake news debunking organisations when they increasingly put these “alternative” information activities and sources under the more neutral umbrella term “controversial” instead of outright “fake news” and “hoaxes” or “disinformation” (see, e.g. Sawiris, Kuchta and Forgon, 2020). This change was in part caused by a legal complaint by one of these websites (Hlavnespravy.sk) that launched a successful legal action in protest to be included into a list of “controversial” websites (Preventive Measure 13C/6-2019/268). Or, as it was legally interpreted, having blocked income from ads because of this labeling (3Cob/39/2019-301). Yet it should be mentioned that it is still an open question whether Hlavnespravy.sk (or other alternative media) will become respected, or at least, accepted, as mainstream illiberal conservative-national alternative to the mainstream liberal media as well as to the mainstream conservative Christian media. The data from 2019 showed that Hlavnespravy.sk had about the same share of neutral framing of its news coverage as major liberal mainstream media such as RTVS, TV Markíza or Nový Čas. However, this was mainly due to using extensively services of wire agencies (Baboš, Dolný, Vicenová, Világi, 2021, 30). Although Hlavnespravy.sk has attempted to move towards more professional standards in the last years (including issuing two hard copies of “special issue” as well as by introducing partial paywall, and by leaving the Association of Independent Media), there is still some unacceptable radicalism and unprofessionalism present in its work (see Števkov, 2021b). Hlavnespravy.sk has so far have managed to avoid major conflicts with either authorities or the mainstream media. For example, they reacted to criticism raised by Števkov by adding explanation that softened its previous radical communicative approach. In early 2020, webportal Hlavnespravy.sk was seen as trusted source of news by 38% of the adult population.<sup>30</sup> This was certainly a significant part of the population.

In the meantime, authorities, including courts, have issued verdicts targeting the content of some of these “controversial” sources as problematic from a legal point of view. For example, Tibor Rostás, the editor of monthly magazine (as well as online web, and with two affiliated FB pages in the past) *Zem & vek* (Earth & Age) was sanctioned (the final verdict was issued in 2021) with 4,000 eur fine for publishing an anti-semitic article in 2017. This journal has been banned from sale in some supermarkets already in 2018 (Tvardzík, 2018). There was also increasing occasional intervention from FB that lead to decreasing reach of controversial websites in 2020.<sup>31</sup> For example, the FB pages of *Zem a vek* have been definitely taken down by FB in late 2020. Similarly, the Police raised criminal charges against controversial webportal *badatel.sk* in early 2021, following an initiative by the Minister of Health regarding dissemination of inflammatory news /related to COVID-19).

As mentioned, the journal *Zem & vek* is a unique part of media ecosystem with its extensive and almost exclusively critical focus on liberal democracy (including economy). Moreover, it presents its views in two thirds of cases in negatively-laden *emotional* language (Baboš, Dolný, Vicenová, Világi, 2021, 26-28). Finally, *Zem & vek* prefers alternative radical politics. It paid the same attention to Harabin in its 2020 coverage as to the Prime Minister (Baboš, Dolný, Vicenová, Világi, 2021, 34-35).

<sup>30</sup> TIS, “Dezinformačné weby pravidelne číta každý siedmy” [Disinformation Webs are Regularly Read by Every Seventh Person], *Sme*, February 2, 2020, <https://transparency.blog.sme.sk/c/526887/dezinformacne-weby-pravidelne-cita-kazdy-siedmy.html>

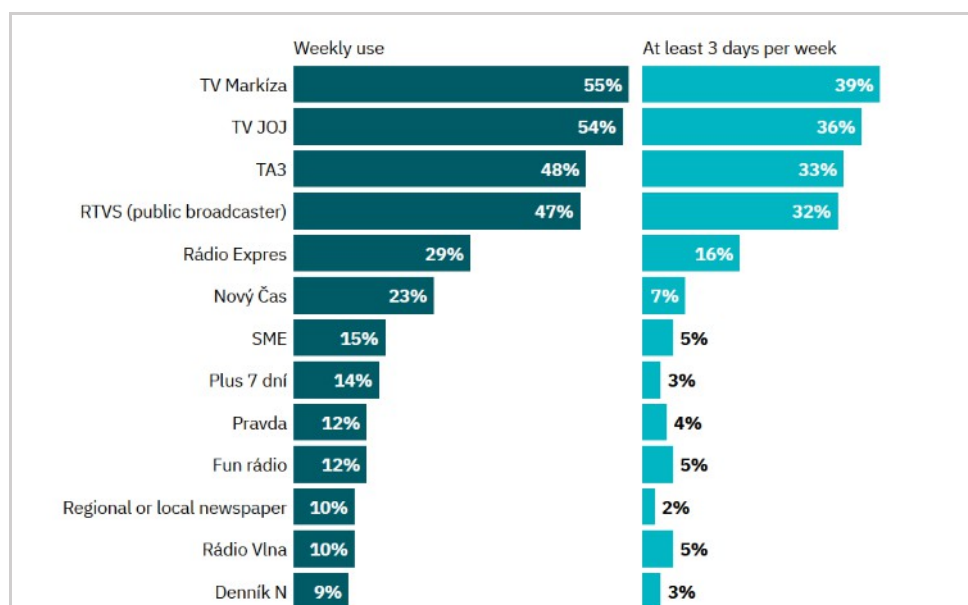
<sup>31</sup> mk, “Facebooku došla trpezlivosť už aj so Slobodným vysielateľom” [FB has lost patience with Free Broadcaster, too], *O médiách*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.omediach.com/hoaxy/19020-facebooku-dosla-trpezlivosť-uz-aj-so-slobodnym-vysielacom>, Filip Struhárik (2020b, October 9), “MediaBrifing: Časopisu Zem a vek klesli čísla na Facebooku o 75 %. Sieť potrestala aj ďalšie stránky za šírenie nepravd” [MediaBreefing: Magazine Zem a vek shows lower reach on FB], *Dennik N*, <https://dennikn.sk/2079550/mediabriefing-casopisu-zem-a-vek-klesli-cisla-na-facebooku-o-75-percent-socialna-siet-potrestala-aj-dalsie-stranky-za-sirenje-nepravd/?ref=tema>

## Social and Online Media as a Challenge to the Mainstream Liberal Media

In the last years the mainstream media successfully played the role of a watch-dog, and, as mentioned, sometimes also the roles of agenda-setters and gate-keepers. The latter two roles are increasingly undermined by social media use and popularity. Especially Facebook, but also some alternative online media, became battleground for conspiratory news and opinions reflecting COVID19 pandemic in particular. Facebook use can, occasionally, fully replace other distribution channels for political communication mostly based on hate, half-truths or negative emotions in general. Although there is usually a lot of discussion about right-wing populists, by far the most successful populist politician spreading hate on Facebook in Slovakia was actually a self-declared Marxist (Tóth, 2021).

The popularity of offline media (weekly reach) can be seen in Chart 1.

**Chart 1: Weekly reach – offline TV, RADIO, PRINT**



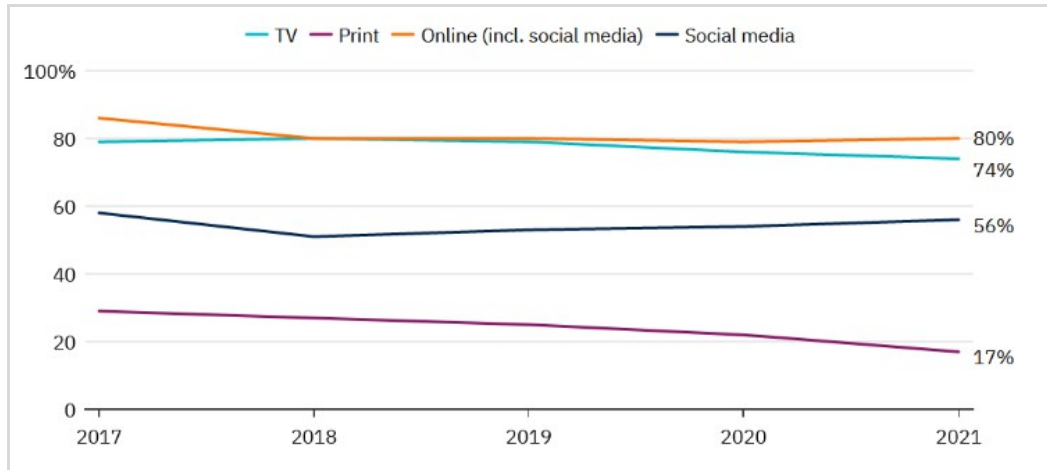
Source: Reuters 2021 Digital News Report

As can be seen, the most popular is commercial TV Markíza which has a fair approach to political coverage (Median, 2021). The next most popular is commercial TV Joj which represents more tabloid-style news format (murders, fires, car accidents). News TA3 and PSM RTVS are watched weekly by about a half of the population each. The three out of four major TV channels reach about a half of population each. Surprisingly, Czech media (especially PSM) that are widely accessible throughout the country are shown to be less relevant (or perhaps, not included into the survey).

Perhaps more relevant for this study are trends and data shown in Chart 2. The online media or sources in general compete with, or supplement, TV broadcast as a primary source of news. The importance of printed media is low, and seems to be slowly, but continuously declining. Overall, trust in news was rather low with 30% trusting news in general, while trust in the specific news that one consumes was 42%. More importantly, the news programmes aired by three most trusted TV channels in 2021 (only one option was possible to specify as an answer) reflected opinions of about two thirds of population. Analytically, the most relevant

information is that only 15% of respondents did not specify and TV news they did not trust or did not trust any TV news in general.<sup>32</sup> As mentioned earlier, this actually corresponds to that part of the population that likes alternative media. Specific trust in printed press was 47% which was slightly below (then) EU28 average for 2020.<sup>33</sup>

**Chart 2: Sources of news 2015–2021**



Source: Reuters 2021 Digital News Report

The issue of trust in news seems to be related to the function of journalism in a society and its fight against populism (or, watch-dog function of the media in general). It is determined by overall level of media freedom (EBU, 2020). As mentioned, it is also reflected in the relative boom of alternative media. It is impacted by (exceptional but significant) negative legacy of the media functioning before and after the Gorilla case (roughly until 2018), when journalism was severely limited in its watch-dog function vis a vis a specific case of captured state and grand corruption. There were two key limitations: first, investigative findings or published leaks had had, obviously, low impact among captured state authorities. Second, as already mentioned, the journalists faced legal challenges when they published certain information about (high level) state capture and (high level) grand corruption (see more in Kern, 2021, Tódová, 2019, Školkay 2019a,b,c). As a result, alternative media and populism re-emerged in the country, as Siamese twins.

After or around the 2018 year, journalism has started working without any limitations. Indeed, there seemed to be no limits for journalism in replacing or supporting liberated state authorities, although the latter had started to function in a more active and fair mode too.

### Case Study Wiretapping Gorilla II

The debate about scandal with wiretappings nicknamed as Gorilla II - 2021 was about self-limitation of journalism in the country (as an independent watch-dog) vis a vis legal framework and the roles of other state authorities. The case was discussed in November 2021. There was not a consensus among the mainstream liberal journalists about the best approach here. Interestingly, alternative media had been, paradoxically, critical towards rather open approach when publishing secret, classified or not-for-public information. The mainstream

<sup>32</sup> Omediach.com, 30.09.2021 TA3 dosiahla podľa Medianu najvyššie hodnoty objektívnosti svojho spravodajstva od roku 2015, <https://www.omeiach.com/tv/21567-televizia-ta3-dosiahla-podla-medianu-najvyssie-hodnoty-objektivnosti-svojho-spravodajstva-od-roku-2015>

<sup>33</sup> Share of respondents who tended to trust the written press in the European Union (EU 28) countries in 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/454403/europe-trust-in-the-written-press-by-country/>

illiberal media also raised their critical voice (see Daniš, 2021, Gašparovič, 2021a, Ižip, 2021, Kostolný, 2021a, Kováčik, 2021, Šnidl, 2021).

In summary, at the editorial level, the media and journalists are free (save for some inevitable clashes related to routine editorial interventions). PSM are operating freely, too. The journalists are neither a homogeneous body nor sharply divided according to two major political-ideological cleavages as it is in Poland and Hungary. Considering smaller and lower total GDP, the quality of journalistic outputs is slightly below of that of their Czech colleagues. The major difference is in ideological positions – the majority of Czech journalists tend to be (self-declared) liberal-right, while the Slovak journalists tend to be (based on the online questionnaire discussed further) liberal-centre or liberal left or left. Be that as it may, as will be shown later on, there is no prevailing open affinity to populists regardless of gender, age or media type. There is a minor affinity towards populists seen as conservatives, or, rarely, seen as leftists, among specific segment of the ideologically illiberal media.

Finally, I present tentative theoretical typology of the media from perspective of populism (Table 1) that illustrates above discussion. As can be seen, no relevant media support local populists. It is questionable where to include Zem& Vek that supported Harabin. He was seen to be more radical than populist, or, as a populist radical.

**Table 1: Typology of Media in Slovakia**

	RTV S	SME	Denník N	Aktuality.sk	Rádio Expres	TV Markíza	TA3	TV Joj	PRAVDA	Hlavné spravy .sk	Postoj.sk	Denník štandard.sk	Zem & Vek
Affinity to Local Populists													?
Affinity to Foreign Populists											√	√	?
Affinity to Radicals													√
Wide Coverage/Reach	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	?	√
Seen as Alternative to the Mainstream										√	√	√	√
Listed as Alternative (Normatively Negatively)										√			√
Official Ideology/ (LD-liberal democracy, L-left, C – conservative- Nationalism AL- anti-liberal	LD	LD	LD	?	?	?	?	?	LD-L	C+N	C	C	AL
Ideology/ prevailing (N-neutral)	N	LD	LD	LD	LD	LD	N	N	N	C	C	C	AL
Level of Professionalism (high-medium-low)	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	L	H	H	M/H

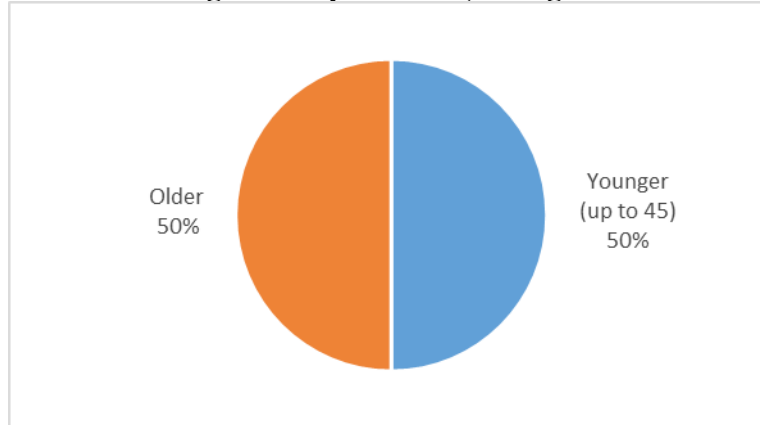
## 2. SAMPLE SELECTION AND DESCRIPTION

Although national teams were asked to interview less than 10 journalists, it was used a sample of 24 journalists, including three former journalists, for Slovakia. Of the latter three, one was retired print journalist, one was a former print journalist who founded webportal about the media, and one was a former journalist who turned to political science. The decision to use the larger sample followed finding by Sim, Saunders, Waterfield & Kingstone (2018) that “determining qualitative sample size a priori is an inherently problematic approach.” Indeed, it seems that one needs to use a simple formula: number of examined media outlets (determined by sample selection criteria and research goals) multiplied by 3. In other words, the best approach is to use triangulation, understood as a qualitative research strategy aimed to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. Furthermore, triangulation helps us to deepen our understanding of research subjects (Olsen, 2004).

In practical terms, this means first clear identification of the sample criteria. Reflecting on local conditions, originally suggested sample would include presumably only the liberal mainstream media. It would be doubtful whether one would get full understanding of interaction of populism and journalism just based on this sample. For example, if one is interested in the most representative sample, such a sample should cover in local conditions, mainstream as well as “alternative” media, as well as radio, TV, print and online media outlets. Moreover, the sample should include media outlets from various ideological positions, as well as local or regional media. As can be seen in Table 1, such sample includes just for offline media more than 10 relevant sources. In addition, one has to include increasingly relevant online only news and current affairs sources – about five of them. In total, this means examining at least 15 media outlets. In effect, this means around 45 interviews (when using triangulation). This goal could not be reached due to a lack of time and resources. Nonetheless, I attempted to get the most diverse sample. I used the larger and diverse sample to find out the key features of journalists and their media outlets that could help us to understand journalism (thus, not only the liberal mainstream journalism) attitudes and approaches towards populist political parties and politicians. These indicators included the ideology of journalists (first self-defined, later on, based on a universal questionnaire discussed further), their age (a threshold was established at 45 years), and gender. Obviously, I also divided journalists according to the media type they worked for: print, online, broadcast, other. I used additional criteria such as more specific identification of the media outlets, including identification of their ideological stance by the journalists who work for them. Therefore, the following analysis includes either 14 or 24 (or 16, if the sample is based on media typology) analysed units since not all interviewed journalists were either available or interested in filling in the online questionnaire.

As can be seen in Chart 3, the sample is exactly divided according to the age indicator.

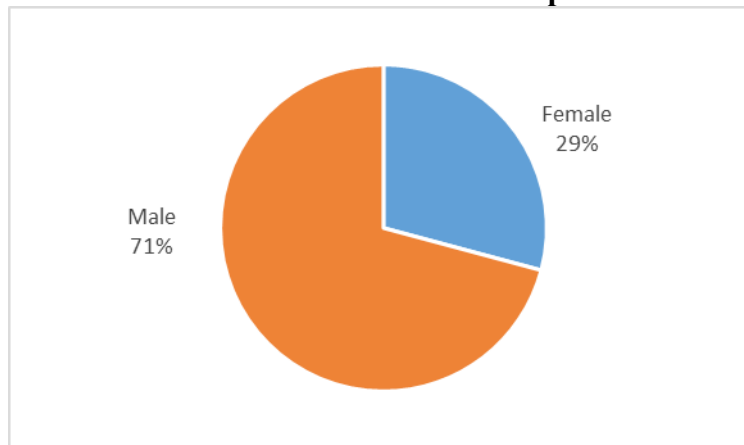
**Chart 3: The Age of Respondents (Younger versus Older)**



Source: own data

For the perspective of gender balance (Chart 4), this is a bit imbalanced sample, with more male than female journalists.

**Chart 4: Male versus Female Respondents**



Source: own data

I also present a more specific typology of the media where the journalists work (or used to work). This sample (Table 2) is based on 24 respondents. The first row represents the number of journalists working in the investigated media outlets that fall into that media category. The second row represents the number of investigated media outlets within particular media category.

**Table 2: Typology of the Media/Journalists Covered by the Sample**

	Online news portals	National print	Regional Print	Local TV	PSM + alternative radio	National TV	Wire agency	Other
<b>Journalists</b>	9	5	2	1	2	3	1	1
<b>Media Outlets</b>	6	3	2	1	2	2	1	1

Source: own data

On one hand, it can be seen as a positive feature that the sample is quite heterogenous. There are media outlets from almost all levels: national – regional, mainstream – alternative, television - print – radio – online. A minority news outlet is also included. I put online news



portal [hlavnespravy.sk](http://hlavnespravy.sk) among “online news portal”, and not in a separate category of “alternative” media outlets. Formally, this web is not listed among monitored “controversial” sources due to already mentioned court case.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, alternative online broadcast [slobodnyvysielač.sk](http://slobodnyvysielač.sk) was included into a general category of “radio”. There are also increasingly hybrid forms of media such as a local news outlet *Podtatranský kuriér* disseminated via mailing list as a PDF but it also has its one website. Moreover, *Podtatranský kuriér* can be seen as a part of alternative media. It is listed (87<sup>th</sup> position, grade 8.8 out of 10 maximum) on the list of “questionable” sources. For comparison, *Slobodný vysielateľ* is listed at 43<sup>rd</sup> place (9.2 points on 10 point scale).<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, if one considers the potential impact of media outlets as seen in tables 1 and 2, this selection is somehow imbalanced towards online news portals and national printed media. It would perhaps be desirable in the future to include more journalists from the major commercial national television channels (who were not interested in participating in the current research).

It is also interesting to compare the self-declared ideology of journalists (Table 3) with their ideology as identified with the help of the online questionnaire (Chart 5). Self-declared ideologies of the journalists were quite diverse. It seemed to be reasonable to categorise them into lower number of relatively similar ideological groupings. There can be a legitimate objection that anarchist and libertarian are opposing ideological poles. Yet, at the same time, both anarchists and libertarians have more in common – as little regulation and control as possible (or, as much freedom as possible).

**Table 3: Self-Declared Ideology of Journalists**

<b>Liberal (civic, conservative)</b>	5
<b>No political ideology</b>	2
<b>Anarchist + libertarian</b>	2
<b>Social Democracy + liberal left</b>	9
<b>Conservative-national</b>	3
<b>Right wing (democrat) + Christian democracy</b>	3
<b>Green</b>	1

Source: own data

The most frequent self-declared ideology in the sample was social democracy / liberal left. The second most frequent self-declared ideology was liberal in its variant civic or slightly conservative. The least frequent were clearly defined ideologies represented by respective political parties such as Christian Democracy and Greens. As mentioned, it was possible to identify anarchist ideology and libertarian ideology that we consider in a local context as quite similar. It was surprising to find that two journalists claimed to be apolitical. The journalists identified themselves as having conservative-national ideology in two cases, and as right-wing democrats in three other cases (including already mentioned Christian Democracy). The right-wing democrats can be perceived being quite similar to the liberal-right wing orientation.

<sup>34</sup> *Konspiratori.sk* (2020, March 3). Súd prikázal Konšpirátorom dočasne stiahnuť web [hlavnespravy.sk](http://hlavnespravy.sk) zo svojej databázy, <https://dennikn.sk/blog/1775813/sud-prikazal-konspiratorom-docasne-stiahnut-web-hlavnespravy-sk-zo-svojej-databazy/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://konspiratori.sk/zoznam-stranok>

I also managed to get information on the categorisation of media outlets according to the opinion of the journalists who work there (Table 4). This is quite rare and perhaps more reliable information provided by insiders rather than if provided by external assessors.

**Table 4: Ideology of the Media Outlets**

<b>No identifiable political ideology</b>	tvnoviny.sk, Podtatranský kuriér, Hospodárske noviny, Regional press & TV, 3x Aktuality.sk. MTV Ružomberok, TA3, Pravda, 2x PSM TV, TASR
<b>Social democracy + reform left</b>	2 x Pravda
<b>Liberal democracy</b>	PSM Radio, 2 x Denník N
<b>Conservative-national</b>	hlavnespravy.sk, Dennikstandard.sk (?), Postoj sk
<b>Christian democracy</b>	Ma7.sk
<b>Alternative Media (Free speech / business model)</b>	Slobodnyvysielac.sk

Source: own data

This data suggests that more than half of the media outlets (10) in our media sample (16) show actually no affiliation to any clearly identifiable ideology. Among the rest, there is no prevailing influential ideological group. Yet it can be argued that the most popular standard media (Table 1) are in almost all cases liberal in their ideology. Certainly, the mainstream media do not support populists (be them in the government and in opposition).

It was interesting to note that in the case of Pravda there was a dissent about its ideological orientation. Similarly, while two journalists from PSM defined it as without having any ideology, one respondent explained that, in effect, they actually defend liberal democracy through the institution. An interesting insight was provided with respect to the “alternative” media. In one case, it was argued that it attempts to become a regular, legitimate alternative to the mainstream (by and large seen as “liberal”) media. In another case, it was stated by a former freelance journalist who used to work for such an outlet that although it formally defends free speech, it is in fact based on a business model. This means that an “alternative” outlet must consider, and in fact prioritise, commercial factors – be that the interests of audiences, or of other stakeholders.

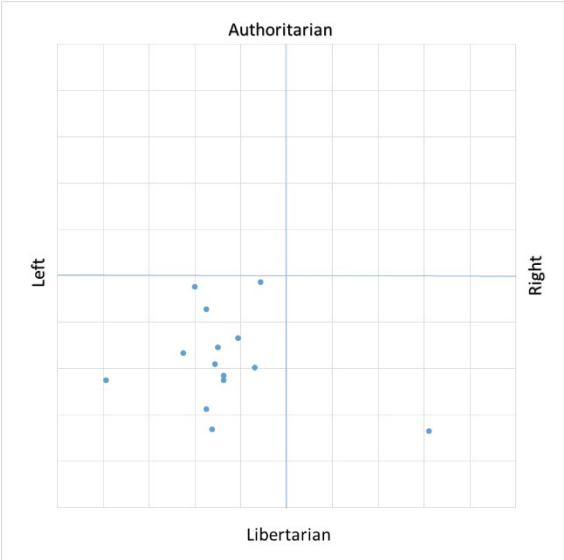
The ideological position of 14 journalists (out of 24) (Chart 5) is based on Political Compass.<sup>36</sup> Political compass is determined by a set of 62 propositions to rate political ideology with two axes: economic (left-right) and social (authoritarian-libertarian). I acknowledge the methodological criticism of this online tool. For example, one of respondents complained that there was missing a correct option among answers, thus he had to answer somehow indirectly and slightly differently. This issue was related to regulatory powers of state authorities. It can be seen in an outlier result – the one that appears as right-libertarian in the Chart 1. However, I still consider it a better analytical tool than the self-declared ideological statements of journalists. Although in general the need for closure predicts political preferences (Federico and Ekstrom, 2018), more importantly, the extent to which basic values account for ideological orientation were near to zero in Slovakia (Caprara et al, 2017).

Considering all caveats mentioned, a majority /almost all/ of selected interviewed journalists among those who filled in the online questionnaire falls into the category of the liberal-left ideology. This is true also for those journalists who declared themselves, before filling in this questionnaire, as “right-wing”. This claim is indirectly supported by the findings of

<sup>36</sup> [politicalcompass.org](http://politicalcompass.org)

Kirkegaard, Pallesen, Elgaard & Carl (2021) which proved that journalists' in 17 Western countries preferred parties that had more left-wing positions overall. Interestingly, Kirkegaard et al (2021) also found twice or three times higher support for either right-wing or left-wing populism among general population than among the journalists. In this context, one can wonder whether earlier mentioned case of the Czech journalists, with their liberal-right ideology, presents a unique case? Or whether a more in-depth research would show that they are maybe not that different from other journalists in Europe.

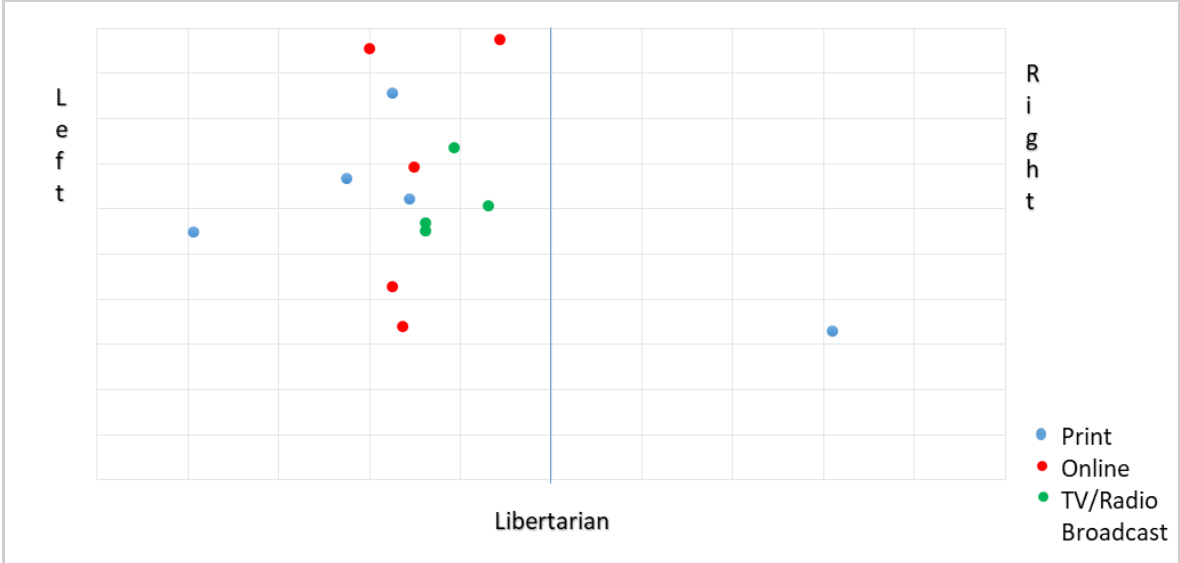
**Chart 5: Journalists' Ideology**



Source: own data

Furthermore, if there is a focus on the connection between ideology and media type (Chart 6), it can be hypothesised that print journalists tend to be more nuanced in their, by and large liberal ideology. This is hardly surprising since our sample included a variety of journalists and media outlets, not only from the mainstream media.

**Chart 6: Journalists' Ideology and Media Type**

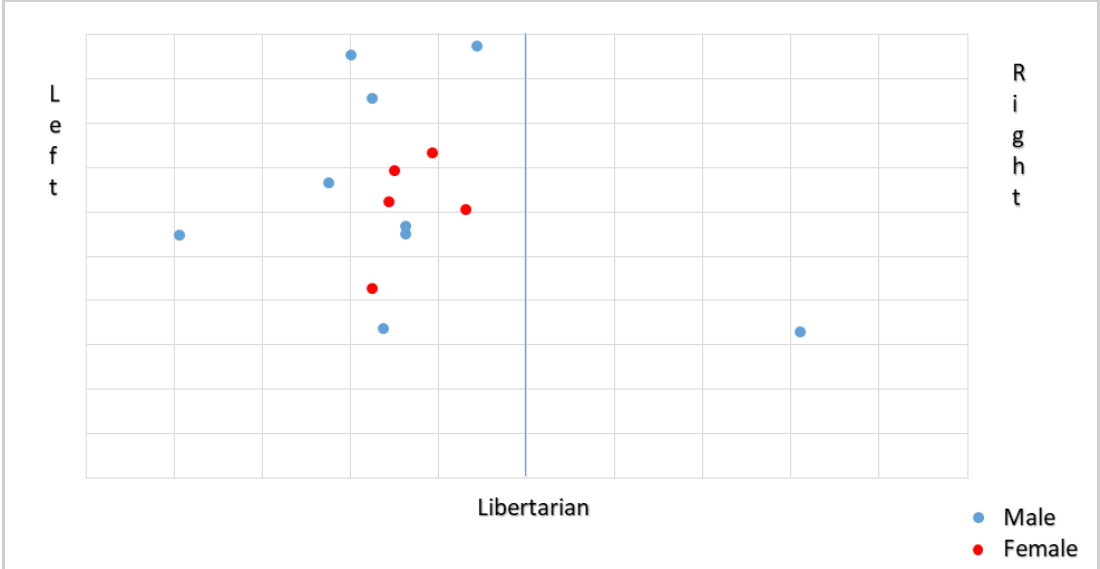


Source: own data

Four journalists from audiovisual media (three working for PSM, one city TV), four only online news and current affairs media (including two “alternative” sources), and six print media journalists, were included.

From the perspective of **gender balance** (limited sample of 14), chart 7 shows that female journalists seem to be somehow more centered around some issues on the liberal left than their male counterparts.

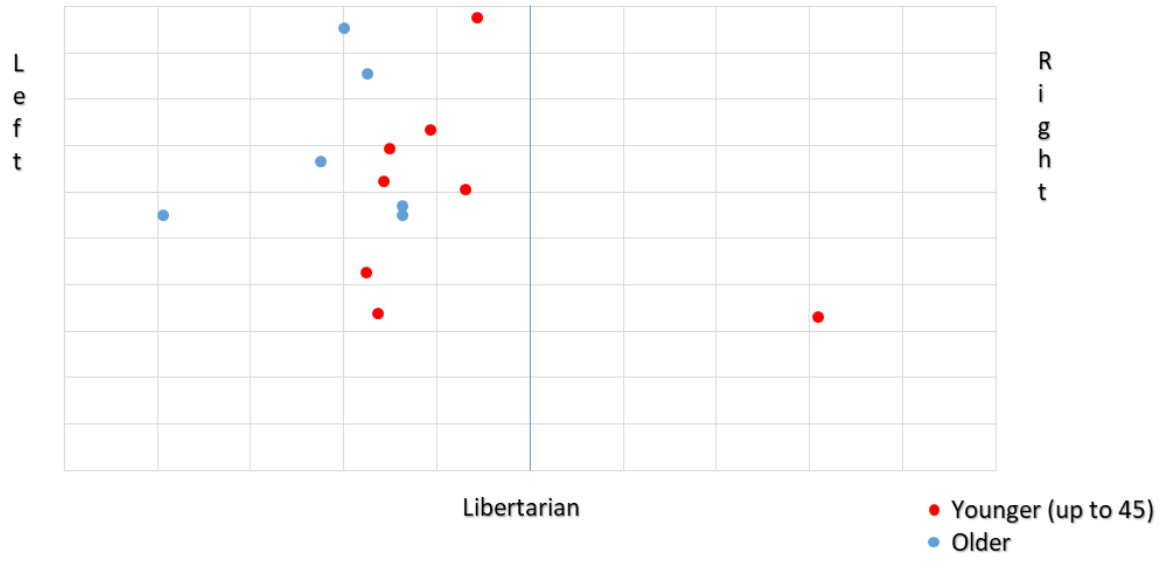
**Chart 7: Gender and Ideology of Journalists**



Source: own data

From the perspective of **age** (45 years was internally defined as a threshold), chart 8 (limited sample of 14) shows the following results. Younger journalists (up to 45 years) tend to be slightly more liberal and less leftist than older journalists. This result could be expected, too. It is a common knowledge that people tend to be more leftist and more socially orientated during aging. For example, if we compare two transparently (at that time) ideologically defined political parties, then the voters of left Smer-SD in 2016 general elections were over 80% older (threshold 40 years of age). In contrast, voters of liberal SaS were almost 60% under 40 years age (Slosiarik, 2019, p.42).

**Chart 8: Age and Ideology of Journalists**



Source: own data

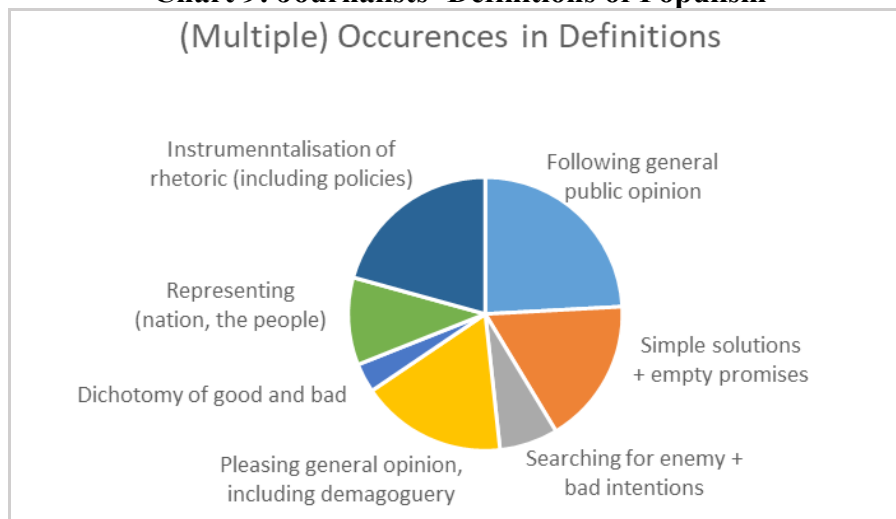
### 3. EXPLAINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOURNALISM AND POPULISM

First, I discuss journalists' perceptions of populism and then journalists' responses to populism. It should be noted that the media (as organisations) may show more pro-active approach when tackling populism or other controversial issues than individual journalists. A pro-active approach may be understood as supporting or opposing populism. This observation should be perhaps used for adjusting methodology in the follow up research. I include some basic observations of respondents on this matter, too. This comment also explains why I use terms such as journalism (includes both journalists and media organisations), as different from journalists and the media.

#### 3.1. Journalists' Perceptions of Populism

Journalists' definitions of populism (chart 9) seem to be by and large influenced by non-scientific definitions. For example, a typical populist dichotomy of „bad versus good“ was mentioned only by a single journalist (21). In fact, journalists' definitions of populism seem to be to a large degree identical with perceptions of populism as understood by the general public – promising popular policy solutions and expensive public spending (see Slosiarik, 2019). The two terms „searching for enemy + bad intentions“ (mentioned by 21, 23) can be, perhaps, seen as similar to „exclusionary“ definitional aspects of populism. Although another key definitional term, the dual opposing term „bad elites - good people“, could also be identified among answers, it was only exceptionally explicitly mentioned within our sample.

**Chart 9: Journalists' Definitions of Populism**



Source: own data

As can be seen in the Chart 9, the meaning of populism for the interviewed journalists can be categorised into six major categories plus a unique category (only one interviewee mentioned this option). Of course, these seven categories are to a certain degree overlapping, or, at least are quite close to each other.

The most popular or typical features of populism among the sample are beliefs that populists just follow general public opinion, offer simple solutions and empty promises. This rhetoric or behaviour is seen as motivated by their desire to please general opinion with the aim to get

power or other negative personal motivation. This bad or negative motivation was mentioned specifically only occasionally, as searching for enemy with bad intentions or a dichotomy between “good” and “bad”. For that purpose, populists use demagoguery as a form of instrumentalisation of rhetoric, including follow up policies.

About a third of the interviewed journalists (including those from so called “alternative” media) considered all politicians to be more or less populists.

It can be argued that the journalists at large see populism rather as demagoguery. This argument can be supported when one compares these findings with a more scientific definition of populism, such as that by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) who defined three core concepts of populism: the people, the elite, and the general will. Within these theoretical concepts, a typical antagonism between the (bad) elite and the (innocent, pure) people is present. The “general will” may be seen as a sort of “universal password” to all questions and issues.

It is arguably analytically more productive to see which parties/movements were actually seen as populists by interviewed journalists. This is documented in Table 5. The journalists were asked to specify which political party or movement or politicians they consider as being populist. Thus, some mentioned only parties, some only politicians, some both parties and politicians. I put together parties with their respective leaders (or, in one case, top party representative but not a leader). Some respondents mentioned that all politicians are populist by definition, or the majority of them, but they usually specified those who were seen as extreme cases of populism. Similarly, although all politicians were seen as populist by some respondents, an exception could be found of a non-populist politician. In some cases, the respondents differentiated between “full populists” and “partial” or “occasional” populists, or between “moderate” populists and “radical national populists”, or between “standard” populism and “dangerous” populism. One respondent considered as populist those political parties that comment on issues they do not understand such as vaccination. Another respondent argued that there are actually no political parties in Slovakia in true meaning of a definition. There was a journalist that discerned populism among political parties that did not have any electoral manifestos.

What comes out of this exercise is that there were two major coalition parties seen overwhelmingly as populist: OĽaNO led by Igor Matovič<sup>37</sup>, and Sme rodina lead by Boris Kollár. As far as opposition was concerned, a consensus was reached among the journalists that the nominally social democratic Smer-SD led by Robert Fico was populist (sometimes seen as having a light-form of populism), while Kotlebovci-ĽSNS party was seen as the worst form of populism, occasionally evaluated as being even fascist party or, more commonly, as radical nationalist/populist.

**Table 5: Populist Parties and Leaders as Defined by the Journalists**

Political Party/Movement or a Politician	Number of Mentions by the Journalists
All of them/majority of them /in a sense, or partially at least/	X x (with one exception) x x x x x x x
<b>Fico / Smer-SD</b> (Blaha - once)	<b>X x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x (18)</b>
<b>Matovič / OĽaNO</b>	<b>X x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x (20)</b>
<b>Kollár / Sme rodina</b>	<b>X x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x (18)</b>
Harabin	X x

<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, Matovič claimed that he worked on “softening populism” by the coalition partners in an interview on November 11, 2021. See <https://www.expres.sk/262312/sabotovanie-reforiem-je-cesta-do-pekla-slovensko-ich-podla-igora-matovica-nevyhnutne-potrebuje/>



Pellegrini /Hlas SD	X x (partially) x x x x x
Uhrík / REPUBLIKA	X x x x x x x
<b>Kotleba / LSNS</b>	<b>X x x x x x x (fascist) x x x x x x (13)</b>
Sulík / SaS	X (partially) X (occasionally) x x (partially) x (partially)
Danko / SNS	X x x

Source: own data

In general, the results in Table 5 do not represent a complete overview of full or complete populist, partially or occasionally populist, or non-populist parties and movements or politicians. Rather, it is a list of populist subjects that were seen as politically most relevant and at the same time, most populist in the summer of 2021. The journalists were asked to recall names of populist parties or populist leaders without giving them a list of options to choose from. This explains, why, for example, Harabin was mentioned only twice.<sup>38</sup> However, in one answer he was mentioned as the biggest populist. In contrast, Za ľudí /For the People/ political party was also mentioned twice. In one case it was mentioned as possibly turning to populism, in another answer as having a populist name, but still being the lowest in populism rating. Similarly, a break-away movement Republika still did not have full programme in November 2021, although it was registered as a party in April 2021.<sup>39</sup> In summary, there is a broad consensus as to which parties or leaders are to be seen as the most populist. These are two coalition parties and one party from opposition. This negative selection is identical with opinion of local political scientists.

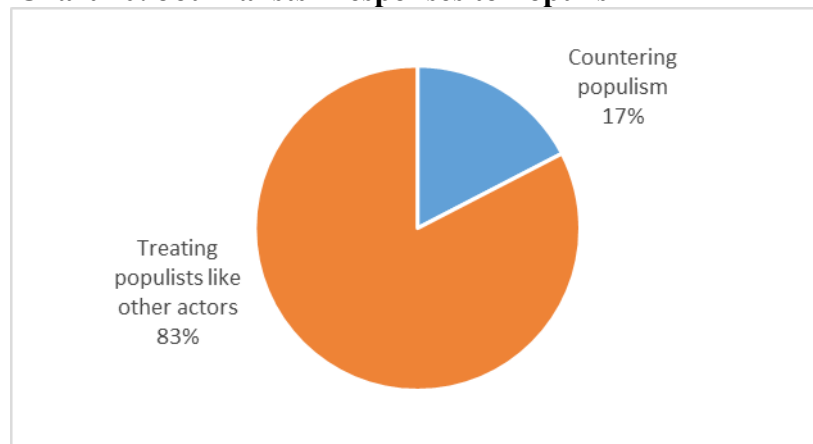
### 3.2. Journalism Responses to Populism

As can be seen in Chart 10, there is no journalist who would publicly acknowledge interest in supporting populists. However, this may reflect (negative) self-selection. Those journalists who tend to support populists, may not be interested in answering such questionnaires (or to participate in research on the subject). In any case, the most popular approach among journalists was to treat populists like other actors. Only a few journalists were interested in countering populism. Yet there is another caveat here – journalists sometimes worked in the media that as organisations countered populism (although only one mentioned this in case of media outlet he worked for, others mentioned other media as behaving in this way), while the journalists themselves, at an individual level, preferred to adopt a neutral approach to populists (especially when reporting on them, or when interviewing them). Exceptionally, there was an opinion that the media should not counter populism (2). Sometimes, an open preference to conservative values was acknowledged (13, 20). This is quite relevant information since the majority of populists parties in the country either defined themselves as conservative, or followed certain significant conservative aspects of ideology. One respondent would counter populism only if exceptional circumstances would arise (21). Those who would openly counter populism, would either show their negative attitude towards populism (15,19), or this attitude impacts the selection of persons and topics covered (17), or would condition it on circumstances (“if possible” - 18).

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Harabin, former minister of Justice and former Chairperson of the Supreme Court, seemed to have the most negative attitudes towards liberal democracy among Presidential candidates in 2019 campaign. See Baboš, Dolný, Vicenová, Világi, 2021, 23-24.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.hnutie-republika.sk/program/>

**Chart 10: Journalists' Responses to Populism**



Source: own data

It can be seen in the Chart 10, a clear majority of journalists considers it necessary to treat populists like any other actors. However, it was noted as a common approach a need to pay more attention to the preparation for interviews with populists, and somehow a more challenging way of conducting interviews with them. We discuss this issue further.

I have already mentioned that some interviewed journalists (9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 8) believed that certain media outlets or the majority (8, 20, 22) of the mainstream media outlets fight populism. Among those fighting populism especially the PSM and national elite newspapers stood out, but also, for example, online only news portal [aktuality.sk](#) (6) or the major commercial TV [Markíza](#) (9). However, there was a rare voice who claimed past collusion of PSM with a certain populist political party (21). Some others (8,10) were of the opinion that commercial media, at least occasionally, collude with populists.

On the other side of the spectrum, liberal / liberal-left journalists (the majority in our sample based on neutral approach to their ideology identification) accused some ideologically orientated outlets as being less critical towards populists if they were close to their ideology (e.g. conservative online news portal [postoj.sk](#) that published a rather uncritical interview with V. Orbán from Hungary – 6, 21), or in some cases collusion of right wing politicians and alternative media (14). I have already discussed the case of [postoj.sk](#).

However, although it was suggested that some alternative media may be close to populists (8, 12,14,16), these were mostly just tentative suggestions (e.g. “but I do not follow that topic so closely”). Alternative media may be seen as being closer to the radical right wing parties (or, occasionally, to the radical left-wing parties) rather than to the typical populist parties. Of course, radical activities by both populists and radicals are attractive to the alternative media who cover them gladly. Moreover, radical right wing parties are not part of the government, yet they are in the Parliament. Therefore, these parties could be seen as a legitimate source of opinion and criticism. While the mainstream media and journalists do not like radical right wing parties, alternative media see this situation as an ideal opportunity to cover such radical opinions and criticism. This approach can be viewed as replacing inactive (or allegedly secretly or openly colluding) mainstream media, thus promoting freedom of speech by

alternative media. At the same time, it can be seen as a smart business model, covering empty slot at the “market of ideas”.

Therefore, it makes sense to split the responses to populism into at least two groups – responses by individual journalists and responses to populism by the media (either “own” media outlet or other media outlets responses to populism). Such approach allows researchers to clearly present on the one hand, individual views and positions and on the other, organizational reactions that reveal the media ideological orientation and strategy.

### **3.2.1 The relationship between journalists and populism (at an individual level)**

As already mentioned (Chart 10), the majority of journalists approach populists in general in the same manner as other political actors. If seen at an individual level (Appendix C), this general journalistic standard was explicitly mentioned by respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 20, 24. Some others did not answer this issue directly, and only a few respondents explicitly mentioned a need for a different approach, as discussed earlier and furthermore. There is usually a need for more in-depth preparation and a need for a more consistent pressing approach to populist respondents (1, 10, 15, 16, 18, 21), including looking at a topic from many angles (4) or focusing at the context (14) and sticking to the facts (6, 7, 15, 22) and confronting populists with experts’ opinions (22). In other words, it seems necessary to keep the focus of an interview, sometimes repeating the same question a few times (10). Some call it a “guided interview” (11). It was noted that there is usually a lack of time during an interview for a constructive confrontation (18) and in general it is seen as a more difficult job, requiring more fact checking, and more deliberation on answers (23).

Some journalists explicitly mentioned that they see an opportunity to express their personal opinion, if necessary, in writing a commentary (3, 6). In doing so, exceptional soft approach was noted in case of respondent 17 who instead of blaming or bluntly criticising populists and their followers, prioritised searching for causes and commenting diplomatically. Another respondent (20) pointed out the advantage of writing from the perspective of a “common person”.

Some questioned whether giving space to a populist actually makes any contribution to public debate (4). For broadcast journalists, it seems to be essential to know how to stop a populist (or any radical) in live broadcast (8). For print journalists, sometimes to get a final proof may be seen as a more difficult task (19).

There was only one voice who referred to the negative impact of owners – it, paradoxically, belonged to a former journalist from an alternative radio (9). Another representative from an alternative media outlet that actually presents itself as „alternative mainstream“ (and considering its popularity, it is quite the correct definition)<sup>40</sup>, as already mentioned, openly acknowledged „preference given to conservative-national voices“ (13). However, in local conditions, or even at a general level, the term „conservative-national voices“ means, by definition, more or less populist voices (in contrast to „conservative voices“ such as Christian Democratic Movement). This is because nationalism, being different from patriotism, includes demagoguery. That's why we differentiated in the Table 3 between, on one hand, conservative-national voices, and, on the other hand, Christian Democracy (or, in general, conservatism with little or no nationalism). In addition, conservatism is an inherently

<sup>40</sup> The official online media monitoring (<https://monitor.iabslovakia.sk/>) does not even mention [hlavnespravy.sk](https://www.hlavnespravy.sk). However, [hlavnespravy.sk](https://www.hlavnespravy.sk) claims to reach more than a million readers (<https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/inzercia>), while only over 54,000 like it on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/www.hlavnespravy.sk/>). However, based on number of interactions, it was already top alternative media source on Facebook in 2019 with over 1.6 million interactions (Struhárik, 2020a).

problematic approach or ideology. It may be seen as a break to any positive or necessary changes in a society. It may be seen as dreaming about the „glorious“ or „happy“ past that will never come back. As it was documented elsewhere, a return to the glorious“ or „happy“ past is a key motivation of populist protest (Bartlett, Birdwell, & Littler, 2011).

### **3.2.2. The relationship between the media and populism (at an institutional level)**

It is useful to start this discussion (also for keeping the historical record) with envisioned media policies by unambiguously identified populist subjects. As it could be seen in Table 5, these are Sme rodina, OĽaNO and Smer-SD. For the last one, there was no media policy in its 2020 electoral manifesto (and, in fact no electoral programme – just three sentences). In contrast, both Sme rodina and OĽaNO had specific media policies in mind before the 2020 general elections as suggested in their electoral manifestos (Krasko, 2020). OĽaNO planned to revise “unnecessary” media regulation. This looked like quite liberal approach that included, for example, abandoning the policy of compulsory dubbing movies into the state language. OĽaNO intended to merge media regulator with telecom regulator, as well as transformation of the Audiovisual Fund. The manifesto also insisted on abolishing fees paid for the PSM. Instead, PSM should be funded by the state budget. Interestingly, OĽaNO suggested a duty to broadcast educational programmes and programmes in the public interest to be introduced for private broadcasters on the basis of a contract with the state.

Sme rodina – surprisingly, considering that its chair was owner of a radio – planned to limit abuse which is the result of the dominant position of oligarchs and financial groups in the media field. Another regulatory idea was a new framework for the digital media to be set up that would include higher transparency of their operations and decrease the possibility of disinformation dissemination. For that purpose, the competencies of the regulatory authorities should be extended to encompass the new media. RTVS should be financed by a stated share coming from the state budget only. At the same time, there should be a new and transparent selection procedure for the selection and appointment of a director general of PSM.

Overall, these envisioned media policies could be seen as legitimate policy aims, compatible with the standard media policies in a liberal democracy. In some aspects, they could be seen as innovative/progressive and needed (e.g. regulation of social media or abolishing dubbing of movies). In other aspects, they could be viewed as questionable within the local context, possibly populists suggestions (the change of financing of PSM), although applied in some of the most developed liberal democracies.

Another detail that merits attention with respect to populism and journalism is the relationship of the populist parties or movements to PSM or the media in general. I have already mentioned Igor Matovič’s change of his previously rather positive attitude to a clearly negative attitude towards mainstream liberal media. Ironically, at the same time, Boris Kollár, leader of Sme rodina, changed his negative attitude towards PSM to a positive one. This was explained by the fact that Sme rodina representatives did not have a problem in accessing PSM broadcast while in opposition, although it was known that they had not voted for the current director general (Struhárik, 2021). Yet at the same time, Kollár felt that he had been treated unfairly by other mainstream media. Kollár identified the causes of this negative approach of the media in the personal motivation of the media owners (related to criminal charges raised by state authorities based on previous grand corruption and state capture) and the failure of progressive politicians in the 2020 general elections (topky.sk, 2020).

Similarly, a part of the public conflict of OĽaNO with PSM was due to a personal motivation by Čekovský, the chair of the parliamentary committee for culture and media. Čekovský had been fired from PSM shortly before he became an MP for OĽaNO.

Thus, we can underline a certain paradox here – a partially liberal (at least in a sense of being rather informal) populist leader moved from (literally and figuratively) liking liberal media (when in opposition) to disliking them (when in power), while a conservative-nationalist populist moved from criticising PSM while in opposition, to defending PSM, once in power. In both cases, though, motivation or justification was purely personal, ie not reflecting any particular ideological-philosophical position or a policy consideration on the mission and merit of the PSM or media in general. However, this negative attitude of both populist leaders did not necessarily mean that the coalition had abandoned all of its original media policy aims as discussed earlier. In fact, quite many legislative changes, including those aiming at protecting the media and journalists were in the pipeline in late 2021 (see Struhárik, 2021).

Robert Fico, who was seen by journalists in this sample as leader of the third most populist party (and in opposition), has moved towards the most radical rhetorical position. Fico publicly labeled “certain” journalists to be “Soros’s pigs”, who were being manipulated by the US Embassy and their media owners, in November 2021 (Screenshot 1). Fico separately, in a blog affiliated to the newspaper Sme, accused journalists from Sme of being “Soros’ flock of pigs that is destroying democracy” in a “conspiratory” plan (Fico, 2021, Screenshot 2).<sup>41</sup> Fico also demanded that the journalists who were behind the publishing of leaks from criminal cases (the Police files) should be punished. Fico explicitly mentioned journalist Tódová from Denník N.<sup>42</sup> In fact Monika Tódová seemed to be a major journalistic target for R. Fico.<sup>43</sup> The influential commercial TV Markíza became another target for R. Fico’s anger (Screenshot 3).<sup>44</sup> In that case, argumentation was based on rational criticism. However, it seemed that this criticism was actually wrong, or the facts were interpreted rather liberally.<sup>45</sup> PSM also became a target of anger, or, as it seemed, coordinated campaign against the mainstream liberal media. In this case, Fico considered a question asked by a journalist during the Sunday current affairs programme to be based on wiretapping that had been questionable from a legal point. Moreover, according to Fico, approach towards Smer-SD in contrast to a coalition party (see Screenshot 4) seemed to be unfair. Finally, the journalists were accused at a press conference of blaming, unfairly, Smer-SD, for co-responsibility of Smer-SD, or some of its representatives, for bad pandemic situation in the country (Screenshot 5). The former governmental social democratic party that had been transformed into an opposition populist party (according to the journalists), perceived the most important mainstream liberal media, or selected journalists working there, as public enemies.

<sup>41</sup> There was an interesting ethical-professional dilemma for the newspaper – should it tolerate such a disgusting accusations published on its website in the name of freedom of speech or to delete it? The newspaper had chosen a middle-way – it lowered its rank of popularity. However, in hindsight, the editor-in-chief would have decided to delete it entirely. See interview with B. Balogová, in Tódová, 2021b.

<sup>42</sup> Webnoviny, 2021, November 7, Robert Fico požaduje odsúdenie novinárov a údajne vie, od ktorého policajta unikli nahrávky z chaty, <https://www.webnoviny.sk/robert-fico-pozaduje-odsudenie-novinarov-a-udajne-vie-od-ktoreho-policajta-unikli-nahravky-z-chaty/>

<sup>43</sup> See FB post by R.Fico on November 11, 2021, JE ČAS POZRIEŤ SA NA MAJETKY NIEKTORÝCH NOVINÁROV AKO JE TÓDOVÁ, <https://www.facebook.com/robertficosk>

<sup>44</sup> There was also another conflict with TV Markíza on December 1, 2021, when Fico accused TV Markíza that is paid for broadcasting pro-vaccination propaganda. See <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/fico-raz-dva-sfukol-rozbehnutu-redaktorku-markizy-nadalej-budeme-tvrdit-ze-ste-plateni-za-propagandu-ockovania/2774656>

<sup>45</sup> See FB post by Jakub Goda, November 21, 2021, 10:27, <https://www.facebook.com/jakub.goda.9>, or FB status of the Ministry of Health, <https://www.facebook.com/MinisterstvoZdravotnictvaSR>, November 20, 2021, 18:39 and finally, FB status of the Ministry of Health, November 25, 2021, <https://www.postoj.sk/93341/dnes-treba-vediet>



Screenshots 1-4– YouTube video on Facebook from Smer-SD Press Conference November 4, 2021, Blog-post by Robert Fico, November 4, 2021 and YouTube contribution Politika dnes, November 21, 2021, Status on Facebook, November 23, 2021, YouTube, November 24, 2021

4. nov 2021 o 19:33 | Páči sa: 38x | Prečítané: 26 339x

# Sorosova črieda prasiat v denníku SME likviduje demokraciu

Aby bolo jasné. Soros je významným spoluvlastníkom denníka SME a dáva redakcii pokyny.

 **Robert Fico**  
Blogger

+ ODOBERAŤ BLOGERA

Písmo: A- | A+

DISKUSIA (175)

YouTube SK

strana smer sd



⚠ R. Fico už má DOSŤ TEJTO súkromnej televízie a posielajú jasný odkaz | SMER SD | Politika Dnes

34 292 views • Nov 21, 2021

← Robert Fico - Tlačová beseda stran...



Robert Fico ✓ was live.

4 November at 10:08 · 🌐

Tlačová beseda strany SMER-SD na tému: Zoberte konečne Sulíkovi tie drogy



👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

👍❤️😂 5K

YouTube SK

politika dnes



⚠ R. FICO NEKOMPROMISNE a TVRDO odpovedá novinárom - TO ste kde videli takéto ŠÍALENÉ VECI?! SMER SD

30,049 views • Nov 24, 2021

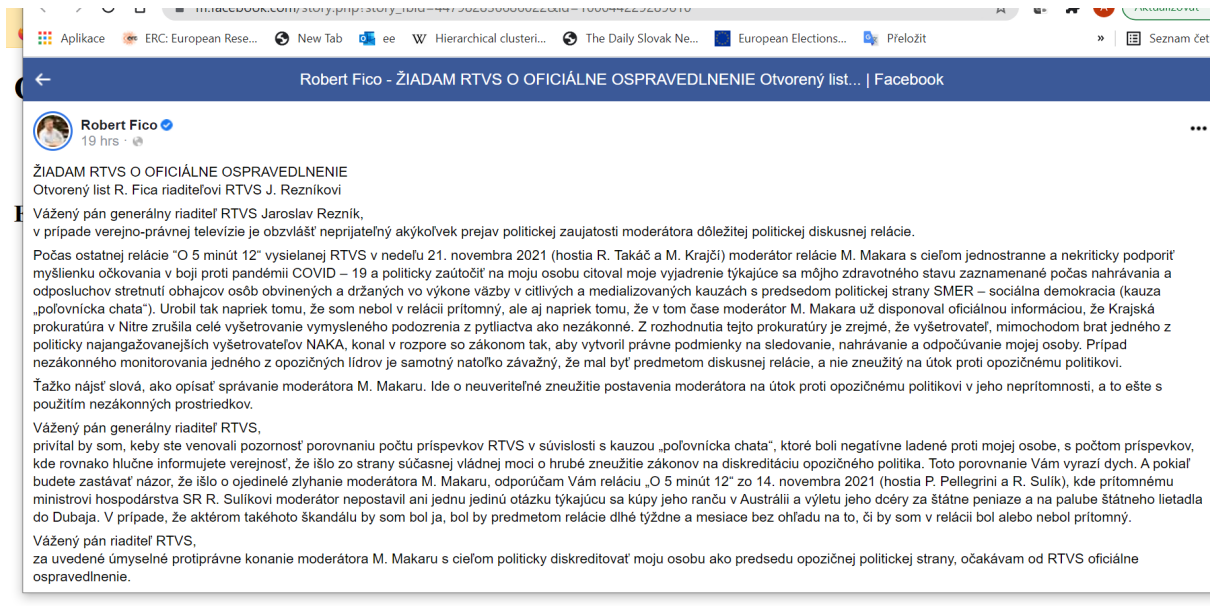
👍 1.7K

💬 51

➦ SHARE

≡ SAVE

...



Thus, it is vivid that in all three cases, the key part (but not all) of the mainstream liberal media and journalists have become public enemies of those political parties or rather leaders, seen as populists by the majority of journalists in this sample, with parties/leaders being either in government or in opposition. It should be noted that another study conducted about the same time (Školkay, Vigh-Vass, Žúborová, 2021) identified the identical three political parties/leaders as the most populist parties/leaders.<sup>46</sup>

Yet it should be mentioned again that there was a calibrated approach towards the mainstream liberal journalism among all three leaders. In other words, the intensity of rhetoric was at different levels. The most negative rhetoric towards the mainstream media was presented by the populist leader in opposition. It seemed to be a part of overall effort to delegitimize the key mainstream liberal media and journalism in the country.

In contrast, the Ministry of Culture under political nominee by OĽaNO was working on quite many legislative proposals that aimed at protecting journalists rather than to harras them. In that legislative regulatory efforts, Sme rodina did not seem to be intervening with negative approach. Of course, one can assess this development with certainty only once the whole legislative package will be passed. It should be mentioned that radical right-wing party representative saw new legislation as aiming against alternative media sector.<sup>47</sup>

It is perhaps clear that there is (by and large) found impartiality (save for minor occurrences of arrogance and prejudice by the *libertarian* journalists mentioned earlier, and occasional cases of misinterpretation of some events, especially in international arena) of the the mainstream liberal media and the journalists.

<sup>46</sup> In addition, after the interviews for this research were finished the authors identified as populist the newly founded right-wing Republika that wasset up by politicians who have defected the radical-right wing Kotlebovci-ĽSNS.

<sup>47</sup> Aktuálne na Slovensku, November 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkj1eZgvAI&t=14s>,



### 3. Conclusions

This national report attempted to explore complex relationship between populism and journalism in Slovakia. It is primarily based on interviews with 24 local journalists. For contextualisation, it was necessary (there was none available) to include extensive descriptive part that explored the national media ecosystem from perspective of populism. The conceptual and empirical differentiation between journalists' and media outlets' towards populism was also identified.

There have been identified these main parts of the national media system: the mainstream liberal media (both online and offline), the alternative (mostly) conservative media (almost exclusively only online) and the alternative illiberal media (mostly online and mostly conservative). Among the latter group, there also was identified a borderline case – Hlavnespravy.sk. This news and current affairs portal is quite popular but rather unprofessionally produced. Yet it is not so unambiguously against liberal democracy or so deeply involved in disseminating fake news and hoaxes as many other alternative illiberal media outlets.

However, no media of above types actually openly supports populism. Rather, if there is any preference, than some illiberal alternative media outlets give more space to (mostly right-wing) radicals or anarchists.

Some conservative alternative media that are seen as legitimate media (being equal professional partner although ideologically different) by the mainstream journalism and politicians, tend occasionally support some foreign populists whom they see as „true conservatives“.

But what it meant by populism here? On the basis of the survey carried out first, I summarized the definitions of populism. Definitions of populism expressed by the interviewed journalists can be categorised into six major categories plus one unique category. These are: following general public opinion, instrumentalisation of rhetoric and policies, offering simple solutions and promises, pleasing general opinion, claiming to represent the nation or the people, searching for enemy and a unique category of dichotomy of good and bad.

Of course, these seven categories are to a certain degree overlapping, or, at least, are quite close in their meanings. The most popular or typical features of populism among our sample are beliefs that populists just follow general public opinion, offer simple solutions and empty promises. This rhetoric or behaviour is motivated by their desire to please general opinion with the aim to get power or other negative personal motivation. This negative motivation was mentioned specifically only occasionally, as searching for enemies with bad intentions or a dichotomy of “good” and “bad”. For that purpose, populists use demagoguery as a form of instrumentalisation of rhetoric, including follow up public policies.

Occasionally, some interviewed journalists (including those from so called “alternative” media) considered all politicians to be more or less populists. It can be argued that the journalists see populism rather as demagoguery. This argument can be supported when one compares a more scientific definition of populism. About a third of journalists found

populism to a certain degree, or at least occasionally, among all political parties or their leaders.

However, we get a more clear-cut identification of populism in empirical terms. The interviewed journalists believe that Slovakia is ruled by the four-party coalition<sup>48</sup> that includes two strong populist parties - OĽaNO and Sme rodina. Moreover, from their perspective, the opposition is also formed by a strong populist party – Smer-SD, and even more radical populist right-wing party, Kotlebovci-ĽSNS. This strong presence of populism in politics suggests a conundrum. Journalism has for a long time been opposing passively, and occasionally actively, populism. At the individual level this open fight against populism is quite rare. Journalists by and large try to treat every political actor equally, impartially. Yet there are some liberal mainstream media (Denník N, Sme) that, together with some other major liberal mainstream media (TV Markíza, PSM - RTVS, aktualita.sk, or TV TA3) or individual media programmes, seem to passively or indirectly fight or, perhaps more correctly, challenge, populists – as any other politicians. This can be seen in quite many impartial current affairs debates and radio talk shows in the major TV and radio channels as well as in important investigative journalism (more often than not based on leaks) by Denník N, online news portal aktualita.sk or, especially in the past, business weekly Trend. This behaviour is enabled by the high level of media freedom guaranteed by the government as well as, by and large, private owners. Paradoxically, free and fair media system characterised, as cited, by “the lowest levels of political parallelism, the highest levels of press freedom, and the highest levels of foreign ownership, the highest levels of journalistic professionalism”, does not seem to be much helpful in preventing the rise and successfully challenging populism. Moreover, this - almost an ideal media environment - did not prevent partial state capture and grand corruption.

Therefore, clearly, the power of the media is, as also documented by other studies, dependent on proper functioning of the political system as such. Yet one can wonder why, then, does the population vote for corrupted but not primarily populist politicians and political parties? (ie. before the rise of populist alternatives, or before standard parties transform themselves into populist ones). One has to acknowledge that more or less standard but corrupted political parties that destroy or significantly weaken the system of checks and balances, pave the way to more populist alternatives.<sup>49</sup> The media, while covering corruption and scandals, unwillingly create “a window of opportunity” for the populists. Moreover, obviously, online alternative media, and, in particular, Facebook, enable populist politicians to reach the frustrated population directly, or, in the former case, utilise opportunity created by availability of about a sixth of population that (before the COVID 19 pandemic) distrusted any TV news. These are major, structural features of interaction of the media and populism in a local context.

An additional possible explanation for the low impact of mainstream liberal journalism is that mainstream journalists are, by and large, ideologically liberal, or liberal-left. The population differentiates between „liberal democracy“ and „democracy“. This is, indirectly, reflected in their selection of topics, discussants, experts, and framing of issues, etc. However, the population is ideologically more diverse, as can be seen in preferences for political parties. This unacknowledged media bias may support a lack of trust towards the media among

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<sup>48</sup> In fact, there are more parties, when OĽaNO represents electoral party.

<sup>49</sup> For example, Baboš pointed out that since 1991, the level of acceptable negative behaviour among population has actually increased in parameters such as cheating in taxes, claiming benefits without a just cause, using a public transport without paying for it, lying, bribe acceptance. Moreover, in contrast to some similar countries, the trend was negative here. See Baboš, Pavol (2021, October 10), *Stále (ne)slušnejšia krajina*, <https://www.babos.sk/?p=2738>

certain sectors (or, among the majority) of the public.<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, trust in news was rather low with 30% trusting news in general, while trust in news one used was 42%. Yet other data suggested that two thirds of the population actually trusted news broadcast by at least one of the mainstream liberal quality TV channels (TV JOJ was excluded here). As mentioned, only about a sixth of the population did not trust any major TV news channel, and probably not coincidentally, as mentioned, exactly the same number of people turned towards alternative media.

Another and related possible explanation is that the mainstream liberal media are seen by a part of population, clearly unfairly, as being colluded with recurring (as documented by the Gorilla scandal, and its failed coverage, and other scandals) failing political establishment. COVID19 pandemic coverage contributed further to this alleged collusion, when some opposition political parties, together with majority of the alternative media, supported narrative of allegedly biased mainstream media (that by and large followed governmental position on COVID19 pandemic). It should be noted that the PSM attempt at organising public debate of both sides of pandemic debate failed due to missing interest of scientists to discuss with their opponents.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, ultimately, it was the murder of data journalist Ján Kuciak who (by and large independently of work of other mainstream liberal media) was uncovering hidden network of captured state and grand corruption (partly due to leaks, partly due to his analytical skills) that ultimately lead to the collapse of partial state capture and grand corruption cases around and after the year 2018. Therefore, it can be argued that journalism had had step by step created conditions (while also paying the ultimate price, it served as the last impetus) for the disintegration of partially captured state. Unfortunately at the same time journalism created conditions for the rise of populism while publicly discussing and revealing scandals and corruption networks. This finding is in line with Bene (2020) who argues that in countries where the media play a major role in shaping political discourse, people have lower levels of external political efficacy.<sup>52</sup>

However, operation and status of journalism respectively, was neither direct cause nor direct consequence of populism in the country. In other words, journalism functions more or less as an independent factor, by and large separated from political and private commercial pressures and interests.

Currently, the journalists themselves are reconsidering their role in changing and challenging environment. A decade ago they faced the dilemma of what to do about scandalous but not verified information. This dilemma included possible legal sanctions when making this information about grand corruption and state capture public. Then, a decade ago, journalists' response was to keep a low profile on this issue. However, today there is discussion that seems to be more polarised as how to tackle leaked information from state authorities and that concerns political and non-political actors. A key difference is that audiovisual evidence is available and wiretapped participants do not deny its veracity. In this debate, the key mainstream liberal media still seem to support breaking the law and prefer what they call public interest. In contrast, recently (a decade ago and less) established alternative

<sup>50</sup> It should be mentioned that PSM broadcasts, Do križa (Crossing), Christian discussion club, on a weekly basis, <https://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/program/15289>. However, my point was about major TV news. Moreover, PSM is at least aware of this issue in newscast and is trying to include multiple ideological positions there too – see interview with Jaroslav Rezník, PSM director general, in Mukušovič, 2021.

<sup>51</sup> See interview with Jaroslav Rezník, PSM director general, in Mukušovič, 2021.

<sup>52</sup> External political efficacy refers to individuals' perception of the responsiveness of political authorities,

(conservative-nationalist, often with low quality output) mainstream and niche media, and illiberal (conservative) mainstream media seem to, paradoxically, prefer following the law. One can wonder whether this attitude is more formed by their need to create an “alternative” to the liberal mainstream at any cost, or by following a more deliberate way of thinking. This is not an unimportant debate since it involves the key populist political actor (Smer-SD) at the same time.

Another debate includes criticism of a part of libertarian, rather than liberal journalists (and, indirectly at least, liberal media). A few libertarian journalists tend to show some open or hidden arrogance as well as alleged moral superiority towards their opponents. In general, the mainstream liberal media obviously prefer their own vision and understanding of events. Alternative media, be them either those seen as “controversial” or more accepted, ideologically more transparent Christian conservative media, seem to filling an information and opinion gap for the part of the population.

There is possibly a deeper problem here. The younger population is not really able to differentiate between facts and opinions when reading electronic text. Slovak pupils belong by far among the worst achievers in this skill (the best were the US pupils).<sup>53</sup>

Regardless of (mainstream) ideologies they adhere to, individual journalists tend to prefer a fair, balanced approach towards populists. This approach is by and large visible in the case of media organisations. Obviously, some alternative media, although they do not necessarily openly support populists, nonetheless, for commercial and/or ideological reasons, provide some coverage of populist parties and leaders – especially or almost exclusively, if they are in opposition. Conservative media outlets occasionally show some affinity to populists, especially of foreign origin, but they see those populists primarily as “true conservative” politicians. As mentioned, the major liberal mainstream media, be that commercial or PSM, tend to show a neutral approach to populists.

The journalists see populism by and large negatively. However, those journalists who acknowledge the political orientation of their media outlet, and are in harmony with its political orientation, tend to be less critical about their favourite political subjects. This is more true on the right of the political spectrum.

Majority of the journalists consider it necessary to treat populists like other actors. What was specific, it was a need to pay more attention to preparation for interviews with populists, and a more challenging way of conducting interviews with them.

However, some interviewed journalists believed that some media outlets or majority of the mainstream liberal media outlets fight populism. As those fighting populism were seen PSM media and national elite newspapers, but also, for example, online only portal aktuality.sk or a major commercial TV Markíza. However, there were rare voices who saw some past collusion of PSM with a certain populist political party. Occasionally, some saw commercial media as at least occasionally colluding with populists (mainly due to their interest in shocking and negative news).

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<sup>53</sup> ČŠI (01.12.2021), Sekundární analýza PISA 2018: Čtenářství ve 21. století, [https://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Publikace-a-ostatni-vystupy/Sekundarni-analyza-PISA-2018-Ctenarstvi-ve-21-stol?fbclid=IwAR0SgAeJN5IA0\\_5KI6CCH4\\_W2IMW1vDscLej0W3xTeCYo8sCHMuA5QFO3cc](https://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Publikace-a-ostatni-vystupy/Sekundarni-analyza-PISA-2018-Ctenarstvi-ve-21-stol?fbclid=IwAR0SgAeJN5IA0_5KI6CCH4_W2IMW1vDscLej0W3xTeCYo8sCHMuA5QFO3cc)

Some liberal journalists accused some ideologically orientated outlets as being less critical towards populists if they were close to their ideology. However, although it was suggested that some alternative media may be close to populists, these were mostly just tentative suggestions. Alternative media may be seen as being closer to radical right wing parties rather than to typical populists. Of course, radical activities by both populists and radicals are attractive to alternative media who cover them gladly. In fact, probably all alternative media, and certainly those most popular ones, were rather critical of populists parties/leaders in the government.

Rather than supporting or opposing populists, or treating them as specific cases, there seems to be prevailing consensus (among those who commented on this issue) that radical right wing parties such as Kotlebovci-ĽSNS or radical individuals such as Harabin, should be treated differently. Indeed, the radical right wing party was seen by many journalists as treated differently by the majority of the media outlets. This was in contrast to some (not all) alternative media who did not provide such support so much due to specific ideology but rather as a result of pursuing “taboo” topics and allegedly enhancing freedom of speech. Therefore, they gave more space to radicals, but not necessarily to populists (especially if the latter were in government) according to some interviewed journalists. This affinity in the latter but especially in the former case can be seen more pronounced during election campaigns. However, there might be more of a sort of an informal barter here – radical parties invested in ads in online alternative media during election campaigns (Noizz, 2020).

There are some secondary findings (ie those that were not initially meant to be explored). The study was originally designed with focus on journalists. Yet, methodologically speaking, there is a difference between the journalists and the media. This was clearly noticed in often different ideological orientation, as well as in their different approaches to populism between both entities. Therefore, this study has attempted to consider such specifics and partially included the media as institutions into a wider analytical framework.

Moreover, a sample that would be originally focused on the mainstream journalists, would, in effect, present views of the mainstream liberal journalists. We would have learned only about the perspective of the mainstream liberal journalism either on populism or on non-mainstream media. This could be a bit incomplete analytical perspective.

Methodologically speaking, there is a huge difference in how one can interpret available opinion polls, depending on the questions asked, and possible answers offered.

It should be mentioned here that we get different answers on the journalists’ responses to populism when the journalists answered this question from their own perspective, or if they were asked to comment on other media how they responded to populism (they commented only occasionally about other individual journalists). Moreover, it is another perspective and experience when we ask about approaches of their media or other media (as organisations) towards populism. Obviously, from their own individual perspective when assessing their own behaviour, no journalist acknowledged that he would support populists. This is related to the obvious negative connotation of populism as well as to occasional disagreement who is

actually a populist. There could also be problem with selection – journalists openly supporting populists are rare cases, often mixing activism with journalism.

There also is, in some cases, a difference in how the journalists see their own ideology and what is their real ideology according to a more complex and independent survey. Tentatively, based on (still imperfect) online surveys, the majority of journalists seems to have liberal-left ideology. This finding suggests that one should be cautious when relying on the self-declared ideology of journalists. At the same time, better designed and calibrated survey tools are needed.

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### Appendix A: List of Interviewed Journalists with Outlet and Job Identification

Three journalists requested partial /related only to some answers/ or full anonymity. Considering a possible mistake or omission, I anonymised fully all three of them.

Number	Name and Surname	Outlet	Position
1	Marcel Marcišiak	tvnoviny.sk	Editor
2	Vladimír Šnidl	Denník N	Editor, political coverage
3	Eudmila Rešovská	Podtatranský kuriér	Editor in chief
4	Nina Janešíková	Hospodárske noviny	Editor
5	Martin Laczko	Regional press & TV	Former journalist
6	Peter Hanák	Aktuality.sk	Editor, journalist
7	Martina Sivačková	Mestská televízia Ružomberok	Editor
8	Attila Lovász	PSM Radio	Director of minority broadcast
9	Martin Bavoľár	Slobodný vysielateľ	Freelance journalist - radio discussion club host

10	Peter Bielik	TA3	Anchor/TV host
11	Július Lorincz	Pravda	Senior editor (foreign affairs), retired
12	Igor Daniš	Pravda	Editor
13	Robert Sopko	hlavnespravy.sk	Editor in chief
14	Ivan Brada	STV / RTVS (PSM tv)	Investigative reporter
15	Mirka Kernova	specialised media portal	Analyst, former journalist
16	Anonymous	Dennik N	Journalist
17	Silvia Ruppeldtova	PRAVDA	Journalist / culture
18	Martin Sliz	aktuality.sk	Journalist
19	Peter Števkov	Dennikstandard.sk	Journalist
20	Szilard Szomogyi	Ma7.sk	Journalist
21	Anonymous	Aktuality.sk	journalist
22	Jozef Majchrák	Postoj.sk	Journalist
23	Anonymous	RTVS	Investigative journalist
24	Juraj Hrabko	TASR, wire agency	Commentator (external)

## Appendix B: The perceptions of populism

wi – without ideology

NPI – not a public information

Respondent	The perception of populism	Self-Declared Ideology	Media Type
		Journalist/Media Outlets	Technology
1	Following the (FB) crowd, not considering consequences, ignoring inconsistencies in follow up statements	Civic democrat/wi	Online news portal affiliated with a major commercial TV
2	Blindly following public opinion	Liberal with conservative features/ liberal pro-West	National printed and online news outlet on record
3	All are populists, realistic view + social justice	liberal/wi	Online only local news outlet disseminated via email and web, seen as “alternative”
4	Searching for popularity, offering unrealistic solutions just for political profit, promises without solutions	Liberal centrist/wi	National printed and online news outlet
5	Demagoguery, using emotions, representing the people	Libertarian/wi	Regional printed press and TV outlet
6	An attempt to utilise the general feelings in a society without an effort to guide them	Liberal center-left/wi	Online only news portal
7	Being representant of popular masses	NPI/wi	City TV
8	To get popular support at any price	Liberal centre/liberal democracy	radio (PSM)
9	Deceiving with unrealistic promises with the aim to follow private aims	Common sense-true democracy/formally free speech but business model	Radio (alternative)
10	Abusing some topics for manipulation of public opinion, never acknowledging mistakes	wi/WI	Private news TV

11	The road to hell, influencing people through demagoguery, not through ideas	Social democracy/ reform left	National Newspaper + online version
12	Unrealistic politics focused on masses. Sometimes non-systematic reaction to ignored public issues.	Social democracy/wi	National Newspaper + online version
13	Empty promises	conservative-national/ conservative-national	Online only news portal (alternative that wants to be a mainstream)
14	Following general popular wishes	Left liberal/WI	PSM TV
15	Popular promises without real basis with the aim to get to power	Right wing/liberal-right wing	Specialised portal on media
16	Uncritical following public opinion/adjustment of policies to popular demand	Right liberal democrat/ Right liberal	National printed and online news outlet on record
17	Abusing public moods for political purposes, saying what the majority wants to hear	green/social democracy	National printed and online news outlet
18	Allegedly representing a mythical nation	Left liberal/wi	Online only news portal
19	Simple solutions	National conservative/not unified but more conservative	Online only news portal
20	Abuse of rhetoric for inhuman goals	Social liberal/ conservative Christian	Hungarian language online news portal
21	Trying to please moods of public at large, dichotomy good people, bad elites	Liberal left/wi	Online only news portal
22	It is present to a certain degree among all parties	conservative/ conservative	Online only news and current affairs portal
23	Speaking what people want to hear, promising simple solutions to complex issues, searching for enemy who is made a culprit	Christian democracy/wi	PSM TV
24	Irresponsibility	SD+Liberal+conservative/ WI	PSM wire agency (external)

## Appendix C: Journalists' Responses to Populism

A / Supporting and contributing to spread populism

B/ Countering populism

C/ Treating populists like other actors

**Note:** Journalists may be independent (fair-impartial), but the media may have at the same time implicit or explicit policies countering populism or radicalism.

	A	B	C	<i>Ideology Journalist/ Media Outlet</i>	<i>Media Type technology</i>
1			But part of a campaign against deepfakes	Civic democrat/wi	Online news portal affiliated with a major commercial TV
2			X (the media should not counter populism)	Liberal with conservative features/ liberal pro-West	National printed and online news outlet on record
3			x	Liberal/wi	Online only local news outlet disseminated via email and web, seen as "alternative"
4			x	Liberal centrist/wi	National printed and online news outlet

5			x	Libertarian/wi	Regional printed press and TV outline
6			x	Liberal center-left/wi	Online only news portal
7			x	NPI/wi	City TV
8			x	Liberal centre/ liberal democracy	Radio (PSM)
9			x	Common sense-true democracy/formally free speech but business model	Radio (alternative)
10			x	wi/WI	Private news TV
11			x	Social democracy/ reform left	National Newspaper + online version
12			x	Social democracy/wi	National Newspaper + online version
13			X (but preference given to conservative values)	conservative-national/conservative-national	Online only news portal (alternative that wants to be a mainstream)
14			x	Left liberal/WI	PSM TV
15		X (negative attitude)		Right wing/liberal-right wing	Specialised portal on media
16			x	Right liberal democrat/ Right liberal	National printed and online news outlet on record
17		X (selection of persons, topics)		green/social democracy	National printed and online news outlet
18		x (when possible)		Left liberal/wi	Online only news portal
19		x		National conservative/ not unified but more conservative	Online only news portal
20			x	Social liberal/ conservative Christian	Hungarian language online news portal
21			X (unless there are exceptional circumstances)	Liberal left/wi	Online only news portal
22			x	conservative/ conservative	Online only news and current affairs portal
23			x	Christian democracy/wi	PSM TV
24		X (PSM are naturally against populism)		SD+Liberal+conservative/WI	PSM wire agency (external)

## Appendix D: Approaches to Populism at Individual Journalists' Level

Respondent	Covered as normal political actors or do they have a special coverage, be it positive or negative? Why? Normalization vs. populization	Self-defined Ideology Journalist/ Media Type	Name	Media Type Technology
1	Just more in depth preparation and follow up confrontation	Civic democrat/wi	tvnoviny.sk	Online news portal affiliated with a major commercial TV
2	No difference, fair approach, ask for opinion, include his opinion	Liberal with conservative features/liberal	Denník N	National printed and online news outlet on record

		pro-West		
3	No difference, interview, if makes me angry, I write an opinion piece	Liberal/wi	Podtatranský kuriér	Online only local news outlet disseminated via email and web, seen as "alternative"
4	No difference, looking at the same issue from many angles. Questioning whether the whole enterprise of Q/A make actually any contribution to public debate	Liberal centrist/wi	Hospodárske noviny	National printed and online news outlet
5	Giving space to the other side /populist/	Libertarian/wi	Regional press & TV	Regional printed press and TV
6	Just to stick to the facts, repeating the same question + possibly critical commentary	Liberal center-left/wi	Aktuality.sk	Online only news portal
7	Fair, ballanced approach, being critical opponent, based on facts	NPI/wi	Mestská televízia Ružomberok	City TV
8	To know how to stop/interrupt them in live broadcast	Liberal centre/liberal democracy	PSM Radio	radio (PSM)
9	Standard approach but business motivation of owners	Common sense-true democracy/ formally free speech but business model	Slobodný vysielateľ	Radio (alternative)
10	More focused, keeping to the topic	wi/WI	TA3	Private news TV
11	Guided interview	Social democracy/ reform left	Pravda	National Newspaper + online version
12	Standard approach	Social democracy/wi	Pravda	National Newspaper + online version
13	Preference given to conservative-national voices	conservative-national/conservative-national	hlavne spravy.sk	Online news portal (alternative that wants to be a mainstream)
14	Context, and comparison with facts	Left liberal/WI	STV / RTVS (PSM tv)	PSM TV
15	Challenging with truth, facts, real impacts, more serious preparation	Right wing/liberal-right wing	specialised media portal	specialised portal on media
16	More time for preparation, better argumentation	Right liberal democrat/ Right liberal	Dennik N	National printed and online news outlet on record
17	Searching for causes, commenting diplomatically (not a reporter)	green/social democracy	Pravda	National printed and online news outlet
18	In depth preparation, problem with a lack of time during interview for confrontation	Left liberal/wi	Aktuality.sk	Online only news portal
19	Maybe to get the final proof may be more complicated	National conservative/ not unified but more conservative	Dennikstanda rd.sk	Online only news portal
20	Fair ballanced approach, writing close to a common man	Social liberal/conservative Christian	Ma7.sk	Hungarian language online news portal
21	Good preparation, to avoid possibility of answering questions formally	Liberal left/wi	Aktuality.sk	Online only news portal
22	Confrontation with facts, experts	conservative/ conservative	Postoj.sk	Online only news and current affairs portal



23	More difficult, more fact checking, more deliberation on answers	Christian democracy/wi	RTVS	PSM TV
24	Standard approach	Sd + liberal + conservatism	TASR	Commentator, external

## Appendix E: Definitions of Populism by the Journalists

Key Term	(Multiple) Occurrences in Definitions by Respondents
Following general public opinion	1, 2, 4, 14, 16, 17, 23
Simple solutions + empty promises	10, 12, 13, 19, 23, 24
Searching for enemy + bad intentions	21,23
Pleasing general opinion, including demagoguery	4, 5, 8, 17,21
Dichotomy of good and bad	21
Representing (nation, the people)	5, 7,18
Instrumentalisation of rhetoric (including policies)	6, 9, 11, 15,16 partially 12

## Appendix F: Liberal Editor-in-Chief Reactions to “Libertarian Hatred on Twitter” Scandal

The image contains two screenshots of Facebook posts by Beata Balogova. The left screenshot shows a post from 22h ago with the following text: "Ospravedlňujem sa všetkým, ktorých sa komunikácia mojich kolegov z Twitteru dotkla. Je mi to úprimne ľúto. Ak momentálne prežívame to, že skutočne chceme skultivovať verejný priestor, ak sa chceme zastat ľudí pred hrubosťou, tak chcem byť prvá, ktorá to podporí. Ale urobme to úprimne a konzistentne: zastaňme sa aj ďalších, na ktorých denne útočia. Ak sa stavíme na stranu slušnej komunikácie na sociálnych sieťach, tak sa do toho pustíme. V mojom predchádzajúcom statuse som apelovala, aby sme zvažovali slová, aby sme nimi neotvárali priepasti - lebo ak to nedokážeme, oberieme sa aj o privilégium humoru a kritiky. Bez nich nemôžeme existovať. A že to má byť o odhadnutí miery a reakcií. Ale aj o pravde. Pre niektorých to nebol dostatočne jasný odkaz. Môžem to len zopakovať: spolupracovníci SME by sa nemali hanlivo vyjadrovať o kresťanoch, je to neakceptovateľné, a redaktori by mali vážiť slová. Nastavujeme svoje hranice vo verejnom priestore a má to význam len vtedy, ak to robíme konzistentne a nevyužívame to na kultúrne vojny. Ak nám to dodá silu zastat sa aj ďalších, na ktorých denne útočia. Na ženy, na menšiny, na ľudí čo slušne povedali nejaký názor."

The right screenshot shows a post from 15 November at 15:16 with the following text: "Uvedomujem si, aké je náročné kultivovať verejnú diskusiu najmä v období, keď sa sociálne siete dávno stali verejným priestorom. Nechceme vykynovať humor a iróniu, zároveň hľadáme hranice, za ktorými sa stávajú útokom. Vyargumentovaná kritika kohokoľvek alebo akejkolvek tvorby je nevyhnutná. Bez nej strácame orientáciu, kde sa začína gýč a končí umenie. Na hodnotenia samozrejme máme iné kritériá v obyčajke a vo verejnom priestore. Poznámky typu „ona je kresťanka a nemali by sme sa vysmievať postihnutým“ je hlúpa a unáša aj jednoduchý výkrik, že niečo sa nám nepáči, smerom, kde sa už kritika ťažko obhajuje. Kde by vôbec nemala byť. Musíme rátať s tým, že na novinárov bude mať spoločnosť vyššie nároky. Lebo často určujeme hranice. Dokonca aj tým, ako takýto incident novinársky zhodnotíme a či ho účelovo nevyužijeme na ďalšie hlúpe zovšeobecnenie. Či dokážeme veciam prísúdiť správnu váhu, alebo ich sami posunieme ďalej na úroveň konšpirácií o Sorosovi. Či z toho neurobíme ideologický boj, v ktorom sa napokon stratí podstata debaty."

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=124102>

## Appendix G Two Radical Examples of Identification and Criticism of Liberal Journalism

a) The Chain-E-mail Network Communication by a Christian activist J.V. (retired, former university lecturer and researcher in natural sciences) disseminated on November 16, 2021

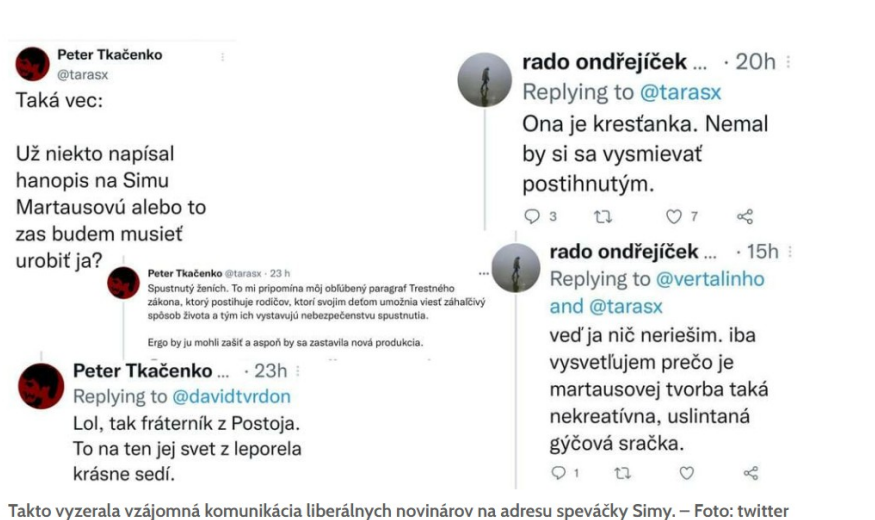
*Novinárska žumpa v SME financovaná Sorosom a CIA nás nadmieru ochotne informovala o tom, že súd zakázal Pochod nezávislosti v Poľsku, ale o tom, že Pochod nezávislosti úspešne prebehol nás neinformovali. Pán generálny riaditeľ Alexej Fulmek, pani šéfredaktorka Beáta Balogová, jej zástupcovia Prokopčák Tomáš, Svetlana Kolesárová, Jakub Filo, Ondrej Podstupka, Juraj Fellegi, nehanbíte sa? O ostatnej novinárskej žumpe DenníkN, Aktuality, Hospodárske noviny, Týždeň ani nehovorím, tie sú svojou kredibilitou hlboko pod SME.*

b) Comments, originally written in the discussion forum on the website of newspaper Sme



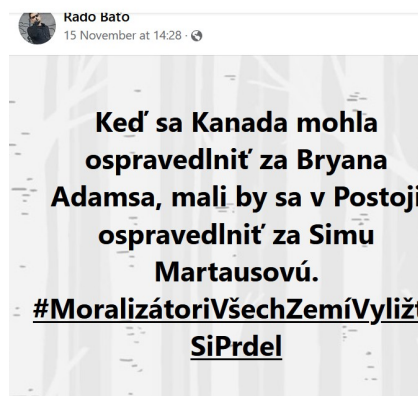
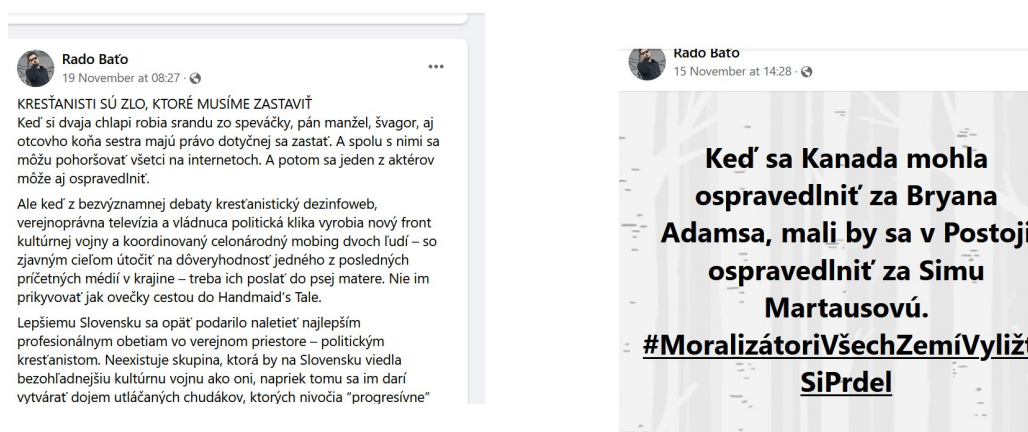
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=124102>

## Appendix H Content of “Libertarian Hate on Twitter” Scandal



Takto vyzerala vzájomná komunikácia liberálnych novinárov na adresu speváčky Simy. – Foto: twitter

## Appendix I Libertarian Journalist ‘s Defense of “Libertarian Hate on Twitter” Scandal



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/rado.bato>