INTRODUCTION

President of the Republic Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, when addressing the parliament, in 2018, in the scope of the 25th of April commemoration, urged the renovation of the political system in order to counter the “dangerous temptations of populist appeals”. Within a more populist Europe, Portugal eluded the trend, being pointed out, in international media and in literature, for its exceptionality. In October of 2019, Portugal can no longer be deemed an exception, with the arrival of a populist far-right party on the sphere of decision-making, but Chega’s emergence on the scene does not represent yet significant progress in populism. Among the 230 members of parliament, André Ventura was the only elected populist, but it being a debut, it cannot be ruled out that this may have been a one-off result.

Elsewhere in Europe, the populist wave begins to loom in the late 1990s, and within twenty years the support given to these parties more than trebled: in 1998, around 12.5 million Europeans, across 31 countries, had to cope with at least one populist politician among political decision-makers; in 2018, the number had soared to 170 millions. Portugal was never included in those figures, despite the fact that it too met a number of political and socioeconomic criteria favourable to the opposite.

This Portuguese exceptionality is the focus of our analysis in this study, the media factor being our specific starting point – to grasp how traditional media behave in a context

ABSTRACT

In the last decade, populism has made its way through Western Europe, securing a prime spot in the decision-making scene of most European countries. Portugal has stood out as an exception, the populist presence in the country remaining very subtle. This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the Portuguese case by looking at the media factor, which often goes hand in hand with the success of populism. The main goal is to understand how populist-minded traditional Portuguese media really are. A content analysis of five outlets (TV broadcasters and press) was carried out and the findings show a rather shy presence of populism in the media, consistent with what has been observed in the political sphere.

Keywords: media, populism, Portugal, content analysis.

RESUMO

Media e Populismo: as origens do excepcionalismo do caso português

Na última década, o populismo emergiu na Europa Ocidental, adquirindo um espaço relevante no
WHEREIN POPULIST POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IS RATHER SLIGHT.

Our goal is ultimately to answer the question: “To what extent can the discourse conveyed by Portuguese traditional media be deemed populist?”, by taking a look at the press and television and carrying out a quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The answer does not explain in full the exceptionality of the Portuguese case, but is surely headed in that direction.

WHAT IS POPULISM AND HOW IT HAS AFFIRMED ITSELF IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

In public debate, “populism” describes a vast array of political phenomena, parties and personalities, usually in a derogatory tone. Cas Mudde identifies two popular prevailing interpretations: the one referring to the politics of a Stammtisch (pub), using a simplistic and emotional discourse, and another identifying it with political opportunism. Although indeed features of populism, these notions are far removed from the academic debate, and not even among scholars is there consensus, the concept having been understood in many different ways.

One of them regards populism as a thin-centred ideology, as an outlook on society that relies on a moral lens dividing into two homogenous and antagonistic groups – the pure people and the corrupt elites –, under a notion that politics must be an expression of the general will of the people. Besides the moral presumption, the distinction between the people and “the others” is also linked to one of three secondary elements: political power, socioeconomic status and nationality.

Conceiving it as a communication style, Jagers and Walgrave go further and strip populism of the anti-elitism and the logic of exclusion as necessary requirements. Populism, in their view, is contingent only on closeness to the people and the addition of other dimensions make it thicker, enabling the identification of different types of populism: empty populism, anti-elitist populism, excluding populism and complete populism.

In contemporary Europe, the late twentieth century was marked by an unprecedented growth in populism and, in 2019, The Populist was able to identify 82 populist parties in 29 countries. These countries shared a thin-centred populist ideology, but under different banners and driven by different factors.

In general, they constitute a reaction to globalisation and to economic and cultural changes, which mean gains for some and losses for others. Mainstream parties responded to the new structural conflicts in an undifferentiated manner and, in this atmosphere, populists appear as new political challengers, an alternative to the parties of the system, filling the void left by them with their distinct and controversial agendas and direct solutions for the complex problems of society.
The success of the populist left ensues mainly from the financial crisis of 2007, which however fails to account for the success of the populist radical right in contexts of relative economic prosperity. These parties represent instead a reaction to the cultural and social transformations that result from globalisation, but perhaps immigration is their key mobilising force.

In Portugal, manifestations of populism have been but sporadic, without ever amounting to a real challenge to the system, and, notwithstanding the election of an MP by Chega in the 2019 legislative elections, the presence of populism remains of little significance in the Portuguese political space. Until then, the PNR (Partido Nacional Renovador), nationalistic and anti-immigration, was the closest there was to the populist radical right that progressed across Europe in the past decade, but its electoral performance was invariably poor, mirroring the irrelevance of that positioning in the Portuguese political setting. To the left, the same crisis that facilitated the entry into the scene of populism in Southern Europe also paved the way to anti-austerity social movements in Portugal, such as the movement “Que se lixe a Troika! (Screw Troika)!”. But while in Spain and in Greece this type of movement gave rise to populist parties, in Portugal that was not the case. Interestingly, public opinion does not appear to be so far removed from populism, and 2019 data reveal a surprisingly high level of populist attitudes (average of 4 in a scale of 5 points), considering the Portuguese political setting.

**POPULISTS IN THE MEDIA AND POPULIST MEDIA**

Cross-sectional to all others, the media factor also has helped explaining the affirmation of populism, from various points of view: as a stage for the parading of leaders, parties and movements, or as a catalyst of populist sentiment, through media discourse itself. In literature, several authors have chosen to study what kind of media coverage do populists receive and its prominence in media agenda. The relationship between the two is mutual, there being a willingness on the part of the media to reserve a part of their space to the populists, a space which is duly explored by the parties themselves, in a kind of “convergence of goals” – the media (tabloid media in particular) need to broadcast sensationalistic stories to attract audiences, while populist leaders use that exposure to reach out to the electorate.

The media themselves may present a populist discourse, promoting either directly or indirectly anti-elitist, racist or xenophobic sentiments. This media populism means that populism exists “among the media themselves independent of any relation to populist movements”. Naturally a populist coverage is more likely to occur among the tabloids, given their need to appeal to popular tastes, but it is not exclusive to them. The elite media
can also legitimise the messages of the populist parties by devoting space to issues in which they are dominant, thus creating an “information environment in which electoral support for these parties increases”. They do it also by means of discursive strategies in which the classic elements of populism (anti-elitism and people-centrism) are present.

OBJECTIVES, HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES
To what extent is the discourse of Portuguese traditional media populist? Answering this question required an analysis of media content based on the selection of a number of issues capitalised on by European populist parties and leaders and on the concept of populism itself. The discourse of the media was the object of a twofold analysis: the framing of news and the salience of the issues. In this regard, the way certain issues are addressed – and the objective here is to ascertain whether the media take on a populist framing relying on the people/outgroups dichotomy – is as important as the media space ascribed to them. We also endeavoured to understand what are the main groups targeted by a populist framing and what is the nature of the criticism possibly directed at them.

Previous studies have demonstrated that, in contexts wherein populism asserted itself, media discourse is by and large tendentially populist. In Portugal, on the other hand, expectations go the other way:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Overall, the discourse of traditional Portuguese media does not use populist rhetoric. Although populism levels in media discourse are expected to be low, the commercial dynamics of the media warranting the usual distinction between elite and tabloid media is also the case in Portugal, and it is therefore expectable that, in this context as well, tabloid media prove to be more populist:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The populism level of the discourse of tabloid newspapers is tendentially higher when compared to reference newspapers.

Between the press and television, the latter, by virtue of its audiovisual nature, has a more sensationalist communication and a simpler discourse, closer to its audiences and possibly more populist:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Television news have a tendentially more populist discourse when compared to reference newspapers.

Usually no distinction is made between public and private media, but they are not expected to behave in the same way, given the former’s dependence on the state and the public service logic by which they are bound, and the latter’s greater susceptibility to market pressures:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The populism level of the discourse of public TV channels discourse is tendentially lower when compared to private channels.
**POPULISM: CONCEPT OPERATIONALISATION**

With the concepts of people-centrism and anti-elitism as its starting point, the analysis was carried out in such a way as to identify, to begin with, populist references, based on three guiding questions: “Do the authors make reference to the people?”; “Do the authors make reference to popular sovereignty?”; and “Do the authors make reference to any outgroup?”. These references are supposed to be generalised in what concerns the concept of people (e.g. “the Portuguese”, “the electorate”, “the taxpayers”), the outgroups – the political (e.g. «the politicians», «Brussels», etc.) or the economic/financial elite (e.g. «the banks») and the ethnic groups (e.g. «the immigrants» or «the gypsies»).

In a second stage, the pieces were qualitatively analysed based on the tone of the references (positive or negative) and on the targets of outgroup criticism. Data was also collected regarding the context of the piece (issue); the reach (national or international); and general tone (positive or negative) of the piece.

The level of populism is measured in a scale of 0 to 100, but not only in its complete dimension. Instead, our methodology replicates the proposals of de Jagers and Walgrave and of Hameleers et al., which make it possible to grasp the multidimensionality that populism may take on and which result from the identification of different outgroups, as systematised below.

**DATA**

Two different means of communication were under analysis: the press, since it provides more elaborate content and is therefore more liable to have more consistent long-term effects on public opinion; and television, which as a rule has a greater short-term impact, besides being the medium which in Portugal reaches a greater number of people and consequently has a greater influence potential.

Striving for the greater possible diversity, within the press, two reference newspapers were selected (one daily – Público – and one weekly – Expresso) and a tabloid – Correio da Manhã. Regarding television, two broadcasters were selected, one public – RTP – and one private – TVI, the analysis focusing on primetime newscasts – “Telejornal” (RTP) and “Jornal das 8” (TVI).

The unit of analysis is the paragraph, for newspapers, since a change of paragraph presumably constitutes a change of argument. For television, we sought to apply the same logic. Lacking such clear cut limits, the change of paragraph was likened to the pauses in the news anchors’ speech and so, in this scope, the unit of analysis is the stretch of speech, understood as continuous speech. News tickers (television) and headlines, headings and text boxes (press), were also coded, also constituting units of analysis.
Opinion/commentary pieces and interviews were not included, and interviews and direct quotations inside the pieces were not coded for the reason that they do not reflect the journalists’ discursive options. All the pieces that fall within the general subject of politics (parties, government and President of the Republic) were analysed, as well as all those whose main theme pertained to the economic situation, corruption, European Union (EU) and/or immigration. Except for the news that concerned the EU, only the content referring to Portugal and/or Portuguese players were selected.

In total, 1834 pieces met these criteria: 391 by RTP, 331 by TVI, 479 by Público, 152 by Expresso and 481 by Correio da Manhã, all of them published/broadcasted between 18th of March of 2018 and 20th of June of 2018. The pieces were collected through manual search in the digital archives of the television channels and in the archives of Hemeroteca Municipal de Lisboa. A second coder analysed 5% of the pieces based in the same codebook that guided this work, and a compliance percentage of 99,3% was reached.

RESULTS

RÁDIO E TELEVISÃO DE PORTUGAL (RTP)

Political news occupies most of the Telejornal lineup, representing 71,4% of the pieces under analysis, followed by economy (11,3%), corruption (9,7%) and the EU (6,2%). The space devoted to the issue of immigration is residual, a mere 6 of the analysed 391 pieces (1,5%). Political pieces also more often than any other, by 23 times, opened the news, followed by corruption, which was the opening theme on three occasions.

Political anti-elitism represents the second more prevalent dimension in RTP’s discourse, but it is worth noting that only 0,21% of stretches and news tickers were coded accordingly, corresponding to a mere five units of analysis in a total of 2389. Even the most recurring dimension, empty populism, has an insignificant presence, at 0,25%. Four other dimensions were observed, each one of them coded in a stretch (anti-political elite populism; exclusionary left-wing populism; anti-economic/financial elitism and total anti-elitism). There are no negative references to immigrants and other ethnic groups, wherefore none of the dimensions involving nativism was observed, as is also the case with complete left-wing populism.

Aggregating the different dimensions of populism, on one hand, and the different dimensions of anti-elitism/nativism, on the other, makes it possible to ascertain which of them has a greater weight on media discourse. In RTP, the aggregate proportion of populist paragraphs is 0,33%, whereas the proportion of paragraphs that only identifies the outgroups without mentioning the people, stands at 0,20%.

Quantitative results show that the political elite is the outgroup towards which RTP’s criticism is harsher, but a qualitative look on these references makes it possible to
assess that it is the state, in particular, the most common target, scrutinised, however, in the scope of a specific case (the 2017 fires):

“At the bottom, what we have is that the State failed the Portuguese.” (statement made by the reporter in the piece “Relatório sobre incêndios”, Telejornal, edition of 21st March of 2018)

As to the economic/financial elite, RTP criticises the banks and the banking sector. Its was also in this scope that the only paragraph coded as “total anti-elitism” was registered: “The State injected over 17 millions euros into banks in the course of the past 10 years.” (statement by the anchor in the introduction to the piece “Ajudas à banca”, Telejornal, edition of 2nd April of 2018)

People-centric approaches are varied, but linked mainly to efforts by the “country” and the “consumers” to the benefit of banks and companies, respectively. There is no reference to popular sovereignty.

**TELEVISÃO INDEPENDENTE (TVI)**

Politics once again occupies a preponderant place, corresponding to 78,9% of the 331 analysed pieces. Corruption is the second most salient theme, followed by the economic situation (5,1%). To immigration only 9 pieces were devoted (2,7%), once again overtaken by the EU (3,3%). Politics was the theme that more often opened the newscast, even if only on 14 occasions.

Political anti-elitism is the most prevalent dimension (0,38%) and empty populism recurs among the higher-scoring of the analysed dimensions (0,19%), followed by anti-political elite populism (0,09%). Complete anti-elitism and anti-economic/financial elitism were coded only once, corresponding to 0,05%, and right-wing populism and nativism are once more absent, as also left-wing populism. As a whole, there are manifestations of populism in 0,28% of the analysed stretches and news tickers. Anti-elitism has a relatively greater presence, at 0,48%.

Qualitative analysis shows that, as far as the economic/financial elite is concerned, TVI also criticises banks, mentioning “State assistance to the banking sector” and the “major banking debtors” At the political level, TVI’s main targets are the “politicians” referred to in the scope of pieces about corruption, and “Brussels” (that is, EU institutions), portrayed as an agent interfering in national politics:

“Brussels wants the government to impose a limit to the growth of public expenditure.” (statement by the journalist in the piece “Bruxelas deixa aviso a Portugal” Jornal das 8, edition of 23rd of May of 2018)

Positive mentioning of the people involve primarily the negative consequences for “taxpayers”, but also the costs into which assistance to banks translates:

“It was the current government (…) that decided to include a state guarantee, which will now burden the taxpayers.” (statement by the anchor in the piece “Prejuízos recorde do Novo Banco”, Telejornal, edition of 29th of March of 2018)
In Público, politics is also the leading theme (81.8%), but unlike what happens with the other four outlets, EU is the second more salient theme, amounting to 6.9% of the pieces. Following behind, corruption (5.0%), the economic situation (3.3%) and, lastly, immigration (2.9%), even though, in absolute terms, Público is the outlet that devotes to this theme a larger number of pieces (17). Among the pieces featured in the front page throughout the period of analysis, politics was the most highlighted theme, even though, in proportion, the economic situation was mentioned more often (37.5% of news concerning the economic situation were featured in Público’s front page, whereas only 19.9% of news dealing with politics deserved the same emphasis).

In total, only two paragraphs were coded: one as anti-political elite (0.02%); the other as anti-economic and/or financial elite (0.02%). Still, as a whole, anti-elitism represents a mere 0.04% of the total of analysed paragraphs, and populism is inexistent in the discourse of this newspaper. The single negative reference to the political elite concerns the involvement of “government officials” in judicial processes. Criticism directed at the economic and/or financial elite, on the other hand, targets entrepreneurs, described as “freemason friends”, favoured by a government official. Despite the fact that Público is the outlet that more often addresses the subject of immigration, there are no negative references to immigrants, which are indeed approached in a tendentially positive light.

In terms of percentage, it is in weekly Expresso that politics receives greater salience, representing 82.9% of the analysed pieces. It is followed by corruption (8.6%) and the EU (5.3%). Although accompanied by a supplement in Economy, only 5 pieces concerning the economic situation were coded, amounting to 3.3% of the 152 under analysis. During this period, no piece on immigration was published. Again, politics is the subject that more often deserves mention in the cover of the weekly newspaper; however, in terms of percentage, corruption is granted more emphasis (only 15.9% of the total of political pieces are featured in the front page, compared to the 30.8% of pieces on corruption).

Populism is present in the discourse of Expresso only in the form of “empty populism”, observed in 0.21% of the analysed paragraphs. Political anti-elitism is, among the analysed dimensions, the most common (0.34%), while anti-economic and/or financial elitism scored 0.07%, corresponding to a paragraph. Therefore, in aggregate terms, anti-elitism corresponds to 0.41%.
Regarding negative references to the political elite, the political class comes up on two occasions connected to the subject of corruption, which is described as a problem “far exceeding the sphere of politicians”. Also, in another paragraph, in which the effectiveness of its work is challenged, the political class is identified by the pronoun “They”, placing it univocally on the other side of the border dividing “the people” and “the elite”. The most cited outgroup is the EU, portrayed as a detached and authoritarian institution, expressions such as “Brussels machine”, “in the corridors of Brussels” and “Brussels enforced” being coded throughout. As to the economic and/or financial elite, the banking sector is again mentioned, namely bankers. In the scope of people-centrism, there is reference to the costs that dealing with corruption cases impose on taxpayers, and popular sovereignty is mentioned on one occasion: “Do not even think about regionalisation without a referendum” (headline, Expresso, edition of 28th of April of 2018)

**CORREIO DA MANHÃ**

Here also politics (61.3%) is prevalent, with a slighter difference distancing it from corruption, in the second position, corresponding to 29.5% of the news. It is followed by the economic situation (5.8%), the EU (2.7%) and, once more vestigial, immigration (0.62%). Proportionately, the subject deserving more prominence in the front page is corruption, even though the absolute number of political news is higher (41 political pieces feature in the cover vis-a-vis 20 corruption news).

Showing a greater dispersion of references, the 11 dimensions under analysis obtained scores higher than zero, more than in the remaining outlets, the only dimensions registering no coded paragraph being those involving negative referencing of immigrants or other ethnic groups.

The more common dimension in the discourse of Correio da Manhã is empty populism (0.32%), followed by anti-economic and/or financial elitism (0.23%) and anti-political elite populism (0.18%). Political anti-elitism and complete anti-elitism were both coded in two paragraphs (0.09%), whereas exclusionary left-wing populism and complete left-wing populism were coded once (0.05%). The aggregate proportion of populist paragraphs stands at 0.60% and 0.41% in anti-elitism.

Despite being the media outlet that scores higher regarding people-centrism, there is no variety in populist rhetoric at this level, and the argument used in coded references is always linked to the costs weighing on the Portuguese and ensuing from financial policies, public investment or benefits for businesses:

“State assistance to banks made public expenditure skyrocket (...). Ultimately, it amounts to 2302 euros from each Portuguese citizen.” (excerpt of the piece “Ajuda à banca custa 2302 por português”, Correio da Manhã, edition of 3rd of April of 2018)

Criticism directed at the political elite target mainly the State which, when mentioned in a negative tone, is identified in opposition to the people, forced to fund the spending
of state institutions. When criticising the economic and/or financial elite, Correio da Manhã once again points its finger at the banking sector, but also at entrepreneurs and business managers, classified as “powerful” in pieces on corruption.

RESULTS IN A COMPARED PERSPECTIVE
The quantitative results pertaining to each outlet and compiled in tables 2 and 3 show, in all dimensions under analysis, with the exception of political anti-elitism, Correio da Manhã registers the highest score. In terms of anti-economic and/or financial elitism, however, it distances itself from Expresso – the second highest scoring in this dimension – only slightly, with a difference of 0.16%.

Political anti-elitism registers in TVI the highest proportion of coded units of analysis (0.38%). This indeed is the highest figure among all the outlets and across all the dimensions under analysis. In aggregate terms, in TVI, anti-elitism (0.48%) outweighs populism (0.28%), while RTP registers a higher score in the aggregate of populist dimensions (0.33%).

Regarding the press, Correio da Manhã is the outlet that leans more towards populism, with an aggregate score of 0.60% vis-à-vis the 0.41% of the anti-elitism aggregate. Weekly newspaper tends predominantly towards anti-elitism, a dimension in which it scores almost two times higher than the aggregate score for populism (0.41% and 0.21%, respectively). Público stands out for exhibiting the lowest score in aggregate populism (0.04%), but, above all, for being the only outlet without any populist reference.

The framing of the people and the elites likewise varies among the different outlets, especially regarding the political elite. Correio da Manhã and, interestingly, RTP, point their fingers at the State, albeit regarding different aspects of the latter’s performance. RTP calls into question the fulfilment of state obligations; Correio da Manhã blames the State for implementing policies that overburden the citizens. Expresso and TVI share negative references to the political class in general, in the scope of corruption cases or conflicts of interest, and to the EU, which they both portray as an institution that has encroaches on national politics.

Concerning the economic and/or financial elite, consensus is larger and all the outlets, with the exception of Público, level criticism at the banking sector. Moreover, Correio da Manhã mentions entrepreneurs, also criticised by Público, even though only a paragraph has been coded accordingly. The framing of the people is identical as well, and all those which make reference to it do so within a framing of victimisation regarding the political and economic elites.

It is important to stress that these results mirror an analysis which scans the news with the utmost detail and translate, on the whole, an extremely residual phenomenon in Portuguese traditional media. Even the differences found among the different media outlets are hardly representative and illustrative indeed of how exhaustive is the analysis.
HYPOTHESIS TESTING

With the results presented and systematised above as our starting point, testing the hypotheses is now required. We are in a position, from the outset, to confirm H1, which postulates that, by and large, populist rhetoric has an extremely residual presence in the discourse of Portuguese traditional media. Despite the uneven results, none of the five outlets has registered an aggregate score higher than 1%.

Still, it is worth discussing the different trends. H2 predicted a greater presence of populist rhetoric in the discourse and framing options of the tabloid newspaper and, in fact, Correio da Manhã is the only outlet whose aggregate quota of populist paragraphs exceeds the 0.50%, and also the only one which scores in all dimensions of left-wing populism. With an aggregate score of 0.60%, it is almost two times more populist than RTP, which holds the second highest score. H2 is therefore confirmed.

H3, on the other hand, translates the expectation of a tendentially higher level of populism in television, compared to reference newspapers. Results uphold that hypothesis, given that the two generalist channels (TVI and RTP) register an average score 0.31% in populist stretches, whereas the average score of the reference newspapers (Público e Expresso) stood at a mere 0.11%.

Lastly, and surprisingly, the public television channel (RTP) not only fails to register a lower aggregate quota of populist paragraphs than that of the private TV channel, it is also the second outlet to resort more often to a populist rhetoric.

Although TVI registers a higher aggregate quota of anti-elitist paragraphs, it is not for that reason the most populist. Regarding the proportion of populist paragraphs, the score of the private broadcaster is actually lower. Therefore, it has not been possible to confirm H4, which predicted the level of populism of the discourse of the public channel to be tendentially lower than that of the private channel. In fact, the opposite has been shown to hold true.

CONCLUSION

Literature on populism in Portugal began recently to tread its path, and the present essay endeavours to make a contribution to that effort by answering a question that has been left in the open regarding the media factor. This was done so by looking into discursive strategies, framing options and theme lineups, and that analysis made it possible to conclude that, by and large, the discourse of traditional media is not populist, and traces of populism in media discourse, in Portugal, are minimal at all levels. On the other hand, variations among the different means of communication reflect an extremely detailed analysis and therefore are rather insignificant, mirroring that merely
vestigial presence. Still, it is interesting to reflect upon them and their possible underlying motives, such as the possibility of specific events (e.g. the 2017 fires, in the case of RTP) eliciting exceptionally populist reactions. Another interesting observation concerns the absence of nativist references. In the Portuguese context, immigration is not a problem like in other European contexts in which the populist radical right has affirmed itself, therefore making it expectable that the subject did not take on a significant salience in Portuguese media. However, every time it was broached, the media invariably dealt with it in a positive way, praising the social and professional integration of newly-arrived immigrants and pointing a finger at unjustified bureaucratic hurdles. Instead of a populist framing, media discourse is marked by an appreciation of pluralism and multiculturalism.

Looking at the Southern European context, in which populism has affirmed itself mainly on the left side of the political spectrum, showing greater opposition to the political and economic and/or financial elites, it is unsurprising to observe instances of anti-political elite populism and/or left-wing populism (exclusionary or complete) in all outlets except for the reference newspapers. However, neither the EU nor the economic situation are particularly salient themes in media agendas, wherefore the influence potential of the already low populism is diminished due to appearing in the scope of themes that are not on top of the agenda. More salient is the theme of corruption, which would have an even greater weight if, for reasons of methodology, it had not been decided to exclude from this topic all cases involving players with no connection to public offices or “controversies” in politics (such as the case of the MP’s travel allowances), which, albeit lacking the “corruption” label, may have a similar impact on public opinion. It is important to raise the question of whether and to what extent they may contribute to the buildup of populist sentiments in public opinion, even in the absence of a populist discourse, just for highlighting themes such as this one. On the other hand, while anti-elitist rhetoric per se is not seen as a dimension of populist discourse, is it not liable to foster an environment conducive to it? These questions become particularly relevant when we look at Chega’s results in the last election, which run counter the trends observed in neighbouring contexts (Spain and Greece), in which populism emerged on the left and at the height of the financial crisis. In Portugal, it surfaces in a moment when the economy is showing signs of recovery, and to the right, by the hand of a party focused mainly on corruption and immigration. Populist rhetoric amounts to a drop in the ocean of Portuguese discourse and, from this point of view, traditional media may have contributed to the exceptional character of the Portuguese case so far. It is conceivable that, in the more recent context, they have had a measure of influence in the arrival of populism at the political sphere, despite not incorporating it in their speech? Looking at the context of Portuguese media, what other factors may also be linked to this exceptionality?

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**ENDNOTES**


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