

The Populist Communication Style: Toward a Critical Framework

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This article seeks to understand the advance and allure of populism and the populist communication style in the era of mediatization. It proposes a critical framework based on three categories—identity construction, rhetorical style, and relationship with media—to assess the relevant features of the communicative styles of specific populist actors of right and left, in power relations, in their own settings and time. The framework is employed to assess the communicative styles of left-wing late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and former right-wing leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party Nigel Farage—two political actors who would not usually be considered as likely populist bedfellows.

Keywords: populism, populist communication style, Chávez, Farage, Trump

The popularity of Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. elections has given rise to discussions about the links between the electoral advance of populist actors of the right and left in the last two decades and the lure that their style of doing and communicating politics exerts on everyday media, either to celebrate or demonize them. Despite differences in backgrounds and political positions, Trump has two things in common with the likes of Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom, Marine Le Pen in France, Pauline Hanson in Australia, Alexis Tsipras in Greece, Pablo Iglesias in Spain, and the late president Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, among others: They have all been associated with right- or left-wing forms of populism and have been recognized for their savvy use of media communication.

While populists have been garnering larger followings, conventional center-ground politicians have found it increasingly difficult to communicate with voters. The lure of those who are abrasive cannot be ignored. Might this be a development of the mediatization of politics, where certain acts of speech or styles of rhetoric—plain, forthright, belligerent—are increasingly winning hearts and minds? Are the media responsible for the advance of the populist style? Or has populism other, possibly deeper, roots than the

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purely mediatic? These questions are worth exploring, as are these more specific questions that we address: (a) What are the key features of the populist political communication style? (b) Is there a framework through which we can analyze, and understand, the communicative styles of populist politicians of the right and left? (c) What are the links between populism and the media? (d) Can the advance of populism be considered an extraordinary phenomenon, or is it rather a normalized element in Western democracy, the style adopted by those who exist on the fringes of mainstream politics? We argue that, although the news media (as actors, content, organizations, and platforms) might play a part in the rise of populist actors, they cannot have sole responsibility for the advance of populism. The populist style has deeper roots associated with identity and culture, a specific style of rhetoric, and savvy use of various communication channels (that mainly involves the media but not exclusively the media) through which populists connect with the political feelings, aspirations, and needs of those who feel disenfranchised, excluded, aggrieved, and/or disadvantaged by conventional center-ground politics or by social advances that threaten their ways of life.

We address these questions by approaching populism at its simplest: as a political communication style in the construction of identity and political power. This approach draws on concepts developed by Canovan (2002), Hawkins (2010), Jagers and Walgrave (2007), Kazin (1995), Laclau (2005), Mazzoleni (2003), and Waisbord (2003), who, from different perspectives, place the issue of communication at the heart of populism. Populism is explored as a particular style of political communication because it is primarily an act of speech, as populist actors use words, signs, and images—forms of communication—to connect with *the people* (the disenfranchised, disadvantaged, aggrieved groups mentioned) and demonize the Other, usually the center-ground elite, or *the establishment*.

The aim of this article is to propose a critical framework through which one can identify and analyze the political communication style of specific contemporary political actors represented as populists by commentators, in their own contexts and times. The first section elaborates on our approach. This is followed by a discussion of the framework. The third section explores and contrasts the styles of two populist actors: the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and former leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) Nigel Farage. The final section reflects on the findings and key features of the populist communication style in the era of mediatized politics.

Populism and the Populist Communication Style

In the absence of a single and uncontested definition of populism, we understand populism as comprising certain key elements, mainly drawn on Block's (2015) categorization of populism: an "appeal to the people" (Canovan, 2002; Laclau, 2005; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014); antipolitics, antielitist, antiestablishment ideologies, sentiments, and tactics (Mudde & Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2012); a "discourse" characterized by a belligerent ethos and plain language that provide a sense of closeness between leaders and their politically disenfranchised publics (Bolivar, 2003; Hawkins, 2010; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007); a focus on (a usually charismatic and, sometimes, narcissistic and intolerant) party "leadership" and "agency" to popularize and legitimize populist issues (van Kessel, 2011); the exploitation of crises of democratic representation, the attempt to bypass institutions of democracy, and the promotion of vague forms of direct democracy to gain positions of power (Roberts, 1995; Taggart, 2002); patronage,

paternalism, and party clientelism, especially in Latin America (Philip & Panizza, 2011); and a complex and fractious relationship with the media (Mazzoleni, 2003, 2008).

Hofstadter (2008) defined *style* as “the way in which ideas are believed and advocated” by political actors—in this case, populist actors—rather than “the truth or falsity of their content” (p. 5). From a rhetorical perspective, Harriman (1995) defined political style in terms of (a) a repertoire of rhetorical conventions; (b) the construction of individual and collective identities and power; and (c) practices and media of communication used by political actors to persuade—a definition to which, for its relevance, we will return later. The concept of *political communication*, we argue, incorporates “the means and practices whereby the communication of politics takes place” (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 2011, p. 41) and the way power relationships are performed and negotiated over the control of the agenda.

The populist communication style is situated in an era in which politics is “mediatized” and marked by increasing media complexity and fluidity (Chadwick, 2013). Empirical tests for the presence of populism in media content—for example, in the work of Bos and Brants (2014) and others (e.g., Rooduijn, 2014)—touch on the appearance of some of these features in content, but these studies are often limited by the narrow range of material examined and their party-centric nature. Rooduijn (2014), for instance, looks at opinion pieces and letters only. These differing approaches, however, all point to the need to understand how populist political actors communicate with their constituencies through what is referred to as *style*, and with the content of that style as it appears in the media.

Although numerous authors have explored the populism–media connection, the possibility of a causal connection was never explicitly articulated until recently, specifically in the United States with the rise of Donald Trump. In *The New York Times*, Nicholas Kristof (2016) argued that the media failed to hold Trump to account and consequently aided his progress: “Despite some outstanding coverage of Trump, on the whole we in the media empowered a demagogue and failed the country. We were lap dogs, not watchdogs” (para. 22). Such comments are noteworthy not only because they represent the media as *the only* defenders of the democratic process against its detractors but also because they (mis)understand the ways by which Trump, and others, gain the support of followers. In this respect, it is not enough to locate the advance of the populists in the limitations of the media, the structural weaknesses of democratic politics, or even a simple-minded bigotry in their followers. What is needed, we would argue, is an approach to populism not only, or simply, as the outcome of the failure of processes of democratic politics (see Flinders, 2016; also Taggart, 2002) but as part of a particular style of political communication that connects with significant sections of the polity that feel aggrieved and, in some way, marginalized within democracy in an increasingly globalized and mediatized world. Populists’ advance, according to Norris (2016), lies in their appeal to those who feel threatened by cultural change and the demise of traditional cultural values.

But how do contemporary populist actors gain—and retain—their followers not only because of media “complicity” but despite media criticism? As journalist Nick Robinson (2015) explained after a particularly antagonistic interview with Farage:

I long ago decided that it was time the media stopped falling for the pint, fag and cheeky grin routine and started testing the UKIP leader as the serious player he aspires to be. So I accused him of always trying to make a joke of everything. . . . This briefly made me a hero of anti-UKIP types on Twitter and Facebook. But it was followed by a 4 per cent rise in UKIP's poll ratings. Farage is a man rewriting the rules. (p. 9)

Are Farage and other populists "rewriting the rules," as Robinson (2015) suggests? What is the role of journalism in such a process? The difficulty for Robinson—and other journalists in Western democratic systems—is that populists' belligerent stance is often accompanied in the very same news item with clips of supporters (and opponents) of populist leaders who ably articulate their views. Philip Elliott (2016) gave a voice to some of these in his piece for *TIME* magazine in which he interviewed a group of "political newbies" who favored either left-wing activist Bernie Sanders or right-wing Trump, who, from "opposite ends of the spectrum . . . have promised to remake the nation with a populist revolution" (para. 2). Elliott (2016) recorded 74-year-old Sharron Martin as saying, "What have we got in Washington? They stay there. Who sees anything or stands up for the American people? They just all go with the flow. It's going downhill, its going right into the garbage" (caption 7).

Whether Martin or others recorded in the piece supported Sanders or Trump does not directly matter in that Elliott's (2016) piece represents populism as a specific way of sharing meaning and feelings vis-à-vis conventional center-ground politics in power relations—as a way of constructing identity.

This testimony is similar, for example, to many testimonies in Venezuela, where Chávez's followers claimed that he had given them "an identity" (Block, 2015), and now they were all called "Chávez" (La Riva, 2013). So power relations in populism are not only about material or tangible issues (although material compensation might be involved in some cases) but also about the communication of meaning, feelings, values, words, and perceptions through which political identities are constructed and power is enacted.

While there is now a growing body of literature on populism and the emerging field of "populist political communication," this has mainly concentrated on media effects and mediated populism in Europe (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2016). Although these efforts are promising, the literature on populist political communication is still limited, especially regarding the role of the media in the rise of populism, as Aalberg and colleagues note in their book (2016). In addition, the distinctive features of the populist communication style have not been extensively studied or typified. Yet the emergence of populist political actors of right and left who, despite their ideological differences, share a common popular antipolitical, antielite, antiestablishment approach (categorized by Aalberg et al., 2016, as "anti-elitist populism") justifies a closer examination.

Critical Framework: Identity, Rhetoric, and Media

Based on this discussion, we propose a critical framework that integrates three key categories to identify and analyze the most relevant features of the populist communication style: identity, rhetoric, and use of the media. This is consistent with Harriman's (1995) definition of political style explained earlier.

First, Hall (2011) described *identity* as fragmented and changeable constructs built on “the resources of history, language and culture” (p. 3) to represent an idealized self that embodies “difference and exclusion,” because it is only through the antagonistic relationship with “the Other” that the idea of identity takes shape, “within the play of power and exclusion” (p. 4). Hall’s view is consistent with Laclau’s (2005) approach to the construction of a collective actor of “popular nature” as an act of power, where a populist “agglutinating” leader plays a key role in the construction of “the people,” a notion that loosely brings together all those with “unfulfilled” demands, a group destined to break the status quo, take power from the ruling elite (the Other), and build a new (ideal but imprecise) populist order. This discussion suggests the relevance of identity construction as a key category to analyze the populist communication style.

Second, the specific style of rhetoric used by the populists involves adversarial, emotional, patriotic, and abrasive speech through which they connect with the discontented often via grassroots, community-oriented, communicative practices and spaces. In Kazin’s (1995) view, it is a “persistent yet mutable style of political rhetoric” (p. 5), a kind of language that is “continually renewed to chill a fresh elite and warms a fresh array of plain people” (p. 287). Jagers and Walgrave (2006) described populism as “a communication frame that appeals to and identifies with the people” (p. 322). We would argue, however, that the populist communication style is much more than a mere top-down appeal because, as we have seen so far, it embodies more complex identity affiliations and emotional interplay between populist actors and their publics.

Third, like all political actors, populist political actors use, engage with, and are covered by the media. Populists use multiple channels of political communication to transmit their messages and connect with their publics. In contemporary societies, where all politics is mediatized at some level, it is inevitable that populist figures will use the media “in the articulation and representation of politics” (Waisbord, 2003, p. 201). Mazzoleni (2003, 2008) and Collovald (2015) suggested that, rather than blocking their advance, an increasingly cynical and antipolitical media—even when offering criticism—help reinvent, “de-demonize,” and hence legitimize populism by normalizing their position in the constellation of political parties contesting power today. Arguably, then, populism and populist actors feed off mediatic controversy: Their tactics may include (a) playing “the underdog,” (b) using “abrasive speech,” (c) earning media spaces by a “bullying” style against the establishment, and (d) staging “newsworthy” political events (Mazzoleni, 2008). However, this process cannot be viewed just from the perspective of linear media “effects,” because increasingly mediatized Western individuals and groups are continuously interacting in public conversations via social media (Chadwick, 2013).

In summary, and contrary to Waisbord (2003), we do not necessarily concur with the idea that “all media politics are populist politics” (p. 215). We wish to retain, however, Waisbord’s notion that populism is a style of political communication that sets out to persuade in particular ways. Some employ mainly forms of media politics, but others also focus on forms of direct (e.g., grassroots, community engagement) political communication, through which populists connect, construct, and reconstruct their publics.

The degree to which this is done, according to Roodjuin and Akkerman (2015), can be related to the “degree of left–right *radicalism*” (p. 9) enacted by populist players. Roodjuin and Akkerman’s research is focused on the radicalism of political parties and the content of their manifestos. This approach had been rejected by Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014), who argued that the study of the populist message should not be limited to the “party political sphere,” as populist messages have “become more widespread in public debates in the media” (p. 13) and, for various reasons (commercialization, newsworthiness, media owners’ ideologies) have become “more prevalent” in Western societies “than previously assumed” (p. 13). Populist actors articulate not only the benefits that they and their followers can gain from their relationship (e.g., political power, socioeconomic benefits, to make their country “great again”) but also the importance of the connections built on shared values, aspirations, and patriotic feelings, mixed with dissatisfaction with the political elites, cultural marginalization, and cynicism. This is part of the rationale for arguing that populism is about the media, but not exclusively: It is about the emotional bond between populist players and significant segments of the population that are disenchanted, even angry, with center-ground politics—with the elite—because there is something that is not working in their polity or because they feel threatened by change. This discussion also suggests that it is timely to approach populism not as an aberration but as a phenomenon that is part of democracy (Arditi, 2008; Canovan, 2002; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014).

Analyzing Two Unlikely Bedfellows: Chávez and Farage

The choice of these two cases—socialist Bolivarian Hugo Chávez and libertarian right-wing UKIP leader Nigel Farage—is intended to test the framework outlined. The two men come from opposite ends of the political spectrum and inhabit very different political universes but nonetheless display similarities in their styles and in their approaches to identity, rhetoric, and dealings with the news media. Both leaders claimed to be one with their people and sought to redeem their respective nations. Exceptionally, Chávez’s followers even *became* him (Block, 2015): They were sworn in his stead and in his absence with the cry of “I am Chávez” at his 2013 street inauguration (La Riva, 2013). Farage, in a more parochial style, praised “Ukippers” as “his kind of people” (Owen, 2015). In this way, groups of disenchanted citizens do not merely follow their preferred populist leaders but develop an emotional connection with them and feel recognized and empowered through them.

Four other points are relevant to both of these political actors. First, both have thrived on controversy and divisiveness and on lambasting the elite or establishment. Second, they have gained important positions of power by acting from, or within, the very same institutions and/or the representative politics they struggle against. This is “the irony of populism” (Taggart, 2002, p. 79): Chávez changed the constitution and political system by skillfully manipulating the same constitution and system he wanted to change; Farage led a struggle against the European Union (EU) as an elected member of its parliament. Third, both actors used the media to attack the very same media that gave them coverage, often because they see professional journalism as an obstacle to the creation of their movements. Finally, both have led their political groupings to success—the former to leading a country, the latter to electoral success in the 2014 European elections and 2016 Brexit vote.

We have drawn on a variety of news media texts, public documents, and scholarly sources to explore Chávez's and Farage's populist communication style within the framework set out—that is, in terms of their use of (a) identity, (b) rhetoric, and (c) the media. We seek to illustrate the way these two unlikely bedfellows of populism, Chávez and Farage, approached particular situations to connect with their publics, construct identity, influence the political and media agendas, and gain positions of power.

The selection of primary material used for our analysis is drawn, almost inevitably, from a diversity of sources. In the case of Chávez, we have drawn from his speeches, his media and public appearances (his TV show, *Aló Presidente*; his "National Chains of Radio and TV"; YouTube videos; and tweets); coverage in the national and global media (e.g., *El Nacional* and *El Universal*; *BBC Mundo*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*); and scholarly and public opinion studies referring to Chávez's rule (1999–2013). For Farage, we have drawn principally on coverage of UKIP (and hence Farage) during the month prior to the June 2014 European election in a selection of British print media (*The Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Mirror*, *Sun*) and the main television news bulletins (BBC, ITV, SKY) in Britain. These texts are analyzed as cultural forms—that is, "the momentarily fixed form of an ongoing negotiation or even struggle over meaning and common sense" (Fürsich, 2009, p. 247), which express the "configuration of feelings of which public rhetoric is based" (Hall, as cited in Fürsich, 2009, p. 247). These texts offer a rich seam of communication content from which to draw on to illustrate our argument that particular styles of communication are germane to populist political leaders irrespective of their different worldviews, political locations, or careers as political leaders.

We next explore the actions and representations of these two political actors within the framework outlined: identity, rhetoric, and use of media.

Chávez's Use of Identity

Chávez's populist style was largely characterized by two elements: an ongoing construction and reconstruction of shared values and colloquial language focused on building ties with the poor, excluded, and disadvantaged in Venezuela. Consalvi (2013) described Chávez as a "popular caudillo" who knew folklore and popular music by heart, danced the typical "joropo," and was a powerful storyteller who became "the great prophet of the people" (para. 9). Chávez also employed the powerful figure of independence hero Simon Bolivar as his key cultural, stylistic, and ideological tool to connect and bond but also as a vision of justice and independence (Lendman, 2013). His followers became *Bolivarian*. In his third anniversary speech, Chávez used Bolivar not only to emphasize the people's sovereignty but also to join him together with Christ, appealing to Venezuelans's Catholic roots:

Long live the Bolivarian government! Long live the Venezuelan people! You are a great people. . . . I have been telling you for years now, Bolivar's people is here again honoring his heritage, his glory! . . . Christ the Redeemer of peoples, is here with us, Christ our father of our everyday lives. . . . He is here with us. (Chávez, 2003, paras. 42–48)

Chávez not only used existing national symbols and religion but also undertook their ideological re-creation: For example, he changed the name of the country to Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Although such changes were criticized and mocked by the opposition and the commercial media, Chávez constantly fed off the controversies that he expertly triggered. Petkoff (2010) argued that at the heart of Chávez's popularity was "the affective and emotional bond" that he tightened with his followers across his nearly 14 years in power, underpinned by "the enormous weight that the Bolivarian and independentist myth has upon the Venezuelan psyche" (p. 169).

The essence of Chávez's communicative style lay in not only his popular appeal but the way he continuously constructed his constituents, illustrated by the expression "I am a little of all of you" in Chávez's (1998, p. 3) first speech as president-elect. Chávez won the presidency by building on Venezuelans's discontent with the representative political system they had had for 40 years; he also thrived on the offer of changing this system to participative democracy, which he achieved within the first 12 months of his presidency (Cañizalez, 2012; Petkoff, 2010). But Chávez's communicative style has been recognized not only for his ability to identify with his constituents but also for his intolerance to dissent; he eventually demanded "absolute loyalty" because, he said, he was not "an individual anymore," he was "a people" (Chávez, 2010).

Farage's Use of Identity

Farage, member of the European Parliament (MEP) since 1999 and leader of the UK Independence Party between 2010 and 2016, also demonstrates an effective and especially affective way of connecting with his followers, the so-called Ukipers, via the exaltation of shared national values, beliefs, and language, transmitted via multiple channels of political communication. Farage extolled the virtues of UKIP as "the people's party" and of British values as distinct from those of Europe in, for example, his speech at the 2013 UKIP conference:

Britain is different. Our geography puts us apart. Our history puts us apart. Our institutions produced by that history put us apart. We think differently. We behave differently. I'm not giving you the "Love, Actually" version of what makes Britain different. The roots go back seven, eight, nine hundred years with the Common Law. Civil rights. Habeas corpus. . . . Let us send an earthquake through Westminster. Let us stand up and say: Give us our country back! (Farage, 2013, paras. 81–83, 161)

In this speech, Farage both constructs and reinvents (akin to the Chávez style) British history and culture by exaggerating the differences with the Other, mainly represented by Europe, European institutions, and (some) European immigrants. For Farage (2015a), Britain's heritage must be "more than just a star on someone else's flag" (para. 21). As with Chávez, Farage believes in "straight talking" and in informal, relaxed manners. He has cultivated a public persona as an assiduous pub goer, a "man of the people," a beer lover and smoker (contrary to current social mores). He is someone not afraid to confront establishment thinking. Ford and Goodwin (2014) quoted Farage as follows:

So there is an identification with us because they see us as a patriotic party, but I always emphasize that's with a small "p" and not a big "p" as I think that's important. It's tough to define but a sense that we're speaking for them. That the rest of the political class don't even speak the same language. (p. 91)

Many of these elements—including the style—can be discerned from BBC political editor Nick Robinson's (2015) book on the general election of 2015. In one TV news report, Robinson showed Farage meeting and greeting people, including one man who greets Farage with the phrase, "I'm Millwall and UKIP" (p. 8). This, as Robinson explained, is the slogan of the Millwall football fans, who acknowledge that "no one likes us, we don't care" (p. 8). Robinson then added, "In over an hour walking around the harbor and the local cafes not a single person fails to greet him warmly" (p. 9).

Farage's populist communication style, like Chávez's, thrives on basic nationalistic feelings of ordinary people transmitted in informal style to help build bonds with and among their publics. As Waterson (2014) suggested, he has successfully convinced the public that he's "a man of the people" (para. 4). Farage (2015a) has been an unconventional politics champion in the UK and Europe, a self-confessed Thatcherite who defends the "little people" against big corporations, particularly when it comes to the EU subverting their interest and the interest of the country they inhabit (and would like back).

Like Chávez, Farage is acknowledged to be charismatic but also intolerant in his style of leadership. Farage's style is characterized, and criticized, for its controlling tendencies: For example, MEP Patrick O'Flynn claimed that Farage was "making UKIP look like an 'absolutist monarchy' or a personality cult" ("Election 2015," 2015, para. 51), and former party member Godfrey Bloom suggested that Farage "is not a team player" (para. 54). In spite of this, his position is unchallenged because, as the BBC suggests, for UKIP voters, "Nigel Farage is UKIP" (para. 57). Farage's UKIP increased its share of the vote from 3.2% obtained in the 2010 general elections to 12.6% in 2015 (see "Election 2015," 2015), but under the first-past-the-post system, this did not translate into seats. Despite his national standing, Farage did not succeed in his own bid for a parliamentary seat.

Chávez's Use of Rhetoric

Chávez built his policies in terms of the communicative impact they could have, prioritizing "the package" of policy over its actual content. His "communicational government" (Block, 2015, p. 48) not only involved a personalized kind of power but also, and paradoxically, embraced the recognition and inclusion of citizens.

Chávez's language was abrasive: through his antiestablishment, antielite, messages, he constructed himself as the ultimate outsider, a sort of antipolitical superhero (Bolivar, 2003). His anti-American rhetoric not only won him international support (some dubious; e.g., from Iran's Ahmadinejad) but also connected the leader with those who felt politically and socially excluded in a deeply polarized society (Corrales & Romero, 2013). Together with the material handouts and social policy that he could afford with the highest oil prices, his communicative style secured him the victory in three consecutive presidential elections and a revoking referendum (Consejo Nacional Electoral, 2016).

Chávez gave his constituents a voice through community, pseudo participatory organizations, such as the “Bolivarian missions,” *comunas* (communes), and *colectivos* (collectives), which, according to Block (2015), were “communicative organisations” in their own right, which managed citizens’ perceptions and aspirations through a discourse centered on ideals of popular participation and voice in decision-making processes that were financially (and thus ideologically) dependent on the presidency (Machado, 2009). The “missions,” according to Hawkins, Rosas, and Johnson (2011), offered an “extraordinary” and “charismatic mode of linkage” through which Chávez’s followers “support a single, quasi divine leader who provides transcendence, a sense of moral renewal” (p. 188). Although this relationship further strengthened the bond between Chávez and his constituents, España (2009) suggested that participation in the Chávez era was more a matter of language—that is, of “perceptions” of participation (through the leader’s words)—than reality. Ultimately, the missions symbolized the realization of Chávez’s communicational construction of governance through which he built a bond that provided a sense of collective identity.

Farage’s Use of Rhetoric

Farage’s style is also about the power of his word and gestures and the peculiar spaces he has created to communicate and create bonds with his constituents. As noted, BBC’s Nick Robinson (2015) might be fed up with “the pint, fag and cheeky grin routine” (p. 9), but it is precisely the repetition of this routine in pubs, community meetings, and other settings that has come to characterize Farage’s populist political communication style. Furthermore, his communication skills cannot be doubted. Deacon (2014) described Farage’s Sheffield 2014 campaign speech as follows:

The Sheffield speech went down a storm. Even Mr. Farage’s most disgusted critic would have to concede that he’s an exceptional performer on stage, embarrassingly superior to the leaders of the three main parties. So convincing an orator is he that people actually nod agreement when he rages against “the political class” for having “all gone to the same handful of schools.” No one so much as raises a hand to remind Mr. Farage that he himself attended Dulwich College, a member of the elite “Eton Group” of England’s poshest independent (i.e., fee-paying) schools. . . . UKIP rallies are far livelier than those of other parties: they seethe with a kind of angry energy, a furious optimism. (para. 9)

Farage and, indeed, Chávez are leaders capable of mobilizing emotions and so lead through connecting with their audiences’ grievances. Farage is also adept at using “the iconography of politics” (Macintyre, 2015, para. 11) to communicate and to trigger nationalistic feelings. On St. George’s Day (England’s day) in 2015, Farage stood at Ramsgate’s Northwood Club alongside the traditional “line-up of bemedalled old soldiers, or the giant England flags” (Macintyre, 2015, para. 11) and “drinking a pint of John Smith’s while clutching a white plastic helmet emblazoned with St George’s Cross” (para. 12). This might be interpreted as a British version of the Chávez style and iconography: big flags, a lineup of patriotic soldiers, and instead of a pint, cup after cup of Venezuelan black coffee, the popular *negrito*, while he talks to his publics. This grassroots campaigning strategy (Goodwin, 2015), alongside the walkabouts and conversations in pubs, illustrates Farage’s nonmediated communicational kind of

leadership that we found characterizes the populist political communication style of connecting with his publics.

Chávez's Use of Media

Chávez furthered the mediatization of the nation's politics via two tools: (a) his several-hour-long joint broadcast transmissions called "National Chains of Radio and Television," a telecommunications mechanism that compels commercial stations to transmit without charge all messages of national interest emanating from the presidency, and (b) a weekly TV show created in 1999. Chávez was the first head of state in Latin America, and probably the world, to produce and present his own talk show, *Aló Presidente*, to which, as Nolan (2012) explained, "he regularly invites cameras to follow him as he governs" (para. 2). Adriana Bolívar (2003) suggested that the aim of *Aló Presidente* was both to establish a direct contact with the people and to compete with the private media (p. 106). For Lombardi (2004), a "hallmark of the Chávez regime" was his "effective exploitation of the media to develop constituency and maintain the currency of the leader's identification with the people" (p. 5).

Cañizalez (2009) argued that "journalism played a key role in making Chávez known to the nation" (p. 221), and at the beginning of his rule, "the empathy between President Chávez and journalism" (p. 222) was evident to the point that some renowned journalists held positions in parliament or in the executive. However, the honeymoon period ended once the policy of expropriation of private business and land was introduced, and this gave way to the emergence of the commercial media as his fiercest opponents, so filling the void of, by then, very diminished, disconnected, and defeated center-ground political parties. Paradoxically, a confrontational commercial media constantly demonizing the president and promoting liberal democratic ideals helped Chávez construct them, in turn, as the main enemy of his government.

Chávez's fractious relationship with the media started as early as 2000, but it turned into intolerance of the media soon after: Chávez ordered the closing of 34 radio stations; did not renew the license of the oldest TV network, RCTV; called the media "terrorists"; and signed a law that penalized with prison mediatic crimes (Carroll, 2009). Editor Teodoro Petkoff (2010) described Chávez's media style as "brutal" and undemocratic. Media brutality was also experienced via social media, particularly Twitter, where Chávez reached more than 4 million followers. Chávez used Twitter not only as a battleground "to fight critics online" (Toothaker, 2010, title) but as a tool to govern remotely; for example, in 2012 Chávez appointed six ministers via Twitter, demanding "efficiency" (Da Corte, 2012). Thus, Chávez fought the commercial media by using the media and their same tools and language.

Farage's Use of Media

Journalistic practices vary from one country to another in significant ways. In Britain, the journalistic practices of broadcast journalists are regulated in such a way that contrasting and competing voices are routinely aired. Consequently, no major political figure, Farage included, appears on air in an unmediated way. So his control over media events has been limited. However, this does not mean that Farage does not use the media to his advantage as Chávez did, and although he operates in a different

context, there are some consistencies in matters of mediatic style in at least two ways. Although in Britain it would be impossible for anyone to talk on national TV for endless hours or without the mediation of journalists, Farage had a weekly newspaper column (in the *Express*, "Farage on Fridays"), and he pens articles for other newspapers. He is also very active on Twitter, where he has half a million followers. His tweets construct and reconstruct relevant issues in direct conversation with his publics and most often in support of his anti-EU stance.

Farage also takes advantage of controversies generated by media outlets that are critical of his anti-Europe, anti-immigration, antimulticulturalism message. He has used mainstream and social media to communicate, antagonize his enemies, and constantly appeal to shared British imaginary to build bonds with his followers, as Chávez did. Farage's "pint, fag and cheeky grin routine" (Robinson 2015, p. 9), though tested, became a feature of his coverage across media. Cushion (2014) claimed that on broadcast news during election coverage: "Farage was regularly pictured at a pub with a beer in one hand and cigarette in the other. Image bites of other party leaders, by contrast, did not appear with as striking or distinctive back-drops" (para. 4). The suggestion, and following Cushion, is that the media allowed Farage to control the way in which he wanted to be represented. Despite the use of opposition voices and critical commentary to show the limits of his support, including accusations of racism and of a shifting policy agenda, Farage's persona remains unaffected. As with Chávez, criticism and ridicule can end up helping Farage and UKIP to the extent that they are becoming, as Goodwin (2014) suggested, the "Teflon party of British politics" (para. 5).

Although Farage failed to get a seat in Westminster, the critical nature of British media and the mediatization of its pluralist politics have not necessarily weakened his position as a populist leader.

Discussion

Is there a populist political communication style, and analytical framework, that could be applicable to Farage and Chávez? The discussion in this article suggests a tentative yes. This analysis illustrates how Chávez and Farage used elements associated with identity, rhetoric, and the media effectively (a) to use and reinvent cultural symbols to construct collective identity; (b) to lead by communication through brutally antagonizing the elite and connecting with their publics (the disenfranchised or discontented with middle-ground politics) by skillfully using abrasive but also colloquial, relatable, patriotic rhetoric; and (c) to create ongoing controversy and to become media events themselves via a strategic use of all forms of media. Despite their contextual differences, there are similarities in the ways the two men have presented themselves to their publics as leaders intent on saving their nations. One key difference should be noted, though: Chávez spawned followers who *became* him, who came to declare "I am Chávez"; Farage has supporters (Ukippers), but they never became Farage or Faragists. Why this was so remains a question for future research.

Yet such differences may be significant in other ways that have yet to be fully explored. In their work on Greece's SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014) sought to distinguish between left-wing and right-wing populism wherein the former sought to reclaim the people "from right wing associations and reactivating its potential not as an enemy but rather as an ally of

democracy in times of economic and political crises" (p. 138). Building on such differences in discourses between the left and the right but also on differences within parties nominally on the right—UKIP, for example, has always opposed an alliance with the French Front National—suggests that more fine-grained analyses are in order.

What remains constant, though, is a style of political communication that utilizes particular communicative practices and routines that simultaneously connect and divide, and construct and reconstruct identities in the pursuit of power. These practices appear to have a measure of success—indicated by votes, for example—in political systems where traditional political, social, and economic patterns are being dislocated by global movements and forces.

One of the implicit conclusions of this article is that a fundamental characteristic of populist political actors lies in their style of communication, in their acts of speech. Populist leaders use abrasive, belligerent, direct, and simple language to connect with disenfranchised publics and to present themselves as those with a solution to existing and continuing problems. Indeed, they accuse others of exacerbating the problems. Other political actors (the center-ground elite), by and large, work with a pluralist conversation, seeking consensus rather than confrontation and keeping distant and protected by walls of political correctness. Further research needs to be undertaken to test this particular conclusion, just as further analysis is necessary to test the applicability of our framework in relation to other populist political actors. We have identified and discussed two very different leaders and used those differences as a way of testing the suitability of our framework. What of other populists?

One important consideration for future research is the question of method. The selection of material to illustrate our two populists was drawn from many sources, some media-based, others not. Populists, like all political actors, exist in mediatised and nonmediatised environments, and future research should be sensitive to the many ways in which leaders communicate and establish themselves as leaders, through speech, gestures, symbols, actions. It is the totality that is important, and future research should go beyond, for example, analysis of one form of data only, be it news items or manifestos. How one achieves that level of incorporation is itself a question that needs to be discussed.

These issues are critical because populism appears, in 2016, all around us. Is it the "politics of the extraordinary," as de la Torre (2016) suggests? Or is it rather a feature intrinsic to democracy? Curran (2004) argued that the populist style of communication is "mainstreaming" (p. 37), either by dabbling in conventional democratic politics to resist from inside or, alternatively, via traditional politicians that assume populist messages and tactics to challenge, gain, or maintain power. Curran's analysis on populism in Australia and Italy pointed to some of the ways populist communication is exerting an influence on (and within) democratic politics. In the United States, with the popularity of antiestablishment political actors of right and left (president-elect Trump and Bernie Sanders, respectively), media voices are already calling populism the "new normal."

In the case of the UK, Farage has given voice to many of those left behind, and his anti-EU ambitions were fulfilled when, first, the Conservative government promised to hold a referendum on the EU, and, second, the UK voted to leave the EU in June 2016 by a small margin (52% to 48%). As *The*

Economist commented in 2014, both the Conservatives and Labour parties have been “trimming their policies in an effort to emulate the insurgent’s success” (“Farage Against,” 2014). Little wonder *The Times* named Farage “The Briton of the Year” in 2014, because he led a “game-changing” strategy that the political establishment could not ignore (Man of the Moment, para. 8). His anti-EU, nationalistic anti-immigration ideologies; man-in-a-pub style; and divisive messages contain key elements of a populist communication style that has created a bond with and among his followers.

Chávez changed the conversation in the Americas by challenging U.S. power in its own backyard. With Chávez, the tone, form, and substance of the political conversation shifted in Venezuela toward more polarization and reductionist representations between enemies (*chavistas* [pro-Chávez] and *antichavistas*), where even the members of the opposition have called themselves by the same name Chávez gave them (“the squalid”), whereas the *chavistas* have suggested that Chávez gave them an identity, that they “are Chávez.”

Both Chávez and Farage have, in their own ways, changed the political conversation vis-à-vis the United States, Europe, and nationalism. Papadopoulos (2002) suggested that good politics “must mirror public opinion and enlighten it at the same time: a difficult conciliation, seeing that populist devises are all oriented toward the first goal and elitist devises toward the second” (p. 52). The populist style, mainly associated with antiestablishment, nationalistic appeals and religious and cultural intolerance, appears to be defining the political agenda of this century; it simultaneously builds bonds among the similar or like-minded (the people) and demonizes the Other (the center-ground elite). Although the populist style of communication broadens the political arena to unconventional voices, their belligerent, polarizing tone tends to obstruct the possibility of dialogue or negotiation. As Ford and Goodwin (2014) suggested, the divisions in generational, educational, ethnic, and class lines exacerbated by UKIP raise concerns about how policy makers, parties, and interest groups can reach consensus “on contentious issues like immigration and national identity in a deeply divided Britain” (p. 284).

The appeal of the populist style of communication may continue to thrive, since the sources of discontent—general dissatisfaction with democratic politics—are likely to linger; however, this should not be taken to mean that the journey traveled by populist parties leads to constant antagonisms and a lack of consensus. As the example of SYRIZA suggests, in a bid to remain in power in September 2015, it had to enter into the sorts of compromises that it had always said it was against. It is possible, therefore, that on gaining power in democratic societies, populist actors are forced to make concessions to the same center-ground politics they so fervently oppose and can no longer keep their ideas and organizations “pure and away from the inevitable compromises and questions from the media participation in democratic life brings” (Lloyd, as cited in Cohen, 2007, p. 119).

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