Scientific Report of the Short Term Scientific Mission:
The impact of news framing on populist attitudes

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During my Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM) at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland I have co-operated with Professor Dorota Piontek. During our meetings I have presented the questionnaire and I have applied various statistical methods on the data collected in Greece and Professor Dorota Piontek has provided feedback and she has proposing additional ways to analyse the data in order to find evidence that would reveal how news framing has an impact on populist attitudes. More specifically, during my STSM, we have studied how elements of populist communication in the frame of a news story can produce changes in opinions, attitudes, and political behaviour. In addition, my STSM gave me the opportunity to participate in the IPSA conference and present a paper titled: "New Indices for Right Wing Populism". The following part of this report is a draft paper that presents the output of my co-operation with Professor Dorota Piontek.

The impact of news framing on populist attitudes

Introduction

Framing theory suggests that how people perceive information, what they think about an issue and eventually how they evaluate specific policies are influenced by the frame the news or media place on the information they convey. News stories are not a simple presentation of core facts, but they also include other elements (the frame of the story) which may carry an implicit message. In order to study the impact of news framing on the political attitudes of the citizens we have run an experiment designed for WG3 in which the core part of the message was kept constant and the frame was manipulated. In this way we were able to highlight certain aspects of an issue over others in order to guide the experiment participants towards a specific interpretation of the presented information.

Data

The Greek data consists of 1565 cases collected from mid-June to mid-July using a panel that was assembled by the Lab of Applied Political Research at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The majority of panellists have been users of the Greek Voting Advice Application HelpMeVote who after using HelpMeVote have agreed to participate in future studies organised by the lab.

After the random assignment to one of the eight conditions (stimuli) decided for the WG3 cross country experiment, the number of respondents in each of the eight groups

is almost the same. Table 1, shows the distribution of respondents in the eight groups. Each group represent about 12.5% of the total sample, with groups "anti-elitism only" and "right-wing outgroup populism" slightly over-represented and control group slightly under-represented. However, each cell has a number of respondents that is adequate for the application of most statistical methods.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents in each group

Group	Frequency	Percent
control	174	11,1
control + anti-elitism	194	12,4
empty populism	185	11,8
anti-elitism only	218	13,9
right-wing outgroup populism	220	14,1
complete right-wing populism	198	12,7
left-wing outgroup populism	185	11,8
complete left-wing populism	191	12,2
Total	1565	100

Preliminary findings

There are no differences between the groups as far as age, gender and education are concerned (but in all groups younger, male and more educated are over-represented when compared with the Greek population of voting age). There are no differences between the eight groups on the Left/Right self-placement (Table 2)

Table 2. ANOVA for Left/Right self-placement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	36,276	7	5,182	,880	,521
Within Groups	8524,007	1448	5,887		
Total	8560,283	1455			

As far as attitudes towards in-group and outgroups and national identity are concerned, Bonferroni post-hoc tests (after ANOVA) show that the only significant difference is between the 2nd group (control + anti-elitism) and the 1st (control) and 3rd (empty populism) groups on the statement: "I would rather be a citizen of Greece than of another country in the world" (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the statement "I would rather be a citizen of Greece than of another country in the world"

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
control	158	3,66	2,262	,180	3,30	4,01
control + anti-elitism	176	4,51	2,087	,157	4,20	4,82
empty populism	171	3,73	1,988	,152	3,43	4,03
anti-elitism only	210	4,00	2,092	,144	3,71	4,28
right-wing outgroup populism	193	3,99	2,079	,150	3,69	4,28
complete right-wing populism	181	4,10	2,093	,156	3,79	4,41
left-wing outgroup populism	168	4,09	2,177	,168	3,76	4,42
complete left-wing populism	175	3,99	2,135	,161	3,68	4,31
Total	1432	4,01	2,120	,056	3,90	4,12

Thus, before presenting the news article to the respondents, the ideological differences between the groups are small and in any case not important for our experiment. The following tables are from questions asked after the random assignment of the stimuli. But first, let's verify that the respondents have read and understood the article:

Table 4. The respondents have read and understood the story

		N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
In the story people in [country] are presented as hard-working.	control	149	2,34	1,766	,145
	control + anti-elitism	149	3,33	2,035	,167
	empty populism	160	3,81	2,176	,172
	anti-elitism only	195	4,61	1,938	,139
	right-wing outgroup populism	175	4,48	2,120	,160
	complete right-wing populism	154	5,20	1,824	,147
	left-wing outgroup populism	154	4,44	2,077	,167
	complete left-wing populism	153	4,61	2,001	,162
	Total	1289	4,13	2,157	,060
The story describes a report NGO FutureNow that concludes the economy will grow in the next years	control	160	1,69	1,641	,130
	control + anti-elitism	172	1,40	1,158	,088
	empty populism	169	1,41	1,178	,091
	anti-elitism only	202	1,63	1,461	,103
	right-wing outgroup populism	195	1,41	1,212	,087

	complete right-wing populism	168	1,40	1,016	,078
	left-wing outgroup populism	167	1,65	1,564	,121
	complete left-wing populism	169	1,62	1,463	,113
	Total	1402	1,52	1,353	,036
The story describes a situation in which [nationality] citizens will be affected by the economic developments	control	159	6,01	1,534	,122
	control + anti-elitism	168	5,93	1,565	,121
	empty populism	169	6,06	1,553	,119
	anti-elitism only	201	6,17	1,351	,095
	right-wing outgroup populism	196	5,76	1,842	,132
	complete right-wing populism	168	6,10	1,538	,119
	left-wing outgroup populism	166	6,29	1,321	,103
	complete left-wing populism	167	6,11	1,483	,115
	Total	1394	6,05	1,538	,041
The story ascribes responsibility for economic developments to politicians	control	151	3,10	2,232	,182
	control + anti-elitism	169	6,31	1,336	,103
	empty populism	164	3,48	2,230	,174
	anti-elitism only	200	6,11	1,528	,108
	right-wing outgroup populism	195	2,72	2,115	,151
	complete right-wing populism	169	5,17	2,066	,159
	left-wing outgroup populism	168	3,71	2,315	,179
	complete left-wing populism	163	5,67	1,685	,132
	Total	1379	4,55	2,381	,064
The story ascribes responsibility for economic developments to the wealthy	control	155	1,97	1,627	,131
	control + anti-elitism	172	3,07	2,301	,175
	empty populism	164	2,09	1,591	,124
	anti-elitism only	200	3,51	2,284	,161
	right-wing outgroup populism	194	1,88	1,539	,110
	complete right-wing populism	162	2,73	2,103	,165
	left-wing outgroup populism	167	6,23	1,463	,113
	complete left-wing populism	168	5,46	1,850	,143
	Total	1382	3,36	2,415	,065
The story ascribes responsibility for economic developments to refugees	control	156	1,52	1,133	,091
	control + anti-elitism	169	1,54	1,305	,100
	empty populism	169	1,62	1,225	,094
	anti-elitism only	200	1,59	1,166	,082

right-wing outgroup populism	198	5,78	1,982	,141
complete right-wing populism	168	5,40	2,109	,163
left-wing outgroup populism	165	1,46	1,242	,097
complete left-wing populism	163	1,71	1,327	,104
Total	1388	2,64	2,321	,062

The mean values in Table 4 indicate that the majority of the respondents have read and understood the article. Now, let's see if the article had an impact on the attitudes towards four groups: Greek people, politicians, wealthy and the refugees. Post-hoc test with Bonferroni corrections indicate two significant differences: i) between "empty populism" and "anti-elitism only" on the statement: "Most people in Greece are trustworthy" (Table 5).

Table 5 Descriptive statistics for the statement "Most people in Greece are trustworthy"

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
control	160	3,99	1,301	,103	3,79	4,20
control + anti-elitism	170	4,12	1,375	,105	3,91	4,33
empty populism	165	4,47	1,276	,099	4,28	4,67
anti-elitism only	201	3,99	1,407	,099	3,79	4,19
right-wing outgroup populism	191	4,26	1,327	,096	4,07	4,45
complete right-wing populism	175	4,14	1,514	,114	3,91	4,36
left-wing outgroup populism	169	4,17	1,427	,110	3,95	4,39
complete left-wing populism	168	4,16	1,635	,126	3,91	4,41
Total	1399	4,16	1,416	,038	4,09	4,23

And between "complete right-wing populism" and "control" on the statement "Refugees are honest" (Table 6). This last finding probably indicates an impact of news framing on the readers' attitude because the readers of the "complete right-wing populism" framed article are significantly more negative than the control group.

Table 6 Descriptive statistics for the statement "Refugees are honest"

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
control	149	3,66	1,355	,111	3,44	3,88
control + anti-elitism	159	3,84	1,235	,098	3,65	4,04
empty populism	153	3,86	1,278	,103	3,66	4,07
anti-elitism only	183	3,83	1,384	,102	3,62	4,03
right-wing outgroup populism	183	3,85	1,222	,090	3,67	4,03
complete right-wing populism	159	4,16	1,496	,119	3,93	4,40
left-wing outgroup populism	155	3,72	1,351	,109	3,51	3,94
complete left-wing populism	149	3,74	1,290	,106	3,54	3,95
Total	1290	3,84	1,332	,037	3,76	3,91

But after this difference, we have checked for differences on all other items in the questionnaire and the findings were not very encouraging. In order to find the next significant difference, we had to move near the end of the questionnaire and on the statement "People who are not originally from our country, have no rights on our social benefits" but the finding here shows that the "control + anti-elitism" group has the higher value. This is probably related to the aforementioned finding, i.e. that the respondents in this group scored higher (before reading the article) on the statement "I would rather be a citizen of Greece than of another country in the world".

Table 7 Descriptive statistics for the statement "People who are not originally from our country, have no rights on our social benefits"

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
control	151	2,22	1,755	,143	1,94	2,50
control + anti-elitism	170	2,43	1,800	,138	2,16	2,70
empty populism	165	2,03	1,492	,116	1,80	2,26
anti-elitism only	202	2,10	1,667	,117	1,87	2,34

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower	Upper
right-wing outgroup populism	189	1,85	1,467	,107	1,64	2,06
complete right-wing populism	168	2,07	1,489	,115	1,84	2,29
left-wing outgroup populism	163	2,01	1,427	,112	1,79	2,23
complete left-wing populism	162	2,02	1,542	,121	1,78	2,26
Total	1370	2,09	1,589	,043	2,00	2,17

The lack of any other significant differences for right wing populism could be related to the findings presented in Table 8, that show that the readers of the right-wing populism framing of the story consider it as less credible, and they are less willing to share the article on SNS, talk to a friend about the article and sign an online petition to support the NGO

Table 8. Reactions to the article

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
The story is credible	control	146	2,96	1,796	,149
	control + anti-elitism	155	3,09	1,856	,149
	empty populism	147	3,16	1,696	,140
	anti-elitism only	184	3,12	1,748	,129
	right-wing outgroup populism	187	2,26	1,681	,123
	complete right-wing populism	161	2,39	1,757	,138
	left-wing outgroup populism	157	2,98	1,834	,146
	complete left-wing populism	151	3,09	1,669	,136
	Total	1288	2,86	1,783	,050
Share the article on SNS	control	159	2,40	1,859	,147
	control + anti-elitism	165	2,56	2,037	,159
	empty populism	166	2,46	1,851	,144

		N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
	anti-elitism only	200	2,49	1,821	,129
	right-wing outgroup populism	193	1,76	1,417	,102
	complete right-wing populism	172	1,93	1,660	,127
	left-wing outgroup populism	168	2,17	1,694	,131
	complete left-wing populism	159	2,65	2,007	,159
	Total	1382	2,29	1,816	,049
Talk to a friend about the article	control	157	3,48	2,043	,163
	control + anti-elitism	169	3,62	2,157	,166
	empty populism	167	3,71	2,165	,168
	anti-elitism only	203	3,44	2,146	,151
	right-wing outgroup populism	195	2,99	2,076	,149
	complete right-wing populism	172	2,84	2,031	,155
	left-wing outgroup populism	170	3,47	2,190	,168
	complete left-wing populism	162	3,59	2,113	,166
	Total	1395	3,38	2,131	,057
Sign an online petition to support the NGO	control	158	2,02	1,582	,126
	control + anti-elitism	166	2,07	1,713	,133
	empty populism	166	2,14	1,658	,129
	anti-elitism only	200	2,18	1,622	,115
	right-wing outgroup populism	193	1,46	1,216	,088
	complete right-wing populism	167	1,51	1,231	,095
	left-wing outgroup populism	169	2,00	1,626	,125
	complete left-wing populism	161	2,32	1,756	,138
	Total	1380	1,96	1,581	,043

Unfortunately, the lack of more differences between the groups have prevented us from further developing the draft paper. We have decided that we will continue working on it after searching deeper into the literature of similar experiments for possible patterns that would help us explain our findings. For instance, we believe that a single exposure on a framed story is not adequate and that the changing of the opinions and the attitudes towards an issue (or a group of people) does not occur immediately after receiving a single piece of framed information, but it is a lengthy process that occurs after multiple similar exposures.