Where do they get their “news”? Preference for right-wing populist parties and online news consumption in Germany

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More and more people get their news online
Self-reports of media use have several flaws (Araujo, Wonneberger, Neijens & Vreese, 2017; Guess, 2015; Prior, 2009; Scharkow, 2016), among them recall bias and social desirability bias
“Digital trace data” used in computational social science lack individual-level information
Combining survey & digital trace data can address some of the limitations of both data types (Stier, Breuer, Siegers & Thorson, 2019)
Party identification & media use

- **Selective exposure** can be driven by party identification (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2017)

- Party supporters evaluate media more negatively if party elites criticize them (Baum & Gussin, 2008; Ladd, 2011; Smith, 2010)

- Supporters of the German right-wing populist party AfD show lower levels of *trust in the media* (Schindler et al., 2018; Schultz, Jackob, Ziegele, Quiring & Schemer, 2017; Ziegele et al., 2018)
Research question

Do supporters of right-wing populist parties differ from supporters of other parties with regard to their online news consumption?
Web tracking data

- Browsing behavior of participants of a non-probabilistic online access panel of a market research company (*respondi*)
- Data from June 2018 to May 2019
  - $\approx N = 2000$ participants per month
  - $\approx 94$ million website visits in total
  - domain-level URLs
- Manual coding of top 5,000 visited domains as *quality print outlets*, *tabloid press*, commercial broadcasting, *public broadcasting*, digital-born media, and *hyperpartisan media*
Survey data

- Online survey with $N = 1347$ complete responses
  - Data collected in July & August 2018
  - $\approx 48\%$ of the sample was female, age range: 16 to 70 ($M = 44.66$, $SD = 13.2$)
- Most survey items taken/adapted from *GLES, ALLBUS*, and *Reuters Digital News Report*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Sample Rel. Freq. (%)</th>
<th>Microcensus 2017 Rel. Freq. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age in years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. 16-29</td>
<td>17.28</td>
<td>17.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. 30-44</td>
<td>26.92</td>
<td>20.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. 45-59</td>
<td>41.11</td>
<td>28.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. 60 and older</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>33.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. male</td>
<td>51.89</td>
<td>48.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. female</td>
<td>48.11</td>
<td>51.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. low</td>
<td>20.75</td>
<td>37.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. intermediate</td>
<td>36.20</td>
<td>30.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. high</td>
<td>43.04</td>
<td>31.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region of residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. West Germany</td>
<td>76.40</td>
<td>79.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.. East Germany</td>
<td>23.60</td>
<td>20.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Variables

- **Dependent variable**
  - Sessions on news sites from a given category (a session can comprise multiple URLs/news stories visited)
  - Distribution of variable is skewed → negative binomial regression models
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- **Independent variable**
  - Party identification

- **Control variables**
  - Populist attitudes
  - Political ideology (left-right)
  - Trust in media
  - Total number of website visits (logged)
  - Sociodemographics (gender, age, education, income)
## Most visited news domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bild.de</td>
<td>513,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zdf.de</td>
<td>151,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spiegel.de</td>
<td>149,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>welt.de</td>
<td>93,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus.de</td>
<td>90,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ardmediathek.de</td>
<td>68,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n-tv.de</td>
<td>58,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>express.de</td>
<td>55,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>news-und-nachrichten.de</td>
<td>54,785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stern.de</td>
<td>50,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mz-web.de</td>
<td>43,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daserste.de</td>
<td>39,850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Web tracking data
Regression results

Hyperpartisan media
- CDU/CSU
- FDP
- Grüne
- Linke
- SPD
- Other or no party
- Populist attitudes
- Political ideology (left/right)
- Political interest
- Trust in media
- Total visits (logged)

Public broadcasting
- CDU/CSU
- FDP
- Grüne
- Linke
- SPD
- Other or no party
- Populist attitudes
- Political ideology (left/right)
- Political interest
- Trust in media
- Total visits (logged)

Quality print outlets
- CDU/CSU
- FDP
- Grüne
- Linke
- SPD
- Other or no party
- Populist attitudes
- Political ideology (left/right)
- Political interest
- Trust in media
- Total visits (logged)

Tabloid press
- CDU/CSU
- FDP
- Grüne
- Linke
- SPD
- Other or no party
- Populist attitudes
- Political ideology (left/right)
- Political interest
- Trust in media
- Total visits (logged)
Supporters of the German right-wing populist party AfD consume fewer public broadcasting and more hyperpartisan news.

Value of observational tracking data (questions on news avoidance might be affected by social desirability bias in survey items on media use).
Outlook

- AfD supporters: Social media as more important news sources? → further exploration of web tracking data
- AfD supporters: Are party cues or source cues (mistrust in the media) the main cause? → survey experiment
- Map news domains on ideological spectrum (left-right)
- Comparisons between countries
Thank you for your attention!


