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BORIS KOLLÁR AND OL'ANO PARTY COMMUNICATION ON FACEBOOK¹

Adina Marincea – Andrej Školkaý*

ABSTRACT

The study analyses communication of populist rhetoric by Slovak populist politicians and populist political parties before the 2019 elections to the European Parliament and then, for comparison, in selected days during non-electoral period in July 2019. The analysis was based on a populism index that measures the complexity or depth of the populist discourse: people-centredness, anti-elitism and exclusion of out-groups. It was found that the main difference between the two political actors was in how they related to out-groups. Comparing two selected periods, it was found that – surprisingly- the intensity of populist rhetoric increased for both entities in the latter period. The theoretical contribution of this paper to methodology of populism index is that 'thin' or 'thick' dimensions of populism, as such, do not reveal subtle, but crucial differences among seemingly identical populist rhetoric.

Key words: Sme rodina, OL'ANO, Populism, Slovakia, Kollár, Matovič, Facebook, Elections, European Parliament

Introduction

This study analyses Facebook communication of a populist political leader, **Boris Kollár**, chairperson of political party *Sme rodina - Boris Kollár (We are a Family – Boris Kollár, or WAF-BK)*² and the official Facebook website of similar

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² The Parliament has passed a law that forbids parties to use the names of party leaders in the party name. Thus, *WAF-BK* has changed its name from November 1, 2019 to *We are a family*.

partially populist movement *Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti (OLaNO)* – Ordinary People and Independent Personalities.

First, we used selection criteria based on selected political science indicators. In other words, we selected political parties/movements or their leaders based on their closeness to populist rhetoric according to prevailing academic and non-academic consensus and a lack of standard ideological orientation (discussed below). Moreover, both parties are present in the national parliament and both parties ran for the European Parliament in 2019 elections (but only *OLaNO* is present in the European Parliament – EP for 2019-2024 term).

Second, selection criteria were based on social media usage. In other words, we selected particular Facebook pages based on public availability of their profiles. While **Kollár**'s Facebook website was much more popular (126,000) than that of his party (83,000), in case of *OLaNO* there was an opposite situation: **Matovič**'s Facebook was much less popular (42,000) than that of his movement (117,000) in 2019. Therefore, we analysed posts from **Kollár**'s Facebook page and posts from *OLaNO* Facebook webpage.

The selection of these two political entities shows that both are "non-standard" political parties/movements. *WAF-BK* actually self-defines as a "non-standard" party, while *OLaNO* is less openly, but still, internally and externally, seen as a non-standard party (for example, there were only four party members³). Both *OLaNO* and *WAF-BK* are openly eclectic in their ideological agendas and priorities, occasionally having mutually contradictory positions at some issues (especially *OLaNO*), or at least not clear ideological profiling.⁴

There are other parties/movements in Slovakia that also show some populist features, but these have transparent ideological orientation. Nonetheless, there is no consensus how to describe analytically either of these two selected parties/movements or their leaders.

Although there is no consensus how to define *WAF-BK* according to traditional approaches within the political science, most analysts agree that it is something "non-standard", and some are inclined to call it a populist subject (with some additional features). In particular, Gyárfášová, Bahna and Slosiarik (2017) define *WAF-BK* primarily as the new anti-system party. In contrast, Goliaš, Hajko

³ Again, as a result of legislation, from November 2019, there must be changes in party internal organisation, including widening membership – there are options how parties can do that.

⁴ Since both entities formed government in 2020, there appears to be emerging some ideological or at least value-based profiling.

and Piško (2017, p.15) call *WAF-BK* a populist political body. Conservative journalist Martin Hanus suggests that *WAF-BK* is a social-nationalist (popular) movement (Mrvová, 2018). Garaj (2018, pp.150-151) puts *WAF-BK* among “centre-right subjects with conservative attitudes”, although he mentions that the party does not have clear ideological profile but “rather reflects current issues according to their attractiveness”. The BTI report (2018) defines *WAF-BK* as a populist xenophobic political party.

Interestingly, in the case of *OLaNO*, analysts are even more hesitant to label it primarily as a populist party, although perhaps all agree that it is a non-standard political subject, too. Gyárfášová (2018, 112) argues that *OLaNO* represents a unique anti-establishment and anti-elite “grouping”. In her analysis, *OLaNO* lacks not only the organizational structure typical for standard political parties but also a clear ideological profile. Marušiak (2017) believes that the central position of the leader controlling the party financing, allows to define *OLaNO* as an example of ‘owner party’. Dolný and Malová (2017) inform that *OLaNO* MPs were only loosely issue-specific coordinated. Garaj (2018, p.150) highlights *OLaNO*’s rather ad hoc reactions to current issues. Its focus to issues relevant to small and medium enterprises may indicate centre-right ideological location, while focus on Roma minority and social issues in general may suggest opposite (more liberal), ideological orientation, concludes Garaj. Mihálik and Jankoľa (2016, p.10) pointed at *OLaNO*’s inconsistent positions towards foreigners: on one hand, perceived threat from labour migrants has been introduced, on the other hand, there was expressed a call for solidarity with migrants, both positions articulated through party leadership.

Gyárfášová (2018, 124) suggested that *WAF-BK* is possibly an alternative to *OLaNO* for a new generation. Most recently, Frič and Gyárfášová (2019) label both political entities as populist, anti-establishment parties.

However, there are normative and communicative differences between these two parties. Indeed, a majority of selected local experts and civic activists agreed that Kollár and *WAF-BK* should be seen with a critical eye. Selected local experts⁵ further believed that among political parties *WAF-BK* was mainly harmful to democracy, while *OLaNO* was seen as slightly contributing to the prosperity of democracy (Goliaš, Hajko and Piško 2017, 10). Neither party was in government,

⁵ Among 81 participants there were approximately 30% activists from NGOs, 27% from business and economic analysts, 21% academicians, 12% journalists and other publicists and 10% civil servants and politicians.

so this assessment must be based on their rhetoric or, possibly, political agendas in general. Nonetheless, it is interesting to find that a party/movement without clear or consistent ideology, with some or full aspects of populist rhetoric (as will be seen later on) can be seen as contributing to the prosperity of democracy.

1 Social and political context of 2019 EP elections

The general social and political context of 2019 EP elections was influenced by consequences produced by the murder of investigative journalist **Ján Kuciak** a year earlier. Since then, media reports, probably based on leaks from the police investigation, sometimes confirmed by the state authorities (and sometimes not dismissed by the state authorities as untrue), presented unofficial evidence of partially captured state that operated in Slovakia until the early 2018 at least. Moreover, and partially as a result of these revelations, a more radical anti-establishment political party, *Kotleba-L'SNS*, was gaining popular support. As a result, pro-European voters seemed to be more motivated to go to vote, further encouraged on the one hand by fear caused by Brexit, on the other hand by general support for deeper EU integration. This latter aspect was most visible among supporters of *Progressive Slovakia*. However, typically, pro-European voters, and ecologically sensitive voters were not present among the youngest generation but among the mid-generation. In general, quite many voters did not understand MEPs' role, assuming that they should represent "Slovak interests" in the EP (Gyárfášová, in Koreň, 2019).

The elections to the EP in Slovakia have brought some interesting results. Slovaks have chosen mostly pro-European politicians to represent them in the EP. Moreover, voters have turned away from governing coalition parties at national level (out of three ruling coalition parties, two parties did not get any MEPs). Interestingly, EU-critical, populist party *WAF-BK*, although popular in national opinion polls, did not win any EP seat either. One reason for this later failure could be that the main candidate was not the chairperson, but rather a national MP with little notoriety or charisma. The populist party also fared poorly in presidential elections held in March 2019, with another not much popular candidate, also an MP, running for President. Since the last party that past threshold to the EP was taken by light-populist/anti-corruption, conservative movement *OLaNO* with 5.25 % and just one MEP (previously 2 MEPs, ECR Group), there are other, more general reasons for failure of populist political parties in elections to the EP in Slovakia. For example, it could be a close

association of *WAF-BK* with **Salvini** and **Le Pen**.

Although voters' turnout was still the lowest within EU (22.74 %), it has increased compared to the previous elections in 2014 (13.05 %). Perhaps paradoxically, more than half of Slovaks believed EU membership to be a good thing for Slovakia, while only 8 percent considered it to be a bad thing, according to a poll conducted in April 2019 by the Focus polling agency.

There were 30 political parties/movements running in this election, many of them rather bizarre. The winner (with 20.11 %) was a coalition of two new progressive/civic, anti-corruption and reform oriented pro-EU parties, not yet present in national parliament: *Progressive Slovakia* (PS, with two MEPs who later joined Renew Europe Group in EP) and *Spolu-občianska demokracia* (*Together – Civic Democracy*), with two MEPs who later joined EPP Group in EP.

Direction-Social Democracy (Smer-SD), winner to the national parliament elections in 2016, as well as 2014 elections to the EP, finished this time closely at the second place (15.72 %), gaining three MEP seats (previously four MEPs, S&D Group).

All three parties were pro-EU, especially *Progressive Slovakia*. In contrast, the third place was taken by anti-EU *Kotleba-L'SNS* (12.07%). This xenophobic, protest and anti-immigrant party was not previously present in the EP. One MEP is „non-attached“ (i.e. no political group in EP), the other is also „non-attached“ as well as „independent“ (i.e. not member of the party itself).

Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) at the fourth place was supported by 9.69 % and thus gained two MEPs (down from three MEPs, EPP Group).

Liberal, libertarian, partly Eurosceptic, *Freedom and Solidarity* (SaS) got 9.62 % and two MEPs (ECR Group).

Apparently, strongly pro-EU (*PS* and *Together*) and strongly anti-EU (*Kotleba-L'SNS*) parties were the most successful in mobilising their electorates.

As mentioned, poor results for populist and/or anti-establishment and protest parties (*WAF-BK*, *OLaNO*) suggest that strong anti-EU rhetoric was appropriated by *Kotleba-L'SNS*, thus leaving other protest parties with less obvious targets. There were no migrants, no other urgent issues. Indeed, the main slogan of *WAF-BK* was appealing to common sense with some emotional background „Less Brussels, more Common Sense“, while *OLaNO*'s main slogan was a positive, and future-looking message: „Let us Repair, not to Tear Down Our European Home“.

The key Message and the key Candidate (with chairperson in background) of *We are family* - Boris Kollár



Source: webpage of the party

The main billboard and message of *OLaNO* (with picture of Igor Matovič)



Source: Webpage of the movement

OLaNO was the most active party in the number of posts which focused on corruption (political-criminal) “mafia”, opinions on the highly politicised process of selecting candidates for judges at the Constitutional Court, the criticism of the Minister of Agriculture **Gabriela Matečná**, and criticism of the Speaker of the Parliament **Andrej Danko**. The party published a number of LiveFB posts focusing on the domestic politics and at the same time it organized many events across Slovakia. Facebook posts were largely in line with the traditional messages of the party - a lot of criticism, statements and enthusiastic support for a particular cause (Godársky, Kužel, Mračka, 2019, 77).

It should be mentioned that *WAF-BK* also raised positive issues in its campaign. For example, it highlighted its own proposal for a 13th pension allowance, abolishing option of voting in abstention in the parliament, social policy suggestions, especially its original agenda – debts execution amnesty (Godársky, Kužel, Mračka, 2019, 85).

In general, the monitoring of public Facebook accounts of parties running in the European Parliament elections between 1 April and 15 May 2019 further revealed that political parties mostly focused on domestic policy issues, in addition to those already mentioned, such as price/quality of food, the anniversary of the tragic death of M.R. Štefánik (a symbol of Slovak modern history), the liberation of Slovakia during WWII, pensions/parents' allowance, and state symbols protection. At the same time, political posts contained a lot of positive campaign aimed at promoting ideas of united Europe and benefits of the EU membership and integration in general, primarily offered by the (later to be) winning coalition. Some opposition parties used FB intensively to campaign for their candidates and also attempted to motivate voters to go out to vote. Instead of running parties (not only *WAF-BK* or *OLaNO*) attacking each other, there was rather a strong informally unified approach to combat extremisms and its political representatives, represented mainly by *Kotleba-LSNS* (Godársky, Kužel, Mračka, 2019).

Sociologist Slosiarik articulates that the first time when social media played an important role in election campaigns in Slovakia was during the 2016 parliamentary elections (Sme, December 31, 2016, p.2). During 2019 campaign for the EP elections, the most popular sources of information about candidates and parties were actually debates on television, radio and on the Internet, as well as special supplements of newspapers (Gyárfášová, in Koreň, 2019). Thus, although social media played an important role, it was not an exclusive role.

It is also assumed that higher voter turnout was due to more diverse messages specifically targeting selected audiences (Gyárfášová, in Koreň, 2019). These included alternative news and current affairs websites. However, alternative websites, also present on Facebook, quite popular in Slovakia, paid little attention to EP elections in their news and current affairs sections.⁶ Between April 10, 2019 to May 10, 2019 (before the official election campaign in the media), only 175 posts published on FB pages of alternative websites were related to the campaign before the EP elections. The issues discussed most often were *nationalism as the only solution*, together with *immigration as a threat*. These topics were supplemented with a negative framing of *liberalism* and

⁶ The monitored FB pages of these alternative websites were selected based on the following metrics: number of fans, number of page storytellers, and the average number of interactions per fan - those openly affiliated with a specific political party were omitted, including the Facebook pages of individual candidates.

references to a so-called 'EU Dictate'. Three political parties were mentioned on the monitored Facebook pages of alternative media the most often: the right-wing *Kotleba-ĽSNS* (*Kotleba-People's Party Our Slovakia*), the liberal-centrist coalition *PS-Spolu- Občianska demokracia* (*Progressive Slovakia /Together – Civic Democracy*) and the *WAF-BK*. Both *Kotleba-ĽSNS* and *WAF-BK* were the only parties that gained significant positive evaluation on monitored alternative websites coverage (Sawiris, 2019).

2 Methodology

The methodology of this study relies on content analysis of the Facebook posts published by *Boris Kollár* – leader of *WAF-BK* party, and *OLaNO* party before elections to the EP, compared to a non-elections period: July 2019. The samples were formed based on constructed weeks sampling strategy, and the number of posts was chosen based on the median number of posts published by the countries analysed in the DEMOS project⁷. This brought an elections sample of max. 44 posts published between 10-23 May 2019 (two weeks before the election, which was held on 25 May), for each candidate/party, and a post-elections sample with 38 posts from the month of July. **Boris Kollár** published less than 44 posts during the pre-election interval, which made his sample to be smaller: 31 posts. On the other hand, *OLaNO* published 72 posts during the two weeks in May, a sample which was then reduced to 44 posts.

In July, *OLaNO* published 87 posts and **Kollár** – 41 posts. For each of them we sampled 38 posts based on the constructed weeks strategy, and two different local coders were assigned to code the resulting four datasets. At the national level, we conducted an inter-reliability test using Krippendorff's Alpha coefficient. For the variables with low reliability scores, a second round of coding by another two coders was carried out, and in exceptional cases, where different opinions still persisted, a final, expert coder manually reviewed the cases and made a final decision.

For analysis, we calculated a populism index that measures the complexity or depth of the populist discourse: whether it includes only one dimension out of the traditional three found in the literature (*people-centredness*, *anti-elitism* and *exclusion of out-groups*) – a form of *thin* or *empty populism* centred around „the people“, two dimensions or *thick populism* (*anti-elitist* and/or *exclusionary*) or all three of them – *complete populism* (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Aalberg & de

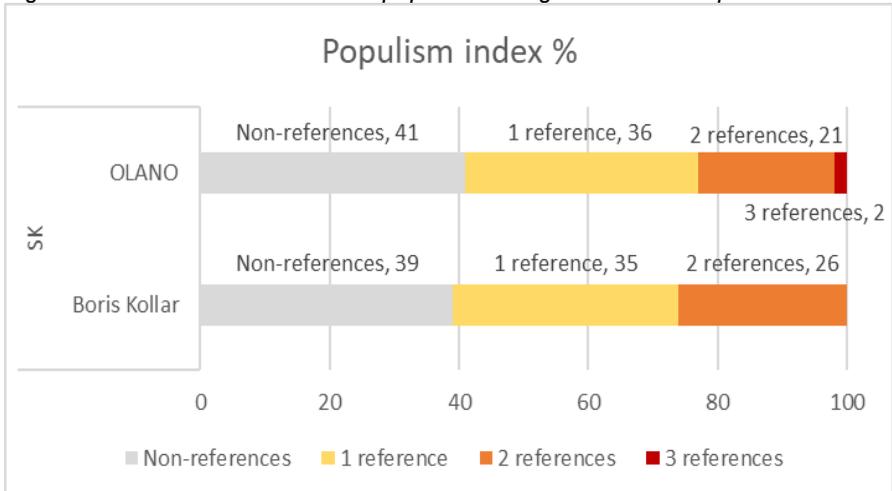
⁷ „Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe“, <https://demos-h2020.eu/en>.

Vreese, 2017). In our empirical approach, we operate with the following definitions: „*Complete populism* includes reference and appeals to the people, as well as anti-elitism and exclusion of out-groups. *Exclusionary populism* includes only reference and appeals to the people and exclusion of outgroups, whereas *anti-elitist populism* includes reference and appeals to the people and anti-elitism. Finally, *empty populism* includes only reference and appeals to the people” (Aalberg & de Vreese, 2017, p. 6).

3 Populist communication strategies on Facebook

During the campaign before elections, **Boris Kollár** and **OLaNO** employed typical populist communication strategies in a similar manner and with an identical frequency, in over half of their posts (61% **Kollár** and 59% **OLaNO** respectively). However, they differed slightly in the depth and type of strategies preferred, as well as in their messages. Overall, **Kollár** resorted to populist strategies slightly more often than **OLaNO** (Fig. 1), and his populism was „thicker“ than **OLaNO**’s, despite the fact that the latter also had a few posts employing all three populist components (*complete populism* – 2% posts for **OLaNO**, none for **Kollár**). Both **OLaNO** and **Kollár** had an equal number of posts that lacked any populist dimension (41% posts versus 39% for **Kollár**), while **OLaNO** had slightly less bi-dimensional populist rhetoric (21% posts versus 26% for **Kollár**).

Figure 1 Number of references to populist strategies. % from all posts



Source: Own elaboration

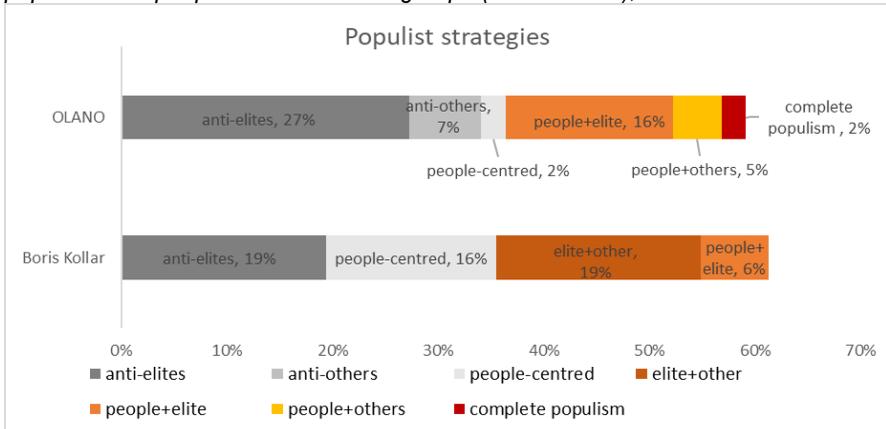
Both shared during the election campaign criticism addressed to elites (27% *OLaNO* posts and 19% **Kollár**), which in itself is insufficient to be considered populist because it lacks other key dimensions like references to „the people“, and attacking opponents is a rather typical political discourse strategy. There was, however, a thicker form of anti-elitism, combined with appeals to „the people“ (16% *OLaNO*'s posts and 6% of **Kollár**'s).

The main difference between the two political actors was in how they related to out-groups. **Kollár**'s exclusionary populism combined anti-elitism with exclusion of other groups (19% cases), while *OLaNO* either resorted to simply criticizing other groups, disconnected from people or elites (7% cases), or, less often, contrasted *the people* with *the excluded others* (5% cases).

Another difference between the two was in how much they employed *empty populism* - a form of *thin populism* that is most common is „normal“ political discourse (Jager & Walgrave, 2007) and is limited to *people-centeredness* (16% **Kollár** and 2% *OLaNO*). This difference may be explained by the very nature of their origin – while *WAF-BK* can be described as „anti-system“ (but still within democratic regime), *OLaNO* founding was motivated by fight against corruption.

Figure 2 Dimensions of populist discourse. % of all posts

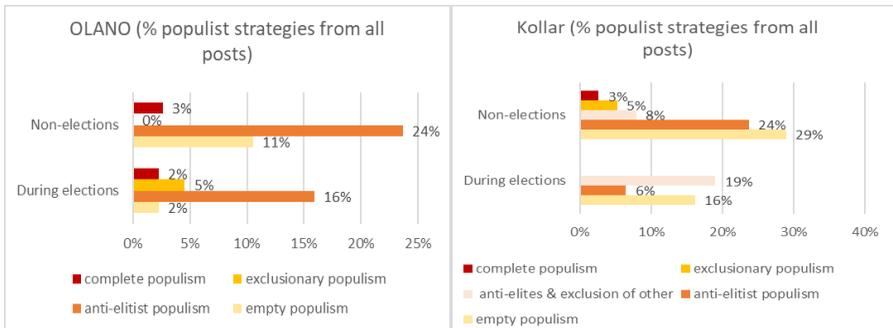
Anti-elites = only 1 reference, critical of elites; anti-others = only 1 reference, critical of out-groups; people-centred = only 1 reference, „the people“; people+elite=anti-elitism (2 references); people+others=exclusionary populism (2 references); elite+other=critical towards elites and towards outgroups (2 references); complete populism=the people+anti-elites+out-groups (3 references);



Source: Own elaboration

In our further inquiry, we tested whether the communication strategies of the two political actors changed outside election period. During the month of July, we analysed a sample of 38 posts for each, based on the constructed weeks sampling strategy. What resulted from the analysis is a common strategy that both actors seem to have employed: their discourse became more populist, and more critical towards elites after the elections (Fig. 3 and 4). Neutral posts dropped to more than half, more precisely from 41% to 18% for *OLaNO*, and from 39% to 18% for **Kollár**.

Figure 3 Types of populism-*OLaNO*. % of all posts Figure 4 Types of populism-*Kollár*. % of all posts



Source: Own elaboration

In other words, both *OLaNO* and **Kollár** seem to have toned down their populism during the electoral campaign, when messages were more carefully crafted and less symbolically charged. However, this moderation seems to be dropped after the campaign, when communication becomes more populist. Drawing on the operationalizations from the cited literature, we conclude that *OLaNO*'s use of populist rhetoric increased from 25% to 37%. After elections, *OLaNO* focused more on *anti-elitist populism* (combining people-centredness and anti-elitism) – from 16% to 24% of all posts, as well as an *empty populism* (only references to „the people“), which increased from 2% to 11%. *Complete populism*, combining all 3 dimensions (people-centredness, anti-elitism and exclusion of others), increased symbolically by 1%. The only dimension that disappeared completely is *exclusionary populism* (from 5% to no posts).

Similarly, **Kollár**'s discursive populism increased after elections from 42% posts to 68%, well over half of all his posts. *Empty populism* dominated, with an

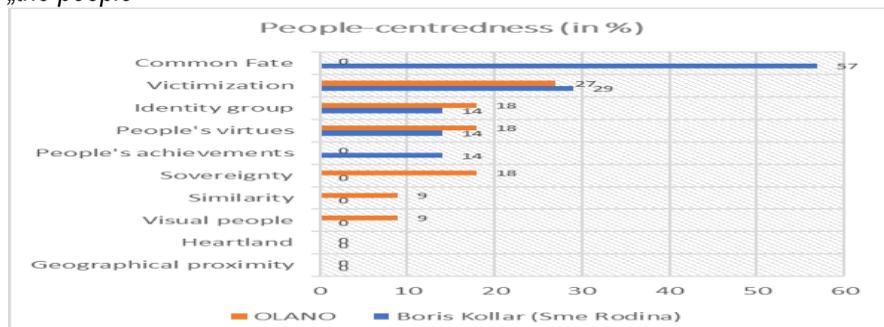
increase from only 16% during elections to 29% afterwards, closely followed by *anti-elitist populism*, in 24% of all posts, compared with a mere 6% during elections. *Exclusionary populism* and *complete populism*, which were completely absent during elections in social media campaign, now added up to 8% of all posts. The only dimension that decreased by more than half was the „criticism of elites“ combined with „exclusion of others“ but in the absence of explicit references to „the people“, a dimension which was entirely missing in *OLaNO*'s case. In **Kollár**'s posts, this dimension dropped from 19% to only 8% of all posts.

In short, *OLaNO*'s strategy after elections shifted the focus towards criticism of the political elites, mostly their national political opponents, combined with slightly more appeals to the people, while dropping attacks on out-groups. By contrast, **Kollár**'s after election strategy relied heavily on calls to the people, while criticism of elites remained rather constant and exclusion of out-groups remained significant, despite the small decrease.

3.1 The construction of „the people“

The way the two constructed “the people” during elections differed. For **Kollár**, collective identity was built largely on *common fate* (57% cases), which was entirely absent in *OLaNO*'s discourse. They both employed a *victimization* frame (29% **Kollár** and 27% *OLaNO*), resorting to an identity group that „the people“ belong to and highlighting their *virtues* (18% *OLaNO*, 14% **Kollár**). They differed in that **Kollár** equally drew on *people's achievements*, while *OLaNO* focused on *people's sovereignty* (18%) and their *similarity* (9%) as unifying factors, and also visually represented them in 9% of the cases.

Figure 5 Construction of the people during elections. % of all posts addressing „the people“



Source: Own elaboration

Kollár appealed to „the people” in almost a quarter of posts, either through *empty populist rhetoric*, or by employing thicker forms of populism like *anti-elitist populism*. Most often, „the people” was constructed through *victimization* and appeals to *common fate*, resorting to history and a sense of belonging to larger European movements like the right-wing populist Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF), and a declared alliance with leaders like **Matteo Salvini** and **Marine Le Pen**:

No one will silence the voice of the peoples of Europe who want to be free! (Identity & Democracy Party, 13 May 2019, shared by **Kollár**, 14 May 2019).

Our SME RODINA - Boris Kollár is part of the great Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom, whose main points are the protection of EU borders, national culture and tradition, but above all, helping ordinary people. (Sme rodina, 23 May 2019, shared by **Kollár**, 23 May 2019).

WE ARE FAMILY became part of the Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF), whose ambition is to reform a Europe that will protect borders, preserve national traditions, but especially help ordinary people. We are part of a great movement led by Matteo Salvini and therefore your voice does not fall! (Sme rodina, 23 May 2019:7.03PM, shared by **Kollár**, 23 May 2019).

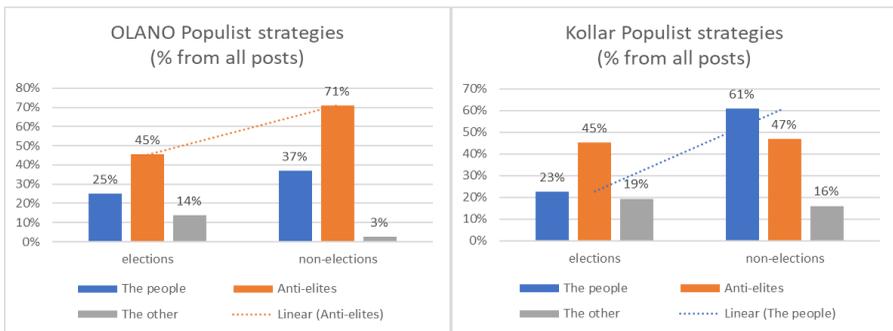
Appeals to the people during elections appeared with similar frequency on OLaNO's page, in a quarter of posts: *the people are the key, nation, common people*, first person plural nouns – *us*, or simply *people*. They are defined with a focus on their *virtues* and belonging to an in-group united by national identity: *Slovaks are a proud nation, good and decent people*. This framing gave weight to the denouncement that people are victims of the elites, and to the anti-establishment critique which represents OLaNO's main focus: *human misfortune, human tragedies, many people cannot feed their families, people are being ignored, you leave them in poverty* (this line of argumentation can be found in **Kollár's** discourse as well). An additional rhetorical mechanism that OLaNO used as part of the anti-elitist strategy was to remind of the sovereignty of the people: *people gave you power, this Republic belongs to the people, the people are the state, those who voted for you*. Most importantly, „the people” are centrally mentioned in the very name of the party („Ordinary People and Independent Personalities”). Ironically, as mentioned, the party itself had only very limited membership and there was no interest to expand it into a mass party without external push.

We further analysed how the discursive construction of the people changed after the elections. When constructing the image of „the people”, OLaNO

continued to prioritize *victimization* (27% during elections, 21% afterwards), focused on defining an *identity group* (18% during elections, 14% afterwards), *people's virtues and achievements* (18% during elections, 14% afterwards) or the *similarities* that unite them (9% during elections, 7% afterwards). The change included more *visual displays* of the people (from 9% to 29%), while *sovereignty* framing disappeared completely (from 18% to 0%), replaced by references to a *common fate* (7% post-elections, 0% during elections).

Figure 6 OLaNO populist dimensions

Figure 7 Kollár populist dimensions...



Source: Own elaboration

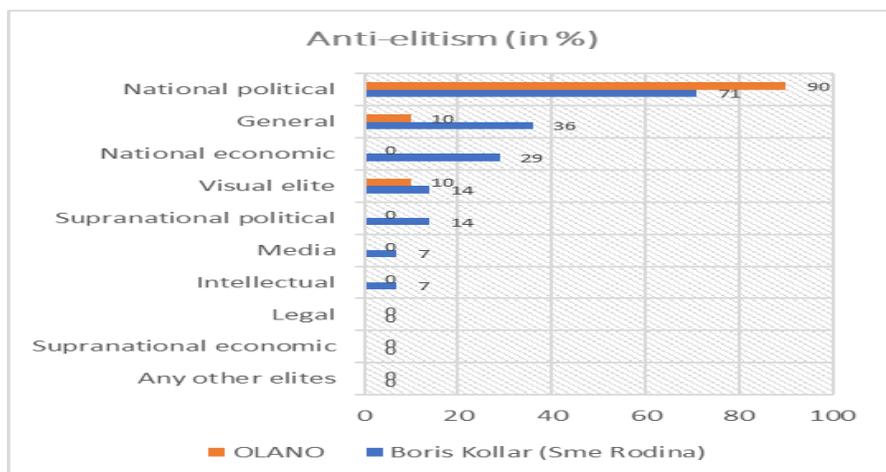
Similarly, *victimization* of the people remained one of **Kollár's** favourite discursive strategies (29% during elections, 30% afterwards), but the rest of the strategies he employed to construct the people changed. After elections, he replaced the prioritization of a *common fate* that unites people – which was his favourite strategy during elections (57% during elections, 13% afterwards), with the belonging to an *identity group* (14% during elections, 65% afterwards). There is also somewhat less focus on *people's achievements and virtues* (14% during elections, 9% afterwards – for each). Instead, just like OLaNO, **Kollár's** messages also became *more visual* in his calls to the people (from 0% to 43%), focusing on their *similarity* (30%), the characteristics that they shared, or even their *geographical proximity* (9%), strategies which were absent during the election campaign.

3.2 The construction of the elites

Most of the anti-establishment criticism brought by OLaNO was not in the

form of anti-elitist populism per se, like Fig. 2 also shows, in the sense that the party did not criticize the elite – as a generalized malevolent force opposed to the „virtuous people“. Rather, *OLaNO*'s posts criticised the government and members of the parliament or specific individual representatives or political parties, which is a common strategy for national oppositional politics and not necessarily populist rhetoric as such. This rhetoric only slides into populism when combined with appeals to the people by, for example, victimizing them, or exclusion of others, for which the elite is usually to blame: *you stole the jobs from them in Slovakia, you took their hope for better life in Slovakia, you made an immoral step, you steal from your own voters, you leave the people scrape along, you took their dignity in Slovakia (of the people)*. National political elites were almost entirely the target of criticism and of „othering“, which also points out that we cannot regard it as anti-elitism per se if it is not coupled with people-centredness. When criticising their political opponents, *OLaNO* resorted to name-calling: *corrupted, slob, monsters, mafia that governs*. It is important to note that *OLaNO* and the party leader - **Igor Matovič**, typically selected specific political and other representatives as public targets of anger and criticism during a longer period. Thus, a short-term quantitative analysis does not cover the specific long-term features of his rhetoric and the extent to which it can be assessed as populist or merely criticism of political adversaries.

Figure 8 Anti-elitism during elections. % of all posts criticizing elites



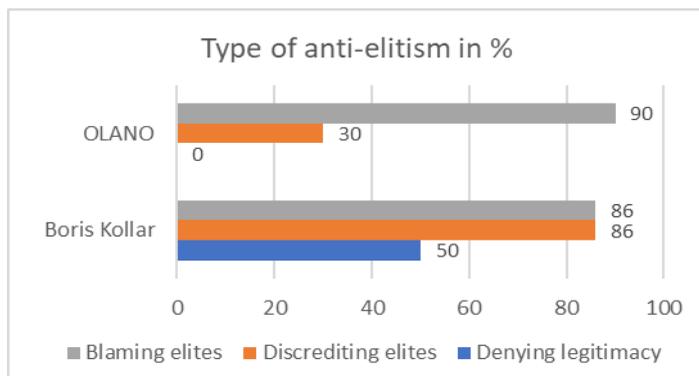
Source: Own elaboration

On the other hand, **Kollár** was more diverse in his criticism of elites, who remained, most often, the ones at the national political level (71% cases). However, his criticism expanded to national business/entrepreneurial elites (29%), supranational political entities like the EU (14% posts), media or intellectuals (7% each). **Kollár's** anti-elitism was harsher than *OLaNO's*, because he not only discredited and blamed the elites, but also denied their legitimacy in half of the posts (Fig. 11). In addition, his anti-elitism was both more generic than *OLaNO's* and more exclusionary:

Right now (the Parliament had session), and the government coalition blocked the draft law and it did not pass. Why? Because they cough on people (they piss on the people). They only care about business money for their sponsors, shareholders and oligarchs. (Kollár, 16 May 2019).

The standard politics extremely support the richest, multinational corporations, financial groups, oligarchs and banks. Standard politicians are stealing, deceiving and cheating extremely. Standard politicians must be sent to the junkyard of history. (**Kollár**, 18 May 2019, shared by **Luboš Hrica**, 18 May 2019).

Figure 9 Type of anti-elitism during elections. % of all posts criticizing elites



Source: Own elaboration

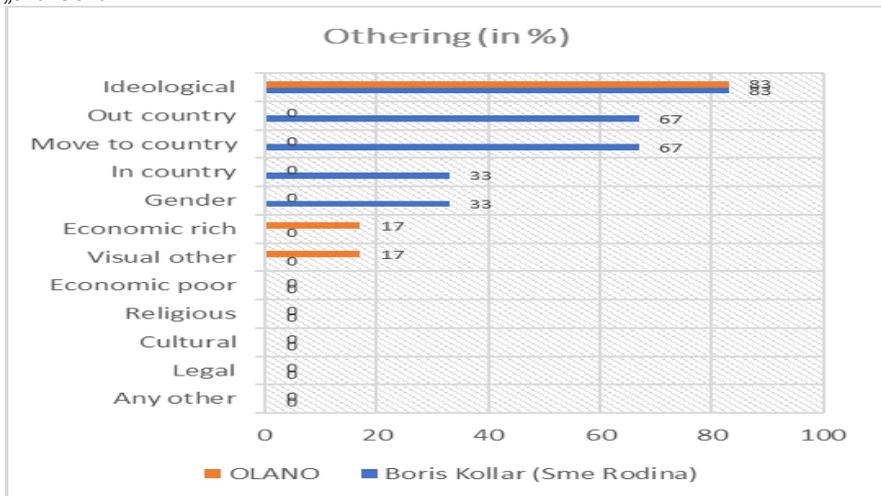
The changes in rhetoric produced after the elections showed that the anti-elitism dimension remained a constant. The main target continued to be represented by *national political elites*, more precisely the political opponents (changes from 71% to 89% in **Kollár's** posts, and from 90% to 85% in *OLaNO's*) during the month of July. If, previously, political opponents represented the only

target of OLaNO's anti-elitism, after the elections the targets diversified, complemented by criticism towards *economic elites* (11%), the *media* (7%) and *legal subjects* in general (4%). In addition, the tone of the criticism shifted from *blaming the elites* (from 90% to 22%) to *discrediting them* (from 30% to 52%). But despite this diversifying of anti-elitism and apparently less harsh tone, the number of posts criticising political elites significantly increased after elections (from 45% to 71% of all posts), possibly as a result of the results of the vote.

Kollár's preferred targets of criticism remained more or less the same, with slight changes of frequency of criticism. While national political actors were criticized more often, business actors like companies (especially foreign ones/multinationals) were much less likely to be attacked (from 29% during elections to 6% afterwards). Supranational political institutions like the EU remained among the favourite targets, with only a slight decrease from 14% to 11%. Criticism targeting the media also somewhat increased (from 7% to 11%), and what disappeared entirely was anti-elitism towards intellectuals. While **Kollár** mostly blamed the elites for their actions and decisions (86% during elections, 89% after), after the elections he seemed to be less inclined to discredit them (from 86% to 50%) or to deny their legitimacy (from 50% to 17%).

3.3 The construction of „the Others“

Figure 10 Construction of out-groups during elections. % of all posts criticizing „the Other“



Source: Own elaboration

Here one could find substantial differences between both entities. While in OLaNO's rhetoric, „the others“, the out-groups, were almost entirely ideological and limited to *populists, right-wing extremists and fascists*, **Kollár's exclusionary populism** had different, even opposite targets (Fig. 12). Most often during election campaign, „the others“ were immigrants, liberal and progressive thinkers or politicians, the „Brussels technocrats“ or people with different gender identity (like **Conchita Wurst**, who appears in one of his posts). **Kollár** implicitly or explicitly attacks his ideological and political opposition among which - *the Progressive Slovakia /PS/ and Together /Spolu/ Coalition*, as well as liberal experts, calling them *naive and childish “sunshine” people (slniečkári)*. He did this by sharing a video where a popular hardworking African immigrant praised Italians and far-right leader **Matteo Salvini** and criticized allegedly lazy (other) immigrants with expensive mobile phones (Mukli SK, 10 September 2018, shared by **Kollár**, 13 May 2019). This type of rhetoric employs exclusionary populist strategies to attack the progressive or supranational European elites with a pro-immigration position, while also defining the excluded group to be that of immigrants and refugees. In addition, **Kollár** often resorted to self-victimization, accusing his liberal ideological opponents of being extremist by wanting to censor speech, an argument that is frequently employed by populist leaders:

*In recent months, I have come across people who are full of freedom, democracy, decency and all these beautiful expressions, which are in places hysterical to aggressive and in a very selective way attack a different opinion and love to label. We listen to labels like extremism and radicalism. Being an extremist because I respect my national traditions, culture, I want to protect my borders - if this is extremism, anyone can call me an extremist. (Pčolinský – an MP for **Kollár's** party 15 May 2019, shared by **Kollár**, 16 May 2019)*

*See how the Progressive Slovakia (PS) and Together (Spolu) Coalition present decency and tolerance in practice. SME FAMILY- Boris Kollar welcomed representatives of EUROPE OF NATIONS and FREEDOMs, including Marine Le Pen, president of the National Assembly There has been talk of protecting EU borders, traditional values, but in particular the social dimension, how to help ordinary, ordinary people. But apparently the progressives and liberals do not like this, who today organized this "decent" demonstration. Vulgarisms, spit, aggression and vulgar gestures [...] (Sme rodina, 13 May 2019, shared by **Kollár**, 13 May 2019)*

See how PROGRESSIVE SLOVAKIA imagines decency - insults, bad language - even spit on us and they threw food out of their hands. They show a

progressive erect median finger (a rather vulgar gesture). We came to them fairly and even brought them croissants. Do you think they are capable of dialogue? NO! They are aggressive, disinterested people who don't allow another view. I really don't want to have anything with these extremists today or in the future, and we should do everything we can to prevent such aggressive people from grasping power in the state. They were throwing croissants at us today, tomorrow it will be cobblestones? (Kollár, 13 May 2019)

OLaNO's discursive strategy in relation to out-groups changed not only its focus - much less on exclusionary tactics (from 14% to 3%), but it also changed the variety of the targets. There was no more criticism addressed to companies or other financially well-off groups. However, the party did attack the people's movement *For a Decent Slovakia* in one of its posts, where OLaNO accused the initiative's representatives of lying.

Kollár's exclusionary strategy remained, overall, rather steady during and after elections. The main targets of exclusion were ideological opponents, namely progressives and liberals (83% during elections, 33% afterwards), together with migrants and foreigners (inside the country – 33% - during both intervals, outside –67% during elections, 17% afterwards). Exclusion based on gender identity of sexual orientation was also less of a focus (from 33% to 17%). Interestingly, new out-groups became subject of attack after the elections: criminals, more specifically – paedophiles (67%), who were connected by Kollár with the progressive mindset, a typical right-wing or ultra-conservative stigmatization. This issue reflected short-term but intensive debate about paedophilia initiated by a local liberal newspaper. Responding to another opposition politician who commented negatively on possible post-election cooperation (for the coming Parliamentary elections in early 2020), Kollár reminded him that he has been defamatory in the past about workers or universal suffrage and allegedly stood for issues that he considered morally unacceptable:

His thoughts [Michal Truban – leader of Progressive Slovakia party], such as the unemployed workers are lazy, deceiving, and not all should have the right to vote (probably he mean pensioners), welcomes migrants, wants adoption of children by homosexuals, wants their partnerships, and most recently he shows that paedophilia does not stinkWe will not cooperate with you in any way unless you give up on this insanity... (Kollár, 11 July 2019).

Conclusions

In this paper, we have analysed the Facebook communication of two non-standard parliamentary Slovak political entities, namely *WAF-BK* (represented primarily, including in this analysis, by **Boris Kollár**, its chairperson) and *OLaNO* (party's official profile) on Facebook during election campaign before elections to the European Parliament in May 2019 and then in selected days in July 2019. Both parties/leaders are, to a different degree, seen by local and foreign analysts as populist and/or protest parties, political projects focused on anti-corruption – much more so for *WAF-BK* („hard“ populists), and much less so for *OLaNO* („light“ populists). Both are certainly non-standard political entities. While both parties were present in the national parliament, only *OLaNO* managed to keep a seat in the EP (but it went down from two MEP seats gained in previous elections), while *WAF-BK* failed in this attempt with zero seats in the EP. *WAF-BK* seems to be significantly associated with its leader, **Boris Kollár**. Indeed, **Kollár's** personal page on Facebook is much more popular than that of his party, which consolidates this perception of increased personalisation of populist politics, while in *OLaNO's* case there is an opposite situation: **Igor Matovič's** Facebook (private) profile is much less popular than that of his party or rather, movement. Thus **Kollár's** rhetoric was analysed here instead of the party itself, and the party profile was analysed instead of **Matovič's** here.

WAF-BK's failure to gain a MEP seat can then be (to a large part) explained by communicating issues that were less attractive to the potential voters of *WAF-BK*, as well as by the fact that **Boris Kollár** himself did not run for a seat in the EP. In addition, more anti-establishment focused voters and more protest-minded voters had a choice of even more radical alternative – *Kotleba-L'SNS* (that, indeed, gained two MEP seats). The latter subject tended to increase its popularity due to continuous revelations of partially captured state by legacy media, after the murder of an investigative journalist in 2018.

Another, this time external factor, that left impact on elections debates (as well as communication of *OLaNO*, at least), was Brexit (referendum of leaving the EU by the British voters) and its aftermath. Even the most radical relevant political force, *Kotleba-L'SNS*, did not raise an issue of leaving the EU (although previously *Kotleba-L'SNS* publicly considered to initiate referendum on that topic). In general, discourse before the elections to the EP was, perhaps ironically, very much focused on domestic issues. These issues reflected, again, at a very general level, low efficacy of state authorities and affiliated selected services.

In general, while the role of social media, and especially of Facebook was important, it was not crucial. Legacy media still played an important role. Not even „alternative“ online news portals proved to be a decisive factor in gaining sufficient support among voters for *WAF-BK*, although they offered a long-term positive assessment of *WAF-BK* (but relatively marginal in numbers of contributions).

In addition, reports of the legacy media on corruption and captured state, served to provide, selectively, and indirectly, support for causes of both entities, as communicated by them on Facebook.

Considering the political and media context described, our empirical analysis aimed to uncover the similarities and differences in Facebook communication of these „hard“ and „light“ populist subjects. **Boris Kollár** and *OLaNO* employed typical populist communication strategies (as defined in populist literature) in a similar manner, but with different frequency and specificities. The electoral campaign seemed to have functioned as a break on the populist tendencies, either because of the perceived distance of European politics, or because of a different kind of scrutiny. This was seen in the fact that both political opponents were more moderate in populism during the campaign for the EP, increasing their populist rhetoric after the elections. Irrespective of the period, **Kollár**'s discourse was twice as often populist compared to *OLaNO*. At its peak, in July 2019, two thirds of posts from **Kollár** were populist, while the same was true for 4 out of 11 of *OLaNO*'s posts.

The two differed slightly in the depth and type of strategies preferred, but more importantly, in their tacit or explicit messages. Overall, **Kollár** resorted more often to populist strategies than *OLaNO*. Both had in common frequent criticism addressed to elites. *OLaNO*'s criticism of elites was more radical (but at the same time more person- and issue-specific), representing a thicker form of anti-elitism, combined with appeals to the people.

Thus, it would be misleading to consider them as identical populist bodies or by and large identical populist rhetoric. As it was discussed earlier, local observers perceived that there existed fundamental differences between both entities' contribution to democracy, while both entities were in opposition (and before this analysis was done, never in government).

Our analysis found that the main difference between the two political actors was in how they related to out-groups. **Kollár**'s exclusionary populism combined anti-elitism with exclusion of other groups (19% cases), while *OLaNO* either resorted to simply criticizing other groups, disconnected from people or elites (7% cases), or, less often, contrasted *the people* with *the excluded others* (5% cases). In other words, one political subject was more exclusionary, while the other was

more inclusionary or neutral in this normatively important aspect.

Moreover, *OLaNO* usually did not criticize the elite *per se* – in the sense of a generalized malevolent force opposed to the „virtuous people“. Rather, *OLaNO*'s posts criticised the government and specific members of the parliament or specific individual representatives of the state or political parties, which is a common strategy for national oppositional politics and not necessarily populist rhetoric as such. This rhetoric only slides into populism when combined with appeals to the people by, for example, victimizing them, or excluding others, for which the elite is usually to blame. This helps to explain why *OLaNO* was seen, perhaps surprisingly, by a majority of local analysts as a slightly positive political force.

Another difference between the two political entities was in how much they employed `empty populism` - a lighter form of populism limited only to people-centeredness (16% **Kollár** and 2% *OLaNO*). Again, higher generalisation of „the people“ in **Kollár**'s case suggests thicker populism. For **Kollár**, collective identity is built largely on common fate (57% cases), which is entirely absent in *OLaNO*'s discourse. Thus, there is a sort of a tacit nationalism present in **Kollár**'s discourse.

Comparing discourses of both political entities during election campaign and during a later, non-elections period, it can be seen that their discourse became more populist, and more critical towards elites, after the elections. In other words, post-election communication returned to (thin or thick populist) “standard”. Yet, nevertheless, there still remained a normative difference in both entities' rhetoric.

It can be seen that there are important differences between communication of both entities during a campaign and during non-campaign periods.

Clearly, there also is a qualitative-normative difference between **Boris Kollár** (*WAF-BK*) and *OLaNO*. While the former is a typical representative of heavy populism, *OLaNO* represents a lighter version of populism. A lighter version means that populism is more specific in its targets, focuses on more issues, reveals more serious disfunctions of a state (not just *ad hoc* relatively minor scandals), and in general is less negative to „others“ (including elites) and in its overall rhetoric and policy direction. All this can help to explain why such a lighter version of populism (this should not be mixed with analytical concept of a thin version of populism) can be seen by local activists and analysts as contributing to the prosperity of democracy. As it was mentioned, local analysts prefer to label *OLaNO* as „anti-corruption, protest party/movement“ and only rarely as a „populist“ subject. In fact, perhaps ironically, the chairperson, or the leader,

Matovič is the most radical in his rhetoric and showman actions, thus, also sometimes rather close in this regard to another showman, **Kollár**, than the rest of *OLaNO* MPs and the only MEP.

Since neither populist entity was present in the government, this different normative assessment of both parties/leaders (in spite of seemingly roughly similar populist rhetoric based on thick and thin dimension) can be explained only by detailed analysis of their rhetoric and by their performance of their control function (checking authorities) as an opposition. Indeed, while **Kollár** used more often general criticism of elites, including their exclusion (de-legitimising them), *OLaNO* was more specific in its criticism of specific, often individualised, governing elites. **Kollár** more often referred to people in general terms than *OLaNO*. While **Kollár** was by and large interested in a limited number of issues related to power and authority, *OLaNO* presented a variety of issues, showed higher concern for social welfare and fighting corruption. Finally, **Kollár** appealed to *exclusionary populism*, unlike *OLaNO*.

The theoretical contribution of this paper to populism index methodology is that 'thin' or 'thick' dimensions of populism, as such, do not reveal subtle, but crucial differences among seemingly identical populist rhetoric.

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