

Abstract

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Popularity Performance and Critical Reporting

This paper examines the role of news media in connection with rising authoritarian tendencies in South Eastern Europe. It takes the populist authoritarianism model and backlash hypothesis as starting points of analysis (Inglehart & Norris, 2016) of rising populist agenda and the role of authoritarian leadership (Aalberg et al, 2017; Mudde, 2013).

The research case in point is the role of daily newspapers in Serbia. Media freedom in Serbia has been on a decreasing line for the past decade. Traditional news media are selected for their importance in agenda setting and watchdog roles. The paper is based on content analysis of six newspapers' coverage of Savamala case. It is a politically charged case following an event (24/25 April 2016) when a group of unidentified men demolished several commercial objects standing on a way of a new housing development, detaining all witnesses while police decline to protection them. The case become a test case for the rule of law and has still not been resolved.

The content analysis includes one year coverage and total of N=1225 news items. The results indicate strong connection between economic performance of the

papers and critical reporting: two tabloids (50% of entire circulation), two mid-market papers (40%) and two broadsheets (10%) devoted exactly reverse amount of coverage (10% tabloids, 20% mid-market and 70% serious papers).

The paper will use economic, political and professional evidence to explain how decline in watchdog role of daily newspapers contributes to populist public communication