Toward a Sociologically Enriched Understanding of Anti-Media Populism: The Case of Enough is Enough!

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The antagonist relationship between the people and mainstream media constitutes an integral dimension of populism. Recently, this relationship has been articulated through the concept of "anti-media populism," which foregrounds populists' vision of the mutual integration between mainstream media and other elites. Mobilizing an emergent strand of sociologically oriented populism theory, this article premises that there is now a need to complement current understandings with inductive and qualitative research, attentive to how anti-elitist citizens ascribe meaning and value to mainstream media and to the specificity of the contexts in which anti-media populism manifests. Through interviews with members of a recent anti-elitist grassroots mobilization in Norway—the Enough is Enough! movement—this study explores how anti-elitist citizens articulate both overarching sociopolitical narratives and specific narratives of media-elite integration. The article demonstrates how a bottom-up, inductive, and context-sensitive approach serves to both nuance and contradict any singular understanding of anti-media populism.

Keywords: populism, anti-media populism, audience research, political theory, ethnography, political sociology

Research on populism and the media consistently emphasize mainstream media as a prime antagonist in populist narratives. The concept of "anti-media populism" (Fawzi & Krämer, 2021, p. 3292; Krämer, 2018, p. 453) offers perhaps the most succinct articulation of this aspect of populism. Centering on the schema of the people versus the elite, anti-media populism foregrounds the mutual integration between the media and other elites, where populists see the media as a part of a networked, ideologically integrated ruling elite and apparatus. These claims are supported by a large and predominantly quantitative body of empirical research, whose findings show that adherents of populist projects harbor mistrust, skepticism, and hostility toward liberal mainstream media (e.g., Fawzi, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2018; Schulz, Wirth, & Müller, 2020). As such, the concept of anti-media populism is valuable in outlining "ideal-type" accounts of how adherents of populist mobilizations make sense of mainstream media as part of their sociopolitical narratives. It pinpoints a significant component of present-day populism and a driver for political polarization.

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At the same time, populist mobilizations manifest in a multitude of national and local contexts. They comprise followers, center on issues, and take on forms that often do not fit very easily with theoretical accounts of populism. In response, there is an emergent strand of populism scholarship that stresses that the nature of populism cannot be determined or deduced a priori and that populism, therefore, needs to be studied qualitatively and in context (e.g., Dean & Maiguashca, 2020; Jansen, 2011; Ostiguy, Panizza, & Moffitt, 2021). This sociologically oriented strand of research advocates inductive approaches that recognize the context specificity of populism and are sensitive to the socioeconomic, cultural, and regional terrains from which it emerges.

As populist mobilizations may vary depending on such factors, so may adherents' relationship with the media. In consequence, we may be left with a thin, reductive, and singular understanding of the relationship between populists and the media. This article adapts perspectives from this emergent strand of populism scholarship to motivate empirical media research. It starts from the premise that to attain a richer understanding of anti-media populism, one that is better sensitized to the actual empirical terrain, we now need to study anti-media populism as it plays out in specific contexts and through specific forms. Furthermore, as the notion of anti-media populism relies on a set of fundamental yet predominantly quantitively derived assumptions about how populists make sense of the mainstream media, it premises that we now need to study such sense making qualitatively, at ground level. Such an approach has the potential to both enrich and substantiate the concept of anti-media populism and to nuance and reconsider its main claims.

The article focuses on a case drawn from the context of Norway: The Enough is Enough! movement (*Nok er Nok!*). This is a recent anti-elitist, grassroots mobilization against traffic tolls and climate policy that recently stirred up local politics in Norway—a country that despite long-held traditions for egalitarian social democracy and a well-functioning media system still harbors substantively populist movements. The "Enough is Enough!" is thus exemplary of many of the populist protest movements seen elsewhere in Europe, yet it is shaped by a range of contextually specific features. It offers a case through which, on the one hand, the notion of anti-media populism can be given empirical texture, and on the other, discussed and nuanced. Based on 15 in-depth lifeworld interviews, this article explores how activists in the Enough is Enough! movement articulate overarching sociopolitical narratives, situate themselves as part of these narratives, and envision mainstream media to be integrated with other elites. In this way, the aim of this article is to contribute a sociologically enriched and nuanced understanding of anti-media populism and thus provide new impetus to debates about the relationship between populism and mainstream media.

Populism and Anti-Media Populism

Populism remains a contested concept (e.g., Kim, 2021). It is understood as a "thin" ideology (Mudde, 2004), logic (Laclau, 2005), discourse (Panizza, 2005), style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), and strategy/organization (Weyland, 2001). Whereas these approaches differ in their emphasis, there is nonetheless broad agreement on the basic constitutive dimension of populism: The antagonistic relationship between two homogenous groups—the "people" and "the elite," where populists represent the uniform will of a homogenous people (e.g., Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2004). Yet right-wing manifestations also usually

entail antagonisms against various out-groups, most prevalently immigrants (e.g., Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

In populism scholarship, mainstream media is situated as part of this fundamental people/elite schism, where the media represent an elite group (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This scholarship foregrounds how mainstream media, from a populist perspective, is seen as part of the political establishment, collaborating with the ruling elite, or even betraying the people. Through his concept of "anti-media populism," Krämer (2018) offers perhaps the most succinct articulation of this relationship. According to Krämer (2018),

> anti-media populism uses the schema of elite versus the people. It then sees a "system" not in the sense of functionalism but in the sense of a networked or hierarchical and ideologically integrated ruling elite and apparatus. The media are only a part of this overall ruling group and system. (p. 454)

Operationalizing this concept, Fawzi and Krämer (2021) draw on established populism theories to posit that anti-media populism is informed by three central features of populist ideology. The first is the perception of a uniform will of a pure and homogenous people, the second is populist anti-elitism (in which elites betray the people's sovereignty), and the third is the antagonism against out-groups (exclusionary populism). As such, Fawzi and Krämer's (2021) conceptualization is also attentive to the potential illiberal or exclusionist aspects of anti-media populism. Such aspects include how the press is seen as illegitimate because it fails to reflect the true will of the people or because a liberal-pluralist press voices the concerns of various out-groups at the expense of those of the people. According to Krämer (2018), mainstream media can constitute the main antagonist in populist ideology, or it can be one of many components of a more general opposition to elites.

When deconstructed, the concept of anti-media populism can thus be seen to center on two key dimensions. The first can be called the *vertical* dimension: The ways in which populists—the people—see themselves as an inferior part of a top-down societal hierarchy. This dimension does not primarily foreground their relationship with the media but with anti-elitist and populist ideology more generally. The second dimension can be called the *horizontal*: The ways in which mainstream media at the upper end sphere of this hierarchy are seen to integrate with other elites. The objective of this article is to offer a ground-level empirical nuance and texture to both these two constitutive dimensions of anti-media populism.

A growing body of predominantly quantitative research lends empirical support to the concept of anti-media populism. This body of research documents that populist attitudes are systematically connected to lower levels of trust in legacy media overall (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2018; Schulz et al., 2020). In Germany, Fawzi (2018) finds that citizens holding populist "anti-elite" attitudes (in contrast to "people-centric" or "anti-group" populist attitudes) were consistently negatively associated with evaluations of media trust or satisfaction with media's performance. Moreover, surveys from a variety of national contexts show that populist voters tend toward tabloidized and entertainment-based media diets at the expense of news (e.g., Hamerleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017; Nærland, Hovden, & Moe, 2020).

As such, anti-media populism is closely related to neighboring concepts used to analyze populists' relationship with the media, such as media cynicism, trust, and performance. Yet whereas these latter concepts center on specific audiences or media qualities, anti-media populism, in contrast, accentuates how anti-media sentiments form part of an overarching populist ideology (Fawzi & Krämer, 2021). Important to note, such sentiments are energized by populist leaders' systematic and strategic efforts to delegitimize the mainstream press (e.g., Van Dalen, 2021).

This fundamental antagonism between "the people" and mainstream media dominant in populism scholarship is, however, also subjected to critique and problematization. The work of Brown, Mondon, and Winter (2021), for instance, challenges the idea of "the mainstream" itself, arguing that it is inherently hegemonical yet constructed as inertly legitimate and positive—as a bulwark against populism. Others (e.g., De Cleen & Glynos, 2021) warn that the dominant conceptualizations of populism—and its current emergence as a research field in its own right—run the risk of reifying populism, thus hampering a nuanced and contextualized understanding of the role populism plays in different populist politics.

The Argument for Context-Specific and Qualitative Approaches

At the same time, there is an emergent strand of scholarship that emphasizes the context-specific and shifting forms of populism and its attributes. The political sociologist Robert Jansen (2011) argues that we need practice-based approaches to study populism, akin to the social movement theory. Jansen (2011) sees populism as the mobilization of "ordinarily marginalized social sectors" (p. 75), in which leaders of political parties and social movements as well as grassroots activists all participate in the construction of, and mobilize around, a shared political project. In its emphasis, Jansen's (2011) conception thus differs from the dominant conceptions in political science. It foregrounds anti-elitist grassroots mobilizations rather than personalistic top-down leadership. Rather than starting from a set of predetermined features (the homogeneity of the people, out-group exclusion, etc.), it has a more open-ended explorative approach. By implication, Jansen (2011) advocates a broader understanding of populism, which includes popular anti-elitist protest and revolt.

Building on Jansen's (2011) work, Dean and Maiguashca (2020) advocate a reorientation of populism studies. They argue that the "thinness" of dominant conceptualizations of populism entails a conceptual overreach that lacks the ability to capture the specificity of contemporary populist politics. They see populism as "a series of *collective enactments* that, while mobilizing ideologies, discourses, and forms of rhetoric, cannot be reduced to them" (Dean & Maiguashca, 2020, p. 20; emphasis added). Understanding populism, they argue, requires us to examine what a range of actors actually do and when, where, and how they do it. To this end, Dean and Maiguashca (2020) advocate

> an inductive approach which recognizes the context specificity of populism and admits that many of its defining features depend on the socio-economic, cultural and historical/regional terrain on which it emerges and finds life and, therefore, cannot be determined or deduced a priori. (p. 20)

These are factors that may be consequential to adherents' view of mainstream media. For one, populist projects may vary greatly in both organization and focus. Some are durable (as in parties), and some are episodic (as certain movements, or grassroots initiatives), focusing on issues spanning from the inflammable to the more mundane. Some have high-profile leaders inciting antagonism through media rhetoric, others emerge bottom-up with spokespersons much less versed in populist media rhetoric. Second, the national context clearly matters. Countries have different political histories, diverging media systems, and divergent levels of trust and polarization, all of which matter in how people value established media. Last, depending on both form and context, adherents of populist projects may have diverse and composite backgrounds, motivations, and outlooks. The ways in which they value and ascribe meaning to mainstream media depend on both personal biographies and the overarching sociopolitical narratives they hold. Depending on such factors, anti-media populism may take on different forms, different directions, or may not be a salient component at all.

In consequence, Dean and Maiguashca (2020) argue that we now need to move toward more theoretically and sociologically enriched accounts of populism by drawing on the insights from political sociology, political theory, and cultural studies. Similarly, Ostiguy and colleagues (2021) recommend a move toward phenomenological and ethnographically oriented research.

This article mobilizes this body of work in two steps. First, it starts from Jansen's (2011) social movement understanding of populist projects to cast light on a contextually specific, yet in key respects exemplary, populist mobilization drawn from the context of Norway. Second, it examines bottom-up, qualitatively, how participants in this movement make sense of mainstream media as part of their overarching sociopolitical narratives. In the analysis, the focus is on both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of anti-media populism: First, it examines how participants understand themselves as part of societal hierarchies; thereafter, it examines how the participants envision mainstream media to be integrated with other elites.

The Case: Enough is Enough!

This article focuses on a case drawn from the context of Norway. Recently, Norway has seen an increase in the number of grassroots protest movements, centering on single issues such as climate, immigration, and culture. The most prominent of these is Enough is Enough! (*Nok er Nok!*), which started as local mobilizations against the expansions of a toll scheme designed to limit private car use and finance public transportation. Drawing significant support from citizens living outside major cities in Norway, predominantly in and around the two west coast cities of Stavanger and Bergen, it soon coalesced into a political party (People's Action No to More Road Tolls—the FNB), which enjoyed considerable success in the local elections in 2019. Empirically, this article focuses on a selection of activists and politicians from this movement.

Several context-specific features render Enough is Enough! a fruitful case for analysis. The first concerns its cause and emergence. Enough is Enough! is a typical example of a populist project emanating from conditions described by Jansen (2011): It is a collective enactment, mobilizing grassroots activists and leaders around a shared political project. It can be described as a grassroots project, initiated bottom-up from discontented citizens rather than from established political actors. Moreover, Enough is Enough! does not fit readily into a left-right spectrum. As will become evident in the analysis, it emerged as a focal point

for more general and latent anti-elite sentiments. As such, it is not a movement primarily centered on antagonism against the media. Rather, it offers a case in which anti-media populism can be studied as one of several components of populist ideology.

The second concerns its semblance to other present-day populist mobilizations. In a case study conducted in Bergen (Norway), Wanvik and Haarstad (2021) connect the emergence of Enough is Enough! to broader international developments in which populist movements challenge the legitimacy of mainstream climate policies through the prism of a conflict between the "people" and the "elite." They draw parallels to the Yellow Vest movement in France, which was also initially fueled by opposition to road tolls and congestion charges. In line with the anti-politics ethos of many populist projects, Wanvik and Haarstad (2021) observe that the leadership of FNB (the party that emerged from the movement) had, or was portrayed in the media as having, "no previous political experiences, little claim to expert knowledge, and no connection to political elites" (p. 11). Another point of comparison is the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (PEGIDA) movement in Germany (Haller & Holt, 2019). While both emerge from the grassroots and are explicitly anti-elitist, the Enough is Enough! movement is not pronouncedly anti-immigration or anti-Islam.

The third concerns the national context. Present-day Norway is marked by egalitarian traditions in which political institutions enjoy high levels of trust and by high levels of social capital (e.g., van der Meer, 2017). Norway has traditions of cross-party compromise and consensus-oriented politics (e.g., Knutsen, 2017) and also a comparatively nonaggressive branch of right-wing populism integrated into the party system (Jungar & Jupskås, 2014). Norway, like the other Nordic countries, is characterized by a distinct media system and a proactive state, operating at arms-length (e.g., Syvertsen, Enli, Mjøs, & Moe, 2014). News readership is high and overall trust in media is comparatively high, yet lack of trust in established news organizations is most pronounced among voters of the right-wing populist Progress Party (Moe, Thorbjørnsrud, & Fladmoe, 2017). Compared with most other European countries, the main public service broadcaster, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), still enjoys a high-level audience trust from across the political spectrum, high-level professional autonomy and civic accountability, as well as stable cross-party political support (e.g. Benson, Powers, & Neff, 2017). Moreover, reflecting the center-periphery conflict that has permeated Norwegian cultural and political history in the past 200 years (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), the Norwegian system of press subsidy was set up to sustain a strong regional and local press. Local newspapers in Norway had historically, and still have, exceptionally high readership compared with other European countries (Syvertsen et al., 2014).

Taken together, these features constitute Enough is Enough! as an "exemplary case" (Flyvbjerg, 2006) that is at once substantively populist yet shaped by a range of contextually specific features. While exemplary first and foremost of similar grassroots-level popular revolts, and less so of exclusionist, illiberal, or personalistic movements or parties, the movement exemplifies a common variant in the present-day landscape of populism. It thus offers a case through which, on the one hand, the notion of anti-media populism can be given empirical texture, and on the other, discussed and nuanced.

Methodology

To examine, first, how the participants of the Enough is Enough! movement make sense of their own place in society and how they conceive of different elites, and second, how they envision mainstream

media to be integrated with other elites, this study takes a qualitative and inductive approach. It relies on loosely structured interviews designed to elicit overarching sociopolitical and biographical narratives and the place of the media therein. Sociopolitical narratives here designate accounts of the social and political reality as experienced by the informants, including antagonists and protagonists, with important questions at stake. Biographical narratives designate their accounts of who they are and their place in society. This approach involves a less assertive role of the interviewer, encouraging the informants to freely emphasize the issues, moments, and actors that they consider important.

A total number of 15 informants were recruited, first via personal contacts, then through snowballing. The majority of these (10) were activists in the Enough is Enough! movement—they had been active in rallies, held organizing positions, and so on. They were strategically recruited to reflect not only the diversity of gender and age but also divergent levels of political radicalism within the movement. In addition, five activists now active in the political party FNB were recruited, either holding seats in the municipal or regional parliaments or advisory positions. All informants were recruited from either the Stavanger or Bergen areas—both local hotspots for activism against road tolls. To attain basic biographical information, before each interview every informant filled out a short questionnaire charting occupational status, level of education, parents' occupation and level of education, and most used news sources. All the activists reported to have manual-type jobs (e.g., as cleaner, electrician, security guard, or janitor). Several were unemployed. Predominantly, their parents had also worked in similar sectors. For the politicians, the picture was somewhat more diversified, where two had attained university degrees. Data were collected and managed in compliance with the ethical standards of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. In the analysis, all informants are referred to by pseudonyms.

The loosely structured interview guide contained questions encouraging the informants to talk about their everyday lives (including family, work, and leisure time), to reflect on how society is run (who holds power and who does not), and their personal routes into political activism. Thereafter, the informants were asked questions more specifically designed to elicit reflections on the role of news media in society. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted either at the home or workplace of the informant. All interviews were subsequently transcribed and thereafter analyzed, first inductively, to identify the overarching and recurrent themes, and thereafter more targeted, focusing on their experiences with and valuations of (mainstream) media.

Narratives of Societal Hierarchy: The Vertical Dimension of Anti-Media Populism

This first part of the analysis examines the vertical dimension of anti-media populism: How participants in the Enough is Enough! movement articulate narratives of societal hierarchies and their own place within such hierarchies. This dimension does not primarily concern their relationship with the media but the overarching anti-elitist worldviews. As will become evident in the following sections, their articulations both align with and deviate from the assumptions about societal hierarchy inherent to anti-media populism.

"The Others"

The informants' accounts of how they see their own place in society clearly resonate with Jansen's (2011) notion of "the ordinarily marginalized social sector" (p. 75). Yet, they articulate a more sinister view of

their own position than what was encapsulated by Jansen (2011) or indeed by mainstream conceptualizations of populism. Most theoretical accounts of populism emphasize the constitutive antagonism between the people and the elite. Here "the people" signify a homogenous social category comprising a unison or "true" version of "ordinary" people with which populists are assumed to self-identify. In contrast, a pervasive theme throughout the interviews was that the informants self-identified in terms such as "the others," "those who struggle," or "losers." Jan Ole, a builder in his 40s currently on benefits, for instance, contrasts the participants of the Enough is Enough! movement with a large and expanding middle class in Norway:

> We are the grassroots and we are *the others* in one way or the other. We are not politicians, we are not in business, we are mostly in hired positions or unemployed. Quite a few of us are outside the labor market.

He further commented that while the Enough is Enough! often has been framed by the media as a movement for "egotistical middle-aged men," it is in reality for "people outside normal society. Those who receive different social benefits or have poorly paid jobs, those who can't afford to take part in normal pastime activities." Similarly, Øyvind, a construction worker in his 30s, contended that the movement "is like its own little society where many people are on disability benefit, some are ill, some really ill, regular workers. It is a splendid mix of different people."

This self-identification as "the others" rather than "the People" with capital P, must be understood against the backdrop of the socioeconomic development in Norway. Since the establishment of the oil industry, Norway in general, and Stavanger ("the oil capital of Norway") in particular, has enjoyed exceptional and broad social mobility, where a considerable number of citizens have achieved higher purchasing power and become the economic middle class (Jarness, 2017).

"The Final Drop"

Many of the informants described their involvement in the movement as a result of an increasing and general sense of injustice. In this respect, the informants shared significant traits with the anti-immigration *alarmed citizens* identified by Thorbjørnsrud and Figenschou (2020). Yet, in contrast, only a few of the informants in this study expressed any preoccupation with immigration. Rather, what emerged was a deep-seated declinist view of society. As such, their outlooks resonate with Reinemann, Matthes, and Shaefer's (2017) findings that populist voters are more likely to have low socioeconomic status, fears of social decline, and feelings of injustice and indignation. Many of the informants evoked metaphors such as "top of the iceberg" and "smoldering volcano" to explain what caused their engagement. As one stated, "The introduction of car tolls was merely the final drop that made it all spill over."

Asked to reflect on their personal trajectories into the movement, most informants emphasized the pivotal role of road toll politics. Few of the activists had been politically active before joining the movement. They described a situation of increasing resentment leading up to their initial engagement. Many connected these resentments to personal experiences. Heidi, a janitor in her 50s, for instance, explained her political engagement with reference to the lack of public care for her father.

> When dad lived, he had to go through the whole process of qualifying for a nursery home.
> He didn't get any . . . So for the past ten years, I've started to realize what's happening
> to us in society. I'm not that critical, but I think it is unfair, I don't like that. In my mind:
> If the politicians say something, they got to stick to it. Don't just stand there and lie.

In general, the informants described a situation in which many people already living on strained budgets felt the consequences of the car tolls. As one of the informants reflected, "When changes, or what they call 'improvements' are to be made, it is always those who have least that has to pay."

"Corrupt, Money-Grabbing, Lying Sacks of Shit"

Whereas the informants did not subscribe to a vision in which they themselves represented a "true" or homogenous "people," they nonetheless articulated a substantive anti-elitist worldview. In general, "the elites" were seen as a monolithic category and a malign social and political force in society. When asked to elaborate on who the elites were, most informants emphasized businesspeople and politicians, but many also brought up people in public administration, the media, and to some extent actors from the cultural field. According to the informants, these elites could be found both in the local community and at the national level. Some also identified global super elites.

Politicians emerged as a prime antagonist. Heidi, the janitor, for instance, explained that she has lost faith in all politicians: "In earlier days they had some honor, now it's all about money, they lie." Tony, an unemployed photographer in his 40s, described politicians as "corrupt, money-grabbing, lying sacks of shit . . . in Norway and everywhere else." Some informants articulated even more antagonist visions. Representing a radical outlier in the material, Arnar, an agricultural machine salesman in his 50s, saw "the workings of the elite" in terms of a grand historical conspiracy. According to him, he "woke up" after the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and realized that "much of what we know isn't true," and subsequently started "digging in the facts." After the outbreak of COVID-19, Arnar explains, the picture became even clearer: The COVID-19 pandemic had been staged by the elites to "incite fear among citizens" to make them easier to manipulate.

Narratives of Media-Elite Integration: The Horizontal Dimension of Anti-Media Populism

Against the backdrop of these hierarchical and substantively anti-elitist visions of society highlighted above, we now turn to the informants' visions of mainstream media. In this section, the analysis attends to the second, and horizontal, dimension of anti-media populism: The ways in which they see mainstream media as co-integrated with other elites.

Generally, the informants articulated a declinist view of the press, in which mainstream journalism has abandoned its functions as a watchdog and the fourth estate. Approximately half the informants reported that in addition to traditional news, they also regularly read news from alternative news outlets such as Resett.no, Document.no, and Rights.no, or Steigan.no. These outlets are either hard-right or hard-left, aggressively anti-immigration (except for Steigan.no), and share an understanding of mainstream journalism as inherently biased and distanced from the concerns of ordinary people (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019).

Most of the informants reported that they read local newspapers on a regular or daily basis. Commonly, the informants reflected that local press outlets covered the anti-car toll issue, its cause, and its members in a more neutral and less villainizing light. In the Stavanger region, such local press outlets included newspapers such as *Sandnesposten* and *Gjesdalbuen* and in the Bergen region, *Bergensavisen*. Some of the newspapers mentioned by the informants are indeed hyper-local in the sense that they cover small areas and only a few people.

When asked to elaborate on what they considered "mainstream media," the informants predominantly identified major national newspapers (*VG*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten*), the NRK (the primary public service broadcaster) and the dominant regional papers (most importantly *Bergens Tidende* and *Stavanger Aftenblad*). All the informants except one (Arnar, the radical outlier) reported that they engaged with one or more of these media outlets on a daily basis. Yet most of them also articulated significant skepticism with regard to journalistic neutrality and norms. Consistent with the findings of Thorbjørnsrud and Figenschou (2020), trust in mainstream news coverage also varied depending on the subject. In general, the informants articulated a high level of skepticism toward coverage of not only the car toll issue but also issues related to climate, and in some cases also immigration. This seemingly paradoxical combination of high usage yet low trust resonates with findings from research on media use and populist political orientation in both Europe (e.g., Haller & Holt, 2019; Schulz, Levy, & Kleis Nielsen, 2019) and Norway specifically (Hovden et al., 2018).

Whereas the original conceptual formulation of anti-media populism accentuates how populists see media as part of the networked or ideologically integrated elites, this study brings to attention how such integration is in fact articulated through a multiplicity of divergent yet interlocked narratives of media-elite integration. Based on the themes that came up in the interviews, five main narratives of media-elite integration emerged. Many of the informants articulated several of these narratives in their accounts, even all five, simultaneously. The narratives identified also overlap. Yet importantly, they capture key varieties of the ways through which the informants see mainstream media as integrated with other elites in society.

Political Integration

The narratives of political integration accentuate how mainstream media promote political programs or agendas shared with other perceived elites. A common theme throughout the interviews was that the media in Norway has a left-wing bias—not least the NRK. Somewhat contradictory to this, many informants simultaneously contended that the major media outlets in Norway push the agenda of business interest and a marked liberalist or globalist order. As Tommy, a security guard in his 30s, reflected,

> I get so tired . . . when I look at the different media, I feel that they all have an agenda. They're either extremely to the left or extremely to the right. You seldom see good investigative, objective journalism. And hardly ever journalism that is critical of politicians. The wages of politicians have increased enormously, while I, at the age of almost 40, still struggle to afford somewhere to live.

Not surprisingly, the narratives of political integration were often articulated with reference to either the car toll issue itself or to climate issues more generally. Many of the informants articulated views about an all-powerful climate elite, driven by politicians, scientists, and activists and promoted by the media. Media were seen as part of this complex, at the global, national, and local levels. As Steffen, a transport manager in his late 40s, contended,

> It has become political suicide to disagree with the green project. Once someone in politics or the media justifies something in terms of "environmental interests" it coups the whole game. If you disagree, you will be villainized or ignored.

Steffen's account exemplifies two pervasive themes in the material. First, the political co-integration of media and other elites was seen to severely limit what it is possible to say in public about the climate issue. Second, it exemplifies an experience or expectation of being vilified or ridiculed if such statements are made in public.

Ideological Integration

Ideological integration emerged as another common narrative. Here, mainstream media are seen to both promote and naturalize elite interests. In contrast to the narrative of political integration, articulations of this narrative emphasized the media's role in maintaining overarching power structures rather than promoting specific interests or agendas. Jan Ole, for instance, articulated a view much akin to traditional Marxian analysis of hegemony:

> You have business leaders, you have politicians . . . I have seen in the media that people in the municipal councils in Norway are predominantly from the middle class. When they don't acknowledge that others are having a hard time, they normalize the things they think are normal. So you have the economic elite and the political elite. And when politics is formed according to the economic elites' wishes . . . their wishes are the ones that count . . . because they create economic growth and jobs. And one is made to believe in this. Those who fall outside are always a burden, an economic "expense item."

As highlighted by many of the informants, the ideological integration between the media and other elites naturalizes and maintains a societal hierarchy in which most of the informants feel that they are at the bottom.

Social Integration

Narratives of social integration accentuate how journalists and media professionals bond professionally and privately with politicians and businesspeople. In contrast to the previous narratives, articulations of social integration accentuated how the media and other elites are mutually integrated into concrete, everyday, social contexts. Aina, a house cleaner in her 50s, for instance, argues, "The journalists are the extended arm of the politicians. They have way to tight connections to politicians and people with

business interests. There is friendship . . . and there's camaraderie." Others, like Øyvind, offered more graphic accounts of how and where such social integration takes place:

> How people know each other, God only knows. . . . But you can see it, really. . . . Take these garden parties over in Oslo, with politicians, journalists and people with a lot of money. They are the ones partying together. This is quite obvious, at least for those of us who keep our eyes open.

Similarly, Peter, a postman in his 50s currently on benefits, likened the intersection between the media and elites in Norway to that of Italy: "The elites . . . is a kind of mafia . . . gathering in closed lodges." This sort of media-elite integration was seen to take place at many levels—local, national, as well as global.

Structural Integration

Structural integration emerged as another significant narrative. Here media organizations, and ultimately their journalistic outputs, were seen as interlocked with or dependent on either business, political actors, or the state. In contrast to the previous narratives, structural integration accentuates ownership and formal institutional bindings. As exemplified by Rebekka, a secretary in her 30s, commercial owner structures emerged as one significant aspect of such narratives:

> When I look at *VG*, *Dagbladet* . . . most of these papers answer to the same masters. Most are owned by Schibsted (the largest media owner in Scandinavia) . . . one may think that these are different newspapers, and technically they are. But at one step up it is the same people who decide which articles get published or not.

Predominantly, the informants emphasized such bindings with regard to regional and national newspapers. Yet, some of the informants articulated a view in which Norwegian news media ultimately are controlled by global business elites, referencing back-players such as Google, Amazon, and sometimes also international banks. Another significant aspect of their articulations of structural integration was news organizations' bindings to the state—either through public press support or, as in the case of the public service broadcaster (the NRK), through ownership by the state.

Many of the informants identified the NRK as the chief proponent for the green agenda and the related push for car tolls. However, the informants also expressed significant ambivalence toward the NRK. A recurrent theme in the interviews was that the NRK offered much-needed neutral arenas for public and political debate. Several informants brought up how NRK's debate programs were open to divergent political views and actors, also regarding the car toll issue. Many informants also emphasized consistency and reliability as qualities of the NRK's overall news operations. As one informant reflected, "The NRK is drab, yet reliable." Another informant reflected that the NRK is "agenda-driven, has way too tight bindings to the government, often blurs the distinction between news and opinion, yet is quite good at representing normal people."

Class-Based Integration

Last, the informants articulated narratives of class-based integration. Here media professionals, journalists, lobbyists, and politicians were seen to occupy the same privileged position in the social

hierarchy. In contrast to the preceding narratives, articulations of class-based integration emphasized how media professionals share social backgrounds, lifestyles, and values with other elite actors. As one of the informants pointed out, "They hang out socially and they marry each other, etc., etc." Such articulations often came as part of their description of their own engagement in the anti-car toll movement. Many of the informants emphasized that the pro-car toll project essentially represents interests shared by the urban upper-middle-class, to which journalists and editors also belong. Tom, a filmmaker in his 50s, for instance, described the car toll project as the "feelgood project of the upper-middle class." Others, like Jan Ole, went to great lengths to describe how the introductions of car tolls essentially served the interest of all the professionals working in the more urban areas. A pervasive theme was that regular people, or those who have less, are made to pay for middle-class dreams. As Tom commented, "It is us who pay the bills for the moralistic projects of the chattering classes."

Discussion: Anti-Media Populism Reconsidered

This analysis offers a starting point for the substantiation, nuance, and contradiction of the notion of anti-media populism. Five major points emerge. First, attending to the vertical dimension, the analysis has shown how the informants articulate hierarchical sociopolitical narratives in which they themselves have an inferior status, and in which a composite elite serves its own interest at the expense of those at the bottom. Overall, and consistent with the concept of anti-media populism, what emerges is a substantive anti-elitist vision of society in which mainstream media either serve, reinforce, or are aligned with other elite interests. Furthermore, this is a vision in which mainstream media villainize, ignore, or ridicule the real-life experiences and concerns of those at the bottom.

However, the informants' articulations of otherness are at friction with any clear-cut understanding of anti-media populism. The activists in the Enough is Enough! movement do not subscribe to a notion of "the People" in a traditional sense. This notion of a pure and homogenous people—commonly construed as a forgotten or exploited majority—is a constitutive component in theoretical accounts of populism, and a bearing component for anti-media populism. In contrast, the adherents of the Enough is Enough! movement self-identify as a disadvantaged minority. Rather than claiming to represent the interests of "ordinary people," the informants see themselves as outside normal society. Their self-identification as outsiders must at least in part be understood as a consequence of the relatively high affluence in Norway in general, and in the Stavanger region specifically. "Ordinary people" are seen to be doing rather well. It is against the notion of ordinary people the activists contrast themselves. The Enough is Enough! movement and its adherents thus emerge as a case example, in which a priori accounts of populism do not fully capture the specificity of the cultural and regional terrains in question.

Second, the analysis offers both texture and nuance to the horizontal dimension of anti-media populism: The ways in which mainstream media are seen as co-integrated with other elites. Whereas the original conceptual formulation accentuates how populists see media as part of the networked or ideologically integrated elites, this study has brought to attention how such integration is in fact articulated through a multiplicity of divergent yet interlocked narratives. As shown, these narratives accentuate political, ideological, social, structural, and class-based forms of integration. Such narratives are potentially significant for political engagement and action. These narratives of media-elite integration, and indeed of

themselves as the "others," must be seen as composites of the shared political project that the grassroots activists and political leaders of the Enough is Enough! movement mobilize around.

Third, two context-specific features concerning press institutions emerge in the material, both contradicting commonplace understandings of anti-media populism. The first concerns the value ascribed to the *local press*. Although structurally embedded in large and presumably "elitist" media corporations and supported by state funding, local journalism was to a significant degree also experienced to mirror the concerns and outlooks of the informants. On the one hand, this speaks of the significance of local media covering small areas at close range, as opposed to distant and centralized press. On the other, it may be reflective of the historically and exceptionally high trust and readership of the local press in Norway. The second concerns the value ascribed to *public service media* (PSM). As documented in a number of studies from Northern Europe (e.g., Sehl, Simon, & Schroeder, 2020), populist-leaning audiences have low trust in and high-level animosity against PSM organizations. PSM are seen as a staple figure of the political and cultural establishment (Sehl et al., 2020) and often as the pinnacle of media-elite integration. Consequently, around Europe, PSM are under heavy pressure from populist political actors working to dissolve PSM organizations or to clip their remit or financing (e.g., Holtz-Bacha, 2021). Such anti-PSM sentiments were salient also among the informants. Yet, as highlighted in the analysis, they also ascribed significant value to the NRK, in terms of both reliability and commitment to represent ordinary people. This ambiguity must be understood against the backdrop of the comparatively high legitimacy of the NRK. Moreover, it may be reflective of the NRK's long-held mandate to represent the geographical peripheries of Norway.

Fourth, the analysis offers empirical insight into the *motivations* citizens have for adopting anti-media populism. Although not a primary objective of this study, a bottom-up, qualitative approach such as the one employed in this study also has the benefit of offering a micro-level explanation as to *why* people adopt forms of anti-media populism. The analysis highlights how the informants' antagonism against mainstream media at least in part is anchored in personal grievances and, further, in experiences of inferior social status and political paternalism. This combination of personal experiences of marginalization on the one hand and intrusive political measures on the other was felt as deeply unjust. In their experience, mainstream media are complicit in this overall injustice. The media were seen to promote elite agendas and to either ignore, villainize, or even ridicule those affected by these agendas. As such, this study has given a snapshot of the emotional "raw material" that fuels anti-media populism.

Fifth, a bottom-up approach as employed here also invites alternative normative interpretations of populist mobilizations. In the dominant political science and political communication paradigm, populism is commonly treated as a pejorative. Seen from the perspective of the activists in Enough is Enough! Their trajectory into the movement may very well be interpreted as a consequence of a lack of "voice" (Couldry, 2010). For many of the informants in this study, their activism clearly offered a rare opportunity to take some control over the public narration of their own lives. Moreover, as Fukuyama (2018) argued in the context of global populism, their political commitment could be interpreted as part of an overall struggle for recognition. Whereas struggles for recognition are usually reserved for movements deemed worthy and progressive, this study has shown how the anti-car toll movement comes from a collectively experienced devaluation of people's presence in society and a collective desire for increased respect. Such interpretations may come more easily due to the relatively "benign" nature of the Enough is Enough! Movement. Although

substantively populist, it is neither aggressively centered on particular out-groups, be they immigrants or gay people, nor initiated and orchestrated top-down by political entrepreneurs or other elite actors. This apparent absence of both pronounced out-groups and strong, personalistic leadership is at odds with commonplace understandings of populism.

Conclusion

This article started from the basic premise that there is a need for thicker, more context-sensitive understandings of anti-media populism, attentive to how anti-elitist citizens ascribe meaning and value to mainstream media as part of their lifeworlds. To start answering such questions, the article mobilized an emergent and sociologically orientated strand of populism research (Dean & Maiguashca, 2020; Jansen, 2011; Ostiguy et al., 2021) that advocates inductive approaches that recognize the context specificity of populism. It operationalized this approach through a qualitative study of the Enough is Enough! Movement in Norway. What emerges is a case in point that both aligns with and deviates from the notion of anti-media populism. Overall, and consistent with the concept of anti-media populism, what emerges is a substantively hierarchical and anti-elitist vision of society in which mainstream media either serve, reinforce, or are aligned with other elite interests.

Yet to recap, several features complicate this picture. The article has shown, for one, how populists may place themselves at the bottom end of the social hierarchy, articulating visions in which they themselves occupy an inferior position as *the others*. Contrary to dominant theoretical understandings, they do not identify as part of a homogeneous "people." Second, it has offered nuance to the ways in which mainstream media are seen as co-integrated with other elites. The study has brought to attention how such integration may be articulated through a multiplicity of divergent yet interlocked narratives, including political, ideological, social, structural, and class-based forms of integration. Third, by highlighting the relatively benign view of particular press institutions such as the local press and public service media, it has shown how the specificities of national and regional contexts matter for anti-elite citizens' relationship with the mainstream media. Fourth, it has highlighted how the informants' antagonism against mainstream media is anchored in personal grievances and experiences of inferior social status and political paternalism. It has thus suggested a micro-level explanation for why citizens adopt anti-media populism. Finally, it has shown how a bottom-up qualitative approach may invite alternative normative interpretations of populist mobilizations.

Fundamentally, one may ask the questions: Is the Enough is Enough! Movement really an example of populism proper? Or is it better understood as a political movement responding to lack of representation, politically and in the press? To help clarify these questions, I will briefly return to the three basic features of populism that underscore Fawzi and Krämer's (2021) anti-media populism. The ideological orientation of the members of Enough is Enough! Is clearly *populist anti-elitist*. The members make sense of society through deep-seated, conflict-driven, and anti-elitist narratives, in which mainstream media constitute one of several chief antagonists. In this regard, the case in point is substantively populist. However, it does not align so readily with the two other features. It Is neither explicitly *people-centric* nor *exclusionary*. This positions the Enough is Enough! movement as a borderline case. It is exemplary first and foremost of similar grassroots-type popular revolts. However, such movements are evidently a salient part of the populist political terrain of today and should therefore, in principle, lay themselves open to analysis through the prism of anti-media populism.

Important to note, in this study, the concept of anti-media populism has worked as a productive *starting point* for analyzing the relationship between populists and the mainstream media. But as this study serves to remind us, populist anti-elitist views of society and the media are shaped by a complex of different factors. Such factors include personal biographies and experiences of social status and the affects and affinities that comes with these. They also include contextually specific factors, such as the social and political history, and the conditions of both the country and the region in question. As argued by Dean and Maiguashca (2020), the specific features of populism depend on the socioeconomic, cultural, and historical/regional terrains on which it emerges and finds life. A task ahead for future scholarship should be to interrogate how the relationship between populists and the media manifests in these shifting terrains.

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