

WATCHDOGGING POPULISM:

journalistic roles conception,
performance and negotiation in
reporting the far-right in Portugal



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ABSTRACT – The article aims to unpack the press reporting of far-right populism invested in its journalistic roles, as manifested in the watchdog performance by the leading Portuguese newsmagazine *Visão* in a series of feature articles on the emergent Chega party. Drawing on an original combination of methodologies comprising surveys, rhetorical analysis, and qualitative interviewing, it concludes that *Visão* adopts an interventionist mode of the watchdog role in the reporting. It also validates the need to integrate a negotiative assessment of the role orientation and reporting practice to fill both the general ideal-practice gap of the journalistic roles and the specific ideal-performance of the watchdog role.

Key words: Ideal-practice press professional roles. Far-right populism. Portuguese journalists and *Visão* newsmagazine. Watchdog orientation and performance. Negotiative assessment of journalistic professional roles.

VIGIANDO O POPULISMO: concepção, desempenho e negociação dos papéis jornalísticos na cobertura da extrema direita em Portugal

RESUMO – Este artigo visa desvendar a cobertura jornalística do populismo de extrema-direita conforme manifesto na forma como a revista portuguesa de referência *Visão* desempenha o papel de cão de guarda (*watchdog*) em uma série de reportagens sobre o emergente partido Chega. Baseado em uma combinação original de metodologias que integram inquéritos, análise retórica e entrevista qualitativa, conclui que *Visão* adotou preferencialmente o modo de cão de guarda intervencionista (*interventionist watchdog*) no tratamento noticioso. Valida igualmente a necessidade de integrar uma avaliação negociada dos papéis ideais jornalísticos com a realidade da produção informativa com vista a preencher os hiatos tanto do ideal-praxis em torno dos papéis jornalísticos em geral, como, da dicotomia ideal-desempenho em termos do papel específico de cão de guarda.

Palavras-chave: Orientação e prática dos papéis jornalísticos. Populismo de extrema direita. Jornalistas portugueses e a revista *Visão*. Ideal e desempenho no papel de cão de guarda. Negociação dos papéis ideais jornalísticos.

VIGILANDO EL POPULISMO: concepción, actuación y negociación de los roles profesionales de los periodistas en la cobertura de la extrema derecha en Portugal

RESUMEN – Este artículo tiene como objetivo principal dar a conocer la cobertura periodística del populismo de extrema derecha en Portugal, en concreto, respecto al modo en que la revista portuguesa de referencia *Visão* desempeña el papel de perro guardián (*watchdog*) en una serie de publicaciones centradas en el emergente partido Chega. A partir de una combinación original de metodologías que integran encuestas, análisis retórico y entrevista cualitativa, encontramos que *Visão* adopta un rol de perro guardián intervencionista (*interventionism wathdog*) en su tratamiento informativo. Además, los resultados muestran la necesidad de integrar al estudio de la orientación del rol de los periodistas al de su práctica de reportar; haciendo posible, de este modo, visibilizar la brecha existente entre la práctica-ideal de los roles periodistas en general y del desempeño-ideal específico del rol de *watchdog*.

Palabras clave: Concepción y actuación de los roles profesionales de los periodistas. Populismo de extrema derecha. Periodistas portugueses y la revista *Visão*. Desempeño-ideal específico del rol de *watchdog*. Negociación de los roles profesionales de los periodistas.

1 Introduction

Populism⁹ has recently spurred into the worldwide radars in the wake of the Brexit referendum, the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, the 2017 German election, and following the advent of parties such as the French Front National (now rebranded to Rassemblement National), the Sweden Democrats, the Hungarian Jobbik, the German AfD, and the Italian Five Star Movement, or other leaders like Geert Wilders, Viktor Orbán, and Jair Bolsonaro. In an era of mediatized politics, journalism is said to play a central

role in the success or failure of such a rather heterogeneous set of contemporary populist actors.

Indeed, the news reporting can either promote populist political ideas and parties or candidates, usually highly dependent on media attention and their portrayal, or play an instrumental role in preventing or limiting the spread of far-right populism that threatens to undermine the democratic foundations (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; De Vreese et al., 2018; Hafez, 2019; Hameleers et al., 2017; Mazzoleni, 2003). And given that besides using the democratic norms against democracy, far-right populism also often uses journalistic norms against journalism, the current upswing of far-right populism needs to be addressed within the nexus of journalism and democracy. Although elite or quality media may resist far-right populism and turn particularly hostile in their watchdog coverage to support of political status quo and social order (Stewart et al., 2003), questions remain on how professional journalism can responsibly report it while performing its normative democratic roles and functions (Herkman, 2017; Krämer & Langmann, 2020).

In addition, how exactly the journalistic roles influence the reporting of the populist actors remains poorly understood, and the performance of the watchdog role – here understood as journalism grounded in the “Fourth Estate” and critical correction to power ideals that seeks to increase transparency and accountability of politicians or public institutions based on extensive inquiry and research, beyond reliance on leaks and secondary sources of information (de Burgh, 2008) – vis-à-vis the far-right populism is yet to be investigated.

Against this background, the Portuguese press reporting of the Chega (Enough), a far-right neo-populist party, and its leader, André Ventura, is an interesting case to understand the interactions between two core actors of the study of media and populism – political actors and the media – in democratic settings. Although the country’s media were initially in limbo on whether to boycott and ostracize it or cover it and how the 2019 general election campaign and securing Ventura a seat in national parliament eventually granted Chega some media visibility while feeding several prejudices and conflicting versions. Hence, this study constitutes a unique opportunity to assess how the elite media performed the journalistic roles in reporting far-right populism before being directly targeted by the populist actors. More concretely, it allows determining whether it adopted a neutral or an interventionist

mode of the watchdog reporting and the existence of the watchdog ideal-practice gap.

It is achieved by resorting to a combination of methodologies: a recent survey of over 400 professionals to assess the role orientation of the Portuguese journalists; rhetorical analysis of the substantial attention and watchdog performance in the reporting of populism in routine periods by the leading *Visão* weekly newsmagazine with a reputation for investigative journalism; and a qualitative interview of the reporter Miguel Carvalho to gauge how journalists negotiate the perceived discrepancy between their social role orientation and role performance. It concludes that *Visão* adopts an interventionist watchdog role in the reporting and corroborates the need to integrate a negotiative assessment of the role orientation and reporting practice to fill both the general ideal-practice gap of the journalistic roles and the ideal-performance watchdog role.

The article begins by addressing the nexus of media interaction with populist actors and the journalistic roles to inform the contextualization of the study and formulate the research questions concerning the watchdog reporting of populism. Then the specificities of the Portuguese newsmagazine reporting of the Chega party and its leader as well as the methodology adopted in the analysis are elaborated upon before presenting and discussing the findings.

2 Media, populism, and journalistic roles

Much scholarly effort has gone into understanding the communicative dimension involved in populism and the role of mediated communication associated with populist actors (Aalberg et al., 2017; de Vreese et al., 2018; Salgado et al., 2021; Serrano, 2020; Waisbord, 2018). One common approach to the relationship between media and populism has been studied mostly as populism by and through the media (Esser et al., 2017, pp. 367–369)¹⁰. Media can be populist while speaking as the voice of the people or in defense of the people against the wrongdoings of the political elites. Populism by the media is likely to happen given the congruence or overlapping of populist style with the newsroom logic of commercial media. In this sense, sections of the media with a more pronounced commercially orientation – the popular tabloids and their framing of politics

through anti-elitist confrontation, scandal, and conflict – tend to be more prone to display strategic and ideological convergence with populist communication (Esser et al., 2017; Hameleers et al., 2017; Mazzoleni, 2008; Wettstein et al., 2018).

As for populism through the media, it relates to the possibility of the media also being unwittingly complicit in the dissemination of populism by providing a platform for populist actors and messages (Bos & Brants, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2014; Kramer, 2017). In this perspective, the media assume the role of intermediary. The way the media cover the activities and messages of populist actors, and how they treat them in their coverage may promote or hinder the visibility, concerns, and success of populist actors. Indeed, populists benefit from the legitimacy and momentum provided by media coverage especially when topics on key policy areas of their owners are being reported (Boomgaarden & Vliegenhart, 2009). Besides the media acting as producer or facilitator of populist communication, a less studied relationship between the media and populism is that of the press critically engaging with populists. Coverage of populism, especially on the far-right, is not overrepresented and tends to be evaluated negatively (Wettstein et al., 2018), at least in the tone (Herkman, 2017; Esser et al. 2017). That is especially the case of elite or quality media who can be critical (at times extremely) in their coverage of populist parties (De Jonge, 2019; Mazzoleni, 2008; Salgado et al., 2021).

To unpack how the media interact with populism and populist actors it is also important to shed light on the evolving notion of journalistic roles. The growing scholarly work on journalistic roles is still generally marked by an academic ghettoization, whereby each specific study of the phenomenon with its conceptualizations and definitions tends to remain quite isolated from one another. There is, nevertheless, a consensus among scholars on a couple of key aspects.

To start with, journalist roles can be conceptualized as “generalized expectations of society towards the profession” or “as actions and beliefs that the professionals see as normatively acceptable” (Donsbach, 2015, p. 316). Roles are a set of orientation and performance by which journalists legitimate their function in society and render their work meaningful for themselves and others (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 369). It is also assumed to impact their professional behavior (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) and to explain for

differences between news cultures (Novais et al., 2013; Donsbach, 2012). Thus, journalistic roles manifest in two different ways: as orientations – they become evident in public expectations and attitudes toward journalism as well as in journalists' self-perception; as performances – they are enacted in how journalists make news decisions and produce news content (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017).

Second, it is also commonly accepted that there is a gap between role conception and role performance (Hanitzsch & Vos 2017; Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015; Tandoc & Duffy, 2016). As a rule, the equivalence of role conceptions and role performances has been more asserted than empirically verified. Although many studies have recently assessed journalistic role performance in a variety of ways (Humanes & Roses, 2018; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020; Mellado et al., 2017; Mellado & van Dalen 2017), such works remain scarce within the realm of political news (Esser, 2008; Esser & Umbricht, 2013; van Dalen et al., 2012) and even more so in the micro-prism of populism (Wettstein et al., 2018).

Based on a multinational content analysis comprising ten European countries, Wettstein et al. (2018) aim at exploring to what degree populist actors are represented, endorsed, criticized, or challenged in media coverage and the extent of the journalistic contribution. They propose a framework to investigate the complex relations between journalists and populists by introducing a typology of populism-related media roles: gatekeepers for populist political actors and their messages, interpreters of populist actors evaluating their behaviors, and originators of populist messages. Of particular interest to my study, the Swiss scholars hypothesize amongst other things that members of populist parties will be more negatively evaluated than other political actors in the news, and that journalists will tend to criticize and dispute statements more often if populist actors make them.

Although Wettstein et al. (2018) conveyed valuable clues for my study, it is also open to criticism considering the specific focus of this work, and especially in what concerns its tripartite typology of populism-related media roles. To begin with, their argument about the gatekeeping role is evidenced in journalists selecting news content and granting or denying visibility to populist actors and statements. In clear contrast, I prefer the notion of gatekeeping as 'meta-role' – a comprehensive role embraced and practiced by the journalists that apply to each of the other roles (Vos, 2017, p. 48). Gatekeeping

refers to a prescriptive role related to the established responsibility to pass along some information and not others, which is also involved when journalists make decisions about evaluating populist actors and their behaviors (as interpreters), and being the originators of populist information, to use the authors' terminology. Then, I argue that their conceptualization of the remaining specific role typologies proposed (interpreters and originators) although commendable, is not particularly convincing either. Such a conceptualization is likely to work for a general analysis of the dichotomy of populism by the media or through the media, but is rather limited to a fine-grained explanation of the watchdog role.

Thus, I prefer to depart instead from another recent operationalization (Márquez-Ramírez, 2020) and adapt it with some adjustments to the watchdog reporting of populism. Despite having a distinct object of analysis (cross-national content analysis) and based on a different scope (structural and sociopolitical conditions as predictors of the detached or interventionist watchdog) compared to the present discussion, Márquez-Ramírez et al. (2020) focuses specifically on watchdog role performance. Drawing on Mellado's (2015) general operationalization of journalist professional roles, they succinctly propose two variations of the watchdog role performance – detached and interventionist – measured across three performative aspects: intensity of scrutiny, the voice of the scrutiny, and source of the event (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020). In a nutshell, their rationale is: the higher the level of the intensity (ranging from questioning to criticizing and denouncing), the presence of the journalist's voice in reporting (instead of a third party or source), and the reporter's initiative in seeking and unveiling exposes (au lieu of covering judiciary processes or external investigations) the more interventionist form of watchdog journalism and vice versa.

Last, beyond previous research that has identified a gap between journalists' ideal roles and the performance of these roles, Raemy and Vos (2021) recently suggested the need to hear journalists themselves about how they perceive or negotiate this gap. The aim of having journalists reflect on their social roles and how they negotiate between their ideal social obligations and their day-to-day work is to be able to elaborate on the understanding of role negotiation as an important nexus between institutional roles and work practice in journalism.

Correspondingly, the theoretical discussion outlined above raises specific questions that will be addressed in the empirical

research conducted within the specific context of the reporting of the Chega party and its leader by the newsmagazine *Visão*:

RQ1– What is the importance of the watchdog ideal in the role orientation of the Portuguese journalists?

RQ2 – How does *Visão* perform in its watchdog role while reporting on the Chega?

RQ3 – How does the journalist reflect and negotiate the ideal-practice gap regarding his reporting of populism?

3 Contextualizing the Chega party

Had this article been written two years ago and it would have to be on a different topic or, at least, focused on a study case other than the Chega party and André Ventura. By then, Portugal was still one of the few longstanding exceptions, along with Ireland, to the widespread rise of the far-right populism in Europe. Until the arrival of the Chega in April 2019, the previous existing fringe parties with a radical right agenda in Portugal had little media visibility and negative news reporting, being unable to present themselves as credible political alternatives (Mendes & Dennison, 2021)¹¹.

That would change upon the Chega's arrival and, even more so, following its first breakthrough with the election of its leader to the national parliament at the 2019 general elections. And with it, the center of attention of the far-right in Portugal definitively went to the newcomer (Marcelino, 2020). Ventura was determined to attain visibility for his party right from the outset by resorting to emotional and controversial messages to spark polemic and fierce debate among civil society (da Silva, 2018). There was a clear foundational discursive strategy to attract the front pages and attain the headlines (Marcelino, 2020).

Besides the notoriety from his previous political career within the second largest party the center-right Social Democratic Party (PSD), his role as a football TV commentator, supporting the most representative club in the country, also helped in making a name for himself. But he would be first noticed as a political figure, however, when he accused the Roma people of living on state benefits while running in the 2017 municipal elections, still as a candidate for the PSD. The Roma sound bite granted him national notoriety and made him

realize that such a media strategy not only achieved news coverage but also resonated with a significant segment of the voters. Unable to pursue that line within the former party, Ventura founded the Chega to hone his divisive rhetoric and widen his audience (Livingstone & Quinn, 2021). Soon after, he would make the headlines once again. On another polemic, Ventura suggested in a Facebook post that the proponent of the repatriation of artifacts removed from former Portuguese colonies, Joacine Katar Moreira, an afro-descendent MP born in Guinea Bissau, should be returned to Africa (Dantas, 2020).

Such a strategy of adjusting the actions and discourse to fit the “media logic”, resulted in the complicity of some of the press – notably the leading tabloid newspaper *Correio da Manhã* and its twin brother 24 hours sensationalist news channel CMTV¹² (França, 2019) – but did not prevent an overall antagonistically tense relationship with the mainstream media (Marcelino, 2020). Up to the point of Ventura portraying himself as the most misunderstood and persecuted politician by the media and the system during the democracy in Portugal (França, 2019), or the journalists from the main news media being reportedly insulted and injured during one campaign event in the recent 2021 presidential ballot (Costa, 2021).

Notwithstanding the relative success of the Chega also in securing two seats in the regional parliament in the 2020 legislative elections for the Assembly of the Autonomous Region of the Azores, to add to representation in the national parliament, Ventura had but a negligible result in the recent 2021 presidential elections coming in the third place. Such a “largely symbolic position”, however, raised again the question of “whether the far-right is on the rise in Portugal”, a country that so far proved immune to populist tactics (Livingstone & Quinn, 2021). Independently of whether the limited direct impact on domestic electoral outcomes may signal a shifting tide or not, the discursive influence of Chega and its leader is not likely to fade away soon, posing new challenges to the Portuguese journalism that must come to terms with the thorny issue of how to report about the far-right populism.

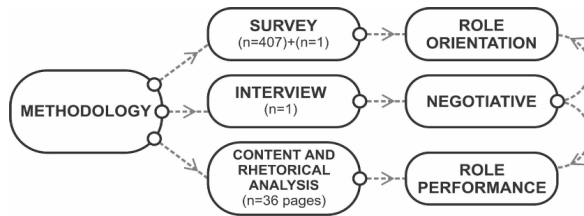
4 Methodological considerations

The orientation-performance-negotiative dimensions involved in the watchdog role by the media vis-à-vis the populist far-right party Chega are studied here via the combination or triangulation of multiple methods

(see figure 1). The surveys allow assessing the ideal role orientation of the Portuguese journalists, whereas the content rhetorical analysis allows determining the performance in the news coverage of populism and whether it adopted a neutral or an interventionist mode of the watchdog reporting. Finally, the qualitative interview of Visão's journalist involved in the feature reporting further complements the analysis by exploring his perception and negotiation of the watchdog ideal-practice gap.

Figure 1

A mixed-methodology for assessing the role orientation and performance in the reporting



The latest representative survey of working journalists from all kinds of media and news beats in Portugal forms the first part of the empirical analysis (Novais, 2018). This data collection used extensive standardized surveys of a sample of 407 working journalists (55% response rate) through mixed-mode (either via telephone or online-survey) as part of the second wave (2012–2016) of the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) that has devised a battery of 18 roles and used a five-step Likert scale (from unimportant to extremely important)¹³. Although a little dated, it is still the only available data that measures the Portuguese journalists' perceived role conceptions in their work practice and the watchdog one more specifically.

As far as the content analysis is concerned, given that the written press tends to devote more analysis, and the upmarket in particular to treat populist actors more critically (Mazzoleni, 2008, p. 52), a representative sample of the quality press is adopted. Within the realm of the upmarket press, the option falls for the weekly generalist newsmagazine segment because it tends to follow a longer news cycle than television or daily newspapers and offers a more detailed, in-depth, or analytical view of events (Griffin, 2004, p. 382).

Hence, the weekly news magazine *Visão* is chosen for different reasons. To start with, it is admittedly one of the flagship

weekly news magazines in Portugal (not the first to be launched since *Sábado* appeared five years before, in 1988). Also for being the largest circulating weekly in the country within its segment during the time frame of the study, that is the last three semesters of 2020 (APCT, 2020). Above all, *Visão* is ideal for this research given that it devoted a series of investigative reporting to the Chega party across three editions in a short span. By so doing, it displayed the commitment to investigate populist actors beyond a single news story (Zelizer & Allan, 2010, p. 170) – a pivotal sign of the watchdog role of the press that constitutes the focus of this investigation. Moreover, it establishes both the news attention granted to Chega as well as the journalistic roles involved in the reporting of populism by closely looking at a specific object of analysis by one newsmagazine. The influence of the watchdog role in the reporting is assessed by pinpointing different criteria that measure its presence.

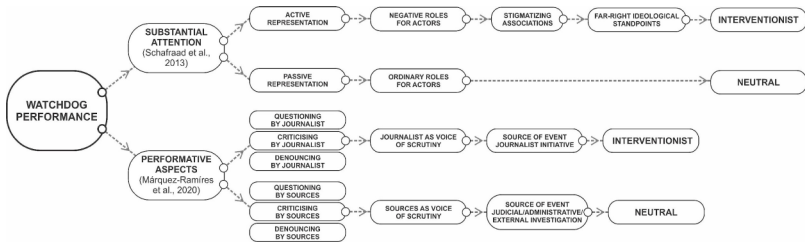
More concretely, the qualitative part comprises a two-stage rhetoric analysis of both the “substantial attention” and the level of presence of the watchdog journalism dimension in the news content (see figure 2). The former determines how the populist actors and standpoints are depicted in the story based upon four indicators (Schafraad et al., 2013, pp.360-361)¹⁴ as preliminary indicators of a neutral or interventionist form of watchdog reporting. First, if the main actors are represented in a passive (mentioned) – journalists writing about far-right actors – or an active fashion (paraphrased or cited) – portrayed as a source of information within the story. A low level of active representation suggests a neutral disposition. Second, the roles in which far-right actors perform in the news are considered. This can be through ordinary roles for political actors such as in an election campaign or a party convention (neutral), or more negative ones concerning conflicts (interventionist). Third, it gauges the presence of stigmatizing associations (such as with Nazis or extremist groups). The fourth is the presence of far-right ideological standpoints in the reporting.

As for the latter, to measure the level of presence of the watchdog journalism dimension in the news content, I've adapted six indicators from the different aspects featured in extant literature (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020)¹⁵. Accordingly, the performance of the watchdog journalism model includes differentiating between the journalistic initiative: a) information on judicial/administrative processes; b) reporting of external investigation; c) reporting of

the conflict. The remaining ones are inversely proportional within a unidimensional structure, where a greater level of the initiative by the journalist entails lower levels of third parties and vice versa: d) questioning (by the journalist or by others); e) criticisms and/or accusations; f) denouncements.

Figure 2

Operationalization of the performance of the watchdog role in the reporting



The empirical corpus of the analysis encompasses all the stories from the printed editions – 1.420 (2020, May 21), 1.429 (2020, July 23), and 1.449 (2020, December 10) – of *Visão* comprising a total of 36 pages and 20 news texts most of them (long) feature articles. Editorials were included in the analysis for revealing the positioning of the newsmagazine, whereas opinion articles were excluded for reflecting the opinion of individual guest writers outside the editorial responsibility (Novais, 2007, p. 566). The unit of analysis for all content variables is each time they occur in the news pieces. Instead of determining the mere presence and frequency of both substantial attention and the watchdog performance variables as rigid indicators that the news magazine reporting fits the watchdog role, the rhetorical analysis examined how well the news texts fit into the categories associated with watchdog role performance. Such “a critical reading” across the entire coverage focused upon concrete rhetorical situations: the persuasive textual tactics employed by the journalist through the reporting on populism, in either neutral and interventionist watchdog modes, while also considering the specificities of newsmagazines and the situational sociocultural context underlying the news coverage (Finlayson, 2007; Selzer, 2003, p. 281).

Last, a “negotiative” assessment of the reporting practice, adapted from Raemy and Vos (2021), complements the self-

perception of the Portuguese journalists. It consists of conducting a short survey and a qualitative interview with Miguel Carvalho, the *Visão* journalist involved in the reporting of *Chega*, given that the decision to initiate the story, the editorial orientation adopted, and the investigative work involved an individual decision made by Carvalho as a result of his middle-rank status as a leading reporter (Grande reporter) of the newsmagazine (Krämer & Langmann, 2020)¹⁶. Such a “negotiative” assessment elicits the narratives of (a) an open question about how journalists describe their role orientation; (b) orientations to professional role ideals based on a list of 20 statements about journalistic role orientations and the importance of each; c) asking to rate their role performance; d) by presenting some of the trends found in the study of the reporting as a device to further evoke the discourse involving role negotiation. The ultimate aim is to assess how journalists negotiate the perceived discrepancy between their social role orientation and role performance.

5 Findings

The analysis of a representative survey comprising professional journalists from all kinds of media and news beats in Portugal offers interesting insights into the journalists’ self-perceptions related to their role conceptions. With regards to professional role orientations, the survey reveals that Portuguese journalists guide themselves by two main ideas: neutral observation and power distance. In what concerns the former, the vast majority of the Portuguese journalists find it most important to “report things as they are” (94,8%), to “be a detached observer” (85,9%), and to “provide analysis of current affairs” (83,3%). As for the latter, journalists in Portugal also display strong reservations towards the power elites by believing that “monitoring and scrutinizing” their activities should be a priority (78,4%). Such ideal watchdog orientation of the Portuguese journalist is further reinforced by the negligible importance attributed to “convey a positive image of political leadership” (4,7%). Although far-right parties are yet to secure seats in the nation’s ministerial cabinet, the unwillingness of the journalist to “support the government policy” (1,7%), however, is once again revealing of the same watchdog disposition by the press. And further enhancing such a disposition, is the overall significantly low trust of the Portuguese journalists in the political actors. Indeed,

politicians in general (2,8%), as well as both political parties (3,8%) and the government (7,8%) consistently feature in the bottom end of the journalistic trust results. Additionally, other assertive roles that have may impact the reporting of populism are also highly valued by most the Portuguese news professional, such as “[to] promote tolerance and cultural diversity” (75,6%) – contrary to the far-right exclusionist ideals, “to provide citizens with interesting information that may inform their political decisions” (62,7%) or to “educate the audience” (51,7%).

In his turn, the *Visão*'s reporter, Miguel Carvalho, displays a similar conception regarding the watchdog ideal in the role orientation. Interestingly, the sole significant exception is the fact that he does not equal being “a detached observer” as important as to “report things as they are” and to “provide analysis of current affairs” or to “monitor and scrutinize political leaders”.

5.1 The substantial attention

In terms of the analysis of actual reporting, the most noticeable finding of the substantial attention granted to the populist actors and standpoints relates to the prolific use of pro-Chega sources of information. As illustrative examples of the active employment of sources are the Luso-Brazilian speech therapist, Sónia Coelho, alluding to the “excellent communication skills of Ventura (...) assertive but far from being extremist or authoritarian”¹⁷, or Constantino Ferreira, an elderly evangelical pastor from the Christian-Maná Church conveying that he had never seen “such a mobilization around a politician” given that Ventura personifies what Christians have been long wishing for”. Even more to the point, a retired teacher, Elsa Abreu, shows no qualms in depicting the Chega as a “punch in the stomach of those too comfortable” and Ventura as “the only one who has the balls to make the changes”. And Carlos Tasanis argues that Ventura “understood the abstention in the elections” and “says what people want to hear”, even if it is a “handful of nothing for many it amounts to a handful of everything”, especially “the pride of belonging to something” to the once Communist voters. Such a trend extends into the following editions. On this occasion, Ventura is presented in a favorable light by people outside the party. The leader of a military weapons company, João Bravo, praises his “brilliance and simple language” whereas João

Pedro Gomes, a partner of the BSGG law firm, reminds him he could be “earning a lot of money as a lawyer”. By the same diapason, Félix Costa (luxury real estate sector) and Cruz Martins (known lawyer) state that he can “give us back the hope and the joy to live in a fair country, more organized and happier” by “shaking status quo” and “ending the political cronies”, respectively.

In addition, no use is made of former members critical of the party in the first edition. Although such a trend of privileging pro-Chega sources prevails throughout the series of the *Visão* reporting, this is rather nuanced as time goes by. In the following number, for example, some concern is voiced on the close links of Chega with the Portuguese emigrated businessman César de Paço. A former Madeira island (autonomous region of Portugal) leader who later expelled himself from the party, Miguel Tristão Teixeira, considers such proximity likely to associate the party with “less clear situations”. More so, when “nobody has a clue about how much money gets in and how it is spent”. The ex-leader of the Southern Algarve region, Rui Curado, is also used to validate the practice of creating fake Facebook profiles, an ongoing issue raised in the previous edition. In December, the former security coordinator of the Chega, Bento Martins, mentions his endeavors to keep away the “neo-Nazi dunghill” accompanying the party’s public activities with the complicity of its leaders. He embraced the project because of Ventura’s persona but soon realized that the Party was just a “gang”. On the same tone, Rodrigo Freire refers to the party as a “façade” while Samuel Martins denounces that “money rules” and Ventura is but a “puppet guy for obscure interests”.

Whereas the pro-Chega sources are usually related to the ordinary internal issues of the party, the negative orientation of the news coverage is often conveyed by critical voices of former Chega members but also as a result of the editorial initiative of the *Visão*’s reporter supported on external investigation and actors, as will be further detailed below. Also, the Party is never used as a source of information despite being abundantly mentioned in the reporting. For instance, when referring to the security forces, the bullfighting hunting domains, and the Evangelic as the main segments of its electorate alongside the close links to the luxury real estate and wealthy youngsters’ fringes of the population. All official declarations come from leading party members or Ventura himself, although the leader does not frequently feature as an active source either. It is

hardly surprising, however, that Ventura is regularly mentioned in the news as the most representative figure of the Chega, even in a passive form. Besides the fact that the party was by then loosely organized, the Chega was from the outset leader-centered, and Ventura its image in the media.

The May edition advances a good example that encapsulates Ventura's repeated narrative ranging from a "fat State" and a system that "favors the outlaws", to the "vice-saturated governments" and the "Parliament's mockery" or the "political mire" (like Trump's "drain the swamp"). Similar rhetoric devices frequently involve the references to the "rapists and murderers" alongside the "corruption poison". None of these compares with the copious use of the word "shame" associated with virtually everything. When Ventura does actively appear, it is mostly justifying some of the party's controversies or his declarations being used to convey other significant polemics. Elsewhere in the same edition, Ventura confirms the inexistence of any "illegal financing of his party" while promising to resign if any scam was detected. He portrays himself as the "best antidote against extremism" (for raising the public discussion issues related to the Roma people or the chemical castration), someone with no "ideological prejudices" in a "society with too much consensus". On a different note, he also conveys that he had enough of the "threats, humiliations, personal hatreds" from fellow party members that are "always waving the racism ghost", claiming that "we went too extreme and have to moderate" by countering with the "line and origin" of the party that the "Portuguese request and want us to perform" without "fear or only half-hearted".

The two remaining analytical parameters of the substantial attention, stigmatizing associations and far-right ideological standpoints, go hand-in-hand throughout the *Visão* reporting. The numerous associations with the Evangelic denominations are usually related to the ultra-conservative ideology of the Chega. The existence of "ultra-conservative Evangelic lobbies" is raised in the first edition alongside a confirmation of the ideological parallels with the party through one Evangelic pastor portraying Ventura as someone who can "uphold the traditional values against gay people and other anti-nature and anti-family modernities (...) who can regain the power from the left – the evil of the world (...) Evangelic Christians granted the victory to Trump and Bolsonaro, now we want to do it in Portugal". In the same edition, an Evangelic enrolled in the Chega's list to the

general elections, Lucinda Ribeiro, challenges the Christians to “engage in politics beyond the sofa activism” against the “diabolic progressive agenda” aimed to “convert the society in another Sodoma and Gomorra”, for whom “those who do not wish to be associated with the far-right are in the wrong party”.

Likewise, Ventura is regularly associated with a messianic figure (sometimes a false one) and other religious symbols (preacher), such as on the front page of the May’s edition or when Mafalda Anjos conveys in the accompanying editorial that it was “crystal clear Ventura’s strategy to sell himself as a God messenger” designated to “save the country”. And less often with historical personalities like the Portuguese dictator Salazar, with whom “he shared religious education”, events (the country’s Christian reconquest to oppose and conquer the occupied Muslim territories that featured in a “video exhibited during the party’s convention that also depicted Ventura in a Captain America suit with a Portuguese flag on the shield”) or with images that resonate in the Portuguese psyche such as of a “political serial arsonist” (related to the country’s propensity for summer forest fires often with a criminal origin) for firing up the debate while watching “his own party burning down”. The reporter sums it up in the May edition by conveying an emblematic metaphor of the divisive facet surrounding Ventura’s political persona, especially significant in the context of the covid-19 pandemics: as “the virus of democracy” for his opponents and the “vaccine of bad politics” to the supporters.

The frequent fascist and Nazi connections report to the radical facet of the party, associated with notorious extremist violent groups (the neo-Nazi’s New Social Order/NOS – and National Opposition Movement/MON), and Portuguese football hooligans (Benfica’s Hells Angels, Porto’s Super Dragões and Farense’s SS Ultras). Being Ventura’s well-known supporter of Benfica does not prevent the links to the rival’s hooligans nor the members of Porto’s boxing team to escort him on some occasions granting his security. One of the members of the party leadership, Luis Filipe Graça, is the “elephant in the room” for repeatedly denying previous links to neo-Nazi groups that media reports, video footage, and other documental evidence seem to corroborate, and counting on the support of Ventura as “one of his closest”. Far from an isolated example, the reporting points out that the vice-president and one of the party’s ideologists, Diogo Pacheco de Amorim, is said to have belonged to a far-right bomb network (Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Portugal – MDLP) in the

aftermath of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal that ended the dictatorship in the country. Apart from that, references to Nazi salutes occasionally popping up during the party activities (one caught on camera in Porto by a Salazar's admirer, Fernando Serra Rodrigues) are brought up in May's editorial to "unveil its true essence". Likewise, as conveyed in an opinion article by Isabel Moreira, outside the editorial initiative of the newsmagazine, and the bulk of the analytical material of this study, instead of an "opportunist party that you can dialogue with", Chega is a "fascist project". Other stigmatizing parallels featuring high in the reporting regard similar populist leaders, with Mateo Salvini as Ventura's role model competing with the likes of Jair Bolsonaro or Donald Trump. A meeting held between Ventura and Salvini involving the common fight hand in hand with "those that work and pay taxes" is mentioned in the December edition.

Having dwelled on the substantial attention of the *Visão* reporting now is time to assess further empirical pieces of evidence of other performative aspects of the watchdog journalism in the news content.

5.2 The level of presence of the watchdog journalism

And the first striking finding concerns the editorial preoccupation with providing background about the Chega party and its leader. It does so by attempting to virtually tackle all the possible topics and angles involved in the news story up to the point of denouncing and exposing little publicized or hidden facts to public scrutiny. Throughout the series of feature reports, Carvalho mentions the use of fake Facebook profiles, the close bonds to the Evangelic Churches, the suspected ramifications of Nazi or extremist groups, as well as the doubts surrounding the financing of the party and the businessmen associated with it, while providing valuable indications of the actors involved, the events and their implications.

Given that the former two have been developed above, mention should be made to the latter. The September edition highlights this as the main story of the front page entitled "The businessmen and networks that cradle Ventura" and reveals in full detail a June 2020 meeting in the outskirts of Lisbon in which participants from key economic sectors in Portugal and abroad met with the Chega leader to discuss proposals and aims to advise him as

wells as to anticipate future electoral scenarios. One of the promoters of the event, João Bravo, discloses the intention to “support Ventura” to “win elections” and “become prime minister”. Another participant, Félix Costa, acknowledges Ventura’s challenge of “awakening and motivating the sleeping right” to react to the “unprecedented attack by the greedy left against our values and principles”. In counterpoint, a former Chega founder, Pedro Perestrelo, wonders how the party at some point “no longer had financial hardship” and the December edition conveys the November flop fundraiser dinner initiative held in Braga (Northern Portugal) prompting Carvalho to wonder “whether Ventura is no more a good investment”.

The intensity of the reporter’s scrutiny also comprises the numerous conflicts featured in the coverage related to Chega’s internal dynamics. Such as over 50 members in the Algarve abandoning the party in “disagreement with the suspension of the Faro district leader Jorge Jesus”. In the neighboring Portimão, a file was delivered to the police documenting “Sicilian-mafia style aggressions and threats”. The reporting includes other conflicting situations elsewhere, for instance in Porto and Madeira Island, alongside an overall conflictual atmosphere with the resulting threat of leaving the party by “tens of thousands of members”. Or the allusion made to the code of silence imposed by Ventura to prevent the frequent offenses amongst party affiliates. As a result, the paradox of a party silenced from within while publicly claiming that it cannot be silenced. In fact, because of the seriousness of the frequent quarrels impending at the party Carvalho wonders if Chega should be regarded “as a political case or a police affair”.

Besides, Visão also exposes some other conflicting situations: one of the vice-presidents, Nuno Afonso, that was still enrolled in his former party (PSD); the fact that Gerardo Pedro was hired to work privately for the Chega immediately after being dismissed from the party following allegations of creating fake online profiles; or the publicized invitation for Ventura to participate in the Trump’s convention that turned out not to be so. Likewise, the level of watchdog reporting is also noticeable in terms of questioning besides being employed as a stylistic device by the reporter to raise the attention to important issues that are about to be answered in the reporting or a rhetorical question not to be replied to. One of such cases appears in the July edition related once again to César do Paço. Carvalho not only disputes the statement that he had never financed

a political party by confirming that he “financed the CDS – People’s Party with ten thousand euros in 2019”, but also debunks do Paço’s philanthropic initiatives reported in the Portuguese Times as paid ad content. Unsurprisingly, César do Paço is described in September as being “unable to get rid of narratives laden with shadows and lights”. Carvalho also brings into question the official budget of the party’s general elections campaign, which got Ventura elected, considering it a “bargain”.

Other criticisms and/or accusations are a common feature of the reporting usually conveyed through critical voices of Chega, as stated before, and by academics or other neutral actors like the evangelic pastor João Viegas that depicts the party as a “messy mix, a catalyst of resentment and despair, employing political bullying as ideology”. Conversely, on some occasions, the journalist also assumes it, such as describing Ventura’s stage skills “blending cabaret comedy, club’s flyers and sensationalist newscast”, in the May edition. According to Carvalho, Ventura is depicted as a “platform professional well trained by the sports commentary” that “recycles grudges” and “employs the salami strategy to everyone, serving rhetoric slices adapted to pensioners, teachers, police officers, firemen, and the nostalgics of the old regime”. In a similar vein, in December he refers to the party as “about to implode” for experiencing “an unlikely and premature state of civil war (...) with an anticipated sulfur and death smell in the air (...) unveiling from North to South the traits of a political underworld that he promised to fight against”.

As far as the reporting of external investigation is concerned, the *Visão* combines occasional usage of borrowed information from other news titles with academic research related to Chega. Whereas the *Expresso* weekly newspaper is employed to back some of the reporting (such as the health, corruption, and justice as the most valued issues by Chega’s voters and revisiting a meeting between Ventura and the Portuguese royal family), the regional newspaper *Correio do Minho* follows up the story of the fake Facebook profiles by identifying other pages and thousands of shares originated from the “army of fake profiles”. In the case of the rival *Sábado* newsmagazine, some degree of intermedia agenda setting is involved given the credited use of the borrowed information regarding the close connections between Luis Filipe Graça and Nazi groups. Interestingly, the Maná-owned *Kuriakos TV* is also mentioned as actively promoting Ventura in the May edition.

In the case of the academics, they are employed in all editions and mostly to add depth to the reporting on different matters. The sociologist Donizete Rodrigues features in the May number elaborating upon the mutually exploitative relationship between the Evangelic denominations and the Chega following the failure of their party (party of the Folk Partido da Gente) back in 1995. Whereas Ventura seeks financial help and votes “to increase his political power”, the Evangelicals aim at “expanding their neoliberal agenda, conservative, populist, far-right, racist, xenophobic, nationalist and homophobic”. Ventura’s “political contortionism and chameleon-like discourse”, Rodrigues adds, convert him into an ideal candidate of the Evangelicals’ search for “economic gains, changes in legislation in their advantage (...) to get tax exemptions or state subsidies” involvement in politics by the religious leaders “campaigning from the pulpit”. Having written a book on the origins of the party, Riccardo Marchi, appears shortly in the September edition, on matters related to the profiling of the Chega. Another religious expert, Alberta Giorgi, explores in the December edition, the connections of the party’s vice-president, Diogo Pacheco de Amorim, with the political powerful Communion and Liberation – a conservative catholic movement said to be “more active than Opus Dei in the public sphere” while “privileging the status quo”. Then a researcher on populism, Alexandre Carvalho, depicts the “two prevailing factions” within Chega: the politico-ideological and the religious. Whereas the former is a sort of “widow of neo-liberalism” with connections to the far-right, the latter blends “the conservative and ultra-conservative”. He further identifies another “fringe” of people comprising of the “political disgruntled, the opportunist, and the careerists” as a sort of a “Trojan horse” aiming at the establishment.

Other specialists besides the academics are less often invited into the reporting. The exception that confirms the rule is the head of a strategic digital consultancy agency that characterizes Chega’s digital army as “extremely organized and efficient in replicating online content” including roughly “20 thousand fake profiles”, as estimated in May.

Finally, in the domain of the watchdog performance level, judicial processes (ongoing or past ones) feature less often in the coverage, and they all regard Chega, its members, or party-related actors. A good example of the case in point concerns the signatures to officialize the party with 2.600 irregularities (including one child and one

deceased) qualified as a “mass forgery” and being investigated by the public authorities, as reported in the May edition. But there are further examples such as the ones of the fortuneteller Cristina Vieira, a former Ventura student and candidate for the European elections, “involved in pyramid scheme scam” of six million euros, and Ricardo Coutinho, a close friend of José Lourenço, “accused of diverting 21 million”.

At this point, nonetheless, a more sophisticated analysis arises to balance the findings of the role orientation and reporting performance. Such examination encompasses a negotiative assessment of the reporting practice by the journalist involved in the news coverage.

5.3 The negotiative assessment

When recalling the editorial rationale behind his reporting on Chega, Carvalho admitted in the interview that the rather prevailing shallow media coverage of the party and its leader prompted him to address it “from a distanced, preconceived and polemic-centered” (personal communication, March 2021). His intention, thus, was to conduct a “thorough investigation involving fieldwork observation and giving voice to its militants” to gauge how the party worked – “its purposes, officials and shadows” – and why it was “polarizing the Portuguese society” (personal communication, March 2021). This is something that he conveyed “eyes-to-eyes to André Ventura” at the outset of his investigative work.

Carvalho aspires to the “highest levels of rigorous investigative reporting and fact-checking to provide thorough information” that allows the readers to “form their own opinions without any constraints or prejudices”, as a quality seal of performance (personal communication, March 2021). “I uphold the integrity of my work as a rule”, he assures, and “the Chega reporting was by no means an exception” (personal communication, March 2021). To live up to his high standards, Carvalho devoted considerable time to gathering sources inside and outside Chega, but was “sufficiently knowledgeable about it” (personal communication, March 2021). This is assumed within the first edition. A full description of the fieldwork conducted (prior, during, and after the peak of the covid-19 pandemics) comprised “following the Chega activities in the Alentejo” region, or “paying for the seats in a dinner-rally held in Viseu” (an inland city in

the center of Portugal). It also involved talking to “hundreds of party members” and “scrutinizing the controversial background, the digital militias, the network of liaisons ranging from football to diplomacy and astrology”. All this watchdog endeavor aimed at getting an in-depth portrayal of Chega, voiced by their own and through the secrets that they share”.

He has privileged the sources that fulfilled two main criteria: the level of information and their reliability. He also employed solid academic research available at the time of the writing for being “pivotal to substantiate parts of the reporting” (personal communications, March 2021). In a feature article of the kind, besides the contrasting sources, however, the reporter is also expected to “analyze, frame and interpret”, something that should account for the presence of some criticisms and remarks by Carvalho’s pen (personal communication, March 2021).

Last, in terms of the criticisms and controversies prevailing in the coverage, he assures that it is not the result of “any preconceived judgment” or “editorial orientation” from his side, but rather the “specific nature and strategy of the Chega party” (personal communication, March 2021). Indeed, he admits that the Chega is to blame for “feeding controversy, fanaticisms, and prejudices, both inside and outside the party”, that end up “contaminating the public debate”. Also, Carvalho uses a similar argument to justify the frequent employment of far-right ideological references or other stigmatizing associations. For him, it is revealing of “the inescapable co-existing ideological currents and intra-groups” within the Chega: “people from various backgrounds, many extremists in the political and religious domains” (personal communication, March 2021). But instead of just assuming it or taking it for granted, this needed to be “verified in loco and accounted for” to attest to the extent “the party’s ideology is adopted by its leaders and militant members” (personal communication, March, 2021).

6 Conclusion

This study contributes both theoretically and empirically to extant research on media, journalism, and populism. Firstly, it advances a revised typology model of watchdog performance in reporting populism. It constitutes a step forward regarding prior proposals that

aimed at distinguishing whether the media facilitated or initiated populism through the reporting and not specifically assessing the watchdog performance role of the press (Wettstein et al., 2018) or a previous work that analyzed the watchdog role performance diluted across news beats other than strictly political (Marqu ez-Ram ıres et al., 2020). As such, this study offers a unique micro perspective of the watchdog reporting applied to the single thematic issue of populism. Secondly, it adds another study case to the growing research field of media reporting of far-right populism by focusing on a country mostly overlooked or still under-represented, and not previously applied to magazines. Thirdly, it proposes a groundbreaking contribution to the operationalization of the orientation-performance-negotiative dimensions involved in the watchdog role by resorting to an original mixed methodological approach. To the author's knowledge, no previous work has endeavored to jointly analyze these three different dimensions in terms of watchdog reporting. Raemy and Vos (2021, p. 18) come close and serve as an inspirational starting block for this study, but as they admit "journalists' practiced role performance was not directly analyzed".

The empirical findings allow answering the research questions by highlighting several aspects of the orientation-performance-negotiative dimensions of the watchdog role in the Vis ao's reporting of the emerging far-right populist Chega that need to be further discussed at this stage against the existing literature. To begin with, the analysis of the survey on Portuguese journalists' self-perception confirms the pivotal importance granted to the watchdog role orientation of the Portuguese press (Q1). Indeed, such a common denominator of the journalists' self-perception in most Western countries (Donsbach & Patterson 2004; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Weaver & Willnat, 2012) also verified in the case of the Vis ao reporter, with the power distance predisposition featuring alongside the ideal determination to adopt a disseminator role.

Then, a similar trend in the news performance through the blending of neutral or detached and active or interventionist types in the watchdog reporting of Chega (Q2). This is noticeable across the diverse parameters of the substantial attention, such as the use of sources and the roles associated with them as well as the presence of stigmatizing associations or defining ideological standpoints of the far-right. In what regards former, the reporter is not the primary definer of the news on populism confirming previous research findings in the field (Novais, 2011; Bennett, 1990) given

that (over) relies on the declaration of sources of information extensively used throughout the investigative reporting series. Such disproportionate use of pro-Chega sources related to internal procedures of the party, however, should not be understood as press-populist parallelism (Esser et al., 2017). Rather as a display of fairness that constitutes an ideal goal for quality journalism (Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2015; Napoli, 2003). As for the latter, the tendency to also invoke sources to voice the recurring stigmatizing associations or defining ideological standpoints of the far-right to the detriment of the interpretations of the reporter that tend to feature in an auxiliary manner confirms once again *Visão's* detached reporting sided with previous findings (McDevitt & Ferrucci, 2017). The detached mode is further evidenced by the distinct indicators of the level of presence of the watchdog journalism: in terms of the source of the events in the news (the periodic use of external investigation borrowed from the press or the academia) and the frequent criticisms and harsh conflicts conveyed in the reporting not being the journalist own.

At the same time, there are clear signs of the watchdog interventionist role performance emerging from the analysis of the scrutiny. *Visão* does not simply endeavor to refer to the ongoing judicial investigations involving the party and its cronies, or to document the claims and activities of the Chega without answering probing questions. Above all, it displays an inclination to make several denouncements and expose little publicized or hidden to public scrutiny facts about the Chega: the fake Facebook profiles, the close links to the Evangelic Church, businessmen, and Nazi or extremist groups feature as prime examples. The gathering of damning evidence is compatible with the investigative journalism facet and the interventionist dimension of the watchdog performance. Likewise, scrutinizing Chega's official actors, activities, and messages, beyond a sign of completeness in the coverage (Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2015), should be considered a defining element of the watchdog performance and a materialization of the investigative initiative in the reporting (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986) that also confirms the journalist autonomy to use its voice (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020). This is even more remarkable if one considers that Carvalho achieved all this working on his own, through extensive research and intensive inquiry – a trademark of investigative reporting (de Burgh, 2008).

Miguel Carvalho's reflection and negotiation of the journalistic role orientation and his reporting performance is revealing of the inexistence of the gap between the ideal-practice journalistic

roles (Q3). Indeed, given the opportunity to offer his nuanced interpretations of his role orientation and the way his reporting corresponds with his role orientation, the journalist's role performance turns out to be different from what the extant literature expects of a role performance in line with previous studies (Raemy & Vos, 2021). Concomitantly, it also elicits from Carvalho's discourse involving role negotiation that the gap between neutral and interventionist types of watchdog reporting is not so gaping after all. Given the same opportunity to offer his nuanced interpretations of his performance in the reporting, the watchdog role turns out to be different from what a detached analysis of the content of the reporting reveals. To prove it, privileging Chega's sources is seen by Carvalho as almost an "ordinary and compulsory practice of good journalism" (personal communication, March 2021). And given that this inclination for echoing the party's perspective is not treated as indisputable, it does not necessarily indicate a bias or detachment in the reporting. Rather than a negative or neutral watchdog distanced from the facts, it is confirming evidence of the reporters' active gatekeeping decision to "give voice to party's militants and members and reveal it from the Chega's entrails" (personal communication, March 2021).

Correspondingly, including external investigation and conveying criticisms – even if only in part voiced by the journalist – is to be understood as an interventionist watchdog and a sign of the politico-ideological independence of the reporting. Or else they would be dismissed as evidence of excessive negativity, or Visão probably accused of being inadequately critical of the far-right populism, as is often the case (De Jonge, 2019; Mazzoleni, 2008; Salgado et al., 2021). Such finding nuances and extends the argument in extant literature that only news containing elements of questioning, criticism, and denunciation account for incremental levels of watchdog journalism (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020; Mellado, 2015). Even more revealing of the Visão's disposition to move further than the limit of politically correct is the intensity of scrutiny. Indeed, the numerous denouncements and exposés of irregular or inconvenient party affairs constitute irrefutable evidence of Carvalho's interventionist watchdog performance (Waisbord, 2000) and disposition "offend the powerful, express controversial standpoints and deviate from the commonplace" (McQuail, 1999, p. 70).

In short, journalists in Portugal perceive themselves ideally as neutral observers with an interventionist watchdog twist, corresponding to a guard dog that is always awake, ready to bark and bite if needed. The

isolated rhetorical analysis of the *Visão* reporting gives the impression of a dog that often barks just to disguise the fact that it would rarely bite. The negotiative assessment offers, nevertheless, the complete picture of the more likely image of an attentive guard dog that barks and bites when needed. Adding the missing direct analysis of the journalists' practiced role performance to the work of Raemy and Vos (2021) validates the need to integrate a negotiative assessment of the role orientation and reporting practice to fill both the ideal-practice gap of the journalistic roles and particularly the ideal-performance watchdog role.

Although this original study advances the understanding of the watchdog journalistic role and function involved in the reporting of the far-right populism, it should be emphasized that its findings only pertain to the newsmagazine realm and *Visão* and does not claim to represent the entire Portuguese press environment. Despite the obvious advantages of a case study as the appropriate approach which allows for a deep analysis of both content and context of the material, the research suffers from the inherent limitations of case studies. Further research, thus, should indicate whether the same conclusions can be drawn for a larger sample of media platforms (television or internet-based) preferably from a transnational comparative perspective. Despite its pitfalls, this study is elucidative of the newsmagazine watchdog reporting of the emergent far-right populism in democratic regimes. It also confirms the possibility of different levels of neutral and interventionist types of watchdog performance coexisting in the coverage. Indeed, by delivering detailed informative and analytical coverage of the *Chega* party (neutral) while voicing criticism and holding actors with political power to account (interventionist) *Visão* lived up to the reputation of the true accountability of the watchdog journalism in Portugal acting as "Fourth Estate" of the populist far-right. Lastly, it suggests the inexistence of inconsistency in the ideal practice of the watchdog role, to the extent that the reporter's views of what he should do match his actual performance, something which could apply to a variety of other thematic issues or cases.

NOTES

- 1 Amidst the different ideological conceptualizations of populism this work conceives it as a discursive manifestation of a thin-centered ideology articulated by political actors (Mudde, 2004;

Novais, 2022 forthcoming).

- 2 The populist citizen journalism (Esser et al., 2017) is outside the scope of this study that will be focused on the traditional or legacy media (print press).
- 3 The exception to the rule being the one-time election of Marinho e Pinto for the European Parliament in 2014 by resorting to a populist campaign against the establishment.
- 4 Ventura's collaboration with both the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper and CMTV ceased in May 2020 with the Board of the companies accusing him of breaching the constitutional rights.
- 5 For further details on the WJS methodological framework see Novais (2018) or <https://worldsofjournalism.org/study-methodological-framework/>.
- 6 For further details on their operationalization see Schafraad et al. (2013).
- 7 More specific information on their operationalization can be found in Márquez-Ramírez et al. (2020).
- 8 A detailed account of the operationalization of the interview is presented by Raemy and Vos (2021).
- 9 All the translations of the Portuguese press material were done by the author.

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