

**ECREA Conference of Political Section  
New Trends in Political Communication  
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# **Humor Meets Right-Wing Populism**

**Results of a Media Effects Study**

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# Austrian TV Satire „Wir sind Kaiser“



TV Satire “Wir sind Kaiser” = “We are Emperor”  
Performance of HC Strache, party leader of FPÖ

# Is this funny? Considering ...

# Right-Wing Populism in Austria

Nationalism

Xenophobia

EU-Skepticism

Social Welfare



“Daham statt Islam” =  
“At home instead of Islam”  
“Wir für euch” =  
“We are there for you”



“Unser Kurs ist klar” =  
“Our direction is clear”  
“Abendland in Christenhand” =  
“Occident belongs in hands of  
Christians”  
“Tag der Abrechnung” = “Day of  
reckoning”



“Sozialstaat statt Zuwanderung” =  
“Welfare state instead of immigration”  
“Wir für Österreich” =  
“We’re there for Austria”



“Mit ihm kommt Österreich zuerst” =  
“With him Austria comes first”  
“statt EU- & Euro-Wahnsinn” =  
“instead of EU and Euro insanity”

Right-wing populism all over Europe based on four pillars:

- a) Appeal to feelings of threat, especially by spreading “conspiracy theories”
- b) Highlighting of national identification
- c) Promise to protect the man in the street by strong leadership
- d) Suggestion of simple solutions which may include inadequate topic mix

No strict separation from right-wing extremism:

- Social Darwinism
- Approval of an authoritarian dictatorship
- Downplay of *National Socialism*

⇒ Mudslinging campaigns of right-wing populist parties cause problems for democracy and appropriate political problem management.

Which communication is effective against populist rhetoric?

- ✓ Heyder, A., & Decker, O. (2011). Rechtsextremismus – Überzeugen, Einstellung, Ideologie oder Syndrom? Eine theoriegeleitete empirische Überprüfung mit repräsentativen Daten. In: Langenohl, A., & Schraten, J. (Hrg.). (Un)Gleichzeitigkeiten – Die demokratische Frage im 21. Jahrhundert (pp. 223-259). München: Metropolis Verlag.

- Aggressive right-wing rhetoric causes resistance and reactance supported by democratic communications
  - Problem of aggressive polemics against right-wing populist mudslinging campaigns also provoke resistance and reactance
  - Research questions refer to intensity of spontaneous resistance induced by populist rhetoric and appropriate communicative support for its strengthening
1. How strong is the people's critical stance on right-wing populist rhetoric? Are people able to resist the persuasive forces of a right-wing mudslinging campaign regarding prejudices, aggressive nationalism, and far right-wing beliefs?
  2. Can political satire and humor support people's resistance under the fire of right-wing populist mudslinging campaigns?
  3. Which type of humor effectively provides protection against right-wing beliefs and political alienation?

# Theoretical Background

## Resistance

- the individual's ability to withstand a persuasive attack mostly on the basis of discordant beliefs
- variable potential built up through competitive communications and inoculation
- intrinsic, permanent part of person or attitude

## Reactance

- caused by external threats to one's freedom of choice
- when freedom seems to be limited → motivation to reassert it
- determined by threatened freedoms in communicative situations

⇒ Both, resistance and reactance, may cause backlash effects of communication with inverse changes of opinions and attitudes

- ✓ Brehm, S. S., & Brehm, J. W. (1981). Psychological reactance: A theory of freedom and control. New York: Academic Press.
- ✓ McGuire, W. J. (1964). Inducing resistance to persuasion: Some contemporary approaches. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advances in experimental social psychology (Vol. 1, pp. 191–229). New York: Academic Press.
- ✓ Knowles, E. S., & Linn, J. A. (eds.) (2004). Resistance and persuasion. New York, London: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group.



# Types of Humor

## Horatian political satire:

- a) Moderately critical
- b) Rooted in everyday life
- c) Includes self-irony
- d) Comic for laughter

## Juvenalian political satire:

- a) Extremely critical towards wrongdoers
- b) Strictly anti-elite
- c) Deriding
- d) Comic for laughter and moral outrage

## Nonpolitical humor:

- a) Deals with what is universally human
- b) Rooted in everyday life
- c) Based on self-irony
- d) Comic-tragic for laughter and crying

- ✓ Holbert, R. L., Hmielowski, J., Jain, P., Lather, L., & Morey, A. (2011). Adding nuance to the study of political humor effects: Experimental research on Juvenalian satire versus Horatian satire. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(3), 187-211.

### Horatian satire



### Juvenalian satire



# Political Satire 2: Horatian and Juvenalian

## Horatian satire



## Juvenalian satire





### Horatian satire



After 3 beers we just about get started.  
Coke and alcohol for our people! Beer for Austria  
Coke'em up and drink them down - no asylum  
seeker shall escape us

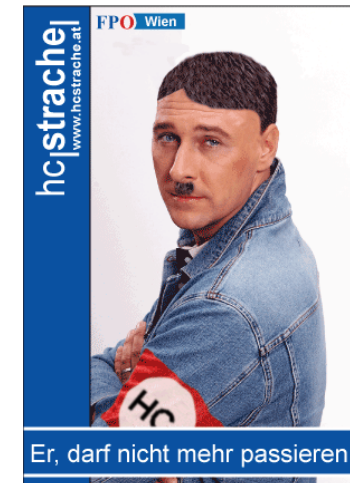
### Juvenalian satire



Old ideas for a new Vienna -  
has learned nothing in 60 years



The people's voice is God's voice, HC  
Strache is the people

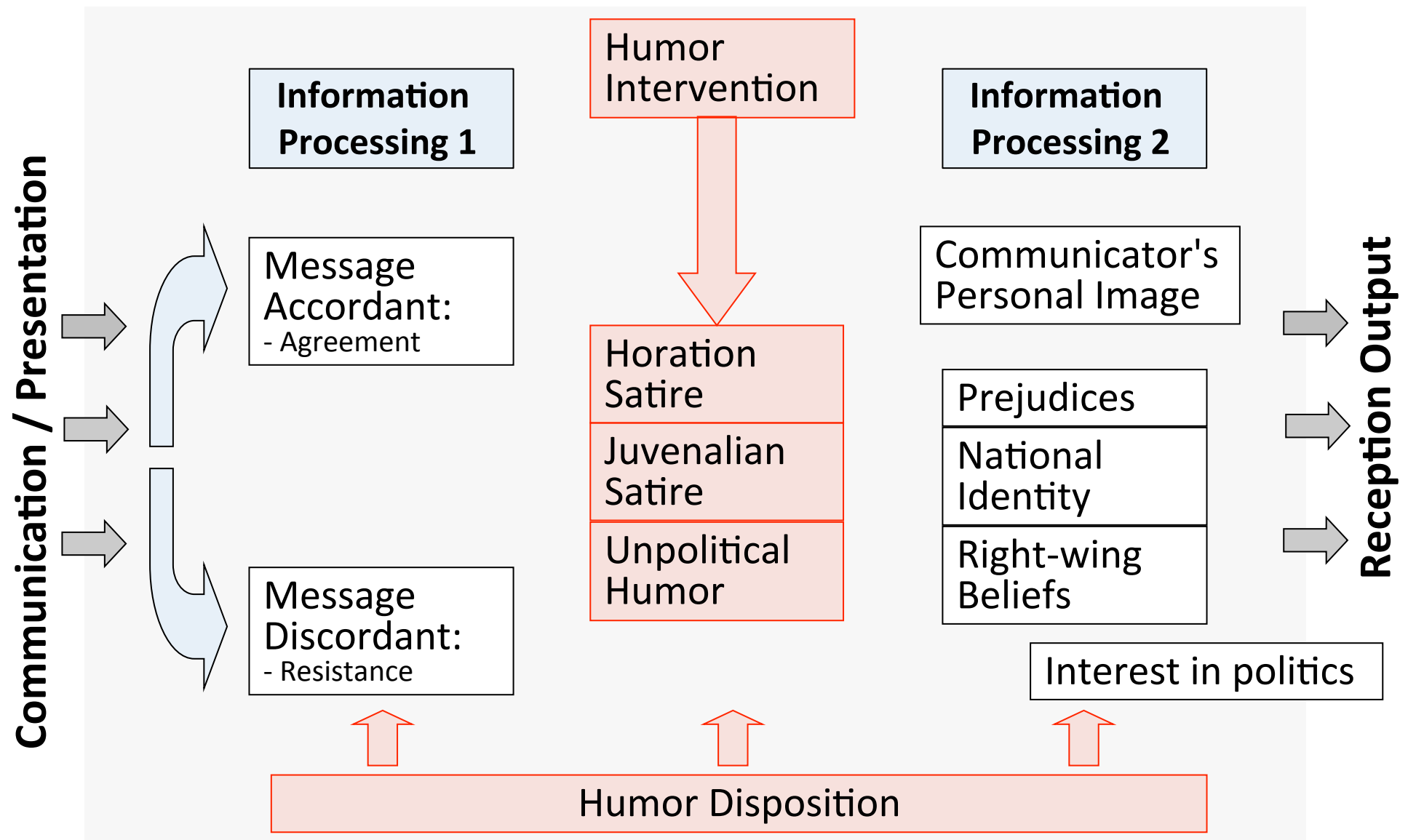


He must never  
happen again

⇒ How does Horatian and Juvenalian satire influence political communication?

# Humor and Resistance Model (HRM):

Reception of Right-Wing Rhetoric



# Method

- G1 Dialogical political satire (Horatian)  
+ mudslinging posters
- G2 Monological political satire (Juvenalian)  
+ mudslinging posters
- G3 Unpolitical satire  
+ mudslinging posters
- G4 Mudslinging posters only

Sample: 158 participants, randomised by film groups  
44% male, 45% non-students, 70% Austrian citizenship,  
34% no party preference, 24% liberal party preferences,  
3.5% preference for right-wing populist party

- t1 Before the film: questionnaire with pre-receptive tests on opinions, attitudes and psycho-social traits
- t2 During the film: viewing only
- t3 After the film: evaluation, post-receptive tests (equivalent to t1)

⇒ **Impact = difference between measurement t1 and measurement t3**

The pre-post-method allows us to comment on short-term effects. These can not necessarily be put on a level with long-term effects, but can be understood as indicators for effect tendencies which can intensify with long-term use of similar stimuli.



# Results

# Humor and Populist Rhetoric:

## Impact on Personal Image

Pre-questionnaire: predominantly negative image: undemocratic, aggressive, reasonably convincing, incompetent, humorless, dislikeable, holding right-wing opinions.

But, also diligent, and being a strong leader

Impression forming	Sign	d%	Sign	d%	Sign	d%	Sign	d%	Sign	Sign	d%
dislikeable - likeable		1.4		3.9		1.2		-0.4			1.5
untrustworthy - trustworthy	**	7.5		1.2		-0.4		1.1			2.4
incompetent - competent		4.8	*	8.6		3.2		1.2		**	4.4
soft - aggressive		2.9		-1.6	**	10.7	**	10.3		**	5.6
not convincing - convincing		2.9	**	13.1		-2.0	*	-8.1	!!		1.5
humorless - humorous	*	7.9		2.7	**	-9.8	**	-9.5	!!		-2.1
undemocratic - democratic		-2.6		-2.0		-5.7		-2.2			-3.1
moderate - radical		0.7		-3.6		-1.2		2.3			-0.4

- Political satire impact on Strache's image: more likeable, humorous, competent and convincing
- Campaign posters reinforced aggressive and undemocratic image
- Unpolitical humor hardly had any effect on the candidate's image

# Humor and Populist Rhetoric:

## Impact on Prejudices

N=158; G1=40 G2=38 G3=40 G4=40 Change of Agreement in %, post-pre		G1		G2		G3		G4		Between Group	Total	
Group Focused Enmity (GFE)		Sign	d%	Sign	d%	Sign	d%	Sign	d%		Sign	d%
Sexism		**	-6.8	**	-7.7		-3.9	**	-6.2	!!	***	-6.1
Devaluation of homosexuals			1.9		0.0		2.6		1.7			1.6
Anti-Semitism			-2.5	*	-3.8	**	-7.3		2.0		**	-2.9
Xenophobia		**	-4.2	**	-6.0	**	-5.5		-1.6		***	-4.3
Racism			-1.4		-0.4		-2.0		1.3			-0.6
Devaluation of homeless people			-2.4		-2.4		0.5		2.3			-0.5
Islamophobia			-3.9		-2.3		-1.5	**	-3.8		**	-2.9
Devaluation of newcomers			-0.2		-4.3		-0.4		-1.8			-1.6
Devaluation of disabled people		*	5.9		-1.7		2.3	**	7.0		**	3.4
GFE (total)			-1.5		-2.2		-2.0		-0.2		**	-1.5

- GFE in total sample decreased significantly
  - Sexism and xenophobia most strongly and highly significantly decreased
  - Fear of Islam: similar effect
  - Anti-Semitism: outlier when only presenting posters
- ⇒ Overcoming of reactance and resistance
- ⇒ Right-wing rhetoric promotes certain prejudices

# Humor and Populist Rhetoric:

## Impact on National Identity

N=158; G1=40 G2=38 G3=40 G4=40 Change of Agreement in %, post-pre		G1 Dialogical political satire + posters Sign d%		G2 Monological political satire + posters Sign d%		G3 Unpolitical humor + posters Sign d%		G4 Posters Sign d%		Between Group Sign	Total Sign d%	
Bond with people		-1.8		-4.8		-2.9		** -7.0			** -4.1	
Bond with landscape		-0.9		-0.6		-2.4		* -3.7			* -1.9	
Bond with national symbols		-0.4		-1.5		-2.0		0.9			-0.7	
Bond with democratic system		-2.5		** -4.7		1.1		-2.0			-2.0	
Bond with history		-0.2		* -3.9		0.7		** 9.5		!!	1.6	
Bond with culture		1.1		-4.9		-0.2		-1.4			-1.3	
Bond with sportsmen		** -7.0		-3.9		0.9		-0.5			* -2.6	
<i>Patriotism</i>		-1.7		** -3.1		-0.6		-0.3			** -1.4	
General superiority		-1.8		* -4.7		** -8.9		** -3.8			** -4.8	
Readiness for violence		-3.4		-2.1		-4.9		1.9			-2.2	
Separation / walls-up policy		-2.7		-3.4		-3.6		-0.2			* -2.5	
<i>Nationalism</i>		-2.6		** -3.7		-6.3		-0.8			** -3.4	
Reflexivity		2.4		-0.2		0.0		0.6			0.7	
Diversity		3.1		** 5.0		4.3		** 4.6			*** 4.2	
Globality		* 4.0		3.7		** 5.5		** 3.4			*** 4.1	
<i>Cosmopolitanism</i>		** 3.2		** 2.8		3.2		** 2.8			*** 3.0	

- Nationalism and patriotism decreased; in contrast with nationalistic-patriotic tendencies of posters
- Humor reduced nationalistic tendencies; especially non-political humor
- Cosmopolitanism rose significantly; exception of nonpolitical humor

⇒ Nationalistic slogans: no influence on viewers' nationalistic beliefs

⇒ Together with humor: decrease of nationalism reinforced

# Humor and Populist Rhetoric:

## Impact on Right-Wing Beliefs

N=158; G1=40 G2=38 G3=40 G4=40 Change of Agreement in %, post-pre	G1 Dialogical political satire + posters Sign d%	G2 Monological political satire + posters Sign d%	G3 Unpolitical humor + posters Sign d%	G4 Posters Sign d%	Between Group Sign	Total Sign d%
In the national interest a dictatorship is under certain circumstances the better form of government.	0.7	0.0	** -5.4	0.4		-1.1
What Austria currently needs is a single party which embodies the whole people's community.	-4.8	-4.2	** -9.3	-1.8		** -5.1
We should have a leader who governs Austria for the good of all with a firm hand.	1.9	-3.9	0.7	* 4.0		0.7
Without the extermination of the Jews Hitler would be seen as a big statesman nowadays.	-0.8	-2.8	* -5.0	1.8		-1.7
The crimes of National Socialism are by far exaggerated in the historiography.	-0.8	-3.5	-0.7	1.4		-0.8
National Socialism also had its good sides.	-0.4	-4.5	-0.4	** 3.2		-0.5
As in nature the stronger should always prevail in society.	0.4	-1.9	-3.6	** 4.6		-0.1
Actually Austrians are superior over other peoples by nature.	** 4.0	-3.4	** -5.5	1.4	!!	-0.8
There is worthwhile and worthless life.	-3.4	-3.0	* -6.1	0.4		** -3.0
Approval of a right-wing authoritative dictatorship	-0.7	-2.7	-4.6	0.8		* -1.8
Downplay of National Socialism	-0.6	-3.7	-2.0	2.1		-1.0
Social Darwinism	0.4	-2.8	* -5.5	2.1	!	-1.4
Right-wing extremist views (total)	0.0	-2.9	-4.0	1.7	!	-1.3

- Campaign posters: rise in right-wing beliefs
  - Humor: opposite results
  - Right-wing slogans: boosting of downplay of National Socialism and social Darwinism
  - Depended on type of humor: decrease of right-wing beliefs
- ⇒ Unpolitical humor: break of suggestive power of right-wing posters

# Humor and Populist Rhetoric: Moderating Influence of Humor Disposition and Political Orientation on Change of Right-Wing Beliefs

N=158; G1=40 G2=38 G3=40 G4=40	G1 Dialogical political satire + posters Sign r		G2 Monological political satire + posters Sign r		G3 Unpolitical humor + posters Sign r		G4 Posters Sign r		Total Sign r	
<i>Humour disposition 'universality' correlated with ...</i>										
Approval of a right-wing authoritative dictatorship	-0.2		0.0		-0.3		** -0.4		* -0.2	
Downplay of National Socialism	-0.1	*	0.3		-0.2		* -0.4		0.0	
Social Darwinism	-0.1	**	0.5		-0.1		-0.2		0.1	
Right-wing extremist beliefs (total)	-0.3	*	0.4		-0.2	**	-0.5		-0.1	
<i>Political orientation left-right correlated with ...</i>										
Approval of a right-wing authoritative dictatorship	0.2		-0.3		-0.2		0.0		-0.1	
Downplay of National Socialism	-0.1		-0.1		0.0		0.2		0.0	
Social Darwinism	0.2		0.1		-0.1		0.0		0.1	
Right-wing extremist beliefs (total)	0.1		-0.1		-0.1		0.1		0.0	

- Humor disposition “universality” (HD-U) decreased right-wing beliefs (r-w) under the fire of populist rhetoric
- No significant influence of HD-U in case of nonpolitical humor and dialogical satire
- Inverse effect of HD-U under the condition of monological humor

- ⇒ **Differential influence of HD-U on change of r-w beliefs.**  
Unpolitical humor and Horation satire reduced suggestive power of populist slogans, however, Juvenalian humor increased it.
- ⇒ **Political right-left orientation did not moderate change of r-w beliefs.**

# Humor and Populist Rhetoric:

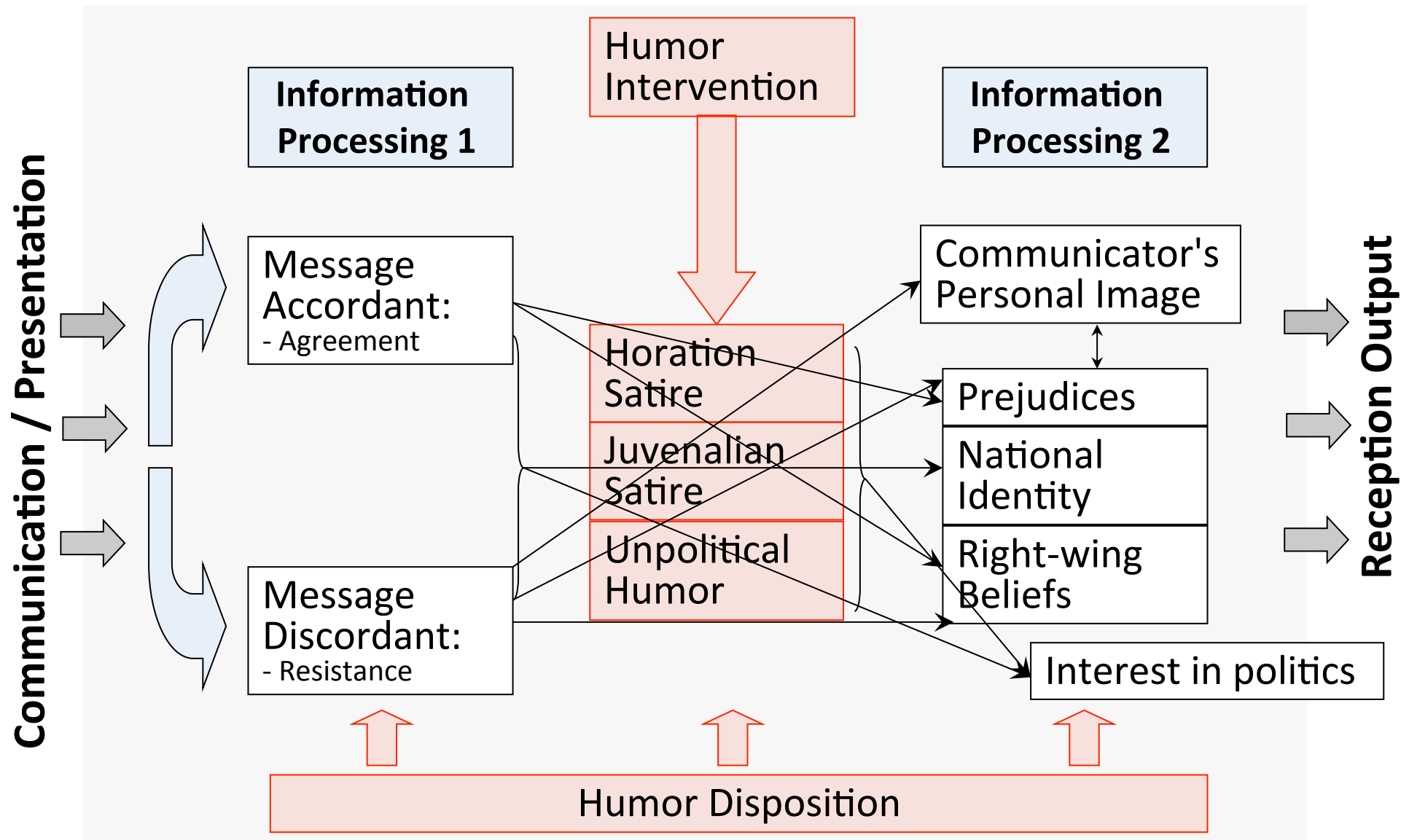
## Impact on Political Interest

N=158; G1=40 G2=38 G3=40 G4=40 Change of Agreement in %, post-pre		G1		G2		G3		G4		Between Group	Total	
Political Interest		Dialogical political satire + posters		Monological political satire + posters		Unpolitical humor + posters		Posters			Sign	Sign
		Sign	d%	Sign	d%	Sign	d%	Sign	d%	Sign	Sign	d%
Interest in domestic policy			-4.3		-4.1		3.9		1.1			-0.8
Interest in foreign policy / global issues			1.1		-1.1		4.3		-0.4			1.0
Interest in party politics			-2.9	**	-9.3		-1.8		0.4		**	-3.3
Interest in governmental politics		**	-7.1	**	-7.5	↔	1.5	*	-5.0		**	-4.6
Interest in associations politics		**	-6.4		-4.9	↔	-7.1		-4.3		**	-5.7
Political interest (total)		**	-4.0	**	-5.3	↔	-1.5		-1.6		**	-3.1

- Political interest diminished
  - Monological and dialogical satire enforced decrease
  - Political satire: influence on governmental politics
- ⇒ Right-wing populist slogans decreased interest in politics
- ⇒ Political humor reinforced this effect
- ⇒ Depoliticizing effect of political satire

# Humor and Resistance Model (HRM):

Reception of Right-Wing Rhetoric



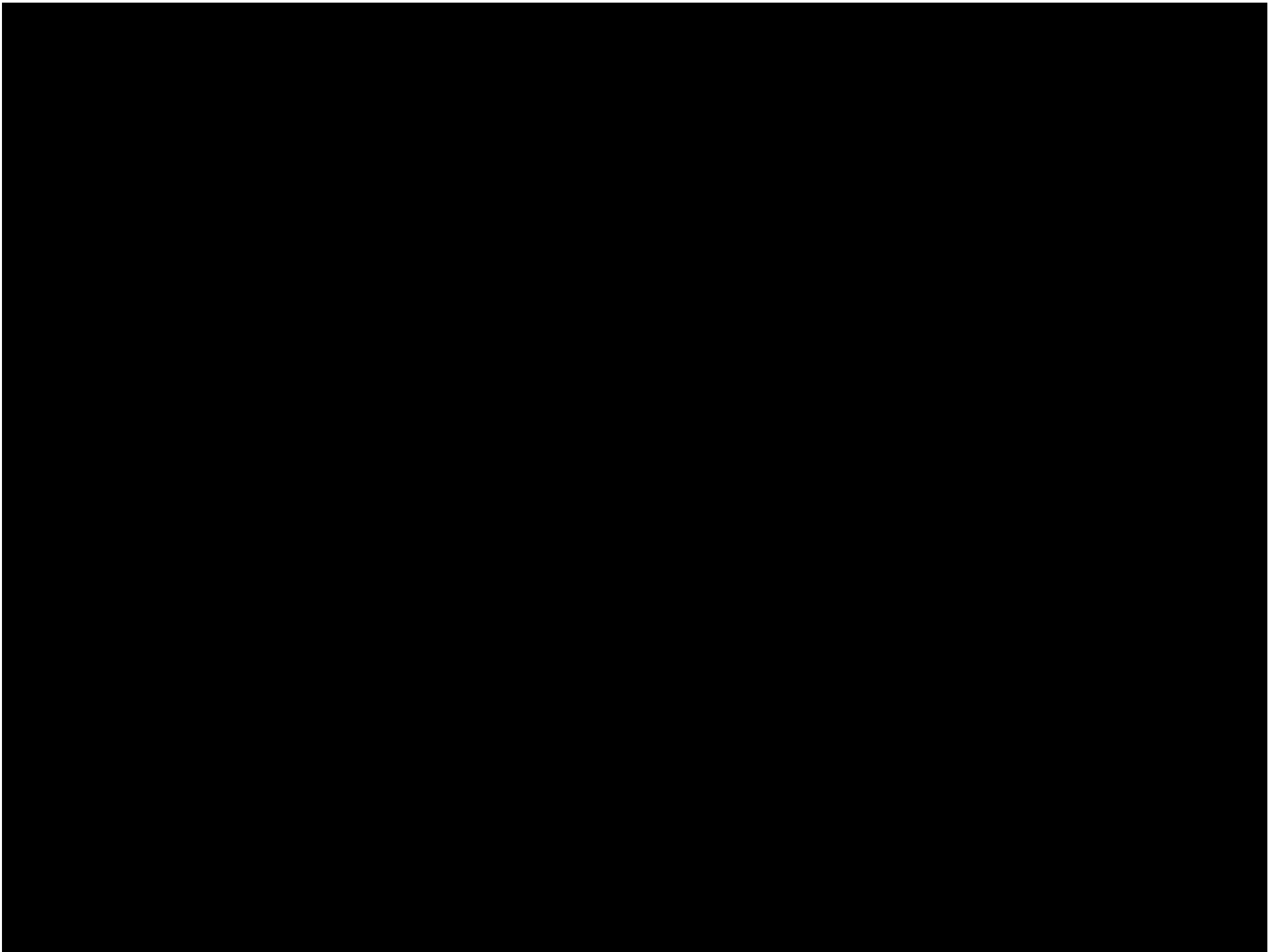


# Humor and Right-Wing Populism

## CONCLUSION

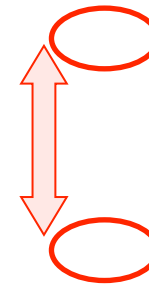
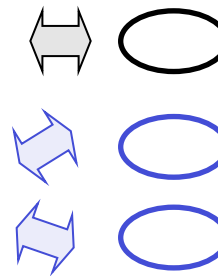
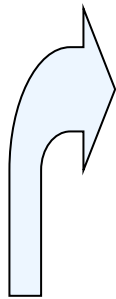
- ⇒ Right-wing populist slogans induce resistance and reactance effects, partially reinforced by humor
- ⇒ Ambivalence of humor intervention
  - Increased sympathy for populist politician vs. inoculation against populist rhetoric
- ⇒ Necessary to distinguish between humor types
  - Horatian humor more effective than Juvenalian to strengthen resistance and reactance against right-wing beliefs
  - Juvenalian and unpolitical humor can help to inoculate against prejudices
- ⇒ Differentiation regarding recipients' characteristics
  - Information processing of political slogans and humor dependent on readiness to laugh at people or at oneself
- ⇒ Serious problem for democracy: depoliticizing effect of right-wing populist rhetoric accelerated by political satire
- ⇒ Limitation: political liberal sample
- ⇒ Future research: verifying results with different sample

*Thank you for your attention!*



# Crimes Series, Receptive Participation 1:

Narrative Engagement, Involvement, Identification



- The sentimental epilogue increases the sympathetic identification with the Turkish family and decreases identification with the locals.
- The epilogue diminished involvement; the viewers found less relations between the fictional and their own reality.
- ➡ **The integrative impact profits from peaceful ending by increasing sympathy for the migrants; but the involvement of the viewers decreased because of the unrealistic impression conveyed .**

# Humour and Right-Wing Populism

## CONCLUSION

⇒ In conclusion, the impact of humour within political communication is complex and not uniform. It is necessary to differentiate between humour types such as monological and dialogical political satire and non-political humour. Differentiation is also required with regard to the recipients' characteristics. The effects of a specific type of humour on the persuasive power of a right-wing populist campaign are influenced by knowledge and attitudes as well as by the target group's humour dispositions. As the measurement of the humour dispositions shows, the information processing of political slogans and political satire changes with one's readiness to laugh at people from a superior position or to laugh at oneself. A noteworthy limitation of the study is the politically liberal sample we used. Only very few participants explicitly expressed sympathy for the right-wing party. For future research, it is necessary to verify the results with a different sample. [-> [in Punkte auflösen und ergänzen](#)]

*Thank you for your attention!*

Right-wing populism is spread all over Europe. It is based on three :

1. How strong are the inoculation protection of people against right-wing populist rethoric
2. Are political satire and humour adequate tools to support inoculation
3. Ligthening the national identification
4. Protection of the man of the street via strong leadership
5. Suggestion of simple solutions including inadequate topic mix

# How to communicate integration conflicts

## S U M M A R Y

- ✓ A crime series episode on integration conflict significantly decreased prejudices like islamophobia and racism and also nationalist attitudes.
  - ✓ The end of the episode influenced the receptive participation and receptive output:
    - Partially increase of prejudices: Turkish culprit induced increase of prejudices regarding newcomers.
    - The reconciliatory epilogue decreased xenophobia but increased sexism.
  - ✓ The impact on locals and migrants are partially divergent:
    - Locals were more involved by the story when be confronted with the Austrian culprit; migrants showed more Involvement under the condition of an Turkish culprit.
    - Locals decreased prejudices more than migrants.
- ⇒ The integrative versus desintegrativ impact of a crime series is dependent on the design of the episode, particularly referring to the ethnicity of the murderer and an harmonic perspective but not from the use of the criminal frame itself

*Thank you for your attention!*