Rally 'round the flag at 'polder' level?

A study into the effects of diplomatic conflict on public opinion in a parliamentary system



MSc thesis by Marijne Beijen

> Student no.: s2117452 MSc programme Dutch Politics Supervisor: Dr. Simon Otjes Second reader: Prof. Dr. Joop van Holsteyn Date: 11 June 2019 Word count: 9292

Abstract

This thesis studies how an international conflict affects the approval of the head of government in a parliamentary system, based on theory on the rally 'round the flag effect. Through thorough analysis of the main hypothesis, the study finds a small increase in approval of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte after a conflict with Turkey in March 2017. There is no evidence that other politicians other than the Prime Minister enjoyed an increase in approval as well, as theory would suggest. The expectation that approval of the Prime Minister is a good predictor for a VVD vote was supported by the research. The study also found evidence to suggest a relationship between patriotism and the observed rally effect.

Introduction

Throughout past decades, research concerning the effects of foreign affairs on public opinion has always received much attention within the field of social science. Although varying in approach, many scholars generally argue that public opinion on diplomatic relations and conflict is characterised by "a sense of order, rather than chaos", and that the public behaves quite predictably to worldly events (Kertzer and Zeitzoff, 2017, p. 544; Shapiro and Page 1988). A well-known effect in public opinion that social scientists have linked to foreign conflict for several decades – acknowledged as the *rally 'round the flag* effect – describes a rather sudden popularity increase of the head of government, following an unexpected, high profile international incident (Mueller, 1970, p. 20; Baum, 2002, p. 264). In other words, theory on the *rally* effect indicates that in times of an international crisis, people tend to approve of the head of government more, metaphorically uniting around their nation's flag – implying a rapid transformation of attitude among large numbers of people.

An effect like this is a vivid illustration of "the power of the situation", which is a key principle of social psychologists studying the shaping of (political) judgement and behaviour (Lambert et al., 2010, p. 886). Studying and recognising the rally 'round the flag is relevant in many sociopolitical ways, for an increase in popularity could pay off electorally, possibly bringing about important, far-reaching consequences in the outcome of national elections (Chatagnier, 2012, p. 631; Lambert et al., 2010, p. 886). Strikingly, existing literature on the rally effect in parliamentary systems is marginal, although systemic differences between political systems seem salient in the workings of the phenomenon (Morgan and Anderson, 1999, p. 811). As voters are likely to be more volatile in (multi-party) parliamentary systems than in two-party systems (Mair, 2008, p. 251), consequences of the rally effect may be regarded as more electorally relevant, as the possibility of a rally event triggering a change in political preference and behaviour, is greater.

Using the *rally 'round the flag* effect as a theoretical base, this thesis aims to answer the central question '*How do diplomatic conflicts influence the popularity of the head of government in parliamentary systems?*'. It uses the diplomatic incident between the Netherlands and Turkey in March 2017 as a case; an unexpected, rapid conflict which triggered several impactful repercussions back and forth, just a few days before the Dutch parliamentary elections. This brief but intense crisis, in a small country with a parliamentary multi-party system, is a valuable opportunity to research the workings of the rally effect in a case differing from most default research in scale, scope, and system. The extreme proximity of the parliamentary elections makes studying a possible rally effect even more pertinent, considering a peak in popularity could have served as a tool for direct electoral gain.

This thesis starts by laying out an extensive theoretical framework and presenting the hypotheses which structure the research. The subsequent section focuses on the case, providing an in-depth argumentation for the selection of the Dutch-Turkish conflict. Next, the theory-derived hypotheses are operationalised. Thereafter, the analysis presents the research's results in models. The thesis ends with a conclusion that provides an interpretation of the outcomes and an adequate answer to the central question.

Theoretical framework

Fundaments of the rally 'round the flag effect

In 1970, political scientist John Mueller introduced the short-lived, sudden increase in public approval of the president after an international conflict as the *rally 'round the flag* effect. Although the phenomenon itself was long recognised by scholars studying presidential popularity, Mueller was the first one to systematically operationalise the effect (Mueller, 1970, p. 21; Baker and Oneal, 2001, p. 664). His main assumption is that when major high-profile international events, crises or conflicts occur, the approval ratings of presidents improve rather suddenly (Baum, 2002, p. 264; Baker and Oneal, 2001, p. 664).

Mueller discusses three indicatory requirements for a conflict to satisfy as a rally *event*: firstly, the conflict must be international in nature; secondly, the conflict must involve the United States and the president directly; and thirdly, the conflict must be specific and dramatic, as well as sharply focused (Mueller, 1970, p. 21). In the case of a rally event, the public tends to unite more behind the 'commander-in-chief', forming a front against the opposing country and eager to strengthen its nation's chances of success in the conflict (Baker and Oneal, 2001, p. 667). During such a crisis, the head of government becomes the symbol of national unity and power and therefore, the public tends to support its actions and leadership more strongly (Lee, 1977, p. 253). The observed increase of popularity in public opinion that follows is believed to be unrelated to the success of policy actions, following Nelson Polsby's work *Congress and the Presidency* (1971): "Invariably, the popular response to a President during international crisis is favourable, regardless of the wisdom of the policies he pursues" (Polsby, 1971, p. 112). In that sense, a rally effect is considered to be a mass psychological expression

of unity as a response to foreign threat, rather than a rational reaction to taken policy actions.

Existing literature on the duration of rally effects is fairly conclusive on the fact that rally effects are short-lived – they are called popularity *peaks* for a reason (Mueller 1970; Baker and Oneal 2001). Next to the magnitude and nature of the conflict itself, relevant studies have also found that other contextual factors embedding the rally event are influential in its durability (Brody and Shapiro 1989; Baum 2002). Several scholars focussing on the role of the media in their study on rally effect mechanisms found that after a rally event, the head of government is in a particular unique situation, in which they have a monopoly on information regarding the conflict. As the domestic debate gets muted temporarily after a rally event, media do not receive any input regarding the reports of partisan conflict, and the public is designated to form its opinion based on official statements of the head of government and his administration only.. After a brief period, information becomes publicly available, which enables the opposition to express critical responses towards the head of government. The increased approval rating decreases gradually, as people are able to judge the head of government based on different perspectives. This opinion leadership mechanism has been adopted by many scholars studying the duration of the rally round the flag effect (Brody and Shapiro 1989; Baker and Oneal 2001; Baum 2002; Oneal and Bryan 1995).

Unsurprisingly, most follow-up empirical research on the rally effect has focused on the United States, as Mueller's three-part characterisation fits the presidential system well. One of the most distinctive researches of the rally 'round the flag effect studies Bush's approval rating after the September 11 attacks in 2001, which, after a rapid 35-point increase, spiked to 90 percent – the highest presidential approval rating ever recorded in the United States (Hetherington and Nelson, 2003, p. 38). Although there are other examples of substantive popularity peaks, such an extreme increase in popularity is not the default rally effect; most observed rally effects are fairly small in magnitude (Baker and Oneal, 2001, p. 666; Baum, 2002, p. 288; Oneal and Bryan, 1995, p. 394).

The amount of rally 'round the flag research in non-presidential systems is marginal (Bronski and Way 2003), although there are numerous examples of conflicts, crises and incidents that could be considered rally *events* – international of nature, involving the head of government directly, with specific, dramatic and sharply focused features. As the existing research on rally 'round the flag effects lacks sufficient literature on its mechanism in parliamentary systems, this research aims to make a scientific contribution by testing the *rally* hypothesis – *After a rally event, the approval of the head of government increases*.

Systemic differences and rally effects

When researching rally effects, it is relevant to acknowledge the possible function of systemic differences. As political actors get assigned different offices in their political system, the responsibilities which they are evaluated on by the electorate can differ as well (Whitten and Palmer, 1999, p. 53). Such systemic differences could also serve as explanatory factors of citizens' tendency to rely on political institutions in times of conflict. In presidential systems, executive power is highly centred on one individual: the president. The president is both head of government and head of state, serving the role of both political leader and ceremonial leader of the nation. Ministers in his government serve as advisers, rather than as coequal participants with demarcated portfolios and responsibilities (Lijphart, 1999, p. 105; Hetherington and Nelson, 2003, p. 38). Theoretically, this makes the responsibility issue rather clear to the electorate, as

the system clearly assigns most of it to the president. Considering the president is both head of state and head of government, as well as the symbolic figure of national unity, a rally event is likely to reflect on his popularity.

The responsibility question is more complex in a parliamentary system, as its institutional design consists of several political actors possessing prominent executive power besides the Prime Minister. Following this line of thought, it is plausible that other actors are also likely to be held responsible in times of a crisis, either institutionally or by public opinion. Political scientists Morgan and Anderson acknowledged this in their study about domestic support and diversionary external conflict in Great Britain from 1950 to 1992, where they compared government approval and support after international conflicts. They affirmed that a parliamentary system like Great Britain's blurs the clarity of responsibility in times of crisis. Governing is a task of cabinet, rather than of a single leader; decision making is a collective accountability of more than one executive power (Morgan and Anderson, 1999, p. 811). As this makes the assessment of responsibility considerably more ambiguous, rally effects can be expected to take on other forms as well, besides an increase in approval of the head of government. The study by Morgan and Anderson supports the assumption that an international crisis would also spark support for other national political actors and institutions, besides evoking a popularity peak for the head of government. By testing the *politicians* hypothesis, this research looks whether other politicians also enjoy an increase in approval, as theory on responsibility in parliamentary systems would suggest - After a rally event, the approval of other politicians increases.

Scholars Bronski and Way argued how the diffused responsibility question also asks for a broader focus of a rally 'round the flag effect, stressing that electoral support for the ruling parties is another relevant mechanism to investigate (Bronski and Way,

8

2003, p. 13). It is reasonable to study this assumed implication of rally effects, as practical consequences concerning party support are important to address – voters might "reward" the head of government for providing leadership in times of an international conflict, crisis, or incident, by voting for their party at an election, potentially bringing about direct electoral gain (Singh and Tir, 2018, p. 175). Although notable studies indicate that the role of the party is more salient than the role of the party leader (Van Holsteyn and Andeweg 2008; Van Holsteyn and Andeweg 2010), political behaviour of the Prime-Minister is likely to affect the support for their party (Clarke et al. 2000; Heffernan 2013). Therefore, it is likely that the support for the ruling party will increase after a rally event, as the Prime Minister is the most visible political actor, speaking on behalf of the government, and also serves the role of (ruling) party leader. The *party support* hypothesis tests this mechanism – *After a rally event, the support for the party of the head of government increases.*

Patriotism as a mechanism

Although the basics of the rally effect are rather clear, assumptions regarding the underlying causes and significance of the rally effect vary among scholars. A prominent mechanism in rally 'round the flag literature is the 'patriotic reflex' (Baum, 2002, p. 264; Chowanietz, 2010, p. 676). This 'patriotism' school of thought follows the idea that in times of an international crisis, the increased popularity rating of the head of government is rooted in patriotism. From this viewpoint, a crisis situation means that the interests of the nation as a whole are at stake, which would trigger the increased approval response in public opinion (Baum 2002).

The complexity of the concept of patriotism is often emphasised, which often leads to broad conceptualisations like "a blend of affection for the country, its way of life and its core values, with national institutions and politics responsible for sustaining it, that is, the country and its way of life" (Parker, 2010, p. 97). Feelings of patriotism are considered to serve a powerful psychological purpose for individuals, guiding political preferences and behaviour (Parker 2010), which also makes the concept relevant to acknowledge when studying effects in public opinion. Negative attitudes like xenophobia and out-group aggression are often associated with patriotic attitudes (Spry and Hornsey, 2007, p. 151; Parker, 2010, p. 97). Unsurprisingly, subjects like immigration and multiculturalism are regurlarly linked to patriotism, as both relate to debates about assimilation – whether immigrants should preserve their original cultural identity, or distance themselves from it and identify exclusively with the culture of the host county (Spry and Hornsey, 2007, p. 153). As expectations derived from literature suggest patriotic attitudes considerably guide political behaviour, the *patriotism* hypothesis is tested: *the rally effect is stronger for people that express stronger patriotic attitudes*.

In conclusion, the theory section of this thesis provides an extensive exploration of the *rally 'round the flag* effect and its presumed underlying mechanisms, with conclusive arguments for testing four hypotheses: the *rally* hypothesis, the *politicians* hypothesis, the *party support* hypothesis and the *patriotism* hypothesis.

10

Case selection

As discussed in the theory section of the thesis, the rally 'round the flag effect is an effect, whereas an unexpected international conflict, crisis or incident triggers a positive shift in public opinion regarding the head of government. There has been fairly limited exploration of rally effects in parliamentary systems, while research using American cases is more common. This calls for more *rally* research in a parliamentary democracy, as theory suggests that this particular political system could have defining implications regarding rally effects.

This thesis uses the diplomatic conflict between the Netherlands and Turkey of March 2017 as a case, whereas it is treated as a rally event, as it corresponds with Mueller's defining characteristics (Mueller, 1970, p. 21). Studying the rally 'round the flag effect using the Dutch-Turkish conflict as a case is relevant for several reasons. As discussed in the theory section, the Netherlands has a parliamentary system, where executive power is diffused over one more than one institution. This diffusion scatters political responsibility and accountability as well. As Bronski and Way (2003) stress. these dynamics make it valuable to not only investigate approval ratings of the Prime Minister, but also to analyse whether the workings of an apparent rally effect show other important particularities in a parliamentary system. Furthermore, the Dutch political system and culture are known for its wide variety of political parties, along with a volatile electorate (Mair, 2008, p. 251), which makes it more plausible that rally events and effects could trigger actual changes in electoral behaviour – possibly making voters switch parties. In that sense, rally effects could have more practical consequences than in presidential, two-party systems.

Self-evidently, there are more examples of conflicts concerning the Netherlands that would serve as relevant research subjects to study rally effects. For example, the MH17 plane crash in July 2014 also meets Mueller's rally event characteristics and is seen as one of the major Dutch crises of the past several years because of its severe societal impact (Van Duin and Wijkhuis, 2014, p. 179). Although the context and magnitude of the Dutch-Turkish conflict differs a lot from such an incident, the deliberate decision to use it is mostly dependent on the timing of its occurrence; just a few days to the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2017. As rally effects are short-lived, studying this conflict in particular is a rare opportunity to analyse change in public opinion and the potential electoral impact that follows. Moreover, using the Dutch-Turkish conflict as a case is important, as it has received little to none academic consideration, yet media and politicians speculated quite bluntly about its electoral impact (Pelgrim and van der Dool 2017; Henley and Darroch 2017).

In conclusion, looking into the rally 'round the flag effect, using the Dutch-Turkish conflict as a case, is a contribution to existing research, regarding the Dutch parliamentary, multi-party system, the volatile political dynamics and the considerable proximity of the parliamentary elections of 2017 – any change the Dutch-Turkish conflict may have triggered is worth looking into, for the long-term consequences it may have had.

Description of the conflict

In March 2017, a diplomatic conflict emerged between the Netherlands and Turkey¹. As Turkey had a referendum on an amendment coming up, several Turkish ministers were planning to come to the Netherlands, to campaign in favour of the amendment amongst

¹ Table 1.1 presents the course of the diplomatic conflict between the Netherlands and Turkey in table form, to provide more clarity about the temporal course of the conflict.

Dutch-Turkish citizens. This startled a series of events where the Dutch government tried to prevent Turkish ministers coming to the Netherlands. Despite this, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Çavuşoğlu, planned to come to the Netherlands anyway, and speak at the Turkish consulate in Rotterdam. When Çavuşoğlu announced this, the Dutch government made an official statement, which read that "the presence of Turkish Ministers in the Netherlands would be undesired for reasons of public law enforcement", as the Dutch-Turkish community had been called on to actively engage in the manifestations (Niemantsverdriet and Kas 2017).

When Turkish authorities resolutely declined Minister Koenders' terms and conditions concerning the reassurance of security standards, Dutch authorities stated that landing rights for Çavuşoğlu's plane would be withdrawn (Hendrickx 2017). Following these statements, Çavuşoğlu threatened with political and economic sanctions, which the Dutch government publicly condemned while firmly holding on to the withdrawal of the landing rights, stating they "would under no circumstances negotiate under blackmail" (Niemantsverdriet and Kas 2017). After another conflict with Turkish Minister of Family Affairs Kaya, upon her forbidden arrival and meet-up at the Turkish consulate in Rotterdam, the conflict escalated quite severely: several hundred Dutch-Turkish demonstrators gathered at the consulate to protest against the assertive dismissal of the Turkish minister. Following the dismissal of the minister, Turkish president Erdogan called the Netherlands 'fascist and Nazi' and Turkey officially imposed diplomatic sanctions, eventually banning the Dutch ambassador from returning to his work place in Ankara (Hendrickx 2017).

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Date	Occurence
3 March 2017	Dutch authorities make official statement – Turkish ministers aren't welcome to campaign in the Netherlands.
9 March 2017	Telephonic contact between Minister of Foreign Affairs Koenders and Çavuşoğlu: Koenders strongly requests the Turkish minister to cancel all planned meet-ups.
10 March 2017	Official statement by Minister Çavuşoğlu, openly dismissing Koenders' request.
11 March 2017	In a television interview with CNN Türk, Cavusoglu threatens to hit the Netherlands with severe sanctions if they refuse his arrival.
12h00	Prime Minister Rutte officially withdraws the landing rights for Çavuşoğlu's plane.
	Turkish president Erdogan makes 'nazi' insults addressed to the Netherlands.
20h30	Turkish Minister Kaya (Family Affairs) arrives at the consulate in Rotterdam by car, but is refused to enter the building. Hundreds of Erdogan supporters demonstrate in front of the consulate; several get arrested.
	Major Aboutaleb issues an order of emergency for the whole city of Rotterdam; Minister Kaya gets escorted out of the country.
12 March 2017	Minister Kaya proclaims she was treated inhumane; President Erdogan calls the Netherlands a 'banana republic' and calls for international sanctions. Demonstrations in Amsterdam, the Hague and Rotterdam.
13 March 2017	Turkey withdraws all diplomatic relations with the Netherlands while demanding an apology.
14 March 2017	President Erdogan refers to the Srebrenica massacre, attributing the crime to the Dutch combats; Rutte responds shocked, condemning such "despicable history falsification" (Hendrickx 2017).
15 March 2017	Dutch parliamentary elections.

Media coverage and contextual factors

The media attention for the diplomatic conflict was great, hence the conflict played out very publicly. Political dynamics in the Netherlands were already rather tense, given that a substantial part of the conflict took place just days before the Dutch parliamentary elections of 15 March 2017. During the conflict, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte publicly stated how "... a conflict of this nature takes countless hours to handle, while I should be busy campaigning right now!" (Niemantsverdriet and Kas 2017). Prime Minister Rutte got praised for his decisive attitude towards the Turkish government, during a conflict which was referred to as the "biggest diplomatic row in his premiership" (Korteweg 2017). *De Volkskrant* read how "The clash between the

Netherlands and Turkey is of unprecedented level. It is seldom that 'the Hague' speaks with such fearless determination", *AD* published an article titled "Rutte not dominated by Ankara regime" and *NRC* reported how Rutte "showed that he has teeth by withdrawing the landing rights of the Turkish minister" (Hendrickx 2017).

In the days before the parliamentary elections, political experts, pollers and media expressed their expectations on the row with Turkey unanimously: the conflict could have electoral benefits for Mark Rutte, because "in a crisis, people tend to unite behind the crisis manager" (Pelgrim and Van der Dool 2017). As the prime-minister had maintained an assertive approach withdrawing the landing rights and publicly condemning the actions of Turkish autorities, he had been showing "defining leadership characteristics" (Kranenburg 2017). At the elections, Rutte's party, the VVD, became the largest party with 33 seats, which was more than the 24 to 28 range that pollers predicted in their final polls before the elections of March 15 (Peilingwijzer 2017), but not a huge win. After the electoral outcome, pollers and media still affirmed their own assumptions about "the extra push" that the VVD would have received because of the conflict and Rutte's firm course of action (Wynia 2017).

Data and method

Data source

In anticipation of the Dutch parliamentary elections of March 2017, I&O Research started conducting election polls in January 2017. Surveys from this parliamentary election series are used to operationalise the concepts of the hypotheses. I&O Research is a Dutch research firm that specialises in researching societal issues, both at a national and a local level. It is able to collect extended data by managing several different data

collection methods, such as internet panel data, telephone-assisted interviewing and face-to-face questioning (I&O 2017). I&O Research respondents are not formed by (online) self-enrollment, limiting the chance of biased results as a consequence of self selection – a common problem for (internet)panels (Scherpenzeel and Bethlehem 2011: 108). Panel respondents are contacted and recruited to join the panel via samples of (municipal) population registries. However, the research has to stress that panel participants are considered to be more politically interested and invested, which suggests they follow political dynamics, and the news in general, more consistently and thoroughly than the average Dutch citizen (I&O 2017).

Surveys in I&O Research's parliamentary election series combine several questions on party preference, issue salience, politician evaluations and current affairs. As this thesis studies the effects of a diplomatic crisis on the approval of the head of government, using the case of the Dutch-Turkish conflict of March 2017, data from I&O Research is valuable for different reasons. Firstly, the data series enables one to analyse the same question at different moments. Most research into rally effects is studied at the aggregate level (Sigelman and Conover, 1981, p. 304), which does not provide much insights in individual-mechanisms. By using I&O Research's data series, which links survey data through a personal identification code, it is possible to study individual-level effects. Secondly, the questionnaires by I&O Research allow one to justly operationalise the hypotheses, as they contain substantive questions about approval of several politicians, party support and the conflict with Turkey.

Operationalisation of the hypotheses

To test the *rally* hypothesis, a quasi-experimental research design is used, given that there is a observation of a group of respondents (a *pretest*), followed by an *intervention*

(the Dutch-Turkish conflict), succeeded by yet another observation of the same group (a *posttest*). This particular within-participants study is called a "one-group pretest-posttest design" (Shadish et al., 2001, p. 108). This method of research has been criticised; the most common points of critique are that the design lacks a control group, and that it is not possible to manipulate the intervention, as the intervention is something that happens out of the researcher's control. It is hard to check for other external variables that may contribute to a possible change (Cranmer, 2018, p. 2). Therefore, the internal validity of the design is a weakness that should be acknowledged. Other factors than the intervention may lead to possible changes in attitude. However, the design is believed to be a good fit in this case, because it allows us to study a possible change in individual attitudes before and after the intervention. Moreover, the main interest of the study is to detect a theoretical expectation within an 'experimental' group, not to generalise the outcomes to a general population.

The parliamentary election series contains questions about the extent to which respondents regard several Dutch politicians to be trustworthy as prime minister. The survey question is posed as a statement, in the following form: "<politician> *is trustworthy (would be trustworthy) as prime minister*", whereas respondents are asked to rate seven Dutch politicians on a scale of 1 to 5². This method to measure a respondents' (dis)agreement with a certain premise using a five-point scale is called a Likert item, which is commonly used in social sciences (Croasmun and Ostrom, 2011, p. 19). In this case, the higher the respondent rates the politician, the more trustworthy the respondent considers him as prime minister. Trustworthiness is considered to be a very good indicator of approval of the head of government, as trust is one of the main pillars of leadership (Hetherington, 2005, p. 9; Gomibuchi, 2004, p. 27).

² In this case, scale scores of 1 to 5 respectively stand for "not applicable at all", "not so applicable", "neutral", "somewhat applicable" and "fully applicable" which counts for an ascending scale - scale scores go from low to high.

The study examines two surveys that include the question about trustworthiness: the first one between 10 and 13 February (considered the *pretest*); the second one between 9 and 13 March 2017 (considered the *posttest*). There are a few implications to this data that should be discussed. Firstly, as described in the case selection section³, the pinnacle of the conflict happened on 11 March around 12h00. Hence, only respondents that filled in the posttest survey after that particular moment are included in the main analysis. Secondly, the period between the pretest and posttest is substantive. This makes it difficult to rule out other possible drivers for a change in attitude, especially in a period of campaigning.

The main analysis is based on a Paired Samples T-Test, considering the aim is to measure whether the approval rate of Prime Minister Rutte of a month before the diplomatic conflict with Turkey, differs from the approval rate after the conflict, within this particular group of respondents. To give the *rally* hypothesis more explanatory power, it is also relevant to conduct a Independent Samples T-Test, whereas two posttest groups are compared – respondents that answered the query about Prime Minister Rutte before (Group 1) and after (Group 2) March 11, 12h00. Prior to conducting the Independent Samples T-Test, a matching procedure is carried out, where cases in Group 1 and Group 2 are matched based on sex, age category, level of education and their party choice of 2012. This method is called Propensity Score Matching and is considered a good tool to increase the ability to draw causal inferences using observational data (Li, 2012, p. 189). By matching cases on several variables, this study tries to limit biased results due to wrongly compared respondents. Based on the outcomes of these statistical tests, the research is able to corroborate or reject the *rally* hypothesis.

³ See Table 1.1. Overview of the Dutch-Turkish conflict.

The subsequent hypothesis that is tested is the *politicians* hypothesis, which tests whether the approval ratings of other politicians also increase after a rally event. Theory on the rally 'round the flag effect in parliamentary systems suggests that this particular political system makes it plausible that rally events also affect the approval of other politicians, as responsibility is more diffused. The *politicians* hypothesis is tested in the same way as the *rally* hypothesis, comparing a pretest and a posttest observation of a particular group, by conducting a Paired Samples T-Test. Again, only respondents that filled in the posttest survey after 11 March 12h00 are included in this test. The statement question "<politician> is trustworthy (would be trustworthy) as prime *minister*" is used to compare the pretest and posttest approval ratings of six other party leaders provided by I&O data; Lodewijk Asscher (PvdA), Geert Wilders (PVV), Sybrand Buma (CDA), Emile Roemer (SP), Alexander Pechtold (D66) and Jesse Klaver (GroenLinks). The pretest and posttest approval ratings of these politicians is compared through a stacked design, which means the n for this test is bigger. Based on the results of a Paired Samples T-Test and an Independent Samples T-Test, the study analyses whether other politicians enjoy a popularity peak after the conflict with Turkey. The outcomes of these statistical tests lead to the corroboration or rejection of the politicians hypothesis.

The *party support* hypothesis tests whether the VVD gained support between pretest and posttest. First, the percentages of support for the VVD within the researched group are compared. Another survey question from the parliamentary election series is used, which asks respondents which party they are planning to vote for at the parliamentary elections. An extensive list of parties is provided, of which they choose one; party choice counts as a nominal, categorical variable. Only respondents that filled in the survey after 11 March 12h00 were considered in the analysis. To clarify, this part

of the hypothesis does not ultimately attributes a potential increase in support for the VVD entirely to the Dutch-Turkish conflict; it is more of a contextual factor important to report. Subsequently, a binary logistic regression analysis is conducted, to support the suggestion that a stronger approval of Rutte is a relevant predictor for a (planned) vote for the VVD. The outcomes of these analyses provide sufficient information to corroborate or reject the *party support* hypothesis.

By testing the *patriotism* hypothesis, the thesis explores whether the rally effect is greater for patriots, as patriotism is considered a salient factor in predicting political behaviour (Parker, 2010, p. 97). In other words, the hypothesis looks whether people with indicated patriotic attitudes show a stronger increase of approval of the Prime Minister. As patriotism and negative attitudes regarding immigration and a multicultural society are closely related, a statement question of an earlier survey series is used to determine respondents' patriotic position⁴: "Muslims and other ethnic minorities should fully adjust to the Dutch way of life". Applying a linear regression, the hypothesis expects a positive relationship between patriotism and the observed rally effect, where higher levels of patriotism correlate with a stronger increase in approval of Prime Minister Rutte.

⁴ This statement question was posed in a survey from January 2017. Scale scores of 1 to 5 respectively stand for "totally disagree", "mostly disagree", "neutral", "agree to a large extent" and "totally agree".

Results

The *rally* hypothesis is tested through a Paired-Samples T-Test, that compares the mean pretest and mean posttest approval rating of Mark Rutte. This is a well-fitted analytical tool for 'one-group pretest-posttest' research designs, as it allows one to analyse different measurements of the same sample. Following the hypothesis, the expectation is that the mean approval rating of Prime-Minister Mark Rutte after the conflict (posttest), is higher than the mean approval rating in February, during the pretest. Table 2.1 contains some descriptive characteristics about the composition of the researched group. The charts in Figure 2.1 present how this group assessed the Dutch governments' course of action regarding the conflict with Turkey, to provide more relevant conflict-related context⁵. Table 2.2 presents the results of the Paired-Samples T-Test.

S	Sex		Age			Level of education			
Male	Female	18-30 years	31-50 years	51+ years	Low	Medium	High		
101	104	11	53	141	30	60	115		
n =	205		n = 205			n = 205			





It is right that the Dutch government did not permit Turkish ministers to speak in the Netherlands (n=205)



⁵ In the survey moment following the pinnacle of the conflict, respondents were presented several statements. They were asked to indicate their position regarding each statement, from a Likert scale item of 1 to 5, respectively corresponding to categories "totally disagree", mostly disagree", "neutral", "agree to a large extent" and "totally agree".

Pro	etest	Pos	ttest		95% CI Diffe	for Mean erence		
М	SD	М	SD	n	Lower	Upper	t	df
3,29	1,34	3,41	1,31	205	0,01	0,23	2,05*	204

 Table 2.2 Paired Samples T-Test for approval rating of Prime Minister Rutte

*** p<0,001; ** p<0,01; * p<0,05

The results in Table 2.2 show a significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean approval rating: within the studied group, the mean approval rating of Rutte appears to have increased from 3,29 to 3,41. On average, posttest ratings were 0,12 points higher than pretest ratings, indicating a small, but significant increase.

As explained in the previous section of the thesis, an Independent Samples T-Test was also conducted. In this test, two groups were compared; Group 1 filled in the survey before 11 March 12h00; Group 2 filled in the survey after 11 March 12h00. Some descriptive characteristics about this group are presented in Table 2.3. The results of the Independent Samples T-Test are presented in Table 2.4.

	S	ex		Age		Level of education			
	Male	Female	18-30	31-50	51+ years	Low	Medium	High	
Group 1	53,5%	46,5%	7,9%	27,1%	65,0%	14,0%	24,6%	61,4%	
Group 2	54,4%	45,6%	9,0%	28,8%	62,2%	14,7%	25,4%	59,9%	

Table 2.3 Descriptive characteristics

 Table 2.4 Independent Samples T-Test for approval of Prime Minister Rutte

Before	Group 1 11 March 1	2h00	C After 11	Froup 2 March 12	:h00	95% CI Diffe	for Mean erence		
М	SD	n	М	SD	n	Lower	Upper	t	df
3,27	1,38	443	3,49	1,29	536	0,39	0,05	-2,59*	915,76

*** p<0,001; ** p<0,01; * p<0,05

Results of the Independent Samples T-Test show a significant mean difference between Group 1 and Group 2. Through Propensity Score Matching based on gender, age category, level of education and party choice of 2012, the study has tried to create comparable groups. On average, approval ratings of Prime Minister Rutte were 0,22 points higher for Group 2 than for Group 1. In other words, the posttest mean approval rating of Prime Minister Rutte was 0,22 points higher in the days after March 11 12h00, than before. Based on the Paired Samples T-Test and the Independent Samples T-Test, the *rally* hypothesis is corroborated; the approval of the head of government increases after a rally event.

By testing the *politicians* hypothesis, the research tries to analyse whether other politicians also enjoy an increase in approval after a rally event. This hypothesis is tested in a similar way to the *rally* hypothesis; through a Paired Samples T-Test and through an Independent Samples T-Test. The approval ratings of the politicians are tested in a stacked design. The results are presented in Table 2.5 and Table 2.6.

Table 2.5 Paired Samples	T-Test for approval	l rating of other	politicians
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Pr	etest	Pos	ttest		95% CI Diffe	for Mean rence		
М	SD	М	SD	n	Lower	Upper	t	df
2,93	1,31	2,92	1,31	1137	-0,04	0,07	0,46	1136

*** p<0,001; ** p<0,01; * p<0,05

Table 2.6 Independent Samples T-Test for approval rating of other politicians

Group 1 Before 11 March 12h00		After	Group 2 After 11 March 12h00			or Mean ence			
М	SD	n	М	SD	n	Lower	Upper	t	df
2,95	1,34	10572	2,94	1,35	3104	-0,04	0,07	0,50	13674

*** p<0,001; ** p<0,01; * p<0,05

Table 2.5 presents the mean pretest and posttest approval rating of other politicians, which shows no significant difference. Results of the Independent Samples T-Test Table, as shown in Table 2.6, also show no significant difference between Group 1 and Group 2. Based on these results, the study rejects the *politicians* hypothesis; there is no evidence found to support the theoretical expectation that the approval of other politicians, besides the Prime-Minister's, increases after a rally event.

The focus of the *party support* hypothesis is to test whether the support for the ruling party increases after a rally event. The first step is to compare the percentages of support for the VVD during the pretest and during the posttest, which are presented in Table 2.7. The additional expectation that is tested, is the positive relationship between stronger support for the head of government and a planned vote for the ruling party. This is tested through a binary logistic regression. Although this tests a relation that is to be expected, it helps to explore the mechanism of rally effects translating into support for the ruling party. The results are presented in Table 2.8.

	e and arter	the funce	y connet	voung v v D				
Perc	centages of	voters pla	nning to vote	Approval of PM Rutte	exp(B)	Wald		
	VVD	other party	don't know yet	Total	Model (n = 211)	10,23	18,56***	
Pretest (n=211)	9%	73%	18%	100%	Chi ²	49 04***		
Posttest (n=211)	11,4%	77,7%	10,9%	100%	Nagelkerke R ²	0,42		
Difference	+2,4%				*** p<0,001; ** p<0,01	; * p<0,05		

Table 2.7 Percentages of respondents planning to vote for	
the VVD before and after the Turkey conflict	

 Table 2.8 Binary logistic regression for chance of voting VVD

An analysis of the logistic regression presents a Chi² of 49,04 on 1 df. This test shows that using the approval of Prime Minister Rutte as predictor significantly increases our ability to predict a vote for the VVD at the parliamentary elections. The Nagelkerke R² indicates that the explanatory power of the model for a planned VVD vote is more than 40 percent. The exp(B) of 10,23 indicates a positive relationship – the higher the respondent rates Rutte, the more likely they are to vote for the VVD. The Wald-statistic shows that the approval rating has an significant influence on the chance of voting VVD. That being said, there has been found affirmative for the *party support* hypothesis. That is, support for the VVD seems to have increased between pretest and posttest. Moreover, the binary logistic analysis provided evidence to suggest that approval rating of Rutte is an important predictor for voting VVD. Based on these results, the *party support* hypothesis is supported.

The *patriotism* hypothesis tests whether the level of patriotism correlates positively with the change in approval rating of Prime Minister Rutte. The expectation is that rally effects are stronger for people that express more patriotic attitudes. Results are presented in Table 2.9.

Table 2.9
Linear regressionDependent variableChange in approval of PM RutteIndependent variableModel 1Level of patriotism0,26*
(0,11)n75Adjusted R20,05

Unstandardised coefficients and standard error; *** p<0,001; ** p<0,01; * p<0,05

The model presents the relation between the level of patriotism and the change in approval of Prime Minister Mark Rutte. The model shows that the relation between the level of patriotism and the change in approval of Prime Minister Rutte is relatively weak, yet significant. The Adjusted R^2 of 0,05 indicates that 5 percent of the mutation in approval of Prime Minister Rutte can be explained through the variance in patriotism. The coefficient of 0,26 indicates a positive relationship: a higher patriotism score relates to a stronger change in approval rating. In other words: it seems that people that show more patriotic attitudes, also show a stronger rally effect. Based on the sufficient grounds of significance, this study corroborates the *patriotism* hypothesis: a rally effect seems stronger for people that show more patriotic characteristics.

Conclusion and discussion

To rally 'round a flag – to collectively evaluate the head of government better after a sudden, high-profile international conflict, crisis of incident. The phenomenon is well-known among social scientists, yet existing literature is fairly limited in geographic terms. An overwhelming part of prevalent *rally research* is focused on the United States, studying severe terror attacks or long-term wars. A theoretical exploration of the rally 'round the flag effect provides relevant insights on this one-sidedness. Apart from its original foundations being focussed on the American system in particular (Mueller 1970), studying the effect in a presidential system is convenient, given the clear separation of responsibility.

However, rally *events* occur all over the world, in political systems of all kinds. Referring to the above-mentioned responsibility question, it is important to extend the knowledge of rally effects in contexts where power and responsibility are much more diffused, and with that, complex. This thesis has tried to narrow this academic gap by addressing one of the most prominent questions in the field: *How do diplomatic* conflicts influence the popularity of the head of government in parliamentary systems? In order to answer this question, four hypotheses were drawn up, each one testing a certain effect or mechanism related to rally 'round the flag effects in parliamentary systems. The case selection section presents the deliberate choices that were made in choosing the Dutch-Turkish conflict of March 2017 as a case – with regards to the Netherlands as a parliamentary, multi-party system with an volatile electorate, and the considerable proximity of the parliamentary elections of 2017. Therefore, any change the Dutch-Turkish conflict may have caused is worth looking into, for the long-term consequences it may have had. As this particular case had only received speculating attention, this study has pursued to approach it academically.

The first and main hypothesis tested was the *rally* hypothesis, as literature on rally effects suggests that rally events affect the approval of the head of government. The results of the Paired Samples T-Test indicate that the approval rating of Prime Minister Rutte had increased, comparing data from (a month) before the Dutch-Turkish conflict, and from right after its pinnacle. As discussed in the operationalisation of the hypothesis, the period between pretest and protest of approximately a month is important to consider as well, since parliamentary elections were coming up and politicians had been campaigning actively. Therefore, an additional Independent Samples T-Test was also conducted, which showed a significant difference in approval of Prime Minister Rutte between the group that filled in the posttest survey right before, and the group that did so right after the pinnacle of the conflict. Based on these grounds, the *rally* hypothesis was supported – after a rally event, the approval of the head of government increases.

To further investigate assumptions about rally effects in a parliamentary system, the *politicians* hypothesis was tested. The theoretical expectation was that the approval of other politicians also increased, as institutional responsibility is more scattered in a parliamentary system, and therefore might be less clear to the public. Besides the aim to provide new insights about this presumed mechanism, testing this hypothesis was also important to potentially rule out strong campaign effects as a driver for popularity increases, which was identified as a serious counter argument of the rally hypothesis. After both a Paired Samples T-Test, as an Independent Samples T-Test, the *politicians* hypothesis was rejected, as there were no conclusive grounds to assume that the rally event had led to rally effects for other politicians than the Prime Minister.

The subsequent hypothesis that was tested was the *party support* hypothesis. Descriptive results showed an increased support for the VVD, comparing pre- and posttest data. However, these are no sufficient grounds to bluntly corroborate the party support hypothesis, as the intermediary period between pretest and posttest should again be acknowledged for. It is more likely that campaigning effects and other contextual factors attribute to the increased support for the VVD. Essentially, the most relevant aspect of testing this hypothesis, was to support the expectation that approval rating of Prime Minister Rutte served as a predictor for a vote for the VVD. A logistic regression analysis provided significant evidence to support this assumption. Testing this hypothesis, the research did not assign a particular part of the increase to the conflict solely, but the *party support* mechanism is still important to consider, as it hints at the the translation of rally effects into electoral support.

The final hypothesis that was tested, was the *patriotism* hypothesis. This hypothesis aimed at investigating whether patriotic people showed stronger rally effects, as theory suggested patriotism is a strong factor guiding political behaviour and attitudes. After conducting a linear regression analysis, the *patriotism* hypothesis was supported, as the positive relationship showed significance (p<0,05). Nevertheless, there

are some considerable implications to this hypothetical outcome. First of all, the sample for this linear regression was very small (N=75), as it relied on paired, completed surveys from different waves. Secondly, this study operationalises patriotism by one indicator, while it should be noted that, as it is a complex characteristic, embodies more than merely ones position on multiculturalism. However, considering the main purpose of the research is to observe and confirm theory-derived expectations within a particular group, rather than generalising upon a population, corroboration of the *patriotism* hypothesis remains right.

In the quest for a proper answer to the question *How do diplomatic conflicts influence the popularity of the head of government in parliamentary systems?*, this research has found confirmative evidence of a rally 'round the flag effect after the Dutch-Turkish conflict in March 2017. The study found a small, yet significant increase in approval for Prime Minister Rutte after the occurrence of the conflict through different methods. Although this observed increase seems like an answer in itself, it also raises valid questions about the stand-alone impact of rally effect; what are the practical consequences of such a slight increase in approval?

However, the stand-alone impact of an effect is hardly ever studied; consequences are context dependent and rarely happen in isolation. Therefore, results of this study should be placed into righteous context too. The *rally* hypothesis found a rally 'round the flag effect; the *party support* hypothesis provided support for the expectation that a higher approval rating correlates positively with the chance of voting VVD. Although the effective impact of rally effects is by some considered debatable, considering its undisputed brief duration (Baum 2002; Brody 1991), the Dutch-Turkish *rally* stands out, as the parliamentary elections of 2017 fall within the theoretical

margins of the effect – the so-called peak. Taking into account that this study observed a rather sudden increase in approval during a politically and electorally defining time frame – with the conflict evoking an unforeseen, strong manifestation of power by the Prime Minister – has given the conclusions and implications of this study more confirmatory strength. Concluding, once again referring to the the "power of the situation" principle (Lambert et al., 2010, p. 886), this study would like to contribute to the suggestion that the rally 'round the flag effect could have practical consequences, if only 'timed right'. Here lie important opportunities for follow-up research, especially when the political system is characterised by large numbers of parties and a volatile electorate. This calls for further studies into the mechanisms and consequences of rally effects in parliamentary systems; as some might prove to be merely indicative, yet others might turn out to be electorally determinative.

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