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Master Thesis
The Dutch Socialist Party: Susceptible to change?
An analysis of the SP's Populist and Eurosceptic degree

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Abstract

The Dutch Socialist Party (SP) has often been categorised as a populist and (soft) Eurosceptic party. Lately, however, the party's Eurosceptic and populist degree have been called into question. Some scholars claimed that the party's Euroscepticism is becoming ambiguous, whereas others diverge on the SP's populist nature. Some scholars (i.e., March, 2011; Otjes and Louwerse, 2015) claim that the SP is a populist party portraying the main characteristics of anti-elitism and people-centrism. Others in contrast, stress that the SP is not populist (e.g., Lucardie & Voerman, 2012). Accordingly, this research elaborates on two issues. First, a better understanding is grasped towards the party's Eurosceptic and populist views. This is done alongside the frameworks provided by Vasilopoulou (2018), Keith (2017), Mudde, (2004) and Hameleers (2018). Secondly, this research examines whether the party has been shifting in its populist and Eurosceptic degree over the past few years in which emphasis is placed on the timeframe 2014-2021. As a result, the research question central to this thesis is: *How can the Eurosceptic and populist character of the SP be understood and in what ways did the party shift in their Eurosceptic and populist degree between 2014 and 2021?* Qualitative methods in the form of content analysis have accordingly been employed. Party manifestos and additional primary sources such as speeches and electoral campaigning videos have been selected and analysed. Based on the analysis of the main sources, the final results of this thesis reveal that the SP can be categorised as conditional Eurosceptic and populist. The party shows a constant Eurosceptic level, but its populist degree is shifting constantly. This seems to be a result both electoral success, poor electoral performances and party leadership change.

List of abbreviations

AA: Association Agreement

EMU: European Monetary Union

EU: European Union

EP: European Parliament

ECB: European Central Bank

RLP: Radical-left parties

SP: Socialist Party

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1. Introduction

The Netherlands has observed a substantial rise in radical-right populist parties over the past few years.[1] This rise was *inter alia* marked by the victory of Dutch political party Forum for Democracy in the 2019 elections when they obtained 12 seats in the First House. Subsequently, during the 2021 national elections, the growth of radical-right populist parties continued; these parties had never won so many seats in the Dutch Parliament. The rise of these parties has accordingly often resulted in abundant research focusing on the rise and populist nature of the radical right (e.g., Art, 2013; Rooduijn, 2015; Muis, 2017). Various scholars found that the rise of the radical right can be gauged in part by the various crises that have impacted the EU in the past decade (Braun et al., 2019). Steinmayr (2016), Revija (2017), and Braun et al. (2019), for example, argue that the crises, such as the economic and migrant crises, have accelerated the rise of the radical right, hardened the parties' Eurosceptic stances, and increased their populist nature.

Although most scholars have narrowed their focus on radical right parties, the radical left appears to be an understudied research field.[2] In the Netherlands, this particularly applies to the Dutch Socialist Party (SP), who has often been named as radical left by scholars such as, Otjes and Louwere (2013), Meijers (2017) and Bohemen et al., (2019). When investigating the academic literature, it becomes evident that less attention has been devoted to this party than its radical-right counterpart: Party for Freedom. This has resulted in some questions concerning the party's populist and Eurosceptic nature being unanswered. To this day, the Eurosceptic and populist degrees of the SP are rather 'fuzzy'. Where Kaniok and Hloušek (2019) classify the SP as soft Eurosceptic, Pirro and Kessels (2018) regard the degree of Euroscepticism in the party to be becoming somewhat ambiguous. This therefore raises the question of whether the party has been changing in its Eurosceptic attitude. The same also applies to the party's populist character. There are diverging views among scholars with respect to the SP's populist nature. Research by March (2011), Otjes and Louwerse (2015) and Otjes (2021) demonstrates that the SP can be categorised as populist. These scholars claim that the party still portrays the main features of anti-elitism.[3] Nevertheless, in their book *Populisten in de Polder*, Lucardie and

[1] The radical right is often characterised by forms of nativism, populism and authoritarianism (see Mudde, 2007).

[2] In this research the radical left is referred to political parties' rejecting socio-economic forms appertaining to capitalist standards (See March,2011).

[3] A more in-depth description of anti-elitism can be found in section 2.1.

Voerman (2012) no longer consider the SP as populist. This aligns with previous research by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011), which stresses that the SP portrays low levels of anti-elitism. Accordingly, based on these findings, Kessels (2015) claimed that the populist degree of the SP is susceptible to change.

To scrutinize the claims made by Kessels (2015) about the SP's populist nature and Kessels and Pirro (2018) concerning the party's Eurosceptic nature, this research examines the party's populist and Eurosceptic character and analyses the extent to which the party has shifted in its populist and Eurosceptic positions since 2014. The main research question central to this research is therefore as follows: *How can the Eurosceptic and populist character of the SP be understood and in what ways did the party shift in their Eurosceptic and populist degree between 2014 and 2021?* Consequently, this research thus focuses on the SP's populist and Eurosceptic nature from the 2014 European Parliament (EP) election to the recent 2021 Dutch national elections. This timeframe has not yet been examined by scholars, given that most research focuses on the years before 2014. Hence, by focusing on this timeframe, a more significant understanding of the party's recent developments with respect to its Eurosceptic positions and populist nature can be acquired.

By *inter alia* focusing on both the populist and Eurosceptic levels of the party, this research tests whether the SP's populist and Eurosceptic characteristics are susceptible to change. It is expected that the SP has shifted in both its levels of populism and Euroscepticism. This researcher presumes that the party's Eurosceptic stance has hardened, whereas its populist character has gradually diminished between 2014 - 2021. To see if this is indeed the case, the second chapter of this paper *inter alia* discusses the concepts of populism, Euroscepticism and the reasons why political parties shift in their positions. The third chapter addresses and explains the methodology used for this research. The fourth chapter subsequently analyses degrees of the party's populism and Euroscepticism, followed by the extent to which the party has shifted in their Eurosceptic and populist degree. The final chapter then provides the conclusion and some recommendations for further research.

2. Literature Review

This literature review critically discusses notions of populism, Euroscepticism, the relationship between both concepts and the underlying causes behind why parties shift. In the first section, populism is explained alongside the frameworks of Laclau (2005) Mudde (2004; 2007) and Hameleers (2018). The next section then enumerates on the most relevant theories of (party-based) Euroscepticism. Theories addressed include those proposed by Taggart and Szcerbiak (2002), Kopecky and Mudde (2002), Flood and Usherwood (2005), and Vasilopoulou (2011; 2018). The final sections then elaborate on the relationship between Euroscepticism and populism, and shifting party positions highlighting the main reasons why parties shift.

2.1. Populism

Populism is derived from the Latin word *populus* which directly translates to 'people'. It is a concept that has been broadly used but also simultaneously contested. According to Gidron and Bonikowski (2014, p. 1), populism 'has been based on political, economic, social and discursive features'. It is a concept that has been analysed from different theoretical angles, where different forms of methodologies have been used. Scholars in this field have proposed a plethora of definitions. For example, Laclau (2005) and Weyland (2001) refer to populism as a discursive style, whereas Mudde (2004) and Abs and Rummens (2007) identify populism as an ideology. When closely considering the academic debate among European scholars of party politics, a distinction can *inter alia* be established between populism as a discursive style and populism as an ideology.

One scholar who defines populism as a discursive style is Laclau (2005). In his book *On Populist Reason*, populism is defined as a discursive style characterised by the distinction of 'us' versus 'them'. Laclau (2005) argues that populists construe certain societal groups as 'the people' (us) who are set against the 'cruel other' (them). According to Gildron and Bonikowski (2014, p. 2), this should be considered as 'a mode of identification in which the relations between its form (the people as signifier) and its content (the people as signified) is given by the very proves of naming – that is, of establishing who the enemies of the people (and therefore the people itself) are'. Based on this view, populism is a status-quo discourse which should be considered a form of politics. However, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012, p. 7) criticise Laclau's (2005) definition for being too abstract and vague, leading to a loss of its analytic utility.

Instead, the scholars claim that populism should be defined as a 'thin-centred ideology' since populists only address a small number of topics. In contrast to Laclau, Mudde (2004, p. 543) defines populism as: 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argued that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people'.

In a later study with Rovira-Kaltwasser (2012; 2018), Mudde reaffirms his idea of the pure people versus the corrupt elite. The authors claim that populist parties often perceive the people as the epitome of a society's democratic morality, whereas the elite is perceived as those undermining the will of the people and depriving them of their economic and political needs out of selfish grounds (Mudde and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2018; Hameleers and Vliegenthart, 2019). However, among populist parties, there are differences in how the elite is perceived. For example, some populist parties consider mainstream parties and the ruling government as the elite, whereas others refer to the elite as wealthy big business and the rich (Mudde and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2018). Based on Mudde's definitions of the pure people and the corrupt elite, the concept of populism can be divided into two core features: people-centrism and anti-elitism. People-centrism refers to the so-called 'will of the people'. Parties categorised as populist often present themselves as representatives of this will. Topaloff (2012) claims that populist parties attempt to represent this will by initiating referendums; this is considered crucial to express the people's will. Populist parties therefore often advocate for direct forms of democracy ensuring that 'the people' are heard and will have a greater say in decision-making processes (Rooduijn, 2012; Taggart 2000). However, anti-elitism refers to a division between the people on the one hand and the corrupt elite on the other. Mudde (2007) claims that parties categorised as anti-elitist often condemn the ruling elite because they hamper the people's *volonté générale*.

Mudde's aforementioned definition of populism has been applauded for being generic and minimal. For example, de la Torre and Mazzoleni (2019) claim that Mudde's definition facilitates in diminishing the complexities of populism as a concept. This is considered ideal for avoiding conceptual disagreements. Nevertheless, the same authors also claim that reducing the complexities of populism as a concept has its limitations. Mudde's (2004; 2007) definition is based on the idea that populism is an ideology. However, there is no consensus among scholars that populism is in fact an ideology. For example, Ostiguy et al., (2021) perceive populism as a form of representation and political style, whereas Aslanidis (2016, p. 98)

describes populism as ‘a discursive frame’. According to Aslanidis (2016), within Mudde’s definition, there are only two options: political parties are populist or not. Aslandis therefore stresses that ‘the ideological perspective inherently abhors “degreeism” and refrains from any quantification of the phenomenon that would expose intragroup variations’ (ibid., p. 92).

Despite voiced criticism, Mudde’s definition has been influential. Many researchers (e.g., Pauwels and Rooduijn, 2015; Bernhard et al., 2018, and Vasilopoulou et al., 2013) have relied upon Mudde’s conceptual framework. Scholars agree that Mudde’s conceptualisation is operationalisable and clear. Consequently, for the purpose of this research, Mudde’s conceptualisation is deemed most useful. This research therefore defines populism as a thin-centred ideology, consisting of people-centrism and anti-elitism. According to Rooduijn (2013), when using this definition, it is important to note that ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ can be referred to in various ways. Parties for example, can refer to the people as hardworking citizens, whereas the elite can be referred to as banks. Rooduijn therefore stresses that parties do not have to specifically mention the elite for them to be anti-elitist. Hence, an additional framework to Mudde’s definition is added to this research. Mudde’s definition of anti-elitism does not specify the various forms of the elite. As stressed before, the elite can be referred to in different ways. Accordingly, this thesis shall utilise an additional conceptualisation created by Hameleers (2018).

According to Hameleers (2018), the elite and the notion of anti-elitism can be divided into four categories of anti-elite populism: anti-establishment, anti-economic elite, anti-expert, and antimedia. The first category aligns with Mudde’s definition. In this categorisation the elite is perceived as the established political order (e.g., the ruling government), which is often blamed for not representing the *volonté générale.* The second category – anti-economic elite – refers to ‘opposition to profit-maximizing elites who threaten the material interest of ordinary hardworking citizens’ (Hameleers, 2018, p. 2175). Banks, managers, and large firms are accused of depriving the hardworking people of their needs and of broadening the ‘gap between the wealthy and poor’ (ibid.). The third type, on the contrary, perceives the elite as scientists and other experts who are being blamed for ‘relying on inaccurate top-down analyses of societal issues’ (Hameleers, 2018, p. 2176). Populist-opposing experts claim that the issues analysed do not reduce the societal problems faced by the people, whereas anti-experts claim that common people are more perceptive and better at initiating solutions for societal problems faced. Finally, the last categorisation is also known as antimedia populism. In this category, populists oppose

the traditional mass media that are accused of being untrustworthy and blamed for not representing the 'common man' and his/her needs (Hameleers, 2018).

2.2. Euroscepticism: Party-based

Now that the concept of populism has been illustrated, the next step is to examine Euroscepticism. Emphasis is placed on a Euroscepticism subset that relates to party-based Euroscepticism. Euroscepticism has various definitions and is often considered a relatively new concept. During the 1960s, scepticism towards European communities was often defined as nationalism, communism, or Gaullism (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004). Since the mid 1980s, the notion of Euroscepticism arose in the British press to voice criticism towards the European Monetary Union. In 1986, the term arose in British newspaper *The Times*, in which a Eurosceptic was defined as 'a person who is not enthusiastic about increasing the powers of the European Union' (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004, p. 15). Subsequently, the concept of Euroscepticism further developed in the 1990s to express opposition against the EU (Hooghe et al., 2002). Consequently, Taggart (1998, p. 366) was one of the first scholars to further conceptualise Euroscepticism through claiming that 'Euroscepticism expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified to the process of European integration'.

In the years to follow, Euroscepticism has been further classified. Various scholars have aimed to provide theoretical conceptualisations of a party-based dimension, enabling researchers to assess and compare Eurosceptic positions within political parties. Therefore, Taggart further developed his definition with Szczerbiak in 2002 to provide a theoretical party-based conceptualisation. They created a model that encompasses both 'hard' and 'soft' Euroscepticism, which was later refined in 2008. In short, hard scepticism refers to upright opposition to the EU and the European integration project in its entirety. Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) stress that this type of scepticism can be located in parties that favour withdrawal from EU membership. Soft scepticism refers to political parties that do not necessary oppose EU membership and/or European integration. Instead, soft Eurosceptics have concerns on some policy areas that could collide with one's national interest (ibid).

Taggart and Szczerbiak's model is often criticised for being too broadly and unclearly defined. For example, Kopecky and Mudde (2002) mainly criticise the soft Eurosceptic aspect. According to these scholars, this concept has been too broadly defined, meaning that the

slightest disagreement or opposition to the EU would be automatically classified as soft Euroscepticism (ibid.). Consequently, as a response to Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2002) model, Kopecky and Mudde (2002) developed a four-fold typology in which Euroscepticism is examined alongside two dimensions of support: diffuse and specific support. The diffuse dimension focuses on support for European integration, whereas the specific dimension relates to support for the EU project and its institutions. Between both dimensions, a distinction can be made between Europhiles and Europhobes (diffuse support) and EU optimists and EU pessimists (specific support). Europhobes oppose the process of European integration and its corresponding ideas, whereas Europhiles favour European integration. European Union optimists are satisfied with the current EU system and its functioning, whereas EU pessimists criticise the current functioning alongside the initial purpose of European integration (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002 p. 302). Based on the aforementioned scenario, Kopecky and Mudde developed a four-dimensional typology composed of the following: Euro-enthusiasts, Eurosceptics, Euro-pragmatics, and Euro-rejects.

In response to the criticism received, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008, p. 8) altered their conceptualisation. Hard Euroscepticism was redefined as 'principled opposition to the project of European integration as embodied in the EU'. Conversely, soft scepticism is conceptualised as 'not a principled objection to the European integration project of transferring powers to a supranational body such as the EU, in which opposition to the EU's current or future trajectory is based on the further extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make' (ibid.). Nonetheless, Topaloff (2012) argues that this refined model still has not been properly distinguished. According to the scholar, the definition provided could result in a mixed used of the hard and soft scepticism definition, which will 'continue to breed discussing and disagreement' (Topaloff, 2012, p. 26). In addition, Topaloff also critiques the typology provided by Kopecky and Mudde. Although this framework provides a more precise and inclusive definition than the hard/soft model, it is criticised for being too inclusive and insufficiently categorised. Topaloff (2012, p. 23), for example, claims that 'EU opposition also can either be because of too much or too little integration'.

On the contrary, Flood and Usherwood (2005) postulate that Kopecky and Mudde's model should be less inclusive, omitting the notion of Euroscepticism. Based on this, they formed their own typology in which a distinction has been made between six forms of opposition: rejectionist, minimalist, revisionist, gradualist, reformist, and maximalist (Flood & Usherwood, 2005, p. 6). Rejectionist Eurosceptics are characterised by their 'outright refusal of integration',

whereas revisionist include those that want 'to return to an earlier state' of European integration (ibid.). Gradualist on the contrary, favour further European integration provided it is done in a slow manner, whereas Maximalist want to push European integration 'as far and as fast as is feasible' (ibid). Reformist also favour furthering of European integration, but simultaneously advocate for redressing deficiencies. Finally, minimalists are those that accept the status quo, but oppose further European integration (ibid). Scholars (e.g., Leconte, 2010) argue that this typology has overcome the flaws of the model developed by Kopecky and Mudde. However, one of the disadvantages of such a typology is that a party can now easily be placed under different labels. For example, a party can be revisionist in their scepticism of one policy area but rejectionist in another area. Hence, the more complex and extensive a typology, the more difficult it is to classify a political party.

As seen in the previous section, all typologies as presented above have certain drawbacks. This particularly applies when one examines (radical) left-wing parties (RLPs). Charalambous (2011) and Halikopoulou et al. (2012) elaborate on Kopecky and Mudde's model when examining the radical-left. However, the findings of both scholars seem to be contradicting. For example, Charalambous discovered that RLPs are critical of the EU's present course. Nonetheless, they seem to gradually become more positive towards sovereignty pooling. The findings of Halikiopoulou et al., (2012), however showed that RLPs oppose further European integration and the pooling of sovereignty. Instead, the scholars stressed that RLPs emphasize issues such as self-determination and protecting one's national sovereignty. Based on these somewhat contradictory findings, it is thus necessary to use a framework that allows the researcher to adequately and accurately examine the SP's Eurosceptic degree.

One typology considered the most suited and tackling most of the drawbacks of the previously discussed theories is that of Vasilopoulou (2011; 2018). Vasilopoulou's framework was initially developed to classify radical right-wing parties. Nonetheless, Keith (2017, p. 90) claims that the typology '[…] was also designed to analyse the Eurosceptic patterns in different party families'. Vasilopoulou has based her framework on European integration and assesses a party's Eurosceptic position alongside four dimensions: culture, practice, principle, and future. The first element focuses on the extent to which political parties embrace that Europeans are bound by cultural and historical ties. However, for this research, the cultural dimension is omitted. According to Halikiopoulou et al. (2012), there is little to no evidence that left-wing parties base their Eurosceptic positions on cultural and ethnic forms. Instead, the SP's positions

are analysed alongside the principle, practice, and future dimensions. The principle focuses on the extent to which parties are willing to cooperate across the EU and the extent to which they want to cooperate multilaterally. Vasilopoulou (2018, p. 9) also defines this as 'the wish and willingness for any type of cooperation at a European level, not necessarily the one embodied by the EU'. The practice of European integration refers to the EU's institutional framework, forms of EU decision-making, and EU policies. Accordingly, Vasilopoulou (2018, p. 19) states that, 'opposition to the practice of European integration becomes opposition to the policy aspect of the EU'. Finally, the future concentrates on the extent to which a party favours further creation of 'an ever-closer union' (Vasilopoulou, 2018, pp. 18–22).

Based on the above-mentioned dimensions, three types of Euroscepticism can be distinguished: rejectionist, conditional, and comprising. Comprising Eurosceptics are those being critical of further European integration, but who simultaneously applaud the EU for the economic benefits and economic progress made. However, to understand a RLP's position, comprising Euroscepticism is, according to Keith (2017, p. 90), '[…] less useful for understanding the current position … than it does for parties of the radical right'. Accordingly, comprising Euroscepticism is therefore replaced with an expansionist/integrationist category. According to Keith (2017, p. 90), parties falling under this scope, 'accept the principle of European cooperation, reject the current decision-making process ... but want further supranational division making in terms towards a federal socialist Europe'. Rejectionist Eurosceptics on the contrary, favour EU withdrawal and advocate for policy regulation at the national level. The main aim of parties falling under this categorisation is to restore one's national sovereignty. Whereas rejectionists favour EU withdrawal, conditional Eurosceptics favour the principle of EU integration and cooperation among member states on an EU-wide level. However, the future and practice of European integration are opposed. For example, conditional Eurosceptics feel that EU-wide cooperation has tripped; they oppose encroachment of one's national sovereignty by supranational decision-makers and blame the EU for being marked by too much supranationalism. Consequently, they advocate for more intergovernmental forms of cooperation in which the power of the supranational institutions, such as the Commission, is curtailed (Vasilopoulou, 2018, p. 24–31). At the same time, however, Vasilopoulou (2018, p. 29) stresses that conditional Eurosceptics do realize that 'particular issues cannot be resolved exclusively at the domestic level'. Keith (2017) has accordingly adapted Vasilopoulou's framework as follows:

Table 8.1 Typology of radical left Euroscepticism

	Rejectionist	*Conditional*	*Expansionist/Integrationist*
Principle of European integration/cooperation	Against	In favour	In favour
Practice of European cooperation	Against	Against	Against
Future of European integration/cooperation	Against	Against	In favour

Source: Adapted from Keith, D. (2018)

Having discussed the notions of populism and Euroscepticism, the next part of this chapter briefly elaborates on the relationship between both concepts and discusses the underlying reasons why political parties shift in their positions. The aim of this research is to explore the populist and Eurosceptic nature of the SP and to examine whether they have shifted. Hence, if the SP has shifted in their degree of populism and/or Euroscepticism, the question that remains is why? Accordingly, this research further elaborates on party position shifts theories in the upcoming sections.

2.3. Populism and Euroscepticism

Having defined both the concepts of populism and Euroscepticism, the question that remains is how both concepts are related. As seen in the previous established sections, both Euroscepticism and populism are widely contested concepts entailing various explanations. Despite the extensive research on both notions, research on the relationship between both concepts has not received the same amount of attention. A few scholars (i.e., Harmsen, 2010; Leconte, 2015), have aimed to explain the relationship between both concepts. What clearly emerges from the academic debate is that parties labelled Eurosceptic, are also often considered populist and vice versa. For example, Taggart and Szcerbiak (2000) found that it is almost impossible to be a populist party and not Eurosceptic. Sitter (2002) confirms this idea and claims that there is a strong link between Euroscepticism and populist parties. This is in line with later research by Harmsen (2010) and Kneuer (2018) who stress that populist parties frequently address anti-EU rhetoric, and that Euroscepticism is gradually becoming a key characteristic of populist parties. Leconte (2015, p.256) even goes slightly further by claiming that Euroscepticism can in fact been seen as ‘a form of populism’.

In addition, Leconte claims that ‘European integration contributes to the emergence of populism’ (ibid). The explanation of this is two-fold. Kneuer (2018) and Pirro et al., (2018)

refer to the European crises (e.g., financial/debt, migration crises) as a driver of populist and Eurosceptic intertwining. Due to the EU crises, populist parties on both the right and left side of the political spectrum have shifted and adopted increased Eurosceptic stances. According to Pirro et al., (2018) populist parties have taken advantage of these crises by adopting an increased Eurosceptic and populist rhetoric. Gifford (2006), Leconte (2015) and Otjes and Louwerse (2015) on the contrary, point at the transfer of decision-making power. Leconte (2015, p.256) stresses that 'by shifting power upwards to the EU level, it enhances a widespread perception of powerless and irrelevant domestic political parties'. As a consequence, European integration results in an emergence of populist parties and it contributes 'to furthering populism as a protest-based anti-elite discourse'. Otjes and Louwerse (2015) also follow the same thought. According to both, the shifting power upwards result in a rise of populist parties. As a consequence, both claim that nowadays 'most populist in Europe can be classified Eurosceptic' (Otjes and Louwerse, 2015, p. 63). Nonetheless, this does not mean that populist parties are the only ones that can be Eurosceptic, since non-populist parties can also be Eurosceptic (Ultan & Ornek, 2015; Pirro et al., 2018).

2.4. Shifting party positions

Hence, based on the afore mentioned, it becomes clear that populism and Euroscepticism are often closely linked. As discussed above, the intertwining of populist parties and Euroscepticism can *inter alia* be explained alongside the EU crises (Pirro et al., 2018). The crises are argued to be one of the factors explaining why populist parties have shifted and adopted increased Eurosceptic stances. Populist parties, however, also seem to shift due to other reasons. One of such reasons includes that of electoral success. For example, Rooduijn et al., (2012) found that populist parties mitigate their populist views when they obtain electoral success. However, the scholars also claim that 'if populist parties have had hardly any success in previous elections, a populist party will campaign on a manifesto that is highly populist' (Rooduijn et al., 2012, p. 569). This is to a certain extent in line with Somer-Topcu (2009), Adams et al., (2006) and Schumacher et al. (2013) who discovered that parties are more likely to shift in response to a poor electoral performance. The more votes a party has lost in recent elections, the more likely a party is to shift.

In addition to the aforementioned, when observing political parties shifts more broadly, Budge (1994) claims that party positions are relatively stable and do not change greatly over time. According to Budge (1994), parties are less inclined to change their (policy) positions due to

the possible implications attached, such as voter and competitor responses. This aligns with research by Harmel and Janda (1994), who found that parties often resist change. Nevertheless, when parties shift, there are a variety of factors that seem to play a significant role. One factor relates to voter changes. For example, Adams et al. (2004; 2009) discovered that when party voters shift in their position, radical-left and right parties are more likely to alter their positioning too. However, shifts among voters' positions are not the only explanation.

Apart from issues such as voter shifts and electoral performance, issues such as governmental participation, public opinion, and internal party changes also play a role in shifting party positions. First, parties are more susceptible to change their position when they are part of the government. Meijers (2017) and Schumacher et al. (2013) determined that government parties have a greater chance of shifting positions than opposition parties due to their visibility. Moreover, public opinion also plays a decisive role. The role of public opinion in political party shifts has been extensively researched. Stimson et al. (1995) were among the first to study its role and found that parties alter their positions when public opinion is shifting away from the party's position. However, later research by Adams et al. (2004) determined that this does not necessarily apply to niche/populist parties. These parties are mainly susceptible to shifting positions among their voters and therefore respond less to shifting public opinion. They are, nonetheless, susceptible to shifts by rival parties and according to Fagerholm (2016, p. 506), more often react 'to positional shifts by rival parties'. Additionally, a final factor that should be named is 'internal party changes'. For example, Harmel et al. (1995) discovered that a change of leadership can impact the party's position. At the same time, the scholars stress that this does not mean that leadership change always results in shifting positions (Fagerholm, 2016). Hence, as the aforementioned has shown, political parties can shift due to various reasons. Accordingly, to ultimately examine the SP's (possible) shifts, the afore-mentioned reasons are taken into account and examined in the analysis section of this research.

3. Methodology

Having established the most relevant theories for this research, this chapter explains and discusses the research design and collected data for this thesis. The thesis builds on a qualitative content analysis design. By solely focusing on the SP as a single case study, more in-depth information on the party's populist and Eurosceptic views can be obtained. Accordingly, a better understanding can be grasped with regards to the diverging academic views concerning the SP's populist nature. The first section of this chapter therefore elaborates on the research design and selected primary sources. The subsequent section then explains the research process more thoroughly, followed by a brief discussion on the design's reliability and validity.

3.1. Research design and source collection

Hence, this research focuses on the Dutch political party SP. Given the diverging, and somewhat ambiguous views among scholars, the aim of this research is to obtain a better understanding of the SP's populist and Eurosceptic degree. Accordingly, this research scrutinizes how the party's populist and Eurosceptic degree can be understood, and subsequently analyses to what extent the party's Eurosceptic and populist views are susceptible to change. The period 2014 – 2021 is therefore selected as the timeframe for this study, given the various national and European elections that took place in this particular period of time. In addition, this timeframe allows the researcher to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the party's populist and Eurosceptic characteristics and possible shifts over the past few years. This is particularly important given that previous research has largely focused on the period before 2014. Hence to closely examine the SP, qualitative research methods in the form of an intrinsic case study were employed.

To obtain as much information as possible, this research focused on party manifestos, speeches, electoral campaigning videos and electoral debates. The thesis uses party manifestos given its reproducible nature. Mikhaylov et al., (2012), for example, consider the use of party manifestos as a reliable method offering a 'high quality of reproducibility'. Besides, manifestos are able to represent the party's view as a whole, and do not solely portray the views of the party leader and/or other affiliated politicians. The party manifestos 'Superstaat Nee, Samenwerken Ja', Pak de Macht', 'Breek de Macht van Brussel: Voor een rechtvaardige EU', and 'Stel een Daad' have each been analysed since they cover the party's stance in the 2014, 2017, 2019 and 2021 national and/or European elections. However, one problem that arose is that the 2017 (Pak de

Macht) and 2021 (Stel een Daad) manifestos were focused on national issues and did not devote much attention to the EU. This in itself was not problematic when assessing the populist degree of the SP. However, to critically assess the party's Eurosceptic degree, more information was needed. Consequently, to remedy this and obtain more information, other primary sources have been included to grasp as much as in-depth information as possible. Hence, additional primary sources such as speeches, campaigning videos, news items, and newsletters posted on the SP's official website were also analysed. Speeches *inter alia* involved party congress and campaigning speeches by former party leader Emile Roemer and current party leader Lilian Marijnissen.

Ensuring that a precise and reliable research is conducted, each of the sources used have been critically assessed by its biases and authenticity beforehand. Subsequently, a content analysis was employed to identify the central themes within the party manifestos, speeches and newsletters. According to Gläser and Laudel (2013, p. 1), a content analysis allows the researcher to 'extract the relevant information and separate it from the original text and process only relevant information'. Ensuring that relevant information was extracted, each of the utilised sources were analysed alongside the key themes of this research (Euroscepticism and populism). Once this step was completed, the identified issues were further subdivided into separate units and statements which included specific populist and/or Eurosceptic references. For example, to measure the Eurosceptic degree, units had to refer to issues such as economic governance, the EU, democracy, and sovereignty to name a few. When measuring the populist-degree, units referred to themes such as elite, Brussels, multinationals, and citizens. Consequently, each of these units have been adequately tagged and coded into the aforementioned categories. The MAXQDA software tool has ultimately been used to ensure a transparent coding, and to assess whether the texts match with the coding.

3.1.1. Content Analysis Populism and Euroscepticism

Although the above has slightly explained the method employed in this research, this section further elucidates the method used. For the analysis on populism, the frameworks by Mudde (2004) and Hameleers (2018) were employed which focus on the concepts of anti-elitism and people-centrism. As seen in the literature review, Mudde's framework has been critiqued by scholars such as de la Torre and Mazzoleni (2019) and Aslandis (2015). Nevertheless, the framework is also regarded as operationalisable and clear and thus is considered most suited for this research. In addition to Mudde's framework, Hameleers' typology has been employed.

Mudde's definition does not specify the concept of the elite, despite this notion deriving in various forms. Consequently, the framework of Hameleers (2018) has been employed to remedy the shortcoming of Mudde's definition. Hence, to examine whether the SP portrays signs of anti-elitism, references to 'the elite' have been critically assessed. However, in order to be classified as anti-elitist, a party does not have to specifically refer to this notion as such. Consequently, statements by the party have been critically analysed alongside Hameleers' framework who distinguishes between four categories: anti-establishment elite, antieconomic elite, antimedia and antiexpert. Based on these categorisations, each of the selected units and statements have been critically assessed.

The other populism aspect scrutinized is the notion of people-centrism. One aspect defining the concept of people-centrism is that of initiating referendums (see Topaloff, 2012). Therefore, the extent to which the party advocates for direct forms of democracy were examined. In addition, a critical assessment has been made to explore whether the SP presents itself as representatives of the *volonté générale*. As a result, it was important to identify how populist parties refer to 'the people' and to establish whether references to 'the people' explicitly refer to the concept of people-centrism. Statements and paragraphs of the sources employed have therefore been coded via the MAXQDA software tool, and subsequently assessed to see whether they are in line with the notion of people-centrism. Ultimately, based on the coding, a glossary has been generated which provides an overview as to how the SP refers to the people. The table below illustrates the words utilized by the SP:

Table 2. SP's references to 'the people'

We
The Dutch people
Our
Workers
Hardworking citizens
Citizens
People
Us

For the Eurosceptic degree, the identified units were analysed alongside the framework of Vasilopoulou (2018) and Keith (2017). As already mentioned in the literature review, Vasilopoulou's framework is considered the most suited since it addresses the drawbacks of other typologies. However, since the party being scrutinized in this paper involves a RLP, the adapted framework of Keith (2017) has been employed. The adjustments made by Keith ensure that the framework, provided by Vasilopoulou, is more suited to examine the SP. Based on this framework, each of the subdivided units were analysed alongside three dimensions of European integration: *the principle, practice and future*. Each of these dimensions were applied to assess the SP's Eurosceptic positions per electoral campaign, and to identify whether the party falls under the conditional, expansionist or rejecting categorisation. Hence, via this way the researcher was able to determine whether the selected units involved opposition towards the EU as a whole, opposition to political and economic integration of the EU, or opposition solely focusing on specific policy areas. Following this method, various arguments of the SP can accordingly be displayed, providing a full overview of the party's Euroscepticism.

3.1.2. Validity

Hence, the content analysis employed thus allows to critically and thoroughly assess the populist and Eurosceptic degree of the SP. By focusing on the timeframe selected and critically assessing both aspects, a good overview can be obtained as to whether the party has shifted in both its Eurosceptic and populist degree between 2014 – 2021. Accordingly, a better view can be grasped as to whether and why the SP's Eurosceptic and populist degree is susceptible to change. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the validity can, however, be questioned. For example, content analysis may be subjected to misinterpretations. According to McNamara (2006, p. 60), content analysis 'relies heavily on researcher reading and interpretation of texts'. To avoid misinterpretations, quantitative methods could have been employed by analysing the texts via computer coding. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this research qualitative methods are considered more suited to portray the variety of party positions and statements. Hence, in order to redress the issue of misinterpretation, quotations from the analysed primary sources have been used, illustrating the populist and Eurosceptic elements of the SP.

4.Analysis

4.1 Populism

This section analyses the extent to which the SP can be considered a populist party. Accordingly, it begins by analysing the 2014 EP elections, followed by the 2017 national elections, 2019 EP elections, and the 2021 national election. Whether and in which ways the SP is populist are examined. The frameworks of Mudde (2004; 2007) and Hameleers (2018) are employed to examine whether the party portrays the populist characteristics of people-centrism and anti-elitism.

4.1.1 2014 European Parliament election

Analysing the SP's 2014 manifesto reveals that the party can be categorised as an anti-economic elite populist party but cannot be categorised as people-centrist. Overall, it can be argued that the party's positions at this time do not align with the notion of people-centrism. As previously presented, people-centrism reflects a representation of the people's *volonté générale*. Populist political parties often aim to represent this by *inter alia* calling for more direct democracy in the form of introducing referendums. Topaloff (2012) considers this an important aspect of people-centrism. The SP's 2014 manifesto does not, however, contain any references to forms of direct democracy. It does reference the people, but these references are not in line with the notion of people-centrism.

Even though no traces of people-centrism are observed, the SP does demonstrate signs of anti-elitism. While the party's manifesto and relevant speeches do not specifically refer to the notion of 'the elite', they evidently reveal that the party's positions align with anti-economic elite populism. As stated before, anti-economic elite populism entails 'opposition to profit-maximizing elites who threaten the material interest of ordinary hardworking citizens' (Hamerleers, 2018, p. 2175). The analysis of the manifesto *inter alia* demonstrates that this form of populism was portrayed in the 2014 EP election. The party strongly opposes the EU's liberal capitalist character as well as the multinationals and banking sector. For example, banks and multinationals are frequently referred to as 'greedy' and 'depriving the diligent workers of their needs' (SP, 2014, p. 11). In addition, the party accuses both banks and multinationals of 'causing Dutch workers to end up in poverty due to the profit-obsessed banks and companies' (ibid., p. 13). Hence, it can be argued that these statements evidently align with the notion of

anti-economic elite populism as presented by Hameleers. Accordingly, the SP can be categorised as fulfilling the role of an anti-economic elite populist party in 2014.

4.1.2 2017 National elections

Although the SP could not be classified as people-centrist in the 2014 EP election, the 2017 election marked a shift. The manifesto and speech by former party leader Roemer reveal that the party could be classified as people-centrist. For example, in a 2017 speech, former party-leader Roemer stated the following: 'We, the SP, stand for radical togetherness. We help restore and bring back power to the people' (Roemer, 2017). Both the speech and 2017 manifesto place great emphasis on the people's will and direct forms of democracy. For example, in the manifesto's chapter with respect to the SP's position on the EU, the party states, 'Who is in charge? The citizens or the Brussels bureaucrats?' (SP, 2017, p. 53). Accordingly, the party advocates for a referendum to vote for a new EU treaty in which member states' independence is strengthened by enhancing public participation and transferring more powers to the member states. Furthermore, the party demands for the instalment of a corrective referendum on a national level to enhance and allow for greater participation of the people and to restore the 'gouged' democracy (SP, 2017, p. 7).

In addition, analysis of the speech and manifesto demonstrates that the SP's 2017 positions also align with anti-economic elite populism, which was also present in its 2014 position. The 2017 manifesto and speech of Roemer contain explicit references to notions of the elite and multiple references to the hardworking citizens. Banks, the rich, and multinationals are explicitly identified as elitist and 'neo-liberal robbers' that are pampered by the Dutch government (SP, 2017; Roemer, 2017). According to Roemer, the Dutch government has focused too much on a neoliberal ideology 'only to prevent the "powerful'' from losing their power, influence and wealth' (Roemer, 2017). Accordingly, the SP advocates for the power of this 'elite' to be reduced (SP, 2017, p. 5; Roemer, 2017). Hence, the SP can be categorised as a people-centrist and anti-economic elite populist party in its 2017 campaign.

4.1.3 2019 European Parliament Elections

As previously established, the SP's 2017 manifesto explicitly references the elite. Notions of both anti-elitism (anti-economic elite) and people-centrism can be observed. Both forms of populism were also present in their 2019 electoral campaign. People-centrism is observed

through the party repeatedly presenting itself as representative of ordinary, hard-working people. The party has perceived itself as able to accommodate the people's interest and to reduce the power of the capital. This is particularly reflected in a 2019 congress speech, in which party leader Marijnissen stated the following: 'We curb the power of the capital and enhance the power of the hard-working citizens' (Marijnissen, 2019). In addition, the party called for more direct democracy. For example, the SP strongly advocated for the introduction of a binding referendum to decide on future EU treaties and accordingly enhance the power of the people (SP, 2019; SP, 2019b; Marijnissen, 2019; Marijnissen 2019a)

Apart from these traces of people-centrism, the 2019 campaign also demonstrated signs of anti-elitism. The manifesto, speeches of the current party leader Lilian Marijnissen, and campaigning videos contain many references to the elite. A major difference in the 2019 campaign is that for the first time, the party explicitly refers to Brussels and The Hague as the political elite (SP, 2019; SP, 2019b). Opposition to Brussels and the political elite is well illustrated in the much-debated campaigning video, in which Commissioner Frans Timmermans is satirised and portrayed as the 'Brussels elite' (SP, 2019e). In addition to this video, the party made various statements in which it addressed Brussels as the political elite, which is blamed for serving the economic elite. In their manifesto, the party accuses Brussels of 'giving maximum mobility to the "big money" which mitigates the freedom and control of the ordinary people' (SP, 2019, p.7). The party further states the following:

The EU does not ensure economic and social progress for the people. Imposed legislation from Brussels particularly serves the economic elite. They help investors, bankers and large company executives to preserve uncontrolled globalisation. It therefore paves the way for their contemporary predatory capitalism. (SP, 2019, p. 8)

Apart from accusing Brussels of serving the economic elite, the SP also accuses The Hague of not listening to and not representing the people's will. This becomes clear from statements made in a 2019 speech in which Marijnissen argued the following: 'For years it has been evident that the people are tired of the EU's meddlesomeness and the internal market's dictates. The elite, however, did not want to listen to them' (Marijnissen, 2019a). To further illustrate her thought, Marijnissen indicated the 2016 referendum on the Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) and the 2005 'No' referendum as examples revealing that the people's will had been neglected.

Marijnissen (2019a) stated: ‘The people’s “No” vote has inconsiderately been set aside. The Hague’s elite has therefore degraded the Netherlands to a province of the European super state’.

In addition to multiple references made to the political elite, analysis of the 2019 campaign further reveals that the SP mainly presented itself as a protector of ordinary and hardworking people from the economic elite. Banks and multinationals were repeatedly presented as depriving the people and workers of their needs, and the political elite was further blamed for accommodating the economic elite. For example, the party stressed, ‘The EU still wants “mega” banks and is giving these banks the opportunity to gamble with our money’ (ibid.). Hence, the SP can be categorised as an anti-economic elite/anti-establishment populist and people-centrist party in 2019.

4.1.4. 2021 National elections

What becomes clear from the information presented in prior sections is that the SP has gradually portrayed populism to a greater degree and in more diverse manners. For example, the SP’s 2017 and 2019 campaign revealed the party as increasingly and explicitly referencing the notion of ‘the elite’. However, analysis of the 2021 campaign elucidates that the party does not specifically reference this notion currently. Nevertheless, analysing the party’s 2021 manifesto and other relevant sources (i.e., a 2021 campaigning video), still demonstrates that the party aligns with anti-economic elite populism. For example, the party continues to strongly oppose multinationals, banks, and the rich. In an online campaigning video, the party strongly advocates for ‘decreasing the gap between the rich and poor’ (SP, 2021b). Besides, emphasis is largely placed on curtailing the power of large companies in Brussels (SP, 2021a).

The 2021 campaign also demonstrates signs of people-centrism when the party underlines the role of the people and direct democracy. For example, the party states that ‘the people should always have the last say and be able to intervene in politics’ (SP, 2021, p. 9). Consequently, the SP advocates for the instalment of a binding referendum on a national, local, and provincial level to reverse certain laws. The same would apply to EU legislation that touches upon one’s national sovereignty and EU trade agreements (SP, 2021, p. 27). In these cases, the party feels that the people ‘should be involved and be able to voice their opinion’.

4.1.5. Preliminary conclusion: Susceptible to change

Hence, based on the information presented in previous sections, it can be argued that the SP is still a populist party that is shifting in its degree of populism. Table 2 provides a brief overview of the party's shifting positions.

Table 2

Year	**Categorisation**	**Shift?**
2014	Anti-economic elite	N/A
2017	People-centrist, anti-economic elite	Yes
2019	People-centrist, anti-establishment, anti-economic elite	Yes
2021	People-centrist, anti-economic elite	Yes

Overall, it can be argued that the populism analysis of the SP confirms the hypothesis based upon Kessels' (2015) research, claiming that the populist degree of the SP is susceptible to change. At the same time, it contradicts the researcher's expectation that the SP's populist character would gradually diminish. This analysis reveals that between 2014 and 2019, the SP has become more populist. In this particular period of time, the party has increasingly highlighted its role as representatives of the 'hardworking' people. Additionally, the party seems to have adopted increased anti-establishment views, which particularly became evident in the 2019 electoral campaign. Nevertheless, in the 2021 campaign, the party seems to have mitigated its populist views regarding their criticism of the establishment. The political elite, meaning Brussels and The Hague, were heavily criticised during the party's 2019 campaign, but the 2021 campaign mainly focuses on criticising the rich, banks, and multinationals. Accordingly, anti-elitism in the form of anti-economic elite populism is the only element which has been continuously observed since the 2014 elections. However, given that the party's populist characteristics shift each election, the question arises whether this has also affected the party's Eurosceptic positioning. For example, Pirro et al., (2018) stressed that populist parties have increased in their Eurosceptic and populist positions in the past decade. Accordingly, the question remains if the increased populist levels between 2014 and 2019 resulted in harder EU

stances and increased Eurosceptic views? The next section therefore presents an analysis of the SP's Eurosceptic evolution between 2014 and 2021 to explore whether its degree of Euroscepticism has undergone the same changes.

4.2. Euroscepticism

This chapter thus discusses the Eurosceptic nature of the SP and the evaluation of the party's Eurosceptic views from 2014 to 2021. Vasilopoulou's (2018) and Keith's (2017) adopted typology is employed to assess the party's Eurosceptic degree and possibly changing Eurosceptic stance. The party's positions are assessed alongside three dimensions: the practice, principle, and future of European integration. The section starts by analysing the SP's position on the practice of European integration.

4.2.1. The practice: EU polity, institutional practices, and EU policies

Democracy and Sovereignty

As previously stated, the practice of EU integration refers to the EU's institutional framework, forms of EU decision-making, and a party's stance on EU policies. Analysis of the SP's 2014–2021 electoral campaigns reveals that the party is critical of the practice of European integration. The EU's status quo, for example, is strongly criticised because of its neoliberal character serving the rich and multinationals. In each of the analysed campaigns, Brussels is referred to as an 'undemocratic construction', a 'sacrifice bloc', and/or a 'super state' touching upon one's national sovereignty. An example of this is reflected in the party's 2014 manifesto in which it states, 'The EU is becoming an untransparent and undemocratic construction that is bossing around' (SP, 2014, p. 5). The party then repeatedly addresses its sovereignty concerns. In its 2014 manifesto, the party advocates to return power to the national level through stating the following: 'In this party programme we will explain how to become the boss of our own country' (SP, 2014, p. 5). In the 2017 electoral campaign, sovereignty concerns were raised again. The main difference with the 2014 campaign is that the party increasingly underlined the role of the people when sovereignty transfers were to occur. This is *inter alia* reflected in a speech of former party leader Roemer, who stressed, 'And no transfer of power takes place without consulting the people' (Roemer, 2017).

The 2019 and 2021 election campaigns further elaborate on the notion of sovereignty. The party has continued to criticise the EU in the manner it did in previous elections. The main difference,

however, is that the SP has specified how it wants to restore one's national sovereignty. In 2019, the party frequently stipulated that the EU is eroding national democracies, sovereignty, and democratic and social rights. As a solution for the sovereignty loss, the SP advocated to restore national democracies:

'The solution does not lie in a European democracy. That is far too distant from the people. We want to restore our national democracy and thus our sovereignty on a number of essential policy areas' (Marijnissen, 2019).

To restore sovereignty, the SP has advocated for a new EU treaty. In the 2014 and 2017 campaigns, the establishment of a new treaty was not suggested. However, the 2019 and 2021 campaigns have aimed to establish a new EU treaty to tackle Brussels' power, which according to the SP, is out of control (SP, 2019; Marijnissen, 2019a; SP, 2021; SP 2021a). Accordingly, this treaty would first be subjected to a referendum, allowing for the strengthening of member states' independence and powers. The SP considers this as an indispensable step towards greater participation of citizens (ibid.).

EU Institutions

The prior analysis reveals that the SP has continuously criticised the EU for being undemocratic and for eroding national sovereignty. Further analysis reveals that the party *inter alia* has blamed the supranational institutions, such as the European Commission and the EP, for making the EU an undemocratic construction. It becomes apparent that the SP is generally critical towards the aforementioned EU institutions. For example, during the 2014 campaign, the SP's position was marked by a critical attitude towards the European Commission in particular. The party frequently stipulated its desire to reform this specific EU body. In the 2014 manifesto, opposition to the Commission is reflected as follows:

'We do not want a European Super State nor a European government. We therefore reject the current form of the European Commission. Instead of a dominant, initiating and ideologically driven Commission, we want an institution that solely executes decisions taken by the member states.' (SP, 2014, p. 7)

Accordingly, the party has claimed that the Commission's power and tasks should be reduced and guided by the national member states' governments, parliaments, and the EP. The

Commission should no longer be able to initiate legislative proposals. Thus, the party has wanted to deprive the Commission of its right of initiative and has expressed that the number of expert groups working for the Commission should be drastically reduced (SP, 2014, pp. 6–8; SP, 2014a). These views were further reflected in the 2017 campaign. However, a major difference in the 2017 campaign is the party's explicit expression that the European Commission should be abolished (SP, 2017, p. 53). During the 2019 campaign, the SP re-emphasised its wish to abolish the Commission, further elaborating on the role of member states should the Commission be abolished: 'At this point all European legislations commence with a proposal initiated by the European Commission. However, this right of initiative has to go to democratically elected governments, to national parliaments, and to the European Parliament' (SP, 2019, p. 12). During the 2021 campaign, however, the party has slightly mitigated its views with respect to the abolishment of the Commission. Whereas the party explicitly stated that the Commission 'should' be abolished in its 2017 and 2019 campaigns, the 2021 manifesto states that 'the European Commission can be abolished' (SP, 2021, p. 27).

Apart from the Commission being criticised, the analysis also demonstrates that the SP has strongly opposed the EP and the European Central Bank (ECB). For example, in the 2014, 2017, and 2019 campaigns, the SP argued that the ECB should be reformed, become more democratic, and be accountable to the EP and national parliaments (SP, 2014, p. 10; SP, 2017, p. 18; SP, 2019, p. 17). The 2021 campaign, however, has not devoted any attention to reforms of the ECB. Furthermore, although the party has advocated that the ECB should be accountable to the EP, the Parliament's role has also been vigorously condemned. In 2014, the party underlined its favouring of the Parliament's 'monitoring' role, allowing them to control the European Commission and Council of Ministers. At the same time, the party indicated that the EP cannot function as a 'real Parliament' given the fact that the 'EU is not a state' (SP, 2014, p. 7). Consequently, the SP has strongly opposed the transfer of the power of national parliaments to the EP and has advocated for an increased role for the national parliaments. The party believes that national parliaments should have the opportunity to call commissioners to account within their own country and be able to block European decisions made by qualified majority voting. Accordingly, the party has advocated for a 'double mandate' allowing national parliamentarians to become members of the EP (SP, 2014, p. 7). During the 2017, 2019, and 2021 campaigns, the party re-emphasised its 2014 positions and the idea to initiate a 'double mandate' for national parliamentarians. The only difference in the 2021 campaign is that the SP has further elaborated on the role that national parliaments should play. For example, the

party believes that the role of national parliaments should be enhanced by *inter alia* providing them the ability to approve EU trade agreements (SP, 2021).

EU Policies: EU enlargement, Economic governance, internal market

As previously described, the SP is critical of EU institutions such as the European Commission, ECB, and EP. Overall, it can be argued that the SP critiques some aspects of the EU as a polity but simultaneously favours institutional reforms, which, for instance, were reflected in the party's stance with regards to the role of the EP. When further analysing the second element of 'the practice of European integration', it becomes evident that the SP is highly critical of various EU policies. As argued by Vasilopoulou (2018, p.19), 'opposition to the practice of European integration becomes opposition to the policy aspects of the EU'. Accordingly, it can be argued that the SP is against the 'practice' of European integration. For example, research regarding the electoral campaigns reveals that there are three main policy areas in particular the SP opposes: EU enlargement, economic governance, and the EU's internal market. With respect to EU enlargement, it becomes clear that the SP has devoted increased attention to this issue. In the 2014 campaign, no attention was devoted to EU enlargement. However, as of the 2016 EU-Ukraine AA referendum, more emphasis had been placed on EU enlargement issues. For example, during this referendum campaign, the SP heavily advocated against this Agreement. According to the party, the AA with Ukraine would serve as a 'stepping-stone' for EU-membership. The party subsequently referred to countries such as Romania and Bulgaria as examples of countries who weren't fit for EU membership, but nevertheless still became a member. Accordingly, the party emphasised that a possible Ukraine membership would be detrimental to the EU and Dutch citizens and would only be beneficial to multinationals given the agreements' neo-liberal character (SP, 2016; SP, 2016a; SP, n.d).

Opposition to EU-enlargement issues were further reflected during the 2017 electoral campaign, in which the party increasingly began to oppose future EU enlargement. This is particularly reflected in the party's manifesto, which states, 'There will not be any future EU enlargement' (SP, 2017, p. 53). The SP specifically refers to Turkey which, according to the party, cannot become an EU member. In the 2019 campaign, the SP strongly opposed possible enlargement of the Balkan countries and stressed that no further enlargement should happen. The same views have been adopted in the 2021 campaign, where the party has emphasised that the EU should focus on internal reforms first before 'welcoming new guests' (SP, 2021, p. 27). In addition to EU enlargement, the SP also heavily opposes economic governance of the EU.

For example, in the 2014 campaign, the party strongly advocated for the 'unbundling' of the eurozone. The SP has blamed the euro for the economic and financial crises while claiming that the euro has resulted in Southern European countries 'becoming too expensive' (SP, 2014, p. 8). The SP has therefore underlined that a change is needed such as an 'unbundling of the eurozone' (ibid.). Thus, it strives to provide alternatives for the euro, allowing countries to withdraw from the eurozone in a controlled manner. To ensure that alternatives are provided, the ECB should be subject to surveillance and new member states banned from joining the eurozone (ibid). However, where the 2014 campaign devoted ample attention to the SP's aversion to the economic governance of the EU, the 2017 campaign neglected the topic entirely. Nevertheless, in the 2019 campaign, the same issues of the 2014 campaign arose, where the party further elaborated on points previously made. The main difference between the campaigns is that in the 2019 campaign, the SP stressed that the European Monetary Union should become more democratic. It also explicitly demanded for the elimination of mandatory austerity measures and the European Stability Mechanism (SP, 2019; Hoekstra, 2019). In 2021, less attention has been devoted to the EU's economic governance. The party does, however, reiterate that it wants to seek alternatives, ensuring that countries can withdraw from the euro. In addition, for the first time, the party explicitly refers to the 'Eurogroup', and a possible Dutch withdrawal from the euro (SP, 2021; SP, 2021a; SP, 2021b). The party stresses, 'If we have to choose between maintaining a currency causing a discord, or cooperation within the Europe, then the SP always chooses to maintain cooperation' (SP, 2021a).

Finally, where the SP is critical towards the EU's enlargement policy and economic governance, it also opposes parts of the internal market. The party has criticised the EU's internal market for its neoliberal character and free movement, causing unfair competition and uncontrolled forms of labour migration (SP, 2014; SP, 2017; SP, 2019; SP, 2019d Marijnissen,2019b; SP, 2021). In the 2014 electoral campaign, the party stressed that the free movement of the internal market needs to change. This is reflected in a statement made by the party's former European party leader Dennis de Jong, where he claimed the following:

The idea of free movement was a very old idea from the very beginning of the European Economic Community. This could be achieved quite easily with the limited number of countries involved at the time. We now have 28 Member States, with a difference in income. Those differences are enormous which often results in exploitation and repression. (De Jong, 2014)

As of the 2017 electoral campaign, the party seems to have slightly hardened its stance towards labour migration by opposing free movement and arguing that labour migration must be regulated. In the 2019 electoral campaign, the party restated that it wants to regulate labour migration by claiming the following: 'In the Netherlands we must regain control of who wants to work here, and therefore we must regulate labour migration' (Hoekstra, 2019). According to the party, labour migration increases pressure on wages and the EU's internal market, and its free movement of workers allows for this pressure: *Is not it allowed in the EU, to have free movement of workers and people? Yes, but this is exactly the problem. The internal market serves the neoliberal race to the bottom that we have organised to benefit big businesses, that want to keep the price of labour low.* (Marijnissen, 2019b). Hence, the SP believes that the problems of the internal market can only be tackled by introducing temporary work permits and adding opt-out clauses for EU member states. Member states can therefore decide whether or not they want to engage in the internal market (SP, 2019; Marijnissen, 2019a; WNL, 2019; SP, 2021).

4.2.2. The principle and future of European integration: Cooperation

Cooperation

Information in the previous section has demonstrated that the SP is critical towards some aspects of the practice of European integration. When looking into the party's position regarding the future and principle of European integration, it becomes apparent that the SP is against the future of European integration but favours the principle. It has become evident that the party vigorously opposes the creation of 'an ever-closer union' and therefore rejects the future of European integration as presented by Vasilopoulou (2018). According to the party, European cooperation has exceeded its limits and should be reformed to more forms of intergovernmental cooperation in which European member states should be able to decide how to cooperate (SP, 2014, pp. 5–13; SP, 2019, SP, 2021). Nevertheless, despite the party's critical attitude, the SP does not entirely oppose cooperation. Instead, the party emphasises the need for enhanced forms of intergovernmental cooperation. For example, in its 2014 campaign, the party repeatedly stated that where appropriate, it wants to cooperate while countries retain control over issues they can decide on themselves. The party therefore favours a change, involving increased forms of intergovernmental cooperation, which is *inter alia* reflected in the following statement:

Instead of further expansion of the transfer of sovereignty, and more decision-making based on qualified majority, we choose for a radical break with current EU practices and instead choose for more intergovernmental forms of cooperation. (SP, 2014, p. 7)

Alongside the SP's call for more intergovernmental cooperation, the party also advocates for greater cooperation among the member states to tackle cross-border crime issues. In 2017, the party's views were not greatly altered. However, this time the party expressed that it was 'time to develop new partnerships' (SP, 2017a). Before the 2017 elections, the SP stated, 'The European project is starting to show cracks on all sides. It is therefore time to slow down and develop new forms of cooperation' (SP, 2016b). In 2019, the party seemed to mitigate its views regarding the development of new forms of cooperation. Instead, the SP repeatedly emphasised the need for cooperation within the EU and referred to European cooperation as valuable which 'may cost something' (SP, 2019). In its 2019 campaign, the SP repeatedly stressed that it favours European cooperation but rejects Brussels that is 'bossing around'. The party expressed that cooperation should mainly be focusing on climate change, tax evasion, migration, and asylum (SP, 2019; Marijnissen, 2019; Marijnissen 2019a). Finally, the SP has demanded for increased cooperation regarding foreign policy to promote human rights, enhance the EU's credibility, and to set an example for other regions in the world. This is reflected in the following statement:

When the EU addresses other countries and regions, international solidarity, fairer sharing, and respect for human rights should play a leading role. We want European cooperation to become a 'humane example' for others. (SP, 2019, p. 31)

In the 2021 election campaign, the SP further builds upon the importance of EU cooperation in the field of human rights promotion. Accordingly, the party stresses that the EU should accede to the European Human Rights Convention and the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe. Hence, it can be concluded that the SP has overall favoured the principle of European integration within its 2014–2021 electoral campaigns. The 2017 campaign presented the SP's more sceptical attitude towards European cooperation. Nevertheless, in the 2014, 2019, and 2021 campaigns, the party has increasingly emphasised the need for cooperation, particularly on issues involving human rights, climate change, and cross-border crime to name a few.

4.2.3. Preliminary Conclusion: Conditional Euroscepticism

Based on the prior analysis, it can be argued that the SP has not greatly shifted in its Eurosceptic views over the years. The party's positions in the campaigns concerned mostly align. Only some minor shifts can be noted in the party's stance on cooperation, labour migration, and reforms regarding the role of the European Commission. For example, the party seemed to adopt a slightly harder stance during its 2017 campaign on EU-wide cooperation in which emphasis was placed on developing new partnerships. Nevertheless, the party has abandoned this idea in the subsequent national and EP elections. During the 2019 and 2021 campaigns, the party has more frequently emphasised the need for EU cooperation in areas such as migration, climate change, and cross-border crime. In addition, a minor shift can be noted concerning the party's stance on the euro. Although the party has continuously advocated for a development of 'alternatives', the 2021 campaign has been explicitly toying with the idea to withdraw from the euro.

Overall, however, when scrutinising the party's views regarding cooperation, economic governance, and the EU's status quo, it can be concluded that throughout the 2014–2021 electoral campaigns, the SP is mainly against two of the three dimensions presented by Vasilopoulou (2018): the future and practice of European integration. This does not, however, mean that the party opposes the EU's polity, but rather that it obtains critical views towards various EU institutions, and decision-making structures. In addition, despite the party's critical attitude and rhetoric towards EU-wide cooperation, in general the party has favoured the principle of European integration. As a result, when referring to the framework as presented by Vasilopoulou (2018), the SP can be categorized as a conditional Eurosceptic party. As seen before, conditional Eurosceptics *inter alia* advocate for more intergovernmental forms of cooperation and the curtailment of supranational institutions' power (Vasilopoulou, 2018). These are all elements well reflected in the SP's campaigns. Hence, in line with this view, the SP can thus be classified as a conditional Eurosceptic party that has not shifted much in its Euroscepticism between 2014 and 2021.

4.3. Shifting populist nature, continuous conditional Euroscepticism

Although the analysis above on the Eurosceptic and populist nature of the SP reveals that the party's populist stance has differed for the different campaigns, the Eurosceptic nature of the party has remained fairly stable. The consistent Eurosceptic views of the SP demonstrate that

the party has not changed much in its Eurosceptic positions. The findings therefore also contradict the views of Braun et al. (2019), claiming that the radical-right and left have shifted their Eurosceptic views, and contradict the views of Pirro et al. (2018) on the increased Eurosceptic and populist rhetoric. Accordingly, the results also challenge this researcher's own expectations. One of the underlying reasons for the SP's unfluctuating Eurosceptic positions is that conditional-Euroscepticism appears to be one of the party's main characteristics. For example, Meijers (2017) determined that Euroscepticism is a consistent feature of the party's identity. This would therefore align with the party having not shifted (much) in its Eurosceptic views between 2014 and 2021.

Regarding the SP's shifting populist views, this researcher's expectations cannot be confirmed. However, the statement by Kessels (2015) can. As presented in the introductory part of this research, various scholars share different views with respect to the party's degree of populism. Lucardie and Voerman (2012) no longer consider the SP as populist, whereas March (2011) and Otjes and Louwerse (2016) categorise the party as populist. The fact that the party shifts in its populist position every so often explains why scholars' categorisation of the SP differs. Although people-centrism and anti-elitism are observed in the SP's 2021 campaign, this does not mean that the party's populism levels will be the same in upcoming elections. Consequently, the question remains why the party shifts in its populist nature. To obtain a full understanding of this shift, more research should be conducted to extensively research the underlying reasons by *inter alia* conducting in-depth interviews with party officials. Nevertheless, for now, a couple of factors emerge when looking into the theories of the party's positional shift that could explain why the party has shifted throughout the 2014–2021 period.

As presented in Section 2.4, parties can either shift because they are successful or due to electoral losses. Rooduijn et al. (2012), for example, discovered that populist parties mitigate their populism when they are facing electoral success. The findings of this research, however, contradict these views and demonstrate that in the case of the SP, electoral success has not moderated the party's populist stance. For example, between 2014 and 2019, the SP performed relatively well. In 2014, the party became one of the big winners during the municipal elections. In 2015, the party subsequently increased its number of seats in the Dutch Senate (Kiesraad, n.d.). Nonetheless, despite the rather successful results, the SP did not mitigate their populism but instead increased it. Hence, one could question to what extent the relative success of the party has influenced the party to become more populist. Rooduijn et al. (2012, p. 569) also

claimed that populist parties 'campaign on a manifesto that is highly populist' when not being successful. This can, however, also be contradicted. In the 2019 EP elections and elections to the Dutch senate, the SP lost a significant number of votes. Nevertheless, the party's 2021 manifesto did not show high populist levels, but rather showed that the party was mitigating in their populist views. These mitigating views can be explained alongside the theories addressed by Somer-Topcu (2009), Adams et al., (2006), and Schumacher et al. (2013) who refer to poor electoral performances as a motive for parties to shift. Hence, as previously stated, the SP has lost a substantial number of votes during the 2019 elections to the Dutch Senate and the EP. During the Dutch elections to the Senate, the party lost almost 4% of its votes (Kiesraad, n.d.). However, after the 2019 EP elections, the party completely disappeared from the European stage. This loss could therefore serve as a possible explanation for the SP's mitigating populist stances between 2019 and 2021.

A final observation that arises is the SP's change of leadership. Change of leadership is considered a factor which can impact party changes. However, it does not always result in shifting positions (Harmel et al., 1995; Fagerholm, 2016). During the 2014 and 2021 electoral campaigns, the SP faced a change in leadership. In both the 2014 and 2017 electoral campaigns, the party did not demonstrate clear traces of anti-establishment populism. However, the party's 2019 campaign revealed high levels of this form of populism. This increased populism can be explained through the change of leadership the party faced in December 2017. Between 2014 and 2017, the SP was led by Emile Roemer. However, as of December 2017, Lilian Marijnissen was appointed as the new party leader. When comparing the speeches, a change in the party's narrative can be observed. It becomes evident that Marijnissen has more thoroughly focused on criticising the ruling elite in Brussels and The Hague, whereas Roemer largely concentrated on criticising the economic elite. Hence, the change of leadership could serve as a final explanation behind why the SP has shifted in its populist character.

5.Conclusion

Hence, based on the previous established sections, the main research question – *How can the Eurosceptic and populist character of the SP be understood and in what ways did the party shift in their Eurosceptic and populist degree between 2014 and 2021?* – can be answered as follows. The SP can be categorised as both a populist and Eurosceptic party. The findings have revealed that the SP's Eurosceptic nature is fairly stable. The SP's Eurosceptic degree does not seem to be susceptible to change. One explanation for this is that Euroscepticism is a consistent feature of the SP's identity. Accordingly, the party can be categorized as a continuous conditional Eurosceptic party between 2014 and 2021. Only some minor shifts could be observed with regards to the party's position on the euro and forms of cooperation. As far as the populist nature of the party is concerned, it can be concluded that the SP's populist stance has differed for the different campaigns. Accordingly, the researcher's presumptions claiming that the SP's Eurosceptic stance has hardened and stating that its populist character has gradually diminished, cannot be confirmed. However, this thesis does confirm Kessels' (2015) thoughts, claiming that the SP populist nature is susceptible to change. The results show the party has gradually become more populist between 2014 and 2019. Where the party only portrayed forms of *anti-economic elite* populism during its 2014 electoral campaign, people-centrism was shown during the subsequent observed national and European elections. In the 2019 European elections, the party also portrayed forms of anti-establishment populism which could not be observed during the previous electoral campaigns. As of the 2021 electoral campaign, the party seems to have slightly mitigated in its populist views renouncing from anti-establishment populist stances. Consequently, the results reveal that the SP is susceptible to change when it comes to their populist degree. As already revealed in the analysis chapter, this therefore explains the diverging views among scholars with respect to the party's populist nature.

In addition, although the results confirm Kessels' (2015) thoughts stressing that the SP's populist nature is susceptible to change, the findings of Rooduijn et al., (2012) are contradicted. Whereas the aforementioned scholars have found that populist parties mitigate in their populism after electoral success, the SP has instead become more populist in their views after their 2014 and 2015 electoral successes. Contrary to the views of Rooduijn et al., (2012), Adams et al., (2006), Somer-Topcu and Schumacher et al. (2013) referred to poor electoral performances as reasons why parties shift. This aspect can serve as one of the explanation as to why the SP has

moderated its populist views after the 2019 elections given the party's poor 2019 electoral performances. Another aspect serving as a possible explanation to the shifting populist positions of the party relates to the notion of changing party leadership. As of December 2017, the SP faced a change in leadership. The results found some differences in the SP's narrative after this change. Whereas party leader Roemers mostly focused on criticising the economic elite, Marijnissen largely focused on the establishment. Hence, based on the aforementioned, the SP is thus a Eurosceptic and populist party susceptible to change when it comes to their populist nature.

5.1. Limitations and Recommendation:

Although the findings have shown that the SP can be categorised as a populist party, it is important to note that the framework chosen plays an important role in this regard. The SP's populist degree is measured alongside the conceptualisations of Mudde and Hameleers. If a different definition had been employed (e.g., Laulau, 2005), then the outcome may have been different. Hence, this gives further ground for more research. Upcoming research can build on these findings and examine/compare the SP's populist degree when employing Laclau's (2005) definition. Besides, additional research could be done in which the emphasis is placed on interviewing party officials. This would allow to further discuss the SP's populist and Eurosceptic stances more thoroughly and allows to obtain a more in-depth understanding as to why the SP changes in their populism.

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