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The Rise of Populism: a Case Study of the Dutch Populist Party PVV

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Introduction

Populist parties have been present in Europe for decades, but have now gained momentum and are even managing to get into the centre of politics (Csehi & Zgut, 2021, p. 53; Berman, 2019, p. 654). In Europe these parties have mostly been from the radical right and have had anti-immigration agendas (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 189). An example of this phenomenon is the *Partij Voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) which is a populist party led by Geert Wilders that has won the 2023 Dutch parliamentary elections by getting a vote share of 23,5% (NOS, 2023). For the past decade, the PVV has consistently been the biggest opposition party and has now managed to increase their number of parliamentary seats from 17 seats in 2021 to 37 seats in 2023 (Crum, 2023; NOS, 2023). This thesis will look into the research question: to what extent does the surge of the PVV at the 2023 Dutch national elections fit within the theories that aim to explain the rise of populist parties?

This topic is both societally and academically relevant. For the Dutch society it is important to work out how the PVV's vast growth could have happened, as the PVV with its controversial ideology will not potentially have a significant say in the decision-making process since the other political parties will not be in a position to further ignore the populist and party after its electoral success in the 2023 elections (NOS, 2023). Not only is the rise of the PVV reason for concern for the Netherlands, but also for the European Union and its member states as the PVV actively campaigns for policies that oppose the EU fundamental values as described in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) (Crum, 2023, pp. 126-127). The PVV has a history of making statements against and not behaving in accordance with the EU fundamental values as stated in Article 2 of the TEU, which has become reason for concern after the PVV's electoral success (Crum, 2023, pp. 126-127). Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union describes the EU fundamental values as follows:

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail” (EUR-Lex, 2012).

The PVV and its party leader Wilders actively put forward discriminatory policies against minorities and have ridiculed democratic institutions (Crum, 2023, pp. 126-127). Crum (2023)

describes Wilders' ideological position as "anti-Islamic alarmism" which means that Wilders sees the Islam as an ideology that is totalitarian and immutable in any context (p. 126). Therefore, Wilders believes that the Islam, if not contained, will be immutable and totalitarian in a democratic country like the Netherlands (Crum, 2023, p. 126). A policy proposal that has caused a lot of commotion in the Netherlands after the 2023 election, was the suggestion to withdraw previously granted residence permits (Crum, 2023, p. 127). The PVV's anti-Islamic stance causes a negative stance against international cooperation with Islamic countries and restrictive immigration policy for immigrants and refugees coming from Islamic countries (Crum, 2023, p. 126). Also, the PVV wishes to prohibit all mosques, Islamic schools, the Quran and head scarfs in governmental buildings (PVV, 2023, p. 8). Next to limiting the Muslim communities' religious and cultural expressions, the PVV wants to make sure that Jewish and Christian values and culture become dominant in the Netherlands (PVV, 2023, p. 30). Apart from breaking with the EU fundamental rights about respecting minorities' rights, Wilders has ridiculed the Dutch democratic institutions more than once. He called the Dutch parliament "fake", suggested to abolish the Dutch Senate that has the function to protect citizens' rights by checking on the parliament, argued that the rule of law in the Netherlands is "dead" and stated that the Dutch national broadcasting organisation is propagandistic "state media" that spreads "fake news" aiming to reinforce the governments narrative (Crum, 2023, pp. 128-129). Since the PVV will likely have more decision-making power after its electoral success in the 2023 parliamentary elections, this might increase the risks of democratic backsliding in the Netherlands. This makes it important for the EU community as it has to make sure to limit these risks to protect the EU's democratic legitimacy and its member states and reinforce its commitment to the Article 2 fundamental values (Theuns, 2024, p. 4).

Apart from being societally relevant, this topic is also academically relevant. Firstly, the literature on the Dutch case study has become outdated due to the recent developments in the PVV's popularity and decision-making power. Therefore, it is worthwhile to revisit the Dutch case study. Also, it is an interesting case study as the Netherlands is considered to be a "full democracy" and is ranked ninth in the Democracy Index ranking (2023) with a score of 9.00 out of 10.00 (Economist Intelligence, 2023, p. 9). "Full democracies" are democracies in which basic political freedoms and civil liberties are respected and additionally are likely to be supported by a political culture that accommodates further democratic growth (Economic Intelligence, 2023, p. 66). Additionally, the government functioning is satisfactory, media are pluralistic and independent, an effective system of checks and balances is in place and the

judiciary system is independent and can make decisions that are enforced (Economist Intelligence, 2023, p. 66). Finally, only limited problems with democratic institutions are allowed (Economist Intelligence, 2023, p. 66). The PVV has managed to drastically increase its support within a “full democracy” and is therefore academically relevant.

Literature review

Populism and its Eurosceptic feature

To explain what it means to be a populist party like the PVV, this section of the literature review will give an overview of the extensive research that has been done about the conceptualisation of populism. The conceptualisations of populism as an ideology, political style and discourse will be discussed. Over the past decade, the conceptualisation of populism as an ideology has become most dominant in academic literature (Moffit, 2016, pp. 16-17). Mudde (2017) formulated one of the most frequently used conceptualisations of populism as a “thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps”, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (p. 6). This definition contains three separate concepts: thin-centred ideology, the pure people, the corrupt elite and the general will. Mudde (2017) argues that populism is a thin-centred ideology that can take different forms and therefore often overlaps with other “thick-centred” ideologies like liberalism and socialism (p. 6). This means populism can take on many different shapes that are based on the manner in which populism overlaps with other thick-centred ideologies, which can help form interpretative frames that appeal to some societies whilst being unattractive to others (Mudde, 2017, p. 6). The strength of this minimal definition of populism is that it is applicable to various types of empirical research (Moffit, 2016, p. 18). Defining populism as an ideology also allows for classification of what is populist and what is not (Moffit, 2016, p. 18).

Whereas populism as an ideology determines whether something is populist or not, the conceptualisation of populism as a discourse rates populism on a nexus (Moffit, 2016, p. 21). A political actor can be populist to a certain extent, but to what extent can vary at different times depending on when and how populist discourse is used (Moffit, 2016, p. 21). The discursive approach thus views populism as discourse that disunites “the people” from “the elite” (Moffit, 2016, p. 21). In contrast to populism as an ideology, populism as a discourse is not a set of political beliefs but is seen as a way of political expression through speech or text

(Moffit, 2016a, p. 21). Both the political style approach and discursive approach focus on a couple of overlapping performative features like use of language, speech and written texts (Moffit, 2016, p. 40).

The political style approach distinguishes itself from the discursive approach as it transcends these features by considering performative and aesthetic elements not taken into consideration by the discursive approach, such as self-presentation and body language (Moffit, 2016, p. 40). The political style approach not only acknowledges the discursive content, on which the discursive approach is mainly focussed, but also style (Moffit, 2016, p. 40). Moffit (2016) has defined populism as “a political style that features an appeal to ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’, ‘bad manners’ and the performance of crisis, breakdown or threat” (p. 45). In contrast to the ideological approach as used by Mudde (2017), that goes into the content of ideological dispositions political actors have, Moffit’s (2016) political style approach emphasises how political actors present themselves by looking at the performative elements (Moffit, 2016, p. 39).

Moffit (2016) describes three features of populism as a political style appeal to “the people” versus “the elite”, “bad manners”, and the performance of crisis, breakdown or threat (Moffit, 2016, p. 45). Populist leaders will aim at convincing “the people” through their performance, since they are considered “the true holders of sovereignty” (Moffit, 2016, p. 43). Populists present themselves as understanding the common people and present the elite as the cause of crises and suffering (Moffit, 2016, p. 44). This explains why populists appeal to “the people” and are disliked by “the elite”. What Moffit (2016) means by “bad manners” is that populists often disregard “‘appropriate’ modes of acting in the political realm” by accusing these modes to be too slow to handle crises and solve problems of the people (p. 44). This feature partially overlaps with the third feature mentioned by Moffit (2016): crisis, breakdown and threat. Populists tend to gain momentum by tapping into the breakdown between citizens and representatives caused by crises (Moffit, 2016, p. 45). They frame this breakdown as the cause of the crisis, even though it can have many other causes like challenges related to immigration or economics (Moffit, 2016, p. 45).

Populism also has a Eurosceptic feature that will be discussed in this section of the literature review. Euroscepticism is frequently defined as “the opposition to the process of European integration” (Csehi & Zgut, 2021, p. 55). In addition, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002)

distinguish between “soft” and “hard” Euroscepticism (p. 7). “Hard” Euroscepticism is opposed to the entire idea of European integration (Taggart & Szcerbiak, 2002, p. 7). “Soft” Euroscepticism only rejects certain policies, but not the entire idea of European integration (Taggart & Szcerbiak, 2002, p. 7). Contrary to previously mentioned authors, Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) contend that Eurosceptic populism is a distinct type of populism, instead of populism and Euroscepticism being two separate concepts. Eurosceptic populism makes use of the critique against the EU to stress people-centrism and anti-elitism (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Put differently, Eurosceptic populists argue that the EU is controlled by fraudulent elites that do not care about the people’s wishes (Csehi & Zgut, 2021, p. 55).

The PVV has many of the features of populism discussed above. The PVV has for instance managed to speak to a large group of politically disengaged people that now feel represented and understood by the PVV (Kemmers, 2018, p. 184). The PVV party leader Geert Wilders also has “bad manners” as described by Moffit (2016). He has made several statements that ridicule Dutch democratic institutions, like calling the Dutch parliament a “fake parliament” to make a point about the people in parliament standing too far from “the Dutch citizens” (NOS, 2015). In the PVV’s 2023 manifesto, the party argues that the Netherlands “is giving away its sovereignty to Brussels” which is directly in line with the discussed Eurosceptic feature of populism (PVV, 2023, p. 29).

Populism within the Netherlands

Apart from giving historical context about populism in the Netherlands, this section aims to show that the Netherlands does not have much experience with populist parties gaining as much support as the PVV and come this close to influencing the decision-making process, which might suggest evidence for the rise of the PVV being part of the trend of the rise of populism in Europe. The Netherlands has known several populist parties since the 2000s of which the most significant were *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) led by Pim Fortuyn, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) led by Geert Wilders and *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD) led by Thierry Baudet (Crum, 2023, p. 120). The foundation of Pim Fortuyn’s LPF party in 2002 can be considered the watershed moment of the current populist wave that the Netherlands is experiencing, as the LPF party was the first populist party that managed to get a considerable part of the political arena compared to other anti-establishment and extremist right-wing parties (Kaya, 2019, p. 131; Crum, 2023, p. 122). Dutch society was very dissatisfied with the

established government that was in place for eight years in handling the problems concerning housing, healthcare, safety, and especially the immigration influxes and social integration of ethnic minorities (Kaya, 2019, p. 130; Crum, 2023, p. 122). Fortuyn's LPF managed to convert this widespread dissatisfaction with the government into 26 parliamentary seats and formed a coalition with CDA and VVD (Crum, 2023, p. 122). However, the LPF was leaderless during this formation due to the assassination of Fortuyn on the sixth of May in 2002 and, after this, rapidly fell apart because of conflicts between party members (Crum, 2023, p. 122).

The FvD has extra-parliamentary origins, as it started as a think tank located in Amsterdam in which citizens came together and thought about the transmission of sovereignty from the national government to the supranational European Union (Crum, 2023, p. 123). Baudet transformed this think tank into a political party in September 2016 which got FvD only 2% of the votes in the 2017 parliamentary elections, but resulted in the largest voting share in the 2019 provincial elections (Crum, 2023, p. 124). This result could be drawn back to nationalist, Eurosceptic and Islamophobic sentiments that became increasingly popular in the Netherlands (Kaya, 2019, p. 130). In the 2021 parliamentary elections FvD got 5.02% of the votes after which this vote share was halved to 2.23% in the parliamentary elections of 2023 (Kiesraad, 2021; Kiesraad, 2023). One of the reasons for this decline was internal conflict within the party (Crum, 2023, p. 124). This conflict together with the usage of Second World War commemorations to protest the by government proposed COVID-19 measures and other extremist outings of the party members, have led to the FvD not being taken into account when forming a government (Crum, 2023, p. 124).

From 2006 onwards, the PVV has established itself as the leading populist radical right party in the Dutch parliament (Crum, 2023, p. 123). Wilders promised to defend the interests of the common people against Muslim immigrants and the cultural rich elite of the Amsterdam Canal Belt (Kaya, 2019, p. 132). During the first election in which the PVV participated its result was modest, but in the 2010 elections it managed to get a vote share of 15,45% which is good for 24 parliamentary seats (Crum, 2023, p. 123; Kiesraad, 2010). After this its share of votes stalled, but remained between 10% and 15% (Crum, 2023, p. 123). Up until now, the PVV has entered one coalition with the *Volkspartij voor de Vrijheid* (VVD), but withdrew its support before the term was over (Crum, 2023, p. 124). After this, the PVV did not get the chance to join another coalition until its electoral victory in the 2023 parliamentary elections

where it obtained 23,5% of the votes and 37 parliamentary seats (NOS, 2023). Now, the PVV is expected to take the lead in the government formation process (NOS, 2023). This is something unprecedented, since other Dutch populist parties like LPF and FvD have never managed to get into office or be a consistent threat for the established political parties due to their loss of initial electoral momentum (Crum, 2023, p. 135).

Theoretical framework

Demand-side versus supply-side explanations

There are many theories that try to explain the rise of populist parties and their electoral success. Within this academic debate, a distinction is made between demand-side and supply-side explanations about the rise of populism (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). Demand-side explanations direct attention to changes in preferences, beliefs and attitudes among the electorate to which political actors can respond (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 196). For instance, when people are having difficulties with understanding what is happening in the world due to increased complexity of issues like migration and climate change, they will search for a way to understand the situation (Goodman, 2022, p. 85). Populist parties tend to transform society's insecurity and frustration into electoral support by creating nationalist policies that prioritise the nation's citizens and sometimes even by simplifying issues for society (Goodman, 2022, p. 90).

Supply-side explanations focus on changes on the political actors' side instead of the electorate (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 196). These changes can entail new political proposals that can appeal to or disengage the electorate (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 196). The location of the biggest mainstream competitor of radical-right populist parties on the ideological left-right spectrum is an example of a supply-side factor of influence (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548). If the biggest mainstream competitor manages to mobilise support on the same issues as populist parties, the populist parties will get less votes due to the greater likelihood of the mainstream competitor to have more influence in the policy-making process (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548).

This thesis will also make use of this distinction by choosing one demand-side theory, Goodman's (2022) *Locus of Control*, and one supply-side theory, Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie (2005) their *Electoral Opportunity Structure*, to explore whether the vast growth in electoral support of the PVV during the 2023 elections fits within these theories. Goodman's

(2022) theory is relatively unknown which is one of the reasons for choosing it since it has not been tested very extensively. Additionally, this theory is one of the few that portrays how people's insecurities can lead to populist parties gaining support. Van der Brug et al. (2005) their *Electoral Opportunity Structure* theory was chosen as the theory discusses not one, but multiple supply-side explanations for the rise of populism. The theory's age could potentially mean that it is not applicable anymore. However, this thesis argues that it could still very well be applicable to many cases and will therefore investigate its current external validity by including it in the research.

Goodman's (2022) Locus of Control

According to Goodman (2022), populist parties make use of citizens' need for a "locus of control" to strengthen their support (p. 90). The "locus of control" means that an individual has to believe that they are in control of their life (Goodman, 2022, p. 80). Firstly, an individual has basic necessities like access to food, water, and a sense of security and wellbeing (Goodman, 2022, p. 80). Secondly, most individuals have an "internal locus of control" and "external locus of control" (Goodman, 2022, p. 80). When an individual has an "internal locus of control" they have a positive sense of self which means that they do not feel inferior to others (Goodman, 2022, p. 80). The "external locus of control" refers to people searching for their locus of control externally by seeking things like power, wealth, friendships and other things which gets them the admiration of others (Goodman, 2022, p. 80).

When people feel like they are losing control or that they have already lost control over their lives, they switch to coping mechanisms like seeing themselves as the victim or ascribing their situation to bad luck (Goodman, 2022, p. 80). Additionally, people in those cases tend to blame the government or external forces too powerful or big for them to defeat (Goodman, 2022, p. 80). Goodman (2022) argues that people feel like they are losing or already have lost control over their lives due to reality becoming increasingly complex because of globalisation, technological development and global crises like climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic (pp. 79-80). The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, was a crisis that had many complex and interacting variables based on which governments had to make decisions (Goodman, 2022, p. 79). To understand these decisions, one has to understand complex theories about the COVID-19 virus. Experts in the field of viruses already had a hard time understanding the virus, let alone citizens whose lives were being influenced by it.

Globalisation made this crisis even more complex, as governments now also had to work together to battle the virus that was rapidly spreading on both the national and international level through supra-national organisations like the EU. Understanding the COVID-19 regulations for non-elite workers now becomes even more complex, since citizens' now have to not only understand how the virus itself works, but also how supranational organisations and their regulations work.

In addition to increasing complexity of crises, fast technological development and expansion of human knowledge also adds onto the difficulty of understanding the world since only elites will be able to keep track of these developments (Goodman, 2022, p. 82). During the COVID-19 crisis the development of new vaccines, for instance, resulted in a lot of resistance as many people do not know the long term effects and what the virus will do (Goodman, 2022, p. 79). Non-elites will thus have trouble keeping up with the increasing complexity of problems and rapid development, and start feeling like they are falling behind and are losing control over their own lives (Goodman, 2022, p. 82). These people start seeing the current political situation as a threat and will blame the established political elites for the injustice (Goodman, 2022, p. 82). As populist parties are positioned vis-à-vis the established political elite, people will tend to side with this populist anti-elitist rhetoric and will be more likely to vote for populist parties to seek justification for this injustice created by the current political situation (Goodman, 2022, p. 82). In sum, increased complexity of issues due to globalisation and technological development leads to citizens trying to seek justification for this injustice that the current political situation created by blaming established institutions and political elites. Populists benefit from this societal discontent, as they are positioned vis-à-vis the established political elite which leads to populist parties gaining a lot of support. This theory allows for the deduction of the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Increased globalisation and technological development lead to people feeling like they are losing or already have lost their locus of control, which leads to discontent with the established institutions and political elites that results in populist parties gaining support.

Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie (2005) their Electoral Opportunity Structure theory

Van der Brug et al. (2005) suggest a two-step model of electoral support for anti-immigration parties to explain the success and failure of anti-immigration parties (p. 544). According to them, one should look at both the electoral potential and the electoral opportunity structure of

the party to predict the electoral success of a populist party (p. 544). A party is considered to be successful when it manages to get a lot of support (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 546). The electoral potential of a party is “the size of the group of voters that considers this party to be an attractive voting option” (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 545). The higher the electoral potential, the higher the chances of populist parties’ electoral success are (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 546). If there was no competition among parties, then the electoral potential of a party, for instance 10% of the electorate, would also be the vote share this party would receive during elections (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 546). The electoral potential of populist parties depends on whether the party is evaluated based on its policies and the proportion of right-wing citizens in the electorate (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 546).

The electoral opportunity structure consists of “the factors that determine the extent to which a party is able to mobilise its potential support” (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548). In other words, the electoral opportunity structure determines the amount of potential votes that is transferred into actual votes. Party competition is an important factor in this structure. If for instance many citizens find a right-wing populist party attractive due to their anti-migration policies, but there is another mainstream right-wing party that proposes similar policies, voters will consider these parties equally attractive (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548). Which of the two parties will get their votes, will then depend on other, often strategic, considerations (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548).

One of these considerations that is important to voters is political power (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548). Sometimes voters vote for their second favourite party instead of for the party they agree most with, because this party is bigger and thus has a more likelihood of affecting public policy (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548). In the case of anti-immigration parties and right-wing populist parties, their electoral success will often depend on the competition created by their largest mainstream right-wing competitor (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548). If these competitors mobilise support on the topics that are relevant to right-wing populist parties, these right-wing populist parties might not attract many votes even when their electoral potential is high (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548). Thus, the electoral success of right-wing populist parties will decrease if this competitor embraces radical right-wing issues such as nationalism, migration and crime (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548). The electoral success of right-wing populist parties will increase if its mainstream right-wing competitor

moves toward the centre of the left-right political spectrum (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548).

A final set of factors that determine the electoral opportunity structure are the institutional arrangements by which votes are translated into parliamentary seats (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 549). If a voter wants to vote for a right-wing populist party, but does not think they are going to get into parliament, the voter will not want to waste their vote and is likely to vote for another mainstream right-wing party that is more likely to get into parliament (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 549). A vote is more likely to translate into a parliamentary seat in a proportional system than in a majoritarian system. Therefore, the chances of electoral success will be higher in a proportional system than in a majoritarian system (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 549). This theory allows for the deduction of the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: The more the biggest mainstream right-wing competitor of the populist party embraces the same issues as the populist party like nationalism, crime and immigration, the less likely the populist party is to be successful.

Hypothesis 3: The electoral success of a populist party will increase if its mainstream right-wing competitor moves toward the centre of the left-right political spectrum.

Hypothesis 4: The chance of electoral success for a populist party will be higher in a proportional system than in a majoritarian system.

Methodology

Research methods

To answer the research question, this thesis will investigate the relationship between the dependent variable, the support for the PVV, and the independent variables as proposed by the two theories by Goodman (2022) and Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie (2005). This exploratory research will be conducted by using a comparative method through which this thesis can test the transferability of the two theories from a European context to a more specific context, the Netherlands (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 233). A single-case study will be analysed as this allows for a detailed and intensive examination of the Dutch case (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 234).

The two analysed theories describe multiple causal relationships between their proposed independent variables and the dependent variable. Consequently, this thesis has deduced four causal hypotheses. However, this thesis can not substantiate a link between these causal relationships as proposed by the hypotheses and the rise of the PVV and therefore does not wish to do so. This thesis will only use these hypotheses to compare them to the PVV case study and possibly help build the argument of the PVV's rise being perhaps partially caused by factors described by these theories. To make this comparison, this thesis will look at the variables described in the theories' causal hypotheses and see whether they behave in line with the theories' predictions by analysing various sources of descriptive statistics within the period of 2020 to 2023. The more similar variables behave to the theories' predictions, the more the rise of the PVV fits within these theories and could possibly be explained by these theories.

Methodology Goodman's (2022) theory

Hypothesis 1

From this theory the first hypothesis has been deduced that states that the external factors, globalisation and technological development, lead to the loss of citizens' locus of control which results in them distrusting established political elites and institutions and increases the chances of populist support (Goodman, 2022). The independent variables that will be analysed for this hypothesis are globalisation, technological development, citizens' locus of control and trust in national and international established political institutions and elites. Globalisation in the Netherlands will be analysed by looking at the KOF Globalisation Index reports from 2020 up to 2023. This index differentiates between "de jure", "de facto" and "overall" globalisation. "De facto" globalisation refers to goods, services, money, information, political institutions and people moving across borders (KOF, 2023). "De jure" globalisation refers to laws, regulations, rights, and freedoms concerning goods, services, money, information, political institutions and people moving across borders (KOF, 2023). The "overall" globalisation category combines these two (KOF, 2023). To include both de facto and de jure globalisation, the overall globalisation variable of the KOF globalisation index will be analysed. To investigate the Dutch technological development, the WIPO Global Innovation Index (GII) will be used. This index ranks 132 countries all over the world based on their technological development.

The independent variable of citizens' locus of control will be assessed by looking at several factors: unemployment, low-income households, satisfaction with life and limitations due to poverty and financial limitations low-income households experience. Increased globalisation and fast technological development create winners and losers of globalisation (Berman, 2019, p. 655). The losers of globalisation are the lower and middle class who lose their jobs due to for example technological development and outsourcing of production to countries with a low minimum wage like China and India (Berman, 2019, p. 655). For especially these losers of globalisation and technological development, feeling like they are in control of their own lives thus become difficult. Therefore when assessing the locus of control, this thesis will mainly look at low-income households. One of the factors to measure the locus of control will be unemployment by looking at data from the *Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)*, which is a Dutch bureau that gathers all kinds of statistics about the Dutch society, economy and state.

A low-income household has an income of 1130 euros per month per person, which creates a high risk of poverty for these households (CBS, n.d.). The low-income households will be measured as a percentage of the total number of households to assess the proportion of Dutch society that either lives in poverty or has a high poverty risk. This directly influences the access people have to their primary needs like food, water and housing (Goodman, 2022, p. 80). If people do not have this access, they will more likely feel like they have no control (Goodman, 2022, p. 80).

Another factor that will be looked at to determine citizens' locus of control is the grade that people give their life which can shed light on people's positive sense of self, thus their internal locus of control. The CBS (2023b) published a report on poverty and exclusion and has investigated citizens' satisfaction levels by asking the survey question "Could you rate your level of satisfaction with the life you currently lead on a scale of 1 to 10?" (CBS, 2023b, p. 91). Scores between 1-4 were classified as unsatisfied, scores between 5-6 were classified as not satisfied/not unsatisfied and scores above 7 as satisfied (CBS, 2023b, p. 91). The last factor concerning the locus of control that will be investigated are the financial limitations that Dutch low-income households experience, such as not being able to afford yearly vacations, a car, new clothes or a laptop (CBS, 2023b, p. 112). If many households experience such limitations, this can have a negative impact on having relationships with others and therefore on people's external locus of control (Goodman, 2022, p. 80).

To measure the last independent variable for this hypothesis, the trust in established political elites and institutions, this thesis will look at both the national and international level by looking at the trust levels in EU politics and national politics. The levels of trust in EU politics will be measured by analysing the publications of the Eurobarometer factsheets about the Netherlands from 2020 up to 2023 in which Dutch citizens were asked whether they “tend to trust”, “tend not to trust” or “don’t know” if they trust the EU (Eurobarometer, 2020-2023). The Dutch citizens’ trust in national politics is researched by CBS (2023c) and has been split into trust in “politicians” and “parliament”.

Methodology Van der Brug, Tillie and Fennema their theory (2005)

Hypothesis 2

For the second hypothesis, this thesis will investigate the topic-similarity between the biggest mainstream right-wing competitor of the PVV and the PVV. Currently, the biggest mainstream right-wing competitor of the PVV is the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD). Before the 2023 elections it was the biggest political party in the Dutch parliament with 34 parliamentary seats (Kiesraad, 2021). After the 2023 parliamentary elections in which the PVV became the largest, the VVD obtained a 15.24% vote share and thus currently has 24 parliamentary seats (Kiesraad, 2023). If the VVD, being the largest mainstream right-wing competitor, embraces similar policies to the PVV in core populist fields like nationalism, immigration, crime and law and order, this will make it less likely for the PVV to gain support as the VVD is more likely to have an influence in the decision-making process (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548).

To determine whether the VVD embraces the same core issues as the PVV like crime, nationalism and immigration, this thesis will look at the *Partijgedrag* database, which looks at how political parties vote for proposed resolutions in parliament by categorising these resolutions in different topics like “migration and integration” and “public order and safety” (Partijgedrag, 2024). This database also allows for comparison between parties through which one can see the percentage of resolutions to which two parties have voted the same. This thesis will compare the PVV and VVD to see to what extent they vote alike and embrace the same topics. The categories “Migration and Integration”, “Public order and Safety” and “Law” will be investigated as these categories correspond to the core populist topics like immigration, crime and law and order (Partijgedrag, 2024; Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548).

Hypothesis 3

To check the third hypothesis, the ideological VVD's ideological position on the political left-right spectrum has to be determined. According to Van der Brug et al. (2005) the chances of electoral success of populist parties increase when the mainstream right-wing competitor moves towards the centre of the political left-right spectrum (Van der Brug et al., 2005, p. 548). This would mean that if the VVD's position is moving towards the centre, this will increase the chances of the PVV to gain support. To measure the position on the political spectrum of both the VVD and PVV this thesis will look at the database of the Manifestos Project which contains a variable called *rile* that explains the position of political parties on the left-right spectrum by giving parties a score ranging between -100 and 100 (Manifestos Project, 2024). A score of 100 means that the party is at the most extreme right point of the spectrum, a score of 0 means that the party is exactly in the centre and a score of -100 means that the party is at the extreme left side of the spectrum (Manifestos Project, 2024).

Hypothesis 4

For the final hypothesis, the type of electoral system of the Netherlands has to be figured out and to what extent it is proportional. To determine whether the Netherlands has a proportional or majoritarian political system, this thesis will look at the information provided on this topic by an independent institution that specialises on Dutch politics and its history, *ProDemos*.

Analytical results

Hypothesis 1

Globalisation & technological development

Globalisation

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
Globalisation index Netherlands	90.929	90.808	90.316	90.324

Figure 1. Source: KOF Globalisation Index data 2023 (KOF, 2023)

In 2018 globalisation was at its peak in the Netherlands being ranked second in the KOF Globalisation index with a score of 90.929. In 2019 it slightly declined to an index of 90.808 and took another hit in 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis, where the index decreased to 90.316 after which it has been steadily rising after 2020 (KOF, 2023).

Technological development

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023
Global innovation index Netherlands	58.8	58.6	58.0	60.4

Figure 2. Sources: GII reports from 2020 to 2023 (WIPO, 2020, p.32; WIPO, 2021, p.4; WIPO, 2022, p. 19; WIPO, 2023, p. 19)

During the COVID-19 pandemic technological development has decreased slightly in the Netherlands from 58.8 in 2020 to 58.0 in 2022, after which technological development increased to 60.4 in 2023 and has been on the rise (WIPO, 2020, p.32; WIPO, 2022, p. 19; WIPO, 2023, p. 19).

Citizens’ locus of control

Unemployment

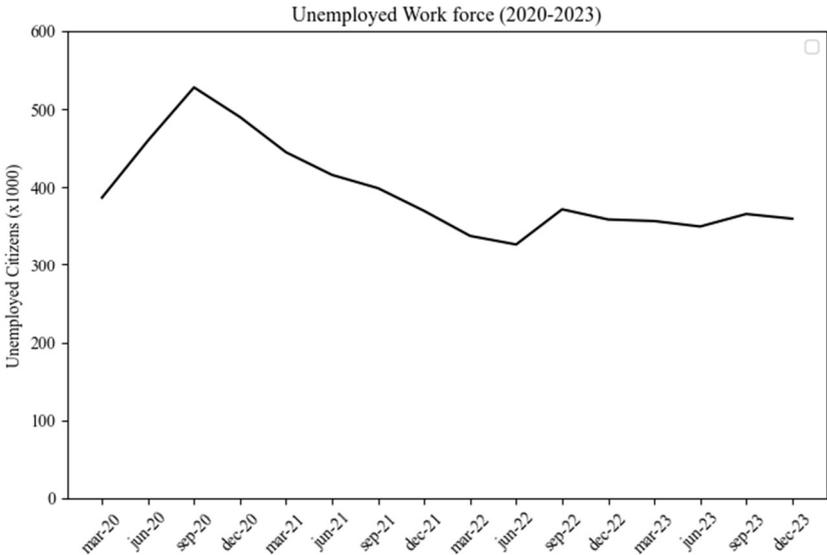


Figure 3. Source: CBS, 2023a

Dutch unemployment went up in the beginning of the pandemic and hit its peak around September in 2020 with 528,000 unemployed people, after which it declined until September 2022 to 372,000 citizens (CBS, 2023a). After a slight increase in September 2022, the unemployment levels have stagnated to approximately 360,000 unemployed citizens (CBS, 2023a).

Low-income households as a percentage of the total number of households

Years	Total number of Households	Total number of low-income households	Percentages (%)
2020	7.539.000	509.000	6,75
2021	7.597.000	478.000	6,29
2022	7.669.000	335.000	4,37

Figure 4. Source: CBS, 2023b, p. 21

As can be seen in figure 4, the low-income households as a percentage of the total number of households is becoming smaller. This proportion has declined from 6.75% in 2020 to 4.37% in 2022 (CBS, 2023b, pp. 20-21). This report demonstrates a declining trend in low-income households.

Satisfaction with life

The percentage of people with a low-income that is satisfied with their life has declined from 68% in the period between 2017-2019 to 61% in the 2020-2022 period (CBS, 2023b, pp. 90-91). In the period between 2020-2022, 86% of the people with a higher income were satisfied with life (CBS, 2023b, p. 91).

Financial limitations

Even though the income inequality has been quite stable in the Netherlands, it is rather unequal from an international perspective (CPB, 2022). According to the most recent report of the CBS on poverty and social exclusion, there is a big difference in financial limitations between low-income and above low-income households (CBS, 2023b, pp. 111-112). In 2022, 66% of the low-income households could not afford to go on vacation whereas above low-income households only 7% could not (CBS, 2023b, p. 111). Also, 8% of low-income households indicated that they were not able to afford a warm meal with chicken, meat or fish every other day whereas this was only 1% in above low-income households (CBS, 2023b, p. 111). Overall, there is a stable income inequality in the Netherlands that is relatively high compared to other countries and there has been a fairly big difference between low-income and above low-income households in terms of financial limitations.

Trust in political elites and institutions

Trust in the EU

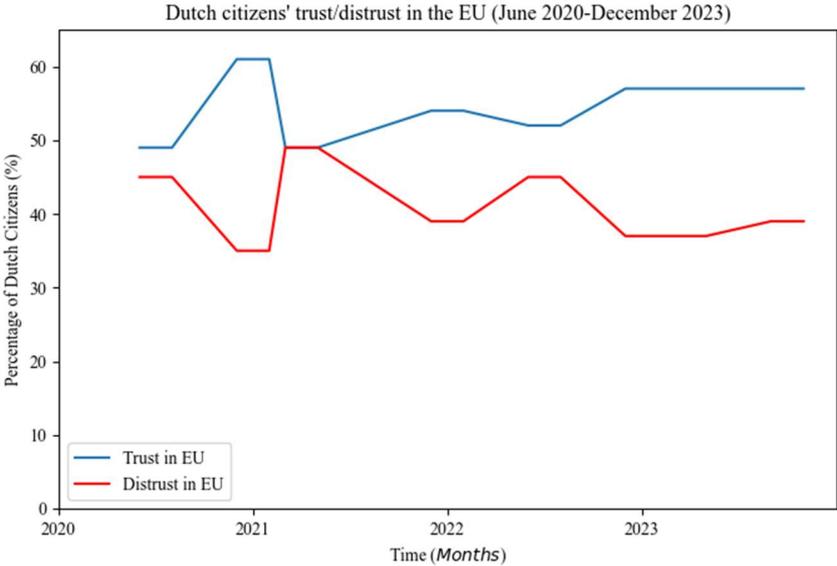


Figure 5. Source: Eurobarometer factsheets the Netherlands, 2020-2023

Dutch citizens’ trust and distrust in the EU have been going up and down with minor changes from June 2020 until approximately December 2022 as can be seen in figure 5. After December 2022, the trust and distrust rates have more or less stabilised with 57% of the Dutch citizens trusting the EU and 39% distrusting the EU.

Trust in Dutch politics

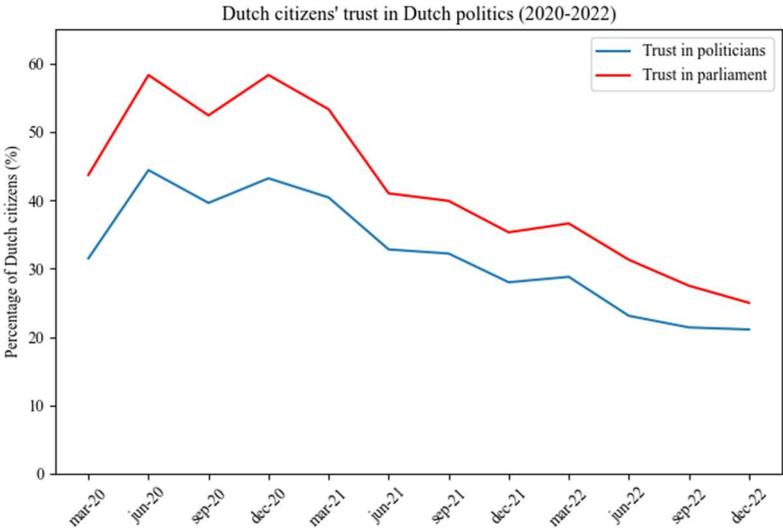


Figure 6. Source: CBS, 2023c

In figure 6, a decreasing trend in Dutch citizens' trust in national politics, both in politicians and parliament, can be established.

In sum, the Netherlands is becoming more globalised and technologically developed. The current Dutch unemployment levels are stable and the number of low-income households as a percentage of the total number of households is declining which implies that the number of people risking losing their locus of control is declining. However, satisfaction with life has decreased among low-income households and they experience much more financial limitations than households with a higher income which can result in low-income households still experiencing both loss of their internal and external locus of control. The trust in national institutions and political elites is decreasing, but the trust in the EU is not. The external factors of globalisation and technological development are increasing, yet the analysis points out that the number of people that are at risk to lose their locus of control is declining. These findings thus run against Goodman's (2022) expectations.

Hypothesis 2

Topic-similarity between VVD and PVV

When comparing the data from the PVV and VVD in Partijgedrag database, we can see that the parties do not fully disagree with each other as their voting similarity ranges from 52%-68% for all topics (Partijgedrag, 2024). The similarity scores for the core issues of the PVV are: 67% for "Migration and Integration", 59% for "Public order and safety" and 63% for "Law and order" (Partijgelijkenis, 2024). This implies that the PVV and VVD vote alike when it comes to the core issues of the populist PVV.

Hypothesis 3

VVD ideological position on left-right spectrum

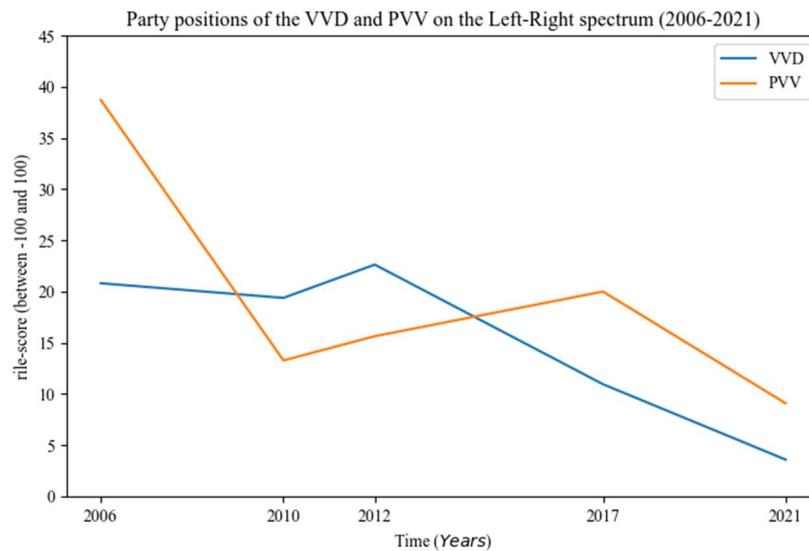


Figure 7. Source: Manifestos Project, 2024

As we can see in figure 7, both the PVV, the orange line, and VVD, the blue line, have been moving more towards the centre over the years (2006-2021). In contrast to the PVV that is still very much on the right side of the spectrum, the VVD is getting closer to the centre of the political spectrum. Even though this database does not include the years 2022 and 2023, a clear trend of the VVD moving more and more towards the centre of the political spectrum can be established.

Hypothesis 4:

Since 1918, the Dutch parliament has been chosen directly by the Dutch citizens through national elections (ProDemos, n.d.). The Dutch political system is considered to be strongly proportional, as almost every vote cast goes directly towards the political party that it is cast for (ProDemos, n.d.).

In short, the VVD and PVV tend to embrace the core issues of the PVV which should lead to an decrease in PVV support according to Van der Brug et al. (2005). Additionally, the VVD is moving more and more towards the centre of the political left-right spectrum which should increase the chances of electoral success of the PVV. Finally, according to ProDemos (n.d.) the Dutch political system is strongly proportional as almost every vote cast, goes directly

towards the political party that it is cast for. This should thus also lead to an increase in PVV support. The findings from the second hypothesis contradict the expectations of Van der Brug et al. (2005), but the analysis of the third and fourth hypotheses are thus much in line with the expectations of Van der Brug et al. (2005).

Conclusion

This thesis has researched the research question: to what extent does the surge of the PVV at the 2023 Dutch national elections fit within the theories that aim to explain the rise of populist parties? To answer this research question, this thesis has deduced four hypotheses from the theories by Goodman (2022) and Van der Brug et al. (2005) and compared these with descriptive statistics about the PVV case study. The analytical results from the analysis of the first hypothesis that was deduced from Goodman's (2022) theory allowed us to conclude that even though globalisation and technological development were increasing in the Netherlands which, according to Goodman (2022), should result in more people losing their locus of control, the amount of people that has already lost or is losing their locus of control is declining. These findings thus run against the expectations of Goodman's (2022) theory. This research therefore has found evidence against Goodman's (2022) *Locus of Control* theory, as this theory is not transferable to the Dutch PVV case study.

The second, third and fourth hypotheses were deduced from the *Electoral Opportunity Structure* theory by Van der Brug et al. (2005). The analytical results of the findings from the second hypothesis was that the VVD tends to embrace the core issues of the PVV which should lead to a decline in PVV support according to Van der Brug et al. (2005). This hypothesis can thus not explain the surge of the PVV during the 2023 Dutch national elections. The analytical results of the second hypothesis showed that the VVD is moving more closer towards the centre of the political left-right spectrum which should lead to an increase in PVV support and thus is in line with the expectations of Van der Brug et al. (2005). The analytical results of the third hypothesis confirmed that the Dutch electoral system is strongly proportional which should also lead to an increase in PVV support and therefore too is in accordance with the expectations of Van der Brug et al. (2005). In conclusion, this means that this theory can partially explain the surge of the PVV. This research has thus found evidence both in favour and against the *Electoral Opportunity Structure* theory by Van der Brug et al. (2005). These theories can thus only explain a minor part of the rise of the PVV.

This research does have some limitations. Firstly, the single-case study of the Dutch populist party PVV allows for a detailed examination of the case and applicability of the theories. However, this only enables this research to find evidence for the transferability and thus for just partial validity of a theory. To be able to fully reject or not reject one of these theories, this thesis suggests further research should be conducted by applying these theories on more case studies at the same time. Secondly, the rise of the PVV is a recent event which sometimes creates a problem for the data availability as the gathered data does not go entirely up to 2023. This has forced this research to establish trends in which there is always a margin of error. Additionally, the analysed descriptive statistics do not incorporate any last minute developments between political parties that can result in different voting behaviour of the electorate. An example of one of these developments right before the 2023 Dutch parliamentary elections is when the VVD party leader Dylan Yesilgöz said that she would consider stepping into a government with the PVV after the VVD had rejected this option since 2014 (Klaassen, 2023). The effect of these kinds of developments on the electorate might be much more influential than the independent variables as proposed by the two analysed theories. For this reason, this thesis encourages further investigation of the potential influence of last minute developments among political parties on the electoral success of the PVV.

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