Wild, Wilders, Wildest? Exploring the Evolution of Eurosceptic Conspiracy Rhetoric in the Tweets of Geert Wilders amidst Party Status Transitions

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Abstract

This thesis explores the shifts in Eurosceptic conspiracy rhetoric in the tweets of Dutch populist politician Geert Wilders, focusing on how he may strategically adjust his rhetoric as his Party for Freedom (PVV) moves from an outsider to a mainstream party in the 2021 and 2023 elections. Using a mixed-methods approach, 1,573 tweets from Wilders' X-account were collected and analysed, identifying 253 tweets containing conspiracy rhetoric, including 32 Eurosceptic conspiracy rhetoric tweets. The study created and employed a robust codebook to code the conspiracy tweets for their theme, agent, action, and intensity.

The thesis places itself in the existing literature on the intersection of populism and conspiracy theories and their shared characteristics of anti-elitism, anti-pluralism, and threatened nationalism. Moreover, the study is underpinned by the theory that populism and conspiracy theories are used as an anti-establishment mobilisation tool, based on those shared characteristics.

The study's findings indicate that conspiracy rhetoric was more common and intense during Wilders' outsider position in 2021, with a dominant theme of deliberate government malfunction and targeting the government and political establishment as the conspiring agents. In contrast, in the 2023 election period, when Wilders gained a mainstream status, the conspiracy rhetoric became less frequent and its content less intense, focusing on themes of migration and its associated threats. This shift suggests a strategic moderation of Wilders' rhetoric to position himself as a potential coalition and government partner.

These findings contribute to the broader discussion on populism and conspiracy rhetoric by showing the shifts in this rhetoric are mainly based on the changing party status. As many populists are experiencing a mainstreaming shift all over the world, this study is highly relevant. Further research can build on the current study, by employing a similar analysis that compares two populists' rhetoric and by analysing Wilders' rhetoric once more during or after his time in government.

Keywords: Conspiracy theories, Populism, Party Status, Eurosceptic Rhetoric

Content

Introduction

It has been firmly argued that populism and conspiracy theories are significantly intertwined, as they usually share three common traits: Anti-elitism (i.e., aversion towards power holders and a sense of victimhood), anti-pluralism (i.e., intolerance of competing beliefs, or an inability to compromise on those), and threatened nationalism (i.e., perception of one's nation, or 'in-group' being threatened by outsiders or external forces) (Van Prooijen, 2018; Müller, 2016; Pirro & Taggart, 2023). For example, populists like Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen, and Donald Trump have all been identified using conspiracy rhetoric in their direct communication to their constituents (e.g., Sawyer & Kalaycı, 2022). It is argued that populists may use their conspiracy rhetoric to portray themselves as the 'underdogs' in the establishment and/or to blame the conspiring elites for all the misfortunes experienced by the people of their nation or in-group (Müller, 2016; Pirro & Taggart, 2023). Seen as populist parties or leaders are coming into political power all over the world (i.e. Giorgia Meloni in Italy, and Donald Trump in the US, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil), and one of the main tropes of conspiracy rhetoric is 'anti-elitism', what happens to this 'outsider' rhetoric once these populist become part of those elites by joining parliamentary or even governmental power?

After the fall of the Dutch government in July 2023, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom [Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV] secured a significant victory of 37 of the 150 parliament seats, indicating a notable shift to right-wing and populist politics in the Netherlands (Kiesraad, 2023). While the PVV has been a major party in Dutch politics since its founding in 2006, this election result was a landslide win for them. The PVV, adopting the traditional characteristics of a radical right-wing populist party, has always focused on topics such as immigration, Islam, law and order, and European integration. Rapidly evolving into a populist party, it strongly criticised both cultural and political elites (Akkerman et al., 2016). Notably, even during its brief mainstream episode as an extra-cabinet supporter of the minority cabinet Rutte-I (2010-2012), PVV remained critical of cultural and political elites. After the collapse of Rutte-I, the party reverted to its anti-establishment and anti-immigrant profile, reinforcing its opposition and outsider status (van Haaften & van Leeuwen, 2020). Akkerman theorises that there were no signs that the PVV had the ambitions to become part of the political elite, by doubling-down on its anti-establishment and anti-immigrant profile after the period of extra-governmental support to Rutte-I: "[Wilders] appeared to have little ambition for office as long as this role demanded policy compromises and implied the risk of losing his strict grip on the party" (2016, p. 163).

Turning to the 2023 snap-election, the PVV is the largest party in parliament and currently in the process of forming a new government with two other former-outsider parties (BBB and NSC) as well the liberal-conservative party that was led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte for the last twelve years (VVD) [1].

That these objectively outsider parties are forming the new Dutch government implies a shift from outsiders to mainstream parties, especially considering one of the proposed definitions of outsider parties: "those [parties] which – even when their vote-share would have enabled it – due to their ideology and/or attitude towards mainstream parties have gone through a period of not being 'coalitionable', whether of their own volition or that of other parties in the system" (McDonnell & Newell, 2011, p. 445). They also argue that when an outsider party is faced with the opportunity to enter the mainstream parties' circle, they are also faced with a dilemma on how to proceed concerning their stances and reputation: will they remain steadfast on their (election)stances in order to remain loyal to their voters, or will they (appear to) leave their outsider and anti-establishment identity behind?

Moving on towards the puzzle and research questions that occupy this thesis. This thesis bases itself on two underpinning arguments that will be delineated to a greater extend in the literature review. These arguments include those put forward Barr (2009) and van Haaften & van Leeuwen (2020) that populist parties may deploy conspiracy rhetoric to strategically place themselves as underdog to or outside of the mainstream parties and political elites; and the arguments made by McDonnell & Newell (2011) and Pirro & Taggart (2023) that outsider and anti-establishment parties are faced with a dilemma on how to act once they become 'coalitionable' or part of said establishment. This dilemma usually results in shifting this conspiracy rhetoric to blame to another power bloc (such as international institutions) as the new 'conspiring elites'. The current study is interested in testing abovementioned theories and arguments by considering the following research questions:

Main research question:

How does the deployment of conspiracy rhetoric in the tweets of populist Geert Wilders, focusing on Eurosceptic content, evolve during his transitions between outsider and mainstream party statuses following the 2021 and 2023 elections?

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[1] BBB: the Farmer-Citizen-Movement [BoerBurgerBeweging]; NSC: New Social Alliance [Nieuw Sociaal Contract] ; VVD: People's Party for Freedom and Democracy [Volksparty voor Vrijheid en Democratie]

<u>Sub questions</u>:

1. What shifts occur in the themes, agents, actions, intensity, or frequency of conspiracy rhetoric during Wilders' transition in party statuses?

2. Is there a specific context or party status that triggers an increased usage of Eurosceptic conspiracy rhetoric?

Literature Review

The intersection of populism, conspiracy rhetoric, and Euroscepticism has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years. This literature review explores the utilisation of conspiracy rhetoric in tweets by the Dutch populist politician Geert Wilders, particularly focusing on issues framed within a Eurosceptic context. The main goal of this study is to understand the shifts in conspiracy narratives as Wilders' transitions from an outsider to mainstream, between 2020 and 2024.

First, the connection between populism and conspiracy theories is addressed, with special attention to populist and conspiracy rhetoric on social media. Second, this section examines the influence of party status on populist rhetoric, followed by an exploration of populist rhetoric on issues salient in Eurosceptic conspiracies.

The Intersection of Populism And Conspiracy Theories

The connection between populism and conspiracy belief has been well-established in scholarly literature, consistently pointing to a correlation between ideological extremism and endorsement of conspiracy beliefs. (e.g., van Prooijen, Krouwel & Pollet, 2015; Silva et al., 2017; Pirro & Taggart, 2023). While many authors propose slightly different definitions of both populism and conspiracy theories, for this thesis, populism is defined as a thin ideology that may occur anywhere the political spectrum, portraying a dichotomy between 'the people' and 'the establishment' (van Prooijen, 2018). Similarly, conspiracy theories are defined in line with Uscinski et al. (2017). They "define conspiracy theory as an explanation of historical, ongoing, or future events or circumstances that cites as a main causal factor a small group of powerful persons, the conspirators, acting in secret for their own benefit or against the common good" (p. 4).

Van Prooijen (2018) and Müller (2016) connect populism and conspiracy theories on three shared characteristics: Anti-elitism, anti-pluralism and threatened nationalism. *Anti-elitism* portrays the negative attitude toward a powerful elite as felt by the ordinary people. In a Manichean struggle between the marginalised 'people' and the powerful 'elites', one may attribute harmful events as deliberate actions of powerful and malicious conspiracies. *Anti-pluralism* reflects an inability to tolerate competing beliefs, or to compromise on one's own ideas. This entails that solely the ideas of the popular leader or that one conspiracy theory is seen as correct; all other narratives are framed by the elites for their own benefit. This also creates a preference for unnuanced and simple ideas or solutions to a problem. Lastly, populism

and conspiracy theories are connected on their notion of *threatened nationalism.* This describes the idea that one's in-group is threatened by an external force, such as the 'elites', foreigners, or even aliens.

Seen as populism and conspiracy theories share some key characteristics, populist leaders have often been found utilising conspiracy rhetoric as a tool to mobilise support by spinning a narrative of 'the people' against alleged malevolent elites, as well as demonising and delegitimising their opponents (Sawyer & Kalaycı, 2022). Dutch populist politician Wilders, is no exception, frequently utilising conspiracy theories in his rhetoric. During his trial for hate speech and inciting violence against Moroccans in 2016, Wilders delegitimised the judicial system, his political opponents, and the media in his final court address, alleging a witch hunt orchestrated by Prime Minister Mark Rutte and casting the Public Prosecution Service as mere pawns of the Dutch cabinet (PVV, 2016). Additionally, Sawyer & Kalaycı (2022) found that populists are most likely to make use of conspiracy rhetoric when directly addressing their constituents. With the rise of the internet and especially social media platforms such as X (formerly known as Twitter), populists seem to have found their perfect communication platform (i.e., Breeze, 2020; Cinelli et al., 2022; Jacobs & Spierings, 2018). These platforms allow populist leaders to control their narrative and to swiftly respond to events, circumventing traditional media. These platforms allow politicians direct communication with followers, enabling the dissemination of simplified messages that resonate broadly, in line with the anti-elitist and anti-pluralist characteristics of populism and conspiracy theories. It is therefore quite interesting to analyse populists' used rhetoric on social media.

Wilders frequently communicates via X, occasionally employing conspiracy rhetoric. For instance, during the Hungarian referendum on the European Union's migrant relocation plans in 2016, Wilders tweeted: "*Vote NO today. NO more Brussels NO more 'refugees' NO more Islam YES to national sovereignty YES to national identity #referendum*" (@Geertwilderspvv, 2016). With this tweet he alludes that 'Brussels', a common synonym for the EU, infringes on national sovereignty, and implies, by using the quotation marks, that refugees are not really refugees, but something that harms national identity. He therefore depicts the EU as well as Islamic refugees as the enemies of not only the Hungarians, but all European states' sovereignty, including that of the Netherlands.

Analysing Wilders' deployment of conspiracy rhetoric as he transitions from an outsider to mainstream party status is particularly interesting, given the shared characteristics of populism and conspiracy theories. Despite the ample academic interest in Wilders, his ideology, and even his (online) rhetoric (e.g., van Haaften & van Leeuwen, 2020; van Kessel & Castelein,

2016; Vossen, 2011), very few have examined the intersection of Wilders and conspiracy rhetoric, with the one exception of Michael Hameleers in 2020. He examined whether Wilders uses conspiracies and who his rhetoric seems to frame as the conspirators. However, while Hameleers selected both a non- as well as an election-period timeframe to gather tweets from, he did not account for the variation that this might cause. I argue that contexts like election periods and party identity do, in fact, influence the salience of conspiracy rhetoric. Despite the existing body of literature on Wilders, he remains of relevant interest.

Wilders is not a newcomer to the Dutch Parliament, in fact, he is currently its 'Nestor', serving as a MP for over twenty-five years. One could argue he already *is* part of the establishment populists usually attack, yet he has had a fairly interesting trajectory in Parliament. Initially, he served as an MP for the mainstream VVD before establishing his own party, which consistently secured a significant number of parliamentary seats, ranking as either the second or third largest party in parliament for the past fifteen years (Parlement.com, n.d.). Additionally, Wilders stands out as the only contemporary Dutch populist politician to have experienced shifts in party status, transitioning from an outsider to a mainstream party member, notably evidenced by his party's support for the minority government during 2010-2012, and the landslide win in the 2023 elections.

The subsequent paragraphs explore the dynamics of party status and its impact on political discourse. Examining the shifts in rhetoric as parties navigate between mainstream and outsider positions, we gain insight into how strategic rhetorical changes shape party perception and identity.

Rhetoric and Party Status

Understanding the definitions of outsider and mainstream parties aides in understanding the effect of party status on its political discourse. While the term outsider and mainstream parties in political science has been vague and not (consistently) conceptualised (e.g., Barr, 2009; Luther, 2011), for this thesis, the definition of McDonnell and Newell (2011) is adopted:

outsider parties [are] those which – even when their vote-share would have enabled it – due to their ideology and/or attitude towards mainstream parties have gone through a period of not being 'coalitionable', whether of their own volition or that of other parties in the system. (p. 445).

Here, 'coalitionable' refers to inclusion within the sphere of potential governing parties. A mainstream party, therefore, has either been involved in governing or has the potential to be part of a governing coalition.

While part of a party's outsider status may be determined by its limited size or its opposing ideologies to the mainstream or coalition parties, certain parties may deliberately maintain or adopt outsider status, positioning themselves outside of the sphere of potential coalition partners. According to van Haaften and van Leeuwen (2020) populist leaders may strategically use their parliamentary rhetoric to maintain an image of political outsiders. Many authors agree that populists tend to portray themselves as outsiders or underdogs to the elites of the establishment, be it the governing parties, international organisations, scientists, or the mainstream media (e.g., Hainsworth et al. 2004; Pirro & Taggart, 2023; Sawyer & Kalaycı, 2022). Imhoff et al. (2012) found stronger support for conspiracy beliefs among voters of opposition parties, who are excluded from political power. While it is not indicative solely of belief in – or utilisation of – conspiracy theories by opposition parties, this finding prompts the question of whether opposition politicians strategically make use of conspiracy rhetoric to appeal to those constituents. The transition from an outsider to mainstream party status is a crucial aspect of the literature here, as outsider parties, as per abovementioned definitions, may need to transform by either abandoning or modifying their former radical or anti-establishment ideologies or discourse, to become potential governing parties (Deschouwer, 2008). This transition is not only about the change of the party's status but also about altering public perception and party rhetoric as well as its identity.

Previous research has examined the impact of status transition on political rhetoric. Pancer et al. (1992) found that the rhetoric of English MPs evolved to be more complex as their party moved from opposition to government and vice versa. Additionally, as time passed since the last election, the governing MPs' rhetoric became more complex while the complexity of the opposition decreased. The used definition of rhetorical complexity overlaps significantly with the previously discussed characteristic of 'anti-pluralism' shared by populism and conspiracy rhetoric: "complex communications are those which are characterised by a recognition that more than one point of view on an issue can be valid and that the different perspectives can be integrated or related to one another in some manner" (Pancer et al., 1992, p. 32). More recently, Cerón et al. (2020) studied populists' anti-establishment rhetoric before and during government participation. Pointing out the chameleonic nature of populism, they argue that populist parties, former outsiders to their respective governments, strategically change their rhetoric once they became part of the coalition negotiations and later the government. Lastly, Pirro & Taggart (2023) found that in majoritarian democracies, such as the US or UK, populists who made use of conspiracy rhetoric before coming into power often adapt their rhetoric to blame new or alternative conspiring elites for any failures during their

tenure to maintain the perception of being underdogs or outsiders and their antagonistic role. However, limited exploration has been conducted on how conspiracy rhetoric evolves in non-majoritarian democracies based on party status, as few authors have explored this theme beyond the US/Donald Trump or Brexit contexts (Mădroane, 2021; Pirro & Taggart, 2023; Plenta, 2020).

What has been explored before, however, is the critique-rhetoric in tweets of both Wilders and one of his former left-wing populist adversaries, Emile Roemer (van Kessel & Castelein, 2016). They found a shift in who was criticised and what their targets were criticised for based on the time period in the election cycle: Wilders was found to be most critical on Twitter during election campaigns compared to non-election periods. However, this study coded the selected tweets on loosely defined terms. This current study hopes to contribute to this subject by using a defined term of conspiracy rhetoric and not just examine expressed criticism but exploring the prevalence of conspiracies in this expressed criticism.

Eurosceptic Conspiracy Rhetoric

In this study, we take special interest in conspiracy rhetoric in a Eurosceptic context. Some of the most salient Eurosceptic topics seem to be the perceived invasion on states' sovereignty, in particular that of economics, energy, and migration. These subjects have been found to be relevant in relation to populism and conspiracy theories, serving as powerful tools for populist agendas: Populist leaders often deploy Eurosceptic rhetoric to vilify the EU as an external and elite force conspiring against national interests and sovereignty, often framing European integration as part of a wider international conspiracy to dismantle the nation-state (Hainsworth et al., 2004; Huber, 2022; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2012). Euroscepticism is defined by opposition and negative and critical attitudes toward the European Union, its representatives, institutions and policies, reflecting a broader resistance to both the idea and the current form of the EU (Krouwel & van Prooijen, 2021). In a study examining conspiracy mentality and political orientation across 26 countries with over 10.000 participants, a linear relationship between Euroscepticism and conspiracy belief was observed, particularly in Western Europe (Imhoff et al., 2022). This suggests that citizens harbouring anti-EU sentiments, are also more prone to believe in conspiracy theories. Conspiracy beliefs may thus have important political consequences, not in the least the undermining of trust in international institutions such as the EU. Moreover, Taggart & Szczerbiak (2012) found a small, yet significant moderating effect of government participation on Eurosceptic parties' policy stances. This implies that the shift

from outsider parties to mainstream might also affect a populist party's conspiracy rhetoric on European affairs.

Aligned with the theory of van Prooijen (2018), as mentioned above, conspiracy theories and populism also converge on the characteristic of 'threatened nationalism'. This entails the perception of one's in-group, or nation is threatened by outside forces, and in Eurosceptic conspiracies, the EU is seen the threat to national sovereignty (Krouwel & van Prooijen, 2021). While Euroscepticism and European affairs are broad in their definitions, this study keeps an open focus on all Eurosceptic topics that Geert Wilders may address, however, these salient topics of sovereignty of energy, migration, and the economy within an EU context are briefly explored next.

<u>Migration, Energy and Economy in a Eurosceptic Context</u>

Migration, energy, and economy are significant factors fuelling Eurosceptic sentiments across Europe. Migration, exemplified by the Brexit debate, saw the UK seek control over its borders against the free movement within Schengen and EU-states, driven by nationalist and conservative rhetoric (Mǎdroane, 2021). The Leave campaign strategically incorporated conspiracy theories like the 'Great Replacement' and 'Eurabia', suggesting a global elite replacing native citizens with – mainly Islamic – immigrants (Bergmann, 2021). This aligns with Wilders' anti-Islam and anti-migration platform (Vossen, 2011).

Energy issues, particularly climate change and energy transition, also attract populist rhetoric due to their elite-driven nature and cognitive distance from their short-term consequences (Douglas & Sutton, 2015). Populist parties often reject the scientific consensus on climate change, framing EU policies as fabricated to impose regulations and restrict citizen autonomy (Huber, 2022). Underscoring the role of political dynamics in shaping conspiracy rhetoric, Huber (2022) found a surge of populist and post-factual rhetoric deployed by the Austrian populist FPÖ party during elections, but also a notable decline once this party participated in government, especially on the subject of climate change and policies. Huber's study, however focussed mainly on energy-related conspiracies in Austria's public opinion, leaving an academic gap for exploring the mechanisms that might explain the change in conspiracy rhetoric of the FPÖ.

Lastly, the shared economy and monetary union are also prevalent Eurosceptic topics. Eurosceptics, including Wilders, often frame the EU as infringing on the national economy, siphoning taxpayers' money to unnecessary projects or 'underserving' member states (e.g., Lubbers & Scheepers, 2010; Nicoli, 2016). Taggart & Szczerbiak (2012) found that

government participation has a small, yet significant, moderating effect on the use Eurosceptic rhetoric by politicians, including the rhetoric on the national and EU-economy. They also specifically found that Wilders, in contrast, did not leave his hard-line Eurosceptic ideas during the time period that his party supported the minority government, in 2010-2012 right after the EU financial crisis. However, this study was conducted almost twelve years ago, and this thesis will address this time gap by assessing time periods a decade after the period of minority support. Moreover, Taggart & Szczerbiak solely assessed the Eurosceptic stances of Wilders and his party and its effect on policy, not the use of conspiracy rhetoric targeting the EU. This study aims to address this gap and contribute to the understanding of the interplay between conspiracy theories, populism, and Euroscepticism in the context of party status and rhetoric.

Having reviewed the current literature on the relationship between conspiracy theories and populism, party status and rhetoric, as well as explained some themes that are salient among Eurosceptics and conspiracy theorists, the following section will delineate the theoretical framework that underlies the study at hand.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws upon a theory that helps illuminate the dynamics of populists' use of conspiracy rhetoric. Based on the well-established connection between populism and conspiracy beliefs, this framework explores the dynamics of anti-establishment mobilisation during transitions between outsider and mainstream party statuses. This theory posits populism as a political strategy characterised by a thin ideology, creating a Manichean divide between 'the people' and 'the establishment.' This thin ideology can be found all over the political spectrum but is most prevalent at the extremes of left and right (Krouwel et al., 2017). Building upon the work of van Prooijen (2018) and Müller (2016), the shared characteristics of anti-elitism, anti-pluralism, and threatened nationalism are explored. Through this theory's lens, we investigate how populist leaders strategically utilise conspiracy rhetoric to mobilise support, demonise elites, and frame a narrative that resonates particularly well when communicated directly to constituents via social media platforms.

Populism as Anti-Establishment Mobilisation

While much attention has been given to populism in a variety of academic disciplines such as sociology, history, philosophy, and of course political science, there is still no consensus on the one definition of the concept. This reiterates the early observation made in 1969 by Ionescu & Gellner: "There can at present be no doubt about the *importance* of populism. But no one is quite clear what it *is*," (p. 368, emphasis in the original), a sentiment repeated by many if not most of the scholars interested in the topic of populism; for instance, Mudde and Kaltwasser even argue that the discussion on populism is not only concerning what populism is, but whether it even exists, remarking that "It truly is an essentially contested concept." (2017, p.2). The term populism has been used to describe leaders, regimes, movements, ideologies, policies, and state structures, highlighting the lack of precision in the application of its definition (Jansen, 2015). However, what all these scholars do agree on, is that populism is centred on a distinction between the 'elite' and the 'people' (e.g. Barr, 2009; Moffitt, 2020; Morgan, 2020; Müller, 2016; Silva et al., 2017).

An important question concerning the debate on populism is what purpose it may serve. Some see it as a political strategy where a charismatic leader directly appeals to a heterogenous mass for personal gain and power (e.g., Roberts, 1995; Vachudová, 2021), a viewpoint that highlights the role of the individual who puppeteers and mobilises the masses for individual gain. However, it tends to oversimplify the socio-political dynamics that shape populist

movements by forgoing any incentive for the masses to follow or support this leader. Others do present such an incentive, arguing that populism is a redistribution tactic, as the populist speaks up for the 'little people' against 'those on top', addressing inequalities (e.g., Dornbusch & Edwards, 1991; León, 2014). By framing populism as a tool for social justice, this viewpoint highlights the grievances fuelling populist sentiment, but it also neglects the potential risks of populism, including the inherent polarisation it fosters. Lastly, there is another group of scholars who see populism as a very specific response to lapses of political representation, where certain groups perceive to be marginalised or excluded by their political institutions, and where populism provides a new form of political engagement (e.g., Roberts, 2015; Skenderovic, 2021). This viewpoint highlights the role and agency of marginalised groups in challenging the established political power structures, underscoring the potential of populist movements to redefine political norms and practices.

More specifically, these authors argue that populism is a thin ideology, that can appear on all sides of the political spectrum and creates a Manichean division between 'the people' and the 'establishment' through top-down mass mobilisation against these established elites (Barr, 2009; Jansen, 2015; Müller, 2016; Roberts, 2015; Skenderovic, 2021, Vachudová, 2021). Put differently, populism fosters polarisation, provokes its audience to decide on which side of the dichotomy they stand, and invites them to actively stand up against the elites, mainly through direct democratic mechanisms, rather than representative ones (Morgan, 2020).

While each perspective offers their own contribution to our understanding of the emergence of populism, this last group of authors considers both the inherent dangers as well as the socio-political factors that add to the sustainability of populist movements or parties. This viewpoint of anti-establishment mobilisation offers the most encompassing lens to study populism in for this current study, especially when considering the role of conspiracy theories in populist mobilisation efforts.

Transitioning to the role of conspiracy theories in anti-establishment mobilisation, Müller (2016) and van Prooijen (2018) found that populism and conspiracy theories interconnect on three shared characteristics: anti-elitism, anti-pluralism, and threatened nationalism. These shared characteristics are briefly discussed next, mainly in the context of how they support the theory that populism is a tool for anti-establishment mobilisation and what role conspiracy rhetoric may play in this mobilisation.

<u>Anti-elitism</u>

The correlation between distrust and conspiracy belief can be no surprise. It is found that a general distrust of powerful groups in society as well as feelings of alienation from politics predict beliefs in conspiracy theories, and those people with negative attitudes towards powerful groups, thus scoring high on 'anti-elitism', are more likely to perceive conspiracies where there are none (e.g., Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999; Goertzel, 1994) By using conspiracy rhetoric, populists can play into this shared characteristic of anti-elitism, attributing ambiguous and negative events or outcomes to the malicious intentions of a malevolent elite. This implicates conspiracy rhetoric as a strategic tool to sow distrust, reinforce their anti-establishment narratives and mobilise support against these elite establishments (Hameleers, 2020). An illustrating example is the discourse Donald Trump has used to demonise his opponent Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential elections using the Pizzagate conspiracy. Clinton, who was entrenched in the US political establishment, would have been part of a gang of paedophiles, who were running human trafficking routes through pizzerias (Nwokora, 2023).

<u>Anti-pluralism</u>

The fundamental characteristic of populism in the belief that you – and only you – are the real voice of 'the people' inherently reflects the inability to accept or understand competing beliefs or to compromise on one's own ideas. It was found that radical political views can predict a decrease in the ability to compromise, increased attitudinal certainty and tendencies to reject diverging ideological beliefs (Müler, 2016; van Prooijen, 2018). Another aspect of anti-pluralism is the presented conviction of simple answers or explanations to complex or ambiguous issues: instead of considering that an interplay factors may cause a certain outcome, which requires a multifaceted response, populists pose easy and one-sided solutions (e.g., evict all migrants and all our problems will be solved) (Galston, 2018). A great example of this aspect is found in the official election plans of Wilders in 2017, titled 'The Netherlands to be ours again!'. These official plans consisted of a single page proposing to put a stop to the Great Replacement of Dutch citizens with Islamic migrants by closing all asylum centres and Mosques, and banning headscarves from public places (PVV, 2017).

Belief in conspiracy theories has been found to correlate with narcissism and increased hostility to the disputing of one's belief: If you are not with us, you are against us. (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999). As van Prooijen argues, "Anti-pluralism implies a worldview in which citizens who disagree with populist rhetoric are part of the establishment, suggesting that such dissenting citizens either conspire with, or are string puppets of, the establishment" (2018, pp.

13-14). This rejection of pluralism invites anyone with non-establishment ideologies to actively oppose compromise and nuances by the establishment, increasing anti-establishment hostility.

<u>Threatened Nationalism</u>

A core characteristic of populism is that Manichean divide between 'the people' and 'the elite', or 'us' vs. 'them', ingroup vs. outgroup. "[P]opulist rhetoric posits the natural social unity and inherent virtuousness of 'the people'", as Jansen aptly describes it (2015, p. 84). This shared characteristic describes the aspect of populism and conspiracy theories, where this virtuous people – the 'us'; the ingroup – is threatened by a malevolent outgroup (Hameleers, 2020; Jansen, 2015; Mudde, 2004; van Prooijen 2018). For most Western populists, their proposed ingroup, 'the ordinary people', is threatened by immigration facilitated by international cooperation and multinational entities such as the EU or the UN (Barr, 2009). The perceived threat to one's ingroup can elicit feelings of fear and uncertainty, which could predict an increase in conspiracy thinking, as well mobilise groups against the perceived elite-threat (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). Donald Trump provides another example of how the feeling of threatened nationalism plays into mobilising the masses against the establishment: the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, was preceded by endless speeches and tweets by Trump claiming that the elections were stolen by Joe Biden and the Democrats. Two of these tweets include: "The steal is in the making in Georgia. Wait for it" and "Get smart Republicans. FIGHT!" (@realDonaldTrump, 2021). Participants of this insurrection called themselves the 'Ministry of Self-defence' on social media, as they were planning to 'save America from the stolen election' (Perliger, 2023).

In summary, these shared elements underscore the role of conspiracy rhetoric as a tool in the broader strategic framework of populism as an anti-establishment mobilisation tool, as it fuels distrust and feelings of uncertainty and rally support against perceived malevolent elites and establishments.

The abovementioned theory concludes to the following hypotheses on the research question exploring changes in Wilders' use of conspiracy rhetoric:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Aligned with the theory of populism as anti-establishment mobilisation, Wilders will intensify his use of conspiracy rhetoric, particularly the months right before the elections. This heightened rhetoric aims to mobilise support by positioning Wilders as an outsider challenging the established power structures.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Wilders' use of conspiracy rhetoric, particularly regarding Euroscepticism, will fluctuate in response to his political positioning during the election campaigns of 2021 and 2023: During mainstreaming positioning, there will be a <u>decrease</u> in the frequency and intensity of conspiracy rhetoric, yet a stronger emphasis on Eurosceptic themes. Conversely, during outsider positioning, there will be an <u>increase</u> in both the frequency and intensity of conspiracy narratives, focussing more on national themes and agents.

The following section discusses the rationale for the case selection as well as the methodology chosen to test these two hypotheses and to ultimately answer the posed research question.

Case selection & Methodology

In order to answer the current research questions, this study analyses Wilders' tweets containing conspiracy rhetoric sent over two time periods of ten months each: the six months leading up to the elections of 2021 and 2023 respectively, as well as the four subsequent months. Before the chosen methodology is discussed, the following paragraphs first detail the reasoning for the case selection and timeframes.

Case Selection

Wilders has been an MP for over twenty years and is widely recognised as a prominent populist political figure both nationally and internationally (e.g., Schaart, 2023; Vossen, 2011). Moreover, most authors on populism agree that populist movements are most commonly centred around one strong, charismatic leader, who can mobilise the masses (e.g., Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017; Müller, 2016; Pirro & Taggart, 2023). Being a consistent MP and the sole member of the PVV, it is most instructive to select Wilders for this study on populists using conspiracy rhetoric.

While adding a comparative perspective by also analysing other populists' rhetoric would strengthen this study, this thesis is limited by language constraints. To facilitate an accurate analysis of the presence of conspiracy rhetoric in communication, I conclude that one ought to be native or well-versed in the language of the observed politician. As conspiracy rhetoric may be nuanced, even in one's native language, trying to detect misinformation in another language may prove to be even more difficult (Caramancion, 2022). Therefore, this thesis will solely analyse Wilders' rhetoric, despite the limitations stemming from these language constraints.

In order to analyse Wilders' rhetoric, this study focuses on his micro blogposts sent on X, formerly known as 'tweets' on Twitter. Here, the term tweets will be used synonymous with X-posts. The justification for using tweets to gauge conspiracy rhetoric is twofold: X is a highly favoured social media platform by many politicians, and especially among populists as it facilitates direct and personal dissemination of information and communication with the public. Social media creates a simple and accessible way to circumvent traditional media, which has often been subject to censorship allegations by both conspiracy believers and populists alike (Ernst et al., 2019; Jacobs & Spierings, 2018; Mangerotti et al., 2021). Additionally, in line with the theory of populism as anti-establishment mobilisation tool, van Kessel and Castelein (2016) argue that populist utilise X "to engage in a 'permanent campaign' against dominant

mainstream parties" (p. 596). They conclude that tweets are highly appropriate in providing insights into anti-establishment strategies and the targets of populists' criticism.

Secondly, research suggests that political parties are more inclined to use populist and conspiracy rhetoric on social media platforms like X when directly addressing their constituents, as opposed interviews, debates, or party manifestos (Ernst et al., 2019; Sawyer and Kalaycı, 2022). Additionally, social media platforms like X have significantly contributed to the spread of conspiracy theories through confirmation biases and their opaque algorithms designed to keep users engaged on their platforms (Goreis & Kothgassner, 2020; Mari et al., 2021; Stano, 2020). Lastly, X's format, primarily based on text-based posts, facilitates the most pragmatic analysis compared to platforms focused on photos or videos, such as Instagram or TikTok. Taking all of the above, X poses the best medium for the purpose of the current study.

The selected timeframes allow for a comparison of his rhetoric in both an 'outsider' and 'mainstream'-election. In 2021, Wilders was pre-emptively excluded from government participation by the biggest parties at that time, therefore retaining an outsider party status. In 2023, however, the VVD mentioned that these elections, they were not opposed to collaborating with Wilders' PVV. This boosted PVV's polls and contributed to their landslide win on 37 seats. Currently, the PVV is forming a government with the VVD, BBB, and NSC, meaning that the 2023 elections, especially the post-election period, the PVV gained a mainstream status (Frederik, 2024). Understanding the rationale for the selected case study and timeframe, the following section will explain how this thesis analyses Wilders' conspiracy rhetoric on X.

Methodology:

This thesis adopts a mixed methods approach after collecting Wilders' tweets from his X-account [@geertwilderspvv] via a Twitter Scraper. A mixed method approach enables a manageable process for both the ample volume and diversity of X's content, where the quantitative part of the analysis tracks the frequency of the manifestation of certain themes or actors in Wilders rhetoric, the qualitative part provides contextual insights to the content (Krippendorff, 2019). Having obtained all Wilders' original tweets, only text-based posts are admitted for the subsequent analysis, those containing solely videos, pictures, or those that were re-tweeted by Wilders were not collected. Doing so allows for a more consistent content analysis, as imagery and retweeted posts do not reflect Wilders' personal rhetoric.

The first step after collection is determining whether the tweet contains conspiracy rhetoric and/or is EU-related. To determine whether a tweet can be coded as a conspiracy tweet, the definition of Uscinski et al. (2017) is maintained, who "define conspiracy theory as an explanation of historical, ongoing, or future events or circumstances that cites as a main causal factor a small group of powerful persons, the conspirators, acting in secret for their own benefit or against the common good" (p. 4). The tweets are read and coded manually firstly on whether they contain conspiracy rhetoric, and whether the conspiracy content is EU-related. For the latter, this could include content on EU-institutions, -directives, or -representatives. Those tweets coded for both, or solely conspiracies are subjected to the subsequent coding processes. Contrastingly, those that are not conspiratorial or solely EU-related are quantitatively processed but not coded any further. See Figure 1 for a schematic overview of this coding process. To facilitate a consistent content analysis all selected tweets are coded according to a codebook (see Appendix I), as is discussed in the following section.

Codebook

A codebook ensures that tweets, with varying content, are coded consistently allowing a holistic comparison for the timeframes. The collected tweets were coded for four main codes, based on the typologies of conspiracy theories by Barkun (2015), Walker (2014), and Harambam (2017), for their theme, agent, action, and intensity. These codes allow for an analysis of what themes Wilders addresses (i.e., migration, health, economic) (Harambam, 2017); who is presented as the conspiratorial agent in each tweet (e.g., the Government, Migrants, EU) and what action these agents are undertaking (e.g., censoring, framing, oppressing) (Walker, 2014). The last main code 'Intensity' facilitates an overview of the intensity of mentioned conspiracy in the tweet. This categorisation has three levels of intensity: event, systematic, and Superconspiracy (Barkun, 2015).
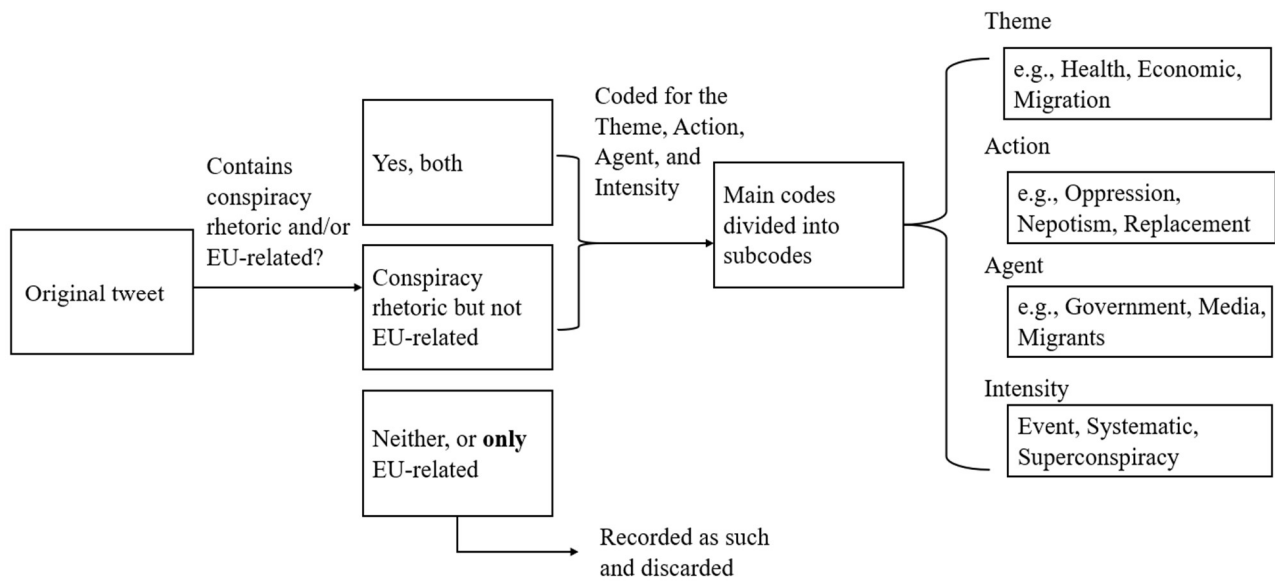
Figure 1: Decision tree on coding

Next, these four main codes were divided into subcodes, which were constructed during the coding of a sample of 100 of the conspiracy tweets (40,5%). The codebook (Appendix I) was created during the analysis of this sample. A subcode is distinguished from a main when a tweet contains a specific and distinctive quality of subject: i.e., the subject of health differs from the subject of migration, yet they both describe the overall theme of the tweet. Similarly, the code Agent describes the actor or mentioned conspirator, where the subcode is the label given to a specifically defined niche of these actors, such as actors in government, which are distinguished from, for example, migrants. The code Action examines the act that Wilders mentions that is undertaken by the agent of the tweet: is this agent oppressing citizens, or are they withholding information? As these subcodes are subjective to the coder, an intercoder reliability test is conducted to establish objectivity, before the final analysis can be presented and discussed. An intercoder decides independently on whether the tweet contains conspiracy rhetoric, is EU-related, as well as on each subcode in a 10% sample of all retrieved tweets (N=156), their results are compared to the author's decisions. The validation and objectivity are calculated with Cohen's Kappa (κ), when κ is over 0.61, it is deemed sufficient. Table 1 presents the Cohen's Kappa for this study, while Table 2 presents the main codes and their subcodes.

Main Code	Cohen's Kappa (κ)	Main Code	Cohen's Kappa (κ)
Presence of Conspiracy rhetoric	0,63	Action	0,62
EU-related conspiracy	0,76	Agent	0,71
Theme	0,67	Intensity	0,84

Table 1: Cohen's Kappa calculations

Code	Subcodes		Code	Subcodes	
Theme	Anti-EU	Islam	**Agent**	Elites	Judiciary
	Climate	Migration		EU	Mainstream
	Economic	Personal Attack		Foreign	Media
	Elitism	Political		Entity	Migrants
	Government	Establishment		Government	Political
	Health				Establishment
Action	Censoring	Puppet-	**Intensity**	Event	
	Democratic Deficit	representation		Systematic	
	Endangerment	Replacement			
	Framing/Indoctrination	Supranationalism			
	Ignoring	Withholding			
	Misallocation of funds	information			
	Nepotism	Working with			
	Oppression	other agents			
	Ostracism				

Table 2: Final Main codes and Subcodes

In order to provide qualitative context to the analysis, polling and election results by Ipsos and I&O-research are gathered. As this thesis seeks to explain any variety in Wilders' rhetoric based on the outsider or mainstream status of his party, news articles are to provide the context of whether Wilders was seen as 'coalitionable' at the given time of any tweet posted that contains conspiracy rhetoric. Aligned with the arguments of McDonnell and Newell (2011), Wilders is considered 'coalitionable' when his party is not (yet) excluded from being considered for government participation.

Some limitations arise from using the abovementioned methods, including the language constraints that limits comparability and thus generalisability that could provide broader insights into conspiracy rhetoric across different populist politicians. Moreover, while the author is a native Dutch speaker, the final results, including examples of the analysed tweets, are presented in English. This could result in the occurrence of translational errors, especially given the nuanced nature of conspiracy theories. Other limitations include the influence of external factors, such as media coverage, public opinion, or geopolitical events. Isolating the impact of party status completely from these external influences from Wilders' deliberate communication choices is not entirely feasible.

Results

In total, 1573 tweets were scraped from Wilders' X-account, of which 1558 valid for this study. Of these, 253 tweets (16,2%) contained conspiracy rhetoric (κ = 0,63), and 32 tweets (2,1%) involved EU-related conspiracies (κ=0,76). This thesis examines the influence of party status on the prevalence and content of conspiracy rhetoric in Wilders' tweets, focusing on two selected election timeframes.

During the 2021 election timeframe (September 2020 – June 2021), a total of 819 tweets were collected, with 166 containing conspiracy rhetoric (20,3%). Only 17 tweets contained Eurosceptic conspiracy content (2,1%). For this timeframe (TK2021), Figure 2 shows a spike in total tweets in March, April and May, coinciding with the election and start of the government formation period, preceded by a decline and followed by another uptick in conspiracy rhetoric. April, especially, saw a high prevalence of conspiracy tweets, with 26 tweets of the 81 tweets sent that month (32,1%). Mid-February Rutte announced his refusal to form a coalition with the PVV, which was polling at 22 seats compared to the VVD's 38, making the PVV an outsider (Driessen et al., 2021; NOS, 2021).

Prevalence of Conspiracy Rhetoric TK2021

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Non-Con%	69,9	84,8	87,6	82,6	80,6	82,6	79,2	67,9	80,3	82,3
EU Conspiracy%	2,4	5,1			1,4	4,7	2,5	1,2	1,6	1,3
Non EU Conspiracy%	27,7	10,1	12,4	17,4	18,1	12,8	18,3	30,9	18,0	16,5
Total N=	83	79	89	69	72	86	120	81	61	79
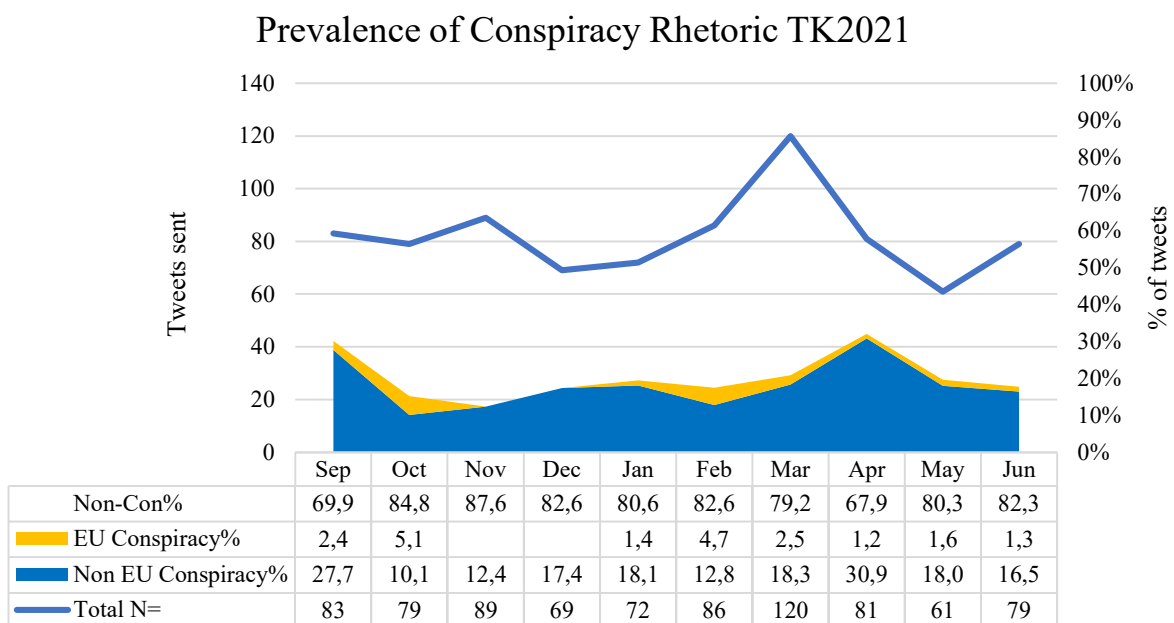
Figure 2: Graph on all valid tweets collected in the timeframe TK2021; and percentages of (EU)-conspiracy tweets

For the 2023 election-timeframe (TK2023: May 2023 - March 2024), a total of 739 tweets were collected, with 87 containing conspiracy rhetoric (11,8%), and fifteen referring to Eurosceptic conspiracies (2%). Figure 3 shows a spike in sent tweets in the months leading up to the election day of 22 November (Oct: 107; Nov: 110), with a drop in conspiracy tweets immediately after the elections: only one was sent after the November elections, and one more in December. Notably, no EU-conspiracy tweets were sent following July, the month in which the government fell, and new elections were announced, until the elections.

Prevalence of Conspiracy Rhetoric TK2023

	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Non-Con%	80,3	75,9	87,2	92,5	92,6	86,0	93,6	97,9	84,8	92,7	92,5
EU Conspiracy%	4,5	3,6	5,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,9	2,1	0,0	0,0	5,7
Non EU Conspiracy%	15,2	20,5	7,7	7,5	7,4	14,0	5,5	0,0	15,2	7,3	1,9
Total N=	66	83	78	53	54	107	110	47	33	55	53
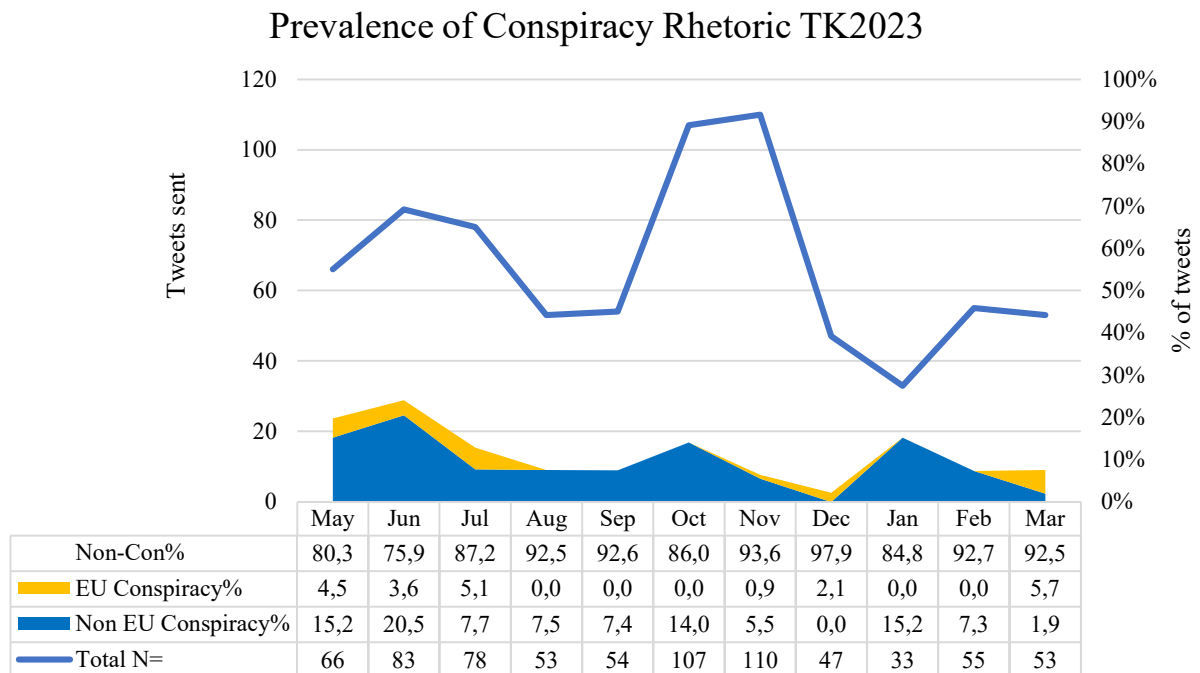
Figure 3: Graph on all valid tweets collected in the timeframe TK2023; and percentages of (EU)-conspiracy tweets

In August, the new VVD-leader, Dilan Yesilgöz, announced that she would not exclude the PVV before the election results were out, unlike her predecessor Rutte did in 2021 (NOS, 2023). Polling at 19 seats, this meant that the PVV was not considered an outright outsider party at this point (EenVandaag, 2023). While the percentage of conspiracy rhetoric does not seem affected by Yesilgöz' statement, it notably stays consistently low from July onwards.

All 253 tweets that contained conspiracy rhetoric were subsequently coded for their Theme, Action, Agent, and Intensity, as detailed in the following sections.

Theme

In TK2021, the most prevalent theme of Wilders' conspiracy tweets was that of Government, as shown in Table 3 and Figure 4, with 30,1% (N=50) referring to the deliberate malfunctioning of the Dutch government or the government formation process after the March elections. This theme is also unique in being consistently found in the entire

timeframe. Other prevalent themes, such as Migration (13,3%; N=22) and Health (12%; N=20), are mentioned frequently but not as consistently.

Theme	Sep (%)	Oct (%)	Nov (%)	Dec (%)	Jan (%)	Feb (%)	Mar (%)	Apr (%)	May (%)	Jun (%)	Total (%)
Anti-EU							4				**0,6**
Climate							4	3,8			**1,2**
Elitism	20							3,8			**3,6**
Health	4	25	9,1	33,3	14,3	33,3	16				**12**
Government	16	8,3	9,1	50	42,9	20	32	38,5	50	35,7	**30,1**
Migration	12	25	27,3		7,1	13,3	20	3,8	16,7	14,3	**13,3**
Economic	8					13,3		3,8	8,3		**3,6**
Political establishment	4	16,7	18,2	8,3	7,1	6,7	12	23,1	8,3		**10,8**
Islam	4	16,7	27,3		7,1		12	19,2	16,7	21,4	**12**
Personal attack	32	8,3	9,1	8,3	21,4	13,3		3,8		28,6	**12,7**
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
N=	**25**	**12**	**11**	**12**	**14**	**15**	**25**	**26**	**12**	**14**	**166**

Table 3: Percentages of conspiracy tweets per Theme, per month (TK2021)
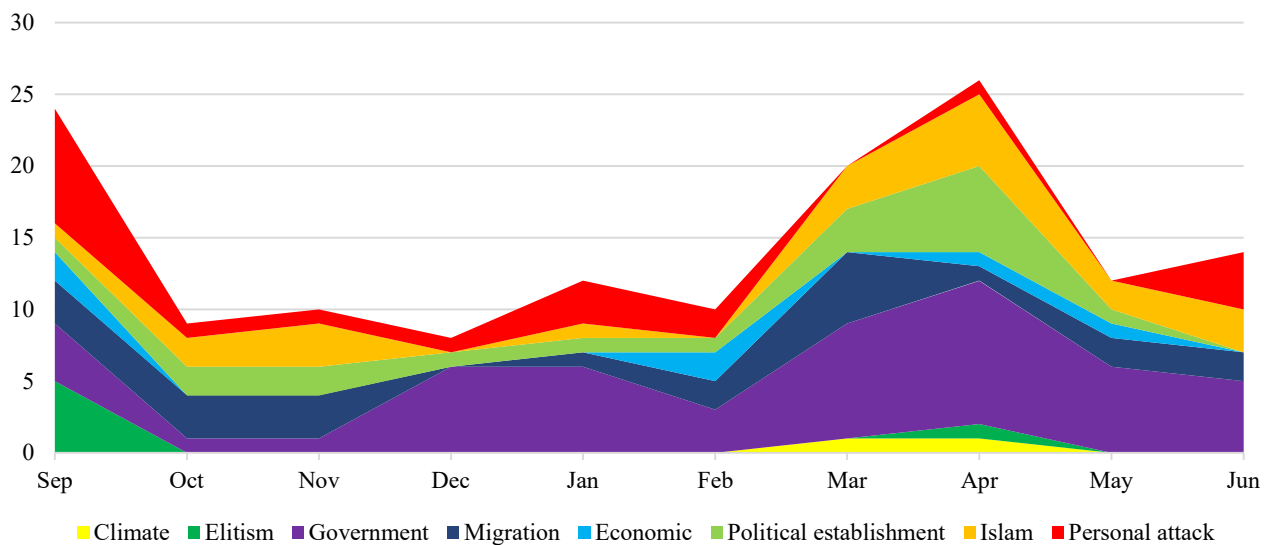
Figure 4: Graph of conspiracy tweets per month, per Theme (TK2021)

As this thesis is interested in Wilders' Eurosceptic conspiracy rhetoric, Table 4 presents the themes mentioned in those 17 tweets found in TK2021. Although the occurrence of Eurosceptic conspiracy tweets is quite low, the most prevalent themes were Government (4 tweets), and Migration and Economic (3 tweets each). One such tweets included "*Rutte signed up to flush 100 billion Dutch euros down the drain to Southern Europe. He kneels, crawls and bows again to the vultures from Brussels. Leaving the Dutch out in the cold. Get out Rutte, we don't want a PM like that!*" (@Geertwilderspvv, 2020). There we no tweets

found in this subset that personally targeted Wilders or the PVV.

Theme	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Anti-EU							1				1
Climate							1				1
Health		2									2
Government						2			1	1	4
Migration	1				1	1					3
Economic	1					1		1			3
Political Establishment		2									2
Islam						1					1
Personal Attack											
Total	2	4		1	4	3	1	1	1	1	17

Table 4: Number of EU-conspiracy tweets per month, per Theme (TK2021)

For TK2023, Table 5 presents the percentual frequency of the themes present per month, while Figure 5 presents a visual overview of the percentual frequencies of each theme. These show that Migration was the most prevalent theme in this time period, mentioned in 31% of Wilders' conspiracy tweets. The next most prevalent themes are those of the Political establishment (16,1%), especially in June (N=6; 30%), and Personal attack (16,1%), most notably in November (N=3; 42,9%). The themes Anti-EU and Health were not found in this time period, while these were present in the TK2021-subset.

## Tweets per Theme (TK2023)
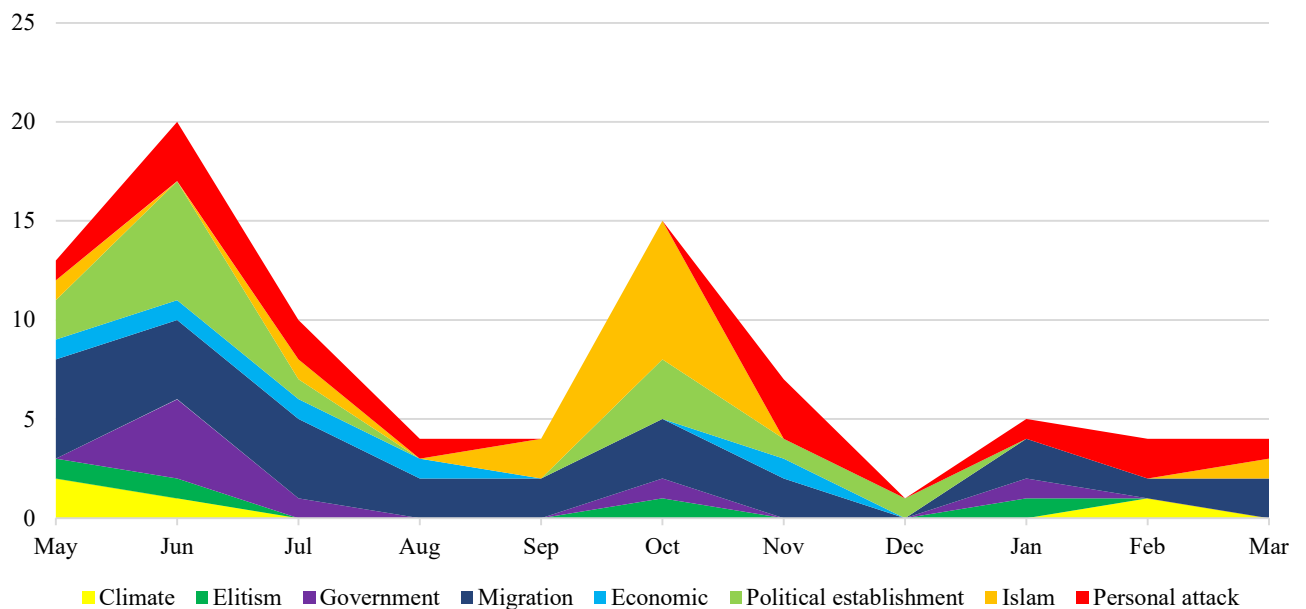
Figure 5: Graph of conspiracy tweets per month, per Theme (TK2023)

Narrowing the results down to the fifteen tweets that contained EU-conspiracy rhetoric, Migration is again the most common Theme (see Table 6). One of these Migration-tweets included "*And even after the fake deal between Rutte, his little EU-friends and the corrupt Arabs from Tunisia, they keep on coming here. We are being swindled and cheated by cowardly politicians who lack the guts to close our own national borders.*" (@Geertwilderspvv, 2023a). This TK2023 EU-subset held no Anti-EU, Health, Islam, Government, or Elitism themed tweets.

Theme	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Climate	1											1
Migration	1	1	2				1				2	7
Economic		1	1									2
Political establishment	1		1						1			3
Personal attack		1									1	2
Total	3	3	4	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	15

Table 6: Number of EU-conspiracy tweets per month, per Theme (TK2023)

Action

The code Action describes the referenced or implied action or goal of the conspiring agent of each conspiracy tweet. In TK2021, the Action of Oppression is found most frequently, with 19,3% and 32 tweets (see Table 7), most often in March (N=8; 32%). Puppet representation is the second most common Action in this subset (N= 13; 11,4%). Figure 6 presents a visual overview of the percentual frequencies of each Action for TK2021.

Action	Sep (%)	Oct (%)	Nov (%)	Dec (%)	Jan (%)	Feb (%)	Mar (%)	Apr (%)	May (%)	Jun (%)	Total (%)
Censoring	28	8,3			21,4	13,3	8	15,4		7,1	12
Democratic deficit			9,1				4				1,2
Endangerment	8		9,1		7,1	13,3	12	3,8		21,4	7,8
Framing/Indoctrination	4	8,3				6,7	8	3,8		7,1	4,2
Ignoring	8	16,7	9,1					3,8		14,3	4,8
Misallocation of funds	8	33,3		16,7		13,3	4	7,7			7,8
Nepotism	16			8,3	7,1		4	7,7			5,4
Oppression	4	16,7	18,2	16,7	28,6	26,7	32	19,2	16,7	14,3	19,3
Ostracism				8,3			4	3,8			1,8
Puppet representation	8		27,3	25	21,4	6,7	4	3,8	16,7	21,4	11,4
Replacement	12	8,3	18,2		7,1		4	7,7	16,7		7,2
Supranationalism							4				0,6
Withholding information			8,3	9,1	25		8	19,2	33,3		9,6
Working with other agents	4				7,1	20	4	3,8	16,7	14,3	6,6
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
N=	25	12	11	12	14	15	25	26	12	14	166

Table 7: Conspiracy tweets per Action, per month, as percentages of total conspiracy tweets

Tweets per Action (TK2021)
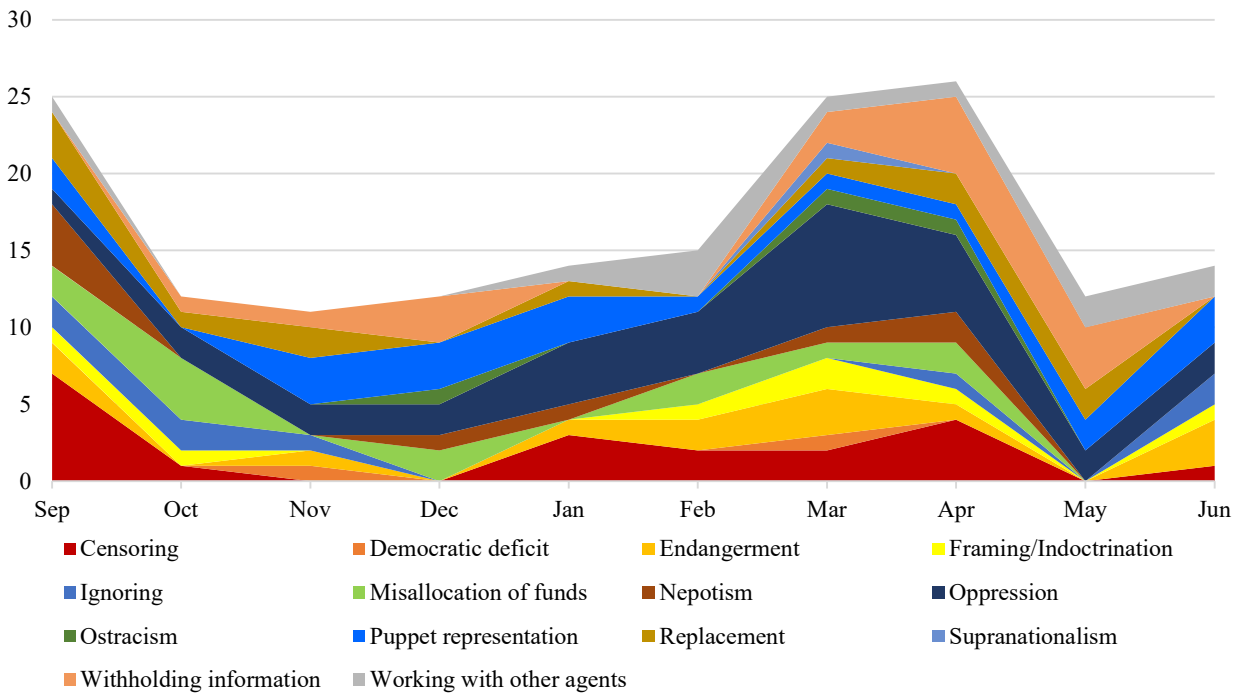
Figure 6: Graph of conspiracy tweets per month, per Action (TK2021)

The Actions of the TK2021 EU-conspiracy tweets were distributed according to Table 8. The Actions of Censoring, Democratic Deficit, Framing/Indoctrination, Nepotism, and Withholding Information were not present in this subset. The most prevalent Action was Misallocation of Funds (N=6; 35,3%). One such tweet included "*Our hard-earned money is going through the EU to the Italian mafia. When I said that in Parliament, I was ridiculed. But it's true, so Rutte should be ashamed of himself. And we need to get out of the EU, pronto! #Nexit*" (@Geertwilderspvv, 2021a).

Action	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Endangerment						1	1				**2**
Ignoring	1										**1**
Misallocation of funds	1	3				1		1			**6**
Oppression		1					1		1		**3**
Puppet representation										1	**1**
Replacement					1						**1**
Supranationalism							1				**1**
Working with other agents						2					**2**
Total	**2**	**4**			**1**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**17**

Table 8: EU-conspiracy tweets per Action per month (TK2021)

Table 9 presents the percentual frequency of the themes present per month for TK2023, where Figure 7 presents a visual overview of their percentual frequencies. These present a quite even spread of the actions Wilders refers to in his tweets, but the three most mentioned actions are Replacement (N=15; 17%), Ignoring (N=14; 15,9%), and Endangerment (N=12; 13,6%). Especially in October, more than half of Wilders' conspiracy tweets contained either the Action Replacement (26,7%) or Endangerment (33,3%). For example, Wilders wrote in October: *"If the Cabinet lets ISIS-terrorists return from Syria to the Netherlands – where they will eventually roam our streets in freedom – they bring our nation, our families, women and children deliberately in grave danger. Do not do it!"* (@Geertwilderspvv, 2023b)

Action	May (%)	Jun (%)	Jul (%)	Aug (%)	Sep (%)	Oct (%)	Nov (%)	Dec (%)	Jan (%)	Feb (%)	Mar (%)	Total (%)
Censoring	15,4	25					28,6					**10,2**
Democratic deficit	7,7						14,3	100				**3,4**
Endangerment	23,1	10			25	33,3						**13,6**
Framing/Indoctrination	7,7	10				20	14,3		20	50	25	**12,5**
Ignoring	7,7	10	30	25		13,3	14,3		20	25	50	**15,9**
Misallocation of funds	15,4	10	10	50			28,6					**10,2**
Oppression	7,7	10	10	25								**5,7**
Ostracism		10	10									**3,4**
Puppet representation		10							20			**3,4**
Replacement	7,7	5	20		75	26,7			40	25	25	**17**
Supranationalism	7,7		10									**2,3**
Working with other agents			10			6,7						**2,3**
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
N=	**13**	**20**	**10**	**4**	**4**	**15**	**7**	**1**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**88**

Table 9: Tweets per Action per month as Percentages of Total Tweets (N) (TK2023)
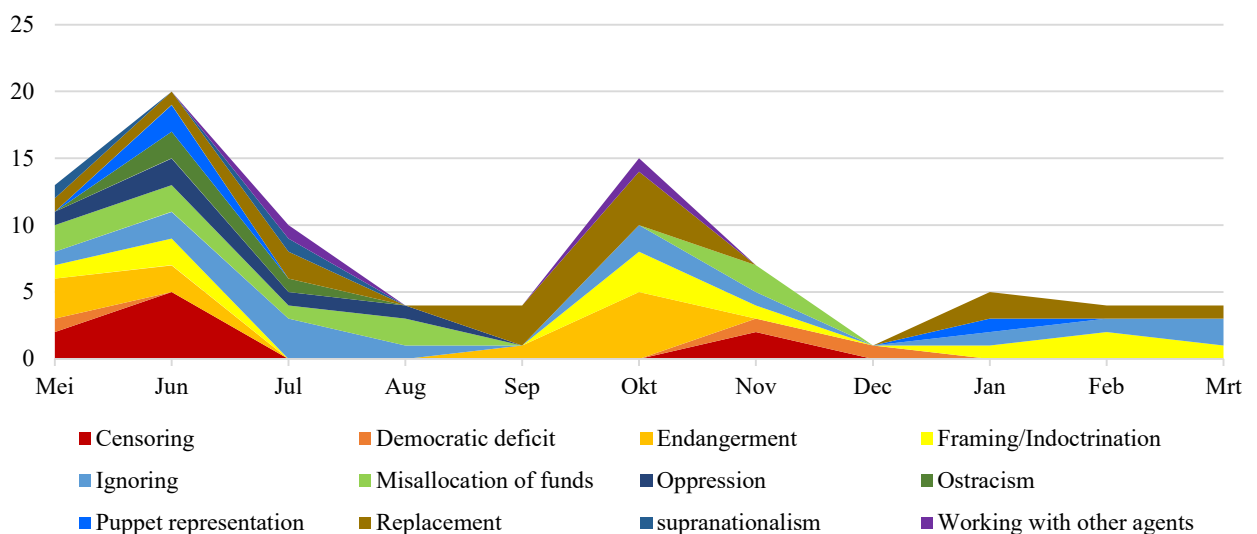

Figure 7: Graph of conspiracy tweets per month, per Action (TK2023)

For the EU-conspiracy tweets of TK2023, Ignoring was the most found Action (N=5; 33,3%), while the actions of Endangerment, Nepotism, Oppression, Ostracism, Puppet Representation, and Withholding Information were absent in this specific subset of tweets. One of these Ignoring-tweets reads *"France, Belgium, Switzerland, it never ends. We are paying the price for years of turning a blind eye to the self-destruction caused by mass immigration and the Islamization of our continent."* (@Geertwilderspvv, 2023c).

Action	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Censoring		1										1
Democratic deficit								1				1
Framing/Indoctrination											1	1
Ignoring	1	1	1				1				1	5
Misallocation of funds	1	1	1									3
Replacement											1	1
Supranationalism	1		1									2
Working with other agents			1									1
Total	**3**	**3**	**4**				**1**	**1**			**3**	**15**

Table 10: EU-conspiracy tweets per Action per month (TK2023)

Agent

The code of Agent is used to determine who Wilders sees as those conspiring, the one carrying out the actions against the in-group. In TK2021, the most frequently mentioned agents are demonstrably Government (N=86; 51,8%) and Political establishment (N=41; 24,7%). Both are mentioned consistently through the entire timeframe, and both peaking in March and April, as shown in Table 11 and Figure 8.

Agent	Sep (%)	Oct (%)	Nov (%)	Dec (%)	Jan (%)	Feb (%)	Mar (%)	Apr (%)	May (%)	Jun (%)	Total (%)
Elites	28	8,3			21,4		8		8,3		**8,4**
EU											
Foreign Entity						13,3		3,8			**1,8**
Government	44	66,7	27,3	75	35,7	60	52	50	50	64,3	**51,8**
Judiciary	20		9,1	8,3	14,3		4	3,8		7,1	**7,2**
Mainstream Media										14,3	**1,2**
Migrants		8,3	18,2		7,1		4	7,7	8,3		**4,8**
Political Establishment	8	16,7	45,5	16,7	21,4	26,7	32	34,6	33,3	14,3	**24,7**
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
N=	*25*	*12*	*11*	*12*	*14*	*15*	*25*	*26*	*12*	*14*	*166*

Table: 11: Tweets per Agent per month as Percentages of Total Tweets (N) (TK2021)
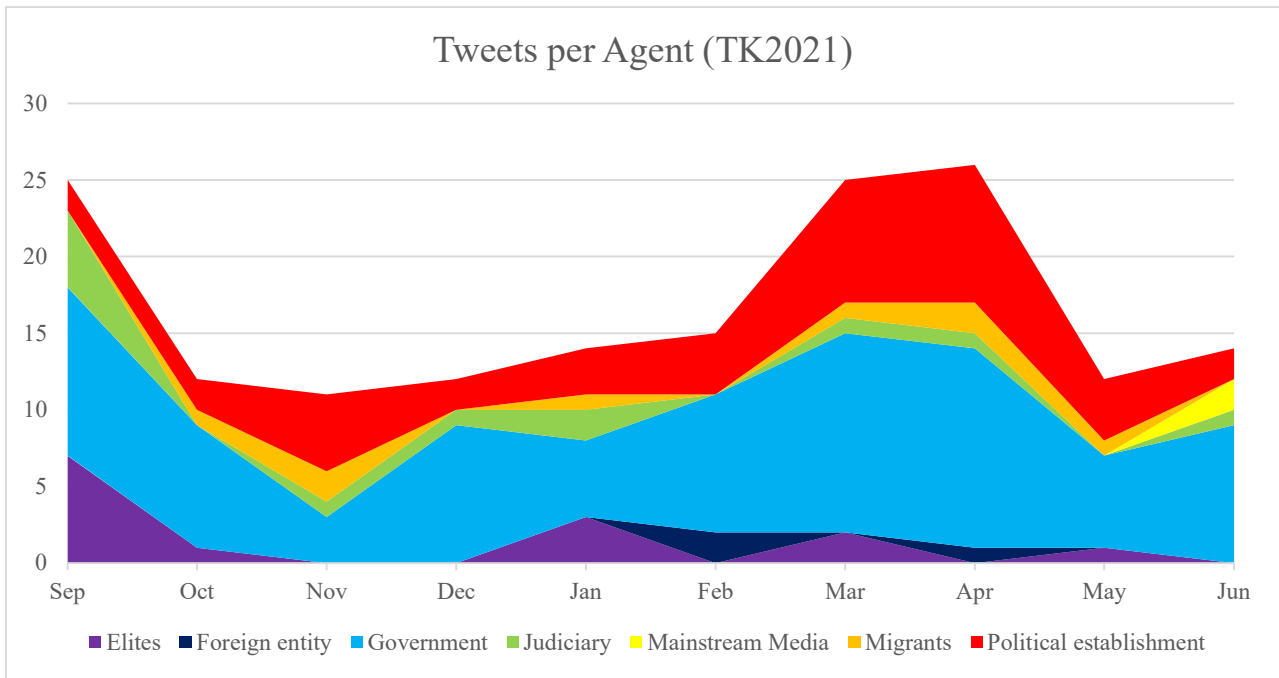
Figure 8: Graph of conspiracy tweets per month, per Agent (TK2021)

While the EU is not mentioned as a conspiring agent in TK2021, Table 12 shows what other Agents were mentioned in the EU-tweets. The most prevalent Agents are similar to the non-EU conspiracy tweets: Government and Political Establishment with 7 and 6 mentions, respectively. One such tweet read "*Interviewed by Hungarian media - TV and newspaper - about #Rutte's hypocrisy regarding homosexuals in the Netherlands and his weak domestic position as a LIAR, dependent on Europhile immigration parties such as D66 and the extreme leftists of GL and PvdA.*" (@Geertwilderspvv, 2021b).

Agent	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Elites					1		1				**2**
EU											
Foreign Entity								1			**1**
Government	1	3				2	1				**7**
Judiciary											
Mainstream Media											
Migrants							1				**1**
Political Establishment	1	1				2			1	1	**6**
Total	**2**	**4**			**1**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**17**

Table 12: EU-conspiracy tweets per Agent per month (TK2021)

In TK2023, the most frequently mentioned agents are the Political Establishment (N=29; 33,3%) and the Government (N=24; 27,6%). The establishment was the referred to agent 10 times (50%) in June, for instance in this tweet: "*An incredible disgrace that so many fellow faction leaders have organised a hearing with the aim of imposing a ban on the FVD. Disgusting and totalitarian. In protest against this targeted backstabbing of my colleague Baudet, I will boycott that meeting tomorrow.*" (@Geertwilderspvv, 2023d)

Agent	May (%)	Jun (%)	Jul (%)	Aug (%)	Sep (%)	Oct (%)	Nov (%)	Dec (%)	Jan (%)	Feb (%)	Mar (%)	Total (%)
Elites	30,8	5	20	25		6,7	42,9		20		25	**16,1**
EU		5	10							25		**3,4**
Foreign entity												
Government	30,8	35	30	25	25	40	14,3		20			**27,6**
Judiciary	15,4		20	25								**5,7**
Mainstream Media							14,3		20	25		**3,4**
Migrants		5	10		50	13,3			20	25	25	**10,3**
Political establishment	23,1	50	10	25	25	40	28,6	100	20	50	25	**33,3**
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
N=	**13**	**20**	**10**	**4**	**4**	**15**	**7**	**1**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**87**

Table 13: Tweets per Agent per month as Percentages of Total Tweets (N) (TK2023)
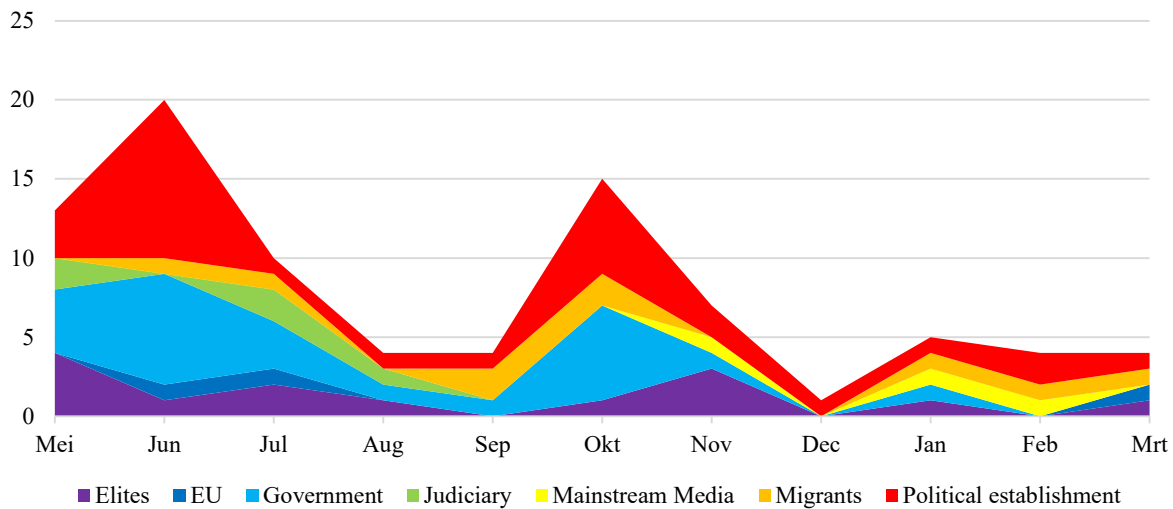
Figure 9: Graph of conspiracy tweets per month, per Agent (TK2023)

The TK2023 EU-tweets, more specifically, point most often to the Dutch Government as the conspiring agent: five times total, as shown in Table 14. Contrastingly to the TK2021 subset, the EU was mentioned as the conspiring agent. The following tweet mentions the Belgian MEP Guy Verhofstadt: "*Verhofstadt wants 'to get rid' of us. Eliminate us politically. This is the real totalitarianism. A dangerous man with an undemocratic vicious mind.*" (@Geertwilderspvv, 2023e).

Agent	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Elites			1				1				1	3
EU		1	1								1	3
Foreign entity												
Government	2	2	1									5
Judiciary												
Mainstream Media												
Migrants											1	1
Political Establishment	1		1					1				3
Total	**3**	**3**	**4**				**1**	**1**			**3**	**15**

Table 14: EU-conspiracy tweets per Agent per month (TK2023)

Intensity

The code for Intensity is based on the typology created by Barkun in 2015. However, no Superconspiracies were found in any of Wilders' tweets, therefore this subcode was not created. For TK2021, Table 15 and Figure 10 show an even distribution of conspiracy tweets over the two subcodes. Certain months, such as December (N= 9; 75%) and June (N=11; 78,9%), presented much more Systematic tweets than others, while there are only a few months with significantly more Event-tweets.

Intensity	Sep (%)	Oct (%)	Nov (%)	Dec (%)	Jan (%)	Feb (%)	Mar (%)	Apr (%)	May (%)	Jun (%)	Total (%)
Event	56	58,3	36,4	25	42,9	53,3	56	53,8	58,3	21,4	48,2
Systematic	44	41,7	63,6	75	57,1	46,7	44	46,2	41,7	78,6	51,8
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
N=	**25**	**12**	**11**	**12**	**14**	**15**	**25**	**26**	**12**	**14**	**166**

*Table 15: Tweets per Intensity per month as Percentages of Total Tweets (N) (TK2021)*
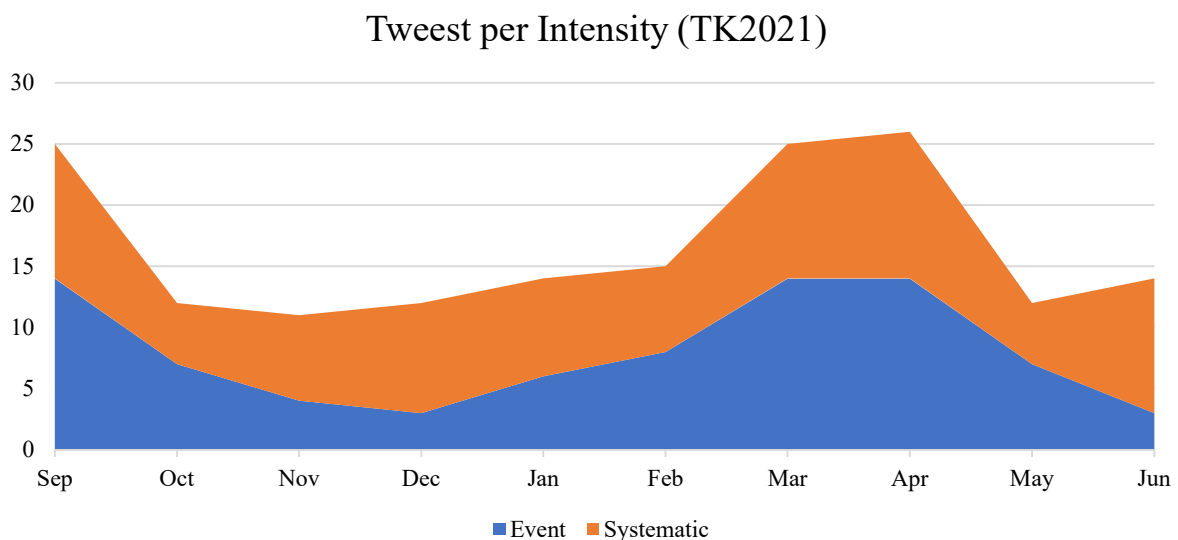
Figure 10: Graph of conspiracy tweets per Intensity, per month (TK2021)

When zooming in on the EU-tweets, there seem to be more systematic (12) than Event-tweets (5), but with the current N-size, it is hard to make any assumptions based on this distribution.

Intensity	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Event	1	2				1		1			**5**
Systematic	1	2			1	3	3		1	1	**12**
Total	**2**	**4**			**1**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**17**

Table 16: EU-conspiracy tweets per Intensity per month (TK2021)

In TK2023, Wilders' conspiracy intensity is also quite evenly distributed, with the exceptions of the months leading up to the elections, where his rhetoric is more intense (e.g., Jul: N=7; 70%; Aug & Sep: N=3; 75%).

Intensity	May (%)	Jun (%)	Jul (%)	Aug (%)	Sep (%)	Oct (%)	Nov (%)	Dec (%)	Jan (%)	Feb (%)	Mar (%)	Total (%)
Event	53,8	45	30	25	25	66,7	28,6	100	40	50	50	**45,5**
Systematic	46,2	55	70	75	75	33,3	71,4		60	50	50	**54,5**
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
N=	**13**	**20**	**10**	**4**	**4**	**15**	**7**	**1**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**88**

*Table 17: Tweets per Intensity per month as Percentages of Total Tweets (N) (TK2023)*
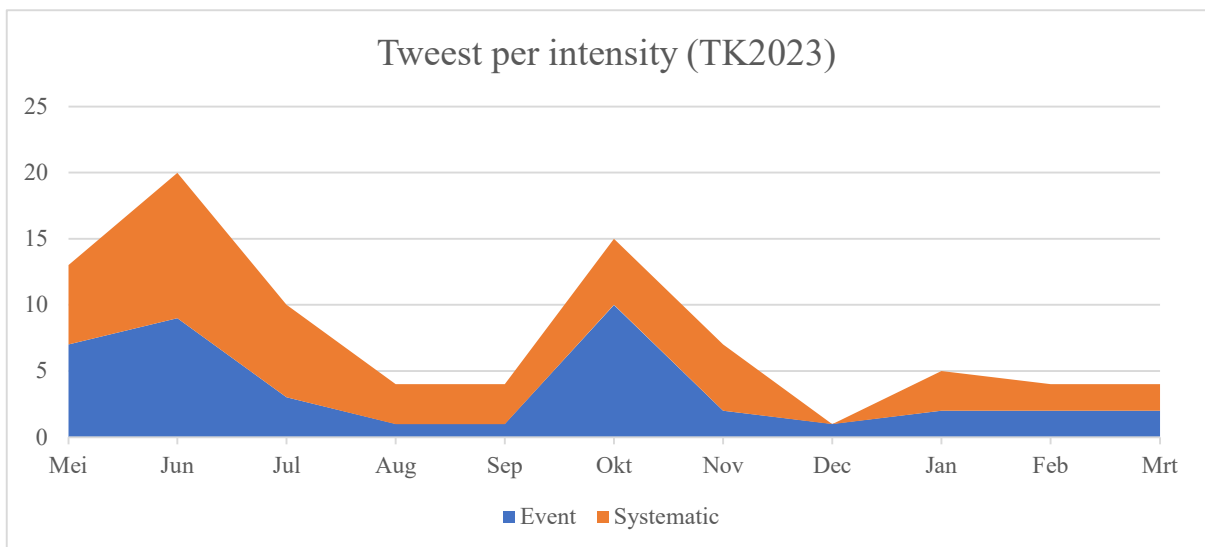
Figure 11: Graph of conspiracy tweets per month, per Intensity (TK2023)

Similar to the TK2021 EU-tweets, Table 18 shows that Systemic conspiracy rhetoric was more prevalent in the TK2023 EU-tweet-subset (11 vs. 4 Event).

Intensity	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Event	1		1					1			1	**4**
Systematic	2	3	3				1				2	**11**
Total	3	3	4				1	1			3	**15**

Table 18: EU-conspiracy tweets per Intensity per month (TK2023)

Having presented the results of this study, the following section discusses the possible implications, answers to the research questions, as well as the limitations of this thesis.

Discussion

This section discusses and interprets the results in light of the two hypotheses and aims to answer the research questions regarding the evolution of Wilders' (Eurosceptic) conspiracy rhetoric in tweets as he transitions from an outsider to a mainstream status. Two sets of tweets surrounding the 2021 and 2023 elections (TK2021 & TK2023) were analysed to answer these questions. The findings offer preliminary insights, though the study acknowledges its exploratory nature and inherent limitations.

Content Analysis

The content analysis of the tweets reveals notable differences between the two elections, answering subquestion 1: The most prevalent themes in TK2021 were related to the Dutch government's failures or its formation process, while only 8% of the TK2023-tweets were government-themed. Aligning with the populism as mobilisation tool theory, this indicates a mobilisation effort by Wilders against the incumbent government in 2021. Contrastingly, the TK2023 tweets shifted towards migration themes, reflecting the current migration crisis and supporting Prooijen and Douglas' (2017) argument that conspiracy themes follow from the crises at hand. The absence of Health-themed tweets in TK2023, which were present in TK2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, further supports this argument. This shift in themes indicates that Wilders adapts his rhetoric to the prevailing crises rather than his party status. However, there is an exception: some correlation between outsider status and an increase in Government-themed conspiracy rhetoric is found, tying into the mobilisation theory, where Wilders' rallies against the government formation process from which he was excluded in advance in TK2021.

Next, analysing the described actions showed Wilders consistently accusing the conspirators of oppressing the people in TK2021, a percentage that increases and peaks pre-election. In light of the mobilisation theory, this can be seen as him rallying the oppressed citizens to seize the elections and vote those oppressors out of power. Post-election, however, the most prevalent action is 'withholding information', relating to the secretive ostracism of a prominent MP during the formation process. Insinuating that even more information is withheld, Wilders deteriorates public trust in those coalition parties, before they even officially formed a government. Even if his calls for new elections over this matter were for show, rallying public opinion against the incumbent parties seemed to be the goal, as similarly argued by Hameleers (2020) in his study of Wilders' conspiracy rhetoric. In TK2023, the most mentioned actions were replacing, endangering, and ignoring Dutch citizens, reflecting the

dominant theme of migration and the dangers Wilders associates with it. These actions peaked before the November elections, supporting the notion that Wilders intensified his rhetoric to mobilise voters against perceived 'out-group'-threats or the conspiring agents.

For both subsets, it is harder to discover any significant trends in the mentioned Agent. However, in both, Wilders consistently mentions the government and political establishment, even more so after being excluded from government participation in 2021. Post-2023 election, notably, these agents are replaced by the media, migrants, and the EU, indicating a shift in focus to external threats, aligning with Pirro and Taggart's (2023) findings that populists target new groups of conspirators after gaining establishment status. However, this finding must be considered in light of the small number of tweets sent by Wilders after these elections.

Lastly, the analysis of the intensity of the tweets' conspiracy rhetoric supports the argument that populists strategically adjust the intensity of their conspiracy rhetoric based on party status: TK2021 presents more Systematic-conspiracy tweets, especially pre-elections, while in 2023, the prevalence of Event-tweets increased significantly, signalling a use of milder conspiracy rhetoric.

Frequency

H1 posits that Wilders' use of conspiracy rhetoric, intensifies based on his political positioning, specifically during election campaigns. H2 suggests that his rhetoric fluctuates with political positioning: decreasing and emphasizing Eurosceptic themes during mainstreaming and increasing with a focus on national themes during outsider positioning.
The analysis of the TK2021-subset shows a stable percentage of all conspiracy tweets leading up to the March elections, with a notable increase in both total and conspiracy tweets in February and March. This aligns with van Kessel and Castelein's findings (2016) that Wilders increases criticism during election campaigns. This increase also indicates an increasing 'outsider' stance, possibly in response to being excluded by PM Rutte mid-February. The uptick in sent (conspiracy) tweets also seems to align with the theory that populism, and conspiracy rhetoric, are mobilisation tools for politicians; in this case, Wilders seemed to use it to mobilise voters not only to vote in favour of him, but mainly to vote against the incumbent government parties.

Contrastingly, the TK2023-subset saw an overall lower percentage of conspiracies, especially post-election, possibly indicating a strategic moderation of Wilders' rhetoric to present himself as a potential coalition candidate. This echoes Ceron et al.'s arguments that populists change their online rhetoric once when seeking establishment or government

acceptance (2020). This difference between the two elections indicates that H1 can be accepted: The increase of conspiracy rhetoric before the elections in 2021 confirms the idea that he uses this rhetoric to position himself as an outsider. The relative low prevalence of conspiracy rhetoric, as well as decreased intensity in the TK2023-set further supports this hypothesis, as it suggests a strategic reduction in such rhetoric to present himself as a potential coalition partner.

H2 can be partially accepted: the abovementioned discussion mainly corroborates the connection between party status and frequency, content and intensity of Wilders' conspiracy rhetoric. However, as both subsets yield relatively few EU-conspiracy tweets, it is hard to draw any conclusions on Wilders' EU-rhetoric. This also complicates answering sub-question 2 on whether specific contexts or events trigger an increased usage of EU-conspiracy rhetoric, including the hypothesised relationship between an increased usage and mainstreaming periods. Some preliminary interpretations could include that in TK2021, Wilders framed the Government as misallocating citizens' money on EU-projects, at the expense of the Dutch Healthcare, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. In TK2023, most EU-conspiracy rhetoric focused on the Government ignoring Migration-related issues, mostly attributed to the EU's open borders (van de Woude, 2020).

A more definitive answer requires the conduction of a similar analysis of Wilders' rhetoric after his cabinet has formed and governed, providing a holistic overview of the potential relationship between EU-conspiracy rhetoric and party status. As Wilders has not yet had real governing power, there is less need to shift his conspiracy rhetoric to another power bloc than national actors.

Limitations

As mentioned in the methodology, the study's external validity is limited by its reliance on two specific datasets of tweets from Geert Wilders: a comparison to other populist politicians who have experienced a similar transition between opposition and governing party, would strengthen the external validity. Additionally, the focus on the 2021 and 2023 elections may overlook long-term trends, or historical contexts, especially as Wilders has been an MP for over twenty years. Moreover, despite the executed inter-coder reliability test, the subjective and nuanced nature of coding and analysing tweets for conspiracy rhetoric might possibly still have introduced a confirmation bias, affecting the internal validity. Lastly, this thesis isolated Wilders' social media rhetoric from other external influences, forgoing the possible influence of mediating variables. Considering these influences could provide a more holistic understanding of the relationship of populist politicians with conspiracy rhetoric.

Conducting a similar analysis in a few years, possibly with more time and resources, such as an increased allowed wordcount, would contribute to preventing the abovementioned limitations. This would probably provide a more definitive understanding of the influence of government participation on populists' use of conspiracy rhetoric.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate the evolution of Geert Wilders' Eurosceptic conspiracy rhetoric in his tweets in his transition from an outsider to a mainstream party between the 2021 and 2023 elections. The conducted analysis provides preliminary insights into how Wilders' use of conspiracy rhetoric fluctuates with his political positioning, mostly confirming the hypotheses and answering the research questions set forth.

The first subquestion explored the content of Wilders' conspiracy rhetoric, and whether this was connected to his particular party status. H1 posited a relationship between party status and the frequency and content of Wilders' conspiracy rhetoric. The findings support this connection, showing a higher frequency and intensity of conspiracy rhetoric mobilising against his direct opponents when Wilders was in an outsider position in 2021, compared to a possible strategic reduction when he aimed for government participation in 2023.

The second question sought possible triggers for an increased use of EU-conspiracies, where H2 posited a mainstream status as one such a trigger. Moreover, it was hypothesised that an outsider stance would increase the frequency of conspiracy rhetoric and vice versa. The prevalence of EU-conspiracies was too low to draw any substantial conclusions, undermining the full acceptance of H2. However, in line with Pirro & Taggart's (2023) arguments, Wilders' tweets did target other 'elites' over the commonly mentioned adversaries of government and political establishment during his transition to a mainstream party in 2023.

The study deployed a content analysis of nearly 1600 tweets sent before and after the 2021 and 2023 elections. After identifying 253 conspiracy tweets, these were for themes, agents, actions, and intensity to understand the evolution of Wilders' conspiracy rhetoric in his shift towards a mainstream party. The methodology's strength lies in its systematic approach to coding, being one of the first studies to create a robust codebook that enabled consistent coding over both election-sets. However, the study acknowledges its limitations, including the time constraints and potential for confirmation bias in coding. The generalisability could be improved by adding a comparison with other populist politicians who underwent a similar party status shift.

Besides adding a comparative element, future research should extend the analysis to include longer timeframes to include long-term trends and historical contexts. Additionally, examining Wilders' rhetoric post-government participation would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between EU-conspiracy rhetoric and party

status. Addressing the potential influence of mediating variables, such as media coverage and public opinion, would also offer a more holistic view of what influence the strategic use of conspiracy rhetoric, whether online, in speeches or in Parliament.

The current study contributes to the broader academic discussions on populism and conspiracy rhetoric by proving a strategic use of conspiracy rhetoric by populists based on their political positioning. It emphasises the influence of election campaigns and prevailing crises in shaping the content and frequency of online conspiracy rhetoric. By investigating Wilders' transition from outsider to mainstream status, the research provides preliminary insights into how populist rhetoric evolves responding to changes in party status and perceived political opportunities.

In conclusion, the current findings suggest that Wilders strategically adjusts his conspiracy rhetoric to mobilise support both in favour of him, as well as against the perceived conspiring adversary, reflecting broader patterns observed in populist communication. Future research should build on these conclusions to further explore this relationship between party status, conspiracies, and rhetorical strategies in populist discourse.

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@Geertwilderspvv. (2023a, July 19) *En ze blijven massaal komen ook ná de nep deal tussen Rutte en zijn EU-vriendjes met de corrupte Arabieren uit Tunesië. We worden opgelicht en bedrogen door laffe politici die het lef niet hebben onze eigen nationale grenzen te sluiten.* https://x.com/geertwilderspvv/status/1681561382779592704

@Geertwilderspvv. (2023b, October 23) *Als het kabinet ISIS-terroristen uit Syrië terug naar Nederland laat komen - waar ze vroeg of laat weer vrij komen komen en op straat rondlopen - brengen ze ons land, onze gezinnen, vrouwen en kinderen doelbewust in groot gevaar. Totaal onverantwoorde politiek. Niet doen!* https://x.com/geertwilderspvv/status/1705496651589091564

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@Geertwilderspvv. (2023d, July 2) *Frankrijk, België, Zwitserland, het houdt niet op. We betalen de prijs van het jarenlange wegkijken van de zelfdestructie als gevolg van de massa immigratie en islamisering van ons continent* https://x.com/geertwilderspvv/status/1675437428478287872

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Appendix I: Codebook

Main Code	Description	Sub code	Description	Example	Translated example
Theme	The theme of the conspiracy theory or issue that is spoken of or referred to.	Anti-EU	Tweets regarding the EU trying to exert or expand their power over national economies, money, and/or sovereignty.	"De EU streeft naar de vernietiging van de natiestaten" "Laat Brussel diep in het moeras zakken. Waar bemoeit die irritante EU zich mee. Opheffen die elite-club. NL weer vrij"	"The EU strives for the destruction of the nation-states" "Let Brussels sink in their swamp. What is that annoying EU interfering with? Dissolve that elite club. NL free again."
		Climate	the scepticism, criticism, and opposition expressed towards climate change policies, initiatives, and scientific consensus.	"Huizen van het gas af halen: kosten 40.000 euro per woning En dat alles voor slechts ,35% van de wereldwijde uitstoot. Mensen worden compleet voor de gek gehouden en op gigantische kosten gejaagd! Kappen met die waanzin! #StemPVV #Wilders"	"Taking houses off gas: costs 4000 euros per house. And all that for just .35% of the global emissions. People are being completely fooled and driven to huge expenses! Stop this madness! #VotePVV #Wilders"
		Economic	Revolve around financial decisions made by political leaders, both domestically and internationally, and their perceived impact on the economic well-being of the country and citizens	"5 miljard euro geeft EU aan Egyptische moslimbroeder Morsi.Van Rompuy collaboreert met islamofascisten. #enWijMaarBezuinigen"	"The EU gives 5 billion euros to Egyptian Muslim Brother Morsi. Van Rompuy collaborates with Islamofascists. #andWeKeepCuttingCosts"
		Elitism	Tweets regarding to the elites (in politics, media, or industries) exerting their influence	"Nederland is Kaagland geworden. Een land vol asielprofiteurs, woke-gestoorden, klimaatgekkies, arabieren, non-	"The Netherlands has become Kaagland. A country full of asylum profiteers, woke lunatics, climate crazies,

		binairen, boerenhaters en quinoa-kauwers. Ik wil mijn Nederland terug! Wegwezen D66!"	Arabs, non-binaries, farmer haters, and quinoa chewers. I want my Netherlands back! Get lost, D66!"
		"Wat in ieder geval opnieuw duidelijk is, is dat de rechterlijke macht in dit land behoorlijk ziek is en opnieuw kiest voor de daders en de slachtoffers - in dit geval nota bene een agent - keihard in de kou laat staan. #NepRechters"	"What is once again clear is that the judiciary in this country is quite sick and once again chooses the perpetrators while leaving the victims - in this case, an officer no less - out in the cold. #FakeJudges"
Government	Tweets relating to the government deliberately malfunctioning, or those concerned with the government formation process.	"Ook in 2021 bleef Rutte na de val van Rutte3 vanwege het toeslagenschandaal zitten. Hij pronkte zelf nog méér macht te hebben. Dat mag niet weer gebeuren. Ook een demissionaire premier kan gedwongen worden op te stappen. Morgen gaan we dat proberen."	"Even in 2021, Rutte remained in office after the fall of Rutte3 due to the childcare benefits scandal. He even boasted about having more power. This must not happen again. Even a caretaker prime minister can be forced to step down. Tomorrow, we will try to make that happen"
		"De heer Omtzigt is niet tegengewerkt door kaboutertjes of marsmannetjes, maar door de hypocriet Hoekstra, die hem wel even zou sensibiliseren oftewel muilkorven. En de CDA-woordvoerder laat hem vallen als een	"Mr. Omtzigt wasn't obstructed by gnomes or Martians, but by the hypocrite Hoekstra, who intended to "sensibilize" or muzzle him. And the CDA spokesperson drops him like a brick,

		baksteen, heeft nul kritiek op Hoekstra. Bah! #NotulenDebat #Wilders"	with zero criticism of Hoekstra. Disgusting! #MinutesDebate #Wilders"
Health	Tweets relating to conspiracies regarding health issues	"Heel Europa in lockdown behalve het Nederland van #Rutte want die speelt graag met mensenlevens in plaats van ze te redden. Gevaarlijke man. #coronavirus #Corona"	"All of Europe in lockdown except the Netherlands under #Rutte, because he prefers to play with lives instead of saving them. Dangerous man. #coronavirus #Corona"
Islam	These tweets focus on criticism and concerns regarding the presence and influence of Islam in the Western world, Europe or the Netherlands.	"Geen lijsttrekker heeft het over de #islam. Alleen over radicalen extremisten, terroristen, Hamas. Met zoveel politieke correctheid en lafheid lossen we de problemen nooit op. Het probleem is de islamisering van Nederland en Europa. Die moet worden gestopt. De rest is blabla."	"No political leader talks about #Islam. Only about radical extremists, terrorists, Hamas. With this much political correctness and cowardice, we will never solve the problems. The problem is the Islamisation of the Netherlands and Europe. That must be stopped. The rest is just blabla"
Migration	Tweets regarding to the facilitation of immigration, or the issues regarding the presence of immigrants.	"The biggest problem we face today is a collapse of our own culture and Western values due to open borders, mass immigration, an uncontrollable amount of non-western asylum seekers and last but not least too many weak politicians advocating cultural relativism."	N/A

		"PVV luidt asielalarm in kampen. Samen met PVV-lijsttrekker Overijssel zal ik de mensen uit Kampen die veel last hebben van asielterreur een hart onder de riem steken! Ook zullen we aan vrouwen die zich onveilig voelen een 'asielalarm' uitdelen!"	"PVV raises asylum alarm in kampen' Together with PVV lead candidate for Overijssel, I will offer support to the people in Kampen who are greatly affected by asylum-terrorism! We will also distribute an 'asylum alarm' to women who feel unsafe!"
Personal attack	These tweets involve criticism, accusations, and negative portrayals directed at Geert Wilders and his political party, the PVV. Also includes deliberate attempts to silence or thwart them.	"Hetze tegen PVV in volle gang. Ook Telegraaf publiceert leugens zonder wederhoor. Zal niet werken. #WeWinnenToch"	"The witch-hunt against PVV is in full swing. Even Telegraaf publishes lies without giving the opportunity for a response. It won't work. #WeWillWinAnyway"
		"Noord-Koreanse toestanden in ijskoude rechtszaal. Dagvaarding uitgebreid. OvJ negeert me. Politiek proces. Hirsch Ballin kan tevreden zijn."	"North Korean-style conditions in the icy courtroom. Summons expanded. Public prosecutor ignores me. Political trial. Hirsch Ballin can be satisfied."
Political Establish-ment	tweets that convey a sense of frustration and disillusionment with established political institutions and figures, portraying them as disconnected from the interests and desires of the general population	"Ze waren dus afwezig tijdens de stemmingen om in het geniep te praten over het verbieden van FVD. Achterbakser kan bijna niet. En wat een totalitair gedrag van die collega fractievoorzitters: onwelgevallige meningen verbieden. Het nieuwe fascisme	"They were absent during the votes in order to secretly discuss banning FVD. It can hardly get more underhand. And what a totalitarian behaviour from those fellow faction leaders: banning dissenting opinions. The new fascism will call

				"zal zich antifascisme noemen.Stemmingen nu in de Tweede Kamer. Bijna alle collega fractievoorzitters: [missen]. Mysterieus! Zijn ze met zijn allen een dagje naar de sauna?"	itself antifascism. Votes now in the parliament. Almost all fellow faction leaders [are missing]. Mysterious! Are they all having a day at the spa together?"
				"Het kabinet wil alleen nog maar in debat met partijen die voor ze applaudisseren. Anders lopen ze weg of ontnemen je het woord via de met corrupt handjeklap benoemde incompetente D66-Kamervoorzitter. Oppositie wordt niet geduld. Het is poldertotalitarisme van de ergste soort."	"The government only wants to debate with parties that applaud them. Otherwise, they walk away or silence you through the appointed incompetent D66 House Speaker, chosen through corrupt backroom deals. Opposition is not tolerated. It's the worst kind of polder totalitarianism."
Action	The referenced or implied action/goal of the conspiring agent	Censoring	The goal or act of intentionally omitting news or excluding certain parties from having a voice	"Minister wil columnist de mond snoeren. Ze had geen podium mogen krijgen. Geen vrijheid van meningsuiting voor mensen met een andere mening. De ayatollahs in Iran kunnen nog wat leren van De Jonge."	"Minister wants to silence columnist. She should not have been given a platform. No freedom of speech for people with a different opinion. The ayatollahs in Iran could learn a thing or two from De Jonge."
		Democratic deficit	Refers to a situation where there is a perceived lack of democratic accountability and representation within a political system; decision-making	Het tot op het bot corrupte Oekraïne wordt ondanks de negatieve uitslag van ons eerdere referendum door Rutte 4 toch tot kandidaat EU-lid	"The thoroughly corrupt Ukraine is declared a candidate EU member state by Rutte 4 despite the negative outcome of our earlier

	processes are not sufficiently transparent, accountable, or responsive to the will of the citizens.	verklaard. We leven in een dictatuur hier. Het volk wordt inmiddels dagelijks geschoffeerd. Hoe lang accepteert NL dit nog? #Nexit"	referendum. We live in a dictatorship here. The people are being insulted on a daily basis. How long will NL accept this? #Nexit"
Endanger-ment	involve a perceived failure by government authorities to adequately address security threats or to protect the public from these threats, thereby endangering the safety and well-being of citizens.	"Onze vrouwen worden aangerand en ze krijgen voorrang op onze huizen en gratis zorg en uitkeringen. Dit kabinet is ziek. In plaats van Nederlanders te verdedigen brengen ze ons in gevaar en doen ons land in de uitverkoop. #NieuweVerkiezingen #Wilders"	"Our women are being assaulted, and they receive priority for our homes and free healthcare and benefits. This government is sick. Instead of defending Dutch citizens, they put us in danger and put our country up for sale. #NewElections #Wilders"
		"Zwakke EU-leiders zijn politiek verantwoordelijk voor terreuraanslagen omdat ze de islam als oorzaak ontkennen en meer islam importeren."	"Weak EU leaders are politically responsible for terrorist attacks because they deny Islam as the cause and import more Islam."
Framing/ Indoctrinati-on	Describes the actions of forcing individuals to hold certain attitudes or ideas, or presenting a truth convenient to the conspirators.	"Dijsselbloem imiteert Iraakse minister van propaganda. 'Er zijn geen Amerikaanse tanks in Bagdad. De recessie is over'."	"Dijsselbloem imitates the Iraqi Minister of Propaganda. 'There are no American tanks in Baghdad. The recession is over'."
		"Wat een enorme engerd die kan die man niet het mediabeleid voor Noord-Korea gaan	"What an enormous creep, that guy. Can't he go do media policy for North Korea or

		doen of zo. Zijn "duiding" maakt het alleen maar erger: berichten die zijn waarheid ontkennen worden weggecensureerd. Snel de app verwijderen!"	something? His "interpretation" only makes it worse: messages that deny his truth are being censored. Quickly delete the app!"
Ignoring	The idea that politicians are aware of the issue but choose not to address it or take action, whether out of negligence, indifference, or deliberate avoidance. Also refered to as willful blindness.	"De Italiaanse rechter heeft groot gelijk! Maar in Nederland zijn de links-liberale gekkies vooral bezig met stikstof, het gasloos maken van woningen en het plaatsen van windturbines. Terwijl we de drugsmaffia zouden moeten uitroeien om onze straten weer veilig te maken!"	"The Italian judge is absolutely right! But in the Netherlands, the left-liberal crazies are mostly busy with nitrogen, making homes gas-free, and installing wind turbines. While we should be eradicating the drug mafia to make our streets safe again!"
		"NL in een notedop: NCTV Schoof ontkent terreurdreiging NL en AIVD-Minister Plasterk is lekker op vakantie in Marokko"	"NL in a nutshell: NCTV Schoof denies terrorist threat in NL and AIVD Minister Plasterk is chilling on vacation in Morocco."
Misallocation of funds	These tweets highlight the notion that money is being directed towards certain initiatives or groups at the expense supporting the needs of the native population.	"Totale winterzotheid: de EU zou - ook met NL's belastinggeld - 2 moskeeen voor illegalen laten bouwen in Griekenland. Kamervragen gesteld."	"Total winter madness: the EU would - also with NL's tax money - build 2 mosques for illegal immigrants in Greece. Parliamentary questions have been raised."
		"Premier Rutte is een ordinaire oplichter. Na jaren	"Prime Minister Rutte is a common swindler. After

		bezuinigen en lastenverzwaren nu wéér hogere energiebelasting, hogere btw, hogere ziektekostenpremie, hogere huren, afschaffen Wet Hillen etc. Maar wél miljarden naar Afrika en asiel. #kominverzet"	years of austerity and tax increases, now even higher energy taxes, higher VAT, higher health insurance premiums, higher rents, abolishing the Hillen Law, etc. But still billions to Africa and asylum. #resist"
Nepotism	involve the use of political power to advance the interests of relatives or close associates in a covert or manipulative manner, often as part of a broader agenda to consolidate control or maintain influence.	"En deze drie heren worden natuurlijk niet door het OM vervolgd want ze zijn lid van de PvdA. #nepjustitie"	"And of course, these three gentlemen won't be prosecuted by the Public Prosecutor's Office because they are members of the PvdA. #fakejustice"
		"Kijk deze D66-nepjournalist neemt het namens de staatsomroep voor Pechtold op"	"Look at this D66 fake journalist taking sides for Pechtold on behalf of the state broadcaster."
Oppression	the act or goal of the conspirator to remain their influence and power, specifically at the costs of others/citizens	"PVV nr 1 with 25% of the vote. The Netherlands is in resistance against open-border policy political elite. #nomore"	N/A
		"Van Dissel heeft zich dus totaal laten inpakken en piepelen door premier #Rutte, de man die alles en iedereen voor zijn karretje spant of slachtoffert om zelf maar aan de macht en in het Torentje te blijven. Van #Toeslagenaffaire tot Corona-aanpak.	"Van Dissel has completely let himself be fooled and manipulated by Prime Minister #Rutte, the man who uses or sacrifices everything and everyone to stay in power and in the Prime Minister's office. From

		#Corona #VanDissel #piepelen"	#Toeslagenaffaire to Corona approach. #Corona #VanDissel #manipulation
Ostracism	Refers to the deliberate exclusion or marginalization of certain groups of people by the conspiring agent.	"Deze man - Emile Affolter - zit nota bene in het landelijke managementteam van Amnesty International. De haat spat er vanaf. De PVV en dus ook onze 1 miljoen kiezers valselijk wegzetten als racisten is een verkapte oproep tot geweld. Schandelijk."	"This man - Emile Affolter - is in the national management team of Amnesty International, no less. The hatred shines through. Falsely dismissing the PVV and thus our 1 million voters as racists is a disguised call to violence. Outrageous."
Puppet representation	This action suggest that politicians are being controlled or influenced in a way that undermines their autonomy and integrity, serving the interests of external powers rather than those of the people it is meant to represent	"NL heeft nepparlement en regentendemocratie. 80% bevolking tegen open grenzen Roemenen/Bulgaren, 80% kamerleden voor."	"NL has a fake parliament and a regent democracy. 80% of the population is against open borders for Romanians/Bulgari ans, 80% of MPs are in favour."
		"Stem de eurofiele Brusselbuiger Rutte weg op 15 maart! #NederlandWeerVan Ons #StemPVV"	"Vote out the Europhile Brussels appeaser Rutte on 15 March! #NetherlandsBack ToUs #VotePVV"
Replacement	refers to the belief or promotion of the idea that native citizens of a country are being replaced by migrants, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds.	"Onze bevolking wordt vervangen. De PVV zegt het al jaren: als we ons land en onze cultuur willen behouden moeten we: ☞ uit de EU	"Our population is being replaced. The PVV has been saying it for years: if we want to preserve our country and our culture, we must: ☞ leave the EU

				☞ de grenzen sluiten ☞ de-islamiseren De islam hoort niet bij NL."	☞ close the borders ☞ de-Islamise Islam does not belong in the Netherlands."
		Supranationalism	The processes by which authority and decision-making powers are shifted from individual nation-states to a supranational entity. includes voluntary transfers by national governments to as well as when the entity expands its authority without explicit consent from member states.	"Opheldering MP Rutte gevraagd over foute speech Barosso waarin hij pleit voor schrappen vetorechten van lidstaten" "Rutte bedriegt Nederland, verkwanselt onze soevereiniteit en levert ons definitief uit aan Brussel. Onacceptabel."	"Asked for clarification from PM Rutte about Barroso's wrong speech in which he advocates for the elimination of member states' veto rights." "Rutte deceives the Netherlands, squanders our sovereignty, and ultimately hands us over to Brussels. Unacceptable."
		Working with other agents	The action mentioned in the tweet refers to the conspirator working with other agents, whether explicitly mentioned or not.	"Sigrid #Kaag financierde de #PFLP met Nederlands belastinggeld. De PFLP pleegt nu opnieuw terreur tegen #Israel. Daarom is Kaag dus zo stil de afgelopen 24 uur. Uit schaamte."	"Sigrid #Kaag financed the #PFLP with Dutch taxpayers' money. The PFLP is now once again committing terror against #Israel. That is why Kaag has been so quiet over the past 24 hours. Out of shame."
Agent	This code describes the conspirator, the one who conspires against a group, or the in-group	Elites	Those who do have power, economically or culturally, rather than politically	"Veroordeeld voor het spreken van de waarheid. En zo breekt de linkse elite inclusief de rechterlijke macht de vrijheid van meningsuiting steeds verder af. Maar we buigen niet."	"Convicted for speaking the truth. And thus, the left-wing elite, including the judiciary, continues to erode freedom of speech further. But we won't concede."

		"Steeds vaker worden onze eigen mensen slachtoffer van bruut allochtoon geweld. Maar omdat het gewelddadig anti-blank racisme is, zwijgt links-liberaal Nederland. Ik niet. Er is maar één oplossing: het tuig direct het land uitzetten en onze grenzen sluiten voor nog meer ellende."	"Our own people are increasingly becoming victims of brutal immigrant violence. But because it is violent anti-white racism, left-liberal Netherlands remains silent. Not me. There is only one solution: immediately deport the scum from the country and close our borders to cause even more misery."
EU	Agents that represent the European Union or her institutions	"Pak niet Polen, maar Duitsland EU-stemrecht af! Merkel "schafft" alleen meer islam, aanrandingen en onveiligheid."	"Rob Germany of EU-voting rights instead of Poland! Merkel only "schafft" more Islam, assaults and insecurity."
		"Verhofstadt wants 'to get rid' of us. Eliminate us politically. This is the real totalitarianism. A dangerous man with an undemocratic vicious mind."	N/A
Foreign Entity	Agents or entities that represent or are sent from foreign nations.	"De Turkse hoofdaanklager gaat een strafrechtelijk onderzoek tegen me instellen voor het spreken van de waarheid over dictator #Erdogan en de Nederlandse regering inclusief #Rutte zwijgt in alle toonaarden. Ongelooflijk.	"The Turkish chief prosecutor is going to initiate a criminal investigation against me for speaking the truth about dictator #Erdogan and the Dutch government including #Rutte is completely silent. Incredible.

		#legaljihad #Wilders #PVV"	#legaljihad #Wilders #PVV"
Government	the group of people in charge of and controlling the Netherlands. This code includes all executive branches of power, which can either be groups or individuals	"Werkloosheid met 100.000 gestegen in 2013 en record aantal faillissementen. Met dank aan de grootste marionet van Brussel, Mark Rutte #exitEU"	"Unemployment rose by 10000 in 2013 and a record number of bankruptcies. Thanks to the biggest puppet of Brussels, Mark Rutte. #exitEU"
		"NL wordt bestuurd door regenten die lak hebben aan het volk. De bende van Rutte. Bestuurlijke tokkies. Weg ermee"	"The Netherlands is governed by regents who couldn't care less about the people. Rutte's gang. Administrative thugs. Get rid of them."
Judiciary	Refers to the system of courts and legal institutions, as well as their employees, responsible for interpreting and applying the law.	"Gestoorde gekken dat zijn diegene bij het OM die dit hebben besloten. Signaal van OM naar asielzoekers is dat onze dochters en kinderen vogelvrij zijn. Walgelijk. Een 27-jarige man die in mei dit jaar in Ter Apel zijn broek en onderbroek liet zakken op het parkeerterrein van winkelcentrum Promenade wordt hiervoor niet vervolgd, meldt het OM."	"Deranged lunatics are the ones at the Public Prosecution Service who decided this. The signal from the Public Prosecution Service to asylum seekers is that our daughters and children are outlaws. Disgusting. A 27-year-old man who dropped his trousers and underpants in the parking lot of the Promenade shopping center in Ter Apel in May this year will not be prosecuted for this, the Public Prosecution Service reports."

Mainstream Media	This code includes actors from various types of news outlets or media companies.	"Hé journalisten wat zijn jullie oorverdovend stil nu? Gisteren stonden jullie er nog rijen dik toen het om jullie ging. En nu zwijgen jullie collectief. #hypocrieten"	"Hey journalists, how deafeningly quiet you are right now? Yesterday you were still standing there in rows when it came to you. And now you are collectively silent. #hypocrites"
Migrants	This code refers to persons who (wisk to) seek refuge or move to the Netherlands, or those who have (il)legally done so already.	"Turkse Diyanet - inclusief moskeeën - in Europa. Daar komen de Marokaanse en andere moskeeën en islamitische organisaties nog bij. WE WORDEN VERVANGEN! #deislamiseren #grenzendicht"	"Turkish Diyanet - including mosques - in Europe. Then there are the Moroccan and other mosques and Islamic organisations. WE ARE BEING REPLACED! #de-Islamise #closeborders"
		"Boedapest vandaag. Zgn 'vluchtelingen' - bijna allemaal jonge mannen - selfies makend, lachend en zingend in centrum."	"Budapest today. So called 'refugees' - almost all young men - making selfies, laughing and singing in city centre."
Political Establishment	Those in power or places of influence on Dutch politics, excluding those described in the code 'Government'	"Experts: Rampzalige klimaatwet leidt tot catastrofe van armoede, kou en honger. Nederland een derdewereldland. Met dank aan de partijen die de klimaatwet steunden: SP, 50plus, VVD, CDA, GL, PvdA, CU, D66. Voorkom deze waanzin op 20 maart en #StemPVV"	"Experts: Disastrous climate law leads to a catastrophe of poverty, cold, and hunger. The Netherlands will become a third-world country. Thanks to the parties that supported the climate law: SP, 50Plus, VVD, CDA, GL, PvdA, CU, D66. Prevent this madness on 20 March and #VotePVV"

				"Vandaag meeting in Brussel met collega leiders van zusterpartijen uit België, Frankrijk, Duitsland, Tsjechië, Estland, Slowakije, Portugal en Denemarken. Samen staan we sterker om de elite politiek te bestrijden en onze burgers + nationale soevereiniteit te verdedigen!"	"Today, a meeting in Brussels with fellow leaders of sister parties from Belgium, France, Germany, Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovakia, Portugal, and Denmark. Together, we are stronger to fight elite politics and defend our citizens + national sovereignty!"
Intensity	Does the conspiracy explain a specific event, a systematic flaw, or to a series of conspiracy theories that are intertwined	Event	This code refers to conspiracies regarding specific and limited events, usually single occurrences	"Bah bah een gigantische ramp voor Limburgers met heel veel schade en menselijk leed meteen misbruiken voor je eigen politieke klimaatagenda. Heel veel sterkte gewenst in Limburg."	"Disgusting, exploiting a massive disaster affecting Limburgers, causing extensive damage and human suffering, for your own political climate agenda. Much strength to Limburg."
				"Ons zuurverdiende geld gaat via de EU dus naar de Italiaanse maffia. Toen ik dat in de Tweede Kamer zei werd ik weggehoond. Maar het klopt dus. Rutte moet zich kapotschamen. En wij moeten snel uit de EU! #Nexit"	""Our hard-earned money goes through the EU to the Italian mafia. When I said that in the Second Chamber, I was ridiculed. But it's true. Rutte should be ashamed of himself. And we need to get out of the EU quickly! #Nexit"

Superconspiracy	This code is reserved for those tweets that posit that every major event, historical development, or social trend is ultimately controlled or manipulated by a single, omnipotent and malevolent entity or group	N/A	N/A
Systematic	These conspiracy theories propose that various events and phenomena are interconnected and part of a larger, overarching conspiracy orchestrated by a powerful group or institution; such as securing and maintaining control of a country or population.	"Our population is being replaced. Our leaders allow it. They betray us. We have to resist both islamization and traitorous leadership. No more. Close our borders, leave the EU and regain national sovereignty, deislamize our nations and do our duty as proud patriots! Mass Migration Now Sole Cause of Population Growth in Germany"	N/A
		"Ook christen-democratische eurofielen willen Nederland dus de facto opheffen en een politieke unie vd EU maken. #NEXIT"	"Even Christian democratic Europhiles want to de facto abolish the Netherlands and make it a political union of the EU. #NEXIT"

Appendix II: Results Tables

Theme	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Anti-EU							1				**1**
Climate							1	1			**2**
Elitism	5							1			**6**
Health	1	3	1	4	2	5	4				**20**
Government	4	1	1	6	6	3	8	10	6	5	**50**
Migration	3	3	3		1	2	5	1	2	2	**22**
Economic	2					2		1	1		**6**
Political Establishment	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	6	1		**18**
Islam	1	2	3		1		3	5	2	3	**20**
Personal attack	8	1	1	1	3	2		1		4	**21**
Total	**25**	**12**	**11**	**12**	**14**	**15**	**25**	**26**	**12**	**14**	**166**

Table II-1: Distribution of Tweets per Theme, per month (TK2021)

Theme	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Anti-EU												
Climate	2	1								1		**4**
Elitism	1	1				1			1			**4**
Health												
Government		4	1			1			1			**7**
Migration	5	4	4	2	2	3	2		2	1	2	**27**
Economic	1	1	1	1			1					**5**
Political Establishment	2	6	1			3	1	1				**14**
Islam	1		1		2	7					1	**13**
Personal attack	1	3	2	1			3		1	2	1	**14**
Total	**13**	**20**	**10**	**4**	**4**	**15**	**7**	**1**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**87**

Table II-2: Distribution of Tweets per Theme, per month (TK2023)

Action	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Censoring	7	1			3	2	2	4		1	**20**
Democratic deficit			1				1				**2**
Endangerment	2		1		1	2	3	1		3	**13**
Framing/Indoctrination	1	1				1	2	1		1	**7**
Ignoring	2	2	1					1		2	**8**
Misallocation of funds	2	4		2		2	1	2			**13**
Nepotism	4		1	1			1	2			**9**
Oppression	1	2	2	2	4	4	8	5	2	2	**32**
Ostracism			1				1	1			**3**
Puppet representation	2		3	3	3	1	1	1	2	3	**19**
Replacement	3	1	2		1		1	2	2		**12**
Supranationalism							1				**1**
Withholding information		1	1	3			2	5	4		**16**
Working with other agents	1				1	3	1	1	2	2	**11**
Total	**25**	**12**	**11**	**12**	**14**	**15**	**25**	**26**	**12**	**14**	**166**

Table II-3: Distribution of Tweets per Action, per month (TK2021)

Action	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Censoring	2	5					2					**9**
Democratic deficit	1						1	1				**3**
Endangerment	3	2			1	5						**12**
Framing/Indoctrination	1	2				3	1		1	2	1	**11**
Ignoring	1	2	3	1		2	1		1	1	2	**14**
Misallocation of funds	2	2	1	2			2					**9**
Oppression	1	2	1	1								**5**
Ostracism		2	1									**3**
Puppet representation		2							1			**3**
Replacement	1	1	2		3	4			2	1	1	**15**
Supranationalism	1		1									**2**
Working with other agents			1			1						**2**
Total	**14**	**20**	**10**	**4**	**4**	**15**	**7**	**1**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**88**

Table II-4: Distribution of Tweets per Action, per month (TK2023)

Agent	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Elites	7	1			3		2		1		**14**
EU											
Foreign entity						2		1			**3**
Government	11	8	3	9	5	9	13	13	6	9	**86**
Judiciary	5		1	1	2		1	1		1	**12**
Mainstream Media										2	**2**
Migrants		1	2		1		1	2	1		**8**
Political Establishment	2	2	5	2	3	4	8	9	4	2	**41**
Total	**25**	**12**	**11**	**12**	**14**	**15**	**25**	**26**	**12**	**14**	**166**

Table II-5: Distribution of Tweets per Agent, per month (TK2021)

Agent	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Elites	4	1	2	1		1	3		1		1	**14**
EU		1	1								1	**3**
Foreign entity												
Government	4	7	3	1	1	6	1		1			**24**
Judiciary	2		2	1								**5**
Mainstream Media							1		1	1		**3**
Migrants		1	1		2	2			1	1	1	**9**
Political Establishment	3	10	1	1	1	6	2	1	1	2	1	**29**
Total	**13**	**20**	**10**	**4**	**4**	**15**	**7**	**1**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**87**

Table II-6: Distribution of Tweets per Agent, per month (TK2023)

Intensity	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
Event	14	7	4	3	6	8	14	14	7	3	**80**
Systematic	11	5	7	9	8	7	11	12	5	11	**86**
Total	**25**	**12**	**11**	**12**	**14**	**15**	**25**	**26**	**12**	**14**	**166**

Table II-7: Distribution of Tweets per Intensity, per month (TK2021)

Intensity	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Event	7	9	3	1	1	10	2	1	2	2	2	**40**
Systematic	6	11	7	3	3	5	5		3	2	2	**48**
Total	**13**	**20**	**10**	**4**	**4**	**15**	**7**	**1**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**88**

Table II-8: Distribution of Tweets per Intensity, per month (TK2023)