Sheep in Wolves' Clothing?

An Analysis of the Development of the Ideational and Stylistic
Populism of Mainstream Parties in the Netherlands 2010-2017

Master Thesis

by Zander Evenberg

s1014217

Zander_evenberg@hotmail.com

Political Science: Conflict, Power and Politics

Supervisor: dr. A. S. Zaslove

13 August 2019

Word count: 14.363

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor dr. Zaslove for his guidance. I greatly appreciate the time and effort he took to help me out when I felt it was necessary and his positivity helped me enormously. I also want to thank Sandra for the free coffee and the company this summer.

Abstract

In this thesis the development of the populism of mainstream political parties in the Netherlands is analysed through a qualitative content analysis of party programmes and Tweets. Mudde's notion of a populist *Zeitgeist* in which mainstream parties have adopted the populism of their populist counterparts has been disputed by several scholars. In the research disputing this claim populism was mostly defined as an ideology. However is has also been claimed that mainstream parties might stay away from populist ideology while adopting the populist style. By differentiating between style and ideology, this thesis has revisited the idea of a populist Zeitgeist. The conclusion of this thesis is that the populism of mainstream parties has increased, albeit only in their use of the populist style and not in the adoption of populist ideas.

Content

1. Introduction

On the 26th of May 2019, EU-loving Europe sighed in relief after the results of the European Union Elections had come in. Nationalist populist parties had done well, but not as well as had been feared in the wake of the surprising successes of Donald Trump in the US and the Leave Campaign in the UK. Although populist had not lost, their success of recent years had stopped snowballing as they 'only' increased their seat share in the European Parliament from 21% to 23% (Economist, 2019). Whether the growth of Western populism has actually stopped only time will tell. What *is* clear is that populism has become a real part of Western politics: it is here to stay (Goodwin, 2019). Since 1998 the populist vote share in European parliaments has more than tripled, going from just 7% to over 25% in 2018 (Lewis et. al., 2018). All over Europe populist parties have gained ground, often coming into power like *Lega* in Italy and *Vox* in Spain. The growing success of populism has attracted the attention of media and scientists alike. The Guardian mentioned populism in some 300 articles in 1998. By 2016 that number had grown to 2000 (Rooduijn, 2018). Scientific interest has shown a similar growth, increasing from 76 publications mentioning 'populism' or 'populist' on the *Web of Science* in 2010 to 332 in 2017 (Rooduijn, 2019:362).

In 2004, the Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde introduced the notion of a 'populist *Zeitgeist*'. His thesis was that the 1990's populism in Western democracies has increased and spread. Although mostly used by fringe parties, mainstream parties have started using it as well, often to counter the success of populist challengers. The populist discourse has become mainstream and mainstream political parties have adopted it (Mudde, 2004; Bale et al., 2010; Mény and Surel, 2002). Since Mudde first introduced the idea of a populist Zeitgeist, the success of populism has been undeniable and a large amount of research has gone into the notion of a Zeitgeist and the contagiousness of populism. In numerous cases it has been found that mainstream parties react to populist parties by either taking over their policy positions or their populist rhetoric, indicating a contagion-effect of populism (Bale, 2018; Bale et. al., 2010; Bossetta, 2017; Meguid, 2005; Oudenampsen, 2013; Tarchi, 2002; Snow and Moffitt, 2012; Curran 2004, Schumager and van Kersbergen, 2016; Van Spanje, 2010). However, the idea of a populist zeitgeist has also been disputed. Manucci and Weber place doubt by the idea of a populist zeitgeist, finding that

> "The period between the 1980s and the 1990s, which is often identified as a watershed for the 'populistization' of Western European politics and the growing electoral success of populist parties, does not seem to represent a critical juncture for the diffusion of populist

discourses. In fact, it is only after 20 years – and the occasion of the last elections – that populism became particularly widespread in party manifestos" (2017:331).

In their research on the populist zeitgeist and the contagion of populism Rooduijn et. al. (2012) analysed the party programmes of mainstream political parties in five Western European countries between 1988 and 2007, to examine whether their ideas had become more populist. They concluded that the programmes had not become more populist and that thus populism was not particularly contagious. This would mean that while mainstream parties might take over policy positions of populists, they do not become populist themselves.

However, since 2007 the success of Western populism has only increased and in 2016 Rooduijn came back on his optimistic and "relaxed" conclusions:

> "Things have changed. Populists in Hungary and Poland seriously challenge liberal institutions, populist discourse has become more widespread and, when in government, populists are no longer merely junior partners. Most disturbingly, mainstream parties in Europe seem to have incorporated elements of populism's illiberalism" (Rooduijn, 2016).

Furthermore, in their research on a populist Zeitgeist, Rooduijn et. al and Manucci and Weber focussed on populism as an ideology, studying party programmes to find out whether the way in which mainstream parties *think* about the people changed. But Bossetta (2017) argues that mainstream parties only adopt a populist political style, without actually changing their political agenda. Under pressure by the success of populists, the political mainstream changes the way in which they communicate to "advocate their existing policy platforms while attempting to appeal to a broader voter base" (Bossetta, 2017:717). Mainstream parties thus might have become more populist, but not in an ideological way. However, Bossetta's research focussed on only two politicians at two points in time. She calls for more research on the topic, especially in 'fragmented multi-party systems' (Bossetta, 2017:732). Finally, Rooduijn et. al. (2012) acknowledge that focussing solely on party programmes only tells part of the story, since voters are often not aware of the content of party programmes. The possibility exists that parties take this into consideration and express their populism elsewhere, resulting in an increase of populist statements in forms of communication that better reach the public (Rooduijn et. al., 2012:571).

Three lacunae in the research on the contagion of populism have been identified. The conclusion of Rooduijn et. al. that there is no populist zeitgeist to speak of might be outdated, as acknowledged by Rooduijn himself. There is the possibility that the populist zeitgeist has only made the political mainstream adopt the populist political style, rather than populist ideas. And potential populism of the political mainstream might have gone unnoticed, because it manifested itself outside of their party programmes. By examining party programmes and tweets for both populist ideas as style, this thesis will aim to fill these gaps in the existing research and answer the research question:

Have mainstream political parties become more populist over time?

This question is answered by performing a content analysis of party programmes and Tweets, whilst differentiating between ideational populism and stylistic populism. This research focusses on the Netherlands and analyses three mainstream parties and two populist parties: the *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA), the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD), the *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* (CDA), the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) and the *Socialistische Partij* (SP).

1.1 Scientific and societal significance

As has been established in the introduction, the study of Western populism has become a hot topic in recent years. There has been a host of research on the way in which parties react to populist contenders and on the contagion of populism. However, this study of the contagion of populism and a populist Zeitgeist has mostly approached populism as an ideology (Mudde, 2007; Manucci and Weber, 2017; Rooduijn et. al., 2012). Research that did make the differentiation between style and ideas, like that of Bos and Brants (2014), might have become outdated because of the continuing development of Western populism. This thesis answers Bossetta's call for more research on the topic of the adoption of a populist style by mainstream parties, by analysing both the ideational as the stylistic populism of mainstream parties. In this way the conclusions of older research can be tested and new insights can be gained.

Populism can be considered a challenge or even a threat to our liberal democracy (Rooduijn, 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012). As Eastern European countries, Italy and the US are showing, in countries where populists come into power the rights of minorities, the freedom of media and the checks and balances of government suffer. It is important to know whether the mainstream parties that should protect these institutions of our democracy are moving toward the parties that threaten them and if so whether they are actually beginning to think like populists or just try to appear as them to appeal to the populist voters, like sheep in wolves' clothing.

1.2 Structure of this thesis

In the second chapter of this thesis, the theoretical framework is discussed. It start off with defining populism for this study. Then the notion of contagion of populism is elaborated on and the hypotheses of this research are introduced. The third chapter contains the methodology used in this thesis. In that chapter the chosen research design and method; case selection; document selection; operationalization of the concepts; and coding practice are justified and explained. In the fourth chapter the results of the content analysis are presented and discussed. The fifth and final chapter is the conclusio. In it the outcomes and most important findings are summarized, the limitations of this study are discussed and recommendations for future research are given.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Defining populism

It is clear that populism is a highly salient topic in contemporary political science. But the salience of the concept is matched by its vagueness. Populism is a contested concept and the difficulty in providing a clear definition of it is a persistent feature of the literature: it has been called "one of the most used and abused terms inside and outside of academia" (Laclau, 2005; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012:1). This is not a new issue: after a conference on populism and its conceptual issues in 1967, the conclusion was that there was no agreement on how to define populism (Rooduijn, 2019). Amongst other definitions, populism has been conceptualized as an economic approach (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991); as a discursive frame (Aslanidis, 2016); as a movement (Lipset, 1960); and as a political logic (Laclau, 2005). For a discussion on the whole history and historiography of the concept of populism there is no room or need in this thesis. However, the approach of populism taken in this work has to be justified and placed in the context of contemporary theorizing on populism. This will be done by discussing the three conceptions of populism that are, according to a number of prominent populism scholars, the most influential (Kaltwasser et. al., 2017:14). These are the political-strategic approach; the socio-cultural approach; and the ideational approach, all covered in *the Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Kaltwasser et. al., 2017). Additionally, the stylistic approach will be discussed.

Political-strategic approach

The conceptual approach of populism as a political strategy is taken to do 'justice' to the relationship between the leader and his followers that constitute populism. According to this approach populism is best defined as "a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (Weyland, 2001: 14). The political-strategic approach revolves around the ways and means by which a leader wins and exercises power in populism (Weyland, 2017:8). Political strategy consists of two central components: "the type of political actor that seeks and exercises power; and the principal power capability which that actor mobilizes as support basis" (Weyland, 2017:8). In populism, this political actor is an individual – a powerful leader rather than any form of organization – combatting the political elite. There are two main possible principal power capability options: numbers or special weight. Special weight is comprised of economic clout or military coercion. Populists criticize the "privileges derived from special weight", the influence business or military can have in the political arena. In their eyes this is an elitist mechanism, disadvantaging 'the people'. Populists instead insist on the norm of political equality, 'one person, one

vote'. Thus they prefer numbers, trying to mobilize 'the people' and overwhelm political opponents in the electoral arena. (Weyland, 2017).

To mobilize the broad, heterogeneous masses of 'the people' and win and maintain their support, populist personalistic leaders rely on unmediated, quasi-direct appeals. Because of the diversity of the mass they try to mobilize, making specific programmatic promises is not effective. Instead, populists bypass intermediation and promote a direct identification with their followers, presenting themselves as the embodiment of 'the people' (Weyland, 2017:12). Because the populist leaders lacks the regular organization that helps maintain support, cultivation of the personal connection between them and their followers is essential to countenance the fickleness of their backing. This is done through quasi-direct appeals, made through TV appearances and social media communications meant to make the leader a daily presence in the lives of his following (Weyland, 2017). To keep the backers mobilized and reinforce their support, the populist leader seeks a danger to confront; "nothing motivates people more than a serious challenge" (Weyland, 2017:12). Populists identify the elite as this danger and use anti-elitist rhetoric, Manichean rhetoric as an instrument to maintain their following.

The political strategy that is populism is therefore based on personalistic leadership of which the success hinges on the mobilization of large numbers of supporters. Instead of relying on a form of institutionalization, like a party, to maintain the connection between leader and follower, the connection is maintained through quasi-direct contact. Rather than offering specific interests to appeal to a very diverse following, populism advances the 'will of the people' by identifying the leader as personification of the people. This creates a "deep association [which] gives populism the intensity that provides many followers with a sense of belonging, which liberal, pluralist democracy with its reliance on "cold" procedural mechanisms lacks" (Weyland, 2017:13).

The political strategy approach can shed light on some properties that have long been associated with populism. Firstly the volatility of populist leaders success. Where conventional political organizations are slow to build up and slowly gain or lose success, populists often experience meteoric rises based on the force of their personality but can lose their success equally fast. Secondly, it has been noted that populist leaders are unpredictable and seem disorganized in their exercise of power, often proclaiming grand projects that are rarely realization. This can be explained by the lack of commitment to any programme by the populist, giving room to govern as they see fit based on the preferences and attention of the leader. The political-strategy approach's focus on action rather than on discourse makes it easier to classify populists, whose words are often vague and changing whilst in their actions they have to "show their true colors" (Weyland, 2017:15).

But the political-strategic approach also has a number of difficulties, some of which making it unsuitable to study the populism of Dutch parties. It labels different modes of organisation and strategy appearing across the political spectrum as populist, that normally would not be labelled so; like some social religious movements or forms of community politics that would fall under this definition. Additionally, with its strong focus on individual leaders, this approach leaves out 'the people', the key core concept of populism. Most importantly for this thesis, Weyland's approach is strongly influenced by the classic literature on populism in Latin America, missing out on both stylistic and ideational elements of populism and making it less suitable for studying European populism. The political-strategy approach excludes organisations with strongly organized parties or explicit ideational commitments like the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* and the *Front National*, parties often classified as populist. (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014; Mudde, 2017).

Socio-cultural approach

The social-cultural approach conceptualizes populism as fundamentally relational and pays attention to the socio-cultural dimension, whilst adding "a sociological component at the level of populism's reception" (Ostiguy, 2017:1). Most importantly, this approach introduces a high-low dimension, which is as structuring for politics as the left-right dimensions. Using this approach, populism is seen as a relationship between leaders and a social basis based on 'low' appeals in contrast with the standard 'high' way of doing politics. Populism can be defined as "the antagonistic, mobilizational flaunting of the low" (Ostiguy, 2017:12).

At the most abstract level, populism is conceptualized as "an antagonistic appropriation for political, mobilizational purposes of an *'unpresentable Other'*" (Ostiguy, 2017:4). In the process of a civilization project – which can range from liberalism to multiculturalism to European integration or any other – an Other has been created. Decent and politically correct people are ashamed and embarrassed by that Other. The politicians *flaunting the Other*, populists, claim to speak in the name of the Other and portray them as being damaged and unrepresented by mainstream politics. Populism is performative in the sense that this flaunting of the Other is done in a loud, inappropriate and often abrasive way in contrast with the politically correct way of other politicians. Populists then go on to claim that the group they represent is the most true people of the homeland, betrayed by a corrupt elite (Ostiguy, 2017:4). What are claimed to be proper discourse and politics are thus in reality not the proper ways, and the Other is in fact the truest people. This means that populists always transgress the proper way of doing politics or behaving in general. All populists share the same 'script': the true people's interest are not being represented and are faced by front of three. This 'coalition' is made up of a nefarious

and hated minority; hostile and powerful international forces; and a government that only represents this minority. The only way to combat this coalition is through mobilization, agitation, and proclaiming 'the truth'. Therefore the populists' transgression of the proper is a decisive and fundamental part of populism (Ostiguy, 2017:5).

The high-low axis concerns the ways of *being* and *behaving* in politics. High and low go beyond discourse as 'words' and revolve around ways of relating to people, including things like accents, language, gestures and ways of dressing. Those on the high end of the axis present themselves as well-mannered, politically correct with an impression of being well-educated. They use a discourse oriented on rationality of ethics. This can come off as stiff, distant and boring. On the low axis people use a more casual parlance, filled with metaphors and slang, use more demonstrative body language, and show affinity with raw and culturally popular tastes. They can appear more colourful or even somewhat grotesque (Ostiguy, 2017:6). High and low also include the way of decision making in politics. The high prefer formal, impersonal institutionally mediated models of authority. The low on the other hand prefers personalistic and strong leadership. The high claim to benefit procedural normalcy, while the low assert to better represent the people and their will (Ostiguy, 2017:11). These elements are about private expressions in the public and are hard to credibly change. They go beyond the superficiality of style but deeply connect with group differences and identities, make it possible to recognize 'one of ours' (Ostiguy, 2017:6).

Like the political-strategic approach, this approach highlights strategy but in contrast it also takes into account the "political and socio-cultural subjectivities of populists' followers" (Ostiguy, 2017:20). Unlike Mudde's ideational approach it can deal with the identities of the people, a central part of populism (Ostiguy, 2017:20).

However, the socio-cultural approach's strong focus on the 'transgression' of the proper makes it unsuitable to study populists that do not behave improperly and exist more toward the high of the high-low axis, leaders like Pim Fortuyn (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2018:1672). Because this thesis focusses on populism in the Netherlands where Fortuyn has been one of the most successful populists, it is not unlikely that other populists emulated his style and exist at the high axis. For example the recent success of Thierry Baudet, whose populist party won the most seats in the Senate in May 2019, would not be identified as populist by the socio-cultural approach because he isn't at the low end of the axis (Rooduijn, 2019). Inability to identify this type of populist makes this approach unsuitable for the analysis of populism in the Netherlands and thus for this thesis.

Ideational approach

Mudde's ideational approach has come to dominate populism research, especially in the study of European populism (Moffit and Tormey, 2014; Rooduijn, 2012). According to this approach, populism is a 'thin-centred' ideology "that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004:543). The main opposition between 'the people' and 'the elite' is not one based on class, like in socialism, but one based on morality. In this opposition the corrupt elite and the pure people come from the same group, but are opposed because the elite have chosen to betray the people in favour of their own interests. To understand the ideational approach, four elements have to be discussed: ideology, the people, the elite and the general will (Mudde, 2017:3).

The most important and controversial part of the ideational approach is the conceptualization of populism as an ideology. More precisely, populism is defined as a 'thin-centred' ideology; an ideology without the intellectual refinement and consistency of a 'thick' ideology like socialism. Such a thin centred-ideology exhibits "a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts" (Freeden, 1998:750, in Mudde, 2017:4). Thin-centred ideologies offer general advice for the way to conduct politics instead of giving clearly defined solutions for major issues, it is moralistic instead of programmatic (Mudde, 2017:5; Mudde, 2004:544)). Because of this thin-centeredness, populism can attach itself to different ideologies from all over the political spectrum instead of standing on its own (Mudde, 2004:544).

The main core concept of populism is 'the people', from which both other core concepts 'the elite' – as opposite of – and 'the general will' – as its expression – derive their meaning. The people are a 'pure', homogenous imagined community . Although purity is a rather vague term, it does add content when juxtaposed with the 'corrupt' elite. Furthermore, the people refers to "an idealized conception of the community", making it necessary for the populist to properly define the people in terms the targeted community identifies itself (Taggart, 2004:274). The conception of the community can vary greatly because is often decided by the thick-centred ideology to which populism attaches itself (Mudde, 2017:8-9).

The elite is theoretically nothing more than the antithesis of the people, being defined solely along morality: the *pure* people versus the *corrupt* elite. Populist discourse presents a Manichean juxtaposition between the *good* people and the elite, who are not just people with different opinions but are *evil* (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008; Mudde, 2004:544). Because populism often attaches

itself to a secondary ideology, the definition of the people and the elite can differ in practice depending on the ideology to which populism has attached itself (Mudde, 2017:9).

The notion of general will is linked to the populist interpretation of the people: a homogenous group with the same interests and preferences. Thus populists argue that the general will should be leading in politics. Populist policy is claimed to be based on 'common sense': "the result of the honest and logical priorities of the (common) people" (Mudde, 2017:7). Because populists simply follow common sense, they can present themselves as the voice of the people expressing the general will without being political. Those opposing the common sense solutions or proposing other solutions are part of the elite and thus the enemy; not promoting the interests of the people like populists but those of special interests (Mudde, 2017:8).

The ideational approach to populism has a number of strengths. Populism is often rejected for being too vague, with there being no clear distinction between populists and non-populists. The ideational approach sets clear boundaries for what is populism and makes it possible to distinguish between populists and non-populists. Mudde's approach has been used extensively in the research on populism, especially that on European (right wing) populist parties (see Mudde, 2007; Pauwels 2011; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012; Stanley, 2008; Rooduijn, 2013; Rooduijn et al. 2012).

Although the aforementioned approaches are of great importance in contemporary populism research, this thesis will use Mudde's ideational approach. The political-strategic and the socio-cultural approaches have a number of problems that make them less suitable for the current research. However, the foremost reason for using Mudde's approach is that it is the one Rooduijn et al. (2012) and Manucci and Weber (2017) used. Because this thesis is meant to revisit and actualize theirs conclusions regarding a populist zeitgeist, using the same approach is necessary for meaningful comparison. The ideational approach makes it possible to identify those with populist ideals, 'real populists'. However, mainstream politicians and political parties that want to appear populists to attract voters but don't adopt actual populist ideals will go unnoticed with Mudde's approach. To make it possible to also identify these populists, the stylistic approach will be used.

Stylistic approach

The stylistic approach conceptualizes populism as a 'political style'. A 'political style' is defined as "*the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations*" (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014: 387). There exists a wide range of political styles, like the technocratic style and the authoritarian style, of which populism is one. In this approach, populism isn't regarded as a *thing* but as a style that is *performed* or *enacted.* In doing so, it can be understood how populism's performative elements can be used by diverse political actors, rather than merging populist identity and populist appeals into one. The stylistic approach acknowledges the changing nature of politics and focusses on contemporary populism, rather than also trying to encapsulate historical populism. It recognizes the importance of the 'aesthetic' of politics in todays intensely mediated landscape, in which performative functions and image are gaining importance over 'content' (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014: 388). Much like Mudde's ideational approach, the stylistic approach makes it possible for populism to be attached to any ideology. The political styles most often imagined by for example socialism or liberalism are not necessarily inherent to the ideology, the populist style could equally well be attached (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014: 389). There are three core elements to the populist style: 'appeal to the people'; 'sense of crisis'; and 'bad manners'.

An appeal to the people is what differentiates populism from other political styles. From this appeal stems the division of society in the people and an 'Other'. Unlike in the ideational approach, the Other isn't necessarily a corrupt elite but can also be other groups in society (like immigrants). However, populists do claim to be distinct from the elite, which is evoked as the source of some sort of crisis of which the people are victim. Populists attempt to show their closeness to the people in numerous ways, for example by rejecting the political-correctness of the elite or showing disdain for the technocracy of mainstream politics and opting for the colloquial language of the people (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014: 391; Bos and Brants, 2014:706).

The driving force behind populism is a sense of crisis (Taggart, 2000:4). These crises often concern a lack of representation of the people, but can also relate to other subjects like economy, immigration or a military threat. Whilst the elite are the source of the crisis, the populist present themselves as the solution. The sense of crisis creates a demand for strong and decisive leadership as opposed to the technocratic bureaucracy of the elite. This simplifies the debate which is reflected in the populists tendency toward clear and direct language (Moffitt and Toremy, 2014:392).

Populists use a coarsening of their discourse to show their closeness to the people and the urgency of the crisis they are concerned with. This 'tabloid style' of populists shows their disregard of the

'appropriate' way of doing politics (Canovan, 1999:5). This coarsening of discourse can be compared to the low axis of the socio-cultural approach.

Like the ideational approach, the stylistic approach explains how populism can appear across the political spectrum. Thinking of populism as a political style rather than as an ideology makes it possible to consider how politicians can "slip in and out of the populist style" (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014: 393). It makes it possible to compare different political styles and analyse why and when political actors use a certain style. It's ability to analyse the 'usage' of populism by mainstream politicians that employ some elements of populism without fitting completely into the category of populist makes it a valuable addition to the ideational approach in the context of this thesis.

2.2 Contagion of populism

In his acclaimed paper *The Populist Zeitgeist* (2004)*,* Mudde argues that not only have populist parties had an increasing success since the 1990's, but that mainstream political parties have adopted populist arguments and rhetoric. Manucci and Weber (2017) argued against the idea that we have been living in a populist zeitgeist since the 1990's, but found an increase in the prevalence of populism in party programmes 2012 and 2013. This is in line with what Rooduijn (2016) hints at: that although he concluded that there was no populist zeitgeist to speak of in 2007, that may have changed in recent years with the continuing and increasing success of populists. Why would the mainstream become more populist as a reaction to populist success? Harmel and Janda (1994) argue that changes in party positions can be caused by external forces. The continuing success of populists could be such a force for mainstream parties. In line with this, Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) argue that parties tend to change their policy positions according to their opponents in elections. Which would explain a change towards populism from mainstream parties. This leads to the first hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 1: the populism of mainstream political parties has increased.*

Following the hypothesis that the populism of mainstream parties has increased, Bossetta (2017) argues that rather than actually embracing populist ideas, mainstream politicians might merely adopt their style in an attempt to counter the success of populist challengers whilst staying true to their own agenda. This leads to the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 2: there has been a larger increase in populist style than in populist ideas among mainstream political parties.*

It has been found that the most important cause of change for a party is an electoral loss (Harmel and Janda, 1994). Parties are reactionary and often need to lose elections to change after which they might

opt for an 'if you can't beat them, join them' strategy by moving closer toward the party to which they lost (Bale et. al., 2010). This brings us to the next hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: the greater the electoral losses of a mainstream party, the more populist they become.

The final hypothesis of this thesis is not concerned with the mainstream parties, but builds on the findings of Rooduijn et. al. regarding populist parties. They found that populists moderate their populism after electoral success (2012:572). They argued that this could be explained by a wish to govern that makes it likely that they tone down their populism. However, this was based on the assumption that for populists to make it into government they had to become the junior party in a coalition and temper there populism to be more acceptable to the senior party. The continuing electoral successes of populists since then and their ability to become the leaders of coalitions places doubts by the findings (Rooduijn, 2016). This leads to the final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: the populism of populists doesn't decrease after electoral success.

3. Methodology

In the theoretical framework, attention has been paid to the contested nature of populism and the two approaches to populism used in this thesis have been explained: the ideational approach and the stylistic approach. To answer whether the populism of mainstream political parties in the Netherlands increased in the period 2010-2017 and to analyse the nature of this change – stylistic or ideational – I conducted a qualitative content analysis of 15 party programmes and +/- 1500 tweets from five Dutch political parties. In this chapter the chosen research design and method; case selection; document selection; operationalization of the concepts; and coding practice are justified and explained.

3.1 Research design and method

When setting up a research, it has to be decided whether the research will be a large *N* or small *N*. Large *N* research looks at a large number of cases in a less in-depth way and is by its nature quantitative. Small *N* research – a case study – delves into a single case or a small number of cases in an in-depth way and can be either quali- or quantitative, or something in between (Gerring, 2006:10). In line with Rooduijn et. al. (2012), this thesis is a case study done through a qualitative content analysis of party programmes, to which a content analysis of tweets is added. Although some efforts have been made to employ computation analysis and make large *N* research possible (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2012) the study of party programmes is usually done through a labour intensive qualitative content analysis (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2013). A good case study possesses two important characteristics: it says something meaningful about the case being studied and it engages in a wider academic debate, being applicable in a broader context. Gerring defines case studies as "an intensive study of a single or a small number of cases to infer something about a larger population" (Gerring, 2006:65; Halperin and Heath, 2012). This case study gives insight in the development of the populism of mainstream Dutch political parties up until the most recent *Tweede Kamerverkiezingen* (House of Representatives elections). Although direct inference from this case study to a wider population isn't possible, by studying the Dutch case the notion of a populist Zeitgeist is tested.

Qualitative content analysis is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005:1278). It is used to analyse text data and "focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text" (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005:1278). Qualitative content is not a mere counting of words, but an intense study of language to enable the classification of text into categories. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) lay out three types of qualitative content analysis: conventional content analysis, summative content analysis and

directed content analysis. Conventional content analysis is used when previous theorizing is limited or non-existent and derives its coding categories directly from the text data. Summative content analysis starts with counting certain words and revolves around understanding the usage of them in context. Directed content analysis is used when an existing theory or priory research is used, which is the case in this thesis. Directed content analysis has a structured nature: first key concepts of the theory are identified to be used as coding categories and then these concepts need to be operationalized (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1281). The identification and operationalization of key concepts is done in 3.4.

3.2 Case selection

This case study of the contagion of populism will not analyse all five countries Rooduijn et. al. (2012) originally studied. Because of the labour intensive nature of a content analysis, this study will limit itself to an analysis of the Netherlands. The three most 'mainstream' political parties have been selected, to find out whether they have become more populist during the 2010-2017 period. The three selected parties are the PvdA (Labour Party), the VVD (Liberal Party), and the CDA (Christian-democratic Party). These parties are considered the three most mainstream parties for a number of reasons. Firstly, none of these parties are protest parties. Secondly, since the formation of the CDA in 1982 every government included at least one of these three parties: out of the eleven coalition since then the PvdA was part of five, the VVD of nine and the CDA of eight. And finally, since 1982 the largest party in the House of Representatives has always been one of these three: the PvdA twice, the VVD three times and the CDA six times. For reference two populist political parties have been included: (right-wing populists) and the SP (left-wing populists) (Pauwels, 2014:1-2).

3.3 Document selection

Party programmes

Conceptualizing populism as an ideology means that populism is seen as a group of ideas from which "it follows that empirical studies should primarily direct their attention to the programmatic statements made by political actors" (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2013:7). Research in this tradition thus mainly focusses on internal party communications, or – like in this thesis – on party programmes. Although few voters actually read the party programme, it is an important piece of party communication which politicians take very seriously. They are official statements of medium-term policy priorities, forming the base of a governing party's mandate. Even if voters seldomly read programmes, opposition parties and journalists do, meaning the programme can be used to hold a

party to account after elections. They are also important in the long run, because "once an idea makes it into a manifesto, it becomes official party policy and has a better chance than not of remaining so in the medium term" (Allen and Bara, 2019:125).[1] Party programmes are additionally the only authoritative source of party policy in the context of a campaign. (Eder, Jenny and Müller, 2017; Allen and Bara, 2019). These factors make the party programme useful for observing party ideology. If parties have become more populist in their ideas, this should be reflected in the party programmes. But if parties have only become more populist in their style to counter populists and attract more voters, this might not affect the party programme. Parties know their programmes are seldomly read by voters so might not change the style of their programmes to appeal to populist voters.

All party programmes have been found online in the repository of the *Documentation Centre Dutch Political Parties* (DNPP) website from the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, a repository of digitalized versions of party documents and publications from Dutch political parties. For all parties the definitive versions of their party programmes for the *Tweede Kamerverkiezingen* for the years 2010, 2012 and 2017 have been used. In 2017, the PVV caused controversy by publishing a one page, 197 word, party programme. This concept version of their program – a definitive version was never published – consisted of four introductory sentences, eleven bullet points, and a financial estimate. Shortly thereafter the PVV publicized a clarification of the focal points laid out in the party programme in a number of newspapers. This *Plan Wilders voor Nederland. Toelichting op de speerpunten van de PVV* (Wilders' plan for the Netherlands. Elucidation of the focal points of the PVV) is not part of the official party programme, although the DNPP has attached it to the party programme on their website. Because the PVV has only published a concept version of their programme and the PVV meant to clarify their programme with the *Plan Wilders*, it will be included in the analysis as part of the 2017 programme.

Twitter

We turn to social media as another form of political communication, as a medium in which it is assumed to be more likely that a change in style might be detected. Social media has become increasingly more important as a source for political news and political communication. Like a party programme, social media can be used to directly communicate a message to the voters without interference from traditional media. By evading traditional media to broadcast their message,

---

[1] A manifesto and a party programme are the same thing: "a publication issued by a political party before a General Election. It contains the set of policies that the party stands for and would wish to implement if elected to govern" (parliament.uk).

politicians and parties themselves have become the sources of news. "This has meant that politicians are left to their own resources to make something newsworthy — the tone, theme, delivery of messages can be factors that impact what becomes 'popular'" (Gonawela, et. al. 2018:300). Social media is very popular in the Netherlands and it is widely used by politicians, with Facebook and Twitter being the most used platforms (Jacobs and Spierings, 2018). For this thesis, Twitter will be analysed because it is a better platform for direct and clear communication with voters than Facebook. Whereas Facebook uses a complicated algorithm to decide whether and where a message is placed on the newsfeed of its users, Twitter simply places messages in a chronological order for those following a page. This makes it easier for parties to ensure their message reaches the intended audience. Because of its 140 characters nature, Twitter is the perfect platform for one-liners and short and straightforward messages, which fits well with the straightforward communication style typically linked to populists (Jacobs and Spierings, 2018).[2] Because Twitter is an effective way for parties to communicate directly with voters and the importance of 'tone, theme and delivery of messages' on the platform, if parties have adopted a populist style this should be reflected in their Twitter messages.

All Tweets have been taken directly from Twitter by using the search function and selecting the wanted periods. To match the Tweets to the party programmes and ensure comparability between parties, the selected Tweets are those leading up to the day after the general elections of 2010, 2012 and 2017. For each party between 100 and 130 Tweets have been selected for each of the periods, varying slightly in number dependent on the codability of the Tweets (further explained in 3.5)[3]. For the SP, VVD, CDA and PvdA the Tweets have been taken from their official party Twitter page. The PVV doesn't have any official party social media, the Twitter page they direct to on their website is that of Geert Wilders. Therefore this thesis assumes that the communication done through Wilders' Twitter page can be seen as party communication and will be used in lieu of an official party Twitter page.

Election results

To answer the 3rd and 4th hypotheses that concern the reaction of parties to electoral loss or success, the election results for the 2006, 2010 and 2012 elections have been taken to calculate the losses or gains parties made. E.g. the populism found in party programmes and tweets in 2017 are related to the loss or gain the party made in the 2012 election. Because of the small sample size a regression analysis of the relation between electoral success and populism level would have very little statistical

---

[2] The increase of Twitter's character limit from 140 to 280 took place after the 2017 elections and thus are of no consequence to this thesis.

[3] For Geert Wilders Tweets leading up to the 2010 election only 80 tweets have been used. Wilders had taken a hiatus from Twitter, so taking the Tweets before those 80 would have strongly altered the timeframe of this thesis.

power. Therefore it was chosen to analyse party reactions to party success only in a qualitative manner.

3.4 Coding categories and operationalization of the concepts

To measure the populism of parties, two forms of political communication are analysed: party programmes and social media. The ideational elements are operationalized based on Rooduijn et. al. (2012; 2013) and the operationalization of the stylistic elements of populism is based on Wettstein et. al. (2018) and Bos and Brants (2014). By making this distinction, it is possible to gain insight into in what way mainstream parties have become more populist.

Ideational approach

As stated in the theoretical framework, the ideational approach to populism consists of three key concepts: the people, the elite and the general will. Because the general will is an expression of the people there would be overlap if these concepts were coded separately. Therefore these two concepts are put together into one coding category: 'people-centrism'. The elite as the enemy of the people, and therefore the enemy of the populist, is the final key element of the ideational approach. Therefore communication in which the elite are attacked is the second ideational coding category: 'anti-elitism'.

People-centrism is operationalized in reference to the following question: "do the authors refer to the people?" (Rooduijn et. al., 2012:567). If the answer is 'yes', a statement will be coded as people-centric. This means looking for any statement referencing the people, which can be done directly by writing about 'the people'; 'citizens'; or 'the electorate. It is also possible that the reference was indirect, like 'our culture'; 'we'; or 'our nation'. This includes proposals that emphasize the primacy of the people, their culture or language, or strengthen democratic participation. References to specific sub-groups are not included, e.g. being proud of teachers or the police is not seen as a reference to the people (Rooduijn, 2013:173) When reference to the people in this way is made, a paragraph or tweet is coded as people-centric: e.g. "#TheNetherlandsOursAgain" (Wilders, 2017). 'Anti-elitism' is operationalized in in reference to the following question: "Do the authors criticize elites?" (Rooduijn et. al., 2012:567). If the answer is 'yes', a statement will be coded as anti-elitist. Elites don't necessarily have to be political, they can also be cultural, economic, legal, or media elites: e.g. Rutte's critique of the *'Amsterdamse witte wijn sippende elite'* (white wine sipping Amsterdam elites) doesn't reference any political elite but would be coded as anti-elite (Het Parool, 2019). The criticism has to be directed towards an elite in general, so statements targeting a specific ruling party are not anti-elite.

Statements *are* anti-elite when they use a particular party, company or news medium as representative of a general elite to which they belong (Rooduijn, 2013:174).

Stylistic approach

Four coding categories have been conceptualized to encapsulate the populist style. The first element of the populist style is the tendency of populists to present themselves as the solution to a crisis and to use dramatization to strengthen or induce the sense of crisis. In the case of right wing populism the crisis is usually immigration related, but it can also be economic difficulties; a military threat; or the loss of national sovereignty (Bos et. al., 2010:145; Moffitt, 2016:53). This element of populist has been operationalized as the coding category 'dramatization'. The second key element of the populist style is an emotional tone, which populists have been found to prefer over facts-based arguing (Bossetta, 2017:721). Appealing to either positive or negative emotions can promote a sense of trust in the first case or induce a feeling of threat in the latter. Messages based on emotions can be a useful instrument in politics because they are hard to falsify and have been found "to be more effective than cognitive based appeals." (Wettstein, 2018:11; Bossetta, 2017:721). Thirdly, populists like strong and clear language and bring their message across without hesitation (Taggart, 2000:97; Bos et. al., 2010:145). This element of populist communication is operationalized as 'absolutism'. And finally, to show their proximity to the people, populists often choose to refrain from using technocratic language and use a more casual parlance. They often agitate against the political correctness of the mainstream by using insults and showing 'bad manners' (Wettstein, 2018:12; Mofitt and Tormey, 2014:52). This makes up the fourth and last element of the populist style: 'colloquial language'.

A statement is coded as dramatization when referring to a crisis or portraying a situation as being in a state of crisis, or when using emergency or war rhetoric: e.g. "They declared war on us. And our EU-open-border-leaders betray us. We need a political revolution. And defend our people." (Wilders, 2017).[4] A statement was coded as having an emotional tone when either expressing or appealing to emotions: e.g. "*CDA blij met kraakverbod*" (CDA happy with squatting ban) (CDA, 2010). A statement is coded as absolutist when it uses "rhetorical elements which explicitly excluded other interpretations and opinions and if it lacked relativizing words" (Wettstein, 2018:12): e.g. *"Onaanvaardbaar. Kamer moet NU terugkomen van reces voor debat! Zojuist verzoek toe ingediend."* (Unacceptable. The house

---

[4] This aspect was somewhat problematic for the 2012 elections, because the economic crisis was a major theme spoken about by all parties. Simply referring to the economic crisis will not be coded as dramatization; only when this was combined with emergency rhetoric it is seen as dramatization. E.g. 'this crisis needs an EU-wide solution' is not coded as dramatization 'this terrible crisis that is costing billions of Euros and thousands of jobs can only be solved…' is coded as dramatization.

has to return from recess for a debate NOW! Just submitted request) (Bos and Brants, 2014:709; Wilders, 2017). A statement was positively coded for colloquial language if it applied colloquial or coarse language, or slang words and refrained from technocratic language or when they resorted to sarcasm or insults: e.g. "*Klaas de eindbaas! #slimstemens*" (Klaas the boss #smartestman)(VVD, 2017).[5]

3.5 Coding practice

Because a statement in which either of the six elements are present can span multiple sentences, the sentence isn't an appropriate unit of analysis. For party programmes it is therefore decided that, like Rooduijn et. al. (2012), paragraphs will be coded. Paragraphs "serve to mark the thematic discontinuities of various kinds" (Ji, 2008:1719) and "it can therefore be expected that breaks between paragraphs represent objectively traceable distinctions between arguments" (Rooduijn et. al., 2012: 566). Using paragraphs overcomes the problem of losing the bigger picture of dictionary coding or the lack of nuance holistic coding (Aslanidis, 2017). Because the introduction of the party programme often contains the 'core message' the party want to communicate and the rest of the programme is mostly a more technical elaboration of this message, the introduction is counted twice (Rooduijn et. al., 2012). Rooduijn et. al. (2012) assumed shorter programmes to be inherently more populist and therefore weighed populist paragraphs in reference to the length of the programme in which it was contained. However, they found that the results did not change substantively when the paragraphs weren't weighed (Rooduijn et. al., 2012:572). Therefore the weighing of paragraphs in this way will not be done in this thesis. Another reason for not weighing paragraphs in this way is that it removes the factor of choice that parties have in deciding the length of their programmes. If shorter programmes are inherently more populist, it might be because populists choose to release shorter programmes rather than the long technocratic style party programmes of the mainstream. There are two more ways in the way in which the party programmes are coded diverts from Rooduin et. al. (2012). Because the length of paragraphs vary within and between party programmes, Rooduijn et. al. (2012) weigh paragraphs with great informative content equally to paragraphs with lesser content

---

[5] Wettstein et. al. used a fifth and final stylistic element labelled 'common man'. This element revolved around the highlighting of the proximity between populist actors and the public. However, the first part of the description of this element overlapped with the ideational people-centrism element. The second part of the element was rather vague in combination with the single example given: 'referring to common sense to back the statement' – "Yet again the hard working singles will be made to foot the bill for those with a family" (Wettstein et. al., 2019:12-13. My request to access the coding book used by Wettstein et. al. to clarify the concept was refused, making it impossible to gain insight in its nuances. Because I felt that there was too much overlap between my interpretation of common man and people-centrism, I decided to not include it in the analysis.

(Aslanidis, 2017). Therefore in this thesis every paragraph is weighed according to its length in reference to the length of the programme in which it is contained. This also resolves a second problem: party programs often contain lists of short bullet points that would be disproportionality weighed if coded as a paragraph when paragraph length isn't taken into account. Rooduijn et. al. (2012) only code a paragraph as (ideational) populist when it contains both anti-elitism and people-centrism, because populism is defined by the combination of these two elements. This would mean that a programme containing paragraph after paragraph of anti-elitism and people-centrism would not be coded as populist as long as there is no overlap between the two elements. Instead of applying this condition in each paragraph, this thesis applies it on the programme in its totality. This means that paragraphs are coded for both elements separately but only count towards ideational populist if there is an equal amount of the other element in the program. A paragraph with both elements counts as 100% ideational populist: a programme containing both elements in all paragraphs is 100% ideational populist. A paragraph containing only one of the elements is less strongly populist and thus counts as only 50% ideational populist *and* needs an equal amount of text to contain the other element to count: a programme containing one of the elements in half of the paragraphs and the other element in the other half is 50% ideational populist. In practice this means that the ideational populism of a program is decided by the element of which it contains the least: a program containing 99% of one element and 1% of the other is only 1% ideational populist. Like Wettstein (2018), we count a paragraph containing any of the stylistic element as stylistic populist. This is done because not all of these elements are necessary for a style to be populist, they are merely the elements that belong to the populist style. Both ideational as stylistic populism are measured on a range from a score of 0% to a score of 100%, where 0% means that no paragraphs contain populism and 100% that all paragraphs contain populism.

Because the tweets are taken together to represent the communication of a party on social media, they are scored in the same way as the party programmes with each tweet being the unit of analysis instead of a paragraph. Tweets with gifs or pictures that are shown in twitter, as well as embedded twitter video's that are no longer than 30 second are coded. Tweets with no text and only videos longer than 30 seconds or links to other websites are not coded. Tweets with external links are coded, but only the tweet text itself: older tweets often contain dead links, making it inconsistent to code external links. For every party and year around 130 tweets were taken to achieve a minimum of 100 codable Tweets. Because the tweets are taken together to represent the communication of a party on social media, they are scored in the same way as the party programmes with each tweet being the unit of analysis instead of a paragraph.

All party programmes have been downloaded in PDF form and have been transformed into .exe documents. Coding of these documents has been done in Microsoft Word by highlighting paragraphs that have been positively coded for one or more of the six coding categories. Through the 'add comment' option that can be found under the 'review' tab, comments have been added to the highlighted paragraphs. In these comments the positively coded categories and the length of the paragraph are noted. The results of this coding has been collected in an excel document. All Tweets have been copy-pasted directly from Twitter into fifteen excel files, one for per year per party. In these files each individual Tweet was coded for the six categories and the results have been collected in one excel document.

4. Results

In the previous chapters the theoretical concepts have been introduced and operationalized and the way in which this research is set up has been explained and justified. In this chapter the results of the content analysis are presented and analysed and the hypotheses are tested. Firstly the results concerning the ideational development of populism are evaluated. Next the findings on the development of the stylistic populism are discussed. This chapter ends by combining these findings and linking them to electoral outcomes.

4.1 Ideational populism

Table 1 and table 2 show the development of the parties' populism. The ideational populism of the mainstream parties hardly changed during the observed period and there is no increase to speak of. Compared to the ideational populism of the populist parties, that of the mainstream parties is insignificant.

The ideational populism of the VVD found in the party programmes declined over time, with 1,5% in 2010 down to 0,18% in 2017. The ideational populism in the programme of the CDA did increase slightly during the period, going from 0,00% in 2010 to 0,61% in 2017. The PvdA's party programme had a very small spike of 0,43% in 2012, but in the other two years was without any ideational populism. Over the observed period the CDA scores an average of 0,23%; the PvdA 0,22%; and the VVD 0,90%. These findings are very much in line with those of Rooduijn et. al., who found an average ideational populism in party programmes during the period 1998-2006 of 0,00 for the CDA; 0,62 for the PvdA; and 0,44 for the VVD and no notable increase for any of them over the observed period (2012). The observed ideational scores are rather insignificant when compared with those of the party programmes of the populist parties. The SP's programme had an average of 5,93% and the PVV's 24,50% over the observed period. The ideational populism in the programmes of the populist parties did change considerably. Whilst that of the SP halved - going from 8,56% to 4,21% - that of the PVV increased by almost half, going from 21,03% to 29,25 percent. These findings are also comparable of those of Rooduijn et. al. (2012), they observed an average of 23,08 for the PVV and of 7,63% for the SP.

Table 1 - Populism in the programmes of all parties

	2010		2012		2017	
	Ideational	Stylistic	Ideational	Stylistic	Ideational	Stylistic
CDA	0,00%	0,23%	0,06%	4,96%	0,61%	8,88%
PvdA	0,00%	4,93%	0,43%	8,96%	0,00%	8,08%
VVD	1,50%	7,11%	1,02%	6,27%	0,18%	23,00%
SP	8,56%	6,21%	4,97%	4,29%	4,21%	8,24%
PVV	21,03%	47,03%	23,21%	68,21%	29,25%	89,88%

Table 2 - Populism in the Tweets of all parties

	2010		2012		2017	
	Ideational	Stylistic	Ideational	Stylistic	Ideational	Stylistic
CDA	0,00%	9,71%	0,00%	13,91%	0,00%	28,81%
PvdA	0,00%	21,10%	0,00%	22,94%	0,00%	27,34%
VVD	0,00%	16,50%	0,00%	22,22%	0,88%	46,80%
SP	0,00%	18,10%	0,00%	20,19%	1,92%	28,85%
PVV	5,00%	67,50%	4,90%	59,80%	9,09%	58,68%

Table 3 - Ideational populism in the programmes of all parties

	2010		2012		2017	
	People-centrism	Anti-elitism	People-centrism	Anti-elitism	People-centrism	Anti-elitism
CDA	1,41%	0,00%	2,82%	0,06%	4,43%	0,61%
PvdA	3,06%	0,00%	3,63%	0,43%	4,30%	0,00%
VVD	3,13%	1,50%	1,79%	1,02%	16,41%	0,18%
SP	9,43%	8,56%	6,50%	4,97%	6,83%	4,21%
PVV	31,09%	21,03%	34,50%	23,21%	90,52%	29,25%

Table 4 - Ideational populism in the Tweets of all parties

	2010		2012		2017	
	People-centrism	Anti-elitism	People-centrism	Anti-elitism	People-centrism	Anti-elitism
CDA	0,97%	0,00%	0,87%	0,00%	5,93%	0,00%
PvdA	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	5,47%	0,00%
VVD	0,97%	0,00%	4,63%	0,00%	8,85%	0,88%
SP	1,90%	0,00%	5,77%	0,00%	11,54%	1,92%
PVV	11,25%	5,00%	4,90%	14,71%	19,01%	9,09%

The party programmes did prove to be the appropriate medium in which to find ideational populism. None of the parties had more ideational populist tweets than party programmes. Both populist parties had significantly more ideational populist programmes than Tweets. Of the mainstream parties only one had a year in which any ideational populism was found in their Tweets: the VVD's scored 0,88% ideational populist in 2017. Surprisingly enough, the SP's Tweets were only ideational populist in one year as well, scoring 1,92% in 2017. The PVV's Tweets where the most ideational populist by far; scoring over 5% each of the years with an average of 6,33% over the whole period.

However, this does not mean that nothing changed during the period. Table 3 and table 4 show the findings for the two ideational elements – people-centrism and anti-elitism – separately. The people-centrism in both the mainstream's party programmes as in their Tweets increased significantly during the period. The people-centrism in the party programmes of the mainstream parties increased from an average of 2,53% in 2010 to 8,38% in 2017, whilst that on Twitter rose from 0,65% to 6,75%. On twitter the people-centrism scores of the mainstream parties are comparable to that of the populist parties. Surprisingly, the 2017 party programme of the VVD contained considerably more people-centrism than that of the SP, whilst the other mainstream parties were not far off. The PVV is an extreme when it concerns the people-centrism in their programme. They went from the already highest score of 31,09% to 90,52% in 2017. Although the PVV released a far shorter programme in 2017 than in the years before, the level of anti-elitism did not grow nearly as dramatically: going from 21,03% to 29,25%.

However, in both their party programmes as in their Tweets the mainstream parties hardly criticized the elite, averaging 0.42% anti-elitism in their programmes and 0,10% in their Tweets with no increase over the period. As expected, the populist parties were more anti-elitist. The left-wing populist SP (in 2017 4,21% anti-elitism in their programme and 1,92% in their Tweets) has a clear and unsurprising theme in their anti-elitism: they criticized the political and the economic elites. 'Neoliberalism', 'the frightful politicians', 'the old-boys network in control of governing', 'rich people in villas', 'European leaders and the EU' and 'bankers' are all targeted (SP, 2012:7, 5, 10, 34, 7, 6). The PVV (in 2017 29,25% anti-elitism in their programme and 9,09% in their Tweets) criticized a range of elites as well in both their programmes as in their Tweets: the EU – 'the monster in Brussels wants to take away our sovereignty' (Wilders, 2012); the left – 'hey left wing elitist losers (Wilders, 2017); the media – 'a new depth reached by the leftist media, dirty!' (Wilders, 2010); and mainstream politicians - 'hey out of touch mainstream political elites. No one trusts you anymore. The Dutch people shall win!' (Wilders, 2017). In the more than three hundred Tweets and three party programmes, the PvdA only had *one* anti-elitist statement, criticizing the banking world for their "*snelle geld [en] kortzichtige speculatie zonder oog voor maatschappelijke gevolgen*" (the easy money and the short-sighted speculation

without eye for social consequences) and calling for better regulation (PvdA, 2012:56). In the only ideational populist paragraph in the CDA's party programme of 2017 they surprisingly enough criticize politicians in general, seemingly offering a *mea culpa* and acknowledging they should do better: "*Veel mensen voelen zich verlaten door een politiek die te veel met zichzelf bezig is. Politici beloven te veel en zijn vooral gericht op successen voor de korte termijn. Ook dat moet anders*" (A lot of people feel abandoned by politics that is too self-absorbed. Politicians promise too much and are too focussed on short-term success. That too has to change)(CDA, 2017:15). The 0,10% average anti-elitism in the Tweets of the mainstream parties represents the single anti-elitist Tweet sent, out of the 1006 mainstream party Tweets that have been coded. On 3 December 2016, the VVD tweeted: "*Mark Rutte tegen ALDE-congres: 'Too often, elites in Europe say that the people are wrong. But the people are not wrong! You are wrong!'*" Which is ironic, since the president of ALDE (*Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party*) is Hans van Baalen, *Member of the European Parliament* for the VVD. This irony did not go unnoticed by those following the VVD on Twitter, where many pointed out that the VVD themselves were part of the elite they meant to criticize. This might also explain why the mainstream parties have all adopted the people-centrism of ideational populism, but have stayed away from the anti-elitism. If there exists a political elite, a central notion of ideational populism, these three mainstream parties are that political elite in the Netherlands (see 3.2). These parties can't credibly claim to be outsiders, so criticizing the elite would mean criticizing themselves. However, adopting people-centrism was possible for these parties without damaging themselves. Although people-centrism in itself is not populist – nearly all politicians in Western democracies claim to speak for the people – there was a significant increase in it during the period (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014:391).

So while the ideational populism of the populist parties did change somewhat over time, this wasn't the case for the mainstream parties. Their party programmes and Tweets contained hardly any ideational populism in 2010 and that was still the case in 2017. No evidence has been found that ideational populism has spread to mainstream parties, which also means that there is no populist Zeitgeist to speak of when it concern populist ideas. However, mainstream parties did adopt the part of ideational populism that they could without damaging themselves. This is in line with the findings of Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) that parties shift their policy towards the parties they face. The mainstream parties had only faced the PVV in 2006, the year it was founded. This could explain why the people-centrism was so low in 2010 and has been rising since then.

4.2 Stylistic populism

Whilst no contagion of populist ideas to mainstream political parties has been found – implying that ideational populism is not contagious – looking at the changes in the stylistic populism of the mainstream parties over the observed period paints a very different picture. The stylistic populism of all mainstream parties increased, both in their programmes as in their Tweets.

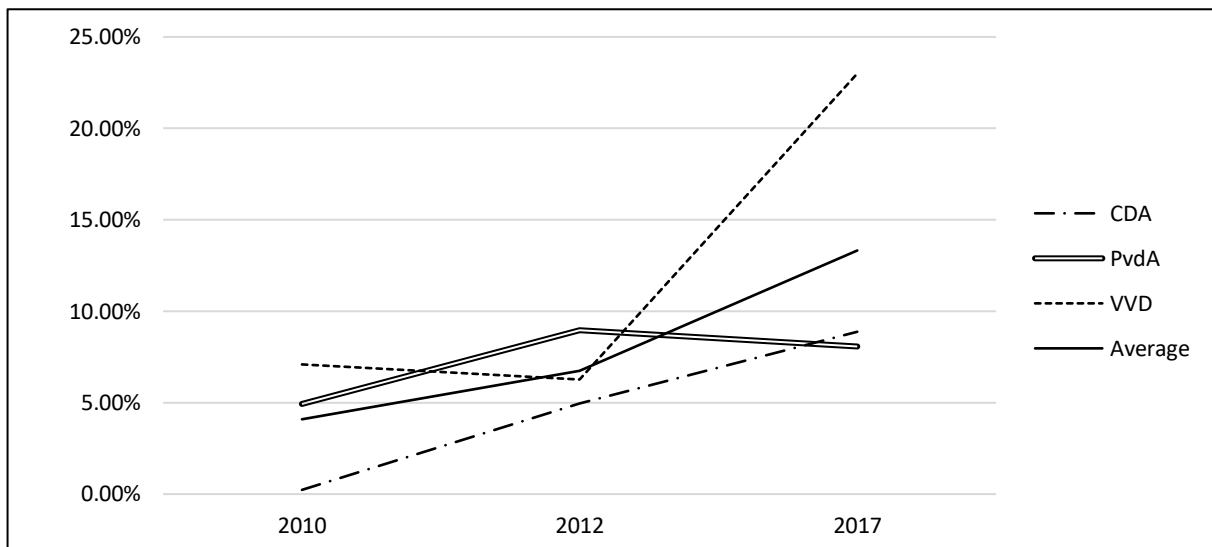*Figure 1 – Stylistic populism in the party programmes of mainstream parties*

Figure 1 shows the development of the stylistic populism in the party programmes of the mainstream parties. The average stylistic populism in the mainstream programmes grows from 4,09% in 2010 to 13,32% in 2017. The stylistic populism in the programme of the VVD stands out; more than tripling from 7.11% in 2010 to 23% in 2017. The stylistic populism of the CDA's programme increased strongly as well (from 0,23% to 8,88%), whilst that of the PvdA increased the least (from 4,93% to 8,08%). The 23,00% of the VVD's programme in 2017 is almost three times as high as those of the PvdA and the CDA. Figure 3 visualizes the stylistic populism of the party programmes of all parties. Surprisingly, the stylistic populism of the SP in 2017 is far lower than that of the VVD and comparable to that of the PvdA and the CDA, with the CDA's programme scoring slightly higher. It is notable that the stylistic populism of the three mainstream parties all showed a very different trend during the period: the CDA shows a consistent increase; the PvdA shows an uptick between 2010 and 2012, but decreases between 2012 and 2017; and the VVD has the opposite of the PvdA, first decreasing but exploding after 2012. The stylistic populism of the PVV's programme is a lot higher than those of the other parties and almost doubled during the period (from 47,03% in 2010 to 89,88% in 2017).

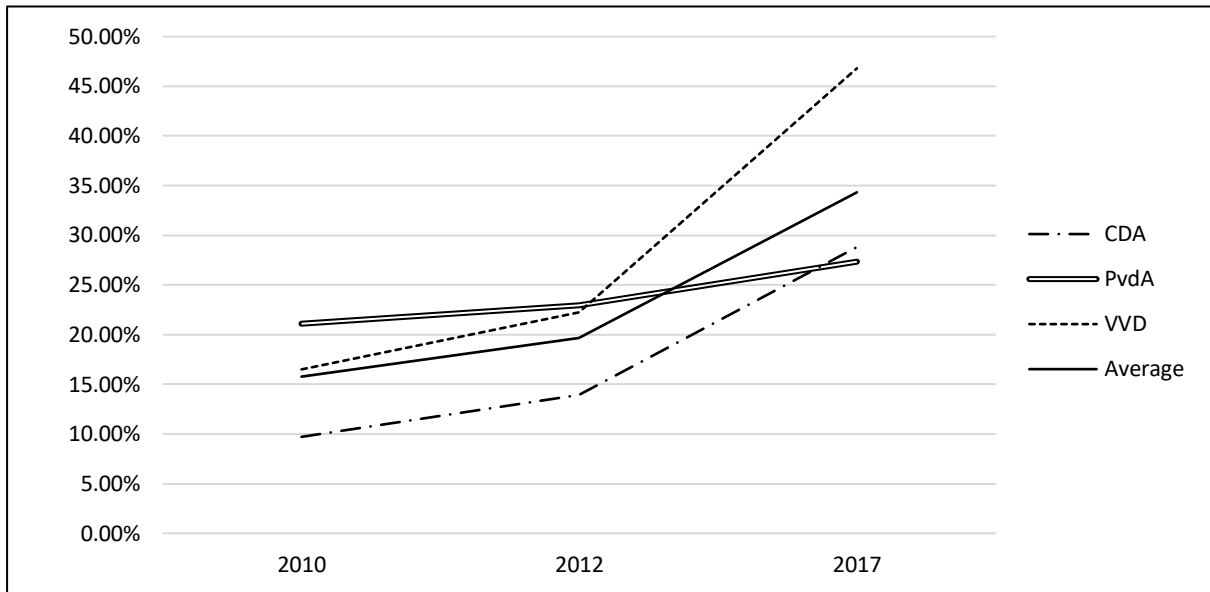*Figure 2 - Stylistic populism in the party Tweets of mainstream parties*

Figure 2 shows the development of the stylistic populism in the tweets of the mainstream parties. As in the programmes, the average stylistic populism in Tweets has increased: from 15,77% in 2010 to 34,32% in 2017. In 2010 the PvdA's Tweets were the most stylistic populist of the mainstream parties (21,10%), scoring even higher than the SP (18,10%). However, in 2017 their Tweets were the least stylistic populist of all with 27,34%. The stylistic populism of the CDA's Tweets grew strongly (from 9,71% to 28,81%) and that of the VVD's almost tripled (from 16,50% in 2010 to 46,80% in 2017). As with the programmes, the stylistic populism of the PvdA's, the CDA's and the SP's Tweets is nearly identical in 2017. Parties have adopted a less formal and rigid way of speaking in their Tweets, as they have done in their programmes. This change of tone shows for example when comparing two Tweets by the CDA announcing that their party leader had won a debate. In 2010 they tweeted factually "*Jan Peter Balkenende wint eerste lijsttrekkersdebat*" (Jan Peter Balkenende wins first debate)(CDA, 2010), compared to a more personal Tweet in 2017: "*Opiniepeiler Maurice de Hond bewijst wat we al wisten: @SybrandBuma is de winnaar van het #RTLdebat. Gefeliciteerd Sybrand!*" (Opinion poller Maurice de Hond proves what we already knew: @SybrandBuma is the winner of the #RTLdebate. Congratulations Sybrand!")(CDA, 2017). Parties also started making jokes – "No fake news but good news! – (VVD, 2017) and references to pop culture - *#slimstemens* (VVD, 2017) – and ongoing events, whilst in 2010 Tweets consisted mainly of quotes, facts and links to articles. The stylistic populism of the VVD is once again the outlier of the mainstream parties, being closer to that of the PVV than to that of the CDA or the PvdA. The Tweets of the mainstream parties all show a similar trend in the increase of stylistic populism, with the least increase between 2010 and 2012 and the most between 2012 and 2017. The

PVV is the only party whose Tweets' stylistic populism decreased over the period (from 67,50% in 2010 to 58,68% in 2017).

As expected the Tweets of mainstream parties have become much more stylistically populist in comparison to their party programmes. Whereas the PVV's 2017 programme is between 3,5 and 9 times as stylistically populist as that of its mainstream counterparts, the PVV's Tweets are only between 1,2 and 2 times as populist as those of the mainstream parties (see figures 3 and 4). A possible explanation might be that the party programmes of mainstream parties are not easily changed, because they have long histories and different fractions in their parties with different wishes (Rooduijn et. al., 2012). A second possibility is that large parts of party programmes are inherently technocratic. The main introductions, as well as the introductions to different chapters and themes, are the parts of the programmes in which parties explain their vision. These parts are not very technical nor detailed and are thus suitable for a populist style. The rest of the programmes consist of more detailed and technical elaborations on party policy. These paragraphs are less suitable for the populist style, which is based on simplistic language and straightforward solutions and is the antithesis of the technocratic style of the mainstream (Moffitt, 2016:44). This possibility is supported by the findings of the content analysis. If we look at the most stylistically populist mainstream party programme (VVD, 2017), the elaborating paragraphs account for 73% of the total length of the programme but only for 22% of the stylistic populism observed. The 2017 programmes of the CDA (82% length to 43% stylistic populism observed) and PvdA (69% length to 10% stylistic populism observed) show similar results. Like Jacob and Spierings (2018) argue, Twitter fits the populist style better than programmes because it is the perfect platform for one-liners and straightforward messages. In addition Twitter lends itself better for attacking political opponents than a party programme, which often happens in a non-politically correct way: '*Wilders is een zielepiet*' (Wilders is a sad figure)(VVD, 2017). Finally, the nature of Twitter as social media makes it more suitable for a casual way of communicating than the official nature of a party programme. This shows: whilst the language in programmes has 'relaxed' somewhat and become more colloquial, this relaxation is far stronger on Twitter where parties have started making jokes and referencing pop culture.

However, there is a difference in the elements of the populist style observed in the party communication between the PVV and the other parties. Whilst dramatization was observed in over 19% of the PVV's tweets in 2017 and in over 64% of the PVV's programme in 2017, no value higher than 2% was found in the Tweets and programmes of the mainstream parties in that year. With 2,88% in their tweets and 2,11% in their programme the SP scored slightly higher than the mainstream, but nowhere close to the PVV. The low dramatization of the CDA, PvdA and VVD can be explained. Parties that are in power or were until recent in power – which is the case for all three mainstream parties –

don't want to promote a perception of crisis, since it reflects negatively on them (Bossetta, 2017:717). If there is a crisis, they were the ones responsible. For the stylistic elements 'emotional tone' and 'absolutism' similarly low values were observed for the mainstream parties and the SP in 2017. The 3% absolutism in the VVD's party programme and the 0,88% emotional tone in the VVD's Tweets were the highest values for these elements amongst all Tweets and programmes of the mainstream parties and the SP. However, the PVV did not score particularly high on these elements either (averaging 0,00% emotional tone in both programmes and Tweets over the period and 6,32% absolutism in programmes and 2.63% in Tweets). It seems likely that the mainstream parties did not adopt these elements of the populist style, because the populist parties themselves hardly showed them. The idea that mainstream parties adopt the populist style is because they feel they are under pressure and want to 'fight fire with fire' by adopting the style of their populist competition (Bossetta, 2017, Bale et. al. 2010). If their competition doesn't show these stylistic elements themselves, the mainstream can't copy them. The only element that increased significantly for all mainstream parties was 'colloquial language': going from an average of 2,74% in programmes and 15,12% in Tweets to an average of 12,62% and 33,79% respectively. The SP again shows a similar development to the mainstream parties, going from 4.93% to 7.01% in their programme and 18.10% to 27.88% in their programme. For both the party programme as the Tweets the level of colloquial language of the PVV was far higher than that of the other parties. (the programme increased from 39,55% in 2010 to 86,88% in 2017, the Tweets decreased from 66,25% in 2010 to 52,07% in 2017).

Although there was no increase in the usage by the mainstream parties for three out of four elements, these findings do support the idea that mainstream parties adopt the populist style. The one element that the populist competition showed which the mainstream parties could adopt without directly harming themselves, they adopted. The findings discussed thus far support hypotheses 1 and 2. The populism of mainstream parties has increased during the observed period, albeit only in style. The fact that the increase was only in stylistic populism supports the hypothesis that there would be a larger increase in populist style than in populist ideas among mainstream political parties.

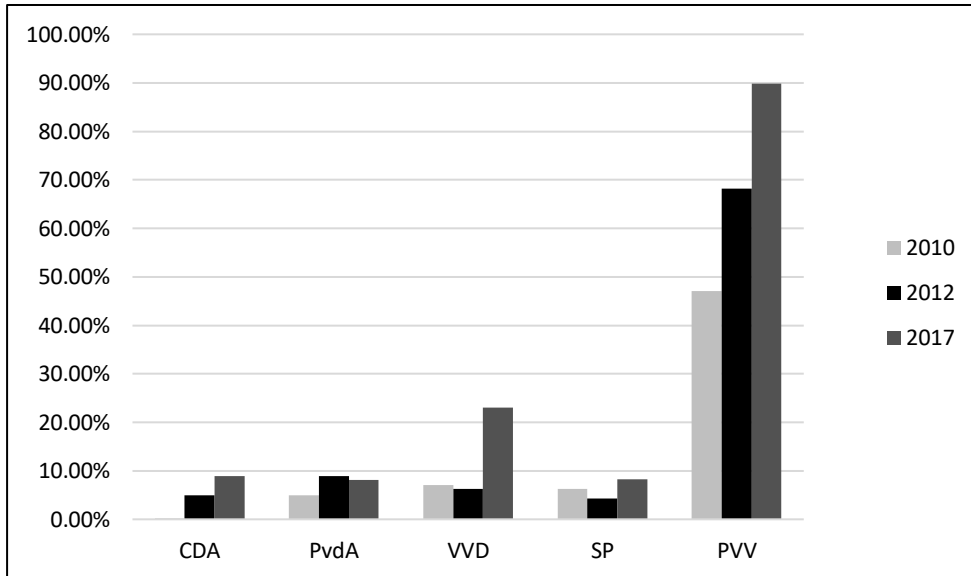*Figure 3 – Stylistic populism in party the party programmes of all parties*

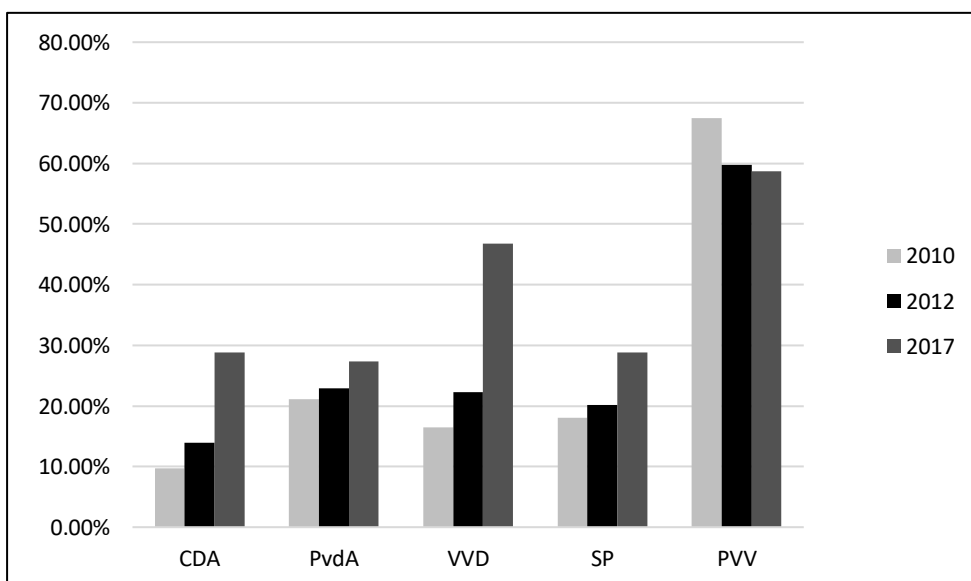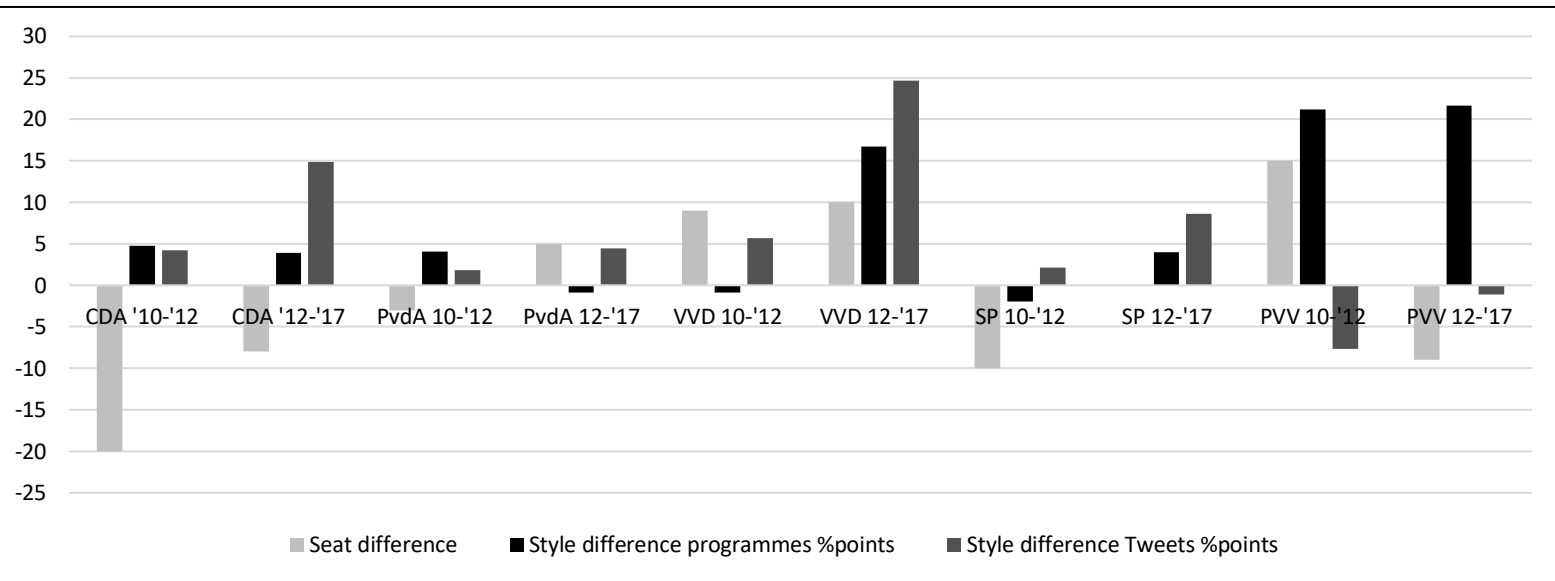*Figure 4 – Stylistic populism in the party Tweets of all parties*

Figure 5 - Electoral outcome and change in stylistic populism of all parties

## 4.3 The effect of electoral outcomes on populism

In 4.2 it was noted that the three mainstream parties all had a very different increase in stylistic populism in their programmes during the period: the CDA shows a consistent increase; the PvdA shows an uptick between 2010 and 2012, but decreases between 2012 and 2017; and the VVD has the opposite of the PvdA, first decreasing but exploding after 2012. Although the increases of the stylistic populism in their Tweets are more alike, there is still some difference. The PvdA hardly increased over the period (6,24%); the CDA increased slightly between 2010 and 2012 (3,20%) and strongly between 2012 and 2017 (14,90%); and the VVD increased reasonably between 2010 and 2012 (5,72%) and very strongly between 2012 and 2017 (24,68%). These differences in increase might be connected to parties electoral losses, as was hypothesised based on Harmel and Janda (1994) and Bale et. al. (2010). Because of the low *N* a regression analysis of the correlation between seat difference and style difference would hold very little statistical power. Meaningful comparison between the parties is also not possible, because there are numerous other factors in play.[6] However, we can compare the parties' different years with each other to see whether we can find any support for the hypothesis. Figure 5 shows the change in the level of stylistic populism in party programmes and Tweets, in reference to their electoral outcomes.[7] However, looking at figure 5 make us none the wiser; electoral losses seem to have no explanatory power regarding increase of populism. The party whose populism

---

[6] For example the PvdA is ideologically less close to the PVV than the CDA and the VVD are which could also factor in in the differences in increase. A lot of research has been done on the topic of how different parties react to populist contenders (see for example Kriesi et. al., 2012) and this is an interesting topic for further elaboration. However this thesis is not the place to do so.

[7] E.g. a seat difference of -10 in '10-'12 means that the party lost 10 seats during the 2010 election compared to the 2006 election. The style difference is way in which their style changed during the period *following* that defeat.

increased the most, VVD, did not lose any seats and their populism increased the most after the year they won the most seats. After losing four seats the populism in both the programmes and the Tweets of the PvdA increased. The following election they won five seats and the populism in their programmes decreased slightly, whilst that in their tweets increased. The results of the CDA are the opposite of what was expected, with the bigger increase following the smaller loss. This might be explained by interpreting it as a snowballing effect, in which the loss is cumulative and the populism increases stronger after more losses. However, the idea hypothesis that the bigger the electoral losses the bigger the increase in populism could not be tested satisfactorily.

Figure 6- Electoral outcome and change in populism of populist parties
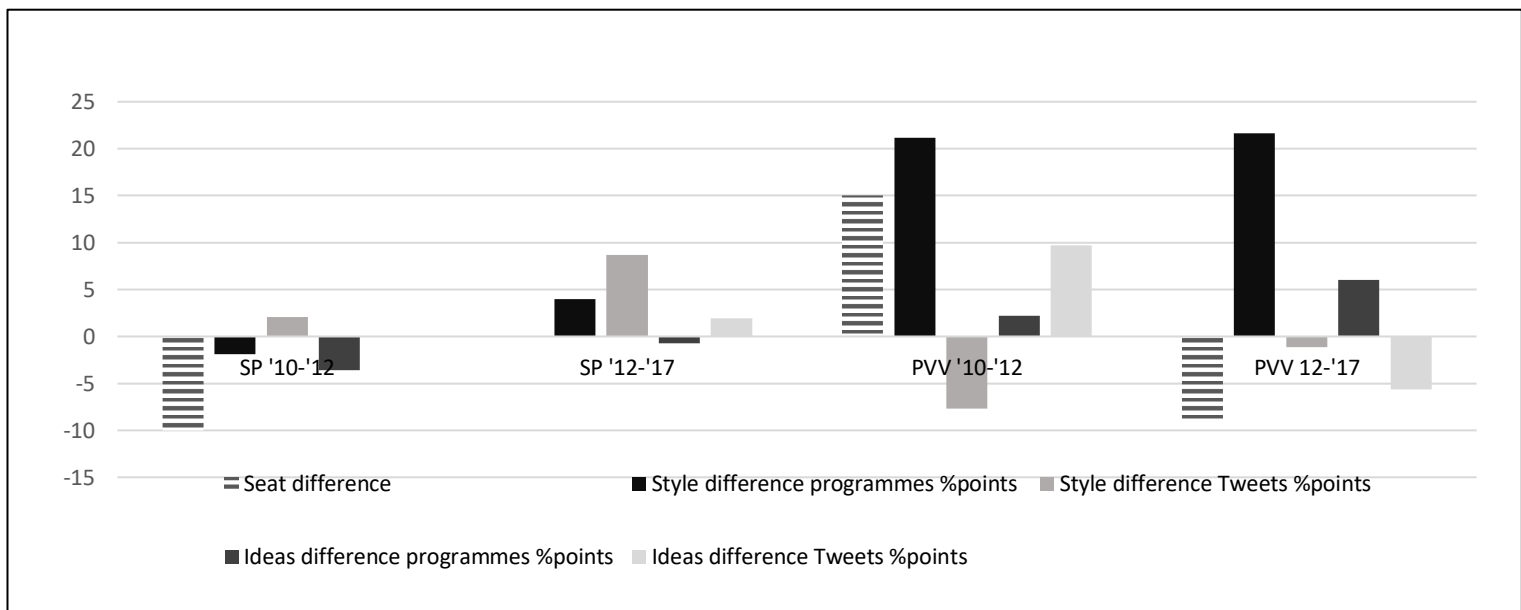
As opposed to the finding of Rooduin et. al. (2012) that populist parties become less populist in reaction to electoral growth, it was hypothesised that populist parties would not become less populist in reaction to their electoral growth. Figure 6 shows the electoral outcomes of populist parties and the change in their populism. The findings of this research support the hypothesis. The PVV won seats in the 2006 election and only the stylistic populism of their Tweets decreased, whilst the stylistic populism of their programme and the ideational populism of both programme and Tweets increased. However, because this was the only year in which a populist party won seats the sample is too small (N=1) to make any conclusions on the effect of electoral success on the populism of populist parties.

5. Conclusion

Some scholars have claimed that mainstream parties have moved towards populism in a reaction to the success of populist parties (Mudde, 2007; Oudenampsen), spreading the idea that we live in a populist Zeitgeist. Others dispute this claim, arguing that the ideas of mainstream parties have not become more populist and that therefore the notion of a populist Zeitgeist is overblown (Rooduijn et.al. 2012, Manucci and Weber, 2017; Bos and Brants, 2014). This research aimed to identify whether mainstream parties have become more populist by differentiating between ideational populism and stylistic populism. The results of the qualitative content analysis of party programmes and Tweets indicate that although the ideas of mainstream parties have not become more populist between 2010 and 2017, their style has. This supports Bossetta's (2017) thesis that mainstream politicians adopt a populist style as a reaction to populist opponents, whilst keeping their own agenda.

During the observed period the ideational populism of none of the mainstream parties increased significantly, in neither the party programmes or the Tweets. It was however found that whilst they stayed away from anti-elitism, they adopted the people-centric part of the populist ideational rhetoric. This might be explained by the fact that the mainstream parties are the political elite, making it hard to criticize the elite without damaging the own party. Because ideational populism is defined by a combination of the two elements mainstream parties did not become more populist, but they did adopt part of the ideational populist rhetoric.

While the mainstream parties did not become more ideational populist, they did become more stylistic populist. All three mainstream parties' stylistic populism increased during the period, with that of the VVD standing out as the highest by some margin. Twitter proved to be the better medium in which to observe stylistic populism compared to programmes. This is because Twitter lends itself better to the populist style than party programmes. Additionally, party programmes change slow which means that a change in style takes time to manifest. On Twitter on the other hand a change in style becomes immediately noticeable. From the four elements of the populist style, the only element that was adopted by the mainstream parties was the use of colloquial language. Bossetta's (2017) explanation for this non-adoption seems likely: cultivating a sense of crisis reflects badly on parties that are in government or recently were. The mainstream parties did not adopt absolutism or an emotional tone because there was nothing to adopt: the populist parties did not use these elements themselves. So although three out of four elements of the populist style were not adopted by mainstream parties, their stylistic populism did increase.

No significant results were found concerning the relation between electoral outcome and the level of populism of mainstream and populist parties.

5.1 limitations and future recommendations

This research set out to close a number of gaps in the existing research, concerning the contagion of populism. By differentiating between ideational and stylistic populism, it has attempted to clarify the state of a potential populist zeitgeist. However, this research has a number of limitations. Firstly, due to the labour intensive nature of the content analysis used, the research had to be limited to five Dutch parties over three years. This means that there is a limited generalizability to the findings. Furthermore the small sample size also means that the findings related to the effects of electoral outcomes on the level of populism of mainstream and populist parties hold little value. Finally, because the coding in this thesis has all been done by the same coder there is the possibility that the coding was not done in a reliable way. The fact that the outcomes of the ideational coding where so comparable to those of Rooduijn et. al. (2012), gives at least some reassurance in this department.

Although the findings concerning the spread of stylistic populism are interesting, future research should try to analyse a larger data set to test whether the findings hold true in other Western countries. Furthermore, like Rooduijn et al. in 2012, this research found no contagion of ideational populism in a period in which Rooduijn (2016) believes there is a populist Zeitgeist. However since an increase in stylistic populism *was* found in this period, it is possible that this increase had already set in during the period studied by Rooduijn et. al. (2012). It might be interesting for future research to redo the research of Rooduijn et. al. (2012), focussing on stylistic populism instead of ideational populism and retest the hypothesis of a populist Zeitgeist.

Some of the notable findings of the content analysis have not yet been discussed, because they raised questions that did not fall in within the intended scope of this research. Firstly, the PVV was the only party of which the stylistic populism of the Tweets decreased, whilst that of the others increased strongly. Furthermore the stylistic populism in their party programme did increase at the same time. Although this may not warrant a dedicated research, it is a notable finding for which this thesis can give no explanation. Secondly, neither the PVV nor the SP scored high on two of the elements of stylistic populism: 'absolutism' and 'emotional tone'. If these are important elements of the populist style, this raises the question whether the populism in the Netherlands differs from the 'norm' or whether these elements are more strongly found in other types of communications than party programmes or Tweets. It is imaginable that for example speeches are a type of communication that lends itself for these two stylistic elements. Thirdly, the fact that the VVD's stylistic populism increased so much stronger than that of the other mainstream parties could not be explained by the electoral outcomes. This might be an interesting topic for research or might already be answerable by literature outside of the scope of this thesis. Fourthly, the hypothesis that populist parties' populism doesn't decrease following electoral growth, as opposed to the findings of Rooduijn et. al., was not

satisfactorily tested and warrants further research with a larger sample size. Finally, the decrease of ideational populism of the SP combined with their increasing stylistic populism cannot be explained by this thesis. A possibility could be that the SP is in fact no longer a populist party and is thus moving closer to the mainstream parties: slowly losing the ideational populism from their party programme whilst increasing their populist style. A case study on the development of the populism of the SP could shed light on this issue.

References and sources

References

Adams, J. & Somer-Topcu, Z. (2009). Policy adjustment by parties in response to rival parties' policy shifts: spatial theory and the dynamics of party competition in twenty-five post-war democracies. *British Journal of Political Science 39*(4): 825–846.

Albertazzi, D., & McDonnell, D. (2008). *Twenty-first century populism: The spectre of Western European democracy*. Basingstoke England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Allen, N., & Bara, J. (2019). Marching to the left? Programmatic competition and the 2017 party manifestos*. The Political Quarterly*, *90*(1), 124-133.

Aslanidis, P. (2016). Is populism an ideology? A refutation and a new perspective. *Political Studies*, *64*, 88-104.

Bale, T. (2018). Who leads and who follows? The symbiotic relationship between UKIP and the Conservatives - and populism and euroscepticism. *Politics*, *38*(3), 263-277.

Bale, T., Green-Pedersen, C., Krouwel, A., Luther, K., & Sitter, N. (2010). If you can't beat them, join them? Explaining social democratic responses to the challenge from the populist radical right in Western Europe. *Political Studies*, *58*(3), 410-426.

Bos, L., & Brants, K. (2014*). Populist rhetoric in politics and media: A longitudinal study of the Netherlands. *European Journal of Communication*, *29*(6), 703-719.

Bossetta, M. (2017). Fighting fire with fire: Mainstream adoption of the populist political style in the 2014 Europe debates between Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *19*(4), 715-734.

Canovan, M. (1999). Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy. *Political Studies*, *47*(1), 2-16.

Charlemagne. (2019, May 26). Populists fall short of expectations in the European elections. *The Economist*. Retrieved from economist.com.

Eder, N., Jenny, M., & Müller, W. (2017). Manifesto functions: How party candidates view and use their party's central policy document*. Electoral Studies*, *45*, 75-87.

Gerring, J. (2006). *Case study research: Principles and practices*. Leiden: Cambridge University Press. (2006).

Gerring, J. (2011). *The case study: What it is and what it does.* In Goodin, R. *The Oxford handbook of political science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gidron N, Bonikowski B. (2013). Varieties of populism: Literature review and research agenda. In *Weatherhead Working Paper Series*, *13-0004*.

Gonawela, A., Pal, J., Thawani, U., Van der Vlugt, E., Out, W., & Chandra, P. (2018). Speaking their mind: Populist style and antagonistic messaging in the tweets of Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Nigel Farage, and Geert Wilders. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work: The Journal of Collaborative Computing and Work Practices*, *27*(3-6), 293-326.

Goodwin, M. (2019, June 14). Europe's populists are here to stay. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from wsj.com.

Curran, G. (2004). Mainstreaming populist discourse: The race-conscious legacy of neo-populist parties in Australia and Italy. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *38*(1), 37-55.

Halperin, S., & Heath, O. (2012). *Political research: Methods and practical skills*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harmel, R. & Janda, K. (1994). An integrated theory of party goals and party change. *Journal of Theoretical Politics 6*(3): 259–287.

Het Parool. (2019, January 14). Rutte de wereld over met 'white wine sipping elites'. *Het Parool*. Retrieved from parool.nl.

Jacobs, K., & Spierings, N. (2018). A populist paradise? Examining populists' twitter adoption and use. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-16.

Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, *46*(3), 319-345.

Ji, S. (2008). What do paragraph divisions indicate in narrative texts? *Journal of Pragmatics*, *40*(10), 1719-1731.

Kriesi et al. (2012). *Political Conflict in Western Europe.* Cambridge University Press.

Laclau, E. (2005). *On populist reason*. London: Verso.

Lewis, P et. al. (2018, November 20). Revealed: One in four Europeans vote populist*. The Guardian.* Retrieved from theguardian.com.

Lipset , S. M. (1960). *Political man. The social bases of politics*. Garden City: Doubleday.

Manucci, L., & Weber, E. (2017). Why the big picture matters: Political and media populism in Western Europe since the 1970s. *Swiss Political Science Review*, *23*(4), 313-334.

Mazzoleni, G. (2008). Populism and the media. In D. Albertazzi, & D. McDonnell (Eds.), *Twenty-first century populism*. *The spectre of Western European democracy*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Meguid, B. (2005). Competition between unequals: The role of mainstream party strategy in niche party success. *The American Political Science Review*, *99*(3), 347-360.

Moffitt, B., & Tormey, S. (2014). Rethinking populism: Politics, mediatisation and political style. *Political Studies*, *62*(2), 381-397.

Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, *39*(4), 542-563.

Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mudde, C. (2017). Populism: An Ideational Approach. In Rovira Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Ochoa Espejo, P., & Ostiguy, P. (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of populism*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Populism in Europe and the Americas threat or corrective for democracy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2018). Studying populism in comparative perspective: Reflections on the contemporary and future research agenda. *Comparative Political Studies*, *51*(13), 1667-1693.

Oudenampsen, M (2013). Explaining the swing to the right: The Dutch debate on the rise of right-wing populism. In Wodak, R., Khosravinik, M., & Mral, B. (Eds.). *Right wing populism in Europe: Politics and discourse.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Parliament. Manifesto. Retrieved from parliament.uk.

Pauwels, T. (2011). Measuring Populism: A Quantitative Text Analysis of Party Literature in Belgium. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *21*(1), 97–119.

Pauwels, T. (2014). *Populism in Western Europe: Comparing Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands* (Routledge studies in extremism and democracy. Routledge research in extremism and democracy, 21). London: Routledge.

Rooduijn, M. (2013). *A populist Zeitgeist? The impact of populism on parties, media and the public in Western Europe*.

Rooduijn, M. (2016). Simply studying populism is no longer enough. *Nature*, *540*(7633), 317-317.

Rooduijn, M. (2018, November 20). Why is populism suddenly all the rage?. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from theguardian.com.

Rooduijn, M. (2019, March 21). De ideologie van Forum voor Democratie. *Stuk Rood Vlees*. Retrieved from stukroodvlees.nl.

Rooduijn, M., De Lange, S. L.., & Van der Brug, W. (2012). A populist zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe. *Party Politics*, *20*(4), 563-575.

Schumacher, G., & van Kersbergen, K. (2016). Do mainstream parties adapt to the welfare chauvinism of populist parties? *Party Politics*, *22*(3), 300–312.

Snow, D., & Moffitt, B. (2012). Straddling the divide: Mainstream populism and conservatism in Howard's Australia and Harper's Canada. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 50(3), 271-292.

Stanley, Ben. (2008). The Thin Ideology of Populism. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, *13*(1), 95-110.

Taggart, P. (2000) *Populism*. Birmingham: Open University Press.

Taggart, Paul. (2004). Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe. *Journal of Political Ideologies, 9*(3): 269–88.

Tarchi, M. (2002). Populism Italian style. In Mény, Y., & Surel, Y. (eds.). *Democracies and the populist challenge.* New York: Palgrave.

Van Spanje, J. (2010). Contagious parties: Anti-immigration parties and their impact on other parties' immigration stances in contemporary Western Europe. *Party Politics*, *16*(5), 563-586.

Wettstein, M., et. al. (2018). What drives populist styles? Analyzing immigration and labor market news in 11 countries. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 96*(2), 516-536.

Weyland, K. (2017). Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach. In Rovira Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Ochoa Espejo, P., & Ostiguy, P. (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of populism*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Sources

Tweets referenced

CDA [cdavandaag]. (2010, June 2). CDA blij met kraakverbod http://bit.ly/dmmwH4 [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/cdavandaag/status/15239412000.

CDA [cdavandaag]. (2010, May 21). Jan Peter Balkenende wint eerste lijsttrekkersdebat http://tinyurl.com/32t8wm8 [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/cdavandaag/status/14451483941.

CDA [cdavandaag]. (2017, February 27). Opiniepeiler Maurice de Hond bewijst wat we al wisten: @SybrandBuma is de winnaar van het #RTLdebat. Gefeliciteerd Sybrand! #geefNLdoor #CDA [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/cdavandaag/status/836307970057244674.

VVD [VVD]. (2016, December 12). Mark Rutte tegen ALDE-congres: 'Too often, elites in Europe say that the people are wrong. But the people are not wrong! You are wrong!' [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/vvd/status/805069567613607936.

VVD [VVD]. (2016, November 25). Als Wilders vindt dat Sylvana moet stoppen omdat ze bedreigd wordt, dan is hij geen strijder voor het vrije woord maar een zielepiet.! [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/VVD/status/802195976098349056

VVD [VVD]. (2017, January 20). Klaas de eindbaas! #slimstemens [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/VVD/status/822555190318469122.

VVD [VVD]. (2017, February 15). Geen nepnieuws, maar goed nieuws! [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/VVD/status/831849021832564740.

Wilders, G. [geertwilderspvv]. (2017, February 3). They declared war on us. And our EU-open-border-leaders betray us. We need a political revolution. And defend our people. #nomoreislam [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv/status/827629477781966848.

Wilders, G. [geertwilderspvv]. (2017, February 4). #TheNetherlandsOursAgain #VotePVV [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv/status/827908858769186817.

Wilders, G. [geertwilderspvv]. (2017, March 9). Onaanvaardbaar. Kamer moet NU terugkomen van reces voor debat! Zojuist verzoek toe ingediend. [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv/status/839864108145082368?lang=en.

Programmes

CDA. (2010). Slagvaardig en samen.

CDA. (2012). Iedereen.

CDA. (2017). Keuzes voor een beter Nederland.

PvdA. (2010). Iedereen telt mee: de kracht van Nederland.

PvdA. (2012). Nederland sterker en socialer.

PvdA. (2017). Een verbonden samenleving.

PVV. (2010). De agenda van hoop en optimisme.

PVV. (2012). Hún Brussel, óns Nederland.

PVV. (2017). Nederland weer van ons!

PVV. (2017). Plan Wilders voor Nederland: Toelichting op de speerpunten van de PVV.

SP. (2010). Een beter Nederland voor minder geld.

SP. (2012). #PakDeMacht.

SP. (2017). Nieuw vertrouwen.

VVD. (2010). Orde op zaken.

VVD. (2012). Niet doorschuiven maar aanpakken.

VVD. (2017). Zeker Nederland.

Appendix 1. Full results coding

1.1 Party programmes

	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elitist	Stylistic	Ideational	Word total
CDA 2010									
Total	0	0	0	79	482	0	79	482	34181
Total %	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.23%	1.41%	0.00%	0.23%	0.00%	
	0.00%	0.00%	0.48%	4.25%	1.41%	0.06%	4.73%	0.06%	
CDA 2012									
Total	0	0	80	747	470	10	827	470	16684
Total %	0.00%	0.00%	0.48%	4.48%	2.82%	0.06%	4.96%	0.06%	
	0.88%	0.00%	-0.18%	3.84%	1.62%	0.55%	3.92%	0.55%	
CDA 2017									
Total	226	0	76	2139	1141	157	2283	157	25720
Total %	0.88%	0.00%	0.30%	8.32%	4.44%	0.61%	8.88%	0.61%	

	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elitist	Stylistic	Ideational	Word total
PvdA 2010									
Total	256	0	97	830	734	0	1183	0	24000
Total %	1.07%	0.00%	0.40%	3.46%	3.06%	0.00%	4.93%	0.00%	
	-0.36%	0.00%	-0.40%	4.98%	0.57%	0.43%	4.03%	0.43%	
PvdA 2012									
Total	287	0	0	3410	1468	175	3622	175	40421
Total %	0.71%	0.00%	0.00%	8.44%	3.63%	0.43%	8.96%	0.43%	
	-0.71%	0.00%	1.00%	-0.95%	0.68%	-0.43%	-0.88%	-0.43%	
PvdA 2017									
Total	0	0	359	2693	1551	0	2908	0	35984
Total %	0.00%	0.00%	1.00%	7.48%	4.31%	0.00%	8.08%	0.00%	

	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elitist	Stylistic	Ideational	Word total
VVD 2010									
Total	691	0	376	1042	721	344	1635	344	23001
Total %	3.00%	0.00%	1.63%	4.53%	3.13%	1.50%	7.11%	1.50%	
	-2.81%	0.00%	-1.32%	1.23%	-1.34%	-0.47%	-0.84%	-0.47%	
VVD 2012									
Total	52	0	85	1555	484	276	1692	276	27004
Total %	0.19%	0.00%	0.31%	5.76%	1.79%	1.02%	6.27%	1.02%	
	1.47%	0.56%	2.69%	16.32%	14.62%	-0.84%	16.73%	-0.84%	
VVD 2017									
Total	714	242	1290	9478	7044	79	9872	79	42929
Total %	1.66%	0.56%	3.00%	22.08%	16.41%	0.18%	23.00%	0.18%	

	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elitist	Stylistic	Ideational	Word total
SP 2010									
Total	258	0	89	610	1167	1059	769	1059	12376
Total %	2.08%	0.00%	0.72%	4.93%	9.43%	8.56%	6.21%	8.56%	
	-2.08%	0.00%	-0.72%	-0.64%	-2.93%	-3.59%	-1.92%	-3.59%	
SP 2012									
Total	0	0	0	920	1392	1064	920	1064	21427
Total %	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.29%	6.50%	4.97%	4.29%	4.97%	
	2.11%	0.00%	0.67%	2.72%	0.33%	-0.76%	3.95%	-0.76%	
SP 2017									
Total	274	0	87	911	887	547	1071	547	12995
Total %	2.11%	0.00%	0.67%	7.01%	6.83%	4.21%	8.24%	4.21%	

	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elitist	Stylistic	Ideational	Word total
PVV 2010									
Total	1423	0	242	3371	2650	1793	4009	1793	8524
Total %	16.69%	0.00%	2.84%	39.55%	31.09%	21.03%	47.03%	21.03%	
	13.41%	0.00%	0.02%	16.18%	3.41%	2.18%	21.18%	2.18%	
PVV 2012									
Total	2685	0	255	4970	3077	2070	6083	2070	8918
Total %	30.11%	0.00%	2.86%	55.73%	34.50%	23.21%	68.21%	23.21%	
	34.75%	0.00%	10.39%	31.25%	56.02%	6.04%	21.67%	6.04%	
PVV 2017									
Total	1410	0	288	1891	1968	636	1954	636	2174
Total %	64.86%	0.00%	13.25%	86.98%	90.52%	29.25%	89.88%	29.25%	

1.2 Tweets

Tweets	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elite	Stylistic	Ideational	Total
CDA 2010	0	2	0	8	1	0	10	0	103
% of total	0.00%	1.94%	0.00%	7.77%	0.97%	0.00%	9.71%	0.00%	100.00%
	2.61%	-1.94%	0.00%	5.28%	-0.10%	0.00%	4.20%	0.00%	
CDA 2012	3	0	0	15	1	0	16	0	115
% of total	2.61%	0.00%	0.00%	13.04%	0.87%	0.00%	13.91%	0.00%	100.00%
	-1.76%	0.85%	0.85%	14.08%	5.06%	0.00%	14.90%	0.00%	
CDA 2017	1	1	1	32	7	0	34	0	118
% of total	0.85%	0.85%	0.85%	27.12%	5.93%	0.00%	28.81%	0.00%	100.00%

Tweets	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elite	Stylistic	Ideational	Total
PvdA 2010	0	0	2	23	0	0	23	0	109
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	1.83%	21.10%	0.00%	0.00%	21.10%	0.00%	100.00%
	0.92%	0.00%	-1.83%	0.92%	0.00%	0.00%	1.83%	0.00%	
PvdA 2012	1	0	0	24	0	0	25	0	109
% of total	0.92%	0.00%	0.00%	22.02%	0.00%	0.00%	22.94%	0.00%	100.00%
	-0.14%	0.00%	0.00%	5.33%	5.47%	0.00%	4.41%	0.00%	
PvdA 2017	1	0	0	35	7	0	35	0	128
% of total	0.78%	0.00%	0.00%	27.34%	5.47%	0.00%	27.34%	0.00%	100.00%

Tweets	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elite	Stylistic	Ideational	Total
VVD 2010	0	0	0	17	1	0	17	0	103
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	16.50%	0.97%	0.00%	16.50%	0.00%	100.00%
	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	5.72%	3.66%	0.00%	5.72%	0.00%	
VVD 2012	0	0	0	24	5	0	24	0	108
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	22.22%	4.63%	0.00%	22.22%	0.00%	100.00%
	1.77%	0.88%	1.77%	24.68%	4.22%	0.88%	24.68%	0.88%	
VVD 2017	2	1	2	53	10	1	53	1	113
% of total	1.77%	0.88%	1.77%	46.90%	8.85%	0.88%	46.90%	0.88%	100.00%

Tweets	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elite	Stylistic	Ideational	Total
SP 2010	0	0	1	19	2	0	19	0	105
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.95%	18.10%	1.90%	0.00%	18.10%	0.00%	100.00%
	0.00%	0.00%	-0.95%	2.10%	3.86%	0.00%	2.10%	0.00%	
SP 2012	0	0	0	21	6	0	21	0	104
% of total	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.19%	5.77%	0.00%	20.19%	0.00%	100.00%
	2.88%	0.00%	0.00%	7.69%	5.77%	1.92%	8.65%	1.92%	
SP 2017	3	0	0	29	12	2	30	2	104
% of total	2.88%	0.00%	0.00%	27.88%	11.54%	1.92%	28.85%	1.92%	100.00%

Tweets	Dramatization	Emotional tone	Absolutist	Colloquial	People-centric	Anti-elite	Stylistic	Ideational	Total
Wilders 2010	5	0	0	53	9	4	54	4	80
% of total	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%	66.25%	11.25%	5.00%	67.50%	5.00%	100.00%
	-1.35%	0.00%	2.94%	-7.43%	-6.35%	9.71%	-7.70%	9.71%	
Wilders 2012	5	0	3	60	5	15	61	15	102
% of total	4.90%	0.00%	2.94%	58.82%	4.90%	14.71%	59.80%	14.71%	100.00%
	14.11%	0.00%	2.02%	-6.76%	14.11%	-5.61%	-1.13%	-5.61%	
Wilders 2017	23	0	6	63	23	11	71	11	121
% of total	19.01%	0.00%	4.96%	52.07%	19.01%	9.09%	58.68%	9.09%	100.00%