

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to provide insights on the exclusivist rhetoric of far-right political parties and how it influences other political parties in the Netherlands, leading to the normalization of this rhetoric. The data was collected from the election programmes of far-right, right-wing, centrist, left-wing and far-left political parties in the Netherlands in 2012 and 2021. These were analysed according to the following themes related to far-right exclusivism: racism, antisemitism, ethnocentrism, ethnopluralism, and xenophobia. This led to the conclusion that the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right is being copied by established right-wing and centrist parties. Left-wing parties fail to actively resist the far-right. This has resulted in the normalization of far-right exclusivist rhetoric by political parties in the Netherlands.

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Introduction

“Europese samenlevingen kunnen de grote groepen migranten niet aan en vreemdelingenhaat ligt op de loer.”

[European societies cannot cope with large groups of migrants and xenophobia is lurking.]
(VVD, 2021a)

This argument against immigration is a direct quotation from the political party VVD’s website during the 2021 elections. The quotation mentions xenophobia: a fear of the foreigner, the immigrant, or the ‘alien’, and the portrayal of those individuals as a threat (Mudde, 2000, pp. 187 – 188). The VVD fails to address two things that will be demonstrated in this thesis. The first is that xenophobia is not lurking in the shadows, it is openly expressed in election programmes of Dutch political parties and by politicians who represent Dutch citizens. The second is that the VVD itself is one of those parties, and it carries responsibility for the normalization of xenophobia. This statement is an illustration of the lack of self-awareness that is all too present in the Dutch House of Representatives.

The topic of this thesis is far-right exclusivist rhetoric and its influence on Dutch political parties. The thesis will demonstrate that the far-right is often associated with ideologies such as xenophobia, racism, white supremacy, conspiracy theories, sexism, nationalism, and internationalism, and that despite their extremist messages, far-right political parties have gained popularity across Europe, including in the Netherlands. This is a result of not only their own strategies, but also of other political parties that enable and legitimize their rhetoric from the outside. This thesis intends to describe the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right in the Netherlands, and explain how it influences other political parties, leading to the normalization of this rhetoric in the Netherlands.

The research problem is positioned within the academic debate on processes of exclusion in Europe, for example in the form of racism or anti-immigration policies. The far-right and its strategies for electoral gain, specifically in Europe, is a topic that has been thoroughly researched and debated in academics. Scholars have outlined the ideology of the far-right as well as the factors that contribute to its normalization. For example, in his book ‘The Far Right Today’ (2019) for example, Cas Mudde provides an overview of how the far-right functions in modern times. He discusses the history, ideology, organization, people, activities, causes, consequences, responses, the gender aspect, and ends the book by posing several theses on the far-right in modern times. Mudde argues that although the far-right faces certain challenges, it is here to stay and it is growing in popularity (Mudde, 2019a). A similar argument is made by Camus and Lebourg (2017) in their book ‘Far-Right Politics in Europe’. The authors state that the far-right adapts to each new stage of the globalization process and will continue to do so in the future (Camus & Lebourg, 2017). Ruth Wodak, author of the book ‘The Politics of Fear’ (2015) also expresses no surprise at the longevity of the support for right-wing populism, but is concerned about the normalization and mainstreaming of its ideology (Wodak, 2015). Furthermore, scholars look at the strategic methods that are used by far-right politicians themselves, such as getting involved in online conspiracy theories or using social media to gain popularity (Kryzanowski, 2020a). Scholars also study outside forces that have contributed to the normalization of far-right rhetoric, such as the role of traditional media and centrist and leftist political parties (Balabanova & Trandafoiu, 2020; Wodak, 2021).

The main position in this debate, which will be elaborated upon in the theoretical framework, is that the far right is growing in popularity and that its rhetoric is becoming increasingly normalized.

The relevance of studying this topic lies in the underlying societal problem that will be addressed, which is the presence of exclusivist far-right rhetoric in the Netherlands. This thesis will demonstrate that in the case of the Netherlands, this exclusivism is mostly aimed towards ethnic minorities. This undermines inclusion in a multicultural society. The freedoms that are a part of modern democracies are threatened under these extremist thoughts. Therefore, the spreading of such ideas is harmful, as is the support of far-right rhetoric and far-right political parties.

This specific research is relevant because it looks at how the far-right is received and addressed by other political parties and it investigates the full political spectrum in doing so. Adding a new perspective to the existing literature, this thesis zooms in on the Netherlands specifically and uses a timeframe between 2012 and 2021. It demonstrates how centrist and leftist parties differ in their ways of addressing the far-right, yet both contribute to the normalization of its rhetoric. In this way, the research adds to the scientific debate on exclusivism and on the normalization of far-right rhetoric by factors from the outside. The research aims to provide insights on the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right and how it influences other political parties in the Netherlands, leading to the normalization of this rhetoric. Awareness on and understanding of the factors that contribute to the normalization of far-right rhetoric in the Netherlands is important because it can contribute to working towards solutions.

This thesis aims to answer the following research question:

How have political parties in the Netherlands been influenced by the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right, leading to its normalization?

This question is divided into the following sub-questions:

- 1. What is the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right in the Netherlands?*
- 2. How have right-wing and centrist political parties in the Netherlands been influenced by this rhetoric, leading to its normalization?*
- 3. How have leftist and far-left political parties in the Netherlands been influenced by this rhetoric, leading to its normalization?*

The thesis will commence with the theoretical framework, consisting of the theoretical background and the theoretical approach. This is followed by the methodological approach. After this, the chapters follow the order of the above three sub-questions. The first chapter outlines the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right in the Netherlands. The second chapter analyses the normalization of this rhetoric by right-wing and centrist political parties in the Netherlands. The third chapter analyses the response of left-wing and far-left political parties in the Netherlands. The thesis ends with the conclusion which will provide an answer to the main research question.

Theoretical framework

This chapter provides the theoretical background and the theoretical approach behind this study and it is divided into five parts. It begins with an outline of the Dutch political spectrum. Then it zooms in on the far-right and its exclusivist rhetoric. After this, the concept of normalization is explained, followed by an overview of the academic debate on the normalization of far-right rhetoric. The chapter ends by illustrating how normalization works.

The Dutch political spectrum

The current political spectrum in the Netherlands is usually depicted as a compass with Left and Right on the horizontal axis and Progressive and Conservative on the vertical axis. On average, left-wing parties are considered progressive and right-wing parties are conservative, but there are exceptions (Heywood, 2015). The left-right axis concerns mostly finance-related topics such as the economy, healthcare and taxes, with left-wing parties wanting equal wealth distribution and a large role of the state, and right-wing parties emphasizing the importance of individual responsibility and the free market. The progressive-conservative axis concerns themes such as migration, climate and European collaboration, which are less finance-related. Progressive parties tend to support European and international collaboration, strong climate change policies and are in favour of opening the borders for migrants. Conservative parties prioritize the national state, do not see climate change as a big issue and are not in favour of letting migrants enter the country. (Heywood, 2015)

Since the elections of 2021, there are currently 17 political parties in the House of Representatives. Since this thesis aims to analyse the ideas of the far-right and the response of the centre and the left to these ideas, the political parties will here be categorized according to far-left, left-wing, centre, right-wing and far-right. This leads to the following categorization:

Far-left wing parties: BIJ1, PvdD, SP

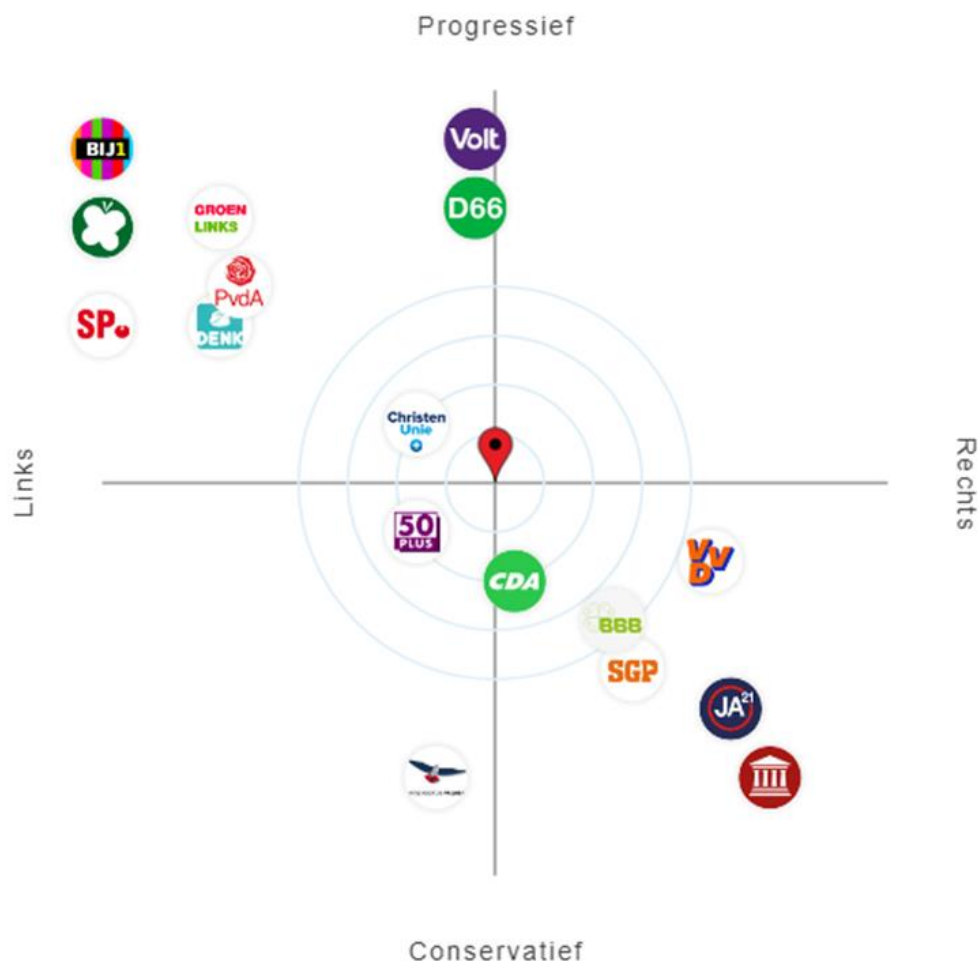
Left-wing parties: GroenLinks, PvdA, DENK

Centrist parties: Volt, D66, ChristenUnie, Fractie-Den Haan (ex-50PLUS), CDA, PVV

Right-wing parties: BBB, SGP, VVD

Far-right wing parties: JA21, FvD

The parties have been placed on the political spectrum below (Kieskompas, 2021):



The exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right

According to political scientist Cas Mudde, the ideology of the far-right can be divided into the following aspects: nationalism, exclusivism, anti-democratic traits, populism, an antiparty spirit, the defense of law and order, environmentalism, a disappointment in the loss of traditional or historic frames of reference, and a socioeconomic view in which the free play of market forces and state control of certain sectors are combined (Mudde, 2000; Camus & Lebourg, 2017). The focus of this analysis is on the aspect of exclusivism. Mudde (2000) defines exclusivism (or exclusionism) as follows: “The distinction between groups whereby one group (they) is excluded from certain aspects of life of the other group (we)” (Mudde, 2000, p. 187). This concept has several sub-concepts: racism, ethnopluralism, ethnocentrism, antisemitism, and xenophobia. Mudde defines these concepts as follows:

“Racism: The belief in natural (hereditary) and permanent differences between groups of people with the centrality of a hierarchy of races.

Ethnopluralism: The belief in permanent (natural or hereditary) differences between groups of people (races and/or ethnic communities) with the centrality that all groups are equivalent but different; people should live within their own group and the groups should live separated; people have both the right and the duty to live according to their own ‘natural way’.

Ethnocentrism: The belief in cultural and (in principle) temporal differences between groups of peoples, with the centrality that the own group is superior to the others.

Antisemitism: The belief that the Jewish race or ethnic community is in its entirety bad; variants of a Jewish-led world conspiracy (in the tradition of the Protocols) with the conclusion that the Jews ('they') are essentially against the 'own group' ('us').

Xenophobia: Fear, hate or hostility with regard to groups that are perceived as 'alien' or 'strange', such as foreigners, immigrants, asylum-seeker, etc. The idea that anything 'alien' is threatening." (Mudde, 2000, pp. 187 – 188)

The far-right in the Netherlands

In his article "Post-war fascism in the Netherlands", Jaap van Donselaar (1993) argued that after World War II, fascism, racism and national socialism never disappeared in politics and science. In order to survive, fascist organizations had two strategies to adapt to post-Second World War public resistance against their ideologies. The first option was to conceal the political objective of the organization, by presenting the organization as social, historical, or cultural. The second option was to conceal the fascist ideology of the organization in order to avoid public resistance and conflict with the law. (Van Donselaar, 1993)

In the four to five decades after 1945, political parties with a fascist, racist, and national socialist background were met with a high level of resistance from society which ultimately led to their demise. Van Donselaar rejected the claim that post-war fascism in the Netherlands could become dangerous once a "great leader" were to take the stage. Instead, he argued that once society stops resisting the ideology of these organizations, they will become truly dangerous again. (Van Donselaar, 1993)

Normalization explained

In this thesis I hypothesize that the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right has influenced Dutch political parties, leading to the normalization of this rhetoric. This demands for an illustration of the phenomenon that is normalization. In sociology, the term normalization is used to describe the process of behaviour, concepts, ideas and beliefs becoming accepted as being normal by society (Thompson, 2018). What is considered to be normal can be subjective when looking at the opinions of individuals, but even these individuals are influenced by societal norms. When they conform to these norms, they portray normal behaviour. Things that were previously considered absurd or deviant become part of the norm through the process of normalization. This section will highlight the major approaches to normalization within academics.

Normality and abnormality

Sociologist Allan Horwitz combines the visions of Herodotus and Darwin to look at how the concepts of normality and abnormality are shaped. He argues that both the idea of cultural variability and that of biological universality work together to define the natural and the unnatural (Horwitz, 2016). In some cases human biology is more dominant, in other cases culture determines behaviour, and sometimes there is an interplay between the two. An

example of this is the biological urge to eat for survival in societies with an abundance of food and an aversion to obesity. (Horwitz, 2016)

Societal norms themselves are subject to change, and the question of when and how something becomes normalized has been a topic of discussion in sociology and philosophy for a long time. Michel Foucault has written multiple works on the topic of normality and abnormality, presenting his revised ideas in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* from 1961. In this work, Foucault researches the history of the idea of madness in psychology and psychiatry. He criticizes the idea that madness is something that has always existed and was eventually discovered. Instead, he proposes, the concept of madness or abnormality is defined by its historical context. Since the Renaissance, abnormal or 'mad' people have been seen as wise, then as outcasts who could be cured, and then as patients who should be locked up and categorized (Foucault, 2001). Foucault's analysis questions the existence of mental illnesses and how they should be analysed and treated. His work has been criticized by Jacques Derrida, who says that Foucault's writing about the history of the split between reason and madness suggests there was a time before when reason and madness were not separated (Taylor Trussel, 2009).

Violence and deviance

Michal Kryzanowski distinguishes two major approaches in research on normalization, namely violence and deviance (Kryzanowski, 2020b). The lens of violence has been mainly used by Foucault. He argues that normalization is a top-down process, part of the reproduction of power in society that is imposed through discipline (Kryzanowski, 2020b). The process of normalization through the lens of Foucault means that conditions for new ways of thinking and behaving are a result of power relations in society (Taylor, 2009). Resistance in society can only occur within already existing power relations (Taylor Trussel, 2009).

The lens of deviance is mainly inspired by Diane Vaughan, who argues that deviance is targeted through normalization processes in order to make it accepted and legitimized (Kryzanowski, 2020b). This links to the perspective of Derrida, who sees normalization as the sacrifice of otherness (Taylor Trussel, 2009).

The academic debate on the normalization of far-right rhetoric

Applying normalization to the case of far-right exclusivist rhetoric is interesting, because this rhetoric is often simultaneously labelled as absurd and copied as if it is normal. The idea that far-right rhetoric is becoming increasingly normalized is supported as well as criticized in the academic debate. The variety of arguments and examples that are used in this debate will be presented here.

Arguments in support of normalization

Many scholars support the idea that the normalization of far-right rhetoric is (increasingly) occurring. They highlight different causes behind this normalization, which are here placed in the following categories: historical and socioeconomic context, the media, the demand-side, the supply-side, and mainstream political parties.

1. Historical and socioeconomic context

Ferrari (2021) researches the connection between support for right-wing populist parties in Europe and economic distress. He finds that not only macro-level economic conditions influence the support for populist parties, but also household level economic conditions. Low-

and middle-income households are more likely to experience economic distress, therefore to view immigration as both a cultural and an economic threat, and subsequently to vote for populist parties. (Ferrari, 2020)

Vrakopoulos (2021) finds that normalization is created through increasing electoral support. In the case of the far-right, the study shows that this support is associated with low quality of government, which creates political legitimisation, and highly conservative right-wing parties, which creates ideological normalization.

Boyer (2019) argues for the importance of historical context. In the case of France, the country's history of colonialism and oppression have led to the Islamophobic sentiment that is currently still present in its political arena. According to the author, this historical context combined with the influence of the media has led the preference of the public to shift. This has resulted in the increasing popularity of the far-right party Front National, and has led centrist parties to follow the Front National in its Islamophobic rhetoric. All of these factors combined have resulted in the normalization of xenophobic far-right rhetoric in France. (Boyer, 2019)

According to Weiner (2014), the Dutch far-right has continuously presented this exclusivism by framing immigration and multiculturalism as a dangerous invasion of the Other in Dutch territory and Dutch culture. The far-right's attitude of xenophobia only fuels the already present racism and persistent denial of race in the Netherlands (Weiner, 2014).

2. The media

Balabanova and Trandafoiu (2020) argue that the main catalysts behind the normalization of far-right rhetoric are the mass media and the subsequent public discourse. Mass media suffers from issues such as sensationalism, bias, fake news, and an overall poor quality of reporting. In a globalizing world, the mass media fails to stay true to the cosmopolitan idea of human rights. (Balabanova & Trandafoiu, 2020)

Ruth Wodak (2021) speaks of a 'shameless normalization' and argues that current political debates on topics such as migration, borders, citizenship, the financial crisis, and wars in the Middle East are shaped and strengthened by the far-right. Because these parties are successful in elections and continue to gain popularity, mainstream parties also start using a rhetoric of exclusion when discussing these political issues, leading to exclusivist ideas being legitimized through policy. At the same time, the mass media commodifies the political debates, making them a spectacle. This also contributes to the normalization of far-right rhetoric. (Wodak, 2021)

3. The demand-side

Demand-side arguments point to the circumstances that result in a 'demand' for far-right political parties (Golder, 2016). Sombatpoonsiri (2019) investigates civil resistance against right-wing populism and criticizes its focus on the supply side of right-wing populism, rather than the demand side. Protests focus on right-wing populist ideologies and leaders, instead of the reason why voters support them. The author argues that right-wing populists gain popularity because voters feel that established political parties do not meet their expectations. (Sombatpoonsiri, 2019)

4. The supply-side

Supply-side arguments look at how the strategies and choices made by far-right political parties influence their popularity (Golder, 2016).

Kryzanowski (2020b) zooms in on public discourse as the main reason for normalization. He argues that public discourse is the main driver of the normalization of far-right rhetoric. In his argument, radical discourse is actively and strategically introduced to the public by the far-right. This is done within the boundaries of borderline discourse. Radical statements are combined with language that is considered civil and politically correct. This rationalises radical statements and transforms them into becoming an acceptable part of public discourse. From this perspective, the normalization of far-right rhetoric is an opportunistic strategy carried out by the far-right. (Kryzanowski, 2020b)

Using the specific example of the far-right in the United States, Austermuehl (2020) proposes that far-right ideas were normalized by former president Donald Trump. According to Austermuehl, using racist and xenophobic language was a strategic decision to win the vote of those who identified with these ideas. Using language to induce fear, discrimination, othering, social exclusion, and more was a discursive strategy used for electoral gain. It appealed to white Americans who already supported an America without diversity. Trump's use of these discursive strategies normalized the use of language that was previously considered unacceptable. (Austermuehl, 2020)

Sobolik (2019) proposes that the electoral success of far-right parties is related to the supply side, rather than the demand side. The public experiences feelings of vulnerability in a globalized world, but these do not cause them to automatically have far-right sentiments. Rather, these vulnerable feelings of mistrust and insecurity offer a space for the far-right to fill up with false narratives of change and a strategy for the future. The right offers concrete answers for the concerns of citizens that are not provided by the left. (Sobolik, 2019)

5. Mainstream political parties

Rubio-Carbonero (2020) uses Kryzanowski's understanding of normalization, which is that normalization is perpetuation in public discourse, because it is legitimized through public discourse. Where Kryzanowski focusses on the actions of the far-right, Rubio-Carbonero looks at the actions of the centre and the left. The far-right has a certain discourse on immigration which is discriminatory. The political discourse on immigration by centre and centre-leftist parties has transformed and uses subtle forms of discrimination. Instead of it being seen as discriminatory, it is seen as shared common knowledge. Since attitudes and opinions in society are created by political discourse, Rubio-Carbonero argues that politicians are the reason for the normalization of far-right rhetoric. (Rubio-Carbonero, 2020)

Kallis (2013) also proposes that Europe is experiencing a trend of "mainstreaming", where ideas that were previously taboo are becoming increasingly normalized in European politics. The borders between extremist and mainstream are being crossed and becoming blurred. The reason for this is the appeal of the ideas of the far-right, but also the lack of defence and the opportunism of the mainstream. According to Kallis, mainstream political parties do not attempt to counter the ideas of the far-right. Instead, they are opportunistic because their main goal is to obtain votes rather than sticking to their principles. In order to achieve this goal, they appropriate the far-right's rhetoric on immigration issues, leading to the normalization of these ideas. (Kallis, 2013)

Han (2021) finds that the position of mainstream parties on immigration is partially affected by the electoral success of radical right-wing parties. When mainstream parties experience an internal division on the topic of immigration, they blur their position on immigration. When there is no internal division, their position is clarified. Therefore, the position of mainstream parties on immigration is partially influenced by their internal

circumstances, and partially by pressure from the growing popularity of radical right-wing parties. (Han, 2021)

Coffé (2008) looks at how socio-economic conditions influence the political arena in the case of the extreme right in Belgium. In doing this, the author looks at the supply side rather than the demand side. She finds that it is not necessarily socio-economic factors that affect whether voters decide to vote for the extreme right, but rather the ability of social democratic parties to be a buffer against the extreme right. (Coffé, 2008)

Henk van Houtum and Rodrigo Bueno Lacy (2017) discuss the normalization of this exclusivism that is part of far-right ideology. They point to the traditional political establishment that adopts a geopolitics of exclusion for electoral gain. An example of this is the VVD, whose 2017 election programme was based on the warning “act normal, or leave”. This came with a narrow definition of what was considered normal by the VVD. Van Houtum and Bueno Lacy say that it used to be extreme to warn people to “act normal”, but now it has become normal to be extreme. They point to the persistent image of the European Union as a modern, open, and safe area that is threatened by extremism outside its borders. The reality, they argue, is that the extremism that we fear has become the new normal inside the European Union. (Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2017)

In an article for the Guardian, Cas Mudde focuses on the topic of immigration. He explains that the left attempts to gain votes by copying the anti-immigration sentiments of the far-right (Mudde, 2019b). Journalist Kevyn Levie agrees with this and says that far-right ideology has been incorporated in the election programmes of parties across the political spectrum for electoral gain (Levie, 2021). According to Mudde, this strategy is based on the misconception that the left-wing voters have moved away from the left and now support the far-right instead. The strategy therefore does not work, since the decline of the left and the rise of the far-right are not directly linked. Mudde proposes for the left to return to its core values that are based on social democracy, which include egalitarianism, social justice, and solidarity. (Mudde, 2019b)

Journalist Bram Leven criticizes the lack of a strong left-wing response based on these core values, while the fascist ideology of the far-right has been finetuned for decades. He argues that the left needs to offer a definition of community that can counter the fascist definition of community, which is based on a Eurocentric, white, and male perspective. Antiracist, ecological, and feminist movements are not the reason behind the growth of the far-right, they are the foundation for an inclusive society that can be the alternative to fascism. (Leven, 2018)

In her book ‘On the Political’, Chantal Mouffe (2005) argues for the necessity of an agonistic debate between political parties. She criticizes the left because it moves to the centre instead of presenting an alternative to the hegemonic order. The left is not challenging the dominant consensus but rather going along with it. The blurring of left and right, or a consensus in the centre, means there is no vibrant democratic debate which results in the success of the far-right. The far-right does present an alternative, and although it is based on exclusion and xenophobia, it is the only option that gives voters hope that things could be different. Mouffe also criticizes the direct response of the left to the far-right. The far-right is dismissed as evil and condemned on moral grounds. This exacerbates the problem, because in doing so, the left evades a political analysis that would reveal their partial responsibility. (Mouffe, 2005)

Arguments against normalization

Although the majority of scholars agree on the idea that far-right rhetoric has become normalized, this view is also met with criticism or counter-arguments. Two main arguments against this idea of normalization can be found. The first is that the far-right continues to exist in a bubble of extreme ideas and this bubble is viewed as radical in society. The second argument emphasizes the resistance from the public and grassroots organization against the far-right's rhetoric.

Angela Saini describes the historical context of the intertwining of racism and science. She argues that after World War II, racism in science did not disappear, but instead came to exist in a bubble outside of mainstream science. Although these ideas are not accepted in mainstream science, they do have influence outside of this bubble. Because Saini views these ideas as existing outside of the mainstream, it implies that she currently does not see them as fully normalized. However, Saini warns against the future normalization of such ideas and places hope in the resistance by activists. This shows that she does view normalization as a realistic scenario for the future. (Saini, 2019)

In their article on the way mainstream parties talk about the populist radical right, Schwörer and Fernández-García (2021) argue that although the populist radical right is demonized less than assumed, some centre-left parties do demonise their opponents. This demonization is a result of the historical context of previous fascist rule, as well as the growth of the radical right. The authors do not oppose the idea of normalization, but they do emphasize that the increasing popularity of the far-right is met with opposition from some parties. (Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2021)

Orazani, Wohl and Leidner (2020) describe how political tolerance and support for freedom of speech are affected by the perception that radical ideologies are normalizing. Both conservatives and liberals worried about the normalization of radical ideas by those outside of their own political group. Perceived normalization of radical ideologies resulted in less tolerant ideas about freedom of speech and political views. This means that normalization does not go unnoticed and is met with resistance. (Orazani, 2020)

A special issue on media, migration and human rights in the *Journal of Language and Politics* discusses the erosion of liberal norms. The papers in the issue discuss the collapse of European solidarity due to nationalist groups and the decreasing support for equality, diversity and human rights. Despite this, Balabanova and Trandafoiu argue that resistance remains and is growing, fighting the normalization of nationalist groups and the decreasing support for equality, diversity and human rights. (Balabanova & Trandafoiu, 2021)

Other authors who discuss resistance against right-wing populism are Fine et al. in their book *Off White: Readings on Power, Privilege, and Resistance* (2004). Furthermore, Janjira Sombatpoonsiri (2018) criticizes the effectiveness of resistance against right-wing populism and offer suggestions for it to become more successful.

How normalization works

From the above it becomes clear that although the majority of scholars agree that far-right rhetoric is becoming increasingly normalized, they point to different reasons for this normalization. In order to understand how normalization works, it should not be seen as an event that has one single cause. Rather, normalization should be seen as a process in which multiple factors, actors, interests and events overlap and intertwine. The following contributing factors can be extracted from the academic debate: the demands from the public, the strategies of right-wing political parties, the actions from mainstream political parties, the

influence of the media, and the wider cultural and socioeconomic context of society. These factors are related to each other and influence each other in no particular order.

Certain cultural and socioeconomic contexts can lay the foundation upon which normalization builds. As described above, this can be economic distress, the quality of government, or sentiments caused by a country's colonial background. The exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right was previously only accepted and celebrated in small communities but seen as extreme in wider society. Right-wing parties strategically introduced radical discourse and narratives to the public, feeding into the public's demand for certainty, security, and safety. Mainstream political parties appropriate the radical ideas of the far-right for electoral gain, causing ideas and statements that were previously seen as extreme to become part of mainstream discourse. In many cases, mainstream parties fail to be a buffer that prevents voters from choosing far-right parties. There is also a lack of defence against the far-right. Because of this shift in the political arena, exclusivist far-right ideas become legitimized through policy. Furthermore, the mass media suffers from sensationalism and false reporting which further perpetuates the xenophobic narratives of the far-right.

This shows the actors that are involved in the normalization process have certain interests, which are electoral gain, financial gain, representation in politics, or improvement of socio-economic status. When they act upon these interests, the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right is introduced to society and the boundaries of extreme and normal become less clear.

Conclusion

This section showed that the following factors influence the normalization of the far-right: the demands from the public, the strategies of right-wing political parties, the actions from mainstream political parties, the influence of the media, and the wider cultural and socioeconomic context of society. These factors combined make the difference between an abnormality accepted by a small community and something that is considered normal. This thesis focuses on the presence of exclusivist rhetoric in the election programmes of centrist and leftist political parties, and therefore on the actions from mainstream political parties.

Methodology

This section describes how the main research question, “How has the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right influenced centrist and leftist political parties in the Netherlands, leading to the normalization of this rhetoric?” was answered using a thematic analysis of literature (Guest, 2014). Thematic analysis was used as a method of analysis in order to be able to identify the themes related to exclusivist rhetoric.

The academic literature in the theoretical framework was used to explain the main concepts of this thesis, which are far-right exclusivist rhetoric and normalization. I used the Radboud University library and Google Scholar to search for articles on these topics, after which I made a selection of the authors that had the most citations and specialized on either researching the development of the far-right, normalization, or a combination of the two. Some of the arguments in the academic debate came from grey literature in the form of media articles, and the rest of the arguments were also selected using the method above.

The data that I used for the analysis were the election programmes of the 17 political parties that were in the House of Representatives in 2021 and the election programmes from the same parties that were active in 2012. I applied thematic analysis to this data in order to discover exclusivist rhetoric in the election programmes of the far-right, the centre, and the left-wing political parties in 2012 and 2021. These three categories were based on the Dutch political spectrum that is used during the Dutch elections, which has been described in the theoretical framework. Since exclusivism is related to sociocultural topics such as immigration, integration, and discrimination, I divided the thesis into the categories right, centre, and left because they represent the differences between the parties on sociocultural topics. The timeframe between 2012 and 2021 was used because the comparison of election programmes could reveal possible changes over time. Not all parties that participated in the 2021 elections existed in 2012, including some of the far-right parties. Some of the bigger parties did exist in both years and therefore their past and present election programmes were compared.

In this research, thematic analysis was applied in two rounds. The first round of thematic analysis was applied to the selection of literature that is presented in the previous section. In this first round, inductive thematic analysis was used (Braun, 2013). First, the literature was read and the arguments of the authors were divided into two categories: either arguing in support of normalization or against normalization. Then, the literature was re-read and the concrete key concepts behind these arguments were noted down. These were then coded manually by using a different coloured marker each time a new theme could be identified. The coding was systemized by grouping the arguments with the same colour together. The final result was a list of themes, with each theme having several authors with similar arguments and similar key concepts that corresponded to that specific theme. In the literature that argued in support of normalization, the themes were: historical and socioeconomic context, the media, the demand-side, the supply-side, and mainstream political parties. In the literature that argued against normalization, the themes were: the far-right as a bubble and resistance against the far-right.

The key concepts that came forward in the first round of thematic analysis were used in the second round of thematic analysis in order to identify exclusivist rhetoric in the election programmes from 2021 and 2012. The second round of thematic analysis was applied to the selected election programmes. This was done using theoretical or “codebook” thematic analysis, and again the data was coded manually (Braun, 2013). The thesis followed the characteristics of far-right exclusivist rhetoric as defined by Cas Mudde (Mudde, 2000). Mudde’s definition was used because it was established by building on the work of his own expertise as well as many academic experts in the field of research on the far-right. According to Mudde, the far-right’s exclusivist rhetoric contains one or multiple of the following aspects: racism and antisemitism, ethnocentrism or ethnopluralism, and xenophobia. In order to recognize these abstract concepts in the election programmes, they were linked to the following concrete key concepts:

Racism and antisemitism	Ethnocentrism or ethnopluralism	Xenophobia
Racism Race Antisemitism Discrimination	Europe The Netherlands Christianity Islam Borders Integration Culture Norms and values International relations	Migration Migrant Refugee Safety Security Defense

Additionally, in the case of leftist parties, their response to the far-right was identified by searching for the terms “far-right”, “extreme”, and “right”.

The above key concepts were identified in the election programmes by searching for them with the find command in the documents. Since the election programmes were in Dutch, the Dutch translation of these key concepts were used. The paragraphs that contained these concepts were then colour-coded according to the theme they corresponded with. A second round of coding was done in case there were any paragraphs, statements or quotations that were missed in the first round of coding. The second round of coding was carried out using the same themes and key-concepts as the first round, as well as the same colours for the codes. This resulted in an overview of the presence of and response to exclusivist rhetoric in the election programmes.

The fact that the data was based solely on the election programmes of the political parties can be considered a limitation. No data is taken from direct interviews with party members, statements they have made in the media or in private, or from how the parties have voted on motions in the House of Representatives. The common critique on only using election programmes as data, is that the election programme aims to present the party’s ideology to the public in a way that attracts voters (Mudde, 2000). Because it is externally oriented, it hides the true face of the party, especially in the case of the far-right. Observations from private meetings or social media posts could then be a welcome addition to the data. However, the objective of this study is to demonstrate how the other political parties have been influenced by the far-right. Since the other political parties do not have access to the

'back-stage' of the far-right, the study also does not use this as data. Furthermore, the theoretical framework has made it clear that the far-right has grown comfortable in expressing ideas that would previously be kept to the 'back-stage'. Election programmes present the exact ideology of the party, and the party can be assumed to act upon this when voting for motions and speaking to the media. This makes election programmes very useful in determining every party's ideology and specific ideas on the relevant topics.

Another limitation is that research, especially on politics, can be biased due to the personal perspective of the researcher on political parties and how they respond to phenomena. This is why in this study, an already existing definition of exclusivism is used and applied to election programmes. The research questions were also stated in a neutral way, aiming only to look at the statements and responses of the parties in order to discover patterns.

Chapter 1

The exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right in the Netherlands

This chapter outlines the exclusivist rhetoric of the Dutch far-right political parties Forum voor Democratie, Juiste Antwoord 21, and Partij voor de Vrijheid. It begins with a short introduction to the parties, their origins, and their ideologies, after which the principles of far-right exclusivism as outlined by Cas Mudde (Mudde, 2000, pp. 187 – 188) will be applied to the parties' election programmes of 2021. The chapter's main focus is on the outward appearance of the parties rather than the exclusivist ideas and practices that occur behind the scenes. However, some of these private incidents will be used to illustrate that the exclusivism that the far-right presents to the outside is a mild and watered-down version of reality.

1.1 The Dutch far-right

Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy) was established in 2016 by its current leader Thierry Baudet. The party started with 2 seats in parliament in 2017 and became the biggest party during the provincial council elections of 2019. The party initially held 8 seats in the House of Representatives after the 2021 elections, and currently holds 5 seats due to a conflict that led to 3 members leaving and starting their own fraction named Groep Van Haga (Group Van Haga (NOS, 2021a)). Groep Van Haga does not have its own election programme since it was established after the 2021 elections. FvD's ideology is national conservatism, right-wing populism, sovereignism, economic liberalism, and Euroscepticism (Adriaanse, 2020). More recently, the party has been supporting and spreading anti-establishment, corona-related conspiracy theories (Den Hartog, 2020).

FvD's Thierry Baudet and other party members have been at the centre of many controversies on topics such as antisemitism and racism. Baudet himself has spoken of the threat of 'homeopathic dilution' and protecting 'our boreal world', and had a five-hour long meeting with white supremacist and race theorist Jared Taylor (Tokmetzis, 2017). According to several guests at a private dinner party, he stated that almost everyone he knows is an anti-Semite (Den Hartog, 2020). He never denied this statement, saying that public and private should remain separated. The following quotation from the election programme seems to refer to this as well: "How can you fight and/or discuss ideas if you can't take note of them? If they are already rejected in advance? If no one is allowed to express any kind of thought in private anymore?" (Forum voor Democratie, 2021, p. 25) Furthermore, he has defended many controversial people: a party member who linked race to intelligence, a party member who spread a conspiracy about the elite wanting to mix the 'Western' and 'non-Western race', and the youth wing of FvD when racist, fascist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic texts from their group chat were leaked (Den Hartog, 2020; Van Dijk, 2020). These are just some examples on a long list of controversies that show the party's far-right extremist ideology.

Juiste Antwoord 21 (Right Answer 21) was established in 2020 by Joost Eerdman and Annabel Nanninga after their split from FvD. Their ideology consists of conservative liberalism, liberal conservatism, and Fortuynism. They currently hold 3 seats in the House of Representatives. JA21 says it aims to be the 'decent' right-wing party, unlike FvD (Popelier, 2021). The split from FvD was a result of the dinner party and the youth wing group chat

messages that are described above. Controversies on racism and white supremacy that occurred beforehand did not lead to a split or even a conflict within FvD (Den Hartog, 2020). JA21's election programme has many similarities with FvD's election programme, to the point where entire sections seem to have been copy-pasted without editing.

Partij voor de Vrijheid (Freedom Party) was established in 2005 by Geert Wilders, its current leader, who split from the VVD. The party is considered centre-left on socioeconomic subjects, and right-wing populist on sociocultural subjects. Its ideology consists of right-wing populism, nationalism, anti-Islam, and Euroscepticism (PDC, 2021). The party currently holds 17 seats in the House of Representatives. Geert Wilders distances himself from other far-right politicians in Europe, calling them the "wrong rightist fascist groups" (BBC, 2010). He has had to appear in court several times for his insults against Muslims and 'non-Western' immigrants, and was found guilty of incitement and encouraging discrimination against Moroccan immigrants (NOS, 2021b).

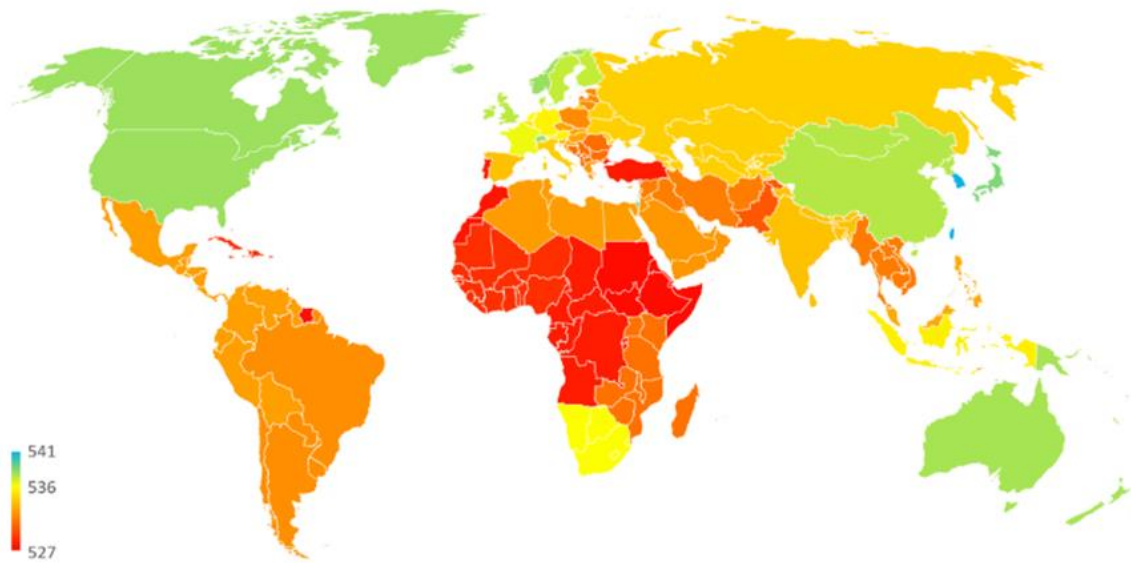
As previously discussed, after World War II fascist, racist or extreme right organizations in the Netherlands had two strategies they could adopt in order to avoid disintegration (Van Donselaar, 1993). They often chose the strategy of explicitly presenting themselves as apolitical in order to avoid conflict with the law. The other option was to be political but sacrifice their ideological principles by watering them down. It seems that these three far-right parties have chosen the latter and unlike previous far-right political parties in the Netherlands, have managed to become mainstream. Far-right exclusivism, as outlined by Cas Mudde (Mudde, 2000, pp. 187 – 188), can be recognized by the following aspects: racism, ethnopluralism, ethnocentrism, antisemitism, and xenophobia. The election programmes of the far-right clearly showcase the majority of these aspects. They will be presented separately below, but it is important to keep in mind that they overlap a lot of the time. Furthermore, many of the ideological principles that the parties present to the public in their election programmes can be labelled as exclusivist, and yet these are likely a watered-down version of the parties' true ideologies.

1.2 Racism and antisemitism

Since FvD presents a mild version of its (alleged) true ideology in its election programme, racist ideas are displayed indirectly. An example of this is that the topic of the Dutch colonial past, specifically slavery, is barely mentioned. There is only one line referring to the problematic colonial past of the Netherlands: "No apologies or damages from the government for affairs concerning a distant past." (FvD, 2021, p. 26). JA21 has a similar statement in its election programme, arguing that such events were seen as normal at the time and that we should not attempt to rewrite history by decolonializing Dutch cities (JA21, 2021, p. 46). The PVV argues that instead of Dutch people being made to feel ashamed, we should discuss the problem of slavery in the Islamic world (PVV, 2021, p. 11).

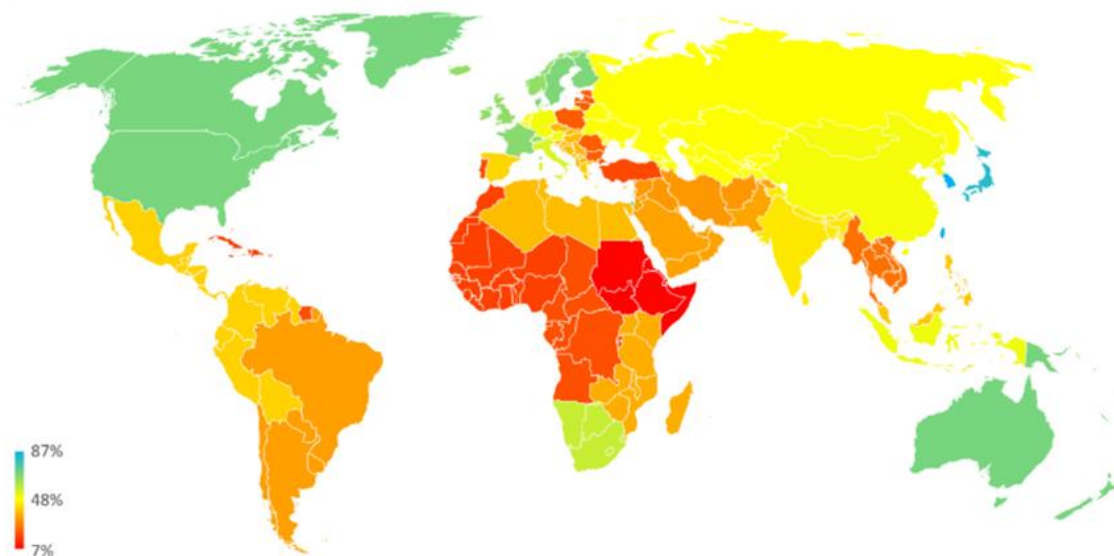
Another example is the response of the parties to Zwarte Piet or Black Pete, a form of blackface minstrelsy that is used during Sinterklaas, a Dutch celebration comparable to Christmas. FvD refuses to allocate any money to organizations that "attempt to undermine Dutch traditions such as Zwarte Piet" (FvD, 2021, p. 26). The PVV expresses a similar sentiment and emphasizes that it causes Dutch natives to be labelled as racists by "those who wish to abolish the Netherlands" (PVV, 2021, p. 12). At the same time, the PVV supports the registration of the nationality of criminals. The parties clearly do not see racism in the Dutch past and present as something that should be given much attention or even recognized as a problem.

The last example is less specific, yet too uncanny to not be categorized under the aspect of racism. FvD uses scientific research conducted by its own Renaissance Institute to support its scientific claims. One of the studies by the Renaissance Institute is dedicated to uncovering the “true cost” of immigration, using statistics to reveal the supposed negative economic effects of immigrants moving to the Netherlands (Van De Beek, 2021). The study differentiates between Dutch nationals and several generations of Western and non-Western immigrants, sometimes also looking at “mixed” children (Van De Beek, 2021). A large section of the study is dedicated to presenting education levels and scores on the Dutch elementary school final exam according to these categories. The figures below are two out of many maps from the study, in which Dutch education levels and elementary school exam scores are presented per nationality (Van De Beek, 2021, pp. 169 – 170):



Figuur 9.12 Citoscores van personen met een eerste generatie migratieachtergrond, naar herkomstregio, 2006-2018. Bron: eigen berekening op basis van CBS-microdata.

Figure 9.12 Cito scores of persons with a first-generation migration background, by region of origin, 2006 – 2018. Source: own calculation based on CBS microdata.



Figuur 9.13 Aandeel havo en vwo leerlingen (%) onder vijftienjarigen met een eerste generatie migratieachtergrond, naar herkomstregio, 2016 (bron: eigen berekening op basis van CBS-microdata).

Figure 9.13 Share of havo and vwo students (%) among fifteen year olds with a first generation migration background, by region of origin, 2016 (source: own calculation based on CBS microdata).

The way in which these statistics are presented and the meaning that is given to them is eerily reminiscent of racist scientific research that is now highly controversial: the studying and comparing of intelligence between “races”, using IQ scores (Saini, 2019). Claiming the study by the Renaissance Institute is neutral and simply a compilation of statistics, as stated in its introduction, does not erase this connotation. Aside from this, the intention behind the study is subjective, since it is referenced in FvD’s election programme to argue for a halt to immigration. Therefore, the examples above demonstrate the underlying racism in FvD’s election programme.

The parties do not mention their stance regarding antisemitism in their election programmes, although they do express love for Judeo-Christian traditions and values (FvD, 2021, p. 2; PVV, 2021, p. 13). This is a sharp contrast with antisemitic sentiments and statements that Thierry Baudet has been accused of expressing behind the scenes, as outlined in the introduction of this chapter.

1.3 Ethnopluralism and ethnocentrism

The election programmes of the three parties lean towards ethnocentric sentiments, rather than ethnopluralist. These ethnocentric sentiments become apparent because the parties emphasize the superiority of the Netherlands and the West, specifically the superiority of Christianity over the Islam, and the wish to apply the law differently to immigrants compared to Dutch natives. This goes hand in hand with the idea that non-Western immigrants are seen as inferior, threatening, or dangerous, which will be elaborated upon in the section on xenophobia. Overall, the parties create division by focusing on contrasting rather than co-existing.

1.3.1 The Netherlands at the centre

The following quotations from its election programme illustrate FvD's appreciation and preference for the West and the Netherlands:

"The core of our programme is our love for the Netherlands. For our civilization, our history and our urban planning. The Judeo-Christian tradition, the classical-humanist world: all we have inherited from ages of building and breeding." (FvD, 2021, p. 2)

"Re-educate and propagate all those beautiful things that the West has produced." (FvD, 2021, p. 98)

"In recent decades, attempts have been made to alienate the Dutch from their history and to cut them loose from their culture. Not only should this be stopped, it has to be reversed." (FvD, 2021, p. 99)

Similarly, JA21 aims to direct subsidy funds primarily to cultural institutions that focus on Dutch cultural expressions and traditions, saying that "our Dutch music, painting, literature, theatre, poetry and sculpture are the most beautiful things that we as a country have produced over the centuries." (JA21, 2021, p. 46).

The PVV states:

"The PVV does not agree with the perspective that all cultures are equal. We declare that our own culture is the best. And we are proud of that!" (PVV, 2021, p. 11)

The Netherlands, the West and Christianity have a positive connotation which is contrasted, often in the same paragraph, with a negative connotation that is given to Islam and non-Western immigrants. This is illustrated by the quotation below which is part of the 'Dutch Values Protection Act' that FvD wishes to introduce (FvD, 2021, p. 18):

"Due to the arrival of large groups of (mainly Muslim) immigrants, a number of achievements and core values of our society have come under great pressure." (FvD, 2021, p. 19)

1.3.2 Religion

FvD also shows ethnocentrism when referring to the topic of religion, in which Christianity is celebrated and Islam is rejected. This is mainly expressed on the topic of education. Islamic education is generalized by describing its increasing radicalisation and how it creates tension with Dutch values and traditions. According to FvD's programme, Islamic schools should endorse the fundamental Judeo-Christian values as described in the previously mentioned 'Dutch Values Protection Act': "Christian education is an indispensable cornerstone of the Dutch educational landscape." (FvD, 2021, p. 23). The PVV argues the same, saying: "It is very important for it to be constitutionally established that our Judeo-Christian and humanist roots are the dominant and leading culture in the Netherlands", and describes the Netherlands as "a country without headscarves", meaning the hijab, "but with traditional Dutch cosiness and respect for the elderly" (PVV, 2021, p. 11; PVV, 2021, p. 5).

JA21 makes a similar statement, saying the following:

“The Netherlands has an age-old history that has shaped our country. We are proud of our identity. We want to protect this. Newcomers should integrate into the dominant culture. Dutch laws and Western values take precedence over Islam.” (JA21, 2021, p. 19)

The parties all push a narrative in which the Dutch culture and values are threatened to be replaced by Islam.

1.3.3 Differences in treatment

Another example of ethnocentrism is that people with two passports, one of which is Dutch, should not be treated the same as people with only a Dutch passport according to all three parties. When someone with a dual passport commits a crime, FvD wants to take away their Dutch passport. In the case of someone with a dual passport being convicted for a serious crime, the party calls for “denaturalization and deportation”, and says that the same thing should happen to asylum seekers and status holders (FvD, 2021, p. 28). JA21 is on the same page, saying that asylum seekers and status holders who commit a crime should have the trial in their country of origin, and that they should be deported (JA21, 2021, p. 14). The PVV takes it a step further and says that people with a dual nationality should not have voting rights or be able to have a political position (PVV, 2021, p. 9).

Not only are non-Dutch people associated with serious crime, Dutch people who also hold another nationality are not treated the same as people who only have the Dutch nationality. The only reason why it is necessary to subject them to stricter rules and punishments is because of their second, non-Dutch passport. This is an example of ethnocentrism in which the Dutch are seen as superior to the non-Dutch.

Despite clearly being anti-migration, the election programme of FvD specifically calls for “extra attention for and good contact with (descendants of) Dutch emigrated people in Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.” (FvD, 2021, p. 20). Even (descendants of) Dutch people outside of the Netherlands are treated differently according to whether their current nationality is a Western one.

1.4 Xenophobia

Many sections of the election programmes of all three parties are explicitly xenophobic: they are fearful, hostile, describe immigrants and Muslims as a dangerous threat, and the arrival of refugees as an overwhelming influx or a crisis. Again, FvD and JA21 are basically on the same page, while the PVV bases most of its fearmongering on the Islam as a “totalitarian ideology” (PVV, 2021, p. 9). The following quotations from FvD’s election programme illustrate their thoughts on foreigners:

“In recent decades, the Netherlands has experienced a systematically excessive influx of underprivileged immigrants and asylum seekers from non-Western countries. That has a huge impact on our society. It puts pressure on our prosperity, erodes our welfare state, leads to degradation of our education, to unsafe streets and it undermines our cultural identity. Continuing this policy would result in up to 40% of the Dutch population being immigrants by 2050.” (FvD, 2021, p. 21)

“The problems in the housing market are the direct result of years of misguided policies” one of which is “mass immigration”. (FvD, 2021, p. 57)

The influx of non-Western immigrants is called systematically excessive due to its supposed negative socioeconomic and sociocultural impact on Dutch society. Adding to the negative effects that are described above, the election programme presents a calculation on the amount of money that the arrival of non-Western immigrants will cost, based on research by its own Renaissance Institute (FvD, 2021, p. 21). Implying that the Dutch population will be slowly replaced by immigrants then becomes a scary and threatening hypothesis which is to be avoided.

JA21 presents a similar calculation on the influx of migrants and its negative consequences:

“On balance, the population is only growing further due to people with a migration background. At the end of 2020, a quarter of the population already had a migration background, in fifty years this is expected to have increased to two in five inhabitants of the Netherlands. Why is that a problem? Because every society has a certain absorptive capacity, which the course of history has satisfactorily demonstrated.” (JA21, 2021, p. 16)

When JA21 uses the words ‘absorptive capacity’, the party does not see an increasing population density as a problem, but instead the idea that the current population will be replaced by migrants. Their section on safety and criminality names asylum seekers among the group of notorious nuisances that are the cause of intimidation, threats, destruction, begging and waste. Additionally, the party claims that continuing migration policy as it is now will lead to more pressure on social services, drastic austerity of the welfare state, segregation between white and non-white schools, and overall “a society that will be in serious trouble due to large-scale immigration” (JA21, 2021, p. 16).

Aside from making Islamophobic statements, the PVV is xenophobic towards non-Western people in general. The party creates a narrative in which there are two options: the Netherlands can either be an “immigration country” or a welfare state (PVV, 2021, p. 24). This is because non-Western inhabitants, “such as Turks and Moroccans”, commit fraud and cheat the social security system (PVV, 2021, p. 23). Furthermore, the PVV claims that native Dutch people are being discriminated by the system because asylum seekers, or ‘fortune seekers’, are given priority on the housing market (PVV, 2021, p. 27). The PVV also links nationality and religion to criminality and safety, saying that robberies, burglaries, violence and intimidation are the order of the day in every municipality because of “Islamic street scum, with a fur collar and a dual nationality” (PVV, 2021, p. 19). The PVV’s focus on specifically the Islam will be further illustrated in the next section.

1.4.1 Islamophobia

In all three of the election programmes, immigrants are equated with Muslims, and Muslims are equated with terrorism, as the following quotation by FvD on the Middle-East illustrates:

“But Europe also had to deal with the bitter consequences of the unstable situation there, such as an enormous influx of asylum seekers and an increased terrorist threat.” (FvD, 2021, p. 39)

It is not unusual for any election programme to have a section on the threat of terrorism, but these parties solely focus on jihadism and not on other forms of terrorism. Europol divides the motivations behind terrorist attacks into the following groups: jihadist, right-wing, left-wing, ethno-nationalist and separatist, single-issue, and non-specified (Europol, 2021). There have been threats and actual attacks from each of these groups in Europe during the past few years (Europol, 2020). The European Union also advises to target every one of these groups in their policy on addressing the threat of terrorism. JA21 does state that it aims to fight any form of extremism, whether left-wing or right-wing, but when discussing the topic of terrorism the party only describes the threat of jihadism (JA21, 2021, p. 13). It is biased to equate terrorism with jihadism, when jihadism is one of six ideologies that can be behind terrorist attacks. Additionally, jihadist arrests in the Netherlands have decreased over the past three years, while right-wing affiliated arrests have increased (Europol, 2021) .

The PVV, known to be specifically anti-Islam, takes it a step further by making it seem as though Islam and jihadism are the same, instead of seeing jihadism as an extremist form of Islam. According to the PVV, Islam has been received with open arms in Europe and the Netherlands, leading to terrorist attacks everywhere around us (PVV, 2021, p. 7). The party describes Islam as a totalitarian ideology, not a religion, and aims for the 'de-Islamization' of the Netherlands by making Muslims re-migrate, closing the borders for every asylum seeker or migrant from an Islamic country, and prohibiting Islamic schools, mosques, and books. The following quotations further illustrate the tone of the PVV when it comes to Islam:

"To be able to conduct our own immigration policy again and close our borders to fortune seekers and immigrants from Islamic countries. Because the Netherlands is overpopulated and Islam does not belong to the Netherlands." (PVV, 2021, p. 4)

"There is nothing more unwise than to give free rein to the Islamic ideology that wants to take away our freedom." (PVV, 2021, p. 5)

"Due to the ongoing Islamization, the welfare of animals has unfortunately received a major blow. Halal meat is on the shelves everywhere, from ritually slaughtered animals that have bled to death without anaesthesia. In a civilized western country this should of course have no place." (PVV, 2021, p. 11)

"There is no place for Islamic education, because that kind of education is at odds with freedom, equality and democracy in every aspect" (PVV, 2021, p. 43)

There is a clear hostility towards the Islam and Muslims, portraying them as a threat that directly clashes with the Dutch way of living. The narrative of Islamophobia and xenophobia is used to justify keeping Muslims and non-Western people out of the Netherlands. In practice, this is expressed through policies of closing the European and Dutch borders, sending people back to their country of origin no matter the reason they left that country, and preventing people from coming to the Netherlands in the first place. The region surrounding the refugee's country of origin should solely be responsible for taking care of them, according to the parties.

Conclusion

The above has illustrated the background of Dutch far-right political parties, specifically the rhetoric of exclusivism that is presented by these parties. The parties support and spread the following aspects of exclusivism in their election programmes: racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia. These are presented at the front-stage and are a watered-down version of the backstage rhetoric. The FvD is linked to many controversial situations that revolve around racism, antisemitism, and homophobia. JA21 has distanced itself from this and brands itself the “decent” right wing party, while having a nearly exactly similar election programme as the FvD. Both parties see the Dutch culture and the Christian religion as superior and want immigration to end in order to preserve this. This is supported by arguments in which the migrant is portrayed as a dangerous threat. The PVV has a very similar election programme, although more simplified. Another difference is that the PVV is specifically xenophobic towards the Islam and the party therefore aims for the “de-Islamization” of the Netherlands. The following chapter analyses how the far-right’s rhetoric of exclusivism is also present in the election programmes of the right-wing and centrist parties, leading to its normalization.

Chapter 2

Normalization of far-right exclusivist rhetoric by right-wing and centrist political parties

This chapter explores how right-wing and centrist political parties are influenced by far-right exclusivist rhetoric. The chapter first describes the background and the ideologies of the right-wing and centrist political parties. Then, it looks at the previously described aspects of exclusivism, which are racism, antisemitism, ethnopluralism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia. A comparison is made between the election programmes of the 2021 elections and those of the parties that also participated in the 2012 elections. This will demonstrate that exclusivist ideas that belong to the far-right are increasingly copied by the right and the centre, leading to their normalization.

2.1 The Dutch right-wing and centre

The Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) was established in 1948. The party has been the biggest party in the national elections four times in a row, making its leader Mark Rutte prime-minister for 11 years. VVD is a centre-right wing party whose ideology is liberalism, economic liberalism, and conservative liberalism (DNPP, 2022). Currently, the party holds 34 seats in the House of Representatives.

Democraten 66 (Democrats 66) was founded in 1966 and is currently led by Sigrid Kaag. The party's ideology is centrist on economic topics, and progressive on social topics (Kieskompas, 2021). The party's ideology is social liberalism and progressive liberalism. D66 currently holds 24 seats in the House of Representatives.

The Christen-Democratisch Appèl (Christian Democratic Appeal) was founded in 1973 and officially became a political party in 1980. It's current leader is Wopke Hoekstra. The party holds 14 seats in the House of Representatives. CDA is a centre to centre-right party whose ideology is Christian democracy, confessionalism, economic liberalism, and social conservatism.

The ChristenUnie (Christian Union) was established in 2000 and is currently led by Gert-Jan Segers. On the political spectrum, the party is classified as centre to centre-left on fiscal topics, and centre-right on social topics (Kieskompas, 2021). The party's ideology is Christian democracy, social conservatism and soft Euroscepticism (Terry, 2014). CU currently holds 5 seats in the House of Representatives.

Volt Nederland (Volt Netherlands) was founded in 2018 as the Dutch branch of Volt Europa, which was founded in 2017 and currently led by Laurens Dassen. The party states that it was founded as a reaction to Brexit and the increase of populism. Volt is a centre party with an ideology of social liberalism, pro-Europeanism, and European federalism, following a pan-European approach. The party has 3 seats in the House of Representatives.

The Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (Reformed Political Party) was established in 1918, making it the oldest political party in the Netherlands. SGP is a Christian right-wing party whose current leader is Kees van der Staaij. The word reformed refers to Calvinism, a branch of Protestantism. The party's ideology consists of social conservatism, theocracy, and soft Euroscepticism. The SGP currently holds 3 seats in the House of Representatives.

The BoerBurgerBeweging (Farmer-Citizen Movement) was established in 2019 by agrarian journalist Caroline van der Plas. BBB is a centre-right wing party and its main ideology

revolves around agrarianism, food politics, and rural development. The party currently holds 1 seat in the House of Representatives.

Fractie den Haan was established after the national elections in 2021. 50PLUS, a centre party, held 1 seat in the House of Representatives and when Liane den Haan left 50PLUS after several conflicts, she kept her seat and changed its name to Fractie den Haan. She represents the original 50PLUS election programme which focuses on the interests of pensioners and whose ideology is social democracy, social liberalism and social conservatism.

2.2 Racism and antisemitism

In the year 2012, the election programmes of the parties VVD, SGP, CU, D66 and CDA did not have specific sections on racism. The SGP did have a section on antisemitism and wanted this to be fought nationally and internationally (SGP, 2012, p. 49). The parties all stated that they support Article 1 of the Constitution which concerns equality before the law and prohibition of discrimination.

In the year 2021, the parties have explicit statements in their election programmes in which discrimination, racism and antisemitism are rejected, and the parties with a Christian foundation have a separate section that highlights the dangers of antisemitism. Aside from CU, no party supports the idea of the government apologizing for the Dutch colonial past. Aside from their statements, the parties do not demonstrate a clear understanding of the complexities of institutional and daily racism in Dutch society, nor do they present plans that describe how to achieve ending it. For example, the BBB states that “for BBB, colour, age, origin, sexual orientation and religion do not matter. Discrimination is prohibited. So also positive discrimination”, referring to the use of quota as a way to increase diversity in the workplace (BBB, 2021, p. 39). This argument is used by all the right-wing and centre parties and it disregards the reality of discrimination and racism. Saying that colour does not matter rejects the reality of a society in which colour does matter and can make a difference in someone’s position in the workplace. Stating that everybody is equal does not mean that inequality does not exist and that no effort should be put into striving for equality. The VVD expresses discomfort with the use of the term institutional racism, “because then immediately entire government departments and companies full of honest and hardworking people are being dismissed” (VVD, 2021, p. 6). The party says that the Netherlands is and will remain one of the most tolerant countries in the world, where everybody has the chance to make something of his or her life, but also where “some people will unfortunately have to fight harder for their place in society” (VVD, 2021, p. 66).

Between 2012 and 2021, the attention that the parties give to the topic of racism has increased. This is likely a reflection of the increase in public and media attention that has been given to the topic of racism. The VVD is the only party that shows a notable change, from explicitly rejecting discrimination to expressing discomfort with the usage of the term racism.

2.3 Ethnocentrism and ethnopluralism

The election programmes show both ethnocentric and ethnopluralist ways of thinking when it comes to migration issues. Europe, the Netherlands and Christianity are given priority, and the European, Dutch or Christian values and beliefs are portrayed as being superior and contrasted with non-Western and non-Christians lifestyles.

2.3.1 *The Netherlands at the centre*

Looking at the election programmes of 2012, the parties presented relatively milder versions of ethnocentrism compared to 2021. The VVD mentioned that migrants often have a culture that is different from the Dutch one and that they need to understand and accept Dutch society. The party wanted more attention to go towards the Dutch core values, “equality, freedom of speech, and tolerance” in the education system (VVD, 2012, p. 50). In 2012 the VVD mainly looked at the economic value that migrants may or may not bring. They wanted to welcome highly educated migrants that could benefit the economy. There was less focus on the clash of cultures and more focus on the education level and economic value of migrants.

In 2012 CDA approached migration in a similar way to VVD: they were strict towards migrants, open to refugees, and inviting to people who come study and work. On the other hand, CDA stressed the importance of celebrating diversity (CDA, 2012, p. 17). They saw the Netherlands as a pluriform society with shared values, in which we should unite rather than exclude. CDA also said to “strive for a great amount of diversity within the government”, aiming for more women and people from different cultural backgrounds in management and political positions (CDA, 2012, p. 72).

When it came to integration, in 2012 the CU proposed many policies to support the integration process and make it easier for immigrants. For example, they wanted Dutch language and culture lessons to be combined with a job or an internship which would benefit the integration process (CU, 2012, p. 14). The party also wanted to allow people to keep their double nationality status (CU, 2012, p. 14).

D66 focused on Europe and the European economy, stating that labour migration within Europe benefits the economy. D66’s ethnocentric focus was milder compared to 2021. The party wanted to leave “us versus them” thinking in the past (D66, 2012, p. 21). According to the party, integration is participation and every migrant should be given a fair chance (D66, 2012, p. 58). Integration was seen as a two-sided process that also required effort from native Dutch citizens.

In 2021, it becomes obvious that specifically the CDA and the VVD place the Netherlands at the centre and disregard the context that takes place outside of this perspective. For example, CDA wants everyone who passes the integration test to receive a Dutch flag with a pennant and a digital package with information about Dutch history, values and norms and democracy (CDA, 2021, p. 101). The party says that “the current emphasis on diversity cannot be done without protecting and preserving the unique examples of Dutch culture”, seeing the Dutch culture as something that adds to diversity rather than the norm that needs diversification (CDA, 2021, p. 106).

When talking about integration, the VVD emphasizes the need for migrants to adapt by naming the ways in which migrants do not fit in with Dutch society. For example, the party expects asylum seekers to behave and says that vulnerable groups such as homosexuals and Christians need to be protected from threats, discrimination and bullying that asylum seekers are guilty of (VVD, 2021, p. 55). Asylum seekers are not portrayed as a vulnerable group that can be bullied, or as people who can be Christians and/or homosexuals. Instead, the narrative is that “our” Christians and homosexuals need to be protected against “their” bullying. While painting a picture of the Netherlands as a free, western society in which there is no place for segregation, the VVD treats migrants and asylum seekers as a separate group that can only clash with Dutch society. The solution to this problem, according to the party, is to carefully select refugees based on how well they fit in society, “for example on the basis of language

and education level and affinity with a free society” (VVD, 2021, p. 55). After a long integration process, there is a possibility to become a Dutchman, which the party describes as “the ultimate reward”. (VVD, 2021b)

Volt and D66 take a different approach to ethnocentrism by placing Europe at the centre rather than solely the Netherlands, making it eurocentrism. D66 focuses on European values such as peace, democracy, the rule of law and human rights that must be supported worldwide (D66, 2021, p. 186). At the same time, these values must be protected by defending European property (D66, 2021, p. 10). Volt paints the following image of Europe:

“Europe is one of the richest societies on earth. The continent of Mozart and Avicii, of Spanish paella and Gouda cheese, of the football boots of Robert Lewandowski and Lieke Martens; where people are free to become who they want to be.” (Volt, 2021, p. 10)

The party names refugee camps on European territory as one of the threats to this image of Europe and their solution is to decrease migration by working together with the Netherlands and Europe to help poorer countries flourish (Volt, 2021, p. 21).

2.3.2 Religion

In 2012, the SGP clearly stated that religions are not equal and that Christianity is the superior religion (SGP, 2012, p. 20). Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of Christianity for culture and society in the Netherlands and the West. However, the SGP felt that people who integrate in the Netherlands should not have to perfectly copy the Dutch culture and they should be allowed to criticize Dutch culture (SGP, 2012, p. 21). Similar to SGP, the CU also stated that Christianity is superior over Islam and emphasized the lack of political and religious freedom in Islamic countries. They believed that the Dutch identity and culture is shaped by Christian roots and values and it should remain as such. However, the CU said there is room for diversity and the party accepted the Netherlands as a multireligious society (CU, 2012, p. 16). CDA agreed by stating that the interreligious dialogue is important since every religion has a unique contribution to make to society (CDA, 2012, p. 19).

In 2021, a similar ethnocentric stance on the topic of religion is emphasized in the election programmes of the SGP and the CU. The SGP still sees Christianity as the superior religion and explicitly rejects Islam:

“Prayer calls from mosques must be countered. Calls to prayer should not be equated with chimes, as these calls include the pronouncing of a creed. The SGP does not see the presence of a mosque or minaret as an enrichment of our public space. Our culture is broadly stamped by centuries of Christian tradition. When building mosques and minarets, municipalities are expected to limit the impact on public space to a minimum.” (SGP, 2021a)

The party also does not want Turkey to be allowed in the European Union partially because “its culture and religion do not belong in Europe”. SGP says the prohibition of discrimination has become too important in politics and law, and freedom of expression should be unlimited. The exception is blasphemy against God in Christianity, which should become punishable. (SGP, 2021, p. 90)

CU does state that to them, freedom of religion means freedom of all religions, not just Christianity. However, the party emphasizes the importance of Christianity for the Netherlands:

“After all, monumental church buildings are iconic in cities and villages. For many Dutch people, churches carry memories of important moments in life. Churches offer a place for reflection.” (CU, 2021, p. 71)

2.3.3 Differences in treatment

In 2012, VVD and CDA proposed multiple policies that implied a difference in treatment between Dutch citizens and migrants. The VVD proposed that parents who did not cooperate with the education system teaching children about Dutch values, should lose their child support (VVD, 2012, p. 50). They also differentiated between highly educated migrants and what they called “underprivileged migrants”, saying that the latter would cause problems on the labour market and should therefore not be allowed to enter the Netherlands (VVD, 2012, p. 51). The party said that learning the Dutch language is a migrant’s own responsibility, including financially. People who did not speak Dutch would not receive social assistance benefits. The VVD did not want migrants to receive social security benefits for the first ten years of their stay in the Netherlands (VVD, 2012, p. 49). When a migrant became unemployed, they should be stimulated to return to their country of origin by limiting their access to social security (VVD, 2012, p. 50).

Similarly, CDA wanted migrants to put maximum effort into getting qualified for the labour market. Migrants who rejected this or acted in a negative way should receive a fine or a reduction in their subsidies (CDA, 2012, p. 22). This shows that in 2012, CDA and VVD actively aimed for a different treatment between types of migrants, and between migrants and Dutch citizens.

Unlike the parties above, D66 aimed for more lenience towards migrants. The party stated that “withdrawing the residence permit if the civic integration course is not completed successfully is disproportionate and contrary to international law. D66 deletes this rule.” (D66, 2012, p. 58).

In 2021, the labelling and compartmentalizing of different kinds of migrants is a theme that can be found in every right-wing or centrist election programme. All of the parties make a distinction between two kinds of migrants: refugees and economic migrants. D66 explicitly states that sometimes, migrants are refugees, but most of the time they are people who want to work or study here (D66, 2021, p. 194). This dismisses the often multiple and overlapping reasons why people migrate, making it impossible to differentiate and put migrants into boxes. Refugees are allowed to stay and receive support from the Netherlands, whereas people who migrate without being in direct danger are given negative connotations and are even labelled ‘fortune seekers’ by the BBB and the VVD (BBB, 2021, p. 33). The narrative that is created is one where ‘we’ are the ones who have the power to label ‘them’ and then use biased definitions to determine who stays and who has to leave. The ones who are allowed to stay are still not seen as equal to native Dutch citizens by all parties. The VVD, for example, wants permit holders to lose their permit when they are convicted for a serious crime, and also says that asylum seekers who cause serious nuisance will be returned to a very strict regime (VVD, 2021b). The party also differentiates between labour migrants from within the European Union and from outside the European Union, saying that they want labour migrants from the

outside to get a lower individual social insurance and to be excluded from the regular social insurance security system. (VVD, 2021, p. 24)

2.4 Xenophobia

The election programmes of right-wing and centrist political parties reveal xenophobia in several ways, both in 2012 and 2021. First, in their portrayal of the concept of migration. Second, in their portrayal of the migrant as an individual. This then leads to their justification of the reasons and methods they present in order to keep migrants out of the Netherlands.

2.4.1 Portrayal of migration

In 2012, most of the parties did not celebrate migration and they wanted to limit the arrival of migrants, but they did not explicitly fearmonger. CU believed that the Netherlands would not benefit from large scale migration. However, the party also said that Dutch society is diverse and multi-coloured and that the arrival of migrants enriched Dutch society (CU, 2012, p. 13). D66 was also very welcoming towards asylum seekers. The party wanted for asylum seekers to be able to study and work in the period of time that they were waiting for clarity on their asylum status. The party said that this benefits their independence as well as Dutch society. Asylum seekers should also be able to finish their education, including their internship (D66, 2012, p. 58).

In 2021, all parties call the increase of the influx of refugees in 2015 ‘the refugee crisis’. Some parties specifically portray the concept of migration as overwhelming, unmanageable, or a tsunami. The VVD calls it “the migration wave that plunged the Netherlands and the EU into crisis” (VVD, 2021, p. 56), and states:

“A soaring African population and a continued presence of Islamic radicalism in the Middle East and Africa mean that many want to move to Europe. The migration crisis in 2015 painfully demonstrated that such an influx is not maintainable.” (VVD, 2021, p. 55)

Additionally, CU describes a potential increase in the amount of refugees as unfortunate (CU, 2021, p. 19). SGP wants to limit the influx of migrants because the Netherlands is small and population density is high (SGP, 2021, p. 68). The CDA is concerned that the current amount of migrants exceeds the limit of society, but also adds that the worries about migration and integration cause tension in politics and society, undermining solidarity (CDA, 2021, p. 98). CDA’s election programme states that “allowing people to stay without being able to really offer them a place in our society is not merciful” (CDA, 2021, p. 99). According to CDA, migration should be a choice instead of something that happens to us (CDA, 2021, p. 99).

2.4.2 Portrayal of the migrant

As described earlier, the migrant is often labelled as a refugee or as an economic migrant which then leads to differences in treatment. Although there is more acceptance towards the refugee, any migrant is still portrayed in a negative way, no matter the label. Economic migrants are portrayed as fortune seekers and profiteers who are unwelcome and should return immediately. Refugees, or ‘the real refugees’ as some parties call them, are portrayed as nuisances who are unable to adapt to modern society.

In 2012, all parties except for D66 made a distinction between “real refugees” and economic migrants”. CU said that the Netherlands cannot handle an unlimited amount of migrants that mainly come for economic reasons (CU, 2012, p. 15). SGP also wanted to limit

the influx of “underprivileged migrants” and their social security benefits (SGP, 2012, p. 20). CDA mentioned the “real refugee” as well (CDA, 2012, p. 17).

VVD did not want “underprivileged migrants” to enter the Netherlands because they would cause problems for neighbourhoods, schools, the job market, and crime (VVD, 2012, p. 51). The party differentiated between what they call “real refugees” and “economically underprivileged migrants” (VVD, 2012, p. 52). They wanted to limit the influx of the latter in order to make room for the former. If someone was not a “real refugee”, they should leave the Netherlands as soon as possible (VVD, 2012, p. 7). They preferred for refugees to remain as close to their region of origin as possible, especially children. “This way, these children can immediately return to their country of origin and we prevent them from becoming rooted in Dutch society.” (VVD, 2012, p. 52). The VVD did acknowledge those who had completed the integration process:

“The VVD values and recognizes people who manage to find and integrate their way into our society on their own two feet. And there are many. That’s not because of the government; people integrate themselves.” (VVD, 2012, p. 49).

In 2021, CDA promises to take firm action against the abuse of the right to asylum and asylum seekers that cause nuisance (CDA, 2021, p. 100). D66 agrees, stating that asylum seekers that cause nuisance will be punished and made to leave the Netherlands since, according to D66, those asylum seekers are usually from safe countries and barely have a chance to stay anyway (D66, 2021, p. 197). Fractie den Haan and the BBB both want ‘economic refugees’ or ‘economic fortune seekers’ to be sent back to their country of origin as soon as possible (Fractie den Haan, 2021; BBB, 2021, p. 33). CU also only wants refugees to be allowed to stay (CU, 2021, p. 20). SGP emphasizes the duty to help refugees according to Christian mercifulness, but states that the migrants’ abuse of the right to asylum has to be countered (SGP, 2021, p. 70). According to VVD, it should be determined as soon as possible whether someone is a ‘real refugee’. The party says that many asylum seekers are fortune seekers and that they are the reason for long procedures (VVD, 2021, p. 58). The party makes it very clear that the asylum seeker is hardly tolerated:

“Provided shelter in the Netherlands is not a right but a favour. In return, we expect newcomers to participate in a free society. Otherwise you are better off on another continent.” (VVD, 2021, p. 55)

2.4.3 Religion

In 2012, the SGP was the only party that specifically described Islam in a negative light and warned against jihadist radicalisation. CU described terrorism as a problem that came from many directions. The party mentioned many forms of terrorism: jihadist attacks, right-wing extremist, left-wing extremist attacks, and violence by squatters and animal rights activists (CU, 2012, p. 10). The other parties did not mention jihadism.

In 2021, the SGP, VVD, CDA and CU describe the threat of jihadism in such a way that it becomes an important reason to deny any migrant from an Islamic country entry to the Netherlands and to Europe. In their sections on terrorism, these parties’ main focus is the threat of jihadism. The SGP makes the Islamic religion a safety concern, stating that “hatred

and violence appear to be rampant within Islam” (SGP, 2021b). The party describes the terrorist attacks by jihadists that occurred in Paris and Brussels and claims that we are extremely vulnerable everywhere we go, adding “Everyone is in danger!” (SGP, 2021b).

2.4.4 Methods of exclusion

In 2012, the VVD supported tight measures on allowing immigrants and said that the European borders needed to be guarded carefully and if necessary, migrants should be stopped at the Dutch border (VVD, 2021, p. 58). CDA agreed and wanted stricter protection and control over European borders (CDA, 2021, p. 27). The other parties did not mention this and also did not propose any plans to create or support a European army.

In 2021, all the election programmes of the parties discussed in this chapter propose methods to keep migrants from entering the Netherlands. Each party wants to protect, strengthen, or militarize the European borders. In the case of the far-right, the borders of the Netherlands are the main focus, whereas the right-wing and centrist parties focus on the borders of Europe. Nevertheless, the goal is the same: protecting ‘us’ by keeping ‘them’ out.

“To protect our way of life, we need to rethink international politics. Investing in defence is necessary, but not sufficient in itself. Fighter jets offer little protection if countries send migratory flows towards us.” (VVD, 2021, p. 46)

This quotation by the VVD is dehumanizing because groups of migrants are not described as people but instead as ‘migratory flows’, something that the Netherlands needs to be protected or defended against in the form of fighter jets. Even if this is meant as a hypothetical scenario, it demonstrates the extent to which VVD would be willing to go to fight off migrants. Ideally, the VVD wants to militarize the borders of the European Union in order to bring the amount of asylum requests down to zero, after which ‘we’ can select a small group of people that fit in ‘our’ society (VVD, 2021, p. 56). VVD wants to criminalize captains who pick up refugees at sea and bring them to Europe, and says that these captains should drop off refugees in Africa if they truly want to save people who are drowning (VVD, 2021, p. 58). The party also refers to a future in which it will be impossible to request asylum in Europe. (VVD, 2021, p. 58)

The militarization of the European border is also described in Volt’s election programme. One of the party’s main points is to create a European army (Volt, 2021, p. 17). Volt is not directly against every form of migration, but the party does wish to prevent migration (Volt, 2021, p. 21). Fractie den Haan wants the European borders to be guarded better (Fractie den Haan, 2021). D66 has a similar approach, and also wants a European army in order to defend European territory and become a free and safe Europe (D66, 2021, p. 78). When discussing the prevention of migration, CU stresses the importance of multiple measures: the party wants to invest in European defence and development aid (ChristenUnie, 2021, p. 129).

Lastly, CDA’s main point is to get a grip on migration. The goal is to accept migrants according to the limits of Dutch society and the support of the general public. In order to achieve this, the countries of the European Union need to work together to strictly guard the European borders (CDA, 2021, p. 98). The party also wants to achieve a ‘strong European return policy according to the more for more principle’ (CDA, 2021, p. 100). In this policy,

countries who cooperate when their native citizens return, get more and better trading agreements.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the far-right exclusivist rhetoric that is present in the right-wing and the centre's election programmes. Although the centrist parties are more mild, there are still aspects of exclusivism present in their election programmes. The right-wing parties often present an approach or ideology that is very similar to that of the far-right, specifically on the topics of migration and Islam. When it comes to xenophobia, the right-wing and the centre have the borders of Europe as their main focus, rather than the borders of the Netherlands. Compared to 2012, there has not been much change in the ideas and policies that the parties present in 2021. However, there is a clear change in their tone. Statements they make have become more aggressive, there is more fearmongering, and there is more focus on cultural differences between native and non-native Dutch people.

Parties such as the VVD, CDA, and D66 are considered the traditional parties that usually get a large amount of votes. These parties are also the ones that have been influenced by far-right exclusivist ideas. Although these parties distance themselves from the extreme ideology of the far-right, they are part of the reason why this ideology is not considered extreme and has therefore become normalized.

Chapter 3

The response of left-wing and far-left political parties

This chapter analyses the response of the left-wing and the far-left to the exclusivism that is expressed in the political arena. First, the left-wing and the far-left parties are described. Then, the chapter will show the direct response to the far-right by these parties. Lastly, the indirect response of the left to the exclusivist far-right rhetoric will be described and analysed.

3.1 The Dutch left

GroenLinks (GreenLeft) is a centre-left to left wing party that was founded in 1989. The party leader is Jesse Klaver and the party currently holds 8 seats in the House of Representatives. The party ideology consists of green politics, ecologism, progressivism, social democracy, and pro-Europeanism.

The Partij van de Arbeid (Labour Party) is a centre-left wing party that was founded in 1946. The Labour Party's main ideology is social democracy, social liberalism, and Europeanism. The current party leader is Lilianne Ploumen and the party holds 9 seats in the House of Representatives.

The Socialistische Partij (Socialist Party) is a left-wing party that was founded in 1971 as the Dutch Communist Party. The current party leader is Lilian Marijnissen and the party holds 9 seats in the House of Representatives. The main ideology of the SP is socialism, social democracy, and Euroscepticism.

BIJ1, meaning 'together' is a radical left-wing party that was founded in 2016 by its current leader Sylvana Simons after she left DENK. The party holds 1 seat in the House of Representatives. BIJ1's ideology focuses on egalitarianism, minority rights, multiculturalism, feminism, anti-racism, anti-capitalism, intersectionality, and Dutch republicanism.

DENK, Dutch for 'think' and Turkish for 'equal', is a centre-left to left-wing party that was created as a split from the Labour Party in 2015. Its current leader is Farid Azarkan and the party holds 3 seats in the House of Representatives. DENK's ideology is social democracy, identity politics, pro-immigration, minority rights, anti-racism, pro-Europeanism, and social conservatism.

The Partij voor de Dieren (Party for the Animals) is a left-wing party that was founded in 2002. The party currently holds 6 seats in the House of Representatives and is led by Esther Ouwehand. The PvdD's ideology focuses on animal rights, animal welfare, environmentalism, progressivism, and soft Euroscepticism.

3.2 Direct response to the far-right

This section explores the direct response of the left-wing political parties to the far-right and to the presence of the far-right in the political arena. In 2012, the parties GL, SP, PvdD and PvdA did not mention the far-right in their election programmes.

In 2021, GL and PvdD have not changed on this topic, since they still do not mention the far-right at all. PvdD states that it wants to get rid of "old-fashioned left/right thinking" (PvdD, 2021, p. 4). GL mainly criticizes the current government on its financial policies and economic ideology, not on sociocultural topics. The closest GL gets to addressing the far-right is in the introduction of its election programme, where Jesse Klaver writes: "I can already dream of the reactions to this program from the established order. From right-wing politics,

from big business and from populists. They will say: 'It sounds nice, but it's not possible!' (GroenLinks, 2021, p. 2). Not only is this statement vague and rather indirect, it is also highly debatable to claim right-wing politicians would say that ending institutional racism sounds nice.

The parties that do address the far-right are PvdA, DENK, SP and BIJ1. These parties want to take steps in countering the spreading of far-right ideology, protecting Muslims from far-right islamophobia, and preventing far-right terrorism. DENK, SP and BIJ1 are the only parties who directly respond to the presence of far-right ideology in the political arena. SP states:

"We do not accept any form of discrimination – by anyone. [...] not by politicians who turn people against each other with a politics of racism." (SP, 2021, p. 25)

DENK also criticizes political parties, by saying:

"DENK will fight parties that problematize the multicultural society for electoral gain. More opposition is needed and they are no longer allowed to dictate the debate on diversity." (DENK, 2021, p. 12)

"The term migration is problematized and presented negatively, out of a need for political gain." (DENK, 2021, p. 12)

And lastly, BIJ1 mentions the exclusivist ideology of the (far) right:

"A long-standing smear campaign against Muslims by the political (far-) right has normalized Muslim hatred." (BIJ1, 2021, p. 154)

"This migration crisis does exist, but not as currently portrayed by the government and other political parties." (BIJ1, 2021, p. 79)

Three out of the six left-wing parties directly address the far-right and the presence of far-right ideology in the political arena, while the three other parties do not address the far-right at all. Furthermore, the fact that this rhetoric is also used by the centre and the right, is either briefly mentioned or not mentioned at all. There is a lack of a direct response to the far-right, the right-wing and the centre, the groups who are responsible for conveying the exclusivist rhetoric. The left fails to address the abnormality of the actions from these political parties and therefore contributes to their normalization instead.

3.3 Response to exclusivism

This section will analyse how the left-wing parties address and respond to the aspects of far-right exclusivism, namely racism and antisemitism, ethnocentrism and ethnopluralism, and xenophobia.

3.3.1 Racism and antisemitism

In 2012, the parties GL, SP, PvdA and PvdD did not mention racism specifically, but the parties did reject any form of discrimination. PvdA said that social democrats have always fought for

equal rights and opportunities for everybody, and that there is a lot to improve when it comes to emancipation and integration (PvdA, 2012, p. 29). GL proposed stricter measures against discrimination on the labour market (GL, 2012, p. 28). PvdD wanted the government to actively protect and support minority groups (PvdD, 2012, p. 31). SP also attacked the ruling government, which consisted of VVD and CDA with support from PVV. SP stated:

“Government policies have exaggerated mutual contradictions, rather than reduced them. They have done this with useless symbolic politics and allowing rude and discriminatory language against migrants.” (SP, 2012, p. 13)

In 2021, each of the parties aside from the PvdD has a section dedicated to racism, antisemitism and discrimination. The parties also present concrete plans to fight racism and discrimination, centred around countering exclusion with inclusion. PvdA for example states that for each of us there is a responsibility to stand up to institutional racism, xenophobia, abuse of power, and discrimination (PvdA, 2021, p. 72). GL says it fights against organizations that propagate white nationalism or have a racist agenda, and for an inclusive society in which racism, discrimination and exclusion have no place (GL, 2021, p. 66). BIJ1 pays the most attention to the topic of racism, dedicating the first chapter of its election programme to the topic “Antiracism and Decolonization” and having this topic recur throughout the programme (BIJ1, 2021, p. 13). DENK states that in the Netherlands, people are often put in a box and categorized according to skin colour, religion, or ethnicity. The party says that this does not do justice to the variability and versatility of the human identity, and therefore this is scientific nonsense (DENK, 2021, p. 12).

3.3.2 Ethnocentrism and ethnopluralism

In 2012, SP wanted to support the countries at the borders of the European Union in order to control migration and to “stop allowing in thousands of migrants on their way to Europe” (SP, 2012, p. 14). The party said that a safe and peaceful Europe is beacon for the rest of the world (SP, 2012, p. 59). At the same time, SP stated that the Netherlands is not an island and Europe is not a fortress and they wanted to work towards a smaller military force (SP, 2012, p. 59). PvdA also wanted collective European admission rules, militarized European borders, and humane reception of migrants in all members of the European Union (PvdA, 2012, p. 34). GL explained that European countries have similar cultures and share fundamental values, such as freedom and democracy. The party stated: “Europe has a different political course than the neoliberal United States and the autocratic and unfree China” (GL, 2012, p. 11). With this statement, GL created the image of a Europe that is superior over other regions because of its unity in the supposed absence of neoliberalism and autocracy.

In 2021, looking at the aspect of ethnocentrism and ethnopluralism in the election programmes reveals a clear divide between the parties. Some left-wing parties seem to lean towards the centre on this topic, and express ethnocentric points of view. Other parties specifically problematize ethnocentrism and ethnopluralism. The PvdD does not belong to either side, since the party mainly addresses topics on the national level.

The parties that lean towards the centre on this topic are PvdA, GL, and SP. These parties express their wish for the militarization of Europe. The difference with centrist and right-wing parties is that they do not necessarily want to strengthen European border security to put a halt to migration, but rather the parties would like to see military interventions to

support peace-building operations. The SP keeps it brief, stating that it wants to reform the armed forces in order to protect the country and carry out peace missions based on a United Nations mandate (SP, 2021, p. 28). GL emphasizes its hesitance, stating that the party only supports military interventions as a last resort, and only if this goes hand in hand with long-term diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and reconstruction (GL, 2021, p. 96). The PvdA takes a similar stance, saying that it wants the Netherlands to participate in peace missions that have a military dimension, but also a political dimension and a development dimension (PvdA, 2021, p. 95). Furthermore, they state that “any application of military force is part of a well-thought-out, long-term strategy.” (PvdA, 2021, p. 95).

The parties that problematize ethnocentrism are BIJ1 and DENK. BIJ1 wants to end the militarization of the borders of Europe, and prevent a European army from being established (BIJ1, 2021, p. 87). The party also wants European companies and projects that invest internationally to prove that local inhabitants and the local environment will not be exploited, oppressed, harmed, or taken advantage of (BIJ1, 2021, p. 29). DENK praises the efforts of the Netherlands when it comes international diplomacy and conflict prevention, but the party also states:

“The international efforts of the Netherlands should not be equal to eurocentrism and ideas of superiority.” (DENK, 2021, p. 49)

DENK addresses that ideas of superiority, although made illegal by law, are still present in daily life and in policies. The party wants this to be recognized, and is against the mentality that is held by ethnic and cultural nationalists. (DENK, 2021, p. 12)

3.3.3 Xenophobia

In 2012, SP wanted any asylum seeker who has proven not to be a refugee to return to their country of origin (SP, 2012, p. 14). PvdA agreed with this procedure and stressed that asylum policies should be humane and refugees should not be criminalized. Furthermore, PvdA criticized the government on their xenophobic policies. The party stated:

“During the last government, many groups of people in society were set aside. Differences between people have been magnified. The rights of old migrants have been affected on many fronts by the previous parliament. Measures such as illegal immigrant quotas, the burqa ban and tackling double passports have resulted in not everyone feeling welcome in our country anymore”. (PvdA, 2012, p. 32)

The PvdA proposed the legalization of double passports, getting rid of the burqa ban, and integration to be paid for by the government (PvdA, 2012, p. 32). Similar to PvdA, GL was critical of the government and their rhetoric of xenophobia. Referring to jihad, GL said that it did not want to participate in making groups of people suspicious (GL, 2012, p. 10). GL wanted to invite refugees to build a new life for themselves in the Netherlands. Rather than calling the multicultural society a failure, GL celebrated it as a fact. The party stated:

“We deal with cultural and religious diversity in a relaxed manner. GroenLinks opts for a society in which fear of the other does not rule.” (GL, 2012, p. 3)

In 2021, the divide between the parties that has been described before is also visible on the topic of xenophobia. The sentiments on the topic of immigration that are held by centre parties, are also expressed by PvdD, PvdA, and SP. GL, DENK, and BIJ1 want to fight xenophobia in Dutch society and emphasize inclusion and acceptance.

The PvdD's main focus is animal welfare and climate change, and therefore the party's section on immigration is brief. It seems as though PvdD leans more towards the centre on this topic, since the party wants money for development aid to be allocated to people "elsewhere", and not to migration- and asylum policies (PvdD, 2021, p. 100). The SP wants to hold on to the distinction between migrants and refugees (SP, 2021, p. 25). The PvdA describes the current political debate on migration and says this is often portrayed using two extremes: everybody is welcome or nobody is welcome, which the PvdA wants to get rid of (PvdA, 2021, p. 89). At the same time, the party does follow the categorization of refugees and economic migrants, and a clear distinction between the two is created. The PvdA wants to offer protection to refugees who left their country of origin because of humanitarian or political reasons, but also says that "this solidarity must not be put to the test by migrants who have come our way for purely economic reasons" (PvdA, 2021, p. 89). Additionally, possibly in an attempt to humanize migrants, the PvdA stereotypes them instead, as can be seen in the following quotation:

"The migrant has many faces, from the Bulgarian asparagus picker, the Syrian refugee family, to the Indian IT specialist." (PvdA, 2021, p. 89)

Similar to CDA, the PvdA does not want migration to just happen to the Netherlands without having control over it: "By getting and keeping a grip on migration, we prevent our livelihoods from being jeopardized" (PvdA, 2021, p. 89).

GL, DENK, and BIJ1 propose policies to make immigration and integration easier and more humane than it currently is. DENK and BIJ1 specifically address the xenophobia that is present in Dutch immigration policies. DENK illustrates the long history of the Netherlands as a country of immigration, and says that it has been very positive for the country. DENK's perspective on immigration is that it is a strength of the Netherlands, and the fact that people want to build a future in the Netherlands should be cherished (DENK, 2021, p. 57). Their rejection of xenophobia can be seen from the following quotation:

"The challenge of managing migration is not carried out based on fear, but based on strength." (DENK, 2021, p. 57)

BIJ1 addresses xenophobia by rejecting the way the migration crisis is portrayed by the government and political parties:

"They claim that the Netherlands is overrun by migrants who are taking 'our' jobs and 'our' homes. This is not true. Since 2015, the number of asylum applications and the number of people who reunite with their family has been decreasing continuously because asylum seekers are detained at the borders of Europe." (BIJ1, 2021, p. 79)

The three parties also address the Islamophobia that is perpetuated by the far-right and the right-wing. GL wants Islamophobia to be recognized as a separate form of racism, stricter punishments for hate crimes against Muslims, and the abolishment of the law against clothing that covers the face (GL, 2021, p. 69). BIJ1's election programme states the same, and BIJ1 also wants stricter measures against discrimination based on religion that occurs in the job application process (BIJ1, 2021, p. 154). In addition to the proposals above, DENK wants to set up an action plan to fight Islamophobia (DENK, 2021, p. 65). The party also celebrates the multicultural society and wants to focus on inclusion, rather than exclusion. The Dutch word 'allochtoon' for example, meaning a person who is not from the Netherlands or who has at least one parent that was not born in the Netherlands, should not be used by the government anymore (DENK, 2021, p. 12). The same goes for the word integration. DENK states (DENK, 2021):

"It is perverse and criminal to problematize groups of Dutch people and to place them outside society by means of one word." (DENK, 2021, p. 12)

Conclusion

The above shows that the left-wing parties can be divided into two groups. One group leans more towards the centre when discussing immigration: these parties support the militarization of Europe and label migrants in order to determine whether they are allowed to stay in the Netherlands, and express this more than they did in 2012. The other group does not support the militarization of Europe and the European border, and this group also does not problematize or stigmatize migrants. Compared to 2012, this second group also pays more attention to problems caused by exclusivist ideas.

Something that almost all left-wing parties have in common, is the lack of direct or aggressive response to the rhetoric of exclusivism that is presented by the far-right and normalized by the right-wing and the centre. Only BIJ1, SP, and DENK directly attack far-right rhetoric in Dutch politics in their election programmes, using a few lines to do so. There is an overall lack of a strong response from the left to the far-right. The parties either lean towards the centre, or indirectly respond to the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right. There is no response to the right-wing and centrist parties that copy and normalize this exclusivist rhetoric. There is also a lack of analysis and self-reflection on the causes behind the normalization of this rhetoric. This lack of strong opposition allows the normalization to happen in the right-wing, the centre, and even in some left-wing parties.

Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to answer the research question *“How have political parties in the Netherlands been influenced by the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right, leading to its normalization?”* using three sub-questions.

The first sub-question, *“What is the exclusivist rhetoric of the far-right in the Netherlands?”* was answered by analysing the election programmes of the parties Forum voor Democratie, Juiste Antwoord 21, and Partij voor de Vrijheid. This showed that the parties present racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia at the front-stage. The FvD and JA21 see the Dutch culture and the Christian religion as superior and want immigration to end in order to preserve this. This is supported by arguments in which the immigrant is portrayed as a dangerous threat. The PVV is specifically xenophobic towards Islam and the party therefore aims for the “de-Islamization” of the Netherlands.

The second sub-question, *“How have right-wing and centrist political parties in the Netherlands been influenced by this rhetoric, leading to its normalization?”* was answered by analysing the election programmes of the right-wing and centrist political parties. This showed that the right-wing has a similar exclusivist rhetoric as the far-right, and the centre has a somewhat milder version. The parties problematize immigration and Islam and are xenophobic towards people from outside the borders of Europe. Compared to 2012, their statements have become more aggressive and there is more fearmongering and focus on cultural differences. Although these parties distance themselves from the extreme ideology of the far-right, they have been influenced by it and are spreading it through their election programmes. They are part of the reason why this ideology is no longer considered extreme.

The third sub-question, *“How have leftist and far-left political parties in the Netherlands been influenced by this rhetoric, leading to its normalization?”*, was answered by analysing the election programmes of the left-wing political parties. This revealed that some left-wing parties lean towards the centre on the topic of immigration, more than they did in 2012. Other parties reject the problematization of immigration and the militarization of the European border, more than they did in 2012. Two small parties directly attack the far-right in the political arena. The other parties only respond to the existence of exclusivist rhetoric in general. There is a lack of analysis and recognition of the reasons behind the normalization of this rhetoric, including a self-reflection by the left. There is also a lack of strong opposition or aggressive response to the far-right to be found in the left-wing election programmes.

The theoretical framework mentioned the work of Jaap van Donselaar, who argued in 1993 that racist, fascist, and national socialist organizations had not managed to become mainstream. This was not because there was a lack of a great leader within these organizations, but because there had been a consistently strong resistance against the ideas that such organizations were spreading. The outcomes of the above analysis are worrying because they show that this has since changed. The far-right is growing within the political arena, and the far-right’s ideas are being copied by established right-wing and centrist parties. The left fails to keep up the previously strong resistance against the far-right. All of this has resulted in the normalization of far-right exclusivist rhetoric by political parties in the

Netherlands. It is necessary for the left-wing to resist this normalization by staying true to its principles of inclusion and equality. This is important when considering future developments in research on normalization, because it reveals a different way of looking at normalization. Normalization is not only the result of strategic actions by those who wish to normalize the abnormal. It is also the consequence of what happens when those who are able to resist normalization choose to remain passive.

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