They did it!
*The content, effects, and mechanisms of blame attribution in populist communication*

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Many would start this section by arguing how hard it can be to complete a PhD project. To be honest, finishing my dissertation has not been the biggest challenge life presented me with so far. Of course, I have experienced some ups and downs over the past two and a half years. And yes, times of frustration came by and passed on. But this is all part of the deal. I have enjoyed working on my dissertation so much that the good times significantly and substantially outweigh the bad times. One of the key explanatory factors of this positive outcome is the support of a great number of people. In hypothetical conditions in which these people are absent, the PhD project would be a – again significantly and substantially – greater challenge. I may not be able to include all names in my model, but I will now mention those who I would like to thank in particular.

First of all, I would like to thank the five members of my dissertation committee: Frank Esser, Jan Kleinnijenhuis, Sarah de Lange, Rens Vliegenthart and Bert Bakker. These scholars have all worked on highly relevant, inspiring research that sparked my own interests and clarified various concepts in political communication and populism. It is therefore a great honor that these scholars are willing to be part of the defense committee.

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a few examples of the many ways in which Linda and Claes have contributed to my dissertation, and I thank the both of them for guiding me so well during this project.

Over the past years, I experienced the privilege of being part of the renowned ASCoR family. On an institutional level, ASCoR has provided me with optimal working facilities, research and conference budgets, inspiring lectures, superb methods courses, good coffee, and, albeit a bit less excellent, PowerPoint templates. The role of the environment in which I worked, and the tools provided to me, should not be underestimated. I was spoiled with all intellectual and material privileges provided to me, and I would not have been able to complete my dissertation without these resources.

But of course, it is the people within this institution that really made the difference, and I owe a lot to many people working at ASCoR. Starting in a more or less chronological order, Rens introduced me to the Political Communication department at ASCoR. As a Research Master student, I had the privilege to be supervised by Rens. Thanks to his enthusiasm and knowledge on framing research, I became interested in political communication, and academic research more generally. Because he hinted at a vacancy for a PhD position on populism and the media, I was introduced to ASCoR.

I had the pleasure of being surrounded by a wonderful and supportive group of fellow PolComm/CorpComm PhD candidates. In a non-particular order of appearance, I want to mention Guus, Tom P, Sjoerd, Jasper, Sabine, Alyt, Toni, Anne, Jelle, Jeroen, Bas, Carlos, Björm, Nadine, Anna, and Tom D. Because of their presence, the office environment on the 8th floor really felt like home. Not only did they provide me with excellent feedback in the PhD Clubs, their support and friendship exceeded the working environment, such as at the many occasions in which we had drinks after work. Therefore, it is an honor that Sjoerd and Tom are supporting me and this work as my paranymphs.

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During my PhD, I was introduced to an international network of communication science scholars in the COST Action on populist communication. It was a great experience to participate in conferences, working groups, dinners, drinks, and all other social and academic events in a number of beautiful European cities. Specifically, I would like to thank Desirée Schmuck and Jörg Matthes for hosting me
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Michael Hameleers,
Amsterdam, April 2017.