Demonisation and electoral support for populist radical right parties

A temporary effect

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Since the 1980s, Western Europe has experienced the surge of populist radical right parties. In an attempt to ward off these electoral newcomers, established parties have pursued strategies of disengagement, such as exclusion and de-legitimisation. This study examines the electoral effects of an excessive form of de-legitimisation, which we label 'demonisation'. We estimate the effects of demonisation on electoral support for the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) and its predecessor *Groep Wilders*. Time series analyses show that demonisation has a negative effect on electoral support, but only for *Groep Wilders*. Once the populist radical right party has made a successful entry into the party system, demonisation does not have its intended consequences.

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1. Introduction

In response to the rise of populist radical right parties, the political establishment in several Western-European countries has pursued strategies of exclusion and de-legitimisation (e.g. Downs, 2001; Husbands, 2002; Widfeldt, 2004).[1] Subsequently, populist radical right parties have complained that the political establishment 'demonised' them (e.g. Golsan, 2003; Happold, 2000; Tributsch, 1994; Verbeeck, 2003). However, while scholars have described certain actions of mainstream parties as demonisation (Downs et al., 2009; Golsan, 2003; Mouffe, 2005; Schafraad et al., 2009; Van Praag, 2005; Van Praag and Walter, 2013), no research exists into the (electoral) consequences of demonisation.

In this paper we study the effects of demonisation on electoral support by means of a number of time series analyses. We focus on the Dutch populist radical right *Freedom Party* (PVV) and its political predecessor *Groep Wilders*. In September 2004 Geert Wilders left the conservative-liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) to establish its own party the PVV. However, before the PVV was officially registered in February 2006, he operated under the name *Groep Wilders*. From registration up until the general elections in November 2006, Wilders' political movement was often described as *Groep Wilders-PVV*. Our analyses show that *Groep Wilders* suffered electorally from being demonised the entire time of its existence, as well as *Groep Wilders-PVV*. However, in later years, the PPV seems to have become immune to it. These results are theoretically as well as politically important.

Theoretically the findings are important because, as we will elaborate below, on the basis of extant literature, one might predict a positive or a negative effect of demonisation. The findings thus contribute to our knowledge of party competition in times of the surge of populist parties, as well as to our understanding of the nature of populist party support. Substantially, the findings are important because demonising one's political opponents is a controversial political strategy, which arguably polarizes society.

2. Defining demonisation

As far as we know, there is only one empirical study on demonisation, by Van Praag (2005). He defines demonisation as *portraying a person as the personification of evil*. Evidently, this

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[1] The study presented here is based on data that were collected in the context of a PhD-project. Parts of the text, especially the description of data and method are quite literally taken from the unpublished dissertation of Van Heerden S.C., *What did you just call me? A study on the demonization of political parties in the Netherlands between 1995 and 2011*, 2014, University of Amsterdam. Furthermore, this article is largely based on a working paper presented by the authors at the ECPR joint sessions in 2014.

prompts the follow-up question what exactly should be considered evil. What constitutes evil will vary across cultural and historical contexts. In the Middle Ages, heretics were probably seen as the embodiments of absolute evil. In the 21st Century in the Middle East it can be expected that many see the US government or the CIA as the embodiment of evil. During the 1950s, it was perhaps communism and/or fascism, which in the US were perceived to be the most evil regimes. To a large extent the concept of demonisation can thus be seen as an empty vessel that varies in its exact content, depending on the historical context in which it occurs.

We study the demonisation of populist radical right parties in the early 21st century. While we do not rule out the possibility that there may be other ways in which these parties can be 'demonised', our study focuses on one specific and obvious form of demonisation: *portraying a political actor as the embodiment of Nazism/ fascism.*

We consider this a form of demonisation, because due to the atrocities of the Nazi's and the crimes they committed during the Second World War, fascism is widely considered to represent absolute evil (see e.g., Van Praag, 2005). Ever since the Second World War, organisations associated with fascism and Nazism have been regarded as highly dangerous and these were therefore heavily combated (Fennema, 2000; Van Donselaar, 1995). Disgust of Nazism/fascism is not exclusive to the Netherlands. Adler-Nissen states that Nazi-Germany is considered a paradigmatic case of 'evil' in international relations, and that it represents one of the most lasting negative state images (2014). In many Western European countries, such as the Netherlands, but also in Belgium, Germany, France and Austria, it is illegal to establish a fascist party, and being a member or founder of a Nazi/fascist organisation could lead to legal prosecution (Van Donselaar, 1995). While the atrocities of the Nazi's are in terms of the number of victims comparable to those of other totalitarian regimes, such as communist China or the Soviet Union under Stalin, adherents of those ideologies are not prosecuted in the same way as fascists.

The horrific events of the Second World War are deeply embedded in a collective moral discourse (Braun, 1994: Art, 2006; Lang, 1992; Van Donselaar, 1995; Walzer, 1977). For the purpose of this study, it is important to point out that many populist radical right parties themselves do not wish to be associated with the extreme right (see Mudde, 2007; Van der Brug et al., 2014). This is especially the case for the party that we study, which is very favourable to Israel when foreign relations are at stake.

Having defined demonisation in general and in a specific context, it remains the question what its status is in the political debate. It is here argued that on a continuum from friendly to hostile communication, demonisation is the extreme of the scale. Other forms of negative communication exist as well, such as shaming, questioning, provoking and strong criticism, but arguably these forms are less hostile. De Luca and Buell (2005) state that deciding where the dividing line is between demonisation and other harsh attacks, poses itself a deeply moral and political dilemma. Arguably the most problematic distinction is that between stigmatisation and demonisation. According to Goffman (1963) a stigma is an attribute that is deeply discrediting, sometimes also called a failing, a shortcoming or a handicap. He speaks of a 'spoiled identity'. A stigmatised person is reduced "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one." (1963: 12). Stigmatisation generally concerns certain kinds of groups, like disabled people, jobless people, homeless people or ethnic minorities. Stigmatisers turn characteristics of their targets into a stigma indicating that the bearer is morally defective and should be shunned. Stigmatisation is thus a threat to a person's identity, and can serve as an instrument to keep people down (Link and Phelan, 2014; Major and O'Brien, 2005).

Although the concepts of stigmatisation and demonisation show much similarity, stigmatisation is a more general concept while demonisation is more specific. Stigmatisation covers a whole range of attributes, while demonisation concerns to the most extreme allegations one can make within a specific context. Furthermore, while demonisation is considered foremost a political concept, stigmatisation is considered foremost a sociological concept. Stigmatisation largely includes rejection by society based on a perceived weakness, failure or handicap, often recognized by physical appearances. Demonisation implies a rejection based on the perception that an actor harbours evil, often recognized by intellectual expression. Stigmatised people are perceived abnormal, but not necessary dangerous.

3. Demonisation and electoral support

There are two main strategic responses established parties can choose from in an attempt to electorally weaken populist radical right parties: engage or disengage (Downs, 2001; Husbands, 2002; Widfeldt, 2004). When established parties opt for strategies of engagement, they seek to tame populist radical right parties by entrenching them in the political system and granting them legislative or governing responsibilities (Downs et al., 2009; also see Bale, 2003, 2008; Bale et al., 2010; De Lange, 2012). When established parties opt for strategies of disengagement, they seek to decrease electoral support for populist radical right parties by ostracizing them. Clearly, demonisation is a strategy of disengagement: it is a way to indicate that the party in question must be regarded as a dangerous political outcast that threatens democracy. In that sense, demonisation can be seen as a specific form of negative campaigning.

Particularly in the US context negative campaigning is quite common and although conclusive evidence is absent, the popular view is that this is an effective strategy. However, while there are negative campaigns that were successful, there are also multiple examples of unsuccessful negative campaigns. What's more, going negative can backfire. In general, voters dislike negative campaigning, especially when the candidates attack personal traits. Thus, attacking parties may gain marginally, but they also risk losing support (Lau et al., 2007). Therefore parties have to make a careful cost-benefit analysis before they engage in negative campaigning. Most literature on negative campaigning focuses on a two-party system, but the dynamic is arguably even more complex in a multi-party system, where a number of parties of various sizes exist. First, in a multi-party system parties have to carefully consider whether a negative strategy could jeopardize future government coalition formation. Secondly, in a multi-party system a decrease in support for the party under attack is less likely to translate into a vote gain for the attacker, since also other contenders may profit (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010).

Elmelund- Præstekær and Svensson (2014) find that with an increasing number of parties, campaigns tend to become more negative, due to higher number of competitors. The authors further find modest support for the expectation that negativity increases when the share of parties without coalition potential is higher. When parties expect that chances are slim they will form a governing coalition with their opponents after the campaign they are less inclined to hold back (also see Walter et al., 2012). This fits the notion of a political outsider that profiles itself by fierce anti-establishment rhetoric, a feature that often characterizes populist radical right parties. In turn, parties with better coalition potential might respond to such attacks without constraints, since they don't expect to govern with the political outsider either. In general, parties are more likely to go negative when they are subjected to negative campaigning themselves (Damore, 2002). Moreover, Van

Spanje (2010) shows that parties are more likely to pursue a strategy of disengagement when they can convincingly accuse another party of ideologies that are widely perceived as unacceptable.

While the PVV/*Groep Wilders* was not a serious contestant for office in the first years after it was founded, it could attract voters motivated by different considerations. There are two opposing perspectives on the potential supporters of radical right parties. One perspective holds that these voters are mainly policy oriented and the other that they are mainly motivated by a desire to express discontent with the 'elite'. These two perspectives lead to opposing predictions on the electoral consequences of demonisation. The notion that these supporters are policy oriented, leads to the prediction that voters will support populist radical right parties when they agree with their program and when they perceive this party as legitimate and effective (Bos and Van der Brug, 2010; Van der Brug et al., 2005; also see Eatwell, 2003). Building on this, Van Spanje and De Vreese (2014) formulate two reasons that predict a drop in electoral support for populist radical right parties once these parties face legal prosecution. Legal prosecution is different from demonisation, but we expect the causal mechanism to apply equally. First, when a politician is charged with a criminal offence, this can considerably lower its party's legitimacy. The party is associated with unlawful behaviour and -justified or unjustified-its record is no longer irreproachable. Second, the perceived effectiveness of a party might suffer from prosecution, mainly from a reduced willingness of other political actors to cooperate with the defendant's party because the politician in question has been discredited. Thus, similar to negative campaigning, the party's reputation is damaged and therefore it risks losing support.

A clear strategy of disengagement is the formation of a *cordon sanitaire*. For example, Pauwels (2011) shows that the decline of the Belgian Flemish Bloc (VB) can be understood as a consequence of the party's permanent opposition status due to consistent containment by the establishment. In the end, voters deemed the party irrelevant. However, while there are reasons to expect that strategies of disengagement impair the electoral success of populist radical right parties, Downs et al. argue that 'the evidence from select countries suggests that strategies of isolation, ostracism and demonisation prove surprisingly ineffective at rolling back or even containing threats to the democratic order […]' (2009:152). The authors further conclude that strategies of disengagement often yield unintended or undesired consequences. Strategies of disengagement may actually *increase* electoral support for populist radical right parties (e.g. Van Spanje and Van der Brug, 2009).

Indeed, the study by Van Spanje and De Vreese (2014) suggests that the decision to prosecute Wilders for hate speech did increase its electoral support. The authors provide three explanations for an increase in support when pursuing legal action, which apply equally to demonisation. First, the defendant's party most likely gains a lot of media attention by being prosecuted, and most research confirms that media attention has an overall positive effect on the electoral performance of political parties (Van Aelst et al., 2008). Second, prosecution can lead to a stronger association between the defendant's party and the issue of immigration, which amplifies the party's 'issue ownership' and that can be electorally beneficial (Petrocik, 1996; Van der Brug, 2004). Third, the electorate perceives an issue as more important when it gets more media attention (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). An increase in the perceived importance of the immigration issue would again benefit electoral support for populist radical right parties, since they own these issues (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007; Walgrave and De Swert, 2004).

The reasoning so far has been based on the presumption that voters for radical right parties are policy oriented and behave in an instrumental manner. Another perspective is that they are largely protest voters, whose main motivation is to express discontent with the elite. To the extent that this is true, demonisation would increase support for these 'outsiders'. Particularly when populist radical right parties successfully maintain that their linkage to Nazism/fascism entails nothing more than a knee-jerk attack, demonisation provides an opportunity to exploit the role of the victim. When voters get the impression that a party is hit below the belt, the party becomes the underdog and could gain the voters' sympathy. Seen as a dishonest attack, demonisation can attract protest voters, especially those who are already dissatisfied with the establishment. So, Downs (2002) argues that an overeager penchant for political correctness only seems to fuel support for populist radical right parties.

In sum, there are sound theoretical reasons to expect the effect of demonisation on electoral support for populist radical right parties to go both ways (reducing or increasing support).

3.1. Timing

In line with Art (2007), we expect timing to be of crucial importance when it comes to the effect of strategies of de-legitimisation (also see Husbands, 2002). According to Art (2007) strategies of de-legitimisation are most likely to have a negative effect when parties are not fully established yet. In the early stages of their establishment, political newcomers are most vulnerable to elite cues suggesting that a party is illegitimate. When a party has attracted a loyal core of supporters, and party officials have become entrenched in legislative bodies, it becomes harder for the political establishment to convincingly dismiss the party leadership as Nazi's. Efforts to de-legitimise populist radical right parties will then become less productive or even counter-productive (also see Beyens et al., 2015), particularly when the political establishment has already cooperated with the populist radical right party. Conversely, demonisation is most likely to decrease the electoral support for such parties, when the party has just been founded. Once the establishment has granted them some legitimacy, populist radical right parties are more likely to credibly discard demonisation as a knee-jerk attack.

Taking into account the conditional effect of timing, it is expected that demonisation will decrease the electoral success of *Groep Wilders*/PVV during the first years after the party was founded, but to have a positive effect on its popularity in the period thereafter.

3.2. The context of this study

We study the effect of demonisation on support for the PVV and its predecessor *Groep Wilders*. Party leader and founder Geert Wilders originally gained a parliamentary seat as a member of the right-wing liberal party the VVD, but after breaking away from this party in September 2004, he decided to keep his parliamentary seat to pursue his own political objectives. Until the PVV officially registered in February 2006, he operated under the name *Groep Wilders*. From registration up until the general elections in November 2006, Wilders' political movement was described as *Groep Wilders*-PVV. In the elections of 2006, the PVV obtained 9 seats in parliament (out of 150). In line with many other populist radical right parties in Europe, the party stood out by its fierce anti-establishment rhetoric. Despite the fact that the party became increasingly established, voters most likely still considered the PVV a political outsider (also see Bos and Van der Brug, 2010). In the 2010 elections, the PVV won an overwhelming 24 seats in parliament (equal to a 16 per cent vote share). More importantly, it became the official support partner of the minority government

coalition, formed by the two established parties VVD and Christendemocratic CDA. In the meantime Wilders had also become one of the longest serving members of parliament, adding to his party's established status.

We collected data for the period from September 2004 when Wilders broke with the VVD and started his own party until December 2011. Three periods should be distinguished: 1) September 2004 until November 2006, when Wilders gained his first electoral victory, 2) November 2006 until the elections of June 2010 when the PVV gained its second big victory, and 3) from September 2010 onwards when the PVV became a coalition partner. Clearly, the PVV fulfilled different political roles in every single period, transforming from a political outsider to a fully established party. In order to take into account a possible effect of timing, each of the three periods is analysed separately.

3.3. Media effects

Research on media-effects often focus on short-term or even immediate responses to media exposure. While repeated exposure to certain types of messages may have long-term effects through processes of learning, the effects of a limited number of messages have been shown to exert short-term effects only (e.g., Bushman and Huesmann, 2006; Van der Pas et al., 2011). In our study, we would therefore mainly expect short-term effects of instances of demonisation. Two types of short-term effects can be distinguished: an immediate effect that causes a fluctuation in the baseline disposition of an individual, and an immediate effect that causes a shift in the baseline disposition of an individual. The latter suggests that behavioural intentions or attitudes change as a result of exposure to certain media material, but this change is not observed beyond a few days after. The former suggests that the alteration after exposure lasts for a relatively long time. We expect that demonisation crosses some kind of moral threshold, causing an individual to disapprove of the party in question (particularly when the party is still it its infancy), or to disapprove of the actor that demonises, increasing support for the demonised party. Although we do not rule out that demonisation has long run effects, whereby media exposure gradually alters a person's baseline, this study focuses on the short-term effects (Potter, 2011).

4. Method and data

In order to estimate the effects of demonisation on the electoral support for populist radical right parties, we employ ARIMA time series analyses on weekly aggregate level data. Because of the sequential nature of the data, time series analyses enable us to make strong claims about causal relationships (Hollanders and Vliegenthart, 2008; Vliegenthart, 2007). As a robustness check, we will also estimate our models by means of a VAR-analysis, which allows for the possibility of reverse causality.

4.1. Measuring demonisation

Our main sources for measuring demonisation are five Dutch national newspapers and three national opinion weeklies, published between September 2004 and December 2011. Articles were initially selected based on the following requirement: the name of the PVV (abbreviation or full name) and/or Wilders (thereby including Groep Wilders and Geert Wilders) has been used in combination with a term that is strongly associated with Nazism/fascism. In order to find these articles, a tailor made dictionary was

developed that includes an extensive list of search terms that refer to Nazism/fascism.[2] After selecting articles in an automatic way, they were coded manually, whereby it was determined whether this combination indeed indicated political demonisation as defined. In total 967 instances of political demonisation of the PVV/Groep Wilders were found. The inter-coder reliability of the content analysis was assessed by asking two coders to code 25 articles independently. There was full agreement between the two coders on the question whether or not this was an instance of demonisation. So, we are confident that the articles are coded in a highly reliable way (Lombard et al., 2002).[3]

Data for demonisation have been obtained solely through printed national news media, which evidently limits the scope of the analyses and introduces a possible bias. For example, Walter and Vliegenthart (2010) have demonstrated that negative campaigning in newspapers focus more on personal traits than other communication channels. This could imply that demonisation occurs more often in written media compared to, for example, televised debate. Although it is acknowledged that a possible bias exists, there are two reasons why we do not consider this to be a real problem. First, since the Netherlands has a relatively high newspaper readership (Aaldering and Vliegenthart, 2016) it is expected that the public largely experience demonisation the way it has been covered in the written media. Second, the time series analyses estimate effects by assessing whether increases or decreases in demonisation are followed by changes in support for the populist radical right party that is demonised. There are no reasons to assume that printed media sources are biased in measuring fluctuations in demonisation.

Furthermore, we have incorporated overall media attention to the PVV/Groep Wilders in our measurement of demonisation. Most research confirms that the degree of media attention for parties contributes to their electoral successes (see Koopmans and Muis, 2009; Van Aelst et al., 2008; Vliegenthart et al., 2012). The degree of demonisation is also expected to influence electoral standing, either in a negative or positive way. Therefore, it is important to control for overall media attention, because when a party benefits from a relative large degree of media attention, but is demonised at the same time, the effect of demonisation is possibly cancelled out or enlarged by the media attention. For this reason, we have divided the number of articles that contain demonisation by the overall number of articles about Groep Wilders/PVV that week, constructing a variable that measures the proportion of demonisation in the media.

4.2. Dependent variable

The dependent variable electoral support is taken from aggregate weekly statistics reported by the Dutch polling institute Peil.nl. Each week Peil.nl interviewed at least 3000 respondents. Peil.nl uses a self-registered online panel to collect its data. Thus, it restricts its respondents to users of the Internet, and more importantly, to people who self-registered. Although Peil.nl controls for these particular attributes, concerns have been raised that some parties are still structurally over- or underrepresented based on the characteristics of their potential voters. A structural over- or under representation of voters for the PVV/Groep Wilders poses no problem, as long as the gain/loss estimates from week to week are valid, because these weekly changes are analysed and not the levels. To

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[2] This dictionary included more than 84 potential referrals.

[3] At a later time, two more coders joined the team. Usually, all coders perform a reliability test. However, taken into account the full agreement between the first two coders, we believe that our codebook leaves little room for subjective differences.

scrutinize the data, the *Peil.nl* polling data for the PVV were compared to the TNS-NIPO polling data for the PVV, and although the TNS-NIPO data show substantial gaps over time, there is a very strong correlation (0.93) between the aggregate data collected by TNS-NIPO and those collected by *Peil.nl*. We are thus confident that the data provide valid estimates of over time fluctuations in support for the PVV.

The three periods of the time series cover 381 weeks in total, of which 10 are missing, mainly during the summer and Christmas holidays. Since our analyses require uninterrupted time series, these gaps have been filled using data interpolation.[4]

4.3. ARIMA-modelling: step by step

A suitable method for analysing a one-directional relationship over time, employing aggregate time series, is Auto Regressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) modelling, also known as Box-Jenkins transfer modelling (Box and Jenkins, 1970). As aggregate time series with 30 or more time points are relatively scarce in political science, these methods are relatively unknown. Examples of studies using these methods in political science are Mishler and Sheehan (1993), Box-Steffensmeier et al. (2004) and Boef and Keele (2008). When the causality is theoretically expected to run both ways, political scientists tend to employ Vector Autoregression Models (VAR-models), including a Granger Causality test (e.g. Freeman, 1983; MacKuen et al., 1992; Chanley and Rahn, 2000). Since our theoretical model assumes an effect of demonisation on electoral support for the PVV, we present the results of an ARIMA model here. Yet, as we cannot rule out the possibility of an effect in the opposite direction, we also present results of a VAR-model and associated Granger causality, as a robustness check.

ARIMA modelling assumes that a variable's own past in part explains its current value. Thus, before adding any explanatory variables, the series' endogenous dynamics have to be captured by way of modelling its own past (Vasileiadou and Vliegenthart, 2014). The necessary steps in these types of analyses are: 1) testing for stationarity 2) correctly accounting for the series own past 3) adding independent variables.

As a first step, ARIMA requires all time series included in the analyses to be stationary. A time series variable is stationary 'if its probability distribution does not change over time' (Stock and Watson, 2012: 579). The stationarity of a series is generally tested with the help of the Augmented Dickey-Fuller test. A series might be non-stationary, for example, when it has a clear downward or upward trend. Usually, a series is made stationary (the trend is removed), by taking the difference between the current and previous value (Vliegenthart, 2007).

The second step is to make sure that the series own past is correctly taken into account.[5] It is important to correct for a series own past, in order to avoid finding effects of other variables on the series that are in fact spurious (and thus are actually explained by

the predictive power of the series own past). Adding autoregressive (AR) and moving average (MA) terms to the model can adequately correct for a series past. AR terms resemble the effects of previous values of the series on the current value, while MA terms represent the influence of the residuals from these previous values on the current value (Vliegenthart, 2007). To determine how many terms are added to the model, you may first look at plots of the Autocorrelation Function (ACF) and the Partial Autocorrelation Function (PACF) of the variable. The ACF is the autocorrelation of the variable with itself at different times. The PACF is the correlation that remains after removing the effects of autocorrelation at shorter time lags. A visual inspection of significant negative positive spikes per lag for both the ACF and PACF, can indicate which model fits best. However, sometimes this interpretation is not straightforward, and possibly more than one model specification fulfils the ARIMA model requirements. Therefore, information criteria such as the AIC and BIC can be used to compare models. Based on log-likelihood with the number of added model parameters, the AIC is a relative measure of model fit. The BIC differs in how it penalizes for adding model parameters, but the interpretation is similar (Klein Entink et al., 2011). As a rule, the model with the smallest AIC/BIC value has the best fit. The model fit indicates how well the complexity of the model and the data under investigation are attuned to each other, whilst passing the diagnostic tests. The aim is to specify a model that is as efficient (parsimonious) as possible. Thus, determining how many AR/MA terms are added to the model is strictly an empirical process, and not theoretically driven (Vasileiadou and Vliegenthart, 2014).

Ultimately, the residuals of the model should not contain any autocorrelation. At this point, all time related structure in the time series variable is accounted for by the ARIMA model coefficients. When the squared residuals of a time series change systematically over time, this could point to a problem of heteroscedasticity.[6] As a correction, the logged values of a series should then be used.[7]

Once the ARIMA model is properly specified, the third and last step is to add the independent variables. At this point, the researcher needs to specify how many lags are added to the explanatory variable. This is mainly a theoretical consideration. After how many lags (time units) do you expect an effect on the dependent variable? It should be noted that the independent variables also have to be stationary, and that once the dependent variable is differenced; all independent variables have to be differenced. Lastly, it is required that the residuals be a white noise process.

We expect to see a decrease/increase in party support for the PVV/*Groep Wilders* shortly after demonisation took place. However, it is unclear at what point in the week *Peil.nl* executes its survey, as well as in what time span the 3000 respondents fill it out. Most likely this will influence the estimation of the effect of demonisation. For example, when demonisation occurs at the end of the week, its expected effect may not be captured by the first following polling results, because data have been obtained before demonisation took place. In order to cover at least one full week after demonisation took place, the effects are estimated both with a lag of one week and a lag of two weeks in all models.

5. Results

Figs. 1 and 2 provide graphs with descriptive information about the time series used in this paper. It should be noted that they describe the data before the series have been logged and/or

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[4] Based on the range of known values, new values were constructed. Although estimation errors cannot be ruled out, the gain of this practice is of greater value than the possible loss in accuracy. Normally, one stays clear from data interpolation when it comes to time-series analysis because you run the risks of artificially blowing op the autocorrelation of the series. However, since the missing values are very limited, and the autocorrelation of the series is not topic of investigation, data interpolation has been used. Moreover, when missing values are treated as missing in the analysis, this does not alter the results. Besides, since Dutch parliamentary recesses largely coincide with these public holidays, it is fair to expect relative stable political attitudes during these periods, and thus relative stable polling results. The fact that most before and after data points hardly vary from each other supports this notion, and choice of data estimation.

[5] The underlying idea is that values in a series do not arise out of the blue, but that they are largely dependent on previous values (Vliegenthart, 2007).

[6] The Ljung-Box Q test is used to test whether residuals resemble white noise.

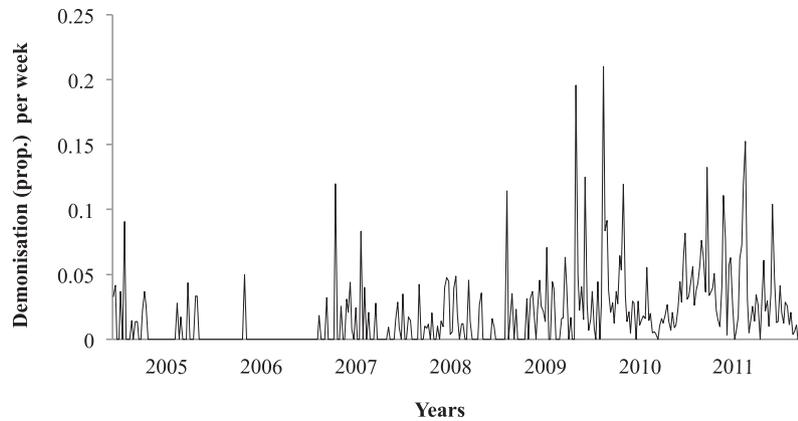[7] During the first period *Groep Wilders*-PVV is demonised 19 times.

Fig. 1. Proportion of demonisation in the media of the PVV/*Groep Wilders* per week, between 2004 and 2011.
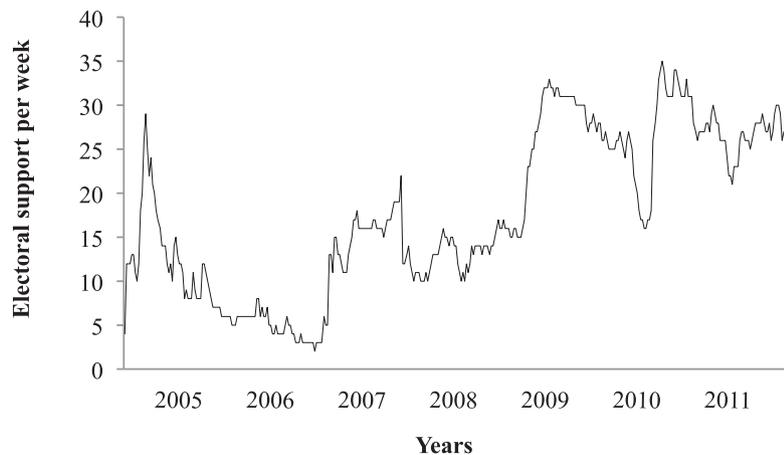

Fig. 2. Electoral support for the PVV/*Groep Wilders* per week, between 2004 and 2011.

differenced. Fig. 1 shows that the proportion of demonisation in the media varies considerably within and between the three different periods, also the polling results (Fig. 2) show a lot of variation. Fig. 1 shows that *Groep Wilders*, and from February 2006 onwards *Groep Wilders*-PVV, is demonised sparsely during the first period. Nevertheless, it was still demonised in about 15 per cent of the weeks (17 out of 115).[8]

Table 1 shows the estimated effect of the proportion of demonisation in the media on electoral support during the first period.[9] Model 1a is a univariate ARIMA model, where the dependent series is modelled in such a way that it correctly takes into account its own past. More specifically, all time related structure in the dependent series electoral support is accounted for by adding an AR term.[10] Model 1a shows that the ARIMA model

Table 1
Influence of demonisation on electoral support for *Groep Wilders* (subsequently *Groep Wilders*-PVV) between September 2004 and November 2006.

	Model 1a	T	Model 1b	T
Autocorrelation (t-12)	−0.42***	−5.00	-0.38***	−5.31
Party is demonised (t-1)	—	—	−26.10**	−3.11
Party is demonised (t-2)	—	—	−28.54***	−5.17
AIC		437.13		402.23
N (obs)		114		112

Note: *p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; ***p ≤ 0.001 (two-tailed); - variable is not included in the model.

coefficient is indeed significant. Model 1b shows that the proportion of demonisation has a significant negative effect (−1.10, significant at p ≤ 0.01) on electoral support in both the first and the second week after demonisation took place in the written media. High proportions of demonisation have a negative effect on electoral support. The size of the effect is quite substantial, it suggests that when *Groep Wilders* and/or *Groep Wilders*-PVV is demonised in all articles that cover the party, it would lose over 26 parliamentary seats (−26.10). However, the fractions of demonisation in the media are much lower in this data set, varying between 0.01 and 0.09. Thus, more realistically, for this period an increase from no demonisation in the media to a fraction of .0l leads to a decrease of around a quarter of a seat, while a fraction of 0.09 leads to a decrease of almost two and a half parliamentary seats for *Groep Wilders* and/or *GroepWilders*-PVV.

Additional models were analysed that included multiple dummy variables marking events that were expected to have

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[8] ARIMA modelling assumes that the included variables are distributed symmetrically. Often statistical tests for normality are considered too strict, since even the slightest departments from normality can reject the assumption of a symmetrical distribution. An alternative is to interpret the skewness (a measure of symmetry) and kurtosis (a measure of the degree to which a distribution is 'peaked') values of a series. Skewness values higher than 3 and kurtosis values higher than 20 are considered a serious problem (Kline, 2011). Log transformation can correct for series that are not normally distributed.

[9] All series in this model have been differenced once. The augmented Dickey-Fuller test indicates for each included series that they are stationary, and the Ljung-Box Q test indicates that the residuals are white noise.

[10] The substantive effects of demonisation presented in Model 1b remain negative and significant when we do not add an AR/MA term to the model. However, the AIC model fit decreases from 403 to 411.

heavily influenced the polling results for *Groep Wilders* and *Groep Wilders*-PVV. Results, however, remained very similar. The first added event variable is the political murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh that took place on November 4th, 2004. An Islamic fundamentalist, provoked by the filmmaker's fierce stance against the Islam, murdered him in broad daylight on a busy Amsterdam street. The murder severely sharpened the debate about the multicultural society and freedom of speech. The second event is the announcement of a new political party, the *Partij voor Rechtvaardigheid, Daadkracht en Vooruitgang* (PRVD) in 2005. The party was founded by a popular Dutch crime fighter Peter R. de Vries, who introduced the party as a strong advocate of a righteous society and hands-on politics. In the end, De Vries withdrew, but his announcement did temporarily stir up political competition. Results show that the proportion of demonisation remains to have significant negative effect in week one (-25.95 (T $= -2.64$) p $= 0.008$) and two (-27.80 (T $= -5.03$) p $= 0.000$). Furthermore, the model shows that the effects of the murder of Van Gogh and the entrance of the PRVD are insignificant. Thus, also with inclusion of several event variables, the effect of demonisation on electoral support remains significant.

Table 2 shows the effects of demonisation on electoral support in the second period under investigation.[11] It was unnecessary to add extra AR or MA terms to account for the dependent series own past, therefore model 1a presents the univariate ARIMA model constant coefficient. Model 2b shows that the proportion of demonisation has no significant effect on electoral support for the PVV when the party is in opposition. Again, additional models were analysed that included multiple dummy variables marking events that were expected to have heavily influenced the polling results for the PVV. Several of these event variables marked controversial statements made by Wilders: in 2007 Wilders stated that the *Koran* is equal to *Mein Kampf*; in 2008 Wilders presented its short anti-Islam film *Fitna*; and in 2009 Wilders proposed a tax on headscarves. None of the variables had a significant effect. Another event variable marked the entrance of the anti-immigration party *Trots op Nederland* (TON) in 2007, and the model shows that this had a significant negative effect (-5.01 (T $= -25.77$) p $= 0.000$) on party support for the PVV in week one. Lastly, two event variables were included for the decision to prosecute Wilders, and for the fall of the government officially supported by the PVV. Its effects were insignificant. Thus, also with inclusion of multiple event variables, the effect of demonisation on electoral support remains insignificant.

Table 3 shows the effects of demonisation on electoral support for the third period under investigation. Since it was unnecessary to add AR or MA terms, model 3a presents the univariate ARIMA model.[12] The analysis starts in September when the PVV agreed to formally support the minority government VVD-CDA.

Model 3b shows that demonisation has no significant effect on electoral support for the PVV once the party is a support partner of the government coalition. That is, similar to the second period under analysis, high proportional levels of demonisation do not influence party support for the PVV. Again, additional analyses

Table 2
Influence of demonisation on electoral support for the PVV between November 2006 and June 2010.

	Model 2a	T	Model 2b	T
Constant	0.03	−0.25	0.04	0.34
Party is demonised (t-1)	–	–	1.95	0.44
Party is demonised (t-2)	–	–	0.54	0.88
AIC		614.31		610.57
N (obs)		183		181

Note: *p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; ***p ≤ 0.001(two-tailed); - variable is not included in the model.

Table 3
Influence of demonisation on electoral support for the PVV between September 2010 and December 2011.

	Model 3a	T	Model 3b	T
Constant	−0.08	−0.53	-0.12	-0.73
Party is demonised (t-1)	–	–	−5.43	−1.47
Party is demonised (t-2)	–	–	−2.36	-0.40
AIC		204.27		199.02
N (obs)		63		61

Note: *p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; ***p ≤ 0.001 (two-tailed); - variable is not included in the model.

were performed that took into account several dummy variables that marked events that were expected to have influenced the polling results for the PVV during this period. One variable marked the departure of two PVV parliamentarians due to personal scandals. Another variable marked the acquittal of Wilders in June 2011.[13] We conclude that this null-finding is robust across various model specifications. Moreover, the null findings in Tables 2 and 3 as well as the significant effects in the first period (Table 1) remain when adding additional lags to the models.[14]

5.1. Robustness check: VAR-models

With ARIMA modelling we cannot rule out the possibility that electoral support for the PVV actually influences the proportion of demonisation in the media. Although we consider the unidirectional relationship we theorise most apparent, we have also estimated Vector Autoregression (VAR)-models for all three periods. A VAR model can disentangle the relationships between all variables in the model. The results of the VAR-analyses confirmed the findings of the ARIMA models. Parameter estimates and Granger causality tests show that in the first period, demonisation of the PVV lead to a significant (at the 0.01 level) decrease of support for this party, while no significant effects were found in the other periods. While the parameter estimates of reversed causality were significant in the first period, suggesting that an increase in popularity lead to a decrease in demonisation, the Granger causality test did not turn out significant. The results of the VAR-analysis for period 1

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[11] The dependent variable is differenced in order to accomplish stationarity. Subsequently, all independent variables in the models are also differenced. It was also necessary to take the logged values of demonisation in in order to reach acceptable skewness and kurtosis values. The residuals and squared residuals of all models in Table 2 resemble white noise.

[12] This result is remarkable since it opposes the finding by Van Spanje and De Vreese (2014) who conclude that the decision to prosecute Wilders caused an across-the-board increase in probabilities of voting for the PVV. However, their findings should not be readily dismissed since they performed a much more refined analysis in order to test the effect of prosecution on party support.

[13] All variables have acceptable skewness and kurtosis values. However, in order to obtain stationarity all variables have been differenced once. The residuals and squared residuals of all models in Table 3 resemble white noise.

[14] Extra models were estimated that incorporated lags up to 12 weeks. These models show that for the first period under analysis the negative effect of demonisation in week one and week two remains with the inclusion of lags up until the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th order. The significant effect remains in week one with the inclusion of up to ten lags. Furthermore, with the inclusion of lags up until the 4th order, the negative effect of demonisation is also significant in week 4. With inclusion of lags up until the 5th order, demonisation has a significant negative effect in the first four weeks. For the second period under analysis all models, up until the inclusion of a 12th order lag, show similar results: no significant effect for demonisation in the first two weeks. For the third period under analysis, the effect of demonisation remains insignificant, irrespective of the number of lags.

are presented in the appendix. The other results can be obtained from the authors.

6. Conclusions

In this paper we assessed the electoral consequences of a particular form of demonisation of the Dutch populist radical right party PVV and its predecessor *Groep Wilders* and *Groep Wilders*-PVV: Associating the party or its leader with Nazism/fascism. We acknowledged that demonisation is a context dependent phenomenon that can take different forms. In the recent Dutch context, however, comparing a party to fascism is an obvious way to demonise it. While this form of demonisation was not common practice in the Netherlands, it turned out to occur quite frequently. In the newspapers that we coded, the PVV/*Groep Wilders* was demonised 967 times in the years 2004 till 2011.

Our time series analyses showed that the proportion of demonisation in the media had a negative effect on electoral support, but *only* for *Groep Wilders* and *Groep Wilders*-PVV. In later periods, after the PVV obtained 9 seats in parliament, no significant effects were found of demonisation on the support for this party. These results largely support the claim by Downs et al. (2009) 'that strategies of isolation, ostracism and demonisation prove surprisingly ineffective at rolling back or even containing threats to the democratic order […]'. In the third period, the PVV was demonised substantially, however, without a notable effect.

These findings add to existing literature in two ways. First, they provide evidence that strategies of disengagement can generate their intended effect. Second, it confirms that timing is extremely important. Art (2007) stresses that strategies of disengagement might well prove ineffective or even yield unintended effects, once populist radical right parties have a loyal group of supporters, their party organisation have become strong, and when their politicians became entrenched in the local, state, or national legislatures (also see Beyens et al., 2015). Our results did indeed show that demonisation becomes ineffective over time.

Finally, this study has some limitations. A first issue at hand is to what extent these findings can be generalised. A relevant factor is the way national actors have dealt with populist radical right parties and demonisation in the past. In the Netherlands for example, demonisation became heavily charged after the political murder of the populist right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in 2002. Many voters had found it disproportionate that Fortuyn had been portrayed as a Nazi/fascist, and not long before his death Fortuyn had expressed the concern that demonisation had put him in physical jeopardy. After Fortuyn's murder, LPF's chair Peter Langendam concluded that 'the bullet had come from the left' and accused several political actors of causing hatred towards Fortuyn. This led to a heated public debate, which may have caused a strengthened aversion of the use of demonisation, hindering the likelihood of demonisation to generate its intended effect.

Second, this study uses aggregated data, which entails that it examined general patterns, and estimated average effects. Thereby, it fails to expose individual, or lower group level relationships between demonisation and levels of electoral support. Clearly, future research about lower level relationships would enable a deeper understanding of the underlying processes.

Third, real-life studies like ours can never claim to have fully ruled out alternative explanations for the relationships that one interprets as 'causal'. Some would therefore interpret Granger causality as 'only' representing a test of the predictive validity of the causal interpretation (e.g. Lechner, 2011). As Granger himself admitted, there is always the possibility that other variables drive the relationship between the two time series (Granger, 2004). This would be the case if another variable would be correlated with demonisation at t-1, which produces a change in PVV-support at t. We have tried to control for this as much as possible, but we admit that non-experimental research cannot rule out such a possibility. Moreover, if there would be long term-effects of demonisation, which are different than an additive sum of the short-term effects, our estimates of short-term effects could be biased. We have no theoretical reasons to think that such long-term effects would exist, but here again, we cannot rule out this possibility.

Finally, even though this study is based on a large and unique data collection, our conclusions are based on the finding of significant effects in the first period of our study only. Even though these effects were significant, we cannot fully rule out the possibility of a type-2 error. So, it is important to try to replicate our findings in different settings for different parties.

Despite these limitations, we think this study provides relevant insights into the consequences of demonisation. Results demonstrate that demonisation has no negative effect on electoral support for the PVV once the party won seats in parliament. Since demonisation can be considered as a particular form of negative campaigning, our findings relates to multiple studies that dismiss the claim that negative campaigning actually works. There is no consistent evidence that negative campaigning achieves the electoral results attackers desire. However, various studies have suggested that negative campaigning has unintended and but detrimental effects on the political system (Lau et al., 2007). Based on a meta-analytic reassessment they conclude that negative campaigning can lower feelings of political efficacy, trust in government and possibly the overall public mood. In the long run this could prove worrisome, especially since demonisation increased over the recent years. Given that demonisation may harm democracy in several ways, while as a strategy it becomes ineffective over time, campaign strategists, politicians and civil society actors are well advised not to resort to this strategy.

Funding

Appendix

Table 4
VAR-analysis of electoral support and proportion of demonisation in the media per week, between September 2004 and November 2006.

Electoral Support			
Electoral support (t-1)	0.11	1.18	
Electoral support (t-2)	−0.01	−0.10	
Demonisation (t-1)	−22.96	−2.57	**
Demonisation (t-2)	−25.29	−2.80	**
Constant	−0.07	−0.50	
Demonisation			
Electoral support (t-1)	0.00	0.96	
Electoral support (t-2)	0.00	1.44	
Demonisation (t-1)	−0.64	−7.22	***
Demonisation (t-2)	−0.22	−2.43	*
Constant	0.00	−0.10	
AIC		−1.89	
Obs		112	

Note: *$p \leq 0.05$; **$p \leq 0.01$; ***$p \leq 0.001$.

Table 5
Granger causality Wald tests.

Equation	Excluded	chi2	df	Prob > chi2
Electoral support	Demonisation	9.4939	2	0.01
Electoral support	ALL	9.4939	2	0.01
Demonisation	Electoral support	3.4312	2	0.18
Demonisation	ALL	3.4312	2	0.18

Results show that the proportion of demonisation in the media has a significant negative effect on electoral support. The Granger causality test further shows that estimations for electoral support as a dependent variable are significantly worse when demonisation would be excluded as an independent variable ($p = 0.01$) Thus, the hypothesis that demonisation does not Granger-cause electoral support is rejected.

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