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Publication date

2013

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Rooduijn, M. (2013). *A populist Zeitgeist? The impact of populism on parties, media and the public in Western Europe*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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A Populist Zeitgeist?

The Impact of Populism on Parties, Media and the Public in Western Europe

A Populist Zeitgeist?

The impact of Populism on Parties, Media and the Public in Western Europe

Various scholars have claimed that populism has become mainstream in Western Europe, and that we are therefore witnessing a populist 'Zeitgeist' in this part of the world. This dissertation puts this claim to the test. Have political parties, media and citizens indeed become increasingly populist and dissatisfied with politics? The findings are mixed. Although media have become increasingly populist and the message of populist parties has fueled political dissatisfaction among voters, mainstream parties have not become more populist over the years. Moreover, populist parties themselves have even become less populist after their initial successes. This indicates that, despite the large impact of populist parties on Western European societies, populism is not pervasive to the extent that we can speak of an all-encompassing populist Zeitgeist.

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ISBN 978-90-9027334-1

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Printed by: Almanakker, Oosterhout

Cover design: Esther Ris, www.proefschriftomslag.nl

Lay-out: Jeroen van Wijngaarden, www.proefschrift-opmaken.nl

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A POPULIST ZEITGEIST?

The Impact of Populism on Parties, Media and the Public in Western Europe

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom
ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties
ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op donderdag 21 maart 2013, te 10:00 uur

door

Matteo Rooduijn
geboren te Heerlen

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List of abbreviations

- AN Alleanza Nazionale (Italian right-wing party)
- BNP British National Party (UK right-wing party)
- CD Centrum Democraten (Dutch right-wing party)
- CDA Christen Democratisch Appèl (Dutch Christian democratic party)
- CdL Casa delle Libertà (Italian center-right party block)
- CDU Christlich Demokratische Union (German Christian democratic party)
- CMP Comparative Manifesto Project
- Cons Conservatives (UK conservative party)
- CSU Christlich Soziale Union (German Christian democratic party)
- D66 Democraten 66 (Dutch social liberal party)
- DC Democrazia Cristiana (Italian Christian democratic party)
- DF Dansk Folkeparti (Danish right-wing party)
- DS Democratici di Sinistra (Italian communist party)
- EES European Elections Studies
- EU European Union
- FDP Freie Demokratische Partei (German liberal party)
- FI Forza Italia (Italian conservative party)
- FML Full Maximum Likelihood
- FN Front National (French right-wing party)
- FPÖ Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Austrian right-wing party)
- FRP Fremskrittspartiet (Norwegian conservative party)
- LN Lega Nord (Italian right-wing party)
- LPF Lijst Pim Fortuyn (Dutch right-wing party)
- MSI Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian right-wing party)
- MVR Movimiento V República (Venezuelan communist party)
- PCF Parti Communiste Française (French communist party)
- PD Partito Democratico (Italian social democratic party)
- PdL Popolo della Libertà (Italian center-right party block)
- PDS Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (German communist party)
- PP Partito Popolare Italiano (Italian Christian democratic party)
- PS Parti Socialiste (French socialist party)

PSUV Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (Venezuelan communist party)
PvdA Partij van de Arbeid (Dutch social democratic party)
PVV Partij voor de Vrijheid (Dutch right-wing party)
RML Restricted Maximum Likelihood
RPR Rassemblement pour la République (French conservative party)
SEM Structural Equation Modeling
SVP Schweizerische Volkspartei (Swiss right-wing party)
SP Socialistische Partij (Dutch communist party)
SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (German social democratic party)
UDF Union pour la Démocratie Française (French conservative party)
UKIP United Kingdom Independence Party (UK right-wing party)
UMP Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (French conservative party)
VB Vlaams Belang (Flemish right-wing party)
VVD Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (Dutch liberal party)

Acknowledgments

Many people have contributed to bringing this dissertation into being and several of them have also made the preceding research process a very enjoyable one. I would like to take the opportunity to thank a number of them.

First of all, I would like to thank Wouter van der Brug and Sarah de Lange for their excellent supervision. It was a privilege to work with both of you. Wouter, your theoretical, methodological and stylistic guidance was indispensable. You taught me that one of the main challenges for (social) scientists is to identify the right puzzles. I hope that in the future we will find (and solve) more puzzles together. Sarah, it was great working with you. Your sharp but always constructive comments protected me from drowning in a pool of slippery concepts and sloppy argumentation. You made me a more precise thinker and, thereby, a much better academic. Wouter and Sarah, I am also very thankful for your enduring commitment. Even my occasional Sunday-morning e-mails received an immediate response...

Two other people were very important in the early phase of this project as well. Jos de Beus, you encouraged me to pursue my academic interests when I worked for you as a student-assistant, and helped me with my research proposal. I enjoyed our collaboration during the first few months of this research project very much. Catherine de Vries, you gave me a lot of helpful advice during the initial phase of this project on diverse topics such as methodology, teaching and mortgages.

Getting along with one's officemates is a prerequisite for a conducive working environment and I have been exceptionally lucky in this respect. Thank you very much Jasper Blom, Lutz Hofer, Madeleine Moret, Benno Netelenbos, Marii Paskov and Mihai Varga for your company, the discussions, and, of course, the full house drinks, the office songs, and the occasional German metal. Other AISSR colleagues whom I would like to thank for making the journey fun are Paul van Hooft, Elise van der Laan, Yulia Poskakukhina, Valentina di Stasio and Marloes van Westrienen.

This PhD trajectory would not have been nearly as enjoyable without the colleagues and friends with whom I have travelled to conferences and/or

summer schools abroad. Thank you Johannes von Engelhardt, Emma Folmer, Marijn van Klingeren, Daphne van der Pas, Annemarie Walter and Marc van de Wardt. I especially want to thank Elmar Jansen with whom I had the honor to share the presidency of the AISSR ‘relaxation’ (read: drinks) committee. I am glad that despite the brain damage that this must have caused, I have been able to finish this dissertation. And last, but not least, thank you Gijs Schumacher. We became friends during our first year as sociology students. Now, twelve years later, we are still friends and academic companions. I hope that this will form a good basis for the production of an unprecedented number of political science articles with titles reminiscent of old Rolling Stones songs.

I would also like to thank those scholars who have helped me to improve this dissertation with their critical questions and useful comments during (Comparative Politics PhD Club) meetings at the Department of Political Science. Thank you Tjitske Akkerman, Bouchra Arbaoui, Joost Berkhout, Armen Hakhverdian, Eelco Harteveld, Sjoerdje van Heerden, Ruud Koopmans, Tom van der Meer, Philip van Praag, Eefje Steenvoorden and Agnieszka Walczak. Kirk Hawkins and Teun Pauwels, I am very grateful for our collaboration. Teun, the third chapter of this dissertation could not have been written without your input; I look forward to joint projects in the future.

A special thanks goes to my fifteen great and reliable coders. Thank you Ina Allenhöfer, Renée Dubbeldeman, David Harding, Vanessa Jorissen, Suzy Kennedy, Giovanni Macca, Olivier Marcombes, Kitty van Muiswinkel, Lucas Neher, Ioana Pal, Camilla Pesce, Marie Piganiol, Stefanie Schellwies, Annefleur Stickel and Alexandra Vasileva. Thank you Nicolò Conti and Luca Verzichelli of the University of Siena for sharing with me your collection of Italian election manifestos.

Bram and Lutz, I am very glad to have you as my ‘paranimfen’ and friends. Bram, we became friends in high school. Later we also became roommates, colleagues and neighbors. I very much enjoyed our theatre performances, Biology classes, trips to Fanghetto, your exquisite meals, and our many, many alcohol-enriched evenings together. Sambuca-Lutz (the name says it all), we have enjoyed many such evenings as well. During the last four

years we succeeded admirably in combining the necessary stuff with some fun. I very much liked our ‘fieldwork’ trips to Collindale, Düsseldorf, Wupertal and The Hague (although I hate old newspapers ever since).

Of course, the support of family and friends outside the ivory tower of academia has been indispensable, as well. Thanks go to my family and friends, especially Bart, Bram, Diederik, Gijs, Kim, Laura, Marco, Mariëlle, Rémy, Theo, Ties, Tom, Wilma en Wouter. Most of all, I would like to thank Bianca for her unconditional support. Bianca, you are the love of my life and my best friend. Without you I would not be the cheerful man I am today.

I dedicate this dissertation to Jeroen, who is responsible for endowing me with the genes of a political sociologist – an essential to the entire endeavor.

Amsterdam, January 2013

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

A Populist Zeitgeist in Western Europe?

... today populist discourse has become mainstream in the politics of western democracies. Indeed, one can even speak of a populist *Zeitgeist*.

Cas Mudde, 2004, p. 542.

Introduction

In the last two decades, Western Europe has witnessed the upsurge of various so-called populist political parties and politicians. In Italy, the media-mogul and businessman Silvio Berlusconi and his party *Forza Italia* (FI) won the Italian parliamentary elections in 1994, 2001 and 2008. In the Netherlands, the eccentric politician Pim Fortuyn obtained 26 of the 150 Dutch parliamentary seats in 2002. In France, the nationalist Jean-Marie Le Pen and his *Front National* (FN) managed to reach the second round of the 2002 French presidential elections. These are only three examples. Other well-known Western European right-wing allegedly populist parties are the *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF) in Denmark, the *Vlaams Belang* (VB) in Belgium, and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in Austria. Notable left-wing allegedly populist parties are the *Socialistische Partij* (SP) in the Netherlands and *Die Linke* in Germany.

A great deal is already known about the *causes* of the rise of such parties (see Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008a; Mudde, 2004; Mény & Surel, 2002a). Much less is known, however, about the *consequences* of the populist upsurge. This dissertation addresses this topic and focuses on the impact of the rise of allegedly populist parties. The main goal is to assess whether the populist upsurge has caused populism to become mainstream. The study is founded on Mudde's (2004) claim that we are witnessing a populist *Zeitgeist* in western democracies. Mudde argues that populism has not remained restricted to the political rhetoric of allegedly populist parties only. Increasingly, populism has been incorporated by mainstream political parties as well. Although various scholars have made similar claims, and some of them have also supported these claims with examples of speeches of individual politicians (De Beus, 2009; Mair, 2002; Mazzoleni, 2008; Mény & Surel, 2002b), a systematic

comparative investigation across cases and over time is still lacking. Moreover, the Zeitgeist-claim has previously only focused on the question of whether populism has become mainstream with regard to *political parties*. Yet in order to speak of an actual all-embracing populist Zeitgeist, populism must also have become more widespread beyond the confined realm of party politics. After all, the term populist ‘Zeitgeist’ means a populist ‘spirit of the times’, which suggests a more comprehensive pervasiveness of populism. This dissertation expands Mudde’s framework and provides a comparative investigation into the impact of the populist upsurge with regard to three realms: the realm of political parties, the realm of the mass media and the realm of public opinion.

My guiding hypothesis is that the populist Zeitgeist is the result of a ‘spiral of populism’, in which the electoral success of allegedly populist parties has fuelled populism and dissatisfaction among all key actors in the electoral process.¹ This is expected to have occurred because the populist idea that the Good, homogeneous people are betrayed by Evil and corrupted elites is potentially very attractive to voters (see Canovan, 1981; De la Torre, 2010; Mény & Surel, 2002b), and thereby also to vote-seeking mainstream political parties and market-oriented mass-media (Mazzoleni, 2003, 2008). Moreover, increasingly populist parties and media might well have fuelled political dissatisfaction among voters (Van der Brug, 2003), and thereby the electoral success of allegedly populist parties again (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006).

This dissertation is highly relevant – both academically and politically – as populism is one of the most fervently discussed topics in Western European public debates (Taguieff, 1995). Because populism is often conceived of as a threat to liberal democracy, and therefore as a so-called ‘political pathology’ (Taggart, 2002), ‘[m]ost of [the contributions to the debates] are of an

¹ This idea of the ‘spiral of populism’ is inspired by the ‘spiral of cynicism’ thesis. According to this thesis, which was developed by Cappella and Jamieson (1997), strategic media coverage of politics fuels political distrust and cynicism, which again leads to low levels of engagement and participation.

alarming nature' (Mudde, 2004). For example, within the Dutch language, at least ten well-known political commentators have published books with the words 'populist' or 'populism' in the title.² Indeed, many of these commentators are concerned about the populist upsurge.³

Academic studies take a less alarming tone than these popular books; most of them (at least try to) refrain from moral judgments about populism. However, many scholarly studies also find that populism and liberal democracy are not fully compatible (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Arditì, 2004; Canovan, 1999; Kornhauser, 1959; Mény & Surel, 2002b; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2011; Taguieff, 1995; Urbinati, 1998). Because of this observed tension between populism and liberal democracy, it is important to assess to what extent populism has become mainstream. After all, if populism has remained restricted to the political fringes, it will most likely not be influential enough to affect the functioning of liberal democratic systems. However, if populism has affected other political and non-political actors as well – and thus has become mainstream – the rise of populism might have an impact on the functioning of liberal democracy.

This introductory chapter proceeds as follows. In the next section, I explain my definition of populism as a set of ideas. In the following part, I focus on Mudde's *Zeitgeist*-claim, which I expand to the realm of the mass media and the realm of public opinion. In the next two sections, I discuss the selection of cases and the data I collected. In a final section, I provide an outline of the dissertation.

² Blommaert, 2004; De Mul, 2011; Heijne, 2011; Lucardie & Voerman, 2012; Pels, 2011; Te Velde, 2010; Van Reybrouck, 2011; Van Rossem, 2010; Van der Zwan, 2003; Wagenaar, 2005; Zijderfeld, 2009.

³ Van Rossem (2010: 21, my translation), for instance, refers to populism as 'an ill weed that grows in the cleavage between political promises and political reality'. Zijderfeld (2009: 93-94, my translation) argues: 'Populism is political quicksand. It does not want party formation. It wants a movement; a movement which is based on emotions and impulses. Essentially, populism dismisses representative parliamentary democracy.'

Defining populism

One might distinguish three different approaches toward defining populism (see Jagers, 2006; Pauwels, 2012). Firstly, populism can be conceived of as a particular form of political organization. In the Latin American literature, for example, it is often emphasized that a populist movement is characterized by a strong leader who receives uninstitutionalized support from a heterogeneous group of people (Germani, 1978; Di Tella, 1997; Weyland, 2001). Similarly, in Western Europe, populism has been associated with loose movements with a strong, charismatic leader at the apex (Taggart, 1995, 2000). Secondly, populism can be conceptualized as a political style. Canovan (1999: 5) has argued that ‘Populist appeals to the people are characteristically couched in a *style* that is “democratic” in the sense of being aimed at ordinary people. Capitalizing on popular distrust of politicians’ evasiveness and bureaucratic jargon, they pride themselves on simplicity and directness’ (see also Bos et al., 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mazzoleni, 2003; Taguieff, 1995). Finally, populism can be defined as a particular ‘thin-centered ideology’ (see Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Canovan, 2002; Mudde, 2004, 2007) or ‘discourse’ (Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Laclau, 1977, 2005). Scholars who employ this latter approach have in common that they conceive of populism essentially as a set of ideas (see Hawkins et al., 2012). They define populism as a Manichaeian way of looking at democracy in which the Good side is equated with the will of the people, and the Evil side is equated with a conspiring elite. In this dissertation, populism is defined in accordance with this third approach – as a set of ideas. More specifically, I employ Mudde’s (2004: 543) definition of populism as ‘an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’. It is important to emphasize that Mudde does not conceive of populism as being a ‘full’ ideology such as liberalism, socialism or conservatism. Following Freedman (1998) and Canovan (2002), he has argued that populism is a ‘thin-centered ideology’: it does not offer an all-inclusive worldview, but only focuses on the

relationship between the people and the elite. It can therefore be easily combined with other ideologies on both the left and the right (Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000).

The first reason to employ this definition is that Mudde's *Zeitgeist*-claim is the point of departure for this dissertation. To make sure that I understand populism in a similar way as Mudde does, I employ the same definition. Secondly, and maybe even more importantly, in Chapter 2 of this dissertation I demonstrate that the lowest common denominator that prototypical populist actors across cases and over time share with each other is that they contrast the Good, homogeneous people with the Evil, corrupted elite. This indicates that Mudde's definition of populism is an appropriate 'minimal definition' for the concept, which can be employed in comparative research across cases and over time (see also Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012).

According to Mudde's definition, populism essentially consists of two elements: people-centrism and anti-elitism. Populism is people-centrist because it emphasizes the centrality and the sovereignty of the homogeneous people, and it claims that the general will of the people should be the point of departure for political decision-making (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969b; Mény & Surel, 2002b). The term 'the people' can have different meanings in different circumstances. It could refer, for instance, to the electorate, to farmers, to 'hardworking men' or to the nation (Canovan, 1981; Pasquino, 2008; Taggart, 2000). Often, however, it is rather unclear what populists refer to when talking about 'the people'.

Populism is anti-elitist because it accuses the elites of standing in the way of the centrality of the people (Mény & Surel, 2002b). The elite is accused of being arrogant, selfish, incompetent, and of having no idea of what ordinary people find important (Barr, 2009; Canovan, 2002). According to Mudde (2004: 546): 'In an often implicitly Rousseauian fashion, populists argue that political parties corrupt the link between leaders and supporters, create artificial divisions within the homogeneous people, and put their own interests above those of the people.' Anti-elitism often concerns a political elite, but it could just as well be about a cultural, economic or judicial elite (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

Some scholars have claimed that populism opposes not only the elite but also ‘dangerous others’ – groups who are not considered part of ‘the people’, such as immigrants or people of another race (see Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Panizza, 2005; Taguieff, 1995). In this dissertation, I follow Mudde (2004) and others (Canovan, 1981; Taggart, 2000) who have claimed that although this exclusionistic feature might be a defining characteristic of *radical right-wing* populism, it is not an intrinsic property of populism as such. In fact, one of the essential properties of populism is that it can be combined with various ideologies. Including the exclusionistic feature in my definition would introduce a bias toward right-wing populism.

That populism is defined as a set of ideas means that populism is not understood here as a feature of a specific political actor (such as a political party, a movement, or an individual politician) but as a characteristic of *the message* of such an actor. Because actors can endorse the populist set of ideas to a larger or smaller extent, populism then becomes a matter of degree. Actors who send out many populist messages are more populist than actors who send out only a few such messages. This means that the way in which populism is understood in this dissertation differs from how populism is regularly conceived of. Firstly, the approach in this dissertation is more fine-grained. Generally, political parties are categorized by means of a dichotomous classification system: as either populist or not populist. Although nothing is wrong with this approach as a starting point for empirical analyses, it is a rather rough method of categorization and misses various shades of grey. After all, party A can be more or less populist than party B (see Hawkins, 2009; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Secondly, this dichotomous approach of categorization is generally employed to classify *political parties*, and it does not take into account that populism, as a set of ideas, can also be encountered beyond the realm of party politics. For instance, the messages in the media or the attitudes of citizens can also be populist to a larger or lesser extent (Hawkins et al., 2012; Mazzoleni, 2003). One of the contributions that this dissertation makes to the literature is that it allows for an analysis of the extent to which populism is employed in these realms too.

In this dissertation, I refer to populism in two different ways. Firstly, to assess whether mainstream parties and mass media have become more populist over the years, I employ this fine-grained gradual approach: parties and media can be more or less populist. Secondly, to assess the effect of the success of allegedly populist parties on the degree of populism among mainstream parties and in media, I also make use of the dichotomous either/or classification system according to which parties are classified as populist or not in the scholarly literature. Because this either/or classification is often not based on systematic empirical investigations (Hawkins, 2009), I employ the term *allegedly* populist parties every time I refer to populism in this sense.

A populist Zeitgeist?

Mény and Surel (2002b: 19) have argued that allegedly populist parties can ‘contaminate’ other parties by influencing their political discourse. According to Mudde (2004: 551), ‘at least since the early 1990s populism has become a regular feature of politics in western democracies. While populism is still mostly used by outsider or challenger parties, mainstream politicians, both in government and opposition, have been using it as well – generally in an attempt to counter the populist challengers’. Examples of mainstream politicians who have incorporated populism in their rhetoric are, according to Mudde (2004: 550-551), William Hague (the former leader of the British Conservatives) and Steve Stevaert (the former vice-prime minister of Flanders in Belgium). Mair (2002) has demonstrated that the rhetoric of the British former Labour leader Tony Blair contains populist elements as well. In a speech, Blair argued: ‘Arrayed against us: the forces of conservatism, the cynics, the elites, the establishment ... On our side, the forces of modernity and justice. Those who believe in a Britain for all the people.’⁴ According to Mair (2002: 92), ‘[o]ne of the first things this rhetoric reveals is the extent to which a populist language has now become acceptable within what has long been

⁴ See www.guardian.co.uk/lab99.

perceived as a decidedly non-populist political culture'. Other scholars have claimed that mainstream political leaders, such as Nicolas Sarkozy and Jacques Chirac in France, Gerhard Schröder in Germany and Wouter Bos in the Netherlands, can, to a certain extent, also be qualified as populist (De Beus, 2009; Jun, 2006; Mény & Surel, 2002b).

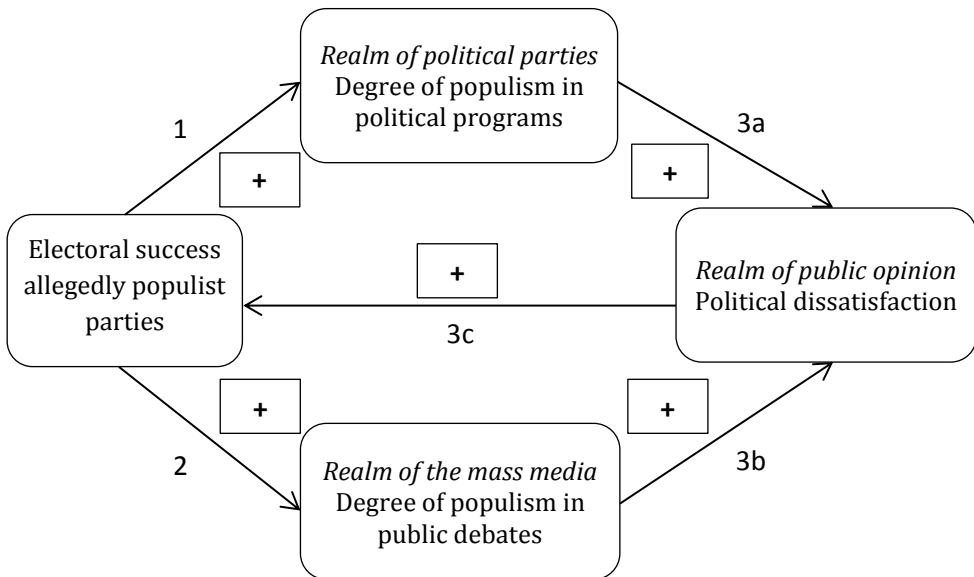
Although many scholars thus have given examples of populist rhetoric employed by mainstream parties, systematic studies across cases and over time are still lacking. Moreover, existing examples of the populist *Zeitgeist* pertain to party politics only. Yet it might well be the case that populism has become more pervasive in other realms as well. In fact, in a footnote in his *Zeitgeist*-article, Mudde has argued that populist arguments have become increasingly prominent in the media as well. Although various scholars have claimed that this 'media populism' should be further investigated in future studies (see Jagers, 2006; Mazzoleni, 2003; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012), research on this topic is still in its infancy (but see Akkerman, 2011). Furthermore, it could also be expected that populism has impacted, beyond parties and media, upon attitudes of individual citizens. Van der Brug (2003), for instance, has argued that an allegedly populist party's message can affect the political satisfaction of a citizen who supports this party. Lenz (2009) has demonstrated that individuals indeed incorporate the ideas of the parties that they identify themselves with. Hence, it might be expected that populism has transcended the realm of party politics and has become more pervasive in other realms as well.

In this dissertation, I assess whether Western Europe is facing a populist *Zeitgeist* by focusing on the impact of the rise of allegedly populist parties on: (1) the realm of party politics; (2) the realm of the mass media; and (3) the realm of public opinion. My study departs from the assumption that populism could be a highly attractive message for the electorate (Canovan, 1981; Mény & Surel, 2002b; De la Torre, 2010). After all, populists claim to stand up for the powerless ordinary people whose interests are said to be neglected by corrupt elites, which are supposed to represent these interests, but, instead, only think about their own well-being (see Barr, 2009). It can be supposed that this popular attractiveness and the success of allegedly populist parties have

triggered vote-seeking mainstream political parties to become more populist (Mair, 2002; Mudde, 2004) and market-oriented mass media to increasingly provide space for populist messages as well (Mazzoleni, 2003; Plasser & Ullram, 2003). Political parties and mass media are, after all, interested in appealing to a large audience. Moreover, because of the attractiveness of populism, I also expect that the extent to which parties and media incorporate populism in their own messages affects citizens' ideas about politics: the more populist the party that one votes for or the newspaper that one reads, the less politically satisfied this person will be (Van der Brug, 2003; Mazzoleni, 2003). Finally, this declined political satisfaction will motivate voters again to vote for allegedly populist parties (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Norris, 2005). This 'spiral of populism' can be expected to bring about an all-encompassing populist Zeitgeist, according to which the whole electoral process is permeated with populism. The spiral of populism is summarized in Figure 1.1. In the remainder of this section, I will pay more specific attention to the expectations within this model.

Figure 1.1

The spiral of populism: main expectations



Let me start with the realm of political parties (see arrow 1). Little is currently known about how allegedly populist parties affect the ideas of mainstream parties. Although various scholars have focused on how the anti-immigrant or nativist stances of so-called populist radical right parties affect the political mainstream (Bale, 2003; Bale et al., 2010; Downs, 2001; Loxbo, 2010; Minkenberg, 2001; Van Spanje, 2010), much less is known about the effect of the *populist* stances of these parties (see Mudde, 2012). Have mainstream parties incorporated the populist set of ideas in their programs to counter the success of their challengers?

Mainstream parties can respond to the rise of allegedly populist parties in various ways (see Meguid, 2005). First of all, they can decide to employ a dismissive strategy, which basically means that they ignore the populist challenger. Second, mainstream parties can adopt an adversarial strategy and oppose the allegedly populist party's populist stances. In both cases, mainstream parties will not incorporate the populist set of ideas in their own discourse. Finally, mainstream parties can adopt an accommodative tactic. Mainstream parties hope that by partially adopting the populist ideas of the successful competitor, they can undermine the distinctiveness of the allegedly populist party, and voters will decide to return to the more familiar mainstream party.

I expect mainstream parties to adopt such an accommodative strategy under two circumstances: when they have lost seats and when allegedly populist parties are on the rise (see Harmel & Janda, 1994: 267).⁵ When mainstream parties have lost seats, they will be inclined to change their political strategy (Panebianco, 1988; Schlesinger, 1984). They may expect to gain their votes back by criticizing the 'established order' and by emphasizing the importance of the power of the people. However, as long as allegedly populist parties are unsuccessful, mainstream parties will have no incentive to

⁵ These two circumstances have to be distinguished from each other because mainstream parties can lose seats without allegedly populist parties being successful, and because the electoral success of allegedly populist parties does not necessarily imply electoral loss of every mainstream party.

employ this strategy. They may expect that by ignoring their challengers (and thus adopting a dismissive strategy), the threat they pose will eventually disappear. However, as soon as allegedly populist parties become successful, mainstream parties could think that incorporating the populist set of ideas in their own discourse will fend off the challenge. After all, by incorporating the central message of allegedly populist parties into their own discourse, they undermine the allegedly populist party's issue ownership of populism (see Downs, 2001; Meguid, 2005). Mudde (2004: 563) has argued that:

'[w]hen explicitly populist outsider groups gain prominence, parts of the establishment will react by a combined strategy of exclusion and inclusion; while trying to exclude the populist actor(s) from political power, they will include populist themes and rhetoric to try and fight off the challenge.'

It is more difficult to theorize with regard to the realm of the media (see arrow 2). Although various scholars have focused on the relationship between the success of allegedly populist parties and media coverage, their studies have only modeled the electoral success of allegedly populist parties as a dependent variable – and thus as a *consequence* of media coverage (Art, 2006; Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Bos et al., 2010; Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2007; Walgrave & De Swert, 2004). With regard to the reverse effect, i.e., the effect of the success of allegedly populist parties on media coverage, we know virtually nothing. In fact, only a very few studies have looked at populism in the media at all (Akkerman, 2011; Bale et al., 2011; Mazzoleni, 2003, 2008). In one of the scarce contributions to this debate, Mazzoleni (2008: 64) has argued that 'media populism' has diffused political discontent and thereby facilitated 'the circulation of populist streams in the democratic body'.

It remains unclear how the success of allegedly populist parties could have fuelled this media populism. Given the lack of studies on this topic, we might find some clues elsewhere. Koopmans (2004) has argued that in order to understand public debates in the media, we have to distinguish two different categories of involved actors: the 'speakers' of messages (the participants in the debates in the media) and the 'gatekeepers' (those who

decide which contributions will be published or broadcasted). It might be expected that when allegedly populist parties are electorally successful, market-oriented gatekeepers will be inclined to broadcast or publish the messages associated with these successful parties (see Plasser & Ulram, 2003). After all, gatekeepers may well expect that the populist message will appeal to many citizens, and that, therefore, attention to this topic will increase their audience shares. This will motivate participants in the debates (the 'speakers') again to incorporate the populist set of ideas in their contributions.

Consequently, it can be expected that the increasingly commercial orientation of the mass media has fuelled the degree of populism in the public debates as well (Plasser & Ulram, 2003: 21). It has been argued that, as a result of the increased focus of the media on large audiences, the media have shifted their attention from parties and the state to 'ordinary' citizens and their common sense (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 277-278). It can be expected that, therefore, the media have increasingly espoused messages that include the populist set of ideas. The populist claim that people are exploited by elites is, after all, an attractive message for 'ordinary' citizens and thus for the market-oriented media as well (Papathanassopoulos, 2000).

For rather similar reasons, it can also be expected that tabloid media are more populist than elite media (Akkerman, 2011; Mazzoleni, 2003; Mudde, 2007; Sparks & Tulloch, 2000). Because elite media are closely aligned with the established political order and are less focused than tabloid media on mass audiences, they will not be strongly inclined to criticize political elites and to emphasize the interests of 'ordinary' citizens. The tabloid media, on the other hand, are not closely aligned with the established political parties. Moreover, they are strongly focused on mass audiences and therefore tend to focus on what they think citizens find important. As a result, they can be expected to be more inclined to express populist messages (Art, 2006; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Mazzoleni, 2003).

What then would be the effect of populism among parties on the attitudes of the public (see arrow 3a)? I focus on the effects of populism on the specific attitude of political satisfaction because it has been argued that, from a

theoretical point of view, the populist message is related to political dissatisfaction among citizens (see Taggart, 2000). Moreover, various scholars have empirically confirmed this relationship (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Mayer & Perrineau, 1992; Norris, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2001). Most of these scholars have argued that political dissatisfaction is a reason for citizens to vote for an allegedly populist party – so, political dissatisfaction is the cause and populist voting is the consequence. Yet there are reasons to expect that the causal direction of this relationship could also be reversed. Van der Brug (2003), for instance, has demonstrated that citizens who supported the LPF were affected by the populist message of this party. This implies that political dissatisfaction can also be a consequence instead of a cause of populist voting. This argument is supported by Cohen (2003), who has demonstrated that party identification strongly affects citizens' attitudes. In a similar vein, other scholars have shown that someone who supports a certain party will be more strongly affected by the messages of this party than someone who does not support this party (Bartels, 2002). In fact, supporters of a party adapt their ideas to the party line when they are exposed to messages in which the party reveals its position (Lenz, 2009). It could therefore be expected that citizens who support a party claiming that ordinary people are exploited by the corrupt elite, will be inclined to incorporate this message into their own way of thinking about politics and therefore become less politically satisfied.

Populist messages are not just conveyed by political parties but also by other actors, such as the mass media. What then would be the effect of populism in the public debates in the media on citizens' attitudes (see arrow 3b)? Early studies of voting behavior expected that persuasive media would directly impact on citizens' attitudes (Lasswell, 1927; Lippmann, 1922). Empirical studies, however, found only little evidence in support of these expectations (Berelson et al., 1954; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). Yet since the 1990s, news effects research has started to re-appreciate the direct, persuasive influences of the media (e.g., Bartels, 1993; Dalton et al., 1998; Zaller, 1992, 1996), and in recent years, a growing body of research has addressed the direct effects of media messages on public opinion (see Brandenburg & Van Egmond, 2011). Studies have focused, for instance, on

voting behavior (Druckman & Parkin, 2005), candidate preferences (Dalton et al., 1998; Lodge et al., 1995), policy preferences (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Zaller, 1996) and attitudes (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009). Hence, we can conclude that there is ample evidence that citizens are directly affected by messages in the media. I therefore expect that the more populist the messages in a newspaper are, the more the readers of this newspaper will incorporate the populist set of ideas into their own thinking, and the more politically dissatisfied they will be (Mazzoleni, 2008: 64).

Finally, as I have already indicated, it can also be expected that the attitudes of citizens affect the electoral success of allegedly populist parties again (see arrow 3c). It has, after all, been demonstrated that politically dissatisfied citizens are inclined to vote for allegedly populist parties (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Norris, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2001).

To sum up, I expect that the success of allegedly populist parties has ideational consequences for political parties, the mass media and public opinion. For every separate realm, I have presented 'realm-specific' arguments for why this would be the case. The more general claim, however, is that populism, by arguing that it represents the interests of ordinary people against corrupt and powerful elites, is an attractive message for many citizens. Therefore, vote-seeking parties and market-oriented media can be expected to be inclined to incorporate this populist set of ideas into their own messages. Once these messages are expressed by parties and the media, they will exert a negative effect on the political satisfaction of citizens. Declining political satisfaction will, finally, spur the success of allegedly populist parties again. If all of this would indeed turn out to be the case (i.e., all effects in Figure 1 turn out to be positive), we could speak of a 'spiral of populism', which would ultimately result in an all-embracing populist Zeitgeist in Western Europe.

Case selection and data

Case selection

Regarding the selection of cases, this dissertation consists of two parts. In the first part I develop a 'universal' minimal definition of populism that can be employed for analyses across countries and over time. This part of the dissertation is based on a comparison of strongly divergent cases across various continents. In the second part of the dissertation, I apply this minimal definition to a specific region – Western Europe – and a specific time-period – 1988-2008 – to assess whether a populist *Zeitgeist* is dawning in this part of the world. Hence, the first and second parts of this dissertation are based on different case selections. In this section, I discuss each of them in turn.

The goal of the first part of this dissertation is to develop a minimal definition of populism based on the lowest common core of what all allegedly populist actors share with each other and to develop a methodology to measure the degree of populism empirically. Ideally I would study *all* allegedly populist actors. However, because this is practically impossible, I have employed a 'most different systems design' and selected a sample of six prototypical populist actors from backgrounds as divergent as possible in terms of time, space and ideology. Only those actors have been included about whom a general consensus exists in the literature that they can be labeled populist. I guaranteed spatial diversity by selecting allegedly populist actors from various continents: Western Europe, Latin America and the United States. To safeguard temporal variation I have included both present-day actors as well as historical cases. I aimed at ideological variation by including prototypical populists from various ideological backgrounds. The selected prototypical populist actors are the following: Tom Watson's *United States People's Party* and Ross Perot's *Reform Party* in the United States, Juan Perón's *Justicialist Party* in Argentina, Hugo Chávez's *MVR/PSUV* in Venezuela, Jean-

Marie Le Pen's *Front National* in France, and Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* in Italy.⁶ See Table 1.1 for an overview.

Table 1.1

Case selection for the conceptual part of the dissertation

Space			
Time	United States	Latin America	Western Europe
Classical	Watson	Peron	Le Pen
	People's Party	Justicialist Party	Front National
	1890s (Farmers interests)	1940s-1970s (Social-democratic)	1970s-2000s (Far right)
Modern	Perot	Chávez	Berlusconi
	Reform Party	MVR / PSUV	Forza Italia
	1990s (Liberal)	2000s (Far left)	1990s-2000s (Conservative)

As argued, this selection of cases is aimed at identifying the lowest common denominator that all populists share with each other. It is unrelated to the case selection for the second part of the dissertation, in which I employ the identified minimal definition to assess whether Western Europe is witnessing a populist *Zeitgeist*. In this part of the dissertation, I focus on Western Europe because 'the main area of sustained populist growth and success over the last fifteen years in established democracies has been in Western Europe' (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b: 1). In particular, I focus on five specific

⁶ These populist actors have been labeled as populist by various authors. Watson/United States People's Party: Goodwyn, 1976, Hicks, 1961, Kazin, 1995; Perot/Reform Party: Canovan, 2004, Kazin, 1995, Taggart, 2000; Perón/Justicialist Party: De la Torre, 2010, Roberts, 1995, Weyland, 2001; Chávez/MVR/PSUV: Hawkins, 2010, Roberts, 2007, Weyland, 2003; Le Pen/Front National: Betz, 1993, Rydgren, 2008, Surel, 2002; Berlusconi/Forza Italia: De Beus, 2009, Tarchi, 2008, Zaslove, 2008.

countries that have been selected on the basis of two criteria. The first criterion is that variation is required in the electoral success of allegedly populist parties. After all, to assess the impact of the electoral success of allegedly populist parties, it is essential to include both cases in which these parties have been successful and cases in which their success has been limited. I have selected three countries in which allegedly populist parties have been successful (France, Italy and the Netherlands) and two countries in which populists have been relatively unsuccessful (Germany and the United Kingdom).⁷ The second reason to focus on these cases is that I explicitly focus on populism on both the left and the right. Finding right-wing allegedly populist parties to include in my analysis is not a large challenge; after all, these parties have emerged in many Western European countries. This is different, however, for populism on the left. Left-wing populism is not as widespread (yet) as right-wing populism. The most notable cases of allegedly left-wing populism can be found in Germany (*Die Linke*) and the Netherlands (*Socialistische Partij, SP*) (see Hakhverdian & Koop, 2007; Hough & Koß, 2009; March, 2007, 2011; March & Mudde, 2005).

To study the causal relations implied by the ‘spiral of populism’ (see Figure 1), the study requires not only variation in the success of allegedly populist actors across the cases but also variation over time. Therefore, I selected election years in each country before, during and after the largest electoral successes of allegedly populist parties. Because most populist successes took place in the mid-nineties and early 2000s, I decided to focus on the last two decades: 1988-2008.⁸ In every country, I focus on four elections within this time frame.

The most notable populist success in France dates back to the end of the nineties and the early 2000s. In 1997, the *Front National* (FN) obtained its best result ever with regard to parliamentary elections: the party received 15

⁷ Allegedly populist parties in a country are assumed to be successful when the most successful allegedly populist party received a vote share of 15 per cent or more at least once.

⁸ 2008 is the final year I focus on because I began the data collection in 2009.

per cent of the votes. Moreover, in 2002, the leader of the FN, Jean-Marie Le Pen, defeated the socialist presidential candidate in the first round of the presidential elections. In comparison with 1997 and 2002, I consider the elections of 1993 (which was the election before FN's biggest success period) and 2007 (which is the last election before I began my data collection).

Although right-wing allegedly populist parties have been rather unsuccessful in Germany, the left-wing allegedly populist party *Die Linke* has become increasingly successful over the years. However, before 2008, the success of *Die Linke* remained limited. Because there has not been one particular moment in which the party had been successful, I decided to select two elections in the 2000s (2002 and 2005) and two elections in the 1990s (1990 and 1994). This means that within the time frame of 1988-2008, I have only excluded the elections of 1998.

In Italy, the most notable populist successes took place in 1994 and in 2001. In 1994, amid a wide-scale political corruption scandal, the populist politician Silvio Berlusconi participated in the elections for the first time and immediately obtained 15 per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives. During the 2001 general elections he obtained his best result ever: approximately 30 per cent of the seats. The election years I focus on in Italy are 1994 and 2001 in comparison with 1992 (just before the populist upsurge) and 2008 (the latest election before my data collection).

The most significant populist upsurge in the Netherlands took place in 2002, when Pim Fortuyn participated in the national elections for the first time and immediately gained 17 per cent of the votes. I also included the election year of 1994 because it was the first year that the *Socialistische Partij* (SP) made it into the national parliament, and it was the year in which the radical right-wing *Centrumdemocraten* (CD) obtained their best result (3 out of 150 seats). I also included the elections of 1989 because allegedly populist parties had not yet been successful, and the elections of 2006, which were the latest elections before my data collection began (and during which the SP obtained its best result so far, and the populist radical right *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) of Geert Wilders made it into the national parliament for the first time).

In the United Kingdom, populists have not been successful so far, so my case selection is not based on populist successes. I selected 1992, 1997, 2001 and 2005 as the election years because those are the only years in which elections were held within the time-frame under investigation.

Data

To assess whether populism has become more pervasive in the messages of mainstream political parties and in public debates in the mass media, I organized a large-scale content analysis of election manifestos and opinion articles from newspapers within the selected election years. Election manifestos were chosen because: (1) they are authoritative documents that party leaders can only depart from with great difficulty (Laver & Garry, 2000: 620); and (2) they are reasonably comparable across cases and over time (Klemmensen et al., 2007: 747). Opinion articles were chosen because the opinion section in newspapers (the section of a newspaper that contains the editorials, columns, op-ed pieces and letters) ‘was designed as a forum for the articulation of multiple ideas in an attempt to promote public debate on salient issues’ (Day & Golan, 2005: 62). Moreover, it is an institutionalized forum, as well as a place where people from different backgrounds can participate and a place in which both the views of opinion leaders and ‘ordinary citizens’ are paid attention to.

For every election I analyzed the manifestos of the mainstream parties (Christian-democratic, conservative, liberal, and social-democratic parties) and those allegedly populist parties that have gained seats in either the national or the European parliament during the time-span under investigation.⁹ I collected three newspapers in every country. I focused on

⁹ The classification of mainstream parties is based on the coding scheme of the comparative manifesto project (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006). Parties were classified as allegedly populist when at least two experts have identified them as such. All radical *right-wing* parties from the countries under investigation (which have gained seats in either the national or the European parliament) were classified as populist. However, only the Dutch and German radical *left-wing* parties were classified

'election periods' (the four weeks before the general elections) because the media focus more on politics during election campaigns (Koopmans, 2004: 372). A systematic sample of days was drawn from every election period, and for every sampled day, the opinion articles from the selected newspapers were collected.¹⁰ Only opinion articles that concerned domestic or EU politics were selected.

The election manifestos and opinion articles have been analyzed by extensively trained coders who have determined for every single paragraph whether it contained people-centrism and anti-elitism.¹¹ Every paragraph in which people-centrism was combined with anti-elitism was classified as a populist paragraph. After all, it is the combination of people-centrism and anti-elitism that defines populism. For every manifesto and every opinion article, I have computed the percentage of populist paragraphs.

To assess whether the degree of populism in election manifestos and newspaper articles affects citizens' political satisfaction, I linked the populism scores of the manifestos and the newspapers to information about citizens' political attitudes. This was done by combining the populism scores with survey data from the European Elections Studies (EES) of 1999, 2004 and 2009. The technical details of how this is done are explained in Chapter 6. For an overview of the case selection and the data with regard to the second part of my dissertation, see Table 1.2.

as populist in the scholarly literature. For reasons of comparison, I have also included the radical left-wing parties that have gained parliamentary seats in the other countries. These parties are the PCF in France and the DS in Italy.

¹⁰ Every election period consists of 4 weeks of 6 days. (Many newspapers do not have a separate Sunday issue, so I excluded the Sunday issues from my sample.) Every other day was selected, as a result of which every day of the week (except Sunday) is sampled twice.

¹¹ People-centrism was operationalized with the question: 'Do the authors of the text refer to the people?' Anti-elitism was operationalized by the following question: 'Do the authors of the text criticize elites?' See for more information on my measurement Chapter 3.

Table 1.2*Case selection and data for the empirical part of the dissertation*

Country	Success of allegedly populist parties ¹	Election years	Allegedly populist parties ²	Best electoral result ³	Mainstream parties ⁴	Newspapers
FR	Yes	93/97/02/07	FN	17.8%	PS RPR UDF UMP	Le Figaro Le Monde Liberation
GE	No	90/94/02/05	Die Linke	8.7%	SPD CDU/CSU FDP	Frankfurter Allgemeine Süddeutsche Zeitung Bild
IT	Yes	92/94/01/08	FI LN AN	29.4% 10.1% 15.7%	DC/PP PD/Ulivo	Corriere della Sera La Stampa La Repubblica
NL	Yes	89/94/02/06	CD SP LPF PVV	2.5% 16.6% 17.0% 5.7%	PvdA CDA VVD D66	NRC Handelsblad de Volkskrant De Telegraaf
UK	No	92/97/01/05	BNP UKIP	0.7% 2.2%	Cons Labour Libdem	The Daily Telegraph The Guardian The Sun

¹ Allegedly populist parties are successful when the most successful allegedly populist party in a country received more than 15 per cent of the votes at least once (1988-2008).

² Only those allegedly populist parties have been selected that have gained seats in either the national or the European parliament during the time-span under investigation. A party is classified as allegedly populist when at least two experts have identified it as such. FN: Rydgren, 2008; Surel, 2002. Die Linke: March, 2007; Decker, 2008. FI: Tarchi, 2008; Zaslove, 2008. LN: Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2010; Tarchi, 2008. AN: Ruzza & Fella, 2011; Tarchi, 2002. CD: Mudde, 2007; Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007. SP: March, 2007; Voerman, 2009. LPF: Lucardie, 2008; Van der Brug, 2003. PVV: Akkerman, 2011; Vossen, 2010. BNP: Fella, 2008; Mudde, 2007. UKIP: Abedi & Lundberg, 2009; Fella, 2008.

³ Highest percentage of votes in either national parliamentary or presidential elections (1988-2008).

⁴ Christian-democratic, conservative, social-democratic and liberal parties as defined by the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, & Tanenbaum, 2001; Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, Budge, & McDonald, 2006).

* Only the Dutch and German radical left-wing parties have been labeled as 'populist' in the literature. However, for reasons of comparison, I have also included radical left-wing parties (or 'communist' parties, according to the Comparative Manifesto Project) that have gained parliamentary seats in the other countries. These parties are the DS in Italy and the PCF in France.

Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation is a collection of five articles (and an introductory and a concluding chapter). Although the separate chapters are all parts of a larger piece (see Figure 1.1), they can also be read independently from each other. An unfortunate consequence is that the chapters contain some repetition with regard to their conceptual and methodological sections. In this section, I describe the main questions that are the focus of each of the following chapters.

The next chapter concerns the conceptualization of populism. The main question of this chapter is: do allegedly populist actors across countries and over time share a common core with each other, or does the label 'populism' only cover 'a multitude of unconnected tendencies' (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969b:

1)? To answer that question, I compare several 'prototypical' populist actors with each other from backgrounds as divergent as possible in terms of time, space and ideology. If indeed there is a lowest common denominator that all these parties share, this would imply that it is possible to formulate a valid minimal definition of populism according to which all prototypical populist actors across cases and over time indeed fall within this populist category. We can then 'travel' (see Sartori, 1970) between different continental contexts to compare populism in the United States with populism in Latin America and populism in Western Europe.

In Chapter 3, I focus on how to measure populism.¹² The chapter is based on a comparison between my own content analysis method of measuring populism and a computerized content analysis of populism. I pay extensive attention to the validity and reliability of my measurement. I assess three types of validity: content validity (is the concept adequately captured by its indicator or indicators?), face validity (does the concept measure what it is supposed to measure?) and concurrent validity (are the results of a measurement of the concept in one study empirically related to the results of a different measurement of the same concept in another study?).

Chapter 4 (which is co-authored with Sarah de Lange and Wouter van der Brug) focuses on the impact of the success of allegedly populist parties within the realm of party politics (see arrow 1). Is populism contagious and have mainstream political parties become more populist over the years? Various researchers have studied the way in which mainstream parties have responded to the electoral success of populists (see Mudde, 2007; Van Spanje, 2010). Yet these studies have primarily looked at radical right parties, and therefore focused on the extent to which mainstream parties have incorporated their *anti-immigrant* stances. In this chapter, I look at the reactions of mainstream parties regarding their *populism*.

In Chapter 5, I argue that, to fully understand how pervasive the populist message is, we should not only focus on party politics; populism

¹² An earlier version of that chapter is an article, which is co-authored by fellow PhD-candidate Teun Pauwels. This article did not include the French election manifestos.

might resonate in other spheres as well. In this chapter, I look at the effect of the success of populists on public debates in the media (see arrow 2). I focus on two main questions: (1) has the electoral success of allegedly populist parties impacted on the degree of populism in public debates in the media?; and (2) have the public debates, as a result, become more populist over the years? I have also assessed whether tabloid media are more populist than elite media (see Akkerman, 2011; Mazzoleni, 2003) and whether letters are more populist than other opinion pieces (see Kerr & Moy, 2002; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004).

Chapter 6 (which is co-authored with Wouter van der Brug and Sarah de Lange) looks at the relationship between the populist message and public opinion (see arrows 3a, 3b and 3c). Many researchers have demonstrated that voting for allegedly populist parties goes hand in hand with political dissatisfaction. Most of them have made a unidirectional, causal claim about this association: political dissatisfaction is the cause, and voting for populists is the consequence (see Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2001). I pose the question whether the causal argument could also be turned around: is it possible that voting for allegedly populist parties is the cause of increasing political dissatisfaction? Are voters affected by the populist messages they are exposed to (Van der Brug, 2003)? To assess whether this is the case, I compare two logics with each other: the ‘expressing discontent logic’ (political dissatisfaction is the cause, and populist voting is the consequence) and the ‘fuelling discontent logic’ (populist voting is the cause, and political dissatisfaction is the consequence). Moreover, building on existing research on direct media effects (see, for a recent example, Brandenburg & Van Egmond, 2011), I also assess to what extent populism in the public debates in the media affects political satisfaction.

In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I focus on the main findings of the separate studies within the broader *Zeitgeist*-framework. Has the rise of allegedly populist parties created a populist *Zeitgeist* in Western Europe? In this final chapter, I also discuss the contributions of this dissertation to the scholarly literature. Finally, I discuss possible avenues for further research.

Chapter 2

THE NUCLEUS OF POPULISM

In Search of the Lowest Common Denominator

This chapter is a minor revision of a paper that has been accepted for publication in *Government and Opposition*.

There can, at present, be no doubt about the importance of populism. But no one is quite clear just what it is. [...] It bobs up everywhere, but in many and contradictory shapes. Does it have any underlying unity, or does one name cover a multitude of unconnected tendencies?

Ghita Ionescu & Ernest Gellner, 1969b, p. 1.

Introduction

Although this excerpt was written more than forty years ago, it could have been written today. The term populism is still being applied to a wide variety of parties and politicians, and it still points in different contexts to different phenomena (Canovan, 1981: 3). Just like half a century ago, the concept deals with ‘an essential impalpability, an awkward conceptual slipperiness’ (Taggart, 2000: 1). In one context, populism refers to small-scale bottom-up movements, whereas it denotes strong charismatic leaders or radical right political parties in others. A pressing question is whether these phenomena actually have something in common.

Three area-based bodies of literature can be distinguished, which classify different types of political actors as populist. First, the United States literature looks at political movements such as the nineteenth century *People’s Party*, Perot’s *Reform Party*, and, more recently, the *Tea Party*. Second, the Latin American literature focuses on authoritarian regimes, such as those of Perón in Argentina, Chávez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia. Third, the Western European literature emphasizes parties such as Le Pen’s *Front National* (FN) in France, Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia* (FI) in Italy and Haider’s *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in Austria. Within each body of literature, the classification of political actors as populist is often in accordance with a *contextual* definition of populism. It is therefore unclear whether Perón would also be labeled as populist by European standards and whether Perot would also be seen as a populist according to the Latin American point of view.

The fact that scholars in different regions use the same term to analyze strongly divergent political actors raises the question of whether it is merely an unfortunate coincidence that political actors from different times, from various places, and with different ideologies have all been labeled populist, or whether they actually have something in common. The aim of this chapter is to find out whether there exists a lowest common denominator that all allegedly populist actors share.

I argue and demonstrate that there indeed exists a lowest common denominator. This lowest common denominator consists of four characteristics: (1) populists emphasize the central position of the people; (2) they criticize the elite; (3) they conceive of the people as a homogeneous entity; and (4) they proclaim a serious crisis. This common core could be the point of departure for the comparison of populist actors across regions and over time.

This is an important finding because it justifies the usage of the classical Sartorian approach, according to which a phenomenon necessitates a core (set of) characteristic(s) to be classified as populist (see Sartori, 1970). Many scholars have already employed such an approach (see Abts & Rummens, 2007; Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008; Weyland, 2001), and some of them have also used it in cross-regionalist comparisons (Hawkins, 2009; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). Yet a systematic validation of this approach is still lacking.¹³

The chapter proceeds as follows. First I make a distinction between twelve alleged characteristics of populism. Each characteristic is emphasized in at least one of the area-based bodies of literature. Next, six political actors are selected that are seen as ‘prototypical populists’ – i.e., there exists strong agreement among scholars that these actors can be labeled as populist. To be able to discover the lowest common denominator, these actors are selected from backgrounds as dissimilar as possible in terms of time, space and

¹³ In this chapter, I focus on the classical Sartorian approach only. I will therefore pay no attention to other approaches to conceptualization (such as, for instance, the family resemblance approach).

ideology. In the following section, the extent to which the selected actors possess the alleged characteristics of populism is assessed. In the final section, I focus on the implications of these findings for the issue of defining populism and the usage of the concept in future comparative research.

Characteristics of populism mentioned in the literature

We can make a distinction between three area-based bodies of literature on populism: the United States literature, the Latin American literature, and the Western European literature. The United States literature focuses on late nineteenth century popular and agrarian movements and perceives populism as ‘a way of looking at things’ that contrasts the ‘plain’ people from rural states with the industrial cosmopolitans from the Eastern shores of the country (see Goodwyn, 1976, 1978; Hicks, 1961; Hofstadter, 1955; Kazin, 1995; McKenna, 1974). In the Latin American literature, the emphasis is on contraposing the people against the elite as well. Yet, in most Latin American countries, the actors who proclaim this populist message are not small-scale bottom-up movements, but powerful and paternalistic political leaders (see De la Torre, 2010; Di Tella, 1965, 1997; Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 2001). The conceptualizations of populism in the Western European body of literature have been strongly influenced by political parties on the far right (see Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008a; Mudde, 2007; Mény & Surel, 2002a). These parties emphasize the cultural identity of the people and therefore position them not only against the bad elite but also against ‘dangerous others’ (immigrants or people of another race or religion).

The cross-fertilization between these three different bodies of literature is still minimal. Although authors from different literatures increasingly cite each other, the definitions of populism they make use of in their analyses are still strongly influenced by their ‘own’ bodies of literature. There are only a few scholars who have transcended ‘their’ literatures and analyzed populist phenomena over a long time period and across different continents (see Canovan, 1981; Ionescu & Gellner, 1969a; Taggart, 2000). These studies,

however, are not based on a systematic comparison across cases and over time.

Within these three bodies of literature, populism has been associated with many different features. Below I focus on the most notable of these features. Some are mentioned in only one of the three bodies of literature, and others are discussed in all three of them. A distinction is made between: (1) features that relate to the *ideas* of populist actors; (2) characteristics that have to do with the *style* of populists; and (3) attributes that concern the *organization* of populist actors.

Characteristics relating to ideas

One feature that is often associated with populism is *the centrality of the people*. Populists are said to worship the people and to emphasize the people's fundamental position at the center of politics (Goodwyn, 1976; Ionescu & Gellner, 1969b; Kazin, 1995; Mény & Surel, 2002b; Taggart, 2000; De la Torre, 2010). 'The people' can mean many different things to many different populists in many different circumstances (Canovan, 1981: 261; Mudde, 2004: 545-546). It can refer, for instance, to the electorate, to the nation, or to no fixed group at all. This does not mean that 'the people' has no meaning (Panizza, 2005: 3). It only means that the way in which the term is understood is dependent on the particular context.¹⁴

People-centrism cannot be understood without the characteristic of *anti-elitism*. The elite is accused of being alienated from the people, of having no idea what ordinary people find important, and of only representing its own interests (Barr, 2009; Canovan, 2002; Goodwyn, 1978; Laclau, 2005; McKenna, 1974; Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001). The accusations differ from arrogance

¹⁴ To deal with the slipperiness of the concept of 'the people', Taggart proposes to make use of the term 'heartland'. A heartland can be seen as an idealized conception of the people, located in an idealized landscape. The heartland is a mythical and constructed ideal of the population; it is an 'imagined community'. The heartland can be used as a tool to better understand what a specific populist means when he or she refers to a particular people (see Taggart 2000).

and selfishness to incompetence and corruption. In most cases, these allegations go hand in hand. Just as people-centrism, anti-elitism is dependent of the context and can take different forms. It could be directed at a political elite (politicians in general, political parties, the 'established' political order), an economic elite (business elites, bank executives or capitalism in general), a cultural elite (intellectuals), a media elite (journalists) or a legal elite (judges) (see also Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). No matter which type of elite is criticized, the general message is the same: that of a conflict between those without power (the people) and those with power (the elite).

The people is conceived of as a homogeneous entity. This is a result of the antagonistic character of the perceived relationship between the people and the elite (see Panizza, 2005: 3). Because populists argue that the people is exploited by the elite, they believe that *all* 'ordinary' men have a shared interest in their opposition against the elite. Therefore, they present 'the people' (singular) as a uniform entity. Some scholars argue that when they address the people, populists blur class distinctions by lumping all men in one single homogeneous category (McKenna, 1974: xii-xiv). Other scholars do not focus explicitly on this lack of class consciousness. They do, however, just as well argue that populists conceive of the people as a homogeneous whole (Taggart, 2000: 92).

According to many scholars, this emphasis on the power of the people and the negativity about the elite leads to the message that 'ordinary citizens' must be given their voices back and that people, consequentially, should have more influence on the political decision-making process. It has therefore been argued that populists want to circumvent the 'opaque and complex consensus seeking politics' by introducing more directness in the form of *measures of direct democracy* such as referenda, popular initiatives and plebiscites (Canovan, 1981: ch. 5; Taggart, 2000: 103-105).

Populism is sometimes not only associated with negativity about the elite but also with negativity about specific social groups: *exclusionism* (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Taguieff, 1995). Populists claim to defend the collective identity of the 'true' people against enemies from the outside. It

depends on the concrete context whether the outsiders are immigrants, unemployed, or people of another religion or race.

To emphasize their message of anti-elitism and/or exclusionism, populists often *proclaim a serious crisis* (political, cultural and/or economic) (Betz, 2002: 198). Populists argue that the political influence, the cultural identity or the economic situation of ordinary people is under great threat and must urgently be protected (Taggart, 2000: 93-94). It does not matter whether this proclaimed crisis is real or not, it only matters that populists *argue* that there is such a crisis.

Characteristics relating to style

The first feature of the allegedly populist style is the usage of a *simplistic language*. Because of their glorification of the people and their contempt for the elite, populists tend to use a rather simple language that is understandable for 'normal' people and differs from the difficult and formal language of the elite. This focus on linguistic simplicity has frequently been described as the 'tabloid style' of populists (see Canovan, 1999: 5).

It is often argued that, to communicate their message, populists make use of a *direct communication style*. The idea is that populists do not want to communicate with citizens via side roads such as 'inconvenient' party platforms or 'annoying' institutions such as parliament. These are obstacles that stand in the way of a direct relationship between policy and voter. Populist politicians therefore prefer to communicate directly via popular mass media such as television (Mazzoleni, 2003) – and more recently also via social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

It has also been argued that populists *polarize* to bring their message of crisis across (Canovan, 2004: 242). They dichotomize the debate and often employ an aggressive language (Taggart, 2000: 113).

Finally, populists often create *an outsider image*. They present themselves as not being part of the elite (see Goodwyn, 1976) and as political mavericks (Barr, 2009; Betz & Johnson, 2004). This does not necessarily mean

that they actually *are* political outsiders. As Mudde has emphasized, it is sufficient that they create such an image (Mudde, 2004: 560).

Characteristics relating to organization

Organizational characteristics concern the way in which populist organizations are constituted. According to some scholars, *centralization of the leader* plays a pivotal role. Weyland (2001: 18) emphasizes that a populist organization has a strong personalistic leader at its apex. Additionally, Taggart (2000: 100-103) argues that populist organizations are characterized by their centralized nature and the pivotal role of (charismatic) leaders.

Another organizational characteristic is that populists want *a loosely mediated relationship between leader and followers*. This means that populists want to eliminate intermediate institutions and organizations that stand in the way of a direct relationship between themselves and their followers. Most populists therefore refuse to create a party structure that is similar to the dominant model of party organization (Taggart, 2000: 75). Populists tend to organize themselves in loose movements instead of tightly structured political parties (Wiles, 1969: 167).

For an overview of all the characteristics that have been discerned from the three bodies of literature, see Table 2.1.

Case selection

To find the lowest common denominator, a ‘most different systems design’ is employed (Mudde, 2007: 14). Ideally, I would study *all* populist actors. However, because this is practically impossible, I selected a sample of six populist actors from backgrounds as divergent as possible in terms of time, space and ideology. Political actors have been included only when most scholars within a body of literature agree that they are populist. Spatial diversity is guaranteed by selecting two prototypical populist actors from each of the geographical areas that correspond to the three bodies of literature.

Table 2.1

Characteristics of populism mentioned in the literature

Ideas
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People-centrism 2. Anti-elitism 3. Homogeneity of the people 4. Direct democracy 5. Exclusionism 6. Proclamation of a crisis
Style
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Simplistic language 8. Direct communication style 9. Polarization 10. Image of outsider
Organization
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Centralization of leader 12. Loosely mediated relationship

To guarantee temporal diversity, the focus is not only on contemporary populism but also on historical cases. Finally, I have also aimed at ideological variety. Although one could disagree on the ideological labels I have attached to the selected populist actors, I believe that the selected actors represent a wide variety of ideological stances (see Table 2.2).

The first selected populist actor is Tom Watson's *United States People's Party* (see Goodwyn, 1976; Hicks, 1961; Kazin, 1995). This political movement was established in 1891 to defend the interests of farmers. It faded away a decade later. The second selected populist actor is Ross Perot's *Reform Party*. As an independent candidate and challenger of the established parties, Perot participated in the United States presidential elections in 1992 and 1996 (see

Table 2.2*Selection of actors that are generally considered populist*

Space			
Time	United States	Latin America	Western Europe
Classical	Watson	Peron	Le Pen
	People's Party	Justicialist Party	Front National
	1890s (Farmers interests)	1940s-1970s (Social-democratic)	1970s-2000s (Far right)
Modern	Perot	Chávez	Berlusconi
	Reform Party	MVR / PSUV	Forza Italia
	1990s (Liberal)	2000s (Far left)	1990s-2000s (Conservative)

Canovan, 2004; Kazin, 1995; Taggart, 2000). Third, the Argentinian politician and general Juan Perón and his *Justicialist Party* is included (see De la Torre, 2010; Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 2001). He was president of Argentina from 1946 until 1955 and from 1973 until 1974. The fourth populist is Hugo Chávez (see Hawkins, 2010; Roberts, 2007; Weyland, 2003). He has been the president of Venezuela since 1999 and is famous for his critique on the United States' foreign policy. Fifth, Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front National* (FN) from France is selected (see Betz, 1993; Rydgren, 2008; Surel, 2002). Le Pen participated in five presidential elections. Sixth, Silvio Berlusconi's FI is included in the analysis. Berlusconi founded his own political party after a widespread corruption scandal in the early nineties has long been the leader of the center-right *Popolo della Libertà* (PdL) (see De Beus, 2009; Tarchi, 2008; Zaslove, 2008).

Results

Watson's People's Party

The United States People's Party was created in 1892 from a collection of regional agrarian organizations in which farmers and other 'normal' people opposed the ruling economic and political elite. During the founding meeting, the Populists of the People's Party presented a declaration of principles in which they showed that they were both strongly people-centrist and anti-elitist: 'We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people' (quoted in McKenna, 1974: 90). The Populists attacked the rich from the East in general, and the corrupt railroad corporations, politicians and capitalists in particular. The party proclaimed a devastating crisis in the first sentence of their Omaha Platform: 'we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin' (quoted in McKenna, 1974: 89). One of the central measures to overcome this crisis was the introduction of the popular initiative and the referendum.

The 'people' the Populists referred to were seen as a uniform entity that transcended specific classes and other groups. According to Goodwyn (1978: 97), the Populists saw the 'people' as an alliance of northern farmers, southern blacks and urban workers. Some Populists wanted to include black people in their alliance as well, but most were rather exclusionist (Kazin, 1995: 37-38). Moreover, in its official documents, the party emphasized that immigrant labor should be restricted (Canovan, 1981: 37).

Because the party developed from collaborations between small, regional farmers' organizations, the party consisted of a rather complex set of alliances and sub-alliances in which the connections between the bottom and top were only loosely mediated (Goodwyn, 1976: 91). It could, therefore, be described as a bottom-up movement. Because the regional organizations continued to play a pivotal role within the People's Party, the party 'was not a function of a particular charismatic leader' (Taggart, 2000: 26), not even of the most central figure, Tom Watson.

To persuade the people to rebel against the ruling elite, the People's Party frequently employed a Manichean discourse of Good versus Evil (us vs. them, democracy vs. plutocracy, producers vs. exploiters), as a result of which the party's language was rather polarizing (see the previous examples from their Omaha Platform). Yet its language was not simplistic; it was impregnated with complex arguments and rather complicated sentences.¹⁵

Apart from the platform, most Populists did not communicate directly with the electorate; a great deal of communication took place at the regional level via the farmers' alliances. In their initial communications, the Populists presented themselves as outsiders in politics. A few years later, however, they decided to form a union with the Democratic Party, and they did not emphasize their 'outsiderness' anymore. This turned out to be a bad electoral choice, for it marked the beginning of the end of their success. Their message of anti-elitism had become much less credible after they had formed an alliance with the Democrats.

Perot's Reform Party

One century after the formation of the People's Party, another third party challenged the main US establishment. During the 1992 presidential elections, Ross Perot, an independent candidate from Texas – and also a billionaire businessman – gained approximately twenty per cent of the vote. Perot claimed that his country was in crisis, and he castigated 'the decade of

¹⁵ See for instance the following sentence in the Omaha Platform: 'While our sympathies as a party of reform are naturally upon the side of every proposition which will tend to make men intelligent, virtuous, and temperate, we nevertheless regard these questions, important as they are, as secondary to the great issues now pressing for solution, and upon which not only our individual prosperity but the very existence of free institutions depend; and we ask all men to first help us to determine whether we are to have a republic to administer before we differ as to the conditions upon which it is to be administered, believing that the forces of reform this day organized will never cease to move forward until every wrong is remedied and equal rights and equal privileges securely established for all the men and women of this country' (website History Matters).

greed, the era of trickle-down economics' (Kazin, 1995: 273). To solve the crisis, the established political order had to make room for a political entrepreneur who would balance the budget.

He said that 'normal' Americans were the owners of the country and had to claim it back from the politicians in Washington. To give more power to the people, he wanted to introduce more direct democracy by means of 'electronic town halls'. One of his one-liners was: 'I am Ross, and you are the boss' (Posner, 1996: 251). Perot did not exclude specific classes or groups in his plea to give more power to the people. Instead, he argued that *all* Americans shared the same interests in their struggle against the corrupt politicians. This was clearly represented by the initial name of his political organization: *United We Stand America* (my emphasis).

His speech 'We Own This Country' formed the start of a campaign strategy involving appearances on many TV shows. With his anti-Washington message and his unusual mix of political positions, he appealed to both Republicans and Democrats. Perot claimed that, initially, he did not want to run as a political candidate, but that he was forced into it because he felt the obligation to rescue the country from the established politicians (see Taggart, 2000: 42).

To appeal to the people, he used a simple language, explained economic troubles in a facile and straightforward way, and also communicated directly with his voters through talk shows on television (Kazin, 1995: 273). On TV, he mixed this simple language with a bombastic style to show his frustration with the established order (Taggart, 2000: 42). He ridiculed overdressed lobbyists, 'country clubbers' and 'preppies' in the White House (Kazin, 1995: 272-273). People liked this clear, tough and confrontational political approach. 'Keeping his message simple, and spicing the shows with his own brand of down-home Texas humor, he was a fresh face in a sea of candidates who normally were reserved and shied away from candor, controversy, or color' (Posner, 1996: 260).

Perot built a political organization around himself, of which the only and uncontested leader was Perot himself. The movement was completely inferior to his personal political performance. Because he strongly disliked the existing

parties and their institutionalized organizational structure, he established an organization in which the distance between him and his rank and file was as short as possible. Kazin (1995: 273) argues that Perot never built a party organization that was more than a mere network of his admirers. Except for the moments that Perot appeared on television, the party was invisible.

Perón's Justicialist Party

Although Juan Perón died in 1974, he is still one of the most popular Argentinean politicians. In 1946, Perón was elected president for the first time. He argued that the country faced a social and political crisis and therefore urgently needed a strong and charismatic leader who would solve the problems (Crassweller, 1987: 222). Perón defined his ideological stance as the 'Third Position': a middle way between capitalism and socialism. He was re-elected in 1951, but he was ousted after a coup in 1955. He lived in Paraguay and Spain and returned to Argentina only in 1973, when he was elected president again. He died one year later.

Similar to the political actors I have discussed so far, Perón strongly emphasized the struggle between the (good) people and the (bad) oligarchy (De la Torre, 2010: 18; Roberts, 2007: 3). His supporters have been called 'descamisados' (shirtless ones) to distinguish them from the members of the political elite, who always wore jackets and ties (Page, 1983: 136-137). Although many of Perón's supporters were working class, one should not conclude that Peronism was a working class movement (Crassweller, 1987: 222). Perón emphasized the importance of national unity and tried to close the gap between the different socio-economic classes by forging a cross-class alliance of supporters – a uniform entity in its opposition against the elite. Perón did not exclude specific social groups such as immigrants or people of another religion, and he was not a supporter of the means of direct democracy. He argued that the will of the people had to be expressed via a strong and charismatic leader (Taggart, 2000: 64).

To forge a cross-class alliance, Perón employed a language that was not only understandable for the highly educated but also for the lower classes. He

therefore used many metaphors. His discourse, however, could not be called simplistic. As Crassweller argues, his communicative strength 'lay in Perón's strange ability to combine *lofty* language with homespun metaphors' (my emphasis) (Crassweller, 1987: 184). And although he criticized the 'oligarchy', his style was not polarizing. In fact, his Third Way politics ('neither left, nor right'), and his emphasis on social justice, made his style rather accommodative.¹⁶ To distinguish 'us' (the people) from 'them' (the elite), Perón presented himself as a political outsider. He was famous for his direct communication with the public. 'The iconography of Perón appearing on the balcony to greet the masses who chanted his name and greeted his appearance with an ovation became an integral component in his subsequent rule as the symbol of his direct link to the people and his genuine popular support' (Taggart, 2000: 62).

Perón had never made a secret of his admiration for the leadership style of Mussolini. He perceived politics in military terms and emphasized that he saw himself as the 'Conductor': a strong personalistic leader (Page, 1983: 220). In his emphasis on strong leadership, Perón was 'hostile to the idea of political parties as bases of power, for they were inconsistent with the functions of the "Conductor"' (Crassweller, 1987: 230). To be able to directly control his organization, Perón made sure that the party was strongly underinstitutionalized and completely dependent on his personalistic leadership (Roberts, 2006: 131).

Chávez's MVR / PSUV

In the early eighties, a group of military academy graduates, inspired by the thoughts of the Venezuelan patriot Simón Bolívar, founded a secret organization within the armed forces. The goal of this organization was to do something about the increasing corruption in the country. In 1992, the group performed a coup against the government. The coup failed, but in 1998 they

¹⁶ This does not mean that Perón *acted* accommodative towards his opponents too. To the contrary, he did not hesitate to jail critical journalists or politicians.

were more successful. The leader of the group (that had by then turned into a political party) – the charismatic Hugo Chávez – convincingly won the presidential election. Now, almost fifteen years later, he is still the president of Venezuela.

The point of departure for Chávez's political ideas is the centrality of the Venezuelan people. A slogan during the 2000 campaign was, for instance, 'With Chávez, the people rule' (Hawkins, 2010: 15). Although he focused mostly on the elevation of the poorest people from the lowest classes, he stated explicitly that his message was directed towards all Venezuelans (Roberts, 2003). In his conception, they form one entity in their opposition against the elite. He argued that their interests were at risk because of a group of conspiring elites, supported by a corrupt political system. Addressing the elite, Chávez frequently uses terms such as 'enemies', 'corruption', 'the oligarchy', 'counterrevolutionary forces', 'coup-mongers', 'the lackeys of imperialism', 'the nightmare of world capitalism' and 'savage neoliberalism' (Hawkins, 2010).

Chávez's main goal was a revolution to overthrow the existing political order. In his opinion, this was the only possible way to solve the political and cultural crisis in which the country was placed by the corrupted political Punto Fijo system (Hellinger, 2003). He had had enough of the representative system and proposed to introduce measures of direct democracy (Ellner, 2003: 149). Chávez was not exclusionist towards specific societal groups, except, of course, for the Venezuelan (and later also foreign – read United States) elite.

To bring his message across, Chávez employs simple language in which he refers to famous myths and symbols (Hawkins, 2010: 56-57). When he talks about the corrupt elite, his language is strongly polarizing and even bellicose.

'Chávez recited passages from *Florentino y el Diablo*, a Venezuelan folk ballad in which a cowboy named Florentino is challenged to a singing duel with the Devil; Florentino courageously accepts the challenge and eventually defeats the Devil through his perseverance and wit. Chávez

asserted that the coup-mongering leaders of the opposition were the Devil, and behind them was the biggest Devil of all, George W. Bush.’ (Hawkins, 2010: 2)

Chávez often emphasizes that he is a political outsider and that he does not belong to the ‘political class’. In fact, he is one of the ordinary people (Ellner, 2003: 145-146) and therefore prefers to communicate directly with Venezuelans through his own television and radio shows in which he discusses his policies, tells jokes and sings songs. The most fascinating example is Chávez’s television show *Aló Presidente*, which was, for a long time, broadcasted every week.

Chávez is supported by a network of decentralized grass-roots organizations. Maybe the most important organizations were the so-called ‘Bolivarian Circles’ – neighborhood committees (Roberts, 2007: 7). Hawkins (2010: 178-181) shows that these organizations were strongly dependent on their political leader and that they had a movement-like form of organization, which was rather unmediated and completely different from the bureaucratic hierarchies of the established political parties.

Le Pen’s Front National

The *Front National* (FN) was founded in 1972. It was an amalgam of many different radical right groups, such as ‘French Algeria die-hards; revolutionary nationalists; wartime Vichyites; Holocaust revisionists; neo-fascists; neo-Nazis; monarchists; Catholic fundamentalists; former members of extreme right *groupuscules*; and so on’ (Hainsworth, 2000: 18). During the first decade of its existence, the party was not successful. Only in 1983, in a local election, did the party make its electoral breakthrough. The greatest success for the FN took place exactly three decades after its foundation: in 2002 FN-leader Jean-Marie Le Pen eliminated the leader of the Socialist Party in the first round of the presidential election.

The FN was founded due to concern about a perceived socio-cultural crisis; an alleged decline of the greatness of the country. France had to act

quickly to avoid a national disaster (Betz, 1994: 130-131). The party strongly emphasized – and still emphasizes – the importance of preservation of what it calls the French national identity. There was fear that this French identity was under threat by the influx of migrants who wanted to keep their own identity and thereby undermined and challenged everything that was typical of the French nation. ‘France for the French’ is one of the most famous slogans of the FN (Davies, 1999). This emphasis on the nation resulted in a rather homogeneous understanding of the people. The FN did not focus on specific socio-economic groups and developed an *interclassiste* profile (Davies, 2002: 140).

Yet the French people are not only contrapositioned against ‘dangerous others’; the FN also emphasizes the antagonistic relationship between the good people and the bad elite. Le Pen depicts all political parties as a single political class that is alienated from the public (Rydgren, 2008: 174). He talks about the ‘Gang of Four’ (political parties) that captures the established order. He also refers to politics as a ‘closed shop’ and supports measures of direct democracy (Davies, 2002: 136). ‘He proclaims himself as the man fighting for the real interests of the French people against the whole of the French political establishment’ and thus presents himself as a political outsider (Davies, 1999). A clear example, which also demonstrates the direct communication style of the FN, is the postcards that the party published for New Year on which it wrote: ‘1991: The Year of the Outsider’ (Davies, 2002: 136).

To bring its message across, the party makes use of an accessible and down-to-earth language (Davies, 2002: 135), and it does not shun polarizing stances. Just one example is the following line of the FN-politician Stirbois: ‘Immigrants from beyond the Mediterranean: go back to your huts’ (quoted in Hainsworth, 2000: 24). From the foundation of the party until 2011, Le Pen was the leader of the FN. He withstood all the challenges from other candidates who contested his leadership, and he managed to keep all the different currents in the FN together. By now he is often portrayed as a charismatic and charming politician (Declair, 1999; Hainsworth, 2000) who managed to build a ‘highly disciplined, efficient, and authoritarian organization’ around himself (Simmons, 1996: 187). In January 2011, Jean-

Marie Le Pen, aged 82, handed over the party leadership to his daughter Marine Le Pen.

Berlusconi's Forza Italia / PdL

In the early nineties, Italy witnessed a huge political corruption scandal of which the political consequences were enormous. One of those consequences was that it opened up the possibility for new political entrepreneurs to enter the stage. One of those entrepreneurs was marketing man, soccer club owner and a media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. Berlusconi argued that he had decided to go into politics because he did not believe in the 'old political class', or the *partitocrazia* anymore. The country was, in his opinion, in a devastating social and political crisis (Campus, 2006: 141-142). According to Berlusconi, politicians had to start listening to what 'normal Italians' wanted. It was not clear to whom exactly Berlusconi referred when he talked about 'normal Italians'. He likely referred to everybody who was not part of the (according to Berlusconi mostly left-wing) political elite – after all, all 'normal Italians' shared the same interests in their struggle with the elite. Contrary to Le Pen in France, Berlusconi was not explicitly negative about immigrants (Tarchi, 2003: 171). One of the ways in which Berlusconi wanted to translate the will of the people into policy was by means of measures of direct democracy.

Berlusconi makes a clear distinction between 'Good' (the people and Berlusconi himself) and 'Evil' (the arrogant 'communist' political elite), and he does not, at any time, nuance this distinction. To distinguish himself from the political elite, Berlusconi presents himself as an outsider in the political realm. He emphasizes that he is a normal man, just like everyone else, and that his political adventure is only a temporary enterprise. As soon as the country is safe from the corrupt elite, he will leave the stage again (Tarchi, 2003: 163-164). To enforce this image as an anti-elitist outsider, Berlusconi makes use of a simple and clear language that is often aggressive towards the leftist media and legal elites: a language that comes from the realm of television and that everyone can easily understand (Tarchi, 2003: 168). An interesting example in this respect is the language of football. Because football is often associated

with action and success, it plays a pivotal role in Berlusconi's discourse. The name of his former party, *Forza Italia*, is the chant of the supporters of the national football team. Literally it means 'Go Italy' (Jones, 2003: 106).

Berlusconi tries to communicate as directly as possible with his electorate. During campaigns, he speaks to the people directly via his own TV channels (he owns three of the six largest television networks), and he refuses to make use of the mediation of the press. He applies the methods of TV advertising to the realm of politics (Ginsborg, 2004). Moreover, during the campaign in 2001, he sent a biography of himself, called *Una Storia Italiana* (An Italian Story), to almost every Italian household. The book contained simply written stories about Berlusconi's life, and, most of all, pictures of his successes (Stille, 2006: 252).

FI (the predecessor of the present PdL) was not a party in the traditional sense of the word. In fact, Berlusconi argued that when FI was called a 'political party' he felt shivers down the spine (Tarchi, 2003: 166). It could better be seen as a loosely organized electoral machinery with only one goal: winning elections. Berlusconi was the uncontested leader who ruled the party with an iron hand. During campaigns, Berlusconi's face was on huge posters on boards alongside the road, in railway and train stations, and all other imaginable spots (Ginsborg, 2003). Berlusconi presents himself not only as 'the idealized archetype of the Italian everyman' but also as 'exceptional, a superman in the making' (Stille, 2006: 257). A comparison Berlusconi himself likes to make is with Moses or Jesus (Jones, 2003: 293).

Conclusion and discussion

More than forty years ago, scholars posed the following question: 'Does [populism] have any underlying unity, or does one name cover a multitude of unconnected tendencies?' (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969b: 1). As this pressing question has not been answered yet, the goal of this chapter was to assess whether there exists a lowest common denominator shared by alleged populist actors across regions and over time.

First, I distinguished three area-based bodies of literature on populism: the United States literature, the Latin American literature, and the Western European literature. Second, I distinguished twelve characteristics of populism that are often mentioned in at least one of these three bodies of literature. Third, I selected two 'prototypical populists' from each body of literature. To assess the lowest common denominator that all these actors share, I made sure that the selected populist actors came from backgrounds as dissimilar as possible in terms of space, time and ideology. The selected populist actors are Watson's People's Party and Perot's Reform Party in the United States; Perón's Justicialist Party (Argentina) and Chávez's MVR/PSUV (Venezuela) in Latin America; and Le Pen's FN (France) and Berlusconi's FI (Italy) in Western Europe. Fourth, I assessed to what extent these populist actors possess the twelve characteristics of populism.

The results indicate that only four of the twelve characteristics that are often associated with populism are shared by all populist actors (see Table 2.3). Interestingly, all shared features relate to ideas. The first shared feature is that all populists emphasize the central position of the people. What they exactly mean by 'the people' often remains unclear. What *is* clear, however, and this is the second shared feature, is that they seem to have the idea that the people with whom they identify are homogeneous. The third shared characteristic is that they all argue that the people are exploited by a corrupt and selfish elite. And the fourth feature that can be found in all six cases is that populists argue that the exploitation of the people by the selfish elite constitutes a serious political, economic and/or cultural crisis.

These findings suggest that actors labeled as populist actually have something in common and that it is not a coincidence that they have all been labeled as such. This is an important finding because it means that it is possible to formulate a minimal definition of populism. We can travel between different regional contexts and compare populists in the United States of the nineteenth century with twentieth century populist leaders in Latin America and present-day allegedly populist parties in Western Europe on the basis of this definition.

Table 2.3
Populists and their characteristics

	Watson People's Party	Perot Reform Party	Perón Justicialist Party	Chávez MVR/ PSUV	Le Pen Front National	Berlusconi Forza Italia
Ideas						
1. People-centrism	+	+	+	+	+	+
2. Anti-elitism	+	+	+	+	+	+
3. Homogeneity of the people	+	+	+	+	+	+
4. Direct democracy	+	+	-	+	+	+
5. Exclusionism	+	-	-	-	+	-
6. Proclamation of a crisis	+	+	+	+	+	+
Style						
7. Simplistic language	-	+	-	+	+	+
8. Direct communication style	+	+	-	+	+	+
9. Polarization	-	+	+	+	+	+
10. Image of outsider	-	+	+	+	+	+
Organization						
11. Centralization of leader	-	+	+	+	+	+
12. Loosely mediated relationship	+	+	+	+	-	+

On the basis of these findings, it is possible to formulate a baseline criterion that a minimal definition of populism must fulfill: it should never contain elements other than the four elements of the lowest common denominator (people-centrism + anti-elitism + homogeneity of the people + proclamation of a crisis). For example, a definition of populism in which exclusionism plays an important role could be employed to analyse cases in Western Europe.¹⁷ Such a definition cannot, however, travel to the United States or Latin America. Similarly, a definition in which leadership is one of the central attributes could be used in an analysis of Latin American populism, but it cannot be applied to cases in the United States or Western Europe.¹⁸ This does not mean that all four elements of the lowest common denominator should necessarily be included in the definition. It might, for instance, be argued that the proclamation of a crisis is not a defining element of populism, but a consequence of contrasting the Good people with the evil elite.

At least two existing, and often employed, definitions of populism fulfill the baseline criterion. Mudde (2004: 543) has defined populism as: ‘an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’; and Hawkins (2009: 1042) has defined populism ‘as a Manichean discourse that identifies Good with a unified will of the people and Evil with a conspiring elite’. Of course, these definitions differ from each other in some respects. Yet both meet the baseline prerequisite of containing no other attributes than the elements of the lowest common denominator.¹⁹ As such, these minimal definitions are appropriate for comparing populist actors across regions and over time.

¹⁷ See, for instance, the definition formulated by Albertazzi & McDonnell (2008b: 3).

¹⁸ See, for example, the definition of Weyland (2001: 18).

¹⁹ Note that these definitions do not contain all four elements of the lowest common denominator. Both contain the elements of people-centrism and anti-elitism, and also the attribute of homogeneity of the people. Mudde, after all, emphasizes the ‘purity’ of the people and their *volonté générale*, and Hawkins talks about the ‘unified will’ of

In the remainder of this dissertation, I employ Mudde's definition of populism for two main reasons. First, the findings in this chapter confirm that this definition can be employed to compare populists across cases and over time. Second, the *Zeitgeist*-claim, on which this dissertation is based, has been formulated by Mudde. To be sure that I conceive of populism in a similar way as Mudde, it is appropriate to make use of Mudde's own definition of the term.

the people. But neither definition also explicitly incorporates the proclamation of a crisis.

Chapter 3

MEASURING POPULISM IN COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Comparing Two Methods of Content Analysis

A previous version of this chapter has been published as Rooduijn, M. & Pauwels, T. (2011), 'Measuring Populism: Comparing Two Methods of Content Analysis', *West European Politics*, 34(6), 1272-1283. The text has been adapted by including French election manifestos in addition to German, Italian, Dutch and British manifestos.

Much as with older accounts of populism, newer ones tend to declare certain leaders populist by fiat rather than through any kind of systematic measurement, and analyses that do offer justifications are usually single-country studies that avoid demonstrating the broad applicability or reliability of their measure.

Kirk A. Hawkins, 2009, p. 1041.

Introduction

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the term populism has been applied to a wide and diverse range of movements, politicians and parties. It has been shown that a potentially problematic aspect of populism as a scientific concept is its contextual sensitivity: populist actors in Latin America have different characteristics than populists in Western Europe, and populists in Italy are different from populists in France. Because of this contextual sensitivity, populism is in turn plagued by a lack of conceptual clarity (Barr, 2009; Canovan, 1981; Laclau, 2005; Taggart, 2000). Consequently, scholars have not yet developed systematic methods to empirically measure populism across cases and over time. There have been some empirical investigations into populism, yet most of these are single case studies (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008a; Mény & Surel, 2002a). A more systematic and comparative perspective is still lacking. This is problematic because the most relevant scientific questions – including the main questions of this dissertation – are empirical and comparative in nature: are we increasingly living in a populist *Zeitgeist*?; under which circumstances are mainstream parties becoming populist?; have the media become increasingly populist? In this chapter, I do not aim to answer these empirical questions yet. However, I do focus on a fundamental *prerequisite* for answering these questions: the methodological issue of how to measure populism empirically.

I compare two methods to measure populism: (1) a classical content analysis where coders systematically analyze texts by means of a codebook; and (2) a computerized content analysis in which an a priori designed

dictionary serves as a gauge of the degree of populism. Although this study demonstrates that both approaches can be used to measure populism across cases and over time, the classical analysis turns out to generate more valid results.

I am not the first to measure populism by means of the method of content analysis. Jagers and Walgrave (2007) were among the first to do that. However, although their analysis provided a breakthrough in measuring populism, their study included only one country, and issues of reliability and validity were not dealt with. Another content analysis of populism has been executed by Hawkins (2009). He analyzed speeches by means of 'holistic grading', in which the unit of measurement is the entire text. The main problems with Hawkins' study are the rough – and therefore possibly invalid – measurement due to the holistic grading method, and at times low reliability (Kappa = 0.44). More recently, Pauwels (2011) also measured populism by means of a computer-based content analysis. However, he only studied the Belgian case. In this chapter, I focus extensively on issues of validity (i.e., evaluating whether we measure what we think we are measuring) and reliability (i.e., the consistency of the measurement), while maintaining a comparative perspective.

Populism as a thin ideology consisting of two components

To measure a concept systematically, we first have to agree on a clear definition. I build on the definition of populism that has been provided by Mudde (2004: 543): '[populism is] an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (see also the previous chapter). Although other scholars have defined populism as a style (see Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) or an organizational form (see Taggart, 1995), I focus on this *ideational* minimal definition of populism because of its denotative clarity (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Stanley, 2008) and because it is an appropriate definition to compare cases

across countries and over time (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). Populism is not a 'full ideology', such as liberalism or socialism, but a 'thin ideology' (Freeden, 1998), which only focuses on a confined range of concepts (e.g., nationalism, feminism, ecologism).

According to Mudde's definition the thin ideology of populism consists of two components: people-centrism and anti-elitism. The point of departure of every populist is the fundamental importance of the centrality of 'the people' (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969b; Mény & Surel, 2002b). Yet 'the people' can mean many different things in many different circumstances (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2004). It can refer, for instance, to peasants, the working class, the electorate, the nation, or no fixed group at all (Canovan, 1981; Taggart, 2000). Populists are anti-elitist because elites stand in the way of the centrality of the people. Elites are portrayed as corrupt and are contrasted against the general will of the people (Mudde, 2004).

Research strategy

The unit of analysis in my content analyses is the election manifesto.²⁰ This unit was chosen for two reasons. The first substantive reason is that an election manifesto can be seen as the document that gives the clearest overview of what a party stands for at a certain point in time. In most cases, politicians are bound to the policy promises laid down in an election manifesto. 'As an official document, it will be difficult for party members to resile from policies in the party manifesto, while party leaders can be charged with failure to implement published manifesto pledges when given the chance to do so' (Laver & Garry, 2000: 620). The second, more practical, reason is that election manifestos are appropriate documents for a cross-national study

²⁰ The unit of analysis should not be confused with the unit of measurement. The classical and the computerized content analysis approach have the same unit of analysis (election manifestos) but different units of measurements (paragraphs and words respectively). This is due to the different points of departure of the two methods. This is discussed further in the next sections of this chapter.

because they are reasonably comparable across countries and over time (Klemmensen et al., 2007).

I focus on the election manifestos of parties in Western Europe because 'the main area of sustained populist growth and success over the last fifteen years in established democracies has been Western Europe' (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008: 1). More specifically, I selected France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom because these countries accommodate a wide range of different kinds of allegedly populist parties: the *Front National* (FN) (Rydgren, 2008) in France; the *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (PDS, later: *Die Linke*) (Hough & Koß, 2009) in Germany; *Forza Italia* (FI), the *Lega Nord* (LN) and the *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) in Italy (Tarchi, 2008); the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) (Vossen, 2010), the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) (Lucardie, 2008), the *Socialistische Partij* (SP) (March, 2007), and the *Centrumdemocraten* (CD) (Mudde, 2007) in the Netherlands; and the *British National Party* (BNP) and the *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP) (Fella, 2008) in the UK. They range from the left (e.g., the SP) to the right (e.g., the PVV), and from electorally very successful (e.g., FI) to relatively unsuccessful (e.g., the BNP).²¹ My focus is not only on the 'usual suspects' but also on the mainstream parties in each country – i.e., liberal, conservative/Christian-democratic and social-democratic parties. The reason for doing so is to explore to what extent my measurement distinguishes allegedly populist parties from mainstream parties. Moreover, some mainstream parties, such as the UK *Labour* party under Tony Blair, have also been labeled as populist (Mair, 2002).

I have not only compared parties across space but also over time. Four election years (between 1988 and 2008) have been selected in each of the countries under investigation. This resulted in 83 election manifestos, which

²¹ All these allegedly populist parties are commonly classified as either radical right-wing or radical left-wing. Although many other radical left-wing parties, such as the DS (IT) and the PCF (FR), are usually not categorized as populist, I have included them in my case selection as well because they share many characteristics with their ideological brethren *Die Linke* (GE) and SP (NL), which are commonly categorized as populist.

were included in the classical content analysis. For an overview, see Appendix A. However, because 13 of these manifestos could not be translated into a legible digital format, the computerized content analysis is based on 70 election manifestos.²²

The classical content analysis

In my classical content analysis of populism, the manifestos were analyzed by extensively trained coders by means of a codebook. In this codebook, people-centrism was operationalized by the following question: 'Do the authors of the manifesto refer to the people?' The coders were instructed to look at every possible reference to the people. It did not matter whether this reference concerned, for instance, 'citizens', 'our country', 'society' or 'we' (as in 'we the people'). The coders were also instructed to interpret the broader context in deciding whether to code people-centrism or not. To assist the coders, I provided an extensive list of words and combinations of words that *could* refer to the people.²³

Anti-elitism was measured by means of the question: 'Do the authors of the manifesto criticize elites?' The critique had to concern political elites *in general*. A critique of a specific party or a particular politician was not general enough and was therefore not coded. Because anti-elitism can be expressed in many different ways, the coders were again instructed to interpret the context while coding.²⁴

²² The excluded manifestos are: PS 1993, RPR 1993, UDF 1993, PCF 1993, PS 1997, RPR 1997, and FN 1997 in France; CDU/CSU 2002 in Germany; AN 1992, LN 1992, AN 1994, and DS 1994 in Italy; CD 1994 and VVD 2006 in the Netherlands; and Libdem 1992 and BNP 1992 in the United Kingdom.

²³ These words are: people, citizen(s), community, society, public, population, nation(al), all of us, each of us, everyone, our, we, voter(s), electorate, referenda, direct democracy, public opinion, country. And words such as: United Kingdom, Britons, Netherlands, Dutch, Italians, Gemany, etc. (depending of course on the country under analysis).

²⁴ For the question wording see Appendix B.

The unit of measurement is the paragraph because paragraphs are objectively traceable distinctions between arguments.²⁵ I have selected those paragraphs as populist in which both people-centrism and anti-elitism were present. Eventually, the percentage of populist paragraphs in every election manifesto was computed.

The computer-based content analysis

Because a classical content analysis is a very time-consuming and therefore expensive enterprise, I have also employed a much easier applicable measurement of populism, drawing on a computer-based content analysis. This measurement relies on the dictionary approach in which a computer counts the proportion of words that can be considered to be indicators of populism.²⁶ This means that words instead of paragraphs are the unit of measurement. Although skeptics might argue that the same word can have different meanings depending on the context, it is often possible to code words unambiguously (Laver & Garry, 2000).²⁷

²⁵ Because populist claims are usually presented in multiple sentences, the sentence is not an appropriate unit of measurement in this study (cf. Guthrie et al., 2004). ‘Themes’, also referred to as ‘appeals’ or ‘statements’, do represent clearly delineated arguments. It is, however, difficult to extract them from texts (Weber, 1990: 22), which makes it difficult to obtain reliable results when using the theme as unit of measurement.

²⁶ While there are different approaches available in computerized textual analyses – such as *Wordscores* or *Wordfish* – I draw on a dictionary approach (Laver & Garry, 2000). A drawback of *Wordscores* is that it requires scores to be computed by other methods such as expert surveys (Laver et al., 2003). *Wordfish* works well for extracting single left-right dimensions (Slapin & Proksch, 2008), while it is less suited to explore a specific ideological aspect such as populism.

²⁷ The word ‘taxes’, for instance, might be associated with cutting taxes, but it can equally be used to indicate that a party wants to increase taxes. In practice, however, this latter meaning will hardly be found in party manifestos, and the word taxes is hence a good indicator for the category ‘reduce state involvement in the economy’, identifying socio-economic rightist parties.

After a first explorative analysis, it turned out that a measurement of people-centrism by means of individual words only is nearly impossible. In many instances, 'the people' is referred to by the words 'we' and 'our' (e.g., 'we [the people] need to raise *our* voice'). Yet not every mentioning of the words 'our' or 'we' is a reference to the people. Often, these words refer to the political party instead of the people (e.g., 'we [the party] propose *our* plans in the next chapter'). I therefore decided to only focus on words that refer to anti-elitism. Although the computer-based measurement is therefore likely to be less valid, I believe that anti-elitism is a reasonable indicator of populism because the classical content analysis taught that criticism towards elites is mostly motivated by the argument that elites betray the ordinary people. The argument cannot be reversed, however, because many political parties will centralize the people without being negative towards elites.²⁸ Whether anti-elitism alone is indeed a good indicator of populism can only be concluded from the comparison of the measurements.

My selection of words for the dictionary was based on both empirical and theoretical reasoning. For inspiration, I used empirical examples (election manifestos of allegedly populist parties that I did not actually analyze) to make a list of words that such parties have used to express their negativity towards elites. However, my final decision of whether to include these words in the dictionary was based on theoretical reasons: only those words have been selected that were explicitly used to position the bad elites against the good people. The development of a dictionary is not an easy task, however. Not every word that could refer to anti-elitism always refers to it, while at the same time, many instances of anti-elitism can easily be missed because it is impossible to formulate every word that could refer to anti-elitism beforehand. Theoretically deduced words that never seemed to appear in the manifestos of any party were excluded. I attempted to translate the dictionary

²⁸ The classical content analysis empirically confirmed this: there is only a weak correlation between people-centrism and anti-elitism ($r = 0.04$, not significant at $p < 0.05$), whereas – the other way around – almost every anti-elitist paragraph also contains a reference to the people.

for the five languages as accurately as possible. However, in addition to the translated 'core words', I also added some 'context-specific words'. The context-specific words are words that are too context-specific to be translated from one language to another.²⁹

Although I am aware of the possible pitfalls when translating the dictionary, I argue that the theoretical argument of anti-elitism is generally similar across cases and over time. Whatever the specific context, populists in every country and every time-period do essentially the same thing: they position the good people against the bad elites. Because they make this same argument, I assume that they also use similar words. I used the open software program Yoshikoder to measure the populism score, which is the percentage of dictionary words. For a complete overview of the dictionary, see Appendix C.

Results

Validity

I focus on three types of validation: content validation, face validation, and concurrent validation. A measurement is *content valid* if the systematized concept is adequately captured by its indicator or indicators (Adcock & Collier, 2001). I have argued that populism consists of the combination of people-centrism and anti-elitism. In the classical analysis I have measured it accordingly because I verified for every measurement unit whether there was a reference to 'the people' combined with a critique on elites in general. Yet the computer-based analysis is less content valid. After all, here the systematized concept of populism is not adequately captured by its indicators.

²⁹ For instance, allegedly populist parties in the Netherlands sometimes talk about 'regenten' to express anti-elitism. This word refers to the Dutch political rulers in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century. Although the 'regenten' did not form a hereditary class, they did form a closed group that reserved government offices for themselves. This specific word is not used by allegedly populist parties in countries other than the Netherlands.

Instead of measuring both people-centrism and anti-elitism, the computerized content analysis only focused on anti-elitism.³⁰

A measurement has *face validity* when it appears to be measuring the concept that it intends to measure (Weber, 1990). In my case, the measurement of populism has face validity if allegedly populist parties have high values on this measure, while other parties score low(er). The results indicate that the allegedly populist parties have, on average, much higher values than the other parties on both measures of populism (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Mean populism scores (standard deviations between brackets)

	Allegedly populist parties	Other parties	Overall
Classical content analysis (N = 87)	7.739 (6.785)	1.150 (2.106)	2.912 (4.874)
Classical content analysis (N = 70)	6.080 (6.194)	0.936 (1.858)	2.203 (4.075)
Computerized content analysis (N = 70)	0.099 (0.091)	0.036 (0.038)	0.051 (0.062)

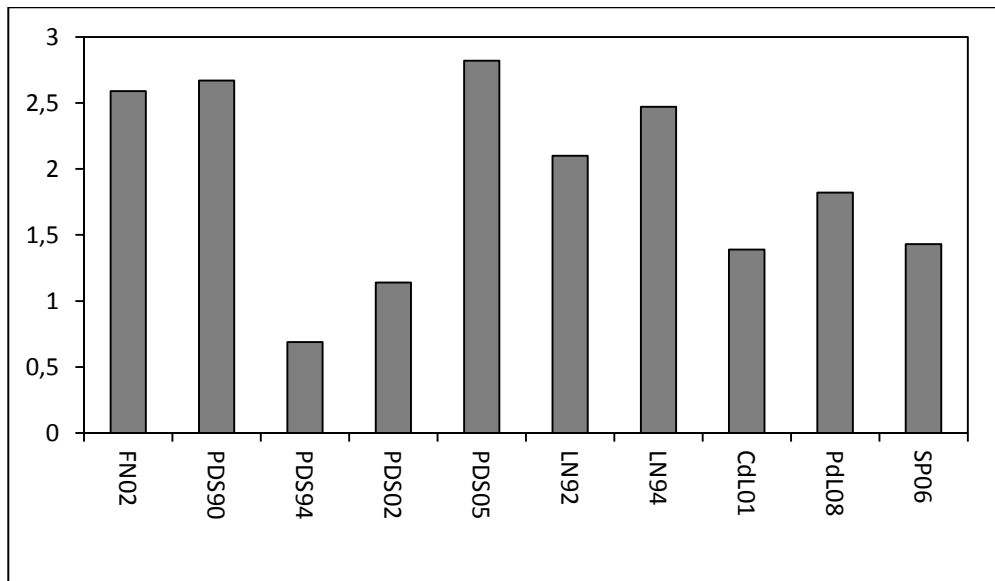
According to the classical content analysis, there are some allegedly populist parties that are less populist than expected (i.e., less populist than the mean populism score): the FN (2002) in France, PDS/Die Linke (1990, 1994, 2002 and 2005) in Germany, LN (1992 and 1994) and the CdL/PdL (2001 and 2008) in Italy, and the SP (2006) in the Netherlands (see Figure 3.1). The most remarkable of these outcomes is that PDS/Die Linke turned out to be only marginally more populist than mainstream parties in all German election

³⁰ It needs to be admitted that a mere reference to the people does not necessarily imply that the people is conceived of as a homogeneous actor. Yet, a close look at the results of the analysis shows that when a reference to the people coincides with an anti-elitist claim, the writers of the manifesto almost always argue that the people are betrayed by the elites. This implies that the people are seen as a unified actor, at least with regard to their relationship with the elites.

years under investigation. This might be explained by the moderate political climate in Germany (Art, 2006). The low populism score for the SP in 2006 is in line with the claim that this party has become less populist over time (Lucardie & Voerman, 2012). That the CdL/PdL has relatively low populism scores might be due to the party being the main right-wing party (block) during the elections of 2001 and 2008 and wanted to present itself as a mainstream political movement (Tarchi, 2008). The low scores of FN and LN are more difficult to explain. My suspicion is that these parties scored low on the populism scale because they focused more strongly on migration and integration than on the core elements of populism (i.e., the people versus the elites).

Figure 3.1

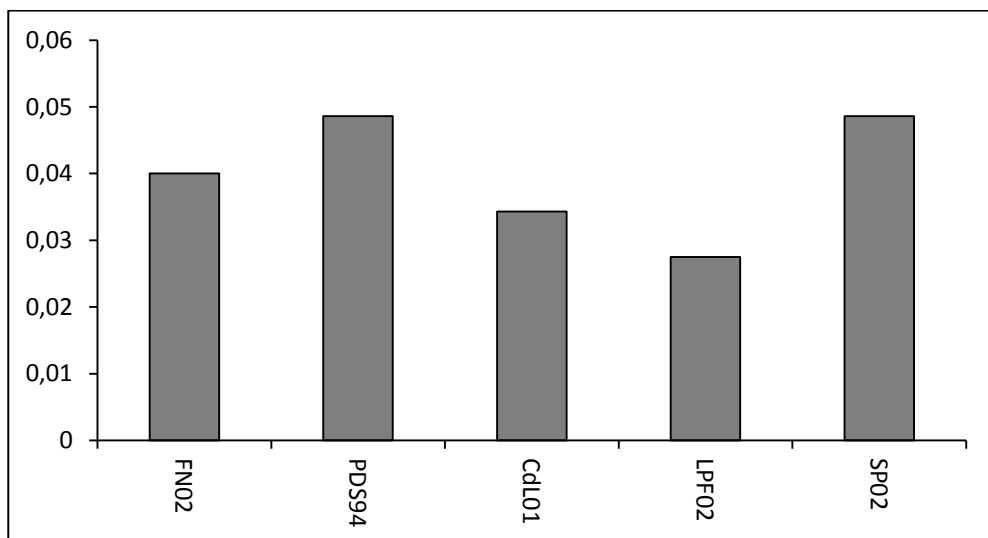
Classical content analysis: allegedly populist parties with populism scores below the mean (2.91)



The computer-based content analysis yields similar results (see Figure 3.2): the FN, the DS, the CdL and the SP are, just as in the classical analysis, identified as less populist than expected.³¹ A striking result of the computerized method is that the LPF is only marginally populist. This contrasts with the existing literature (see Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Mudde, 2007; Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007) and with the results of the classical content analysis.

Figure 3.2

Computerized content analysis: allegedly populist parties with populism scores below the mean (0.05)



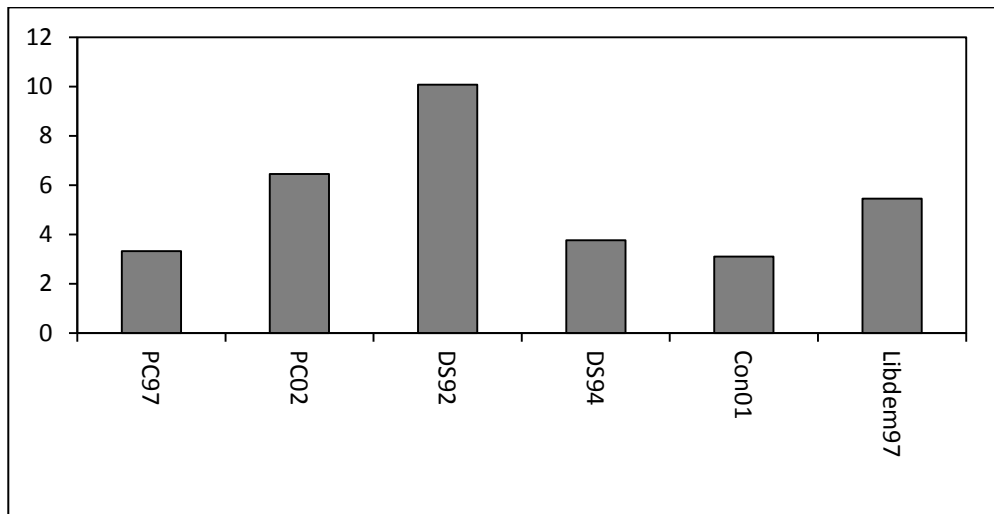
There are some non-populist parties that turned out to be rather populist (i.e., more populist than the mean populism score) according to the classical content analysis (see Figure 3.3). These parties are the PCF (1997 and 2002) in France, the DS (1992 and 1994) in Italy, and the Libdems (1997) and Conservatives (2001) in the United Kingdom. It is not so surprising that the French PCF and the Italian DS are rather populist. After all, both belong to the

³¹ Note that LN 1992 is not included in the computerized analysis.

far left party family (e.g., Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006), and it has been argued that populism is highly compatible with radical left ideologies (March, 2007; March & Mudde, 2005). Moreover, Italy also witnessed a large-scale corruption scandal in the early nineties, which might well have fuelled DS's populism (Tarchi, 2002). The high score of mainstream parties in the United Kingdom can perhaps be explained by the UK's two party system in which fierce opposition campaigns can come close to populism. Indeed, various scholars have argued that mainstream parties in Britain are rather populist (e.g., Mair, 2002; Mudde, 2004).

Figure 3.3

Classical content analysis: other parties with populism scores above the mean (2.91)

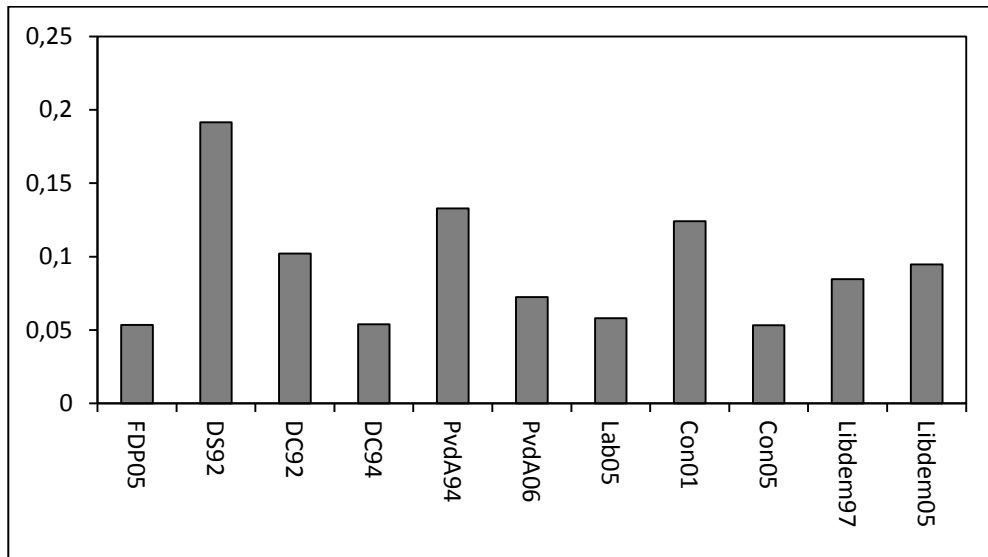


According to the computer-based content analysis, there are more non-populist parties that have rather high populism scores (see Figure 3.4): Libdem (1997 and 2005), the Conservatives (2001 and 2005) and Labour (2005) in the United Kingdom; the FDP (2005) in Germany; the DC (1992 and 1994) and the DS (1992) in Italy; and the PvdA (1994 and 2006) in the Netherlands.³²

³² Note that DS 1994 (Italy) is not included in the computer-based analysis.

Figure 3.4

Computerized content analysis: other parties with populism scores above the mean (0.05)



Although the high scores for the Libdems, the Conservatives and Labour might be explained by the British party system, the results for the German FDP, the Italian DC and the Dutch PvdA are more difficult to explain. Because the classical content analysis generated fewer results which are difficult to explain (3) than the computerized analysis (8),³³ it can be concluded that the classical content analysis is more face valid than the computerized method.

Concurrent validity entails that a measure is valid if the results of a measurement of the systematized concept in one study are empirically related to the results of a different measurement of the same systematized concept in another study (Adcock & Collier, 2001). I can test whether my measurements of populism are valid by comparing their results. The results are generally

³³ These cases that are difficult to explain are FN 2002, FN 2004 and LN 1992 with regard to the classical analysis, and FN 2002, DS 1994, LPF 2002, FDP 2005, DC 1992, DC 1994, PvdA 1994 and PvdA 2006 with regard to the computerized analysis.

Reliability

In a classical content analysis, the inter-coder reliability is the extent to which different coders code the same text in the same way (Krippendorff, 2004). To prevent low inter-coder reliability, I have extensively trained my 13 coders (4 from the Netherlands, 3 from the United Kingdom, and 2 from France, Germany and Italy). Every coder attended three training sessions in which the codebook was explained and in which coding examples were discussed. Between the training sessions, the coders had to complete take-home exercises. After the training sessions, I assessed the inter-coder reliability. The coders had to complete two reliability tests. First, all coders had to analyze a sample of paragraphs from British election manifestos (all coders speak English), so I could calculate whether the *cross-national* inter-coder reliability was sufficient. I have calculated the inter-coder reliability using Krippendorff's alpha. The results for cross-national reliability are $\alpha = 0.72$ for people-centrism, and $\alpha = 0.69$ for anti-elitism. Second, all coders had to analyze another sample of paragraphs from the election manifestos of parties from their own countries, so I was able to assess the *national* inter-coder reliability coefficients. The Krippendorff's alpha's range from 0.66 to 0.89. The statistics in general are satisfactory.³⁵

One of the advantages of the computer-based content analysis is its accuracy. Because a computer produces the exact same results no matter how many times one runs the analysis, Laver and Garry (2000: 625) claim that '[c]omputer coding is 100 percent reliable [...].' This is, however, a rather one-sided way to look at reliability. It must be kept in mind that different researchers of populism would most likely end up with different dictionaries to measure the concept, which in turn would impact the results. I have performed a split-half test to shed some light on this issue. First, the words of the dictionaries for each country were randomly divided into two groups. For

³⁵ The sample of paragraphs in the reliability tests contained approximately five per cent of the total amount of paragraphs. The results for people-centrism are: $\alpha = 0.75$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.74$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.89$ (IT), $\alpha = 0.78$ (NL), and $\alpha = 0.73$ (UK). The results for anti-elitism are: $\alpha = 0.69$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.79$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.84$ (IT), $\alpha = 0.84$ (NL), and $\alpha = 0.66$ (UK).

each country this resulted in two 'half' dictionaries. In a second step, I explored the Pearson correlation coefficients between the results computed by the two 'half' dictionaries in each country. The results are as follows: 0.54 for France, 0.24 for Germany, 0.51 for Italy, 0.41 for the Netherlands, and 0.48 for the United Kingdom. To control for analyzing 'half' dictionaries only, I adjusted the split-half correlations by means of the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula, which resulted in reliability scores of 0.70 for France, 0.39 for Germany, 0.68 for Italy, 0.58 for the Netherlands, and 0.65 for the United Kingdom.³⁶ Except for Germany, which might be explained by the lack of allegedly populist parties and hence variation in the scores, these statistics seem sufficient. Therefore, even when the split-half test provides a different picture than that suggested by Laver and Garry (2000), I would nonetheless argue that the computerized approach is reliable enough to be employed in empirical research. Whether it is more or less reliable than the classical content analysis is difficult to assess because of the different approaches in reliability testing. Yet the low reliability for Germany suggests that the classical content analysis might be more reliable.

Conclusion

The measurement of populism, particularly over time and space, has not received much attention. In this chapter, I have paid extensive attention to the measurement of populism over time and across countries. By means of both a classical content analysis as well as a computerized method, I investigated the degree of populism of political parties in the France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The validity of the computerized method thus turns out to be lower than that of the classical approach. The main problem with this method is that the indicator of anti-elitism alone does not cover the whole concept, which consists of *both* people-centrism and anti-elitism. Yet, empirically, the effect of this theoretical shortcoming is limited.

³⁶ Reliability = $\frac{n * r}{1 + (n - 1)r}$.

Face validation and concurrent validation show that anti-elitism alone is a relatively good indicator of populism and that the computerized content analysis method can be employed to measure populism across cases and over time.

Nevertheless, because the classical content analysis method is a more valid approach to measuring populism and because it might be argued that it is also a more reliable approach, I employ the classical analysis of populism in the remainder of this dissertation.

Chapter 4

POPULIST ‘CONTAGION’?

Allegedly Populist Parties and Mainstream Parties in Western Europe

This chapter is a minor revision of a paper entitled ‘A populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe’. This paper, which was co-authored by Sarah de Lange and Wouter van der Brug, has been accepted for publication in *Party Politics*.

... at least since the early 1990s populism has become a regular feature of politics in western democracies. While populism is still mostly used by outsider or challenger parties, mainstream politicians, both in government and opposition, have been using it as well – generally in an attempt to counter the populist challengers.

Cas Mudde, 2004, p. 551

Introduction

Allegedly populist parties have become important players in Western European party systems. Over the past decades, radical right-wing parties have entered national parliaments in countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, whereas radical left-wing parties have gained representation in Germany, the Netherlands and Scotland. Several allegedly populist parties, including the *Fremskrittspartiet* (FRP), *Perussuomalaiset* (PS), and the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (SVP), are supported by more than twenty per cent of the electorate, and others (e.g., the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreich* (FPÖ), the *Lega Nord* (LN) and the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF)) have assumed office in recent years. In this chapter, the main focus is not on these allegedly populist parties themselves. Instead, the aim is to assess to what extent the electoral success of these parties has impacted on the mainstream parties that they have challenged. How did the political mainstream respond to the populist upsurge?

Various scholars have examined the way in which mainstream parties have responded to the electoral success of radical right-wing allegedly populist parties (Bale, 2003; Bale et al., 2010; Downs, 2001; Heinisch, 2003; Loxbo, 2010; Minkenberg, 2001; Mudde, 2007; Van Spanje, 2010; Van Spanje & Van der Brug, 2009). However, their studies have primarily focused on the extent to which mainstream parties have reacted by copying these parties' anti-immigrant or nativist stances. Far less attention has been paid to populism, which is also a component of the ideology of radical right-wing

allegedly populist parties. Moreover, these studies have exclusively focused on contagion by radical *right-wing* parties, ignoring the radical *left-wing* allegedly populist parties that have emerged in recent years as well.

According to Mudde (2004), we are witnessing a populist *Zeitgeist* in Western Europe. He has claimed that radical left- and right-wing allegedly populist parties are gaining support and that, in response to this development, mainstream parties are increasingly using populist *rhetoric*. Thus, populism can be considered contagious (Bale et al., 2010; Mény & Surel, 2002b). In this chapter, I analyze mainstream parties' *programmatic* reactions to the rise of both radical left- and right-wing allegedly populist parties in Western Europe. The reason for this choice for programmatic reactions is that most scholars have defined populism as a 'thin-centered ideology', that is, a particular set of ideas about the relationship between 'the people' and 'the elites' (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Canovan, 2004; Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Mudde, 2004, 2007; Stanley, 2008). In line with this definition, I examine whether the programs of mainstream parties have become more populist over the years.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I discuss my definition of populism. Populism is a contested concept, so it is of vital importance to be clear about the way the concept is defined here. Second, I investigate the conditions under which the programs of mainstream parties are likely to become populist. Third, I pay attention to the design and method used in this chapter. In particular, I devote attention to the method of content analysis that I employed to establish to what extent the programs of parties can be qualified as populist. Fourth, I analyze whether mainstream parties have become (more) populist since the late 1980s. Finally, I discuss the implications of my findings for our understanding of the rise of populism in Western Europe.

Defining populism

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars seem to agree that populism can best be defined as a 'thin-centered ideology' in which the Good people are positioned against the Evil elites (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Canovan, 2004; Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Mudde, 2004, 2007;

Pauwels, 2011; Stanley, 2008).³⁷ In this chapter, I build on this agreement and employ Mudde's (2004: 543) definition of populism as 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people'.

I conceptualize populism as being essentially a property of a message rather than a property of the actor sending the message. This difference may appear pedantic, yet I believe it is important. By conceptualizing populism as a characteristic of a message, politicians, parties, newspaper articles, party programs, or speeches cannot be qualified as being either populist or not populist. Instead, populism then becomes a matter of degree. A politician who sends out many populist messages can thus be classified as more populist than a politician who sends out few such messages.

My definition of populism has two core elements, 'the people' and 'the elites'. Populism relates to the antagonistic *relationship* between these two groups (Laclau, 2005; Panizza, 2005). Populists define the people in opposition to the elites and the elites in opposition to the people. They worship the 'people' – who are believed to be homogeneous – and emphasize that any democracy is built on the idea of popular sovereignty (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969b; Mény & Surel, 2002b). The 'people', however, may mean different things to different people in different circumstances (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2004). It can refer, for instance, to the electorate, to the nation, to the peasants, or to the working class (Canovan, 1981; Pasquino, 2008; Taggart, 2000).³⁸

³⁷ Alternatively, populism can be conceptualized as a discourse. The differences between a discourse and a thin-centered ideology are minimal because both concepts highlight that populism refers to a set of ideas (Hawkins, 2010; Hawkins et al., 2012). The 'ideational approach' should be distinguished from the 'stylistic approach', in which populism is conceived of as a political style or strategy (Bos et al., 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mazzoleni, 2003) and the 'organizational approach', in which populism is seen as an organizational form (Taggart, 1995).

³⁸ Taggart (2000) therefore proposes to use the term 'heartland' instead of 'people'. The heartland refers to an idealized conception of the people and is thus a tool to

Populists accuse the elites of being alienated from the people and of being arrogant, incompetent and selfish (Barr, 2009; Canovan, 2002; Laclau, 2005; Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001). The elites are believed to have no idea what ordinary people deem important and to only focus on their own interests. Anti-elitism can be directed at the cultural elite, including intellectuals, journalists and judges, or at the economic elite, including businessmen and bankers. Most often, however, anti-elitism is directed at the political elite, which is portrayed as corrupt and out of touch with reality. The elites are accused of ignoring the will of the 'man in the street' and of only implementing policies that benefit themselves (Mudde, 2004; Mény & Surel, 2002b).

Some scholars have argued that populists not only criticize elites, but they also target 'outsiders' (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Taguieff, 1995). They are believed to exclude 'dangerous others' – individuals or groups who are not part of what populists consider to be 'the people', such as immigrants, or religious or ethnic minorities. However, several scholars have claimed that while exclusionism is a central feature of *radical right-wing* populism, it is not part of populism per se (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 2000). Whether populists are exclusionary depends on the ideology that they adhere to, which can be either left- or right-wing (March, 2007). Thus, populism is inherently chameleonistic (Taggart, 2000). Following these authors, I do not consider exclusionism to be a constitutive component of populism. Including it in my definition would produce a bias towards radical right-wing populism, whereas I am explicitly interested in both left- and right-wing populism.

Is populism contagious?

Mudde (2004: 550) has argued that mainstream parties in Western Europe have increasingly resorted to using populist rhetoric: 'While populism has

describe the discourse or ideology of allegedly populist parties in more detail. In this chapter, however, I am not interested in specific conceptions of the people, but in the *degree* to which parties can be qualified as populist. Therefore I do not employ the term 'heartland'.

been less prominent in mainstream politics in Western Europe, the last decade or so has seen a significant change in this. Various mainstream opposition parties have challenged the government using familiar populist arguments'. To substantiate his point, Mudde (2004: 550) discussed a statement made by William Hague, leader of the Conservatives, during the British election campaign in 2001. In a speech Hague accused the leadership of New Labour of being part of 'the condescending liberal elite' in an attempt to construct an image of a left-wing metropolitan elite that was completely out of touch with ordinary Brits. Examining a speech that Tony Blair delivered to the British Labour Party Conference in 1999, Mair (2002: 92) has come to a similar conclusion. He noted that '[o]ne of the first things [this speech] reveals is the extent to which a populist language has now become acceptable within what has long been perceived as a decidedly non-populist political culture'. Other Western European political leaders of mainstream parties, such as Nicolas Sarkozy in France, Steve Stevaert in Flanders and Wouter Bos in the Netherlands (De Beus, 2009; Mudde, 2004), have also been qualified as populists. Mudde (2004: 563) has argued that:

'When explicitly populist outsider groups gain prominence, parts of the establishment will react by a combined strategy of exclusion and inclusion; while trying to exclude the populist actor(s) from political power, they will include populist themes and rhetoric to try and fight off the challenge. This dynamic will bring about a populist *Zeitgeist*, like the one we are facing today, which will dissipate as soon as the populist challenger seems to be over its top.'

Although Mudde primarily observed changes in the *rhetoric* of mainstream parties, it is plausible that the responses of mainstream parties to the rise of allegedly populist parties have been more substantive. Given that populism is often defined as a thin-centered ideology, it can be expected that mainstream parties have not only changed the way they *speak* about, for example, the people in their speeches, but that they have also changed the way they *think* about the people. I believe it is important to examine how pervasive the

populist Zeitgeist is and investigate whether mainstream parties' ideas, as laid down in their manifestos, have become more populist over time. I therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4.1: The programs of mainstream parties in Western Europe have become more populist since the late 1980s.

Why would mainstream parties have become more populist in recent years? Harmel and Janda (1994) have argued that parties are conservative organizations that only change when they are under pressure. The motto of most parties is 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' (Harmel & Svåsand, 1997: 316). The pressure that will drive parties to change might come from within (e.g., a leadership change), but in most cases it will result from external developments, such as electoral losses and the rise of new parties (Harmel & Janda, 1994: 267).

Several authors (Harmel et al., 1995; Harmel & Janda, 1994; Janda et al., 1995) have demonstrated that electoral losses are among the most important causes of party change. According to Schlesinger (1984: 390), political parties might best be described as 'forms of organized trial and error'. They respond to the political market: when they lose seats, they realize that they are doing something wrong and therefore change their strategy (see also Panebianco, 1988). I therefore expect that mainstream parties that lose seats will revise their political programs. In an era of increasing levels of political cynicism, distrust, and personalization of politics, they might believe that an appeal to the man in the street and a critical stance towards elites might be a remedy to electoral decline. In other words, mainstream parties that experience electoral setbacks might resort to populism. Thus, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4.2: The greater the electoral losses of a mainstream party, the more populist the programs of this party become.

It is also possible that mainstream parties respond more specifically to the electoral threat of allegedly populist parties. Mudde (2007: 283) has argued that mainstream parties will become more populist when they have to compete with allegedly populist parties 'in an attempt to keep or regain their

electorate'. As long as allegedly populist parties are relatively unsuccessful, mainstream parties might not be inclined to adjust their programs. Instead, they might opt for a dismissive strategy and hope that by ignoring allegedly populist contenders, they will disappear (Downs, 2001; Meguid, 2005). However, when allegedly populist parties become successful, mainstream parties may respond by incorporating populism into their own programs (Mény & Surel, 2002b). If they think that populism is one of the drivers of allegedly populist parties' success, they may think that including anti-establishment rhetoric and references to the man in the street in their programs will help them win back these votes. So, when allegedly populist parties are on the rise, mainstream parties are likely to adopt an accommodative strategy (see Bale et al., 2010; Downs, 2001; Harmel & Svåsand, 1997; Meguid, 2005) and become more populist. Moreover, they will react more strongly when the allegedly populist party is seen as a credible threat than when it is seen as a mere nuisance (Otjes, 2010: 6). These observations lead me to formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4.3: The more successful the allegedly populist parties are, the more populist the programs of the mainstream parties become.

It might be expected that mainstream parties will only change their programs when they face competition from an ideologically proximate populist party. Right-wing parties may be most inclined to adapt their policy positions on immigration when confronted with a successful radical right-wing allegedly populist party (e.g., Harmel & Svåsand, 1997: 317). However, in a recent article, Van Spanje (2010: 578) demonstrated that 'rightist parties are not more likely to co-opt the policies of the anti-migration parties than leftist parties are'. Because populism itself is neither left nor right, I do not expect left-wing mainstream parties to differ from right-wing mainstream parties in their responses to the successes of left- and right-wing populists.³⁹

³⁹ I nevertheless empirically test whether mainstream left and mainstream right parties respond differently to left- and right-wing allegedly populist parties. This is not the case.

Design and method

To test my hypotheses, I need to select cases with sufficient variation on two variables: (1) the electoral losses of mainstream parties and (2) the electoral successes of allegedly populist parties. Moreover, because I explicitly aim to examine whether left- and right-wing populism is contagious, I have also sought to select countries in which both types of populism are present. I have therefore selected five Western European countries: Italy, the Netherlands and France (where allegedly populist parties have been rather successful), and Germany and the United Kingdom (where allegedly populist parties have been fairly unsuccessful).⁴⁰

In these five countries, I identified eleven allegedly populist parties⁴¹: the *Front National* (FN) (Rydgren, 2008; Surel, 2002) in France; *Die Linke* (Decker, 2008; March, 2007) in Germany; *Forza Italia* (FI) (Tarchi, 2008; Zaslove, 2008), the *Lega Nord* (LN) (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2010; Tarchi, 2008) and the *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) (Ruzza & Fella, 2011; Tarchi, 2002) in Italy; the *Centrum Democraten* (CD) (Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007; Mudde, 2007), the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) (Van der Brug, 2003; Lucardie, 2008), the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) (Akkerman, 2011; Vossen, 2010) and the *Socialistische Partij* (SP) (March, 2007; Voerman, 2009) in the Netherlands; and the *British National Party* (BNP) (Fella, 2008; Mudde, 2007) and the *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP) (Abedi & Lundberg, 2009; Fella, 2008) in the United Kingdom. The largest electoral successes of allegedly populist parties and the aggregated electoral losses of mainstream parties are listed in Table 4.1.⁴²

⁴⁰ Allegedly populist parties in a country are assumed to be successful when the most successful allegedly populist party received a vote share of 15 per cent or more at least once.

⁴¹ I have classified parties as being populist if at least two scholars of populism have identified them as such. I only included parties that have been represented in either the national or European parliament in the period under investigation (1988-2008).

⁴² I am aware of the fact that the selected countries differ from each other in terms of historical backgrounds, as well as party and political systems. I have therefore performed extensive robustness checks, during which I have controlled for country effects, among others, by jackknifing (see the results section).

Table 4.1*Case details*

Country	Allegedly populist party	Electoral success allegedly populist party*	Electoral loss mainstream parties**
France	Front National (FN)	17.8%	-0,02
Germany	Die Linke	8.7%	-0,13
Italy	Alleanza Nazionale (AN)	15.7%	+2%
	Forza Italia (FI)	29.4%	
	Lega Nord (LN)	10.1%	
Netherlands	Centrum Democraten (CD)	2.5%	-0,25
	Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF)	17.0%	
	Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	5.7%	
	Socialistische Partij (SP)	16.6%	
United Kingdom	British National Party (BNP)	0.7%	-0,01
	United Kingdom	2.2%	
	Independence Party (UKIP)		

* Highest percentage of votes gained by allegedly populist party in parliamentary or presidential elections, 1988-2008

** Total percentage of votes lost by mainstream parties, 1988-2008

I focus on the period between 1988 and 2008 because allegedly populist parties in Western Europe surged mainly during this time-span. In each country, I selected two elections in the 1980s or 1990s and two elections in the 2000s and analyzed the programs of mainstream (i.e., Christian-democratic, conservative, liberal, and social democratic parties) and non-mainstream parties.⁴³

⁴³ Parties have been classified using the coding scheme of the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006).

I have measured how populist the programs of parties are by means of a content analysis of election manifestos. Although an election manifesto is only one type of document in which a party's ideology can be observed, I decided to use election manifestos for two reasons. First, an election manifesto can be seen as an authoritative document that gives a clear overview of the ideas of a party at a certain point in time. In most cases, politicians are bound to the policy promises laid down in an election manifesto. 'As an official document, it will be difficult for party members to resile from policies in the party manifesto, while party leaders can be charged with failure to implement published manifesto pledges when given the chance to do so' (Laver & Garry, 2000: 620). Second, election manifestos are appropriate documents for comparative content analysis because they are reasonably comparable between countries and over time. In fact, 'The best-known time series data on party positions are derived from party election manifestos' (Klemmensen et al., 2007: 747).

The populist ideology consists of a set of claims about the relationship between the good people and the bad elite. Because these claims are usually presented in multiple sentences, the sentence is not an appropriate unit of measurement in this study (see Guthrie et al., 2004). 'Themes', also referred to as 'appeals' or 'statements', do represent clearly delineated arguments. It is, however, difficult to extract them from texts (Weber, 1990: 22), which makes it difficult to obtain reliable results when using the theme as unit of measurement. I have therefore decided to code paragraphs. It has been established that authors use paragraphs to mark thematic discontinuities in texts (Ji, 2008; Koen et al., 1969), and it can therefore be expected that breaks between paragraphs represent objectively traceable distinctions between arguments.

The manifestos have been analyzed by extensively trained coders who used a codebook to determine whether paragraphs were populist or not. More specifically, the coders were asked to determine whether paragraphs contained indications of people-centrism and anti-elitism. People-centrism was operationalized by the following question: 'Do the authors of the manifesto refer to the people?' Coders were instructed to look at every

reference to the people, no matter whether it concerned, for instance, 'citizens', 'our country', or 'the society'.⁴⁴ Anti-elitism was measured by means of the question: 'Do the authors of the manifesto criticize elites?' The critique had to target elites *in general*. Criticism directed towards individual parties (e.g., Labour in Britain) or individual politicians (e.g., Sarkozy in France) was not coded as anti-elitism.⁴⁵

To assess the inter-coder reliability of the results of the content analysis, the coders analyzed a sample of paragraphs from the British election manifestos. I used Krippendorff's alpha to calculate the reliability scores. The reliability scores are $\alpha = 0.72$ for people-centrism and $\alpha = 0.69$ for anti-elitism, which is satisfactory by the standards normally applied (Krippendorff, 2004: 241). To assess the inter-coder reliability of the country teams, coders analyzed a sample of paragraphs from manifestos from their own country.⁴⁶ The alphas range from 0.66 to 0.89, showing that the inter-coder reliability within the various country teams is also satisfactorily.⁴⁷

The dependent variable in this study is the extent to which party programs can be qualified as populist, which is measured on a scale that ranges from 0 to 100. To construct this scale, every paragraph in which anti-establishment critique is combined with a reference to the people has been

⁴⁴ The coders were provided with a comprehensive list of words that could be indicative of people-centrism, which included words such as all of us, citizen(s), community, country, direct democracy, each of us, electorate, everyone, nation(al), our, people, population, public, public opinion, referenda, society, voter(s) and we. The coders were instructed to take the context in which these words were used into consideration to determine whether the parties were indeed referring to the people.

⁴⁵ Anti-elitism is present if the parties criticize, for instance, our politicians, the old parties, the political establishment, European technocrats, Brussels (as being the symbol for European politics), the rich, the business elite, multinationals, intellectuals, the media, judges.

⁴⁶ The sample consisted of roughly five per cent of the total number of paragraphs that had to be coded by the country teams.

⁴⁷ The results for people-centrism are: $\alpha = 0.75$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.74$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.89$ (IT), $\alpha = 0.78$ (NL) and $\alpha = 0.73$ (UK). The results for anti-elitism are: $\alpha = 0.69$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.79$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.84$ (IT), $\alpha = 0.84$ (NL) and $\alpha = 0.66$ (UK).

classified as a populist paragraph. After all, it is the *combination* of people-centrism and anti-elitism that defines populism. Only if a critique of the (Evil) elite coincides with an emphasis on the (Good) people, can we speak of populism.⁴⁸ So, populist rhetoric is defined as the *combination* of a focus on the people and anti-elitism. For every manifesto, I have computed the percentage of populist paragraphs. I have taken into account that the introduction of an election manifesto usually contains the core message of a party. The remainder of the text is often a detailed and technical elaboration of the arguments that are made in the introduction. I have therefore counted the introductory paragraphs twice (see Van der Pas et al., 2012; Vliegenthart, 2007).⁴⁹ Moreover, because I expect that detailed manifestos to contain less populism than concise texts, I have assigned the paragraphs in long manifestos more weight than paragraphs in the short manifestos.⁵⁰

The face validity of this measurement of populism is quite good: the manifestos of the mainstream parties listed in Table 4.2 contain only a few populist paragraphs (the party means range from 0.00 to 2.34). The *Liberal Democrats* (UK) have the highest mean populism score of the mainstream

⁴⁸ The decision to only count paragraphs as populist when both people-centrism and anti-elitism are present does not affect the results of my analyses. The vast majority of references to anti-elitism are made in paragraphs in which people-centrism is present as well and there is a correlation of $r = 0.86$ between anti-elitism and populism. Moreover, if I performed the same analyses with anti-elitism as the dependent variable, the results did not change substantively.

⁴⁹ I have also performed the analyses with weights of 1 and 3, which did not change the results.

⁵⁰ First, I computed the mean length of the manifestos (number of paragraphs) per country. Second, I computed the Z-scores for every manifesto per country. If the Z-score of a manifesto was between 1 and 2, I gave the paragraphs from this manifesto a weight of 1.5. If the Z-score was 2 or larger, I gave the paragraphs a weight of 2. If the Z-score ranged between -1 and -2, I weighted the paragraphs with a factor 0.67, and if the Z-score was -2 or lower, I gave them a weight of 0.5. When I run the analyses without weighting the paragraphs, the results do not change substantively. Finally, I have multiplied the weight for the introduction with the weight for the length of the manifesto.

parties (2.34 per cent), while a number of mainstream parties have no populist paragraphs in their manifestos at all. The populist manifestos contain much more populism (the party means range from 1.61 to 23.08) (see Table 4.3). Among the allegedly populist parties, the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) has the highest mean score, and the *Partido della Liberta* (PdL) has the lowest mean score.⁵¹

Table 4.2

Populism in the programs of mainstream parties

Country	Party	Election 1	Election 2	Election 3	Election 4	Average
France	PS	0.00	1.53	0.00	0.00	0.38
	RPR	0.50	0.00	0.62	-	0.37
	UDF	0.00	-	0.80	-	0.40
	UMP	-	-	0.00	0.00	0.00
Germany	CDU/CSU	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	SPD	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	FDP	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.13
Italy	DC/PP	0.13	1.67	-	-	0.90
	PD/Ulivo	-	-	0.34	0.00	0.17
Netherlands	CDA	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	D66	-	0.65	0.00	2.64	1.10
	PvdA	0.00	1.03	0.85	0.61	0.62
	VVD	1.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.44
UK	Cons	0.24	0.31	3.10	1.43	1.27
	Labour	0.00	0.53	0.58	0.90	0.50
	LibDems	1.13	5.45	1.00	1.76	2.34
Average		0.29	0.90	0.49	0.56	

The election years are: 1993, 1997, 2002 and 2007 in France; 1990, 1994, 2002 and 2005 in Germany; 1992, 1994, 2001 and 2008 in Italy; 1989, 1994, 2002 and 2006 in the Netherlands; and 1992, 1997, 2001 and 2005 in the United Kingdom.

⁵¹ See for more information on the validity of this measurement the previous chapter.

Table 4.3*Populism in the programs of non-mainstream parties*

Country	Party	Election 1	Election 2	Election 3	Election 4	Average
France	FN*	-	15.79	2.59	4.08	7.49
	PCF	2.89	3.33	6.45	-	4.22
Germany	Die Linke/PDS*	2.67	0.69	1.14	2.82	1.83
Italy	AN/MSI*	17.44	7.29	-	-	12.37
	CdL/FI/PdL*	-	3.80	1.39	1.82	1.61
	LN*	2.10	2.47	-	-	2.29
	DS	10.07	3.76	-	-	6.92
Netherlands	CD*	-	12.50	-	-	12.50
	LPF*	-	-	10.53	-	10.53
	PVV*	-	-	-	23.08	23.08
	SP*	-	16.41	5.04	1.43	7.63
UK	BNP*	19.51	-	-	10.64	15.08
	UKIP*	-	8.54	-	8.02	8.28
Average		8.44	7.08	4.83	7.41	

* Allegedly populist party.

The election years are: 1993, 1997, 2002 and 2007 in France; 1990, 1994, 2002 and 2005 in Germany; 1992, 1994, 2001 and 2008 in Italy; 1989, 1994, 2002 and 2006 in the Netherlands; and 1992, 1997, 2001 and 2005 in the United Kingdom.

To test the hypotheses, I measured various independent variables. Based on a typology that distinguishes between mainstream parties, non-populist non-mainstream parties and populist non-mainstream parties, I constructed two dummy variables. The first one measures whether a party is mainstream or not, and the second measures whether a party is non-populist-non-mainstream or not. In the analysis, the allegedly populist parties are thus the reference category. To determine whether there is a populist *Zeitgeist*, I included a time variable that ranges from 1 to 20, in which 1 represents 1989 and 20 represents 2008. The success of the allegedly populist parties is

measured by the percentage of votes that the allegedly populist parties in a country received in the previous national election. The extent to which parties have experienced electoral loss is measured by the percentage of seats that they lost during the previous national election.⁵²

The unit of analysis in the analyses is the election manifesto. There are 83 election manifestos nested in 31 parties, which are themselves nested in 5 countries. Given this low N , I was not able to estimate a multilevel model. I have therefore used clustered standard errors for an accurate estimation of the regression coefficients: the 83 manifestos are clustered in 31 political parties.⁵³

Results

Table 4.2 shows that mainstream parties in the United Kingdom score much higher on the populism scale than the mainstream parties in France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. Differences in the extent to which mainstream parties can be qualified as populist might be explained to some extent by the type of party system. In the British two-party system, the competition between the Conservatives and Labour is likely to be framed in terms of opposition versus government and therefore of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ or ‘the ruling party’. In a multi-party system, mainstream parties have the possibility to criticize some specific parties, without criticizing the establishment as such. Moreover, they have incentives to tone down their criticism because they have to form coalition governments. It might well be that the British exception is not the result of populist contagion, but of a divergent model of political competition.

If I compare the 1990s with the 2000s, mainstream parties do not seem to have become more populist (see Table 4.4). The average level of populism in the manifestos of mainstream parties was 0.59 in the 1990s and 0.52 in the

⁵² Election results were obtained from Döring and Manow (2010), elezionistorico.interno.it, and www.parliament.uk.

⁵³ To prevent multicollinearity problems, all continuous independent variables were centered around their means before constructing interaction terms.

2000s. Instead of an increase in populism, we thus witness a small decrease. If we look at the countries individually, we see a strong decline in France (from 0.41 to 0.24) and Italy (from 0.90 to 0.17), and a more moderate decline in Germany (from 0.08 to 0.00). In the Netherlands we see a rather negligible increase from 0.49 to 0.51. Only the United Kingdom has experienced a substantial increase of the extent to which mainstream parties use populism in their manifestos (from 1.28 to 1.46). On the basis of these descriptive accounts, one is inclined to conclude that there is no populist *Zeitgeist* in Western Europe.

Table 4.4

Populism scores of mainstream parties, 1988-2008

	1990s	2000s	Average
France	0.41	0.24	0.31
Germany	0.08	0.00	0.04
Italy	0.90	0.17	0.54
Netherlands	0.49	0.51	0.50
United Kingdom	1.28	1.46	1.37
Average	0.59	0.52	

A more formal test of the *Zeitgeist* hypothesis is presented in Table 4.5.⁵⁴ Model 1 estimates which parties are more populist than others. The results demonstrate that mainstream parties are significantly less populist than allegedly populist parties ($b = -7.02$, $p < 0.01$). Yet there is no evidence that non-populist non-mainstream parties are less populist than allegedly populist parties. Although the regression coefficient is negative (-2.27), it is not

⁵⁴ Because of the low N , I decided not to include control variables, such as the left-right position of a party, its size, and whether it is in government or not. I have estimated the effects of these variables in a separate analysis. None of these variables exert a significant effect on populism. I have therefore not included these variables in the analyses presented in this chapter.

significant. It can thus be concluded that mainstream parties differ from allegedly populist parties and non-populist non-mainstream parties in regard to the extent to which their manifestos can be qualified as populist.⁵⁵

In model 2, I estimate the effect of time to examine whether the three types of parties mentioned above have become more populist over time. The time variable has no significant effect on the extent to which parties use populism. Adding time to the model does not change the effects found in the first model. Moreover, the interactions between 'mainstream' and 'time' and 'non-populist non mainstream' and 'time' are not significant (see model 3). I can therefore reject my first hypothesis. The programs of mainstream parties in Western Europe have not become more populist since the late 1980s, nor have those of non-populist non-mainstream and allegedly populist parties. So, these formal tests confirm my initial observation that there is no evidence for a populist *Zeitgeist* in Western Europe.

So far, the analyses focused on *general* patterns in the extent to which parties use populism. I now turn to more *specific* patterns, in particular how parties react to electoral success or defeat. I hypothesized that mainstream parties will be more likely to resort to populism when they are confronted with either electoral defeat or with successful allegedly populist parties. These hypotheses are tested in models 4, 5, 6 and 7 shown in Table 4.5. We can conclude that electoral losses during previous elections do not influence the extent to which parties include populist paragraphs in their manifestos. Moreover, the effect of electoral loss does not vary between mainstream parties, non-populist non-mainstream parties, and allegedly populist parties because none of the interactions is significant. I therefore have to reject my second hypothesis. Mainstream parties that lose seats do not become more populist.

⁵⁵ On the basis of the results presented in Table 4.5, it cannot be concluded that mainstream parties differ from non-populist non-mainstream parties. I have, however, also estimated the regression coefficients using non-populist non-mainstream parties as the reference category. The results of this analysis demonstrate that mainstream parties also differ from non-populist non-mainstream parties.

Table 4.5
The effects on the degree of populism of election manifestos

	Model 1		Time Model 2		Model 3		Electoral loss Model 4		Model 5		Success of allegedly populist parties Model 6		Model 7	
	b	(CRSE)	b	(CRSE)	b	(CRSE)	b	(CRSE)	b	(CRSE)	b	(CRSE)	b	(CRSE)
Mainstream	-7.02**	(1.61)	-7.04**	(1.62)	-7.10**	(1.69)	-7.02**	(1.60)	-7.08**	(1.60)	-7.26**	(1.64)	-7.28**	(1.71)
NPNM	-2.27	(1.85)	-2.45	(1.87)	-2.53	(1.69)	-2.27	(1.87)	-2.09	(2.02)	-2.15	(1.74)	-1.51	(1.82)
Time			-0.05	(0.08)	-0.19	(0.27)								
Electoral loss							0.00	(0.00)	0.01	(0.02)				
Success allegedly populists											-0.09	(0.05)	-0.18*	(0.07)
Mainstream * Time					0.19	(0.27)								
NPNM * Time					0.13	(0.41)								
Mainstream * Loss									-0.01	(0.02)				
NPNM * Loss									0.02	(0.02)				
Mainstream * Success													0.17*	(0.08)
NPNM * Success													-0.19	(0.15)
N	83		83		83		83		83		83		83	
Adjusted R ²	0.42		0.41		0.41		0.41		0.40		0.44		0.46	

CRSE = clustered robust standard errors. *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$

Model 6 shows that parties in general do not respond to the electoral success of allegedly populist parties by adopting a more populist program. Yet the interaction effect between 'mainstream' and 'success' in model 7 is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, suggesting that the success of allegedly populist parties affects mainstream parties in a different way than it affects non-populist non-mainstream and allegedly populist parties. More specifically, the regression coefficient of 'success' in model 7 is -0.18 ($p < 0.05$), while the coefficient for the interaction between 'mainstream' and 'success' is 0.17 ($p < 0.05$). This means that the regression coefficient for mainstream parties is $-0.18 + 0.17 = -0.01$, indicating that mainstream parties do not change their manifestos when challenged by successful allegedly populist parties. I can thus reject my third hypothesis. Mainstream parties do not become more populist when they are confronted with successful populist challengers.⁵⁶

The main effect of the previous success of allegedly populist parties is significant and negative, which means that allegedly populist parties become less populist when they have been successful in previous elections. Hence, the model shows that allegedly populist parties moderate their populism after populism has been electorally successful. Given that the interaction effect between 'non-populist non-mainstream' and 'success' is not significant, it can be concluded that non-populist non-mainstream parties also become less populist in response to the success of allegedly populist parties. We should, however, be careful of reading too much into this finding because the number of non-populist non-mainstream manifestos in the analysis is very low ($N = 5$).⁵⁷

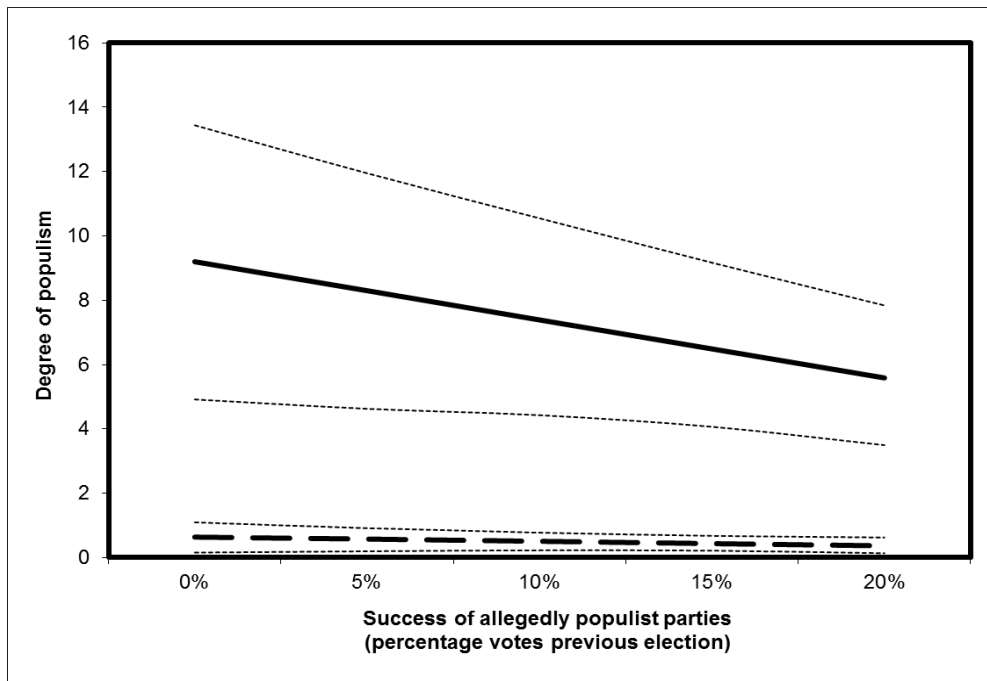
⁵⁶ I also tested whether left-wing mainstream parties react primarily to the success of left-wing populists and whether right-wing mainstream parties respond to the success of right-wing populists. The analyses demonstrate that this is not the case, left- and right-wing mainstream parties do not react differently to left- and right-wing allegedly populist parties.

⁵⁷ I have executed different robustness checks, which substantiate these findings. First, I estimated the models for 83 subsets of my sample (jackknifing). Second, I controlled for country effects in two ways: (1) by clustering the standard errors on the country level instead of the party level; and (2) by including country dummies. The direction and significance of the results remain the same, and I therefore conclude that my findings are robust.

The magnitudes of the estimated effects for mainstream and allegedly populist parties are visualized in Figure 4.1. The dotted line in the figure highlights that the extent to which mainstream parties' manifestos include populist paragraphs is not influenced by the electoral success of allegedly populist parties. Whether an allegedly populist party receives 0 or 20 per cent of the votes does not matter; mainstream parties manifestos always include less than 1 per cent populist paragraphs. The solid line in the figure shows that allegedly populist parties do become less populist when they have been successful in previous elections. If allegedly populist parties have had hardly any success in previous elections, an allegedly populist party will campaign on a manifesto that is highly populist, while if allegedly populist parties have received more than 15 or 20 per cent of the vote in previous elections, an allegedly populist party will reduce its populism.

Figure 4.1

The effect of the success of allegedly populist parties on the degree of populism



Solid line : effect for allegedly populist parties (with 95% confidence interval)
 Dotted line : effect for mainstream parties (with 95% confidence interval)

Conclusion

Several scholars have argued that the rhetoric of Western European mainstream parties has become more populist over the years (De Beus, 2009; Mair, 2002; Mudde, 2004), and the idea that we live in a populist *Zeitgeist* has therefore become popular. Yet, the claim has not been tested systematically. This chapter investigated whether evidence for the existence of a populist *Zeitgeist* can be found in party programs. More specifically, I examined whether populism is contagious, that is, whether mainstream parties make more populist statements in their programs in response to the success of allegedly populist parties. The results indicate that the manifestos of mainstream parties in Western Europe have not become more populist in the last two decades and hence that populism is not particularly contagious.

I realize that a study of party programs has its limitations. One could argue that populist statements are not always included in party programs because the appeal of these programs is not particularly large and voters are often not aware of their contents. Additionally, even though no indications for a populist *Zeitgeist* were found in party programs, there might still be an increase in populist statements in the media or in political speeches. While I admit that party programs only tell a partial story, I want to stress that many party manifestos do contain populist statements. First of all, there is much more populism in the programs of parties that are generally seen as 'populist', and secondly, there is substantial variation in the *degree* to which mainstream parties use populist statements in their programs. Another possible criticism of the use of manifestos is that mainstream parties change their manifestos less easily than allegedly populist parties do because they have longer histories, and therefore more groups and factions to address when they write their programs. While this may be true, mainstream parties have responded to the success of radical right-wing allegedly populist parties by adapting their position on immigration, also in their manifestos (Van der Brug et al., 2009). Therefore, the fact that their party programs have not become more populist is a significant finding.

It turned out to be quite difficult to explain the variation in populism contained in party programs. Mainstream parties do not become more populist when they are confronted by electoral losses, nor do they include more populist statements in their programs when they are challenged by allegedly populist parties. In other words, mainstream parties are no copycats that – pressured by their own electoral failure or the success of allegedly populist parties – adopt an accommodative strategy and cut and paste from the manifestos of their rivals. Although there is a large amount of evidence that mainstream parties have adjusted their positions on immigration and integration issues as a consequence of the emergence of *radical right wing* allegedly populist parties, my findings show that mainstream parties have not responded in a similar fashion regarding their populism. Yet the question of why some mainstream parties are more populist than others remains unanswered. Future research could focus more on contextual factors, such as the party system and the political system, and on agency and leadership (Van Kessel, 2011).

Interestingly, allegedly populist parties themselves are not immune to their own electoral success. Contrary to mainstream parties, they *do* adjust their political programs once they have experienced electoral growth. If allegedly populist parties have gained seats during previous elections, an allegedly populist party tones down its populism, most likely in an attempt to become an acceptable coalition partner to mainstream parties. One of the allegedly populist parties that most clearly illustrates this finding is the Dutch SP. The populism score of this party plummets from 16.4 in 1994 to 1.4 in 2006, making it difficult to still label the party populist. De Lange and Rooduijn (2011) argue that the moderation of the manifestos of the SP is due to the desire of the party to assume office. Their argument supports Heinisch's (2003) claim that allegedly populist parties will face numerous challenges in office and are therefore likely to tone down their populism before making the transition from opposition to government.

That some allegedly populist parties become less populist and some mainstream parties become more populist indicates that it might be a good idea to discard the dichotomous approach according to which we classify

parties as *either* populist *or* not populist. As I have shown, parties can be classified as *more* or *less* populist.

The fact that allegedly populist parties moderate their populism after their electoral success suggests that populism need not be a deeply rooted worldview. As a *thin-centered* ideology (instead of a *full* ideology), it can also be used more strategically to gain votes. This is done by parties that believe that appealing to the 'man in the street' and bashing elites might help them to achieve electoral breakthrough. This does not mean that populism should be conceived of as (merely) a style. After all, it is not just their *rhetoric* that populists adjust; they change their *programs* just as well.

Chapter 5

THE MESMERIZING MESSAGE

Populism in Public Debates in Western European Media

This chapter is a minor revision of a paper that has been accepted for publication in *Political Studies*.

A full understanding of the populist phenomenon cannot be achieved without studying mass communication perspectives and media-related dynamics, especially not without using a comparative approach.

Gianpietro Mazzoleni, 2003, p. 2.

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I focused on the impact of the electoral success of allegedly populist parties on mainstream parties. However, to fully assess how pervasive the populist message is, we should not only look at party politics; the populist message might resonate in other spheres as well. The present chapter therefore focuses on the question of whether the upsurge of allegedly populist parties has impacted on public debates in the mass media. This is an important question because if it is true that the electoral success of allegedly populist parties is accompanied by a diffusion of the populist message outside the realm of political parties, we can conclude that populism is more widespread than one would otherwise assume.

Another aim of this chapter is to assess whether the degree of populism in public debates can be explained by particular media-related characteristics. First, the literature suggests that it might be the case that the debates in tabloid newspapers are more populist than the debates in elite newspapers (see Akkerman, 2011; Mazzoleni, 2003; Mudde, 2007). Second, it could be expected that the type of contribution to the debates makes a difference: letters to the editor might be more populist than other contributions to the debates (see Kerr & Moy, 2002; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001, 2004).

The degree of populism in public debates is measured by means of a content analysis of opinion articles in fifteen newspapers in five Western European countries: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These countries were selected because, for the purpose of this study, it was essential to include countries with varying degrees of success of allegedly populist parties. The focus is on opinion articles because they

constitute one of the most central spaces where public debates are carried out (Day & Golan, 2005: 62).

The chapter proceeds as follows. After the presentation of a definition of populism, I focus on the guiding hypotheses of this chapter. In the following section, I focus on my research design, the operationalization strategy and the method of analysis. Extensive attention is paid to the content analysis with which I have measured how populist opinion articles are. After the presentation of the most important descriptive and inferential results, I discuss the implications of my findings and paths for future research.

Defining populism

Scholars increasingly agree on a conceptualization of populism as a set of ideas⁵⁸ concerning the antagonistic relationship between two constructs: the (Good) people and the (Evil) elites (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Mudde, 2004, 2007; Pauwels, 2011; Stanley, 2008). Here, I employ the definition of Mudde (2004: 543), who argues that populism is ‘[a thin-centered] ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’.⁵⁹

The central elements of this populist ideology are ‘people-centrism’ and ‘anti-elitism’. These elements cannot be understood separately from each other because populism concerns the specific *relationship* between the two (Laclau, 2005; Panizza, 2005). People-centrism means that populists centralize the people and emphasize the idea of popular sovereignty (Ionescu

⁵⁸ Some call it a ‘thin-centered’ ideology, others a discourse or a worldview (see Hawkins, 2010; Hawkins et al., 2012; Mudde, 2004).

⁵⁹ As a *thin-centered* ideology, populism differs from *full* ideologies such as liberalism, socialism and conservatism. Full ideologies offer an all-inclusive view of the world, whereas thin-centered ideologies focus on a confined range of concepts (e.g., feminism, ecologism and nationalism). Populism is a thin-centered ideology because it focuses on the relationship between the people and the elites.

& Gellner, 1969b; Mény & Surel, 2002b). They see the people as a homogeneous entity, devoid of divisions, and they argue that the will of the people should be the point of departure of all politics (Taggart, 2000). The 'people' can mean many different things to many different people in many different circumstances: it could refer, for instance, to the nation, to the electorate, to peasants and to the proletariat (Canovan, 1981; Taggart, 2000). The elite is criticized because it is said to hamper the centrality of the people. It is accused of having no idea of what people find important and of being incompetent, arrogant and selfish (Barr, 2009; Canovan, 2002; Laclau, 2005; Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001). The critique could be directed towards the political elite (parties, politicians), the economic elite (bankers, companies) and/or the cultural elite (writers, academics).

Some scholars have argued that populists also criticize 'dangerous others': groups – other than elites – that are not considered part of what populists see as 'their' people (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Taguieff, 1995). Other scholars, however, have argued that exclusionism is a characteristic of the populist *radical right* only, and not of populism as such (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 2000). They argue that populism can be combined with many different ideologies and that it only becomes exclusionistic once it is combined with a radical right ideology. Here, I concur with this second group of scholars because I am not only interested in populism on the right side of the ideological spectrum but also in left-wing populism.

Populism as a thin-centered ideology is a set of ideas (Hawkins, 2010). As such, it is a characteristic of a specific message rather than a characteristic of an actor sending that message. A consequence of this conceptualization is that populism can also be studied outside the political realm. The focus of this chapter is on populism in spaces where many messages of many different actors come together: public debates in mass media.

Populism in public debates in the media

Western European allegedly populist parties have had much electoral success in the last two decades (e.g., the *Front National* in France, the *Lega Nord* in Italy, the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* in Austria, the *Dansk Folkeparti* in Denmark, and the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* in the Netherlands). However, as a result, has the actual populist *message* also become more widespread? The evidence so far is inconclusive. Mudde (2004) and Mair (2002) have focused on the diffusion of populism in the realm of party politics and have argued that mainstream parties have incorporated (elements of) populism in their own rhetoric. Yet if we are interested in the diffusion of populism, an exclusive focus on party politics would provide a limited account of the pervasiveness of populism. The populist message might (also) have become more pervasive *beyond* the party political sphere. It could, for instance, have become more widespread in public debates in the media. If this would turn out to be the case, we should conclude that populism is more prevalent in Western European societies than previously assumed.

The term 'public debate' has been employed by different scholars (see Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Nikolaev & Porpora, 2007) and is defined here as the open debate about all ideas and feelings relevant to politics (Bennett & Entman, 2001: 3). The participants are practically anyone who is interested in what happens in the public sphere. One of the most central spaces where the debate is carried out is in the mass media (Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007: 525).

Have Western European public debates become more populist in the last two decades? This might well be the case for two reasons. A first reason why we might expect that public debates have become more populist over the years is increased media commercialization. Plasser and Ulram (2003: 21) have argued that the dispersion of the populist message is related to the increased commercial orientation of the mass media. Media are ever more pressured by advertisers to reach large audiences and therefore, they increasingly focus on what they think ordinary citizens deem important. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004: 277-278), the media have therefore

shifted their focus from representatives of political parties and the state to 'ordinary' citizens and their 'common sense'. Because of this increased focus on ordinary citizens, the mass media are said to have changed their style in the sense that they put more emphasis on 'simple and concrete language, light, bright, and vivid writing, shorter stories, and extensive use of photographs and graphics' (Norris, 2000: 71). It has also been argued that this changed focus has not only affected the *style* of media coverage but also the *substance* (see also Norris, 2000: 71). In their competition for audiences, the media can be expected to increasingly focus on messages that they think will coincide with the ideas of their public. For example, the media are said to pay more attention to political scandals because they believe that the message that corrupt politicians have betrayed the 'ordinary' hardworking people sells well (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 278-279; Papathanassopoulos, 2000: 57).

Second, the diffusion of the populist message in the public debates might also be triggered by the electoral success of allegedly populist parties. To understand this, we have to make a distinction between two categories of actors: the 'speakers' of messages (the participants in the public debates) and the 'gatekeepers' (those who decide which messages are published or broadcasted) (Koopmans, 2004: 372). When the message of allegedly populist parties leads to supportive reactions by other speakers in the debates, we can speak of 'positive resonance' (Koopmans, 2004: 374). This can be expected to happen when the popularity of allegedly populist parties increases. After all, the more electorally successful political parties become, the more they are supported by citizens, and the more market-oriented gatekeepers will be inclined to provide space for their people-centrist and anti-elitist ideas. I thus expect that:

Hypothesis 5.1: Public debates in the media have become more populist in the last two decades.

However, the relationship between the electoral success of allegedly populist parties and the degree of populism in the public debates is much more complicated than this. Although there is a net growth of the electoral success

of allegedly populist parties, in many countries this growth has been rather capricious from election to election. Therefore, to better understand the relationship between the electoral success of allegedly populists and the degree of populism in the debates, we would have to look at individual elections and answer the question of whether electoral success indeed coincides with increasingly populist public debates in the media. I therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5.2: The electoral success of allegedly populist parties positively affects the degree of populism in public debates in the media.

It is important to note that there might also be a reciprocal effect of the degree of populism in the public debates on the success of populists. Scholars have demonstrated that public debates in the media affect the electoral success of right-wing allegedly populist parties. Art (2006), for example, has shown that the differences in the national public debates in Germany and Austria have affected the successes of radical right-wing allegedly populist parties in these countries. Other scholars have shown that if an issue that is ‘owned’ by an allegedly populist party becomes salient in the media, people are influenced to support this party and to eventually vote for it (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Walgrave & De Swert, 2004).⁶⁰ It might therefore be expected that once populism becomes more salient in the debates, citizens are inclined to support those parties that ‘own’ these populist themes. In the concluding section of this chapter, I focus on the question of what this endogeneity problem means for the possibility of drawing causal inferences from my findings.

I expect that the degree of populism of the public debates is determined by two media-related characteristics. The first one is the type of medium. Not all media are supposed to be equally populist. A distinction can be made between ‘elite media’ and ‘tabloid media’ (Mazzoleni, 2003: 8). Tabloid media are often identified with populist politics (see Franklin, 1997; Mudde, 2007;

⁶⁰ Walgrave and De Swert (2004) call this the ‘media-make-the-issue’ hypothesis, in which they combine agenda-setting theory with issue ownership.

Sparks & Tulloch, 2000), which leads to the premise that the coverage in these tabloid media is more populist than in elite media (Akkerman, 2011: 3). This premise is based on the observation that elite media and tabloid media differ from each other in at least two respects: (1) with regard to their relationship with the established, mainstream political parties; and (2) with regard to their market-orientation.

Elite media (such as the broadsheet press) tend to be closely aligned with the established political order. Tabloid media (such as the tabloid press), on the other hand, tend to have less intimate connections with the political mainstream (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 279). Because of this absence of strong ties with mainstream parties, it can be expected that tabloid media are more inclined to criticize the political establishment. This is not to say that elite media do not criticize mainstream parties at all. Yet elite media will be less prone to attack them *as being part of an 'established elite'*. Moreover, to demonstrate their distance from the political establishment, tabloid media are said to emphasize their closeness to 'ordinary citizens' more strongly than elite media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 279). The public debates in tabloid media can therefore be expected to be both more anti-elitist and more people-centrist.

Elite media and tabloid media also differ from each other in another respect. Tabloid media are more market-oriented than elite media, and therefore, they focus more strongly on mass audiences (Mazzoleni, 2003: 8). As a result, they will be much more focused on what they believe that 'ordinary citizens' deem important (see also Art, 2007). Because a critical attitude vis-à-vis the established order combined with an emphasis on 'ordinary citizens' is expected to sell well (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 279), I expect that this difference in market-orientation is another reason why the public debates in the tabloid media will tend to be more anti-elitist and people-centrist – and thus more populist – than in the elite media.

Hypothesis 5.3: The public debates in tabloid media are more populist than in elite media.

The degree of populism of the public debates might also be determined by another factor. Public debates in the media are shaped by many different speakers from many different backgrounds that might well differ from each other with regard to their inclination to be populist. I focus on opinion papers in newspapers, and I distinguish two types of contributions to the debates: letters to the editor on the one hand, and other opinion articles, such as editorials, op-ed pieces and columns on the other hand. This latter type of opinion article is commonly written by 'opinion leaders' such as editors, journalists, writers, politicians, academics and other professionals. They are generally highly educated, have learned to write nuanced texts and will therefore not be prone to express a populist message. Letters, on the other hand, explicitly function as a stage where, next to opinion leaders, also 'ordinary citizens' participate (see Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004: 90). Citizens who send letters to the editor come from diverse backgrounds. On average, they are less well educated than opinion leaders, and they commonly feel strongly about the issues they write about (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001). This means that letters to the editor often represent views that are more radical and provocative than those of the average citizen, and in particular, than those of opinion leaders (Kerr & Moy, 2002). Moreover, editors in their turn, tend to prefer letters that are radical and provocative because they are expected to stimulate the public debate (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004). As populism is a quite radical perspective on the relationship between the good people and the evil elite, which is commonly expressed with rather provocative language (Taggart, 2000: 113), I expect that populism prevails more strongly in letters than in other opinion articles.

Hypothesis 5.4: Letters are more populist than other opinion articles.

Research design and method

Case selection

The geographical focus of this chapter is on Western Europe because ‘the main area of sustained populist growth and success over the last fifteen years in established democracies has been in Western Europe’ (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b: 1). Five countries from this region have been selected: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These countries have been selected because they differ from each other with respect to the electoral success of allegedly populist parties.⁶¹ In terms of their vote share, allegedly populist parties in France, Italy and the Netherlands have been rather successful, whereas allegedly populist parties in Germany and the United Kingdom have been fairly unsuccessful.⁶² See Table 5.1 for an overview. I focus on the last two decades (1988-2008) because the allegedly populist parties that have been selected for this study surged in the 1990s and early 2000s. This implies that I can study the public debates before, during and after the populist upsurge.

To gauge the public debates in the media, I focus on opinion articles in newspapers. Although the opinion section in newspapers is not the only media site where public debates take shape – there are, for instance, also magazines, television programs and discussion forums on the internet (Norris, 2000) – it is one of the most central ones. Its function ‘was designed as a forum for the articulation of multiple ideas in an attempt to promote public debate on salient issues’ (Day & Golan, 2005: 62). Moreover, contrary to most other venues, it is both an institutionalized forum, and a place where actors from many different backgrounds (both opinion leaders and ‘ordinary’ citizens) participate (Nikolaev & Porpora, 2007: 8).

⁶¹ A party has been classified as an allegedly populist party only when at least two scholars of populism have identified it as such. In Chapter 3, I showed empirically that the election manifestos of these selected parties are strongly populist.

⁶² Allegedly populist parties are assumed to be successful in a certain country when the most successful allegedly populist party received 15 per cent of the votes or more at least once.

Table 5.1
Successes of populist parties and losses of mainstream parties

Country	Allegedly populist party*	Electoral success allegedly populist party**	Identified as allegedly populist party by ...
France	Front National (FN)	17.8%	Rydgren, 2008; Surel, 2002
Germany	Die Linke	8.7%	March, 2007; Decker, 2008
Italy	Alleanza Nazionale (AN)	15.7%	Ruzza & Fella, 2011; Tarchi, 2002
	Forza Italia (FI)	29.4%	Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2010; Tarchi, 2008
	Lega Nord (LN)	10.1%	Tarchi, 2008; Zaslove, 2008
Netherlands	Centrum Democraten (CD)	2.5%	Mudde, 2007; Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007
	Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF)	17.0%	Lucardie, 2008; Van der Brug, 2003
	Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	5.7%	Akkerman, 2011; Vossen, 2010
	Socialistische Partij (SP)	16.6%	March, 2007; Voerman, 2009
United Kingdom	British National Party (BNP)	0.7%	Fella, 2008; Mudde, 2007
	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	2.2%	Abedi & Lundberg, 2009; Fella, 2008

* Only those parties have been selected which have been represented in either the national or the European parliament

** Highest percentage of votes gained by allegedly populist party in parliamentary or presidential elections, 1988-2008

Table 5.2
Selected newspapers and election periods

Country	Right-wing elite	Left-wing elite	Tabloid	Election periods
France	Le Figaro	Le Monde Liberation	-	1993, 1997, 2002, 2007
Germany	Frankfurter Allgemeine	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Bild	1990, 1994, 2002, 2005
Italy	Corriere della Sera La Stampa	La Repubblica	-	1992, 1994, 2001, 2008
Netherlands	NRC Handelsblad	de Volkskrant	De Telegraaf	1989, 1994, 2002, 2006
United Kingdom	The Daily Telegraph	The Guardian	The Sun	1992, 1997, 2001, 2005

To be able to assess the difference between the debates in the elite media and the tabloid media, I collected three newspapers in every country.⁶³ Because media pay more attention to politics during election campaigns (Koopmans, 2004: 372), I have focused on opinion articles in the four weeks before a general election. For every country, I selected four election periods between 1988 and 2008. For a complete overview of the selected newspapers and election periods, see Table 5.2. A systematic sample of days has been drawn from every election period, and for every sampled day, the opinion articles from the selected newspapers have been collected.⁶⁴ I selected only those opinion articles that concern domestic and EU politics.

⁶³ The goal was to collect two elite newspapers (one left-wing and one right-wing), and one tabloid newspaper. However, it was not possible to find a national tabloid newspaper to analyze in Italy. This might be the case because in Italy the development of commercial media came relatively late and because the press is strongly elite-oriented with a strong focus on political life. See Hallin & Mancini (2004: 730). I have therefore collected a third elite newspaper: *La Stampa*. In the French case, I could not find a real national tabloid either. I have therefore included the newspaper *Liberation* as a third newspaper. Although *Liberation* can best be described as a (left-wing) elite newspaper, it differs from the more established elite newspapers *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*. For this reason, I have also investigated the outcome of dropping *Liberation* from the analysis. This does not affect the main findings. In the Netherlands, I have analyzed the *Telegraaf* as a functional equivalent of a tabloid. Although it is less sensationalist than, for instance, *The Sun* and *Bild*, it is certainly not an elite newspaper and it comes closer to a tabloid than any other newspaper in the Netherlands (see, for instance, Gleissner & De Vreese 2005; Pfetsch et al. 2008). Because of the difficulty of finding national tabloids in these countries, I have also investigated the outcome of dropping all tabloids from the analysis. This does not affect the results.

⁶⁴ Every election period consists of 4 weeks of 6 days. (Many newspapers do not have a separate Sunday issue, so I excluded the Sunday issues from my sample.) Every other day was selected, and as a result, every day of the week (except Sunday) is sampled twice.

Content analysis and the dependent variable

The degree of populism in the debates has been measured by means of a content analysis.⁶⁵ The unit of measurement is the paragraph because paragraphs are used to mark thematic discontinuities in texts (Ji, 2008; Koen et al., 1969). As breaks between paragraphs can thus be seen as objectively traceable distinctions between arguments, paragraphs are appropriate units for the measurement of a substantive message such as populism.⁶⁶ The coders were asked to decide for every paragraph whether the two central elements of populism – people-centrism and anti-elitism – were present. People-centrism was measured by the following question: ‘Do the authors of the article refer to the people?’ The coders were asked to include each and every reference to the people, regardless of whether it concerned ‘the people’, ‘citizens’, ‘we’ (as in ‘we the people’), ‘our country’ or ‘the society’. I provided the coders with an extensive list of words that *could* refer to the people. Anti-elitism was measured by the following question: ‘Do the authors of the article criticize elites?’ The coders were instructed to code only those instances in which the elites *in general* were criticized. A critique on specific parties or politicians was not general enough to be coded as anti-elitism. Therefore, the critiques of, for instance ‘the establishment’, ‘the old parties’, ‘the rich’ and ‘European technocrats’ were coded as anti-elitism; critiques of, for instance, Jacques Chirac or the Labour party were not. This measurement of populism is identical to the content analysis that I have employed in the previous chapters. I have demonstrated that this approach yields valid results and have no

⁶⁵ This content analysis has been carried out by ten coders with two native coders for every country.

⁶⁶ Other units of measurement, such as ‘themes’ (also referred to as statement or appeals), are less appropriate because it is rather difficult to extract them from texts (Weber, 1990: 22). This can lead to problems with the reliability of the measurement. Measurement units such as words or sentences are also less appropriate than paragraphs because these units are more limited than paragraphs to be employed for the measurement of a set of ideas. After all, most ideas require more than one word or one sentence to be expressed in full detail. See Chapter 3.

reason to suspect that this would be different for an analysis of opinion articles.

The inter-coder reliability of the content analysis of opinion articles was assessed with Krippendorff's reliability statistic alpha (Krippendorff, 2004). To assess the general reliability, the coders had to analyze a sample of articles from the British newspapers. The results are satisfactory: $\alpha = 0.81$ for people-centrism and $\alpha = 0.72$ for anti-elitism. I also assessed the inter-coder reliability for every country separately by letting the coders analyze a sample of articles from their own country. The results are acceptable as well; the alphas range from 0.72 to 0.92.⁶⁷

The dependent variable is the degree of populism of individual opinion articles on a scale from 0 to 100. This scale has been constructed as follows. For every article, paragraphs in which people-centrism is combined with anti-elitism have been selected as populist paragraphs. The presence of only people-centrism or only anti-elitism is not enough to mark a paragraph as populist. It is, after all, the *combination* of people-centrism and anti-elitism that defines the populist ideology. Only if a critique on the (Evil) elite coincides with an emphasis on the (Good) people, can we speak of populism.⁶⁸ Therefore, I decided to operationalize populism as the percentage of populist paragraphs in each opinion article. It is important to note that the populism score thus refers to the extent to which *the authors* of opinion articles employ a populist discourse themselves. A mere reference to the populist message without a clear endorsement of it by the author is therefore not coded.

⁶⁷ For people-centrism: $\alpha = 0.81$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.79$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.84$ (IT), $\alpha = 0.83$ (NL) and $\alpha = 0.92$ (UK). For anti-elitism: $\alpha = 0.74$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.80$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.72$ (IT), $\alpha = 0.78$ (NL) and $\alpha = 0.87$ (UK). For the reliability test, I selected about five per cent of the sampled articles.

⁶⁸ It needs to be emphasized that a reference to the people does not necessarily imply that the people are conceived of as a 'pure' and 'homogeneous' actor. However, a close reading of the results of the content analysis indicates that when a reference to the people is accompanied by an anti-elitist claim, the writer of the text almost always argues that the people are, in one way or another, betrayed by the elites. The argument that the people (singular) are betrayed by the elites, implies that the people are conceived of as a unified actor and thus as a homogeneous entity – at least with regard to its relationship with the elites.

Independent variables

To test the hypothesis of whether the public debates have become more populist (hypothesis 5.1), I used a time variable that ranges from 1 to 20, in which 1 refers to 1989 and 20 to 2008. To assess whether the electoral success of allegedly populist parties is related to the degree of populism in the public debates (hypothesis 5.2), the (by opinion polls) predicted vote shares for allegedly populist parties have been used.⁶⁹ Because I have modeled electoral success of populists as an independent variable, and my focus is on the four weeks before a general election, the success of populists must precede these four weeks. I therefore looked at polls from at least four weeks and a maximum of six weeks before the election.⁷⁰ Because I expect that after a certain degree of populist success, the degree of populism in opinion articles will not increase anymore, I do not expect electoral success to be linearly related to the degree of populism in the debates. I therefore took the natural log of the predicted success of populists.⁷¹ To test the hypothesis that elite media differ from tabloid media (hypothesis 5.3), a dummy variable was included in which 0 refers to an elite newspaper and 1 to a tabloid. To distinguish opinion leaders from 'ordinary' citizens (hypothesis 5.4), I have included a range of dummies that measure the type of opinion article. I made a distinction between five types of articles: editorials (written by the editor(s)); op-ed articles (written by guest contributors); columns (written by journalists who have their own periodical 'column' in the newspaper); letters (regularly written by 'ordinary' citizens who do not (openly) represent an elite); and other opinion articles of which it is unclear to which category they belong. Because the letters are usually much shorter than other opinion articles, I

⁶⁹ Allegedly populist parties are parties that have been labeled as populist by various scholars. See the parties that have been mentioned in the section on case selection.

⁷⁰ The polls were executed by CSA and Ipsos in France; by the Politbarometer of the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen in Germany; by Swg and Ipsos-explorer in Italy; by Interview/NSS and Peil.nl in the Netherlands; and by Ipsos-mori in the UK.

⁷¹ Because this variable contains some zeros and it is not possible to take the natural log of zero, I have added 1 to the variable before taking the natural log.

controlled for the length of an article by means of a variable that measures the number of paragraphs of each article. Finally, a left-right dummy has been included to control for the influence of the ideological affiliation of newspapers (0 = left; 1 = right).

Method

The units of analysis in this study are the individual opinion articles (N = 3315). Because the opinion articles are not independent from each other, I employed multilevel models to test the hypotheses (Hox, 2010). The articles are nested in newspapers, which are again nested in countries. Moreover, the articles are also nested in time. Because of this complicated data structure, a cross-classified model was designed in which the articles are nested in fifteen newspapers and twenty country-year combinations. The program MLwiN was used to conduct the analyses. The estimation method is restricted maximum likelihood (RML) because RML estimates have less bias than the 'regular' full maximum likelihood (FML) estimates. Most importantly for this particular study, RML is a better procedure than FML when the sample size (on the second level) is small (Hox, 2010, p. 41). I included the independent variables step by step: first the time variable (model 1; hypothesis 5.1), and then the other variable on the country-year level: the polled success of allegedly populist parties (model 2; hypothesis 5.2). Next, I included the variables on the newspaper level (model 3; hypothesis 5.3) and the variables on the article level (model 4; hypothesis 5.4). All variables have been introduced as fixed effects. I included country-dummies to take into account the nesting of both newspapers and country-years in countries.⁷²

⁷² Because of the low N on this country level (N = 5) it was impossible to add an extra level in the multilevel analysis.

Results

Figure 5.1 displays the mean populism scores for each country over time. In France, this score increased between 1993 and 1997 and declined again in 2002 and in 2007. The German picture is more capricious. The score grew between 1990 and 1994, it dropped in 2002, and it increased again in 2005. In Italy, we see a strong growth between 1992 and 2008. The Dutch mean populism score reveals a steep growth between 1989 and 2002 and a drop in 2006. The mean populism score in the UK is rather stable: after a small decrease between 1992 and 1997, it increased in 2001 and in 2005. These first results show a clear net picture: in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK, the opinion articles have become more populist over the years, whereas in France this has not been the case.

There is some interesting cross-national variation in the degree of populism in the public debates. The most remarkable cases are most likely Italy, the Netherlands and France. The debates in Italy are much more populist than in other countries. This might well be due to widespread corruption scandals in the early nineties (see Tarchi 2003). However, also in the 2000s, many Italians seem to have had enough of their political parties – especially in 2008. Various opinion articles in Italian newspapers reveal a sense of powerlessness among the Italian people. This is illustrated by the following excerpt from a letter to the editor of *La Repubblica* in which the writer asks for advice on whether to vote or not: ‘I’m fed up with the absence of ideology in the election campaigns. [...] Politicians barricade themselves in their distant palaces of the political caste.’⁷³

In the Netherlands, the degree of populism in the public debates strongly peaked in 2002. This peak can most likely be explained by the impact of the sudden political upsurge and the murder of the populist politician Pim Fortuyn. One day after Fortuyn was killed, a Dutch commentator honored Fortuyn by expressing his agreement with Fortuyn’s populist message and wrote: ‘Political power resides in a group of regents that are linked to each other by common interests. They share positions, jobs and money, and

⁷³ My translation.

communicate in an enciphered language which is incomprehensible for outsiders.'⁷⁴

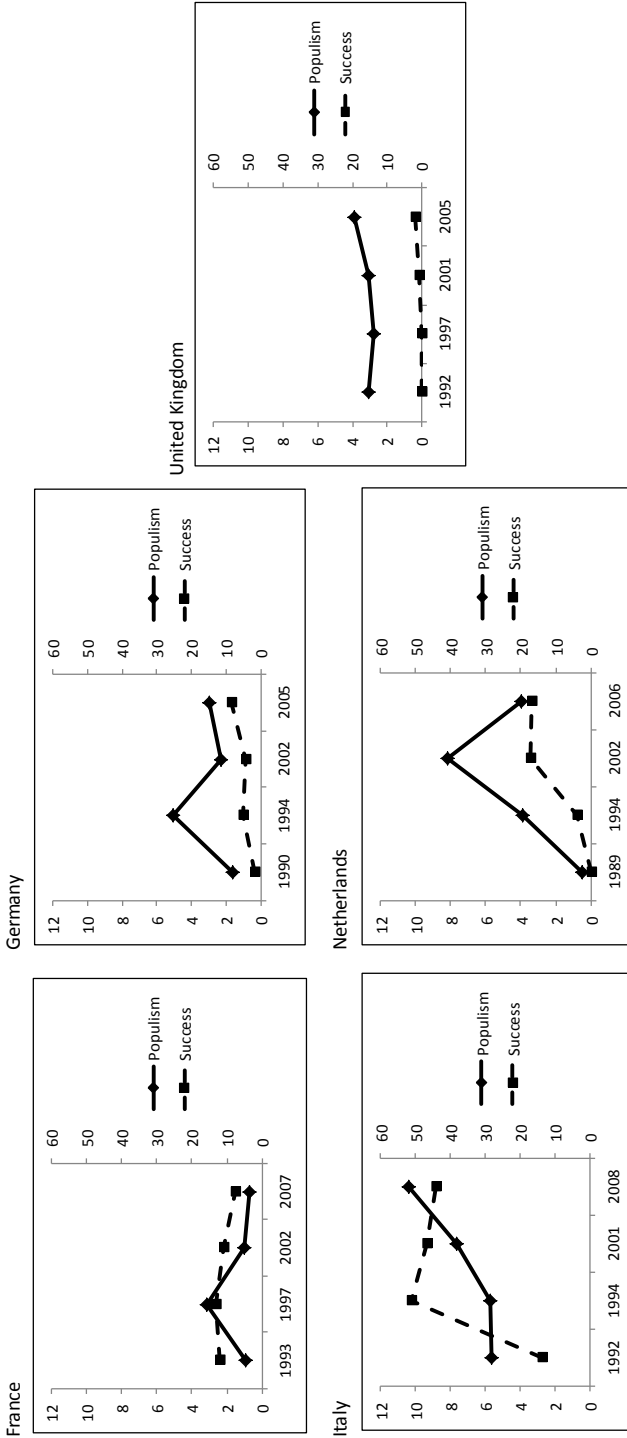
The debates in France are much less populist than one might expect regarding the success of Le Pen during the first round of the presidential elections in 2002. This low degree of populism in the public debates is most likely due to the isolation of the FN: the FN was widely conceived of as radical, and many of its standpoints have long been ignored in the debates (see Hainsworth 2000).

Figure 5.1 also shows the predicted successes of allegedly populist parties. In France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the predicted vote shares for allegedly populist parties coincide with the degree of populism in opinion articles. When the parties were more electorally successful in the polls, the debates became more populist as well. When the parties were less successful, the debates became less populist. In Italy, the electoral success of allegedly populist parties and the degree of populism in opinion articles do not seem to coincide. It is important to emphasize, however, that although the vote shares of FI, LN and AN dropped in 2001 and 2008, these parties were still highly successful in these years (in fact, in both 2001 and 2008 they won the elections and also formed a government coalition together). These first results indicate that there is a correlation between the success of populists in the polls and the degree of populism in opinion articles: the more success that is attained by allegedly populist parties, the more populism is observed in the public debates.

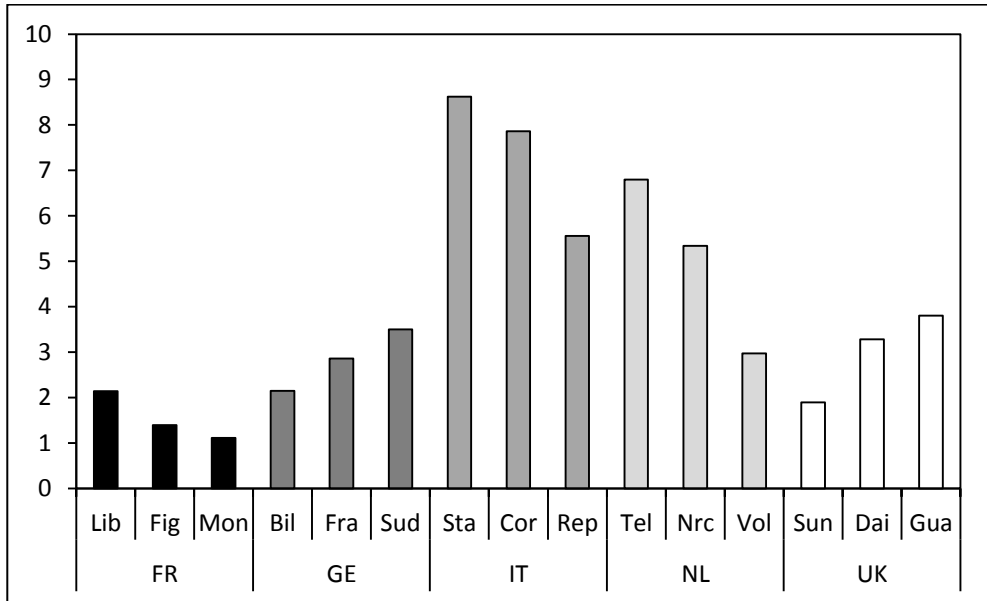
Figure 5.2 indicates that the public debates in Italy are the most populist, followed by the public debates in the Dutch media. The tabloid newspaper *De Telegraaf* is much more populist than the elite newspapers *NRC Handelsblad* and *de Volkskrant*. The UK and Germany are similar to each other regarding their mean populism scores. Moreover, in both cases, and this is rather unexpected, the tabloid newspaper (*The Sun* and *Bild*) is less populist than the elite newspapers (*The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, respectively). The public

⁷⁴ My translation.

Figure 5.1
Mean populism scores (left axis) and success of populists (right axis) over time per country*



* In predicted vote share

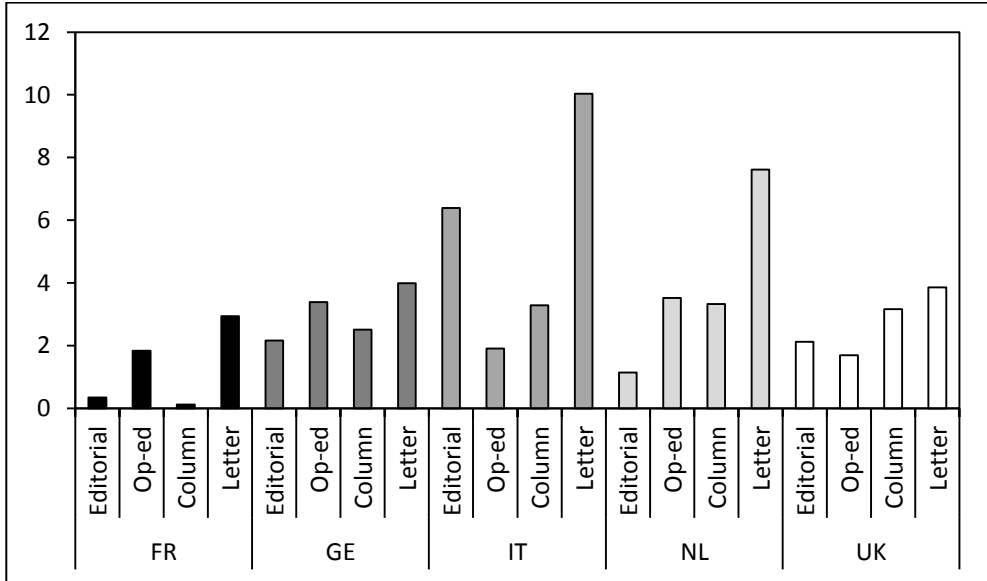
Figure 5.2*Mean populism scores per newspaper*

debates in France are the least populist. *Liberation* is more populist than the more established elite newspapers (*Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*). The findings indicate that the opinion articles in tabloids are not more populist than the opinion articles in elite newspapers.

The mean populism scores per type of opinion article are presented in Figure 5.3. In all countries, the letter is the most populist type of opinion article. In France, Germany and the Netherlands, op-eds are the second most populist articles. In most countries, editorials have low mean populism scores. A more formal test of the hypotheses is presented in Table 3. In model 1, the time variable is entered as a fixed effect. It significantly affects the degree of populism in opinion articles. Moreover, the regression coefficient is in the predicted direction ($b = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$). This means that opinion articles indeed have become more populist over the years. In model 2, the success of populists in the polls is introduced. This variable significantly affects the degree of populism ($b = 2.09$, significant at $p < 0.01$): the larger the polled success for populists, the more populist the opinion articles. The newspaper variables are

Figure 5.3

Mean populism scores per article type



entered in model 3. The debates in the tabloids turn out not to be more populist than the debates in elite newspapers, and the left/right affiliation of a newspaper does not significantly affect the populism score either. In model 4, I introduced the variables that are measured on the article level. The coefficients clearly indicate that letters are more populist than editorials ($b = 2.99$, significant at $p < 0.01$). Op-eds, columns and other opinion articles do not significantly differ from editorials, which form the reference category. I have also estimated the same model with other reference categories (not shown here). It turns out that letters significantly differ from all other articles, whereas none of the other articles significantly differ from each other. To make sure that the difference between letters and other articles is not due to the length of articles (letters are usually much shorter than other opinion articles), I controlled for article length. The length of an article has no significant effect on its degree of populism.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ I conducted two types of robustness checks. First, I made use of the jackknife procedure and estimated the regression models for different subsets of the sample. I

Table 5.3

Cross-classified multilevel models explaining the degree of populism in opinion articles (with country dummies)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)
<i>Intercept</i>	-0.12	(1.13)	-3.14*	(1.44)	-3.45*	(1.51)	-3.50**	(1.60)
<i>Country-year variables (N=20)</i>								
Time	0.13*	(0.06)	-0.04	(0.07)	-0.04	(0.07)	-0.05	(0.07)
Success populists			2.09**	(0.62)	2.11**	(0.62)	1.98**	(0.62)
<i>Newspaper variables (N=15)</i>								
Left/right					0.71	(0.96)	0.48	(0.92)
Tabloid					-0.04	(1.25)	0.48	(1.20)
<i>Article variables (N=3315)</i>								
Article type (ref = editorial)								
Op-ed							1.22	(0.97)
Column							0.47	(0.91)
Letter							2.99**	(0.66)
Other							2.05	(3.43)
Article length							-0.08	(0.05)
<i>Variance components</i>								
Country-year level	1.27	(1.10)	0.16	(0.80)	0.12	(0.79)	0.08	(0.77)
Newspaper level	0.62	(0.79)	1.15	(0.85)	1.50	(0.98)	1.30	(0.90)
Article level	220.68**	(5.46)	220.67**	(5.46)	220.71**	(5.46)	219.12**	(5.42)
Deviance	27313.02		27303.59		27303.73		27264.90	

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01.

re-estimated the models after first dropping the country-years one at a time and then dropping the newspapers one after another. This gives an indication of how sensitive the results are for outlying country-years and newspapers. The results indicate that all findings are robust. Second, because the dependent variable in this study is not normally distributed (it is strongly inflated by zeros), I also tested how sensitive the results are to different model specifications. I employed different procedures to estimate the regression coefficients and the corresponding standard errors, such as robust standard errors, bootstrapping and negative binomial regression models. They all lead to the same substantive conclusions. See Appendix D.

Conclusion and discussion

Although many studies have been published on the electoral success of allegedly populist political *parties* (e.g., Betz, 1994; Decker, 2008; Lucardie, 2008; Pauwels, 2010; Rydgren, 2008; Tarchi, 2008), less is known about the impact of the populist upsurge beyond the realm of party politics. In the previous chapter, I have assessed to what extent the rise of allegedly populist parties has affected the ideas of mainstream parties. In the present chapter, I focused on the question of whether the populist message has transcended the arena of party politics. Has the populist message become increasingly prevalent in the public debates in the media?

The analyses demonstrated that this is indeed the case. The public debates in Western-European countries have become more populist in the last two decades. This is an important finding because it indicates that participants in the public debates have increasingly employed the populist message in their media contributions. The analyses also show that there is a strong correlation with the electoral success of allegedly populist parties. Although I have only shown that a *correlation* exists, it is plausible that there is *at least* a causal effect running from the success of allegedly populist parties to the public debates. The reason is that it is unlikely that the correlating fluctuations of the success of allegedly populist parties and the degree of populism in the debates (see Figure 5.1) are the result of *only* a reversed unidirectional causal effect of the degree of populism in the debates on the success of populists. After all, populist success depends on much more than favorable public debates in the media. Supply side factors, such as an appealing party leader and a good party organization, exert a decisive effect on party success as well (Carter, 2005; Taggart, 2000; Van Kessel, 2011). It would be highly unlikely that favorable conditions on the supply side were present every time the public debates became more populist if there is not also an effect of the success of allegedly populist parties on the degree of populism in the debates. We can therefore infer that there is at least a causal effect of the success of allegedly populist parties on the degree of populism in the debates.

I expect that the participants in the debates (the so-called ‘speakers’, see Koopmans, 2004: 372) become sensitive to the populist message once the actors who express it (seem to) become successful. After all, the more successful allegedly populist parties become, the more they are supported by the public, and the more it is in the interest of market-oriented gatekeepers to provide space for their ideas. Further research on the basis of time-series analysis or experiments could provide more insights into the causal mechanisms behind the correlation between the success of allegedly populist parties and the degree of populism in the public debates.

It has been suggested that tabloid media are more inclined to express the populist message than the elite media because they have less intimate connections with established parties and they focus more strongly on mass audiences (Art, 2007; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Mazzoleni, 2003; Mudde, 2007). The data suggest, however, that this is not the case. This finding is in concordance with the results of a recent study by Akkerman (2011). Based on an analysis of *The Sun* in the United Kingdom and *De Telegraaf* in the Netherlands, she concluded that tabloids do not share a populist anti-elitist bias with allegedly populist parties. In regard to populism, the difference between tabloid media and elite media is apparently not as clear-cut as some scholars tend to believe. Future studies might focus on the question of why this is the case.

The results also indicate that letters to the editor are more populist than other opinion articles. Writers of letters are on average more radical and provocative than writers of other opinion articles. I have demonstrated that they are also more prone to express a populist message. These findings raise many questions about the way in which opinion articles are selected. Future research might focus on this process by examining the role of gatekeepers in providing a stage for the populist message, as well as by looking at the question how gatekeepers of tabloid media differ from gatekeepers of elite media.

It is important to emphasize that the findings of this study only pertain to newspapers and not to other media outlets. Further research might indicate whether the same conclusions can be drawn with respect to, for instance,

television or the internet. Nonetheless, this study is an important first step for two reasons. First, newspapers often function as agenda setters for other media (Kleinnijenhuis, 2003; Vliegthart & Walgrave, 2008). Second, populism is often expressed using provocative and colorful language (Taggart, 2000: 113). Such a language is more common on television and on the internet than in newspapers. It might therefore well be that what counts for newspapers will count even more so for other media outlets.

Future studies might also focus on media messages during 'routine times' – i.e., outside election campaigns. My analysis is fully based on newspaper articles during election times, when public debates are strongly focused on party competition and the relationship between voters and parties. It might well be the case that the media behave differently during routine times. Adding articles from routine times would make the conclusions about the relationship between the success of populists and the degree of populism in public debates in the media more externally valid.

The results of this investigation indicate that populism is more widespread than previously assumed. Not only have allegedly populist parties become more electorally successful in the last two decades; the populist message itself has also become more pervasive in Western European public debates. Populism appears to be a mesmerizing message that transcends the realm of party politics.

Chapter 6

I CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION

The Impact of Populism on Political Satisfaction

This chapter is a revision of a paper which is co-authored with Wouter van der Brug and Sarah de Lange and which is currently under review.

Individuals may adopt their party's position on an issue because they think their party generally reflects their interests. When the costs of developing one's own opinions are high, taking cues from a party that shares one's interests could be reasonable.

Gabriel S. Lenz, 2009, p. 831.

Introduction

In the two previous chapters, we have seen that the degree of populism in the programs of political parties and the opinion articles in newspapers varies. The aim of this final empirical chapter is to assess to what extent the degree of populism of parties and newspapers affects how politically satisfied voters are. It could be expected that the degree of populism of the party a person votes for affects his or her political satisfaction. Previous studies have demonstrated that a relationship exists between voting for allegedly populist parties and political dissatisfaction (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Mayer & Perrineau, 1992; Norris, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2001). Based on an analysis of the Dutch allegedly populist party the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF), Van der Brug (2003) has argued that it is plausible that the message of an allegedly populist party fuels discontent among its supporters. Moreover, it can also be supposed that the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads has a negative effect on one's political satisfaction as many studies of media effects have shown that media messages exert a direct, persuasive influence on their audiences (Bartels, 1993; Brandenburg & Van Egmond, 2011; Zaller, 1992, 1996).

Hitherto, little research has been conducted on the impact of allegedly populist parties and media on political discontent. The research conducted so far on this topic is limited to only a small amount of cases. Moreover, only a few studies have looked at the actual populist messages of parties and media, so that no information is available about the influence of these messages on citizens' attitudes and behavior. This chapter fills these lacunae in the literature by focusing on the relationship between political satisfaction, voting

behavior and media use in five countries. It combines survey data on the attitudes of individual citizens with information about the degree of populism of the parties that these citizens vote for and the newspapers that they read. The data on populism stem from a large-scale content analysis of election manifestos of political parties and opinion articles published in newspapers.

Populism has often been defined as a set of ideas in which the good people are pitted against a corrupt, evil elite (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Ardit, 2004; Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Mudde, 2004, 2007; Pauwels, 2011; Stanley, 2008). Populists claim that 'the establishment' is out of touch with ordinary citizens and fails to represent 'the man in the street' (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Taggart, 2000; De la Torre, 2010). According to populists, the general will of the people should be expressed in a direct and unmediated way. In western democracies, however, this direct expression of 'the general will' is hampered by several checks and balances imposed by constitutional laws to protect the rights of individuals and minorities against the majority rule. Therefore, it is not surprising that populists, and their supporters, are dissatisfied with the way in which the democratic system is currently working.

The literature on the relationship between populist voting and political dissatisfaction indicates that this relationship can run in two directions. First, dissatisfaction can impact citizens' political preferences and therefore influence their voting behavior. Dissatisfaction with politics can thus be considered to be a *cause* of voting for an allegedly populist party. I will refer to this explanation as the 'expressing discontent logic' (e.g., Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Norris, 2005). This is how most scholars have modeled the relationship between political satisfaction and populist voting. Second, those who support allegedly populist parties are more likely to be exposed to and be influenced by these parties' populist messages. The emergence of allegedly populist parties thus does not necessarily reflect existing feelings of discontent; these parties might fuel such feelings by convincing their supporters that the elite exploits the people and thereby corrupts the democratic system. So, theoretically, dissatisfaction can be as much a *cause* as a *consequence* of support for allegedly populist parties. I will refer to the latter

as the 'fuelling discontent logic' (see Van der Brug, 2003). This logic has not been studied much yet.

The literature on the relationship between media populism and political satisfaction is still in its infancy. Yet, at least theoretically, we might expect the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic to be present here as well. According to the expressing discontent logic, dissatisfied citizens are inclined to read a more populist newspaper because such a newspaper provides space for similar feelings of political discontent (see Jagers, 2006; Mazzoleni, 2003, 2008). According to the fuelling discontent logic, newspapers that express populist messages have a direct and persuasive effect on the degree of political satisfaction among their readers (see Bartels, 1993; Brandenburg & Van Egmond, 2011; Zaller, 1992, 1996).

Using multilevel regression analysis and structural equation modeling, I examine the relationships between political satisfaction, voting behavior and media use. My analyses show that, although the degree of populism of the newspaper that a person reads is not related to his or her political satisfaction, the degree of populism of the party that a person votes for is strongly correlated with his or her political satisfaction. Moreover, with regard to voting behavior, both the expressing discontent model and the fuelling discontent model turn out to fit the data well. It is therefore probable that political dissatisfaction is not only a cause of voting for more populist parties; it is also a consequence. A citizen who votes for an allegedly populist party because he or she agrees with its policy propositions regarding, for instance, the economy, can also be expected to become susceptible to this party's message that the democratic system is in crisis because the corrupt elite exploits 'ordinary people'.

This is an important finding because it indicates that the effect of political disaffection on populist voting has most likely been overestimated in many previous studies. We should therefore carefully rethink the relationship between populist voting and political disaffection. Moreover, the results imply that populism is not only a message that *resonates with* voters' attitudes, it is also a message that *changes* the attitudes of the supporters of the parties spreading the message. This is in line with existing studies that demonstrate

the persuasiveness of the populist message (Hawkins, 2010; De la Torre, 2010), and research showing that citizens are inclined to adopt the ideas of their preferred parties (Lenz, 2009).

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the next section, I focus on the link between populism and democratic dissatisfaction. Then, I focus on the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic. After a discussion of my case selection, measurements, and methods, I proceed to the results of my analyses. In the concluding section of this chapter, I focus on the implications of my findings for both the literature on populism and voting behavior.

Populism and political dissatisfaction

Many scholars define populism as a set of ideas in which the good people are pitted against the evil elites (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Canovan, 2004; Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Mudde, 2004; Pauwels, 2011; Stanley, 2008). Mudde (2004: 543) describes populism as ‘an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’. He argues that populism is not a full ideology, such as conservatism, liberalism or socialism, but a ‘thin-centered’ ideology. It does not offer an all-encompassing worldview, but contains, first and foremost, ideas about the organization of the democratic decision-making processes. Consequently, populism is inherently chameleonic (Taggart, 2000); it takes on the identity of the ideology to which it attaches itself.⁷⁶

As a set of ideas, I conceive of populism essentially as a characteristic of a message rather than a characteristic of the actor sending that message.

⁷⁶ I therefore do not consider exclusionism – i.e., excluding ‘dangerous others’ such as immigrants or religious minorities (see Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b) – to be a defining element of populism. Although it is a central feature of *radical right wing* populism, it is not necessarily a characteristic of populism as such (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 2000).

Consequently, populism becomes a matter of degree. A political actor who sends out many populist messages is more populist than an actor that employs only a few populist messages.

Central elements of the populist message are the idea that every democracy is founded on the principle of popular sovereignty and the claim that the voice of the people should give direction to decision-making (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969b; Mény & Surel, 2002b). This way of thinking implies that a single general will exists, which is undivided. Therefore, the people are seen as a homogeneous entity (Canovan, 2004). However, it remains often unclear whom populists refer to when they speak about the people (e.g., the electorate, farmers, or the nation) (see Canovan, 1981, 1999). Yet the people are always defined in opposition to what is perceived as their enemy: the elites. The elites are accused of being completely alienated from ordinary people and of being selfish, arrogant, incompetent and corrupt (Barr, 2009; Laclau, 2005; Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001). In every respect, the elites are portrayed as the antipodes of the people: the people are inherently good, whereas the elites are fundamentally evil. Anti-elitism is most often directed at political elites, which are found guilty of ignoring ordinary citizens and of focusing on their own interests only (Mudde, 2004).⁷⁷ The elites are believed to dominate the people in the democratic decision-making process, whereas the principle of the sovereignty of the people implies that this should be the other way around.

Populism has an ambivalent attitude toward liberal democracy. According to the so-called two-strand model of democracy, a liberal democracy is built on two pillars: a democratic one and a liberal one (Mouffe, 2005). The central element of the democratic pillar is the sovereignty of the people, which means that political power ought to reside with the people. The essential feature of the liberal pillar is that political power should be curbed and controlled. This is achieved by means of three mechanisms: checks and balances, minority rights and political representation. There exists an inherent

⁷⁷ Anti-elitism could also be directed at economic elites (e.g., bankers or big corporations) or cultural elites (e.g., intellectuals).

tension in the two-strand model, which is eloquently described by Kornhauser (1959: 131):

'Populist democracy [i.e., the democratic pillar] involves direct action of large numbers of people, which often results in the circumvention of institutional channels and ad hoc invasion of individual privacy. Liberal democracy [i.e., the liberal pillar] involves political action mediated by institutional rules, and therefore limitations on the use of power by majorities as well as minorities.'

Populists emphasize the importance of the democratic pillar. They believe that in any democratic system, the general will should be expressed as directly and unmediated as possible (Canovan, 1981). However, in a liberal democracy, the direct expression of the general will is not possible and occurs through intermediaries, such as elected representatives. For this reason, Taggart (2000: 3) argues that populism is essentially hostile towards liberal democracy:

'Eschewing the complexity of representative politics, populists advocate simplicity and directness in their politics. The accoutrements of representative politics, including parties and parliaments, are all too often, for populists, distractions and unnecessary complications.'

Political elites, checks and balances, minority rights, and political representation thus stand in the way of a direct expression of the *volonté générale* of the people. Yet, they play a decisive role in modern democracies. Because populists, and by extension their supporters, fiercely criticize political elites and are also hostile towards various elements of liberal democracy, they can be expected to be dissatisfied with the way in which the democratic system currently functions. It has indeed been demonstrated empirically that citizens who are dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy are more likely to support allegedly populist parties than citizens who are satisfied with democracy (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Norris, 2005; Schumacher &

Rooduijn, 2011). While the evidence is overwhelming that a relationship exists between political satisfaction and the populist message, it is still unclear whether the populist message is a cause or consequence of political dissatisfaction.

The impact of populism on political satisfaction

What might be the causal mechanism behind the relationship between political satisfaction and populist voting? To answer this question, I discuss two causal logics: the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic (see Van der Brug, 2003; Van der Brug & Fennema, 2003; Van der Brug et al., 2000, 2005). According to the expressing discontent logic, citizens primarily vote for an allegedly populist party because they are politically dissatisfied. It is expected that citizens who are dissatisfied with the performance of the political establishment and the political system vote for a party that shares this attitude (see Bergh, 2004). With their choice for an allegedly populist party, discontented voters signal their dissatisfaction with the political establishment. Therefore, according to the expressing discontent logic, citizens vote for allegedly populist parties to signal feelings of discontent with politics (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Mayer & Perrineau, 1992; Norris, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2001). Although in the extant literature this argument has typically been made about *radical right-wing* allegedly populist parties, I believe that the expressing discontent logic could hold for both the left and the right. After all, left-wing allegedly populist parties are critical about the political establishment as well (March, 2007; March & Mudde, 2005; Schumacher & Rooduijn, 2011).

According to the fuelling discontent logic, voters become more discontented with the functioning of liberal democracy *as a result of* being exposed to the messages of allegedly populist parties. Those who support populists are most likely to be affected by the frequently repeated message that the political elite is incompetent and that the democratic system is not functioning well (Van der Brug, 2003). Thus, political dissatisfaction can also be the consequence of voters' support for allegedly populist parties.

Although little is known about the way in which the populist message affects citizens' attitudes, it has been shown that people are affected by the messages they are exposed to. Lenz (2009) has demonstrated that if someone supports a party, s/he will be more strongly affected by the messages of this party than someone who does not support this party (see also Bartels, 2002). According to Lenz (2009: 834), citizens change their opinions to be more consistent with the ideas of the party they vote for. For instance, he argued that American voters in the 1980s learned the positions of the presidential candidates Reagan and Carter and subsequently incorporated the position of their preferred candidate as their own position. Cohen (2003) similarly has argued, and demonstrated by means of a series of experiments, that party identification strongly affects individuals' attitudes. He showed that supporters of a party tend to adapt their ideas to the party line when they are exposed to messages in which the position of their party is revealed. According to Lenz (2009: 831), the reason might be that individuals think that 'their' party defends their interests in general: 'When the costs of developing one's own opinions are high, taking cues from a party that shares one's interests could be reasonable'. Thus, if a voter supports a party that expresses the message that the people are being exploited by the elites, s/he might be inclined to incorporate this idea in his or her way of thinking about politics. It may therefore be expected that the more populist the program of a political party is, the less politically satisfied its supporters will become.

It is not only political parties that convey populist messages. Populist messages may also be voiced by other actors – such as the mass media. Only a few studies have been conducted with regard to the relationship between media populism and political satisfaction among citizens. Yet, theoretically, it can be expected that in the realm of the mass media the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic are present as well. The expressing discontent logic can be expected to be present because citizens might well choose to read newspapers that express attitudes that are similar to their own. Just as citizens with low amounts of political satisfaction can be expected to vote for a party that expresses similar attitudes (see Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005), these dissatisfied citizens might also be supposed to be inclined to read

newspapers that provide space for similar attitudes of political discontent (see Mazzoleni, 2003).

The fuelling discontent logic can be expected to be present in the media realm because many studies have indicated that the mass media exert direct persuasive effects on public opinion (e.g., Bartels, 1993; Dalton et al., 1998; Zaller, 1992, 1996). Early studies of voting behavior relied on a framework of direct persuasive media (Berelson et al., 1954). In recent years, a growing body of research has started to re-appreciate these direct effects of the media (Brandenburg & Van Egmond, 2011). Studies have focused on the effect on voting behavior (Druckman & Parkin, 2005), vote-decision timing (Nir & Druckman, 2008), candidate preferences (Dalton et al., 1998; Lodge et al., 1995), policy preferences (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Zaller, 1996) and attitudes (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009). Because of these direct persuasive effects of the media, it can be expected that the more populist a newspaper is, the less politically satisfied its readers will be.

Irrespective of the causal direction of the relationships between voting behavior and political satisfaction on the one hand and media use and political satisfaction on the other hand, both logics are ultimately driven by the attitudinal and background characteristics of citizens. To draw valid inferences about the causal relationships, I need to control for these other factors. Prior research on voting for allegedly populist parties indicated that gender, age, class, education, and religiosity affect citizens' support for allegedly populist parties (see for instance Lubbers et al., 2002; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2000; Van der Brug et al., 2000) as well as their satisfaction with democracy (see for instance Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Bernauer & Vatter, 2012; Singh et al., 2012). The same can be said about the effect of citizens' attitudes towards issues such as European integration and their general left-right orientation on voting for populists (see Ivarsson, 2008; Van der Brug et al., 2000, 2005) as well as their satisfaction with democracy (Karp et al., 2003; Bowler et al., 2006).

Data and methods

Data

I focus on Western Europe because 'the main area of sustained populist growth and success over the last fifteen years in established democracies has been in Western Europe' (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008: 1). I have selected five countries: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These countries have been chosen for two reasons: (1) the electoral success of allegedly populist parties varies across these cases;⁷⁸ and (2) I want to include allegedly populist parties on both the left and the right side of the political spectrum. Table 6.1 contains an overview of the allegedly populist parties.⁷⁹ Successful right-wing allegedly populist parties (15 per cent of the votes or more in the electorally most successful election between 1988 and 2008) have emerged in Italy (*Forza Italia* and *Alleanza Nazionale*), the Netherlands (*Lijst Pim Fortuyn*), and France (*Front National*). Unsuccessful right-wing allegedly populist parties (less than 15 per cent of the votes in each election between 1988 and 2008) have emerged in Italy (*Lega Nord*), the Netherlands (*Centrum Democraten* and *Partij voor de Vrijheid*), and the United Kingdom (*British National Party* and *United Kingdom Independence Party*). A left-wing allegedly populist party with limited electoral success has emerged in Germany (*Die Linke*), whereas a successful one can be found in the Netherlands (*Socialistische Partij*).

I have constructed a dataset containing information about citizens' political satisfaction, the degree of populism of the parties they vote for and of

⁷⁸ Although I do not directly assess the electoral success of allegedly populist parties in this chapter, my case selection is nevertheless based on this criterion because I do indirectly focus on parties' electoral successes. After all, I look at vote choice in order to combine data on the party level with data on the individual level.

⁷⁹ This table has been constructed exclusively to clarify my case selection. The division between successful and unsuccessful allegedly populist parties and between left- and right-wing allegedly populist parties has not been used in the actual empirical analyses.

the newspaper(s) they read, some attitudinal positions, and a number of demographic and socio-economic background variables.

Table 6.1.

Selected countries and allegedly populist parties

	Right	Left
Successful (more than 15 percent of votes)	Forza Italia (FI), IT Alleanza Nazionale (AN), IT Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), NL Front National (FN), FR	Socialistische Partij (SP), NL
Unsuccessful (15 percent of votes or less)	Lega Nord (LN), IT Centrum Democraten (CD), NL Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), NL British National Party (BNP), UK United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), UK	Die Linke, GE

Notes. Only those allegedly populist parties have been included which have gained seats during national or European parliamentary elections between 1988 and 2008. Success is expressed as the largest vote share of the party between 1988 and 2008 with regard to national parliamentary elections.

The data concerning the degree of populism of political parties come from a content analysis of election manifestos in which 63 manifestos of both mainstream parties and allegedly populist parties were analyzed (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4).⁸⁰ For every paragraph in every election manifesto, extensively trained coders determined whether this paragraph contained indications of people-centrism and anti-elitism. People-centrism was measured with the question ‘Do the authors of the manifesto refer to the people?’. I instructed the coders to include every reference to the people, irrespective of whether it concerned ‘the electorate’, ‘the nation’ or ‘our

⁸⁰ I focus on only 63 of the 83 manifestos that I analyzed in the previous chapters because the datasets that include the variables on the individual level only go back to 1999.

society'.⁸¹ Anti-elitism was measured with the following question: 'Do the authors of the manifesto criticize elites?' Only when the critique concerned elites in general was it coded as anti-elitism. Hence, a critique of individual politicians or parties was not coded as anti-elitism. If both people-centrism and anti-elitism were present, the paragraph was coded as populist. For every manifesto, the total percentage of populist paragraphs was computed. This percentage is the so-called populism-score for a party during a specific election. In Chapter 3, I have demonstrated that this operationalization yields a valid and reliable measurement of populism. An overview of the mean populism-scores per party per year, and the corresponding reliability statistics are presented in Appendix E.

Information about the degree of populism in the public debates in the media comes from a similar content analysis of opinionated articles in newspapers (see Chapter 5). I realize that articles in the 'opinion sections' of newspapers contain only a rather limited part of the messages that enter the political debate. However, I think that these opinionated articles will provide a good reflection of the variation in the degree of populism in the public debates. The samples of opinionated articles were taken from newspapers published in the four weeks before general elections because the media pay more attention to politics during campaigns (Koopmans, 2004: 372). In every country, three newspapers were analyzed. For every election period, a systematic sample of days was drawn, and for every sampled day, the opinion articles about domestic and EU politics have been collected. To measure the degree of populism, the same coding procedure as for the party manifestos was employed. In a first step, the populism-score per opinion article was calculated. This is the percentage of populist paragraphs in each article. In a second step, the populism-score per newspaper per year was determined. This is the mean populism-score of all the analyzed opinion articles in this

⁸¹ 'The people' can mean many different things to many different populists in many different circumstances (Canovan, 1981). To deal with this this variety of meanings, and in order not to miss particular perceptions of 'the people', I have decided to employ an open coding procedure and thus not to strictly define 'the people' beforehand.

newspaper in a specific year. See Appendix F for an overview of the populism scores per newspaper per year and the corresponding reliability statistics.

These data were combined with survey data from the European Elections Studies (EES) of 1999, 2004 and 2009. Although the EES focuses primarily on European elections, it includes variables that concern the national level as well. I have combined the data as follows. In each EES wave, respondents were asked: 'If national elections were held today, which party would you vote for?'. Respondents who expressed an intention to vote for any of the 63 parties whose manifestos were coded are included in my analyses. I then created a new variable, labeled 'populism of the party voted for', to which I attributed the populism scores of the party manifestos to voters that intended to support these parties. Therefore, if a respondent intended to vote for party A at time X, I have ascribed the populism score of the most recent manifesto of party A at time X to that person. Respondents were also asked which newspaper they read. Similarly, if a respondent read newspaper B at time X, I have attributed the populism score of the relevant newspaper to that respondent. In this way, I created the new variable 'populism of the newspaper read'. A disadvantage of combining the EES with these content analysis results was that it generated a large amount of missing values. After all, many respondents did not read a newspaper at all. They had, unfortunately, to be dropped from the analyses. I will return to this point later in the chapter. Hence, I have created a dataset in which the information about vote choice and newspaper readership is replaced with interval level variables: the degree of populism of the party one voted for and the degree of populism of the newspaper one read. The degree of populism of parties ranges from 0 to 23.08; the degree of populism of newspapers ranges from 0 to 12.76. See the Appendices E and F.

Satisfaction with democracy was measured with the question: 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?' Respondents could indicate on a 4-points scale to what extent they were satisfied (1 = not at all satisfied, 4 = very satisfied). Many scholars have employed this variable as a measure of satisfaction with democracy (see Aarts & Thomassen, 2008; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Bernauer & Vatter, 2012;

Blais & Gélinau, 2007; Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Lijphart, 1999; Mcallister, 2005; Singh et al., 2012).

Respondents' positions on the left-right dimension were measured with an item that asked them to place themselves on a 10-points scale that ranges from left (1) to right (10). To measure how radical a respondent is, I first recoded this left/right variable so that it ranged from -4 (left) to 4 (right),⁸² and I then squared this variable. As a result, high scores indicate a position on either the extreme left or the extreme right of the left-right dimension. The squared variable ranges from 0 (not radical) to 16 (very radical). Another attitude that might affect a respondent's satisfaction with democracy and populist voting is his or her attitude towards European integration. It has been demonstrated that the attitude towards Europe is a component of the socio-cultural dimension in public opinion, of which the attitude towards immigration and integration is also part (Van der Brug & Van Spanje, 2009).⁸³ It was measured with the following question: 'Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion?' Respondents could answer this question on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (has already gone too far) to 10 (should be pushed further).

I included several other background variables in the analysis. The first one is political interest, which ranges from 'not at all interested' (1) to 'very interested' (4). Secondly, I controlled for education, which is measured in the EES by asking respondents at which age they ended their full-time education. The assumption is that the higher the age, the higher the level of education. Thirdly, I have taken into account the net household income per month. As this variable has been categorized differently across countries and waves, I have standardized it per country-wave combination. Fourthly, I have included a measure of subjective class position. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-points scale whether they belonged to the working class (1), the lower

⁸² To compute this score I have combined the two middle categories of the original left/right variable.

⁸³ Unfortunately, questions regarding immigration and integration have not systematically been asked over the different EES waves, as a result of which it was not possible to include such attitudes in this analysis.

middle class (2), the middle class (3), the upper middle class (4) or the upper class (5). Additionally, I have controlled for gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and the age of the respondent. Finally, a measure of religiosity has been included. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale how often they attended religious services, ranging from never (1) to several times a week (5).

For a descriptive overview of the variables, see Appendix G. The pooled dataset consists of 1700 respondents, nested in 15 country-year combinations (five countries and three years: 1999, 2004 and 2009). I did not analyze the countries separately from each other because the number of party-year combinations is too small to conduct separate analyses. Nevertheless, I controlled for the differences between countries in several ways (see below).

Methods

My analysis involved a number of steps. To determine whether the degree of populism of the party a person voted for and of the newspaper that a person reads is related to his or her satisfaction with democracy, I first estimated multilevel linear regression models. Multilevel analysis was used to account for the hierarchical structure of the data: the respondents are nested within country-year combinations. I estimated three different models. In the first model, the degree of populism of the party one voted for is the dependent variable. As satisfaction with democracy here is assumed to be a determinant of the degree of populism, this model represents the expressing discontent logic with regard to the political realm. I also estimated a model in which the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads is the dependent variable. As satisfaction with democracy here is modeled as an independent variable as well, this model represents the expressing discontent model vis-à-vis the media realm. Finally, I estimated a third model in which satisfaction with democracy is the dependent variable. This model represents the fuelling discontent logic with regard to both the political realm and the media realm, as the degree of populism in the programs of parties and in the public debates in the media are modeled as independent variables. The program MLwiN was used to conduct the analyses. The estimation method is restricted maximum

likelihood (RML) because RML estimates are less biased than full maximum likelihood (FML) estimates (Hox, 2010: 41). I included country dummies to take into account the differences between the countries under investigation.⁸⁴ Regression models are not the best suited to test the validity of a causal claim. In the second stage of my analyses, I therefore conducted path analyses, which allowed me to compare two models representing the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic. An advantage of path analysis is that complex causal models can be analyzed, and therefore, indirect effects can also be estimated. Moreover, and even more important for my purpose, it makes it possible to compare how well the two models fit the data. Ideally, path analysis requires parsimonious models. I therefore used the outcomes of the regression analyses to create more parsimonious models. Variables that had no significant effects in both regression models were excluded from the analyses in this second stage. The path models have been estimated using LISREL 8.80 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006).⁸⁵

Results

The first results of the multilevel analyses are presented in Table 6.2. In model 1, I focus on the degree of populism of the party one votes for as the dependent variable. It turns out that political satisfaction has a positive and

⁸⁴ Because satisfaction with democracy is measured on an ordinal 4-point scale, I also estimated the second model by means of ordinal logit and logistic regressions (for which I have dichotomized this 4-points scale). This leads to the same substantive results.

⁸⁵ Because some variables are measured on an ordinal scale, I have first estimated the polychoric (PCM) and asymptotic correlation matrices (ACM) with PRELIS and used these matrices to estimate the models. As I used these special correlation matrices, I estimated my models by means of weighted least squares (WLS). To take into account the country differences, I have also estimated the models by centering the variables on their country-means. Because this resulted in variables that could not be interpreted as ordinal anymore, it was not possible to use the polychoric and asymptotic correlation matrices. Therefore, I was forced to make use of the original covariance matrices. However, these analyses did not lead to substantively different results.

significant effect on the degree of populism of the party one votes for ($b = -0.477$, significant at $p < 0.01$). This indicates that political satisfaction and a party's populism are negatively related to each other, and it suggests that political satisfaction can be modeled as a cause of the degree of populism of the party one votes for. In model 2, the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads is modeled as the dependent variable. It turns out that political satisfaction is not significantly related to the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads. This is confirmed in model 3, in which political satisfaction is the dependent variable and the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads is one of the independent variables. This indicates that with regard to the realm of the media, neither the expressing discontent logic nor the fuelling discontent logic seem to hold. Model 3 does indicate, however, that the degree of populism of the party one votes for can be modeled as a cause for the amount of political satisfaction. After all, the degree of populism of the party one votes for exerts a negative and significant effect on political satisfaction ($b = -0.025$, significant at $p < 0.01$).

These first findings indicate that the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads and one's political satisfaction are not related to each other.⁸⁶ Because the variable that measures the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads contains many missing values – after all, many people do not read a newspaper at all – I have excluded this variable from the analyses in the remainder of this chapter. This led to a very strong increase of my N from 1700 to 6016. For an overview of the descriptive statistics on which the analyses in the remainder of this chapter are based, see Appendix H.

⁸⁶ Although one could argue that this finding might well be due to the large time-span between my measurement of the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads and the measurement of political satisfaction in the EES, I doubt that this argument holds. After all, this time-span is just as large with regard to my measurement of the degree of populism of the party one votes for and the measurement of political satisfaction. I found a significant correlation between these two variables nonetheless.

Table 6.2

Regressions explaining the populism of a party, the populism of a newspaper, and satisfaction with democracy (with country dummies)

	Populism party		Populism newspaper		Satisfaction with democracy	
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)
Intercept	3.653**	(0.768)	2.269*	(1.020)	2.713**	(0.155)
<i>Background variables</i>						
Gender	-0.194	(0.159)	-0.038	(0.082)	-0.031	(0.037)
Class	-0.090	(0.089)	-0.032	(0.046)	0.071**	(0.021)
Income	-0.166*	(0.082)	-0.051	(0.043)	-0.014	(0.019)
Age	0.001	(0.005)	0.004	(0.003)	-0.001	(0.001)
Education	-0.007	(0.014)	-0.017*	(0.007)	-0.006	(0.003)
Religiosity	-0.164*	(0.070)	0.011	(0.037)	0.032*	(0.016)
<i>Attitudinal variables</i>						
Political interest	0.060	(0.108)	-0.048	(0.056)	0.012	(0.025)
Left/right attitude	0.085*	(0.040)	0.093**	(0.021)	0.042**	(0.009)
EU attitude	-0.119**	(0.029)	0.002	(0.015)	0.026**	(0.007)
Radicalism left/right	0.032*	(0.015)	-0.020*	(0.008)	-0.006	(0.003)
Populism party			0.023	(0.013)	-0.025**	(0.006)
Populism newspaper	0.067	(0.044)			-0.025	(0.020)
Satisfaction with democracy	-0.477**	(0.105)	-0.166	(0.155)		
<i>Variance components</i>						
Country-year level (n = 15)	0.454*	(0.211)	2.764**	(1.056)	0.015	(0.008)
Respondent level (n = 1700)	9.827**	(0.338)	2.641**	(0.091)	0.523	(0.018)
Deviance	8734.001		6541.266		3740.997	

*: significant at $p < 0.05$. **: significant at $p < 0.01$. Two-tailed tests

Table 6.3 shows the results of the multilevel analyses without the newspaper variable. Let me now focus more specifically on these outcomes. In models 1 and 2, I focus again on the degree of populism of the party one votes for as the dependent variable. In model 1, only the effects of the background variables gender, class, income, age, education and religiosity have been estimated. Gender, class and religiosity turn out to exert significant negative effects on the degree of populism of the party one votes for ($b = -0.151$, significant at $p < 0.05$, $b = -0.188$, significant at $p < 0.01$ and $b = 0.154$, significant at $p < 0.01$, respectively), indicating that females, individuals who position themselves in a higher class, and individuals who are more religious, vote for less populist parties. In model 2, all variables have been included. Gender, class and religion are still significant. The EU attitude seems to affect the degree of populism of the party one votes for as well. The negative coefficient ($b = -0.101$, significant at $p < 0.01$) indicates that more positive attitudes toward European unification lead to voting for less populist parties. Satisfaction with democracy exerts a strong and negative effect on the degree of populism of the party one votes for. The more satisfied a citizen is with the way in which his or her democracy functions, the less populist the party he or she votes for: $b = -0.332$, $p < 0.01$.

However, what happens when I model satisfaction with democracy as the dependent variable, and the degree of populism of the party one votes for as one of the independent variables? This approach is tested in models 3 and 4. Of the background variables, only class, income and religiosity exert significant effects (see model 3). Social class has a positive effect, showing that the higher classes are more satisfied with democracy ($b = 0.069$, significant at $p < 0.01$) than the lower classes. Income equally has a positive effect on satisfaction with democracy ($b = 0.037$, significant at $p < 0.01$). Religiosity exerts a significant and positive effect as well ($b = 0.031$, significant at $p < 0.01$), indicating that more religious individuals are more satisfied with democracy. Once I include the attitudinal variables in the model (see model 4), the effect of religiosity is only significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The effects of class and income remain significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. The ideological attitudes of

Table 6.3*Explaining populist voting and satisfaction with democracy*

	Populism party		Satisfaction with democracy	
	Model 1 B (SE)	Model 2 B (SE)	Model 3 B (SE)	Model 4 B (SE)
Intercept	2.058** (0.418)	3.217** (0.458)	2.493** (0.101)	2.316** (0.104)
<i>Background variables</i>				
Gender	-0.151* (0.075)	-0.176* (0.076)	-0.028 (0.019)	-0.015 (0.019)
Class	-0.188** (0.041)	-0.149** (0.042)	0.069** (0.010)	0.049** (0.010)
Income	-0.072 (0.041)	-0.048 (0.041)	0.037** (0.010)	0.028** (0.010)
Age	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)	0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
Education	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.002 (0.007)	0.001 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)
Religiosity	-0.154** (0.033)	-0.142** (0.033)	0.031** (0.008)	0.019* (0.008)
<i>Attitudinal variables</i>				
Political interest		0.037 (0.050)		0.018 (0.012)
Left/right attitude		0.014 (0.016)		0.026** (0.004)
EU attitude		-0.101** (0.014)		0.026** (0.003)
Radicalism left/right		0.013 (0.007)		-0.007** (0.002)
Satisfaction with democracy		-0.332** (0.052)		-0.020** (0.003)
<i>Populism party</i>				
Country-year level (n = 15)	0.362** (0.145)	0.373** (0.149)	0.021** (0.008)	0.019* (0.008)
Respondent level (n = 6016)	8.296** (0.151)	8.149** (0.149)	0.507** (0.009)	0.494** (0.009)
Deviance	29842.346	29734.810	13030.181	12868.522

*: significant at p < 0.05. **: significant at p < 0.01. Two-tailed tests

citizens affect their political satisfaction as well. The more right-wing a citizen, the more satisfied he or she is with the way in which his or her democratic system works ($b = 0.026$, significant at $p < 0.01$), and the more positive someone's attitude towards European unification, the larger his or her political satisfaction ($b = 0.026$, significant at $p < 0.01$). Additionally, radicalism on the left/right scale exerts a significant effect: the more radical a person, the lower his or her satisfaction with democracy ($b = -0.007$, significant at $p < 0.01$). Finally, and most importantly, the degree of populism of the party a person votes for exerts a significant effect on democratic satisfaction as well. The regression coefficient of $b = -0.020$ (significant at $p < 0.01$) shows that the more populist the party a person votes for, the less satisfied this person is with the functioning of his or her democratic system. This indicates that satisfaction with democracy can also be modeled as a consequence instead of a cause of populist voting.⁸⁷

To assess this relationship more carefully, I have constructed two different path models, based on the outcomes of the previous regression analyses (see Figure 6.1). I have only included those variables that exerted a significant effect in one of the regression analyses. Therefore, in my path models, the left/right attitude and the EU attitude of a citizen, as well as his or her radicalism on the left/right scale, affect democratic satisfaction, whereas only the EU attitude has an effect on the degree of populism of the party one votes for. Additionally, class has a direct effect on satisfaction with democracy, and the gender and religiosity of a person affect the degree of populism of the party he or she votes for.⁸⁸ The left/right positions and the EU attitudes of citizens are assumed to co-vary. I have also included those background

⁸⁷ I tested the sensitivity of these findings to specific country characteristics by means of the jackknife procedure. I estimated the models again after dropping one of the five countries at a time. The only difference is that after dropping the respondents from Germany, Italy or the UK, age becomes significant in the models that explain satisfaction with democracy. As this only concerns a background variable, I conclude that my findings are robust.

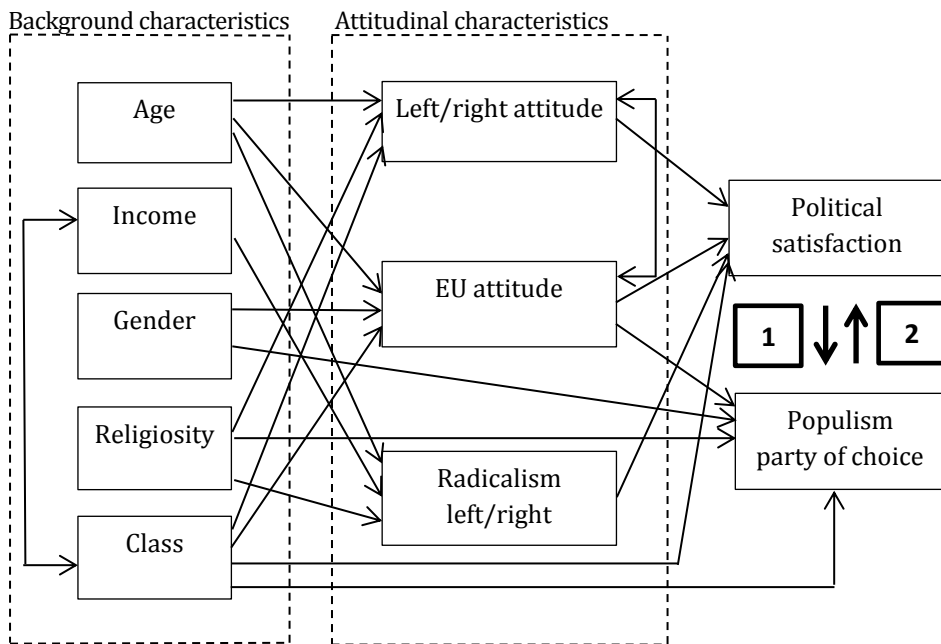
⁸⁸ I fixed the effects of income and religiosity on political satisfaction to 0 because LISREL indicated that these effects are not significant.

variables in my models that turn out to significantly affect one of the attitudinal variables: age, gender, income, class and religiosity. Effects that turned out to be insignificant were removed from the models. It is assumed that class and income co-vary.

Having thus arrived at a model specification, which provides the best fit of the data, I turn to the question of which model fits the data best, the one representing the expressing discontent logic (number 1 in Figure 6.1) or the one representing the fuelling discontent logic (number 2 in Figure 6.1)?

Figure 6.1.

Expressing discontent logic (1) and fuelling discontent logic (2)



The results are presented in Table 6.4. I evaluated the goodness of fit of the models using the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the comparative fit index (CFI). I defined acceptable model fit by the following criteria: $RMSEA \leq 0.05$; $SRMR \leq 0.08$; and $CFI \geq 0.95$. I compared the two models with each other on the basis of the chi-squared and the Akaike's information criterion (AIC). The model with the lowest chi-squared and AIC is the best fitting model. Both models fit the data very well. The RMSEA for both models is 0.009, the SRMR is 0.014 and the CFI is 0.99. The chi-squared is 36.37 for model 1 and 37.29 for model 2; the AIC is 96.37 for model 1 and 97.29 for model 2. These indices show that the expressing discontent model fits the data marginally better than the fuelling discontent model, but because the differences between the models are extremely small and not significant, I cannot refute one of the logics and accept the other. Hence, these results indicate that political disaffection can be modeled both as a cause and as a consequence of populist voting.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Unfortunately, LISREL failed to converge while estimating a non-recursive model according to which both causal effects exist.

Table 6.4.*Path models explaining populist voting and satisfaction with democracy*

	Model 1 (Expressing discontent)	Model 2 (Fuelling discontent)
Age → Left/right attitude	0.09	0.09
Age → EU attitude	-0.04	-0.04
Age → Radicalism left/right	0.10	0.10
Class → Populism of party	-0.04	-0.05
Class → Satisfaction democracy	0.18	0.17
Class → Left/right attitude	0.10	0.10
Class → EU attitude	0.17	0.17
Income → Radicalism left/right	-0.03	-0.03
Religiosity → Populism of party	-0.09	-0.09
Religiosity → Left/right attitude	0.12	0.12
Religiosity → Radicalism left/right	-0.04	-0.04
Left/right attitude → Satisfaction democracy	0.10	0.10
EU attitude → Populism of party	-0.10	-0.10
EU attitude → Satisfaction democracy	0.15	0.14
Radicalism left/right → Satisfaction democracy	-0.06	-0.06
Satisfaction democracy → Populism of party	-0.06	
Populism of party → Satisfaction democracy		-0.06
Class ↔ Income	0.37	0.37
Left/right attitude ↔ EU attitude	-0.16	-0.16
<i>R-squared</i>		
Left/right attitude	0.04	0.04
EU attitude	0.04	0.04
Radicalism left/right	0.01	0.01
Populism of party	0.03	0.03
Satisfaction democracy	0.08	0.08
Chi-squared (df)	36.37 (25)	37.29 (25)
RMSEA	0.009	0.009
SRMR	0.014	0.014
CFI	0.99	0.99
AIC	96.37	97.29

Conclusion

It can be expected that the degree of populism of the party one votes for and the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads affect one's political satisfaction (see Mazzoleni, 2003; Van der Brug, 2003). It can also be expected that the causal directions of these relationships run in the opposite direction: political dissatisfaction then is not a consequence, but a cause of voting for a more populist party and of reading a more populist newspaper (see Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005). I have labeled these logics the fuelling discontent logic and the expressing discontent logic, respectively. In this chapter, I have tested whether the degree of populism of the party one votes for and the newspaper one reads are related to one's political satisfaction, and, if this is the case, which of the two mentioned logics best explains this relationship.

Combining the results of a content analysis of election manifestos with the European Election Studies (EES) of 1999, 2004 and 2009, I have linked information about the parties individuals vote for and the newspapers they read to the degree of populism of these parties and newspapers. In this way, I have combined data at the level of parties and media with data on political satisfaction at the individual level. In contrast to most existing studies, I have analyzed the actual populist *messages* of parties. Most research simply defines parties as either populist or not populist. Following recent studies, I have conceived of populism as a matter of degree and have determined whether parties are *more* or *less* populist (Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Pauwels, 2011). I focused on five Western European countries: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

By means of multilevel analyses, I have demonstrated that no significant relationship exists in the data between the degree of populism of the newspaper a person reads and his or her political satisfaction. The analyses did show a relationship between the degree of populism of the party one votes for and one's political satisfaction, however. Moreover, structural equation modeling indicated that with regard to this relationship, both the expressing discontent model and the fuelling discontent model fit the data well. Although the expressing discontent model fits marginally better, the differences

between the two models are extremely small and not statistically significant. This means that political dissatisfaction can be modeled as both a cause and a consequence of voting for more populist parties.

This is an important conclusion because it means that previous studies that have used cross-sectional data and that have modeled discontent to be exogenous to voting for allegedly populist parties have most likely overestimated the strength of these effects (e.g., Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005). After all, the correlation they have found is most likely due to causal effects in both directions.

Individuals who support a party that expresses a populist message might very well do so not because of the populist message, but because they agree with this party on other issues, concerning for instance taxes, migration or European integration (see Van der Brug et al., 2000, 2005). Various studies have shown that citizens who support a specific party because they agree with this party's stances on, say, the issues A and B, are inclined to adopt this party's attitudes on the issues C and D as well (Bartels, 2002; Cohen, 2003; Lenz, 2009). It is therefore highly likely that once citizens support a party, they will also be susceptible to other ideas of this party, such as, for instance, its populism.

This study is based on cross sectional surveys, as a result of which the internal validity of causal claims is less strong than it would have been if I used panel data. Unfortunately, cross-national panel data were not available for this study. Future studies might collect such data to further examine the logics of expressing and fuelling discontent. Another path of future research might be (survey) experiments in which one could test whether and how populist messages affect individuals' ideas about politics. While I recognize the limitations of this study, I do feel it is an important first step in the endeavor of unraveling the complex relationship between the populist message and political disaffection.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The Specter of Populism

A Spectre is haunting the world – populism.
Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, 1969, p. 1.

*... in twenty-first century Europe, in the name of the people, the spectre
continues to pursue the sceptre.*

Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, 2008, p. 11.

Introduction

Allegedly populist parties are on the rise in Western Europe. In many countries, they have managed to obtain seats in the national parliament, and in some countries, they have even assumed office (e.g., Italy, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands). The main question of this dissertation was whether the success of these parties has impacted upon various key actors within the electoral process, and thereby generated a so-called populist *Zeitgeist* (Mudde, 2004). The guiding hypothesis was that the electoral success of allegedly populist parties has affected political parties, mass media and public opinion, and thereby created a ‘spiral of populism’ that has resulted in an all-embracing presence of populism in Western European societies.

This spiral of populism draws on the assumption that populism is attractive to voters. Populism claims to represent the interests of ‘ordinary’ citizens, who are said to be neglected by corrupt and selfish elites (Canovan, 1981; De la Torre, 2010). Because in many Western European countries allegedly populist parties have demonstrated that this populist set of ideas indeed appeals to large numbers of voters (see Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Mény & Surel, 2002b), I expected that it would also be attractive for vote-seeking mainstream parties to incorporate elements of populism into their discourse (Mair, 2002; Mudde, 2004). Moreover, I expected market-oriented media to be inclined to increasingly provide space for populist messages as well (Mazzoleni, 2003; Plasser & Ulram, 2003). After all, mass media are dependent upon their audience shares and are thus likely to focus on what they think will appeal to their readers or spectators. Finally, the

expression of populism by political parties and mass media was expected to negatively affect the political satisfaction of voters (see Lenz, 2009; Van der Brug, 2003), who would, as a result, increasingly vote for allegedly populist parties again. If all of this does turn out to be the case, we are indeed witnessing a populist Zeitgeist in Western Europe.

In this concluding chapter, I assess whether such a populist Zeitgeist is dawning. In the next section, I first discuss the main findings of this study separately from each other. Then, in the following section, I interpret these results within the broader framework of the research model that I have presented in the introductory chapter. After a discussion of the main contributions of this dissertation, and suggestions for further research, I conclude with a prediction for the near future.

Main findings

Before I began my empirical investigation into the question whether Western Europe is indeed experiencing a populist Zeitgeist, I focused on the conceptual question of how to define populism – see Chapter 2. I demonstrated that prototypical populist actors across three continents and over time all have four elements in common: (1) they emphasize the central position of ‘the people’; (2) they argue that the people constitute a homogeneous entity; (3) they argue that the Good people are exploited by an Evil elite that is corrupt and selfish; and (4) they claim that the exploitation of the Good people by the Evil elite generates a serious political, economic and/or cultural crisis. These four shared characteristics all relate to the *ideas* of allegedly populist actors, and not to their style or organization. This implies that the shared nucleus of populism is of an ideational nature.

That all populist actors share this common core means that it is possible to employ a minimal definition of populism that is valid in the sense that all prototypical populist actors across cases and over time fall within the populist category. We can compare populism in Latin America to populism in the United States and Western Europe on the basis of the discovered lowest common denominator. It turns out that Mudde’s (2004: 543) minimal

definition of populism – according to which populism is ‘an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’ – is an appropriate starting point for such a comparative endeavor.

In Chapter 3, I presented an empirical measurement of populism based on this minimal definition. The measurement is the result of a manually coded content analysis of election manifestos of Western European political parties.⁹⁰ The validity of this measurement of populism is rather satisfactory: the *content validity* is good because the systematized concept (populism) is captured rather well by its indicators (people-centrism and anti-elitism); the *face validity* is acceptable as well because allegedly populist parties turned out to be much more populist than mainstream parties; and the *concurrent validity* is adequate because my method generated similar results as another, computerized, content analysis of populism.⁹¹ I conducted two inter-coder reliability tests – one on the national level and one general test across countries. Both tests generated satisfactory reliability statistics. The degree of populism of political parties can thus be measured both validly and reliably by means of a content analysis of election manifestos.

In Chapter 4, I assessed whether the success of allegedly populist parties has caused mainstream parties to become more populist. The findings indicate that, contrary to the expectations, mainstream parties have not become more populist in the last two decades. Moreover, mainstream parties have not become more populist when confronted with either electoral losses or

⁹⁰ I have focused on political parties in Western Europe only because the geographical focus of the remainder of this dissertation is on this part of the world. Nevertheless, because my measurement is based on Mudde’s definition of populism, which is, as I have shown, also applicable to other parts of the world, I expect that my measurement of populism could also be applied beyond Western Europe.

⁹¹ In the remainder of this dissertation, I have employed the results of the manually coded content analysis only because the content validity and face validity of the computerized method were less satisfactory.

successful allegedly populist parties. However, allegedly populist parties *themselves* have turned out not to be immune to their own electoral success. After having experienced success, they have toned down their populism, most likely in an attempt to become acceptable future coalition partners.

Chapter 5 investigated the realm of the mass media. The findings indicate that the success of allegedly populist parties affects the degree of populism in public debates in newspapers. Moreover, the public debates have become slightly more populist in the last two decades. Apparently, the pervasiveness of populism goes beyond the realm of political parties only. In line with the expectations, the analyses showed that letters to the editor are more populist than other contributions to the debates. Contrary to expectations, however, tabloid newspapers turned out to be not more populist than elite newspapers.

Chapter 6 combined the findings of the previous chapters and investigated the relationship between voters' exposure to populist messages and political satisfaction. The findings indicate that although the degree of populism of the party a person votes for is related to this person's political satisfaction, the degree of populism of the newspaper someone reads is not. The chapter therefore mainly focused on populism among parties. I compared two logics with each other: the 'expressing discontent logic' (political dissatisfaction is cause and populist voting consequence) and the 'fuelling discontent logic' (populist voting is cause and political dissatisfaction is consequence). My findings indicate that both logics are supported by the data: political satisfaction can be modeled as a cause as well as a consequence of populist voting. Hence, it is highly likely that the rise of allegedly populist parties has decreased political satisfaction.

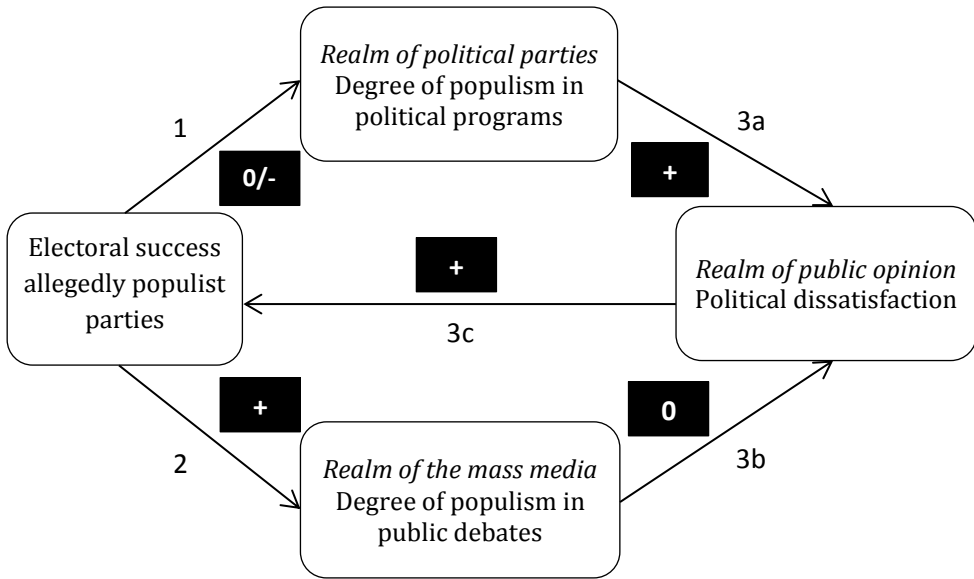
A populist Zeitgeist?

The main empirical findings are visualized in the framework of my general model, which is represented in Figure 7.1. If all of the investigated effects (see the arrows) are positive, it would be valid to conclude that a 'spiral of

populism' exists and that Western Europe is experiencing a populist Zeitgeist. This is not the case, however.

Figure 7.1.

The spiral of populism: main findings



For five reasons, the ideational impact of the success of allegedly populist parties is not so comprehensive and persistent that we can speak of a populist Zeitgeist in Western Europe. First, the success of allegedly populist parties has not generated more populism in the messages of mainstream parties (see arrow 1). Second, allegedly populist parties themselves have even become less populist after achieving electoral successes (see arrow 1). Third, I have found no evidence that the degree of populism in the public debates in the media affects the ideas of citizens (see arrow 3b). Fourth, within each country, the electoral success of allegedly populist parties fluctuates over elections, as a result of which the degree of populism in the public debates in the media varies as well. This implies that, within every country, the pervasiveness of populism differs from election year to election year, and it is therefore not

persistent over time. Fifth, the indirect impact of the success of allegedly populist parties on an individual's attitudes is limited because: (1) although the degree of populism of the party a citizen votes for affects this citizen's political satisfaction, mainstream parties have not become more populist and allegedly populist parties have become less populist, as a result of which, the net indirect effect of populist success on public opinion via the realm of political parties is rather small (see the combination of arrow 1 and arrow 3a); and (2) although the success of allegedly populist parties has affected the public debates in the media, no effect is found of the media on political satisfaction among citizens, which means that the net indirect effect of populist success on public opinion via the realm of the mass media is small as well (see the combination of arrow 2 and arrow 3b).

However, the success of allegedly populist parties has nonetheless had a significant ideational impact in four ways. First, the success of allegedly populist parties has an effect on the degree of populism in the public debates in the media. The more successful allegedly populist parties are, the more populist the public debates in the media become (see arrow 2). Second, the public debates have become significantly more populist over the years. Third, populism is a persuasive message that exerts an effect on the ideas of citizens: citizens who support a political party that expresses a populist message are inclined to internalize this message and become politically less satisfied (see arrow 3a). Fourth, the more politically dissatisfied citizens are, the more they are inclined to vote for political parties that express a populist message, and, therefore, the more successful allegedly populist parties will become (see arrow 4).

We can thus conclude that the electoral success of Western European allegedly populist parties has impacted upon various key actors within the electoral process. However, because the spiral of populism is interrupted, we cannot conclude that Western Europe is experiencing an all-embracing populist *Zeitgeist*. At least two correction mechanisms exist that prevent the populist *Zeitgeist* from coming into being – one internal and one external. The internal correction mechanism is that allegedly populist parties become less populist after having been electorally successful. The external mechanism is

that mainstream parties do not incorporate the populist set of ideas into their own discourse to fend off the challenge that allegedly populist parties pose.

Hence, there is no populist *Zeitgeist* if we translate the German word *Geist* as the word 'spirit'. According to this customary translation (which is also employed by Mudde in his *Zeitgeist*-article), a populist *Zeitgeist* refers, in the full Hegelian sense, to the existence of an all-embracing populist 'spirit of the times'. However, *Geist* is not only the German word for 'spirit' but also for 'ghost' or 'specter'. This means that a populist *Zeitgeist* could also be seen as an era that is characterized by a roaming populist specter. Although this much less common perception of 'Zeitgeist' will be encountered more frequently in fairytales than in academic studies, the specter-metaphor does make sense in the context of this dissertation, as it provides the word *Zeitgeist* with a much less comprehensive and persistent connotation: a specter has a large impact, but it will never be omnipresent. Perhaps for this reason, various scholars have indeed employed the metaphor of the populist specter (see Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Arditi, 2004; Crick, 2005). I therefore conclude that a populist *Zeitgeist* does *not* exist if we conceive of it in the common Hegelian sense of the all-encompassing populist spirit of these times. Yet a populist *Zeitgeist* *does* exist if we conceive of it in a less comprehensive and more metaphorical way: as an era that is characterized by a roaming populist specter.

Contributions to the literature

This dissertation contributes to the extant literature in various respects. It contributes to the conceptual literature on populism in two ways. First, it is one of the first studies that systematically demonstrates that prototypical allegedly populist parties across continents and over time share a number of key characteristics (see also Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). This is an important contribution because it demonstrates that a minimal definition of populism can be formulated according to which all prototypical allegedly populist parties are indeed populist. Although many scholars have already employed such an approach (see Abts & Rummens, 2007; Mudde, 2004;

Stanley, 2008; Weyland, 2001), and some of them have also used it in cross-regionalist comparisons (Hawkins, 2009; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012), a systematic justification was still lacking.

Second, I have shown that a minimal definition of populism should be an *ideational* definition of populism – i.e., a definition according to which populism consists of a set of ideas. After all, all discovered common characteristics relate to substantive ideas. This is in contrast with definitions of populism that conceptualize populism primarily as a specific style of practicing politics (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mazzoleni, 2003; Taguieff, 1995) or as a particular organizational form (Germani, 1978; Di Tella, 1965; Weyland, 2001). This difference might occur because those scholars who have conceptualized populism as a form of organization have mainly focused on Latin America, and those authors who have conceived of populism as a style have primarily investigated populism in Western Europe. These two regions differ significantly from each other with regard to the way in which the party political system works. By transcending continental borders and by focusing on different time-periods, I have demonstrated that definitions of populism as a style or an organizational form are too context-specific to be employed in cross-continental investigations of populism.⁹²

This study also contributes methodologically to the literature on populism. Most empirical studies of populism have employed a dichotomous classification system according to which they have categorized some parties as populist and other parties as not populist. Only a few studies have challenged this dichotomous either/or approach by arguing that populism could better be perceived as a matter of degree (see Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Pauwels, 2011). Yet none of these studies has fully legitimized this gradual approach by demonstrating that the degree of populism can be measured across cases and over time in both a valid and

⁹² It needs to be emphasized that this does not imply that I repudiate the existence of, for instance, a populist strategy. It only implies that populism is primarily a set of ideas, and that, therefore, a populist strategy will always be based on this particular set of ideas.

reliable way. This dissertation is methodologically and conceptually innovative because it is the first study that has successfully taken on this issue.

My conclusions also contribute to the literature on the strategies of political parties – both the strategies of allegedly populist parties and the tactics of the mainstream parties they challenge. First, my finding that allegedly populist parties moderate their populism after having been electorally successful indicates that populism does not need to be a deeply rooted worldview. As a *thin-centered* ideology instead of a *full* ideology (Freeden, 1998), populism can also be employed strategically to gain votes. This suggests that the distinct approaches of defining populism as either a set of ideas (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Hawkins, 2009; Mudde, 2004), or a style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mazzoleni, 2003; Taguieff, 1995) or strategy (Weyland, 2001), might be less dissimilar from each other than the extant literature suggests (Jagers, 2006; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Pauwels, 2012).

Second, my finding that mainstream parties have not responded to the populist success by incorporating populism in their own messages, and therefore do not employ an accommodative strategy (see Downs, 2001; Meguid, 2005), is an important finding with regard to the debate on how ‘contagious’ allegedly populist parties are (Bale, 2003; Bale et al., 2010; Loxbo, 2010; Minkenberg, 2001; Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005; Van Spanje, 2010). Various scholars have found that allegedly populist parties are indeed contagious (see Van Spanje, 2010). How, then, is it possible that I have found no effect of the success of allegedly populist parties on the discourse of mainstream parties? The most probable reason is that, in contrast to the existing studies, I have not focused on contamination with the *anti-immigrant* or *nativist* stances of allegedly populist parties, but on contagion with their *populism*. Theoretically, it could well be the case, and it might even be considered probable, that mainstream parties have employed an accommodative strategy with regard to the immigration issue, but they have shunned away from also incorporating elements of populism in their discourse. After all, for an established mainstream party, expressing an anti-establishment message would imply self-critique.

Third, my finding that mainstream parties have not become more populist over the years contradicts the argument that mainstream parties have increasingly incorporated populism in their own discourse (De Beus, 2009; Jun, 2006; Mair, 2002; Mudde, 2004; Mény & Surel, 2002b). This is most likely due the exemplar nature of the empirical evidence of these studies. The argument that populism has become mainstream is based on loose examples of speeches by Bos in the Netherlands and Sarkozy in France (De Beus, 2009), Schröder in Germany (Jun, 2006), Blair in the UK (Mair, 2002), Hague in the UK and Stevaert in Belgium (Mudde, 2004), and Chirac in France (Mény & Surel, 2002b). My evidence, however, is based on a systematic comparison across parties, countries and over time, and might therefore be considered to be based on a more appropriate methodology for answering the question of whether populism has become mainstream. The difference between our conclusions might also be caused by the fact that I have investigated election manifestos, whereas the existing studies have focused on speeches. However, although it might be true that populism manifests itself more clearly in speeches than in manifestos, the manifestos of allegedly populist parties turned out to contain many more populist messages than the manifestos of mainstream parties. Moreover, the manifestos of mainstream parties also display variation with regard to the degree of populism. Therefore, if a populist *Zeitgeist* were present in Western Europe, a shift to more populism would most likely also have become apparent in these election manifestos.

This dissertation also contributes to the literature on populism and the media. First, several scholars have hinted that, over the years, populism might have become more prominent in the mass media (Jagers, 2006; Mazzoleni, 2003; Mudde, 2004). Some of them have also argued that, to fully understand the impact of populism, scholars should therefore start focusing on this 'media populism' (Jagers, 2006; Mazzoleni, 2003). To the best of my knowledge, this dissertation is the first investigation into the question of whether media populism has indeed increased over the years. My finding that the public debates in media have indeed become more populist is an important finding because it means that populism has become more widespread than previously

assumed. Apparently, the pervasiveness of populism transcends the realm of political parties.

Second, although various studies have been published about the effect of media coverage on the success of allegedly populist parties (Art, 2006; Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007, 2009; Bos et al., 2011; Mazzoleni, 2003, 2008; Walgrave & De Swert, 2004), only a few studies have been conducted with regard to the reverse effect of the success of allegedly populist parties on the degree of populism in media coverage. This dissertation is one of the first studies to do so. The finding that the success of allegedly populist parties positively affects the degree of populism in the public debates in newspapers adds significantly to our still rather scarce knowledge about the relationship between allegedly populist parties and the mass media. It indicates that populism is an attractive message for the market-oriented mass media, especially when allegedly populist parties are electorally successful and seem to appeal to a large number of people.

This dissertation also adds to the literature on voting behavior. To start with, this is the first investigation that conceives of populist voting as a matter of degree (i.e., one does not vote for either a populist party or a non-populist party, but one votes for a *more* or *less* populist party), and it demonstrates that populist voting in this gradual sense is significantly related to individuals' political satisfaction. This is an innovative approach because it incorporates the *actual messages* of political parties.

This study also contributes to this literature in another respect. Many previous empirical studies have found a relationship between populist voting and political (dis)satisfaction. Most of these studies have modeled political satisfaction as the independent variable and populist voting as the dependent variable and concluded that political satisfaction exerts a causal effect on populist voting: citizens vote for allegedly populist parties because they are politically dissatisfied (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Norris, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2001). I have shown that the causal effect can also be modeled in the opposite direction: the degree of populism of a political party also affects the political satisfaction of someone who supports this party (see Van der Brug, 2003). This is an important finding because it suggests that the

populist message is a persuasive message that affects the ideas of citizens. An important implication is that the effect of political satisfaction on populist voting has been overestimated in previous studies in which scholars have employed cross-national data (e.g., Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005). After all, the correlations they have found are mainly interpreted in terms of unidirectional causal effects, whereas these correlations are most likely due to causal effects in both directions.

Future research

There are various avenues for future research with regard to the ideational impact of populism. One pressing issue that should be addressed in future investigations is the issue of causality. This study is based on comparative data with only a few time points, and therefore, the causal claims are less strong than they would have been if they were based on panel data or experimental data. Unfortunately, such data were not available for this study. It is therefore impossible to fully rule out that the relationships between the electoral success of allegedly populist parties and the pervasiveness of populism in the realm of party politics, the mass media and public opinion are spurious or that the causal effects run in the opposite direction. Future studies might therefore focus on the impact of populism on the basis of panel data or experiments. It needs to be noted, however, that the collection of cross-sectional panel data would be very costly and that the strong internal validity of experiments goes at the expense of their external validity.

With regard to the realm of political parties it might be interesting to look beyond election manifestos and to focus on comparative analyses of other sources, such as the speeches of politicians (Hawkins, 2009), party broadcasts on television (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), or interviews with party officials. Because it might be expected that political parties' behavior will differ from one communication channel to another, analyzing other sources than party manifestos would provide a more comprehensive picture with regard to the impact of populism. It may also be interesting to focus on the degree of populism among radical left-wing parties in particular (see March &

Mudde, 2005; Mudde, 2004). This study has demonstrated that these party families tend to be rather populist. More systematic research into these specific party families might further our knowledge of populism.

With regard to the realm of the mass media, research on populism is still in its infancy. Future studies might focus more specifically on the relationship between the success of allegedly populist parties and the degree of populism in the public debates in the media (Mazzoleni, 2003). One may collect data over a longer period of time and/or make use of time-series analysis to better assess causality. Another avenue for further research could be to conduct in-depth interviews with editors, or, even better, participant observation at the editorial office of the opinion page of a newspaper, to see how editors are affected by the success of allegedly populist parties. Further research into the degree of populism in the media should also extend the focus from opinion articles in newspapers to other newspaper articles (Akkerman, 2011) and other types of media, such as television (Plasser & Ulram, 2003) and/or the internet. Finally, much more research is needed into the remarkable finding that tabloid media are not more populist than the elite media. Although this finding is in line with a previous study (Akkerman, 2011), it still remains unclear as to why this is the case.

Finally, much more work needs to be done to better understand the relationship between public opinion and the success of allegedly populist parties. Although I have demonstrated that it is likely that the degree of populism of a party affects the ideas of supporters of this party (see also Van der Brug, 2003), more research must be conducted to further disentangle the relationship between public opinion and populist voting. As argued before, one might collect panel data (Bélanger & Aarts, 2006) or conduct experiments (Schumacher et al., 2012) to be able to better assess the causal direction of the relationship. Furthermore, future studies should also look at the degree to which populist attitudes actually exist among the public. After all, as a set of ideas, populism is not only a prerogative of political parties and mass media; it can exist as a set of ideas in the minds of citizens as well (Akkerman et al., 2012; Hawkins et al., 2012).

The impact of populism in the near future

Will the specter of populism remain with us? On the basis of my findings, it can be supposed that, in the near future, the pervasiveness of populism within the realm of political parties will be limited. I have demonstrated that mainstream parties do not incorporate the populist set of ideas in their own discourse and that allegedly populist parties themselves moderate their populism after having been electorally successful. Still, the breeding ground for allegedly populist parties seems to become more fertile every day – especially with regard to the European Union. With the current problems of the economic and political institutional design of the EU on the one hand, and the skepticism of Western European citizens about the EU on the other hand (see, for example the referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005 and the recent support for euroskeptical parties in various countries), the populist message that an elitist European super-state has taken over political power and neglects the interests of ordinary people can be expected to be(come) very attractive to voters.

I therefore believe that, although it is unlikely that we will witness an all-encompassing populist Zeitgeist in the near future, the less comprehensive and metaphorical populist ‘specter’ will remain with us for a while.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Overview of analyzed election manifestos with classical content analysis

Country	Party	Election 1	Election 2	Election 3	Election 4
France	PS	X	X	X	X
	RPR	X	X	X	-
	UDF	X	-	X	-
	UMP	-	-	X	X
	PCF	X	X	X	-
	FN*	-	X	X	X
Germany	CDU/CSU	X	X	X	X
	SPD	X	X	X	X
	FDP	X	X	X	X
	Die Linke/PDS*	X	X	X	X
Italy	DC/PP	X	X	-	-
	PD/Ulivo	-	-	X	X
	DS	X	X	-	-
	AN/MSI*	X	X	-	-
	CdL/FI/PdL*	-	X	X	X
LN*	X	X	-	-	
Netherlands	CDA	X	X	X	X
	D66	-	X	X	X
	PvdA	X	X	X	X
	VVD	X	X	X	X
	CD*	-	X	-	-
	LPF*	-	-	X	-
	PVV*	-	-	-	X
SP*	-	X	X	X	
UK	Cons	X	X	X	X
	Labour	X	X	X	X
	LibDems	X	X	X	X
	BNP*	X	-	-	X
	UKIP*	-	X	-	X

* Allegedly populist party.

The election years are: 1993, 1997, 2002 and 2007 in France; 1990, 1994, 2002 and 2005 in Germany; 1992, 1994, 2001 and 2008 in Italy; 1989, 1994, 2002 and 2006 in the Netherlands; and 1992, 1997, 2001 and 2005 in the United Kingdom.

Appendix B

Questions in classical content analysis

Reference to the people

Do the authors refer to 'the people'?

Note 1: The authors can refer to 'the people' directly by using terms such as 'the people', 'the citizens', 'the British', 'Britain', 'the community', 'the society', etc. They can also refer to 'the people' more indirectly. This is the case if they use terms such as 'our nation', 'public opinion', 'the electorate', 'our culture', 'we', etc. They also refer to the people if they propose to introduce a measure that implies that emphasize the importance of the people. Examples are the proposition to introduce more participatory democracy or a strong emphasis on integration.

Note 2: We only speak of 'the people' if the authors of the text (implicitly) identify themselves with 'the people'. This means that in some particular cases, even the broad term of 'Westerners' or the narrow term of 'New Yorkers' could refer to 'the people'.

Note 3: The authors of a text do NOT refer to the people if they only talk about specific subgroups *within* the people, such as children, elderly, migrants, etc.

Note 4: What the authors mean by the 'the people' can also differ from case to case. It could refer to the sovereignty or power of the people, their identity (national feelings, values, ideas, religion, language, ethnicity, etc.), their prosperity, their rights, their wisdom, etc.

0. Argument not made
1. Argument made

Anti-Elitism

Do the authors criticize political, cultural, economic, legal, or media elites?

Note 1: Elites are not individual persons. Criticisms regarding for example a prime minister or a businessman are usually not anti-elitist. Only if these individuals are portrayed as representatives of a certain elite these criticisms should be seen as anti-elitist.

Note 2: Criticisms regarding a specific government, political party, company, medium or organization are usually not anti-elitist. A criticism is only anti-elitist if it concerns an elite *in general*, or if a specific government, political party, company, medium or organization is clearly portrayed as a representative of an elite in general.

- 0. Argument not made
- 1. Argument made

Appendix C

Words in dictionary for computer-based content analysis

	NL	UK	GE	IT	FR
Core	elit* consensus* ondemocratisch* ondemokratisch* corrupt* propagand* politici* *bedrog* *bedrieg* *verraa* *verrad* schaam*	elit* consensus* undemocratic* corrupt* propagand* politici* *deceit* *deceiv* *betray* shame*	elit* konsens* undemokratisch* korrupt* propagand* politiker* täusch* betrug* betrug* *verrat*	elit* consens* antidemocratic* corrot* propagand* politici* ingann* tradi*	élit* consensus* antidémocratique* corromp* propagand* politiciens* *tromp*
Context	establishm* heersend* capitul* kapitul* kaste* leugen* lieg*	establishm* ruling* establishm* ruling*	establishm* *herrschaft*	partitocrazia	mensonge mentir*

Appendix D

Alternative estimation techniques for the analysis in Chapter 5

	Model 1 <i>Final model</i>		Model 2 <i>2 levels</i>		Model 3 <i>Robust SEs</i>		Model 4 <i>Bootstrapping</i>		Model 5 <i>Negative binomial</i>	
	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)
<i>Intercept</i>	-3.50**	(1.60)	-3.16**	(1.55)	-3.15**	(1.27)	-3.11*	(1.52)	-1.29**	(0.40)
<i>Country-year variables (N=20)</i>										
Time	-0.05	(0.07)	-0.04	(0.08)	-0.05	(0.07)	-0.04	(0.08)	-0.04	(0.02)
Success populists	1.98**	(0.62)	1.82**	(0.67)	1.85**	(0.64)	1.81**	(0.66)	0.70**	(0.16)
<i>Newspaper variables (N=15)</i>										
Left/right	0.48	(0.92)	0.40	(0.67)	0.42	(0.58)	0.38	(0.64)	-0.01	(0.14)
Tabloid	0.48	(1.20)	0.60	(0.89)	0.62	(0.98)	0.60	(0.88)	0.04	(0.19)
<i>Article variables (N=3315)</i>										
Article type (ref = editorial)										
Op-ed	1.22	(0.97)	1.36	(0.97)	1.41	(0.73)	1.36	(0.98)	0.49	(0.25)
Column	0.47	(0.91)	0.65	(0.91)	0.69	(0.64)	0.66	(0.97)	0.23	(0.23)
Letter	2.99**	(0.66)	2.98**	(0.66)	2.98**	(0.68)	2.98**	(0.67)	0.77**	(0.17)
Other	2.05	(3.43)	2.22	(3.43)	2.16*	(1.03)	2.20	(3.36)	0.98	(0.84)
Article length	-0.08	(0.05)	-0.10	(0.05)	-0.10	(0.05)	-0.10	(0.05)	-0.02	(0.01)
<i>Variance components</i>										
Country-year level	0.08	(0.77)	1.02	(0.88)	0.33	(0.81)	1.05	(1.06)	0.00	(0.00)
Newspaper level	1.30	(0.90)	-		-		-		0.00	(0.00)
Article level	219.12**	(5.42)	219.02**	(5.42)	218.62**	(28.58)	218.93**	(5.48)	-	
Deviance	27264.90		27263.77		27263.00		27262.75		-	

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01.

I have employed different strategies to take into account that my dependent variable is not normally distributed (it is strongly inflated by zeros because most opinion articles do not contain populism at all). Each of these strategies, however, suffers from its own shortcomings. For this reason, I have not presented them in the main analysis. I have estimated the parameters with robust standard errors by means of bootstrapping and with a negative binomial regression model. Unfortunately, MLwiN was not able to estimate robust standard errors or to use the bootstrap procedure in its cross-classified design. The parameter estimation in the robust standard error and bootstrap procedure is therefore based on a simple two-level data structure with only the article and the country-year levels. The first model presented in this table is the full cross-classified three-level model that is presented in the actual analysis. Model 2 is the exact same model with only two levels. The findings do not substantially differ from the findings in the three-level model.

Robust standard errors

In model 3, I estimate the parameters with robust standard errors because inferences based on robust standard errors are less dependent on the assumption of normality (Hox, 2010: 261). The results show that this does not really affect the substantive conclusions. The only difference is that the effect of ‘other articles’ has become significant because its standard error decreased from 3.43 to 1.03 after correction. We should not pay too much heed to this finding. First of all, the ‘other articles’ category is very small ($N = 20$). Second, and this brings us to the biggest shortcoming of using robust standard errors, one needs a reasonable sample size on the second level for the standard errors to be accurate estimates (Hox, 2010: 261).

Bootstrapping

The fourth model shows the results after bootstrapping. ‘In bootstrapping we draw a sample b times (with replacement) from the observed sample at hand. In each sample we calculate the statistic(s) of interest, and the observed

distribution of the b statistics is used for the sampling distribution' (Hox, 2010: 264). I used the non-parametric bootstrap procedure using 20 iterated bootstrap runs of $b = 5000$ iterations each. As seen in model 4, the results do not differ from what I have found in the original sample. An important shortcoming of the bootstrap procedure is that, just as with using robust standard errors, it requires a large sample size at the highest level.

Negative binomial regression

Finally, I have estimated negative binomial regression models because the distribution of the dependent variable approximates the negative binomial distribution. Because the populism score is not a count variable, I have recoded the scores into discrete values. (In this case MLwiN was able again to estimate the cross-classified three-level model.) Again, the results remain basically the same. Both the success of populists and the letter have a positive significant effect on the degree of populism in the opinion articles. The most important shortcoming of this procedure is that the populism score – even with discrete values – is not a real count variable.

Appendix E

Populism-scores of election manifestos and reliability scores employed in Chapter 6

Country	Party	Election 1	Election 2	Election 3
France	PS	1.53	0	0
	RPR	0	0.62	-
	UDF	-	0.8	-
	UMP	-	0	0
	FN	15.79	2.59	4.08
	PCF	3.33	6.45	-
Germany	CDU/CSU	0	0	0
	SPD	0	0	0
	FDP	0.5	0	0
	Die Linke	0.69	1.14	2.82
Italy	DC/PP	1.67	-	-
	PD/Ulivo	-	0.34	0
	AN	7.29	-	-
	CdL/FI/PdL	3.80	1.39	1.82
	LN	2.47	-	-
	DS	3.76	-	-
Netherlands	CDA	0	0	0
	D66	0.65	0	2.64
	PvdA	1.03	0.85	0.61
	VVD	0	0	0
	CD	12.5	-	-
	LPF	-	10.53	-
	PVV	-	-	23.08
	SP	16.41	5.04	1.43
United Kingdom	Cons	0.31	3.1	1.43
	Labour	0.53	0.58	0.9
	LibDems	5.45	1	1.76
	BNP	-	-	10.64
	UKIP	8.54	-	8.02

The election years are: 1997, 2002 and 2007 in France; 1994, 2002 and 2005 in Germany; 1994, 2001 and 2008 in Italy; 1994, 2002 and 2006 in the Netherlands; and 1997, 2001 and 2005 in the United Kingdom.

Reliability

The general inter-coder reliability scores (measured with Krippendorff's alpha) are $\alpha = 0.72$ for people-centrism and $\alpha = 0.69$ for anti-elitism. The reliability statistics of the various country teams was measured with a sample (of approximately 5 per cent) of paragraphs from manifestos from every separate country. The results for people-centrism are $\alpha = 0.75$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.74$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.89$ (IT), $\alpha = 0.78$ (NL) and $\alpha = 0.73$ (UK). The results for anti-elitism are: $\alpha = 0.69$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.79$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.84$ (IT), 0.84 (NL) and $\alpha = 0.66$ (UK).

Appendix F

Populism-scores of newspapers and reliability scores employed in Chapter 6

Country	Newspaper	Election 1	Election 2	Election 3
France	Le Figaro (right-wing elite)	4.28	0.88	0.00
	Le Monde (left-wing elite)	2.94	0.35	0.00
	Liberation (left-wing)	2.08	1.91	2.26
Germany	Süddeutsche Zeitung (left-wing elite)	6.01	4.54	1.56
	Frankfurter Allgemeine (right-wing elite)	4.76	0.69	4.34
	Bild (right-wing tabloid)	3.85	0.94	1.39
Italy	Corriere della Sera (right-wing elite)	5.46	8.34	9.57
	La Repubblica (left-wing elite)	3.67	3.89	11.51
	La Stampa (right-wing elite)	8.52	8.94	-
Netherlands	NRC Handelsblad (right-wing elite)	2.73	9.46	3.35
	de Volkskrant (left-wing elite)	1.52	4.61	2.36
	De Telegraaf (right-wing tabloid)	6.61	12.76	6.37
United Kingdom	The Daily Telegraph (right-wing elite)	3.45	3.48	4.05
	The Guardian (left-wing elite)	2.29	3.55	4.72
	The Sun (right-wing tabloid)	2.34	1.57	2.52

The election years are: 1997, 2002 and 2007 in France; 1994, 2002 and 2005 in Germany; 1994, 2001 and 2008 in Italy; 1994, 2002 and 2006 in the Netherlands; and 1997, 2001 and 2005 in the United Kingdom.

Reliability

The results of the general reliability assessment are $\alpha = 0.81$ for people-centrism and $\alpha = 0.72$ for anti-elitism. The reliability scores per country are based on a selection of approximately 5 per cent of the selected articles. The results for people-centrism are $\alpha = 0.81$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.79$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.84$ (IT), $\alpha = 0.83$ (NL) and $\alpha = 0.92$ (UK). The results for anti-elitism are $\alpha = 0.74$ (FR), $\alpha = 0.80$ (GE), $\alpha = 0.72$ (IT), 0.78 (NL) and $\alpha = 0.87$ (UK).

Appendix G

Descriptive statistics Chapter 6

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Populism of party-year	1.39	3.38	0	23.08
Populism of newspaper-year	4.60	3.37	0	12.76
Satisfaction with democracy	2.65	0.79	1	4
Left/right attitude	-0.11	2.09	-4	4
EU-attitude	5.65	2.89	1	10
Radicalism left/right	4.40	5.49	0	16
Political interest	2.92	0.75	1	4
Education	21.00	6.16	0	67
Income	0.25	1.00	-3.48	2.96
Religiosity	2.27	1.14	1	5
Class (subjective)	2.87	1.07	1	5
Gender	0.42	0.49	0	1
Age	52.50	15.51	19	96

Appendix H

Descriptive statistics Chapter 6 without the degree of populism of newspaper variable

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Populism of party-year	1.39	3.38	0	23.08
Satisfaction with democracy	2.65	0.79	1	4
Left/right attitude	-0.11	2.09	-4	4
EU-attitude	5.65	2.89	1	10
Radicalism left/right	4.40	5.49	0	16
Political interest	2.92	0.75	1	4
Education	21.00	6.16	0	67
Income	0.25	1.00	-3.48	2.96
Religiosity	2.27	1.14	1	5
Class (subjective)	2.87	1.07	1	5
Gender	0.42	0.49	0	1
Age	52.50	15.51	19	96

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NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Een Populistische Tijdgeest? De Impact van Populisme op Partijen, Media en Burgers in West-Europa

De laatste decennia zijn populistische partijen electoraal zeer succesvol geweest in West-Europa. Hoewel er al behoorlijk wat onderzoek gedaan is naar de oorzaken van de opkomst van deze partijen, is er nog maar weinig bekend over de gevolgen van hun electorale successen. Verschillende politicologen beweren dat gevestigde partijen het populisme van hun populistische uitdagers hebben overgenomen. Tot op heden is er echter nog geen systematisch vergelijkend onderzoek gedaan naar de vraag of dit inderdaad het geval is. Bovendien gaat het in bestaand onderzoek voornamelijk over partijpolitiek. Het is goed mogelijk dat het populisme ook steeds sterker aanwezig is buiten de partijpolitieke sfeer – denk bijvoorbeeld aan het publieke debat in de media of aan de ideeën van burgers. De vraag die centraal staat in dit proefschrift is daarom of populisme *mainstream* is geworden in West-Europa. Is er sprake van een populistische ‘tijdgeest’?

Dit is een belangrijke vraag omdat politieke commentatoren populisme vaak als een gevaar voor de democratie zien. Wetenschappers zijn over het algemeen wat terughoudender, maar ook zij stellen dat er sprake is van een spanning tussen de uitgangspunten van de liberale democratie en de ideeën die populistten er op na houden. Als nu blijkt dat het populisme ‘slechts’ een randverschijnsel is dat er niet in is geslaagd tot het centrum van de politiek door te dringen is er niet zoveel aan de hand. Maar als nu sprake blijkt te zijn van een populistische tijdgeest, en het populisme dus is doorgedrongen tot de gevestigde partijen, de media en de ideeën van burgers, dan zou de opkomst van het populisme weleens gevolgen kunnen hebben voor het functioneren van de liberale democratie.

Vooraf was mijn verwachting dat een ‘spiraal van populisme’ ervoor gezorgd heeft dat het gehele electorale proces doordrenkt is geraakt van populisme, en we dus inderdaad van een populistische tijdgeest kunnen spreken. Die spiraal van populisme begint bij de populistische boodschap die inhoudt dat de belangen van ‘gewone mensen’ worden genegeerd door een corrupte elite die alleen maar aan zichzelf denkt. Deze boodschap is in

potentie erg aantrekkelijk voor burgers, en daarmee ook voor gevestigde partijen (die immers op zoek zijn naar kiezers) en media (die immers op zoek zijn naar kijkers en lezers). Als partijen en media deze boodschap steeds meer hebben overgenomen, zou je ook kunnen verwachten dat burgers steeds meer zijn blootgesteld aan het populisme en daardoor steeds ontevredener zijn geworden met de politiek. En aangezien ontevreden burgers geneigd zijn op populistische partijen te stemmen zou het succes van populistten hierdoor ook weer verder zijn toegenomen.

Mijn definitie van populisme komt voort uit een systematische vergelijking van prototypische populistten met sterk uiteenlopende achtergronden (zie hoofdstuk 2). Uit mijn analyse blijkt dat ze vier eigenschappen met elkaar delen: (1) ze benadrukken de centrale positie van 'het volk'; (2) ze beweren dat het volk een homogene entiteit is; (3) ze stellen dat het Goede volk wordt uitgebuit door een Slechte en corrupte elite; en (4) ze zeggen dat de uitbuiting van het volk door de elite een serieuze politieke, economische en/of culturele crisis teweeg heeft gebracht. Dat prototypische populistten daadwerkelijk iets met elkaar gemeenschappelijk hebben betekent dat het mogelijk is een 'minimale definitie' van populisme te formuleren. Het voordeel van een minimale definitie is dat aan de hand hiervan populistten uit verschillende landen en tijdsperiodes met elkaar kunnen worden vergeleken.

De specifieke minimale definitie die in deze dissertatie wordt gehanteerd is ontleend aan de politicoloog Cas Mudde en luidt als volgt: 'Populisme is een dunne ideologie die ervan uitgaat dat de samenleving bestaat uit twee homogene en antagonistische groepen, het "pure volk" versus de "corrupte elite", en stelt dat de politiek een reflectie is van de algemene wil van het volk.' Deze definitie van populisme impliceert dat populisme gecombineerd kan worden met zowel linkse als rechtse ideologieën. Politieke partijen zijn in dit onderzoek niet *of* populistisch *of* niet populistisch. Populisme is hier een mate van gradatie; partijen – en ook andere actoren zoals media en burgers – kunnen *meer of minder* populistisch zijn.

Om nu vast te stellen of er inderdaad sprake is van een populistische tijdgeest in West-Europa heb ik me gericht op vijf specifieke landen in deze regio – Duitsland, Frankrijk, Italië, Nederland en het Verenigd Koninkrijk – in

de periode tussen 1988 en 2008. Ik heb een grootschalige inhoudsanalyse van verkiezingsprogramma's en opinieartikelen in kranten uitgevoerd, en heb in hoofdstuk 3 laten zien dat de resultaten zowel valide als betrouwbaar zijn. Om het effect van de mate van populisme van partijen en media op de ideeën van burgers te onderzoeken heb ik de resultaten van de inhoudsanalyse gekoppeld aan de gegevens van een grootschalig survey-onderzoek (de *European Election Studies*).

Hoofdstuk 4 gaat in op de vraag of populisme 'besmettelijk' is en of gevestigde partijen populistischer zijn geworden in de afgelopen jaren. Hoewel verschillende onderzoekers al hebben gekeken naar de manier waarop gevestigde partijen hebben gereageerd op het electorale succes van populisten, richten deze studies zich alleen op radicaal-rechtse populistische partijen, en negeren dus de reacties op linkse populisten. Bovendien was alleen nog maar onderzocht of gevestigde partijen de opvattingen met betrekking tot immigratie hebben overgenomen. Over de populistische boodschap zelf zeggen deze studies niets. Uit mijn analyses blijkt dat, in tegenstelling tot de verwachtingen, gevestigde politieke partijen niet populistischer zijn geworden in de afgelopen decennia. Ook wanneer gevestigde partijen te maken kregen met electoraal verlies of electoraal succesvolle populistische uitdagers, zijn ze niet overgegaan tot het overnemen van de populistische boodschap. Interessant genoeg blijken populistische partijen zélf niet immuun te zijn voor hun eigen succes. Na electorale successen zwakken ze hun populisme af, waarschijnlijk met het idee dat ze zo een grotere kans hebben op regeringsdeelname.

In hoofdstuk 5 komt het effect van het succes van populisten op de publieke debatten in de media aan de orde. Ik heb me voornamelijk gericht op twee vragen: (1) is het electorale succes van populisten van invloed geweest op de mate van populisme in de publieke debatten op de opiniepagina's van kranten?; en (2) zijn de publieke debatten, als gevolg hiervan, de laatste jaren populistischer geworden? Ik heb ook onderzocht of 'tabloidmedia' populistischer zijn dan 'elitemedia' en of brieven populistischer zijn dan andere opinieartikelen. Ik heb me daarbij niet gericht op de aandacht die er is voor populistische *actoren*, maar op de mate waarin populistische *argumenten*

doorsijpelen in het publieke debat. Uit mijn analyses blijkt dat het succes van populistten inderdaad van invloed is op de mate van populisme in de mediadebatten. Bovendien blijken de publieke debatten, zoals verwacht, een beetje populistischer te zijn geworden in de laatste twee decennia. Brieven blijken populistischer te zijn dan andere opinieartikelen, maar opmerkelijk genoeg zijn de debatten in tabloidmedia niet populistischer dan de debatten in elitemediã.

In hoofdstuk 6 heb ik de relatie tussen de populistische boodschap en de ideeën van burgers bestudeerd. Verschillende onderzoekers hebben laten zien dat het stemmen op populistten samengaat met politieke onvrede. Velen van hen hebben hieruit geconcludeerd dat politieke onvrede de oorzaak is van het stemmen op een populistische partij. Ik heb onderzocht of dit causale argument ook kan worden omgedraaid. Is het mogelijk dat het stemmen op partijen die populistischer zijn leidt tot meer politieke onvrede onder kiezers? Om deze vraag te beantwoorden zijn twee modellen met elkaar vergeleken, het *expressing discontent* model (onvrede is oorzaak) en het *fuelling discontent* model (onvrede is gevolg). De resultaten laten zien dat zowel het *expressing discontent* model als het *fuelling discontent* model wordt ondersteund door de data. Dit betekent dat politieke onvrede kan worden gemodelleerd als zowel een oorzaak als een gevolg van populistisch stemgedrag. Het is daarom zeer waarschijnlijk dat de opkomst van populistische partijen de politieke tevredenheid van kiezers heeft doen afnemen.

Kunnen we, al deze bevindingen in acht nemend, nu concluderen dat er sprake is van een populistische tijdgeest? Nee. De invloed van het populisme is niet dusdanig allesomvattend en persistent dat we kunnen spreken van een 'tijdgeest'. Ten eerste heeft het succes van populistten er niet voor gezorgd dat gevestigde partijen populistischer zijn geworden. Ten tweede zijn populistische partijen zelf juist minder populistisch geworden nadat ze succesvol zijn geweest. Ten derde heb ik geen bewijs gevonden dat de mate van populisme in de publieke debatten in de media de ideeën van burgers op dit terrein beïnvloedt. En ten slotte fluctueert het succes van populistten van verkiezing tot verkiezing, als gevolg waarvan ook de mate van populisme in het publieke debat in de media fluctueert. Dit betekent dat de aanwezigheid

van populisme niet persistent is. Toch heeft de opkomst van populistische partijen wel degelijk grote gevolgen gehad. Ten eerste heeft het succes van populistische partijen een effect gehad op de mate van populisme in de publieke debatten in de media: hoe succesvoller de partijen, hoe populistischer het debat. Ten tweede zijn de publieke debatten in de media ook 'netto' populistischer geworden over de jaren. Ten derde is de populistische boodschap een overtuigende boodschap die van invloed is op de ideeën van burgers: burgers die op een partij stemmen die een populistische boodschap verkondigt zijn geneigd deze boodschap te internaliseren en ontevredener te worden over de politiek. En ten slotte zijn ontevreden burgers ook weer geneigd om op partijen te stemmen die een populistische boodschap verkondigen.

We kunnen daarom concluderen dat het electorale succes van populistische partijen van invloed is geweest op verschillende actoren binnen het electorale proces. Maar aangezien de 'spiraal van populisme' wordt onderbroken kunnen we niet spreken van een allesomvattende populistische tijdgeest. Er zijn twee politieke correctiemechanismen die de totstandkoming van een populistische tijdgeest voorkomen: (1) gevestigde partijen nemen het populisme niet over van hun uitdagers; (2) populistische partijen worden minder populistisch nadat ze zelf succesvol zijn geweest.

Toch zouden we wel degelijk van een populistische tijdgeest kunnen spreken wanneer we de term niet opvatten in zijn zware, allesomvattende, Hegeliaanse betekenis, maar op een iets lichtere en meer metaforische manier; als een tijdperk dat wordt gekenmerkt door een rondwendend populistisch spook. Hoewel deze interpretatie eerder zal worden aangetroffen in sprookjes dan in wetenschappelijke studies, is ze wel degelijk zinvol binnen de context van deze dissertatie, aangezien ze voor een minder zware en allesomvattende connotatie van de term 'tijdgeest' zorgt. Een spook heeft een grote invloed op de samenleving waarin hij rondwaart, maar zijn aanwezigheid zal nooit alomtegenwoordig zijn. Soms laat een spook zich jaren lang niet zien. Tot hij plotseling, als uit het niets, weer tevoorschijn komt om de boel eens flink op te schudden.

