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Public images of right-wing populist leaders: the role of the media

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Publication date
2012

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bos, L. (2012). *Public images of right-wing populist leaders: the role of the media*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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Chapter 1

PUBLIC IMAGES OF RIGHT-WING POPULIST PARTY LEADERS: PERCEPTIONS OF LEGITIMACY AND EFFECTIVENESS

An almost identical chapter was published in Party Politics¹.

Abstract

In the last two decades several right-wing populist parties have risen in Western Europe. Some of these parties have been very successful in elections, whereas others have been rather unsuccessful. Some scholars have argued that this success depends in part on the extent to which voters perceive these parties (and their leaders) as legitimate (not violent or undemocratic) and as effective. However, no studies exist that test the effect of these public perceptions on electoral support. We fill this void by proposing operationalizations of voters' perceptions of parties in terms of legitimacy and effectiveness. These operationalizations were employed to measure public perceptions of leaders of two right-wing populist parties and leaders of four established parties that participated in the Dutch national parliamentary elections of 2006. The analyses of these data ($n = 382$) demonstrate the significance of measuring public images directly and show that legitimacy and effectiveness are important predictors of support for right-wing populist parties. Prior research showed that voters evaluate right-wing populist parties largely by the same criteria as they use to evaluate other parties. Our study demonstrates that this is only true when voters consider a right-wing populist party as effective and legitimate.

¹ Bos, L., & Van der Brug, W. (2010). Public images of leaders of anti-immigration parties: Perceptions of legitimacy and effectiveness. *Party Politics*, 17, 777–799.

The ordering of the author names represents the relative contribution to the publication. The first author has contributed most.

Introduction

In the last two decades we have witnessed a rise of anti-immigration or right-wing populist parties, especially in Western Europe. Some of these parties have been very successful in national elections, whereas others have been rather unsuccessful in attracting votes. Because of their location at the far right of the political spectrum (Ignazi, 2002; Lubbers, 2000: 82), their ethnocentric (Rydgren, 2005) or xenophobic stance (Betz, 1998; Jackman & Volpert, 1996; Schain, Zolberg, & Hossay, 2002), their resentment against immigrants and/or opposition to the immigration policies of the government (Carter, 2005; Fennema, 1997) and their anti-constitutional or anti-democratic (Carter, 2005), anti-political establishment (Schedler, 1996), anti-party or anti-elitist appeal (Hainsworth, 2000; Schain et al., 2002), these parties generally have been treated as unique species within political party and voting literature.

Recently, a number of articles and books have been published that attempt to explain differences in their electoral success (Carter, 2005; Eatwell, 2003; Golder, 2003; Van der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2005). Carter (2005) and Golder (2003) make a typology of different types of (radical) right-wing populist parties and show that some types are more successful than others. Particularly neo-Nazi parties and parties classified as extreme right turn out to be unsuccessful at elections. Their explanation is that while some voters are willing to support a party when they agree with their policies on immigration, most voters are not willing to support a party that they see as undemocratic. Yet, this explanation has not yet been tested.

Van der Brug et al. (2005) similarly argue that voters are only willing to support a right-wing populist party if they see it as a 'normal' party. By a normal party, they mean that it has to be seen as legitimate (or democratic), and effective (which means that it is able to affect policies). This is in line with Eatwell's (2003) claim that extreme right parties tend to gather strength when they are perceived as legitimate and when voting for them is seen as in some way efficacious¹. However, Eatwell (2003) does not test his assumption and Van der Brug et al. (2005) rely on very indirect measures of voters' perceptions of right-wing populist parties as 'normal' parties.

With this study we aim to fill two gaps in the existing studies of right-wing populist parties. First of all, we develop direct measures of voters' perceptions of

these parties' images in terms of legitimacy and effectiveness, since such measures do not exist yet. Second, we estimate the extent to which these images affect voters' propensity to support these parties.

We focus on the perceived effectiveness and legitimacy of political leaders rather than parties. The right-wing populist parties in this study hardly have a party organization. The leaders are better known than the parties. In fact, when we asked questions about these parties in the questionnaire, we put the names of the party leaders in brackets behind the names of the parties, fearing that many respondents would only know the leaders and not the parties. Since the parties were founded recently and lack a strong party organization, we expect the success of such parties to depend to a large extent on the leaders' ability to attract media attention. Moreover, the public image of these parties can be expected to be very closely linked to the image of their leaders. For these reasons it was decided to focus on the perceived image of leaders rather than parties in this study.

To investigate this, we chose the Dutch national parliamentary elections of 2006, in which no less than four right-wing populist parties participated. We acknowledge that this may limit the opportunity to generalize the results to other elections and countries. However, by focusing on one country and one election we avoid the specific problems of cross-national surveys in explaining the extreme right vote (Hooghe & Reeskens, 2007). Moreover, this case study gives us the opportunity to do a more in-depth analysis and test our new concepts and operationalizations at the same time. We collected data on the two right-wing populist parties that were sufficiently visible during the election campaign – the Party for Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders and One Netherlands (EenNL) of Marco Pastors (see for an analysis of the election campaign Kleinnijenhuis, Scholten, Van Attenveldt, Van Hoof, & Krouwel, 2007) – and on four established partiesⁱⁱ. This provides us with two bases for comparison: between the two right-wing populist parties, and between right-wing populist parties on the one hand and established parties on the other.

The party perspective: Legitimacy and effectiveness as necessary conditions for party support

The success or failure of right-wing populist parties has mainly been explained by focusing on demand and/or supply-side theories. Whereas individual-level causes such as socio-structural variables, protest votes and ideological votes can partially account for varying levels of electoral success, according to Eatwell (2003) we should be careful in treating these factors not solely as necessary but also as sufficient conditions. Following Eatwell (2003) and Carter (2005) we argue that supply-side explanations, and more specifically the characteristics of parties, may be just as important in explaining differences in these parties' success. When we want to learn why certain parties – right-wing populist or not – are more or less appealing to voters, we should not only focus on the traits of voters, but also look at the features of these parties:

Populist radical right parties must be put at the center of research on the phenomenon. Populist radical right parties are not just dependent variables, passively molded by structural factors, but they are also independent variables, actively shaping part of their own destiny. (Mudde, 2007, p. 293)

In her book on the extreme right in Western Europe, Carter (2005) concludes that party characteristics – such as ideology, party organization and leadership – explain these differences in electoral fortunes. She differentiates between several kinds of extreme right parties – neo-Nazi, neo-fascist, authoritarian xenophobic, neo-liberal xenophobic and neo-liberal populist parties – and finds that parties that outright reject the existing democratic system are far less successful than parties that accept the system but propose reforms. Additionally she finds that extreme right parties “are more likely to experience success if a strong level of internal party discipline exists within them that minimizes dissent, and that fosters internal party cohesion and coherence” (Carter, 2005, p. 65). In the same way Eatwell (2003) comes to the conclusion that voters have to believe that they can affect the political process: it has to be efficacious to vote for a certain party. Obviously, discussion and dissent within the party stand in the way of this goal.

These findings are in line with recent studies, which explain voting for right-wing populist parties with the analytical tools of a rational choice model (e.g. Norris, 2005; Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007; Van der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2000). Applying the Downsian (1957) conception of rationality as purposeful behaviour, these studies expect voters to choose parties on the basis of ideological and pragmatic considerations. The overwhelming majority of voters, including potential voters for right-wing populist parties, support the basic principles of democracy. For ideological reasons, they probably only support parties that they perceive to be legitimate; that is, parties that do not pose a danger to the political system. For pragmatic reasons, we expect voters to also take into account whether they perceive a party to be effective. Why vote for a party if it is not able to achieve anything?

This line of argumentation is, however, not limited to right-wing populist parties: it is rational for all voters who prefer all kinds of parties – whether right-wing populist or mainstream – to take ideological and pragmatic considerations into account and opt for parties that are legitimate and effective. In pursuing this line of thought we follow Van der Brug et al. (2000) and argue that there are no a priori reasons to expect differences between voters' motives for supporting right-wing populist parties on the one hand and mainstream parties on the other: voters have to evaluate parties as being legitimate and effective for them to have a considerable chance at electoral success. However, whether a party is objectively legitimate and effective is not the issue, what counts is whether the individual voter evaluates the party in this way.

We assume that voters in general prefer parties that do not intend to radically change or overthrow the democratic representational systemⁱⁱⁱ. We expect no problems in this regard for most parties: we presume that voters perceive most parties to be legitimate even though they do not prefer them on the basis of other considerations such as ideological differences. In the case of certain right-wing populist parties this may not be so. Because of their (fascist) anti-democratic and anti-constitutional legacy (Carter, 2005) many people think that some of these more radical right-wing populist parties pose a threat to the democratic system. Many of the activities of anti-fascist and anti-racist organizations are directed against these parties. Even though potential voters for these parties may be critical of the political establishment, most of them will not want to endanger the democratic system. So, even if a group of citizens agrees with the parties' platforms on issues such as

migration, many of them will not support the party if they feel it poses a threat to democracy. It is therefore important for right-wing populist parties:

(1) to make clear that they belong neither to the political establishment nor to the camp of anti-democratic forces; (2) to make credible that they do oppose the political elite – but the political elite only and not the liberal democratic system. (Schedler, 1996, p. 302)

The findings of Carter (2005) support this idea: she finds that parties that reject outright the existing democratic system are less successful than parties that only forward smaller institutional changes.

In the same regard voters have to believe that their vote will be effective: they will want to vote for a party that is able to reach certain goals. We may consider two types of goals: (1) that a message is heard (expressive goals); and (2) that policies are affected (pragmatic goals). Parties can thus be effective in different ways, and as such they may appeal to different types of voters. However, we expect that parties which are ineffective in both ways, not able to affect policies and not effective in the public debate, will not have much appeal to any voters. That is why we assume that parties that are thought to be ineffective will be less preferred.

Again, this argumentation holds for all parties, but for right-wing populist parties additional grounds apply. Many of these parties act as outsiders and oppose mainstream parties. We do not contend that this may have positive effects on their electoral chances, but do acknowledge that this strategy might gain results in terms of media attention. However, when parties pursue this scheme, they “have to gain anti-establishment credentials” (Schedler, 1996, p. 298) and at the same time convince voters that they can be effective. This might be a mission impossible, since policy influence – especially in systems of proportional representation – is often dependent upon compromise and cooperation between several (mainstream) parties; the same parties they have been criticizing.

Additionally, the populist nature of these parties can lead to instability. Because they are often organized around a ‘charismatic’ leader, with the centralization of these parties as a result, “authority . . . will perish with the individual with which it is associated” (Taggart, 2000, p. 102). Carter (2005, p. 65) in this regard argues that these strong leaders “exert the kind of total control that is often essential in parties

of the extreme right”, while Betz (2002, p. 210) claims that it is this internal coherence and effective leadership which is necessary for radical right-wing parties to constitute an effective challenge to mainstream parties. In the Netherlands we have seen the perfect example of dissent, chaos and factionalism in the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) after the assassination of its leader. Without Pim Fortuyn himself no one took control over the party, party leadership and policy proposals changed at the blink of an eye and, more importantly, the LPF proved itself to be extremely unreliable as a coalition partner in the government. The government of which it was a member fell after only 83 days, mainly due to the chaos and internal struggles within the LPF. Because of these recent experiences, Dutch voters are expected to place much emphasis on the effectiveness of parties and their leaders.

The public image of party leaders, in terms of legitimacy and effectiveness, can affect party support in two ways. First of all, these attributes can have a direct effect. The more a politician is seen as effective and the more he or she is seen as legitimate, the more likely it is that voters will consider a vote for his or her party. But interaction effects can also play a role. There may be an interaction effect with ideological voting. We expect voters to evaluate a party only in terms of its policies if they consider the party effective and legitimate. As a result, the effect of ideological considerations on party preference is assumed to be (partially) dependent upon perceived effectiveness and legitimacy.

In general it can be said that the more a voter believes that a party leader can represent their interests – by not overthrowing the democratic system and being influential in the political debate – the more they will be inclined to emphasize the factors that cause them to give a higher preference to the party, or the more ‘trust’ a voter has in a politician, the more he or she will see eye to eye with him or her.

The research setting

In this study we focus on the Dutch case where in November 2006 four parties characterized as right-wing populist competed in the elections, of which two, the PVV (Party for the Freedom) led by Geert Wilders and EenNL (One Netherlands) led by Marco Pastors, were sufficiently visible. The Dutch case is particularly interesting because of the great electoral success of the List Pim Fortuyn in the elections of 2002, when this newly formed party, organized around its

assassinated leader, Pim Fortuyn, won 26 seats in parliament. The instant success of this party – in spite of the loss of seats in the elections of 2003 – propelled immigration and integration to the top of the political agenda. As a result, several other politicians claim to be heirs of the legacy of Pim Fortuyn and have founded their own parties in the hopes of following in his footsteps. The LPF (now called LVF – List Five Fortuyn) as well as the Party for the Netherlands (PVN) and EenNL are the parties most influenced by Pim Fortuyn. Even though the three groups participated on their own in the elections, they do not differ that much ideologically. They all came out of the original Pim Fortuyn movement and have split into separate parties because of pragmatic or personal reasons and conflicts. Geert Wilders' PVV – the only right-wing populist party that won seats in the elections – has a different background. He has separated himself from the right-leaning liberal VVD because of its position in the debate on Turkey joining the EU. Additionally, he is considered to be the most radical in his opinions, talking about the 'islamization' of the Netherlands and a 'tsunami of Muslims'. In this chapter we focus on the two parties whose leaders were quite visible in the mass media during the 2006 election campaign: the PVV and EenNL. Bos and Van der Brug (2010) demonstrate on the basis of a content analysis of mass media that the leaders of these parties, Wilders and Pastors, received substantial media coverage during the campaign. However, Wilders was better known, judging by the percentages of nonresponse on survey questions about him (see below). This is probably because he has been in national politics for a longer time. The percentage of non-response on questions about leaders of established parties ranges between six and eight percent. In the case of Wilders this is also seven percent, whereas in the case of Pastors it is 25 percent. Even though a substantial group of voters does not answer questions about him, we think that the number of respondents who do know him is still large enough to include Pastors in the analyses.

The parties of Wilders and Pastors can be considered right-wing populist parties, or anti-immigration parties as they address nativism in their programs (Mudde, 2007) and have in common "resentment against migrants and the immigration policy of their governments" (Fennema, 1997, p. 474). With regard to their attitude towards the political establishment, democratic values and/or democratic institutions these parties are similar as well: they are anti-establishment, anti-party or anti-elitist and both propose to abolish the senate.

Data and research methods

It is within this Dutch context that we investigate whether the legitimacy and effectiveness of right-wing populist party leaders are necessary, yet not sufficient, factors in explaining the level of right-wing populist party support. The first methodological issue to discuss is how one measures party support. In electoral research this is normally by vote choice, but this is problematic in the case of our study, where we compare between six parties, three of which are very small. Under these circumstances, estimation by the usual multinomial logit/probit and conditional logit/probit methods is not feasible because the small number of votes for some parties makes estimates of their effect parameters unreliable (Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007; Van der Eijk, Van der Brug, Kroh, & Franklin, 2006). This is why studies using these methods usually restrict their analysis to larger parties in the election (Whitten & Palmer, 1996). Our focus on smaller populist parties denies us this option and makes it necessary to employ a different methodology.

Fortunately, party support can be measured in other ways. Rabinowitz and Macdonald's (1989) directional theory of issue voting, for example, has thermometer scores as its dependent variable. We measure party preference by asking respondents to give each party a score (from 1 to 10) according to their likelihood of ever voting for it. It is stated as follows:

Could you indicate what the chances are that you will one time vote for the following party? If you think you will never vote for this party, fill in a 1; if it is very possible that you will once vote for this party, fill in a 10. You can of course also fill in any number in between.

We prefer this measure over the thermometer scores, because it is even more strongly (indeed, almost deterministically) related to the vote (Tillie, 1995; Van der Eijk et al., 2006). The measure has been used extensively to analyse electoral behaviour in various national (Schmitt, 2001; Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007; Van der Eijk et al., 2006) as well as cross-national studies (e.g. Van der Brug, Franklin, & Toka, 2008; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996).

There are two advantages of having party preference measures for all parties. First, it overcomes the 'small n' problem endemic to studies of small populist

parties. Second, it allows the comparison of voter preferences across the range of competing parties by reordering the data in a stacked form so that the unit of analysis is the respondent–party combination. In the stacked data matrix one respondent is represented by as many cases as there are parties included in the analysis. In this case these are the PVV of Geert Wilders and the party EenNL of Marco Pastors on the one hand and the four most important mainstream parties on the other^{iv}. The design of the analysis of the stacked data matrix is similar to conditional logit, since the independent variables indicate relationships between voters and parties rather than between voter characteristics (see also Tillie, 1995; Tillie & Fennema, 1998; Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007; Van der Brug et al., 2000; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Van der Eijk et al., 2006, for examples in electoral research).

As predictors of party preference we will make use of direct measures of legitimacy and effectiveness of party leaders, each of which was measured with two variables on seven-point scales. Each question was asked for the leaders of all parties, right-wing populist parties as well as mainstream parties. Legitimacy was measured with the following two items:

(1) To reach their goal some politicians are willing to ignore important democratic rules, while others will comply with these democratic rules under all circumstances. Below you see a number of current politicians. Could you tell me whether you think that they have always complied with the democratic principles and that they always will?

(Responses could vary from 1 – Doesn't care about democratic rules, to 7 – Always complies with the democratic rules.)

(2) Sometimes people think a certain politician or party is dangerous. They are afraid that when that politician rises to power he or she will pose a threat to democracy. Others are of the opinion that this will not be the case. Below you will see a number of politicians. Imagine a situation in which this politician has risen to power – do you think that this politician would then pose a threat to democracy?

(Responses could vary from 1 – If he/she rose to power he/she would pose a real threat to democracy, to 7 – If he/she rose to power he/she would definitely not pose a threat to democracy.)

Both measures are related to democratic rules and procedures or the democratic system and therefore refer to the concept of legitimacy as defined in the theoretical part of this chapter. Whether politicians would indeed pose a threat to democracy depends of course on their power. One could imagine a neo-Nazi party that wants to overthrow democracy, but which poses no threat to democracy because it is very small. Since we do not want to measure whether they actually pose a threat to democracy, but whether they are seen as anti-democratic and therefore potentially dangerous should they grow larger, we added the phrase ‘imagine that this party has risen to power’. We believe this is something that respondents can relate to.

The two effectiveness measures refer to the extent to which party leaders can have an influence in the political field and are worded as follows:

(1) Some politicians have great influence on governmental policy; others do not have a lot of influence. Could you indicate for each of the following politicians whether you expect they will exert little or a lot of influence after the elections?

(Responses could vary from 1 – Will probably have little influence on policy, to 7 – Will probably have a lot of influence on policy.)

(2) Some politicians you don’t hear from, whereas other politicians are highly significant in public discussions on matters that are relevant in society. How visible and significant have the following politicians been in public debates?

(Responses could vary from 1 – Not visible and significant in public debates at all, to 7 – Very visible and significant in public debates.)^v

Effectiveness is thus conceptualized by taking past and future behaviour into account. The first question about influence on public policy is phrased in prospective terms, because some parties did not have much opportunity to affect policies because they were only recently founded. The question about their

influence on public debates was phrased retrospectively because all politicians had the opportunity to participate in public debates. Factor analysis and reliability analysis shows that the two scales are well measured.^{vi}

We also control for (traditional theories of) ideological, pragmatic and protest voting. The proximity of party and voter on a left–right scale is the strongest predictor of the vote for most right-wing populist parties, in particular the more successful ones (Van der Brug et al., 2000). Here it is measured as the distance between a voter’s position on a 10-point left–right scale and the perceived position of a party on that same scale (1 = left; 10 = right). Because of the central role of the immigration issue in the ideology of right-wing populist parties, we also use a measure that asked respondents to what extent immigrants should adapt themselves to the Dutch culture: respondents who score high on this variable adopt an assimilationist stance, while respondents who score low adopt a multiculturalist stance (1 = Immigrants and ethnic minorities should be able to stay in the Netherlands and be able to keep their own culture; 7 = Immigrants and ethnic minorities should adjust themselves to the Dutch culture).

Following Downs (1957), we believe that besides ideological considerations other factors play a role when it comes to voting: voters have to take the actions of other voters into account and think about the chance of the ideologically closest party winning. Van der Brug et al. (2000) find that voters for right-wing populist parties also take on a more pragmatic or tactical approach in the sense that it is rational for them to vote for a party that is not necessarily ideologically closest, but one that is (or can be) more powerful in parliament (also see Niemi, Whitten, & Franklin, 1992; Tillie, 1995). These pragmatic considerations are added to the model by taking into account the party’s standing in the last polls before the elections of 2006 as a proxy for party size. For this variable we used the mean number of seats predicted by three different polling agencies.

A third explanation of support for right-wing populist parties is the protest vote model. Right-wing populist parties take an anti-political establishment (Schedler, 1996), antiparty or anti-elitist approach (Hainsworth, 2000; Schain et al., 2002), blame mainstream political parties and elites for problems in society and argue that these mainstream parties and elites have lost the connection with ‘the people’. Consequentially, it is thought that these parties attract dissatisfied, cynical, alienated voters. The empirical study of Van der Brug and Fennema (2003) shows

mixed results in this regard. Only smaller right-wing populist parties attract protest votes, whereas larger and more established parties appeal to ideological and pragmatic voters. On the whole, voters for right-wing populist parties do seem to be more cynical of political institutions (Knigge, 1998; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2000, 2001), but the direction of this relation remains something to be investigated (Norris, 2005). To control for protest votes we use seven items that measure attitudes towards politicians. The overall measure – the sum of the value on these items – has to be seen as a political trust/political cynicism concept.^{vii} Finally, we control for several socio-structural variables, such as age, gender, education, income, social class and occupation.

By creating the stacked data matrix, the dependent variable ‘party preference’ becomes generic, which means it has no party-specific meaning. As a consequence, we cannot use the original independent variables in our analyses. Social class could have a positive effect on the support for party A (meaning that it is more popular among the higher classes) and a negative effect on support for party B (a party that is more popular among lower classes). In the stacked data matrix these effects would neutralize each other, thus leading to the invalid conclusion that social class has no effect on the popularity of parties. The reordering of the data into a stacked form, therefore, requires us to transform the independent variables. We do so by linear transformations of the original independent variables, which are not party-specific: political trust/cynicism, the immigrant issue and the socio-structural variables. Before doing so, the categorical variables education, income, social class and occupation were recoded into dummy variables to account for the possibility that specific parties are most popular among intermediate categories (the middle classes, or people with medium levels of education). The technical details of the procedure are explained in Appendix A.

We employ survey data collected by the Netherlands Institute for Public Opinion (NIPO), using individual respondents in their internet panel, which is a randomly drawn sample from a large pool of potential respondents. This ‘pool’ forms a representative sample of the Dutch adult population in terms of various demographics, and political attitudes and behaviours. Data from NIPO has been the basis for numerous academic studies (e.g. Kleinnijenhuis & Fan, 1999; Van der Brug, Semetko, & Valkenburg, 2007). Respondents were interviewed in the weekend before the elections of 22 November 2006 ($n = 382$). After the elections

the same respondents were asked which party they voted for. We have used this variable to construct a weight variable, even though an unweighted sample almost perfectly reflected the election results.^{viii} Out of this somewhat small sample we did not want to lose any respondents, which is why we resorted to multiple imputation of missing data. The procedure for handling missing data and other technical details are further discussed in Appendix A.

Below we present the results of two sets of analyses. In the first set, the preference for each party will be regressed on the explanatory variables by means of a regression analysis. In the second, we analyse preferences for all parties and include dummy variables to distinguish the right-wing populist parties from established parties. Interaction effects between this dummy variable and predictors tell us whether these predictors have a stronger or weaker effect on preferences for right-wing populist parties than on preferences for established parties. All interaction effects are calculated by not using the original variables, but their deviations from the mean (Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan, 1990).

Results

Whether our measures of legitimacy and effectiveness are really of importance with regard to the party preference for right-wing populist parties depends on the extent to which there are differences in public perceptions. In Table 1.1 the means and standard deviations are displayed for our central variables – legitimacy and effectiveness – and our dependent variable – party preference. In general, the mean perceptions of legitimacy and effectiveness and the mean party preferences were lower for the right-wing populist parties than for the mainstream parties. Moreover, Marco Pastors, the party leader of EeNL, was thought to be more legitimate and effective according to the average voter than his rival Geert Wilders, even though the latter has been more successful in the elections, something that is illustrated by the higher party preference for the PVV.

When we take a look at the standard deviations, there seems to be more agreement among voters about the extent to which Marco Pastors and, to a lesser extent, Geert Wilders are a threat to democracy than there is about the party leaders of the mainstream parties. Both findings are in line with our assumption that it is more difficult for right-wing populist parties to appear legitimate and/or effective.

The perceived effectiveness of Geert Wilders, on the other hand, seems more controversial.

Table 1.1: The Distribution of the Central Variables: Means and Standard deviations

	PVV	EenNL	CDA	PvdA	VVD	Groen-Links
Legitimacy	2.891 (0.061)	3.512 (0.047)	3.803 (0.075)	3.941 (0.079)	3.433 (0.075)	3.491 (0.079)
Effectiveness	2.776 (0.077)	3.172 (0.064)	4.599 (0.045)	4.564 (0.048)	3.999 (0.069)	3.741 (0.069)
Party preference	2.054 (0.123)	1.707 (0.093)	4.619 (0.189)	4.817 (0.189)	4.211 (0.182)	3.460 (0.169)
n	382	382	382	382	382	382

Note. Standard deviations are given within parentheses; These are the weighted results; The measures of legitimacy and effectiveness are measured on a 7-point scale (1-7), whereas party preference is measured on a ten-point scale (1-10).

Even though the results in Table 1.1 show us that several party leaders are certainly perceived differently when it comes to levels of legitimacy and effectiveness, this cannot be regarded as evidence for our assumption that the perceptions of these party leader characteristics are as important for right-wing populist parties as they are for mainstream parties.

Therefore we will now turn our attention to the results of a regression analysis with robust standard errors, which are given in Table 1.2 for six parties. Although we cannot compare the regression coefficients directly – since the models are not nested – we can see which predictors are significant for the preference formation for each party and which variables are important predictors of party preference in general.

Table 1.2: Predictors of Party Preference: Preliminary Analysis (Regression Analysis with robust standard errors)

	Right-Wing Populist Parties			Mainstream Parties		
	PW	EenNL	iCDA	PvdA	WD	GreenLinks
<i>Demographics</i>						
Gender	-0.107 (0.237)	-0.314 (0.196)	-0.026 (0.358)	-0.129 (0.331)	-0.162 (0.363)	-0.422 (0.308)
Age	-0.106 (0.008)	-0.007 (0.006)	0.022 (0.012)	-0.018 (0.011)	-0.037 (0.012)**	-0.019 (0.010)*
<i>Socio-structural variables</i>						
Income	-0.031 (0.018)	-0.019 (0.014)	0.051 (0.032)	0.016 (0.027)	0.013 (0.033)	0.035 (0.028)
Education	-0.001 (0.099)	0.031 (0.087)	-0.308 (0.162)	-0.090 (0.137)	-0.033 (0.143)	0.002 (0.122)
Social class	0.008 (0.156)	-0.097 (0.138)	-0.541 (0.278)*	-0.167 (0.221)	-0.097 (0.249)	-0.639 (0.208)**
Occupation	0.005 (0.076)	0.017 (0.014)	-0.005 (0.130)	0.162 (0.093)	0.058 (0.103)	0.256 (0.080)***
<i>Ideological and protest votes</i>						
Left-right distance	-0.203 (0.056)***	-0.140 (0.045)**	-0.575 (0.067)***	-0.675 (0.072)***	0.702 (0.075)***	-0.380 (0.065)***
Immigrant issue	0.336 (0.709)***	0.117 (0.056)*	0.090 (0.119)	-0.003 (0.136)	-0.107 (0.143)	-0.169 (0.128)
Political trust / cynicism	-0.077 (0.026)**	-0.049 (0.020)**	0.047 (0.042)	-0.034 (0.043)	0.011 (0.045)	-0.034 (0.035)
<i>Leadership effects</i>						
Legitimacy	0.162 (0.037)***	0.120 (0.029)***	0.248 (0.048)***	0.237 (0.049)***	0.070 (0.050)	0.213 (0.041)***
Effectiveness	0.194 (0.038)***	0.099 (0.031)***	0.307 (0.078)***	0.341 (0.073)***	0.059 (0.065)	0.231 (0.046)***
<i>Interaction effects</i>						
Legitimacy * Left-right distance	-0.031 (0.013)*	-0.018 (0.009)*	-0.049 (0.020)**	-0.036 (0.022)	0.036 (0.021)	-0.034 (0.018)*
Effectiveness * Left-right distance	-0.045 (0.016)**	-0.009 (0.012)	-0.044 (0.026)	-0.048 (0.024)*	-0.006 (0.025)	-0.022 (0.016)
Intercept	3.582 (1.145)**	3.094 (0.904)***	4.942 (1.937)**	4.549 (1.480)**	6.392 (1.602)***	3.702 (1.321)**
R	0.3248	0.1643	0.3238	0.4042	0.2330	0.3446
N	382	382	382	382	382	382

Note. * = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001

The current analysis shows that legitimacy and effectiveness not only had a strong effect on electoral support for right-wing populist parties, but also on support for all established parties, except for the liberal VVD^{ix}. In Table 1.2 there are no systematic differences between the right-wing populist parties on the one hand and the established parties on the other in the effects of these variables. The evaluation of the party leader had a remarkable and strong impact, as expected. Legitimacy and effectiveness were strong predictors of party preference, as indicated by the high significance levels of these coefficients.

As could be expected on the basis of the voting literature, left–right distance is a strong predictor of preference for all parties. The effect was also strong, yet less significant, in the case of the right-wing populist party that was unsuccessful in the 2006 elections, EenNL. The importance of the immigration issue for the preference for the PVV, as well as EenNL, confirms earlier findings. Moreover, this issue sets these parties apart from the other parties, the effect being significant and positive, which suggests a more assimilationist stance of proponents of this party. The negative – yet non-significant – effect of this item on the preference for the majority of the mainstream parties on the other hand indicates a multiculturalist stance. The analysis also shows that voters that were more cynical about the political establishment show a higher preference for right-wing populist parties.

Finally, the effects of the socio-structural variables are for the most part insignificant, which is no striking result.

With regard to the estimated interaction effects, we see that both were significant in the case of the PVV, which indicates that ideological considerations constituted a larger effect when party leader Geert Wilders was deemed more legitimate and more effective.

As for the other parties, it is hard to draw general conclusions. For some parties (EenNL, CDA and GroenLinks) the effect of left–right distance was larger when the party leader was perceived as more legitimate, whereas for the PvdA we find that ideological approximation constituted a larger effect when Wouter Bos was thought to be more effective.

The analyses presented in Table 1.2 do not allow us to compare the effects between the different party leaders, because the separate models are not nested. We now turn to analyses of the stacked data matrix, which do allow such comparisons. These are presented in Table 1.3, in which the intra-individual variance is explained

by using four different models. In the base model a considerable proportion of the individual party preference was explained ($R^2 = 0.3898$) by testing the usual explanations for the right-wing populist party vote. Part of the explanatory power of the model stemmed from the fact that the intercept of the regression model is (significantly) lower in the case of right-wing populist parties, which indicates that on the aggregate level the electoral preference for these parties is lower, even when controlling for the theoretically relevant predictors of party support. In general it can be said that ideological, pragmatic and protest votes explain an important part of the individual party preference.

The results of the second model confirm the findings of our first analysis: legitimacy and effectiveness are important predictors of propensities to support parties. When adding these variables to the model, the proportion of explained variance increases by more than five percent. Moreover, the effects of the two measures remained large and significant in all three remaining models. Even though it could be argued that the idea that the party leader can be influential after the elections – the effectiveness aspect – is similar to the pragmatic voting hypothesis, this result suggests otherwise. Voters seem to differentiate between the power a party has in parliament, as reflected in the expected number of seats, and the trust they place in the party leader for being effective. Again, the socio-structural variables show no striking results.

In Model III we tested whether not only the intercept of the regression model differed when it comes to the preference for right-wing populist parties, but whether this is also true for the slope. In other words: could it be that not only the mean party preference for these parties differs, but the effects as well? The two significant interaction coefficients and the 3.2 percent increase in the proportion of explained intra-individual variance indicate that this is the case. The effects of ideological proximity and perceived legitimacy were (somewhat) smaller in the case of right-wing populist parties than they were in the case of mainstream established parties. However, the effect of perceived effectiveness does not differ significantly in the case of right-wing populist parties.

Table 1.3: Fixed Effects Model on Generic Party Preference

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
<i>Demographics</i>				
Gender	0.636 (0.311)*	0.487 (0.299)	0.258 (0.292)	0.247 (0.289)
Age	0.659 (0.143)***	0.562 (0.138)***	0.443 (0.134)***	0.452 (0.133)***
<i>Socio-structural variables</i>				
Education	0.461 (0.104)***	0.423 (0.099)***	0.405 (0.097)***	0.389 (0.096)***
Social class	0.328 (0.137)*	0.279 (0.132)*	0.330 (0.130)**	0.303 (0.128)*
Income	0.312 (0.247)	0.184 (0.237)	0.094 (0.231)	0.165 (0.228)
Occupation	0.579 (0.101)***	0.533 (0.097)***	0.528 (0.094)***	0.520 (0.093)***
<i>Ideological, protest and pragmatic votes</i>				
Left-right distance	-0.571 (0.028)***	-0.446 (0.029)***	-0.595 (0.032)***	-0.598 (0.032)***
Immigrant issue	0.388 (0.114)***	0.246 (0.110)*	0.363 (0.107)***	0.353 (0.106)***
Political trust / cynicism	0.664 (0.177)***	0.498 (0.172)**	0.325 (0.167)*	0.341 (0.167)*
Party size	0.035 (0.005)***	0.035 (0.005)***	0.035 (0.005)***	0.037 (0.005)***
<i>Leadership effects</i>				
Legitimacy		0.158 (0.025)***	0.204 (0.028)***	0.218 (0.028)***
Effectiveness		0.250 (0.028)***	0.298 (0.033)***	0.312 (0.034)***
<i>Interactions with dummy right-wing populist party</i>				
RWP * Left-right distance			0.512 (0.055)***	0.518 (0.055)***
RWP * Legitimacy			-0.074 (0.038)*	-0.090 (0.037)*
RWP * Effectiveness			-0.078 (0.041)	-0.115 (0.041)**
<i>Interaction effects with left-right distance (LRD)</i>				
Legitimacy * LRD				-0.039 (0.007)***
Effectiveness * LRD				-0.037 (0.008)***
Dummy for RWP	-1.640 (0.162)***	-1.640 (0.155)***	-1.640 (0.151)***	-1.660 (0.149)***
Intercept	3.414 (0.145)***	3.414 (0.139)***	3.414 (0.135)***	3.273 (0.135)***
R-square within individual	0.3898	0.4400	0.4728	0.4868
R-square between individuals	0.0266	0.0761	0.0807	0.0887
Overall R-square	0.3141	0.3667	0.3946	0.4086

Note. Number of observations = 2292, number of individuals 382; *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

In Model IV we test whether the effect of ideology (left–right distance) depends on the extent to which one considers the party leader to be more or less legitimate and/or effective. The interpretation of higher-order interactions is not straightforward, because one has to take into account the main effects and lower-

order interactions as well. In order to facilitate the interpretation, Table 1.4 presents the regression coefficients of left–right distance, estimated separately for right-wing populist parties and mainstream parties, at different values of legitimacy and effectiveness.

Table 1.4: Effect of Left-Right Distance on Party Preference

	Right-wing populist Party	Mainstream Party
Low Legitimacy	0.101 (0.065)	-0.451 (0.045)***
Medium Legitimacy	-0.078 (0.047)	-0.599 (0.032)***
High Legitimacy	-0.258 (0.062)***	-0.748 (0.045)***
Low Effectiveness	0.036 (0.057)	-0.489 (0.043)***
Medium Effectiveness	-0.081 (0.047)	-0.598 (0.032)***
High Effectiveness	-0.197 (0.064)**	-0.707 (0.047)***

Note. Number of observations = 2292, number of individuals 382; *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

If we look first at the results for the four established parties, we see that left-right distance always had a strong effect. However, the results also show that these ideological considerations are contingent upon levels of perceived legitimacy and effectiveness.

The more legitimate and effective a party leader is thought to be, the stronger the effect of left–right distance on the preference for his/her party. Things are different, however, for right-wing populist parties. The effect of left-right distance on party preference is insignificant when the party leader is deemed less or only moderately legitimate or effective. However, when voters perceive a party leader as posing no threat to democracy or as effective they do evaluate his party by ideological considerations.

Robustness of findings

In this section we explore two possible threats to the robustness of our findings. First, our results are based on a somewhat small sample ($n = 382$). In order not to lose any data, we employed a method for imputation of missing data. Monte Carlo simulations demonstrate that imputation of missing data decreases the likelihood of obtaining biased results and is therefore to be preferred over listwise deletion of missing data (King, Honaker, Joseph, & Scheve, 2001). One could wonder, however, whether our results depend on the use of imputation of missing

data. Therefore, we also estimated the models in Table 1.3 with listwise deletion. The results are very similar to those using imputation. All parameters have the same sign and the effects are largely of the same magnitude. In all models listwise deletion yields a higher proportion of explained variance than imputation. However, because of the lower sample size, the standard errors tend to be larger, so that two effects are no longer significant: the main effect of political trust and cynicism (in Models III and IV) and the interaction effect between anti-immigrant parties and legitimacy (in the same models). The former is not central to the topic of this study. The latter is central to the topic of our research. The results obtained by listwise deletion are more in line with one of our main conclusions: that there are only minor differences between the determinants of support for right-wing populist parties and determinants of support for other parties (see below). Yet, since the relevant literature advises the use of imputation, and because we run the risk of making a type-II error (i.e. concluding wrongfully that effects are not significant), we interpret the interaction effect as significant.

A second decision that could potentially have affected our results is the choice to exclude the SP (a radical left-wing party) from the analyses. We wanted to compare right-wing populist parties with established parties. Since the SP, as well as the right-wing populist parties, are often considered ‘populist’ (see e.g., Mudde, 2007, p. 48), we decided not to include the SP in the group of established parties. In order to assess the consequences of this decision for our findings, we also estimated the models in Table 1.3 with the SP included in the group of established parties. Inclusion of the SP never altered the signs of the effects, nor the significance of any of the relevant variables. So, we may conclude that our results do not depend in any way on the decision to exclude the SP.

Conclusions and discussion

Recently, a lot of research has been conducted on factors that explain differences in support for right-wing populist parties. Three types of factors have been distinguished in the literature: (1) the demand side; (2) the competitive context (sometimes also referred to as the opportunity structure); and (3) characteristics of the parties themselves. The third factor has been rather under-studied. Yet, as argued by Mudde (2007, p. 293), in order to explain the (lack of) support for these

parties we should put them at the centre of our explanations, since they are ‘actively shaping part of their own destiny’. Our study contributes to the literature by focusing on two characteristics of the leaders of these parties, which affect support for their parties: legitimacy and effectiveness. We have measured citizens’ perceptions of these characteristics in a representative survey of the Dutch population and demonstrate that both characteristics contribute significantly to the support for these parties.

Existing studies have shown that neo-Nazi, extreme right or neo-fascist parties are much less successful than more moderate right-wing populist parties (Carter, 2005; Golder, 2003). The explanation has always been that this is because voters will not support a party that they perceive as undemocratic or too extremist. So far, this interpretation has not been tested, but it now finds support in the results of our study, which show that the legitimacy of party leaders contributes to support for the party.

Similarly we have found evidence for the idea that it is important for right-wing populist parties, just as it is for mainstream parties, to be seen as effective in the public debate and in affecting public policies. We have been able to test these theories because of the introduction of our direct measures of perceived legitimacy and effectiveness. Our new measures have proven useful and demonstrate the importance of directly measuring the public image of party leaders and/or parties, thereby taking into account the role of the parties themselves in shaping their electoral success (Mudde, 2007).

In the literature on right-wing populist parties, much emphasis used to be placed on their unique character. Right-wing populist parties differ from established parties in their political position at the extreme or far right of the political spectrum, their ambiguous attitude towards the political establishment and/or constitution, and in their harsh opposition to migration and integration policies. However, from the fact that these parties are in many ways different from established parties, we should not conclude that the party–voter relationship is different as well. Recent research shows that voters for right-wing populist parties base their decisions largely on the same kinds of considerations as voters for established parties do (see also Mughan & Paxton, 2006; Norris, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2001; Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007; Van der Brug et al., 2000). The results of our analysis generally support this view.

The analyses showed that legitimacy and effectiveness are important factors in explaining party preference for right-wing populist parties as well as mainstream parties. The effects of our central variables on party support turned out to be somewhat weaker for right-wing populist parties than for established parties. The differences are small, however. There is support for the proposition that right-wing populist parties attract voters who are more cynical and dissatisfied. However, the effects are small. Especially in the case of the most successful right-wing populist party, Geert Wilders' PVV, it is hardly significant. The most prominent distinction between right-wing populist parties and their established counterparts is their stance – and the position of their voters – on the immigration issue. Yet, the determinants of support for right-wing populist parties are very similar.

There is one aspect, however, in which our study prompts us to amend results from previous research, which showed that supporters of right-wing populist parties arrive at their party choice through the same ideological and pragmatic considerations that lead others to vote for established parties (Ivarsflaten, 2005; Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007; Van der Brug et al., 2000, 2003, 2005). Our study showed that this is only the case when right-wing populist parties are seen as legitimate and effective. If citizens see a right-wing populist party as legitimate, they will evaluate it by the same standards they use to judge other parties. Whether that will make the party successful in elections will depend on the distribution of voters and the competition from other parties. However, our analyses strongly suggest that being seen as legitimate and effective are necessary, but not sufficient, preconditions for being successful.

Notes

ⁱ He adds the condition that there is a notable loss of trust in the mainstream parties.

ⁱⁱ The other two right-wing populist parties (LVF and PVN) were less visible during the election campaign, and consequently less known by the electorate.

ⁱⁱⁱ This is illustrated by the fact that in the World Value Survey of 1999-2002 87.7% of the respondents agreed (strongly) with the statement “Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government”.

^{iv} The established parties in our analyses are the Christian democratic party CDA, the social-democrats PvdA, the liberal VVD and the Green party GroenLinks. We did not ask the appropriate questions of other parties, except for the Socialist Party (SP). We decided, however, not to include the SP in the analysis. We want to compare right-wing populist parties with established parties. Many observers consider the SP as well as the right-wing populist parties to be populist, however (see e.g., Mudde 2007, p. 48). Differences in the effect of effectiveness and legitimacy could possibly stem from the populist nature of these parties. If this is the case, and if the SP is indeed populist, the inclusion of the SP could lead us to underestimate the differences between right-wing populist parties and established parties. In the final part of the results section we discuss analyses which show that the conclusions are not affected substantively by including the SP in our analysis.

^v The question wording is difficult to translate. The Dutch phrase refers to “bepalend in het publieke debat”.

^{vi} The factor loadings of the latent variable legitimacy on the two items are 0.836 and Cronbach’s alpha is 0.570. The factor loadings of the latent variable effectiveness on the two items are 0.915 and Cronbach’s alpha is 0.806.

^{vii} We used a battery of statements with an answer scale from 1 = completely agree to 4 = completely disagree. Examples of statements that were included are: Politicians promise more than they can deliver; Ministers and junior-ministers are primarily self-interested; Friends more important than abilities to become MP; Parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion; Politicians do not understand what matters to society; Politicians are capable to solve important problems; Most politicians are competent people who know what they are doing.

^{viii} The sample was almost representative in terms of party choice. Non voters are underrepresented, however.

^{ix} This can be explained by the fact that there was dissent in the VVD about the party leader. Even though Mark Rutte was elected as the official party leader, follower-up Rita Verdonk was very popular. Moreover, after the elections it became clear that Rita Verdonk received more votes than Mark Rutte did.