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

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MEDIA COVERAGE OF RIGHT-WING POPULIST LEADERS

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on how leaders of new right-wing populist parties are portrayed in the mass media. More so than their established counterparts, new parties depend on the media for their electoral breakthrough. From a theoretical perspective, we expect prominence, populism, and authoritativeness of the party leaders’ media appearance to be essential for their electoral fortunes. We used systematic content analyses of 17 Dutch media outlets during the eight weeks prior to the 2006 national elections \( (n = 1,001) \) and compared the appearances of four right-wing populist and seven mainstream party leaders. This chapter makes two contributions to the existing literature: First, we develop valid and reliable indicators of authoritativeness and populism and apply them to a systematic content analysis. Second, we show that more successful right-wing populist leaders were more prominent during the election campaign and that the most successful right-wing populist leader also appears more authoritative in the news.


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

We have witnessed a rise of right-wing populist parties over the last decades. Various explanations have been put forward for this development. Recently, a number of scholars have studied the relationship between the media agenda and the electoral success of these parties (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003; Walgrave & De Swert, 2004). However, until very recently (Vliegenthart & Boomgaarden, 2008), no attention has been paid to the media coverage of the parties themselves or of the leaders of these parties. In this chapter we close this gap by looking at the media coverage of right-wing populist leaders. While we do not estimate the effects of media coverage on the political preference for these parties, we do however contribute to the literature by identifying three aspects in the media coverage of these leaders that are theoretically related to their success: prominence, populism, and authoritativeness. We develop a procedure to measure these concepts by means of a systematic content analysis. Moreover, we make comparisons on three levels. As a first step to explore whether media coverage in terms of prominence, populism, and authoritativeness contributes to success, we compare the coverage of successful and unsuccessful politicians. Second, to assess the assumed distinctiveness of these leaders (as addressed in Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007), we compare these right-wing populist leaders with their mainstream competitors. Finally, we contrast “elite media,” which “tend to be more aligned with the status quo” and “are more likely to try to appear unbiased,” with “tabloid media,” which “are more likely to be sensitive to ratings and to seek mass audiences” (Mazzoleni, 2003: 8). The latter are thought to contribute more to the rise and encouragement of populist discourse.

Due to decreasing party membership, decreasing importance of ideologies in politics, and increasing diffusion of mass media, it has been argued that the role of party leaders has become increasingly important (Mény & Surel, 2002; Mughan, 2000). Leaders of right-wing populist parties are even more important because many of these parties were founded recently and, partially as a result of that, they lack a strong party organization and depend heavily on their founders. Moreover, it has recently been argued that the success (and failure) of these parties can be partially attributed to the public image of their leaders (Bos & Van der Brug, 2010),
which, in turn, conceivably derives from how these leaders are portrayed in the media.

It may prove difficult for these leaders to appear prominent in the media. Because they are new parties, they do not have the kind of media access that leaders of established parties have, neither on the basis of formal positions (as ministers or spokespersons of opposition parties) nor on the basis of established contacts with journalists. Their capacity to get their message across in the media therefore depends largely on their newsworthiness. In order to get media attention, these politicians will have to be somewhat unusual in their behavior, style, or in terms of their messages. They might employ populist rhetoric or style to get the attention they want. By exploiting their novelty and outsider position, their news value can in fact become very high, thereby assuring prominence. However, because of their radical standpoints, it could be more difficult to get attention from more light-hearted media outlets. Moreover, if they behave too outlandishly in their efforts to get media attention, they may be subject to ridicule, which threatens their ‘authoritativeness.’ Therefore, it can be very difficult for these political outsiders to appear both prominent as well as authoritative in the media. They will have to reach a very delicate balance between being somewhat unusual and provocative – or populist – (in order to guarantee newsworthiness and therefore prominence) and at the same time must assure they are taken seriously as a party (to guarantee authoritativeness). We expect that right-wing populist leaders who are able to reach that balance (i.e., who are both more authoritative and more populist) will be most successful.

Prominence, authoritativeness, and populism

When studying the content of the media appearances of right-wing populist leaders, we distinguish three dimensions. The first dimension is prominence, the amount of media attention a politician is able to garner (Watt, Mazza & Snyder, 1993). Within the context of the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999), party leaders, right-wing populist or mainstream, must appear in the mass media in order to make themselves known to the electorate. Particularly new parties, such as many of these right-wing populist parties, cannot rely solely on reputation and therefore need the mass media to provide them with a stage. Without sufficient
coverage, chances are high that voters will be unaware of their existence, let alone their ideological positions, and electoral gain is very unlikely. As Lippmann (1954) states, “... what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him.” (p. 25) Moreover, it is also assumed that more prominent news messages (i.e., news messages that “are allotted more print space or time in broadcasting” (Watt et al., 1993, p. 415)) exert a larger influence on issue (or actor) salience: “that is, the ease with which these issues can be retrieved from memory.” (Scheufele, 2000, p. 300) Finally, it can also be argued that according to the Two-Step Flow of Communications (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), media consumers who do not read a specific newspaper or watch a specific TV-program can still be influenced indirectly by means of interpersonal communication about newspaper articles or programs on radio or TV. Accordingly, the more prominent a politician is in the mass media, the greater the likelihood that voters will know him or her. Furthermore, the more voters who know a politician, the greater the likelihood that he or she will be successful electorally. We therefore expect more successful right-wing populist leaders to be more prominent than less successful right-wing populist leaders (H1a).

With regard to the comparison with mainstream leaders, we believe multiple processes might play a role. First of all, it could be argued that right-wing populist leaders are expected to be more prominent because of their newsworthiness (Mazzoleni et al., 2003). On the other hand, public logic (Brants & Van Praag, 2006), by which media identify with the public good and the agenda is set by political parties, makes journalists focus on the parties whose positions count, thereby leading to more prominence for the political players that can make a difference (i.e., the leaders of potential governing parties). Because of the forces pulling at both ends of the continuum, we expect the prominence of mainstream and right-wing populist party leaders to be distributed according to their electoral success (H1b). The extra attention right-wing populist leaders are alleged to have due to their newsworthiness is cancelled out as a result of public logic. Moreover, following Stewart, Mazzoleni and Horsfield (2003), we expect right-wing populist leaders to appear more prominently in tabloid media than in elite media (H1c): Whereas tabloid media appear to pay more attention to populist parties in their early growth phase, the elite media wait until the establishment phase or the electoral success phase of the party. Accordingly, we expect that tabloid media give more
prominence to right-wing populist leaders than mainstream leaders; we also assume that this relationship works the other way around for elite media. These expectations will especially hold in cases where these right-wing populist parties are in their early growth phase.

The second dimension we distinguish is populism. Populism can be characterized by its style or by its substance. Characteristic of a populist style is the use of “highly emotional, slogan-based, tabloid-style language” (Mazzoleni et al., 2003, p. 5) which combines “...verbal radicalism and symbolic politics with the tools of contemporary political marketing to disseminate (...) ideas among the electorate” (Betz & Immerfall, 1998, p. 2). Characteristic of the populist message is its hostility to representative politics and the established order and its identification with the united/our/ordinary people. As a result, when populists engage in politics they employ the language of the common man in order to eschew the ‘elitist’ complex language of representative politics. (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 2000).

We conceptualize populism as the combination of these style elements and the substantive rhetoric. First, we look at the two core aspects of the populist ideology: its anti-establishment appeal and the celebration of the homeland. “The most general characteristic of populist parties is that they consider the political establishment as technically incompetent and morally corrupt. Populist parties (...) assume that the common man is basically good and his opinions are always sound, whereas the political elite is – by its very nature – selfish and dishonest” (Fennema, 2005, p. 10). Second, regarding the populist style, we distinguish between three aspects: The first aspect is that populists are reluctantly political, which is the consequence of their ambivalence toward representative politics (Taggart, 2000). The only reason they engage in politics is because of a perceived extreme crisis, in the case of right-wing populism usually the immigration problem. We therefore expect their leaders to refer to a (perceived) crisis situation. A second aspect of the populist style is “straightforwardness, simplicity and clarity,” “the clarion calls for populism” (Taggart, 2000, p. 97). Populists like simple and strong language. Accordingly, we do not foresee them to hesitate in bringing their message across. They will also emphasize decisiveness and fast and strong measures and use intense language. Finally, the third aspect of the populist style is the emphasis on the strong (charismatic) party leader. Generally, populist movements are organized around a central leader, without whom the party organization would fall apart. Moreover,
these leaders often have authoritarian traits: they refer to themselves as the crisis manager and have an ambivalent relation to democratic leadership (Taggart, 2000). We therefore argue that party leaders who adopt a populist style will be more likely to present themselves as problem managers or be presented as such.

Because we assume voters for right-wing populist parties prefer leaders who adopt a populist style and rhetoric, we expect the more successful leaders of these parties to have a higher position on the populism dimension than less successful leaders of right-wing populist parties (H2a). Additionally, we anticipate differences between these leaders and their mainstream competitors: We assume that mainstream party leaders appear less populist than right-wing populist leaders; for the media it is the populist nature, the populist style and/or the populist message, of these leaders that is newsworthy (H2b). Finally, because of the propensity of tabloid media to display “media populism,” “responsiveness to popular tastes and demands” (Mazzoleni, 2003, p. 8), and to pay more attention to newsworthy aspects of everyday politics, we expect them to be more interested in the populist style and the populist message than elite media (H2c). We do no expect any differences between the two groups of party leaders.

The third dimension we focus on in the coverage of right-wing populist leaders is authoritativeness. Authoritativeness refers to how knowledgeable a politician is about the political topics discussed and, as a result, it is dependent on the issue at stake. In general, we assume that voters base their electoral preference (partially) on substantial grounds. Consequently, it is essential for party leaders to get their ideological message across; they must be able to convey their position on a set of core issues. More importantly, voters want to vote for a party leader who is also able to convince others, particularly within parliament or the broader political realm. To have authoritativeness in this regard is thus highly related to being persuasive: To what extent can the party leader convince voters that he or she has a strong case, i.e., is credible (Hovland & Weiss, 1951)? Because of the association of the two fields, we take a closer look at the area of persuasive communication to conceptualize authoritativeness.

Based on extant research, we argue that party leaders are more authoritative when they use arguments and when they elaborate on their viewpoints. This seems to be the minimum requirement. As O’Keefe (1998) maintains, “advocates whose viewpoints are more fully articulated might be perceived as more credible (more
trustworthy and more competent), since receivers could reason that an advocate willing to be so explicit about the supporting materials must be especially honest and well-informed; such enhanced credibility then might make for greater persuasive effectiveness.” However, what constitutes a good argument is not that clear. For instance, O’Keefe (1998) and Allen and Burrell (1992) find that ‘more complete arguments’ or ‘arguments with higher quality of evidence’ are more persuasive. In this chapter we look at three aspects: reference to facts, reference to figures, and information-source citation. The first two aspects are the result of an attempt to objectively determine the quality or the completeness of an argument. Although experimental evidence is inconclusive as to whether quantitative evidence is convincing (O’Keefe, 1998, 2002; Reynolds & Reynolds, 2002), reference to figures can be seen as evidence of the substantial knowledge of the source. Moreover, some message receivers are easier won over by narrative evidence or examples (O’Keefe, 2002; Reynolds & Reynolds, 2002), which is why we also define reference to facts as an aspect of authoritativeness. As for the latter, (a meta-analysis of) experimental research has shown that testimonial assertion evidence increases the persuasiveness and perceptions of credibility of information sources (O’Keefe, 1998; Reinard, 1998; Reynolds & Reynolds, 2002): when referring to other sources as evidence, one’s own credibility is enhanced. Moreover, reference to scientists, opinion leaders, or experts, for example, can also be seen as evidence of substantive knowledge on the topic.

Finally, literature on fear-arousing appeals or threat appeals has prompted us to look at the extent to which party leaders propose solutions to the problems raised. Threat appeals are “those contents of a persuasive communication which allude to or describe unfavourable consequences that are alleged to result from failure to adopt and adhere to the communicator’s conclusions” (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953, p. 60). We assume that politicians who bring up problems and do not come up with suggestions to overcome them are perceived to lack knowledge on the issues addressed. Moreover, the literature on fear arousal also teaches us that what is persuading when talking about threats is the change in attitudes and/or behaviors recommended by the message source (Mongeau, 1998) or the proposed solution to a problem.

Because we assume that voters will prefer party leaders that are more authoritative, we expect more successful right-wing populist leaders to have a higher
position on the authoritativeness dimension than their less successful competitors (H3a). However, we also expect mainstream leaders to score higher on this dimension than right-wing populist leaders (H3b). We assume journalists pay particular attention to right-wing populist leaders when they are atypical and we expect them to shift their attention to other politicians if these right-wing populist leaders no longer behave extraordinarily. Moreover, right-wing populist leaders who want to appear authoritative will have to adjust their rhetoric and, to some extent, be more like the political elite they criticize. Finally, we expect the quality press to give party leaders in general more freedom to express their opinions substantively (H3c). Because of their tendency to reflect the values and views of the established elite, and because they are under public pressure to assume civic responsibilities, we expect the quality press to pay more attention to these arguments than tabloid media, whose main goal is profit and not journalistic quality. We again expect no differences between mainstream leaders and right-wing populists in this regard.

**Research setting**

Right-wing populist parties have entered the political stage across Europe. Our study is conducted in the Netherlands, where the 2006 election campaign provides an excellent case to test our theoretical expectations. Four ideologically similar right-wing populist parties participated in this election, two of these parties, Pim Fortuyn’s renamed party Lijst Vijf Fortuyn (LVF: ‘List Five Fortuyn’), led by Olaf Stuger, and Hilbrand Nawijn’s Partij voor Nederland (PVN: ‘Party for the Netherlands’) were quite unsuccessful. Marco Pastors’ EenNL (‘One NL’) did not fail until Election Day. Only Geert Wilders’ Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV: ‘Party for the Freedom’) experienced electoral success, winning nine seats in parliament.

Rita Verdonk is an exceptional case: She attempted to become the leader of the established liberal VVD with a populist message, but failed to be nominated by her party members by a very small margin. In the 2006 national election, however, she received more votes than her own party leader Mark Rutte and more than any of the (other) right-wing populists.

All of these party leaders satisfy the two most important criteria Mudde (2007) outlines for defining right-wing populist parties. They all addressed nativism or ideology in their programs by, for instance, proposing to halt immigration, sending
back sentenced immigrants or fundamentalists, and promoting or defending the Dutch identity or culture. All leaders can moreover be considered to be populist to the extent that they all propose measures to simplify the representative democratic order by, for example, decreasing the scope of the government, reducing the number of seats in parliament or in the senate (or abolishing the latter), and introducing more direct democratic measures (i.e. referenda).

The ideological differences between the four right-wing populist parties are very small and it is very unlikely that voters would be aware of differences between the programs of these parties. Rita Verdonk from the VVD also campaigned on the same types of issues. Consequently, it is highly improbable that differences in success are related to the substance of the political programs. Furthermore, it is quite plausible that differences in success are related to the amount and the nature of the media attention that they received.

**Content analysis**

This section presents the results of a content analysis of the 2006 election campaign. We use systematic content analyses of 17 Dutch media outlets: seven newspapers, three news programs, two current affairs programs, and five infotainment programs from September 27th 2006 until the elections on November 22nd in the same year to examine the way in which right-wing populist party leaders are portrayed in the mass media.

**Data**

As part of the ASCoR Election Study we carried out a content analysis of Dutch newspapers, national TV news, current affairs programs, and infotainment programs. We included seven national newspapers: De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, and Trouw are broadsheet newspapers and represent the Dutch national quality press. De Telegraaf and Algemeen Dagblad represent the national tabloid press. We also incorporated the two largest freely distributed newspapers into the analysis: Metro and Sp!ts. In addition, we also analyzed the most widely watched Dutch public evening news program, NOS Journaal (Nederland 1: 20.00 – 20.25), the main private news programs, RTL Nieuws (RTL 4: 19.30 – 19.55) and Hart van Nederland (SBS 6: 19.00 – 19.20), and the main public TV current affairs programs, NOVA Den Haag vandaag/ Nederland Kiest and Eén Vandaag. Finally,
we included the main Dutch public TV infotainment programs Pauw & Witteman, De Wereld Draait Door, Max & Catherine, and Lijst Nul as well as the commercial broadcast Jensen.

The content analysis was conducted for news articles and TV items published or broadcasted within the eight weeks prior to the 2006 Dutch national elections (between September 27th and November 22nd, 2006). We included all news and current affairs programs during this period. Infotainment programs were only coded when party leaders were mentioned or interviewed. For the newspaper articles we conducted a search in LexisNexis, the online newspaper database, using keywords related to the election campaign and additional economic keywords for other research purposes. We took a systematic sample of the newspaper articles found and coded 41% of the articles in our target population.

Because of a shortage of newspaper articles in which right-wing populist leaders were coded as one of the actors, we coded all of the articles in which Geert Wilders, Marco Pastors, Hilbrand Nawijn, and Olaf Stuger spoke about substantive matters. As a result, we coded an additional 38 items. These items were only used to estimate the positions of the right-wing populist leaders on the populism and authoritativeness dimensions and were not included in the description of the content analysis data below.

For the purpose of this chapter, all newspaper articles coded as campaign news were included. For the TV news programs and the current affairs programs, all campaign items were incorporated. Items in infotainment programs were included when party leaders were interviewed and the item satisfied the definition of campaign news. Items that did not meet these requirements were not used for the analyses in this chapter. In total, we used 2,209 items: 1,505 newspaper articles, 413 TV news items, 230 items in current affairs programs, and 61 items in infotainment programs. For 1,001 items the selected party leaders were coded as (one of the) main actor(s): 615 newspaper articles, 201 TV news items, 132 current affairs items, and 53 infotainment items.

11 Dutch native speakers conducted the coding. The unit of analysis and the coding unit was the individual news story, characterized by a distinct overall issue focus. We included 74 items in a post-test and conducted an additional post-test on 35 items for indicators of authoritativeness and populism. This extra post-test was performed by two of the coders and one of the authors. The reliability estimates of
the various used measures are given below. We report percent agreement for
nominal variables or, if possible, Krippendorff’s alpha for ratio variables. Overall,
we find that the reliability of our measures was generally acceptable for our new
measures (Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Bracken, 2002).

Operationalizations

Prominence. For each campaign item up to five different actors could be
coded, including party leaders (campaign news: agreement = 81.64 %). In the
present study we only look at actors coded as party leaders, with the exception of
Rita Verdonk, who was a minister and the runner-up on the list of the VVD at the
time of the election. Therefore, we only included cases in which Jan-Peter
Balkenende appeared in his role as party leader, not when acting as prime minister.
One or more party leaders were coded as actors in 1,001 different items. In total,
1,796 actors were coded as party leaders (agreement = 69.56 %). For each actor
the amount of attention within the item was coded by looking at the total number
of words (newspaper) in the article (agreement = 91.43 %, Krippendorff’s alpha =
0.97) or the length of the TV item (TV news and current affairs programs) (alpha =
0.88\textsuperscript{vii}), and the page on which the article appeared (agreement = 98.19%, alpha =
0.99), the consecutive number in the TV program (agreement = 79.48 %), or the
reference in the leader (agreement = 87.47 %). For infotainment programs the
amount of attention for a party leader is measured by coding the situation in which
he or she appeared: as the main guest in the show, as one of the guests sitting at the
table during the entire show, as one of the guests sitting at the table during a part of
the show, or as part of a (short) video clip.

To measure the impact of the coverage of the party leaders we constructed a
formula, based on Vliegenthart (2007) and Watt. et al. (1993), to calculate the
prominence of the appearance of a party leader in a item. See Appendix B for the
formula\textsuperscript{viii}.

Party leaders’ style and rhetoric: authoritativeness and populism. Whenever
party leaders were coded as actors in campaign items, we also coded whether they
took a position on some topic (agreement = 66.84 %). In the cases in which they
did (497 cases of the 1,001 items), we coded indicators of authoritativeness and
populism. The indicators were formulated as statements and measured on dichotomous response scales (0 = No, 1 = Yes).

To investigate the extent to which these variables constitute scales, we produced a stacked data matrix in which the party leader-item combination is the unit of analysis. Because the items are dichotomous, the most well-known method for testing the unidimensionality of the scales, factor analysis, is not preferred (Van Schuur, 2003). A more appropriate method for these data is Mokken scaling, which is a probabilistic version of the better-known Guttmann scale (e.g., Jacoby, 1991; Mokken, 1971; Van Schuur, 2003).

Table 2.1: Populism Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>( \alpha_i )</th>
<th>( H_i )</th>
<th>( Z )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the party leader depict the current or future situation as being critical?</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>12.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the party leader use intensifiers such as ‘surely’, ‘certainly’?</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>11.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the party leader present him/herself as a manager or problem solver or is he or she presented as such by others?</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>14.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the party leader place emphasis on decisiveness and fast and strong measures or is he or she presented as being decisive?</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>15.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the party leader use hedges and hesitations?</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>6.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-scale items*:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the party leader criticize all other parties/the established political order/the large established parties?</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the party leader mention the ‘man in the street’, the ‘common man’?</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Item coefficient: value when item is added to five-item scale; \( n = 497 \).

We operationalized the populism dimension by measuring whether a certain party leader refers to a critical situation (agreement = 85.76 %), emphasizes decisiveness and fast and strong measures or is presented as such (agreement = 77.97 %), presents him/herself as a manager or is presented as such (agreement = 75.43 %). Additionally, we measured whether the party leader in question used intensifiers such as ‘surely’ and ‘certainly’ (agreement = 80.34 %) and whether he or she used hedges and hesitations (agreement = 71.16 %). The last item was recoded so that 0 = hedges and hesitations and 1 = no hedges and hesitations. The Mokken scale analysis shows that these items (\( n = 497 \)) form a medium scale (\( H = 0.46, Z = 18.75 \)). The additional two items referring to the ideological core of populism, criticism of the established political class (agreement = 94.77 %), and mentioning the man in the street (agreement = 88.36 %), do not fit the scale; our concept of
populism appears to be multidimensional. Table 2.1 gives the results of the scaling analyses.

Five items were developed to measure ‘authoritativeness’: whether the party leader in question uses arguments (agreement = 78.12%), refers to facts (agreement = 52.33%) and/or figures (agreement = 91.04%) and/or other sources (agreement = 96.018%), and by coding whether the party leader proposes solutions for perceived problems (agreement = 74.08%). Because of low intercoder reliability results we have excluded the second item from the scale. The Mokken scale analysis shows that the four remaining items form a medium scale (H = 0.45, Z = 10.53). Table 2.2 gives the results of the scale analysis.

Table 2.2: Authoritativeness Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>( \pi_i )</th>
<th>( H_i )</th>
<th>( Z )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The party leader refers to scientists/opinion leaders/other sources or persons to ground his/her opinion.</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>5.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The party leader uses figures to ground his/her opinion.</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>9.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The party leader comes up with possible (policy) solutions for observed problems.</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>7.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The party leader uses arguments to ground his/her opinion.</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>7.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( n = 497 \)

Results

Prominence

Table 2.3 presents the prominence of the various party leaders. In general it can be said that Rita Verdonk, Geert Wilders, and Marco Pastors received far more attention in newspapers than the other two right-wing populist leaders, Olaf Stuger and Hilbrand Nawijn. Moreover, if we look at the prominence within the article, Geert Wilders is the most prominent.

The analysis of the coverage of the party leaders in the various television programs reveals very similar results. If we compare the various right-wing populist leaders with regard to their overall prominence, we see that Rita Verdonk’s prominence was highest, which is a result of the number of items in which she was one of the main actors. Of the party leaders, Geert Wilders appeared most prominent on TV, followed by Marco Pastors. Since the more successful right-wing
populist leaders (Verdonk, Wilders, and Pastors) were most prominent in the news, these results are largely in line with our first hypothesis H1a. However, the differences between the various right-wing populist party leaders ($F = 0.144$, $df = 4$) regarding their average prominence are not significant; we therefore do not find support for H1a. If we compare the prominence measures of the mainstream leaders with the right-wing populist party leaders, we find that the former were more prominent in the news than the latter, in newspapers as well as on TV. While these results are in line with our hypothesis H1b, the differences are again not significant ($F = 1.818$, $df = 1$).

Table 2.3: Prominence of Party Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Type</th>
<th>Average prominence per article (SD)</th>
<th>Prominence newspapers</th>
<th>Average prominence per TV item (SD)</th>
<th>Prominence Television</th>
<th>Average prominence (SD)</th>
<th>Overall prominence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Party Leaders</td>
<td>1.02 (0.86)</td>
<td>128.36</td>
<td>1.04 (0.99)</td>
<td>85.46</td>
<td>1.03 (0.91)</td>
<td>213.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-Wing Populist Leaders</td>
<td>0.96 (0.78)</td>
<td>20.17</td>
<td>0.86 (0.70)</td>
<td>13.16</td>
<td>0.92 (0.75)</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita Verdonk</td>
<td>0.89 (0.90)</td>
<td>110.74</td>
<td>0.86 (1.35)</td>
<td>55.17</td>
<td>0.87 (0.86)</td>
<td>165.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geert Wilders</td>
<td>1.02 (0.79)</td>
<td>42.85</td>
<td>0.82 (0.79)</td>
<td>21.87</td>
<td>0.91 (0.73)</td>
<td>64.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco Pastors</td>
<td>0.93 (0.76)</td>
<td>26.95</td>
<td>0.95 (0.80)</td>
<td>20.97</td>
<td>0.94 (0.77)</td>
<td>47.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilbrand Nawijn</td>
<td>0.80 (0.87)</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>1.51 (0.93)</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>0.97 (0.90)</td>
<td>11.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olaf Stuger</td>
<td>0.93 (0.93)</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.75 (0.51)</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>0.82 (0.65)</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.00 (0.86)</td>
<td>1089.96</td>
<td>1.00 (0.95)</td>
<td>706.01</td>
<td>1.00 (0.90)</td>
<td>1795.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $n = 1,001$.

**Populism**

As expected, the simple scores of the various party leaders on the populism style dimension (Table 2.4) show that, on average, the leaders of the right-wing populist parties scored higher on this dimension ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 1.24$) than their mainstream counterparts ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 1.27$). However, they did not differ significantly ($F = 0.318$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.573$). We therefore do not find unconditional support for H2b. Geert Wilders, the most successful right-wing populist leader, scored highest of all party leaders: he appeared as the most populist and was the only leader that was significantly more populist than his mainstream competitors: $F$
However, the differences between the five right-wing populist leaders with regard to their populist style are not significant ($F = 1.860, df = 4$), although they score differently on this dimension: Marco Pastors scored much lower, with Rita Verdonk and Hilbrand Nawijn occupying the middle positions. Although the direction of our findings support our hypotheses H2a and H2b, the differences are not significant.

Table 2.4: Placement of the Party Leaders on the Populism Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party leader</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Leaders</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-Wing Populist Party Leaders</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita Verdonk</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geert Wilders</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco Pastors</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilbrand Nawijn</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olaf Stuger</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2.5 we present the scores of the various party leaders on the two ideological populism concepts. Overall we find that only two right-wing populist leaders have criticized representative politics, Geert Wilders and Marco Pastors, thereby lending support to hypothesis H2a. Moreover, the latter popular party leader did that significantly more than the former ($F = 9.066, df = 1, p = 0.03$) and the differences between the various right-wing populist leaders are significant ($F = 6.964, df = 4, p = 0.00$). However, these leaders do not differ significantly from mainstream leaders in this regard ($F = 0.112, df = 1, p = 0.738$). The other ideological component of populism, referring to the common man, was also found in Rita Verdonk’s media appearances. Nevertheless, right-wing populist leaders do not differ significantly in this regard ($F = 1.154, df = 4, p = 0.334$). On the other hand, we do find that rightwing populist party leaders refer to the common man more frequently than mainstream party leaders ($F = 3.576, df = 1, p = 0.059$), which supports H2b\textsuperscript{iii}. Overall, the results with regard to the populist ideology dimension are somewhat contradictory.
## Table 2.5: Placement of Party Leaders on Two Populism Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party leader</th>
<th>Criticism on representative</th>
<th>Referring man</th>
<th>to the common</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \hat{\kappa}_1 )</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>( \hat{\kappa}_2 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Leaders</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-Wing Populist Party Leaders</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita Verdonk</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geert Wilders</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco Pastors</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilbrand Nawijn</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olaf Stuger</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Authoritativeness

Table 2.6 shows the various party leaders’ positions along the authoritativeness dimension. The results show that the leaders of the four right-wing populist parties (\( M = 0.94, SD = 1.10 \)) scored significantly lower on this dimension than leaders of mainstream parties (\( M = 1.26, SD = 0.96 \)): \( F = 7.929 (df = 1) \) is significant at the .01 level\(^{iv} \). This lends support for H3b. The three less successful right-wing populist leaders, Nawijn, Pastors, and Stuger, appeared particularly less authoritative in the mass media. Moreover, we find that Wilders presented himself as more authoritative by using more substantial arguments: He scores relatively high on the authoritativeness dimension and does not differ significantly from his mainstream counterparts in this respect (\( F = 0.038, df = 1, p = 0.845 \)). These findings also support hypothesis H3a: More successful right-wing populist leaders appear more authoritative. However, the differences among the five right-wing populist leaders are not significant (\( F = 1.554, df = 4, p = 0.190 \)).
Table 2.6: Placement of the Party Leaders on the Authoritatively Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party leader</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Leaders</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-Wing Populist Party Leaders</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita Verdonk</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geert Wilders</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco Pastors</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilbrand Nawijn</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olaf Stuger</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.7 presents the differences between outlets on the three dimensions\textsuperscript{xv}. As for the prominence of the party leaders\textsuperscript{xvi} in the various outlets, we find that all party leaders, both right-wing populist and mainstream, received the most attention in current affairs programs. However, in the case of the right-wing populist party leaders, the differences are not significant. Because of the nature of Dutch current affairs programs, which are public broadcasts and have a highly educated audience, it seems plausible to categorize them as elite media. The overall results therefore show that mainstream as well as right-wing populist party leaders seem to garner more prominence in elite media (current affairs programs and broadsheet newspapers) than in tabloid media (tabloid and free newspapers and infotainment programs). Moreover, differences between party leader types were insignificant within media outlets. These results lend no support for hypothesis H1c, wherein we expected more prominence in tabloid media than elite media for right-wing populist leaders.

Regarding the populist style covered in the various media outlets, hypothesis H2c cannot be supported. Party leaders’ positions were highest in current affairs programs, and not in tabloid and free newspapers or infotainment programs as expected. Moreover, there are differences between the two types of leaders: whereas differences between the media outlets were not significant for mainstream party leaders, they were for right-wing populist leaders. Additionally, if we look at differences between outlets with a similar purpose and target audience, we find that current affairs programs pay significantly more attention to the populist style of right-wing populist party leaders than broadsheet newspapers and news programs do. This can probably be explained by the fact that current affairs programs have
more room for politicians to voice their political opinions, as opposed to news programs and newspapers in which time or space is usually limited.

Table 2.7: Prominence, Authoritativeness and Populism: Differences Between Outlets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broadsheet</td>
<td>Tabloids &amp; Free newspapers</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prominence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Party Leaders</td>
<td>1.27 (1.11)b</td>
<td>0.69 (0.51)a</td>
<td>0.78 (0.70)a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-Wing Populist Leaders</td>
<td>1.12 (1.01)a</td>
<td>0.63 (0.44)b</td>
<td>0.67 (0.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.25 (1.13)c</td>
<td>0.68 (0.50)a</td>
<td>0.75 (0.68)a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Populism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Party Leaders</td>
<td>1.14 (1.15)</td>
<td>1.27 (1.11)</td>
<td>1.22 (1.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-Wing Populist Leaders</td>
<td>1.48 (1.38)a</td>
<td>1.10 (1.01)a</td>
<td>1.07 (0.92)a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.26 (1.20) a</td>
<td>1.23 (1.04) a</td>
<td>1.23 (1.23)a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritativeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Party Leaders</td>
<td>0.96 (0.85)ac</td>
<td>1.11 (0.98)ac</td>
<td>1.32 (0.85)ax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-Wing Populist Leaders</td>
<td>0.75 (0.93)a</td>
<td>1.31 (1.14)a</td>
<td>0.64 (0.93)ay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.92 (0.92)ac</td>
<td>1.14 (0.98)a</td>
<td>1.23 (0.88)ac</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. a,b,c Different superscripts indicate a significant difference between media outlets (p≤0.05): all tests are one-tailed; x,y Different superscripts indicate a significant difference between leader types (p≤0.05): all tests are one-tailed; n = 1,001.

Example: In the last row we find that with regard to the level of authoritativeness of the party leaders there are no significant differences between broadsheet newspapers, tabloids and free newspapers, and news programs. Authoritativeness levels are significantly higher in current affairs programs as compared to all of the other outlets. Finally, authoritativeness levels are significantly lower in infotainment programs as compared to tabloids and free newspapers, news programs and current affairs programs. Authoritativeness levels do not differ on a significant level between infotainment programs, and broadsheet newspapers.
In terms of the authoritativeness of the various party leaders, H3c is partially supported: while they were placed highest on the authoritativeness dimension in ‘elitist’ current affairs programs, they were placed lowest in ‘tabloid’ infotainment programs. Moreover, we did not find large differences between leader types, as expected.

**Conclusions and discussion**

This study contributes to the literature on right-wing populist parties in several ways. We proposed three aspects in the media appearance of right-wing populist leaders that are important for their public image and therefore possibly for their electoral fortunes: prominence, populism, and authoritativeness. We developed a procedure to measure these concepts with a comprehensive content analysis; a Mokken scale analysis has shown that our indicators do indeed form unidimensional scales, thereby fulfilling standard criterions to test their construct validity.

Moreover, with regard to the prominence of the various political leaders, our hypotheses are partially supported, although the results do not differ significantly in all cases: More successful right-wing populist leaders are the most prominent and are somewhat less prominent in the news than mainstream leaders. However, as for the differences between media outlets, our results contradict the results of Stewart et al. (2003), who find that tabloid media pay more attention to right-wing populist leaders in their early growth phase. We however find no differences between the various media outlets. Several explanations can be put forward for this finding. First, it could be possible that this finding is limited to the Dutch context. In the Dutch media landscape tabloid media are less prominent than in some other countries. The tabloid newspapers – de Telegraaf and the Algemeen Dagblad – are much more broadsheet than, for example, the Sun. Moreover, it is possible that after the Fortuyn revolt Dutch mainstream media have paid more attention to the populist voice. A comparison over time might shed more light on this issue. Another explanation could be that this finding is not dependent upon the Dutch context, but that the tabloid media outlets pay less attention to right-wing populist politicians because of their extremist opinions. Perhaps they want to present more light-
hearted news and distance themselves from heavy issues such as immigration and crime.

The scale analysis also shows that a particular populist style or rhetoric exists. Non-ideological style components are essential to this populism dimension: The strength of the leadership is emphasized and the directness of the language is key. The alleged two central tenets of populist ideology and rhetoric (Walgrave & De Swert, 2004), criticism of the established political class and reference to the common man, do not belong to this dimension.

However, if we do look at the populism dimension as well as the two central ideological populism items, we find support for our hypotheses that more successful right-wing populist leaders appear to be more populist and that right-wing populist leaders score higher on these concepts than mainstream leaders. The differences regarding the latter distinction are small, which indicates an attempt of mainstream party leaders to fit the media logic by using populist ideological elements, since this populist style matches “quite closely certain key features of present-day mass communications,” such as “pressures on media organizations to compete by attuning their fare to popular tastes, concerns, priorities, understandings, and language [...] and [...] the emotive, sensational, hard-hitting, plain-seeking, say-it-as-it-is, black-and-white styles of tabloid journalism” (Blumler, 2003, p. xvii). Another explanation for this finding could be media populism (Mazzoleni et al., 2003), that is, the propensity of mass media to focus on populist rhetoric and ideology, because it fits media logic, for mainstream leaders as well as right-wing populist leaders. In terms of media populism, our findings also point to something interesting: In general it is not the tabloid media, but the Dutch quality or elite media, such as broadsheet newspapers and public broadcast current affairs programs, that pay (more) attention to populist elements in the rhetoric of party leaders. Overall, by comparing the media coverage of right-wing populist leaders with the coverage of mainstream leaders in this chapter, we have found that the alleged central populist tenets are not exclusively confined to (right-wing) populists, as is generally assumed (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Taggart, 2000).

The various items constructed to measure authoritativeness mainly refer to (the content of) the arguments used. This operationalization was inspired by persuasion literature. This chapter indicates that these theories on support
articulation (O’Keefe, 1998), sequential arguments (Allen & Burrel, 1992), or fear appeals (Mongeau, 1998) are not only applicable in experimental or effects research on persuasive communication, but are also very useful to strengthen our knowledge about the coverage of party leaders, right-wing populist or mainstream, and to be able to differentiate between their argument strength. The scale analysis provides information about the argumentational chain of party leaders in general. There seems to be an order in the extent to which certain arguments are used, with the lesser used arguments nested in the usage of the more frequently expressed arguments. Following our results and hypotheses regarding this dimension, we argue that authoritativeness could be a very relevant concept in the study of right-wing populist parties, as opposed to the vague notion of the charismatic leader often referred to in the literature (Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007). Moreover, what sets the most successful right-wing populist leaders apart from the less successful ones is ‘authoritativeness.’ On this dimension, his/her position approaches ‘normality’: the average score of mainstream leaders. Therefore, what distinguishes him from his direct competitor is not his anti-establishment position (Fennema, 2005), but rather that which makes him more similar to the establishment.

Overall, these findings support our hypothesis that in order to be successful, a right-wing populist leader must reach a delicate balance between appearing unusual and populist or anti-establishment in order to gain news value, on the one hand, and still appearing authoritative, or part of the establishment, on the other.

Future research has the task of testing whether our results can be extended to other countries or contexts. By focusing on the Netherlands we were able to conduct an in-depth analysis of the style and rhetoric employed by Dutch political leaders. Future studies could compare right-wing populist leaders in different phases of their existence or established party leaders in other political contexts, e.g. in contexts in which right-wing populists are ostracized or employ populist or authoritative style components. While we are aware that there may be other aspects of the party leaders’ style or rhetoric that could have been included, we believe we have focused on the most important ones. We also look forward to seeing whether the unexpected results we have found regarding the differences between the various media outlets hold in other media systems. Finally, future research should investigate the effects of exposure to right-wing populist leaders in the news on
sympathy toward and electoral support for these leaders vis-a-vis more mainstream political leaders.
Notes

1 http://academic.lexisnexis.nl/uva/
2 We ordered the newspaper articles chronologically and by outlet. The articles published within four weeks before the elections \((n = 3,368)\) we assigned the numbers 1 to 3 and the articles published within the four weeks prior to that we assigned the numbers 1 to 9 \((n = 2,958)\). We started coding the articles with number 1 and subsequently coded 2 and 3. Of the articles published in the four weeks prior to the elections we coded 49\% \((n = 1,735)\) and of the remaining articles we coded 17\% \((n = 508)\).

3 We coded items as campaign news when they were presented as such, or when they satisfied one of the following criteria: presence of a national party leader; events within the framework of the elections; reference to the elections, election programs or election campaigns; or the (present or future) government, its composition or structure, is the subject of the news story.

4 In this chapter we included all right-wing populist leaders that competed in the 2006 elections, Geert Wilders, Marco Pastors, Olaf Stuger and Hilbrand Nawijn, and all leaders of parties that are generally assumed to be part of the establishment, Jan-Peter Balkenende (CDA), Wouter Bos (PvdA), Mark Rutte (VVD), Femke Halsema (GroenLinks), Alexander Pechtold (D66), Andre Rouvoet (ChristenUnie) and Bas van der Vlies (SGP).

5 In our codebook the first variables are preconditions for the latter: for instance, only when an item was coded as campaign news, actors had to be coded. Moreover, it was only when the same party leaders coded as actors were coded to take a standpoint that the various variables that constitute our central concepts had to be coded. As a result, of the 74 items that were in our posttest, only 16 could be used to estimate the reliability of our central measures. Consequently, some variables were constants, which is why we cannot calculate Cohen’s Kappa.

6 We excluded two right-wing party leaders that did not compete in the elections, from the analysis: Mat Herben and Michiel Smit.

7 Because of the ratio level of the variable it is undesirable to compute percent agreement.

8 In the literature the attention for the actor within the item is sometimes included in the formula as well. Because the results are similar when we exclude these variables, we have chosen to not account for the attention for the actor for reasons of simplicity.

9 We used the program MSPWIN 5.0 (Molenaar, Van Schuur, Sijtsma, & Mokken, 2002) to perform the scale analysis.

10 According to Mokken, the coefficient \(H\) (homogeneity of the items) has to be .30 or higher to be a scale. When \(H\) is higher than .50 it is a strong scale.
In the comparison between right-wing populist party leaders on the one hand and mainstream party leaders on the other, we did not include Rita Verdonk, because she was not the leader of a party at that moment in time. However, if we do incorporate Rita Verdonk in the group right-wing populist leaders we find that the difference between the two groups is significant ($F = 6.162$, $df = 1$).

If we include Rita Verdonk in the group of right-wing populists, results do not change.

If we incorporate Rita Verdonk into the group right-wing populist leaders, the difference between these leaders and the mainstream party leaders becomes insignificant.

If we include Rita Verdonk in the group of right-wing populists, results do not change.

If we include Rita Verdonk in the group right-wing populist leaders, results do not differ much for populism and authoritativeness figures. As for prominence, we find more significant differences between the several outlets.

For the purposes of this table we have recalculated the prominence scores of the party leaders by leaving the average circulation and average number of viewers (circ(a) and view(a)) out of the equation.