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**What did you just call me? A study on the demonization of political parties in the Netherlands between 1995 and 2011**

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What is political demonization? Which political parties are demonized and when? Who demonizes? What are the consequences of demonization for the electoral support of anti-immigration parties? And, to what extent does demonization erode political trust among the electorate?

In response to the rise of anti-immigration parties, the political establishment in several Western European countries has pursued strategies of exclusion and de-legitimation. Anti-immigration parties have complained that the political establishment has been demonizing them. While scholars have described certain practices as demonization, the term itself has not been conceptualized. The practice and consequences of demonization have rarely been studied empirically.

This dissertation defines demonization as portraying a political actor as the embodiment of absolute evil. Within the context of this study - the Dutch political domain between 1995 and 2011 - Hitler is regarded as the ultimate demonic figure and Nazism/fascism as the political regime that represents absolute evil. Empirical analyses demonstrate that the circumstances in which demonization takes place differ from other forms of negative campaigning. The results further indicate that the Dutch anti-immigration party *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) suffered electorally from being demonized only when the party was still in its infancy. Although the PVV seems to have become immune to demonization in later years, the results strongly suggest that demonization reduces political trust.

WHAT DID YOU JUST CALL ME?

Sjoerdje C. van Heerden

## WHAT DID YOU JUST CALL ME?

*A study on the demonization of political parties in the Netherlands between 1995 and 2011.*

Sjoerdje C. van Heerden