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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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Chapter 5  
Demonization and Political Trust

## Introduction

Chapter 4 shows that demonization has no unintended effects on the electoral standing of anti-immigration parties, and contrary to some theoretical expectations, demonization does not increase electoral support for the targeted anti-immigration party. However, demonization can still have unintended effects in other ways. A large body of literature suggests a relationship between negative campaigning and political trust (e.g. Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; Hetherington, 2005; Mutz and Reeves, 2005; Patterson, 1993; Pedersen, 2012; Robinson, 1975). Scholars have found that negative campaigning decreases political trust, because voters exposed to negative campaigning become disenchanted with the electoral process. If negative campaigning leads to lower levels of political trust, demonization might lead to lower levels of political trust as well, because demonization can be regarded as the ultimate form of negative campaigning. After all, demonization represents strong personal attacks, political contestation and polarization.<sup>61</sup>

Most scholars regard a decline in political trust worrying because “a basic level of political trust is considered to be the cornerstone of modern-day democracy” (Van der Meer, 2010: 517). Arguably, political trust links voters to the institutions that represent them (Mishler and Rose, 2001). In recent decades, political trust has been relatively low or has declined in most industrial Western societies (see Bovens and Wille, 2008; Dalton, 2004; Norris, 1999; Pharr and Putnam, 2000). However, compared to other Western European countries, political trust in the Netherlands remained quite high. Nevertheless, there was a dip in 2002, after which political trust remained low for some years. In late 2006 political trust seemed partially restored, but from 2008 onward, it started fluctuating again (Bovens and Wille, 2008; Van der Brug and Van Praag, 2008).<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Demonization is, however, not used strategically by definition. It can also be expressed as a warning (see Chapter 2 and 3). However, besides Chapter 3 supporting the assumption that demonization is used strategically to a considerable degree, demonization as a warning also encompasses a negative statement. Thus, on both accounts, demonization contributes the degree in which the political debate is perceived ‘negative’.

<sup>62</sup> Also see SCP rapport *Burgerperspectieven* 2013 no. 4: [http://content1b.omroep.nl/urishieldv2/127m2dc41cb122db63ed0052c03e3e000000.6028a027e458086eda5968e0869b8e/nos/docs/280912\\_cpb\\_rapport.pdf](http://content1b.omroep.nl/urishieldv2/127m2dc41cb122db63ed0052c03e3e000000.6028a027e458086eda5968e0869b8e/nos/docs/280912_cpb_rapport.pdf). (visited December 29th, 2013). Also see *Legitimiteitsmonitor Democratisch Bestuur* 2013 <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:aFvxIjdmwA8J:www.rijksoverheid.nl/bestanden/documenten->

The aim of this chapter is to analyze the effect of demonization on political trust among the Dutch electorate. The time period under investigation is October 2002 until February 2006. During this period, the LPF gradually faded from the political scene, while the PVV emerged. Although these anti-immigration parties have been demonized substantially during this period, others have also been demonized (see Chapter 2). Since there is no reason to expect that only the demonization of anti-immigration parties has an effect on political trust, the analyses in this chapter will focus on the extent to which the demonization of *all* Dutch parliamentary parties affects political trust.

## Theory

Political trust entails an evaluation of a political system or its core institutions, such as the National Parliament. Unlike interpersonal trust, political trust is a relationship with an “asymmetry of power between the truster and the trustee”, whereby a basic level of political trust entails that the trustee uses its granted power competently (Marien, 2011: 3; see Newton, 2007).<sup>63</sup> A proper functioning of a democratic political system requires high levels of political trust. Citizens’ support for democracy influences the extent to which they consider political institutions legitimate. Low levels of political trust hinder political systems in the implementation of rules for society. Political trust is therefore imperative to making binding decisions, and to secure the electorate’s compliance without coercion (Bovens and Wille, 2008; Chanley et al., 2000; Easton, 1965; Gamson, 1968; Rudolph and Evans, 2005; but see Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003).<sup>64</sup>

In recent years, many different reasons for a change in political trust have been proposed. For example, negative perceptions of economic performance, the occurrence of political scandals/conflict and public concerns

[en-publicaties/rapporten/2013/09/02/rapport-legitimiteitsmonitor-democratisch-bestuur/b-19520-bw-legitimiteitsmonitor-db-3.pdf+&cd=2&hl=nl&ct=clnk&gl=nl](http://en-publicaties/rapporten/2013/09/02/rapport-legitimiteitsmonitor-democratisch-bestuur/b-19520-bw-legitimiteitsmonitor-db-3.pdf+&cd=2&hl=nl&ct=clnk&gl=nl) (visited 15-01-2014).

<sup>63</sup> Based on the different nature of interpersonal trust, some scholars have argued for ‘confidence in government’ rather than ‘trust in government’ since “a personal relationship involving trust is far richer and more directly reciprocal than a citizen’s relationship to government” (Hardin, 2000: 31).

<sup>64</sup> Several studies suggest that low levels of trust also have more direct political consequences. For example, untrusting citizens are more likely to free ride and to have a more lenient attitude towards breaking the law (Marien and Hooghe, 2011). Low levels of political trust, it is also argued, obstruct economic growth potential (Cherchye and Moesen, 2004).

about crime rates, have each been nominated as causes of diminishing political trust (e.g. Chanley et al., 2000; Citrin and Green, 1986; Hetherington, 1998). Bovens and Wille (2008) have proposed that decreases in political trust in the Netherlands are related to a growth of negative political campaigning and political polarization. For decades Dutch political culture was characterized by the art of compromise, but the turbulent entry of Fortuyn in 2002 broke with the prevailing consensus culture. Fortuyn “gave way to a populist emotional and expressive style in which strong personal attacks were no longer taboo” (p. 296; also see Brants and Van Praag, 2005). The electoral success of Fortuyn paved the way for harsh and adversarial campaign strategies; a political style that had been considered unfruitful and undesirable before (Van Praag and Brants, 2008). Van Der Meer (2010) also finds tentative support for the claim that an adversarial political culture can affect political trust negatively.<sup>65</sup>

Robinson (1975), one of the first scholars to argue that how political disagreement is publicly conveyed shapes government evaluation, showed that when news coverage on television is largely negative in nature, political cynicism among viewers increases.<sup>66</sup> Robinson describes this process as ‘video malaise’ (also see Gross et al., 2004). The central part of his findings have been validated many times, but theories have broadened into more general claims, rather than just claims solely about the influence of televised negative campaigning (e.g. Brader, 2005; Lau et al., 2007; Leshner and Thorson, 2000; Pinkleton et al., 2002; Thorson et al., 2000). Patterson (1993) has argued that negative news coverage in all media promotes unfavorable attitudes towards the political process. Negative news not only leads people to think ill of politicians, but also of the system they are embedded in. Along the same line, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) have concluded that people exposed to negative campaigning express less confidence in the political process, stating

65 The study by Van der Meer (2010) offers explanations for cross-national differences in trust in parliament between 26 countries. His analyses show that a winner-takes-all electoral system obstructs trust in parliament. Although the Netherlands has an electoral system of proportional representation, its political culture took up some characteristics typical to the winner-takes-all systems, like polarization and confrontational leadership.

66 Arguably, political trust and political cynicism are two sides of the same coin because the presence of political cynicism is interpreted as an absence of political trust (Miller, 1974, also see Jackson, 2011). Furthermore, Pedersen (2012; also see Agger et al., 1961) also maintains that cynicism is typically defined as a lack of trust. Thus, when political cynicism increases, political trust decreases. Moreover, “In contrast to healthy skepticism, political cynicism is defined as a corrosive attitude that leads to political alienation.” (Cappella and Jamieson, 1996 in Thorson et al., 2000: 19).

that: “the tone of political campaigning contributes mightily to the public’s dwindling participation and growing cynicism” (p. 105; also see Mutz and Reeves, 2005).<sup>67</sup>

In addition, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) have demonstrated that news that emphasizes battle among politicians negatively affects citizens’ political attitudes and behavior. Citizens also become more cynical as a result of exposure to news coverage framing politics as a strategic game (also see De Vreese, 2005; Elenbaas and De Vreese, 2008).<sup>68</sup>

Thus, two types of media messages diminish political trust. First, messages that are largely negative in nature, including those in which a politician or political party is slandered. Second, messages that (truly or falsely) suggest that politics is nothing more than a tactical interplay between political rivals. By definition, demonization belongs to the first category, as it inherently encompasses a dark and extremely negative message because a party or politician is portrayed as the embodiment of a political regime that represents absolute evil. Arguably, however, demonization also belongs to the second category, as it has often been related to political strategy and discussed as such in the Dutch media (see Chapter 2, 3 and 4).

So how exactly does negative campaigning decrease political trust? According to Mutz and Reeves (2005) an uncivil discourse often violates “well-established face to face social norms for the polite expression of opposing views” (p. 1). The tone of political debate deviates so strongly from ordinary social norms, that citizens feel alienated from the political process. Citizens expect politicians to act in a civil manner and when politicians fail to do so, the public becomes disenchanted with the rules of the game. Increased polarization causes a decline in good humor, good manners and general civility within the political debate (King, 2000; also see Dionne,

67 Several studies emphasize that regardless of the actual tone of the debate, the media increasingly cover politics in an adversarial and uncivilized manner. From this perspective, the increasing tabloidization of the media is to be blamed for an increase in adversarial and contentious political reporting (Jamieson, 1992; Patterson, 1993; also see Brants and Van Praag, 2005). Although media coverage can increase or decrease the degree to which politics is perceived contentious, this poses no serious problem for the analysis presented in this chapter, since the public largely experiences the political debate as it has been covered by the media.

68 Scholars are divided about the question of to what extent the pervasiveness of negative campaigning plays a role. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) maintain that subjects do not need to be exposed to a lot of negative news coverage in order to see its effects (also see Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; Mutz and Reeves, 2005) while De Vreese (2005) argues that effects on political cynicism are actually dependent on the level of strategic news reports (also see Elenbaas and De Vreese, 2008).

1991). As a consequence of mudslinging and name-calling the public learns that “politicians in general are cynical, uncivil, corrupt, incompetent and untrustworthy.” (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995: 110). In short, an uncouth political debate disenchant the electorate and decreases its political trust (King, 2000).<sup>69</sup> Besides, negative messages appear more memorable than positive campaigning (Brians and Wattenberg, 1996; Chang, 2001), which may further enhance its impact. The following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: When demonization of parties and politicians increases, political trust decreases.

### Method and data

The main objective of this study is to estimate the effect of demonization of Dutch parliamentary parties/politicians on political trust. *Political trust* is the dependent variable and *demonization* is the independent variable. Data for both variables were collected on a weekly basis over an extensive period of time: between October 2002 and February 2006. The analyses in this chapter assume a one-directional relationship: i.e. demonization of Dutch political parties precedes a change in political trust. A suitable method for analyzing one-directional relationships over time is ARIMA modeling (for a detailed description of ARIMA modeling, see Chapter 4.)

### Dependent variable

The dependent variable is *political trust*. Data were obtained through Dutch market research institute *Peil.nl* (also see Chapter 4).<sup>70</sup> Between October 2002 and February 2006, respondents were asked to indicate their level of political trust in Dutch Parliament using a 10-point scale (1-10), with 1 indicating ‘very low trust’ and 10 indicating ‘very high trust’. There are some missing

<sup>69</sup> At this point it should be noted that attacks do not always have to be considered foul play or in conflict with social norms. For example, people may consider demonization as stating the truth, and thus perceive it as a legitimate statement. (This is also true for other forms of negative campaigning, however). Nonetheless, in this case a negative effect would still be expected. In this respect, it is not merely the expression of a coarse message that diminishes political trust, but rather its distressing content. In other words, the fact that a political party or politician of this nature took place in parliament is also expected to disenchant the voter and subsequently to lower his or her political trust.

<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately *Peil.nl* stopped collecting data about political trust after February 2006.

data, however, particularly during the summer and Christmas holidays. Since ARIMA modeling requires uninterrupted time series, these gaps were filled using data interpolation.<sup>71</sup>

The data retrieved from *Peil.nl* were verified by comparison with data from *Eurobarometer*, which show a similar trend in political trust in Dutch Parliament during this period in the Netherlands (for more detail see Appendix IV).

### Independent variables

The variable *demonization* indicates how often Dutch parliamentary parties/politicians were demonized during each week under analysis. Dutch written media were searched for articles that contain demonization (see Chapter 2 for a detailed description of how these articles have been selected and obtained; also see Chapter 4 for the argument that Dutch written media provide valid estimates of the increase/decrease in demonization from week to week). Between October 2002 and February 2006, 431 instances of political demonization were found in Dutch written media. The party that was demonized most during this period was the VVD, followed by the LPF, CDA and PVV (see Appendix V).

A control variable *populist parties in the media* was also included in the model. Arguably, when populist messages increase, political trust among the electorate decreases. A prominent feature of populist parties is that they portray the elite as a morally corrupt, power-driven, incompetent political class that fails to serve ordinary citizens. Although it is often assumed that populist rhetoric attracts disenchanted voters, Van der Brug (2003) has demonstrated that at the same time populist rhetoric can also fuel discontent among voters of these parties. Moreover, from a negative and distrustful

<sup>71</sup> The entire period under analysis has 23 missing values out of 181 observations. Data interpolation was used to estimate new values for the missing data. Based on the range of known values, new values were constructed. Simply put, the rounded up average of the first value before, and the first value after the missing value, became the new value. Although estimation errors cannot be ruled out, the gain with this practice is of greater value than the possible loss in accuracy. Normally, one steers clear from data interpolation with time-series analysis because there is the risk of artificially inflating the autocorrelation of the series. However, since the missing values are somewhat limited, and the degree of autocorrelation is not the topic of analysis, data interpolation has been used. More importantly, when missing values are treated as missing in the analysis, the results are not altered. Besides, since Dutch parliamentary recesses largely coincide with these public holidays, relative stable political attitudes can be expected during these periods, and thus relative stable polling results. The fact that most before and after data points vary minimally from each other supports this, and the choice of data estimation.

stance towards the political establishment, the electorate may infer that the entire democratic process is flawed, not just the targeted parties or politicians (see Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995). Since voters seem receptive towards messages that convey politics is corrupt and functioning poorly, it is likely that when populist messages increase, political trust among the electorate decreases.

The variable was measured by way of how often populist parties were visible in Dutch written media each week under analysis. During the period under investigation, five populist parties were present: SP, TON, *EénNL*, LPF and PVV. With the help of digital database *LexisNexis*, articles that mention either one of these party names, or the names of their leaders, were selected. These data were obtained from the same media sources used to collect data about demonization of Dutch parliamentary parties/politicians (see Chapter 2).

Finally, Keele (2007) maintains that when political trust falls as a function of a decline in interpersonal trust, the effect will not show immediately, but will occur gradually across time. However, if trust is expected to respond to performance or public display, it will show almost immediately. Van der Pas et al. (2011) also state that effects of portrayals in the media are generally strongest in the short run. Thus, an effect of demonization on political trust is expected to occur quickly after demonization takes place. As explained in Chapter 4, the point in the week at which *Peil.nl* conducts its survey, as well as in what time span the 3000 respondents fill it out, is unclear. Since this is likely to influence the estimation of the effect of demonization, and in order to cover at least one full week after demonization took place, the effects are estimated with both a lag of one week and a lag of two weeks.<sup>72</sup>

## Results

First, some descriptive data are presented. Note that figure 5.1 and figure 5.2 present the data series before they were made stationary as a requirement to

<sup>72</sup> As also explained in Chapter 4, due to a particular time series function in *Stata*, the time unit 'week' could not be adjusted to the manner in which weekly polling data is collected. Consequently, the effects of demonization and/or populist party visibility are not always estimated with even intervals, and it is most appropriate to estimate the effects of demonization or polling results with both a lag of one week and a lag of two weeks.

ARIMA modeling.

Figure 5.1 shows average levels of political trust in Dutch Parliament between October 2002 and February 2006. Political trust in the Dutch Parliament among the electorate shows a clear peak in February 2003. At this point, political trust scores 5.8 on a 10-point scale: 1 indicates 'no trust at all' and 10 indicates 'very high trust'. This peak occurs right after the general elections took place, suggesting that the prospect of a new government/parliament boosted political trust. However, this effect was short-lived, and political trust fell back to an average score of 4.3 in April 2003. In the remainder of the period, the level of trust varied less and remained rather stable, with a score little higher than 4.0. The low point in political trust occurs around October 2004, when the average level of political trust is 3.7. From January 2005 onwards until February 2006, the level of political trust gradually recovered to a score that remained more or less stable above 4.0. Overall, the level of political trust appears relatively low. Only in the beginning does political trust score above 5.0. The remainder of the time, the levels of trust remain below 5.0, an apparently unsatisfactory score on a scale that ranges from 1 to 10.<sup>73</sup>

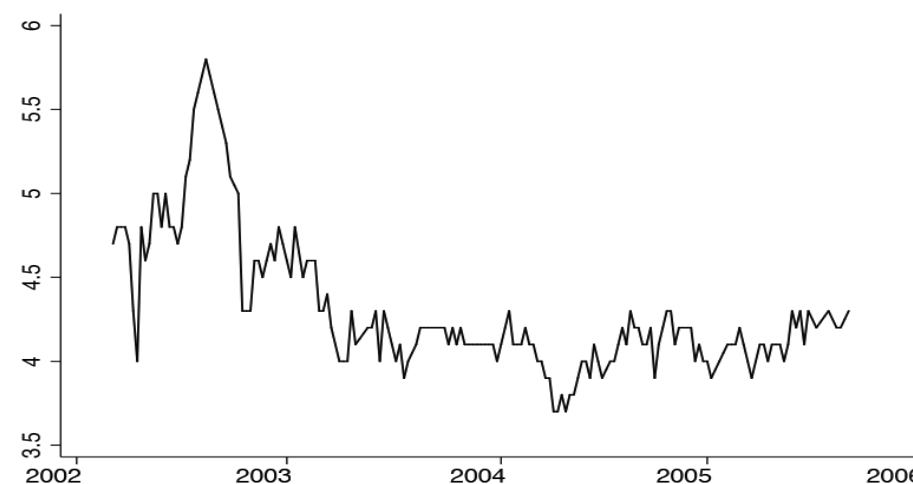


Figure 5.1 Weekly levels of political trust in Dutch Parliament between October 2002 and February 2006.

<sup>73</sup> Along the same line, *Eurobarometer* indicates that in 2003 and 2004 a minority of the Dutch respondents tended to trust Parliament (41 and 49 per cent), opposed to a majority in 2001 (62 per cent). Political trust in Dutch Parliament remained relatively low during 2005 and 2006. In these years 50 to 55 per cent of the respondents tended to trust in Dutch Parliament (see Appendix IV)

Figure 5.2 shows weekly levels of demonization between October 2002 and February 2006. Of particular interest is the peak in demonization that occurs in June 2004, a peak largely explained by the demonization of VVD Minister for Integration and Immigration, Rita Verdonk. Verdonk proposed using vignettes to depict the extent to which migrants had been integrated. The term ‘vignette’ met strong emotional resistance, and prominent VVD politician Hans Dijkstal related the proposal to the use of Stars of David that marked Jews under the Nazi regime. Verdonk demanded apologies and rectification, further fueling media attention for her proposal. In general, demonization occurred around 0 to 9 times a week, with the exception of one week in March 2004, when demonization occurred more than 10 times.

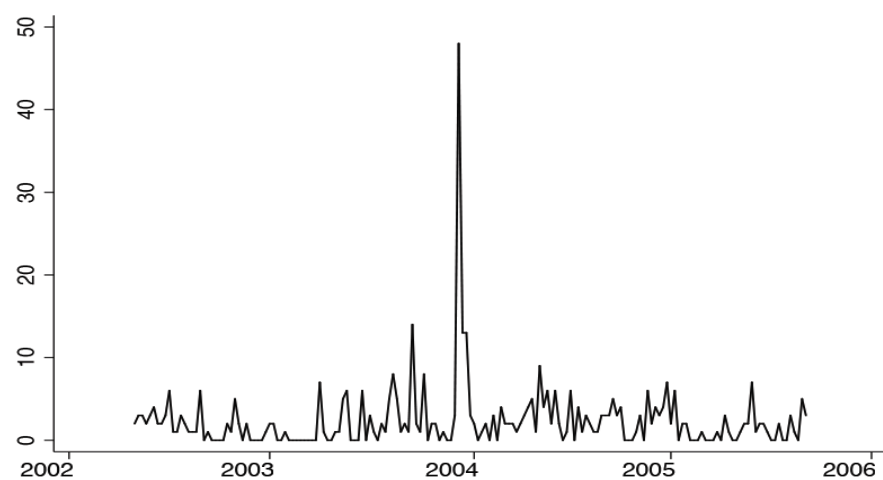


Figure 5.2 Weekly degree of demonization of Dutch parliamentary parties between October 2002 and February 2006.

Table 1 shows the results of three separate ARIMA models. Before discussing the results, it should be noted that all variables have been differenced once in order to make the series stationary.<sup>74</sup> Model 1a is an univariate

<sup>74</sup> Every single count of demonization is not expected to affect the electoral standing of the PVV to the same degree. In other words, the difference between 0 and 1 count of demonization is expected to be of greater influence than the difference between 20 and 21 counts of demonization. Taking the logged values of a series deals with this issue. Log-transformation changes the series in such a way that peaks in data are flattened and the series becomes more compact (Vliegthart, 2007: 82). Thus, the differences between the scores in the upper values are more compressed than the differences in the lower values (Kline, 2011: 63). Since it is a more suitable way of estimating the effect of demonization, the variable demonization was logged (also see Chapter 4). The unlogged variable demonization has a skewness of 7.3 and a kurtosis of 75.6. Skewness values higher than 3 and kurtosis values higher than 20 are considered a serious problem. At this point, corrective action is required since this severely violates the ‘normality’ assumption of the ARIMA model. Log-transformation deals with this problem: after logging the skewness of demonization is 0.5 and the kurtosis 3.2. All other variables did not require log-transformation in order to reach acceptable skewness and kurtosis levels.

ARIMA model, where the dependent series political trust correctly takes into account the series’ own past. More specifically, all time related structure in the dependent series is accounted for by adding an AR term. Model 1a shows that the ARIMA model coefficient is indeed significant (-0.17, significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ). Furthermore, the residuals and squared residuals of all models presented in table 1 resemble white noise.

Table 5.1 Influence of demonization on levels of political trust in Dutch Parliament between October 2002 and February 2006.

	Model 1a	T	Model 1b	T	Model 1c	T
AR (t-1)	-0.17**	-2.10	-0.19**	-2.37	-0.18**	-2.18
Demonization (t-1)	-	-	-0.03**	-2.11	-0.03**	-2.24
Demonization (t-2)	-	-	-0.01	-0.73	-0.01	-0.56
Populist visibility (t-1)	-	-	-	-	0.00	-1.37
Populist visibility (t-2)	-	-	-	-	0.00	-0.66
AIC		-212.43		-212.76		-210.52
N		174		172		172

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$  (one-tailed); - variable is not included in the model.

Model 1b shows that demonization does have a significant negative effect on political trust with a lag of one week (-0.03, significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ) but the effect becomes insignificant with a lag of two weeks.<sup>75</sup> The effect is also rather small and it should be kept in mind that interpretation is a little less straightforward since the variable demonization has been logged.<sup>76</sup> However, results indicate that each time a Dutch party or politician is demonized, political trust among the electorate diminishes a little. In other words, the more parties and politicians are demonized, the lower the level of political trust.

In order to test the robustness of these findings, the control variable populist parties in the media has been added to the model, again with a lag of one week, and a lag of two weeks. Model 1c shows that, contrary to expectations, the visibility of populist parties (SP, TON, *EénNL*, LPF, and

<sup>75</sup> Additional models that only included a lag of one week have been run. The effect in the first week remains significant, also when the control variable ‘visibility of populist parties’ is included.

<sup>76</sup> The independent variable is logged while the dependent variable is not. This suggests the following interpretation of the coefficient: a 1% increase in X would lead to a ‘coefficient/100’ decrease in Y. Thus, a one per cent increase in demonization would result in a 0.0003 decrease in political trust.

PVV) in the media has no significant effect on political trust. Nevertheless, results do indicate that the significant negative effect of demonization on political trust remains (-0.03, significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ).

Additional models have been estimated that included variables that capture key events (Dutch general elections, murder of Theo van Gogh, cabinet crisis) that attracted considerable media exposure and which are expected to have also influenced political trust among the electorate. In all of these additional models, the negative effect of demonization on political trust remained significant with a lag of one week.<sup>77</sup> This leads to the conclusion that this effect is robust, and H1 is supported.

## Conclusion

Academic literature suggests that certain types of media messages diminish political trust. This is especially true of messages that are largely negative in nature, for example, messages in which a politician or political party is slandered. Demonization certainly belongs to this category, as it involves a deeply negative message where a party or politician is portrayed as the embodiment of a political regime that represents absolute evil. In addition, demonization has often been related to political strategy and discussed as such in the Dutch media.

In this chapter, the effect of demonization on political trust in Dutch Parliament was examined. The results suggest that demonization has a negative effect: when demonization of Dutch political parties and politicians increases, political trust in Parliament among the Dutch electorate decreases. The outcome of this study suggests that voters are indeed disenchanted by an uncivil discourse that violates the well-established social norms of political expression. Apparently, citizens expect politicians to act in a civil manner,

<sup>77</sup> In a further attempt to check the robustness of these findings, three variables were added to capture the effect of key events. The first event variable marks the Dutch general elections that took place on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2003. Results indicate that in the week after the general elections, political trust significantly increased. The second event variable marks the murder of Theo Van Gogh. The direction of the effect is negative, but not significant. The third event variable marks the cabinet crisis that took place in March 2005. Despite the disruptive character of the crisis, it had a near significant positive effect ( $p = 0.0551$ ). More importantly, results show that the effect of demonization on political trust remains significant and negative. Besides, when a control variable that captures the peak in demonization induced by Verdonk's proposal, is also added, the effect of demonization remains significant in week one, removing concern that it is only this peak that caused the significant negative effect.

and when politicians fail to do so, the public becomes embittered with the rules of the game. Moreover, with a deeply negative stance towards political competitors, the electorate may infer that the entire democratic process is flawed, not just the targeted parties or politicians (see Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; King, 2000; Mutz and Reeves, 2005). Also, these findings provide further evidence for the claim made by Bovens and Wille (2008; also see Van der Meer, 2010) that an increasing polarizing and adversarial political culture can explain a decline in political trust.

These findings are likely to be of particular interest to those wishing to safeguard the stability of democratic political systems. A decline in political trust has been related to all kinds of democratic ills. When political trust is low, the effectiveness and legitimacy of government action come under pressure. Almond and Verba (1963) claim that political trust is an essential component of civic culture and, according to Easton (1965), political trust is crucial to diffuse support for democracy. Moreover, since “the dominant view in scholarly debate is that low levels of political trust should be a major reason for concern” (Marien and Hooghe, 2011: 267) it can be concluded that demonization can have far-reaching unintended consequences.

Based on this outcome, analyzing other potential consequences of demonization could be of interest. There is substantial evidence that negative campaigning also negatively affects the sense of political efficacy, as well as that it can negatively affect the public mood (Lau et al., 2007). Future research could examine the extent to which demonization has diminishing effects on political efficacy and the public mood.

Finally, this study has some limitations. First, it uses aggregated data, which entails that the analyses indicate that overall the electorate's political trust declines after being exposed to demonization in the media. It also examined a general pattern, and estimated an average effect, so fails to expose individual, or lower group level relationships between demonization and levels of political trust. For example, previous research has indicated that effects of negative campaigning differ between men and women (King and McConnell, 2003), while other studies have indicated that effects of negative campaigning differ depending on the age, level of education and ideological



standing of the respondent (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1997; also see Elenbaas and De Vreese, 2008; Garramone and Atkin, 1986). In addition, this chapter involves the implicit assumption that all voters have been exposed equally to demonization. However, that is not realistic, so research about lower level relationships will provide a deeper understanding of the underlying processes.

Second, the findings cannot be generalized without taking into consideration the context of the study. The period under analysis followed the political murder of Fortuyn (May 2002) relatively quickly. Before his death, Fortuyn had repeatedly stated that his demonization had put him in danger. After his murder, several public and political actors were accused of fomenting hatred against him, and creating a climate in which Fortuyn was likely to be killed. These accusations led to a heated public debate, and demonization became heavily charged. This may have strengthened a negative effect on political trust.