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Who votes for the populist left?

Comparing voter attitudes of the populist left with those of the populist right and mainstream left

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Abstract. *Contemporary literature has paid attention to populism, but mainly to the populist right. Literature about the populist left has focused on the aggregate level but what voter characteristics increase the likelihood to vote for the populist left remains somewhat neglected. This thesis aims to identify voter characteristics that increase the likelihood to vote for the left wing populist party SP compared to the right wing populist party PVV and the mainstream left wing party PvdA. To add to the literature this study tests the effects of anti-capitalist attitudes, euroscepticism, political discontent, anti-migration attitudes and socio-economic status on the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PvdA and PVV. Data is deployed from the National Elections Study (NKO) 2012 (N=569). The results from this thesis show that SP voters are similar as PVV voters on levels of euroscepticism and political discontent; a key difference is the lower levels of anti-immigration attitudes and the lower levels of income that are found among SP voters. PVV voters also tend to be less educated. Compared to the mainstream left SP voters are similar in levels of political discontent and migration attitudes. The higher levels of euroscepticism and the lower levels of income distinguish the SP voters from PvdA voters, also PvdA voters tend to be higher educated than SP voters. Surprisingly, anti-capitalist attitudes have no effect on the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PVV and PvdA.*

Keywords: Dutch politics, Left-wing populism, populism, voter characteristics

The past two decades Western Europe witnessed the rise of populist parties (Roodijn, 2013 & Mudde, 2004). Scholars have identified several right wing parties as populist. In France, the right wing populist party Front National (FN) made it to the second round of the elections (Roodijn, 2013), and in Austria the right wing populist Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) has regained popularity (Mudde, 2004). However, populism is also found among the left wing parties. In Greece the left wing populist party Syriza

has gained popularity as well as the left wing populist party Podemos in Spain. This trend is also seen in the Netherlands where the populist right wing Freedom Party (PVV) currently holds 15 seats in parliament, and the populist left wing Socialist Party (SP) holds equal amounts of seats in parliament (Ipsos, 2017).

A great deal of literature addresses populism, explaining not only how to define populism (Mudde, 2004 & Roodijn, 2013), but also which characteristics of the political structures make it more likely for populist parties to succeed (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006) whether populism is really a threat to democracy (Kaltwasser, 2012), and individual characteristics that explain right wing populist voting (Van der Brug, 2003). Such academic literature is mostly about right wing populism (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006 & Van der Brug, 2003 & Oesch, 2008).

A much smaller number of studies pay attention to the populist left. March (2007) and March and Mudde (2005) have investigated what characterises populist left parties and the position that the populist left parties have filled during history. But while these studies are of great value for our understanding of left wing populism, the individual characteristics that contribute to a vote for the populist left are understudied. March and Rommerskirchen (2015) link success of the radical left, which overlaps to some extent with the populist left, to euroscepticism, anti-globalisation sentiments and higher levels of unemployment, but focus on the aggregate level, leaving the role of micro level characteristics in explaining left populist success unclear. Thus, the relevance of individual characteristics in increasing the likelihood to vote for the populist left has not yet been acknowledged in the academic field.

However, positions of voters and parties are not necessarily the same (Kselman and Niou, 2009 & Roodijn, van der Brug and de Lange, 2016). Therefore, this study will look at which individual characteristics increase the likelihood to vote for the populist left. It is important to take into account that party ideology might not be the (only) reason to vote for a certain party; scholars may be aware of the characteristics of left wing populist parties but literature lacks to provide knowledge about which motivations are the most important when voting for left wing populist parties. One could vote for the populist left as an economic protest, but also one could protest vote for the populist left to show discontent with mainstream politics (Kselman and Niou,

2009). This thesis compares voting for the populist left with voting for the populist right and the mainstream left on voting. The following research question is guiding in this study: *Which voter characteristics increase the likelihood of voting for a left wing populist party in comparison to a right wing populist party and a mainstream left wing party?* This study will focus on the Netherlands, which is characterized by a multiparty system where both the populist left and the populist right are in parliament, which makes a comparison possible between the electoral of those parties. The left wing populist party that will be used in this study is the SP (SocialistParty), as the right wing populist party the PVV (FreedomParty) will be used, and for mainstream left this will be the PvdA (LabourParty).

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to the academic literature about left wing populism. First, by offering insight into the individual characteristics that increase the likelihood to vote for the populist left. Secondly, comparing the importance of these characteristics to the likelihood to cast a vote for the radical right this thesis will show to what extent there are different forms of populism, and that their electoral support is found among different types of people. Third and lastly, by comparing characteristics increasing the likelihood to vote for the populist left wing to the likelihood to vote for a mainstream left wing party this study will show to what extent the populist left has a unique position in the left political spectrum.

This study finds it societal relevance in a better understanding of the results of recent elections and the place populism holds in not only those elections but also in the public debate. Comparing attitudes explaining left wing populist voting with attitudes explaining right wing populist voting provides information for both parties and voters, which can help them interpret election results and processes that are taking place in the contemporary political landscape. For voters the insights derived from this study might also contribute to a better understanding of the position of the populist left in the political spectrum. For political parties the results of this study might offer insight in what voters want and what individual characteristics shape voting behaviour.

Theoretical framework

What is left wing populism?

An important starting point of this study is the definition of populism. Mudde (2004:543) defines populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”. This ideology is not necessarily intertwined with right wing or left-wing ideology. Populism can be combined with a multitude of political ideologies. March (2007) describes populism as a ‘chameleonic’ concept, implying that it is a political style that can adapt to the context. This political style often involves simple language and an appeal to the gut feeling. However, while it’s true that these tactics can also be used by mainstream parties, March (2007) and Mudde (2004) emphasize that the focus on the distinction between the ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite’ is a unique feature used by populist parties.

Contemporary left wing populist parties can be characterized as radical (March & Rommerskirchen, 2012). This is because of the fact that they reject the contemporary capitalist structure that is found in society and because “they advocate ‘root and branch’ transformation of capitalism in order to take power from existing political and economic elites” (March & Rommerskirchen, 2012:41). Here the division of society in ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’ by Mudde (2004), which is a core element of populism, is described as part of the left wing populist ideology. The elite is composed by the business elite and the government that looks out for this business elite. The pure people is defined as the common worker who is disadvantaged by the elite (Otjes & Louwerse, 2015). Thus, the government is currently not representing and serving the ‘common people’. Also, neoliberalism, or contemporary capitalism, is described as problematic because this is perceived as responsible for the inequality as the contemporary structure behind social and political arrangements (March & Rommerskirchen, 2012:41).

The SP qualifies as a left-wing populist party (March & Mudde, 2005: 35). When looking at the party programme of the SP the division between the elite and the

common worker is clearly portrayed. With their current campaign slogan 'Take the power!' (*Pak de macht*) the party addresses that the richest 20% in society keeps on profiting and is enjoying more economic benefits while 'the rest of the Dutch people saw their income decrease' (SP, 2017). Also neoliberalism and capitalism are clearly problematized. As they state in 'About the SP' section: 'The world is flooded by neoliberalism, a new belief in the blessings of capitalism and the free market. The restored world domination of capitalism as economic base of society is creating new oppositions in society and strengthens existing oppositions.'" (Own translation, SP, 1999).

Which factors could explain the left-wing populist vote?

Positions of parties and voters are not necessarily the same; as mentioned in the introduction there could be motivations underlying a vote that are not based on party stances; which is the case with a protest vote (Kselman and Niou, 2009). Also, a voter could base its decision on one stance of a party, a stance that is very important to him or her, for example an economic stance, while other stances, like cultural stances, are less important in choosing a party to vote for.

Expected is that the social economic position of the voter is of great importance in explaining the left wing populist vote. As will be explained in the following paragraphs the relationship between social economic position and left wing populist voting is expected to be mediated by several attitudes. The paragraphs are in order of expected importance in increasing the likelihood to vote for the populist left; in which the first paragraph is expected to be the most unique distinguishing individual attitude. The last paragraph is about the above mentioned mediation; in which the relationship social economic status and populist left voting is mediated by attitudes that will be explained in the following paragraphs.

I start with a paragraph about anti-capitalist attitudes, followed by a paragraph about euroscepticism and a paragraph about political discontent. The fourth paragraph focusses on migration, expected is that this is especially relevant for the populist right voter but is worth taking in account because it is neglected in studies about left wing populism. The last paragraph is about social economic position and

will provide insight in how the above mentioned attitudes are mediating the relationship between social economic position and populist left wing voting.

Anti-capitalist attitudes

The populist left rejects the structures underlying contemporary capitalism; because the inequality is structuring not only the economy but also politics. They advocate radical change of the neo-liberal economic structure (March and Rommerskirchen, 2012). Economic redistribution is an important element that is desired by the populist left as they aim for “alternative economic and power structures involving a major redistribution of resources from the existing political elites” (March and Mudde, 2005:23).

The SP, or socialist party, is also characterized by this anti-capitalist attitude; opposing the free market and advocating income equality and social protection (SP, 1999 & SP, 2015). The SP takes an anti-capitalist stance in the political field, whereas this is not found among other parties. The socialist fundamentals of the party are opposed to the free market ideology, which is seen as a capitalist principle (SP, 1999 & SP, 2015, Azmanova, 2011).

However, it is important to note that there is a lack of literature on the theorizing and operationalization of anti-capitalist attitudes; especially regarding anti-capitalist attitudes among individuals. The theorizing and operationalization of anti-capitalist attitudes in this thesis is thus somewhat experimental.

Expected based on the available literature is that this anti-capitalist attitude is a unique and distinguishing factor explaining a vote for the SP compared to both a vote for the PVV and a vote for the PvdA. Individuals opposing capitalism will thus be more likely to vote for the SP because this party represents their economic stances. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1a: An anti-capitalist attitude increases the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PVV

H1b: An anti-capitalist attitude increases the likelihood to vote for SP compared to mainstream left-wing parties

Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism is an important element incorporated in the ideology of populist parties (March and Rommerskirchen, 2015). Taggart (2014) shows the relevance of euroscepticism for populist parties: “Almost universally there is an acceptance that the architecture of the EU is somehow insufficiently representative” (Taggart, 2014: 277). The European union is not only lacking representativeness of the people, but also services mainly elite-business interests (Taggart, 2014). Euroscepticism is a uniting factor between left wing populist parties and right wing populist parties. Both parties voice concerns that are not addressed by mainstream parties (Halikiopoulou, Nanou and Vasilopoulou, 2012:505). While “mainstream parties have generally converged on pro-European-integration positions” (Buhr, 2012:572).

The relationship between euroscepticism and citizens left-right wing ideology is argued to be curvilinear according to van Elsas and van der Brug (2015). This means that euroscepticism is more found among radical left parties, like the SP, and radical right parties, like the PVV. Euroscepticism is less present among mainstream parties. The reason for the radical left to oppose European integration is that in their perception this integration is threat to national welfare provision. According to van Elsas and van der Brug (2015:199) “market integration threatens national welfare states by increasing international competition and decreasing the regulatory powers of national governments, and thus conflicts with one of the core achievements of the left “. The populist right’s scepticism towards European integration is linked to an anti-immigrant attitude and longing to defend the national culture against foreigners (Halikiopoulou, Nanou and Vasilopoulou, 2012). However, this argument will be further elaborated in the section about migration.

From the above, we can expect that that Eurosceptic voters are more likely to vote for the populist left or the populist right compared to the mainstream parties. Thus, the expectation can be derived that SP and PVV voters have the same level of euroscepticism. Levels of euroscepticism are expected to be lower among mainstream left voters compared to left-wing populist voters. (Van Elsas and van der Brug, 2015). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2a: Euroscepticism has no effect on the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PVV

H2b: Euroscepticism increases the likelihood to vote for SP compared to mainstream left wing parties

Political discontent and protest voting

Political discontent is positively related to the success of populist parties (Rooduijn, van der Brug and de Lange, 2016). Political discontent can be defined as low levels of satisfaction with politics and democracy. This contributes to the success of populist left and right because these parties position themselves as opposed to the political elite and criticize the elite (Mudde, 2004). Populist parties argue that democracy should be founded on the voice of the people, and that democratic processes are dominated too much by the elite (Rooduijn, van der Brug and de Lange, 2016). So if individuals are discontent with mainstream politics, they may experience that populist parties are voicing their discontent, which increases the likelihood to vote for a populist party (Rooduijn, van der Brug and de Lange, 2016).

Voting can thus be a way of expressing dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties (Kselman and Niou, 2009). The theory about protest voting describes how a vote can be an instrument through which people can express their discontent. “When a voter, unhappy with their previously supported party, has an alternative that looks viable, they will be more likely to protest vote than to abstain” (Kang, 2004 p85).

Halikiopoulou, Nanou and Vasilopoulou (2012, p506) state that “the radical right and new populist parties are ‘driven largely by their opposition or protest strategy’”. This study draws the expectation that the same argument can be made regarding a vote for the SP; as voters are not content with the mainstream parties they will be more likely to vote for SP. This protest vote is thus a way to voice their discontent.

A protest vote is not per se based upon ideology: “the prime motive of a protest voter is to show discontent with ‘the’ political elite by voting for a party that is an outcast in the political arena “(Van der Brug, 2003:91). Because both the SP and PVV, as populist parties, voice a critical perspective on the mainstream political parties and political processes the expectation can be drawn that voters for these parties do

not differ in their levels of political discontent. The mainstream left-wing parties could be perceived to be part of the elite that dominates political processes, voters for these parties see their party be part of the active government and might feel better represented by politics, which is likely to increase their levels of political satisfaction. For this reason, the expectation can be derived that political discontent is higher among SP and PVV voters compared to mainstream left party voters. This results in the following hypotheses:

H3a: Political discontent has no effect on the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PVV

H3b: Political discontent increases the likelihood to vote for SP compared to mainstream left-wing parties

Migration

Migration is connected to right wing populist parties, but not so much to left-wing populist parties (Otjes and Louwense, 2015 & Van der Brug, 2003). Otjes and Louwense (2015) indicate based on party voting behaviour within parliament that anti-immigrant attitudes are found in voting behaviour of the PVV, while this is not found in the voting behaviour of SP. However, in general the role of migration for left wing populism has received little attention; and no clear-cut link between left wing populism and migration has been provided by the literature.

Migration can be expected to be an important factor distinguishing left- and right wing populist voting. The positions towards migration differ between the PVV and the SP. The SP is known to want to pose restrictions on migration, but this is particularly aimed at labour migration in order to protect the national economy from possible unfair competition related to wages and jobs (SP, 2016). Migration also isn't one of the core ideas of the SP; making it less likely that individuals opposing migration will vote SP.

The PVV is known as an anti-immigrant party with nationalistic stances. In the party manifesto there is clearly stated that they want to close the borders to protect the Netherlands from Islamic migrants (PVV, 2017A). In the perspective of this party migration is not only possibly an economic threat, but also a cultural threat to the

Dutch identity. The opposition towards migration is one of the core elements of the PVV.

Van der Brug (2003) explains the success of List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), a populist right wing party that was successful around 2002, by using theories about how lower socioeconomic positions are linked into anti-immigration attitudes. However, this study focuses on the anti-migrant dimension of the radical right party. While being anti-migration is not the core message of the SP, the party does want to restrict migration by re-introducing labour permits, which enables the government to regulate migration more (SP, 2016). Regulated migration may appear to be beneficial for less skilled workers, generally people of a low socioeconomic position, who compete for the same scarce resources, like jobs and houses, as migrants (Van der Waal and de Koster, 2015). So, from this the expectation can be derived that individuals in a weaker socio-economic position may vote SP to protect their own position.

However, as said before no clear-cut link between migration and left wing populist voting has been provided by the literature. Also, opposing migration is not a core element of the ideology of the SP while it is a core element in the ideology of the PVV. Based upon party manifestos and party stances I expect migration to have no effect on SP voting compared to PVV and mainstream left voting. This results in the following hypothesis:

H4a: Anti-immigration attitudes decrease the change of voting for the SP compared to the PVV

H4b: Anti-immigration attitudes have no effect on the likelihood to vote for SP compared to mainstream left wing parties

Socioeconomic position

Expected is that a lower socio-economic position increases the likelihood to vote for the populist left. However, this relationship is mediated by the previously mentioned attitudes. The above-mentioned characteristics, anti-capitalist attitudes, euroscepticism, political discontent and attitudes towards migrants are known to be related to the socio-economic position of individuals. The economic position of individuals influences their attitudes, for example their position towards economic policies like free trade (Fordham and Kleinberg, 2012). The attitudes that are part of this study are more likely to be found among people with a lower socioeconomic position.

Anti-capitalist attitudes are more likely to be found among people of lower socioeconomic status; these are the people that are disadvantaged by processes related to capitalism. Kriesi et al. (2006) state that globalisation leads to a new structural conflict in Western Europe; dividing society into the people that profit from globalisation and the people that are disadvantaged by globalisation (Van der Brug, 2003). Globalisation and trade openness is linked to capitalism, in which a global market and free trade plays an important role (Azmanova, 2011). Individuals who are disadvantaged by globalisation, such as low skilled workers, generally are more opposed towards free trade and globalisation in general which are core elements of the capitalist economy (Van der Waal and de Koster, 2015 & Fordham and Kleinberg, 2012). For this reason, lower socioeconomic status can be linked to anti-capitalist attitudes.

Euroscepticism is positively related to being less educated. Lubbers (2010) approach of political cynicism implies that the less educated are generally less interested in politics and have a tendency to be more sceptical about politics. "Because the public would perceive the EU as an extension of national politics, negative evaluations of national politicians would erode a positive connotation of the EU" (Lubbers, 2010 p24). Being of low socio-economic position shapes your attitude towards trade openness. Thus, making it more likely for them to oppose trade openness, which is an inherent part of European integration, in order to protect their own more economically fragile position (Fordham and Kleinberg, 2012).

Feelings of political discontent are also more likely to be found among people from lower socioeconomic positions. Hooghe, Marien and Vroome (2012) show that the less educated are more likely to experience less political trust. Lubbers (2010) shows that the less educated have the tendency to be more sceptical about politics.

An individuals' socioeconomic position is related to an individuals' position towards migration: people of low socio-economic status compete for the same scarce resources as migrants: these can be jobs, wages but also housing and social security benefits (Manevska and Achterberg, 2013). Also, the less educated tend to have more nationalistic attitudes; this is linked to the perceived cultural threat that migrants pose to the national identity (Lubbers, 2010). The following hypotheses can be derived from this paragraph:

H5a: A lower socio-economic position has no effect on the likelihood to vote for SP compared to the likelihood to vote for PVV

H5b: A lower socio-economic position increases the likelihood to vote for the SP compared to the mainstream left.

Method

For this study the Netherlands is a very suitable case for two reasons. First, the Dutch political landscape is characterized by the presence of many parties, such as the Socialist party, (SP) the Freedom Party (PVV) and the Labour party (PvdA). This makes it possible to compare groups of voters for the populist left with groups of voters of the populist right and the mainstream left, which provides insight in which people are more likely vote left-wing populist and why. Second, the parties that are used in this study have been active in the parliament for over a substantive period of time.

In order to test the hypotheses of the theoretical section this thesis uses survey data from the National Election Study of 2012 (*Nationaal Kiesonderzoek, NKO*). This survey is conducted among people who are entitled to vote in the Netherlands subsequent to each parliamentary election. The last round has been conducted in 2017, but the data of this round is not available yet. The most recent available survey is from 2012, which was collected 6 weeks after the elections, and is used for this

study. The data is gathered via computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), and via paper surveys, known as paper-and-pencil interviewing (PAPI).

The dependent variable in this study is the vote casted in the parliamentary election of 2012. Using this variable I constructed a variable that consists of three categories: a vote for the SP, a vote for the PVV and a vote for the PvdA. Votes for other parties, don't know answers and missing answers are excluded. The N of this study is 569, however this is not equally distributed among voter groups. 140 people voted for the SP making up 24,6% of the respondents, 89 people voted for the PVV making up 15,6% of the respondents, and 340 people voted for the PvdA, this is the largest group in the study and makes up for 59,8% of the respondents.

The first of the independent variables is an item that taps into anti-capitalist attitudes by asking whether the respondent perceives big companies as threat to democracy, in which 1 = fully agree and 5 = fully disagree. Due to limitations in the data it is not possible to find other relevant items measuring anti-capitalist attitudes.

The second set of independent variables measures the level of euroscepticism; these items are used to form a scale. The satisfaction with the European Union is measured on a scale from 1= very satisfied to 4 = not at all satisfied. Trust in the European Union is measured from 1= very much to 4=no trust at all. Lastly, the position of the respondents towards European unification are taken in account where 1 = should go further to 7= has gone too far. The last item is recoded in order to match the range of the first two items. Category 1 and 2 are recoded into value 1, category 3 into 2, category 4 and 5 into 3, category 6 and 7 are recoded into value 4. Because of the relative small N of this study (N=569) basing this on a factor score is not the best option. The recoding in this study is based upon the distribution of the answers on the items, which is visualized in the histograms in appendix 1. The answers have been recoded in the following way: category 1 and 2 are recoded into value 1, category 3 into 2, category 4 and 5 into 3, category 6 and 7 are recoded into value 4. The Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .606, indicating that this scale is of acceptable reliability and internal consistency.

The protest is measured via multiple items which tap into political discontent; together these items form a scale for which a higher score indicates higher levels of political discontent. The first item is trust in government, for which the answer

categories range from 1 = very much to 4 = no trust at all. Political cynicism is measured via two items. The first item asks whether politicians are reliable which can be answered with categories ranging from 1 = fully agree to 5=fully disagree. The second item asks whether the respondent thinks politicians only have fine talk in which can be answered with categories ranging from 1 = fully agree to 5 is fully disagree. The items about political cynicism have been recoded in order to match the range of 1 to 4 of the first item, making it possible to construct a scale. Also, items are recoded in a way that a higher score indicates a higher level of political discontent. As mentioned regarding the previous scale a factor score is not a viable option in this study, and items are recoded based upon the distribution of the answers of the respondents. The histograms of this distribution can be found in appendix 1. For both the first and second item of the scale the first four answer categories have remain the same, but the category 5 has been recoded into category 4. The Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .680, indicating that this scale is of acceptable reliability and internal consistency.

Perceptions about migration are measured with three items, which together form a scale for which a higher score indicates stronger anti-migration attitudes. The position of the respondent regarding asylum seekers is measured on a scale from 1 = admit more to 7 = send back more. The cultural threat posed by migration is measured with an item asking whether the Dutch culture is threatened, in which 1= fully agree and 5 = fully disagree. Also the respondents' opinion about integration is taken in account, for this an item asking whether foreigners can 1= keep their own culture or 7= should adjust to Dutch culture. The items are recoded to match the scale range of 1 to 4 of the other scales. Recoding is based upon the distribution of the answers given by the respondents, the histograms upon which this recoding is based can be found in appendix 1. The answers of the first and the last items are recoded in the following way: category 1 and 2 are recoded into value 1, category 3 into 2, category 4 and 5 into 3, category 6 and 7 are recoded into value 4. For the second item the first four answer categories remained the same, but category 5 has been recoded into category 4, also this item has been reversed to match the direction of the other items. The Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .660, indicating that this scale is of acceptable reliability and internal consistency.

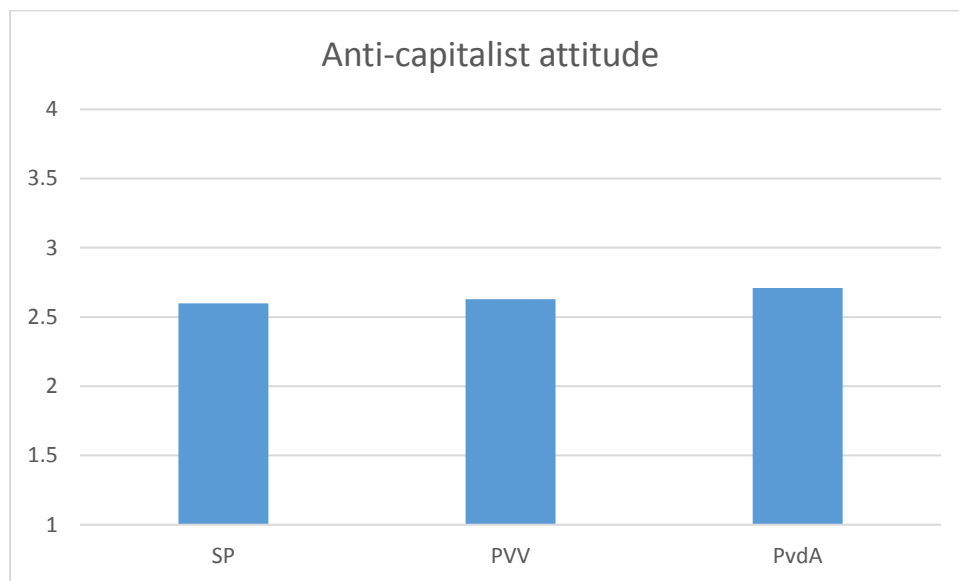
Lastly, the social economic status of the respondents is measured with educational level and spendable income. Educational level is measured through the highest completed education of the respondent in which 1 = elementary school and 5 = university. From this item a dummy is made with the following categories: 1 = lower educated, 2 = medium educated and 3 = higher educated. However, to gain an accurate perspective of the socio-economic position of the respondent this study also takes the spendable household income in account, which is measured in categories of percentage of income. A higher spendable income implies a better socio-economic position.

The effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable has been tested using a multinomial logistic regression, which is performed using SPSS. The SP is used as the reference category in the model. Multinomial logistic regression offers the possibility of comparing the effects of individual characteristics and attitudes on voting for the SP compared to the effect of these characteristics on voting for the PVV and PvdA.

Results: descriptive analyses

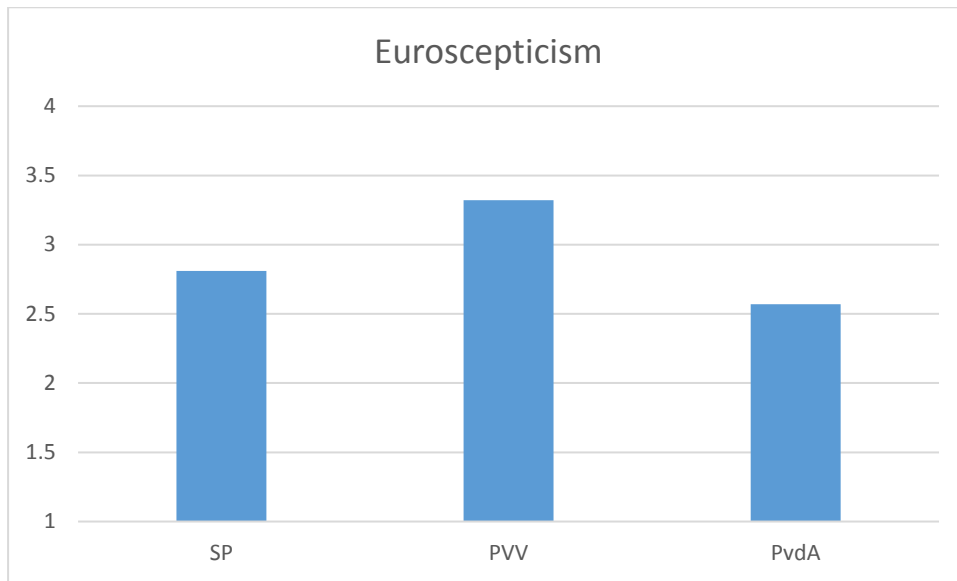
Before performing a multinomial logistic regression on the data it is indicative to take a look at the descriptive statistics of the items used per group of voters. Expected was that SP voters to hold more anti-capitalist attitudes compared to PVV and PvdA voters. Surprisingly, when looking at graph 1 one can see that the mean the anti-capitalist attitude is actually the lowest among the SP voters.

Graph 1: Descriptive statistics anti-capitalist attitude. NKO 2012.



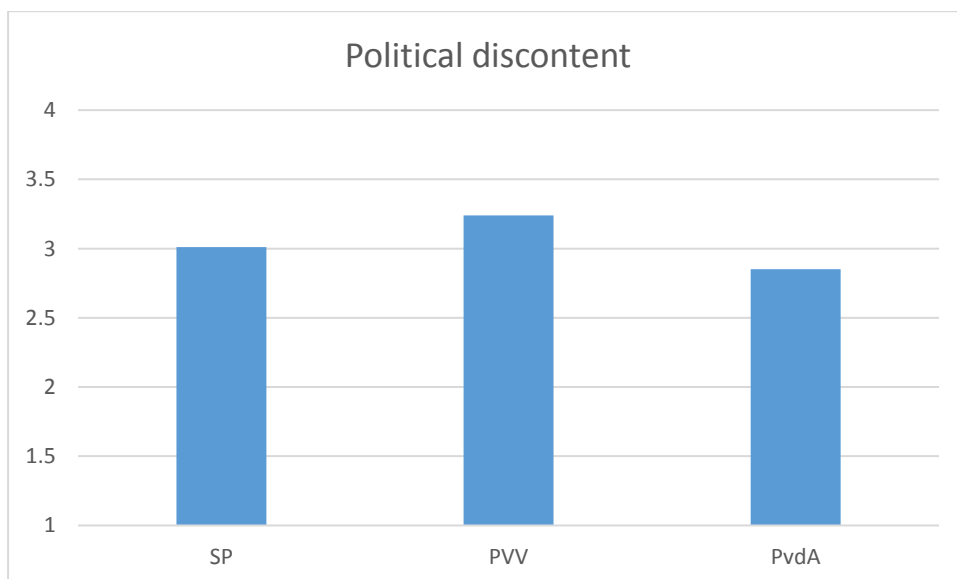
When looking at levels of euroscepticism among voters the expectation was that SP voters are somewhat equally eurosceptic as PVV voters. PvdA voters were expected to be less eurosceptic. When looking at the graph below one could see that indeed SP and PVV voters are on average more eurosceptic than PvdA voters, but that the mean level of euroscepticism is higher for PVV voters than for SP voters.

Graph 2: Descriptive statistics euroscepticism. NKO 2012.



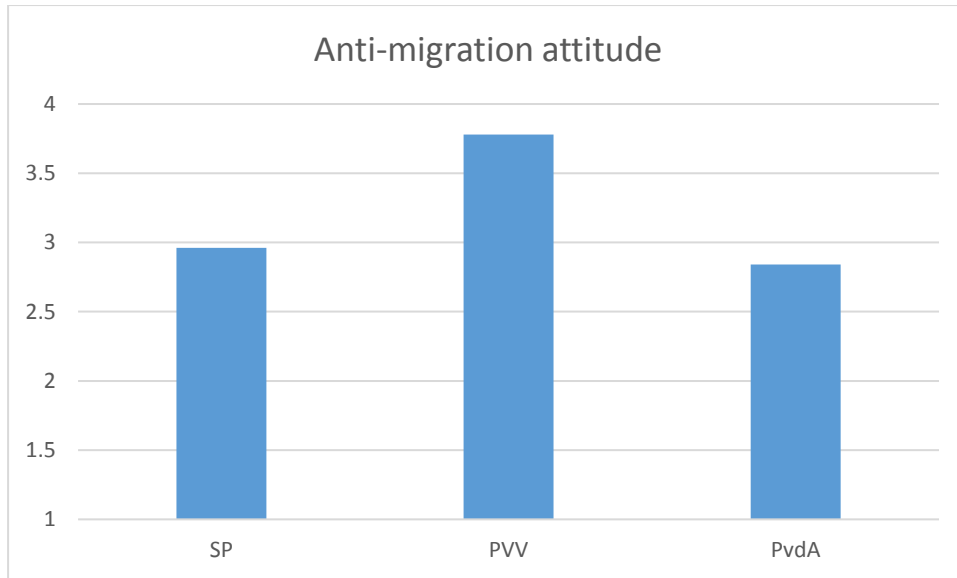
Furthermore, SP and PVV voters both are expected to be political discontented; graph 3 shows that PVV voters are somewhat more political discontent than SP voters. PvdA voters are on average the less political discontent, this is in line with the expectations.

Graph 3: Descriptive statistics political discontent. NKO 2012.



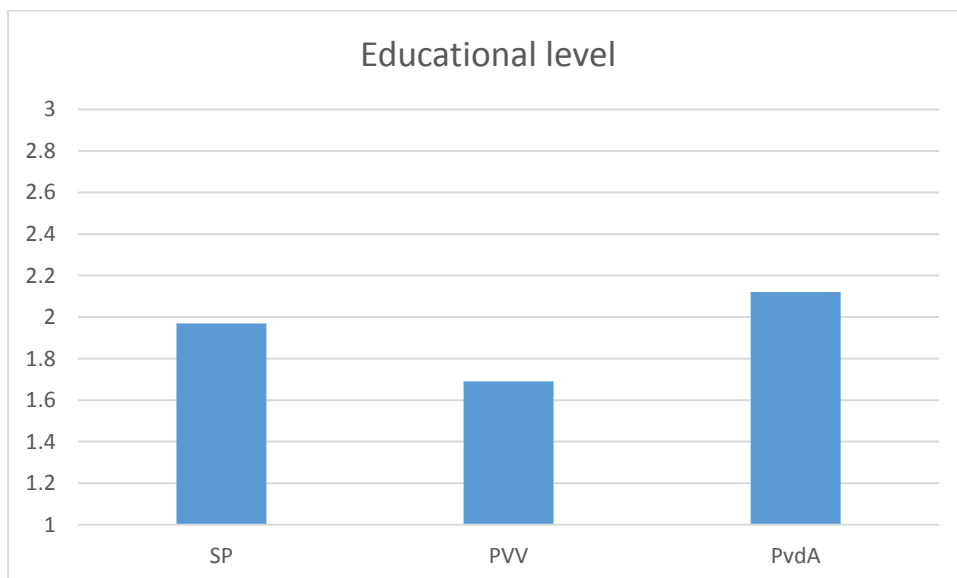
Graph 4 shows that PVV voters score higher on anti-migration attitudes compared to SP and PvdA voters, which score similar. Which is all in line with the expectations

Graph 4: Descriptive statistics anti-migration attitude. NKO 2012



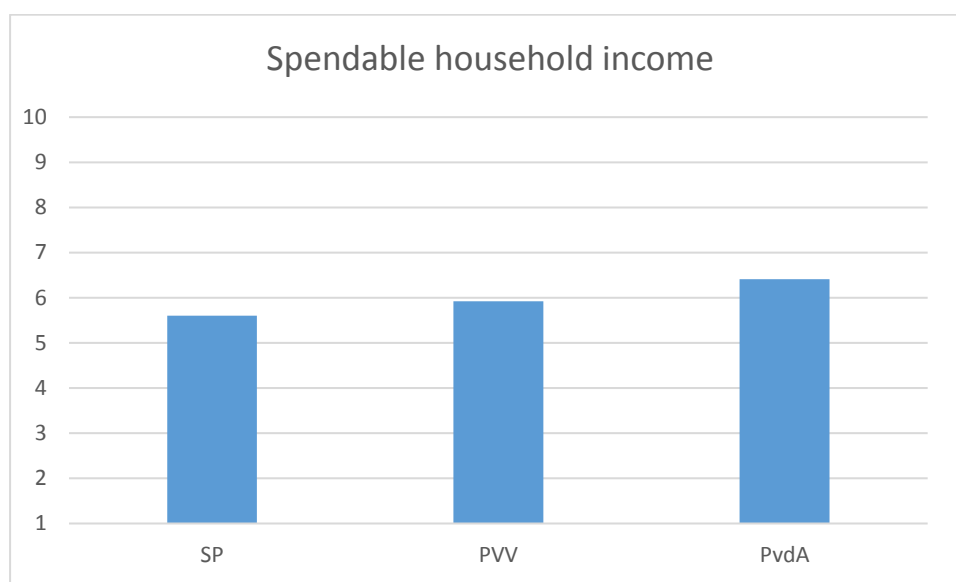
Regarding educational level, graph 5 shows that PVV voters have the lowest educational level, PvdA voters have the highest educational level, and SP voters are in-between.

Graph 5: Descriptive educational level. NKO 2012



Graph 6 shows the average spendable household income per voter group. The item about income levels shows that PvdA voters have the highest income, followed up by PVV voters. SP voters have the lowest spendable household income.

Graph 6: Descriptive statistics household income. NKO 2012.



Results: analyses

The central point of this study is to investigate which voter characteristics increase the change of voting for a left wing populist party in comparison to a right wing populist party and a mainstream left wing party. Table 1 presents model 1, which is composed of the results of the first multinomial logistic regression analysis. The reference category in this model is voting for the SP. In this model only the effects of educational level and spendable household income are included. In table 2 attitudes on anti-capitalist, euroscepticism, political discontent and migration are added; educational level and spendable household income are also part of this model. Making two separate models makes it possible to look for mediation; it shows whether educational level or income is related to a greater likelihood to vote for SP compared to the likelihood to vote for PVV and PvdA; and whether this effect remains unaffected or changes when the attitudes are added to the model.

Table 1: Model 1 (Reference category: SP)

	PVV		PvdA	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Constant	-1,154	,390	-,048	,282
Less educated	,654*	,310	,250	,256
Higher educated	-1,048*	,466	,589*	,256
Spendable household income (in 10% groups)	,110*	,057	,119**	,042

Nagelkerke R²: 0.088

P<0.001 *** P<0,01 ** P<0,05*

Model 1 shows that being higher educated is related to a smaller likelihood to vote for the PVV compared to the likelihood to vote for SP. Being less educated increases the likelihood to vote for the PVV instead of the SP. Regarding the level of income this model shows that having a higher income increases the likelihood to vote for PVV compared to the likelihood to vote for SP.

This model also shows that being higher educated is related to a greater likelihood to vote for PvdA compared to the likelihood to vote for SP. Regarding income this model shows that having a higher income increases the likelihood to vote for PvdA compared to the likelihood to vote for SP. In model 2 anti-capitalist attitude, euroscepticism, political discontent and anti-migration attitude are added to the model.

Table 2: Model 2 (Reference category: SP)

	PVV		PvdA	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Constant	-15,624	2,223	1,072	,982
Anti-capitalist attitude	,241	,251	,163	,170
Euroscepticism	,585	,380	-,663**	,248
Political discontent	,450	,377	,019	,242
Anti-migration attitude	2,994***	,476	,039	,194
Less educated	,344	,392	,472	,306
Higher educated	-,006	,572	,313	,290
Spendable household income (in 10% groups)	,159*	0,74	,132**	,048

Nagelkerke R²: 0.394
P<0.001 * P<0,01 ** P<0,05***

Anti-capitalist attitudes

The first hypothesis is about anti-capitalist attitudes. Hypothesis 1a expected that this attitude would increase the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PVV. However, the model shows no significant effect for this relationship, which results in the rejection of hypothesis 1a. Hypothesis 1b stated that an anti-capitalist attitude would increase the likelihood to vote for SP compared to the PvdA. When looking at the model there is no significant relationship found, meaning that anti-capitalist attitudes are not a good indication of whether someone would vote SP or PvdA. This results in the rejection of hypothesis 1b

hypothesis 1 expected an anti-capitalist attitude to be a unique factor distinguishing the SP voters from the voters of the populist right PVV and the mainstream left PvdA. However, the results don't confirm this expectation. This can be interpreted in two ways; the first interpretation could be linked to the limitation of data this study is confronted with. Anti-capitalist attitude is measured via one indirect item that is expected to tap into anti-capitalist attitudes. However, it is possible that this measurement is not internally valid; meaning that it may not be the best way to

measure anti-capitalist attitudes. The second interpretation could be linked to the theory that people don't always vote based on party stances a vote might just as well be an expression of political discontent or other party stances, like their position towards the EU, could be more important to voters. While anti-capitalism is an element within party manifestos of SP it is possible that this is not the reason why people vote for SP.

Euroscepticism

The second hypothesis regards euroscepticism. H2a expected that this attitude would have no effect on the likelihood to vote for SP compared to the PVV. The model shows no significant effect of euroscepticism on the likelihood to vote for PVV compared to the likelihood to vote SP. This confirms hypothesis 2a. Regarding hypothesis 2b model 2 shows that that higher levels of euroscepticism decrease the likelihood to vote for PvdA compared to SP. This confirms hypothesis 2b. Meaning eurosceptic individuals are more likely to vote for SP than PvdA, making this an important attitude for distinguishing the SP voter from the PvdA voter.

Thus, hypothesis 2 is confirmed; euroscepticism is again to be found a unique factor that increases the likelihood to vote for either a left-wing or a right-wing populist party. Euroscepticism increases the likelihood to vote for the populist left SP compared to the mainstream left PvdA; thus, making the eurosceptic attitude of the SP and its voters a distinguishing element on the mainstream left political field.

Political discontent

The third hypothesis is about political discontent. Hypothesis 3a expected that political discontent has no effect on the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PVV. Model 2 shows no significant effect of political discontent on the likelihood to vote for PVV compared to the likelihood to vote SP. This confirms hypothesis 3a. When testing hypothesis 3b the model shows that there is no significant effect of political discontent on the likelihood to vote PvdA compared to the SP. Meaning that political discontented voters are not more likely to vote SP than PvdA. This results in the

rejection hypothesis 3b. This is an unexpected finding, to test the possibility if this finding is due to the possible interrelatedness of political discontent and euroscepticism a third model has been constructed which can be found in appendix 2. However, when leaving out euroscepticism political discontent still remains insignificant.

To conclude, hypothesis 3a is confirmed; indicating that voters of the populist left and the populist right are politically discontented; low levels of trust in government and political cynicism seem to result in voting for a populist party either on the left or the right of the political spectrum; this can be seen as protest voting while these voters are voting for anti-establishment parties to articulate their discontent towards mainstream politics. That PvdA voters are less political discontented than SP voters is not confirmed, an extra test has been used which shows the same results, which leads to the rejection of H3b. It is a possibility that PvdA voters are equally discontented as SP voters; but this is up for future research.

Anti-immigration attitudes

The fourth hypothesis regards anti-immigration attitudes; hypothesis 4a expected these attitudes to increase the likelihood to vote for PVV compared to SP. Model 2 shows that stronger anti-migration attitudes increase the likelihood to vote for the PVV compared to the SP. This confirms hypothesis 4a. When looking hypothesis 4b; model 2 shows no significant relationship between anti-immigration attitudes and the likelihood to vote for PvdA compared to the likelihood to vote SP, this results in the acceptance of hypothesis 4b. This implies that SP and PvdA voters have similar attitudes towards migration.

Hypothesis 4 is confirmed; anti-migration attitudes increase the likelihood for voters to vote for the populist right instead of the populist left. This is not surprising and in line with the literature (Otjes and Louwse, 2015 & Van der Brug, 2003). In the left political spectrum anti-migration attitudes seem to have no impact on the likelihood to vote for the mainstream left compared to the populist left. Thus, while anti-migration sentiments have been associated with populism this study provides

insight in the (lacking) role of anti-migration attitude for populist left voters; showing diversity between populist voters.

Socioeconomic position

Hypothesis 5a drew the expectation that lower socio-economic position has no effect on the likelihood to vote for SP compared to the likelihood to vote for PVV. When looking at the model it is visible that there is an effect. The effect of spendable household income is significant; a higher spendable household income increases the likelihood to vote for PVV compared to the likelihood to vote for SP. However, the effect of educational level is not significant in model 2. Thus, while not both items are significant one item is significant, there is enough for a tentative rejection of hypothesis 5a. Hypothesis 5b expected a lower socio-economic position to increase the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PVV. Spendable household income has a significant effect; a higher spendable household income increases the likelihood to vote for PvdA compared to the likelihood to vote for SP. However, educational level is not of influence. This results in the tentative acceptance of hypothesis 5b.

In the theoretical framework the effect of mediation was discussed; suggesting that the attitudes mentioned in this framework (anti-capitalist attitudes, euroscepticism, political discontent and anti-migration attitudes) are more likely to be found among people of a lower socio-economic position, and thus mediate the relationship between socio-economic position and the likelihood to vote for SP. Before analysing the possibility of mediation it is important to state that the method used in this study can merely indicate mediation; and thus provides no solid proof that mediation is taking place. However, this indication could be guiding for future research.

In model 1 it can be observed that a higher income and being less educated is linked to a greater likelihood to vote for PVV compared to SP. Being higher educated decreases the likelihood to vote for PVV compared to SP. When looking at model 2 these effects have changed; the effect of educational level is no longer significant. This indicates that the effect of education was found in the first place because the attitudes were not taken in account, but if taken in account the effect of educational

level disappears, indicating that mediation is present. This implies that being of low socioeconomic position does influence the likelihood to vote for the parties in this study, but this relationship works through the attitudes that are linked to a lower socioeconomic status, such as anti-migration attitudes. Thus, less educated are more likely to vote for PVV than SP; but if you would zoom in on the relationship in-between being less educated and a PVV vote you find attitudes such as anti-migration attitudes. It works as following; less educated people tend to oppose migration more strongly which in turn results in a greater likelihood to vote for PVV than SP. Thus, mediation seems to be at place when looking at educational level. The effect of income remains significant in both models, indicating that mediation plays no part in the relationship between spendable household income and the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PVV.

In model 1 it can also be observed that the higher educated are more likely to vote for PvdA than for SP. In model 2 this effect has changed; it is no longer significant. This is an indication that mediation is at place. Higher educated are thus more likely to vote for PvdA than for SP; but this is due to attitudes that are linked to being higher educated; for example, a positive attitude towards European integration. The effect of spendable household remains unchanged in model 1 and 2, it is significant in both models. Thus, mediation is not taking place in the relationship between spendable household income and the likelihood to vote for SP compared to PvdA.

To conclude, hypothesis 5 provides insight in the role of socioeconomic status; a higher spendable income increases the likelihood to vote PVV or PvdA compared to SP. When looking at the effect of education on the likelihood to vote for PVV compared to the likelihood to vote SP the results indicate mediation; the positive effect of being less educated on the likelihood to vote for PVV compared to SP seems to be mediated by attitudes that are linked to lower levels of education, such as euroscepticism, anti-migration and political discontent. The change in significance between the two models comparing PVV voters with SP voters indicate that socio-economic position has a role in affecting the likelihood to vote for the populist right compared to the populist left. When looking at the effect of education on the likelihood to vote for PvdA compared to SP the results also indicate mediation; the positive effect of being higher educated on the likelihood to vote for PvdA compared

to SP seems to be mediated by attitudes that are linked to higher levels of education; such as a low level of euroscepticism. The change in significance between the two models comparing PvdA voters with SP voters indicate that socioeconomic position has a role in affecting the likelihood to vote for the mainstream left compared to the populist left. So while socio-economic position is indeed an important element in explaining differences in voting behaviour within this study; it is important to see that this socio-economic status operates through attitudes that accompany lower or higher levels of education.

Conclusion and discussion

Who votes for the populist left? From the starting point that the current literature about populism doesn't provide enough insight in what individual characteristics increase the likelihood to vote for the populist left, this thesis tested the effect of several attitudes and the socio-economic position of voters on the likelihood to vote for the populist left-wing party SP compared to the likelihood to vote for the populist right-wing party PVV and the mainstream left-wing party PvdA. The overarching goal of this study was to provide more insight into the unique and distinguishing characteristics of the voters of the SP. The following research question guided the analysis and the interpretation of the findings: *Which voter characteristics increase the likelihood of voting for a left wing populist party in comparison to a right wing populist party and a mainstream left wing party?*

This study has made a contribution to the academic literature about left wing populism. This thesis offers insight into the individual characteristics that increase the likelihood to vote for the populist left party SP; which are euroscepticism, political discontent, the absence of strong anti-migration attitudes and a lower spendable household income.

In the Netherlands the populist left voter is similar to the populist right voter in terms of euroscepticism and political discontent. This thesis shows that anti-migration attitudes are an important distinguishing trait between populist voters. Voters with stronger anti-migration attitudes are more likely to vote for PVV than for SP. This confirms the expectations based on the literature; anti-migration is more clear

articulated in the manifesto's and the voting behaviour of the PVV (Otjes and Louwse, 2015 & Van der Brug, 2003). Regarding socioeconomic status income and education has an effect, SP voters tend to have a lower income than PVV voters. PVV voters tend to be less educated than SP voters, however, there is an indication that this effect is mediated by voters' attitudes towards for example migration.

The populist left voter is similar to the mainstream left voter in their position towards migration and their level political discontent. The results show that euroscepticism is a unique characteristic that distinguishes SP voters from PvdA voters; SP voters tend to be more eurosceptic than PvdA voters. Regarding socioeconomic status, the findings show that a higher spendable income results in a greater likelihood to vote for PvdA instead of SP. PvdA voters tend to be higher educated than SP voters, however, there is an indication that this effect is mediated by voters' attitudes towards for example European integration.

Surprisingly, the results show that anti-capitalist attitudes do not increase the likelihood to vote for SP compared to the likelihood to vote for the PVV or the PvdA. This indicates that voters may not vote for the SP because of the anti-capitalist stances of the party, and that other reasons are driving their vote for the SP, such as for example euroscepticism. Another surprise posed by the results of this thesis is the similar level of political discontent between voters of the SP and PvdA. This shared level of political discontent is unexpected and contrary to the expectations; future research is needed further investigate this unexpected finding.

This study is confronted with several limitations. The first limitation is regarding the relative small amount of respondents in this study; with a total N of 569 it is possible that the results of this study are not as generalizable as desired. Especially PVV voters are underrepresented in this study with N=89. A bigger N would have been an improvement, however, the current N is not harming the study; there is no reason to expect that the N used in this study has affected the results and conclusions.

The second limitation of this study is regarding validity. Internal validity is possibly limited by the theorizing and operationalization of the concept of anti-capitalism. The amount of literature about anti-capitalist attitudes is low; which results in less theoretical support of the concept than would be ideal. For future research it is valuable to invest in the further theorizing of the concept of anti-

capitalist attitudes. The dataset also poses limitations for the measurement of anti-capitalist attitudes, NKO 2012 only has one item that presumably taps into anti-capitalist attitudes. This in turn challenges the validity of this study; for future research it is strongly recommended to take in account more items that tap into anti-capitalist attitudes in order to improve validity.

External validity is in this case about the possibility to generalize these results to other countries; the Netherlands is characterized by a proportional election system in which votes are almost directly translated into seats. Parties experience low thresholds to get in parliament, which enables even smaller parties to get a seat (Hague, Harrop and McCormick, 2016). The proportionality of the Dutch election system is not found in many countries, which limits the possibility to generalize this study. Where in the Netherlands the populist left and right can get seats in parliament more easily this may not be the case in other countries. The results of this study might not be applicable to countries with different election systems. Comparing the populist left wing SP voters to voters of more parties could also add to a better and more rich understanding of the unique characteristics that. It would be particularly interesting to compare voters of the SP with voters of other left parties such as the Greenleft (Groenlinks) and the Animalparty (Partij voor de Dieren), this will provide more insight into the unique position the populist left-wing party has in the left political spectrum.

The third limitation of this study is the way mediation is studied; while the two models in this study provide an indication of mediation because of the disappearing significance in model 2 it remains theoretically weak to state there is mediation because this is not the optimal measurement of this mechanism. However, due to time limitations and other elements that had to be studied it was not doable to further invest in studying this mechanism of mediation. For future studies it would be an important challenge to further study this relationship using the proper method and data.

This thesis has provided insight in the individual characteristics that increase the likelihood to vote for the left wing populist SP compared to the right wing populist PVV and the mainstream left PvdA. Future studies could add to the literature about left wing populist by investing in cross national comparison; here

the role of different election systems could be taken in account. Also, this could provide insight in whether the voter characteristics that are unique to SP voters may apply to voters of other left wing populist countries; it is possible that in other countries different characteristics have a greater impact.

Also, future studies could invest more in the comparison of left and right wing populist voters. Populism has been on the rise for the past two decades on the left and right side of the political spectrum (Mudde, 2004). The media frames about populism may be biased. It is possible that the media frames right wing populist parties as populist and left wing populist parties as not populist; this could result in right wing voters that vote consciously for a populist party, while left wing populist voters do not vote for a populist party in their perception. Studying motivations more in depth could be done with a new survey that provides more insight than the National Elections Study (2012) but also in-depth interviews could provide valuable information about why people vote for the populist left and whether they are aware of the populist character of the party.

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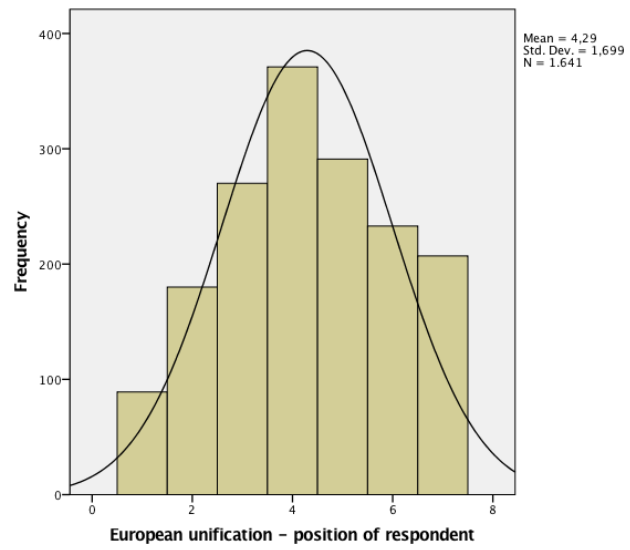
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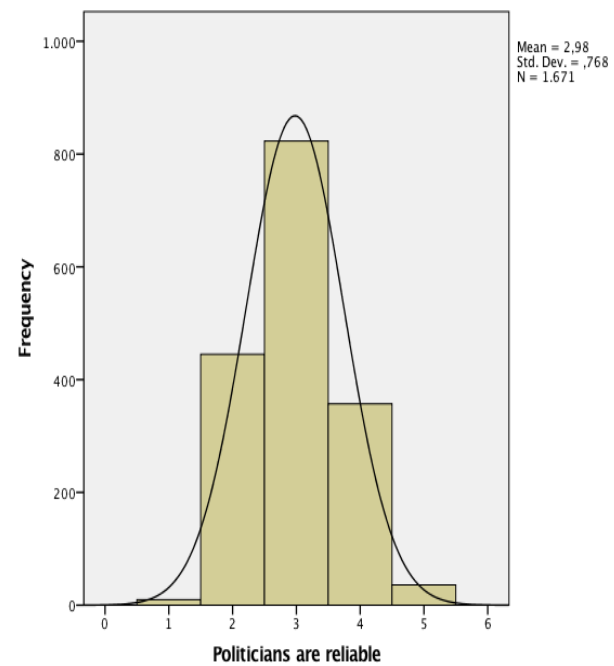
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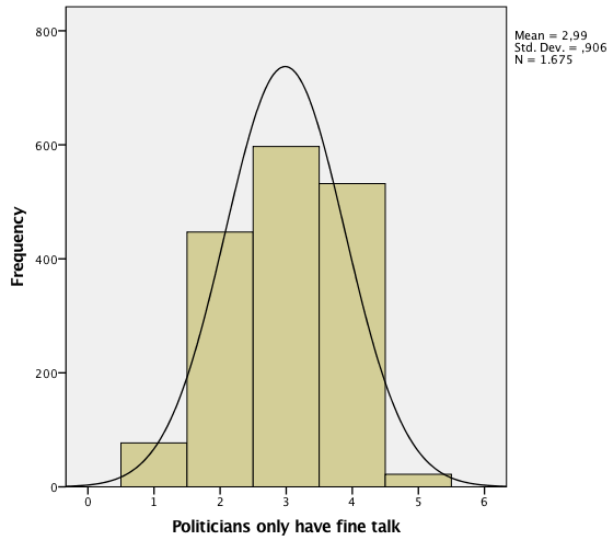
Appendix 1

Eurocepticism

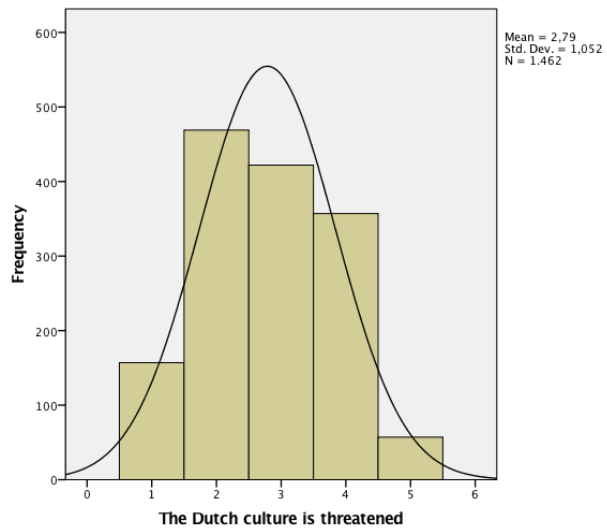


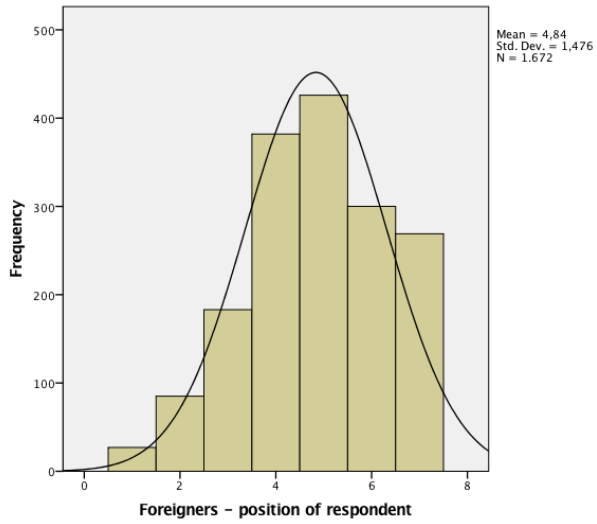
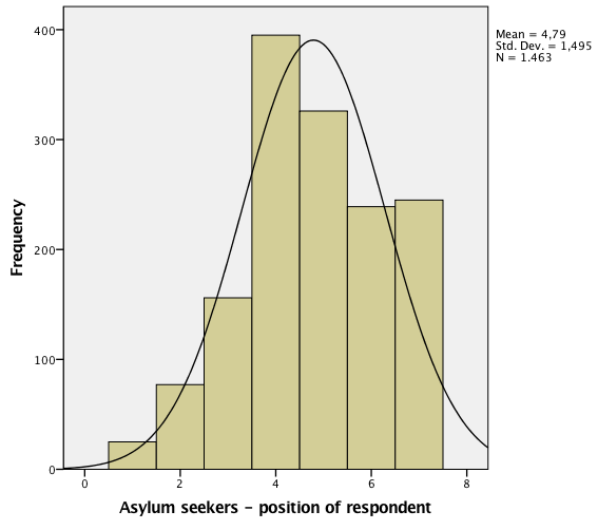
Political discontent





Anti-migration attitude





Appendix 2

Table 3: Model 3 (Reference category: SP)

	PVV		PvdA	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Constant	-15,312	2,183	,360	,933
Anti-capitalist attitude	,241	,249	,179	,169
Political discontent	,678*	,350	-,171	,226
Anti-migration attitude	3.206***	,473	-,140	,179
Less educated	,315	,387	,457	,302
Higher educated	-,288	,551	,391	,285
Spendable household income (in 10% groups)	,174**	0,73	,122**	,047

Nagelkerke R²: 0,361

P<0.001 * P<0,01 ** P<0,05***