

# Negative Campaigning and Being in Government

*Why vote on a party that does not want to be in  
government?*

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# 1. Introduction

In many western countries populist parties are gaining support. Populist leaders are expressing their discontent with the establishment in several countries, often combined with a more nationalistic alternative (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Recent examples of this are the election of Donald Trump in the United States of America, the Brexit in the United Kingdom, and the recent elections in for example Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. There are a couple of common explanations for this increase in popularity of these populist parties. An explanation for the increased popularity of populist parties has to do with the economic situation of a certain group of people in a country, preferably the working class man. When an economic crisis hits western countries, the ordinary people in a country might feel that their government is not doing enough to help them see through this period of time. A populist party can anticipate these worries of the ordinary people in their country and can therefore propose some policies which might be beneficial in the short run, but their impact on the long run might not be that beneficial (Guiso et al. 2017).

Another explanation is not about economic reasons, but more about cultural reasons. Populist parties can target a group of generally older people which are sceptical about progressive cultural change. Therefore the message of populist parties is quite nationalistic and refers to relatively old values, which are desirable for this group of older people (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). These two views are interesting and can explain some things about the demand side of populism and the supply side of populism (the preferences of voters and the behaviour of political parties respectively). There is one thing that is quite interesting in this story. In some cases we see that populist politicians have an actual impact on policy making. Examples of this are mentioned before: Donald Trump getting elected, Brexit, and the governments of Austria for example. However, there are also examples where the populist party makes it clear that its goal is not necessarily to be in a government coalition. In some cases populist parties are quite explicit about this, sometimes we can see it in the behaviour before the elections or in the outcome of a cabinet where they did in fact took place in. An example of this is the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) in the Netherlands, with Geert Wilders as its leader. We have seen that this party has cooperated in a cabinet once, but this was only for a short period of time (Kollau, 2017).

Since the short-lived coalition of VVD (liberal party in the Netherlands), CDA (centre party in the Netherlands), and PVV in 2010 and 2011 the PVV is not regarded as an ideal coalition party by other Dutch political parties. Their standpoints on immigration and the EU are becoming more extreme, which makes it even less likely that a political party in the Netherlands is willing to be in a coalition with the PVV. When we look at this from an economical perspective, this raises some questions about the decisions of the PVV to become an unattractive partner with respect to the formation of a coalition. This also raises questions about the people in the Netherlands who vote for the PVV in Dutch elections: Why would a political party, when it is mostly concerned with vote shares and influence, express a negative attitude towards being in a coalition? And why would people vote on a political party, which is never planning on being in government and therefore is never able to implement policies that make an actual difference? Assuming that people vote on a political party in order to see the policies of the next coalition to align with their preferences.

The aim of this research is to give a rational economic explanation behind what we see in countries like the Netherlands. This research will be based upon the model of Skaperdas and Grofman (1995), who did research in the behaviour of politicians during the campaigning period

before national elections. In the model, political parties have limited resources when it comes to campaigning for an election. The choice that the political party faces is whether to campaign in a positive or negative way. In their paper negative campaigning means a personal attack on a politician or political party (Skaperdas & Grofman, 1995). Although the paper by Skaperdas and Grofman is more about the political landscape in the United States, where politicians tend to attack each other personally before the elections, the model is applicable to this research as will be explained later on.

In this research *positive* campaigning will refer to the message of a political party that says that it is willing to be in government after the elections, resulting in the political party positively taking part in debates about different standpoints, to defend its own policy platform. The *negative* campaigning in the model will refer to the message of a political party that is not willing to take place in a coalition after the elections, and simply focuses on attacking some other party's platform. In the real world this might look like: extreme standpoints, which leads to a distance between the political party and other parties, a negative attitude towards the establishment, implying that they would only take part in a coalition when the current political system has been changed drastically, or it can be that the political party only attacks other parties as opposed to giving its own view on certain topics.

For the sake of simplicity the political landscape in the model has only three parties: An established left-wing party, an established right-wing party, and a populist right-wing party. We develop two cases. In the first case the two established parties are only able to campaign positively before the elections, whereas the third party can choose whether it campaigns positively or negatively. In the second case the established right-wing party is also allowed to campaign negatively, like the populist right-wing party.

The purpose of the first case is to find out whether there is in fact an equilibrium where a populist party is willing to campaign negatively at all. The second case will be about finding out what the influence is of the entrance of a populist right-wing party on the campaigning strategy of the established right-wing party. When there is in fact a change in the strategy of the established party when there is a populist party that campaigns negatively, there might be an actual influence in negative campaigning, which might shine a different light on the voting behaviour of people that are voting on a populist party.

The most important assumptions in the model are that political parties only care about the vote share that they have at the end of the elections. Voters are split up in two categories: undecided voters and voters with a predisposition towards a party. Undecided voters are won over by positive campaigning, whereas voters with a predisposition are won over by negative campaigning. When a voter has a predisposition towards the established right-wing party, and there is some negative campaigning towards this party, it is possible that this voter is switching towards a different party, depending on where the negative campaigning comes from.

Given these assumptions, we derive a number of results: The first result is that in the first case, where only the populist party has the option to campaign negatively, there is in fact an equilibrium where it is a strategy for the populist party to engage in negative campaigning. For this to happen, we need the difference in initial support to be big enough and the effect of negative campaigning to be strong enough. The second result is that in the second case, where also the established right-wing party is allowed to engage in negative campaigning there is an equilibrium where both the populist and the established right-wing party engage in (some)

negative campaigning. Implying that the entrance of a populist right-wing party which characterises itself by campaigning negatively can change the political landscape in such a way that other parties are changing their way of campaigning before the elections. This gives a reason why it can be rational for voters to vote for a party which is only engaging in negative campaigning. The results on the second case are dependent on a number of conditions regarding the difference in initial support of both right-wing parties and the general effect of negative campaigning. Later on we discuss some real world examples of factors that make negative campaigning more effective.

The next section introduces the model. Section 3 solves for the different equilibria of the game. The final section discusses the results, the limitations of this research, and the recommendations for further research.

## 2. The Model

There are three parties; 1, 2, and 3. 1 is the established left-wing party, 2 is the established right-wing party, and 3 is the populist right-wing party. Each party can choose its campaigning strategy in such a way that they can choose to put effort in positive campaigning:  $y_i$  or to put effort in negative campaigning:  $x_i$ . The party must set his strategy to meet the following constraint:

$$1 = y_i + x_i \quad \text{for} \quad i = 1, 2, 3$$

There is some initial support for each candidate/party before the campaigning starts. This initial support is common knowledge. We denote the initial preference for a certain candidate/party by  $r_i$ . There are also undecided voters:  $R$ . The voters in this society are divided as follows:

$$1 = R + r_1 + r_2 + r_3 \quad \text{or alternatively:} \quad R = 1 - r_1 - r_2 - r_3$$

Let us assume that all voters, regardless of their initial preference, will be voting for one of the three parties. In this model, the undecided voters can only be won over via positive campaigning, whereas voters who in fact have an initial preference can be won over from another party by negative campaigning. As we are under proportional representation, parties care about maximizing their vote share after the campaigning and the elections:  $r_i^0$  for  $i = 1, 2, 3$ .

The share of undecided voters that is won over by the positive campaigning of party  $i$  is given by the function  $q^i(y_1, y_2, y_3)$ . This function is the standard (Tullock, 1980) contest success function, which has the following properties:

- (1) For party  $i$  this function is increasing in  $y_i$  and the function is decreasing in  $y_{\neq i}$ .
- (2)  $q^1(y_1, y_2, y_3) = q^2(y_2, y_1, y_3) = q^3(y_3, y_1, y_2)$ .
- (3)  $q^1(y_1, y_2, y_3) + q^2(y_2, y_1, y_3) + q^3(y_3, y_1, y_2) = 1$

In words, the first assumption means that the share of undecided voters that are won over by a party are increasing in the amount of positive campaigning that is done by that party. It is decreasing in the amount of positive campaigning that is done by the other parties, because that results in voters that are won over as well, obviously. The second assumption means that the positive campaigning of each party has the same effect on the undecided voters. In other words: There is no difference in the effectiveness of parties when it comes to positive campaigning. Although this has been said before, the third assumption means that all undecided voters will be

making a decision for a party. There are no voters that remain undecided after the campaigning of the parties.

Function  $q^i(y_1, y_2, y_3)$  is thus given by:

$$q^i = \frac{y_i}{y_i + y_j + y_k}$$

Given that we wish to focus on negative campaigning, the Tullock function will be rewritten like this:

$$q^i = \frac{1 - x_i}{3 - x_i - x_j - x_k}$$

The effect of negative campaigning on the vote share of a party will be twofold: First of all, when a political party targets another party with negative campaigning, there will be a share of initial voters of the targeted party that will switch in the direction of the attacker. Further, for the sake of tractability, we assume that only the populist and the right wing party can engage in negative campaigning, and only against each other. The left wing party engages in positive campaigning only.

The other effect of negative campaigning is inspired by the 'boomerang effect', described by Skaperdas and Grofman (1995). It means that a party that is attacking another party through negative campaigning will see some of their initial voters become undecided voters. This is by assumption a smaller fraction than the fraction of voters that are won over by the negative campaigning of the attacker.

Two variables determine both the overall effectiveness of negative campaigning, but also the difference between the benefit and the cost in vote share for the attacking party. Variable  $B$  represents the overall effectiveness of negative campaigning. This variable can in fact be the result of a certain state of society. In an economic crisis, this variable will be a lot higher compared to a state of economic growth. More applications to the real world will be made in the part where the results will be discussed.

Variable  $A$  shows the relative effectiveness of targeting another party through negative campaigning. We assume  $A > 1$ , ensuring an overall positive effect of negative campaigning if the initial support for both parties is the same.

The overall effect of negative campaigning for party  $i$  is:

$$Bx_i^j(Ar_j - r_i)$$

We also impose that:

$$Bx_i^j(Ar_j - r_i) > 0$$

This condition makes sure that negative campaigning will be regarded as a beneficial strategy.

Combining both the impact of positive campaigning and the impact of negative campaigning, the objective functions of the three parties are as follows:

$$U^1 = r_1 + q[(1 - x_1^2 - x_1^3), (1 - x_2^1 - x_2^3), (1 - x_3^1 - x_3^2)]R + B[x_1^2(Ar_2 - r_1) + x_1^3(Ar_3 - r_1)]$$

$$U^2 = r_2 + q[(1 - x_1^2 - x_1^3), (1 - x_2^1 - x_2^3), (1 - x_3^1 - x_3^2)]R + B[x_2^1(Ar_1 - r_2) + x_2^3(Ar_3 - r_2)]$$

$$U^3 = r_3 + q[(1 - x_1^2 - x_1^3), (1 - x_2^1 - x_2^3), (1 - x_3^1 - x_3^2)]R + B[x_3^1(Ar_1 - r_3) + x_3^2(Ar_2 - r_3)]$$

We assume that the above functions are well behaved: the first order condition is both necessary and sufficient to pin down the optimal choice of each party.

### 3. Equilibrium analysis

#### 3.1 Established parties campaign positively

What is investigated in this part is the following question: Is it at all a possibility that a third non-established party will apply a strategy where the party behaves as a populist? In this research, behaving like a populist means that you will engage in negative campaigning.

As mentioned above, the third party has the same resources and effectiveness in campaigning as the two established parties. The difference between the established parties and the third party is mainly the difference in initial support. The initial support of the third party can be higher than zero, but it is lower than the established parties. The two established parties have an equal amount of initial support in this case.

Knowing that party 1 and 2 will not engage in negative campaigning, the utility function of the populist party can be simplified. This combined with the restriction that the third party only directly benefits from attacking party 1, the utility function of the populist party becomes:

$$U^3 = r_3 + q[1, 1, (1 - x_3^1)]R + Bx_3^1(Ar_1 - r_3)$$

In order to be able to differentiate  $U^3$  with respect to  $x_3^1$ , function  $q^3(y^1, y^2, y^3)$  is also needed. In this case,  $q$  in the function  $U^3$  is:

$$q = \frac{1 - x_3^1}{3 - x_3^1}$$

The first order condition is:

$$0 = -\frac{2}{(3-x_3^1)^2}R + B(Ar_1 - r_3)$$

Rewriting the first order condition yields:

$$\frac{2}{(3 - x_3^1)^2}R = B(Ar_1 - r_3)$$

Rewriting this in terms of  $x_3^1$  will give:

$$x_3^1 = \max\left[0; \min\left[3 - \sqrt{\frac{2}{B(Ar_1 - r_3)}R}; 1\right]\right]$$

This function is the optimal strategy of the third party. It makes it possible to look at the conditions that make the third party engage in negative campaigning. The results will be derived from the partial derivatives, which are given below.

## Results

$$\frac{\partial x_3^1}{\partial B} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{\frac{2}{B(Ar_1 - r_3)}R}} * \frac{1}{B^2(Ar_1 - r_3)}R$$

$$\frac{\partial x_3^1}{\partial A} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{\frac{2}{B(Ar_1 - r_3)}R}} * \frac{1}{Br_1A^2}R$$

$$\frac{\partial x_3^1}{\partial r_1} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{\frac{2}{B(Ar_1 - r_3)}R}} * \frac{1}{ABr_1^2}R$$

$$\frac{\partial x_3^1}{\partial r_3} = -\frac{1}{\sqrt{\frac{2}{B(Ar_1 - r_3)}R}} * \frac{1}{Br_3^2}R$$

$$\frac{\partial x_3^1}{\partial R} = -\frac{1}{\sqrt{\frac{2}{B(Ar_1 - r_3)}R}} * \frac{1}{B(Ar_1 - r_3)}$$

The partial derivatives show which variables have a positive or a negative influence on the amount of negative campaigning of the third party. This shows that  $A$ ,  $B$ , and  $r_1$  have a positive effect on the amount of negative campaigning of the third party, while  $r_3$  and  $R$  have a negative effect on the third parties' negative campaigning.

These results give some insight in the conditions that are necessary for a third party to behave like a populist. The results are as expected and are consistent with what can be observed in the real world. For example the role of the media in the time of campaigning before the elections has changed in recent years. This is captured in an increase in the value of  $B$  making negative campaigning more visible and part of the public debate. Also some recent economical crises in 2008 and 2012 can be seen as opportunities for populist parties to win over voters that have no more trust in the established parties. This is reflected in an increasing value of  $A$ . Another example of the Netherlands is the increasing of the popularity of the right-wing VVD party. This was also an opportunity for Geert Wilders, who was part of the VVD for a period of time, to leave the VVD and start his own party, targeting the VVD to win over some of their voters, who are ideologically quite close to Wilders.

### 3.2 Negative Campaigning by Established Right-Wing Party

On Monday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2017, Mark Rutte said the following to Geert Wilders after an intense political debate: "That is the difference between sending tweets from home and actually ruling a country" (Kas, 2017). It is interesting to see that an established party is now also negatively attacking a rather populist opponent, namely Geert Wilders. The previous case assumed established parties only campaign positively, but it seems in this case that the presence of a populist party with a significant amount of support can change the attitude of an established party.



Under what conditions is it rational for an established party to alter its strategy given the entrance of a third populist party? When the right conditions are there for a smaller third party to act as a populist, the established party that is being attacked by a populist party has a new choice to make regarding its campaigning strategy.

Let us assume that only the first party reacts to the attacks from the third party. The second party is not targeted by the third party and therefore will not react in this case. Taking this assumption into account, the analysis will start by stating the two utility functions of the first and the third party respectively. After deriving the first order conditions, the reaction functions can be formulated. Imposing consistency between the two reaction functions allow us to derive the equilibrium choices of the populist and right wing party.

### 3.2.1 Equilibrium

The objective functions of the first and the third party are:

$$U^1 = r_1 + q[(1 - x_1^3), 1, (1 - x_3^1)]R + Bx_1^3(Ar_3 - r_1)$$

$$U^3 = r_3 + q[(1 - x_1^3), 1, (1 - x_3^1)]R + Bx_3^1(Ar_1 - r_3)$$

The two first order conditions are:

$$U_1^1 = \frac{x_3^1 - 2}{(3 - x_1^3 - x_3^1)^2}R + B(Ar_3 - r_1) = 0$$

$$U_3^3 = \frac{x_1^3 - 2}{(3 - x_1^3 - x_3^1)^2}R + B(Ar_1 - r_3) = 0$$

Rewriting these functions gives:

$$x_3^1 = 3 - x_1^3 - \sqrt{\frac{2 + x_3^1}{B(Ar_3 - r_1)}}R$$

$$x_3^1 = 3 - x_1^3 - \sqrt{\frac{2 + x_1^3}{B(Ar_1 - r_3)}}R$$

Solving this two functions as a system of two equations in two unknowns, we obtain the following two solution possibilities:

$$x_1^3 = \frac{2(A - 1)B(r_1 + r_3)[(A - 2)r_1 + (2A - 1)r_3] - (Ar_1 - r_3)\sqrt{R}(\sqrt{R} + \sqrt{4(A - 1)B(r_1 + r_3) + R})}{2(A - 1)^2B(r_1 + r_3)^2}$$

$$x_3^1 = \frac{2(A - 1)B(r_1 + r_3)[(2A - 1)r_1 + (A - 2)r_3] + (r_1 - Ar_3)\sqrt{R}(\sqrt{R} + \sqrt{4(A - 1)B(r_1 + r_3) + R})}{2(A - 1)^2B(r_1 + r_3)^2}$$

or

$$x_1^3 = \frac{2(A-1)B(r_1+r_3)[(A-2)r_1+(2A-1)r_3] + (Ar_1-r_3)\sqrt{R}(-\sqrt{R} + \sqrt{4(A-1)B(r_1+r_3)+R})}{2(A-1)^2B(r_1+r_3)^2}$$

$$x_3^1 = \frac{2(A-1)B(r_1+r_3)[(2A-1)r_1+(A-2)r_3] - (r_1-Ar_3)\sqrt{R}(-\sqrt{R} + \sqrt{4(A-1)B(r_1+r_3)+R})}{2(A-1)^2B(r_1+r_3)^2}$$

### 3.2.2 Comparative statics

As these equilibrium functions are quite involved, we rely on graphical analysis of numerical simulations to make these comments. Looking at these numerical simulations, we see that the second solution only provides outcomes that are higher at least higher than 1.5 for both parties. We did make an effort to prove this algebraically, but we found that the outcome was not straightforward and easy to interpret. Therefore we rely on the numerical simulations as a motivation for the use of the first solution rather than the second solution.. An issue we have to be careful with is corner or partial corner solutions. As we do not wish to impose arbitrary values to our parameters, we rely on some realistic values for initial preferences, found in the opinion polls of the Netherlands the weekend before the Dutch elections of 2017 (Rademaker & Lubbe, 2017), since this research uses these elections and the Dutch political scene as an example. These opinion polls show that around 40% of Dutch voters are undecided voters that the biggest party (the VVD) expects 17% of the voters, and the PVV expects 14% of the votes. The default values that will be used are:

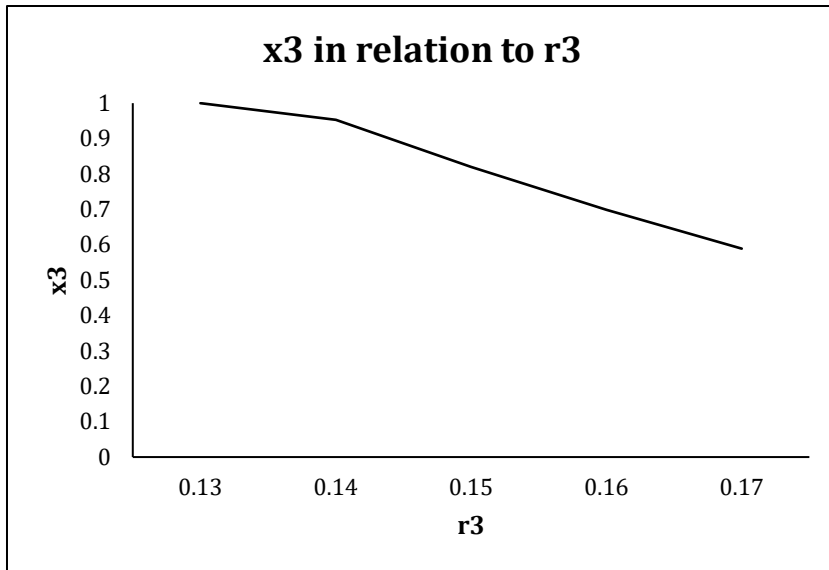
$$r_1 = 0,17, r_3 = 0,14, A = 2, B = 1 \text{ and } R = 0,4$$

With these default values, we choose  $A$  and  $B$  so that the negative campaigning choices of parties 1 and 3 are both interior.

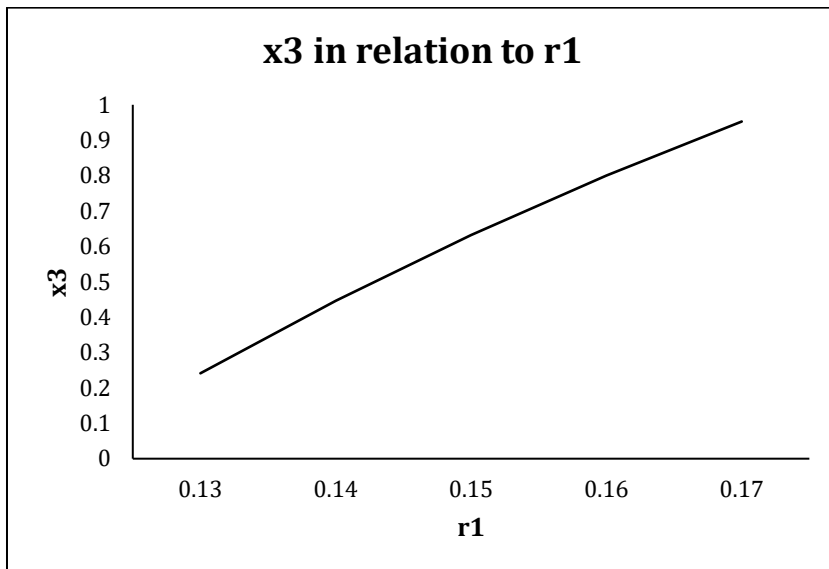
The intervals in the tables and graphs show a clear turning point in the strategy of the third party. Not all intervals that are chosen for the first and the third party are exactly the same. This is done to show the dependency of the investigated variable on the strategy of the third party.

#### **Results for the third party**

First of all the initial support will be investigated, which is reflected in variables  $r_3, r_1$ , and  $R$ . Graphically, this looks like:

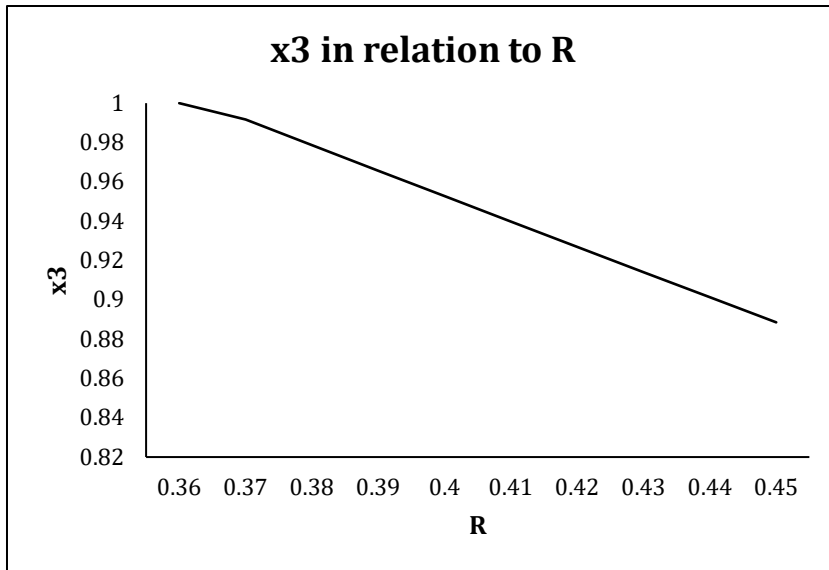


The same is done for the variable  $r_1$ . Graphically, this gives:



The amount of negative campaigning for the third party depends heavily on the difference in initial support of the two parties. This goes both ways: either its own expected vote share decreases or the vote share of the competitor on the right-wing increases. This yields one of the most important findings of this research, namely that it might not be irrational to vote for a populist party who is campaigning negatively if one expects that this party will eventually change its tune towards wanting to be in government. An informed voter will expect that when the support for the populist party is sufficient, the party might in fact want to be in government and are willing to communicate that message. Since the discontent in the status quo is sufficiently high as well, the voters that vote for the populist party are not likely to switch to an established party if the message of the populist is negative at some point.

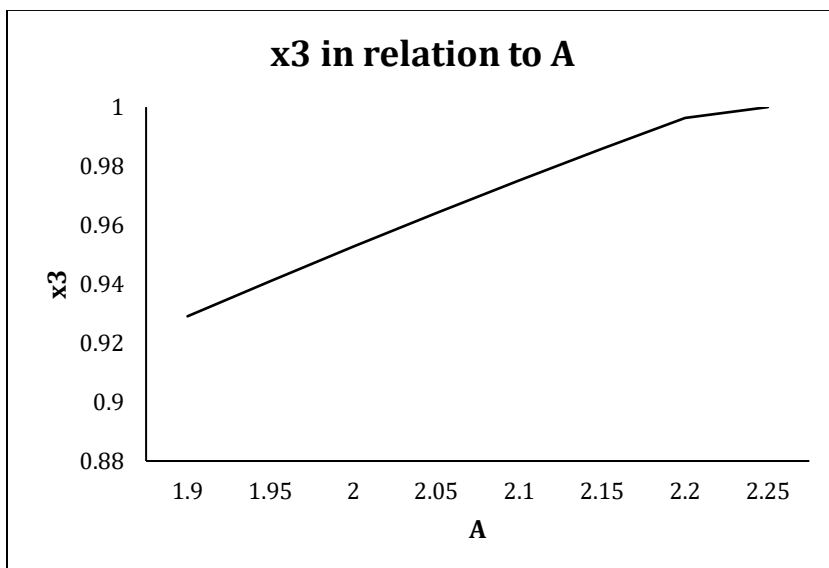
The other factors that play a part in this result are the other three variables. The  $R$  variable also might play a part in the strategy of the third party. Graphically, we have:



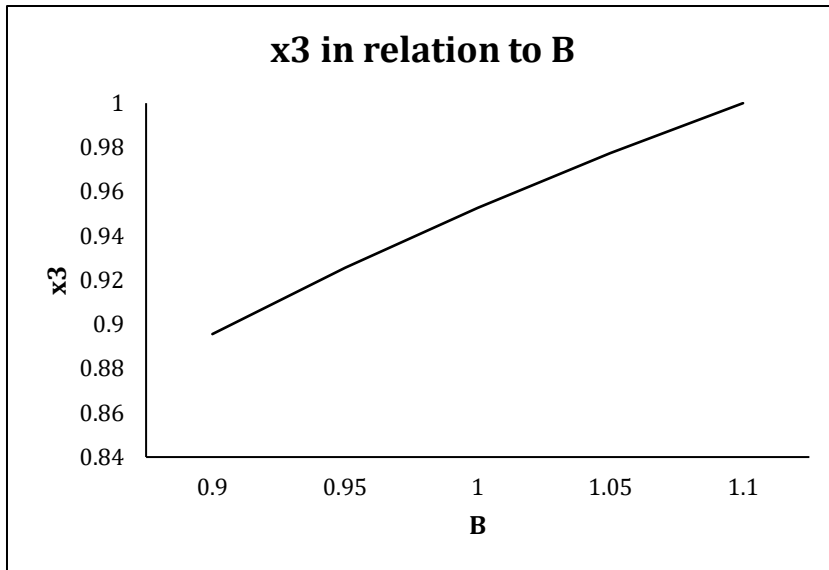
These results are also not very surprising, since a higher number of undecided voters will make positive campaigning more rewarding. This means that negative campaigning becomes less attractive, obviously. With respect to the effect that has been described above, this means that, when the share of undecided voters is relatively high, a higher difference between the third and the first party can be sufficient for the third party to engage in less negative campaigning. The other way around is that, when the share of undecided voters is relatively low, the third party will engage in negative campaigning for lower values of the difference between the third and the first party in initial support.

The other variables that are of influence are  $A$  and  $B$ . These two variables give more context on the social and economic environment of the society where this model is applied on.

Starting with  $A$ , the graphical representation of its effects is as follows:



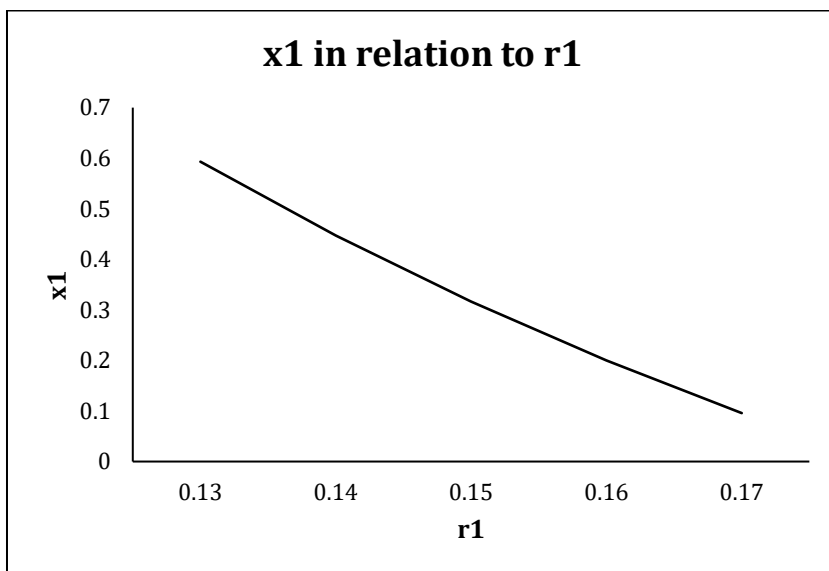
whereas the effect of  $B$  looks as follows:

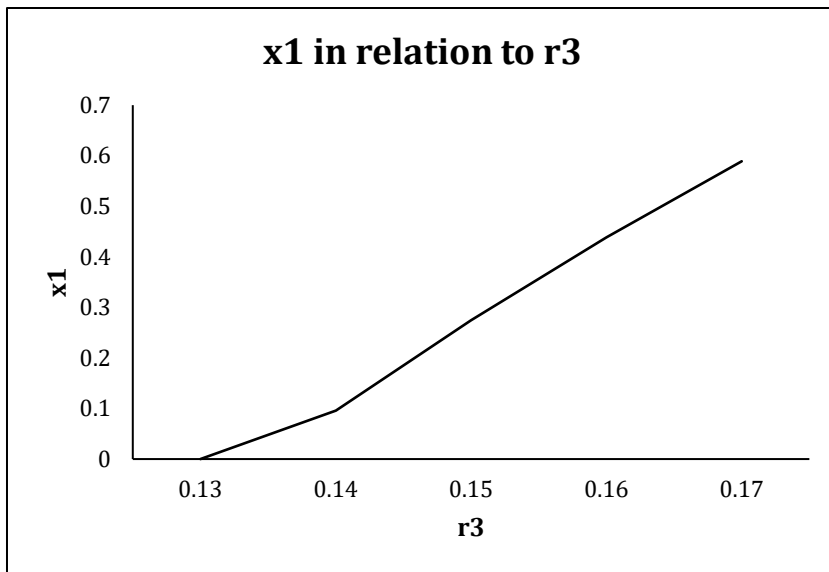


Thus the effect of  $B$  is intuitive, but that of  $A$  is not. The effect of variable  $B$  is similar to the effect of  $R$ . A higher  $B$  makes it more attractive for a party to engage in negative campaigning, since the sensitivity of negative campaigning is higher. So, a high  $B$  in combination with a high  $A$  makes it attractive to engage in negative campaigning. Having the exact opposite effect of  $R$  when it comes to the moment when the third party stops engaging in negative campaigning and starts campaigning positively in relation to the difference its initial support compared to the initial support for its competitor on the right wing.

### Results for the first party

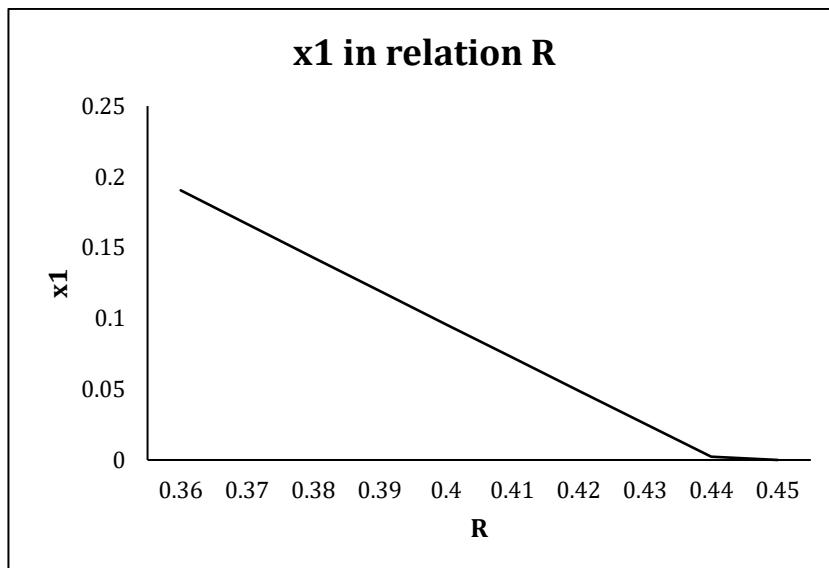
Let us start with  $r_1$  and  $r_3$ .





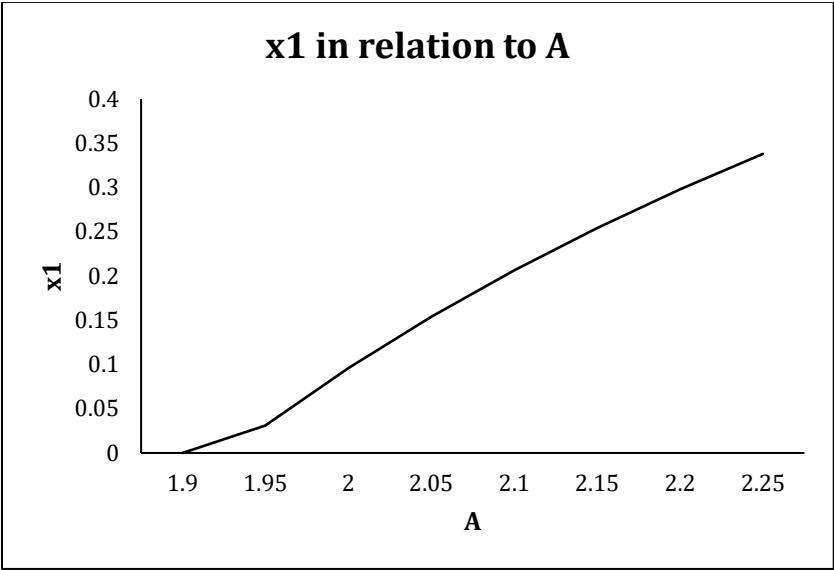
These results make pretty clear that the first party behaves like an established party, in such a way that it will only start campaigning negatively when the third party outgrows him. Even when both parties are equal in initial support, the first party will not engage in negative campaigning. In the results of the third party can be found that the third party will engage in some negative campaigning, even if both parties are equal in size before the elections. The reaction of the first party will be to keep reacting like the sensible party, like the established party that is fit to be governing a country.

The results for the other variables are as follows:

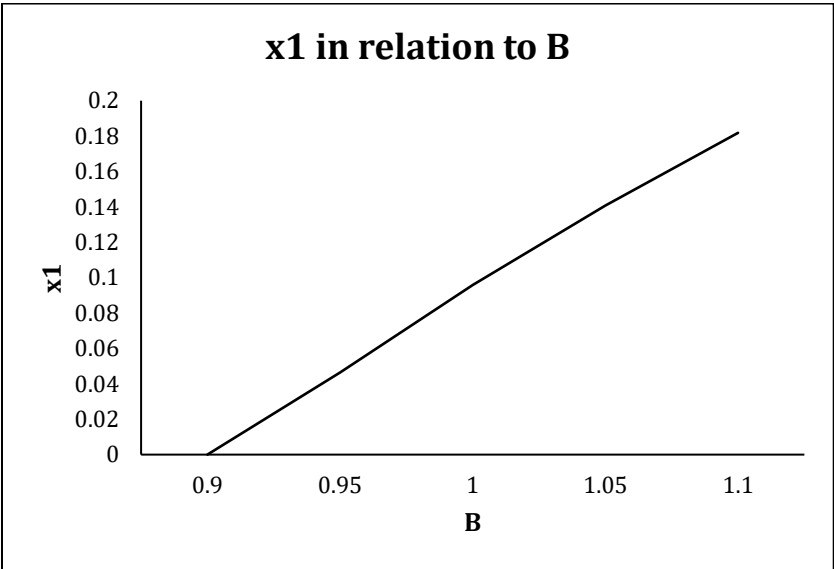


What can be derived from this table is that the first party is only engaging in negative campaigning when the amount of voters that can be won over by positive campaigning is very small. In the article about the opinion polls of the Dutch elections the number of 40% has been named to estimate the amount of undecided voters. The figures in this table do not even come close to that. This means that this party is very likely to behave itself as an established party, in the sense that it is aiming to be in government.

The other results are:



and



These two tables are consistent with the other results that are calculated for the first party. It takes a lot of incentive coming from the social and economic status of a country to make the first party engage in negative campaigning. Especially the extraordinary high value of  $B$  makes it clear that this party is indeed acting as an established party. The same goes for the variable  $A$ . In the results of  $A$  it is clear that, compared to the third party, the first party starts changing its expected behaviour later in the increase of  $A$ . This is an interesting pattern, which makes the case for voters that are voting for the third party more plausible: The third party is relatively likely to change its behaviour regarding its campaigning strategy and therefore their ambitions to be in government.

**Summary of the results**

The results that follow from the second model were divided into an analysis of the behaviour of the first and the third party respectively. The behaviour of both parties was the result of the optimisation of both parties' utility functions. Those functions led to two reaction functions,

which in their turn led to two solutions. By using the first solutions, the behaviour of both parties was modelled. The determining factors of the behaviour of both parties were their initial support and the difference relative to the initial support of the other party, the overall sensitivity of negative campaigning, the relative advantage of negative campaigning, and the amount of undecided voters.

For the third party the results were quite intuitive: Given that the first party has a bigger initial support than the third party, the smaller the difference between both parties' initial support, the less likely the third party is to campaign negatively. The effect of the sensitivity of negative campaigning as well as the relative advantage of negative campaigning have an increasing effect on the amount of negative campaigning the third party will engage in. These results are the least surprising. Finally, the amount of undecided voters have a decreasing effect on the amount of negative campaigning the third party will engage in. The results that speak to the amount of negative campaigning of the first party are the same, that is: the effects of all variables are the same.

These results lead to an interesting proposition regarding the research question: Voters will vote for a populist party because they expect that, when the support for the populist party has reached a certain point, the populist party will start to change its campaigning strategy. This means that the message about wanting to be in government changes when the party is big enough.



## 4. Conclusion

In this research the political phenomenon of populism is investigated. In a significant amount of western countries the support for populist parties is growing, even though the message of some of these political parties is that their intention is not to be in government. An often heard explanation for this is that voters are discontent with the current economic and political situation in their country and therefore their vote on a populist party is a vote against the establishment. This explanation would imply that voters that vote on populist parties are often not driven by rational motives that realise their desired outcomes in a government and in policy. One might say that the motives of voters that vote for a populist are somewhat based on emotions or sentiment. The aim of this research is to discover whether it is possible to give a rational explanation for the behaviour of voters when they vote on a populist party. Another aim of this research is to provide insight in the chosen campaigning strategy of political parties. Why would a populist party explicitly say that it does not want to be in government? The case of the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands is used as an example to apply the model to. In the campaigning period before the Dutch elections of 2017 the PVV and the VVD (right-wing party that was the biggest party in the last elections) competed to be the biggest party in the Netherlands. The opinion polls beforehand predicted a very close outcome. However, the VVD beat the PVV by a larger margin than predicted. This case is an interesting example of how the campaigning strategy of a political party can be determined by the initial support before the campaigning period and by the political and economic situation of a country.

The framework used for this research is the model of negative campaigning, introduced by Skaperdas and Grofman (1995). They provide a framework to analyse the choice of politicians to engage in positive or negative campaigning. Their model was applied to the American political system where politicians sometimes choose to personally attack their opponents. This is their definition of negative campaigning. In this research negative campaigning is defined as a negative attitude towards the current political situation and therefore a negative attitude of a political party to be in government. This model provides for several factors that determine the campaigning strategy of a political party such as the overall sensitivity of negative campaigning, the relative advantage of negative campaigning, and the initial preferences of voters for a certain party.

In this research there are two cases that are examined: The first case being the entry of the populist party in a political environment with two established political parties that only campaign positively. The aim of this part was to see whether it is at all reasonable that there is a smaller third party that only engages in negative campaigning. The results of this first case show that when the economic and political situation is in an undesirable condition for voters, there is room for the entry of a populist party that is only engaging in negative campaigning. The second case examines the behaviour of the established right-wing party as well as the behaviour of the populist right-wing party when they both have the possibility to campaign negatively towards each other. The aim of this second case is to see whether the possibility of negative campaigning of the first and the third party makes a difference in the campaigning strategy of both the first and the third party. And when it makes a difference, it is interesting to see whether these results might shed a light on the reason for voters to vote on a populist party. The results of this second case show that it is indeed possible that the campaigning strategy of the first and the third party is able to adapt to the economic and political situation in a country as well as to the initial preferences of voters. This means that when the populist party has an initial support that is big enough, the campaigning strategy of the populist party might change to a more positive way of campaigning. The opposite seems to be the case for the established right-wing party. These findings might explain why voters vote on a populist party even when this

party on campaigns negatively. An explanation for this is that they expect that the populist party will change its message and its attitude towards being in government when he is big enough compared to its established competitor.

This expectation can be shown in the behaviour of Dutch voters in the elections of 2017. Before the election day the opinion polls showed that VVD and PVV were very equal in expected vote shares. However, the PVV did not alter their message to a more nuanced or positive message. If anything, their message became more extreme, leading to even lower chances of the PVV ending up in government. In the final debate before the elections between VVD leader Mark Rutte and PVV leader Geert Wilders the difference between a positively campaigning Rutte and a negatively campaigning Wilders was clearly visible. The actual results of the Dutch elections showed a bigger difference between the VVD and the PVV than the difference that was predicted before the elections. A possible explanation for this based on the results of the second case is that voters might have expected the PVV to alter their message as their initial support was growing. When the PVV did not change their message to a more positive alternative, voters reacted by voting on other parties like the VVD. This is of course a possible explanation which is only based on this model and is not investigated empirically.

Investigating the motives of voters empirically is of course an interesting addition to this research. Another interesting opportunity for research lies in the behaviour of the second party, which is the established left-wing party. Especially because it is not entirely clear what will happen when the second party targets the first party, because the voters that initially support the first party can either move to the second party, but they also can move to the third party. It would be interesting to see what the impact is of the second party to the results. Also when the second party attacks the third party, it is not certain where the persuaded voters will cast their votes on in the end. This case is also interesting because in the real world it is often observed that the established left-wing parties attack the right-wing populist parties the most compared to the right-wing established parties. It would be quite relevant to look at the potential influence of a negatively campaigning second party on the behaviour of the first and the third party and on the results of an election.

Other opportunities are found in the different variables that are used and the structure of the model. It might be interesting to look at a model where undecided voters can also be sensitive to negative campaigning. For now it is only assumed that negative campaigning attracts voters that already have a preference towards a candidate. It might be interesting what the influence would be of a group of people that are classified as undecided voters, but at the same time is group that is discontent with the current economic and political situation.

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