

Othering Narratives in Dutch Populism: A Longitudinal Analysis of PVV and SP

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Abstract

This thesis has examined the evolution of othering narratives in the manifestos of Dutch populist parties, the PVV and SP, across multiple election cycles. It distinguishes between vertical othering (targeting elites) and horizontal othering (targeting migrant groups). The SP targets political and economic elites, while the PVV additionally focuses on migrant groups. This research has found that the othering narratives have shifted through time, potentially influenced by contextual factors, particularly power positioning, and connected strategic choices. Recommendations include interviews with party members and voters and re-analysis during future elections to understand the strategic motivations and impacts of these narratives. This research enhances understanding of (the evolution of) populist rhetoric in Dutch politics.

Keywords: populism, othering, narrative analysis

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1. Introduction

It is the essence of the political. That is how Ernesto Laclau would describe populism (2005). The political landscape in western democracies has witnessed a rise in populism in recent years. Including the Netherlands. Among other things, terrorist attacks and refugee crises have triggered the rise of populist movements in Europe. The threat and fear that these pose, combined with the belief that the EU is bad at addressing and solving these issues, have created a perfect situation for populists (Mudde, 2016). These populist parties often have nativist ideologies, prioritizing the interests of native-born over those of immigrants or other outsiders (Guia, 2021). Populism is usually associated with nativism, but the appeal of populism can spread across the political spectrum. Left-wing parties have also used populist strategies, albeit with different emphases. In western democracies like the Netherlands, left- and right-wing populism challenges dominant narratives about governance and representation.

The Dutch Socialist Party (SP) and the Party for Freedom (PVV) capitalize on public discontent with traditional political establishments, offering simplified solutions to complex socio-economic and cultural challenges, therefore often being described as populist parties. Their populist appeal lies in their ability to present themselves as defenders of the ‘ordinary’ people against the perceived ineffectiveness of mainstream politics. The PVV, led by Geert Wilders, is known for its strong anti-immigration stance, Euroscepticism, and opposition to Islam, presenting itself as the voice of the ‘common people’. The SP focuses on left-wing populism, emphasizing social justice, economic equality, and anti-austerity measures, also portraying themselves as representing the ‘ordinary’ citizen. Research has shown that both parties exhibit similar views on issues such as sovereignty and democratic reforms (Otjes & Louwense, 2015). Also, studies on left-wing xenophobia in Europe have shown that extreme left-wing people can also have anti-immigrant attitudes, depending on cultural factors (Veul, Flache & Venema, 2016; Reinemann et al., 2017; Sanders et al., 2017; Kopyciok & Silver, 2021). Researching left-wing parties next to right-wing parties challenges the conventional narrative that populism and anti-immigrant sentiments are solely for right-wing parties. By researching the development of narratives and strategies of both left-wing and right-wing populist parties, a more nuanced understanding can be gained of the factors driving populist mobilization and its impact on political discourse and policymaking.

Populism is not merely a set of policy proposals, but a mode of communication, a form of storytelling that resonates with disaffected segments of society (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Müller, 2016). Populism being fundamentally characterized by its language and style, not only results in the exclusion of outgroups, but also anti-elitism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). This showcases the core populist tendency of being anti-migrant—referred to as horizontal othering—and also manifests in

its anti-elite sentiment, known as vertical othering. Horizontal othering targets marginalized groups such as migrants, framing them as threats to the identity of 'the people'. In this thesis, this 'migrant' out-group entails asylum-seekers, but also citizens migration backgrounds. Vertical othering focuses on rejecting the political, economic, and cultural elites, accusing them of betraying or ignoring the will and needs of the ordinary citizens. This dual process of othering is central to the populist narrative, making both the vertical and horizontal axes relevant elements for research in this thesis.

Former research on populist political parties abroad has shown how these may radicalize over time, however, there is also counterproof to this claim. Research on Belgium and Switzerland has indicated that right-wing populist parties in western Europe moderate their public stances upon entering government coalitions, toning down anti-establishment rhetoric and adjusting messaging to broaden their appeal (Sijstermans & Favero, 2022). The externalization of 'us' and 'them' by populist parties in power makes them able to keep or potentially even intensify their discourse. However, this is challenged by the theory that extended tenure in office weakens populist rhetoric (Hegedüs, 2019). Researching the development of both the PVV and SP offers an opportunity to observe this phenomenon in two types of populist parties. This research can contribute to understanding the dynamics of populist movements and their long-term implications for democratic governance.

With narrative research, the complexities of this political ideological discourse can be researched. By analyzing the stories, symbols, and language by political actors, the underlying narratives that shape public perceptions can be uncovered. In the case of SP and PVV, understanding the development of vertical and horizontal othering narratives is important to know in order to find out its political communication strategies and societal implications. Narrative research creates the possibility to explore development, revealing shifts, consistencies, and potentially underlying ideologies.

Moreover, by comparing the manifestos from various election cycles, this study can find out whether there is a noticeable chronological pattern in the populist parties' approaches to othering migrant groups and elites. The chronological examination of the pre-electoral narratives shows the parties' responsiveness to changing political contexts and electoral dynamics, showcasing its adaptation strategies and messaging tactics over time.

This thesis seeks to answer the following question: *“How have othering narratives in party discourse of Dutch populist political parties PVV and SP shifted over time?”*

In order to explore this question comprehensively, the following sub questions will be addressed:

1. *How do othering narratives manifest in PVV's pre-electoral programs in the different election cycles?*
2. *How do othering narratives manifest in SP's pre-electoral programs in the different election cycles?*
3. *What are the differences and similarities between the narrations in each of the pre-electoral programs?*

2. Literature review

2.1 Populism, the people

“A characteristic of populism is that there is no clear definition of it” (Taggart, 2002, p.66). Initially, scholars struggled to define populism, with early definitions coming from Latin American political movements like those of Juan Domingo Perón and Getúlio Vargas. However, as newer waves of populism emerged globally, especially in Europe, scholars began to view populism more as a discourse or ideology centered around the dichotomy of ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’ (Hawkins & Littvay, 2019). Populism is defined by people-centrism, which romanticizes the common people and frames democracy as their struggle against the elite (Mudde, 2004). Populists advocate for systematic institutional change: they challenge liberal norms and attack evidence-based reasoning. Populism is different from traditional ideologies like liberalism or socialism, characterized by a small set of ideas and often a lack of articulation. It can be on both the left and right of the political spectrum and attached to different ideologies. It is particularly interesting to add left-wing populism to this scope, as this aspect has often been overlooked in populist research.

2.1.1 The other

Populism often polarizes societies by framing discourse in terms of ‘us versus them’, targeting political opponents, cultural minorities, or marginalized communities (Cowburn, 2022). This deepens societal tensions and undermines social cohesion. Moral panic and othering theories explain how dominant groups construct narratives that portray marginalized communities as threats (Cohen, 1973; Critcher, 2008; Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011). By framing migrants as the ‘Other’, populists foster divisions and appeal to nativist sentiments.

Othering, a process of defining and marginalizing those perceived as different, is a common phenomenon in contemporary political and social discourse (Dervin, 2012). The process of othering

is particularly evident in the rhetoric of populist movements, which frequently target both migrants and political and economic institutions, elites, in their narratives. This dual focus on othering highlights the varied dimensions of populism, especially in its constitutional and anti-constitutional forms. Tong and Zuo (2018) describe it as labeling those perceived as belonging to a different group as 'deviant.' This fosters both violent and non-violent conflicts (Van Der Zwet et al., 2020). So, populism creates a separation between 'the people' and 'the others,' which can include the elite(s) or any group perceived as different. It is also described as 'the heartland' opposing to 'the outsider' or 'the establishment'. This inherent antagonism is a key characteristic of populism, as it exists through an 'us versus them' mentality, pushing social and political divisions (Ostaijen & Scholten, 2014). By defining the other, societies not only create boundaries but also reinforce their own identities. This process of defining the self in opposition to the other is very important for identity development (Sonnis-Bell, 2019). The division is associated with emotional states like anger and resentment (Müller, 2016). These emotions stimulate support for populist movements and their enforcements of binaries, as leaders emphasize perceived injustices and inequalities. Scapegoating entails blaming specific groups for societal problems (Cohen, 1973; Critcher, 2008). In migration, scapegoating can be portraying migrants as causes of social, economic, or cultural issues without addressing structural problems.

2.1.2 Constitutional vs. anti-constitutional populism

Constitutional and anti-constitutional populism approach the established political order differently. Constitutional populism operates within democratic norms and legal frameworks, representing the 'will of the people' without undermining constitutional order. Anti-constitutional populism challenges and seeks to undermine these frameworks, perceiving these frameworks as obstacles to sovereignty (Krygier, 2022). Both forms engage in othering, but the targets and methods can be different. Constitutional populists focus on othering externals like migrants or supranational institutions, saying that they threaten a country's sovereignty and culture. Anti-constitutional populists, however, are more likely to target domestic institutions and elites, portraying them as inherently corrupt and in need of radical overhaul.

2.1.3 Othering Migrants

The identity of the self is based on an unconscious projection of the other who is not us (Kearney, 2002). This dynamic is clearly seen in the treatment of migrants and minorities. Migrants are often othered through moral panics and negative media portrayals, which construct them as threats to the social order (Tong & Zuo, 2018). Such narratives can serve to unify the in-group by creating a common enemy and reinforcing national or cultural boundaries.

The rise of far-right populism in Europe showcases this trend. These movements have othered minority groups, including migrants, Muslims, and the LGBT community, describing them as threats to national identity and security (Lazaridis, Campani, & Benveniste, 2016). This othering aims to combine the in-group and support for populist agendas that promise to protect the nation from these threats.

2.1.4 Othering Institutions and Elites

The scope of othering in populist rhetoric goes further than migrants and minorities. Political elites and (supranational) institutions like the EU are also targets. Anti-elitism is a core part of most populist movements, which describe elites as out of touch and corrupt (Lazaridis, Campani, & Benveniste, 2016). This form of othering is clear in the Brexit campaign, in which political elites and the EU were narrated as oppressors undermining British sovereignty (Looney, 2017). Populist movements stimulate feelings of insecurity, directing these feelings against internal elites and external institutions. This dual othering strategy helps to mobilize a lot of support by attracting nativist, but also generally anti-establishment feelings. The populist leaders are ‘champions of the people’ against enemies, from migrants to the liberal media and global institutions (Looney, 2017).

While othering is usually seen as negative, it can have more complex implications. Powell (2017) says that recognizing differences can lead to positive outcomes, such as creating greater understanding and solidarity among groups. However, in the current socio-political climate, othering tends to be strongly divisive, challenging unity and diversity (Van Der Zwet et al., 2020).

2.1.5 Binaries and Power Dynamics

Binaries can be used in politics to show categories of difference. These binaries can be social and political divides such as man/woman, occidental/oriental, and rich/poor (Dhamoon, 2021). Although binaries can be restrictive, at times they are necessary for organizing social movements. It is good to understand why these binaries become important and the role they play in society (Dhamoon, 2021). Complex socio-political issues are simplified into simple narratives (Cowburn, 2022). Populists do not trust complexity, framing themselves as the voice of common sense.

2.2 Migrant narratives

2.2.1 Narrative of public health risk

This narrative narrates migrants as potential carriers of diseases. Or, as individuals who might burden the healthcare system (Gushulak et al., 2009; Wickramage, 2018), due to either mental or physical illness. The narrative poses that migration can lead to public health challenges. The suggested

overburdening of the healthcare system in a receiving country would then create reduced quality of care and longer wait times for native citizens. In some cases it will be described as a cause for even taking away the care of native citizens completely. The narrative includes fears of inadequately screened migrants introducing diseases that were previously under control or rare in the host country.

2.2.2 Narrative of cultural clash

In contrast to migrants being described as cultural enrichment (Fowers & Richardson, 1996), the narrative of cultural clash highlights concerns about the risks of cultural weakening (Albada et al., 2021; Landmann et al., 2019). This perspective emphasizes the tensions and conflicts that arise from cultural differences, portraying migrants as outsiders whose presence threatens traditional values and social cohesion. It warns against loss of cultural heritage and the ‘invasion’ of foreign norms and practices (e.g. Stansfield & Stone, 2018). By pushing fears of cultural conflict, this narrative gets support for restrictive immigration policies and border controls, promoting cultural preservation.

2.2.3 Narrative of economic burden

According to the narrative of economic burden, migrants are a burden to public resources and undermine economic stability (Haw, 2023; Jonakin, 2012). This perspective emphasizes the literal costs of immigration, from pressure on education systems to competition for jobs (Dustmann & Preston, 2006). Migrants are described as abusers of welfare benefits leading to resentment and hostility from the native-born. This narrative creates (already existing) fears of economic insecurity and job displacement, framing migrants as competitors for scarce, and villainized in the process. By highlighting the perceived economic costs of immigration, this narrative seeks to justify restrictive immigration policies.

2.2.4 Narrative of security threat

In this narrative migrants are viewed as causes of national security and public safety concerns. This emphasizes the risks of crime and terrorism due to migrants (Cantat, Pécoud & Thiollet, 2023). It narrates migrants as potential threats to public order and national security, fueling fears of violence, extremism, and lawlessness (Collyer, 2013). This narrative connects immigration with increased crime rates and terrorist activity, leading to goals of stricter border controls and immigration enforcement measures. By pushing fears and insecurity, this narrative has the aim to justify increased surveillance, portraying migrants as a threat to the safety and well-being of society.

2.2.5 Narrative of spacial overcrowding

The spatial overcrowding narrative focuses on the physical and spatial impact of a high number of migrants in a city or country. This leads then to a perceived, or actual, overcrowding in public spaces

(Eonomopoulou et al., 2017). It suggests that the large income of migrants results in too densely populated living conditions, congestion, and pressure on housing markets.

2.3 Elite narratives

Anti-elite sentiment in populism goes further than the political elite. Namely, it also includes economic and social elites, such as corporations and institutions (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). This opposition targets people in the entities, but also the complete entities. They emphasize a rejection of existing power structures.

2.3.1 Elitist corruption

This narrative highlights the corrupt behavior and unethical practices of the elites, who are portrayed as using their power to participate in bribery, embezzlement and fraud (Engler, 2020; Franks et al., 2017). It suggests that elites are primarily driven by self-interest and greed, often at the expense of the public good. By emphasizing elitist corruption, this narrative creates less trust in the political and economic systems controlled by elites (Pop-Eleches, 2010). It fosters public anger towards corrupt practices and aims to get more transparency and accountability. Next to that, often populist want higher fines and stronger punishments.

2.3.2 Elite control

This narrative assumes that a small, powerful elite group controls society. This includes politics, the economy and the media (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016). These elites are said to control systems and institutions to maintain their dominance and suppress the will of the people. Elite control narratives stimulate a sense of powerlessness among the general population (Mangset, 2019). It shows the need for radical changes to redistribute power and democratize decision-making processes. This narrative supports populist calls for dismantling elite structures and increasing direct participation of ordinary citizens in governance.

2.3.3 Elitist conspiracy

This narrative says that elites are involved in conspiracies that are aimed at maintaining or expanding power. It is being suggested that elites lie and manipulate the public with their hidden agendas (Garrett & Weeks, 2017; Hameleers, 2021). By promoting the idea of elitist conspiracy, this narrative creates fear and suspicion towards elites. It can lead to conspiracy theories about certain institutions, and also justify extreme conspiracy measures (Lewandowsky et al., 2013; Byford, 2011). Here, populists portray themselves as defenders of truth and justice.

2.3.4 Elite incompetence

This narrative describes elites as incompetent and ineffective in their roles. They cannot be trusted, whether in government, business, or other sectors (Farrand & Carrapico, 2021). Elites are said to lack skills, knowledge or dedication to work properly. This causes crises. Emphasizing elite incompetence undermines legitimacy and authority of elite figures (Barr, 2009). It strengthens populist leaders who present themselves as more capable and in touch with the needs of ‘ordinary people’. This narrative stimulates the idea that new leaders are necessary, advertising for populist leadership.

2.3.5 Elite hypocrisy

This narrative highlights the difference between the public statements and (private) actions of elites. Populists accuse elites of being hypocritical (Staykova et al., 2016). It points out situations in which elites do not ‘practice what they preach’. It is usually when the elites advocate for policies or values that they, themselves, do not even put into practice. Exposing elite hypocrisy takes away credibility, which makes it easier for populist movements to find support.

2.3.6 Elite privilege

This narrative suggests that elites have an inflated sense of entitlement, believing they deserve their privileged status and benefits, regardless of contribution (Marx & Nguyen, 2018). It shows elites as arrogant and disconnected from the struggles and needs of ordinary people. By focusing on elite entitlement, this narrative resents the arrogance and selfishness of elites. It stimulates populist claims that the system is ‘rigged’ in favour of a few at the expense of the many, justifying calls for greater equality and redistribution of wealth and power.

2.3.7 Elite disconnect

The elitist disconnect narrative emphasizes the growing gap between the elites and the general population, highlighting how elites are increasingly out of touch with the daily realities and concerns of ordinary people. This narrative suggests that elites live in a separate, insulated world with little understanding or empathy for the struggles of the average citizen (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Schulz et al., 2018). It underscores the perception that elites prioritize their interests and agendas, often leading to policies and decisions that do not reflect or benefit the broader society. This disconnect fosters a sense of alienation among the public, fueling populist sentiments that call for leaders who are more in tune with the people's needs and values. This narrative can justify populist demands for greater representation and a reorientation of political priorities towards more inclusive governance.

2.4 Down or against the stream?

Now, it will be discussed how populist political parties can strengthen or weaken their instances of othering over time. The analysis of the parties' manifestos over time will focus on tracking the development of anti-elitist and anti-migrant narratives. This analysis aims to find out whether the parties exhibit signs of this radicalization, moderation, neither or both. It is worth noting how the populist behaviour of a political party can be influenced by its positioning in government. Populist parties may adjust their populist rhetoric according to whether they are in power or not (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015). Without claiming whether populists in power radicalize or moderate their rhetoric, Albertazzi and McDonnell provide insights into how populist parties can adjust their populist characteristics to maintain and protect their political ideals.

2.4.1 Radicalization

Firstly, path dependency theory shows enduring prevalence of radical discourse within populist parties, particularly those containing nativist ideologies. This theory says that historical trajectories and ideological positions shape the contemporary identity and policy priorities of such parties. Over time, these parties create a political brand centered on nativist themes, capitalizing on concerns about immigration, multiculturalism, and national identity to bolster their appeal (Kreuzer, 2009). Understanding the role of path dependency is important for contextualizing contemporary political discourse.

Furthermore, internal dynamics within populist parties can fuel radicalization, as factions or leaders advocate for more extreme positions to seize perceived opportunities or maintain relevance within the political landscape. Additionally, external pressures from competing populist movements or shifts in public opinion may compel parties to radicalize their rhetoric to remain pertinent (Hegedüs, 2019, p.409). An influence on the extent of radicalization of populism can be the position of power. Being in power in government, so being part of the cabinet, can be a cause of the stabilization of even radicalization of populist rhetoric (Albertazzi & Mueller, 2013). However, the opposite is also possible: prolonged periods out of government may also lead to radicalization if populist parties feel marginalized or excluded from the political process (Caiani & Graziano, 2022, p. 578-579). Radicalization has several strategic purposes for populist parties. Firstly, it allows them to maintain their appeal to supporters with anti-establishment and anti-elitist feelings. These parties differentiate themselves from mainstream counterparts by adopting more and more extreme positions (Hegedüs, 2019, p.407). Radical discourse also often is a distraction from governance issues or failures, changing the focus towards identity-based rhetoric (rather than policy outcomes). This emphasis on emotional rhetoric and identity politics resonates deeply with disaffected parts of society, further extending the party's support and strengthening its power (Hegedüs, 2019, p.409).

2.4.2 Moderation

Then there are theories that elucidate the phenomenon of ‘de-radicalization’ within populist political parties. This is a process in which these parties moderate their rhetoric and policies over time. Moderation can be a result of pragmatic governance, institutional constraints, international pressures, and strategic considerations aimed at electoral success. Pragmatic governance can be a factor for moderation within populist parties. These parties may recognize the necessity of moderation to govern effectively when gaining power (Hegedüs, 2019, p.409). Populist parties may moderate their discourse and policies over time as they gain more experience in governance (Caiani & Graziano, 2022, p. 578-579). Extremist positions may hinder their ability to achieve policy objectives and maintain long-term public support. They may adopt a pragmatic approach, toning down radical rhetoric in their discourse. The desire to avoid isolation on the global stage makes them want to reduce their radical rhetoric and come closer to international norms. Mainstreaming for electoral success is a strategy for moderation within populist parties. As these parties want to become more attractive to voters, they could moderate their rhetoric and aimed policies (Hegedüs, 2019, p.407). Mainstreaming is about weakening extreme positions and getting more popular concerns (Akkerman et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2023; Newth, 2023).

Analyzing the change and development of anti-elitist and anti-migrant narratives in the parties' manifestos over time creates clarity on the progress of their political discourse. By examining the presence, intensity, and tone of these narratives across different election cycles, patterns can be found that could show if the parties are moving towards radicalization, mainstreaming, or neither. The evolution of these narratives may reveal a trend, such as an increasing line indicating radicalization, a declining line suggesting mainstreaming, or a more unclear pattern influenced by contextual factors and selective emphasis.

2.5 Expected Results

As Bonikowski (2016) says, populism's adaptability is evident in how politicians use populist rhetoric selectively, depending on audience reception and broader societal contexts. This emphasizes the importance of selective emphasis in forming narratives of the PVV and SP. Selective emphasis becomes an important factor, because both parties highlight specific aspects of their narratives to resonate with electoral agendas. For example, during periods with a lot of public concern over security, the PVV may amplify its portrayal of migrants as a security threat. The SP might emphasize economic inequalities and social justice issues to receive more appeal. This strategizing makes it possible for parties to adjust their messaging to capitalize on important issues (Brown et al., 2023). To add to this is the context given that both the PVV and the SP in the scope of this research have not

been part of government. Both parties having been in opposition during this timeline, can potentially mean a certain freedom for them to radicalize rhetoric (Albertazzi & Mueller, 2013). However, the opposite might also be true (Caiani & Graziano, 2022; Hegedüs, 2019).

Furthermore, narrative convergence and divergence between PVV and SP are likely. While both parties engage in othering, the emphasis of these forms may differ. For instance, the PVV may prioritize horizontal othering, targeting migrants and narrating them as cultural and economic threats to native Dutch people. The SP might emphasize vertical othering, directing criticism towards political elites and institutions. However, also instances of narrative convergence are expected, specifically on themes such as sovereignty, where both parties aim to position themselves as champions of the "ordinary" people (Otjes & Louwse, 2015).

3. Research design

The chosen method for this research is a temporal comparative narrative analysis. This sets the opportunity to do an examination of the othering narratives present in manifestos of the PVV and SP. Narrative analysis is well-suited for capturing the nuances of language and storytelling which are essential for understanding how marginalized groups are portrayed (Bamberg, 2012). A narrative analysis enables the identification of recurring themes, patterns, and shifts in narrative portrayals (Mishler, 1995). The narrative analysis aligns with the research question, as it enables the study of how migrant groups are depicted in party programs of the populist parties over the years, including any potential changes or evolutions in these portrayals leading up to the PVV's recent electoral success (Cebulak & Lippert, 2024).

3.1 Case selection

Both the SP and PVV have held significant positions in Dutch politics, making them influential players in shaping (populist) political discourse and policy outcomes. The choice of analysing populist parties in Dutch politics over those of different national politics, is because the Netherlands has a multi-party system with the emergence of many distinctive parties. What makes this fascinating, is the Dutch the background of being known as politically and socially tolerant, which showcases a strong contrast with the divisive populist rhetoric. It is interesting as well as relevant to analyze the tensions between traditional democratic values and populist ideologies.

The SP and PVV are known for their stances on national identity and populist ideas (Vossen, 2016), specifically the PVV regarding immigration and migrants (March & Mudde, 2005). This makes them relevant for researching shifts in discourse over time, as their positions are highly debated in Dutch politics. Although the populist parties Forum for Democracy (FvD) and BIJ1 would be interesting cases, their relatively short existence makes it impossible to effectively measure the temporal development. Both the PVV and SP have participated in multiple national election cycles, providing a good dataset for analysis. Examining their manifestos and party principal documents across these cycles makes it effective for the identification of any shifts in their messaging over time. Elections are important moments in politics, because they show overarching narratives and policy positions of political parties. By examining manifestos, this thesis can really grasp the evolution of the discourse over time.

3.2 Sampling strategy

In addition to analyzing national election cycles, analyzing the EU pre-electoral programs and party principal documents of the PVV and SP contributes to a more comprehensive database of their standpoints. This broader perspective helps to contextualize the parties' positions within national and supranational contexts. It shows insight into how their ideologies and policies intersect at different levels of governance.

Local and provincial elections also play a role in shaping political landscapes. However, focusing solely on national and EU elections is a more focused approach for this research. National and EU elections attract broader attention and involve debates on issues of national and international significance. This makes them relevant for examining shifts in political discourse on migrants and related topics at a broader scale. Thus, by concentrating on national and EU pre-electoral programs and general party principle documents, this research can show a detailed overview of the PVV and SP's standpoints over the years within relevant political contexts.

To ensure a fair and comparable analysis between the Socialist Party (SP) and the Party for Freedom (PVV), the documents from the same time period for both parties will be examined, meaning the full period since the first party principle document of the PVV in 2005, until the most recent EU parliamentary elections. For the SP, this includes 11 pages of party principal documents, 311 pages of pre-electoral programs for national elections, and 154 pages of pre-electoral programs for EU parliamentary elections. The PVV's documentation consists of 23 pages of party principal documents,

219 pages of pre-electoral programs for national elections, and 16 pages of pre-electoral programs for EU parliamentary elections. In total, the corpus consists of 734 pages. This approach ensures that both parties are studied within a consistent timeframe and with similar volumes of textual data, enabling an equitable comparison of their discourse.

3.3 Data collection

The selected data collection approach entails gathering pre-electoral party programs of the PVV and SP from multiple election cycles. These documents are primary sources, giving insight into the party's evolving discourse on marginalized groups. By examining a series of pre-electoral programs spanning several years, it is aimed to identify recurring themes and analyze the rhetorical strategies employed.

Once the documents were gathered, they underwent preparation to facilitate systematic analysis. Digital copies of the documents are organized chronologically and indexed for easy reference. If needed, any formatting or typing irregularities are fixed to make sure the data is clear and consistent for analysis in Atlas.ti. I have also kept track of important details like when the programs were published, the election situations at the time and any changes in party leadership. This helps to understand the context better when analyzing the documents.

3.4 Data analysis

Atlas.ti software was used for coding and analyzing the different manifestos, creating systematic data interpretation. The coding process is carried out in an abductive manner: initially taking a deductive approach, using established narratives to guide the initial coding, and then allowing for inductive coding to capture any emergent themes or nuances that may not fit within existing frameworks (Azungah, 2018). The codes used are based on the framework as set out in the operationalization table.

The analysis of the parties' manifestos over time have focused on tracking the evolution of both anti-elitist and anti-migrant narratives to find out whether the parties show any signs of radicalization or moderation. For anti-elitist narratives, the examination has centered around identifying the prevalence and intensity of rhetoric targeting mostly political elites and institutions. With the goal to observe potential trends towards either radicalization or moderation, manifestos across different election cycles were studied. If the parties are showing radicalization, it would be

expected to see a strengthening of anti-elitist language, with sharper critiques of political elites and heightened appeals to populist sentiments. If moderation is occurring, there may be a toning down of anti-elitist rhetoric, with less emphasis on extreme positions and more focus on pragmatic governance strategies (Hegedüs, 2019). The same for anti-migrant narratives, the analysis focussed on how migrant communities are portrayed and perceived impacts on society. A radicalizing trend would manifest in stronger, more divisive language demonizing migrants and framing them as existential threats to the nation. This could include stronger mentions of more restrictive immigration policies and scapegoating of migrant groups. If moderation is taking place, a moderation of anti-migrant rhetoric would be observed, with more nuanced discussions on immigration policy. This might be a shift towards emphasizing economic or security concerns over cultural threats posed by migrants (Akkerman et al., 2016). Something to take into account is that changes in the presence of anti-elitist and anti-migrant narratives may reflect shifts in the political landscape, public opinion, or strategies, and not necessarily just a process of radicalization or moderation.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The discourse under analysis intersects with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion, requiring cultural sensitivity in the analysis. These identity markers will be approached with nuance and interpretations that may further marginalize certain groups, are avoided. Acknowledging one's own biases, privileges, and positionalities as a researcher is crucial in ensuring ethical conduct throughout the study. Reflexivity encourages me to critically examine how my own perspectives may influence data analysis and interpretation.

3.6 Operationalization

The operationalization table presented hereunder functions as a structured framework for the analysis. These narratives, gathered from diverse theoretical perspectives, play an important role in explaining the multifaceted dimensions of parties' discourse within their manifestos. This table offers a systematic approach to examining the narrative themes and discursive dynamics embedded within the texts. By operationalizing these concepts into measurable units of analysis, an extensive understanding of the intersections between political rhetoric, identity politics, and electoral strategies can be created.

	Theoretical concepts	Codes	Definition
Othering narratives	Horizontal (anti-migrant)	Security threat	Migrants as a threat to national security and public safety
		Cultural clash	Migration as a clash of civilizations, emphasizing perceived cultural incompatibilities between migrants and native populations
		Economic burden	Migrants as an economic burden on the host country, highlighting the costs associated with providing social services, healthcare, education, and other resources to migrant populations
		Public health risk	Migrants bringing diseases or health risks into the country, portraying them as a danger to public health
		Spacial overcrowding	Migrants as spacial overcrowding, taking up too much space
	Vertical (anti-elite)	Elitist corruption	Elites as corrupt and self-serving, exploiting their positions of power for personal gain
		Elite control/oppression	Elites wield disproportionate influence in shaping political agendas, economic policies, and social norms, often to serve their own interests and maintain their privileged status
		Elitist conspiracy	Elites are depicted as conspirators who manipulate events behind the scenes to

			maintain their grip on power and control
		Elite incompetence	Elites are portrayed as incompetent and ineffectual leaders who are ill-equipped to address the challenges facing society
		Elite hypocrisy	Elite double standards, moral failings, or ethical lapses, casting doubt on their sincerity and integrity
		Elite privilege	Elites perpetuating systems of privilege and inequality, ensuring that wealth and power remain concentrated among a select few
		Elite disconnect	Elitist gap between the elites and the general populace, highlighting how elites are increasingly out of touch with the daily realities and concerns of ordinary people

Figure 1: Operationalization table / code book

4. Results

4.1 Approaches to othering

The analysis of the manifestos of the PVV and the SP has shown different approaches to populist othering. The PVV's manifestos have a combination of vertical and horizontal othering and the SP mainly has vertical othering, generally avoiding the othering of people with migration backgrounds. The SP's focus is on challenging political and economic elites. This is shown by their constant emphasis on issues such as corporate greed and social justice.

4.2 Horizontal othering

So, the PVV exercises horizontal othering by perceiving various social groups as "others." This horizontal othering targets migrants in general, mostly the ones being part of mass migration. The PVV's rhetoric narrates these groups as threats to the Dutch way of life, cultural identity, economic stability, and public safety. One of the main targets of the PVV's horizontal othering is Muslim people and the Islam in general. The party frequently describes the Islam as incompatible with western values and safety. This generalization creates a very clear distinction between the in-group (native Dutch citizens) and the out-group (Muslims and migrants). For example, the PVV's manifestos might include statements like "Islam does not belong to the Netherlands. It will be an eternal source of unrest." (PVV, 2012, p.35 6:13), which emphasizes the cultural and ideological conflict between Islam and Dutch society that the PVV is convinced of. Within the Muslim society, the PVV often talks about specific national or ethnic groups, particularly Turkish and Moroccan people. These groups are mentioned explicitly, and the PVV writes that they are not integrating into Dutch society and are instead contributing to social problems.

4.3 Vertical othering

The PVV focuses its criticism on three main groups as elites. Firstly, political elites. Many mainstream political parties are described as corrupt and ineffective, detached from ordinary citizens. Secondly, the PVV aims at left-liberal politicians, including their supporters, claiming that they promote policies that weaken national identity. Lastly, the PVV critiques the EU and its compartments, describing EU institutions as undemocratic and harmful to Dutch sovereignty.

The SP's portrayal of elites is broader. The SP also criticizes political elites, but includes a wider range of political actors, such as other political parties and the government itself. It criticizes them for not addressing social inequalities properly and for creating policies that are solely beneficial for the wealthy. The SP is as well highly critical of the EU, 'Brussels', and the European Central Bank (ECB), explaining how they create neoliberal economic policies that prioritize corporate interests over the welfare of 'ordinary' people, usually being Dutch citizens. The SP also criticizes economic elites, including corporations and the financial sector, whom they accuse of exploiting workers. Furthermore, the SP uses terms like "rich people," "money grabbers," and "slumlords" to describe people who they believe are wealthy at the expense of vulnerable populations, such as tenants and low-wage workers.

In order to make a valid comparison of the coding results across political manifestos of varying lengths, the results have been quantified and presented in a table. Given the significant differences in

the number of pages among the manifestos, ranging from as few as 1 to as many as 80 pages, the table has normalized the data by calculating the average number of codes (narratives) per 10 pages for each document. This approach has standardized the coding frequencies, so that the differences in document lengths are evened out.

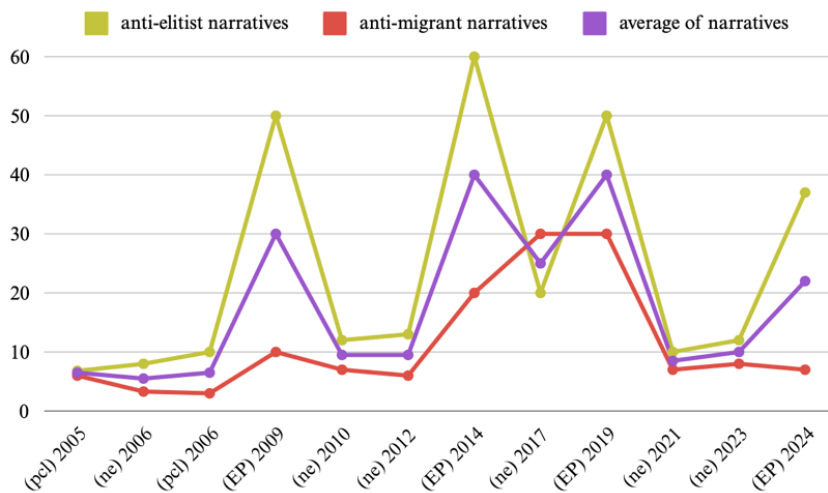


Figure 2: othering narratives in PVV manifestos over time

4.4 PVV: othering migrants and elites

From the start, the PVV intensified its rhetoric against other political parties, particularly those on the left, as well as the EU. This strong opposition stance showed aggressive critique of leftist politics and European institutions. This made the PVV a defender of national sovereignty and traditional values.

“The blame lies with the left-wing elites who think the world looks like Woodstock.” (PVV, 2010, p.7 5:6)

“No more billions spent on left-liberal ideological policies such as nitrogen and climate.” (PVV, 2023, p.3 11:1)

This narrative kept being sharpened constantly: as the party's anti-elite rhetoric grew stronger, it also became more targeted. The PVV was criticizing leftist political parties more and more, portraying them as out of touch with ordinary citizens and overly supportive of multicultural policies. This can be seen in their manifestos from this period, where they for instance described leftist parties and people as being hateful towards ‘heroes’ from Dutch history, emphasizing a narrative of

disconnection (PVV, 2023, p.3 11:1). Also the EU was more and more frequently depicted as a symbol of an undemocratic elite pushing policies on the Netherlands without proper consideration for the will of its people:

“In recent decades we have witnessed the slow erosion of our freedom and independence. A proud nation is swimming into a trap that is becoming increasingly oppressive.” (PVV, 2012, p.10 6:20)

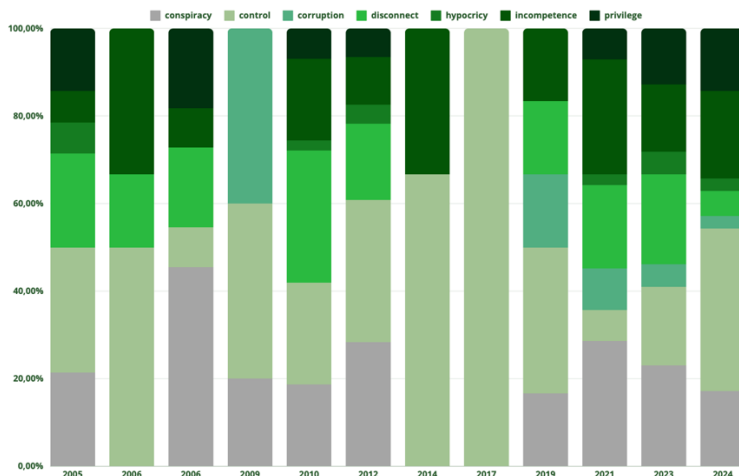


Figure 3: anti-elitist othering narratives in PVV manifestos over time

Two main anti-elitist narratives by the PVV have been elitist control and elitist conspiracy. These narratives have been clearly present from the first publication until the most recent, being a core othering technique in their discourse. At first, the control narrative was quite implicit, with statements about the power held by elites such as the government:

The PVV places the bill with the politicians: fewer politicians, lower salaries and abolishing the severance pay scheme. With the government: fewer civil servants, less bureaucracy, we cut provinces and municipalities and transfer the water boards to the provinces.’ (PVV, 2010, p.10 5:53)

Over time, it became more explicit, calling for the people to reclaim their power and demanding that the government and the EU stop meddling and controlling things:

“The Netherlands must become an independent country again. In charge of our own country and our own laws. We make political decisions in The Hague, not in Brussels” (PVV, 2019, p.1 9:4).

“Let us cherish and protect our Dutch identity and national sovereignty. We must not surrender to the whims of the unelected European Commissioners in Brussels.” (PVV, 2024, p.4 12:12)

Similarly, the conspiracy narratives started off implicitly, with quotes from philosophers: “at least as threatening is such a tyranny of the majority on the social level. Democracies, based on the principle of social equality, tend towards conformism” (PVV, 2024, p.2 12:22), and evolved to become much more literal, with references to "Big Brother" and accusations of totalitarian plans.

Something that is visible in figure two above, is the distinction between the two governmental levels. The manifestos for the elections on European level have shown to be much more ‘other-narrative dense’. This is mainly due to the strong disapproval of the PVV regarding the control and even so-called oppression that the European Parliament exercises. Less so for the SP, the PVV really emphasizes these narratives extra intensively when it comes to the EU level.

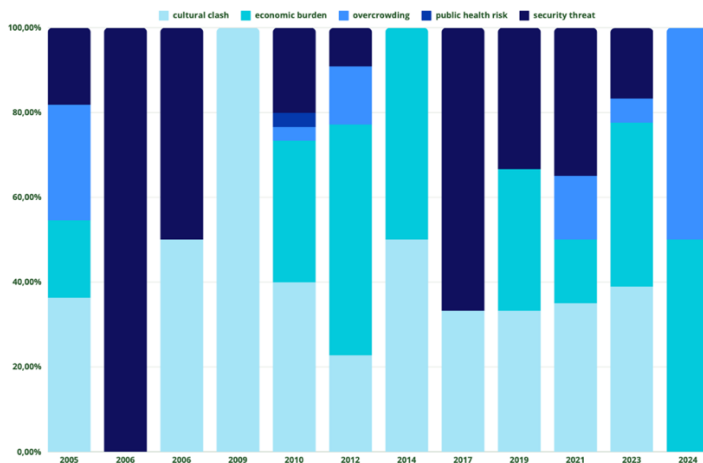


Figure 4: anti-migrant othering narratives in PVV manifestos over time

The PVV's othering of migrants has shifted frequently through time, as seen in figure two. The anti-migrant narrative of overcrowding has remained incidental narrative that has taken the stage mostly at the beginning and the end of the period of analysis. The first document stated, "The Netherlands is full," and the last said the exact same. In the early stages, the PVV's anti-migrant rhetoric centered

around cultural clashes, portraying immigration as a threat to Dutch values and identity. Manifestos from this period often included statements such as “Islamic headscarves not in public functions” (PVV, 2017, p.1 8:2), highlighting fears of cultural weakening. Also the security threat narrative has been a stable occurrence through the years, aligning with the broader trends of the average othering timeline of the PVV.

Over time the focus of the PVV's anti-migrant rhetoric began to shift and broaden. Especially economic concerns became more clear in their discourse. The party started to emphasize the economic burden that migrants allegedly placed on the welfare state and the security risks they posed to Dutch society. For instance, one manifesto highlighted that “So we immediately throw out criminals with a non-Dutch nationality and say goodbye to foreigners who do not have a job: 'work or get out'” (PVV, 2012, p.35 6:17), portraying migrants as an economical burden and a danger to public safety.

Even during times in which the PVV had a lower number of othering narratives, the cultural clash narrative kept being the most relatively present narrative:

“There is also no place in the Netherlands for sympathizers of violent jihad and sharia. The Netherlands is not an Islamic country. Our own culture and secular laws always take precedence and if you don't like that, you can leave.” (PVV, 2023, p.4 11:5)

4.5 SP: othering the elites

The results have shown a negligible amount of horizontal othering in all the manifestos from the SP. Given the minimal presence of this type of othering, I have decided not to include it in the graph. This decision is based on the consideration that the low frequency of horizontal othering would not provide meaningful insights or contribute significantly to the overall analysis. Instead, the focus remains on more prevalent forms of othering that better reflect the core themes and strategies employed in the manifestos.

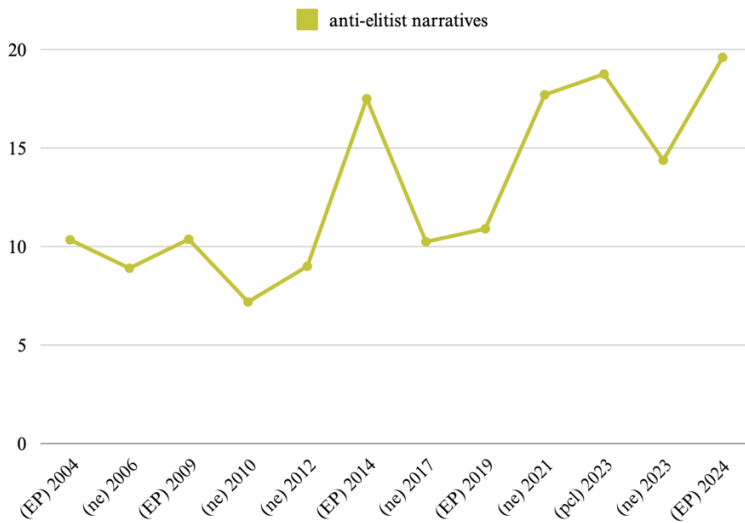


Figure 4: othering narratives in SP manifestos over time

So, the SP's EU manifestos prominently featured anti-elitist rhetoric, portraying EU institutions as disconnected elites. This "us versus them" narrative aimed to connect with voters' frustrations about for instance EU governance. The SP's national manifestos were more moderate, focusing on domestic issues with less aggressive language. These manifestos emphasized socio-economic protection (from elites), aligning more with traditional socialist values. However, this does not take away from the fact that the national manifestos contained a significant amount of populist othering language as well.

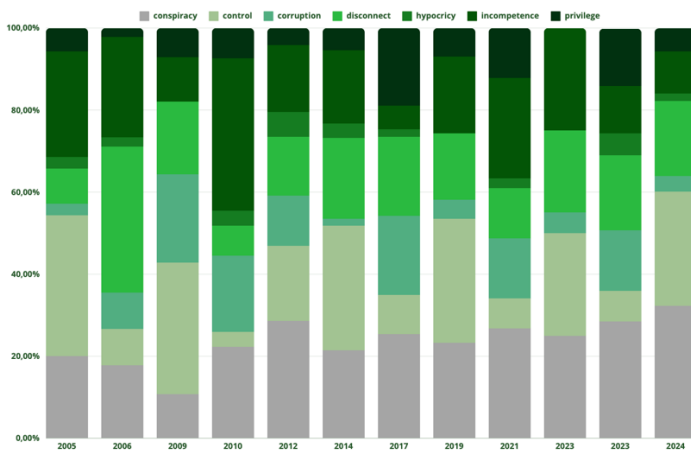


Figure 6: elitist othering narratives in SP manifestos over time

In the early years, the SP used a strong narrative of othering the elite, particularly when she experienced significant electoral success in 2006. During this period, the SP's rhetoric focused on criticizing corporate elites and firms, saying they are unaware of the needs of ordinary citizens. The

2006 electoral victory can be seen as a key moment when this anti-elite sentiment connected a lot with the electorate. This period had aggressive critiques aimed at the economy, emphasizing the SP's role as an opposition force against the incompetence and corruption of the corporate elites:

“Privatized employment mediation has ended up in the hands of commercial reintegration companies, which in many cases are more concerned with profit than with finding work for their clients.” (SP, 2006, p.14 14:7)

“This also applies to the so-called ‘private equity’ companies, or ‘strip and demolition capitalists’, who are increasingly buying up Dutch companies with the sole aim of cashing in. In doing so, they do not take into account, for example, the interests of employees and consumers. The government should put a stop to this development.” (SP, 2006, p.5 14:8)

From the beginning, the SP combined anti-elitist conspiracy narratives with anti-elitist control narratives, maintaining these themes prominently throughout the research period. The party's rhetoric was full of accusations that elites were engaged in secretive schemes to undermine the well-being of the general population.

“With the introduction of European economic governance, the European Commission has been given the right to interfere in all sorts of matters that it had to stay away from before the crisis: pensions, housing, social security, education, yes, even matters such as the kilometer charge are no longer purely national policy. Most Dutch people rightly see this as a deception, just as we were deceived in 2005 during the referendum on the European Constitution.” (SP, 2014, p.5 18:8)

This approach consistently portrayed elites as both conspiring against and oppressing ordinary people, creating a powerful message among their supporters. This dual narrative provided a cohesive framework that emphasized the need to challenge and dismantle the structures of power that enabled such conspiracies and oppression to thrive.

Over time, the SP strengthened this corruption narrative to include not mainly the private sector but also strongly the government and public organizations, like in 2021: “The government is there for the people – and not the other way around. That is why we are working together with the victims of the Tax Authorities, who have been wrongly accused of fraud.” (SP, 2021, p.9 21:5). This

shift reflected a wider scope of critique, portraying various forms of elite-driven inequality and corruption as pervasive throughout both private and public sectors.

Parallel to the development of the corruption narrative, the SP's rhetoric on elitist incompetence and privilege also grew more explicit (so, not necessarily growth in numbers, but in form). While these themes were always present, they became more directly articulated in the party's rhetoric over time. Initially implied, these narratives eventually evolved into pointed criticisms of elite behavior and status.

“The introduction of the euro was a historic mistake.” (SP, 2019, p.19 20:30)

“That drama is a disgrace to the EU.” (SP, 2019, p.31 20:34)

The SP began to explicitly highlight the incompetence of elites, arguing that their decisions and policies were out of touch with the realities and needs of ordinary people. This critique was coupled with an increasing focus on the undue privileges enjoyed by elites, portraying them as insulated from the consequences of their actions due to their wealth and power.

This narrative of incompetence was used to show the idea that the existing political and economic systems were flawed, needing change to ensure that governance served the interests of the majority rather than a privileged few. Also, the focus on privilege showed the SP's critique of social and economic inequalities: “Why are salaries at the top going through the roof and why have ordinary employees been earning far too little for years?” (SP, 2017, p.15 19:3). By emphasizing the unequal advantages held by elites, the SP sought to draw attention to the barriers that prevented ordinary citizens from achieving similar success. This narrative aimed to get support for policies that redistribute wealth.

5. Analysis

The PVV's vertical othering aligns with the broader trend of far-right populism in Europe, where minority groups such as migrants, specifically Muslims, are othered, framing them as threats to national identity and security (Lazaridis, Campani, & Benveniste, 2016). The rise of far-right populism has been strong after the migration crisis, which intensified anti-migrant feeling and likely influenced the PVV's rhetoric during these years. This is exemplified by figure two, in which a surge of anti-migrant rhetoric around the time of the 2015 migrant crisis can be observed. The SP mainly uses vertical othering, focusing on the structures of power and inequality by political and economic elites. The SP's manifestos emphasize issues such as corporate greed and social justice, fitting into

their general ideas of social solidarity. The difference between the parties in this perspective can be understood by aligning this with the idea of constitutional versus anti-constitutional populism (Krygier, 2022). Constitutional populism works within the democratic framework. The SP's focus on vertical othering and socio-economic reforms supports this approach. The SP emphasizes the need to challenge existing structures of power without undermining democratic principles. Anti-constitutional populism challenges the fundamental principles of democratic governance through aggressive rhetoric and divisive tactics. The PVV's use of horizontal othering, targeting also migrants, fits this model.

Being in opposition gave the SP opportunity to indulge in more radical rhetoric without the constraints of governance. The SP's opposition stance likely enabled them to sharpen their critiques of political and economic elites. A radicalization has taken place, visualized in figure five. However, the analysis has showed that there have been strong changes in the intensity of othering in the PVV's manifestos over time. There was a significant weakening of othering in the PVV's manifestos during the period from 2010 to 2012, overlapping with their participation in a minority cabinet. Similarly, the manifestos of 2021 and 2023 also shows a weakened level of othering, which could be connected to their victory in the 2023 elections.

The two dips in the strength of the PVV's othering narratives can potentially explained by different contexts and strategies. The first dip, observed between 2010 and 2012, can be linked to the PVV's entry into a minority cabinet. This could mean that being part of a governing cabinet may have moderated their use of othering language. During this period, the necessity to work within a cabinet likely caused the party to adopt a more nuanced and moderated stance, as they had to balance their populist rhetoric with the rest of governance. This phenomenon is supported by before-mentioned theoretical perspectives suggesting that participation in government can lead to the moderation of extremist rhetoric (Caiani & Graziano, 2022; Hegedüs, 2019).

The second dip in othering rhetoric, in the 2021 and 2023 manifestos, may mean a strategy change by the PVV. This could mean that the PVV's approach to othering in their manifestos is influenced by their strategic decisions. After the increased use of othering narratives during the migration crises, the party appears to have adopted a softer tone after. This change could be a move to broaden their appeal and present a less polarizing image to the electorate. The subsequent electoral victory in 2023, occurring two years after this strategic softening, suggests that this approach may have worked well with voters. This is in line with the theories that have stated how parties moderate their public stances to broaden their appeal (Sijstermans & Favero, 2022). The SP has not shown prevalent moderation in their othering discourse. The distinction between SP lacking moderation

and PVV moderating could thus be explained by the PVV's strategic choices while being in positions of power.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Both parties use othering as a populist technique but differ in their targets and emphasis. The PVV engages in both vertical (against political and EU elites) and horizontal othering (against migrants). In contrast, the SP's narratives are primarily focused on vertical othering of economic and political elites. While both parties critique elites, the PVV's approach is more confrontational and culturally divisive, where the SP maintains a focus on socio-economic justice and inclusivity.

The PVV's pre-electoral programs consistently have a double strategy of vertical and horizontal othering. Initially focusing broadly on elites such as the Dutch government and EU institutions, the PVV sharpened its rhetoric after 2006 when in opposition. They intensified critiques against leftist parties and the EU, accusing them of elitism and betrayal of national interests. The PVV's othering of migrants have shown to probably center around the context of the elections: the level of governance, the political situation in the country, and the adjustment to power positions.

The SP's othering narratives focus on vertical othering of mainly the economic and political elites. From their inception, the SP criticized corporate elites for inequalities and later expanded their critique with government and public organizations. Their discourse consistently emphasized control, conspiracy, disconnect, and incompetence among elites. The othering by the SP has radicalized through time, in the way that the party has increased their use of othering narratives over the years of analysis. This could potentially be explained by their lack of position in power.

The distinctions between the cases seem to have not necessarily have been a consequence of the parties being either right-wing or left-wing. The differences more so highlight strategic changes in response to changing political landscapes and voter priorities, showing the dynamic nature of populist discourse in Dutch politics. The distinction between "us" and "them" is not a fixed or static element of populist rhetoric, but is responsive and flexible. For instance, the softening in PVV's othering in 2023 has shown that while strong othering might mobilize certain segments of the electorate during crises, a more moderate stance can also create positive electoral outcomes.

Some expectations of this research were on how othering narratives would follow the streams of the political context, using selective emphasis. Although this hypothesis could not be directly tested, the data supports it. For instance, the PVV's intensified anti-migrant rhetoric in response to the migration crisis and the SP's radicalized othering due to their permanence of opposition, illustrate how contextual factors shape populist narratives.

The convergence of certain narratives between the two parties was also expected. This convergence was evident in the presence of strong narratives of conspiracy and control throughout the manifestos of both parties. Both the PVV and SP have used these themes to get support and position themselves as parties of the people. This similarity underscores the shared populist foundations of their political strategies, despite differences in their targets and rhetoric.

It could be said that the findings of this thesis suggest that the evolution and impact of populism in the Netherlands are better understood through constitutional versus anti-constitutional populism rather than solely focusing on vertical or horizontal othering. This perspective highlights how populist parties navigate the political landscape, balancing their core messages with strategic adaptations to achieve and maintain influence within the democratic system.

One limitation of this study is the potential impact of differing manifesto lengths on the presentation of populist othering. Shorter manifestos may appear more intense in their use of othering language due to their conciseness and focus. The longer manifestos might weaken this effect with additional neutral or unrelated information. This difference in document lengths could thus fault the interpretation of how populist othering is used in the manifestos. However, it is also true that more concentrated populist othering in shorter manifestos demonstrates a stronger degree of populism, making these findings valid in that context.

6. Recommendations

To gain a deeper understanding of the strategic choices behind the othering narratives of the PVV and SP, it is recommended to conduct qualitative interviews with party members. These interviews can give new insights into the motivations for the parties' rhetoric. Interviewing members of the electorate can help explain the appeal of different othering narratives for the parties. This approach can offer a fuller view of the factors stimulating the use of certain populist strategies.

It is interesting to re-analyze the party manifestos during the next election cycle to see if any shifts in othering rhetoric happen, especially if the PVV remains in its position of power in the government. Being in a governing position might change the party's rhetoric. This would be due to the responsibilities in governance. It would also be interesting to study the role of media and public discourse in the othering narratives of populist parties. This can create knowledge on the connection between populist parties and their audience.

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