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Who are "the ordinary people" of Europe and why do they not like the European Union?
A case study on Dutch populism

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1   Introduction

The existence of a culturally and socially constructed border between an "elite" and "the ordinary people" is no new phenomenon in Europe. In fact, the construction of a national identity has partly been a means to make both political elites and governed citizens feel as a collective with a common culture and common interests. In populist parties' discourse, these ideas of common culture and interests are severely challenged. Recently, such parties have become quite popular in several European countries. Populist parties challenge democracy (that is, the relation between elites and citizens in society) and integration (that is, the formation of trans-border relations in society) both at the national and the EU level. They construct and highlight a border between governing and governed people in society, and they criticise the relation between these two groups of people. Moreover, populist parties hardly ever seem to be strong supporters of the European integration project. Why is that?

This paper examines the cases of both a left-wing and a right-wing populist party from the Netherlands, namely the SP (socialist party) and the PVV (party for freedom). Both parties have become quite successful during the last decade, and similar parties can be found in other European countries. I will analyse what images of "the ordinary people" and "the elite" these parties construct, and I will present and discuss statistic data about their electorate. I do this in order to reflect upon the question of who might identify with "the ordinary people" that the parties claim to represent. Finally, I will discuss the questions of who "the ordinary people" of the Netherlands are as an example case of today's Europe (according to

the analysed election programmes and the presented statistic data), and why these "ordinary people" are rather EU-sceptical.

2   What is populism?

In most academic literature, there is a consensus nowadays that the fundamental trait of populism is the idea of an existing gap between two homogeneous groups within society, namely "the virtuous people" (or "the heartland" in Taggart's terminology) and "the corrupt elite." The populists then claim to represent the first, morally superior group, and they claim that politics should be an expression of the "volonté générale" (general will) of this group.[1]

When taking these basic ideas as a starting point for the definition of populism, one can regard populism as a kind of ideology, although several scholars rather interpret it as a syndrome, a political movement or a political style. Indeed, populism as an ideology is not as refined and consistent as for example socialism and liberalism. This is why it can be called a "thin-centred ideology" that can be easily combined with other, very different ideologies.[2]

Political scientist Paul Lucardie names three different examples of such general variations on populism, namely right-wing, liberal and left-wing populism. *Right-wing* or *national populism* stands for an ethnically more or less homogeneous group of people that is seen as being threatened by immigrants and/or alien rulers, a threat that is even bigger due to the untrustworthiness of the elite. *Liberal populism* is opposed against a bureaucratic elite or a political caste that is more interested in its own wealth than in the interests of the country and its people. *Left-wing populism* mixes populism with aspects of socialism and/or social-democracy and sets the virtuous people against an elite of capitalists, bankers and bureaucrats.[3]

Furthermore, following political scientist Koen Vossen, populism is mostly accompanied by

- *conspiracy theories* against the ruling elites and their relationship with the media and/or a certain "out-group," like an alien ethnic or religious group, immigrants, "economic parasites," an alien ruler, banks and multinationals,

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[1] Koen Vossen, "Hele en halve populisten. Rita Verdonk en Geert Wilders langs de meetlat," Wiardi Beckman Stichting, 2009, 20, http://www.wbs.nl/uploads/publicaties/vossen_koen_hele_en_halve_populisten_sd2009_9.pdf (accessed 29 April 2011); Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 543-546.

[2] Ibid., 543-544.

[3] Anthonie Paul Marius Lucardie, "Rechts-extremisme, populisme of democratisch patriotisme? Opmerkingen over de politieke plaatsbepaling van de Partij voor de Vrijheid en Trots op Nederland," Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen Jaarboek 2007, 2008, 178, http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/jb-dnpp/jb07/JB07LucardieDEF1.pdf (accessed 29 April 2011).

- *a popular style*: direct, short and easy understandable language, references to a common sense, leaders that "ordinary people on the street" can identify with,
- *a preference for direct democracy* (the people know what is best) and/or *the ruling of a strong, charismatic leader* (who knows what the heartland wants and acts according to that),
- *voluntarism*: the belief that politics can achieve many improvements when it is simply based on "the people's will" and common sense and puts aside unnecessary complex international treaties and agreements, constitutional restrictions, economic prognoses and bureaucratic procedures.[4]

According to another political scientist, Cas Mudde, such features rather facilitate than define populism.[5] Vossen, on the other hand, states that although these features are not populist in themselves, they all together build a coherent, ideal type of populism. He claims that only politicians who possess all of these features can be called true populists.[6] Other politicians rather just possess certain populist features then.

Whether the two parties I focus on in my paper, the SP and the PVV, can be called truly populist, is first to be judged after the following two chapters of this paper.

3   The SP and the PVV in the historical context of the Dutch political party landscape

The Dutch political party landscape since World War II has been characterised by the presence of many different, partly quite small political parties. One explanation for this is the absence of an official election threshold in the Netherlands, which makes it easier for parties to establish themselves. Moreover, the country's largest party has never had much more than one third of the votes. This has further led to coalition building and compromises as typical characteristics of Dutch political culture. During the 1990s and the 2000s, there have been between nine and eleven different parties in the Dutch House of Representatives (which consists of 150 seats), and the country's government has mostly been formed by three different parties during this period.[7]

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[4] Vossen, "Hele en halve populisten. Rita Verdonk en Geert Wilders langs de meetlat," 20-21.

[5] Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 545.

[6] Vossen, "Hele en halve populisten. Rita Verdonk en Geert Wilders langs de meetlat," 21.

[7] Kiesraad, "Databank verkiezingsuitslagen," http://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl (accessed 4 May 2011).

The two largest parties in the Netherlands during the first decennia after World War II were the Catholic KVP (Catholic people's party) and the social-democratic PvdA (labour party), both being mainly responsible for the building of a comparably very generous Dutch welfare state. The different fractions of Protestantism that were dominant in the political and economic centre of the country were represented by several smaller parties. Geographically, one can state that the south-eastern part of the Netherlands (among others the Dutch provinces Limburg and Noord-Brabant) was dominated by Catholicism, while the north-western part (among others the two provinces of Holland) was predominantly Protestant.[8]

During the 1960s an "ethical revolution" occurred in Dutch society, as in many industrialised countries of that time, which would have important consequences for the political party landscape. People gave up their religious identities, they became more individualistic and less attached to established political parties and organisations of any kind. The Christian-democratic parties lost many voters, which in 1980 led to a fusion of the KVP and two Protestant parties into the CDA (Christian-democratic appeal).[9]

In spite of the ongoing secularisation, the CDA managed to join all governments from its foundation until 1994. That year, the former political enemies PvdA and the conservative-liberal VVD (people's party for freedom and democracy)[10], formed a new government together with the progressive liberals of D66 (democrats 1966). This so-called "purple coalition," referring to the mixture of the blue colour of the liberals and the red colour of the social-democrats, was partly made possible by the development of the PvdA to the right, and it lasted from 1994 until 2002.

The development of the PvdA to the right probably also contributed to the rise of the SP (socialist party) from 1994 onwards. This party has its roots in the Dutch Maoist movement of the 1970s. During the 1990s the SP gave up its communist identity, but it was still regarded as a left-wing populist party. Since then the party has given up its most extreme points of view, like the ones opposing the Dutch monarchy and the Dutch membership of the NATO. As a consequence, the party now appealed to a broader electorate. In the national Dutch elections of 2006 the SP achieved its biggest success so far by becoming the third largest party in the House of Representatives. In spite of this success, the party did not manage to form a government with the CDA and the PvdA, and the party was left in the

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Frank J. Lechner, *The Netherlands. Globalization and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 20; Stijn van Kessel, "Different faces, same logic: explaining the electoral performance of populist parties in the Netherlands and Poland" (paper presented at "Het Politicologenetmaal" in Leuven, Belgium, 27-28 May 2010).

[10] Karl Dittrich, "The Netherlands 1946-1981," in *Ideology, strategy and party change: spatial analyses of post-war election programmes in 19 democracies*, ed. Ian Budge, David Robertson and Derek Hearl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 207-209.

opposition again. Since then its popularity has shrunk a bit, becoming the fifth largest party in the 2010 elections.[11]

When the 2002 elections approached, after the fall of the second purple government, the most successful opposition against the purple coalition did not come from the SP though, but from a charismatic outsider called Pim Fortuyn. This former columnist and former sociology professor founded his own party, LPF (list Pim Fortuyn), after he got banned from the also newly established party Leefbaar Nederland (liveable Netherlands). Fortuyn wanted to turn the "elite party democracy" into a "lively democracy for and of the ordinary people" again. He uttered controversial points of view which attracted a lot of media attention, and which contrasted him against other parties.[12]

Most of the controversy was aroused by Fortuyn's views on Islam, which he called "a backward culture," and his ideas that the Dutch way of life should be protected against certain foreign cultural influences.[13] A typical feature of Fortuyn as a right-wing populist is that he used liberal values to contrast the Dutch against Islam culture, including gay rights.[14] The fact that he was openly homosexual himself may have made him even more credible and authentic in this respect. Finally, the controversy surrounding him led to his death. Fortuyn was killed by an environmental activist just before the 2002 elections, in which his party became the second largest of the Netherlands. The LPF built a coalition with the CDA and VVD, but already in the same year this government fell due to an internal division in the quickly established LPF which now lacked a clear leader. Finally, the LPF party was dissolved completely.

The call for "a new Fortuyn" was still present in the Netherlands though. When it became clear that the most successful days of the LPF were over, two members of the VVD, Geert Wilders and Rita Verdonk, independently from each other started a new right-wing populist party. The first, Wilders, has without any doubt become the more successful of the two. His official reason for leaving the VVD was a disagreement with his parliamentary leader in 2004 about the question of whether Turkey should be allowed to join the EU some time in the future. After he left the party he kept his seat in the House of Representatives though, forming a one-man fraction called Groep Wilders (Group Wilders), which later would become the PVV (party for freedom).[15]

Compared to Fortuyn, Wilders is more radical both in form and content with regard to questions related to immigration and Islam. Some of his utterances

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[11] van Kessel, "Explaining the Electoral Performance of Populist Parties: The Netherlands as a Case Study," 73.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Tjitske Akkerman, "Anti-immigration parties and the defence of liberal values: The exceptional case of the List Pim Fortuyn," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 10:3 (2005): 337.

[15] van Kessel, "Explaining the Electoral Performance of Populist Parties: The Netherlands as a Case Study," 75.

have even drawn international media attention. One cause for why these utterances appealed to so many people in the Netherlands was the murder on the Dutch film director Theo van Gogh in 2004 by a Dutch-Moroccan radical Muslim, approximately 1.5 years after the assassination of Fortuyn. Theo van Gogh had, together with the Somali-born VVD politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, made a controversial movie about the position of women in Islam culture. This occasion has given other Islam critics in the Netherlands, like Hirsi Ali and Wilders, the opportunity to profile themselves as remaining, heroic defenders of the free word. Besides, some people think that "the left" bears the shame of having "demonised" such Islam critics in its rhetoric, and with that contributed to Fortuyn's and Van Gogh's murder.

What can be called one of the first major electoral successes of Wilders, as well as a major success for the SP, was the Dutch referendum on the European Constitution in 2005. Both Wilders and the SP opposed this constitution, unlike most established parties in the Netherlands. The treaty was rejected by 61.54% of the voters.[16] Instead, the Treaty of Lisbon was established now, which was quite similar to the European Constitution in content. This time Dutch citizens were not asked to vote about the treaty in a referendum though, causing much criticism by the SP and Wilders.

The first big elections held after all these events were the Dutch parliament elections of 2006. As mentioned before, these were the most successful elections for the SP so far. The PVV made a successful first appearance by becoming the fifth largest party. Four years later, in the national elections of 2010, the PVV even became the third largest party. Since October 2010, the PVV is helping a minority government of VVD and CDA to get a majority in the House of Representatives in exchange for a strict immigration policy, among other policies. This is a unique situation for the Netherlands, where majority coalitions are usual.Example subsection

4   Who are the ordinary people according to the SP and PVV's election programmes?

4.1 SP: "The Netherlands want less Brussels"

The contrast "virtuous people" versus "corrupt elite" plays an important role in the world view that the SP presents in its election programmes. The people that the party stands for are described as honest and hard-working, while the elite is described as driven by economic interests, not knowing and not caring about the hard working people's interests.

These views are illustrated by politicians who take many additional jobs, political parties that are being sponsored and with that influenced by commercial interests, and "the sad destiny of whistle-blowers," the ultimate virtuous citizen

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[16] Kiesraad "Databank verkiezingsuitslagen."

that is treated very badly by an evil society merely interested in economic bene-fits.[17] It is stated that "a huge gap" exists between "the paper reality of the minis-tries" and "the reality of the people who have to do the work." The government has taken bad decisions, because it does not know those people.[18]

The SP, on the other hand, claims to have done enormous research on those people and what they want, so it can stand for "the solutions of people." Moreover, it wants to have more forms of direct democracy so that people can correct their representatives.[19] A popular style can be found in the straight-forward language the party uses and the many pictures in its election programmes showing ordinary, virtuous and hard-working people. In spite of all this, it is unclear whether "conspiracy theories" and "voluntarism" would be the right terms to de-scribe the SP's characteristics. Still, I would argue that there is enough ground to label the SP as a populist party.

The SP is clearly no supporter of the EU in its current form, because the union, according to the party, stands too far from its citizens and it would be more interested in economic profits than in the people's interests. Both in the European election programme of 2009 and the national Dutch election programme of 2010 a reference is made to the absence of a referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon, still called "European Constitution" in the latter text, highlighting the minor differ-ences between the two treaties. This also explains the party's European election slogan of 2009, "the Netherlands want less Brussels."[20] The SP interprets these elections as a kind of substitute referendum for or against "a developing European super state," as the referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon did not take place.[21]
The EU should not become a "super state" (that is, a federal state), according to the party's views, and certainly not a military power. The party claims to defend "national sovereignty and international solidarity."[22] It admits that European coop-eration is necessary, but it thinks that the integration process is going too far right now.[23] According to the SP, EU member states should keep more veto rights,[24] and more power should go to the national parliaments of the EU member states, of which the European parliament would only be a supplement.[25] Generally, less money and power should go to Brussels.

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[17] SP, *Een beter Nederland voor minder geld. Verkiezingsprogramma SP 2011-2015*, SP, 2010, 11. http://planet.sp.nl/2010/2011verkiezingsprogrammaSP.pdf (accessed 2 May 2011).

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 11, 12.

[20] SP, *Een beter Europa begint in Nederland. Programma van de SP voor de verkiezingen van het Europees parle-ment 2009 – 2014*, SP, 2009, 6. http://www.sp.nl/europa/programma/2009/2009_eu_programma. pdf (accessed 2 May 2011).

[21] Ibid., 7.

[22] Ibid., 43.

[23] Ibid., 10.

[24] Ibid., 12.

[25] Ibid., 14.

4.2 PVV: "Stand up for the Netherlands"

In the analysed texts of the PVV the contrast "virtuous people" versus "corrupt elite" also plays an important role, the latter being put aside as weak, naïve and left-wing elitist. Furthermore, a border between the "Dutch" people and certain out-groups is constructed, like immigrants, Muslims and fellow EU citizens, by stressing differences in interests and/or culture. The Netherlands should, for example, not spend money on farmers in Poland and France according to the PVV, because that would not be in the country's own interests (the money would be better spent in the Netherlands itself).[26]

According to the PVV, "our culture" is based on a Jewish-Christian and humanist tradition, and it stands for freedom, women's and gay rights. "The Islamic culture," on the other hand, is connected with terrorism, hate against Jews and homosexuals, and poorly emancipated women. The party thinks that the weak, naïve and left-wing elite does not see this due to its cultural relativism. According to the PVV, moderate Muslims certainly exist, although "a substantial part" of the Muslims is not moderate, and the Islam itself certainly is not moderate at all. Islam is presented as a political ideology, not as a religion, that strives for world dominance and obliges its followers to the jihad, with which it is assisted by the blindness and weakness of the ruling elites in the EU and the Netherlands.[27]

Islam appears to be, with other words, an ideology that exists apart from the Muslims who follow Islam, according to the PVV's world view. Due to the PVV's belief in this objective existence of an Islam ideology, the party does also not believe that Islamic culture will ever be able to change fundamentally, as it states that Turkey should never become an EU member due to the country's opposition to "our culture."[28]

Although the elite is too naïve to face reality, the PVV and the ordinary Dutch people that the party stands for clearly see what the world truly is like, according to the text. The difference between how "the elite" and "the people" think is described as a huge gap and a dramatic crisis for democracy in the Netherlands and the EU. Following the PVV, ordinary people really know what reality is like when talking about "the climate theories of Al Gore, mass immigration, Islamisation, the European super state, development aid, art subsidies, and severe punishments." The left-wing elites do not know this, but at the same time they are trying to impose their views on the people by spending disproportionally much "tax money" on left-wing propaganda "to talk our people into something which they oppose." In order "to break the dominance of the left-wing elites," the PVV wants

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[26] PVV, *Partij voor de Vrijheid Verkiezingsprogramma Europees Parlement 2009*, PVV, 2009, 1. //dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/EurVerk/PVVVerkProgrEurParl2009.pdf (accessed 3 May 2011).

[27] PVV, *De agenda voor hoop en optimisme. Een tijd om te kiezen: PVV 2010-2015*, PVV, 2010, 13. http://www.pvv.nl/images/stories/Webversie_VerkiezingsProgrammaPVV.pdf (accessed 3 May 2011).

[28] PVV, *Partij voor de Vrijheid Verkiezingsprogramma Europees Parlement 2009*, 1.

to start "a radical democratisation" process by establishing binding referendums in the Netherlands.[29]

Within this context, the PVV's reference to the "massive propaganda" from Brussels also fits very well. Moreover, like the SP, the PVV refers to the referendum on the European Constitution in order to show how big the gap is between elites and citizens. And just like the SP, it opposes the so-called "super state." According to the PVV, EU nationalism should be quelled. The EU should merely stand for economic and monetary cooperation, and the Netherlands should stay absolutely sovereign. The party does not want the Netherlands to give up any veto right, and it states that there is no need for a European parliament, as the EU should be a purely international instead of a supranational organisation according to its views.[30]

4.3 A brief look at the other established parties: Are the SP and the PVV the only populists?

Unlike the SP and the PVV, none of the other established parties of the Netherlands strongly contrasts the interests and values of an "elite" against those of "the people" in their election programmes from 2010. Most parties speak of a lack of trust that people have in their political representatives nowadays, but they do not blame some elites' misbehaviour for this.

Rather, they come up with ideas to build up the trust, apart from merely stating that people should vote for them. These ideas range from restoring people's trust in indirect democracy, which is generally favoured by the more conservative, Christian-democratic parties[31], to moderating the expectations that people have from their government, which is favoured by the conservative-liberal party VVD[32], to experimenting with forms of direct democracy, which is generally favoured by the more progressive parties[33].

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[29] PVV, *De agenda voor hoop en optimisme. Een tijd om te kiezen: PVV 2010-2015*, 17.

[30] Ibid., 17-19.

[31]   CDA,   *Verkiezingsprogram   2010-2015.   Slagvaardig   en   samen*,   CDA,   2010,   81. http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/programmas/Verkiezingsprogramma/2010/Definitief/C DAverkiezingsprogramma2010.pdf (accessed 28 December 2011); SGP, *Daad bij het Woord: de SGP stáát   ervoor!   Verkiezingsprogramma   SGP   2010-2014*,   SGP,   2010,   33. http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/programmas/Verkiezingsprogramma/2010/Definitief/SG Pverkiezingsprogramma2010.pdf (accessed 28 December 2011).

[32]   VVD,   *Orde   op   zaken.   Verkiezingsprogramma   2010-2014*,   VVD,   2010,   30. http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/programmas/Verkiezingsprogramma/2010/Definitief/V VDverkiezingsprogramma2010.pdf (accessed 28 December 2011).

[33] ChristenUnie, *Vooruitzien: Christelijk-sociaal perspectief, Verkiezingsprogramma ChristenUnie 2010-2014*, ChristenUnie,   2010,   64.   http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/ root/programmas/Verkiezingsprogramma/2010/Definitief/CUverkiezingsprogramma2010.pdf (accessed 28 December 2011); D66, *Anders ja D66. Verkiezingsprogramma D66 voor de Tweede Kamer 2010-2014*,   D66,   2010,   56.   http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/ root/programmas/Verkiezingsprogramma/2010/Definitief/D66verkiezingsprogramma2010.pdf

Other parties, like the clearly populist ToN (proud of the Netherlands), have hardly played any role in Dutch politics, and they have never won any seat in national Dutch or European elections. Consequently, I will not further mention them in this paper.

5 Who are the ordinary people according to the SP and PVV's voters' statistics?

The election programmes of the SP and the PVV seem to have contributed to a big success for especially the latter party during the elections of 2009 and 2010. The results of both elections were the following, in comparison with the foregoing elections of 2004 and 2006:[34]

European elections:

	2004 (turnout: 39.26%)	*2009* (turnout: 36.65%)
SP	6.97% (6th largest party)	7.10% (7th largest party)
PVV	non-existing	16.97% (2nd largest party)

National elections:

	2006 (turnout: (80.35%)	*2010* (turnout: 75.40%)
SP	16.58% (3rd largest party)	9.82% (5th largest party)
PVV	5.89% (5th largest party)	15.45% (3rd largest party)

Figure 1+2: Votes for SP and PVV in European and national elections, 2004-2010.

The electorates of the SP and the PVV of 2010 appear to have many common characteristics. The typical SP voter[35] is female, between 50 and 64 years old, has had a mid-level education, earns less than the average income, and lives in the southern part of the Netherlands. The typical PVV voter is male, between 50 and

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(accessed 28 December 2011); GroenLinks, *Klaar voor de toekomst. Verkiezingsprogramma 2010*, Groen-Links, 2010, 41-42. http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/programmas/Verkiezings

programma/2010/Definitief/GLverkiezingsprogramma2010.pdf (accessed 28 December 2011); PvdA, *Verkiezingsprogramma Tweede-Kamer verkiezingen 2010. Iedereen telt mee. De kracht van Nederland*, PvdA, 2010, 67-68. http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/programmas/Verkiezingsprogramma/ 2010/Definitief/PvdAverkiezingsprogramma2010.pdf (accessed 28 December 2011); PvdD, *Recepten voor mededogen en duurzaamheid. Verkiezingsprogramma Partij voor de Dieren Tweede Kamerverkiezingen 2010*, PvdD, 2010, 50. http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/programmas/Verkiezingsprogramma/ 2010/Definitief/PvdDverkiezingsprogramma2010.pdf (accessed 28 December 2011).

[34] Kiesraad "Databank verkiezingsuitslagen."

[35] The term "typical" here refers to the social characteristics that are most frequent among SP voters, and the same counts for "the typical PVV voter" later on. More information can be found in the attachment of this paper.

64 years old, has had a lower education, earns less than the average income, and lives in the southern part of the Netherlands.[36]

The image of an older, lower educated populist voter corresponds well to the image of older and lower educated people generally having less trust in politics in the Netherlands.[37] On the other hand, the typical PVV voter differs from the general image of right-wing populist voters internationally, as the latter tend to be younger.[38] Part of the explanation for this can be that the PVV treats older people as a target group, as it for example stated that the retirement age should remain 65 during its 2010 election campaign.

The characteristic "southern Netherlands" can be partly explained by the fact that SP leader Emile Roemer comes from the southern province of Noord-Brabant, while PVV leader Geert Wilders comes from the southern province of Limburg. Also, these provinces are traditionally the peripheral, catholic part of the Netherlands. In this way, the idea of not being treated well be the elites in the centre (whether that is The Hague or Brussels) might already be incorporated into the traditional self-image of people living in Noord-Brabant and in Limburg. It comes as no big surprise then that populist rhetoric appeals to particularly these people, as they are already used to the idea of an opposition between a good self versus evil elites. Besides, the strong secularisation of the catholic south of the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards has left an electoral gap that was traditionally filled by the main political representative for the people in the south, the Catholic people's party.

When the voting behaviour of the SP and the PVV voters of 2010 is compared to the same people's voting behaviour of 2006, many SP and PVV voters even appear to have switched between these two parties, in spite of their ideological differences. Apart from the SP and the PVV being each other's electoral competitor, it has also been observed that the Christian-democratic CDA is a common competitor of both parties. Besides, the social-democratic PvdA is a typical competitor of the SP, while the conservative-liberal VVD is a typical competitor of the PVV. Furthermore, it has been observed that both the SP and the PVV electorate

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[36] Synovate Politieke Barometer, "Nieuwkomers, weglopers en trouwe kiezers. De profielen per partij," Synovate research reinvented, June 2010, 7, http://www.politiekebarometer.nl/pdf/profielen.pdf (4 May 2011).

[37] Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, "De Nederlandse samenleving 2010," CBS 2010, 178-179, http://www.cbs.nl/NR/rdonlyres/4356E489-ED7D-463C-BA4B-5FA090670696/0/2010a314pub.pdf (accessed 4 May 2011).

[38] Werner T. Bauer, *Rechtsextreme und rechtspopulistische Parteien in Europa* (Vienna: Österreichische Gesellschaft für Politikberatung und Politikentwicklung, 2011), 18. http://www.politikberatung.or.at/typo3/fileadmin/02_Studien/6_europa/Rechte_Parteien.pdf (accessed 29 April 2011).

consists, to a great extent, of people who do not always vote, and who might need an extra push to take part in an election.[39]
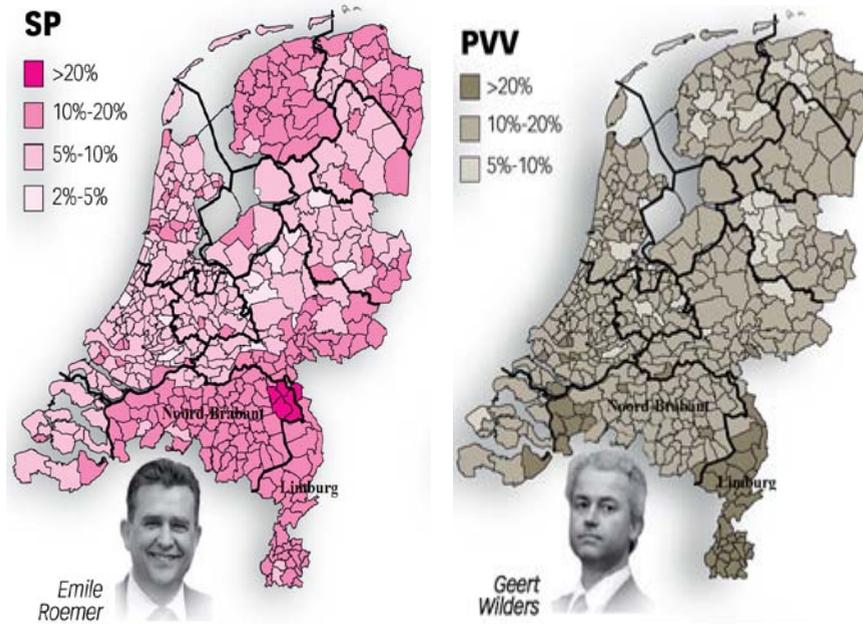

Figure 3: Two maps showing the popularity of the SP and the PVV in different Dutch regions.[40]

When SP and PVV voters were asked why they voted for the party they did, SP voters highlighted the party's points of view on health care, while PVV voters highlighted the party's points of view on criminality and multiculturalism as the most important reasons. PVV voters further believed more than the average Dutch voter of 2010 that the party they voted for would really change something, while PVV voters much less than the average Dutch voter named the party leader as a reason to vote.[41]

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[39] Synovate Politieke Barometer, "Nadere analyses TK2010 – Winst en verlies, per partij," Synovate research reinvented June 2010, 2-3, http://www.politiekebarometer.nl/pdf/winst%20en%20verlies.pdf (accessed 4 May 2011).

[40] Frans Becker and René Cuperus, "Politics in a fragmented society. The 2010 elections in the Netherlands," Friedrich Ebert Stiftung – International policy analysis, July 2010, 8-10, http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/07318.pdf (accessed 4 May 2011).

[41] Synovate Politieke Barometer, "Waarom mensen stemmen wat ze stemmen. Confessioneel vaak uit gewoonte, Pechtold is kiezersmagneet," Synovate research reinvented March 2010, 1-2, http://www.synovate.nl/documents/pb-2010-wk12extra.pdf (accessed 4 May 2011).

The latter indicates that PVV leader Geert Wilders may not be as charismatic as people would expect a successful populist party leader to be. On the other hand, 83% of the PVV voters of 2009 claimed that the Netherlands need a strong leader with many competences, compared to 65% of the SP voters and 61% of the total Dutch citizens of voting age.[42] Regarding another populist feature, the idea that the ruling elites should listen better to the citizens, no less than 91% of the PVV voters of 2009 agreed, compared to 76% of the SP voters, 70% of the people who have no intentions to vote, and 58% of the total Dutch citizens of voting age.[43]

Big differences between the SP and the PVV electorate were revealed when the voters of these parties in 2010 were asked what political values appeal most to them. A majority of the SP voters (54%) answered solidarity, in contrast to 30% of the Dutch voters in total and 4% of the PVV voters. A majority of the PVV voters (60%) answered nationalism, in contrast to 11% of the Dutch voters in total and 5% of the SP voters. Both parties have few voters who stated that they support confessional politics: 2% for both parties, compared to 10% of the Dutch voters in total.[44]

One question that remains is why they do not like the EU. Thinking about the importance of nationalism to PVV voters, one can guess that there is a connection there. Still, 30% of the PVV voters of 2010 claimed to identify with Europe, compared to 51% of the total Dutch population.[45] Unfortunately, I have no figures about SP voters regarding this question.

Related to questions about identity, one can ask though how much these people feel involved in the EU. As for the general Dutch citizen in early 2006, 43% stated that they feel involved in European affairs, whereas the same applies to 36% of the intending SP voters and 26% of the intending Wilders voters (the name PVV did not exist yet when the survey was held). Regarding the question if they think it is good that the Netherlands are an EU member, 65% of the Dutch citizens of 2006 answered "yes," compared to 52% of the SP and 31% of the Wilders supporters of that time. Finally, one could ask how well informed about the EU the Euro-sceptic SP and Wilders supporters actually are. Generally, 21% of the Dutch citizens of 2007 said they feel well informed about EU affairs that can be of

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[42] Synovate Politieke Barometer, "Hoe populair is populisme?" Synovate research reinvented April 2009, 1, http://www.synovate.nl/documents/pb-2009-wk17extra.pdf (accessed 4 May 2011).

[43] Ibid., 2-3.

[44] Synovate Politieke Barometer, "Solidariteit nog steeds belangrijk. D66 het minst geprofileerd," Synovate research reinvented May 2010, 1-2, http://www.synovate.nl/documents/pb-2010-wk18extra.pdf (accessed 4 May 2011).

[45] Synovate Politieke Barometer, "Wie stemt wat: de atlas van de kiezers. Het kiezerslandschap in beeld," Synovate research reinvented June 2010, 9, http://www.synovate.nl/documents/pb-2010-wk221extra.pdf (accessed 4 May 2011).

importance for the Netherlands, and the same counted for 18% of the SP and 17% of the Wilders supporters.[46]

One has to keep in mind though that Wilders' party, the soon-to-become PVV party, was not well established yet back then, that the party's electorate has grown since that time and probably also changed. Moreover, one should obviously be aware of the fact that these figures regard the subjective feelings that people have, and not a reality concerning for example how well informed they really are. Still, a feeling of not being well enough informed about politics might at least be just as important in explaining people's mistrust against ruling elites (and with that, their potential to vote for populist parties) as facts regarding how well informed these people actually are, say, on a scale from 1 to 10.

With regard to the theme democracy (the relation between ruling elites and citizens in society), it comes as no surprise that SP and PVV voters belong to the ones who are the least satisfied with the way democracy works both in the Netherlands and in the EU. As for the general Dutch citizen of voting age of 2008, 75% is satisfied with democracy in the Netherlands, and 44% with democracy in the EU. The same numbers for SP voters are 63% and 36%, and for PVV voters 51% and 31%.[47]

One characteristic of many SP and Wilders voters that may have further influenced these negative feelings is that almost all citizens voting for one of these parties during the period 2003-2005, also opposed the European Constitution prior to the referendum of 2005. That is, 93% of the SP voters and 96% of the Wilders voters, compared to the final referendum result of 61.54% opposing the Constitution.[48] It is likely that these voters were not very happy when the Dutch government decided not to hold a new referendum on the Constitution's successor, the Treaty of Lisbon, which is still often referred to in the election programmes of both the SP and the PVV, both in 2009 and in 2010, as shown in chapter 4.

6   Conclusion: Who are the ordinary people of Europe, and why do they not like the EU?

Both in the SP's and the PVV's discourse, a left-wing and a right-wing populist party from the Netherlands, the contrast people versus elite plays an important

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[46] Paul Dekker et al., "Divers Europa. De Europese Unie in publieke opinie & verscheidenheid in cultuur, economie en beleid," CPB and SCP 2007, 20, http://www.cpb.nl/sites/default/files/publicaties/download/bijz63.pdf (accessed 4 May 2011).

[47] Statline, "Beoordeling politiek en democratie 2006. Gewijzigd op 10 november 2008," Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek November 2008, http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLNL&PA=71720NED&D1=4-5&D2=a&HD=081202-1555&HDR=T&STB=G1 (accessed 4 May 2011).

[48] Maurice de Hond, "NOS EU-referendum onderzoek nr. 5, 21 mei 2005: Sterke toename tegenstemmers," Peil.nl May 2005, 2, https://n6.noties.nl/peil.nl/ (accessed 4 May 2011). Kiesraad "Databank verkiezingsuitslagen."

role. As for the SP, the ordinary people of the Netherlands are honest and hard-working, while the elite is driven by economic interests, not knowing and not caring about the hard-working people's interests. This is certainly also true for the elite at the EU level, according to the party.

As for the PVV, the ordinary people that the party stands up for are ordinary "Dutch" people, who do not equal immigrants, Muslims, left-wing elitists, and fellow EU citizens. According to the party, the ruling elites do not know the real problems of those ordinary Dutch people, and once they hear about these problems they are too naïve and weak to do something about it. The gap between the ordinary Dutch people and the EU elite is claimed to be even bigger.

With regard to the SP's and PVV's electorate, an overrepresentation of older and lower-educated people can be observed. These aspects go well together with the image of older and lower educated people generally having less trust in politics in the Netherlands. Both the SP and the PVV also treat older people obviously as a target group in their election programmes. In an international perspective the statistic outcome is striking, as it would mostly be younger people that tend to vote for new and extreme political parties. Furthermore, many SP and PVV voters appear to come from the southern, traditionally peripheral, catholic (but now predominantly secular) part of the Netherlands, just like the SP and PVV leaders.

A gap between Dutch citizens of voting age and the established political parties representing these people was revealed when the referendum on the European Constitution took place in the Netherlands in 2005. The experience of such a gap may have been stronger among the SP and the Wilders electorate, although the SP and Wilders opposed the treaty as well. For these voters it may have strengthened the impression that the ruling "elites" are basically the same regardless of the party they belong to, except for the SP and/or Wilders who represent "the ordinary people." Furthermore, the impression of ruling elites doing whatever they want regardless of what "the ordinary people" think has probably been strengthened as well when the Dutch parliament accepted the European Constitution's successor, the Treaty of Lisbon, without consulting Dutch citizens via a referendum again.

Apart from not trusting politicians and not being satisfied with the way democracy works in general (especially on the EU level), many SP and PVV voters also claim not to be well informed about politics. This combination of general mistrust and a feeling of not being well informed will probably make these people more susceptible to dramatic crisis stories as presented in the SP's and PVV's election programmes.

Furthermore, one has to remember that the political history of the Netherlands during the 2000s actually was quite dramatic, with one politician (Fortuyn, 2002) and one politically active film director (Van Gogh, 2004) being murdered and several other politicians (like Wilders) being threatened. These events and the following media attention have certainly strengthened a feeling of living in a time

with exceptional circumstances among many people in the Netherlands, as Dutch political culture had been characterised by rather peaceful negotiation and compromising ever since World War II. Of course, international events like the terrorist attacks in New York (2001), Madrid (2004) and London (2005) have contributed to this feeling as well. Moreover, these events may have given the continuing radical critics of Islam, like Wilders, a hero status in the eyes of some people.

Many people voting for the SP and the PVV appear not to be customary voters. Many of them did not vote during elections preceding the ones in which they voted for SP or PVV. Moreover, some voters even appear to switch between the SP and the PVV in spite of these parties' ideological differences. It seems like they are in need of parties who claim to take them and their concerns seriously, who describe a dramatic crisis situation in a way they can recognise, and who come with straight-forward ideas regarding how to solve such crises, unlike politicians of the purple coalitions or diplomatic EU politicians for example. A threat that appears to motivate many SP voters is the one against their social security (like health care), whereas many PVV voters are concerned about the national identity of the Netherlands and the way of life of "ordinary Dutch people" being threatened.

As long as people keep experiencing a democratic deficit in the EU, as long as EU politics remains rather diplomatic and proceduralist and as long as emotional attachments to Europe and fellow Europeans remain weak, populist parties will be much more likely to profile themselves as EU-sceptical. Combined with certain national circumstances, like the ones in the Netherlands (which can, however, not be applied to the EU as a whole), such parties can suddenly grow quite big.

In my opinion, the way their opponents should react to this, both at the national and the EU level, is not doing "business as usual" or coming with a new load of easy propaganda. Rather they should take the populist voters' concerns seriously, and then react to the possible reasons for these concerns in a very clear way, like "the political elite's" decision not to hold a referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon, which has become a symbol of the supposed gap between ruling elites and ordinary citizens since then. Moreover, it is possible that populists have valid points sometimes, of course. Future research could focus more on how the supposed "elites" currently meet populist challenges, and how successful they are in doing this.

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Annex: The SP and PVV electorate49

Profile of SP voters (in %):		
	Netherlands average	**Total SP voters**
Male	49	42
Female	**51**	**58**
18-24 years old	7	10
25-34 years old	23	16
35-49 years old	**29**	28
50-64 years old	**29**	**38**
65+ years old	11	9
Education low	31	36
Education middle	**41**	**44**
Education high	28	20
< Average income	27	**40**
Average income	16	16
> Average income	**33**	24
Big cities	15	13
Rest West	**29**	22
North	10	14
East	21	22
South	24	**29**

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[49] Synovate Politieke Barometer, "Nieuwkomers, weglopers en trouwe kiezers. De profielen per partij," 7.

Profile of PVV voters (in %):		
	Netherlands average	**Total PVV voters**
Male	49	**54**
Female	**51**	46
18-24 years old	7	7
25-34 years old	23	19
35-49 years old	**29**	30
50-64 years old	**29**	**34**
65+ years old	11	11
Education low	31	**47**
Education middle	**41**	40
Education high	28	13
< Average income	27	**32**
Average income	16	18
> Average income	**33**	28
Big cities	15	16
Rest West	**29**	26
North	10	7
East	21	22
South	24	**29**