

Populist Political Communication in the Netherlands

An Experimental-Survey Approach

*Preliminary draft:
please do not cite without permission of the authors*

Dick Houtman
Peter Achterberg
Roy Kemmers

Introduction

Theories of postmodernization hold that the legitimacy of the literal and allegedly universally binding truth claims of religion and science alike has declined in the wake of the counter culture of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Campbell 2007; Inglehart 1997). This has allegedly given rise to an increased legitimacy of mythical and counter-factual narratives about a less alienating social order and to an increased emphasis on personal experience as a reliable road to truth (e.g., Campbell 2007). Whereas the resulting cultural climate appears markedly hospitable to a populist political style, most of the literature about contemporary Dutch populism has unfortunately foregrounded its content rather than its style. Indeed, ever since the rise of the late Pim Fortuyn almost 15 years ago, Dutch populism has been primarily defined as a new-rightist politics that aims to curb immigration and insists on the cultural assimilation of immigrants. As such, it has often been contrasted with the new-leftist politics of the new social movements that emerged in the bosom of the progressive and inclusion-seeking counter culture of the 1960s and 1970s that foregrounded tolerance, freedom and emancipation instead.

Although this foregrounding of Dutch populism's new-rightist political content has served to suggest that its political style is intrinsically rightist, too, there are good reasons for doubt about this. One such reason is that its relentless critique of an alienating and overly rationalized society, its appeal to personal experience, and its positive revaluation of myth and imagination echo the political style of the new-leftist counter culture of the 1960s and 1970s, suggesting that political content and political style cannot simply be conflated. It is indeed striking to note that the rationalist modern political style that was critiqued by the counter culture back then is also rejected by contemporary Dutch populism. This modern political style is

moreover not exclusively tied to rightist or leftist political content either, with 'rightist' laissez-faire liberalism and 'leftist' socialism alike having firm roots in the rationalist heritage of the Enlightenment. There are no good reasons to assume that this is any different for the populist style.

The frequent conflation of the new-rightist contents of contemporary Dutch populism and its political style hence raises the question of whether the two are really that intimately linked, i.e., whether the efficacy of populist political communication remains confined to new-rightist political messages and electorates. We study this by assessing whether a populist political communication style is more effective in communicating new-rightist messages to new-rightist electorates than in communicating other messages to other electorates and, if so, whether this can be attributed to affinity with a postmodern culture. As a prelude to the further theoretical elaboration of this research problem, we first discuss the content and style of Dutch populism since the first electoral successes of Pim Fortuyn in 2002. After that, we formulate our hypotheses, discuss our research design and data collection, and present our findings. By way of conclusion, we provide some avenues for future internationally comparative experimental research in populist political communication.

Populism in the Netherlands (2002-2015): Content and Style

Populism has become a major player in the Dutch electoral landscape since the electoral rise and subsequent assassination of Pim Fortuyn in 2002. Even though Fortuyn's own party LPF ('List Pim Fortuyn') was initially the major populist party in the country, it quickly declined and was dissolved on January 1, 2008. This did however not mean the end of the electoral success of populist politics in the Netherlands, because even long before this dissolution, the LPF was succeeded by other parties. The most successful of these were initially Rita Verdonk's ToN (Trots op Nederland: 'Proud of the Netherlands') and subsequently – until today – Geert Wilders' PVV ('Freedom Party').

The rise to electoral success of populist parties has coincided with massive changes in the style and content of Dutch politics. As to content, 'nativist' and 'new-rightist' anti-immigration and anti-Islam issues have sharply increased in electoral significance. These ideas do nowadays no longer remain confined to the intimacy of the private realm and proverbial 'soccer clubs' canteens', but are expressed much more frankly, openly and publicly. As to political style, too, many a Dutch academic observer has pointed out a break with the type of political communication that was hegemonic during the pre-2002 period. These observers typically single out two features of Dutch populist political communication for special attention. The first is an increased tendency among politicians to seek the electorate's consent, approval

and support by making appeals to the everyday experiences of 'normal', 'hard-working' and/or 'law-abiding' citizens, or, in the words of those who dislike and reject it, by 'making an appeal to the underbelly of the common people'. Secondly, observers point out an increased tendency of engaging in 'redemptive politics', not so much proposing practical and pragmatic solutions for actually existing problems, but rather engaging in promises of salvation from evil in a pie-in-the-sky fashion that critics consider outright misleading and fraudulent.

Dutch Populism: New-Rightist Content

From the late Fortuyn up until Wilders today, Dutch populists have construed the Dutch nation as homogeneous and as characterized by a 'tolerance' that is allegedly incompatible with the 'intolerance' of (particularly Muslim) immigrants (Van der Brug 2003; Pellikaan, Van der Meer & De Lange 2003. Fortuyn's interview in one of the leading Dutch national newspapers in 2001 constitutes a good example.

Addressing alleged Islamic intolerance and hostility towards gays and women, he explained that "I don't feel like doing the emancipation of women and homosexuals all over again" and that "if I could make it happen juridically, I would just say: no Muslim will enter the country! But I can't. Islam is backward, I'm saying it like it is. It's just a backward culture" (Volkskrant 2002, our translation). This juxtaposition of an allegedly 'tolerant' Dutch culture and allegedly 'intolerant' Muslim outsiders has become one of the staples of Dutch new-rightist politics since. In his book *Choose Freedom*, for instance, Geert Wilders (2005: 73) similarly proclaims that "we have to learn to be intolerant to the intolerant. That is the only way to maintain our tolerance".

This characteristic rhetoric of 'tolerance' has sparked some debate about whether Dutch anti-immigration discourse since Fortuyn can be characterized as right wing just like that. Canovan (2005: 75-6), for instance, has suggested that "the case of Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands showed that such labels [of 'right' and 'left'; DH/PA/RK] can be misleading" and that "in the context of a liberal popular culture (...) the populist claim to speak for the people against their supposed representatives could not simply be dismissed as right-wing xenophobia". She points out in this context that Fortuyn was openly gay – "and therefore anathema to many on the Right" – and that "his reasons for opposing Muslim immigration and multicultural policies found some echoes on the Left" (i.e., in concerns about the liberty of women and gays to lead their lives and construct their own identities as they wish).

Dutch sociologist Duyvendak (2004: 13) has pointed at the deep irony and paradoxicality of this juxtaposition of 'tolerant insiders' and 'intolerant outsiders' in one of the most secular and most morally permissive countries of the world, where nowadays "widely shared values of tolerance [are used] to stigmatize and exclude Islamic immigrants". The rhetoric of 'tolerance' does as such express a typically Dutch rendition of 'nativism', the notion that "states should be inhabited exclusively

by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state" (Mudde 2010: 1173). Indeed, despite the liberal rhetoric that is drawn upon to justify the exclusion of Muslims and Islam, empirical research has pointed out that liberal ideals of tolerance and freedom of speech do not play any role in driving the PVV vote, whereas ethnocentrism does so very strongly (De Koster et al. 2013).

Dutch Populism: A Redemptive and Experiential Style

Populism radicalizes the democratic notion of the sovereignty of the people to such an extent that laws and constitutions, formal procedures, and international treaties are understood as impeding "the expression of the ...[general will] of the people" (Mudde 2004: 543; Plattner 2010). This marked anti-institutionalism (Kriesi 2014; Taggart 2000: 75; cf. Johansson 2014) sparks what Canovan (1999), inspired by Oakeshott (1996), calls a 'redemptive' political style. This style can be distinguished from (practical, deal-making, 'responsible') 'pragmatic' politics in much the same way that Max Weber distinguished between a 'politics of conviction' (*Gesinnungsethik*) and a 'politics of results' (*Verantwortungsethik*) (e.g., Laermans 2012). The two are different sides of politics that cannot do without each other, but are nonetheless difficult to combine and balance. Without the substantial political ideals that are central to redemptive politics and politics of conviction, politics degrades into pragmatic and lifeless 'administration' that basically accepts the world as it is. Without the matter-of-factness of pragmatic politics and a politics of results, however, politics descends into the chaos of political polarization and irreconcilable conflict that results from a refusal to accept the world as it is.

Arguing that politics should not revolve "around the politically and administratively attainable, but around the imaginable" (Fortuyn 2001: 34) and that "[w]e should dare to dream and make possible what is considered impossible in The Hague" (Wilders 2005: 106), the Dutch populism of Fortuyn, Wilders and others unmistakably features this type of 'redemptive' or 'conviction' politics. The latter easily results in policy proposals laughed away by political opponents as instances of 'fact-free' politics, at best practically unattainable and at worst sheer demagoguery. Examples are Fortuyn's suggestion to abolish the article of the Dutch constitution that forbids discrimination and Wilders' proposals to introduce a 'headrag tax' for Muslim women, to leave the Euro-zone, to ban the Qur'an, or to close the borders to immigrants. Laughing such proposals away as instances of naïve and immature 'fact-free' politics however misses the point that they are intimately tied to the cultural logic of populism's redemptive political style.

Not even populist politicians themselves appear to believe that policy proposals like these are potentially successful. They instead enable them to convincingly get their message across that they are neither interested in a pragmatic 'sticking plaster' approach to politics nor prepared to accept the sorry state of the

world as it is. For that reason, former US Congressman and American political advisor Tom Tancredo recommends precisely such impractical and other-worldly policy proposals, and has allegedly given the same advice to PVV's Geert Wilders and Martin Bosma. Tancredo holds not only that "If you want to change long-standing policies, you have to be willing to say things that piss people off", but moreover that the major attraction of impractical proposals like the aforementioned is that they invite political defeat. They do as such fuel popular distrust of the political establishment to the effect of legitimating and reinforcing the cause of populist politics: "People distrust the government, people distrust each other, people think that America is slipping out of their hands. You have to appeal to that" (quoted in Meeus 2012: 91).

Besides a redemptive political style, distrust of expert knowledge and appeal to everyday experience has been the second major feature of the Dutch populist political style. It has been so ever since Fortuyn explained in his book *The Orphaned Society* [Dutch: *De verweesde samenleving*] (2002) that he was not so much concerned about a re-emergence of "primitive racism", but rather feared a "new fascism" that would "sneak in tip-toed, on waves of technological possibilities" and that would take shape as "an anonymous bureaucracy led by equally anonymous bureaucrats and officialese politicians" (quoted in Wansink 2004: 77-8, our translation). Such an analysis accuses professional politicians, scientific experts and public officials of being 'out of touch with society', 'struck by the heath' and 'unaware of the goings-on in the real world', with ordinary citizens finding themselves confronted with a proliferation of 'meaningless' or 'senseless' rules.

In rejecting the expert knowledges of political, scientific and bureaucratic elites, populism favors 'what every normal human being knows', i.e., the intuitive knowledge and everyday experiences of the common (wo)man in the street (e.g., Kemmers et al. 2015: 10). This is a stable feature of contemporary populist political communication in the Netherlands, where nowadays Wilders invokes common sense and everyday experience by referring to his imaginary Dutch couple 'Henk and Ingrid'. Politics, Wilders thus communicates, should take the everyday experiences of couples like them seriously: their problems and concerns, but also their first-hand knowledge of what is actually going on in Dutch cities and neighborhoods. Such an appeal to the intuitions of the common people is of course not typical of contemporary Dutch populism only. It was for instance also already present in the moral conviction of early American populism "that only those who created wealth in tangible, material ways (on and under the land, in workshops, on the sea) could be trusted to guard the nation's piety and civil liberties" (Kazin 1995: 13).

In terms of content, in short, Dutch populism since Fortuyn distinguishes itself by means of a marked nativism that understands Muslims and Islam as incompatible with the tolerance of the Dutch nation. Stylistically speaking, it

engages in redemptive politics and in making appeals to the everyday experiences of ordinary citizens as a source of political wisdom and insight that is superior to expert knowledge. Whereas Dutch populism's marked nativism serves to set it apart from populist politics elsewhere or in the past, its stylistic features appear more or less stable and invariant features of populism generally.

A Postmodern Political Style?

Contemporary Dutch Populism and the 1960s' Counter Culture

One may indeed doubt whether the efficacy of the populist political style remains confined even in the Netherlands today to the nativist and xenophobic new-rightist end of the political landscape. For one thing, apparently in response to the electoral successes of rightist populist parties in the Netherlands since 2002, Dutch establishment politicians appear to appeal increasingly to the experiences of ordinary citizens in their politico-communicative efforts, too. They do so, for instance, by rhetorically distancing themselves from the formal politics of 'The Hague', the Dutch government center, and by seeking approach to the experiences of ordinary citizens instead (e.g., Houtman & Achterberg 2010). For another thing, the populist style displays a marked yet often neglected continuity with the so-called 'counter culture' of the 1960s that featured new-leftist rather than new-rightist contents. One cannot help but notice, for instance, how much today's new-rightist populist redemptive fact-free politics resembles the counter-cultural *soixante-huitards'* battle cry of 'l'imagination au pouvoir!' (e.g., Couwenberg 2004).

Indeed, despite the marked contrast between the counter culture's new-leftist emphasis on personal authenticity, freedom and tolerance and the new-rightist ethnocentrism of contemporary Dutch populism, the two are remarkably similar in terms of style. Both critique the rationalized and conformity-demanding modern order as alienating and repressive and both boast romantic myths about a less alienating world. This cultural understanding of modernity was as central to the counter culture of the 1960s (Musgrove 1974; Roszak 1969; Zijderveld 1970) as it is central to the processes of cultural change that have taken place in its wake (Campbell 2007; Inglehart 1997; Houtman, Aupers & De Koster 2011: 1-22). What they have in common is their shared denial of the alleged ability of science and religion alike to legislate truth and meaning in a universally binding fashion (e.g., Bauman 1987; Seidman 1994; Gellner 1992). In the past half century, the religious field has tellingly witnessed the emergence and spread of a powerful discourse of 'spirituality' that embraces the latter as 'religion's' allegedly more 'authentic' other, characterized by an epistemological shift from 'belief' to 'experience' (e.g., Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Aupers & Houtman 2006). A similar shift away from universally binding literal truth claims has occurred in the intellectual realm, most visibly in the

emergence and spread of the postmodern cultural studies that deny the possibility of attaining an 'objective' and 'universally binding' representation of the social. Precisely due to this denial and the marked politicization that has come with it, these cultural studies have remained contested among social scientists until the present day (e.g., Sherwood, Smith & Alexander 1993; Inglis 2007).

Acknowledging this decline in legitimacy of literal and universally valid truth claims in science and religion alike, cultural changes since the 1960s have typically been defined in terms of either 'postmodernization' (e.g., Bauman 1987; Inglehart 1997) or 'reflexive modernization' (Beck 1992; Beck, Giddens & Lash 1994). Both of these characterizations define these cultural changes in a 'negative' sense by highlighting what has come to be denied and rejected, i.e., the capacity of religion and science alike to legislate universally binding truth and meaning. Campbell's (2007) notion of 'easternization' defines the same changes in a 'positive' fashion, however, by pointing out how the cultural void created by this dual rejection has evoked massive cultural changes. In terms of ontology, romantic appreciations of imagination, fantasy, and myth have become more important than the world as it 'really' is. In terms of epistemology, personal experience has gained importance as a vessel of truth, at the cost of religious faith and scientific reason.

Hypotheses

This foregrounding of romanticism and experientialism in postmodern culture hints at a Weberian elective affinity (*Wahlverwandschaft*) between the latter and a populist political style. Such an elective affinity has however remained largely unobserved in the relevant literature. This omission appears due on the one hand to the aforementioned conflation of political content and political style. On the other hand, it appears an outcome of the rationalist construal of critiques of rationalist political styles as inevitably 'regressive'. Be this as it may, many a leftist academic observer has construed the political style of new-rightist Dutch populism as necessarily 'rightist', too, sometimes even as a prelude to a new era of fascism.

All this is however open for doubt, if only because others have suggested exactly the reverse. Student of political culture Ronald Inglehart (1997), for example, construes postmodern politics and its 'elite-challenging' style as inevitably new-leftist. This assumption is equally debatable, because nothing in the populist political style appears to inherently predispose it to either leftist or rightist political content. Indeed, the rationalist modern political style is not necessarily leftist or rightist either, as shown by the fact that 'leftist' socialism and 'rightist' liberalism alike are firmly rooted in the rationalist Enlightenment tradition. There are as such no good reasons to assume that this is any different for the postmodern political style of contemporary Dutch populism. Indeed, we have already highlighted the marked similarity between the political styles of the latter and that found within the new-leftist counter culture back in the 1960s.

What remains unrecognized in much of the relevant literature, in short, is that a ‘postmodern’ or ‘populist’ political style appears to cross-cut the binary of ‘left versus right’ in the sense that it is equally compatible with both. As far as we know, however, no one has ever systematically studied whether a populist or postmodern political style features a positive elective affinity with new-rightist political messages in the contemporary Dutch context, i.e., whether this style is equally capable of enticing other than new-rightist electorates about other than non-rightist political messages. If it can, the populist style is not more effective in gaining support for new-rightist political standpoints than for other ones (*hypothesis 1*) and is not more effective either in gaining support from the new-rightist electorate of Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party (PVV) than from others (*hypothesis 2*). Finally, to the extent that electorates do differ in terms of their receptiveness to populist political communication, this should be attributable to their romanticism and experientialism (*hypothesis 3*).

Data and Method

Experimental Survey

The data are collected through the panel of Centerdata at Tilburg University, which is an ongoing online panel which is representative for the Dutch population. A total of 2,838 persons were invited to fill in our questionnaire, which was designed to test the hypotheses elaborated above alongside hypotheses for other papers in progress. A total of 1,982 respondents have actually filled in the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 68.9%. Our rather vast questionnaire was tailored to take about 30 minutes of the respondents’ time, but some of them took either much more time (i.e., more than 10,000 seconds, or 167 minutes, with some even taking several days) to complete it, or much less (i.e., less than 600 seconds, or 10 minutes). We have excluded those respondents who were either much too quick or much too slow and hence base our analyses in what follows on the data for the remaining respondents.

The questionnaire contained various experiments, one of which was designed to address the efficacy of populist political communication as discussed in the current paper. This experiment was hence not so much designed to study whether a populist political style does better or worse than a non-populist one *in general*, but rather to study with *what type of political issues* and *for whom* it works better or worse (Houtman & Achterberg 2015).

Experimental and Control Conditions

All respondents were assigned a brief fictitious and experimentally manipulated text, which was introduced as “a text fragment from a national newspaper about a large conference about ‘Problems of Multicultural Society’”. The first line of the

actual text itself then briefly explained the setting that was described in the newspaper excerpt: “At the end of the afternoon a politician gave the final address”. From that point onwards, the text for each respondent was randomly assigned from three binary sets of conditions, corresponding with the presence or absence of the three features of contemporary Dutch populism discussed above. The first pair of conditions operationalized the new-leftist, respectively new-rightist political content of the politician’s message and the second and third pairs the two aforementioned aspects of a populist style.

As to political content, the new-rightist condition read, “His talk was completely devoted to the problems that the white autochthonous Dutch experience in the large cities”, whereas the new-leftist condition read, “His talk was completely devoted to the problems that members of ethnic minority groups experience in the large cities”. The second pair of conditions operationalizes the contrast between an appeal to everyday experience on the one hand and a sober, subdued problem analysis on the other. The experiential-populist condition read as follows: “‘Imagine yourselves in their place’, he appealed to his audience. ‘Imagine that it is you who faces the need to live in such a run-down neighborhood, taunted and treated in a hostile fashion, feeling subordinated and treated like a second-class citizen, left alone by the government’”. The sober, subdued condition read, “‘The situation is serious,’ he told his audience. ‘People are treated in a hostile fashion, are treated unequally and subordinated, with government assistance failing.’” The third and final pair of conditions captures the contrast between a redemptive and a pragmatic political style. The redemptive style was expressed as follows: “By way of conclusion, he makes an appeal to his audience to ‘join hands’ and to ‘support him in unison in his fight against these abuses, so that our children and their children will later inherit a country where it is agreeable to live and dwell all over again’”. The pragmatic style was operationalized as follows: “By way of conclusion, he announces the installment of a ‘commission of wise men and women’ who ‘will commission scientific research to develop effective policies.’”

Each of the respondents received one single text, based on a random assignment of each of the three pairs of conditions. They were subsequently asked to evaluate the politician and his message by means of four questions. As Table 1 indicates, the answers to these questions constitute a very reliable scale for the measurement of the degree of (dis)agreement with the politician’s message. High scale scores indicate strong agreement in the analyses that follow.

Table 1: Factor analysis evaluation of the politician and his message

Items (1=completely disagree; 10=completely agree)	Factor 1
--	----------

This politician talks about an important issue	0.82
I agree with this politician	0.94
I think this politician is convincing	0.94
This man is likeable	0.88
<hr/>	
R ²	0.80
Eigenvalue	3.21
Cronbach's Alpha	0.92

Measurement: Romanticism and Experientialism

Apart from the evaluation of the politician and his message and a few demographic controls, we need a measure of political party preference to assess whether or not a populist political style has more appeal to new-rightist voters (PVV) than to other electorates. Political party preference has been measured in a straightforward fashion by asking respondents what party they would vote for if there would be national elections tomorrow.

Table 2: Factor analysis romanticism

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you long for... (1=completely disagree; 10=completely agree)	Factor 1
<hr/>	
A society in which things are less complicated	0.77
A society which is less hectic	0.77
A society in which it is easier to be happy	0.80
A society in which people live in harmony with each other more	0.86
A society in which people live in harmony with nature more	0.76
A society in which people take the feelings of others more into consideration	0.81
<hr/>	
R ²	0.63
Eigenvalue	3.81
Cronbach's Alpha	0.88

Romanticism has been measured with a series of items that all indicate either cultural discontents about a society that is experienced as oppressive and alienating or

longings for a less alienating counter-factually imagined future society. Table 2 demonstrates that the series of items does indeed constitute a reliable scale.

Table 3: Factor analysis experientialism

Items (1=completely disagree; 10=completely agree)	Factor 1
My first impression of people is almost always right	0.73
I always trust my first impression of people	0.70
For my trust in people, I always rely on my intuition	0.83
I trust on my instincts	0.80
Although I cannot exactly explain how, I usually know whether somebody is right or wrong	0.75
I am a very intuitive person	0.75
I can get a first impression of people quickly	0.73
R ²	0.57
Eigenvalue	4.01
Cronbach's Alpha	0.87

Experientialism has been measured by means of Likert-type items, too. Here we have used a series of items that all express trust in one's intuitions and experiences as a reliable guide in everyday life. As Table 3 demonstrates, these items constitute a reliable scale, too.

Finally, we include level of education, age and gender as statistical controls in the analyses that follow below. All three have been measured in the most straightforward of manners that do as such not necessitate further explanation.

Results

In what follows, we test the three hypotheses that we have formulated above. We first study whether the populist political style is more effective in gaining support for new-rightist political standpoints than for new-leftist ones. We then study whether it is more effective in gaining support from the new-rightist electorate of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) than from others. Finally, we study whether differences in receptiveness to a populist political communication style can indeed be attributed to differences in romanticism and experientialism, i.e., whether the latter moderate the effectiveness of a populist style.

Table 4: Evaluation of the politician and his message explained by political content and political style (unstandardized regression coefficients)

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	5.31 (0.37)***	5.52 (0.68)***
Redemptive style (ref.=pragmatic)	0.09 (0.09)	0.15 (0.29)
Experiential style (ref.=rationalist)	0.37 (0.09)***	0.17 (0.29)
New-rightist content (ref.=new-leftist)	-0.69 (0.09)***	-0.84 (0.39)*
Redemptive style * new-rightist content	--	-0.03 (0.18)
Experiential style * new-rightist content	--	0.13 (0.18)
Age	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00)***
Education	-0.13 (0.03)***	-0.13 (0.03)***
Female (ref.=male)	0.16 (0.09)	0.16 (0.09)
R ²	0.08	0.08
N	1,656	

Does a Populist Style Work Better with Populist Content?

To find out whether a populist political style is more effective in communicating new-rightist political messages than in getting new-leftist ones across, we estimate the main effects of our three experimental conditions as well as the interaction effects between content and style. The results can be found in Table 4. It is clear that the evaluation of the politician and his message depends more heavily on the content of the political message than on the communication style that is used to get it across: new-rightist messages are evaluated more negatively than new-leftist ones. It is equally clear that an experiential political style is more helpful in evoking positive evaluations than a more rationalist political style, marked by a sober, subdued and matter-of-fact problem analysis. Most importantly, however, is the finding that the evaluation of a new-rightist political message is not affected by the style used to communicate it: there are no significant interactions between the content of the message on the one hand and the political style used to get it across on the other.

Does a Populist Style Work Better with New-Rightist PVV Voters?

This brings us to our second hypothesis, which predicts that a populist political style is more effective in gaining support from the new-rightist electorate of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) than from others. If this is actually the case, we expect to find stronger positive effects for the two aspects of a populist political style among those who vote for the PVV than among those who vote for one of the other parties. Table 5 points out that this is clearly not the case. Whereas PVV voters do of course evaluate new-rightist messages more favorably than the others, there are no

indications that a populist communication style is more effective for them than for others. If anything, the latter is less effective for them, given that the experiential political style increases the favorableness of the evaluations of the other voters, but not of the PVV voters.

Table 5: Evaluation of the politician and his message explained by political content and political style, for PVV voters and others separately (unstandardized regression coefficients)

Independent variables	PVV voters	Other voters
Constant	2.73 (1.65)	5.44 (0.38)
Redemptive style (ref.=pragmatic)	0.56 (0.44)	0.07 (0.09)
Experiential style (ref.=rationalist)	-0.84 (0.45)	0.43 (0.09)***
New-rightist content (ref.=new-leftist)	1.98 (0.43)***	-0.85 (0.09)***
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)***
Education	-0.03 (0.15)	-0.13 (0.03)***
Female (ref.=male)	0.27 (0.51)	0.17 (0.09)
R ²	0.22	0.10
N	93	1563

Do Romanticism and Experientialism Moderate the Efficacy of a Populist Style?

It has become clear thus far that a populist or postmodern political style does not feature an elective affinity with new-rightist political content. Not only does it communicate new-leftist messages just as successfully as new-rightist ones, but it is not less enticing to other than new-rightist electorates either. This leaves us with our third and final question, i.e., whether receptiveness to populist political communication can be attributed to a postmodern worldview, i.e., to romanticism and experientialism. To find out whether such is the case, we add these two cultural features of the evaluators themselves to see whether and how they interact with a redemptive and a experiential political style.

Table 6: Evaluation of the politician and his message explained by political content, political style, romanticism and experientialism (unstandardized regression coefficients)

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	2.94 (0.50)***	3.53 (1.19)**	3.12 (1.18)**
Redemptive style (ref.=pragmatic)	0.07 (0.09)	-0.15 (0.50)	-0.66 (0.53)
Experiential style (ref.=rationalist)	0.34 (0.09)**	0.17 (0.50)	0.97 (0.52)*
New-rightist content (ref.=new-leftist)	-0.74 (0.09)***	-0.73 (0.09)***	-0.73 (0.09)***
Romanticism	0.29 (0.04)***	0.21 (0.15)	0.29 (0.04)***
Experientialism	0.10 (0.08)	0.10 (0.08)*	0.04 (0.31)
Romanticism * redemptive style	--	0.02 (0.07)	--
Romanticism * experiential style	--	0.03 (0.07)	--
Experientialism * redemptive style	--	--	0.21 (0.14)~
Experientialism * redemptive style	--	--	-0.15 (0.15)
Age	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00)***
Education	-0.10 (0.03)**	-0.10 (0.03)**	-0.10 (0.03)**
Gender (=female)	0.11 (0.09)	0.11 (0.09)	0.11 (0.09)
R ²	0.12	0.12	0.12
N	1,605		

Table 6 shows that even though three of the four interaction effects between a postmodern political style and a postmodern world view are insignificant, i.e., these between an experiential style and experientialism, between an experiential style and romanticism, and between a redemptive style and romanticism, the fourth one is significant and in the expected direction. We hence find a significant interaction effect between a redemptive political style and experientialism which points out that promises of salvation from social suffering are most effective in convincing those who trust their personal intuition as a guide in everyday life. This interaction effect indicates that whereas a populist political style is not more effective for new-rightist electorates than for others, it is more effective for those adhering to a postmodern worldview.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

We have seen that in contemporary Dutch politics a populist political communication style combines just as successfully with new-leftist as with new-rightist political messages and that it is not more successful in communicating messages to new-rightist voters either. These findings invite internationally comparative experimental research, because whereas contemporary Dutch populism features a marked new-rightist emphasis on nativist anti-immigration issues, populisms elsewhere push very different substantial political agendas. South-American populism is for instance traditionally associated with 'old-leftist' issues of social justice and economic redistribution between society's classes. Southern Europe, too, has recently witnessed the rise of a strain of populism that differs markedly in terms of content from the Dutch rendition as discussed in the current paper. The Indignados and Podemos movements on the Iberian Peninsula, the Italian Five Star Movement of Beppe Grillo, and of course Greece's Syriza party that has formed the new Greek government, are all manifestations of populism that lack the typically Dutch new-rightist agenda of the past 15 years. These Southern European manifestations rather tend to be leftist – indeed, not so much 'new-leftist' in the sense of defending personal liberty, tolerance and multicultural diversity, but rather 'old-leftist' in the sense of anti-capitalism and anti-austerity, aiming for state control of the economy and economic redistribution between classes.

Our findings for the Netherlands invite internationally comparative research to find out whether the efficacy of populist political communication is independent from political content elsewhere as well. For that purpose, the research design introduced in the current paper will need to be adapted and fine-tuned to the specificities of other contexts by including the topics and issues that divide the respective electorates most. Such adaptations can be accomplished without great difficulty, e.g., by adding 'old-leftist' messages to the 'new-leftist' and 'new-rightist'

ones used here. Whereas an 'old-leftist' message that underscores the importance of paying attention to the economic interests of the common man appears most interesting and most important, adding an 'old-rightist' message that preaches the blessings of the free market could be interesting as well. Besides the addition of alternative types of political content, other types of political style can of course also be added.

Two research questions in particular need to be addressed in such cross-nationally comparative research. Firstly, it is important to test the hypothesis that whereas countries do doubtlessly differ widely in terms of how the various political messages are evaluated, these differences do not affect the successfulness of a populist political style. If this hypothesis is confirmed, it provides further evidence for the notion that populism constitutes a political style that can basically be combined with any political content. On the other hand, however, it is to be expected that a populist political style is not equally successful in all countries. We have pointed out above that it appears to resonate particularly well with a postmodern culture where religion and science have lost much of their former authority. To further test this hypothesis, it is vital to study its effectiveness in countries that are less massively secularized than the Netherlands and/or where trust in science and reason is still firmly in place.

References

- Aupers, S. & D. Houtman. 2006. 'Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21 (2): 201-222.
- Bauman, Z. 1987. *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity, and Intellectuals*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Beck, U. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U., A. Giddens & S. Lash. 1994. *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Campbell, C. 2007. *The Easternization of the West: A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Canovan, M. 2005. *The People*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Canovan, M. 1999. 'Trust the People: Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies* 47 (1): 2-16.
- Couwenberg, C.W. 2004. *Opstand der burgers: De Fortuyn-revolte en het demasqué van de oude politiek*. Civis Mundi jaarboek 2004. Budel: DAMON.
- De Koster, W., P. Achterberg, J. Van der Waal, S. Van Bohemen & R. Kemmers. 2014. 'Progressiveness and the New Right: The Electoral Relevance of Culturally Progressive Values in the Netherlands, *West European Politics* 37 (3): 584-604.
- Duyvendak, J. W. 2004. *Een eensgezinde, vooruitstrevende natie: Over de mythe van de individualisering en de toekomst van de sociologie*. Amsterdam: Vossiuspers.
- Fortuyn, W.S.P. 2002. *De verweesde samenleving*. Uithoorn: Karakter.
- Gellner, E. 1992. *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Heelas, P. & L. Woodhead, with B. Seel, B. Szerszynski & K. Tusting. 2005. *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Houtman, D. & P. Achterberg. 2015. 'Quantitative Analysis in Cultural Sociology: Why It Should Be Done, How It Can Be Done'. Forthcoming in David Inglis (ed.), *Sage Handbook of Cultural Sociology*. London: Sage.
- Houtman, D. & P. Achterberg. 2010. 'Populisme in de polder: Stemmen en mopperen in een post-confessionele politieke cultuur'. Pp. 11-31 in *Kritiek: Jaarboek voor socialistische discussie en analyse*. Amsterdam: Aksant.
- Inglehart, R. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Countries*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Inglis, D. 2007. 'The Warring Twins: Sociology, Cultural Studies, Alterity and Sameness', *History of the Human Sciences* 20 (2): 99-122.
- Johansson, K.M. 2014. 'How Populist Parties Organize', *PESO Research Report No 2*, School of Social Sciences Södertörn University. Accessed February 16,

- 2015: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A699764&dswid=656>.
- Kazin, M. 1995. *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kemmers, R., S. Aupers, D. Houtman & J. Van der Waal, J. 2015. 'State of Disgrace: Popular Political Discontents about the Dutch State in the 2000s', *Parliamentary Affairs* 68 (forthcoming: <http://pa.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2014/01/08/pa.gst036.full.pdf?keytype=ref&ikey=y1Tzp3BSWdIK406>).
- Kriesi, H. 2014. 'The Populist Challenge', *West European Politics* 37 (2): 361-378.
- Laermans, R. 2012. 'Populisme als buitengewone politiek: Naar een Weberiaanse interpretatie', *Sociologie* 8 (1): 149-173.
- Meeus, T.J. 2012. *De grote Amerikashow: Populisme en wantrouwen in een gespleten land*. Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam.
- Mudde, C. 2004. 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government & Opposition* 39 (3): 541-63.
- Mudde, C. 2010. 'The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy', *West European Politics* 33 (6): 1167-86.
- Musgrove, F. 1974. *Ecstasy and Holiness: Counter Culture and the Open Society*. London: Methuen.
- Oakeshott, M. 1996. *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Skepticism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pellikaan, H., T. Van der Meer, & S. De Lange. 2003. 'The Road from a Depoliticized to a Centrifugal Democracy', *Acta Politica* 38 (1): 23-49.
- Plattner, M.F. 2010. 'Populism, Pluralism, and Liberal Democracy', *Journal of Democracy* 21 (1): 81-92.
- Roszak, T. 1969. *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. New York: Doubleday.
- Seidman, S. 1994. *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory in the Postmodern Era*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Sherwood, S.J., P. Smith & J.C. Alexander. 1993. 'The British are Coming... Again! The Hidden Agenda of "Cultural Studies"', *Contemporary Sociology* 22 (3): 370-5.
- Taggart, P. 2000. *Populism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Van der Brug, W. 2003. 'How the LPF Fuelled Discontent: Empirical Tests of Explanations of LPF Support', *Acta Politica* 38 (1): 89-106.
- Volkskrant, (2002). 'De islam is een achterlijke cultuur', 9 februari 2002.
- Wansink, H.A. (2004). *De erfenis van Fortuyn: De Nederlandse democratie na de opstand van de kiezers*. Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam.
- Wilders, G. (2005). *Kies voor vrijheid: Een eerlijk antwoord*. Den Haag: Groep Wilders.
- Zijderveld, A.C. 1970. *The Abstract Society: A Cultural Analysis of Our Time*. New York: Doubleday.