

# **The Success & Failure of Right-Wing Populist Parties in the Benelux**



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May 2019

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the variation in the electoral performances of right-wing populist parties in the Benelux region (i.e. Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg). Despite numerous historical and political commonalities, right-wing populist parties have been more successful in the Netherlands and Flanders (i.e. the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) than in Luxembourg and Wallonia (i.e. the southern, French-speaking part of Belgium).

The thesis sets out to explore ‘conventional’ explanations, including socio-economic indicators (i.e. demand-side factors), and institutional as well as party organisational features (i.e. supply-side explanations). The analysis suggests that demand for right-wing populist parties is relatively constant across the Benelux region, whereas the supply of such parties has been weaker in Wallonia and Luxembourg than in Flanders and the Netherlands. However, supply-side explanations cannot fully account for the variation in the electoral performances of right-wing populist parties. The research therefore focuses on the wider context in which party competition takes place by highlighting the role of mainstream parties and the media; taken together, they act as gatekeepers in the sense that they can facilitate or hinder access into the electoral market. By politicising issues that are traditionally ‘owned’ by the populist radical right (notably immigration), they can create favourable opportunity structures for right-wing populist parties to thrive.

Empirical support is drawn from party manifestos as well as semi-structured interviews with media practitioners and politicians. In Flanders and the Netherlands, the decline of mainstream parties as well as changes in the media landscape have contributed to the radicalisation of the political discourse, which has created fertile ground for right-wing populist challengers. By contrast, Wallonia and Luxembourg have remained relatively immune to these tendencies: mainstream parties have (thus far) managed to hold on to their core electorates, while the media are generally hostile to the populist radical right.

The thesis complements existing theoretical explanations by moving beyond the traditional demand- and supply-side framework. The findings suggest that the reactions of mainstream political parties and the media are crucial to understand the variation in the electoral performances of populist radical right parties in Europe.

**Preface**

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank my supervisor, Dr Julie Smith, for her unwavering support over the course of this project. Her sometimes tough but always fair and knowledgeable comments helped to make this thesis what it is. I could not have asked for better guidance. My sincere gratitude also goes to my second supervisor, Dr Pieter van Houten, for his helpful feedback on various chapters.

Over seventy individuals kindly agreed to be interviewed for this thesis. Without them, this project would not have been possible, and I am grateful to every single one of them. I have also benefited greatly from the advice and encouragement of academics at other universities, who shared sources, sent articles, lent me books and made themselves available to meet or read my work. During my fieldwork in Belgium, I was fortunate to spend several weeks as a visiting scholar at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*; I want to thank the entire CEVIPOL team, in particular Dr Emilie van Haute, for providing a supportive and stimulating working environment. I also owe thanks to Dr Philippe Poirier at the University of Luxembourg for his encouragement and support.

Furthermore, I am grateful to all the teachers, coaches and mentors who have guided and encouraged me along the way, in particular Dr Geoffrey Edwards, Dr Robert Givens, Raymond Lamberty, Hermann Paar, Teresa Tande, Dr Aparna Thomas and Dr David Yamanishi; without them, I would not be where I am today.

Over the course of my PhD, I was very fortunate to be surrounded by a dense network of colleagues, friends and family. Their support has been invaluable to my personal and intellectual growth, and they therefore deserve my deepest gratitude. Barry Colfer, Sean Fleming, Tobias Cremer, Philipp Hirsch, Anton Jäger, Lucia Linares, Tobias Müller, Alice Musabende, Joshua Smeltzer, Benjamin Studebaker and Maria Chiara Vinciguerra have been a wonderful source of wisdom and encouragement. Tobias Cremer, Judit Kuschnitzki, Tobias Müller and Marion Messmer have read various parts of the thesis, and I am thankful for their time and thoughtful comments. Sebastian Steingass deserves special mention for his feedback, advice and continuous support.

Lys Differding has lent her artistic skills to various projects throughout my PhD research, including one of the figures presented in this thesis. Beyond this, I am

grateful for her friendship. I also owe thanks to Jacqueline de Jonge, Roeland and Maureen Douma-Arntz, Florent Dyé and Barbara Konijnenberg, who helped with translations. The staff at POLIS and Pembroke College also deserve to be recognised here; they have been incredibly supportive and forthcoming.

In addition, I want to thank the Cambridge University Basketball Club for keeping me mentally (and physically) sane. Tim and Laura Weil deserve special mention for their dedication and support. I am also grateful to my friends at Pembroke College, in particular Florent Dyé, Judit Kuschnitzki, Matt Lim, Nacim Nikkhah, Ruizhi Wang and Noémie Borel; they have made this PhD journey very enjoyable. These acknowledgements would not be complete without mentioning my friends at home (in Luxembourg) and abroad. Their moral support has made all the difference.

Special thanks are due to the School of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Cambridge for providing me with generous financial support throughout my doctorate. I received additional fieldwork funding and travel grants from Pembroke College and POLIS.

Lastly, I want to thank my family. My cousins, aunts, uncles and grandmother have been a source of constant love and encouragement. I am particularly grateful to my siblings, Raoul and Mariëlle, and their wonderful partners, Marlene and Luca, for offering distraction from work as well as moral support whenever needed. My deepest gratitude goes to my parents, Reinald and Jacqueline, for teaching me what really matters in life. *Ik hou van jullie.*

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>AD</b>	<i>Algemeen Dagblad</i> (Dutch newspaper)
<b>ADR</b>	<i>Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei</i> (Alternative Democratic Reform Party, Luxembourg)
<b>ADDE</b>	Alliance for Direct Democracy in Europe
<b>ACRE</b>	Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe Group
<b>AECR</b>	Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists
<b>AfD</b>	<i>Alternative für Deutschland</i> (Alternative for Germany)
<b>AL</b>	<i>Actioun Lëtzebuergesch</i> (Action Luxembourgish)
<b>ARP</b>	<i>Anti-Revolutionaire Partij</i> (Protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party, The Netherlands)
<b>BP</b>	<i>Boerenpartij</i> (Farmers' Party, The Netherlands)
<b>CEFIS</b>	<i>Centre d'étude et de formation interculturelles et sociales</i> (Intercultural Social Research and Education Centre)
<b>CETA</b>	Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement
<b>CD</b>	<i>Centrum Democraten</i> (Centre Democrats, The Netherlands)
<b>CDA</b>	<i>Christen-Democratisch Appèl</i> (Christian Democratic Appeal, The Netherlands)
<b>cdH</b>	<i>Centre démocrate humaniste</i> (Humanist Democratic Centre Party, Belgium)
<b>CD&amp;V</b>	<i>Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams</i> (Christian Democratic and Flemish Party, Belgium)
<b>CDU</b>	<i>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands</i> (Christian Democratic Union of Germany)
<b>CHU</b>	<i>Christelijk-Historische Unie</i> (Protestant Christian Historical Union, The Netherlands)
<b>CMP</b>	Comparative Manifesto Project
<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Network (US)
<b>CP</b>	<i>Centrumpartij</i> (Centre Party, The Netherlands)
<b>CP'86</b>	<i>Centrumpartij '86</i> (Centre Party '86, The Netherlands)
<b>CSA</b>	<i>Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel</i> (Superior Council of Audio-visual Media, Belgium)

<b>CSU</b>	<i>Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern</i> (Christian Social Union in Bavaria, Germany)
<b>CSV</b>	<i>Chrëschtlech Sozial Vollekspartei</i> (Christian Social People's Party, Luxembourg)
<b>DP</b>	<i>Demokratesch Partei</i> (Democratic Party, Luxembourg)
<b>EEC</b>	European Economic Community
<b>EFB</b>	<i>Éislecker Fräiheitsbewegung</i> (Oesling Freedom Movement, Luxembourg)
<b>EFTA</b>	European Free Trade Association
<b>EP</b>	European Parliament
<b>ESS</b>	European Social Survey
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EVS</b>	European Values Study
<b>FDF</b>	<i>Fédéralistes Démocrates Francophones</i> (Francophone Democratic Federalists, Belgium)
<b>FDJ</b>	<i>Front de la Jeunesse</i> (Youth Movement, Belgium)
<b>FELES</b>	<i>Fédératioun Eist Land – Eis Sprooch</i> (Federation Our Country – Our Language, Luxembourg)
<b>FLB</b>	<i>Fräie Lëtzebuerger Baureverband</i> (Free Luxembourgish Farmers' Association)
<b>FN</b>	<i>Front National</i> (National Front, France)
<b>FNb</b>	<i>Front National</i> (National Front, Belgium)
<b>FPÖ</b>	<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i> (Austrian Freedom Party)
<b>FvD</b>	<i>Forum voor Democratie</i> (Forum for Democracy, The Netherlands)
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>ISP</b>	<i>Imprimerie Saint-Paul</i> (Saint-Paul Publishing, Luxembourg)
<b>ISPO</b>	<i>Interuniversitair Steunpunt Politieke-Opinieonderzoek</i> (Institute of Social and Political Research, Belgium)
<b>KPL</b>	<i>Kommunistesch Partei vu Lëtzebuerg</i> (Luxembourgish Communist Party)
<b>KVP</b>	<i>Katholieke Volkspartij</i> (Catholic People's Party, The Netherlands)

<b>LAV</b>	<i>Lëtzebuerger Arbechterverband</i> (Luxembourgish Workers' Federation)
<b>LCGB</b>	<i>Lëtzebuerger Chrëschtliche Gewerkschaftsbond</i> (Luxembourgish Confederation of Christian Trade Unions)
<b>LENA</b>	Leading European Newspaper Alliance
<b>LN</b>	<i>Leefbaar Nederland</i> (Liveable Netherlands Party)
<b>LPF</b>	<i>Lijst Pim Fortuyn</i> (List Pim Fortuyn, The Netherlands)
<b>LSAP</b>	<i>Lëtzebuerger Sozialistesche Aarbechterpartei</i> (Luxembourgish Socialist Workers' Party)
<b>MCC</b>	<i>Mouvement des Citoyens pour le Changement</i> (Citizen' Movement for Change, Belgium)
<b>MEP</b>	Member of European Parliament
<b>MINTÉ</b>	<i>Plate-forme Migrations et Intégration</i> (Platform for Migration and Integration, Luxembourg)
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>MR</b>	<i>Mouvement Réformateur</i> (Reformist Movement, Belgium)
<b>NB</b>	<i>National Bewegung</i> (National Movement, Luxembourg)
<b>NOS</b>	<i>Nederlandse Omroep Stichting</i> (Dutch Broadcast Foundation)
<b>NPO</b>	<i>Nederlandse Publieke Omroep</i> (Dutch Foundation for Public Broadcasting)
<b>NPD</b>	<i>Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> (National Democratic Party of Germany)
<b>N-VA</b>	<i>Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie</i> New Flemish Alliance (Belgium)
<b>NVU</b>	<i>Nederlandse Volksunie</i> (Union of the Dutch people, The Netherlands)
<b>NSB</b>	<i>Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging</i> (National Socialist Movement, The Netherlands)
<b>NSV</b>	<i>Nationalistische Studentenvereniging</i> (Nationalist Student Movement, Belgium)
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>OGBL</b>	<i>Onofhängege Gewerkschaftsbond Lëtzebuerg</i> (Independent Trade Union Confederation of Luxembourg)
<b>PCF</b>	<i>Parti communiste français</i> (French Communist Party)
<b>PFN</b>	<i>Parti des Forces Nouvelles</i> (Party of New Forces, Belgium)

<b>PID</b>	<i>Partei für Integral Demokratie</i> (Party for Integral Democracy, Luxembourg)
<b>POS</b>	Political Opportunity Structures
<b>PP</b>	<i>Parti populaire</i> (People's Party, Belgium)
<b>PPP</b>	Purchasing Power Parity
<b>PR</b>	Proportional representation
<b>PRL</b>	<i>Parti Réformateur Libéral</i> (Liberal Reformist Party, Belgium)
<b>PRRP</b>	Populist radical right party
<b>PS</b>	<i>Parti Socialiste</i> (Socialist Party, Belgium)
<b>PvdA</b>	<i>Partij van de Arbeid</i> (Labour Party, The Netherlands)
<b>PVDA/PTB</b>	<i>Partij van de Arbeid van België / Parti du Travail de Belgique</i> (Belgian Worker's Party)
<b>PVV</b>	<i>Partij voor de Vrijheid</i> (Freedom Party, The Netherlands)
<b>PVV</b>	<i>Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang</i> (Party for Freedom and Progress, Belgium)
<b>RILE</b>	Right-left dimension (CMP Index)
<b>RPR</b>	<i>Rassemblement pour la République</i> (Rally for the Republic, France)
<b>RTBF</b>	<i>Radio-Télévision belge de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles</i> Belgian Radio-Television of Walloon-Brussels Federation
<b>RTL</b>	Radio Television Luxembourg
<b>RW</b>	<i>Rassemblement Wallon</i> (Walloon Rally, Belgium)
<b>SP</b>	<i>Socialistische Partij Anders</i> (Socialist Party, Belgium)
<b>sp.a</b>	<i>Socialistische Partij Anders</i> Socialist Party Differently (Belgium)
<b>SPD</b>	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
<b>SVP/UDC</b>	<i>Schweizerische Volkspartei / Union démocratique du centre</i> (Swiss People's Party)
<b>TNS-ILRES</b>	<i>Taylor Nelson Sofres - Institut luxembourgeois de recherches sociales et d'études de marchés</i> (Luxembourg Institute of Social and Market Research)
<b>UDF</b>	Union pour la Démocratie Française (Union for French Democracy)

<b>UDRT</b>	<i>Union Démocratique du Travail</i> (Democratic Labour Union, Belgium)
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UKIP</b>	United Kingdom Independence Party
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>VARA</b>	<i>Vereeniging van Arbeiders Radio Amateurs</i> (Association of Worker Radio Amateurs, The Netherlands)
<b>VB</b>	<i>Vlaams Blok / Vlaams Belang</i> (Flemish Bloc; after 2004: Flemish Interest Party, Belgium)
<b>VC</b>	<i>Vlaamse Concentratie</i> (Flemish Aggregation, Belgium)
<b>VLD</b>	<i>Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten</i> (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats, Belgium)
<b>VNV</b>	<i>Vlaams Nationaal Verbond</i> (Flemish National Union, Belgium)
<b>VMO</b>	<i>Vlaamse Militante Orde</i> (Order of Flemish Militants, Belgium)
<b>VRT</b>	<i>Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie</i> (Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting Organisation)
<b>VTM</b>	<i>Vlaamse Televisie Maatschappij</i> (Flemish Television Company, Belgium)
<b>VU</b>	<i>Volksunie</i> (People's Union, Belgium)
<b>VVD</b>	<i>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</i> (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, The Netherlands)
<b>WWI</b>	World War I
<b>WWII</b>	World War II

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The populist radical right has become an important political force. Despite noteworthy setbacks (most notably the defeats of presidential candidates Norbert Hofer in Austria in 2016, and Marine Le Pen in France in 2017), net support for so-called ‘right-wing populist parties’ has increased substantially in Europe over the last three decades (see, for example, Rooduijn 2015). Concern about the possibility of a renewed ‘swing to the right’ in European politics therefore looms large among media commentators and mainstream politicians. For instance, an editorial published in *The Economist* in November 2015 warned of ‘stormy weather’ as Europe faced its ‘biggest crisis in a generation’, as ‘the mass influx of refugees is aggravating many of Europe’s other looming problems’ and ‘stoking populism everywhere’ (*The Economist* 2015).

This statement echoed earlier warnings by European leaders about the rise of populism in the face of the crises. In 2010, for instance, the then-President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, identified populism as ‘the greatest threat to Europe’ (*Frankfurter Allgemeine* 2010). Similarly, in 2013, then-President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, expressed deep concern ‘about the divisions that we see emerging: political extremes and populism tearing apart the political support and the social fabric that we need to deal with the crises [...]’ (European Commission 2013). Their concern can partly be explained by the fact that the European ‘lurch’ to the right has been accompanied by the resurfacing of nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiments. For some, the advances made by right-wing populist parties evoked memories of the political disintegration of the 1930s (see, for example, *Huffington Post* 2016). In particular disagreements about immigration have given rise to some of the most heated and emotionally loaded public debates of our times.

The rise of the populist radical right is arguably ‘one of the few academic topics that one can study without having to defend the relevance of one’s choice’ (Mudde 2007: 1). Indeed, it constitutes one of the most dramatic changes in European politics in the post-war era (van der Brug et al. 2005: 548). The electoral fortunes of right-wing populist parties have coincided with the decline of the traditional party families that long dominated European politics, thereby illustrating the ‘thawing’ of European party systems that had long been declared ‘frozen’ (Lipset

& Rokkan 1967).<sup>1</sup> It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the phenomenon has been matched with a proliferation of academic studies seeking to shed light on the reasons behind their electoral success (e.g. Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008; Arzheimer & Carter 2006; Betz 1994; Eatwell 2003; Kitschelt 1995; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005; Pytlas 2015).

As Cas Mudde (2016: 2) has noted, '[t]he populist radical right is by far the best-studied party family within political science. Since the [...] early 1980s, more articles and books have been written on far right parties than on all other party families combined.' However, the disproportionate attention that these parties have received (Mudde 2013) tends to obscure the fact that they have not been (equally) successful in *all* Western European countries. Indeed, there is great variation in the electoral performances of such parties across the continent; while right-wing populist parties have formed part of (or provided parliamentary support for) national governments in some countries including Austria, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands, they have been virtually non-existent or unsuccessful in rallying support in countries such as Portugal, Ireland and Luxembourg.

In other words, the development of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe has been a story of failure as well as success. This raises questions about the variation in the electoral fortunes of these parties in Western Europe. Specifically, why have right-wing populist parties with an anti-immigration agenda succeeded in garnering broad electoral support in some countries but failed to do so in others? This thesis seeks to answer this question by focusing specifically on the Benelux region (i.e. Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg). The Benelux countries provide useful comparative case studies: despite numerous commonalities, including a shared history, these countries have had very different experiences with right-wing populism. Indeed, right-wing populist parties have been more successful in the Netherlands and Flanders (i.e. the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) than in Luxembourg and Wallonia (i.e. the southern, French-speaking part of Belgium). Considering the fact that right-wing populist parties have emerged in all

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<sup>1</sup> Lipset and Rokkan (1967: 50) argued that the party systems of the 1960s 'reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s', which implies that 'the party alternatives, and in remarkably many cases the party organizations, are older than the majorities of the national electorates'.

neighbouring countries including Germany with the *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany or AfD) and France with the *Rassemblement National* (National Rally or RN – formerly known as the *Front National* or FN), the absence of a successful right-wing populist contender in Wallonia and Luxembourg is particularly puzzling. Why have the Netherlands and Flanders witnessed the rise of right-wing populist contenders, whereas comparable movements in Luxembourg and Wallonia have failed?

This research question will be examined by exploring a wide range of explanatory variables, including socio-economic (e.g. immigration and unemployment figures), institutional (e.g. the electoral system), organisational (e.g. party leadership) and contextual (e.g. the media landscape) factors. Building on existing research, the electoral performance of right-wing populist parties is conceptualised as a marketplace, where success and failure are contingent on ‘public demand’ and ‘party supply’ (e.g. Eatwell 2003; Kitschelt & McGann 1995; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005; van Kessel 2013). Broadly speaking, demand-side explanations highlight factors that create a breeding ground in which right-wing populist parties can thrive, notably socio-economic or political conditions that make voters more prone to support right-wing populist parties, while supply-side theories highlight the mechanisms that enable right-wing populist parties to harness demand for right-wing populist ideas. I argue that the demand for and supply of right-wing populist parties are ultimately dependent on the context, which is shaped by the media- and party-landscapes in which these parties operate. To fully understand the electoral trajectories of the populist radical right, we thus need to consider contextual factors, i.e. ‘the political and discursive opportunity structures in which [right-wing populist] actors exercise their political agency’ (Pytlas 2015: 4).

These opportunity structures can broadly be defined as a set of variables that help determine ‘which ideas are considered “sensible”, which constructions of reality are seen as “realistic”, and which claims are held as “legitimate” within a certain polity at a specific time’ (Koopmans & Statham 1999: 228). It is important to understand the unique characteristics of the electoral market, since these features are likely to influence both public demand and party supply. The analytical framework developed in Chapter 2 focuses on the factors that influence demand- and supply-side variables addressed by other authors. In a nutshell, I posit that,

while demand- and supply-side explanations provide a useful and indeed necessary starting point to understand the different electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties, they are limited in the sense that they do not take into account the context in which these parties operate.

Before going into further detail, it is essential to define the key concepts. Specifically, (1) what are ‘right-wing populist parties’ and (2) how do we conceptualise their ‘success’ and ‘failure’?

### 1.1. Key Concepts

Providing clear definitions is crucial because the strength of a theory ultimately hinges on the robustness of the classification system underpinning it (see Mudde 2007: 258). This is particularly important when studying ‘essentially contested concepts’ such as populism (Mudde 2017a; Rooduijn 2019). It has long been acknowledged that there is no consensus in the literature on how to define (right-wing) populism (see, for example, Mudde 1996). Part of the problem derives from the fact that scholars have used a host of different labels (including the ‘extreme right’, ‘far right’, ‘radical right’) to refer to the same party family (Art 2011: 10). Despite this lack of definitional consensus, scholars often implicitly agree on which parties to include (see Kitschelt 2007: 1178; Mudde 2000: 7; 2007: 58). Since this thesis is primarily interested in explaining the electoral performance of parties that are (1) situated on the *right* side of the political spectrum (in socio-cultural terms) and (2) *populist*, I generally use the term ‘right-wing populist parties’ when referring to the object of my study.

The definition employed in this thesis draws from the works of other scholars, notably Cas Mudde (2004; 2007) and Benjamin Moffitt (2016). In very general terms, ‘right-wing populist parties’ are defined here as political parties that are nativist, exclusionist and radical in the sense that they reject certain features of *liberal* democracy without being anti-democratic. Furthermore, they are populist in their rejection of ‘appropriate’ political behaviour (i.e. they break taboos) and, above all, in their appeal to the pure ‘people’ in opposition to the corrupt and evil ‘elite’. This definition clearly merits further discussion; the following chapter, therefore, provides a more elaborate justification of this conceptualisation. At this point, it is sufficient to note that the labels ‘right-wing populist’ and ‘populist

radical right’ are used interchangeably, whereas the ‘far right’ is used as an umbrella term to refer to a broader range of parties on the right-end of the political spectrum and includes radical (democratic) and extremist (anti-democratic) parties (Mudde 2010: 1169; Ravndal 2017: 847).

Having provided a brief working definition of right-wing populist parties, how can we conceptualise their electoral success? This thesis considers the *variation* in the electoral fortunes of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. As far as the Benelux countries are concerned, most (if not all) observers would agree that these parties have historically been more successful in the Netherlands and Flanders than in Wallonia and Luxembourg. Yet, generating a more formal definition of success proves difficult, since success is inevitably contextual and hence best defined *within* the national context.

Even at the national level, however, there is no consensus in the literature on what constitutes a successful political party. As Sartori (1976: 121) noted nearly half a century ago, ‘there is no absolute yardstick’ to assess the strength or importance of a political party. This can partly be attributed to the fact that there are different ‘dimensions’ and ‘phases’ of success. For instance, ‘success’ can refer to the results or influence obtained in a single (national) election, or it can indicate rising support levels over time. Even within these different dimensions, there is no agreement on what exactly constitutes success, given that it can be measured in a variety of different ways, such as vote share, seats in (national) parliaments, participation in government, or political influence on mainstream parties and/or policymaking (e.g. the impact they exert on shaping immigration policies).

Despite this conceptual conundrum (or perhaps because of it), few scholars specify what they mean by ‘success’.<sup>2</sup> This is problematic, given that conflating different dimensions and/or measures of success is likely to yield erroneous conclusions. As Hilde Coffé (2004: 18) has noted, while one specific phenomenon may explain the breakthrough of a party, it may have no (or even the opposite) effect on its longevity. Indeed, it seems plausible that some factors account for parties’ initial *electoral breakthrough*, while others help explain their *electoral persistence*. Whilst undeniably related, breakthrough and persistence are distinct processes that

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<sup>2</sup> There are a few noteworthy exceptions, including Art (2011), Coffé (2004), and Ellinas (2010).

may not always be explained by the same combination of factors (Mudde 2007: 202). Therefore, some explanatory factors may be more important during the earlier stages of a party's life span, while other variables become relevant at subsequent phases (Ellinas 2010: 15). For instance, it seems conceivable that the behaviour of the media can help explain earlier trajectories including initial electoral breakthroughs, whereas party organisation and leadership can account for a party's electoral persistence (ibid). In brief, the thesis is built on the premise that once a party has passed a certain 'threshold of relevance', different factors become relevant when explaining its electoral persistence (see Mudde 2007: 301).

In this thesis, I am less concerned with explaining electoral persistence (see Art 2011) or party decline (see Pauwels 2011a). Rather, I seek to unveil the factors that account for a party's *initial electoral breakthrough* as defined below. The breakthrough moment is particularly important, because it can 'lift small parties from relative obscurity and turn them from backstage understudies into important political actors' (Ellinas 2010: 16). This realisation has important implications for analysing the variation in the electoral trajectories of parties, since differentiating between different stages of success can allow us to assess the *relative* importance of 'marginal' and 'mainstream' parties across time more effectively.<sup>3</sup> As Bonnie Meguid (2005; 2008) has noted, most studies attribute the same weight to marginal and mainstream parties by treating them as 'equals'. It is only reasonable to do this, however, once marginal parties have successfully entered the competitive space.

Following Ellinas (2010), I posit that before marginal parties become big enough to matter, they are exposed to (and to some extent dependent on) the context in which they operate (see Chapter 2). It makes more sense, therefore, to focus on these 'contextual factors', notably the strategic choices of mainstream parties and the role of the media (Ellinas 2010: 16). Taken together, these contextual factors shape the opportunity structures available to right-wing populist parties, thereby determining the 'openness' of the electoral market. For instance, before far-right parties become relevant, mainstream parties could choose to ignore them, which

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<sup>3</sup> Scholars have noted that populist parties have moved from the margins 'into the mainstream' (e.g. Akkerman et al. 2016). As a result, the lines between 'mainstream' and populist challenger parties have blurred. In this thesis, the term 'mainstream parties' is generally used to refer to the three traditional party families in Western Europe, e.g. Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Liberals.

may no longer be a viable option once far-right parties have passed the ‘threshold of relevance’ (see Sartori 1976: 121-29). Similarly, media behaviour may have a stronger impact on the electoral trajectories of far-right parties during the earlier phases of their development, because ‘exposure can push minor parties into the mainstream debate, give them visibility, and legitimate their claims’ (Ellinas 2010: 18). Initial breakthrough typically endows parties with additional resources (e.g. media exposure and finances). This means that once a new political challenger has entered the electoral arena and gained relevance, it effectively alters the parameters of party competition. The behaviour of mainstream parties and the media, therefore, is likely to be more important in determining the trajectories of right-wing populist parties in the early stages of their life span (i.e. *before* their initial breakthrough), whereas the actions of these parties matter more *after* they have passed ‘the threshold of relevance’. In sum, ‘once Far Right parties pass the threshold of relevance, they are harder to combat’, and their electoral fortunes are less dependent on the behaviour of the tactical manoeuvring of other players, including mainstream parties and the media (Ellinas 2010: 18). Differentiating between different phases of a party’s development therefore seems a fruitful starting point when seeking to explain divergent electoral fortunes.

There is no consensus, however, on what constitutes a party’s *electoral breakthrough*. According to Mudde (2007: 301), for instance, electoral breakthrough is quite simply defined as winning sufficient seats to enter parliament. This definition is arguably too broad an indicator, because it would lead us to conclude that the Belgian *Front National* was a ‘successful’ party, given that it held between one and two seats in the Belgian Parliament from 1991 until 2007. The number of seats a party receives in parliament is directly dependent on the electoral system in which that party operates. For instance, UKIP (the United Kingdom Independence Party) won nearly 4 million votes (or 12.6 percent of the vote) in the 2015 UK general election; yet, because of the country’s first-past-the-post electoral system, UKIP’s electoral performance translated into a single parliamentary seat (out of 650) in the House of Commons – despite being the third biggest party in terms of vote share. Thus, if we were to conceptualise party success solely in terms of national parliamentary seats, UKIP could hardly be described as a ‘successful’ political party.

Since the number of parliamentary seats is not a very useful indicator of party success, many scholars interested in explaining the divergent electoral performances of far-right parties have used national vote shares as an indicator of success (e.g. Golder 2003; Meguid 2008; Norris 2005; van Kessel 2015; van der Brug et al. 2005). According to Pippa Norris (2005: 50), for instance, radical right parties can be considered ‘relevant’ if they achieve at least 3 percent of the mean share of the vote in one or more national, legislative election. By contrast, Stijn van Kessel (2015: 77-8) suggests that populist parties can be considered a ‘marginal’ phenomenon in countries in which their average vote share is below 10 percent.<sup>4</sup> Others (e.g. Meguid 2008; van der Brug et al. 2005) fail to specify the share of the vote a party needs in order to be classified as successful or ‘relevant’.

Given that any numerical cut-off point is likely to be arbitrary and hence unsatisfactory, success is defined here in terms of ‘national relevance’.<sup>5</sup> How should this be defined, however? As Sartori (1976: 121) mused, ‘How much strength makes a party relevant, and how much feebleness makes a party irrelevant?’ According to Sartori (1976), a party can be considered ‘relevant’ if its existence has an impact on party competition, ‘particularly when it alters the *direction* of the competition – by determining a switch from centripetal to centrifugal competition either leftward or rightward, or in both directions – of the governing-oriented parties’ (Sartori 1976: 123). Conversely, a party is considered ‘irrelevant’ (or unsuccessful) if it has neither coalition potential (i.e. it is at least *considered* at some point to have the potential to help form a governmental majority) nor blackmail potential (i.e. whether a party’s existence affects other parties’ behaviour and policy platforms).

Based on this observation, success is defined here as ‘the moment when a party’s [...] electoral strength increases significantly to a point where it changes the parameters of political competition’ (Ellinas 2010: 16). Whilst this increase in strength tends to be most noticeable in *national* elections, right-wing populist parties have also made important gains in local or European elections. Thus, ‘[r]egardless of how an initial breakthrough is achieved, it marks a substantial

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<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Pippa Norris, Stijn van Kessel’s work considers left- and right-wing manifestations of populist parties.

<sup>5</sup> This is a similar approach to that used by Ellinas (2010: 15), who refers to Sartori’s notion of the ‘threshold of relevance’ (Sartori 1976: 121-29).

increase in party strength that crowns minor players with the perception of a national political relevance' (Ellinas 2010: 16).

Having provided some conceptual clarity, the remainder of this introduction briefly sums up the existing research and identifies some of the gaps in the academic literature (1.2); explains the research design and methodology, and introduces the case studies (1.3); and outlines the plan for the thesis (1.4).

## 1.2. Existing Research

Since the end of WWII, the far right is among the most studied political phenomena. In particular, the great variation in the electoral performances of far-right parties has long puzzled scholars. As a result, this question has been examined under different guises, for instance by focusing on (right-wing) extremist parties (Carter 2005); populist radical right parties (Mudde 2007); anti-immigrant parties (van der Brug et al. 2005); right-wing populist parties (Bornschieer 2012); radical right parties (Norris 2005; Art 2011); populist parties (van Kessel 2013); niche parties (Meguid 2008); or challenger parties (Hino 2012). Instead of trying to reinvent the academic wheel, this thesis draws on this rich body of academic research to derive a comprehensive analytical framework that comprises different perspectives, thereby deepening our understanding of the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties.

In order to provide a brief overview of the literature, it is helpful to separate the existing research into three different explanatory strands: (1) demand-side explanations; (2) supply-side explanations; and (3), what I refer to here as 'contextual' explanations. In practice, these different dimensions cannot be distinguished so neatly from one another; indeed, they partly overlap and are likely to reinforce one another (Mudde 2007: 202). For instance, political convergence can generate dissatisfaction with mainstream politics, thereby stoking demand for the populist radical right (e.g. van Kessel 2015: 20). At the same time, however, it can also create space for right-wing populist challengers, thereby facilitating the *supply* of such parties (e.g. Mudde 2007: 239). Nonetheless, separating the academic literature into different explanatory strands provides a useful starting point when seeking to grapple the complex reasons behind the rise of the populist radical right. While it is obviously reductionist to synthesise the vast scholarly

literature into just three categories, doing so allows us to provide a concise overview of the existing research on the topic.

### **1.2.1. Demand-Side Explanations**

The first strand of literature can be grouped together under the heading of demand-side explanations. Sometimes described as the ‘sociological approach’ (Norris 2005) or the ‘socio-structural model’ (van der Brug & Fennema 2007), the demand side emphasises factors that help create fertile ground in which right-wing populist parties can thrive. In other words, demand-side explanations highlight socio-economic or political conditions that make voters more prone to cast their ballots for right-wing populist parties. This strand of literature seeks to answer the question of *why* people vote for these parties. Classical demand-side explanations include so-called ‘grievance theories’, which hypothesise that broad structural and societal changes, such as immigration, European integration, economic recessions, globalisation, secularisation or rising unemployment rates can generate insecurity and fuel popular dissatisfaction with mainstream (consensus) politics (Eatwell 2003; Ivarsflaten 2008; Mudde 2007). Essentially, scholars focusing on demand-side explanations have argued that broader structural and societal changes fuelled demand for the right-wing populist parties (Betz 1994; Ignazi 1992; 2003; Minkenberg 2000), particularly among the so-called ‘losers of globalization’ (Kriesi et al. 2008). In a seminal contribution, Hans-Georg Betz (1994: 27) suggested that the emergence of the populist radical right can largely be seen as ‘a consequence of a profound transformation of the socioeconomic and sociocultural structure of advanced Western European democracies.’ The breakdown of social cleavages that had long had a stabilising effect on European politics generated social fragmentation and particularisation. This created opportunities (or demand) for new parties ‘to monopolize a new issue and thus find a niche in the new space of postindustrial politics’, particularly where these issues had been neglected by mainstream parties (Betz 1994: 35).

### **1.2.2. Supply-Side Explanations**

It has long been acknowledged that it is reductionist to focus exclusively on demand-side explanations. As Mudde (2010: 1168) has noted, while ‘demand-side factors do help explain the success of populist radical right parties in (Western)

Europe, they often fail to account for significant differences between and within countries.’ Indeed, it seems plausible that the social conditions that allegedly give rise to the radical right ‘do not vary much between the different European countries and hence cannot account for their different fortunes’ (van der Brug & Fennema 2007: 475).

Towards the turn of the twenty-first century, therefore, scholars started to highlight the importance of supply-side variables (Eatwell 2003; Kitschelt & McGann 1995; Mudde 2007). Using a broad range of terms such as ‘populism’, ‘extremism’ or ‘radicalism’, academics started to pay attention to ‘supply-side’ explanations by focusing on electoral systems, party leadership, and organisational capacity (e.g. Art 2011; Carter 2005; Givens 2005; Koopmans et al. 2005; Norris 2005; van der Brug et al. 2005; van Kessel 2015). This second strand of research considers how right-wing populist parties are able to harness demand for right-wing populist ideas. To some extent, ‘supply-side factors constitute a toolkit of political activity that designs a specific offer on the political market’ (Pytlas 2015: 10). More precisely, supply-side explanations highlight different structural conditions that allow right-wing populist parties to gain momentum – also known as the ‘external supply side’ (Mudde 2007: 232), as well as the agency of the parties themselves (e.g. organisation or leadership) – also known as the ‘internal supply side’ (Mudde 2007: 256). For instance, Elisabeth Carter (2005) found that supply-side factors including the nature of the electoral system, party competition, party ideologies as well as their organisational structures and leadership largely accounted for the electoral success of right-wing populist parties.

Other scholars have focused more on party agency. David Art (2011), for example, has challenged ‘structural’ or demand-side explanations as well as institutional factors focused on the external supply side by studying the internal lives of the parties themselves, i.e. the *internal* supply side. According to Art (2011: 21-2), the success of the populist radical right partly ultimately hinges on historical legacies and pre-existing foundations or networks that these parties can exploit.

### **1.2.3. Contextual Explanations**

This brings us to a third and final branch of research, which I have grouped under the heading of ‘contextual explanations’. Contextual explanations are defined here

as theories that consider the broader environment in which parties operate. They go beyond demand- and supply-side variables in that they determine the ‘openness’ or ‘accessibility’ of the electoral market. In other words, contextual factors define the extent to which a polity is ‘receptible’ to right-wing populist contenders (see Arzheimer & Carter 2006: 422).<sup>6</sup> The underlying assumption is that political parties do not exist in a vacuum. In order to therefore explain the asymmetrical electoral fortunes of right-wing populist parties, we need to take into account the broader political and cultural context in which they operate. With that in mind, the electoral breakthrough is ultimately contingent on the way in which they are received and perceived in a given polity. If the environment in which they operate is receptive to them, they are more likely to be successful. On the other hand, if they enter a public sphere that is relatively hostile, they are less likely to succeed (Art 2006; see also de Jonge 2019).

The traditional demand- and supply-side framework is a useful (and indeed necessary) tool to deploy when seeking to explain the divergent electoral fortunes of right-wing populist parties, but it fails to take into account the political and cultural environment in which such parties operate.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it underestimates the complexities of the electoral marketplace and undertheorises contextual factors, most notably the role of the media landscape and the nature of party competition. These two factors play a crucial role in the success and failure of populist radical right parties, but do not fit easily into the conventional analytical framework. Both mainstream parties and the media interact with demand- and supply-side variables without necessarily fitting into either of these two categories.<sup>8</sup> This key insight was derived from my MPhil research (de Jonge 2015) and will be explored further in the present thesis.

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<sup>6</sup> This definition is narrower than the one provided by Arzheimer & Carter (2006: 422), where ‘contextual variables’ simply refer to political opportunity structures, i.e. institutional or supply-side factors.

<sup>7</sup> To be sure, there are numerous studies that focus on contextual factors without necessarily recognising or labelling them as such, for instance by highlighting the role of the media (e.g. Aalberg et al. 2017; Art 2006; Berning et al. 2018; Bos et al. 2011; Damstra et al. 2019; Ellinas 2010; Mazzoleni 2003; Rooduijn 2014; and Walgrave & De Swert 2004), or by stressing the importance of party competition (e.g. Bale et al. 2010; Downs 2001; Goodwin 2011; Heinze 2018; Hino 2012; Meguid 2008; Pytlas 2015).

<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that some scholars have conceptualised the media (implicitly or explicitly) as a demand-side explanation (e.g. Walgrave & De Swert 2004), while others see it as a supply-side variable (e.g. Eatwell 2003; Mudde 2007).

More precisely, mainstream parties and the media can act as ‘buffers’ by either absorbing or dampening demand, or they can act as ‘drivers’ or ‘catalysts’ by stoking demand for right-wing populism. Turning to the supply side, the media can facilitate the ‘supply’ of right-wing populist parties by offering them a platform through which they can spread their views, whereas mainstream parties can create or occupy the space of right-wing populist parties. Taken together, mainstream parties and the media can play an influential role in the success and failure of the populist radical right. Their behaviour towards the populist radical right is crucial in obstructing or encouraging the electoral breakthrough of these movements. For instance, their decision to stigmatise, isolate, mimic or challenge the populist radical right can help fuel or dampen demand for these parties.

There is no doubt that these different strands of research have enhanced our understanding of the electoral performances of the populist radical right, thereby making a very valuable contribution to the literature. Yet, there is an important research gap, namely the *interaction* and relationship between these different explanatory trajectories has not been studied extensively enough (see, however, Bornschier 2012; van der Brug & Fennema 2007; van Kessel 2013; 2015). Rather, demand- and supply-side explanations are often separated and even sometimes portrayed as competing theories. However, as van der Brug and Fennema (2007: 482) have observed, ‘[any] valid explanation of variations in electoral fortunes of radical-right parties needs to integrate demand and supply-side factors.’ Most existing scholarly work on the rise of right-wing populist parties is limited to a narrow range of aspects, for example by focusing solely on either demand- or supply-side explanations, or by isolating the role of the media.

This thesis argues for a more ‘holistic’ or integrated approach. Specifically, I combine insights derived from these different strands of research into a single analytical framework. The aim is to show how the different variables interact, thereby shedding light on the mechanisms at play. This approach is based on the idea that richer insights can be derived by integrating contextual factors (notably the role mainstream parties and the media) into a broader theoretical framework that focuses on demand- and supply-side explanations. The main contribution of this integrative approach is that it offers an opportunity to systematically examine different underlying factors that might account for the success or failure of right-

wing populist parties in a given country. By approaching the topic from different angles, the overarching goal is to generate a multi-faceted picture that can supplement existing explanations.

#### **1.2.4. Research Gaps**

The thesis addresses four empirical research gaps. First, most existing studies are concerned with the larger Western European states. As Mudde (2016: 4) has observed, '[n]ot unlike other topics in comparative politics, the study of populist radical right parties is primarily focused on the big states of Western Europe.' Indeed, many comparative studies seeking to explain divergence in the electoral fortunes of right-wing populist parties tend to concentrate on at least one of the three biggest European states, i.e. the United Kingdom, France and Germany (e.g. Art 2006; Bornschier 2012; van Kessel 2013), while considerably less attention has been paid to smaller states (see however Coffé 2005; Pauwels 2014). Specifically, while much has been written on the rise of populism in the Netherlands (and to some extent Flanders), the cases of Wallonia and Luxembourg remain un(der)examined.

Second, the vast majority of studies focus primarily on populist success stories, while the absence, decline, and failure of these parties remain understudied and hence ill-understood (see Arzheimer 2018: 159; de Lange & Mudde 2005: 481; Pauwels 2011a). As Mudde (2007: 201) has noted, 'only very little attention has been paid to the electoral failure of populist radical right parties, even though these cases are (far) more numerous.' Indeed, there appears to be a lack of 'negative' case studies. To be sure, some scholars have attempted to explain the puzzling absence of a right-wing populist contender in Ireland (McDonnell 2008; O'Malley 2008; O'Malley & FitzGibbon 2015). Similar single-case studies have been conducted on Finland (Kestilä 2006), Germany (Backes & Mudde 2000), Sweden (Rydgren 2002), Spain (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser 2015), and Portugal (Quintas da Silva 2018).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Teun Pauwels (2011a) has sought to explain the decline of the Flemish Interest Party (*Vlaams Belang* or VB) since 2007, and Hilde Coffé (2005) has conducted a sociological study on the differences in extreme-right voting

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<sup>9</sup> The first four studies were conducted before the breakthrough of the Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset*, previously known as the 'True Finns'), the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna* or SD), the German AfD, and Vox in Spain.

between Flanders and Wallonia. Overall, there have been very few conscious attempts to systematically compare ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ cases, with Art (2011), Bornschier (2012), Coffé (2005) and van Kessel (2013) being the exceptions. Including variation on the dependent variable (i.e. adding ‘negative’ cases) is important. As Art (2011: 5) has noted, ‘unless the failures are examined, the success of radical right parties appears to be almost natural, and even theoretically uninteresting’.

Third, although there is a broad scholarly consensus that the media are central to the rise and spread of populism (e.g. Bos et al. 2011; Mazzoleni 2003; Rooduijn 2014a; Walgrave & De Swert 2004), the exact nature of the relationship between right-wing populist parties and the media remains poorly understood. Several studies have shown that media coverage can influence election results (e.g. Hopmann et al. 2010; van Spanje and de Vreese 2014). It is also widely acknowledged that the media are central to understanding the success of populist parties (e.g. Eatwell 2003; Kriesi 2014: 265; Mudde 2007: 248-53; Norris 2005: 270). However, empirical research on this topic remains scant (Aalberg & de Vreese 2017: 4; Ellinas 2018: 279). While some contributions (most notably Art 2006; Ellinas 2010) have furthered our understanding of the role of the media more generally, the role of the media in the success and failure of right-wing populist parties remains undertheorised and hence poorly understood. Specifically, there are few comparative studies that shed light on why some media provide space for right-wing populist parties while others deny it (see de Jonge 2019).

Fourth, although there is a growing body of literature on the role of mainstream parties in the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties (e.g. Bale et al. 2010; Downs 2001; Goodwin 2011; Heinze 2018; Meguid 2008; Minkenberg 2001; van Spanje 2018), most of these studies focus on the *reactions* of mainstream parties to the rise of right-wing populist challengers. Simply put, when studying the success of the populist radical right, mainstream parties are generally treated as ‘victims’ rather than ‘agents’. There are few empirical studies that seriously take into account the behaviour of mainstream parties *before* the rise of right-wing populist challengers, with Ellinas (2010) and Oudenampsen (2018) being two of the most noteworthy exceptions.

This thesis seeks to redress these gaps in three ways. First, it makes an empirical contribution to the existing literature by focusing on the electoral performances of populist radical right parties in smaller Western European polities. To my knowledge, this is the first comprehensive, English-language study of the electoral trajectories of populist radical right parties in Wallonia and Luxembourg. Second, the thesis starts from the premise that negative case studies are just as revealing as populist success stories; by integrating ‘negative’ cases, the aim of the thesis is to explain factors that might hamper the electoral success of right-wing populist parties, thereby extending our theoretical understanding of the electoral fortunes of the populist radical right. Third, by focusing on contextual variables, the thesis sheds light on the various ways in which the behaviour of the media and mainstream parties may hinder or facilitate the rise of the populist radical right.

These three contributions constitute the core of the thesis. I thereby engage closely with the existing literature, with the aim of furthering our understanding of the divergent electoral performances of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. This is important given that there is a growing tendency in the field to neglect previous academic research on the topic (see Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018; Rooduijn 2019). As Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017: 526) have observed, ‘[i]n their hasty response to the recent wave of populist victories, many analysts have ignored previous scholarship on populism.’ The remainder of this introduction lays out the research design and outlines the plan of the thesis.

### 1.3. Research Design & Methodology

‘In a very crucial sense, there is not methodology without *logos*, without thinking about thinking’ (Sartori 1970: 1033).

This thesis is problem-driven (as opposed to method-driven): It starts out with ‘a problem in the world’, which is translated into a clearly defined research question (i.e. why have right-wing populist parties been more successful in Flanders and the Netherlands than in Wallonia and Luxembourg?), and then uses the existing literature to define the research task at hand with reference to its overall contribution to the field (Shapiro 2002: 598).

Given the nature of the research question, a comparative case studies approach is most suitable. This age-old research technique, which was arguably first described by John Stuart Mill (1843 [1967]), such that it has become widely known as ‘Mill’s

methods of agreement and difference’, implies that the ‘researcher strategically selects cases for analysis that either exhibit contrasting outcomes despite their many otherwise similar characteristics or similar outcomes despite their otherwise contrasting characteristics’ (Slater & Ziblatt 2013: 1303). In very basic terms, the comparative method consists of systematically evaluating similarities and differences in an attempt to unravel some of the underlying features that help explain variation.

This thesis rests on a ‘most similar systems’ research design, which is based on the assumption that ‘a number of theoretically significant differences will be found among similar systems and that these differences can be used in explanation’ (Przeworski & Teune 1982: 39). The aim is to line up cases that are ‘comparable’, i.e. ‘similar in a large number of important characteristics (variables) which one wants to treat as constants, but dissimilar as far as those variables are concerned which one wants to relate to each other’ (Lijphart 1971: 687). In other words, cases are selected ‘that are as similar as possible in as many features (properties) as possible, thus allowing a large number of variables to be ignored (under the assumption that they are equal)’ (Sartori 1994: 22). In this thesis, the Benelux countries were selected because they manifest opposing ‘dependent variables’ (i.e. the electoral success of right-wing populist parties in the Netherlands and Flanders versus the failure of such parties in Luxembourg and Wallonia) despite many comparable ‘independent’- or ‘background variables’ (e.g. small consociational democracies; high affluence; proportional representation, and so on).

Given that statistical analyses are less useful when studying a small number of cases or when faced with a lack of reliable, comparable data (see Ragin 1987), a qualitative approach seems most appropriate in this context.<sup>10</sup> As with most small-N studies, there is a potential risk of being confronted with multiple causal variables, which makes it difficult to pinpoint which factors are deterministic (Lieberson 1991). Furthermore, the explanations for the variation in the electoral fortunes in the four chosen cases may not be applicable to other cases and may therefore lack external validity (Slater & Ziblatt 2013). Despite these limitations, a

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<sup>10</sup> There are few datasets available that contain comparable data on all four cases; while some studies do not provide data on Luxembourg (e.g. the European Social Survey), others do not provide separate data for Wallonia and Flanders (e.g. the European Values Study or Eurobarometer).

qualitative, comparative case study method is the most fruitful research approach because it allows for a detailed, in-depth exploration of the selected cases. Moreover, it is particularly well-suited to capture causal complexity such as equifinality (multiple causal paths leading to the same outcome) and conjunctural causation (i.e. conditions that only in combination become necessary or sufficient to produce a specific outcome) (Ragin 1987: 19-33; see also George & Bennett 2005: 207).

The aim of the case-oriented, comparative investigation is twofold. First and foremost, comparisons serve to generate knowledge and understanding about specific cases. The overarching goal is ‘to understand or interpret specific cases because of their intrinsic value’ (Ragin 1987: 35). Second, the comparative method can pave the way for further academic research by illuminating new aspects within the selected cases that can explain the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties and which may otherwise have been omitted. Since it can serve as a pathway for the production of more general theories, the case-oriented comparative approach can also contribute to our understanding of other cases. As Sartori (1994: 16) states, ‘comparing is “learning” from the experience of others.’ Thus, the findings can also enhance our theoretical understanding about the conditions that either facilitate or hinder the electoral success of right-wing populist parties.

### **1.3.1. Sources & Methods**

Qualitative research is generally ‘highly reflexive’ (see Srivastava & Hopwood 2009: 77). In other words, it involves ‘a loop-like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data as additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations develop along with a deepening understanding of the material’ (Berkowitz 1997: 42; see also Gschwend & Schimmelfennig 2007). The analytical framework presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis was constructed using an ‘adaptive approach’, which combines inductive and deductive reasoning as it ‘rests on the twin employment of, and the subsequent interaction between, extant or prior theoretical materials and emergent data from ongoing research’ (Layder 1998: 166).

After formulating the research question, I began my search for an explanation by using existing theoretical approaches to guide the research (notably the demand-

and supply-side framework mentioned earlier). As Ragin (1987: 45) has observed, ‘initial theoretical notions serve as guides in the examination of causally relevant similarities and differences’, because ‘[w]ithout theoretical guides, the search for similarities and differences could go on forever.’ I also identified and contacted academic experts to discuss potential research avenues (see Annex III). Over the course of the research, I found that the classical demand- and supply-side framework was necessary but insufficient to solve the research puzzle at hand, mainly because it did not provide sufficient insight into the crucial role of the media and mainstream parties. As a result, the analytical framework that underpins this research was shaped and adjusted according to emergent insights obtained over the course of the research.

Empirical support for this thesis was drawn from a combination of primary and secondary sources, notably semi-structured interviews with media practitioners (N=46) and party representatives (N=8); party literature, including campaign posters and pamphlets; reports from national media outlets; campaign speeches; statistical data; electoral data (e.g. PartiRep 2014); and data from the Manifesto Project Database (e.g. Volkens et al. 2018).<sup>11</sup> The findings were complemented and triangulated by drawing on the secondary literature, as well as through consultations with academic experts and country specialists.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary tool for data collection. They are an appropriate means through which to derive comparable data, given that they involve asking similar questions to all interviewees. At the same time, they allow for the exploration of unanticipated topics and themes. The main advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that they allow the researcher to address a defined topic whilst permitting the interviewee to answer in their own terms. More generally, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to explore subjective viewpoints and gather detailed, in-depth accounts of people’s experiences. The bulk of the fieldwork was conducted between September 2016 and September 2017. During this time, I spent two months in Luxembourg (from September until October 2016), followed by several weeks in the Netherlands (in March 2017) and Belgium

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<sup>11</sup> A full list of interviews conducted is attached in the Annex (I & II).

(from late March until mid-April 2017) to conduct interviews with media practitioners and party representatives.<sup>12</sup>

First, representatives of traditional media outlets (mainly newspapers, but also commercial and public service television as well as radio stations) were contacted. The positive response rate was very high at 90 percent.<sup>13</sup> The aim of these interviews was to understand the relationship between the media outlets and the populist radical right. Specifically, the interviews were used to shed light on (1) why some media outlets choose to provide space for right-wing populist parties whereas others deny it, and (2) how journalists justify their coverage of these parties. To this end, interviewees were asked about the ways in which they (and their media outlet) deal with right-wing populism and related topics such as immigration. Interviewees were also asked to compare past and present practices, and to reflect on specific instances.<sup>14</sup>

Second, I contacted party representatives affiliated with contemporary manifestations of (allegedly) right-wing populist parties, i.e. the Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR) in Luxembourg; the People's Party (PP) in Wallonia; the Flemish Interest Party (VB) in Flanders; and the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands. The main aim of these interviews was to supplement existing knowledge of these parties outlined in Chapter 3, for instance by asking interviewees to elaborate their views on specific policy items (e.g. immigration). The PVV was the only party that declined my requests for interviews – an unfortunate but predictable consequence of the party's overall (media) strategy (see Art & de Lange 2011: 1230; Vossen 2013: 178).<sup>15</sup> I thus relied on secondary

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<sup>12</sup> Preference was given to face-to-face interviews given that it is easier to establish a rapport during such encounters. When this was not possible, interviews were conducted via telephone or Skype.

<sup>13</sup> I sent interview requests to fifty-one media practitioners. Interviewees were contacted via email. The initial email included a personal introduction; a brief overview of my research project; the anticipated duration of the interview; and a few suggestions for possible meeting dates. Where there was no reply, I usually followed up with a reminder a few weeks later. In some cases, I contacted the interviewees' offices by phone to explain how crucial the interview was for my research. Three people did not respond, notably representatives from *L'Echo* (Wallonia); *Sudpresse* (Wallonia); and *L'Essentiel* (Luxembourg), and two people declined my interview requests: the Editor-in-Chief of the NRC (the Netherlands) and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Dutch Public Service Broadcaster (NPO).

<sup>14</sup> A sample questionnaire (in French) is attached at Annex IV.

<sup>15</sup> In June 2017, I also sent out requests for interviews to key representatives from the francophone *Parti Socialiste* (PS), including Paul Magonne, Elio Di Rupo and Frédéric Masquelin. The aim was to gain deeper insight into the ways in which the party has dealt with (demand for) right-wing populism. However, party spokespeople repeatedly declined my requests. This was likely due to the

accounts regarding the PVV as well as interviews the party has done with journalists.

During the initial round of interviews, I employed a ‘snowballing technique’ (see, for example, Gusterson 2008: 98) to identify other relevant interview partners. This involved asking interviewees to suggest and/or put me in touch with other potential interviewees. I continued the interview process until reaching a ‘saturation point’ at which ‘no additional data are being found’ and ‘the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated’ (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 65). The interviews were held in the native languages of the interviewees (i.e. Luxembourgish, French and Dutch). Language barriers between the researcher and the interviewee can present a significant methodological challenge when undertaking cross-language qualitative research. By conducting the interviews in the native languages of the interviewees, I was able to unveil nuances that may otherwise be ‘lost in translation’ (e.g. different interpretations of ‘right-wing populism’).

Whenever possible, interviews were digitally recorded in order to ensure an accurate and detailed transcription.<sup>16</sup> I transcribed the interviews in the original languages in which they were conducted. Recordings were complemented with detailed notes and observations taken during the interviews. Interviewees were fully informed about the research project and I verbally obtained consent to use their insights.<sup>17</sup> Interviewees were given the opportunity to check any direct (translated) quotations used in the text for accuracy through a follow-up email exchange.

The transcriptions and fieldnotes were then organised thematically and compared both within and across cases. Thematic data analysis involves identifying patterns and themes. This process ‘begins at the stage of data collection and continues throughout the process of transcribing, reading and re-reading, analysing and

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fact that my attempts to contact the party coincided with a period of internal turmoil linked to a series of corruption scandals (see Chapter 4). I relied instead on secondary accounts as well as Hilde Coffé’s PhD thesis (see Coffé 2004), which contains valuable interview data with PS officials.

<sup>16</sup> In some cases, recordings were impeded by the circumstances of the interview; for instance, one interviewee invited me for lunch in a very loud and busy office canteen.

<sup>17</sup> Ethical approval for this research project was granted by the Cambridge University Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on 9 June 2016. I chose not to ask interviewees to sign written consent forms since this was likely to over-formalise the process, which may have alienated the participants.

interpreting the data' (Evans 2018: 3). Following King and Harrocks (2010: 152ff), I familiarised myself thoroughly with the interview transcripts and assigned descriptive themes to interview passages to facilitate the comparative analysis employed in the thesis (see Chapter 5).

### **1.3.2. Case Selection**

As discussed above, this thesis considers the electoral performances of right-wing populist parties in four Western European polities: Flanders and the Netherlands, which are used as 'positive cases', and Wallonia and Luxembourg, which are used as 'negative' cases.<sup>18</sup> These four polities share numerous characteristics that justify a most similar systems research design. Located geographically between two of the largest European states (France and Germany), the so-called 'Benelux' or 'Low Countries' provide interesting comparative case studies as they are relatively homogeneous within the larger Western European context: they have a common history; they are all founding members of the European Union (EU); they are relatively small and affluent welfare states with open economies; they share (arguably different) traits of a 'Germanic' culture; they are multi-party representative democracies that are traditionally led by coalition governments; and they have a longstanding history of 'consensus politics', hence they are often characterised as 'consociational democracies' (see, for example, Lijphart 1969; Vollaard et al. 2015). In addition, since the mid-twentieth century, all three countries have experienced relatively high immigration flows whilst maintaining low unemployment rates. Lastly, unlike many other European countries, none of the Benelux states were particularly severely affected by the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, as none of them experienced a sharp economic shock or a serious political crisis (Kriesi & Pappas 2015).

Despite these similarities, however, the Benelux have had very different experiences with right-wing populism; while political parties with nationalist and populist tendencies have emerged in all four polities, their influence and success have differed remarkably. Historically speaking, right-wing populist parties have been relatively successful in the Netherlands and Flanders, but they have failed to rally broad popular support in Luxembourg and Wallonia. The following

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<sup>18</sup> As explained below, Belgium does not have a national party system (even for federal elections), which makes it possible to treat Wallonia and Flanders as two separate cases (Coffé 2008: 179).

paragraphs provide a brief overview of these three countries' experiences with right-wing populism.<sup>19</sup> Emphasis is placed on political parties since they tend to form the primal means of expression for (right-wing) populist movements (Mudde 2007: 38). Indeed, as Kriesi and Pappas (2015: 6-7) note, '[t]he main, although not exclusive, organizational vehicle for populist ideology and discourse is a political party, and populist leaders typically create new or transform existing parties in order to win elections and gain power.' Accordingly, political parties serve as the main unit of analysis in this thesis.

### *The Netherlands*

Once known for its social tolerance, the Netherlands long seemed immune to far-right tendencies. However, since the turn of the twenty-first century, the country has witnessed the rise of several right-wing populist movements including the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (List Pim Fortuyn or LPF) and, above all, Geert Wilders's *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV), which has established itself as a lasting force in Dutch politics (see, for instance, van Kessel 2011).<sup>20</sup> The LPF entered parliament in 2002 after gaining 17 percent of the votes in the general election but imploded soon thereafter, following the assassination of the party's flamboyant leader, Pim Fortuyn, by an animal rights activist just nine days before the elections. The PVV, which has held seats in the Dutch Parliament since 2006, came third in the 2010 general election, gaining over 15 percent of the vote (or 24 out of 150 parliamentary seats), and subsequently provided parliamentary support for a minority government (2010-2012). In the early 2012 general election, the PVV's share of votes declined to 10 percent. With the onset of the refugee crisis, however, the PVV regained momentum by demanding the 'de-Islamisation' of Europe as well as the closure of national borders (PVV 2016). In the 2017 elections, the PVV became the second largest party, winning 13 percent of the votes and 20 seats.

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<sup>19</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of the cases, see Chapter 3.

<sup>20</sup> The Dutch general election in 2017 and the regional election in 2019 saw the emergence of new political groupings, including the Forum for Democracy (*Forum voor Democratie* or FvD), which can also be characterised as a right-wing populist movement (see van Holsteyn 2018b). Given the novelty of the FvD, the party is not included in the analysis here. Instead, the thesis focuses primarily on older right-wing populist movements, notably the LPF and the PVV.

### *Luxembourg*

Comparable movements have been largely unsuccessful in Luxembourg. This is intriguing, since the Grand Duchy has historically had one of the highest numbers of immigrants relative to the size of the resident population in all of Europe (Eurostat 2019). While xenophobic sentiments and right-wing populist movements have surfaced occasionally, they have never been able to gain ground electorally (see Blau 2005; Spirinelli 2012). Accordingly, in the past, Luxembourg was lauded as ‘an immigration success story’ (Fetzer 2011) and ‘the most successful immigrant nation in Europe and perhaps the entire world’ (Parsons & Smeeding 2007: 5). Although Luxembourg does not have an electorally significant far-right equivalent to the French FN or the Austrian FPÖ, the Luxembourgish *Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei* (Alternative Democratic Reform Party or ADR) can be located on the right end of the Grand Duchy’s political spectrum and is sometimes referred to as a ‘soft version of right-wing populism’ (Blau 2005: 89). While the party describes itself as ‘a populist party that is neither right nor left’ (Dumont et al. 2011: 1059), the ADR is undoubtedly the political party in Luxembourg most critical of immigration (Fetzer 2011: 15), as demonstrated by the party’s promotion of restrictive citizenship laws (ADR 2013b), their advocacy of immigrants’ greater use of the Luxembourgish language (ADR 2014), and their opposition to granting non-national residents the right to vote in legislative elections (ADR 2015c).

### *Belgium*

Belgium is a particularly interesting case because there are important regional differences with regards to the electoral performance of right-wing populist parties. The Belgian state is organised into three different territorial regions (Flanders; Wallonia; and Brussels), comprising three different language communities: the Flemings (i.e. a Dutch-speaking community); the Walloons (i.e. a French-speaking community); as well as a German-speaking community.<sup>21</sup> The Belgian party systems (plural, to reflect the different systems in the various territories) and the media reflect the linguistic divisions of the country; parties generally compete in

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<sup>21</sup> In addition to the Flemings and the Walloons, there is a relatively small German-speaking community of some 60,000 people located in eastern Wallonia. Although the Brussels region is located on Flemish territory, it is officially a bilingual region (Deschouwer 2012: 50-55). Given the small size as well as the linguistic and political complexities of these two polities, the German-speaking community and the Brussels region are not analysed in this thesis.

only one of the language communities (with the exception of the complex case of the bilingual Brussels region), while the media landscape is composed of a monolingual French-speaking media system alongside a Dutch-speaking one (De Cleen & Van Aelst 2017: 99; De Winter et al. 2006: 938). As Deschouwer (2012: 136-7) has noted, '[l]ooking at election results from a national or statewide perspective is [...] not the usual way for Belgium. Political parties themselves and the media always present and discuss results within each language group only.' Since the country does not have a national party system (even for federal elections), it is possible to treat Wallonia and Flanders as two separate cases (Art 2011: 25; Coffé 2008: 179). While far-right parties have historically been very successful in Flanders, most notably with the *Vlaams Belang* (VB, formerly known as the *Vlaams Blok*), they have failed to become a relevant electoral force in Wallonia (see Coffé 2005).<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, Flanders was home to one of the strongest and earliest manifestations of a new generation of far-right parties in post-war Europe (Art 2008). In its various incarnations, the VB has held seats in the federal parliament since 1981. Founded in 1978 as an elitist, nationalist and regionalist (pro-independence) party, the VB started to gravitate towards the populist radical right in the 1990s and early 2000s (De Cleen & Van Aelst 2017: 99; Pauwels 2011a: 61). The country made international headlines on 24 November 1991, when the *Vlaams Blok* garnered over 10 percent of the Flemish vote. That election day, which became widely known as 'Black Sunday' (since the rise of a far-right party was viewed negatively by the media), marked the beginning of a continuous electoral rise that peaked in 2004, when the VB won 24 percent of the vote in the Flemish parliamentary elections (Deschouwer 2012: 96).<sup>23</sup> In the 2007 federal elections, the VB witnessed its first setback, when its vote share shrank to 19 percent (although this was still an increase in terms of federal percentage), and support for the party subsequently ebbed further (Pauwels 2011a). In the 2014 federal elections, the VB's vote share fell to just under

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<sup>22</sup> In 2004, the *Vlaams Blok* changed its name to *Vlaams Belang* after having made several changes in its party programme. This was a response to a court ruling that found the *Blok* guilty of violating the law against racism (see Erk 2005).

<sup>23</sup> The colour black was also associated with Nazi-collaborators (Art 2008: 427).

8 percent. Despite the VB's decline, it remains safe to say that '[r]ight-wing populism is very much a Flemish affair' (Deschouwer 2012: 96).<sup>24</sup>

Although comparable movements to the VB have surfaced occasionally in Wallonia with parties such as the Belgian *Front National* (FNb) and the *Parti Populaire* (People's Party or PP) (see Pauwels 2014: 43), the Walloon region has remained relatively 'immune' to right-wing populist tendencies. Founded in 1985, the FNb's share of (federal) votes peaked at 2.3 percent in the 1995 general election (Deschouwer 2012: 133), and the party was dissolved in 2012. The PP, which was founded in 2009, assumed the place of the FNb. In 2016, the PP's leader, Mischaël Modrikamen, gained prominence as a vocal supporter of Donald Trump and an outspoken critic of (Muslim) immigration after appearing on the American far-right news network *Breitbart* (see *Breitbart News* 2016). In 2018, Modrikamen made international headlines after joining Donald Trump's former White House Chief Strategist, Steve Bannon, in founding *The Movement*, a Brussels-based far-right organisation aimed at promoting right-wing populist groups in Europe (see *The Guardian* 2018). Despite arguably being much better organised and more professional than the FNb, the PP has not (yet) managed to break through electorally; in the 2014 federal elections, the party won 1.5 percent of the votes (compared to 1.3 percent and in 2010).

#### 1.4. Outline of the Thesis

The following chapter (Chapter 2) elaborates on the various concepts touched upon in this introduction. Specifically, it presents the theoretical argument that underpins the thesis by introducing a multi-faceted framework for analysis. The chapter sets out to generate a clear working definition of right-wing populist parties. It then surveys existing theories to explain the electoral success of right-wing populist parties by systematically differentiating between demand- and supply-side explanations and merging them into a comprehensive, multi-faceted analytical framework that is transferable to different cases. The final part focuses on contextual factors (i.e. the role of mainstream parties and the media) and highlights the ways in which they impact voter demand and party supply.

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<sup>24</sup> In line with existing scholarly views (e.g. Pauwels 2014: 42-3; van Holsteyn 2018a: 479), the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (New Flemish Alliance or N-VA) is not included in the analysis due to its elitist character (despite having adopted some of the VB's rhetoric).

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the history of the far right in the Benelux countries, and surveys conventional explanations for the variation in the success and failure of right-wing populist parties. The aim of the chapter is to show that although classical demand- and supply-side explanations provide a useful starting point to solving the research puzzle, they fail to paint the full picture. In order to fully understand the asymmetrical electoral trajectories of populist radical right in the Benelux, it is necessary to take into account the context, notably mainstream parties and the media landscape, which shape the opportunity structures available to right-wing populist parties.

The next two chapters therefore focus on contextual explanations. Chapter 4 sheds light on the nature of party competition and the role of mainstream parties in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Drawing on mainstream party manifestos collected by the Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2018) and secondary sources (including the existing literature on depillarisation and cleavages), the chapter argues that the failure of traditional parties to adapt to changing electorates helped pave the way for the emergence of right-wing populist challengers in the Netherlands and Flanders. By contrast, in Luxembourg and Wallonia, mainstream parties have acted as ‘buffers’ on public demand and party supply.

Chapter 5 considers the various ways in which the media choose to deal with right-wing populist parties in the Benelux region. Using insights gained from interviews with media practitioners, the chapter shows that, in the absence of a credible right-wing populist challenger, media practitioners in Luxembourg and Wallonia adhere to strict demarcation, whereas the strategies of Dutch and Flemish media practitioners have evolved over time and become gradually more accommodating.

The conclusion (Chapter 6) returns to the initial research question and summarises the main findings. It does so by reiterating the factors that help explain the variation in the electoral performances of the populist radical right in each of the Benelux polities. It also discusses the wider implications of the findings by tentatively ‘testing’ the theoretical framework on other cases and points to potential avenues for future research.

## Chapter 2: Towards a Framework for Analysis

There is great concern among media commentators and mainstream politicians over a ‘*verrechtsing*’ (right-turn) trend in European politics (see, for example, Mudde 2013). Accordingly, the ‘rise of the right’ has attracted substantial scholarly attention. In the early 1990s, experts already noted an ‘explosion’ of far-right (extremist) parties across Western Europe (Husbands 1992b). By 2003, one scholar concluded ‘that the renaissance of right-wing extremism has become a more or less Europe-wide phenomenon [...]’ (Rensmann 2003: 95). While the European shift toward the right since the 1980s is relatively uncontested, there is noteworthy disagreement on how to define it. Indeed, as shown below, there is widespread confusion in the literature on labelling and characterising this ‘new party family’.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the reasons behind the asymmetrical electoral performances of right-wing populist parties in Europe remain poorly understood.

Specifically, scholarly attempts to explain demand for and supply of right-wing populist parties have generated contradictory findings. For instance, Knigge (1998) maintained that the success of right-wing populist parties was linked to high or rising levels of immigration (see also Lubbers et al. 2002), while Golder (2003) (using different variables and datasets) found no such correlation (see also Art 2006: 149ff; Mudde 2007: 210ff). Turning to the supply-side, Betz (1994) as well as Kitschelt and McGann (1995) have argued that the political convergence of mainstream parties can be conducive to the success of right-wing populist parties, as it creates space for ‘niche’ parties on the fringes of the political spectrum. In contrast, Ignazi (1992: 20; 2003) found that polarisation is conducive to the rise of right-wing populist parties because it may lead to a bidding match between more centrist and radical right-wing parties, which can stretch the political spectrum rightwards, thereby generating opportunities for populist contenders (see also Mudde 2007: 238ff).

These seemingly contradictory findings can partly be explained by the use of different methodologies, datasets and/or definitions of electoral success. Above all, however, they must be attributed to the fact that conventional demand- and supply-

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<sup>25</sup> Mudde (2007: 1) has noted that the Greens and the populist radical right are the only new party families that have been able to establish themselves alongside traditional European party families (i.e. Christian democrats, conservatives, liberals and socialists) since the end of WWII.

side explanations fail to sufficiently take into account contextual factors. It seems perfectly plausible that immigration figures or political convergence alone cannot account for the electoral success of right-wing populist parties. Instead, they may only be conducive to success under certain conditions. For instance, concerns over immigration can become politically salient when the media stir up public anxieties about the erosion of national identities, and/or when mainstream parties contribute to the politicisation of identity-related topics whilst simultaneously failing to address some of the underlying issues that result from rising immigrant flows. Therefore, it makes sense to take a closer look at the conditions under which issues become salient.

Following Koopmans and Muis (2009: 644), in order to understand these conditions, we need to consider ‘aspects of political opportunity that can, first of all, change within short periods of time and, second, are visible for people.’ As we saw in Chapter 1, in the earlier stages of a party’s life, their opportunity structures are shaped by the ways in which they are received and perceived in a given polity. From this perspective, it makes sense to consider the strategic choices of mainstream parties as well as the role of the media (see Ellinas 2010), since they shape the broader context in which demand- and supply-side factors play out. Specifically, the media and mainstream parties can fuel or dampen demand for and supply of right-wing populist parties.

Traditional scholarly accounts tend to focus primarily on demand- and supply-side explanations, while scant consideration has been given to contextual factors. Furthermore, these various explanatory strands have not been systematised into an analytical framework. This chapter presents the theoretical argument that underpins this thesis by introducing a framework for analysis within which right-wing populist parties have a clearly defined meaning. It does so by summarising the main findings derived from the three different strands of research outlined in Chapter 1 (i.e. demand- and supply side explanations as well as contextual factors) and weaving them into a comprehensive, multi-faceted analytical framework that is transferable to different cases.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The opening section seeks to defuse the conceptual minefield that exists around right-wing populism by revisiting the

existing literature and generating a minimal definition of right-wing populist parties. Drawing on the plethora of scholarly work on the rise of the populist radical right, the second part synthesises existing theories that seek to explain the electoral success of right-wing populist parties by systematically separating them into demand- and supply-side explanations. The final part focuses on contextual factors (i.e. the role of mainstream parties and the media) and highlights the various ways in which they can impact voter demand and party supply.

### 2.1. Ending the ‘War of Words’: Defining Right-Wing Populist Parties

In the early stages of scholarly writing on the populist radical right, Mudde (1996) noted that there was a ‘war of words’ to define the newest wave of right-wing parties. This ‘war’ appears to be ongoing: whereas Mudde (2007; 2013) prefers the phrase ‘populist radical right parties’ (PRRPs), others employ labels, including ‘the extreme right’ (Arzheimer & Carter 2006; Carter 2005; Ignazi 2003; Rensmann 2003), ‘the radical right’ (Art 2011; Rydgren 2002; Zhirkov 2014), ‘the new populism’ (Taggart 1995; 2000), or ‘the far right’ (Ellinas 2010; Roxburgh 2002). Some use broader ideological classifications, such as ‘nativism’ (Fetzer 2000), ‘neo-nationalism’ (Eger & Valdez 2014), or simply ‘populism’ (Moffitt & Tormey 2014; Pauwels 2014).

These terms are often used interchangeably (Skenderovic 2009: 14). Indeed, there seems to be a tacit understanding that they all refer to parties such as the Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* or FPÖ), the Flemish Interest Party and the French *Front National*. As Kitschelt (2007: 1178) has noted, ‘[w]hile there is some conceptual disagreement, authors generally agree on the inclusion of the same electorally successful parties under their definitions.’ Similarly, Mudde (2000: 7) observed that, ‘we seem to know *who* they are even though we do not exactly know *what* they are.’ In a later work, Mudde (2007: 58) elaborated upon this observation: ‘Many debates on the populist radical right party family base the often implicit classification of individual political parties on the age-old common wisdom: if it walks like a duck, talks like a duck, and looks like a duck, it is a duck.’

This comment captures the challenges involved in generating a definition of right-wing populist parties. It is extremely difficult to escape circularity when seeking to extract commonalities from a selection of parties (Stanley 2008: 101), since ‘we

have to decide on the basis of which *post facto* criteria we should use to define the various parties, while we need *a priori* criteria to select the parties that we want to define' (Mudde 2007: 13). Aside from the risk of committing a tautology, there are several other hurdles that obstruct the formation of a definition. First, (right-wing) populist parties rarely self-identify as such (Freedden 2017: 9; Mudde 2007: 35; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 2; van Kessel 2015: 15; Worsley 1969: 218).<sup>26</sup> Second, unlike other party families (e.g. Social Democrats, Liberals or Greens), parties associated with the populist right do not necessarily work (well) together in transnational arenas such as the European Parliament, and they rarely share similar party names (e.g.: *Vlaams Belang* [Flemish Interest] in Belgium; *Front National* [National Front] in France; *Partij voor de Vrijheid* [Freedom Party] in the Netherlands) (de Jonge 2017; Mudde 2007: 33-6).

Third, right-wing populist parties are by no means monolithic; indeed, there are important regional and national differences between parties, depending on the national and political context in which they operate (Taggart 2000: 76). For instance, the Dutch PVV supports LGBT rights and same-sex marriage, whereas the Austrian FPÖ staunchly opposes them.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, right-wing populist parties are very much a 'moving target' in the sense that they are constantly evolving rather than forming a static entity. Indeed, especially in the early phases of their existence, right-wing populist parties are subject to (frequent) personnel changes that can affect their ideology and overall positioning on the political spectrum. For instance, UKIP and the German AfD started out as Eurosceptic parties but later transformed into radical right parties. Finally, as discussed below, the term 'right-wing populism' is composed of two very slippery concepts, namely the political 'right' and 'populism'. As a result, it is difficult to come up with a label for this new 'party family' that perfectly captures their nature.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is nonetheless necessary to provide a precise definition of 'right-wing populist parties'. In an attempt to find 'a middle course

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<sup>26</sup> This appears to be changing; far-right politicians are increasingly assuming labels such as 'populist' and even 'racist' by wearing them as a badge of pride (see, for example, CNN 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Even within a given party there can be different currents or factions that make it difficult to classify a party. The Belgian N-VA is a good example of a 'borderline' case: while Theo Francken (who served as Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration from 2014-2018) commonly employs a discourse that might qualify as populist radical right, the official party line has remained more 'moderate'.

between crude logical mishandling on the one hand, and logical perfectionism (and paralysis) on the other hand' (Sartori 1970: 1033), this chapter aims at constructing a working definition by outlining a set of core features that are shared by all twenty-first century right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. As shown below, despite the difficulties described earlier, it is possible to generate a 'minimal definition' of right-wing populist parties.<sup>28</sup>

Here, the minimal definition of right-wing populist parties is taken as political parties that follow a rightist ideology and employ a populist style, where the 'rightist' element denotes a strong sense of nationalism, a tendency towards authoritarianism and a rejection of some features of liberal democracy, while the 'populist' element signifies a reliance on an anti-elitist discourse as well as a rejection of 'appropriate' behaviour. This definition draws from the works of Cas Mudde (2004; 2007) and Benjamin Moffitt (2016). At this point, it is important to emphasise that this definition is grounded in the ideational approach (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 5; Mudde 2017a: 30-31), which presumes that populism (however 'thin' it may appear) is ultimately based on a set of ideas (see Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013: 150).<sup>29</sup>

Both constitutive elements of this definition require further scrutiny. Thus, the following two subsections seek to explain (1) why these parties can primarily be described as a *right-wing* phenomenon, and (2) what exactly makes these parties *populist*.

### **2.1.1. On the 'Right' Track?**

The concept of 'right' on the political spectrum is used in many different contexts. Generally, the political right is associated with socially conservative parties that prefer to maintain the status quo. This is misleading; as mentioned earlier, some right-wing populist parties are socially progressive (for instance by advocating LGBT rights). In modern times, however, the political right has also come to

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<sup>28</sup> There are several examples of 'minimum definitions' on related contested concepts such as fascism (Eatwell 1996); populist radical right parties (Mudde 2007); and populism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Rooduijn 2014b).

<sup>29</sup> While Mudde (2007) conceptualises populism as a (thin-centred) ideology, Moffitt (2016) prefers to define it as a political style (see also Moffitt & Tormey 2014). Despite their disagreement on whether or not populism is an ideology, both scholars subscribe to what has become known as the 'ideational approach' to populism (see Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), which holds that populism draws on a set of ideas, notably the opposition between 'the people' and 'the elite'.

designate a preference for neoliberal socio-economic programmes (i.e. free trade, self-regulating markets and limited state interference in the economy). While earlier scholarly works argued that pro-market economic policies formed part of the ‘winning formula’ of the electoral success of right-wing populist parties (Kitschelt & McGann 1995), this theory has been widely contested (e.g. Carter 2005; Ivarsflaten 2005; Mudde 2007; see also Inglehart & Norris 2016). In fact, there is little empirical evidence that right-wing populist parties promote pro-market economic programmes; many (e.g. the French RN) are inherently distrustful of global markets and publicly advocate protectionist policies and state-sponsored social welfare programmes (Mudde 2007: 123-5; see also Otjes et al. 2018). This is intriguing because the latter policy approach is typically associated with the ‘left’ side of the (economic) political spectrum (see Downs 1957).

In reality, political conflicts are often carried out along multiple lines of contestation (Schattschneider 1960). In recent years, a post-materialist, socio-cultural dimension has become increasingly salient (see Chapter 4). This new dimension can be conceptualised as ranging from Green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) views promoting cultural pluralism on the left, to traditional/authoritarian/nationalist (TAN) positions advocating cultural homogeneity and protectionism on the right (Hooghe et al. 2002).<sup>30</sup> The main reasons why right-wing populist parties are generally located on the right end of this political spectrum is that (1) they are nativist, and (2) they have a tendency towards authoritarianism.

The first core ideological feature that unites right-wing populist parties across Europe is a strong sense of nationalism, and alongside that, a proclivity to exclusionism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013).<sup>31</sup> Given that there are (theoretically) liberal manifestations of nationalism, scholars have come to prefer the term ‘nativism’ (e.g. Mudde 2007; Rooduijn 2019). This term was predominantly used in the American literature and can be defined as a xenophobic

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<sup>30</sup> In a similar vein, Bornschier (2010: 421) has conceptualised this new divide in terms of a conflict between libertarian-universalistic values on the left, and traditional-communitarian values on the right (see also Kriesi et al. 2008).

<sup>31</sup> This strong proclivity to exclusionism differentiates right-wing populist parties from more inclusionary ‘left-wing’ populist parties such as *SYRIZA* in Greece or *Podemos* in Spain. This feature also separates right-wing populism from traditional conservatism; while both political currents embrace law and order (as explained below), right-wing populist parties are eager to highlight cultural differences to construct clear ‘us-versus-them’ distinctions (Skenderovic 2008: 22).

form of nationalism, ‘which holds 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 2007: 19). Nativism is broader than racism, as it can include more factors than just race (e.g. religious or cultural aspects) but excludes more liberal forms of nationalism. Meanwhile, as explained below, when applied to right-wing populist parties, the term highlights the importance of xenophobia and the opposition to immigration, without reducing them to single-issue parties.

As Mudde (2007: 26) has observed, the political ‘right’ reflects ‘the belief in a natural order with inequalities.’ In the early 1990s, Husbands (1992b: 268) already identified a ‘commitment to some sort of ethnic exclusionism – a hostility to foreigners, immigrants, Third-World asylum-seekers, and similar outgroups’ as a common denominator of all European far right parties. After the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars singled out immigration as ‘the mighty irritant that stirs up right-wing protest from Austria to California, and even Australia’ (Merkl 2003: 27). Indeed, the dual forces of nativism and exclusionism often translate into an anti-immigration agenda, which continues to be a key characteristic of all (successful) right-wing populist parties in Western Europe (Ivarsflaten 2008). Since the mid-1980s, non-European immigrants and asylum seekers have become the arch-enemy of the populist right, and ‘Muslims have been targeted most consistently and vehemently in the propaganda of populist radical right parties’ (Mudde 2007: 70). Because immigrants and asylum seekers generally do not hold national citizenship, ‘they constitute an outgroup *par excellence*: they are weak, vulnerable, and powerless’ (Knigge 1998: 258).

Since most right-wing populist parties have an anti-immigration agenda, some scholars have resorted to calling them ‘anti-immigrant parties’ (e.g. Fennema 1997; Gibson 2002). However, this label is problematic because it reduces the populist radical right to single-issue parties, i.e. parties that emphasise one problem only without addressing any other issues. Empirical evidence suggests that most right-wing populist parties have broad programmes that cover more than immigration (Eatwell 2003: 49). Although immigration reform is a major focus, many right-wing populist parties also have clear stances on other topics, including nationalism, employment, social welfare, European integration and/or regional independence.

As Mudde (1992: 190) has noted, ‘immigration has at best been the *main* issue of *some* [right-wing populist] parties in *certain* periods of time.’ Thus, simply labelling right-wing populist parties as ‘anti-immigrant’ parties would be overly reductionist.

Besides nativism, the second core ideological feature that all right-wing populist parties have in common is their tendency towards authoritarianism, which is ‘the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely’ (Mudde 2007: 23). This belief is exemplified by their advocacy for stricter border controls as well as a strong emphasis on security and law and order. As Perliger and Pedahzur (2018: 674) have observed, ‘[c]ontemporary European authoritarianism is rooted mostly in secular ideas’ insofar as ‘it demands full subordination of every part of society to the authority of the state or leader and seeks to reinforce the notion of “law and order” in its strictest sense.’

Parties that are both nativist and authoritarian can be considered ‘radical right’ (Mudde 2007: 24). This is the third core characteristic of the right-wing populist party family. Although ‘radicalism’ has come to be associated with the right, it originated from the left of the political spectrum. While the term can have different meanings in different contexts, it implies an ‘anti-system’ or ‘anti-establishment’ element (Mudde 2007: 24-5). Radicalism does not imply a rejection of all democratic principles; instead, the term denotes a critique of the constitutional order (Skenderovic 2009: 14; see also Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008: 3; Mudde 2007: 25). This is what differentiates right-wing populist from right-wing extremist parties; unlike right-wing extremists, right-wing populists reject certain features of *liberal* democracy (notably political pluralism and the protection of minority rights). However, they are not anti-democratic, nor do they typically resort to militant (let alone violent) forms of protest (Skenderovic 2008: 22). As Fennema (1997: 482) has noted, the ‘extreme-right’ as a political ideology stands ‘in polemical opposition to the democratic creed.’ However, many contemporary right-wing populist parties simply do not fit this mould; they do not advocate a one-party system and seem to respect basic democratic principles (Roxburgh 2002: 33; Mudde 2007: 25). Stated differently, radicalism generally accepts procedural democracy, while extremism does not (Mudde 2010: 1168). The ‘far right’ is used here as an umbrella term to denote *all* parties on the right end of the political

spectrum, including radical (democratic) and extremist (non-democratic) ones (Mudde 2010: 1169; Ravndal 2017: 847).

Thus, the ‘rightist’ element in the populist right-wing party family is composed of three core characteristics: nativism, authoritarianism and radicalism. Having examined the meaning of the term ‘right’, we now turn to ‘populism’.

### **2.1.2. Populism: An Essentially Contested Concept**

In one of the first comprehensive works on populism published in the late 1960s, scholars noted that ‘[t]here can, at present, be no doubt about the *importance* of populism. But no one is quite clear just what it *is*. As a doctrine or as a movement, it is elusive and protean. It bobs up everywhere but in many contradictory shapes’ (Ionescu & Gellner 1969: 1; emphasis in original). This observation still holds true in the twenty-first century. While some sort of a consensus appears to be emerging around the ideational approach (Hawkins et al. 2012; Rooduijn 2019: 363), populism remains an ‘essentially contested concept’ (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 2). As Margaret Canovan (1981: 3) has suggested, ‘the term is exceptionally vague and refers in different contexts to a bewildering variety of phenomena.’ Given the lack of a consensus on a definition, ‘[i]t has become almost a cliché to start writing on populism by lamenting the lack of clarity about the concept and casting doubts about its usefulness for political analysis’ (Panizza 2005: 1; see also Moffitt 2016: 11; Moffitt & Tormey 2014: 382).

According to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012: 1), ‘populism’ is ‘[o]ne of the most used and abused terms inside and outside of academia.’ Indeed, in media and academia alike, the term has been (mis)used to denote a host of different phenomena and actors at different time periods and in different parts of the world. For instance, political commentators have attached the populist label to the radical *Occupy Wall Street* movement as well as the reactionary American Tea Party faction (see Aslanidis 2016: 94-5; Urbinati 2014: 129-30). Likewise, despite having arguably very little in common, politicians from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Barak Obama have been described as ‘populist’, which has led scholars to conclude that the term has been ‘thrown around with abandon’ in the (British print) media (Bale et al. 2011). In sum, ‘populism’ has become a popular buzzword to designate any type of

movement that ‘challenge[s] the entrenched values, rules and institutions of democratic orthodoxy’ (Mény & Surel 2002: 3).

The vague usage of the term in public debate can partly be ascribed to the fact that it is commonly employed to describe either an emotional and overly simplistic political discourse, also known as ‘the politics of the *Stammtisch* (the pub)’, or an opportunistic political rhetoric that is meant to please voters (Mudde 2004: 542-3). Since ‘populism’ is often equated with political opportunism or demagoguery, it generally carries a negative connotation (Stanley 2008: 101). As a result, the ‘populist’ label is generally ‘reserved for the political “enemy”’ (Bale et al. 2011: 127) and attached to ‘any kind of appeal to the people, mild rebukes of elites, crowd-pleasing measures, and “catch-all” politics’ (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015: 4).

The pejorative, inconsistent and normative use of the term in the public sphere is perhaps unsurprising given the long quest for definitional consensus in the academic literature. For instance, scholars have used the term to describe a late-nineteenth century radical peasant movement in the United States that sought to reform the political system and gave rise to the American People’s Party in an attempt to combat capitalism (see Canovan 1981: 17-30; Goodwyn 1976; Hofstadter 1969; Taggart 2000: 27-37; see also Jäger 2018). The concept has also been attributed to the so-called *narodniki* movement, which was formed by a small group of urban elites in nineteenth-century Russia in a (failed) attempt to incite a peasant revolt (see Canovan 1981: 59-83; Walicki 1969; Taggart 2000: 46-58). In the mid-twentieth century, the term ‘populism’ was used to characterise a new form of political mobilisation in Latin America, which emerged with charismatic leaders like Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico, Getulio Vargas in Brazil and, above all, Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012: 3; Roxborough 1984; Woods 2014: 6). The ‘populist’ label has also been attached to authoritarian regimes in the Global South, ‘where elections effectively “rubber-stamped” dictators with the semblance of popular legitimacy’ (Mény & Surel 2002: 2; see also Saul 1969). Towards the end of the twentieth century ‘populism jumped onto the scene’ in Western Europe (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012: 4), when the term was associated with the emergence of a new wave of nativist, right-wing parties with an anti-immigration agenda.

These different manifestations of ‘populism’ raise the question as to whether they have ‘any underlying unity,’ or whether ‘one name cover[s] a multitude of unconnected tendencies’ (Ionescu & Gellner 1969: 1). The broad usage of the term in the literature suggests that ‘populism’ has undergone considerable ‘conceptual stretching’ (i.e. the distortion of a concept that can occur when trying to apply it to different contexts) (Sartori 1970; see also van Kessel 2014). This has led some scholars to conclude that the concept has lost its analytical utility. For instance, Mény and Surel (2002: 2) maintain that ‘[w]ith this extension, both the concept and the word lost most of their heuristic utility [...]’. Others have argued that it is futile to try to generate a universal definition of populism because these different manifestations of the phenomenon are related only in name (see Canovan 1981; Ionescu & Gellner 1969; Roxborough 1984). As Mény and Surel (2002: 2) assert,

[t]his eclectic collection of situations, phenomena and data have led many observers and analysts to believe that there is no such thing as ‘populism’, but, rather, a mix of extremely heterogeneous situations which can be analysed according to type, but which cannot be reduced to any form of comprehensive unity.

Despite the fact that ‘[t]he holy grail of a definition of populism is elusive’ (Taggart 2000: 66), experts continue to strive for greater conceptual clarity. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the academic debate on populism has continued to thrive (see Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017: 10-11; Rooduijn 2019). Scholars have variously sought to characterise populism as: a style (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Moffitt 2016; Moffitt & Tormey 2014); a strategy (e.g. Weyland 2001); a rhetoric (e.g. Betz 2002); a discursive frame (Aslanidis 2016); a moralistic imagination (Müller 2016); and a (thin-centred) ideology (e.g. Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008, 2015; Mudde 2004, 2007; Stanley 2008).<sup>32</sup>

While these different classifications point to disagreement about ‘the genus’ of populism, they are not (necessarily) contradictory; indeed, many of them would subscribe to the ‘ideational approach’ (see Mudde 2017a; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018: 1669). It seems plausible to assume that populism can manifest itself in different ways. As van Kessel (2014: 8) has noted,

[f]rom an empirical perspective, the fact that there are different interpretations concerning the manifestation of populism is not necessarily

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<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the different approaches, see Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017: 2-5).

problematic, as long as there is a consensus about the concept's attributes. It seems reasonable to argue that populism can occur in various forms (e.g. style, strategy *and* ideology) and that its expression is not confined to a delineated set of political actors.

Different conceptualisations of populism can thus be seen as complementary rather than contradictory (Kriesi & Pappas 2015: 6). Moreover, there is *some* consensus in the literature on one core attribute of populism. As Rooduijn (2019: 363) has observed, nowadays, 'scholars agree with each other much more strongly than before on how the term should be defined.' What unites most (if not all) definitions of populism is the emphasis on the centrality of 'the people'. According to Mény and Surel (2002:11-12), for instance, populists 'emphasise the role of the people and its fundamental position, not only within society, but also in the structure and functioning of the political system as a whole.' Similarly, Woods (2014: 10) has observed that, '[f]or populists, the people are paramount. At the most general level, this is the bedrock of the populist ideology and a recurrent theme in populist rhetoric and claims to legitimacy.' However, this realisation is far too broad to serve as a definition since the evocation of 'the people' appears to be a relatively pervasive feature of modern politics. After all, one could argue that most politicians, at some point, try to appeal to 'the people' to gain political clout.

Cas Mudde (2007: 23) offers a more precise and widely used definition of populism. According to him, populism is:

a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.

Mudde's definition has brought greater conceptual clarity to the academic debate and paved the way for cross-regional comparative analysis (see, for example, Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). However, conceptualising populism as a (thin) ideology is problematic for both theoretical and practical reasons. While there is undeniably an ideational aspect to populism (as it clearly draws on a set of ideas, notably the opposition between 'the people' and 'the elite'), populism lacks a theoretical basis as there are no key texts or philosophers of populism; there is neither a global 'populist movement' nor a common genealogy (Freeden 2017; Moffitt & Tormey 2014: 383; Stanley 2008: 100). As a result, '[m]ost scholars of populism refrain from asserting that their concept stands on a par with liberalism,

socialism or any other fully developed –ism [...]’ (Aslanidis 2016: 88-9). Furthermore, populism rarely exists in isolation; indeed, it is usually accompanied with a ‘host ideology’ (Pauwels 2014). For instance, political parties may be classified as right- or left-wing populists (Rooduijn & Akkerman 2017), but ideologically, they can rarely solely be described as ‘populist’ (Albetrazzi & McDonnell 2015: 5).

Scholars have long noted the difficulty of delineating the ideological core of ‘populism’ (e.g. Betz 1994: 107; Rooduijn 2019).<sup>33</sup> As Taggart (2000: 10) has observed, populism is highly ‘chameleonic’ in a sense that it can change appearance depending on the political context in which it occurs. The slippery nature of the concept has led scholars to define populism as a ‘thin’ ideology that ‘is diffuse in its lack of a programmatic centre of gravity, and open in its ability to cohabit with other, more comprehensive, ideologies’ (Stanley 2008: 99-100). However, this begs the question ‘whether a “thin ideology” can actually become so thin as to lose its conceptual validity and utility’ (Moffitt & Tormey 2014: 383; see also Moffitt 2016: 19). The ‘chameleonic’ nature of the concept renders it particularly difficult to operationalise. Therefore, conceptualising populism as a discourse or rhetorical style rather than an ideology may be a fruitful alternative. While this conceptualisation does not negate the fact that populism has an ideational basis, it has important methodological advantages. As Woods (2014: 16) has suggested,

considering populism as a discursive style lends itself to its operationalization as a gradational property of specific instances of political expression [...] rather than an essential attribute of political parties or political leaders that can be captured by a simple populist/non-populist dichotomy.

Conceptualising populism as a style implies that *any* political actor or message can assume populist tendencies. In other words, the term ‘populism’ becomes a ‘descriptor’ (i.e. a type of rhetoric that can be employed by any actor) rather than a ‘classifier’ (i.e. an essential, lasting feature of a given actor) (see Sikk 2009; van Kessel 2014). Seen in this light, populism is not conceptualised as a dichotomy (i.e. parties are either populist, or not). Instead, populism is a ‘matter of degree’ (Rooduijn & Akkerman 2017: 195), in the sense that actors can be more or less

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<sup>33</sup> According to Rooduijn (2019: 364), one of the biggest challenges in contemporary populism research is that it is relatively easy to conflate populism with related concepts (particularly nativism).

populist depending on the messages that they send out (Hawkins 2009; Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Pauwels 2011b; Rooduijn & Pauwels 2011).

In the Western European context, the populist style is composed of two key features.<sup>34</sup> First, it presupposes a Manichean view of society that draws a clear distinction between the virtuous ‘people’ and an antagonistic ‘other’ (e.g. Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015; Mudde 2004; van Kessel 2015). Specifically, populism is defined here as ‘an anti-status quo discourse that simplifies the political space by symbolically dividing society between “the people” (as the “underdogs”) and its “*other*”’ (Panizza 2005: 3; emphasis in original). These two categories are diffuse constructs, or ‘empty signifiers’ (Laclau 2005: 40), that may be defined differently depending on the political context. In general, ‘the people’ is used to refer to some idealised, homogeneous form of society that is also known as ‘the heartland’ (Taggart 2000), while the ‘*other*’ is depicted as posing a threat to the sovereignty of ‘the people’ by depriving them of their identity, rights, prosperity and voice (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015: 5). While it is not always obvious who forms part of ‘the heartland’, it is generally quite clear who is excluded from it (Mudde 2004: 546).

This core characteristic highlights the populist tendency to see the world in ‘black and white’, which often leaves very little room for nuanced debate (Mény & Surel 2002: 12). A key indicator of populism is ‘[a] *denunciation of the elite* as the incarnation of evil and the *glorification of the people* as the representation of good virtues, true wisdom and authenticity’ (Vossen 2010: 24). According to Mény and Surel (2002: 12), ‘[t]his rhetoric, based on the celebration of the good, wise, and simple people and the rejection of the corrupt, incompetent and interlocking elites, permeates the populist discourse.’ Populists’ proclivity to construct rigid ‘us-versus-them’ distinctions exhibits itself at different levels depending on the political context in which they operate (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013: 168). For instance, populists often differentiate themselves from enemies within the nation and the state (e.g. political, economic, intellectual or media elites) (Mudde 2007: 66-9). Populist parties that follow a *rightist* ideology generally also construct an

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<sup>34</sup> The definition provided here is *contextual* in the sense that it is primarily tailored to suit the Western European context. For an attempt to generate a universal definition of populism, see Rooduijn (2014).

image of the enemy within the state but outside the nation (e.g. immigrants and asylum seekers) (Mudde 2007: 66-9) because they pose a perceived threat to ‘the heartland.’

The second core element of the populist style is a tendency to break taboos by presenting their hard-line approach as acceptable and ‘politically correct’. As Moffitt and Tormey (2014: 392) have observed, ‘[m]uch of populists’ appeal comes from their disregard for “appropriate” ways of acting in the political realm.’ Jean Marie Le Pen’s *Front National*, for instance, managed to build support ‘by codifying its [...] xenophobic policies in easily digestible forms’ (Roxburgh 2002: 117). The populist tendency to break taboos is overlooked by many scholars. Yet, it is a central element of the populist style in the sense that it sets them apart from their ‘mainstream’ competitors. This style is perhaps best illustrated by Filip Dewinter, a leading politician of the Belgian *Vlaams Belang*:

We just say what people think. [...] A lot of political issues and themes are taboo at the moment – it’s impossible to speak about the immigrant problems, it’s impossible to speak about the rise of crime. The politically correct parties don’t want to speak about these things. We just say what people are thinking about this sort of issues and that’s the reason our party is doing well. We are a non-conformist, non-traditional political party (quoted in Roxburgh 2002: 195-6).

In that sense, populism can be likened to ‘an awkward dinner guest’, who ‘can disrupt table manners and the tacit rules of sociability by speaking loudly, interrupting the conversations of others, and perhaps flirting with them beyond what passes for acceptable cheekiness’ (Arditi 2007: 78).

The main advantage of conceptualising populism as a *modus operandi* is ‘that it frees us from the “puzzle” of populism’s ability to appear across the political spectrum’ (Moffitt & Tormey 2014: 392). This allows us to define right-wing populist parties as political parties that follow a *rightist ideology* and employ a *populist style*, where ‘rightist’ denotes the rejection of certain features of the liberal democratic regime and ‘populist’ signifies the belief that society is split into ‘the virtuous people’ and a ‘corrupt elite’, as well as the rejection of the concept of ‘appropriate’ behaviour (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Summary Table: Defining Right-Wing Populist Parties

Right-wing	Populist
<p><b>Nativist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• xenophobic &amp; nationalist</li> </ul>	<p><b>People-centric &amp; Anti-elitist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manichean view of society based on rigid us-versus-them distinctions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tendency towards Authoritarianism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strict belief in law &amp; order</li> </ul>	<p><b>Tendency to break taboos</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘bad manners’</li> </ul>
<p><b>Radical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anti-establishment;</li> <li>• reject features of <i>liberal</i> democracy without being anti-democratic</li> </ul>	

## 2.2. The Rise of Right-Wing Populist Parties: Conventional Explanations

Having generated a working definition of right-wing populist parties, we now turn to consider factors that help explain their electoral performance. Scholars have come up with numerous different theories to account for their rise. As mentioned earlier, the overall aim is to synthesise the existing research into a comprehensive analytical framework. Perhaps the most comprehensive approach for explaining the success of this new ‘party family’ originated with Herbert Kitschelt and Anthony McGann (1995) and was later expanded by other scholars, including Roger Eatwell (2003), Cas Mudde (2007) and Stijn van Kessel (2015). These authors offer a multi-dimensional analysis of the success of populist radical right parties, as they separate demand- from supply-side variables. A similar approach is used in this chapter. However, one important caveat is in order. Most scholars include factors pertaining to the role of the media and the behaviour of mainstream parties in this demand- and supply-side framework. However, I have chosen to remove these factors from the conventional framework; given that this thesis is built on the premise that the media and mainstream parties play a crucial role prior to the electoral breakthrough of right-wing populist parties (both in influencing voter demand and party supply), these factors will be considered in greater detail when discussing contextual factors (see section 2.3).

### 2.2.1. The Demand Side: Creating a Breeding Ground

While it seems safe to assume that at least some demand for right-wing populist parties exists in all of Western Europe, it is still important to understand which factors contribute to generating a breeding ground for right-wing populist parties. In order to understand the rise of the populist radical right, it is necessary to consider what factors generate popular appetite for right-wing populist parties. To explain the intellectual reasoning behind this first strand of research, it is useful to consider the early literature, specifically the first two ‘waves of scholarship’ on the far right, which spanned from the immediate aftermath of WWII until the early 2000s (Mudde 2016; 2017b). Most of the early scholars writing on the post-war extreme right were historians studying the re-emergence of fascist movements, thereby emphasising the continuity between the pre- and post-war periods (see, for example, Eisenberg 1967; Tauber 1967). The second wave of scholars was concerned with newer manifestations of the ‘extreme right’, and primarily sought to explain how parties such as the Austrian Freedom Party and the French *Front National* could become so successful in modern Western European countries. Most of these earlier scholars based their studies on the (in)famous ‘normal pathology’ thesis (Scheuch & Klingemann 1967; see also Mudde 2010: 1168-71), which presumes that radicalism and extremism are fundamentally alien to Western democratic values, but that a small potential for these sentiments to (re)surface exists in all societies, and that these sentiments (and parties) will only gain traction under ‘extreme’ conditions.<sup>35</sup>

Since support for far-right (i.e. radical and extremist) parties was perceived to be a ‘normal pathology’ (i.e. an expected anomaly), studies tended to focus exclusively on the demand side. Indeed, most studies focused solely on the socio-economic characteristics of the voters who were generally portrayed as the ‘losers of modernity’ (see, for instance, Betz 1994). The research agenda was thus driven by the question of why popular appetite for far-right parties persisted (Mudde 2010: 1172). In other words, given that demand for the far right was expected to be low under ‘normal’ conditions, scholars sought to understand the underlying ‘extreme’ conditions that would help explain the ‘abnormal’ support for these parties and

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<sup>35</sup> The ‘normal pathology thesis’ has been explained and contested by Mudde (2010).

movements, thereby treating the parties themselves as the dependent variable (Mudde 2017: 3).

Existing scholarly accounts can be separated into two different levels of analysis: macro and micro (see Eatwell 2003; Mudde 2007).<sup>36</sup> The macro level of analysis addresses trends in the international environment, whereas the micro level considers individual motivations behind voting for the populist radical right.

#### *Macro-level explanations*

At the macro level of analysis, demand for populist radical right parties is often linked to broad, global changes, including social, economic, political and historical developments. Specifically, scholars have linked rising demand for the populist radical right with supranational trends, such as globalisation (e.g. Zaslove 2008); modernisation (e.g. Betz 1994; Minkenberg 2000); secularisation (e.g. Bornschier 2010; Marzouki et al. 2016); immigration (e.g. Lubbers et al. 2002); European integration (e.g. Taggart 2004); and the occurrence (or ‘performance’) of crises more generally (see Moffitt 2015). Recognising that it is impossible to provide a complete overview of the literature due to space limitations, this section offers a concise summary of the main findings.

The success of right-wing populism can be partly attributed to the changing international environment that typified the turn of the twenty-first century (Roxburgh 2002). The end of the twentieth century saw the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the greater integration of the European Union, which triggered a resurgence of nationalist sentiments across the European continent. In Eastern Europe, former Soviet satellites and Yugoslav states seized the opportunity to move towards nationhood. Meanwhile, in Western Europe, the widening and deepening of the European Union ignited a fear that national identities were eroding. As national governments started to pool sovereignty in different policy areas, ‘Brussels’ became increasingly remote and mistrusted. This has generated demand for right-wing populist parties, mainly because the populist belief in ‘[t]he

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<sup>36</sup> Some scholars have included an intermediate or ‘meso’-level of analysis. This level of analysis is somewhat of a ‘grey area’, because it focuses on the ways in which these broad, macro-level changes have been addressed in the domestic political realm. Since this pertains to the role of mainstream political parties, it is omitted here and addressed later when discussing contextual factors.

singularity of the heartland is at odds with a European project that seeks to affirm complementary identities [...]’ (Taggart 2004: 297).

Against this backdrop, different socio-political developments, often exacerbated by precipitating factors, can be seen to have acted as catalysts in generating demand for right-wing populism (Taggart 2004). This can partly be attributed to the fact that the populist notion of ‘the heartland’ is often animated by ‘special circumstances’ such as political resentment or a (perceived) threat to ‘our way of life’ (Mudde 2004: 547). The rising awareness of nationality brought about by the breakup of Soviet Union and the deeper integration of the European Union coincided with significant influxes of refugees fleeing from imminent, escalating conflicts. Between 1992 and 2001, the EU witnessed the arrival of 3.75 million asylum seekers (Roxburgh 2002). European governments were not ready to handle the refugee influx; many of the refugees were housed in deprived, urban neighbourhoods, which ‘had an unsettling effect on existing communities’ (Roxburgh 2002: 24). The (perceived) threat of mass immigration and *Überfremdung* generated a political backlash (Mudde 2007: 209).<sup>37</sup> Immigrants – especially those with non-European origins – were portrayed as people seeking a better life in Europe at the expense of Europeans, thereby posing a threat to native Europeans. In the media, immigrants were often blamed for rising crime rates, which triggered feelings of resentment among domestic populations (Roxburgh 2002: 25). Furthermore, the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001 triggered a wave of anti-Muslim sentiments throughout the Western world, which, in turn, provided ammunition for right-wing political parties. Since many of the immigrants arriving in the EU were Muslim, anti-Muslim rhetoric worked to the advantage of right-wing populist parties.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, European leaders have been faced with a new series of ‘crises’ that seem to confirm the existence of a ‘populist *Zeitgeist*’ (Mudde 2004). The 2008 global economic crisis has potentially exacerbated existing cleavages between ‘the people’ and ‘the elites’, thereby creating fertile ground for populist parties to thrive (see Kriesi & Pappas 2015). As politicians and

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<sup>37</sup> The term *Überfremdung* was conceived by Swiss elites at the turn of the twentieth century and roughly translates into ‘overforeignization’, which denotes a fear of being ‘subverted by foreigners’ (see Kury 2003; Scuto 2012: 93; Skenderovic 2009: 49).

parties across the continent continue to struggle with the aftermath of the financial and Eurozone crises, the climate of uncertainty and insecurity produced by the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’ seems to have provided new momentum for the populist radical right. Indeed, there seems to be a relationship between populism and crises in that a crisis can be a catalyst for populist sentiments, whereas populism can also *trigger* crises (Moffitt 2015). While the nature of the relationship between economic- and political crises on the one hand and the electoral success of right-wing populist parties on the other remains far from straightforward, it appears relatively uncontested that the sense of insecurity and antagonism generated by any sort of critical turning point (whether real or perceived) can help create a breeding ground for right-wing populist parties.

While these broad, macro-level processes including modernisation and globalisation have undoubtedly helped to create a breeding ground for the populist radical right, they are ‘so broad and vague that they are of little use in empirical research’ (Mudde 2007: 298). To be sure, they can help explain the general sense of dissatisfaction with ‘mainstream’ politics. However, they fail to explain cross-national and regional variation in the success and failure of right-wing populist parties. After all, macro-level changes have affected *all* countries in Western Europe. As Mudde (2007: 298) has observed, ‘every European country has a (relatively) fertile breeding ground for the populist radical right, yet, only in some countries do these parties also flourish in elections.’ Therefore, it makes sense to look at how these broad changes have affected voting behaviour at the micro-level of analysis.

#### *Micro-level explanations*

How do these broad, macro-level changes affect voting behaviour at the micro level of analysis? This demand-side perspective considers different theories that help explain why people decide to vote for right-wing populist parties. Existing research has paid relatively scarce attention to *individual* motivations for populist voting; indeed, we know little ‘about the mentality of populist voters or cognitive processes that lead people to join populist forces’ (Hawkins et al. 2017: 267). Earlier research often vaguely sought to explain electoral support for (right-wing) populist parties as a way of protesting against political elites (e.g. van der Brug et al. 2005) or the establishment more generally (e.g. Betz 1994). Indeed, voting for radical right-wing

parties was seen as a ‘vehicle for expressing discontent with the mainstream parties’ (Eatwell 2003: 51). The ‘protest vote theory’ was based on the idea that voters express their dissatisfaction with mainstream politics by casting votes for (right-wing) populist parties because of their anti-establishment message.

More recent scholarship has sought to disentangle the somewhat simplistic, vague and dismissive interpretation of populism as a form of protest by trying to analyse the attitudes of populist voters (e.g. Akkerman et al. 2014; Spruyt et al. 2016; Stanley 2011). A study conducted by Steven Van Hauwaert and Stijn van Kessel (2018: 86) found that ‘populist attitudes are unique and distinct from other behaviours such as protest or dissatisfaction’, thus indicating that support for populist parties ‘is more than just [a vehicle] for an uninformed and apathetic protest vote.’ This conclusion echoes earlier studies, which suggest that support for anti-immigrant parties is driven by programmatic and ideological considerations instead of mere protest (van der Brug et al. 2000). In light of these findings, it makes sense to take a closer look at the why voters support right-wing populist parties by using a micro level of analysis.

Some scholars have sought to link support for (right-wing) populist parties to certain personality traits (Bakker et al. 2015). In an attempt to unveil the ‘psychological roots of populist voting’, they found congruence between the personality of voters and the anti-establishment message of populist parties (ibid). Specifically, the study shows that voters who score low on ‘Agreeableness’ (i.e. people who are inclined to be uncooperative, egoistic, intolerant, distrustful and antagonistic towards others) are more likely to support populist parties. Although the study provides interesting insights into potential micro-explanations for support for populist parties, it tells us little about the causal relationship between voting behaviour and personality type, nor does it help explain variance in the electoral performance of (right-wing) populist parties across time and place, as it seems doubtful that the recent rise of populist parties in some countries can be attributed to an overall increase in ‘less agreeable’ voters.

Given these limitations, it seems more fruitful to consider the attitudes as well as the social and demographic characteristics of right-wing populist voters. While support for right-wing populist parties cannot be linked to a specific socio-

demographic group, scholars have found that support for populist parties is generally highest among people – notably men (see Norris 2005) – who feel deprived in one way or another (Pauwels 2014: 7). Macro-level changes in the international environment (e.g. immigration, globalisation, economic crises) tend to make people feel less secure about their lives (Mudde 2007: 223), thereby giving rise to a broad range of ‘grievances’. As traditional social structures such as religion or class are degenerating, individuals lose a sense of belonging (i.e. social dealignment) and may therefore become more susceptible to the attraction of nationalism (Eatwell 2003: 52). With rising unemployment rates, job insecurity increases. Studies have shown that the so-called ‘losers of the modernisation process’ (*Modernisierungsverlierer*) tend to be most inclined to vote for (right-wing) populist parties (Kriesi et al. 2012; Mudde 2007: 203). This typically includes people working in certain industries that are vulnerable to foreign competition, small business owners and other working-class people (Arzheimer & Carter 2006: 422; Eatwell 2003: 57). In times of economic recession, for instance, competition over scarce resources such as jobs and access to public services increases, which can contribute to a heightening sense of insecurity (Eatwell 2003: 56; Lubbers et al. 2002). It is important to note that these grievances at the voter-level are not solely driven by economic factors but also by cultural processes (e.g. immigration) and political changes (e.g. European integration) (Kriesi 2014: 369; see also Bornschier 2018: 222).

In this insecure environment, voters tend to move away from moderate parties at the centre of the political spectrum; instead, ‘[t]hey seek salvation in the “simple messages” of the populist radical right, which promises a clear identity and protection against the changing world’ (Mudde 2007: 223). As a result, in contrast to mainstream contenders, populist parties on both the left and right attract voters that can be characterised as socially and economically vulnerable (van Kessel 2015). Studies have shown that there are numerous similarities in the voting bases of right- and left-wing populist parties (see, for example, Rooduijn et al. 2017; Van Hauwaert & van Kessel 2018). Using survey data from nine European countries, Van Hauwaert and van Kessel (2018) found that populist voters are generally more interested in politics but have lower levels of satisfaction with democracy (see also

Ellinas 2010: 25). In addition, populist voters on both sides of the political spectrum are similarly sceptical about the European Union (Rooduijn et al. 2017).

Despite these parallels, however, the underlying motivations for supporting radical right- versus left-wing populist parties are very different (Rooduijn et al. 2017). For instance, voters who are more prejudiced towards immigrants are more prone to support right-wing populist parties, whereas less prejudiced people tend to support left-wing populist parties (Van Hauwaert & van Kessel 2018). It follows that they have different views about immigration: ‘the radical left shows marked signs of cosmopolitanism and the radical right clear nativism’ (Rooduijn et al. 2017: 555; see also Norris 2005: 181-5). Another key difference is that radical right voters tend to have lower levels of education than radical left voters (Rooduijn et al. 2017). This finding is in line with previous research, suggesting that higher levels of education can strengthen democratic values and lessen social intolerance (Arzheimer & Carter 2006: 421; Mudde 2007: 217; Pauwels 2014: 177).

There also appears to be a relationship between demographic environment and anti-immigrant views, as people living in areas *surrounding* concentrations of immigrants tend to be more prone to support right-wing populist parties than people living *in* areas of high immigration. This is also known as the ‘halo-effect’ (Eatwell 2003: 50). In France, for example, support for the FN was generally higher in rural areas surrounding cities with high immigrant concentrations than in the neighbourhoods that were actually home to large numbers of immigrants (Roxburgh 2002: 123). In metropolitan areas where interactions with foreigners are frequent, popular support for right-wing populist parties tends to be lower than in areas where there is limited contact.

To sum up, a perfect breeding ground for right-wing populist parties is analogous to different layers of soil. Changes in the international environment fill up the bottom of the flower pot (i.e. the macro-level of analysis), while the topsoil (i.e. the micro-level of analysis) is made up of individuals who vote for right-wing populist parties because of a general sense of insecurity, which can translate into support for anti-immigration policies.

### 2.2.2. The Supply Side: Exploiting Fertile Soil

Demand-side explanations shed light on the *potential* electorate of populist radical right parties. They tell us little, however, about why this potential translates into electoral success in some countries but not in others. Assuming that the breeding ground for right-wing populist parties is relatively similar across Western Europe, the demand side provides little insight in cross-national variation in the electoral performances of the populist radical right. Demand-side explanations highlight only some of the reasons for the rise of right-wing populism; a fertile breeding ground for right-wing populist parties does not automatically guarantee their electoral breakthrough. Accordingly, '[n]o contribution to the literature claims that the distribution and intensity of demand-side preferences, by itself, would explain the relative electoral strength of the radical right across Western Europe' (Kitschelt 2007: 1177). Although demand-side factors (particularly immigration) appear to be necessary for the rise of right-wing populist parties, they are by no means sufficient in accounting for their electoral success (Art 2011: 13). While demand-side explanations emphasise certain conditions that make countries and voters 'susceptible' to right-wing populist parties, the supply side highlights factors that enable parties to gain political clout. Following Mudde (2007), it is helpful to differentiate between the 'external supply side', i.e. institutional conditions that allow right-wing populist parties to gain influence (Mudde 2007: 232), and the 'internal supply side', i.e. the agency of the parties themselves (Mudde 2007: 256).

#### *The External Supply Side*

The external supply side considers features of the political system that can influence the 'supply' of right-wing populist parties. The arguably most important variables are known as political opportunity structures (POS). POS are defined here as 'institutional arrangements' that facilitate the development of new (protest) movements (Kitschelt 1986: 58).<sup>38</sup> According to the POS theory, the institutional design of a country's political system can facilitate or hinder the electoral success of right-wing populist parties.

Electoral institutions matter insofar as they 'influence the extent to which this demand is translated into actual votes' (Golder 2003: 461). Proportional

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<sup>38</sup> The POS theory employed here refers strictly to the *institutional* context (see Arzheimer 2009); the role of mainstream parties will be discussed below (see 2.3).

representation (PR) electoral systems are more ‘permissive’ than disproportional majoritarian systems and make it easier for new parties to gain parliamentary representation, thereby favouring multipartyism (Duverger 1954; see also Arzheimer & Carter 2006; Eatwell 2003; Roxburgh 2002). In general, countries with PR electoral systems (e.g. the Netherlands) are known to offer more political opportunity for smaller parties than countries with majoritarian electoral systems (e.g. France).<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, some countries have adopted additional institutional hurdles that make it difficult for small parties to gain influence at the national level. The German five-percent electoral threshold (known as the *Fünf-Prozent-Hürde*) is a case in point. Unlike institutional settings, however, these hurdles result from strategic choices that mainstream parties make as a way of responding to potential far-right competitors. These strategies will be considered in greater detail when discussing contextual factors (see 2.3). At this point, it is sufficient to note that institutional design can both hinder and facilitate the electoral breakthrough of the populist radical right.

A second external supply-side variable relates to the political space available to right-wing populist challengers. If mainstream parties gravitate towards the centre of the political spectrum, there is more space at the fringes of the political spectrum for radical parties to emerge (Eatwell 2003; Lubbers et al. 2002; Rydgren 2005). According to Roxburgh (2002: 29), ‘[s]ome of the strongest far-right movements developed in countries with centrist coalition governments, where they presented themselves almost as an “antidote” to years or decades of vapid unadventurous rule.’ In France, for instance, the former FN-leader Jean-Marie Le Pen was able to advance to the second round in the 2002 presidential elections after half a decade of *cohabitation* between a conservative president and a socialist prime minister.

The tendency to seek consensus is arguably more pronounced in so-called ‘consociational’ democracies (see Lijphart 1969) and in eponymous consensus democracies.<sup>40</sup> Consociational democracies are characterised by a willingness

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<sup>39</sup> Even within PR electoral systems, the degree of proportionality can differ widely (Mudde 2007: 234).

<sup>40</sup> While the concept of ‘consociational democracies’ has been attributed to Arend Lijphart, his work was influenced by other scholars working in different countries (e.g. Ake 1967; Lehmbruch 1967). It should also be noted that, even though they are very similar, consociational democracies are not exactly the same as consensus democracies. The term ‘consensus democracy’ is broader than ‘consociational democracy’ in that it can also be used to describe societies that are not inherently

among political leaders to cooperate, compromise and accommodate, for instance by forming grand governing coalitions to overcome social cleavages. Following Lijphart (1969: 216), consociationalism refers to ‘government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy’ (see also Katz & Mair 2009). In contrast to majoritarian systems, consociational democracies foster inclusiveness through elite and inter-party cooperation, which can come at the expense of accountability (Andeweg 2000). Hakhverdian and Koop (2007) have tested this hypothesis empirically and found that support for populist parties indeed tends to be higher in consensual than in non-consensual political systems, as centripetal forces incentivise elites from different parties to converge by clustering around the centre.

At first sight, this observation seems to be confirmed by the data; countries that are typically considered ‘consociational democracies’ such as Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland have all witnessed the rise of right-wing populist challengers. However, this observation does not hold for Luxembourg or Wallonia, which can *also* be considered classical examples of consociational democracies with PR electoral systems (Lijphart 1969), thereby compounding our research puzzle. Furthermore, since institutions are relatively static, they can hardly explain variation in the electoral performances of parties over time (Meguid 2005: 347). While institutions certainly have some effect on the electoral performance of right-wing populist parties, they do not *determine* electoral outcomes and thus ‘help little in explaining the differences in electoral success between different countries, parties, periods and regions’ (Mudde 2007: 234). It therefore makes sense to consider the agency of the parties in order to gain insight into how exactly they translate political opportunities into votes.

Finally, national traditions may also have an effect on the availability of political space. Right-wing populist parties are more likely to thrive if they can present themselves in line with national political traditions. For instance, far-right parties have difficulties gaining traction in countries with a legacy of anti-fascism (Eatwell 2003: 62). By contrast, they are more likely to succeed in countries that have maintained strong nativist subcultures after World War II; in these contexts, the

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segmented, whereas ‘consociational democracy’ specifically refers to societies that are deeply divided (Andeweg 2000).

ideological distance between mainstream and extremist parties is comparatively smaller. In other words, in countries with flourishing nativist subcultures and where nationalism forms part of the mainstream political culture, it is easier for right-wing populist parties to recruit members and reach out to the mainstream (Mudde 2007: 302). Specifically, the positions that elites assume vis-à-vis their Nazi past can affect the electoral success of the (populist) radical right (Art 2006). Indeed, scholars have found that ‘countries in which the elites take a revisionist approach to their Nazi past have provided a favourable environment for the development of a strong nativist subculture after the war, bridging the political extreme and mainstream’ (Mudde 2007: 245). David Art (2011) focuses extensively on this external supply-side variable. He argues that pre-existing resources for right-wing radical parties (such as historical legacies, nationalist subcultures and fascist nostalgia), alongside the initial reaction of mainstream parties and civil society to such parties influence their subsequent success or failure. In France or Austria, for instance, there are large nationalist subcultures that exist in parallel to the dominant right-wing populist contenders, which ‘feed important facilities and competent personnel into the local party’ (Mudde 2007: 245; see also Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000).

### *The Internal Supply Side*

The internal supply side considers the behaviour and strategies of right-wing populist parties. There is widespread consensus in the literature that (right-wing) populist parties are more likely to succeed if they are able to present themselves as credible alternatives to mainstream parties (e.g. van Kessel 2015). If right-wing populist parties manage to mobilise voters by claiming issue ownership over certain issues – particularly immigration – they are more likely to succeed electorally. For instance, right-wing populist parties may tap into voters’ fears by using immigrants as scapegoats, notably by drawing simple equations between the number of unemployed people and the ‘excessive’ number of immigrants (Roxburgh 2002: 15). They often do so by portraying immigrants as a direct threat to the economic well-being of the native population, which can translate into electoral support for right-wing populist parties (Eatwell 2003: 56; Fetzer 2000: 13). As Kriesi (2014: 369) has observed, the structural conflict between the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of globalisation is best articulated by the populist right. Thus, ‘the success of the far

right in recent years can largely be attributed to its exploitation of contemporary anxieties over such things as crime, immigration, unemployment, and remote, corrupt, or insensitive government' (Roxburgh 2002: 31).

Several factors can influence a party's credibility, notably party organisation as well as party leadership.<sup>41</sup> These two features are closely linked, as charismatic leaders can be instrumental in both rallying public support and holding their parties together (Carter 2005; Eatwell 2003; Mudde 2007). As such, charismatic leaders can play an important role in generating credibility (van Kessel 2015). Charismatic leaders are particularly successful when operating in an insecure environment. When voters have anxieties about issues such as immigration, crime or unemployment, they are more susceptible to populist slogans. Effective leaders know how to tap into these fears to attract electoral support. However, while the electoral strategies and overall credibility of right-wing populist parties play an important role in their electoral performances, they arguably matter more for their electoral *persistence* than their electoral breakthrough *per se* (see Pauwels 2014: 63ff). Thus, they are only of secondary importance to this thesis.

Whether or not right-wing populist parties are able to take advantage of a fertile ground by harnessing demand for right-wing populist ideas is dependent on different supply-side factors. Existing institutional structures can generate space and opportunities for right-wing populist parties to succeed. Whether or not a party is able to make use of these opportunities depends on internal supply-side variables, notably the credibility and overall organisational skills of the party. Taken together, demand- and supply-side explanations shed light on the general reasons behind the electoral fortunes of right-wing populist parties. However, they are too broad to fully account for the variation in the electoral performances of the populist radical right across countries and regions. Above all, these 'classical' explanations tell us little about *why* demand and supply might be stronger in some areas than in others.

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<sup>41</sup> The definition of charisma and its role in facilitating the success of the populist radical right is contested (see Mudde 2007: 262). Charisma is not considered a defining feature of populism; however, it appears to be a core characteristic of most (if not all) *successful* right-wing populist parties. This is not surprising, given that successful leaders are more likely to be considered charismatic. Therefore, explaining success through charisma (e.g. Lubbers et al. 2002) is somewhat tautological (see Koopmans & Muis 2009: 634; van der Brug et al. 2005: 542).

Therefore, it makes sense to focus on the mechanisms that fuel or dampen demand for and supply of right-wing populist parties.

### 2.3. Contextual Explanations

There are two factors that have received limited attention thus far: mainstream parties and the media. Taken together, they form part of the wider *context* in which right-wing populist parties operate. I posit that the electoral fortunes of right-wing populist parties are largely dependent on the behaviour of mainstream parties and the media (Ellinas 2010). Taken together, they can act as ‘gatekeepers’ who can create opportunity structures that enable right-wing populist parties to enter the electoral arena (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018). Specifically, they play a crucial role in fuelling or dampening demand, thereby facilitating or hindering the electoral success of the populist radical right. In line with Art (2006), I argue that their reaction to the populist radical right is instrumental in obstructing or facilitating the electoral breakthrough of these parties.

Scholars generally agree that mainstream parties and the media play an important role in the rise of right-wing populist parties. However, these factors are rarely systematically incorporated into any theoretical framework. When they are, there is often a failure to fully capture their importance. Mudde (2007: 237-53) for instance, conceptualises both variables as ‘external supply-side explanations’, thereby implying that they have less influence on voter demand. However, it is reductionist to consider them solely as supply-side factors; as shown below, mainstream party positioning and media portrayal can also impact public demand. In other words, mainstream parties and the media straddle classical demand- and supply-side explanations. Therefore, it makes sense to remove them from the conventional framework by instead conceptualising them separately as ‘contextual factors’.

The media and mainstream parties help determine the nature of the public discourse, which can provide or foreclose opportunities for right-wing populist parties to mobilise support. As such, studying these contextual factors can help us understand why right-wing populist parties succeed ‘in making their voices heard in the public sphere in the first place’ (Koopmans & Muis 2009: 643). Contextual factors interact with both demand- and supply-side variables. Specifically, the media and mainstream parties can act as ‘buffers’ by dampening demand, or they can act as

‘catalysts’ by stoking demand for the populist radical right. Turning to the supply side, the media can facilitate the ‘supply’ of right-wing populist parties by offering them a platform to spread their views, whereas mainstream parties strategically can create or occupy the space of right-wing populist parties. Taken together, the media and mainstream parties therefore play an influential role in shaping the discursive opportunity structures available to right-wing populist parties, which in turn, can help explain their electoral trajectories. The following subsections focus on (1) mainstream parties and (2) the media by explaining how exactly these contextual factors interact with traditional demand- and supply-side explanations.

### **2.3.1. Mainstream Parties**

Scholars noticed decades ago that mainstream parties play a crucial role in the electoral trajectories of populist radical right parties (see, for example, von Beyme 1988: 15). Since then, studies have primarily focused on explaining how the behaviour of mainstream parties can affect the electoral space available for right-wing populist parties (e.g. Bale et al. 2010; Downs 2001; Heinze 2018; Meguid 2008; van Spanje 2018). As mentioned earlier, political convergence in general and consensual politics in particular can be conducive to the rise of (right-wing) populism. In many countries, right-wing populist parties gained electoral support after decades of consensus-seeking ‘grand coalition’ governments. In most cases, these grand coalitions were only possible because parties agreed to a lowest common denominator, which left delicate issues unaddressed. The ‘mushy coalition policies’ (Roxburgh 2002: 124) that these centrist governments produced generated a political backlash, as they made voters feel that they were not being offered a real choice (see Mudde 2007: 210). This created distrust and political dissatisfaction, thereby generating fertile breeding ground (i.e. demand) for right-wing populist parties. This suggests that it is reductionist to conceptualise the role of mainstream parties solely as a supply-side factor.

The rise of right-wing political parties has been linked to various related trends involving mainstream political parties including: political convergence (Kitschelt & McGann 1995); cartelisation (Katz & Mair 2009); polarisation (Ignazi 1992; 2003); the emergence of new cleavage structures (Bornschier 2010); and partisan dealignment (Dalton et al. 2002). Indeed, the broad, macro-level changes described earlier (i.e. modernisation and globalisation) have had a noticeable impact on party

competition, as they were accompanied by widespread *social* changes including secularisation and class dealignment, which, in turn, helped pave the way for *political* dealignment. In addition, over the past decades, many European countries have witnessed different types of domestic political crises related to corruption, economic recessions or political legitimacy, which has contributed to a growing sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream politics (Pauwels 2014).

As a result, attendance at political gatherings plummeted, party membership declined drastically, and voter turnouts dropped to all-time lows (Eatwell 2003: 51; Knigge 1998: 258; Mair 2006; 2013). The growing disenchantment with mainstream politics has been attributed to the cartelisation of the European party system (Katz & Mair 1995; 2009). The so-called ‘cartel party thesis’ suggests that the role of political parties has shifted over the years from being representatives of civil society to playing a governmental role, to an extent that nearly all parties (even those in opposition) can be seen as ‘governing’ parties. According to Katz and Mair (2009: 759), the cartelisation of the party system ‘has clearly contributed to the rise of populist anti-party-system parties that appeal directly to public perceptions that the mainstream parties are indifferent to the desires of ordinary citizens.’ Specifically, the erosion of parties’ representative function has contributed to a sense of alienation between voters and political parties (Kriesi 2014), thereby generating demand for (right-wing) populist parties, as they seek to present themselves as the ‘true voice of the people’.

The rise of ‘challenger parties’, or ‘niche parties’, can partly be seen as a response to the disenchantment with mainstream politics. Scholars have shown that the emergence of these new parties had a distinct impact on existing patterns of political competition. New parties tended to emphasise issues that went beyond traditional socio-economic cleavages (see Wagner 2012). The politicisation of new issues brought about by the emergence of right-wing populist challengers incentivised mainstream parties to shift their agendas, for instance by cosying up to the challengers and toughening their stances on immigration or multiculturalism (e.g. Abou-Chadi 2016; Han 2015; Pytlas 2015; van Spanje 2010). However, when mainstream parties copy the issues of right-wing populist parties, they are likely to increase the salience of these new issues, thereby (inadvertently) tilling the field for the populist radical right. This has contributed to ‘the creation of a new axis of

political contestation that supplements partisan competition over materialist issues’ (Ellinas 2010: 26). It is therefore reasonable to assume that the behaviour of mainstream parties can play an important role in the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties (see also Abou-Chadi & Krause 2018).

The existing literature on the success and failure of (populist) challenger parties tends to ascribe a relatively passive role to mainstream parties (Meguid 2005: 347). Indeed, mainstream parties are often seen as ‘victims’ who are suffering the consequences of the success of right-wing populist parties. This thesis, in contrast, treats mainstream parties as agents that play an active role in altering traditional political cleavage structures and bringing about related shifts in voting patterns (see also Bale 2003). More generally, ‘the behavior of mainstream parties influences the electoral fortunes of [...] new, niche party actors’ (Meguid 2005: 347). Rather than being static entities, mainstream parties react to and interact with changes in the political environment. Their behaviour can pre-empt the rise of the populist radical right or, indeed, facilitate it (Bornschieer 2018: 212).

When new (niche) parties emerge on the political horizon, ‘[e]stablished parties must decide whether to recognize and respond to the issue introduced by the niche party’ (Meguid 2005: 349). Following Downs (2001: 26), mainstream parties are faced with ‘a fundamental choice’ when confronted with the presence of a right-wing populist challenger: they can (1) disengage or (2) engage. In essence, disengagement strategies are a way of *excluding* right-wing populist challengers and their policy concerns from the political process and public office, whereas engagement strategies involve *including* them (Goodwin 2011: 23).

Prior to outlining these strategies, two important caveats are in order. First, while Downs’s arguments refer primarily to the reactions of mainstream parties *after* radical right-wing populist parties have entered national assemblies, I posit that his theories are also applicable to the time leading up to the electoral breakthrough of such parties. Second, these strategies are to be understood as ‘ideal types’; in reality, they are often conflated or altered over time, which makes it difficult to distinguish them from one another (Heinze 2018: 290; see also Bale 2003: 68; Goodwin 2011: 23). The following subsections outline the different ways in which established

parties can theoretically disengage or engage with (issues of) the populist radical right.

### *Disengagement Strategies*

Disengagement or ‘dismissive strategies’ (Meguid 2005: 349) can take two different forms: (a) disregard and (b) isolation. When faced with the emergence of right-wing populist parties, established parties may simply choose to ignore them (along with the issues they have brought up), in the hope that the challengers will wither away (Downs 2001: 26; Goodwin 2011: 23). Similarly, established parties may choose to defuse the salience of new political issues, for instance by trying to focus the agenda on other topics in the hope that other mainstream parties will follow (Bale et al. 2010: 413).

A second disengagement or exclusion strategy consists of political isolation through what Minkenberg (2001) has referred to as ‘demarcation’ (or *Abgrenzung* in German). This disengagement strategy goes beyond mere disregard, in that it aims at totally isolating the populist radical right. In other words, mainstream parties may opt to stigmatise challengers by demonising them and treating them as pariahs. For instance, mainstream parties can erect legal or institutional barriers (e.g. electoral thresholds) aimed at keeping the populist radical right out of office (Downs 2001: 27). Similarly, mainstream parties may come to an explicit or implicit agreement to exclude certain (usually extremist) parties from participating in coalitions, for instance by forming a political *cordon sanitaire*. Technically, a *cordon sanitaire* is a guarded line put in place to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. In this case, it is a measure designed to prevent the spread of (right-wing) extremism. A related form of political isolation is to create coalitions as a way of ‘blocking the populist radical right from power’; as Downs (2001: 27) puts it, ‘[g]rand coalitions produce the immediate payoff of forming a clear democratic front in opposition to extremism.’

### *Engagement Strategies*

Conversely, mainstream parties can choose to engage with right-wing populist challengers by recognising and adopting (some of) the issues that they bring to the fore. Again, following Meguid (2005; 2008), there are two ways of engaging with new niche parties: through (a) divergence (also known as adversarial strategies) and

(b) convergence (also known as accommodative strategies).<sup>42</sup> Essentially, the main adversarial strategy consists of mainstream parties choosing to *hold* their positions by ‘sticking to their guns’ and maintaining their own party lines (Bale et al. 2010). This strategy involves offering a clear alternative to voters. It is very similar to the demarcation approach described above; however, in this case, right-wing populist parties are not treated as pariahs.

Mainstream parties may also opt to accommodate right-wing populist parties in order to draw voters away from them (Meguid 2005: 348). There are two different ‘degrees’ of accommodating the populist radical right: (a) co-optation and (b) collaboration. Established parties can try to *co-opt* or copy right-wing populist parties by adopting some of their issues (Downs 2001: 21), for instance by taking a tougher stance on immigration (see van Spanje 2010). The logic underlying this strategy is, ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’ (Bale et al. 2010: 413); by decreasing the political space towards the populist radical right, mainstream parties hope to win (back) voters that may otherwise choose the far right (see Bornschier 2018: 227).

Using the examples of Austria and Greece, Ellinas (2010) has shown that many centre-right parties in Europe started incorporating issues related to national identity into their party programmes from the early 1980s onwards. In an attempt to address public demand for cultural protectionism, mainstream parties pushed issues pertaining to national identity into the public sphere. This set in motion a process of intense political competition along a new political axis, thereby extending the political space rightward and shifting the boundaries of acceptable political discourse and behaviour: ‘This shift in the contours of legitimate political discussion allows Far Rightists to enter the mainstream debate, gain media attention, and publicize their views’ (Ellinas 2010: 28). This strategy can become an electoral liability for centre-right parties if they cannot keep the nationalist card on the table: ‘A number of reasons compel major parties – especially when they are in government – to retract the nationalist card, moderating the initial positions on national identity issues’ (Ellinas 2010: 29). The sequencing of events is crucial here; when mainstream parties retract the nationalist card *after* having politicised the

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<sup>42</sup> In this case, convergence does not refer to mainstream parties inclining toward each other but to mainstream parties cosying up to the populist radical right.

issue, they risk losing voters because they inadvertently created favourable opportunity structures for far-right parties to enter the political arena (see also Bornschier 2012; Ignazi 2003).

In their ‘purest’ form, accommodative strategies might involve *collaborating* with right-wing populist parties, for instance by forming a coalition with them, or by supporting their proposed policies (Downs 2001: 27-8). Bale (2003) has shown that, far from being innocent bystanders, mainstream parties have, at times, purposefully engineered political opportunities for right-wing populist challengers to weaken mainstream competitors. In some (rare) cases, mainstream parties have deliberately opted to strengthen the position of the populist radical right as a way of weakening mainstream contenders. For instance, during the 1986 French parliamentary elections, Socialist President François Mitterrand introduced a proportional electoral system to weaken the centre-right by aiming to bolster support for the *Front National* (Art 2006: 146; Mudde 2007: 235).

As shown below, there is mixed evidence for the effectiveness of disengagement and engagement strategies. It makes little sense, however, to assess the effects of mainstream party behaviour in isolation. Prior to discussing the potential implications of the various strategies, the following section theorises the ways in which the media can choose to deal with right-wing populist parties.

### **2.3.2. The Media**

Research has shown that media coverage can influence election results (e.g. Azrout et al. 2012; Hopmann et al. 2010; van Spanje & de Vreese 2014). It is also widely acknowledged that the media are central to understanding the success of populist parties (e.g. Eatwell 2003; Kriesi 2014: 265; Norris 2005: 270). Indeed, since the turn of the twenty-first century, there is a growing consensus in the literature that the ‘mediatisation of politics’ has contributed to the rise of populism (Kübler & Kriesi 2017).<sup>43</sup> Political competition increasingly consists of a battle over media attention that is acted out on a public stage, with the electorate taking on the role of an audience in a theatre (Koopmans & Muis 2009: 644).

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<sup>43</sup> This thesis does not consider the role of ‘new media’. Although social media platforms may be more receptive to populism (Gerbaudo 2018), it is doubtful whether they can match the effects of the traditional media (Ellinas 2018: 277; Esser et al. 2017: 377). The role of social media is discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

While several studies have focused specifically on the role of the media in the electoral success and failure of the populist radical right (e.g. Aalberg et al. 2017; Bos et al. 2011; Ellinas 2010), the exact relationship between the media and right-wing populist parties remains relatively obscure and hence poorly understood.<sup>44</sup> This section, therefore, seeks to further investigate the relationship between the populist radical right and the media by theorising the various ways in which journalists and editors might deal with right-wing populist parties (see also de Jonge 2019). Just like mainstream parties, media practitioners can also choose between (1) disengagement and (2) engagement strategies.<sup>45</sup>

### *Disengagement Strategies*

First, media practitioners can opt to isolate right-wing populist parties. In its ‘purest’ form, this disengagement strategy involves totally disregarding far-right movements and parties by ‘silencing them to death’. As Mudde (2007: 252) has noted, however, there are virtually no countries where right-wing populist parties are truly ignored by the media. Instead, journalists may choose to ostracise or demarcate them by treating them as pariahs (see Minkenberg 2001). For instance, media outlets can deny access to politicians who are associated with the populist radical right by means of a *cordon sanitaire médiatique*. The aim of a media cordon is not to ignore certain parties (and the issues they bring up) but to isolate them (Damen 2001). In other words, demarcation implies ‘differential treatment’ of right-wing populist parties.

### *Engagement Strategies*

Second, media practitioners might choose to engage with right-wing populist parties. They may do so by assuming an adversarial or confrontational stance vis-à-vis right-wing populist parties by being overtly critical towards them. This strategy is similar to the demarcation approach described above; however, it differs in the sense that right-wing populist parties are not treated as pariahs. Instead, they are considered ‘normal’ political contenders; hence, they are not excluded from

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<sup>44</sup> Some scholars have portrayed the media (implicitly or explicitly) as a demand-side variable (e.g. Walgrave & De Swert 2004), while others see them as an (external) supply-side factor (e.g. Eatwell 2003; Mudde 2007). It is likely, however, that the media interact with both voter demand and party supply (see Ellinas 2018) – hence, they are discussed here.

<sup>45</sup> Just like mainstream party responses, media strategies are also to be understood as ‘ideal types’; empirically, they are difficult to distinguish them from one another.

participating in the political process. For instance, media practitioners may seek to distance themselves from the populist radical right by demonising or stigmatising them. They may also try to ‘expose’ them by showing their ‘true face’, or they can try to delegitimise their policies through unfavourable news coverage of these parties and/or their leaders.

Third, journalists can opt for a more accommodative strategy by offering a platform to spread their views. In its ‘purest’ form, this strategy implies granting direct, unmediated access to right-wing populist parties. In practice, it is often much subtler; for example, media practitioners might incorporate some of their rhetoric in their news coverage (i.e. populism by the media) by seeking to pay attention to the ‘silent majority’, or focus extensively on issues that are typically ‘owned’ by right-wing populist parties (i.e. populism through the media), notably issues pertaining to national identity immigration as well as crime-related topics (Esser et al. 2017).

More generally, the media can set the public agenda by addressing issues and making them (politically) salient (McCombs & Shaw 1972). The media can also play an instrumental role in exacerbating political dissatisfaction and cultural cleavages, for instance by amplifying voters’ fears about immigration. In the aftermath of 9/11, for example, the British media played a key role in perpetuating the idea that asylum seekers in general, and Muslim immigrants in particular, were somehow linked to terrorist networks (Eatwell 2003). In particular, the ways in which the (tabloid) media have framed immigration has helped legitimise xenophobic appeals of the populist radical right (Ellinas 2018: 271). Even if the news coverage of right-wing populist parties is highly negative (which often is the case), the media may simultaneously push ‘the (salience of) key issues of the populist radical right’ (Mudde 2007: 253), which, in turn, may help to foster demand for right-wing populist parties.

Thus, the media can play an instrumental role in rallying voters’ support and disseminating the populist message, which can contribute to legitimising their cause or ‘remove the stigma of extremism’ (Ellinas 2018: 273) by making them appear more socially acceptable. Particularly in the earlier phases of a party’s development,

the media can be an important asset in pursuit of national visibility. According to Ellinas (2010: 3),

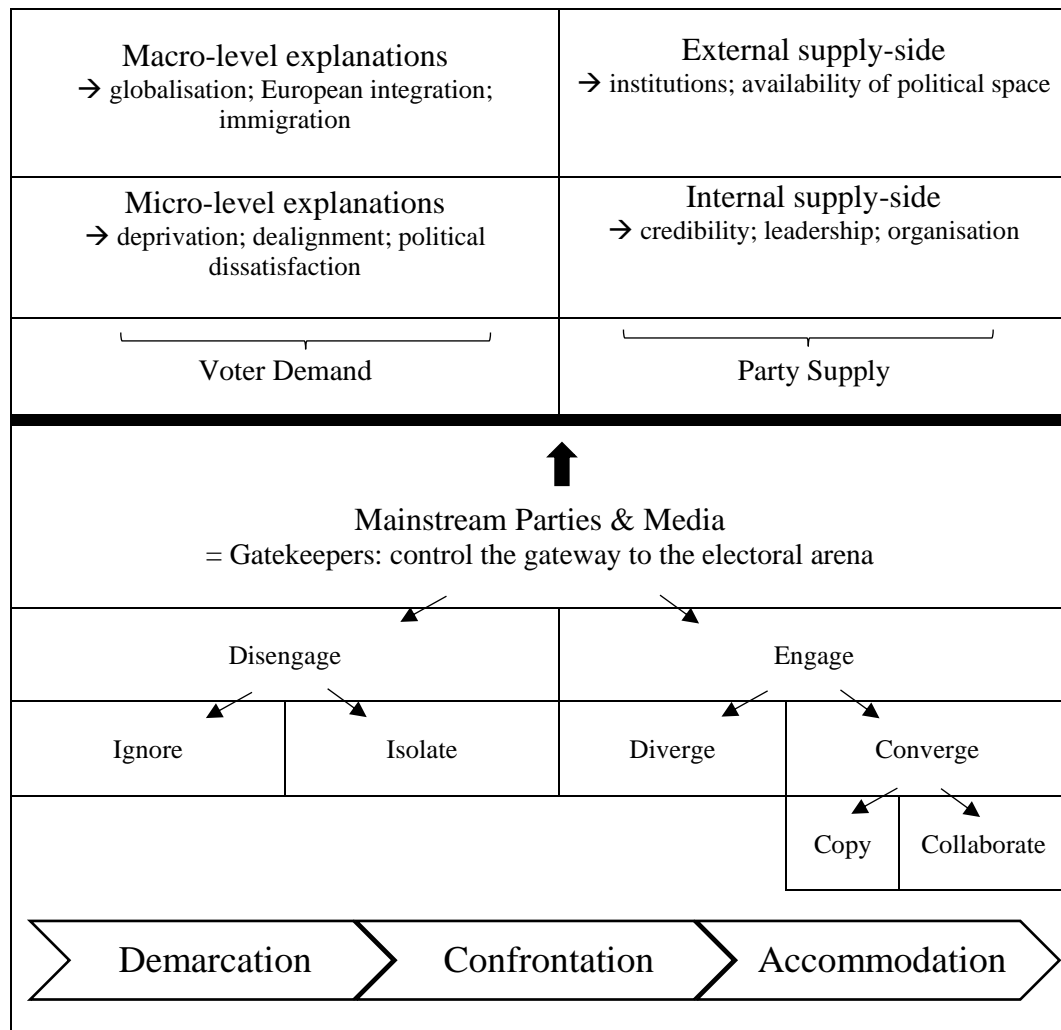
[t]he media can help small parties communicate their messages to much broader audiences than their organizational or financial resources would otherwise allow. Moreover, they can confer legitimacy and authority to political newcomers, and they can dispel voter doubts about their electoral viability. In this sense, the media control the gateway to the electoral market.

In light of these factors, national media landscapes can either be favourable or unfavourable to the electoral success of right-wing populist parties. Much like with political parties, the choices of media practitioners depend on the organisational and institutional context in which they operate (see Heinze 2018). As such, the choices behind the various media strategies are likely to be influenced by a broad range of factors, including the structure of the media system as well as political affiliations, ethical standards, and commercial interests of the different actors that make up the media landscape (e.g. news organizations, journalists, editors, and so on) (Ellinas 2010: 211).

#### 2.4. Theoretical Expectations

This chapter has provided a working definition of right-wing populist parties and highlighted various demand- and supply-side factors that help explain their electoral success. The chapter has also highlighted the central role of mainstream parties and the media; their reactions help determine the opportunity structures available to right-wing populist parties (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Theoretical Framework: The Success of Right-Wing Populist Parties



There is mixed evidence for the *effects* of these responses on the success and failure of right-wing populist parties. For instance, by ignoring right-wing populist parties and/or the issues they raise, mainstream parties and media practitioners avoid legitimising them. While this response allows parties to ‘keep their hands clean’, it also risks confirming the populist claim that the elites are unresponsive to the concerns of ‘the people’, thereby adding fuel to the populist fire (Downs 2001: 26). Similarly, when the media consistently seek to delegitimise the populist radical right, they risk confirming their ‘underdog’ position (see Esser et al. 2017: 266).

There is also mixed evidence for the effects of co-optation and collaboration attempts (Bale et al. 2010). While accommodative strategies can have the

unintended effect of boosting and/or validating the populist radical right, they may rather have a dampening effect (e.g. Ivarsflaten 2003; Meguid 2008). Indeed, accommodative strategies can have a moderating effect by forcing the populist radical right to tone down their rhetoric (Downs 2001: 38). This is what Heinisch (2003: 101) has called the ‘filtration effect’. In addition, by accommodating right-wing populist contenders, centre-right parties may succeed in seizing some of their electoral support, particularly if the populist challenger has acted as a junior coalition partner. According to the so-called ‘black-widow-effect’, when collaboration is not mutually beneficial, it may lead ‘to unceremonious cannibalisation of a junior partner swiftly seen to have outlived its usefulness’ (Bale 2003: 85).

Evidence put forward by van Spanje and de Graaf (2018) indicates that engagement strategies are most effective when combined with non-engagement strategies. Drawing on evidence from nearly 300 election results in 28 Western European countries from 1944 to 2011, the authors show that copying (or ‘parroting’) a challenger party can work (i.e. it can decrease that party’s support), but *only* if that party is also systematically isolated (see also van Spanje 2018).<sup>46</sup> This suggests that combining different strategies might be key to their overall effectiveness.

It is also likely that different responses work for different types of mainstream parties. In other words, while some strategies may prove effective for centre-right parties in the sense that it can help them to win (back) voters from the populist radical right, they may be detrimental to centre-left parties. For instance, Bale et al. (2010: 413) have observed that a ‘principled’ disengagement strategy (i.e. disregard and isolation) is particularly risky for social democratic parties because it implies that they openly advocate ‘tolerance of migration and multiculturalism in the face of contemporary, media-fuelled, concerns about terrorism, crime, welfare abuse and dependency.’ At the same time, while accommodative strategies (i.e. co-optation and collaboration) may benefit centre-right parties, they can be particularly risky for centre-left parties because by cosying up to the populist radical right, they are more likely to alienate their traditional electorates. Indeed, co-optation can undermine the coherence of social democratic party programmes, which may harm

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<sup>46</sup> The article focuses on the effects of copying radical right *as well as* radical left challengers.

their credibility (Bale et al. 2013). This suggests that a confrontational or adversarial stance is the only credible option for centre-left parties.

Finally, it seems plausible that whether mainstream party strategies work may depend on whether or not they are used *in combination* with media strategies. Specifically, the success of disengagement strategies seems to hinge on both the timing (i.e. *when* the cordon is initiated) and the rigidity of the *cordon sanitaire*. It appears that sequencing is key: for a cordon to be effective, it needs to be set up *prior* to the rise of a radical right party (Art 2011: 47; see also Heinze 2018). A cordon may be less effective when instituted *after* the electoral breakthrough of a right-wing populist contender. It is also less likely to be effective when it is set up at a time of political upheaval (e.g. scandals, crises, high political dissatisfaction); in other words, when a cordon is initiated at a time when there is a particularly high demand for right-wing populist tendencies, it may reinforce the ‘underdog’ position of such parties, which could fuel demand for their existence.

The effectiveness of the cordon also depends on how solid it is. When a cordon is truly ‘watertight’ in the sense that the media universally deny access to right-wing populist parties and mainstream parties clearly rule out any sort of cooperation with the populist radical right, it is likely to be effective. Scholars have shown that right-wing populist parties are less likely to succeed where public debates in the media take an adversarial stance. For instance, David Art (2006) has demonstrated how public debates in Austria provided a favourable environment for the resurgence of the far right, whereas Germany’s public sphere appeared more hostile to right-wing populism due to the country’s legacy of authoritarianism. In addition, it can prevent the recruitment of qualified personnel (Art 2011: 46). However, when a cordon is permissive (i.e. allowing some possibility for cooperation with radical right actors because they are not universally treated as pariahs), it is less likely to be effective, as ‘even small cracks in the *cordon sanitaire* can have large consequences’ (Art 2011: 44). Once a right-wing populist challenger has gained ‘issue ownership’ of cultural issues (notably immigration), disengagement as well as co-optation become increasingly difficult (Ellinas 2010). Thus, as mentioned earlier, in particular the *initial* reaction of mainstream parties to populist challengers seems to be crucial, for it appears that once mainstream parties choose to engage with the populist

radical right, this strategy ‘cannot easily be reversed’ (Heinze 2018: 305; see also Bornschier 2018: 228).

Based on these observations, we can formulate two general theoretical expectations: First, when the public sphere is universally hostile to the emergence of right-wing populist parties – in other words, when mainstream parties and the media uniformly and consistently demarcate right-wing populist parties *as soon as* they appear – these parties are unlikely to succeed electorally. Second, when mainstream parties and the media become receptive to the messages of the populist radical right by cooperating with them and/or politicising the issues that are traditionally ‘owned’ by these parties, right-wing populist parties are more likely to enter the electoral arena and succeed. This is particularly the case when (1) centre-right parties first politicise issues pertaining to immigration and national identity to attract new voters, but then ‘retreat’ by converging back to the centre; (2) when centre-left parties either ignore or accommodate the issues brought up by the populist radical right; and (3) when the media become receptive and/or contribute to spreading the populist message.

Prior to analysing the role of mainstream parties and the media in the Benelux countries, the following chapter provides relevant background information on the history of the far right in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Drawing on existing demand- and supply-side explanations, the chapter shows that the conventional framework is helpful but insufficient to fully understand the variation in the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties in the Benelux.

### **Chapter 3: History of the Populist Radical Right in the Benelux**

The Benelux countries have all had some experience with right-wing populist parties and movements. Drawing on primary and secondary sources, this chapter traces the history of the far right in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Conceptually, the chapter applies the traditional demand- and supply-side framework to explain variations in the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties, thereby demonstrating the strengths and limitations of this model.

As shown below, there is a breeding ground for right-wing populist parties throughout the Benelux region. Turning to the supply side, it appears that the supply of populist radical right parties has been stronger in the Netherlands and Flanders than in Wallonia and Luxembourg. In the Netherlands, the success of populist radical right movements can, to a large extent, be attributed to the leadership and personae of Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders. In Flanders, far-right movements have been able to draw on an extensive support network rooted in the Flemish independence movement. However, demand- and supply-side explanations cannot fully account for the timing of the electoral breakthrough of right-wing populist parties in Flanders and the Netherlands. After all, the Flemish Interest Party was able to draw on pre-existing resources through the Flemish movement long before its electoral breakthrough. Similarly, Pim Fortuyn succeeded in mobilising broad electoral support despite the lack of a strong, nationalist subculture. The conclusion of this chapter therefore points to the importance of contextual factors.

Before proceeding, one caveat is in order. While this thesis primarily seeks to explain political developments of the twenty-first century, this chapter deliberately opts for a broader timespan; after all, many of the current features of the political landscape are conditioned by past developments and can only be fully understood in that context. As Art (2008: 437) has noted, by ‘ignoring historical legacies, or treating them as a residual variable, one misses the underlying causes of the radical right’s success and failure.’ While a historical perspective is likely to be broad in scope, it enables us to recount the success and failure of the populist radical right by taking into account its full complexity. Moreover, understanding why far-right movements have failed in the past can provide useful insights into contemporary developments.

### 3.1. The Netherlands

Once known for its social tolerance, the Netherlands long seemed immune to far-right tendencies (Daalder 1966: 234). The historic weakness of the Dutch far right has been widely recognised by scholars. For instance, Paul Lucardie (1998: 111) remarked that '[a]s a nation of sailors and merchants, the Netherlands does not have a strong tradition of xenophobic nationalism. Extreme right-wing parties have always been relatively weak, lacking a strong ideological tradition as well as a solid social base.' Writing at the turn of the twenty-first century, Mudde and van Holsteyn (2000: 159) observed that, '[t]he Dutch extreme right can be considered [...] one of the least successful representatives of the current West European extreme right.' In a similar vein, the Dutch historian Henk te Velde (2010: 245) noted the following:

Politics in the Netherlands has no populist tradition. There have been more populists than some people may think, but it always involved short-term movements or phases in the development of political groups. There is no continuous line that connects all those populists with one another. That is partly why Dutch politics is still so inconvenienced by populism: no has every really learned how to deal with it.

Given the impressive rise of the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) and Geert Wilders's Freedom Party (PVV) in the first decade of the twenty-first century, 'it is remarkable that contemporary Dutch radical right parties in fact do not have deep and long historical roots' (van Holsteyn 2018a: 479). Indeed, until the early 2000s, the Netherlands formed a noteworthy exception with regards to the success of populist radical right movements; while far-right challengers had started to make noteworthy electoral gains in neighbouring Flanders, they long failed to garner broad public support in the Netherlands.

The weakness of far-right parties became evident in the interwar period, when a number of fascist movements, such as the National Socialist Movement (*Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* or NSB), emerged but failed to gain ground (Ignazi 2003: 162). Following the German invasion, the NSB was the only political party legally permitted in the Netherlands (Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000: 145). During WWII, the Dutch government in exile issued a decree to ban all parties and organisations with any links to the national-socialist party that had collaborated with the Germans (Mudde 2000: 117; van Holsteyn 2018a: 480). As a result, in the immediate

aftermath of the war, NSB collaborators were purged and fascist movements were outlawed (Ignazi 2003: 162). Nevertheless, attempts to rebuild right-wing extremist movements were not completely prevented (Mudde 2000: 117); by the 1950s, extreme right groupings started to form. However, they never managed to gain ground and failed to break through electorally.

In the following decade, the Netherlands witnessed the creation of several populist (or ‘semi-populist’) groupings, notably the Poujadist-oriented Farmers’ Party (*Boerenpartij* or BP) (Daalder 1966: 234; Lucardie & Voerman 2012: 27-8). In the 1967 general elections, the BP won nearly five percent of the popular vote, which translated into seven of the 150 parliamentary seats in the *Tweede Kamer* (i.e. the Dutch House of Representatives – literally ‘Second Chamber’). While the BP primarily backed agrarian interests, it attracted numerous far-right activists, including some former NSB collaborators, which harmed the party’s image. The different ideological strands within the BP gave rise to infighting, which led to splintering and the party’s eventual dissolution in the early 1980s (Ignazi 2003: 163).

It was not until the early 1970s that the Dutch extreme right was able to make a comeback with the founding of the *Nederlandse Volksunie* (Union of the Dutch people or NVU) (Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000: 146). The NVU promoted an openly racist and ethnocentric agenda. Specifically, it aimed at expelling ethnically diverse people and unifying all Dutch speakers in a ‘Great Dutch State’ (Ignazi 2003: 164). Over the years, the NVU moved further towards the right by adopting a national-socialist vision (Lucardie & Voerman 2012: 30). The progressive radicalization of the NVU caused more ‘moderate’ party members to split. In 1980, two former NVU members established the misnamed *Centrumpartij* (CP or Centre Party) (van Donselaar 1993: 96).

The CP was the first of several so-called ‘extremist centre parties’ (Lucardie 1998). These parties formed part of what would become known as the ‘centre movement’ (*centrumstroming*), an umbrella term used to describe the CP and its numerous successor parties (Mudde 2000: 120). While its name was intended to underscore the CP’s moderate political outlook, some party members eventually proved to have a radical, if not extremist agenda. Initially, the CP sought to distance itself from the

NVU's extremist and blatantly racist views by advocating the 'preservation of Dutch culture' (Ignazi 2003: 164) but then proceeded to position itself against non-European immigrants, who were blamed for all societal ills, including unemployment, crime and environmental issues. The party soon attracted the interest of Hans Janmaat, who was to become a key figure in the Dutch far-right scene in the following decades.

Janmaat had an eclectic history of short-lived and failed professional and political careers (see van Holsteyn 1998). A political scientist by training, he joined the CP in May 1980 and led the party list in the 1982 general elections, in which he was able to win one seat in the *Tweede Kamer* by securing 0.8 percent of the vote. Despite the wave of countermobilization from the left, support for the CP continued to grow (Ignazi 2003: 164). However, the party was plagued by continuous infighting and personal rivalries. In October 1984, Janmaat was expelled by the party leadership because his views were deemed 'too moderate', but he refused to give up his seat in the *Tweede Kamer* (Lucardie 1998: 113; Mudde 2000: 121). Weeks later, some of Janmaat's followers proceeded to form the Centre Democrats (*Centrumdemocraten* or CD), which in December 1984, Janmaat himself joined.

Devoid of its figurehead, the CP suffered a particularly poor performance, garnering just 0.4 percent of the vote in the 1986 general election (Ignazi 2003: 165). The election result was followed by haemorrhaging membership and infighting, which eventually led to the CP's collapse in the summer of 1986. Just one week later, the party was resurrected under the name of the Centre Party'86 (*Centrumpartij '86* or CP'86). Thus, by the late 1980s, two small fringe parties, the CP'86 and Janmaat's CD, were competing over the legacy of the CP (Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000: 147).<sup>47</sup>

Because of his experience and reputation, Janmaat soon acquired a lead role in the newly founded CD (Mudde 2000: 123). Initially, it seemed the CD was doomed to

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<sup>47</sup> Janmaat's CD was considered one of the earliest manifestations of the 'third wave' of extreme right-wing parties in Europe (Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000; see also von Beyme 1988: 10). While the CD was not overtly racist, it was clearly xenophobic and anti-immigrant (Lucardie & Voerman 2012: 31-2). The party's ideology has been described as a 'populist form of nationalism', which focused on the preservation of Dutch cultural identity and the promotion of national solidarity (Lucardie 1998: 117). Unlike its predecessors, the CD promoted a civic kind of nationalism rather than an ethnic one; in other words, the party did not define the boundaries of the nationhood by using ethnic criteria (Mudde 2000: 131).

rapid oblivion as it only managed to win 0.1 percent of the vote in the 1986 general election (Mudde 2000: 123). In the subsequent elections in 1989, however, the CD won back its parliamentary seat (which was once again taken by Janmaat) after garnering 0.9 percent of the vote (Ignazi 2003: 166).<sup>48</sup>

In the early 1990s, the CD was moderately successful in local elections, notably in the larger cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague (Ignazi 2003: 166). In light of these results, there was reason to believe that the far right would perform well in the 1994 general election. However, these expectations were unfounded; the CD was only able to secure three parliamentary seats (and 2.5 percent of the vote), while the CP'86 failed to win a single seat (Ignazi 2003:167). This result was the beginning of a downward spiral. In the June 1994 European elections, the Dutch far right was all but annihilated; the CD won just 1 percent of the vote, while CP'86 did not even run. Following this defeat, most local representatives and party members decided to quit the CD (Mudde & van Hosteyn 1994). The 1998 general elections marked the provisional collapse of the Dutch far right. Alterations in the electoral rules made it more difficult for parties to collect signatures and form electoral lists. The CD was only able to win 0.6 percent of the vote, as a result of which all three CD MPs lost their seats in the *Tweede Kamer* (Ignazi 2003: 167). This marked the beginning of the end for the misnamed 'centre movement.'

While far-right parties were in decline, populist groupings had been gaining momentum. In the 1990s, populist movements managed to secure a strong foothold in local politics with the emergence of small parties that were formed as a way of protesting against the rising levels of professionalization in municipal politics (Lucardie 2008: 154). These movements stood up against large-scale urban redevelopment projects and advocated the preservation of the 'Dutch quality life' by introducing a new term, *leefbaarheid*, which roughly translates into 'liveability'. The new movement adopted names such as '*Leefbaar Rotterdam*', '*Leefbaar Hilversum*' or '*Leefbaar Utrecht*' (Lucardie & Voerman 2012: 71-8). In 1999, the Hilversum and Utrecht chapters decided to join forces to create a national party called '*Leefbaar Nederland*' (Liveable Netherlands or LN). In June 2001, the party

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<sup>48</sup> The party's 'comeback' has been attributed to widespread media attention, which in turn derived from controversies sparked by anti-fascist attacks against Janmaat (Mudde 2000: 123-4).

held its first party congress, and in November that same year a new leader was elected: Pim Fortuyn (Lucardie 2008: 154).

Wihelmus 'Pim' Fortuyn was born in 1948 into a lower middle-class Catholic family (Lucardie & Voerman 2012: 92). As a sociology student, he was interested in Marxism but soon became disillusioned with socialism, which prompted him to leave the Labour Party (PvdA) in 1989. In the 1990s, Fortuyn developed a reputation as a very outspoken and eloquent public speaker and columnist. A maverick politician, he was fiercely critical of the incumbent 'purple' government and held very outspoken views on immigration and immigrant integration.<sup>49</sup> He was particularly critical of multiculturalism and (Muslim) immigration, which he considered a threat to the Dutch liberal way of life. Fortuyn was provocative, flamboyant, openly gay and a staunch defender of freedom of speech. His lifestyle was known to be extremely lavish (see van Holsteyn & Irwin 2003: 44). Above all, he was very charismatic (Lucardie 2008: 157).

In February 2002 (just three months before the general elections), Fortuyn was expelled from his party, *Leefbaar Nederland*, for making provocative statements in a *Volkskrant* interview, in which he argued that 'Islam is a backward culture' (Lucardie & Voerman 2012: 84; see also Wansink 2004: 17-24). His fierce criticism of multiculturalism and his hard line on the integration of Muslim immigrants contributed to both his break with LN and his growing popularity in urban areas (Lucardie 2008: 159). After being ousted by LN, Fortuyn proceeded to form his own party: the 'List Pim Fortuyn' (*Lijst Pim Fortuyn* or LPF). With the departure of its strongman leader, *Leefbaar Nederland* soon lost its relevance, while support for the LPF quickly rose in the polls (van Kessel 2015: 102).

Given Fortuyn's nativist, authoritarian and populist views, there is broad agreement in the literature that the LPF qualifies as a populist radical right party (see, for example, van Holsteyn 2018a: 483; van Kessel 2015: 102). Unlike Janmaat, however, Fortuyn could hardly be considered a right-wing extremist (Lucardie 2008: 160); rather, his politics are best described as a somewhat eclectic mixture of

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<sup>49</sup> The government was called 'purple' because it was composed of two 'blue' liberal parties (VVD and D66) and the 'red' Social Democrats (PvdA).

liberalism, nationalism, communitarianism and populism (Lucardie 2008: 158; see also Oudenampsen 2018: 89).

In the run-up to the 2002 general election, opinion polls predicted a bright future for Fortuyn. However, on 6 May 2002 (just nine days before the general election), Fortuyn was shot dead on the street by an animal rights activist. Despite (and partly because of) his murder, the newly founded LPF went on to win 26 seats in the *Tweede Kamer* (with 17 percent of vote), ‘by far [the] most impressive results ever recorded by a new party at national elections’ (van Holsteyn & Irwin 2003: 42). As some scholars have noted, the LPF managed to shake ‘the very foundations of the Dutch political system to the extent that politicians and observers began speaking of the “new politics”’ (van Holsteyn et al. 2003: 71). As the second biggest party, the LPF went on to join a coalition government with the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Liberal Party (VVD). Having lost its leader, however, the LPF quickly succumbed to infighting. After just 87 days, the government resigned, and new elections were scheduled for January 2003. The LPF all but imploded; support for the party fell to 5.7 percent, which translated to a loss of 18 seats (down to just 8 seats). By the 2006 elections, the LPF had disappeared, thereby making room for a new and more durable right-wing populist contender: Geert Wilders’s Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid* or PVV).<sup>50</sup>

Like Fortuyn, Wilders was born into a Catholic family, in 1963. While he often presents himself as a ‘political outsider’, he is, in fact, best described as a career politician. As Vossen (2011: 181) has pointed out, Wilders has worked in the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* for most of his adult life: in 1990, at the age of twenty-seven, he started working as a parliamentary assistant and speechwriter for the liberal VVD. In 1997, he was elected as a VVD representative onto the City Council of Utrecht, and in the 1998 general election he entered the *Tweede Kamer* (Lucardie & Voerman 2012: 152). Over the course of the years, Wilders grew increasingly critical of Islam, and in 2004, he broke with the VVD following a clash over Turkey’s EU membership (Lucardie & Voerman 2012: 155-6; see also Vossen 2013). As he refused to give up his parliamentary seat, Wilders formed a one-man

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<sup>50</sup> The LPF was officially dissolved in 2008 (de Lange & Art 2011: 1234).

fraction called the Wilders Group (*Groep Wilders*). In February 2006, he founded the PVV.

Over the years, Wilders's ideology shifted from neoconservatism towards right-wing populism (Vossen 2011). In comparison to his predecessors, Wilders appealed more explicitly to the 'ordinary people' and adopted a more radical stance against Islam (ibid). For instance, Wilders often portrays Islam as a totalitarian political ideology rather than a religion. In line with this way of thinking, in the run-up to the 2017 general election, the PVV advocated the closure of all mosques and Islamic schools as well as the preventive incarceration of radical Muslims (PVV 2017). Given the party's nativist, authoritarian and populist outlook, the PVV is a textbook right-wing populist party.

Unlike the LPF, Wilders's PVV managed to become a durable force in Dutch politics (see de Lange & Art 2011). In the 2006 general election, the PVV won just under 6 percent of the popular vote. However, in 2010 the PVV became the third biggest party by winning 24 seats with 15.4 percent of the vote (van Kessel 2015: 60). When early elections were called in 2012, support for the PVV declined to 10.1 percent; however, the party was able to recover, coming in second after winning 13.1 percent of the vote (or 20 seats) in 2017.

*Table 2 – Far-Right Parties in Dutch General Elections (1981-2017)*

	Extreme Right Parties			Populist Radical Right Parties	
	<i>CP</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>CP'86</i>	<i>LPF</i>	<i>PVV</i>
1981	0.14	-	-	-	-
1982	0.83	-	-	-	-
1986	0.4	0.13	-		
1989	-	0.92	-	-	-
1994	-	2.46	0.36	-	-
1998	-	0.61	-	-	-
2002	-	-	-	17.0	-
2003	-	-	-	5.7	-
2006	-	-	-	0.2	5.86
2010	-	-	-	-	15.45
2012	-	-	-	-	10.08
2017	-	-	-	-	13.1

Source: Dutch Electoral Council (*Kiesraad* 2019)

Notes: - = party did not compete.

Thus, while populist radical right movements were unable to garner broad popular support in the Netherlands in the twentieth century, they have become an important player in Dutch politics in the twenty-first century. How can we account for the stunning rise of right-wing populist movements in the Netherlands since the turn of the century? This question has been addressed extensively in the scholarly literature. In the following paragraphs, I draw on demand- and supply-side factors to explain the initial failure of the ‘centre movement’ and the subsequent success of the LPF and the PVV. As shown below, while the conventional framework provides a useful starting point, it cannot fully explain the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties in the Netherlands.

### **3.1.1. Demand-Side Explanations**

As several scholars have observed, there was clearly (some) demand for the populist radical right in the Netherlands before the turn of the twenty-first century (see, for example, Husbands 1992a; Ignazi 2003; Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000). Although levels of political trust were quite high at the time, voter turnout was declining while political cynicism was on the rise (Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000: 159-60). Perhaps more importantly, as shown below, xenophobic tendencies and concerns over immigration were clearly present in the late 1980s.

The Dutch have traditionally been very hospitable towards immigrants, and foreign residents acquired voting rights in local elections as early as 1986 (Ignazi 2003: 169).<sup>51</sup> However, as demonstrated by Ignazi (2003: 170), there was a small but noticeable shift in public opinion in the late 1980s and early 1990s; various surveys revealed that many Dutch nationals harboured ‘an uncaring or strongly hostile attitude’ towards foreigners (ibid). For instance, one study (based on a representative sample of Dutch citizens) found that nearly 43 percent of the respondents agreed that ‘foreigners who live in the Netherlands should take on Dutch customs’ (Scheepers et al. 1989: 302). Another study found that half of the respondents were in favour of financially supporting the repatriation of immigrants to their home countries, while 60 percent did not see the benefit of their presence in the Netherlands (quoted in Husbands 1992a: 98). This public concern over

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<sup>51</sup> This was well before the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which introduced the concept of European citizenship and thereby the right to vote and stand for municipal (and European) elections in accordance with certain residence requirements.

immigration suggests that there was, in fact, a breeding ground for the populist radical right, albeit a slightly less favourable one than in some other Western European countries (Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000: 161). Thus, while there was clearly some demand, ‘no party had the relevant “attractive product” available’ (van Holsteyn 2018a: 491).

Demand for the populist radical right has also been tied to partisan dealignment (i.e. the weakening of traditional linkages and related transformations of social structures), which can be seen as a precondition for its emergence (Bornschier 2018: 224). From the early 1900s until the mid-1960s, the Dutch system was stable, and the electorate tended to vote along traditional social and religious lines (see Lijphart 1975). In other words, there were close ties between political elites and the masses through networks of ideological organisations (or subcultures), also known as ‘pillars’ (*zuilen*). For instance, religious voters tended to vote for a Christian democratic party, whereas working-class voters would opt for the Labour Party. Since voters were loyal to the pillar to which they belonged, election outcomes were traditionally very stable and predictable, making the Netherlands a ‘prototype of a “frozen” party system’ (Aarts & Thomassen 2008: 203).

From the 1960s onwards, secularisation and individualisation contributed to the demise of the pillar structure, a process known as ‘depillarisation’ (or *ontzuiling*). While these processes have affected most countries in the modern world, they ‘had a particular impact in the Netherlands’ (Lucardie 2008: 152). Specifically, the progressive individualisation and secularisation of society contributed to the erosion of the dividing lines between the pillars, which brought about a ‘thawing’ of the party system. The crumbling of the pillar structure generated a large number of free-floating voters; as they were ‘liberated’ from traditional party loyalties, they became ‘available’ to vote for new parties – initially the liberal D66 and Greens (*GroenLinks*) on the left, and the CP/CD on the right (Ignazi 2003: 169). By the turn of the twenty-first century, the Dutch party system had become increasingly fragmented and volatile (Lucardie 2008: 153; Mair 2008). The demise of the ‘pillarisation’ of Dutch society is often considered a long-term cause of the rise of the populist radical right in the Netherlands (e.g. Ignazi 2003: 169; van Holsteyn & Irwin 2003: 47-8; van Kessel 2015: 108).

Demand-side explanations are not particularly useful, however, when seeking to account for the sudden electoral success of the LPF and, more recently, the PVV; in other words, demand-side explanations are ill-suited to account for the ‘timing’ of the rise of these parties. After all, depillarisation had already started in the 1960s. More importantly, voter demand in the Netherlands did not change drastically in the early 2000s (e.g. Pellikaan et al. 2007; van Holsteyn et al. 2003; van Kessel 2013). First, as Bovens and Wille (2008) have shown, levels of political trust and satisfaction with the functioning of democracy remained very high towards the turn of the twenty-first century. Indeed, in 1998, about 80 percent of the population said they were (very) satisfied with the government – a number that is only rivalled by countries like North Korea or Cuba (Bovens & Wille 2008: 32). From 2002 onwards, these numbers started to drop, and by 2004, only 49 percent of the population was satisfied with the government (ibid). However, as the authors point out, this trend was also present in other European countries and cannot therefore on its own account for the spectacular breakthrough of Pim Fortuyn. While it is not entirely clear what prompted this decline in public trust (see Bovens & Wille 2008: 38), it is unlikely that this dip *caused* the rise of the LPF since it occurred mainly *after* the murder of Fortuyn. Instead, it is conceivable that Fortuyn’s outspoken criticisms and his subsequent violent death triggered a rapid decline in levels of trust. Furthermore, despite this noticeable decline, levels of trust in the Netherlands remained well above the EU average (Bovens & Wille 2008: 40). In addition, after 2004, levels of trust and satisfaction recovered and nearly reached the record-high figures of the 1990s. This means that they cannot explain the success of Geert Wilders’s PVV (van Kessel 2015: 108).

Second, contrary to popular belief, there was no noticeably rightwards shift among Dutch voters in the run-up to the electoral breakthrough of Pim Fortuyn. Using data based on the self-placement of voters from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study, van Holsteyn et al. (2003: 73) have shown that there was hardly any movement in the electorate in terms of the left and right-wing positions between 1994 and 2002. Specifically, underlying attitudes and opinions of voters vis-à-vis various topics, including immigration did not change significantly. In a similar vein, Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010: 270) have shown that there were no major changes in citizens’ preferences on ethnic immigration policy between 1994 and 2006; indeed,

only very small shifts were noticeable. In fact, as indicated earlier, scepticism towards immigration gained salience in the late 1980s, suggesting that there had long been potential for right-wing support in the Netherlands (van Holsteyn et al. 2003: 75; see also Adriaansen et al. 2005). In the face of this existing ‘breeding ground’, demand-side explanations are not particularly helpful when seeking to understand the electoral trajectories of the Dutch far right. Instead, the failure of the ‘centre movement’ and the subsequent success LPF and PVV can largely be attributed to external and internal supply-side explanations.

### **3.1.2. Supply-Side Explanations**

#### *The External Supply Side*

External supply-side arguments only partially help to explain the initial failure and subsequent breakthrough of the Dutch far right. While there are no pre-existing far-right networks to draw on, political opportunity structures in the Netherlands generally favour the formation of new parties.

The Dutch far right was unable to draw upon an extant nationalist subculture. As Lucardie (1998: 122) has pointed out, ‘the Netherlands lack a strong historical tradition of nationalism or right-wing extremism’, and ‘tolerance remains a characteristic of this mercantile nation, even if it has been declining since 1980.’ As a result, unlike the Flemish far right (discussed below), Dutch extremist parties were unable to rely on a large, pre-existing network through which to mobilise supporters (Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000: 164; see also Mudde 1994). The Dutch tradition of tolerance as well as the absence of a nationalist subculture also helps to explain the social and legal ostracism that the far right initially faced, a point which I will return to in greater detail in the following chapters.

Having said that, there are no significant institutional hurdles in the Netherlands that impede extremist parties from entering the political arena. The Dutch electoral system is known for its ‘extreme proportionality’ (van Kessel 2015: 107). Seats in the *Tweede Kamer* are distributed according to the number of votes candidates gain across the entire country; winning just 0.67 percent of the votes is enough to secure one of the 150 seats in the lower house (Lucardie 2008: 152). Therefore, the Dutch electoral system is very favourable to the formation of new, small parties. Unlike in countries with majoritarian electoral systems (e.g. Britain), the Dutch far right

does not face major institutional hurdles to mobilise voters (Mudde & van Hosteyn 2000: 161). While this external supply-side factor in itself is not particularly useful when seeking to understand the failure of the ‘centre movement’, it does help explain the success of the LPF and the PVV, particularly because the ‘availability of voters’ due to partisan dealignment (see Chapter 4) enabled these parties to really take advantage of the favourable opportunity structures resulting from the low electoral threshold.

### *The Internal Supply Side*

Internal supply-side explanations consider the agency and characteristics of populist radical right parties themselves. After all, ‘[i]rrespective of how favorable the breeding ground and the political opportunity structure might be to new political parties, they merely present political actors with a series of possibilities. In the end, it is still up to the populist radical right parties to profit from them’ (Mudde 2007: 256). Looking at the organisation and structure of the parties in question is particularly useful in illuminating the limited electoral success of the ‘centre movement’ and the subsequent rise of the LPF and the PVV.

The failure of the ‘centre movement’ is best understood as a result of the poor organisational skills and a lack of leadership potential. Mudde and van Holsteyn (2000: 162) observed at the turn of the twenty-first century that, ‘[i]f there is one common theme in the history of the extreme right in the Netherlands, it is that it is simply too weak (organizationally, electorally, ideologically) to become a real political force.’ This can be partially attributed to the personality of Hans Janmaat, who was unable to capitalise on lingering demand and (somewhat) favourable political opportunity structures. While Janmaat was an experienced public speaker, he was not particularly eloquent or charismatic, and often too emotional to mobilise support and persuade voters (Lucardie 1998: 116). Although there were rising concerns over multiculturalism and immigration, these topics were considered taboo. As Lucardie and Voerman (2012: 190) have noted, his nationalist agenda always trumped his populist appeal, and he was never able to break the taboo surrounding nationalism (Lucardie & Voerman 2012: 190).

It is hardly possible to explain the rise of the LPF without considering the ‘Fortuyn factor’. In the words of Stijn van Kessel (2013: 183), we must take into account ‘the

agency of the man himself.' Unlike Janmaat, Fortuyn was an eloquent public speaker, which made him particularly attractive to the Dutch media (see Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003). While he did not score particularly high on the 'sympathy scale' (van Holsteyn & Irwin 2003), Fortuyn was extremely charismatic. According to Lucardie (2008: 157), there is '[n]o doubt Fortuyn had charisma, in the original quasi-religious sense as defined by Max Weber.' Indeed, Fortuyn was considered much more competent than any of his predecessors (van der Brug & Mughan 2007). As a result, '[a]ny analysis dealing with populist parties in the Netherlands without taking into account the effects of Fortuyn's performance is, at least, incomplete' (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart 2007: 408). Taken together, Fortuyn's skills made him an effective leader (van Kessel 2015: 114).

However, given that Fortuyn founded the LPF just three months prior to the 2002 general election, he had a very short time window within which to build a functioning party apparatus. This forced him to rely on friends to recruit candidates and set up an administrative centre (de Lange & Art 2011: 1236). Because of his premature death, the LPF was never fully institutionalised. Fortuyn's sudden departure left a power vacuum, and since there was not yet a formal party structure in place, the LPF quickly succumbed to infighting. Indeed, '[t]he very day after the death of its founding father, the remaining members of the executive committee began quarrelling over his succession' (Lucardie 2008: 162). In the words of van Holsteyn (2018a: 486), '[t]his undeveloped, unstable organizational structure was not strong enough to carry the weight of electoral success and the political responsibilities of government participation.' Fortuyn's successor, Mat Herben, was far less effective as a leader (van der Brug & Mughan 2007). These factors help explain why the LPF vanished just as quickly as it had appeared (de Lange & Art 2011).

Internal supply-side explanations can also help account for the subsequent success of the PVV. The implosion of the LPF left a political vacuum, which various new parties attempted to fill. In this 'succession battle', the PVV emerged victorious. This can, to a very large extent, be attributed to the persona of Geert Wilders. An experienced politician, Wilders knew what it takes to become successful. Over the years, he had turned into a talented and passionate professional politician (Vossen 2010: 29). Above all, however, Wilders learned from the mistakes of the LPF in the

sense that he avoided many of the weak organisational features of Fortuyn's movement (de Lange & Art 2011). For instance, he deliberately designed a political party that would not accept any members other than Wilders himself. While this leader-centred party model did not entirely prevent infighting (see van Kessel 2015: 116), it did allow Wilders to maintain some degree of cohesion and unity among his MPs.

Thus, conventional explanations would lead us to conclude that the success of the populist radical right in the Netherlands can largely be attributed to supply-side factors. The arrival of the LPF and the PVV marked the emergence of 'credible' populist radical right movements. However, while these explanations are helpful and indeed necessary to understand the electoral trajectories of the populist radical right in the Netherlands, they are reductionist because they attribute too much weight and importance to the characteristics of individual leaders. In the words of Pennings and Keman (2003: 51), '[w]hy could one "newcomer" without a well-developed party organization gain such a smashing electoral victory?' After all, voters in the Netherlands generally vote for parties rather than individuals (van Holsteyn & Irwin 2003: 54). In order to account fully for the rise of the populist radical right in the Netherlands, we therefore need to take into account the role of mainstream parties and the media. These factors will be addressed in the following chapters. Prior to doing so, however, we turn to discuss the history of the far right in Belgium and Luxembourg.

### 3.2. Belgium

The history of the Belgian far right is deeply rooted in regionalism; indeed, it is difficult to understand the success of the Flemish radical right without taking into account this regional dimension. Far-right groupings in Flanders grew out of the 'Flemish movement', which traces its roots to the early nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> During this time, Flemish was considered a peasant language; French was the key to upward mobility and an inability to speak it resulted in marginalisation from different aspects of social life including the education system and the military (Hossay 2002: 165; van Haute 2011: 202). This generated resentment among Dutch-speakers, particularly among Flemish soldiers who had fought under French

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<sup>52</sup> The 'Flemish movement' (*Vlaamse Beweging*) is an umbrella term used to refer to different groups representing Flemish interests (Art 2008: 426).

command during World War I. Resentment gave way to outright antagonism towards the French-speaking hegemony, and ultimately led to the formation of the Front Party or *Frontpartij* in 1919 (Hossay 2002: 166; Ignazi 2003: 124). As the first party-political formation to represent Flemish interests, the Front Party fought for recognition of the Dutch language in both educational and administrative settings (Deschouwer 2012: 90).

Although the Flemish movement was not originally dominated by a far-right ideology, it shifted rightwards in the early 1930s, when the *Frontpartij* was succeeded by the fascist, pro-Nazi *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (Flemish National Union or VNV), which collaborated with the Germans during World War II (Art 2008: 427; Deschouwer 2012: 90; Ignazi 2003: 124). The political consequences of the German occupation for the Belgian radical right were different from those that emerged in the Netherlands because Flemish nationalism ‘was never completely uprooted’ during the war; indeed, it was to become a key ideological ingredient for the Flemish post-war radical right (van Holsteyn 2018a: 480).

As Deschouwer (2012: 90) has pointed out, the Flemish movement’s collaborationist past complicated the recreation of an organised Flemish nationalist party after the war. In the immediate post-war period, Nazi collaborators were purged, and what was left of the Flemish movement was either absorbed or marginalised by the mainstream Christian right (Hossay 2002: 167). The marginalised factions soon regrouped by forming moderate and more radical nationalist splinter groups, including the anti-repression party *Vlaamse Concentratie* (Flemish Aggregation or VC), and the paramilitary *Vlaamse Militante Orde* (Order of Flemish Militants or VMO) (Art 2008: 427). The VC and the VMO recruited Flemish war collaborators who had been stripped of their political rights (the so-called *incivieken*), and actively lobbied for their amnesty (Ignazi 2003: 126). Yet, their efforts remained marginal; it was not until the creation of the Catholic *Volksunie* (People’s Union or VU) in 1954 that the Flemish movement started to regain political momentum.

The VU was a democratic Flemish nationalist party that fought for increased autonomy and eventual independence of Flanders. Like its predecessors, the VU also pressed for social protection for and recognition of former Nazi collaborators, whom they saw as well-meaning (albeit misguided) patriots whose motives were

entirely fuelled by their desire for Flemish independence (Art 2008: 427). As a result, the VU attracted members of the Flemish extreme right (Swyngedouw 1998: 60). Thus, although ‘the party initially drew its leaders from nationalist circles that had not collaborated with the Nazis, [it] nevertheless soon became the party of the “blacks” (former collaborators)’ (Art 2008: 427).

By the early 1970s, the VU had become the third largest party in Flanders (van Haute 2011: 201). In the same decade, debates about the re-ordering of the Belgian state resulted in the signing of the Egmont Pact, an agreement calling for the federalisation of Belgium. The more radical factions within the VU saw the agreement as too great a compromise and rebelled against the party leadership (Swyngedouw 1998: 60). Following the VU’s signing of the Egmont Pact, there was a backlash from hardliners, which prompted the departure of several prominent leaders. This rupture paved the way for the foundation of a more radical, regionalist party: the *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Bloc or VB) (Pauwels 2011c: 219).

The VB was one of the strongest and earliest manifestations of a new generation of far-right parties in post-war Europe (Art 2008: 428; Deschouwer 2012: 91). Founded in 1978 by VU dissidents Karel Dillen and Lode Claes, the party initially recruited its members from a broad range of smaller Flemish nationalist organisations. While it was founded as an elitist, nationalist and regionalist (pro-independence) party, the VB started to gravitate towards the populist radical right in the mid-1980s (De Cleen & Van Aelst 2017: 99; Pauwels 2011a: 61). Under the impetus of Filip Dewinter, immigration became an increasingly important topic on the VB’s agenda. By 1987, ‘anti-immigrant policies have overshadowed the party’s nationalist views [...], together with other party concerns such as criminality, public safety, and political corruption’ (Swyngedouw 1998: 67). Besides a strong emphasis on law and order (i.e. authoritarianism), the VB’s ideology can be characterised by nativism, as illustrated by its 1987 slogan ‘Our country first!’ and its 2009 slogan ‘This is our country’ (Pauwels 2011a; 2011c). Over the years, the VB also became increasingly populist, as demonstrated by its claim to represent ‘the common man in the street’ (ibid).

The VB has held seats in the federal parliament since 1981. On 24 November 1991, Belgium made international headlines when the VB garnered over 10 percent of the

Flemish vote. That election day marked the beginning of a continuous electoral rise, which peaked in 2004 when the VB won nearly a quarter of the vote (24 percent) in the Flemish parliamentary elections (Deschouwer 2012: 96). In the 2007 federal election, the VB witnessed its first setback when its regional vote share shrank to 19 percent and support for the party subsequently ebbed (Pauwels 2011a). In the 2014 federal elections, the VB's share of the vote fell further to just under 8 percent. While the VB has been systematically excluded from power by means of a political *cordon sanitaire* (see Chapter 4), it has arguably been successful in influencing the rhetoric and programmes of other parties. In the words of VB party chairman Tom Van Grieken, 'We have never held political power, but we have had a lot of influence.'<sup>53</sup>

The development of right-wing populist movements in Flanders contrasts starkly with Wallonia, which has never produced a regionalist or nationalist pro-independence equivalent to the Flemish movement. While nationalism was the main driving force behind the proliferation of far-right movements in Wallonia in the early twentieth century, these groupings were primarily motivated by *Belgian* nationalism as opposed to Walloon independence (Ignazi 2003: 125). The interwar period saw the creation of various patriotic and nationalist leagues, including the predominantly French-speaking Rexist Party, or simply Rex, which was named after the Roman Catholic publishing company 'Christus Rex' (Latin for 'Christ the King'). Founded by a former member of the Catholic party, Leon Degrelle, Rex became the fourth biggest party in Belgium in the 1936 general election by garnering 11.5 percent of the vote (Delwit 2011: 236). However, counter-mobilisation on the Left and, above all, opposition from the Catholic Church, forced the Rexist into retreat; in the 1939 general election, the party was nearly annihilated.

The outbreak of WWII reinvigorated the Belgian extreme right. Under the Nazi occupation, the remnants of Degrelle's party collaborated with the Germans and even sent a special Walloon legion to support the Germans on the Eastern Front (Delwit 2011: 236). Just like their Flemish counterparts, Walloon collaborators were purged in the aftermath of the war: nearly 350,000 cases of collaboration were

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Tom Van Grieken on 13 July 2017 in Brussels.

adjudicated, resulting in over 1000 death sentences, thereby leaving ‘deep wounds in Belgian society’ (Ignazi 2003: 125). Degrelle fled into exile, and extreme right manifestations remained very rare in Wallonia until the 1970s.

The economic crisis of the 1970s and debates about the restructuring of the Belgian state created fertile ground for the formation of semi-populist and extremist movements, including a neo-fascist Youth Movement (*Front de la Jeunesse* or FDJ), the *Poujadist*-oriented Democratic Labour Union (*Union Démocratique du Travail* or UDRT), as well as the regionalist Walloon Rally (*Rassemblement Wallon* or RW). Although these eclectic movements ‘bordered on rather than belonged to the extreme right’, they introduced various issues that helped pave the way for the emergence of far-right parties in the following decades (Ignazi 2003: 127).

The 1970s and 80s saw the creation of various right-wing extremist movements, notably the Party of New Forces (*Parti des Forces Nouvelles* or PFN) in 1975, and, above all, the Belgian National Front (*Front National* or FNb) in 1985. Founded by Daniel Féret, a former member of the FDJ and URDT, the FNb sought to present itself as a ‘respectable’ party by distancing itself from neo-fascist groupings, such as the PFN (Delwit 2011: 236). Modelled after its French namesake, the FNb tried to ride on the coat-tails of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s movement in neighbouring France. The party was staunchly anti-immigrant and shared many other similarities with both the French FN and the Flemish VB (Hossay 2002: 160). For instance, the FNb advocated law and order, and portrayed itself as ‘the true voice of the people’ (Delwit 2011: 242). Despite some moderate electoral success in the early 1990s, the FNb was never able to gain ground: the party’s share of (federal) votes peaked at 2.3 percent in the 1995 general election (Deschouwer 2012: 133). In the following decade, the FNb succumbed to infighting and was dissolved in 2012, after having been taken to court by France’s Marine Le Pen for copying her party’s name and logo (RTBF 2012; see also de Jonge 2017).

Some issues on the FNb’s agenda were taken over by the *Parti Populaire* (People’s Party or PP). Founded in 2009 by Rudy Aernoudt and Mischaël Modrikamen, the PP was conceived as an ultra-liberal right-wing party. Aernoudt and Modrikamen were not entirely new to the world of politics; Aernoudt had previously acted as Head of Cabinet for several liberal ministers (in both Wallonia and Flanders), and

Modrikamen was one of the lawyers representing small shareholders against the *Fortis Group* in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. In 2010, Aernoudt left the PP following a personal clash with Modrikamen. The party subsequently shifted to the populist radical right. Sometimes referred to as the ‘Belgian Donald Trump’, Modrikamen gained international prominence as a vocal Trump supporter and outspoken critic of Muslim immigration. The PP places a strong emphasis on law and order and advocates the closure of Belgian borders to non-European immigrants (*Parti Populaire* 2017). The party manifesto of 2017 states that ‘[t]he Belgian is open to the other. But he does not want to become a minority in his own country [...]. The Belgian is certainly generous, and we will help real refugees [...] but not by welcoming them to Europe because of terrorist risks and often irreconcilable cultural differences’ (*Parti Populaire* 2017: 2). The party can also be classified as populist, as illustrated by various claims to defend ‘the common people’ against the ‘so-called elites’, as well as its outspoken rejection of political correctness (*Parti Populaire* 2017: 1).

According to Modrikamen, the PP is best described as a ‘disruptive movement’ (*mouvement de rupture*) and a ‘citizens movement’. When asked to compare his party to similar movements elsewhere, he stressed that the party had its own DNA, but then proceeded to list a broad range of nationalist-conservative parties that he could identify with, including UKIP, the FN, the Belgian N-VA, the FPÖ, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), as well as the Hungarian *Fidesz* party, led by Viktor Orbán.<sup>54</sup>

In 2017, Modrikamen set up *The Movement*, a platform intended to unite European far-right leaders. In October 2018, he made international headlines following his announcement to cooperate with former White House strategist Steve Bannon by transforming *The Movement* into a foundation to support likeminded right-wing groupings across Europe in the run-up to the 2019 European elections (POLITICO 2018a). As a result, Modrikamen was named among the POLITICO 28, a list of people who are expected to be ‘shaping, shaking and stirring Europe’ in 2019 (POLITICO 2018b). Modrikamen maintains close ties to other right-wing populists, including former UKIP leader Nigel Farage, and in the past, he provided

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Mischaël Modrikamen on 10 May 2017 in Brussels.

legal advice for the Alliance for Direct Democracy in Europe (ADDE), a now-defunct Eurosceptic group in the European Parliament.<sup>55</sup>

Although Modrikamen is relatively well-known internationally and his party is arguably much better organised and more professional than the FNb, the PP has not (yet) managed to break through electorally, despite minor successes at the local level. Since 2010, the PP has held one seat in the Belgian federal Parliament; in 2010, the party won 1.3 percent of the vote, and in 2014, its vote share increased marginally to 1.5 percent. Thus, since the 1980s, the VB has consistently outperformed its Walloon counterparts (see Table 3). How do we account for this asymmetrical electoral performance? The following section draws on demand- and supply-side explanations in order to shed light on the different electoral trajectories of right-wing populist movements in Belgium.

*Table 3 – Far-Right Parties in Belgian Federal Elections (1978-2014)*

	<b>Flanders</b>		<b>Wallonia</b>			
	<i>Vlaams Blok / Belang</i>		<i>Front National Belge</i>		<i>Parti Populaire</i>	
	<b>Regional</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>Regional</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>Regional</b>	<b>Federal</b>
1978	2.0	1.4	-	-	-	-
1981	1.8	1.1	-	-	-	-
1985	2.2	1.4	*	0.1	-	-
1987	3.0	1.9	*	0.1	-	-
1991	10.3	6.6	1.7	1.1	-	-
1995	12.2	7.8	5.5	2.3	-	-
1999	15.3	9.9	4.1	1.5	-	-
2003	18.2	11.6	5.6	2.0	-	-
2007	19	12	5.6	2.0	-	-
2010	12.6	7.8	1.4	0.5	3.4	1.3
2014	5.8	3.7	-	-	4.1	1.5

Source: Belgian Interior Ministry (2019)

Notes: 1) The table shows *regional* electoral results obtained during federal elections. Since Belgium has a confederal party model, these results are most relevant here.

2) \* = data unavailable; - = party did not compete.

### 3.2.1. Demand-Side Explanations

Whilst macro-level demand-side explanations help set the scene for the rise of right-wing populism in Western Europe, they are not particularly helpful in solving the Belgian puzzle; after all, these broad changes in the international environment such as globalisation and immigration have affected the whole of Belgium. In fact,

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

immigration rates have historically been higher in Wallonia than in Flanders (Coffé 2005). When the VB first became successful in the early 1990s, just 4 percent of the Flemish population was made up of immigrants, compared to 12 percent in Wallonia (Hossay 2002: 161). By January 2018, the percentage of foreigners living in Wallonia still exceeded the percentage of foreign residents in Flanders; 11.3 percent of the Walloon population was made up of non-nationals, compared to 9.5 percent in Flanders (Statbel 2018a). In addition, the percentage of foreigners originating from countries that are particularly prone to being targeted as scapegoats by the far right (notably Muslim immigrants from the Maghreb countries and Turkey) does not vary significantly between the two regions (see Coffé 2005; 2008: 182). Socio-economic predictors are also inadequate for explaining the variation in the electoral performance of the populist radical right in Belgium. Flanders possesses a thriving economy, with low levels of unemployment, whereas the francophone south is still recovering from industrial decline (Coffé 2008: 180; Hossay 2002: 162). According to the 2017 Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate in Flanders was 4.4 percent, compared to 9.8 percent in Wallonia (Statbel 2018b).

At the micro-level of analysis, it appears that Walloon voters do not have a fundamentally different outlook on socio-economic or political topics (Billiet et al. 2006). Past studies have shown that Walloons are not more tolerant towards immigrants than the Flemings (Coffé 2005). Using data from the Belgian post-election surveys collected by ISPO (the Belgian Institute of Social and Political Research), Billiet et al. (2015: 100) found that regional differences in views on immigrants are minimal, and that Walloon voters are, in fact, generally *more* Islamophobic than the Flemings, thereby showing that the ‘stereotype of the racist Flemish and the tolerant Walloons has clearly been disproven.’ These findings are in line with previous public opinion research, which revealed that Flemish and Walloon voters hold very similar views on social issues and the state of democracy (e.g. Coffé 2005; Deschouwer et al. 2012). According to electoral panel survey data gathered by the PartiRep research team in the run-up to and aftermath of the 2014 Belgian elections (European, federal and regional), 64 percent of Flemish respondents and 70 percent of Walloons listed topics related to the economy (i.e. the economy and job prospects) when asked which issues they considered most important in determining their vote. Just 6.2 percent of Flemish respondents chose

immigration, comparable to the 6.9 percent of Walloons (Deschouwer et al. 2015: 160). Levels of trust in democracy and political institutions also seem remarkably similar in both regions (Henry et al. 2015).

Demand-side explanations are thus not very useful when seeking to explain the asymmetrical success of right-wing populist parties in Belgium. In fact, many of the conventional demand-side theories would lead us to expect popular appetite for the populist radical right to be stronger in Wallonia than in Flanders (Hossay 2002: 160), as the reservoir for potential far right voters is actually larger in Wallonia (Coffé 2005: 81). The following subsection therefore looks at supply-side explanations.

### **3.2.2. Supply-Side Explanations**

#### *The External Supply Side*

Given that the formal institutional setup does not vary much across regions in Belgium, this variable is not particularly helpful for resolving the Belgian puzzle. Indeed, the same voting system applies in Flanders and Wallonia, where regional and federal parliaments are elected based on proportional representation. However, since Flanders is more populous than Wallonia, the district magnitude – i.e. the number of legislative seats assigned to a given district – for Walloon provinces tends to be slightly smaller (Deschouwer 2012: 114). As a result, although the Belgian electoral system is known to be very proportional, the degree of proportionality is marginally lower for elections in Wallonia (Deschouwer 2012: 128), which makes it more difficult for new parties to enter the political arena.

Focusing on informal institutions is much more useful for understanding the variation in the electoral trajectories of the populist radical right in Belgium. In particular the existence of a strong, nationalist subculture enabled the Flemish far right to draw on pre-existing resources. David Art (2011) has shown that the VB benefitted tremendously from the existence of a nationalist subculture. The VB was able to build on a nationalist campaign that had been in the making for nearly a century (Hossay 2002: 164). The repression of Flemish nationalism in the immediate aftermath of WWII contributed to strengthening the spirit of former Nazi-collaborators and led to the creation of very dense social networks (Art 2011:

110). As a result, within the Flemish movement, nationalism was generally seen in a positive light, which enabled far-right groupings to gain legitimacy.

This contrasts starkly with Wallonia, which never produced a regionalist or nationalist pro-independence movement equivalent of the Flemish one. According to Hossay (2002: 164), ‘the radical right in Francophone Belgium [has been] unable to exploit either a Belgian or a specifically Walloon sense of national identity.’ Given their status as ruling minority in Belgium, there was simply no need for Walloons to fight for francophone interests, ‘and in fact Belgian nationalism was a much stronger force in the region than [Walloon] nationalism ever was’ (Art 2008: 429). In addition, due to the collaborationist past of the Flemish movement, nationalism gained a very negative reputation in Wallonia. Because the Flemish far right had been tainted by fascism, the Walloons distanced themselves from it. To some extent, nationalism in Wallonia developed as a mirror image to its Flemish counterpart: whereas the Flemish far right was an extension of collaborationist groupings, the few Walloon nationalist movements that emerged in the post-war era grew out of wartime resistance groups (Hossay 2002: 168). Thus, while Flemish nationalism became a cause of the Right, Walloon nationalism (to the extent that it ever really existed) was absorbed by the Left (ibid).<sup>56</sup>

In sum, ‘[i]f the Flemish radical right was consolidated in a nationalist political home, the radical right in Wallonia was fragmented for lack of one’ (Hossay 2002: 170). The extent to which Belgian far-right movements could draw on pre-existing networks also helps explain why Flemish far-right movements were much better organised than their Walloon counterparts. This leads us to consider internal supply-side explanations.

### *The Internal Supply Side*

Due to its long history, the Flemish far right was able to draw on an elaborate network, which allowed it to excel at organisational tasks (Art 2008; Coffé 2005). Indeed, the Flemish movement provided ideological as well as organisational coherence for the Flemish far right (Hossay 2002: 184). The VB never significantly suffered from factionalism – at least not to the same extent as other radical right parties – because its members were socialised within the same nationalist subculture

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<sup>56</sup> For instance, the *Rassemblement Wallon* was eventually absorbed by the *Parti Socialistes* (PS).

(Art 2011: 114). According to Pauwels (2011a: 68), ‘even opponents of the party would agree that the VB is among the best-structured populist radical right parties of Europe. [...] The party has a well-developed youth organization, a large and stable membership, and many local branches all over Flanders.’ From its early days, the VB drew much of its support through its local branches. The party’s ‘grass roots’ involvement in local organisations enabled it to build support from the bottom up (Swyngedouw 1998: 68). As a result, unlike most other parties in Europe, the VB managed to increase its membership well into the twenty-first century (van Holsteyn 2018a: 490).

The VB’s organisational strength can partly be attributed to the fact that the party has always managed to attract very capable leaders, most of whom are recruited and socialised through the numerous organisations linked to the Flemish movement (e.g. VU; VMO; *Were Di...*). As Swyngedouw 1998: 61) has observed, ‘[n]early all of the VB’s founders, officers, and elected representatives were former members of one or more of these organizations or were trained by them.’ Filip Dewinter is a case in point. From an early age, he was actively involved in various Flemish nationalist organisations, such as the Nationalist Student Movement (*Nationalistische Studentenvereniging* or NSV). This experience taught him to bring the VB’s message across and build an effective party infrastructure (see Mudde 2007: 264).

This contrasts sharply with the Walloon situation, where far-right movements were often amateurish, violent, and lacked any sense of direction or leadership, which usually resulted in factionalism. The Belgian *Front National* is a case in point. Unlike the VB, the FNb never managed to set up a working party apparatus as it lacked both resources and ideological coherence (Delwit 2011: 238). During interviews with Belgian politicians, Art (2011: 64) found that the FNb was generally perceived as a party of ‘poor souls’ or a ‘bunch of lunatics’. Crucially, current and former party members interviewed at the time were similarly critical when describing the credibility and organisational strength of their own party (Art 2011).

Thus, while demand for right-wing populist parties seems relatively constant across Belgium, the supply of such parties has been weaker in the francophone south. Yet,

while the organisational argument can account for *some* of the success of the VB (notably the party's electoral persistence), it fails to fully explain why far-right parties never managed to break through in Wallonia. This is for two reasons. First, organisational skills do not automatically translate into electoral success. One might argue, for instance, that the VB had strong organisational capacity long before its initial electoral breakthrough (Art 2008: 422). Second, in comparison to the FNb, the PP appears much better organised; yet, it has failed to gain political clout.<sup>57</sup> As shown in the following chapters, the variation in the electoral performances of the populist radical right in Belgium is best understood by taking into account the role of mainstream parties and the media. Prior to doing so, however, we now turn to Luxembourg.

### 3.3. Luxembourg

As in Belgium and the Netherlands, the German invasion during WWII left a lasting mark on the Grand Duchy. According to the Luxembourgish historian Gilbert Trausch (2005), the Nazi occupation constitutes by far the most painful episode in Luxembourg's history. In the collective memory, extreme-right movements and National Socialism have become conflated, and Luxembourgish right-wing extremists were often exclusively associated with the so-called '*Gielemännecher*' or 'yellow men' collaborators of the Nazi regime in the 1940s (Trausch 2005: 20-1).<sup>58</sup> However, as in other countries, extreme-right currents existed both among collaborators, who were attracted to fascism, *as well as* resistance militants, to whom the German invasion posed a threat to Luxembourgish identity (Blau 2005).

In the aftermath of the war, blatant antisemitism gave way to latent fears of *Überfremdung*. These fears were primarily driven by the rapid influx of immigrants (see Figure 2). With its long history of migration and its highly internationalised labour market, Luxembourg can be characterised as an immigration country *par excellence*. Yet, while the country has been lauded as 'an immigration success story' (Fetzer 2011), it would be inappropriate to assume that Luxembourg has

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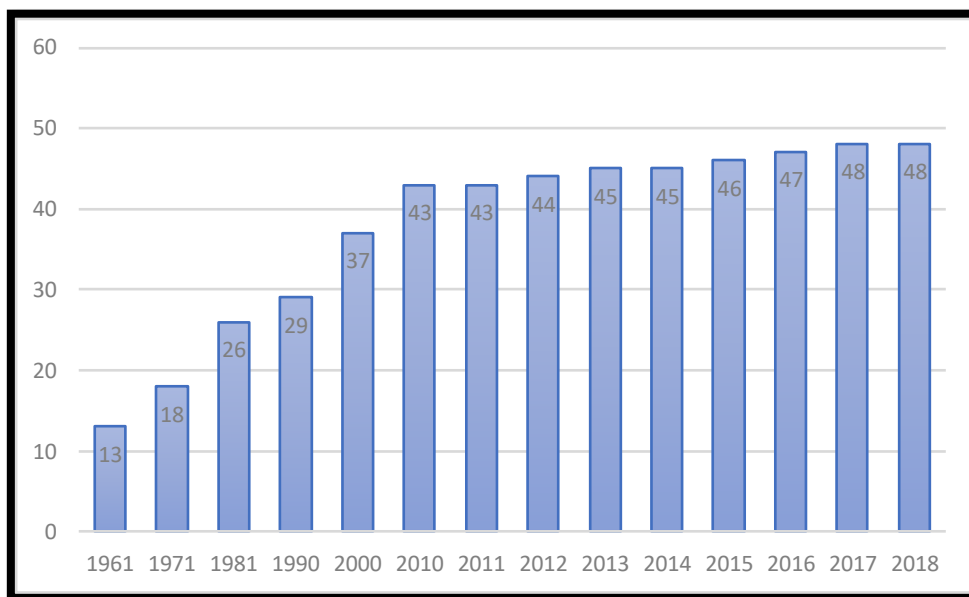
<sup>57</sup> Since 2015, the party appears to have kept factionalism at bay. For an overview of departures from the PP, see Demelenne (2018).

<sup>58</sup> Because of the colour of their uniforms, the Luxembourgish population referred to the Nazi occupiers as *Gielemännecher*, which is the Luxembourgish term for yellowhammer (i.e. a small, yellow bird). The term literally translates into 'small yellow men', and later became associated with Luxembourgish collaborators. The collaboration long constituted a taboo topic in Luxembourg (see Artuso 2013; Majerus 2002).

always been particularly welcoming to immigrants. In fact, given the size of the country, the perceived threat imposed by mass immigration is a recurring theme in the history of the Luxembourgish far right (Blau 2005: 31).

The industrial revolution and the growth of the steel industry in the 19th century transformed the southern edges of the Grand Duchy into a regional hub. Because the indigenous workforce was insufficient to meet the demand, employers started recruiting foreign workers. The first wave of immigrants hailed from Germany and other neighbouring countries, followed by a second wave of Italian workers during the early industrial period (Fetzer 2011: 5; Willems & Milmeister 2008). After WWII, the proportion of foreigners started to rise sharply (Fetzer 2011; Scuto 2012).

*Figure 2 – Proportion of Foreign Population in Luxembourg*



Source: Statec 2018b

During the 1960s, Italian immigrants were no longer able to fill the chronic labour shortage. As a result, the Luxembourgish government started to actively recruit Portuguese workers, thereby marking the beginning of the third major wave of immigration (Fetzer 2011: 7).<sup>59</sup> The rising number of immigrants sparked fears of

<sup>59</sup> Luxembourgish immigration officials were actively recruiting immigrants that were culturally and ethnically homogenous to the local population; officials felt that Italians and Portuguese workers would easily integrate because they were white, European and Catholic (Fetzer 2011: 8-9). It was not until the 1990s, when Luxembourg took on refugees from the Balkans (primarily Muslims from

*Überfremdung* among small sections of the local population, which, in turn, led to the formation of several nationalist and far-right groupings. Many of these movements grew out of associations that advocated the preservation of the Luxembourgish language.<sup>60</sup> Founded in 1971, the *Actioun Lëtzebuergesch* (Action Luxembourgish or AL) aimed ‘to stand up for everything that is Luxembourgish – particularly for our language’ (quoted in Blau 2005: 519). Although the organisation was set up to be apolitical, it soon attracted far-right sympathisers and activists.

In 1984, two AL members (Emile Schmit and Charles Malané) launched a petition to protest against the introduction of voting rights for foreign residents in order to ‘protect and preserve’ the Luxembourgish language and identity from being ‘submerged’ by Portuguese immigrants:

Because already now [in 1984], the percentage of foreigners is at 26 percent, and there are already communes where non-Luxembourgers make up a majority. If we agreed to give political rights to those people, we would totally abandon the ‘steering wheel’ [*gouvernail*] and it would be them who would decide the direction. This would be the beginning of the end (quoted in Blau 2005: 519).

When other committee members of the AL refused to sign the petition, Schmit and Malané left the group in order to found the *Fédératioun Eist Land – Eis Sprooch* (‘Federation Our Country – Our Language’ or FELES). FELES was set up with the aim of ‘preserving Luxembourg for the Luxembourgers’ (Blau 2005: 522). While FELES was neither blatantly racist nor antisemitic, the organisation clearly rejected multiculturalism (Spirinelli 2012: 14). Above all, FELES was staunchly opposed to enfranchising foreign residents. The organisation also voiced concern over the rapid economic and demographic growth of the country. This concern was eventually aligned with environmental issues. In a newspaper article, Pierre Peters, who had joined FELES in 1986, wrote the following:

It is only with the help of a mass of foreigners that Luxembourg can maintain its economic growth. [...] For Luxembourg as a nation and a people, the consequences are catastrophic. Our beautiful country is losing its beauty, our people [*Vollék*] is losing its quality of life and territory

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Kosovo and Bosnia) that immigration started to diversify (Fetzer 2011: 7; Willems & Milmeister 2008: 67).

<sup>60</sup> Luxembourgish was long considered a German dialect and was only recognised as an official language in 1984. Ever since, the country has had three official languages: Luxembourgish, French and German.

[*Liewensraum*]. Sooner or later, our home [*Hémecht*] will be degraded to a European metropolis, where foreigners are in charge (quoted in Blau 2005: 540).

Following some internal tensions within FELES, this eco-nationalism gave rise to two other far-right movements including the *Gréng National Bewegung* (Green National Movement, which would later become the National Movement or NB) and the *Éislecker Fräiheitsbewegung* (Oesling Freedom Movement or EFB).<sup>61</sup> The NB was founded in 1987 by four FELES members in the southern town of Tétange. The aim of the movement was to ensure that ‘voting rights are exclusively reserved for Luxembourgers’, because ‘Luxembourg should no longer be politically oppressed, and no Luxembourger should have to feel foreign in his own country’ (quoted in Blau 2005: 555).

In the same year, the EFB was founded in the north of Luxembourg. The ideology of the EFB was identical to that of the NB; however, the EFB placed particular emphasis on agrarian themes (Blau 2005: 556), which were considered particularly relevant in the rural north of the country: ‘We are particularly committed to rescuing our peasantry, because without it, neither our culture nor our environment would stand a chance to survive. We are also opposed to any agricultural policy that threatens the survival of the Luxembourgish family farm’ (quoted in Blau 2005: 557). In addition, the EFB made frequent references to the resistance movement during WWII, thereby implying that Luxembourg was again at great risk of succumbing to foreign domination due to immigration and European integration (Blau 2005: 564).

The NB and the EFB sought to present themselves as alternatives to the establishment politicians and pressed for the increased usage of referendums by referring to the Swiss model (Blau 2005: 566-7). The NB also warned against the ‘Islamisation’ of Luxembourg. According to Blau (2005: 584), the ways in which the NB wrote about Islam resembled articles written by Luxembourgish antisemites during the interwar period: ‘the NB simply replaced the word “Jew” with “Muslim”.’

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<sup>61</sup> Oesling (or *Éisleck*) is the name of Luxembourg’s rural northern region.

Neither the EFB nor the NB managed to break through electorally. As a result, the EFB ceased to exist in 1991. The NB participated in the 1989 and 1994 general elections but was dissolved in 1995, after gaining 2.3 and 2.6 percent of the votes (see Blau 2005: 603ff). Since the 1990s, the Luxembourgish extreme right has been dominated by solitary actors, notably the former NB figurehead Pierre Peters.<sup>62</sup> Peters, who maintained ties to the extremist and misnamed German National Democratic Party (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* or NPD), has repeatedly been condemned for incitement to hatred. In 2016, he was convicted for incitement to hatred after having distributed leaflets, which proclaimed that ‘[t]here is absolutely no doubt that the destruction of our country is due to the mass of foreigners [...]. They simply need too much (housing, electricity, drinking water, roads, schools, infrastructure, etc.) and in return produce a lot of waste’ (quoted in *Le Quotidien* 2016).

In the Luxembourgish partisan arena, far-right groupings have remained largely absent. Indeed, Luxembourg does not have an electorally significant far-right equivalent to the Dutch PVV or the Belgian VB. However, the Alternative Democratic Reform Party (*Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei* or ADR) can be located on the right end of the Grand Duchy’s political spectrum and is sometimes described as ‘the soft version of right-wing populism’ (Blau 2005: 89). While the party describes itself as ‘a populist party that is neither right nor left’ (Dumont et al. 2011: 1059), media commentators routinely categorise the ADR as a populist radical right party (e.g. *Die Zeit* 2015). This conceptualisation is not entirely accurate. First, although there is some evidence of people-centrism in the ADR’s discourse, there is little evidence of anti-elitism. Second, while the ADR is clearly nationalist, it is not openly xenophobic. Furthermore, unlike most (if not all) right-wing populist parties, the ADR is not diametrically opposed to immigration. In the Luxembourgish context, such a policy position would be unthinkable given that over 70 percent of the workforce is composed of non-nationals, including foreign residents and cross-border workers (Statec 2018a). However, the ADR is undoubtedly the main political party in Luxembourg most critical towards immigration (Fetzer 2011: 15) as demonstrated by the party’s promotion of

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<sup>62</sup> The Luxembourgish blogger and leftist activist Maxime Weber closely monitors contemporary developments in the extreme right scene in the Grand Duchy (see Weber 2018).

restrictive citizenship laws (ADR 2013b), its advocacy of immigrants' greater use of the Luxembourgish language (ADR 2014) and its opposition to granting non-national residents the right to vote in legislative elections (ADR 2015a).<sup>63</sup>

According to Fernand Kartheiser, who joined the party in 2008 and has held a seat in parliament since 2009, the ADR is best described as 'socially-conservative':

Out of the established parties in our party system, we are the ones that can be located furthest to the right – I think there's no doubt about that. Although in a more detailed analysis, I would say that on some social questions, we are more left-wing than others. But in broad terms – this is a simplification – if I list some topics including identity, patriotism, positions on Europe and so on, ethical questions such as abortion, gay marriage etc. [...], if you look at these factors, we are clearly a conservative party. Perhaps even more conservative in some matters than our British colleagues.<sup>64</sup>

In a follow-up email exchange in April 2019, however, Kartheiser explained that this characterisation was no longer accurate since the formation of *Déi Konservativ* (The Conservatives) by former ADR-member Joe Thein in March 2017. After being expelled from the ADR following a disciplinary procedure over a controversial 'Like' on Facebook (explained below), Thein founded his own party for 'more democracy and freedom for Luxembourg' (*Déi Konservativ* 2019). According to Kartheiser, the party is more right-wing than the ADR given its nationalist and Eurosceptic outlook.<sup>65</sup>

When asked to compare his party to similar movements elsewhere, Kartheiser insisted upon having had no contact whatsoever with right-wing populist movements abroad.<sup>66</sup> According to his colleague and long-term ADR-MP Gast Gibéryen, the ADR thematises topics that other parties avoid, including the preservation of Luxembourg's national language and identity, but 'we always do so in a responsible manner. [...] Some may call that populism – although I'm not really sure what that is, but you have to explain things to people so that they can

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<sup>63</sup> It is notable that the website of the ADR is almost exclusively available in Luxembourgish, whereas most other parties (also) publish their material in German and/or French.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Fernand Kartheiser on 21 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

<sup>65</sup> In the general election held in October 2018, *Déi Konservativ* ran with a list only in the southern electoral district, and it obtained 0.52 percent of the vote. Given the party's marginal position, it will not be discussed further in this thesis.

<sup>66</sup> Since 2010, the ADR is a member of the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe Group or ACRE (previously known as AECR or the Alliances of European Conservatives and Reformists). The decision to join ACRE was partly driven by the ADR's attempt to distance itself from other far-right groupings in Europe (*Luxemburger Wort* 2014).

understand them. Otherwise you cannot mobilise them. And that's what we do with regards to these topics: we speak a clear language.'<sup>67</sup>

As Fetzner (2011: 15) has observed, the ADR's rhetoric and preferred policies are moderate and can hardly be compared to those of far-right parties in surrounding countries. Furthermore, the ADR was not conceived as a right-wing party, but only shifted in that direction in the early 2000s. Indeed, the party originated as the 'Action Committee 5/6<sup>th</sup> - Pensions for Everyone' (*Aktiounskomitee 5/6 Pensioun fir jiddfereen*), which was founded in 1987 as a single-issue party with the aim of overhauling the Luxembourgish state pension system (Hirsch 1995: 418).<sup>68</sup> The movement gained momentum when other organisations joined, such as the Free Luxembourgish Farmers' Association (*Fräie Lëtzebuerger Baureverband* or FLB) and the Free Winegrowers (*Fräi Wënzer*) (ADR 2012: 24). In their first appearance in the 1989 general election, the Action Committee came in fourth (with 7.3 percent of the vote), thereby winning four out of sixty seats in the Luxembourgish Chamber of Deputies (ADR 2012: 39). Before the 1994 elections, the party expanded its political agenda and changed its name to 'Action Committee for Democracy and Equitable Pensions' (*Aktiounskomitee fir Demokratie a Rentegerechtegkeet* or ADR) (Hirsch 1995: 418). The ADR's success continued, peaking at the 1999 elections, during which the party was able to gain seven parliamentary seats by winning 11.31 percent of the votes (ADR 2012: 44).

Given that an overhaul of the pension system had been the party's single most important goal, the ADR lost some of its appeal when a pension reform was introduced in the 1999-2004 legislative term. In 2006, the ADR underwent a period of reorganisation, culminating in another name change, this time from 'Action Committee for Democracy and Equitable Pensions' to 'Alternative Democratic Reform Party'. Internal tensions persisted for years, most notably between the party's liberal and conservative wings (Dumont et al. 2012).

The ADR has repeatedly attracted attention with its confrontational, polemical stance in parliamentary debates. Although the party is not openly xenophobic, it is clearly nationalist, as illustrated by its activism in 2006 to replace the traditional

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Gast Gibéryen on 22 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

<sup>68</sup> The Action Committee 5/6<sup>th</sup> aimed at granting all citizens access to the pension scheme of civil servants (Hirsch 1995).

red-white-blue flag with the country's national emblem, the Red Lion (so as to avoid confusion with the Dutch flag), and its staunch opposition to dual citizenship in 2008. In its party platform for the 2004 legislative elections, the ADR agreed to 'modest, manageable immigration as long as it does not overexert our integration capacity' (ADR 2004: 36). While the party acknowledged that, without immigration, 'our country could not have become what it is today', it also warned about the 'misuse of the right to asylum by economic refugees' and 'so much diversity in such a confined space', and therefore advocated a migration policy that 'preserves our national uniqueness' by maintaining that immigrants must learn 'our language, our history, our culture [and] our traditions' to avoid the formation of ethno-social ghettos (ADR 2004: 35). Similarly, in its party platform for the 2013 legislative elections, the ADR stated that, 'Luxembourgers must not become second-class citizens in their own country'; while legal foreigners should be granted access to social entitlements, the ADR opposes the exploitation of social services as well as any form of 'social tourism' (ADR 2013a: 141).

The ADR was also the main voice of opposition to granting voting rights to foreign residents (i.e. the so-called *Ausländerwahlrecht*) in the 2015 referendum (see Figure 3).<sup>69</sup> Under the proposal put forward by three governing parties at the time (i.e. Liberals, Social Democrats and Greens), non-citizens would have become eligible to participate in legislative elections – provided they had resided in the country for at least ten years and previously participated in either communal or European elections (*Luxemburger Wort* 2015b).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> While the Christian Social People's Party (CSV) also opposed the *Ausländerwahlrecht*, its campaign slogan was comparatively ambiguous, as it did not explicitly say 'No' but instead urged voters to inform themselves before making a decision (see CSV 2015; de Jonge & Petry 2019).

<sup>70</sup> The governing parties suffered a serious blow in the 2015 referendum when all three government proposals were rejected by a landslide: 78 percent of the Luxembourgish electorate said 'No' to the *Ausländerwahlrecht*, 80.87 percent said 'No' to granting people between the age of sixteen and eighteen the right to participate in elections, and 69.93 percent said 'No' to imposing a ten-year term limit for ministers (*Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg* 2015).

Figure 3 – Campaign Posters for the 2015 Referendum - ADR says ‘No’ (‘Nee’)



Source: Photograph taken by the author in Steinsel (Luxembourg) in June 2015.

The ADR rejected the proposal, arguing that ‘the pseudo-referendum [...] provokes xenophobia’ and that ‘[w]e don’t need a better image [...]’. The *Ausländerwahlrecht* would not improve our image anyways. With such an initiative, which other countries do not even consider, everybody would shake their heads at us’ (ADR 2015a). During their ‘No’ campaign leading up to the 2015 referendum, the party relied heavily on emotional arguments by evoking feelings of *Überfremdung* and by warning voters that the introduction of the *Ausländerwahlrecht* could indicate that Luxembourgish voters might soon become a minority in their own country, thereby risking being outvoted by foreign residents (ADR 2015b).<sup>71</sup>

In the 2018 general election, the ADR joined forces with the *Wee2050* (‘Way’ or ‘Path’ 2050), a grassroots movement that gained national prominence in the run-up to the 2015 referendum. Formerly known as *Nee2015* (i.e. ‘No2015’), the movement was launched by two Luxembourgish citizens, Fred Keup and Steve Kodesch, who started a website to persuade voters to say ‘No’ to the *Ausländerwahlrecht* (Keup & Kodesch, 2015; see also Petry, 2016: 65-67). Similar to the position of the ADR, the arguments of the *Nee2015* movement were built on the premise that voting rights for national elections should be reserved for

<sup>71</sup> This claim was unfounded: According to a report published by Luxembourg’s official statistics agency, as of January 2015, a maximum of 105,000 foreign residents would meet the requirements to participate in legislative elections (provided they would all sign up for local elections first), compared to 245,092 nationals (Allegrezza et al. 2015). If foreign voters fulfilling these prerequisites had been allowed to participate in the 2018 legislative elections, they would have accounted for at most 27.6 percent of the votes (ibid).

Luxembourgish nationals. They argued that, by extending voting rights to non-nationals, Luxembourgers would ‘give up their own sovereignty’, which could be ‘the beginning of the end of “our” nation’ as it would lead to ‘the increasing disappearance of “our” language’ (Keup & Kodesch 2015).

The website attracted thousands of supporters via social media and eventually became the main voice of opposition to the *Ausländerwahlrecht*. Fred Keup, who was the spokesperson of the movement, soon became the figurehead of the ‘No camp’. A geography teacher by profession, Keup consistently presented himself as ‘the voice of the ordinary Luxembourgish people’ (Woxx 2016). In the run-up to the 2015 referendum, he launched a social media campaign, wrote letters to newspapers, distributed leaflets and participated in various public debates. The *Nee2015* movement played an influential role in the outcome of the referendum. After the referendum, the movement changed its name to *Wee2050*, and in March 2018, the ADR announced that it would form a strategic alliance with the movement by reserving eight of the sixty places on its electoral list for Fred Keup and his team (*Tageblatt* 2018). The electoral campaign was dominated by nationalist themes, including concerns over rapid population growth and related fears over the alleged demise of the Luxembourgish language and identity. In the end, six members of the *Wee2050* movement stood as candidates on the ADR list in the 2018 general election (*Luxemburger Wort* 2018a). However, none of them were elected.

Nonetheless, the ADR managed to increase its overall vote share by 1.64 percent to 8.28 percent total, which resulted in one additional parliamentary seat (to four seats total). Since the turn of the twenty-first century, electoral support for the ADR has fluctuated between 9.95 percent in 2004 and 6.64 percent in 2013. While the party has held seats in the Luxembourgish Chamber of Deputies since 1989, it has never held any governmental positions. Due to the party’s marginal stance as well as its comparatively moderate rhetoric, it seems fair to say that right-wing populist movements have not been very successful in the Grand Duchy. According to Fetzter (2011: 13), ‘[o]ne of the most striking paradoxes of immigration politics in Luxembourg is the country’s relatively low level of xenophobia, despite its very high proportion of foreign-born workers and residents.’ The following subsections draw on traditional demand- and supply-side explanations to account for the

absence of an electorally successful populist radical right movement in the Grand Duchy.

### **3.3.1. Demand-Side Explanations**

Given the country's unique socio-economic situation, one might assume that demand for the populist radical right in Luxembourg is weaker than in Belgium and the Netherlands. Indeed, when it comes to per capita economic output, Luxembourg ranks among the highest in the world. In 2017, Luxembourg's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) measured at purchasing power parity (PPP) was estimated at \$103,744 (World Bank 2018).<sup>72</sup> By contrast, per capita GDP in the Netherlands and Belgium was less than that of Luxembourg at \$52,503 and \$47,840 respectively (ibid). It is conceivable that the Grand Duchy's wealth has acted as a buffer on demand, in the sense that it has dampened the impact of some of the broader global changes including immigration, integration and globalisation. To be sure, economic prosperity does not preclude the rise of the populist radical right. In fact, there are several examples of rich welfare states where populist radical right parties have fared well (e.g. Switzerland and Norway), while there are considerably less prosperous states that have not witnessed the rise of a right-wing populist contender (e.g. Spain and Portugal). As explained in the previous chapter, however, demand for populist radical right parties tends to be generally higher among the so-called 'losers of modernisation', notably working-class voters whose jobs are more prone to the influence of foreign competition (e.g. Kriesi et al. 2012; Mudde 2007).<sup>73</sup> As shown below, the electorate in Luxembourg is not directly threatened by foreign competition. In addition, the working-class vote has all but disappeared from the Luxembourgish electorate (Poirier 2014: 210).

In fact, the makeup of the Luxembourgish electorate is very distinct. As in most countries, voting rights in Luxembourg are tied to citizenship. In other words, only people with Luxembourgish nationality can participate in legislative elections. Given the high proportion of foreign residents, the Grand Duchy is confronted with

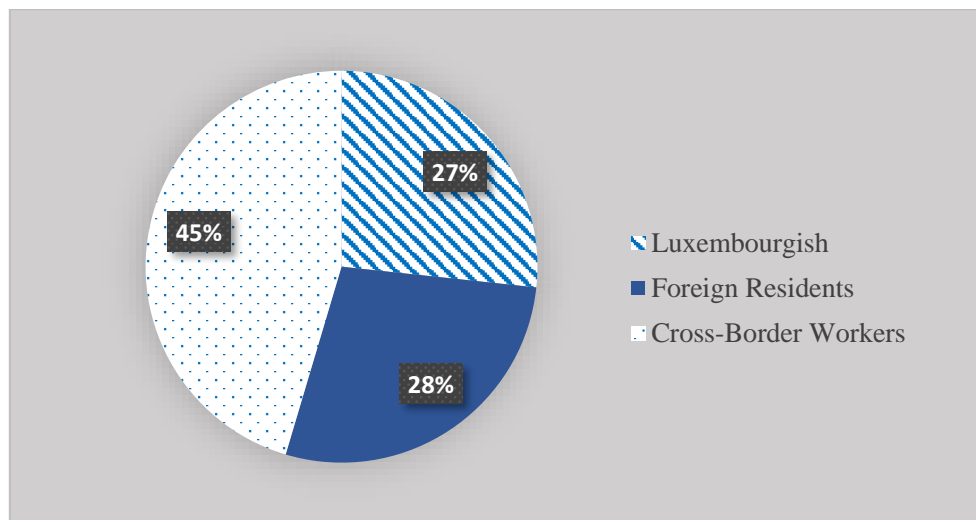
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<sup>72</sup> This figure is misleading, given that nearly half the Luxembourgish workforce (45 percent) is composed of cross-border workers who contribute to the country's GDP but are not taken into account in per capita calculations.

<sup>73</sup> As Rooduijn et al. (2017) have noted, even though radical right voters tend to have lower socio-economic positions, this does not mean that they are automatically inclined to vote for the radical right; indeed, they might also vote for the radical left.

a looming ‘democratic deficit’. In 2015, only 54.5 percent of the total adult population had the right to vote (Allegrezza et al. 2015). In 2018, the number of eligible voters had decreased to 47.2 percent (233,014 voters out of 493,270 residents aged eighteen or older). Among these eligible voters, working class voters are underrepresented. This has to do with the fact that the Luxembourgish workforce is highly internationalised; as of 2018, only 27 percent (112,360 people) of the total workforce (421,009 people) are Luxembourgish. This means that only about one third of the country’s workforce forms part of the electorate (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4 – Composition of the Workforce in Luxembourg*



Source: Statec 2018a

The ‘working class’ in the Grand Duchy is largely composed of foreign residents and cross-border workers, neither of whom have voting rights. According to preliminary findings from the latest post-electoral survey, 24 percent of the electorate in 2018 had a university degree, compared to 12 percent in 2013 (see *Radio 100,7* 2019). Furthermore, in 2013, nearly half of the electorate (49.9 percent) was economically active and blue-collar workers (i.e. unqualified manual labour) made up 11.3 percent of the active electorate (compared to 17.3 percent of the total adult population), while nearly half (44.3 percent) held public (or semi-public) sector jobs (compared to 29.4 percent of the total adult population) (Zahlen & Thill 2013). Thus, working class voters are underrepresented in the electorate, while civil servants are overrepresented.

It is important to note that public sector jobs in Luxembourg are very secure and well-paid. However, they are difficult for non-nationals to access, which is why the public sector is sometimes referred to as the ‘protected sector’ (*secteur protégé*) (see Pigeron-Piroth 2010). As of 2017, about 90 percent of public sector jobs were taken up by Luxembourgish nationals (RTL 2017a). Although many of these jobs are technically open to *all* EU nationals, it is difficult for non-citizens to access them because they often require applicants to have a working knowledge of all three official languages (i.e. Luxembourgish, French and German). This prerequisite acts as a ‘filter’ (Pigeron-Piroth 2010: 28) in the sense that it disqualifies most foreign applicants from competing for public sector jobs, thereby creating a ‘protected domain’ inside the labour market.<sup>74</sup> This ‘protected domain’ includes well-paid, secure positions in the Luxembourgish civil service and affiliated sectors (e.g. the national railway company). As a result, the perceived ‘threat’ from immigrants is dampened, given that they generally cannot compete for high-paid and secure public sector jobs.<sup>75</sup> Because of this class bias in the composition of the Luxembourgish electorate, demand for the populist radical right is likely to be less pronounced. In other words, very few of the so-called ‘left-behind’ are likely to be eligible to vote in Luxembourgish elections. It is therefore not surprising that only 37 percent of respondents in Luxembourg agreed that ‘[i]mmigrants take jobs away from the country’s citizens’, compared to 47 percent in the Netherlands and 54 percent in Belgium (European Values Study 2008).<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, levels of trust and political satisfaction are known to be relatively high in the Grand Duchy. As in other European countries, however, levels of trust in various political institutions including the government, political parties and trade unions have decreased in recent years (see TNS ILRES 2016: 24). In September 2011, 76 percent of the electorate expressed trust in the government. Two years

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<sup>74</sup> The language requirement also affects the education sector. According to a report published by the OECD (2016), children with an immigrant background perform relatively poorly in the Grand Duchy’s public-school system. This partly results from the fact that they struggle to come to terms with the country’s three languages of instruction (OECD 2016). This is likely to restrict their upward mobility, thereby challenging the widespread belief that Luxembourg is particularly immigrant-friendly.

<sup>75</sup> The percentage of non-nationals employed in the Luxembourgish public sector has increased over time (Pigeron-Piroth 2010). In 2017, then Minister of Home Affairs Dan Kersch announced that he was considering opening the civil service more widely to foreign residents in light of a shortage of staff in certain areas, notably education, tax administration and information technology.

<sup>76</sup> The most recent comparable data available from the European Values Study (EVS) dates from 2008.

later (September 2013), levels of trust had decreased to 51 percent. In December 2013, 63 percent of the electorate had confidence in the newly elected ‘Gambia coalition’ (so-called because the colours associated with the three governing parties match those of the Gambian flag). Following the 2015 referendum, however, levels of trust plummeted: in June 2015, shortly after the referendum, just 33 percent of the voters had trust in the government. Following this uncharacteristic dip, levels of trust recovered to 54 percent in May 2018 (*Luxemburger Wort* 2018b).

When viewed from a cross-national perspective, levels of trust seem higher in Luxembourg than in Netherlands and Belgium.<sup>77</sup> According to the 2008 European Values Study, 68 percent of the Luxembourgish population had ‘a great deal or quite a lot of confidence’ in their government, compared to 49 percent in the Netherlands and just 32 percent in Belgium. Similarly, 40 percent of the population in the Grand Duchy had ‘a great deal or quite a lot of confidence’ in political parties, compared to 33 percent in the Netherlands, and 21 percent in Belgium, and in terms of overall satisfaction with democracy, 75 percent of the Luxembourgish population was ‘rather or very satisfied with the way democracy is developing in their country’, compared to 56 percent in the Netherlands and 61 percent in Belgium (*ibid*). In light of these comparatively higher levels of trust and satisfaction with democracy, we might expect demand for populist radical right parties to be lower in Luxembourg than in Belgium and the Netherlands.

However, when it comes to attitudes towards immigrants, a cursory examination of existing data shows that the Luxembourgish population is only moderately more xenophile (see Table 4; see also Fetzer 2011: 13-27). For instance, 35 percent of Luxembourgish respondents agreed that ‘[a] country’s cultural life is undermined by immigrants’, compared to 52 percent in Belgium and 46 percent in the Netherlands (European Values Study 2008). At the same time, however, 43 percent of the Luxembourgish respondents agree that ‘There are too many immigrants in their country’, compared to 57 percent in Belgium and 41 percent in the Netherlands (*ibid*). Similarly, 12 percent of the respondents in Luxembourg stated that they

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<sup>77</sup> The availability of comparable data is rather limited and dated: Luxembourg is not included in the data compiled by the Pew Research Centre, whereas the European Social Survey only provides data on Luxembourg for 2002 and 2004. The European Values Study (EVS), on the other hand, only provides comparable data on the Benelux countries for 2008. Furthermore, these databases do not provide separate data for Wallonia and Flanders.

would not like to have people of a different race as neighbours, compared to 6 percent in Belgium and 10 percent in the Netherlands.

*Table 4 – Societal Values in the Benelux with Regards to Immigration*

<b>Average opinion on a scale from 0 (Disagree) to 100 (Agree)</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>Luxembourg</b>
<i>'Immigrants make crime problems worse'</i>	64	63	55
<i>'For the greater good of society, it is better if immigrants adopt the customs of the country'</i>	68	60	58
<i>'Immigrants are a strain on a country's welfare system'</i>	66	55	52
<i>'A country's cultural life is undermined by immigrants'</i>	52	46	35
<i>'Immigrants take jobs away from a country's citizens'</i>	54	47	37
<b>Percentage of people...</b>			
<i>...that agree or agree strongly that because of the number of immigrants they feel sometimes like a stranger in their own country</i>	37%	26%	30%
<i>... that agree or agree strongly that there are too many immigrants in their country today</i>	57%	41%	43%
<i>...that wouldn't like to have immigrants / foreign workers as neighbours</i>	7%	14%	13%
<i>...that wouldn't like to have people of a different race as neighbours</i>	6%	10%	12%
<i>...that wouldn't like to have Jews as neighbours</i>	4%	7%	13%
<i>... that wouldn't like to have Muslims as neighbours</i>	15%	17%	17%

Source: European Values Study (2008)

Similarly, data from the March 2018 *Eurobarometer* survey suggests that, although 82 percent of the Luxembourgish respondents felt fairly or very positive about immigration of people from other EU member states, they were considerably less enthusiastic about immigration from outside the European Union (see Figure 5). Indeed, 48 percent of the Luxembourgish respondents stated that immigration from

outside the EU evoked negative feelings (compared to 56 percent in Belgium and 35 percent in the Netherlands).

*Figure 5 – Feelings About Immigration from Inside & Outside the EU*



Source: Eurobarometer (2018)

Of course, the data presented above are merely descriptive; yet, taken together, they provide tentative, illustrative evidence that the Luxembourgish population is only slightly less concerned about immigration. Besides the fact that immigrants pose less of a ‘threat’ to the Luxembourgish electorate, this could have to do with the fact that that exposure to immigrants is more pronounced in the Grand Duchy. As explained in the previous chapter, frequent contact with immigrants can increase tolerance towards them. First, Luxembourg has a high proportion of residents with an immigrant background. As of 2011, more than 60 percent of the Luxembourgish

population (aged fifteen or older) were first- or second-generation immigrants, while only 38.8 percent were born in the Grand Duchy with Luxembourgish citizenship to Luxembourgish parents who were also born in Luxembourg (Heinz et al. 2013). Using data from the 2008 European Values Study, scholars have shown that having a migratory background has a significant effect on positive attitudes toward immigrants in Luxembourg (Valentova & Berzosa 2012). Indeed, frequent contact with foreigners had a positive effect on people's perception of immigrants in the Grand Duchy: Luxembourgish natives (i.e. nationals born in Luxembourg and whose parents were also born in Luxembourg) who maintained personal relationships with immigrants were generally more open towards immigrants than those with fewer contacts (Valentova & Berzosa 2012: 355).

Second, because of Luxembourg's small size, contact with foreigners (i.e. immigrants and cross-border workers) is necessarily more frequent than in neighbouring countries. Although all three Benelux countries are relatively small, Luxembourg's territory is considerably smaller than that of the other two.<sup>78</sup> This might soften the impact of the 'halo-effect' (explained in Chapter 2). This is particularly the case in the urban, cosmopolitan areas of Luxembourg City. Indeed, Fetzer (2011: 21) has shown that hostility towards foreign-born residents is highest in the northern, less ethnically diverse part of the country.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Luxembourgers might be generally more aware that immigrants are the main source of the country's wealth (Fetzer 2011: 17). Given that the Luxembourgish economy is largely run by non-nationals, Luxembourgers have no other choice but to see beyond the narrow confines of their national borders, which, to some extent, 'forces' them to assume more 'cosmopolitan' views.

Another explanation for the somewhat more limited spread of anti-immigrant sentiments (particularly towards EU immigrants) in Luxembourg might be due to the fact that the makeup of the immigrant population is relatively homogenous. Indeed, only about 15 percent of Luxembourg's foreign residents are citizens of

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<sup>78</sup> It takes a little over one hour to cross the entire Grand Duchy from north to south by car.

<sup>79</sup> There was some evidence of the 'halo-effect' in the 2015 referendum on the *Ausländerwahlrecht*. Although all communes ultimately rejected the government's proposal to grant foreigners the right to vote, support for the *Ausländerwahlrecht* was highest in and around Luxembourg City, and lowest in rural communes located in the east and the north of the country (*Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg* 2015; de Jonge 2015).

non-European countries, while over 85 percent of them trace their origins the other European countries – primarily Portugal (35 percent); France (15 percent); Italy (8 percent); Belgium (7 percent) and Germany (5 percent) (Statec 2018c). While immigration flows have diversified from the late 1990s onwards, the dominant religion among the foreign population (as well as the native population) remains Roman Catholicism (Fetzer 2011: 9). According to Frank Engel, a Luxembourgish MEP for the Christian Democrats (CSV),

We made the wise decision of letting in Portuguese people. Not that they're any better than the Turks or us or you. But they have one major advantage: They're Catholics, just like us... Whenever you take immigration examples that have worked out badly, you find [the immigrants] are maybe of the same skin color but certainly of a different religion (quoted in Fetzer 2011: 16-7).

The cultural and religious similarities between immigrants and residents have made for a relatively seamless integration into Luxembourgish society, which in turn, could contribute to dampening demand for the populist radical right (see also Fetzer 2011: 17).

Yet, the Luxembourgish electorate is not unequivocally immigrant-friendly. When seen in combination with declining levels of voter trust, there is at least *some* breeding ground for right-wing populist sentiments in the Grand Duchy. This became obvious in the run-up to the 2015 referendum on the *Ausländerwahlrecht*. As mentioned earlier, on 7 June 2015, Luxembourg held a consultative referendum asking voters to voice their opinion on several constitutional changes, including lowering the legal voting age, imposing term limits on governmental mandates, and extending voting rights to non-citizen residents. Given the high number of foreign residents, the latter question was particularly controversial (see de Jonge & Petry 2019). The debates sparked by the 'No' campaign, which was led by the *Nee2015* movement and the ADR, stirred up fears of *Überfremdung*. The campaign proved highly effective, as nearly 80 percent of the electorate voted against the *Ausländerwahlrecht*. The exact motivations of the electorate are difficult to disentangle; while some voters may have been genuinely afraid of becoming 'a minority in their own country', others might have voted 'No' because they were dissatisfied with the performance of the governing parties (*Luxemburger Wort* 2015c).

Yet, the *Ausländerwahlrecht* referendum propelled identity politics to the centre of the political debate (see Chapter 4). Since the 2015 referendum, issues pertaining to the preservation of the Luxembourgish language have gained traction – issues that have traditionally been ‘owned’ by the nationalist ADR, which has long sought to halt the ‘Francophonisation’ of the country by raising the status of the Luxembourgish language. In 2016, for instance, a petition proposing to promote Luxembourgish as the country’s main language instead of just one of three official languages received a record-breaking 15,000 signatures. In response, a law on the promotion of the Luxembourgish language was adopted unanimously in parliament in 2018.

The legacy of the 2015 referendum was also noticeable in the run-up to the 2018 general election. As mentioned earlier, the grassroots movement that had lobbied against the *Ausländerwahlrecht* (*Nee2015/Wee2050*) joined forces with the ADR. Together, they revived the nationalist themes that had dominated the referendum campaign by focusing on concerns over rapid population growth and related fears over the alleged demise of the Luxembourgish language and identity. Although the ADR/Wee2050 was ultimately unable to capitalise on these themes (e.g. the ADR ‘only’ managed to increase its vote share by 1.64 percent), many other political parties copied these nationalist themes. For instance, the liberal Democratic Party ran on the campaign slogan ‘*Zukunft op Lëtzebuergesch*’ (‘Future in Luxembourgish’), while the social-democratic LSAP opted for ‘*Lëtzt* speak about politics’ (‘*Lëtzt*’ being the first syllable of *Lëtzebuergesch*, which is the Luxembourgish term for the local language).

Thus, there appears to be some latent demand for right-wing populist themes in the Grand Duchy. Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that this demand is less pronounced than in Belgium and the Netherlands. The relative homogeneity of the immigrant population, the frequent contact with immigrants as well as the country’s high affluence appear to have dampened demand for the populist radical right in Luxembourg. However, these factors do not make the country immune to right-wing populism. It is therefore useful to consider supply-side explanations.

### 3.3.2. Supply-Side Explanations

#### *The External Supply Side*

While the Luxembourgish electoral system is also based on proportional representation, it is not as permissive as the Dutch one.<sup>80</sup> This partly results from the variation in district sizes, as well as the seat distribution mechanism, which give rise to an informal electoral threshold. Despite its small size, Luxembourg is comprised of four constituencies: North, East, South and Centre. The number of parliamentary seats allocated per electoral district varies from seven (out of sixty) seats in the eastern district to twenty-three seats in the southern district. However, this distribution quota, which was introduced in the 1980s, is known to be anachronistic in the sense that it no longer corresponds either to the number of eligible voters or to the number of residents living in each district (Fehlen 2018). As a result, the ‘natural’ electoral threshold varies substantially per district: in the East, 12.5 percent of the votes are needed to acquire one seat in parliament, whereas only 4.2 percent are required in the South. The unequal value of votes is often criticised (particularly after elections) given that the seat distribution generally favours bigger parties in smaller electoral districts.<sup>81</sup> Despite this informal electoral threshold, the Luxembourgish electoral system is still proportional and should therefore not represent a major hurdle for populist radical right parties.

On the other hand, unlike in Flanders, far right groupings in Luxembourg cannot rely on the existence of a well-developed nationalist subculture as a way of mobilising supporters. While Luxembourgish nationalism does exist, it is a relatively recent phenomenon. Luxembourg became a sovereign state almost ‘by accident’ in 1839, after Belgium gained independence from the Netherlands. Thus, the country became an independent state *before* a sense of nationalism existed among the population (Garcia 2014: 118). The emergence of a true sense of national belonging and identity developed during WWII (Tausch 2003: 201-74), as the German occupation forged a sense of Luxembourgish nationhood. In that sense, it ‘represented a turning point in both nation- and language-building, as language was

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<sup>80</sup> One peculiarity of the Luxembourgish system is that voters can distribute personal preference votes to candidates, even if they run on different party lists. This practice, which is known as *panachage* favours well-known personalities, making it more difficult for political newcomers to enter politics.

<sup>81</sup> In Luxembourg, ‘remainder seats’ are allocated using the *D’Hondt* method, which tends to favour larger parties.

used as evidence to prove the existence of an authentic nation distinct from Germany' (Garcia 2014: 114).

It was not until the 1970s, however, that questions pertaining to national identity became politically salient. During this time, Luxembourgish society became exposed to a range of broad, structural changes in the international environment, including European integration, globalisation and the increased presence of immigrants (Garcia 2014: 119). These factors sparked the emergence of a nationalist linguistic movement. The use and promotion of *Lëtzebuergesch* have become symbols for the country's identity. As explained earlier, the various far-right movements that emerged in the 1970s and 80s grew out of groups and associations that advocated the preservation of the Luxembourgish language. Yet, while there is a distinct Luxembourgish national identity, there is no strong, underlying nationalist subculture that far-right movements could rely on to recruit qualified personnel and activists.

### *The Internal Supply Side*

In contrast to the Netherlands and Flanders, Luxembourg has not witnessed the rise of a 'credible' right-wing populist contender. Past far-right movements in Luxembourg such as FELES or the NB can be characterised by a lack of charismatic leadership and low levels of professionalisation. Moreover, they have often been plagued by internal dissension. The ADR is a case in point. Personality clashes arose after the party had achieved a major overhaul of the pension system in the early 2000s. According to one ADR MP, 'That's when the problems arose, where we said: our selling point is gone. [...] And that's when the party also started facing internal turmoil.'<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the loss of their *raison d'être* resulted in a series of internal disputes and a loss of parliamentary seats (ADR 2012; Dumont & Poirier 2005). The common strife for pension equity had left the party with an eclectic mix of members, ranging from bank managers to construction workers. In the words of Gast Gibéryen, 'the entire private sector was in it! [...] Some were left-leaning, others more right-wing. Some were very liberal, some were for abortion, others were radically opposed to it. Some were in favour of a regulated economy, others

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Gast Gibéryen on 22 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

wanted to liberalise it – and we kept all of this here in the party for years. And so the party slowly but surely had to find its way.’<sup>83</sup>

As a result, the ADR witnessed several episodes of infighting over the past decades. In 2009, for instance, the party’s youth wing was dissolved after one of its members allegedly voiced extreme-right opinions during his campaign for municipal elections (Dumont et al. 2012). In 2012, the party’s stance on social issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion created tensions between liberal and conservative factions, which culminated in the resignation of the more liberal, long-time ADR MP Jacques-Yves Henckes (see *Luxemburger Wort* 2012). Later that year, Jean Colombera, the party’s northern MP, left the ADR for similar reasons.<sup>84</sup> In 2014, Liliana Miranda resigned as General Secretary and cancelled her membership, lamenting the party’s lack of leadership and accusing the ADR of right-wing extremism (see *Tageblatt* 2014). In 2017, the ADR ousted Joe Thein, a young local councillor and former chairman of the ADR-youth section, after he had ‘liked’ a comment on Facebook stating that the country’s Foreign Minister, Jean-Asselborn, should drive in a convertible through Dallas – thereby implying that he should be killed in a Kennedy-like assassination.<sup>85</sup> The comment had been made by a non-ADR member on the Facebook page of ADR MP Fernand Kartheiser, who had posted an article on the Polish Ambassador expressing outrage about Asselborn’s criticism of Poland for failing to comply with the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession. Although Thein stated that his ‘like’ was in no way intended as a reference to the Kennedy assassination, senior members of the party decided to exclude him, particularly given that it was not the first time that he had attracted negative media-attention to the ADR (see RTL 2017b). For instance, in 2016, he had been spotted at a party congress of the German *Alternative für Deutschland*, which some media observers considered proof of the ADR’s far-right credentials (e.g. *Tageblatt* 2016).

This section has shown that there is *some* lingering demand for the populist radical right in Luxembourg, although it is arguably expressed differently from Belgium and the Netherlands due to the comparative homogeneity of the immigrant

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Gast Gibéryen on 22 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

<sup>84</sup> Jean Colombera went on to form his own party (the Party for Integral Democracy or PID). In the run-up to the 2018 general elections, the PID formed an alliance with the Pirate Party.

<sup>85</sup> As mentioned earlier, Joe Thein went on to form his own party in March 2017.

population, the country's affluence as well as frequent interactions with immigrants. Similarly, the supply of populist radical right movements has been weaker in the Grand Duchy. Indeed, past far-right movements were poorly organised and lacked organisational capacity. Contemporary 'softer' manifestations of right-wing populism have suffered from chronic infighting, which may have impeded their electoral success.

#### 3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a historical overview of the electoral trajectories of far-right movements in the Benelux region. Drawing on conventional demand- and supply-side explanations, the chapter has outlined various reasons that help explain the variation in the electoral performances of the populist radical right in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. The chapter has shown that, even though demand for right-wing populism may be weaker in the Grand Duchy, it exists in all three Benelux countries. This is in line with previous observations. For instance, van der Brug and Fennema (2007: 475) have shown that the socio-economic conditions that supposedly favour the success of radical right movements 'do not vary much between the different European countries and hence cannot account for their different fortunes' (see also Mudde 2010: 1168).

Unsurprisingly, supply-side explanations are much more helpful in accounting for the asymmetrical electoral trajectories of the populist radical right in the Benelux. Indeed, Dutch and Flemish right-wing populist movements have been much better organised, whereas Luxembourg and Wallonia have yet to witness the rise of a credible right-wing populist contender. Yet, supply-side factors are not fully able to account for the success of the populist radical right in the Netherlands and Flanders and the absence or failure of comparable movements in Wallonia and Luxembourg.

First, just like Wallonia and Luxembourg, the Netherlands also lacks a strong post-war nationalist subculture. Second, while the strong organisational capacity may account for *some* of the success of the Flemish and Dutch populist radical right movements (notably their electoral persistence), it fails to explain the *timing* of their electoral breakthroughs; after all, the VB had strong organisational capacity long before its initial electoral breakthrough (Art 2008: 422), whereas the Dutch LPF

managed to break through electorally despite comparatively weak organisational skills (de Lange & Art 2011). Third, simply suggesting that Luxembourg and Wallonia have not witnessed a ‘credible’ right-wing populist contender is too simplistic, because it attributes too much importance to the characteristics of individual leaders. It is also somewhat tautological; after all, a party may only be considered ‘credible’ once it gains electoral support. In any case, it begs the question as to *why* these polities have not witnessed the emergence of a ‘credible’ populist radical right movement – despite a (moderately) fertile breeding ground.

Thus, demand- and supply-side arguments cannot fully explain the divergent electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties. We therefore need to take into account the broader socio-political, historical and cultural context in which they compete. This allows us to understand how right-wing populist parties can make their voices heard in the in the first place (see Koopmans & Muis 2009: 643). I concur with David Art (2007) that the electoral success of right-wing populist parties ultimately hinges on the way in which they are received and perceived in the polity in which they emerge. The following chapters therefore address the importance of mainstream parties (Chapter 4) and the media (Chapter 5) for explanations of variance in the electoral performances of right-wing populist parties in the Benelux.

## Chapter 4: Mainstream Parties

Whether a fertile breeding ground for the populist radical right is translated into electoral success depends not only on the credibility and organisational capacity of these parties, but also on the behaviour of their mainstream competitors (see Chapter 2). Specifically, the strategic choices that mainstream parties make can influence the opportunity structures available to right-wing populist actors. This chapter analyses the ways in which mainstream parties have furthered or limited the spread of right-wing populism in the Benelux.

It does so by considering the rise of the populist radical right in the Benelux region through the lens of party competition. The broader aim is to show that the behaviour of mainstream parties is central to understanding the success and failure of the populist radical right in individual polities. The chapter demonstrates that the behaviour of centre-right and centre-left parties helped pave the way for the rise of the populist radical right in the Netherlands and Flanders, while they narrowed the opportunities for right-wing populist challengers in Wallonia and Luxembourg. Indeed, in the Netherlands and Flanders, mainstream parties failed to keep traditional lines of conflict ‘frozen’. In Luxembourg and Wallonia, on the other hand, mainstream parties have maintained a substantial share of the vote.

I am mainly concerned with the pre-emptive behaviour of mainstream parties. Hence, I focus specifically on the role of mainstream parties *prior* to the electoral breakthrough of right-wing populist parties. As explained in Chapter 1, whilst they are undeniably related, electoral breakthrough and electoral persistence are distinct processes (Coffé 2004). Therefore, it seems plausible that they can be explained by using different factors. As Ellinas (2010: 15) has noted, the weight attributed to the various explanations for the success of right-wing populist parties may depend on the specific stage of development they find themselves in. The behaviour of mainstream parties is likely to be more important *before* right-wing populist parties have crossed the threshold of relevance (Ellinas 2010: 16). Once a new political challenger has successfully entered the electoral arena, it changes the parameters of party competition, which means that the range of options available to mainstream parties also changes (Ellinas 2010: 17; see also Meguid 2008).

The chapter proceeds as follows: the first section sketches out the nature of Dutch party competition. It then analyses the behaviour of centre-right and centre-left parties prior to the rise of the LPF. The second section analyses the differences between the francophone and Flemish party systems in Belgium. It shows how the social democratic *Parti Socialiste* managed to absorb demand for the populist radical right by maintaining the salience of socio-economic issues. The final section sheds light on the nature of partisan competition in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg by discussing the state of consociational democracy. By comparing the electoral trajectories of mainstream parties in the Benelux, the concluding section shows that traditional mainstream parties have lost their dominant position in the Netherlands and Flanders, whereas they were able to maintain their stronghold in Wallonia and Luxembourg.

#### 4.1. Netherlands

As shown in Chapter 3, internal supply-side explanations are helpful to explain the rise of the populist radical right in the Netherlands. The relatively sudden rise of the LPF as well as the subsequent breakthrough of the PVV are commonly attributed to the characteristics of their respective leaders, Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders. Since they can both be described as well-spoken orators, they are, to some extent, the antithesis of their ‘predecessor’, the far-right leader Hans Janmaat. In that sense, Fortuyn and Wilders were important catalysts who effectively managed to tap into lingering demand for the populist radical right. However, this analysis is overly simplistic, as it attributes too much weight to individuals and thus fails to paint a complete picture. While Fortuyn and Wilders were important agents, the success of Dutch right-wing populist movements cannot solely be attributed to the strength and charisma of their leaders. The key question that remains is *how* Pim Fortuyn and later Geert Wilders managed to mobilise voters with their fierce critique of multiculturalism.

In order to understand their electoral success, we need to take into account the broader context. In the words of Simon Bornschier (2018: 214), ‘[W]e need to adopt a party system perspective and look both at the structuring power of older divisions as well as at the strategies that established parties employ with respect to the new cultural dimension the radical right mobilizes on.’ A party system perspective can

shed light on *why* the LPF and later the PVV were able to mobilise voters where the CD had failed. As demonstrated below, the behaviour and positioning of mainstream parties helped pave the way for the rise of the LPF and PVV.

Scholars have attributed the rise of the populist radical right in the Netherlands to the programmatic convergence of Dutch mainstream parties, which created room and opportunities for new parties to challenge the political establishment (see, for example, Lucardie 2008; Pennings & Keman 2003; van Kessel 2013). Although the Dutch party system had started to fragment towards the end of the twentieth century, it was still generally dominated by the three party families that had grown out of the three main ‘pillars’ or social segments that long made up Dutch society, namely the Christian-democratic *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* (Christian-Democratic Appeal or CDA), the liberal-conservative *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy or VVD), and the social-democratic *Partij van de Arbeid* (Labour Party or PvdA).<sup>86</sup> Pim Fortuyn rose to fame following eight years of coalition governments between social democrats and liberals. These coalition governments were referred to as being ‘purple’ because it mixed the ‘blue’ liberalism of the conservative VVD and the progressive D66 (Democrats 66) with the ‘red’ socialism of the PvdA. The coalition generated centripetal forces that compelled the VVD and the PvdA to move to the centre (Lucardie 2008: 153). The purple coalitions made the governing parties seem indistinguishable in the eyes of many voters, and the programmatic and ideological convergence generated space on the fringes of the political spectrum for the LPF. When the subsequent implosion of the LPF generated a void, the space was filled by the PVV.

While there clearly is some merit to this argument, it needs to be nuanced since it presumes that political competition occurred along a single-dimensional left-right political axis (Pellikaan et al. 2007: 284). In reality, political competition takes place on several fronts (Schattschneider 1960). The political space in Western Europe is (at least) two-dimensional, and focusing on the interplay between the

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<sup>86</sup> The CDA is, in fact, a relatively new party that was formed in 1977 as a confederation uniting three (traditional) Christian democratic parties from different Christian denominations (representing different pillars), notably the Catholic People’s Party (*Katholieke Volkspartij* or KVP), the Protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party (*Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* or ARP), and the Protestant Christian Historical Union (*Christelijk-Historische Unie* or CHU) (see Andeweg 1999: 110). The formation of an interconfessional party was an attempt to halt the rapid electoral decline of Christian democratic parties (van Kessel & Krouwel 2011).

economic and cultural dimensions of competition can help us understand the electoral fortunes of the populist radical right (Bornschieer 2018). In brief, it is argued here that the behaviour of Dutch centre-right parties in the 1980s and 90s contributed to the creation of a new, cultural line of conflict, which facilitated the politicisation of immigration. Following the creation of this new line of conflict, however, the centre-right failed to ‘deliver’ by not actually taking a tougher stance on immigration, moving back to the centre instead. This was partly because the VVD was constrained through its coalition agreement with the progressive D66 and social-democratic PvdA. Due to similar constraints, the centre-left also failed to ‘freeze’ traditional lines of conflict and was unable to maintain the salience of economic issues. This resulted in ideological convergence on the economic *and* the cultural axes, which, in turn, generated space for a political newcomer. According to Pellikaan et al. (2003), the success of the LPF resulted from its ability to combine opposition to multicultural society on the cultural axis with a critique of the neoliberal economic policies of the purple government on the economic axis.<sup>87</sup>

To fully understand this line of reasoning, it is necessary to explain the evolution of the Dutch political landscape in the second half of the twentieth century. As in many Western European countries, Dutch voters were long stabilised by cleavages that ‘anchored’ voters by tying them to specific political parties (Mair 2008: 251). In the Netherlands, these cleavages were solidified into ‘pillars’ (or subcultures) that structured not just the political landscape, but nearly every aspect of life. The pillar structure was a way of organising a socially divided country composed of minorities. Since the late nineteenth century, Dutch society was structured around four minority groups: Catholics, Protestants, Socialists and Liberals (Lijphart 1975). Each of these groups formed broad networks composed of various ideological organisations (e.g. associations, trade unions, newspapers etc.) that accompanied people from cradle to grave.<sup>88</sup> Every pillar produced its own political party, and members of a particular pillar would generally vote for their own ‘pillar

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<sup>87</sup> Although Fortuyn was highly critical of the economic policies of the governing parties, he ultimately subscribed to a neoliberal economic agenda (de Lange 2007; see also Pauwels 2014: 73).

<sup>88</sup> Rudy Andeweg (1999: 110-12) has noted that, in the Netherlands, the links between consociational parties and their traditional pillars have always been relatively weak in the sense that auxiliary organisations never played a key role in tying people to a specific party. In general, auxiliary association membership was lower in the Netherlands than in Belgium (Luther & Deschouwer 1999: 243).

party'. Similar to a Greek temple, the pillars that made up Dutch society were kept apart and only joined at the 'top' through political elites, who formed the 'roof' of the Dutch state (Andeweg 1999: 108). In order to come to political agreements, the great social heterogeneity was compensated through cooperation at the elite level (Lijphart 1975). Through the 'politics of accommodation', elites could offset the threat to stability caused by social division (see also Andeweg & Irwin 2002: 27ff). This power-sharing system of governance became widely known as 'consociational democracy'. Consociationalism was designed to ensure political stability, and pillarisation long had a stabilising effect on the Dutch electorate.

In general, established cleavage structures can limit the opportunities for political mobilisation based on new lines of conflict. The rigid pillarisation of Dutch society offered few opportunities for populists to mobilise 'the people' across the different societal subgroups. As Lucardie and Voerman (2012: 25) have pointed out, '[e]very assertion about a homogenous people seemed like a travesty in the pillarised Netherlands. Attempts to mobilise 'the people' right across the pillars against the elite of the pillarised parties [...] were doomed to fail.' Thus, the strength and salience of existing cleavages restricted the availability of 'free floating' voters, which, in turn, limited the opportunities for populist radical right parties to recruit voters.

Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, however, the pillars started to crumble (Andeweg 1999: 108). While the erosion of traditional cleavages affected other countries, it had a particularly strong impact on consociational democracies because the societal cleavages had been institutionalised into pillars (Luther & Deschouwer 1999: 247). The demise of the pillars led to a decline in the hegemony of Christian parties that had long played a dominant role in Dutch politics (Lucardie 2008: 152). Depillarisation came hand in hand with (and partly resulted from) other broad, long-term societal transformations, including secularisation and individualisation. Whilst these processes also occurred in other European countries, they had a more profound impact on the Netherlands (ibid). The 1960s and 70s saw the emergence of a non-pillarised public domain, which was composed of movements and organisations that refused to be categorised into one of the existing pillars, and by the turn of the twenty-first century, the Dutch electorate was left largely unstructured (van Holsteyn & Irwin 2003). In the words

of Peter Mair (2008: 240), Dutch voters were left ‘with scarcely anything with which to anchor themselves into place in terms of cleavages and other social identities.’ How do we account for the political dealignment that resulted from the erosion of social cleavages?

Existing research to explain national variations in the shifts in social and political cleavages can be separated into two complementary approaches: a ‘bottom-up’ and a ‘top-down’ approach (Rennwald & Evans 2014: 1109; see also Evans & Tilley 2012; Evans & de Graaf 2013).<sup>89</sup> According to the ‘bottom-up’ theory, political conflicts are shaped by ‘structural political potentials that arise from the gradual evolution of social structure’ (Bornschieer 2018: 212). In other words, cleavage structures change as a result of broad, macro-changes in the international environment, including modernisation, individualisation, globalisation, secularisation and depillarisation. In the Dutch case, it is commonly argued that such changes contributed to the erosion of boundaries between social classes and hence weakened traditional voting patterns (see van Kessel 2011). Increased levels of affluence and higher education have facilitated more social mobility, which has weakened the ‘distinctiveness’ of social classes and their accompanying pillars. As a result, the link between social class and party choice has weakened. In that sense, the success of populist radical right parties in the Netherlands can be tied to partisan dealignment (i.e. the weakening of traditional societal linkages and related transformations of social structures), which ‘freed up voters’ and thus helped pave the way for the LPF and later the PVV (e.g. Lucardie 2008). This bottom-up approach attributes a very passive role to political parties.

By contrast, the ‘top-down’ theory suggests that the changes in social cleavage structures must also be attributed to the positioning of mainstream parties. In that sense, the ‘top-down’ approach is less concerned with purely structural accounts but instead focuses on the agency of mainstream parties. Political parties can help *shape* the evolution of social cleavages by providing voters with choices that allow for the political expression of preferences based on existing cleavages such as class or religion. In other words, political parties do not just respond to changing lines of

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<sup>89</sup> These two approaches are not competing but rather complementary: accepting that ‘structure and agency are two sides of the same coin, coexisting in a dialectic relationship is a useful corrective to reductionist approaches that regard political elites as “great men” on the one hand or mere superstructure on the other [...]’ (Deegan-Krause & Enyedi 2010: 687).

conflict but can also *actively contribute* to the creation of new cleavages.<sup>90</sup> According to the ‘top-down’ approach, political actors play a central role in perpetuating existing cleavages (i.e. ‘freezing’ traditional lines of conflict), transforming them, or forming new ones altogether. This approach helps explain why the Dutch party system remained relatively stable until the end of the twentieth century – despite the forces of depillarisation. Indeed, as Pellikaan et al. (2007) have shown, during the period of pillarisation, political competition between parties was kept at a minimum. Stated differently, until the turn of the twenty-first century, established political parties in the Netherlands managed to ‘freeze’ political conflicts alongside traditional lines of conflict (explained below). As a result, parties attempting to introduce new lines of conflict generally failed to do so (Pellikaan et al. 2007: 283).

The ideological positioning of parties is often described in spatial terms (Downs 1957). Placing parties on a political spectrum allows us to trace their positions over time and describe their relations to other parties within the same party system. In a given space, parties’ ideological positions are traditionally described in bipolar terms along a linear left-right axis, where the far left describes an economy that is entirely in the hands of the government and the far right represents a completely free market economy (Downs 1957: 116). However, party systems are generally dominated by multiple lines of conflict. Particularly in multiparty systems, political conflicts are often fought on more than just one battlefield. Since it is difficult for parties to invest time and effort into fighting on multiple fronts simultaneously, they must decide for themselves ‘which battle [they] want most to win’ (Schattschneider 1960: 67). In other words, parties must decide strategically which lines of conflict they choose to politicise. Therefore, established parties have a vested interest in ‘freezing’ the existing lines of conflict, since any significant changes to the structure of the political landscape could have damaging consequences for them. In the words of Peter Mair (1997: 14), ‘[m]uch as rival cigarette manufacturers have a mutual interest in the promotion of smoking, however competitive they may be *vis-a-vis*

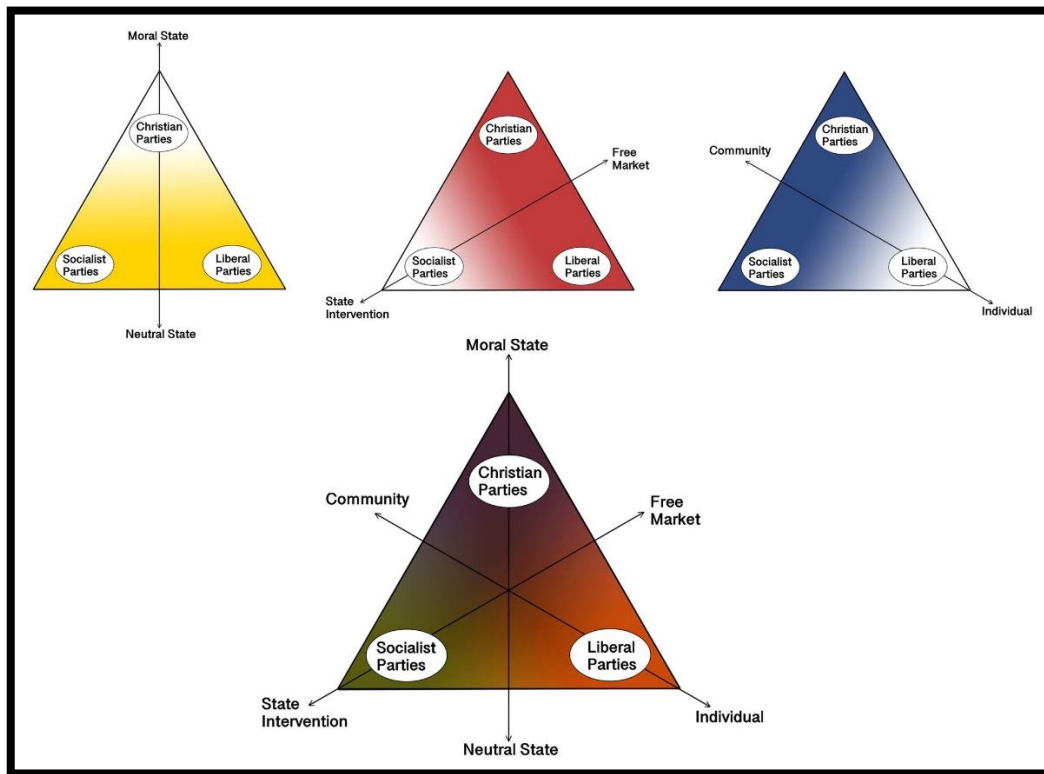
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<sup>90</sup> Rennwald and Evans (2014) have demonstrated the importance of the ‘top-down’ approach in understanding differences in shifting patterns of class voting in Austria and Switzerland. By focusing on the strategies of social democratic parties, the authors show that, in contrast to their Swiss colleagues, Austrian social democrats maintained close ties to their working-class electorate, which resulted in weaker working-class support for the radical right. The underlying argument is that supply (i.e. political parties) can create demand for certain views.

one another as far as the marketing of their own particular brands may be concerned, the established parties in a party system may be seen to have a mutual interest in the survival of their particular conflict and their particular form of competition.’

Pellikaan et al. (2007) have used the Schattschneider-Mair thesis (i.e. that established parties try to preserve the traditional lines of conflict that structure electoral competition) to explain the drastic rise of the LPF. The authors argue that the Dutch party system was long stabilised by three lines of conflict that emerged out of the pillarised structure of Dutch society (see Figure 6): First, an ethical (or denominational) line of conflict (represented in yellow in Figure 6) separating parties that support a moral state that restricts issues such as abortion, same sex marriage and euthanasia (i.e. Christian parties) from those that favour a neutral state (i.e. socialist and liberal parties); second, an economic line of conflict similar to the Downsian model described earlier (represented in the red) that separates parties that favour a free-market economy (i.e. liberal and Christian parties) from those that prefer a state-led one (i.e. socialist parties); and third, a communitarian line of conflict (represented in blue) that separates parties that adhere to an individualist conception of society (i.e. liberal parties) from those that prefer a more collectivist approach (i.e. socialist and Christian parties) (Pellikaan et al. 2007: 288).

Figure 6 – The Dutch Triangle



Source: Author's own illustration, created with graphic design support from Lys Differding. The figure is based on a model created by Pellikaan et al. (2003: 32). See also Pappi (1984).

As the authors point out, the three party families originating from the pillars 'were able to survive because they could manage political conflicts by unifying citizens along these cleavages or lines of conflict. [...] Each of the three party families had a coherent political position on all three lines of conflict and in a joint effort these lines of conflict were frozen' (Pellikaan et al. 2007: 290). Thus, when the pillars started to crumble, Dutch voters were still stabilised along this triangular construction, and new parties that entered (e.g. the liberal-progressive D66 and Green-Left) were forced to position themselves according to this ideological triangle. Under the 'purple' coalition government, however, old lines of conflict started to become redundant. First, the coalition parties 'resolved' ethical issues by legalising euthanasia and same sex marriage. The CDA decided to accept the new ethical status quo given that opposition would have made participation in future coalitions difficult. As a result, the ethical line of conflict became obsolete, and electoral competition was reduced to two dimensions: an economic and a communitarian line of conflict (Pellikaan et al. 2003: 30; Pellikaan et al. 2007: 291).

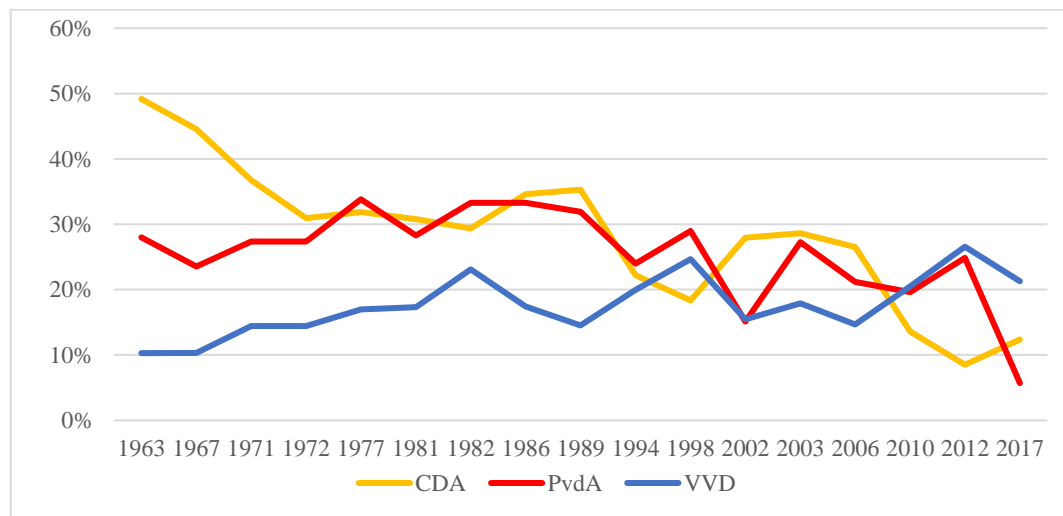
Second, the authors argue that the rise of Pim Fortuyn altered the content of the communitarian cleavage into a new, cultural line of conflict, separating supporters of a monocultural society from those who favour a multicultural society.

While this analysis can generally be described as a ‘top-down’ approach in the sense that it ascribes the changes in social cleavage structures to the positioning of mainstream parties, the authors still attribute the creation of a new social cleavage entirely to the LPF. In other words, according to Pellikaan et al. (2007: 283), it was Pim Fortuyn who successfully introduced a cultural line of conflict to the Dutch party system. While it was Fortuyn who managed to cement this new dimension into the Dutch party system, I argue that *mainstream parties* played an active role in the creation of this new line of conflict. Indeed, as shown below, centre-right parties actively contributed to the politicisation of issues pertaining to immigration long before the rise of the LPF, while the centre-left failed to offer a clear alternative.

#### **4.1.1. Radicalisation of the Centre-Right**

The behaviour of mainstream parties must be seen in the context of their overall positioning within the Dutch party landscape. The Dutch party landscape started to fragment in the 1960s (Mair 2008). As shown in Figure 7, Christian democratic parties in particular consistently started to lose support. Faced with declining voter loyalties, mainstream parties strategically sought to re-position themselves to the maximum number of voters.

Figure 7 – Support for Mainstream Parties in the Netherlands



Source: *Kiesraad* (2019)

Notes: As explained earlier, the CDA was formed in 1977; for earlier years, the graph depicts the aggregate of support levels for the predecessor parties: KVP, ARP and CHU.

As explained in Chapter 3, from the 1990s onwards, issues related to immigration had started to gain salience among small portions of the Dutch electorate (Aarts & Thomassen 2008). Dutch centre-right parties sought to appeal to these voters by adopting a more restrictive stance on issues relating to immigration and integration. In other words, they tried to minimise losses in their voter base by politicising issues related to immigration and integration.

There is ample empirical evidence to suggest that this ‘rightwards shift’ of the centre occurred not in response to but *before* the rise of a successful far-right challenger. For instance, applying qualitative methods, van Kersbergen and Krouwel (2008) have analysed the discourse of Dutch mainstream parties over time and found that, from the early 1990s onwards, centre-right parties shifted towards more hard-line and restrictive immigration policies. Their analysis suggests that the Christian-democratic CDA and, above all, the liberal-conservative VVD consciously and strategically politicised the ‘foreigner issue’ for electoral gain (van Kersbergen & Krouwel 2008: 401). Similarly, by means of systematic, quantitative content analysis of party programmes, van Heerden et al. (2014) have shown that Dutch mainstream parties actively contributed to the politicisation of immigration in the early 1990s. Specifically, their analysis suggests that Dutch parties changed their positions on issues relating to immigration and integration by adopting a

monoculturalist discourse instead of the previously dominant multiculturalist discourse (van Heerden et al. 2014: 128). This shift entailed that parties ceased to mobilise voters on traditional socio-economic topics by emphasising issues relating to cultural integration. Drawing on data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) project, Rooduijn (2017) comes to a similar conclusion. In an article published on the Dutch political science website *Stuk Rood Vlees*, Rooduijn uses CMP data to trace the positive and negative attention that Dutch mainstream parties devote to issues such as patriotism, nationalism, multiculturalism, law and order, and security.<sup>91</sup> The analysis indicates that the Dutch mainstream parties, VVD, CDA and PvdA, consistently shifted rightwards on socio-cultural positions between the 1960s and the early 2000s (Rooduijn 2017). Thus, it was not so much the emergence of Pim Fortuyn, but rather the politicisation of immigration and related topics brought about by the positioning of mainstream parties that laid the foundation for a new, cultural line of conflict.

This general rightwards shift helped pave the way for the rise of the populist radical right in the sense that it altered the nature of the public debate. Up until the 1990s, issues concerning immigration including asylum as well as the integration of ethnic minorities had been kept out of the political debate in the Netherlands because they were generally associated with the extreme right (Aarts and Thomassen 2008: 217). As a result, in the decades preceding the 1990s, Dutch civil society, mainstream parties and media practitioners (see Chapter 5) showed zero tolerance for the intolerant.

Indeed, during the 1980s and 1990s, Hans Janmaat's extremist 'centre parties' were met with severe political ostracism and social resistance (see, for example, de Vetten 2016). The wartime experience had given rise to an 'extremely hostile legal, public and political attitude' towards the radical right (van Holsteyn 2018a: 480). In the decades after the war, there was a general determination among the Dutch population that Nazism and fascism should never be allowed to return (Mudde & van Holsteyn 2000: 146). It was mainly because of this systematic societal and legal

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<sup>91</sup> The CMP approach is based on sentence-by-sentence coding of party's election manifestos (e.g. Volkens et al. 2018). It aims at measuring the salience of issues as well as the overall positions parties assume vis-à-vis those issues. The CMP approach has been criticised for various shortcomings, including flaws in the theoretical underpinnings of the coding scheme, coding reliability and document selection. For an overview, see Gemenis (2017).

ostracism that initiatives to form far-right movements never really materialised (van Donselaar 1993); the adverse public sentiment made it difficult for far-right sympathisers to meet and organise. After winning a seat in the Dutch parliament for the first time (with 0.8 percent of the vote), Janmaat entered the *Tweede Kamer* in September 1982 ‘amid cries of protest’ (Lucardie 1998: 112; see also Brants & Hogendoorn 1983: 132). All over the country, antifascist committees emerged (Lucardie 1998: 112). Virtually all other parties represented in the Dutch parliament at the time proceeded to boycott the CP, for example by leaving the room when Janmaat approached the microphone (van Donselaar 1995: 50). In a similar fashion, Janmaat’s Centre Democrats ‘were denounced and boycotted since their foundation in 1984 by all other politicians, including those of the mainstream right-wing VVD’ (van Spanje & van der Brug 2009: 363). According to Ignazi (2003: 166-7), the success of the CD ‘provoked an uproar from anti-fascist and anti-racist organizations, and steadfast ostracism inside the elective assemblies (e.g. the systematic exclusion from committees and limitation to the minimum of services normally provided by the institutions to parties and representatives).’

The subsequently formed CP’86 was also faced with severe ostracism; in response to the party’s success in the 1990 municipal elections, hundreds of people took to the streets in cities such as Amsterdam and The Hague to protest against the installation of far-right local councillors (Husbands 1992a: 113). In 1997, Janmaat was convicted for incitement of racial discrimination after announcing that he would ‘abolish the multicultural society as soon as we have the opportunity and the power’ (van Kersbergen & Krouwel 2008: 404) – a claim that would hardly be considered radical in today’s context. Thus, the ‘centre movement’ was generally not considered a political opponent, but an enemy (de Vetten 2016: 279). Throughout his political career, Janmaat was consistently faced with protest (including serious physical attacks) and political exclusion. In the words of Ignazi (2003: 172), ‘[p]robably in no other country has the counter-mobilization against the extreme right proved so vigorous as in the Netherlands, both on the streets (including many violent events) and inside the institutions.’

Over the course of the 1990s, however, the nature of the public discourse in the Netherlands started to shift. This was partly because centre-right parties adopted more ‘radical’ positions. Under the leadership of Frits Bolkestein (1990-98), the

liberal VVD placed immigration on the centre of the political agenda. Indeed, influential figures within the VVD (notably Bolkestein, but also others such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali) introduced a new, conservative-liberal ideology in the Dutch political discourse (Oudenampsen 2018). This ideology consisted of a mixture of a conservative outlook on social and cultural affairs, neoliberal economic views and a realist foreign policy agenda (Vossen 2011: 181). It also introduced a mild degree of Euroscepticism. As Baukje Prins (2002: 367) showed, in the early 1990s, Bolkestein started defending the values and achievements of European civilisation by juxtaposing them to Islam, thus challenging the dominant discourse by making it ‘crystal-clear to Muslims living in the Netherlands that any kind of bargaining about the principles of Western liberalism was out of the question.’ Evidence of this shift can be found in several of Bolkestein’s speeches and writings. For instance, in 1991, he gave a revealing and commonly-cited speech entitled ‘The Collapse of the Soviet Union’ at a meeting of the Liberal International in Luzern, in which he warned about the growing influence of Islam. Referring to the looming presence of nearly 400,000 Turkish and Moroccan residents in the Netherlands, Bolkestein worried that this would exceed the Dutch ‘absorption capacity’:

The unsettled situation in Eastern Europe ripples over into Western Europe. Germany in particular has taken a vast number of refugees from the East. The pressure in The Netherlands from people who want to settle here is also growing inexorably. Prominent among recent immigrants in The Netherlands are people from Morocco and Turkey. [...] It is an influx such as we have never before had to absorb (Bolkestein 1991b)

Bolkestein then moved on to speak about integration policy, highlighting the need for cultural assimilation:

What should government policy be towards these people who come from a different culture and of whom many speak little or no Dutch? Our official policy used to be: ‘Integration without prejudice to everyone’s own identity. It is now recognised that this slogan was a bit too easy. If everyone’s cultural identity is allowed to persist unimpaired, integration will suffer. And integration there must be, because the Turkish and Moroccan immigrants are here to stay. [...] If integration is officially declared government policy, which cultural values must prevail: those of the non-Muslim majority or those of the Muslim minority? Here we must go back to our roots. Liberalism has produced some fundamental political principles, such as: the separation of church and state, the freedom of expression, tolerance and non-discrimination. We maintain that these principles hold good not only in Europe and North America but all over the world. Liberalism claims

universal value and worth for these principles. That is the political version. Here there can be no compromise [...] (Bolkestein 1991b).

A few days after the Lucerne conference, Bolkestein (1991a) published an op-ed in the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, in which he argued that the integration of minorities must be tackled ‘with guts’ (or courage). While Bolkestein’s comments may not seem very significant in today’s context, they marked a noticeable shift from the Dutch multicultural consensus at the time. In a nutshell, Bolkestein’s words implied that Dutch culture was at risk of being ‘compromised’ by the influences of foreign (i.e. Muslim) beliefs, and that the minority must therefore abide by the rules of the native (i.e. Dutch) majority. By bringing these issues onto the agenda, Bolkestein urged Dutch elites to preserve Western values and take complaints regarding (Muslim) immigration seriously (Prins 2002: 368; see also Lucardie 1998: 121).<sup>92</sup>

Beyond this new ideology, Bolkestein also introduced a new, more confrontational political style (Prins 2002). According to Vossen (2017: 8), ‘Bolkestein stood out for his aggressive debating style, untypical by Dutch standards, in that he was aiming for conflict rather than compromise.’ By openly criticising multiculturalism and the progressive cultural relativism enshrined in Dutch minority policies, Bolkestein was among the first in the Netherlands to break the taboo on immigration (Vossen 2011: 181). When Bolkestein started a debate on immigration and integration, he could not simply be marginalised because he was the leader of an established centre-right party (Aarts and Thomassen 2008: 217). The politicisation of immigration by the centre-right inadvertently generated favourable discursive opportunity structures for the populist radical right. When seen from this perspective, it becomes obvious that Fortuyn effectively radicalised a type of political discourse that had already become widely accepted and respectable by the time he arrived on the political scene (Prins 2002; Oudenampson 2018). As mentioned in Chapter 3, prior to starting his own party, Geert Wilders was long active as a member of the liberal VVD. In many ways, Wilders emulated Bolkestein, who had become a role model to him (Vossen 2017: 141), while Wilders became something of a ‘sorcerer’s apprentice’ to Bolkestein (Fennema

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<sup>92</sup> As Oudenampson (2018) has shown, this ‘new right’ ideology was rooted in Anglo-American neoliberalism and neoconservatism.

2010). Wilders successfully appropriated the immigration issue and made it his own. As the following chapter will show, this rightwards shift was also reflected in the media.

Several scholars have argued that mainstream parties failed to react to growing concerns amongst the electorate over immigration, and that this generated favourable opportunity structures for the populist radical right (e.g. van der Brug et al. 2005; van Kessel 2015: 109). This is misleading because it fails to take into account the behaviour of mainstream parties *prior* to the rise of the populist radical right. I therefore concur with Tim Bale (2008: 320) who observed that:

[T]he now familiar notion that there was a more or less bipartisan (and ultimately counterproductive) ‘conspiracy of silence’ on the part of the mainstream that created ‘a political space’ for the anti-immigrant extreme [...] is, notwithstanding its status as common wisdom, highly problematic. It did not require, for instance, a far-right threat to bring about the almost pan-European “immigration stop” in the early 1970s.

As mentioned earlier, Dutch mainstream parties had adopted a more restrictive stance on immigration before the rise of the LPF (e.g. van Heerden et al. 2014). In particular, the VVD had voiced concerns over multiculturalism since the early 1990s. However, after politicising the issue, the party did not incorporate immigration and integration in its electoral campaigns. Partly as a result of the changing discourse of the centre-right, issues pertaining to immigration and asylum that were previously considered to be of minor importance started to gain traction in the 1990s (Bale 2008). By politicising immigration, the centre-right allowed the epicentre of political competition to be shifted from socio-economic issues (e.g. government intervention in economy; the welfare state; redistribution) to non-material issues (e.g. asylum; immigration) (van Kersbergen & Krouwel 2008: 400). This fundamentally altered the nature of party competition in the Netherlands, in the sense that the main axis of competition was no longer the economic left-right divide but a post-material axis, which facilitated the politicisation of immigration.

After politicising the issue, the VVD could not actually deliver (i.e. cater to the anti-immigrant vote) because it was constrained on the one hand by being in a coalition with the Dutch Labour party (PvdA) and the Christian Democratic CDA, and on the other hand by its more libertarian electorate, who saw immigrants as a cheap supply of labour (van Kersbergen & Krouwel 2008: 402). It also unleashed debates

inside the VVD between a more conservative faction, who favoured a monocultural, Eurosceptic and nationalist stance, and more a more libertarian wing advocating multiculturalism, economic liberalism and personal freedoms (van Kersbergen & Krouwel 2008: 399). This conflict intensified when Bolkestein left as party leader in 1998. His successor, Hans Dijkstal, was unwilling to shift the VVD in a more conservative direction, and during the 2002 general election, the VVD's shift on the multicultural dimension ultimately did not materialise in the party's programme (Pellikaan et al. 2003: 44). Thus, having created a new axis and politicising the immigration issue, the VVD could not actually 'fill the space', so demand for stricter immigration policies remained unfulfilled, which then paved the way for an anti-immigrant party to emerge (Vossen 2017: 141). In the words of Tim Bale (2008: 322), 'once the toothpaste is out of the tube, the can of worms opened, the issues rarely go away.' By politicising issues relating to immigration and integration, centre-right parties helped to increase the salience of these issues. In other words, the positioning of centre-right parties vis-à-vis the populist radical right shifted over time from demarcation to confrontation and accommodation.

This explanation is in line with the sequential argument put forward by Ellinas (2010), who argues that populist radical right parties tend to succeed when mainstream parties 'play the nationalist card' but subsequently fail to deliver by moving back to the centre (see also Bornschier 2012; Ignazi 2003).

In sum, in the 1990s, centre-right parties contributed to radicalising political competition over national identity in the Netherlands. As a result, they legitimised some of the appeals of the far-right and, above all, introduced a new axis of political contestation. By withdrawing the nationalist card, they lost 'issue ownership' over it and generated space for Fortuyn to assume this position. When the LPF imploded, the scene was set for Geert Wilders.

#### **4.1.2. Acquiescence of the Centre-Left**

A second factor that can help explain why the cultural line of conflict became dominant has to do with the behaviour of the centre-left. As shown below, the Dutch social-democratic PvdA moved to the centre on the economic left-right scale, which helped increase the salience of the cultural line of conflict. The PvdA assumed an ambiguous position on this new political dimension by choosing not to take a clear

stance on issues pertaining to immigration and integration. This behaviour ultimately played into the hands of the populist radical right.

Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, Dutch mainstream parties positioned themselves closer to one another (Pennings & Keman 2003; Pennings & Keman 2008: 159). Previous studies have shown that the Dutch Labour party largely abandoned its left-wing economic agenda by shifting closer to the centre (Green-Pedersen 2001; Pellikaan et al. 2003: 41). The ideological convergence between centre-left and centre-right parties was not unique to the Netherlands; in the second half of the twenty-first century, social democratic parties in numerous European countries sought to increase their voter bases by moving to the political centre in order to appeal to a growing middle class (see Bickerton 2018). This set in motion a phase of programmatic and ideological renewal that became widely known as the ‘Third Way’ (or *die neue Mitte*). This reinvention of social democracy was ‘an attempt to formulate a more “offensive” political project’ that would combine elements from ‘the failed old-style social democracy with its firm belief in the state as the instrument of social and economic intervention, and, on the other hand, the kind of ruthless neoliberalism that was advocated and sometimes practiced in the 1980s with its rock solid confidence in the “free” markets’ (Green-Pedersen et al. 2001: 310).

This ideological convergence around economic issues was particularly pronounced in the Netherlands because of the pivotal role of the CDA (Green-Pedersen 2001). Because of its dominant role within the Dutch party system, neither the liberal VVD nor the social-democratic PvdA could afford to shift too far away from the CDA; after all, doing so would endanger future government coalitions (Pennings & Keman 2003: 65). In that sense, the CDA managed to draw the PvdA and the VVD closer to one another, thereby essentially turning both into centre parties (Green-Pedersen 2001: 978). When the CDA-VVD cabinet under the leadership of CDA Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers (1982-86) introduced a series of austerity measures, the PvdA moderated its critique because it did not want to be disqualified from future government participation. At the same time, the centre-right government sought to cultivate its social image, for instance by advocating special benefits for families that were particularly vulnerable. As a result, in the 1986 elections, the

three main Dutch parties were essentially advocating a nearly identical socio-economic policy agenda (Green-Pedersen 2001: 978).

Even after the CDA lost its pivotal position, the ideological convergence persisted and arguably intensified. In 1994, the electoral defeat of the Christian democrats (who had consistently been in power since the end of WWII) facilitated a coalition between the PvdA and VVD (along the socially-progressive liberal D66). This fundamentally altered the relationship between the two main parties: while they had principally excluded one another as potential coalition partners until the late 1980s, ‘they now embraced each other’ (Pennings & Keman 2008: 52). The PvdA’s policy stance on economic issues became firmly centrist. A glance at the 1998 PvdA Party Manifesto is rather telling. On the relationship between the state and the market, the party noted the following:

Political regulations and market forces can go hand in hand very well. [...] The market is not a panacea for all ills. Nor is the state. Each has its own strong and weak sides. Markets can solve economic imperfections and save costs but [also] create social imperfections that lead to new – social – costs. Government action can limit and prevent social inequality but [also] prevent social dynamism (PvdA 1998: 10).

With the PvdA’s programmatic shift to the centre, the economic dimension became depoliticised and ultimately redundant, allowing the cultural dimension to become dominant. On this new political axis, however, the PvdA also assumed an ambivalent position: on the one hand, the party accepted the idea of a multicultural society with Muslims forming their own ‘pillar’; on the other hand, the party advocated measures to reduce the number of immigrants in the Netherlands (Pellikaan et al. 2003: 39). From the 1990s onwards, the PvdA started calling for the social integration of ethnic minorities. While the PvdA was aware of the electoral potential of more restrictive immigration policies, the party had initially hoped that government action in that direction would ‘defuse’ the issue instead of making it more salient (Bale et al. 2010: 416). To this end, the PvdA sought to frame immigration in socio-economic terms (e.g. by advocating labour market access and education); however, at the same time, Bolkestein (and later Fortuyn) insisted that the failed integration of minorities resulted from cultural differences linked to religion and language (ibid). According to Bale et al. (2013: 94), the ambiguous stance of the PvdA was reflected in the party programmes: ‘Indeed, a

closer look at its short manifesto for the 2003 parliamentary election indicates that the Labour Party prioritised the issue of social integration of ethnic minorities to a greater extent than in previous programmes. [...] In the Labour Party's programme of 2006, the issue receded to the middle of the document.' The low priority given to immigration and integration suggests that the PvdA was trying to play down these issues. By doing so, the centre-left also assumed a more accommodating position towards the populist radical right.

In fact, the ambivalent stance of the party resulted from disagreement inside the Labour party. Internally, the PvdA was divided between members who were in favour of the assimilation approach and those who had a more liberal outlook and were advocating multiculturalism (Bale et al. 2013: 94). This resulted in a 'middle of the road' policy that ultimately dissatisfied both camps. This ambiguity weakened the party's position. As a result, the PvdA was no longer able to 'defuse' the immigration debate, which forced the party to assume a more restrictive stance:

The failure to defuse the issue helped transform the strategic environment in which the Dutch social democrats now operated. Their move to the centre during the 1990s had weakened their core vote [...]. As the PvdA no longer defended its former multicultural positions – the *hold* strategy – and with their *defuse* strategy now backfiring, the party could do nothing else but *adopt* a more monocultural, tough-on-immigration stance. This was too late, however, to prevent radical populist mobilisation of discontent on both the left and right [...] (Bale et al. 2003: 416).

Thus, as Lucardie (2008: 153) has observed, the 'red' of the social democrats in the 'purple' coalition governments 'turned out to be rather pale'; PvdA leader Wim Kok was 'keen on "shedding the ideological feathers" of his party and his government mainly pursued liberal policies in both socio-economic and socio-cultural spheres.' When the VVD played the nationalist card, the PvdA did not offer any clear alternative but instead 'went along' with the new monoculturalist discourse. Mainstream parties seemed unable (and indeed unwilling) to freeze traditional lines of conflict. As a result, they were inadvertently tilling the field for the rise of the LPF. Fortuyn was able to assume issue ownership on the immigration issue, thereby capitalising on the increased salience of this new dividing line. As we shall see in the following chapter, the media also contributed to generating favourable discursive opportunity structures for the LPF and later the PVV. In that

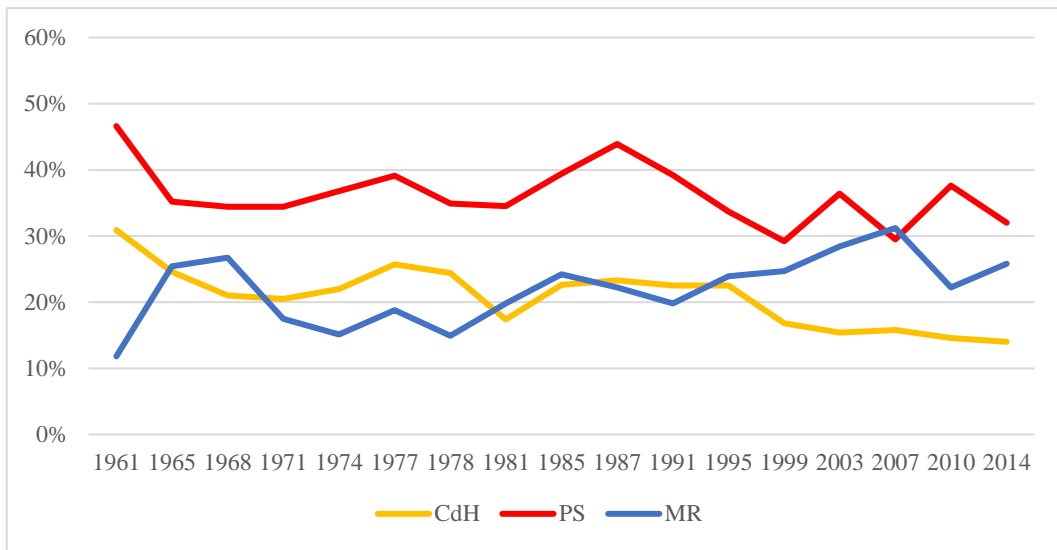
sense, taken together, mainstream parties and the media helped paved the way for the rise of Fortuyn and later Wilders.

#### 4.2. Belgium

As mentioned in Chapter 3, it is impossible to understand the rise of the populist radical right in Belgium without taking into account the regional dimension. Indeed, regionalism has had a profound impact on the party system(s). In the past, the Belgian party system was – just like the Dutch one – organised around three social cleavages (i.e. economic, denominational and communitarian), which gave rise to three traditional party families and associated pillars: i.e. Christian democrats, Liberals and social democrats. However, on top of these traditional cleavages, Belgium also has a cross-cutting linguistic cleavage.

The linguistic cleavage became increasingly salient over the course of the twentieth century and ultimately transformed Belgium into a federal state, whereby the country was divided into two distinct party systems, each of which developed different patterns of party competition. Specifically, the Flemish party landscape is more fragmented than the francophone one (De Winter et al. 2006: 934). Relatedly, as shown below, in Wallonia (see Figure 8), support for traditional party families (i.e. social democrats, Christian democrats and Liberals) remains relatively stable, whereas support for Flemish mainstream parties (particularly support for the Christian democrats) has plummeted (see Figure 9).

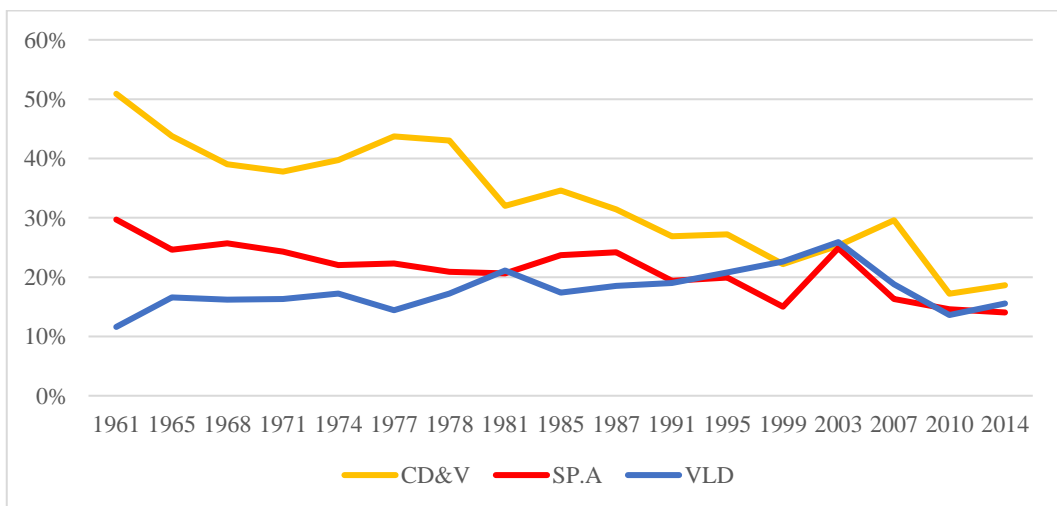
Figure 8 – Support for Mainstream Parties in Wallonia



Source: Belgian Interior Ministry (2019)

Notes: In 1977, the PS and the *Rassemblement Walloon* (RW) formed a joint-list in the southernmost Belgian province called Luxembourg.  
In 1995 and 1999, the Liberal Reformist Party (PRL) formed a joint-list with the Francophone Democratic Federalists (FDF). In 1999, the Citizen' Movement for Change (MCC) joined the alliance. In the 2000s, a German-speaking liberal party (Party for Freedom and Progress) joined the PRL-FDF-MCC alliance. This led to the foundation of the MR in 2002.

Figure 9 – Support for Mainstream Parties in Flanders



Source: Belgian Interior Ministry (2019)

Notes: In 2003, the social-democratic sp.a (*Socialistische Partij Anders* or Socialist Party Differently) formed a joint-list with the social-liberal party SPIRIT (a break-away faction from the moderate nationalist *Volksunie* or People's Union).  
In 2007, CD&V formed a joint-list with the N-VA.

Differing levels of support for mainstream parties was particularly striking in the 2014 Belgian Federal elections (see Table 5). In the francophone region, traditional party families won over 70 percent of the vote, compared to less than 50 percent in Flanders, where the relatively new nationalist New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) garnered 32 percent of the vote.

*Table 5 – Mainstream Parties in 2014 Belgian Federal Elections*

Wallonia			Flanders	
Social Democrats	<i>Parti Socialiste</i> (PS)	31.43%	<i>Socialistische Partij Anders</i> (sp.a)	14.04%
Christian Democrats	<i>Centre démocrate humaniste</i> (cdH)	13.43%	<i>Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams</i> (CD&V)	18.47%
Liberals	<i>Mouvement Réformateur</i> (MR)	25.96%	<i>Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten</i> (VLD)	15.55%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>70.82%</b>		<b>48.06%</b>

Source: Belgian Interior Ministry (2019)

Notes: The table shows *regional* electoral results obtained during federal elections. Since Belgium has a confederal party model, these results are most relevant here.

#### 4.2.1. The Salience of the Economic Cleavage in Wallonia

The relative strength of Walloon mainstream parties (particularly the PS) can be attributed to the fact that traditional social cleavages are more pronounced in the francophone south of Belgium. Scholars have shown that social cleavages carry different weights in the two Belgian party systems (De Winter et al. 2006: 938). In Wallonia, ‘[t]he [economic] left–right dimension is still the most relevant for electoral behaviour [...], whereas in Flanders ethnocentrism and political alienation have become the main factors’ (De Winter et al. 2006: 953). In Flanders, the ethno-linguistic cleavage appears to trump all other lines of conflict. The importance of the regional dimension is reflected in the party names; with the exception of the social democrats, most political parties stress their Flemish identity: in 1992, the liberals changed their name from ‘Party for Liberty and Progress’ into ‘Flemish Liberals and Democrats’ (*Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* or Open VLD), and in 2001, the ‘Christian People’s Party’ became ‘Christian Democratic and Flemish’ (*Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* or CD&V). In Wallonia, on the other hand, the economic line of conflict continue to play an important role.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> The salience of the traditional left-right cleavage in Wallonia may also help explain the rise of the far-left *Parti du Travail de Belgique* (Belgian Worker’s Party or PVDA-PTB) since 2010. With its

In Chapter 2, we saw that the salience of traditional cleavage structures can dampen demand for the populist radical right (Kriesi et al. 1995: 4). If old cleavages remain prominent, it is difficult to mobilise voters on new issues (Bornschieer 2010). Over the past decades, as in the Netherlands, the erosion of the Belgian social pillars has contributed to the fragmentation of the Belgian party system(s). However, depillarisation has been less pronounced in Wallonia than in Flanders (van den Berg & Coffé 2012). Political fragmentation generally implies increased electoral volatility as well as partisan dealignment or detachment from traditional parties (e.g. Dalton et al. 2002), which, in turn, has increased the ‘availability’ of voters. This trend is more pronounced in Flanders, which helps explain the increased potential for demand for populist challenger parties.

There are two different ways to explain the variation in the salience of cleavage structures. From a ‘bottom-up’ perspective, the importance of the economic cleavage in Wallonia may simply be understood as a reflection of the socio-economic situation. As explained in Chapter 3, the southern, francophone region of Belgium is poorer than the northern Dutch-speaking part; although it was one of Europe’s first industrialised regions, Wallonia has faced economic decline since the end of WWII. In Flanders, on the other hand, post-war industrialisation was led by small and medium-sized enterprises and multinationals and, as a result, by the 1960s, Flanders was prospering, while the Walloon economy was shrinking (De Winter et al. 2006: 183). Socio-economic issues may therefore simply be more relevant to Walloon voters.

However, as Coffé (2005: 128) has rightly noted, the strength of the economic cleavage in Wallonia cannot solely be explained by the different economic situation. Instead, it must also be attributed to the behaviour of mainstream parties. From a ‘top-down’ perspective, it can be argued that Walloon mainstream parties have successfully managed to ‘freeze’ traditional lines of conflict. The dominance of the economic cleavage in Wallonia can be linked to the behaviour of the social democratic *Parti Socialiste* (Socialist Party or PS). Unlike most other social democratic parties in Europe, the PS has maintained a central position in the Walloon party landscape. This can be explained by the fact that the party plays a

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campaigns against globalisation, the PVDA-PTB appears to be mobilising voters on traditional economic issues, thereby appealing to voters from the PS.

pivotal role in the socialist ‘pillar’. As such, the links between the PS and its socialist subculture remain very close. Thanks to these links, the party managed to hold on to its traditional working-class electorate. It has done so through a combination of localised politics (*‘socialism of proximity’*) and clientelist practices, for instance by reserving jobs for party members in state enterprises, or by making use of the party’s auxiliary organisations (or ‘pillar organisations’), which grant the party direct access to public services, allowing it to distribute material benefits to its members (Coffé 2005; 2008: 184).<sup>94</sup> For instance, the party maintains close ties with municipal utility companies, while public services (including health care, unemployment benefits and public-sector jobs) are also managed by party-affiliated organisations. The PS has deliberately used service provision (*‘politiek dienstbetoon’*) as a strategy to combat the rise of extremist groupings (Coffé 2005: 143ff). Based on interviews with PS politicians, Coffé found that party representatives considered one of their main strengths to be their proximity to voters. According to the then-leader of the PS, Elio Di Rupo, ‘customer loyalty’ with voters is one of the party’s biggest strengths; moreover, ‘PS candidates do not mind putting in a good word for their voters with city administrations, or helping their constituents figure out how gas- and electricity connections work’ (Coffé 2005: 146-7).

Luther and Deschouwer (1999: 244) have shown that while membership in auxiliary organisations started plummeting in the Netherlands in the 1960s, it *increased* in Belgium for two more decades:

Greatest stability is to be found amongst associations dispensing clientelistic [sic] services and it appears reasonable to conclude that the establishment of the latter type not only initially facilitated subcultural encapsulation, but also subsequently helped militate against the decline of organisational penetration.

The survival of the socialist pillar in Wallonia ensures that the predictability of voting behaviour based on membership of socialist pillar organisations has remained relatively high (Billiet et al. 2006: 922). In that sense, the behaviour of

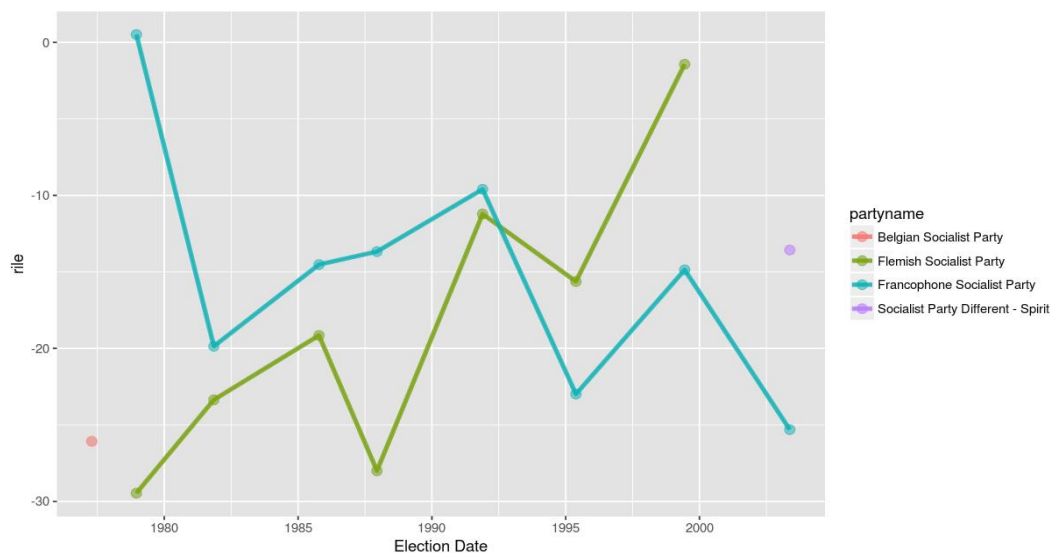
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<sup>94</sup> In 2016 and 2017, the PS was struck by a series of corruption scandals regarding excessive remunerations awarded to PS politicians, who were also board members of public companies and non-profit organisations (e.g. Publifin and SAMUsocial). This led to several resignations. In June 2017, Yvan Mayeur (PS) was forced to step down as Mayor of Brussels. The scandals generated a dip in public support for the PS, which coincided with a rise in support for the far-left PVDA-PTB. At the time of writing (May 2019), however, the PS seems to be recovering in the polls.

the PS has contributed to the preservation of traditional cleavage structures. Indeed, the party was able to capitalise on the salience of traditional economic issues (Coffé 2008: 186).

Unlike the Flemish social democrats (sp.a), the PS continued to advocate a classic left-wing socio-economic agenda. Even whilst governing with the liberals, the PS consistently maintained a strong leftist-socialist position and discourse (Coffé 2008: 190). This observation is confirmed by looking at the overall positioning of Belgian social democratic parties over time. Using data compiled by the CMP, Figure 10 plots the right-left positions of Belgian social democratic parties during general elections according to the RILE-index (Volkens et al. 2018). The RILE-index (arguably the most used and contested CMP index) is constructed based on certain *a priori* assumptions about the meaning of ‘left’ and ‘right’ (see Budge 2013). In very basic terms, the index measures party positions on various issues (e.g. welfare state expansion; the role of the military; democracy; law and order; nationalism, etc.), and then plots them along a unidimensional right-left axis, where higher (positive) values indicate a right-wing position and negative values signify a left-wing position (Volkens et al. 2018).<sup>95</sup>

*Figure 10 – Social Democratic Parties in Belgium on Left/Right Scale*



Source: Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2018)

<sup>95</sup> A full list of issues included in the RILE-index as well as a critique of the index can be found in Mölder (2016: 39).

The graph shows that the Walloon PS has moved further to the left over the past decades, whereas its Flemish counterpart has moved rightwards. In line with other social democratic parties of the *Third Way*, the Flemish social democrats revised their welfare agenda in the early 1990s by moving away from an outspoken leftist position and instead moving closer to the centre-right (Coffé 2008: 190). As a result, socio-economic issues became depoliticised: ‘This *Third Way* direction also implied that economic and welfare policies became a more consensual area, with limited party disagreement. [...] As such, it receives less attention in political debates, thereby leaving more space for other political issues’ (ibid). Incidentally, the rise of the VB went hand in hand with the decline of the Flemish centre-left. When the VB had its initial electoral breakthrough in the early 1990s, nearly one fifth (19 percent) of the voters came from the social democratic *Socialistische Partij* (SP), while over 14 percent of the socialist trade union shifted their vote over to the VB, thereby turning the VB into ‘the biggest labour party’ in Flanders (Coffé 2008: 183).

The PS, on the contrary, managed to hold on to its core electorate. It did so by advocating a classic left-wing party. The party’s main official goal remains to end the class struggle. This focus is enshrined in the party statutes, the first article of which stresses its aim ‘to organise, within a class struggle context, all the socialist forces in Wallonia and Brussels, without distinction of race, sex, language, nationality, religious beliefs or philosophy, in order to conquer power and achieve the full emancipation of workers’ (PS 2017: 2). By comparison, the language of the Flemish social democrats (sp.a) is milder. In the first article of its party statutes, the sp.a maintains that it ‘wants a society without a class distinction, in which everyone can unfold freely and completely, without any form of it discrimination of gender, race, disability, language, nationality, religion or ideological belief’ (sp.a 2017: 3).

The economic left-wing position of the PS was also reflected in the decision of the Socialist-led Walloon parliament to veto the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada in 2016. In the run-up to the decision, Walloon civil society had been very active in lobbying against EU trade deals. The resistance from the left against the trade agreements in Wallonia (and elsewhere) was driven by concerns that transatlantic trade deals would enable multinational corporations to undercut European labour and environmental

standards. Given the precarious economic situation in industrial Wallonia, the trade deals were considered particularly controversial and therefore became highly politicised. The PS had to cater to its electorate in order to thwart the risk of outflanked by the far-left PTB and the green party *Ecolo*. In October 2016, PS politician and then-Minister-President of Wallonia Paul Magnette announced that the Walloon parliament would not be signing the trade deal, thereby blocking the entire CETA deal, explaining that he had a democratic mandate to represent his constituents:

Wallonia has always been a land of great democratic vitality. We have trade unions, social security providers, societies and associations in all sectors who are extremely active and vigilant, who mobilised and studied this text [i.e. CETA] very seriously, and who consulted the best experts [...]. This democratic vitality of our own people we cannot ignore; we cannot brush it off with the excuse that we might run the risk of being isolated. To be isolated from one's own people, to be isolated from one's own citizens, at a time in the early twenty-first century when democracy is already deeply in crisis, would be at least as serious as being diplomatically isolated (Magnette 2016).

By maintaining a classic left-wing discourse and agenda, the PS managed to strangle support for the populist radical right (see also Hossay 2002: 169). In other words, lingering demand for right-wing populism has, to some extent, been absorbed by the PS. In that respect, the PS has acted as a buffer to dampen demand for the far right (Coffé 2008).

Besides absorbing demand for the populist radical right, the PS has also managed to absorb supply. The party has a history of recruiting politicians with nationalist (and sometimes even racist) tendencies and successfully neutralising them by embedding them into the wider socialist party structure. The case of José Happart serves as a useful example to illustrate this point (Coffé 2005: 153; see also Demelenne 1995). Happart was born in Herstal, a suburb of Liège. When his father was expropriated in the early 1960s due to the expansion of the steel industry, the latter proceeded to buy a new farm in Sint-Pieters-Voeren, a town which, at that time, still formed part of the francophone province of Liège. In 1962, the municipality of Voeren became part of the Dutch-speaking province of Limburg. José Happart campaigned on behalf of the francophone population for the region to be returned to Liège. In 1982, the linguistic struggle intensified when a local party called *Retour à Liège* (Return to Liège) won a majority in the municipal elections

and nominated José Happart as their mayoral candidate. Happart refused to speak Dutch, and to many francophone Belgians he became a symbol of anti-Flemish resistance. Initially, Happart was only active in local politics and did not seek to connect to established political parties. At the 1984 European elections, however, he was offered a place as an independent candidate on the list of the PS and was elected with nearly 235,000 personal votes (*Volkskrant* 1996). That same year, Happart joined the PS. In the words of Hilde Coffé (2005: 154): ‘By receiving him [i.e. Happart] with open arms, the PS swallowed almost the entire Walloon Movement. [...] He was, to some extent, an outsider of the political system and was therefore able to appeal to discontent voters. In that way he formed a barrier against the extreme right.’

The Happart case was not an isolated incident. There are several other examples of local PS politicians flirting with nationalist and/or xenophobic ideas. In September 2015, for instance, Freddy Delvaux, a local PS councillor in Sambreville (located in the province of Namur), caused public uproar after posting a Belgian flag on his Facebook profile with the caption: ‘Protecting your country from an invasion [of immigrants] is not racism or xenophobia but patriotism.’ In October 2018, Christian Michel, who was a PS candidate in Arlon, was accused by other parties (notably *Ecolo*) of being a right-wing extremist after promising to advocate social rights ‘for our fellow citizens before others’ in the run-up to the Belgian local elections’ (Michel 2018).

To be sure, the PS has not always managed to ‘discipline’ local PS politicians, which has occasionally resulted in expulsions (see, for example, *Le Soir* 2015).<sup>96</sup> However, the *official* party line of the PS has remained unequivocally in favour of multiculturalism and immigration. This can partly be attributed to PS leaders such as Elio Di Rupo, who himself is of Italian descent, and who has consistently advocated social tolerance. Reacting to the outcry over PS local councillors supporting racist slurs, Di Rupo (quoted in RTBF 2015) took a clear stance by distancing his party from the latter:

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<sup>96</sup> Serge Reynders, a PS local councillor from Saint-Nicolas (located in the Province of Liège), who was expelled in September 2015 after repeatedly targeting immigrants on social media has since joined the ranks of the right-wing *People’s Party* (PP).

Today's Belgium is no longer 'daddy's Belgium', it's no longer francophones in the south nor Dutch speakers in the north, there is a melting pot all over the country and we also need to promote the talents of those people who come from horizons beyond Belgium. [...] Over the course of the centuries, we have built an open, supportive and tolerant country, and it must remain so.

As Coffé (2005: 155) has observed, unlike their Flemish colleagues, francophone mainstream politicians have 'resolutely opted for an "open society".' This can be explained by the different historical experiences the two regions have had with immigration. The francophone region has a long history of migration. In the wake of World War II, the Belgian government actively recruited Italian workers for the country's booming industries, most of whom settled in Wallonia (Coffé 2004: 198). From their very arrival, foreign workers were incorporated into existing social structures, notably trade unions, which pre-empted the emergence of Italian political associations because it effectively depoliticised and neutralised any potential immigrant community leaders (Hossay 2002: 171). This practice, which fostered a relatively seamless integration, set the tone for future waves of immigrants.

#### **4.2.2. The Politicisation of Immigration in Flanders**

In Flanders on the contrary, immigrant labour is a relatively recent occurrence; it was not until the 1960s that the Belgian government started to recruit Moroccan and Turkish guest workers to supplement the declining supply of migrants from southern Europe. Unlike Italian workers, these new immigrants settled in cultural enclaves and remained relatively isolated. Although the flow of migrant workers ebbed in the 1970s, the immigrant communities continued to grow as a result of high birth rates and family reunification laws (Hossay 2002: 172). While antagonism towards immigrants started to rise in Flanders, francophone politicians strategically started advocating voting rights for migrants in an attempt to increase their voter bases (Hossay 2002: 173). The Flemings were generally opposed to granting voting rights to immigrants because they feared that the latter would support Francophone candidates; according to Hossay (2002: 179), '[a]fter over a century of struggle to gain equal recognition of their culture and language, Flemings were unlikely to easily adopt a multiculturalist perspective of society. The fact that many African immigrants were Francophone only sharpened tensions.' These different historic experiences also help explain why migration became more

politicised in Flanders than in Wallonia, where the relatively seamless integration prevented the creation of a new, cultural line of conflict.

While Walloon mainstream parties (particularly the PS) were able to hold their positions by maintaining their traditional party lines, Flemish parties tried to co-opt the populist radical right by accommodating them and copying some of their issues. As Bale et al. (2010: 413) have observed, when faced with the rise of a far-right challenger, such a 'principled' response is generally quite risky for social democratic parties because it implies 'making the case for tolerance of migration and multiculturalism in the face of contemporary, media-fuelled, concerns about terrorism, crime, welfare abuse and dependency, and the sheer pressure of population on public services and housing.' While such a principled stance might have been risky in Flanders, it proved possible in Wallonia. As shown in the following chapter, migration-related topics were less politicised in the francophone media than in the Flemish press (Coffé 2004: 203-5). This enabled the PS to maintain a demarcating stance, thereby successfully defusing the salience of new political issues by focusing the agenda on other topics (see also Bale et al. 2010: 413).

This contrasts starkly with the Flemish case, where mainstream parties and the media facilitated the politicisation of new issues. To be sure, the spectacular rise of the VB in Flanders did not just affect social democrats. As Erk (2005: 499) has observed, the party managed to pull the entire political centre towards the right. The main difference with the Dutch case, however, is that the VB politicised immigration *after* entering the electoral arena. As explained in the previous chapter, the VB emerged as a regional pro-independence party and only morphed into a populist radical right party in the 1990s. The party thereby managed 'to put the issue of immigration on the political agenda without much competition from other Flemish parties' (Pauwels 2014: 110).

In the early 1980s, the VB's xenophobia primarily targeted Walloons and Belgian nationalists, but in the following decades, non-European immigrants (notably Muslims) became increasingly under attack (Pauwels 2014: 102-3). After the VB had seen its first electoral success at the local level by winning more than 17 percent of the votes in the city of Antwerp in the 1988 municipal elections, mainstream

Flemish parties were alarmed and felt compelled to adopt some aspects of the VB's agenda (Coffé 2004: 225). This increased the salience of issues related to crime and, above all, immigration (Coffé 2008: 190). In 1992, the VB developed its (in)famous seventy-point programme, which was essentially a plan for repatriating non-European foreigners to their countries of origin. By the time other mainstream parties started appropriating the immigration issue, the VB had already established issue ownership. Once a populist radical right party has persuaded voters that it is better suited to 'handle' certain issues, the increased salience of those issues will benefit the populist radical right (Mudde 2007: 241-2).

To be sure, in both regions in Belgium, mainstream parties adhered to political demarcation by agreeing not to cooperate with the far right by means of a political *cordon sanitaire*. The idea of boycotting the VB originated in Flanders, following the VB's breakthrough in the 1988 municipal elections. When the party also won a seat in the European elections a year later, other parties decided to formally exclude the *Vlaams Blok*. Under the initiative of Jos Geysels, who was an MP for the Flemish Green Party *Agalev* (now called *Groen!* or Green!), representatives of the remaining Flemish parties, including the Christian democratic CVP (Herman Van Rompuy), the progressive liberal PVV (Annemie Neyts), the social-democratic SP (Frank Vandenbroucke), the conservative liberal VLD (Jaak Gabriëls) and the moderate Flemish-nationalist VU (Paul Van Grembergen) signed a protocol in which they committed their parties to completely refrain from cooperating with the *Vlaams Blok*, whether at the local, provincial, regional, national or European levels (Damen 2001: 92).

However, the cordon could not prevent the electoral breakthrough of the VB in Flanders. First, it was set up *after* the VB had made important electoral gains at the local level. In other words, the *cordon sanitaire* was initiated *in response* to the presence of an electorally successful far-right party in Flanders, whereas the comparable movements had not yet managed to enter the electoral arena in Wallonia. Second, the cordon became porous relatively quickly; barely forty days after signing the agreement, the then-chairman of the Flemish-nationalist People's Union (VU) Jaak Gabriëls proclaimed in an interview with the *Gazet van Antwerpen* that the cordon was absurd, and that it would ultimately grant too much publicity to the VB (Coffé 2005: 165). Because of the defection by the VU, the

cordon became less effective; after all, as noted in Chapter 2, if a cordon is not fully ‘watertight’ (i.e. solid), it is less likely to fulfil its purpose (Art 2011: 44). Therefore, the cordon could not prevent the electoral breakthrough of the VB. Yet, the Flemish VB has consistently and principally been excluded as a viable coalition partner at the regional and federal level. It is possible that the party’s systematic exclusion from power has had a negative impact on its *electoral persistence*. According to Pauwels (2011a), it can help explain ‘the strange decline of the VB’, given that being forced into ‘permanent opposition’ can deter voters *in the long run* from voting for that party.

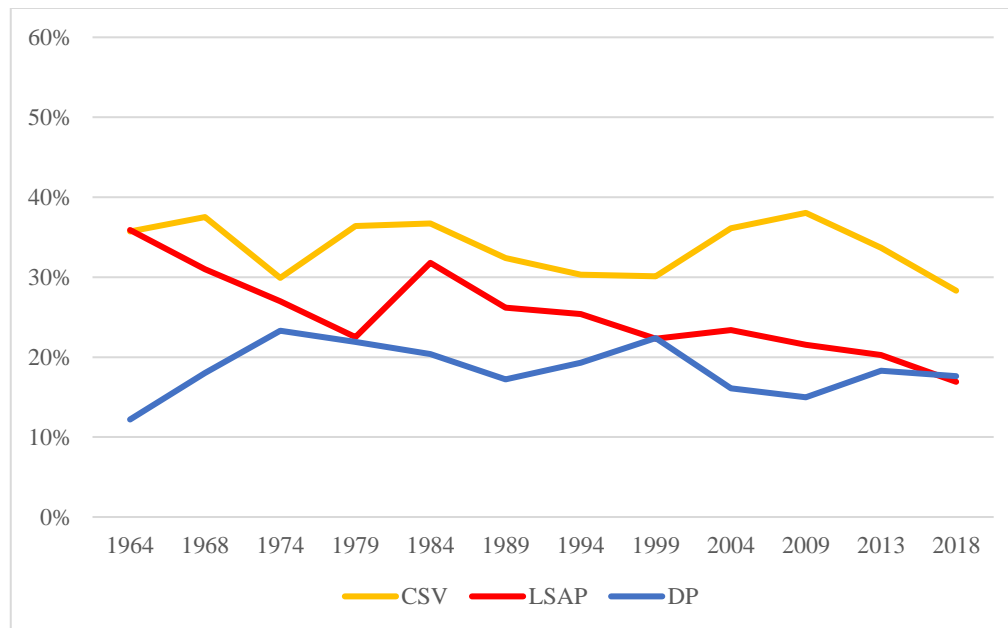
Overall, Walloon mainstream parties (notably the social democratic PS) have played an important role in defusing the debate around immigration. By maintaining the salience of the economic line of conflict, they effectively ‘froze’ existing cleavage structures, which hampered the introduction and politicisation of a new, cultural axis. In Flanders, mainstream parties were unable to prevent the introduction of a new political cleavage and proceeded to co-opt the nationalist agenda of the VB.

#### 4.3. Luxembourg

In comparison to Belgium and the Netherlands, there are very few academic studies of party competition and the state of consociationalism in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Although Luxembourg is generally considered an archetypal consociational democracy, it is often excluded from analyses. This may partly be due to the country’s size. Yet, the lack of literature may also be attributed to the fact that politics in the Grand Duchy are generally quite uneventful.

Luxembourg is widely known for its great political stability. This is reflected in the overall support for the three traditional party families: the Christian-democratic CSV; the social-democratic LSAP and the liberal DP. Since the end of WWII, these three parties have competed for voters at the centre of the ideological triangle, which helps explain why polarising issues never really gained traction during elections (Lorig 2008: 39-40). As shown in Figure 11, unlike in the Netherlands and Flanders, support for Luxembourgish mainstream parties has remained relatively stable over the last half century.

Figure 11 – Support for Mainstream Parties in Luxembourg



Source: *Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg* (2019)

The stability of Luxembourgish politics can be linked to the country's remarkable economic success (see Chapter 3), which, in turn, has been attributed to what Katzenstein (1985) has labelled 'democratic corporatism', an ideology that is characterised by a willingness of different interest groups to cooperate by sharing political power, thereby creating a particularly stable political environment.<sup>97</sup> Specifically, the post-war economic success of Luxembourg (and other small, consociational democracies) can be explained by

an ideology of social partnership expressed at the national level; a relatively centralized and concentrated system of interest groups; and voluntary and informal coordination of conflicting objectives through continuous political bargaining between interest groups, state bureaucracies, and political parties [which has resulted in] low-voltage politics (Katzenstein 1985: 32).

There is very little evidence of polarisation in Luxembourg, and mainstream political parties have truly established a consensus democracy. Therefore, '[c]omparative analysis with other EU countries qualifies Luxembourg as a

<sup>97</sup> Although Katzenstein (1985) focused his study of *Small States in Global Markets* primarily on Switzerland, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, his theories are also applicable to Luxembourg.

relatively low-conflict society, where democratic institutions [...] are traditionally widely accepted' (Lorig 2008: 41).

The very essence of consociationalism is the 'that democratic instability resulting from social segmentation can be avoided when the segmental elites refrain from competition' (Andeweg 2000: 532). In consociational democracies, the co-optation of minorities has contributed to decreasing the salience of political cleavages, which has raised questions as to whether consociationalism was ultimately 'bound to disappear by rendering itself superfluous' (Lehmbruch 1993: 56–57). Once social cleavages have disappeared, elites often continue to engage in consociational practices. For instance, they might avoid majority decision-making by instead seeking to accommodate differing viewpoints and forging a consensus. According to Andeweg (2000: 532), elites are particularly likely to refrain from engaging in political competition after cleavages have waned 'when the conditions or institutional arrangements are such that they think it is beneficial and/or appropriate for them to do so.' When elites stick with consensus-making habits after societal cleavages have disappeared, we find ourselves in a depoliticised democracy.

In line with this observation, at the turn of the twenty-first century (i.e. before the rise of the populist radical right), scholars noted that politics in the Netherlands had become 'depoliticised' (e.g. Andeweg 2000; Lijphart 2001; Koole & Daalder 2002).<sup>98</sup> This description also seems applicable to Luxembourg. According to Lijphart (1981: 9), the Grand Duchy 'reached the high point of [its] consociational development in the late 1950s and [has] been declining since – not, it is worth emphasizing, as a result of a failure of consociational democracy, but because consociationalism by its very success made itself superfluous.' Although social cleavages and differences between political parties have faded, political elites remain actively engaged in employing consociational practices. Cooperation at the elite level is facilitated by the small size of the country. As Lijphart (1984: 123) has observed, '[i]n small countries political leaders are more likely to know each other personally than in larger countries, the decision-making process is less complex, and such countries generally do not conduct a very active foreign policy.' Given the nature of the Luxembourgish political landscape, it makes little sense to discuss

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<sup>98</sup> Rudy Andeweg (2000) has argued that consensus democracies provide fertile ground for anti-system parties (see also Hakhverdian & Koop 2007).

party competition; to put it bluntly, there is very little competition between political parties in the Grand Duchy. It makes more sense to consider elite behaviour instead.

The tradition of accommodation and inter-party cooperation that is characteristic of consensus democracies has given rise to the ‘cartelisation’ of politics (Katz & Mair 1995: 17). In very basic terms, cartelisation is a term used to describe a situation in which political parties have moved away from civil society and closer to the state, whilst also moving closer towards one another, thereby contributing to the ‘hollowing out’ of democracy (Mair 2006). This implies that party programmes have become increasingly similar and campaigns focus on achieving previously agreed goals. Cartelisation is more likely to occur in consociational democracies; as Katz and Mair (1995: 17) have observed, cartelisation is ‘a process that is likely to develop most easily in those political cultures marked by a tradition of inter-party cooperation and accommodation.’ Similarly, Lijphart (1969:216) has argued that ‘[c]onsociational democracy means government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy.’

The cartelisation of Luxembourgish parties is reflected in the fact that, up until 2013, power was traditionally shared between two of the three traditional party families. The Christian democrats played a pivotal role in the formation of government coalitions; indeed, between 1947 and 2013, the CSV had only been in opposition once (1975-1979). As shown in Table 6, in the past, coalition governments were typically composed of either Christian democrats and social democrats, or Christian democrats and liberals.

Table 6 –Government Participation of Mainstream Parties in Luxembourg

	CSV	LSAP	DP
1945-1948	+	+	+
1948-1951	+	-	+
1951-1954	+	+	-
1954-1959	+	+	-
1959-1964	+	-	+
1964-1968	+	+	-
1968-1974	+	-	+
1974-1979	-	+	+
1979-1984	+	-	+
1984-1989	+	+	-
1989-1994	+	+	-
1994-1999	+	+	-
1999-2004	+	-	+
2004-2009	+	+	-
2009-2013	+	+	-
2013-2018*	-	+	+
2018-*	-	+	+
Total Number:	14	12	9

Source: *Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg* (2019)

Notes: Government participation is marked in green (+); opposition in red (-).

\*In 2013 and 2018, LSAP and DP formed a three-way coalition with the Green Party.

The cartelisation of Luxembourgish politics is evidenced by the fact that there is a broad cross-partisan ‘cosmopolitan’ consensus. In other words, party elites representing the traditional party families generally agree that immigration is both necessary and positive for the Grand Duchy. This is reflected in their advocacy of enfranchising foreign residents. Similar to Wallonia, Luxembourg has a long history of immigration. As shown in Chapter 3, the wealth of the country is largely dependent on foreign workers. Luxembourgish politicians are acutely aware of this, and since the 1970s, they have resolutely opted for a xenophile discourse.

This has not always been the case. As Scuto (2012) observed, the Grand Duchy’s official stance on immigration has oscillated between active recruitment of foreign workers as a result of acute labour shortages to fear of *Überfremdung* and restrictive immigration laws. Up until WWI, immigration was largely unregulated as the Luxembourgish government adopted a ‘*laissez-faire*’ approach (Fetzer 2011: 8; Willems & Milmeister 2008: 75). In the interwar period, the large proportion of

foreign workers assumed the role of a ‘safety valve’ that could be opened and closed as needed, allowing the government to export unemployment and other social problems in times of economic hardship (Scuto 2012: 88-9; Thomas 2015: 32). During the global depression in the 1930s, more than half of the foreign workers were simply sent home, thereby allowing the Grand Duchy to maintain a remarkably low unemployment rate. After WWII, the number of foreigners started to rise sharply (see Chapter 3), which evoked rising nationalist and xenophobic sentiments among the local population (Scuto 2012: 93). Consequently, until the mid-1970s, the Luxembourgish government maintained restrictive citizenship laws as well as protectionist and discriminatory immigration policies. Throughout the 1950s, for instance, annual quotas were set to restrict the number of Italian immigrants, workers were only given short working permits, and they were not allowed to bring their families (Scuto 2012: 284-5).

It was only after the European Economic Community (EEC) introduced the first regulation on the free movement of workers in 1961 that the Luxembourgish government started to ease restrictions again. According to Scuto (2012: 286), ‘the government’s immigration policy was “reduced to rubble” [*battue en brèche*] by the principle of free movement.’ Similarly, Thomas (2015: 32) notes that European integration brought a certain element of stability and protection for migrant workers in the EEC. Indeed, it was the European Social Charter (drafted by the Council of Europe) in combination with recommendations by the European Commission that prompted Luxembourg to install government support services for immigrant workers in 1964 (Scuto 2012: 296).

The 1960s marked an important turning point for the country, as it eventually started to overcome its fear of being annexed by its neighbours. According to Scuto (2012: 286), this was a time of ‘progressive opening towards modernity’ as the patriotic and nationalistic rhetoric ebbed. During the 1970s, the country’s leaders gradually came to accept immigration as a structural rather than a temporary phenomenon (Scuto 2012: 296; Thomas 2015: 32). As the elites started to fully grasp the importance of foreign workers to the Grand Duchy’s economy, their public discourse became openly xenophile. In 1984, Jacques Santer, then newly elected head of government and leader of the conservative Christian-democratic party, declared that ‘immigrants have largely contributed to the upswing of the

country and their presence will continue to be indispensable for the future success of our economy’ (quoted in Scuto 2012: 308). This set an important precedent for Luxembourgish leaders.

The resolutely open stance of Luxembourgish elites initially generated a backlash, as demonstrated by the creation of several localist nationalist and xenophobic groupings (see Chapter 3). According to Scuto (2012: 308), ‘this context explains why the xenophile discourse on migration and integration adopted by the government on the one hand and the majority of MPs on the other was not accompanied by adequate political measures.’ In other words, localised domestic resistance kept the government from matching its words with policy deeds. In response, Luxembourgish elites in government as well as in trade unions have strategically used the European framework to advocate for and introduce more immigrant-friendly policies. By strategically using the strong tailwind from Brussels, Luxembourgish government officials were able to gradually enfranchise foreign residents.

A specific example can be found in the introduction of voting rights for foreign residents in local elections. The 1992 Maastricht Treaty introduced the concept of European citizenship and thereby ‘the right to vote and to stand as a candidate for European and municipal elections in the State in which he or she resides’ (European Union 1992 [2012]). In accordance with this treaty, EU citizens residing in Luxembourg were given the right to vote in European parliamentary elections in 1994. In 1999, non-national EU citizens were also allowed to vote and stand in local elections, provided they were able to prove six years of residency (CEFIS 2014). In 2003, the government went one step further by granting all non-national residents (*including* those from non-EU countries) the right to vote in communal elections, provided they had resided in the country for a minimum of five years (Fetzer 2011: 98). Since 2011, non-EU citizens are also allowed to stand for communal elections. In addition, since 2011, non-national residents can also run for the posts of mayor and deputy mayor (CEFIS 2014).

In addition, the country’s two main trade unions have consistently lobbied the government for more inclusive policies for immigrants and cross-border workers. When the government started to become cautiously xenophile during the 1970s, the

two major trade unions at the time, the *Lëtzebuenger Arbechterverband* (Luxembourgish Workers' Federation or LAV) and the *Lëtzebuenger Chrëschtleche Gewerkschaftsbond* (Luxembourgish Confederation of Christian Trade Unions or LCGB) followed suit and started to align themselves with migrant workers (Scuto 2012: 298). In the following decades, these unions began actively to recruit immigrants and cross-border workers into their ranks. From the 1980s onwards, trade unions became increasingly attentive to the demands of foreign workers and started lobbying for their political and social integration. Once again, the European framework served as a stepping stone to initiate more inclusive social structures within the unions. As Thomas (2015: 39) notes,

[Luxembourgish] unions initially relied on the existence of a common legal infrastructure, consisting of the provisions on the free movement of workers, which applied to citizens of the EEC and later the EU. This common infrastructure made it possible to put in place support and information services for [union] members in the areas of social- and workers' rights.

When the Luxembourgish Parliament reformed the country's system of family allowances in 2010, thereby limiting cross-border workers' access to student grants, trade unions protested on their behalf by invoking EU legislation and arguing that the modified law was in violation of the principle of non-discrimination. In his detailed analysis of this case, Thomas (2013: 164) explained that:

[Luxembourgish] trade unions have been active at the different levels of micro-regional integration, as well as in the EU dimension, in accordance with the Europeanised rhetoric, making use of the different levels of EU governance [...]. [T]hey turned to EU authorities, including members of the European Parliament and the European Commission.

#### **4.3.1. The Politicisation of National Identity in Luxembourg**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, in 2015, the government initiated a consultative referendum on constitutional changes, asking voters (among two other questions) to voice their opinion on extending the voting rights of non-citizens to legislative elections (de Jonge & Petry 2019). In a country otherwise known for its stability, the referendum resembled something of a political earthquake: all three questions initiated by the governing parties were rejected by a landslide. While the referendum was intended as a means to enfranchise foreign residents, it led to the politicisation of immigration and increased the salience of issues pertaining to national identity.

Upon taking office (in 2013), the Gambia coalition announced its ambition to modernise the political institutions of the country by advocating increased participatory democracy and strengthening the political rights of residents who do not have Luxembourgish nationality: ‘We want more participation, which means actively involving people in political decision-making processes [...]. We are looking to establish a constructive dialogue with them and are therefore willing to strengthen their rights’ (*Service Information et Presse* 2014: 86). In line with this announcement, the prime minister framed the referendum as an opportunity to boost the democratic credentials of the country. During his annual state-of-the-nation address, held on 5 May 2015, Luxembourg’s liberal Prime Minister Xavier Bettel pledged for the introduction of the *Awunnerwahlrecht* (‘resident suffrage’), arguing that Luxembourg could become a ‘reference country’ for other European states. Bettel explained that:

[the referendum] is an opportunity for Luxembourg to stand out as a country that is not only characterized by diversity and multilingualism, but as a country where people with different nationalities are welcome and invited to participate’, and that ‘participation should not be limited to people who have a Luxembourgish passport, but should be extended to those who live, work and reside here (quoted in *Chambre des Députés* 2015).

The official campaign leading up to the referendum was remarkably one-sided. The *Ausländerwahlrecht* was supported by most of the established political parties as well prominent civil society actors and media outlets (see Chapter 5), who felt that enfranchising the large foreign population in Luxembourg was important for both demographic and moral considerations. At the forefront of the campaign were the three governing parties (i.e. DP, LSAP and Greens), which argued that voting rights in Luxembourg should be seen as a corollary of residency rather than citizenship.

The ‘Yes’ camp was backed by youth parties as well as an eclectic mix of civil society actors. In April 2015, the youth wings of the four main parties (social democrats, Greens, liberals and Christian democrats) published a joint statement to express their support of the *Ausländerwahlrecht* and even went one step further by demanding less restrictive prerequisites to enfranchise foreign residents (*Luxemburger Wort* 2015a). In an open letter published later that month, a group of some fifty prominent Luxembourgish writers and artists also pledged their support for the initiative, urging voters to say ‘yes’ because ‘Luxembourg is a multilingual

and multicultural country’ and ‘this diversity should become a driving force for democracy, cultural dialogue and politics, through which a society of “inclusion” emerges’ (*Tageblatt* 2015). In June 2015, a group of leading business representatives followed suit, signing and publishing a full-page ad in the printed press: ‘We say [...] YES, because we are convinced that this choice is important for our democracy and right for our country’ (RTL 2015). Two of the country’s main trade unions (i.e. the socialist-oriented OGBL as well as the Christian-conservative LCGB) also expressed their support for the *Ausländerwahlrecht* by joining the Migration and Integration platform MINTÉ (*Plateforme Migrations et Intégration*), a group composed of nineteen associations representing foreign workers’ rights in the Grand Duchy. These examples illustrate that Luxembourgish elites (alongside various civil society actors) have played an important role in promoting an open society. As demonstrated in the following chapter, this view is also reflected and supported by the traditional media outlets.

Opposition to the 2015 referendum through *established* channels was comparatively weak. Only two of the six political parties that held seats in parliament at the time voiced concerns over the *Ausländerwahlrecht*. First, the CSV assumed its role as opposition party by objecting to the *Ausländerwahlrecht* initiative proposed by the governing parties by arguing that a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ vote on complex issues such as the *Ausländerwahlrecht* might risk polarising society (see Petry 2016: 53). According to the CSV, ‘participation in national elections and citizenship are very closely intertwined’; ‘nationality is a more effective tool for integration than optional voting rights’; and ‘no other European country separates voting rights from citizenship’ (CSV 2015). Thus, the CSV was not opposed to the enfranchisement of foreign residents *per se*. Indeed, over the course of the campaign, the party made it very clear that it shared many of the objectives pursued by the proponents of the *Ausländerwahlrecht*, notably the promotion of social cohesion as well as increased political participation for foreign residents (Petry 2016: 53-54). However, the CSV had different views on how these goals were to be achieved. Specifically, the party suggested alternative routes to ensure the political integration of foreign residents in the future, notably by facilitating access to citizenship. In line with this rather convoluted stance, the party’s campaign slogan for the referendum was somewhat ambiguous. Indeed, the

CSV's campaign posters did not explicitly say 'No' to the referendum question(s), but merely urged voters to inform themselves before casting their ballots (CSV 2015).

In light of the ambivalent position of the CSV, the main partisan opposition came from the nationalist ADR. In comparison to the CSV, the ADR was vocally and explicitly opposed to granting foreigners the right to participate in general elections. In the run-up to the 2015 referendum, the ADR argued that voting rights entitle voters to have a say on questions related to national sovereignty, and that the right to vote should therefore remain coupled to Luxembourgish citizenship (ADR 2015d). The ADR also highlighted the fact that Luxembourg already offered many opportunities for political participation to foreign citizens, and that the country accepts dual citizenship. Furthermore, the party warned that instituting voting rights for foreign nationals would be irreversible, and that even though the referendum question only concerned active voting rights, it would likely eventually lead to passive voting rights. Throughout the campaign, the party relied on emotional arguments by evoking feelings of *Überfremdung* (Petry 2016: 55-56; see also de Jonge 2015).

Besides the CSV and the ADR, the civil servants' trade union (CGFP) was also opposed to granting voting rights to non-Luxembourgish citizens, arguing that Luxembourg already grants dual citizenship, which allows non-nationals to acquire voting rights via Luxembourgish citizenship (see Petry 2016: 71-72). Overall, however, the opposition to the *Ausländerwahlrecht* from established political and civil society actors was rather weak, especially in comparison to the enthusiastic 'Yes' campaign discussed above.

Given this half-hearted political opposition as well as the general lack of space in the media (see Chapter 5), it is perhaps not surprising that the 'No' campaign for the 2015 referendum largely emerged in virtual forums. Since there was only very little resistance from established parties, two Luxembourgish citizens decided to take matters into their own hands by launching a website entitled '*Nee2015.lu*' (i.e. 'No2015'). On their site, Fred Keup and Steve Kodesch, presented themselves as 'the political middle' and listed various arguments to persuade readers to say 'No' to the *Ausländerwahlrecht* (Keup & Kodesch 2015). In line with the ADR, the

*Nee2015* movement argued that every foreign national could easily acquire Luxembourgish nationality; applying for citizenship would signal their willingness to learn the Luxembourgish language, thus preserving the nation's identity. Furthermore, Keup and Kodesch (2015) maintained that, by extending voting rights to non-nationals, Luxembourgers would 'give up their own sovereignty', which could be 'the beginning of the end of "our" nation' as it would lead to 'the increasing disappearance of "our" language' [i.e. the Luxembourgish language]. As mentioned earlier, nearly 80 percent of the population eventually voted 'No'. The overwhelming success of the 'No camp' can largely be attributed to the activism of the *Nee2015* movement.

The debates surrounding the *Ausländerwahlrecht* referendum contributed to the politicisation of national identity and brought to the fore new dividing lines in Luxembourgish society. Above all, it introduced an 'us versus them' discourse (on the basis of the '80 versus 20 percent' referendum result) and propelled identity politics to the centre of the political debate. Since the 2015 referendum, issues pertaining to the preservation of the Luxembourgish language have gained traction. The ripples of the 2015 referendum were also clearly noticeable in the run-up to the 2018 general elections (see Chapter 3).

In light of these developments, it appears that the 'nationalist card' has belatedly been put on the table by Luxembourgish mainstream parties. Following Ellinas (2010: 28), the politicisation of national identity 'sets into motion a process of intense political competition' along a new, cultural axis, which can lead to polarisation. This can increase the legitimacy of the populist radical right, because it is likely to shift the boundaries of what is politically acceptable. As long as mainstream parties keep the 'nationalist card' on the table, the increased legitimacy of far-right actors is likely to remain inconsequential; however, when they *retract* this card, it can create fertile ground for populist radical right parties to thrive (Ellinas 2010: 30). In Luxembourg, this is less likely to happen because of the unique structure of the Luxembourgish electorate (see Chapter 3) and the moderate media landscape, which is averse to polarisation (see Chapter 5). Yet, if the rise of the radical right is indeed part of a two-step process involving radicalisation of the discourse and polarisation of the party system, followed by political de-alignment,

as Ignazi (2003: 203) has argued, then Luxembourg may witness the rise of the radical right in the future.

The recent electoral trajectories of Luxembourgish mainstream political parties resemble what occurred in the Netherlands some twenty years ago. As noted above, 1994 marked a major electoral defeat for the Dutch Christian democrats, which resulted in a coalition government between social democrats and liberals. During the ‘purple coalition’, ethical issues were ‘resolved’, thereby forcing the Christian-democrats to reposition themselves. In the Netherlands, this period (which has been described as a depoliticised consensus democracy) helped pave the way for the rise of Fortuyn and later Wilders.

With reference to the works of Lijphart, Rudy Andeweg (2000: 533) foresaw the rise of anti-system parties in the Netherlands, on the basis that ‘the absence of true opposition within the system is likely to result in opposition against the system’, explaining that ‘[t]his hypothesis perfectly fits the rise of populist parties of the radical right in recent elections in Austria, Belgium and Switzerland.’ In Luxembourg, the ethical line of conflict appears to have become obsolete in recent years. In 2009, the CSV-LSAP government adopted legislation on euthanasia and assisted suicide, and in 2014, the Gambia coalition legalised same-sex marriage as well as the adoption of children by homosexual couples. With the CSV relegated to opposition, the Gambia coalition launched further substantial reforms to separate church and state. Thus, it appears that political competition is entirely depoliticised in the Grand Duchy.

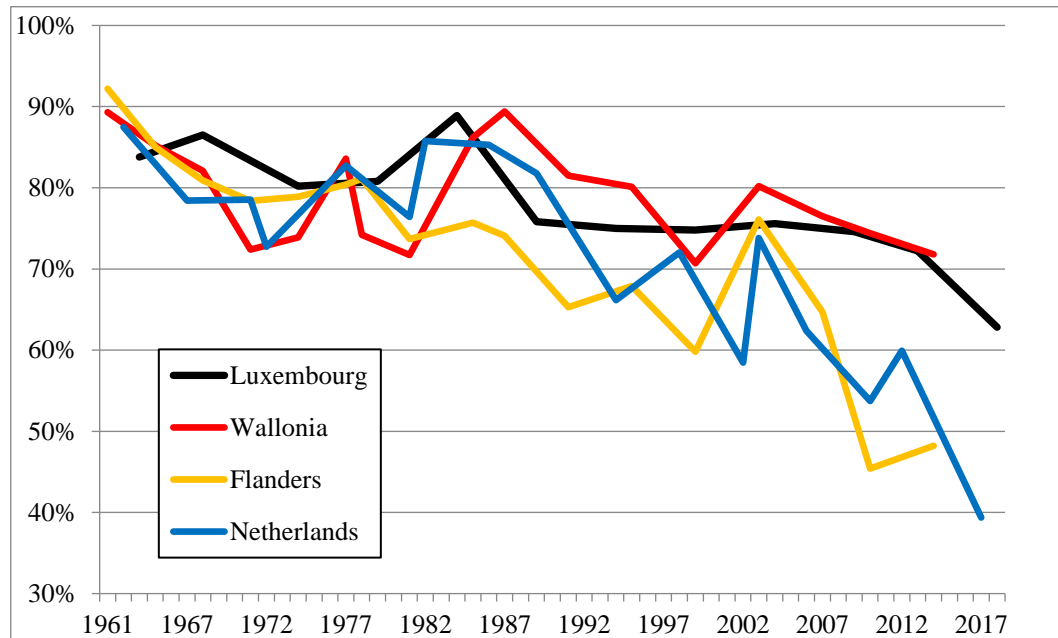
If Luxembourg is indeed following a similar path as the Netherlands, the country could witness the rise of anti-system parties in the near future. The electoral success of the Pirate Party in the 2018 general elections (which won 6.45 percent of the vote) could be interpreted as an early warning sign. More generally, the overall lack of partisan competition in Luxembourg *could* result in the rise of anti-system parties in the future.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

As in other polities, the traditional (consociational) parties in all three Benelux countries have been affected by partisan dealignment and rising electoral volatility

(see Figure 12). In Luxembourg and Wallonia, however, the decline of mainstream parties has progressed at a slower pace.

*Figure 12 – Total Support for Mainstream Parties in the Benelux*



Sources: Belgian Interior Ministry (2019); *Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg* (2019); *Kiesraad* (2019).

These differences may be due to the varied strengths of the related subcultures or ‘auxiliary organisations’ that helped tie the parties to their specific pillars. In the Netherlands, ties between the pillar parties and their subcultures have always been weak and, accordingly, there has been very little evidence of clientelism:

During the heyday of pillarization, many services [in the Netherlands] such as housing and health care were provided by pillar organizations, but over the years these have become professionalized and less oriented to members of their own subculture. Unlike [...] in Belgium [notably Wallonia], the parties have never used, or been able to use, this potential for patronage to reinforce, or later to replace, mobilization based on interest representation. This reluctance or impotence on behalf of the parties has probably advanced and accelerated depillarization, but it may also have so far saved these parties from accusations of corruption (Andeweg 1999: 120).

This has created a much more ‘level playing field’ in the Netherlands, with increased opportunities for political challenger parties. Similarly, Steven Wolinetz (1999: 240) has argued that, unlike Belgian pillar parties, their Dutch counterparts had fewer ‘resources of patronage’ available to encapsulate voters. By contrast, the

Belgian social democrats have been more successful in exercising their ‘vertical’ role of mobilising its subculture. In Luxembourg, the media has played an important role in preserving the remnants of the pillar structure (see Chapter 5).

In line with Luther and Deschouwer (1999: 260), the analysis presented above has shown that political parties are not ‘simply at the mercy of their societal environment. On the contrary, they are [...] in control of what is happening to them, or at least of what is happening in their institutional environment.’ In Flanders and the Netherlands, mainstream parties contributed to the increasing salience of the immigration debate. The following chapter will show that in these polities, the media also played an important role in the radicalisation of the political discourse, which helped create a fertile breeding ground for the rise of the populist radical right, whereas in Wallonia and Luxembourg the reverse was the case.

## Chapter 5: The Media

Like mainstream parties, the media can also play a crucial role in generating favourable or unfavourable opportunity structures for right-wing populist parties to thrive (see Chapter 2). The relationship between political systems and the media is best conceptualised in terms of co-evolution (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 47). The previous chapter has shown that broad, macro-level changes, including secularisation and depillarisation, contributed to various degrees of partisan dealignment and political fragmentation in the Benelux countries. This chapter discusses the ways in which these societal transformations have impacted their respective media landscapes as well as the interactions between the media and the populist radical right.<sup>99</sup>

Journalistic norms play a crucial role in shaping media coverage about the far right (Art 2006: 47). These norms are shaped by the media environment in which journalists operate (Ellinas 2010: 211). Drawing on existing research as well as a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews (N=46) with media practitioners including editors-in-chief and journalists of traditional media outlets (i.e. newspapers, radio stations and television stations), the evidence presented below indicates that the Dutch and Flemish media landscapes are more accessible to right-wing populist challengers than those Wallonia and Luxembourg. Specifically, the chapter shows that media practitioners in Luxembourg and Wallonia adhere to strict demarcation, whereas the strategies of Dutch and Flemish media practitioners have become more accommodating over time. The following subsections present the different media strategies in the four cases. The closing section compares the ways in which the media approach the populist radical right in the Benelux. Drawing on the seminal work of Hallin and Mancini (2004), it also reflects on the ways in which different media structures and strategies can create favourable or unfavourable opportunity structures for the rise of right-wing populist parties.

### 5.1. Luxembourg

The Luxembourgish media landscape is very distinctive. Given the size of the country, the number of potential media consumers is relatively small; yet, the media landscape is characterised by an unusually large number of media outlets (Barth &

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<sup>99</sup> Parts of this chapter have been published in the *International Journal of Press/Politics* (see de Jonge 2019).

Hemmer 2008: 208). Alongside five daily (paid) newspapers as well as a dozen weekly and monthly print publications, there are three national radio stations and one national television channel. The remarkable quantity of media outlets can be ascribed to the Grand Duchy's protectionist media legislation and the persistence of partisan ties in the press. In an attempt to safeguard media pluralism, print publications benefit from a generous public funding scheme, which amounts to nearly €7.5 million annually (*Service Information et Presse* 2017). Thanks to these press subsidies, financial pressures are limited, and most media outlets have the luxury of not having to cater to consumer demands.<sup>100</sup>

Furthermore, contrary to most Western European countries where the print media gained independence from political parties in the 1960s, partisan ties persist in the Luxembourgish press, and there are few truly independent (print) publications. This helps explain the high number of dailies, as '[t]he difference between the various paid [print] titles on offer has less to do with each newspaper's areas of specialisation than [...] its political or ideological leanings' (*Service Information et Presse* 2013: 3). Virtually all (paid) daily newspapers have historic partisan ties. For example, the *Luxemburger Wort* (the oldest and largest daily newspaper in Luxembourg), which is read daily by 32 percent of the population (TNS ILRES 2017), is published by the *Imprimerie Saint-Paul* (ISP). ISP belongs to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Luxembourg and the *Wort* is generally associated with the conservative Christian Social People's Party (CSV). The *Tageblatt* (the second largest newspaper) is published by *Groupe Editpress*, which is partly owned by the socialist-oriented trade union (OGBL) and maintains ties to the Socialist Workers' Party (LSAP) (Barth & Hemmer 2008: 210). While partisan links are fading, they remain a reality in the minds of the Luxembourgish people. As one editor-in-chief put it, the legacy of these partisan ties continues to 'rub off on the image of the newspapers'.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Because of their prominent position, RTL (the only commercial television and radio station) has signed an agreement with the Luxembourgish government to carry out a 'public service mission'. In return, radio and television frequencies are made available to RTL by the Grand Duchy, and part of its production and broadcasting costs are covered by the state.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *Lëtzebuurger Journal* on 20 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

Finally, because of the country's small size, there is a very high degree of familiarity between the media and political actors. Indeed, it is common for journalists to maintain personal relationships with key actors in politics and civil society. One study conducted in 2003 about the Luxembourgish media landscape showed that 80 percent of the Luxembourgish editors-in-chief maintained personal relationships with political decision-makers (compared to 46 percent in Germany) (Barth & Bucher 2003: 11). According to one editor-in-chief, '[t]he problem here in Luxembourg is that everyone knows everybody else [and so] one knows every parliamentarian and every minister. Very many journalists use the informal 'you' ['du'] to address the minister, the minister of state and other parliamentarians' (quoted in Barth & Bucher 2003: 11). In addition, there seems to be a 'revolving door' mechanism at work in the sense that many politicians used to work in journalism prior to entering politics. For instance, no fewer than five of the eighteen government ministers in office between 2013 and 2018 were former journalists, four of whom used to work for RTL.<sup>102</sup> One editor-in-chief described the situation as follows:

I think the relationship in general in a small country, where everyone knows everyone – I mean if you are a domestic political journalist, [...] you quickly get an overview of who does what, and you don't have these massive apparatuses like you have abroad. In everyday life, this forges – how should I say – a close proximity because you are regularly in touch with these people.<sup>103</sup>

The high degree of familiarity in combination with partisan ties and government subsidies make for a very moderate media landscape. One interviewee described the Luxembourgish media landscape as 'something terribly artificial', by explaining that it is very diverse but lacks a sound economic basis:

We have I don't know how many daily newspapers, we have X weekly journals, revues and gazettes and this and that, and we have radios, and one or two television channels. And all of this runs on a market of 550.000 people. That's just not possible. [This also creates challenges as far as the content quality is concerned]. Therefore, I'd say, there is no reflex in our

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<sup>102</sup> The former journalists who were in government from 2013 until 2018 are: Félix Braz, Corinne Cahen, Francine Closener, Marc Hansen and Lydia Mutsch.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of the public service radio station (*Radio 100,7*) on 27 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

media landscape to make it [i.e. right-wing populism] an issue. There's more of a 'let's stay away from this'. That is my impression.<sup>104</sup>

While all interviewees maintained that there was no formal agreement on how to deal with right-wing populism, many pointed to the ethics code of the press council, explaining that there appeared to be an informal understanding among Luxembourgish journalists to be highly critical towards populism and extremism. According to one interviewee, 'there is a great tacit consensus in the press against racism and exaggerated nationalism, even among the more conservative newspapers.'<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the Luxembourgish media generally reflect the moderate views of the political elites. Given the uncommercial nature of the media landscape, there is little evidence of 'sensationalism' in the Luxembourgish press.<sup>106</sup> In comparison to other countries, topics such as immigration are not very politicised in the media, even though these views are not necessarily shared by the public.

As shown in Chapter 4, there is a broad consensus at the elite level in Luxembourg that immigration and diversity contribute to the country's wealth. This view is reflected in rather than criticised by the press. This became ever more obvious in the debates on 'foreigner voting rights' leading up to the 2015 referendum. Just like the majority of mainstream parties, the print media were generally sympathetic to the *Ausländerwahlrecht*. For instance, in an article entitled 'If the "Wort" could vote' published in May 2015, the editors of the *Luxemburger Wort* expressed their support for granting foreigners the right to vote:

The editors of the '*Luxemburger Wort*' are willing to open the right to vote (not, however, the right to be elected) to foreigners having resided in Luxembourg for more than ten years on the basis of their noticeable integration into everyday-life. We don't see it as a threat to the political order nor to the Luxembourgish language, which we perceive to be more alive than ever (Siweck 2015).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with the Director of the public service radio station (*Radio 100,7*) on 2 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *Lëtzebuerg Land* on 20 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

<sup>106</sup> Luxembourg does have a 'tabloid' news outlet called *Lëtzebuerg Privat*. However, it is boycotted by other news outlets and circulation numbers are not included in national surveys, which makes it difficult to gauge the number of regular readers. Moreover, demand for 'tabloid' newspapers is covered by foreign news outlets such as the German *Bild Zeitung*.

<sup>107</sup> In September 2017, Jean-Lou Siweck resigned as Editor-in-Chief of the *Luxemburger Wort* after clashing with the board of directors of the publishing house ISP over the newspaper's editorial line. According to various news sources, the chairman of the board, former CSV cabinet minister Luc

This decision was surprising given that the *Wort* is generally considered to be a conservative newspaper. Interestingly, no media outlet spoke out against the *Ausländerwahlrecht*, which is striking given that 80 percent of the electorate eventually voted against it. It is also noteworthy that neither political parties nor media outlets took a critical stance in the aftermath of the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’. In an op-ed published in the *Luxemburger Wort* in July 2016, a prominent political news commentator asked to what extent the Grand Duchy really needs all these different media outlets when they all have the same opinion, and summed the situation up as follows:

In Luxembourg, [...] there is no medium in which commentators took a “conservative” stance in the ongoing refugee debate. Similarly, there was also no media outlet that took a stance against the [*Ausländerwahlrecht* referendum], so that at the time, 80 percent of the Luxembourgish population did not feel represented by any medium (Bumb 2016).

This suggests that the public debate in Luxembourg is generally steered by the moderate views of the ruling elites, and these views are reflected in rather than criticised by the media. Because of the uncommercial character of the Luxembourgish media landscape, journalists have little incentive to establish close affinities to their audiences, spread anti-establishment sentiments or adopt a ‘populist newsroom logic’ (see Esser et al. 2017: 367). The Luxembourgish media system is therefore not very compatible with the populist logic. As a result, there is little evidence of ‘media populism’ in the Grand Duchy.

Overall, there seems to be a strong aversion towards right-wing populist tendencies among Luxembourgish media practitioners. For instance, when asked about his editorial line towards right-wing populism, the Editor-in-Chief of the liberal *Journal* said: ‘We try to debunk the various clichés and prejudices that are spread by those people, and those unfounded ideas – we try to expose them... by depicting reality’.<sup>108</sup> The aversion towards right-wing populist tendencies is so strong that it has become a bit of a taboo topic. The then Editor-in-Chief of RTL Radio remembered an incident that occurred in the wake of the Balkan wars, which led to an increase in the number of refugees from former Yugoslavian countries, where

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Frieden, was dissatisfied that Siweck had made the newspaper too mainstream and that the paper had thereby lost its centre-right (i.e. Christian democratic) political identity (see *Reporter* 2017).

<sup>108</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of the *Lëtzebuurger Journal* on 20 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

he interviewed a government representative about the prospect of hosting thousands of people in the *LuxExpo* exposition building: ‘In light of the very sudden and rapid influx of refugees, I asked, “Don’t you think that that might be a bit too many?” That’s when immediately so-called progressive journalist colleagues put me in the corner of the ADR. That is to say: I was apparently very right-wing extremist at that time’.<sup>109</sup> According to one interviewee, ‘Nobody dares to say anything, because one is afraid that others will give you hell for it. But there is no contract in which this is agreed upon.’<sup>110</sup>

Thus, overall, Luxembourgish media practitioners choose to demarcate the populist radical right; while there is no formal agreement on how to deal with right-wing populist movements, there is an implicit consensus not to give too much voice to these tendencies. As a result, the Luxembourgish media landscape provides unfavourable opportunity structures within which right-wing populist parties can thrive.

## 5.2. Wallonia

In francophone Belgium, media practitioners adhere to strict demarcation. There is an explicit agreement among media commentators not to offer a platform to the far right (see CSA 2011; 2012). This agreement, which is known as the *cordon sanitaire médiatique*, was initiated by francophone media outlets in the 1990s, and later formalised by the *Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel* (Superior Council of the Audio-visual or CSA), an organisation that regulates various electronic media in Belgium including television and radio stations. Essentially, the media cordon stipulates that, during election campaigns, audio-visual media cannot provide a platform to people who are linked to parties or movements that are labelled racist or ‘*liberticides*’, i.e. profoundly hostile to freedom (CSA 2012).

In Belgium, political parties are represented on the governing body (*conseil d’administration*) of their public service broadcasters (i.e. the Flemish VRT and the francophone RTBF) proportionally to the number of votes they receive in their respective language communities. When the *Vlaams Belang* won seats on the board of the VRT after its initial electoral breakthrough on ‘Black Sunday’ in November

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of RTL Radio on 8 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *Lëtzebuurger Land* on 20 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

1991, the RTBF decided to come up with a set of loose guidelines to prevent far-right parties from gaining media access. Specifically, extremist parties were not to be interviewed ‘live’, and they were to be barred from participating in televised debates. These two guidelines were intended to obstruct extremist parties from gaining influence, because the RTBF feared that granting initial access would be impossible to reverse. To use the words of Simon-Pierre De Coster, who developed the legal basis for the *cordon médiatique* at the RTBF: ‘Once the worm is in the fruit, it will continue to make its way through the apple of the VRT.’<sup>111</sup>

Based on these two guiding principles (i.e. no livestreamed interviews and no participation in debates), the RTBF decided to deny access to the FNb in the run-up to the 1994 elections because the party was considered racist and xenophobic, thereby clashing with internal RTBF regulations. This led to a series of lawsuits against the francophone media, most of which the FNb won, on the basis that the RTBF did not have sufficient proof to show that the party was, indeed, racist and xenophobic. In response, the RTBF set up a detailed vetting process to comb through the publications of parties they suspected of extremism. The aim was to demonstrate that some of their points ran contrary to certain legal principles – notably those enshrined in the non-discrimination clause of the European Convocation of Human Rights. In 1999, the Supreme Administrative Court of Belgium (Council of State) ruled that the RTBF had the right to deny access to parties they considered undemocratic.<sup>112</sup> This led to the formalisation of the *cordon sanitaire médiatique*. To date, the RTBF continues to scrutinise party publications in detail in the run-up to elections to determine whether or not a party abides by the rules of democracy. This process is taken very seriously. As the director of legal affairs explained, ‘I assume my responsibilities. I examine these party programs before every election. It takes a lot of time, but that’s the only way to fight non-

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with the Director of legal affairs at RTBF on 28 September 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>112</sup> The court ruling was based on the 1973 law on the Cultural Pact, which regulates media access for political groupings (Jamin 2005: 98). The law (article III, §1) only safeguards the protection of cultural and philosophical movements that respect the principles and rules of democracy (*Service Public Fédéral Belge* 2018). The Cultural Pact does not ban extremists from cultural boards, but merely *permits* cultural organisations to ban members of ‘extremist’ parties from participating (Jamin 2005: 100). The Flemings grant access to members of the VB, while the Walloons do not, suggesting that the two polities have different interpretations of the Cultural Pact.

democratic parties – that is to say: show where and how they do not respect the rules of democracy.’<sup>113</sup>

Given that there was a consensus among francophone editors to maintain a *cordon sanitaire médiatique*, it became legally binding for electoral campaigns in 2011 (CSA 2011), when televisions and radio stations in Wallonia agreed not to ever feature ‘extremist’ politicians in live-stream in the run-up to elections. This is not to say that they do not quote them or that they do not talk about them; they just never feature these parties directly. In other words, all quotes by and references to these parties are contextualised. It is worth emphasising that the cordon was not imposed by the CSA; rather, it was initiated by Walloon media practitioners as a purely voluntary and self-regulatory measure.<sup>114</sup> Although the CSA regulation only legally applies to electoral campaigns, most editors-in-chief adhere to this principle all year round – even outside electoral campaign periods.<sup>115</sup> It is not up to the CSA to classify political parties, however, which appears to be the greatest difficulty with the *cordon sanitaire*.<sup>116</sup> Newsrooms have different ways of determining which parties should be covered by the cordon; they typically conduct internal investigations and consult with political scientists and/or *Unia*, an independent public institution in Belgium that was set up to combat discrimination and promote equal opportunities.

The interviews revealed that there is a remarkable sense of solidarity among francophone media practitioners. Most (if not all) interviewees expressed a sense of pride in the media cordon. Upholding the policy was seen as a matter of principle. As one journalist at RTL television put it: ‘*On ne s’approche pas du diable*’ – you don’t talk to the devil.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, the director of legal affairs at RTBF stated the following: ‘As journalists, we are the watchdogs of democracy, and as watchdogs, it is our job to bark and – if necessary – bite’.<sup>118</sup>

Although the media cordon technically only covers domestic politics, it is also applied to foreign politicians since the RTBF wants to avoid being accused of

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<sup>113</sup> Interview with the Director of legal affairs at RTBF on 28 September 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with a CSA representative on 7 April 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with a political journalist at RTL on 12 April 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with the Director of legal affairs at RTBF on 28 September 2017 in Brussels.

inconsistency.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, the public service broadcaster also refrains from featuring live interviews with representatives of the French *Front National*.<sup>120</sup> In the run-up to the 2017 French presidential election, the RTBF decided to put a two-minute delay in broadcasting the debate between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen.<sup>121</sup> The intention was to discourage any future domestic far-right movements from making the case that media access was to be granted, given that a representative of the French FN had been featured on live television.

The print media also generally adhere to this ostracising principle, although some interviewees admitted that this position is becoming increasingly untenable. The deputy Editor-in-Chief at *Le Soir*, for instance, raised the problem of deciding who should be covered by the *cordon*: ‘Say we receive a chance to interview Donald Trump – do we do this? And what about Marine Le Pen? Where do you draw the line?’<sup>122</sup> She also explained that *Le Soir* forms part of an international newspaper group LENA (Leading European Newspaper Alliance). Given that they are the only newspaper in this group to maintain such a measure, it is becoming increasingly difficult to justify. Nevertheless, the press also generally abides by the guidelines stipulated by the *cordon*.

The election of Donald Trump in the United States in November 2016 only seemed to reassure francophone media practitioners. In a televised debate about the future of the *cordon sanitaire* organised by RTL in the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election, the Editor-in-chief of *Le Soir* explained that, ‘It’s a matter of values. We will not change our rules now that Trump has been elected. The experience that the francophone media have had with the *cordon médiatique* seems to have borne fruit to this date’ (quoted in *Le Soir* 2016). Overall, given the communication barriers, the Walloon media landscape seems impenetrable to right-wing populist parties. To use the words of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the media deprive far-right movements of the ‘oxygen of publicity’. In

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<sup>119</sup> Interviewing other far-right movements could provide ammunition for comparable domestic movements to advocate laxation of the *cordon*. Interview with the Director of legal affairs at RTBF on 28 September 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with the Director of news and sports at RTBF on 29 March 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with the Director of legal affairs at RTBF on 28 September 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with the deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Le Soir* on 7 April 2017 in Brussels.

such a hostile media environment, it is particularly difficult for right-wing populist parties to thrive.

### 5.3. Flanders

While the political *cordon sanitaire* persists to this day in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, the media cordon was never formalised in Flanders and therefore became porous relatively quickly. Although most media outlets initially did not treat the Flemish Interest Party as an ‘ordinary party,’ media coverage of the party became more nuanced (i.e. less hostile) over time (Schafraad et al. 2012).

In 1999, at the initiative of a Brussels-based organisation ‘Extreme right? No. Thanks’ (*Extreemrechts? Nee. Bedankt*), Flemish social scientists and journalists formulated a set of recommendations for ‘how to report on the extreme right’. Drawing on guidelines set up by their Dutch colleagues, they advised Flemish media editors to ensure that far-right spokespersons were only given very limited opportunities, for instance, by removing topics related to the far right from newspaper headlines, or by not publishing any readers’ letters written by far-right politicians (Dierickx 2005; De Swert 2001: 11).

In the early 2000s, there was still a broad consensus among Flemish news editors to combat the *Vlaams Blok*. For example, in May 2003 (one day before the federal elections of that year), an article appeared in *De Standaard* in which then Editor-in-Chief Peter Vandermeersch listed five reasons to vote in favour or against each of the major Flemish parties, but then explicitly stated that there was no valid reason whatsoever to vote for the *Vlaams Blok*: ‘We have [...] analysed its [i.e. the VB’s] programme, studied how well it functioned in Parliament and investigated the quality of its political personnel. After careful consideration, we decided that there are no valid reasons to vote for the Bloc’ (*De Standaard* 2003).

The Flemish public broadcaster (which at the time already counted two representatives of the *Vlaams Blok* on its board of directors) also took a clear stance against the VB. In a special note on its democratic and societal role (entitled *De VRT en de democratische samenleving*), the VRT explained that it would be particularly cautious when reporting on the VB, because it was ‘not a political party like any other’ (see *De Standaard* 2001). The directive stated that the VRT would not grant open tribunes to groups that could pose a threat to a pluralistic, democratic

society; only facts that were newsworthy or ‘journalistically relevant views’ were to be covered. However, as one interviewee pointed out, this directive has since ‘disappeared somewhere in a drawer’.<sup>123</sup>

According to several interviewees, the demarcation strategy simply became unsustainable. Indeed, as the VB gained influence, media coverage intensified and became more nuanced. This can partly be explained by the rapid growth of the VB, as it is difficult to justify isolating a party once it has gained a substantial portion of the vote. As Esser et al. (2017: 366) noted, populist parties generally receive less coverage if their standing in the polls and their electoral strength is low; however, once a party gains influence, ‘media coverage becomes more intense and nuanced’, turning the VB from a ‘controversial outsider’ into an ‘established outsider’ (Schafraad et al. 2012).

Some interviewees linked this shift to market pressures, by pointing out that putting a substantial part of the electorate offside would simply not be beneficial from a commercial point of view. This became evident when interviewing the Editor-in-Chief of the *Gazet van Antwerpen*, a regional newspaper sold predominantly in the city of Antwerp, where the VB reaped some of its earliest electoral breakthroughs. She explained that, in the early days of the Flemish Interest Party, the *Gazet* sought to maintain a cordon, but this position was simply not sustainable because the party became such an important electoral force in Antwerp:

There were lots of discussions here at the office about this at the time: ‘Why did that have to be so big?’; ‘Again Filip Dewinter?’; ‘Don’t put that on the front page!’ or ‘Keep this in the regional pages’ – those were the discussions we had constantly. But I think we’ve grown up a bit by becoming much calmer about this [...]. So [the *Vlaams Belang*] has become a party that we treat with wariness, but we *do* talk to them...<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, when asked why there was no Flemish equivalent of the *cordon médiatique*, one interviewee explained there had been one, but that it eroded after 2004, when the *Vlaams Blok* was sentenced for racism.<sup>125</sup> The subsequent name change caused some of the quality newspapers to change their editorial line towards the VB. Many interviewees referred to an editorial published in 2004 by Peter

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with a political journalist at VRT on 29 March 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of the *Gazet van Antwerpen* on 27 March 2017 in Antwerp.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with a journalist at *Apache*, 27 March 2017 in Antwerp.

Vandermeersch in *De Standaard*, who argued that the name change signified a return to a normal political landscape in which the *cordon sanitaire* would be redundant (*De Standaard* 2004a). In the same year, *De Standaard* published an op-ed by one of the leading members of the VB, Filip Dewinter, thereby granting direct access to the party for the very first time (see *De Standaard* 2004b).

This decision seems to have marked a critical turning point, as it may have provided an incentive for other newspapers to follow suit.<sup>126</sup> At the left-leaning *De Morgen*, it was not until June 2016 that the newspaper first published an extensive featured interview with Dewinter (see *De Morgen* 2016a). In a corresponding editorial, the Editor-in-Chief Bart Eeckhout explained the reasoning behind this decision:

*De Morgen* still does not consider the *Vlaams Belang* to be a party like any other. [...] With his social image, Filip Dewinter is far removed from the open, free and equal society that this newspaper embraces. That is precisely why we believe that his voice should be heard, also extensively in *De Morgen*. This ‘independent newspaper’ has a social conviction. That’s nothing to be embarrassed about. Journalistic interest, especially for disturbing, deviating and conflicting opinions, is an integral part of that conviction (*De Morgen* 2016b).

When interviewed, Eeckhout elaborated on this justification by explaining that, as a journalist, he had learned to become relatively self-critical and cautious about judging people who vote for right-wing populist parties by distancing himself from this classically progressive way of thinking. Instead, he was interested in analysing what motivates people to vote for these parties:

It’s difficult to say that you’re interested in their incentives – even though you may not agree with these incentives, and even though you can see the risks of those incentives – but you cannot look at this with an open mind whilst also maintaining that those politicians are not allowed to speak. That simply no longer works from a journalistic point of view.<sup>127</sup>

This editorial line appears to have persisted. In March 2018, for example, *De Morgen* published an in-depth featured interview with the then rather unknown Dries Van Langenhove, founder of *Schild & Vrienden*, a Flemish far-right youth-organization (see *De Morgen* 2018a).<sup>128</sup> This generated considerable backlash

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<sup>126</sup> Interview with a journalist at *Apache*, 27 March 2017 in Antwerp.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *De Morgen* on 30 March 2017 in Kobbegem.

<sup>128</sup> *Schild & Vrienden* (literally ‘Shield & Friends’) refers to an episode during the Franco-Flemish war (1297-1305), during which Flemish militias allegedly used the phrase as a shibboleth to distinguish the French from the natives (as the phrase is difficult to pronounce for French-speakers) (Blommaert 2018).

among the more left-leaning readership of the newspaper. In response to the criticism, Joël de Ceulaer, a senior writer at *De Morgen*, who had conducted the interview with Van Langenhove, published an editorial in which he explained: ‘I don’t think journalists should be paternalistic. The question as to what effect an interview has on readers’ voting behaviour is, in my opinion, irrelevant. I’m just doing my job’ (*De Morgen* 2018b).

In general, media practitioners in Flanders seemed to abide by different journalistic standards from their Walloon colleagues. Most interviewees highlighted the importance of maintaining an open mind when it comes to discussing right-wing populist parties. For instance, the Editor-in-Chief of *VTM Nieuws* (the daily news broadcast of the commercial Flemish Television Company) insisted that it is important to dare to call things what they are, maintain an open spirit and portray different opinions.<sup>129</sup>

In fact, several interviewees explained that isolating the far right was simply unprofessional, which suggests that they held different views about the role of journalists in society from their Walloon colleagues. Overall, Flemish media practitioners highlighted the importance of taking readers’ views very seriously. The Editor-in-Chief of the *Gazet van Antwerpen* explained that, as a newspaper, they tried very hard to respect their readers by taking their fears and opinions into account: ‘In my op-eds, I always try to show some degree of understanding – not for the politicians who say these things, but for those people who might be prone to believe them. That is a nuance that I find important.’<sup>130</sup>

Thus, the positioning of media practitioners vis-à-vis right-wing populist parties shifted over time from demarcation to confrontation and accommodation. This observation is in line with previous studies, which showed that many newspapers initially applied confrontational ‘exposure’ strategies to unveil the VB’s ‘true face’, especially in the run-up to elections (De Swert 2002). Perhaps more importantly, scholars have also shown that the Flemish media helped politicise some of the *issues* of the VB by paying disproportionate attention to immigration and crime, thereby contributing to its electoral success (Coffé 2005: 172-4; Walgrave & De

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of VTM on 6 April 2017 in Vilvoorde.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of the *Gazet van Antwerpen* on 27 March 2017 in Antwerp.

Swert 2004). In other words, although ‘the [Flemish] media did not open their gates entirely and uncritically to the populist radical right, [...] the news media did focus extensively on nationalism, immigrant topics, and crime-related themes as issues “owned” by the VB’ (De Cleen & Van Aelst 2017: 103).

The effort of media practitioners to focus on the experiences of common citizens (i.e. populism by the media), as well as their tendency to open up to populist messages (i.e. populist citizen journalism) is illustrative of the populist newsroom logic (see Esser et al. 2017), which makes the Flemish media landscape accessible to right-wing populist parties.

#### 5.4. The Netherlands

These trends were also visible in the Netherlands, where editors held similar views to those in Flanders. Most media practitioners highlighted the importance of maintaining an open mind. When asked about the role of newspapers in society, one editor-in-chief responded: ‘We’re a platform for collisions. And if you have a closed worldview as a newspaper, well, you take position on one side of the debate... Yes, and I find that boring from an intellectual point of view’.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, the Editor-in-Chief of the weekly newsmagazine *Elsevier Weekblad* stated: ‘It’s our job to collect facts and arguments, and to pass them on to society. It’s not for us journalists to decide whether someone might benefit from that information. We should be able to call things what they are; throw it into the open! The facts will emerge through these clashes of ideas.’<sup>132</sup>

In general, the Dutch media see their role less as educators; instead, they think of themselves as providing a forum for debate. This was exemplified in their emphasis on ‘populist citizen journalism’ (see Esser et al. 2017: 371). Several media practitioners highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for readers and viewers to express their opinions. For instance, the Editor-in-Chief of the popular tabloid *Telegraaf* stated that the views of ‘the common people’ are considered just as important as those held by elites.<sup>133</sup> The two biggest newspapers in the Netherlands, the *Algemeen Dagblad* (AD) and the *Telegraaf*, both reserve pages in their newspapers for readers to voice their hopes, fears and concerns. This view is

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<sup>131</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *de Volkskrant* on 21 March 2017 in Amsterdam.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *Elsevier Weekblad* on 9 August 2017 via phone.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *de Telegraaf* on 23 March 2017 in Amsterdam.

based on the premise that newspapers should also serve as an ‘safety valve [uitlaatklep]’ for people to express their views.<sup>134</sup> According to the Editor-in-Chief of the AD, it is crucial for a newspaper to stay close to its readers:

There are two groups of people who are overrepresented in the media: the elites, and the opposite, that is: those who are kicking at everything. The large group in the middle does not feel represented. And that is our group! We are your voice; we cater to the average Dutch person – not because they are average, but because there are so many of them. [...] If you have to say something, you can do it here – not just in our letter section, but also in interviews: people like you. So if we write about education, we always feature the educators, not the directors.<sup>135</sup>

Overall, there was a great drive among Dutch journalists to address uncomfortable issues to avoid creating any taboos. This marks a clear departure from the media’s demarcating stance during the 1980s and 90s toward earlier (and less successful) far-right movements (see Chapter 3), notably Hans Janmaat’s Centre Democrats, which were portrayed as ‘a party of fascists, criminals and scum’ (Rensen 1994). Indeed, in the past, the Dutch media ‘did all it could to damage the party’s reputation’ (Art 2011: 85; see also Ellinas 2010: 209; Mudde & Van Holsteyn 2000: 148). In a TV show entitled *Het zwarte schaap* (‘The Black Sheep’), which aired in 1999, a prominent Dutch political commentator and journalist, Paul Witteman, acknowledged that Janmaat ‘did not receive a fair chance to present his ideas’ as ‘politicians and journalists at the time were concerned about the question how to best defuse the danger posed by the extreme right’ (see *Het zwarte schaap* 1999). When asked whether he had ever interviewed Janmaat, Witteman said no, explaining that he worked for the VARA, a broadcasting association which, at the time, was associated with the Socialist pillar, and that the views proclaimed by Janmaat clashed with the ideological foundations of this pillar: ‘We thought that every vote for the CD was one vote too many’ (ibid). When asked whether, in retrospect, this was justified, he responded that although it was not objective, this stance was perfectly legitimate. An analysis of newspaper coverage of the CD illustrates the difficulty the party had in gaining media access: in 1994, only 2.9 percent of the total references made to party programmes in the *NRC Handelsblad*

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<sup>134</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *de Telegraaf* on 23 March 2017 in Amsterdam.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *Algemeen Dagblad* on 24 March 2017 in Rotterdam.

and the AD went to the CD, compared to zero percent in 1998, and 0.9 percent in 2002 (Bornschieer 2008: 237).

The limited media exposure that Janmaat received contrasts starkly with that of Pim Fortuyn. Indeed, Fortuyn dominated the 2002 electoral campaign and was by far the most visible politician in the media. According to Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2003: 86), no less than 24 percent of all media coverage devoted to individual politicians was dedicated to Fortuyn, while the runner-up merely received 7.3 percent. Fortuyn's spectacular rise to fame marked an important turning point in the Dutch media landscape (see Koopmans & Muis 2009), after which journalists decided to start paying more attention to the 'silent majority'. This was an event that contributed to the dissemination of populist discourses in the media. According to one editor-in-chief, 'all sluices burst open' after Fortuyn gained prominence, explaining that his success 'showed that we'd really been locked into our own bastions [...], and we have not listened enough to the people living in working-class neighbourhoods.'<sup>136</sup>

This trend was reinforced by the Brexit vote in the UK in June 2016 and, above all, the election of Donald Trump in the United States several months later, which produced an 'issue culture' (see Esser et al. 2017: 374) that generated favourable discursive opportunity structures for the populist radical right. One week after the 2016 American Presidential Elections, the head of the main Dutch public broadcaster (NPO) wrote an op-ed published in the *Volkskrant* to announce that the Dutch public broadcaster was going to learn from the American elections, explaining they were going to pay more attention to the 'common people on the street':

In the Netherlands, the question is raised whether the so-called mainstream media know what happens on the street. Whether they give sufficient voice to all Dutch people, or whether they only give voice to the highly-educated, cosmopolitan Dutch person. We here in Hilversum take this discussion seriously. Because the public broadcaster belongs to everybody. [...] It is our duty to take all sounds and visions in society seriously and to give them a voice and show them. (Rijxman 2016)

This sort of self-criticism is a recurring theme among Dutch media practitioners since Fortuyn's electoral breakthrough in 2002 (Akkerman 2016). There is a

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *de Volkskrant* on 21 March 2017.

tendency in the Dutch media to (over)compensate for the past lack of attention given to the concerns of Dutch citizens by seeking to amplify the voice of the ‘common people’. In an article, the co-founder and Editor-in-Chief of the online news website *de Correspondent* argued that, after Pim Fortuyn proclaimed the failure of multiculturalism,

[a] long-brewing discontent with diversity flared up, seemingly out of nowhere. Politicians in The Hague looked on in shock as the bald professor from Rotterdam shook the foundations of the status quo. Meanwhile, Dutch journalists looked in the mirror despairingly. How did we miss this? What followed was a decade of ‘saying the unsayable.’ (Wijnberg 2017)

Similarly, the Editor-in-Chief of *Elsevier Weekblad* noted: ‘In the past, some issues were ignored by the media, and Fortuyn was able to benefit from this. Following his rise, the immediate reaction of the media was to say: “We did something wrong,” and what followed, was a lot of: “Let’s hear the voice of the people” – it really led to hypercorrection’.<sup>137</sup> This newsroom logic makes the media more accessible to right-wing populist parties; after all, these parties also seek to portray themselves as representatives of ‘the common people’.

Thus, in contrast to Wallonia, right-wing populist parties in the Netherlands do not receive special treatment and are generally no longer considered pariahs. When asked how they deal with right-wing populism in general and Geert Wilders in particular, most editors-in-chief in the Netherlands explained that they treat him like any other politician – although some newspapers seemed more cautious than others. For instance, the deputy Editor-in-Chief of the more ‘elitist’ *NRC Handelsblad* said the following: ‘Should we put him [i.e. Wilders] in the newspaper or not? We always have heated debates about this. We often end up doing so, but we never do so without prior consideration.’<sup>138</sup> By contrast, the Editor-in-Chief of the popular tabloid-style newspaper *Telegraaf* explained, ‘we approach right-wing populism (as far as it translates into political power and parties) just like any other parties, that is to say: we approach them critically. I don’t see any difference [...]. We follow him [i.e. Wilders] and the PVV with great interest, because it’s important what is happening there—after all, it’s the second biggest party’.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *Elsevier Weekblad* on 9 August 2017 via phone.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with the deputy Editor-in-Chief of *NRC Handelsblad* on 16 August 2017.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *de Telegraaf* on 23 March 2017 in Amsterdam.

Similarly, the Editor-in-Chief of the AD explained, ‘You always get questions like: “Should we give the floor to Wilders?” Well, there are people who feel represented by him, so yes, we should do this.’<sup>140</sup> However, all interviewees drew a clear line when it came to the infamous *minder, minder Marokkanen* (i.e. ‘fewer, fewer Moroccans’) incident in 2014, when Wilders asked the crowd at a campaign rally if they wanted ‘fewer or more Moroccans’ in their city. When the crowd responded with ‘Fewer! Fewer!’ Wilders answered, ‘We are going to take care of that’ (see *The Guardian* 2014). Virtually all editors-in-chief pointed out that Wilders had gone too far with this statement because it called into question the rule of law. Overall, however, it seems fair to say that the Dutch media landscape has become gradually more accessible to the populist radical right.

### 5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has shed light on the ways in which the media deal with the populist radical right in the Benelux region, thereby illuminating different motivations behind societal responses to right-wing populism. As Ellinas (2018: 269) has noted, the ways in which the media choose to treat the populist radical right reflect some of the thorniest debates in democratic politics; specifically, ‘[m]edia coverage raises questions about the degree of tolerance societies should display when it comes to the often intolerant ideas of right-wing radicals and, more generally, questions about the limits of freedom of expression democracies grant to groups and individuals.’ The evidence presented above suggests that Dutch and Flemish media practitioners have gradually become more accommodating towards right-wing populist parties, whereas Walloon and Luxembourgish journalists continue to adhere to strict demarcation. How, though, do media practitioners justify their coverage of right-wing populist parties?

The willingness of media practitioners to engage with populist radical right actors can be linked to the electoral trajectories of these parties. In Flanders and the Netherlands, media practitioners justified their strategies by explaining that it would simply be ‘bad journalism’ not to give space to an electorally successful party. More generally, electoral success can weaken the inhibitions of some media to grant access and exposure to right-wing populist parties (Ellinas 2010: 219). Luxembourg

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<sup>140</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *Algemeen Dagblad* on 24 March 2017 in Rotterdam.

and Wallonia have yet to witness the rise of a charismatic leader along the lines of Marine Le Pen or Geert Wilders, and there is no doubt that the absence of a credible right-wing populist contender makes it easy to maintain a media cordon. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that Luxembourgish and Walloon media practitioners generally maintained a more politically motivated and normative stance than their Dutch-speaking colleagues by arguing that the media should not provide any space to far-right movements. In particular Walloon media practitioners underscored time and again that they would stick to these principles – even if they were to be confronted with an electorally successful far-right movement. This suggests that journalists in the Benelux region hold different views about their societal role. These views are likely to be influenced by the broader media landscape in which journalists operate.

The structure of the media in Western Europe has changed significantly in the post-war period (Hallin & Mancini 2004; Mudde 2004: 553). In the past, media outlets were often tied to political parties, trade unions, or churches; from the 1960s onward, however, the media started to gain political independence. This trend was accompanied by the dismantling of public broadcasting monopolies and the proliferation of private media outlets. The increased competition launched a ‘struggle for readers and viewers and, consequently, a focus on the more extreme and scandalous aspects of politics’ (Mudde 2004: 553; see also Esser et al. 2017: 365). At the same time, the expansion of private media outlets has generated a tendency to focus on entertainment values (Eatwell 2003: 57).

These changes can have an impact on media content. Specifically, it ‘changes the social function of journalism, as the journalist’s main objective is no longer to disseminate ideas and create social consensus around them, but to produce entertainment and information that can be sold to individual consumers’ (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 277). Market pressures incentivise the media to feature political actors with lively personalities, thereby pushing the media ‘into a symbiotic relationship with the Far Rightists’ (Ellinas 2010: 211). Indeed, populists seem to benefit from the commercial character of the growing popular news media and tabloid-press industry, as ‘these media give passionate attention to what happens in the usually animated precincts of populist movements’ (Mazzoleni 2008: 50). According to Mazzoleni (2008: 62), the media and populists need one another: ‘The

media must cover the sensational stories provided by contentious, often flamboyant (and in some cases “media darling”) figures while populist leaders must use the media to enhance the effectiveness of their messages and build the widest possible support.’

There is tentative evidence that the changes in the media systems have been more profound in the Netherlands and Flanders than in Wallonia and Luxembourg. Specifically, it appears that the Dutch-speaking media are shifting away from the world of politics toward the world of business (as predicted by Hallin & Mancini 2004). In his 2017 book, the Dutch news correspondent Joris Luyendijk, made the following observation:

In the mid-1990s, the *NRC Handelsblad* was, like many other newspapers in the Netherlands, owned by a foundation. Then, just like all other newspapers, it had to be ‘launched on the market’. The NRC was bought by investors from London and then sold on. And sold again. My colleagues who still work there say: ‘We are no longer a newspaper but a company.’ Profit is no longer a means to make a newspaper without government subsidies. Profit is now a goal and the newspaper is a means (Luyendijk 2017: 40-41).

There is unmistakable evidence of a growing concentration of media ownership among the Dutch-speaking media outlets. Indeed, over the past decades, the Dutch-speaking (newspaper) market has become dominated by two (Flemish) media companies: *De Persgroep* and *Mediahuis* (see Annex). In addition, throughout the interviews, there was straightforward evidence of commercial thinking among Dutch and Flemish media representatives. In Flanders, several media practitioners maintained that it would not be sensible from a commercial point-of-view to alienate a substantial portion of readers and viewers. In the Netherlands, interviewees routinely referred to their readers and viewers as ‘clients’. Some pointed to sales trends and business models, while others proclaimed their interest in becoming ‘the largest newspaper’ – concerns that did not come up in any interviews in Luxembourg or Wallonia.

Unlike in Wallonia and Luxembourg, there is a growing consensus among Dutch-speaking media practitioners that journalists are to remain ‘neutral’ commentators. Indeed, they consistently underlined the importance of maintaining an open mind and covering all viewpoints. Crucially, however, the Dutch and Flemish public-service broadcasters also subscribe to this view. This is interesting given that they

are primarily funded by the state and therefore isolated from market mechanisms. This suggests that the differences in media strategies cannot simply be attributed to commercialisation. The media do not exist in a vacuum; rather, '[m]edia organisations operate in political environments and their behaviour is also determined by their interaction with this environment' (Ellinas 2018: 278). Thus, we cannot fully understand the media without considering the nature of the states, party systems, wider social structures in which they are embedded (Hallin & Mancini 2004). After all, "[i]n settings where the media have strong ties with the political system, it is reasonable to expect that the treatment of radicals is at least partly driven by political considerations" (Ellinas 2018: 278). This is particularly true for democratic corporatist media systems that are characterized by a high degree of political parallelism (see Hallin & Mancini 2004).

The Dutch-speaking media seem to have transitioned toward the more commercialised 'Liberal Model', which implies 'a shift toward the neutral journalistic professionalism, of the sort that is particularly strong in the United States' (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 285). This may also be linked to 'audience fragmentation'; over the past decades, listeners and viewers in the Netherlands and Flanders have become 'consumers' rather than follower of specific political or religious segments (see Nieuwenhuis 1992: 207). In other words, just as voters have become less loyal to traditional 'pillar' parties, media consumers have become less loyal to the institutions of the social segments they once belonged to.

In Luxembourg, the persistence of the partisan press as well as the subsidy system have prevented convergence towards the 'Liberal Model' (see Hallin & Mancini 2004: 162). In Wallonia, political concerns simply seem to outweigh commercial considerations. More generally, in Luxembourg and Wallonia, the remnants of pillarisation continue to play a role in the media landscape. This became evident in the interview process. For instance, when asked about their editorial line towards immigration, the responses by newspaper editors in Luxembourg and Wallonia were often clearly rooted in the ideological pillar that they (used to) belong to. For instance, the Editor-in-Chief of the liberal *Lëtzebuenger Journal* explained, 'our editorial line is liberal, that is to say: relatively open to all opinions'.<sup>141</sup> Meanwhile,

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of the *Letzebuenger Journal* on 20 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

the Editor-in-Chief of the conservative (formerly catholic) *La Libre* in Wallonia used terms such as ‘humanist’, ‘tolerant’, and ‘Christian’ to describe his editorial line.<sup>142</sup>

In Flanders and, above all, the Netherlands, the editorial line was not always as obvious. When asked about his editorial line towards immigration, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Algemeen Dagblad* responded, ‘The editorial line? You probably mean “editorial policy” in English, so the policy... Well, it’s not like our journalists are sent out with a specific policy when writing about immigration. [...] Journalists just need to write.’<sup>143</sup> Likewise, the Editor-in-Chief of the Dutch public broadcaster NOS explained, ‘We treat it [i.e. immigration and right-wing populism] like any other topic: if it’s newsworthy, we cover it’.<sup>144</sup>

Finally, it is possible that media practitioners in Luxembourg and Wallonia have ‘drawn lessons’ from the experiences of their neighbouring countries. Particularly in Wallonia, there was evidence of ‘learning’: after witnessing the rise of the Flemish Interest Party, Walloon media practitioners came up with a set of principles and practices that were intended to prevent a similar electoral breakthrough in their polity. These guidelines were institutionalised over time and eventually formalised into a rigid *cordon sanitaire*. According to a VRT journalist, this helps explain why the Flemish media cordon was never implemented as rigidly as in Wallonia: ‘We set up the cordon when the VB had already started to gain momentum. Wallonia has not yet seen a successful far-right party, so the cordon is applied much more strictly: in Wallonia, the populist radical right is nipped in the bud’.<sup>145</sup>

There is ample evidence that media behaviour does not simply reflect but also shapes the electoral advances of right-wing populist parties (e.g. Czymara & Dochow 2018; Damstra et al. 2019; Murphy & Devine 2018). Specifically, the media can play an instrumental role in rallying support and disseminating the populist message, which can contribute to the legitimisation of their cause by ‘remov[ing] the stigma of extremism’ (Ellinas 2018: 273). Particularly in the earlier phases of a party’s development, the media can be an important asset in the pursuit

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<sup>142</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *La Libre* on 6 April 2017 in Brussels.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *Algemeen Dagblad* on 24 March 2017 in Rotterdam.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of NOS on 23 March 2017 in Hilversum.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with a political journalist at VRT on 29 March 2017 in Brussels.

of national visibility and legitimacy. In Wallonia and Luxembourg, media practitioners have consistently narrowed the opportunity structures available to right-wing populist parties. In Flanders and the Netherlands, on the other hand, the media did not have any rigid and formal guidelines *prior* to the rise of the LFP and the VB. This flexible stance could help explain why Dutch and Flemish media practitioners became gradually more receptive to right-wing populist parties. This suggests that the timing of the various responses to right-wing populism plays a crucial role in their effectiveness. The importance of timing will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The main goal of this thesis was to enhance our understanding of the variation in the electoral success of right-wing populist parties. Previous research has shown that the rise of the populist radical right has a ‘contagion effect’ in the sense that populist radical right parties can incentivise mainstream parties to shift their policy agendas rightwards, for instance by advocating stricter immigration rules (e.g. Bale 2003; van Spanje 2010). There is also empirical evidence to suggest that the so-called ‘parroting effect’ (van Spanje & de Graaf 2018) is real; in other words, mainstream parties tend to copy the populist radical right when faced with a successful right-wing populist challenger (Abou-Chadi & Krause 2018; Han 2015; van Spanje 2010). The presence of electorally successful right-wing populist parties has pulled European party systems rightwards (Wagner & Meyer 2017). Indeed, political campaigns, immigration laws and the entire public discourse have become increasingly right-wing (in a cultural sense), as illustrated by the diffusion of radical right ideologies and issues into the mainstream political discourse (Pytlas 2015).

As Rydgren (2005: 429) has noted, however, ‘right-wing populism *is not* contagious (in the sense that epidemics are); it only diffuses if actors want it to diffuse’ (emphasis in original). In other words, if there are no actors (i.e. parties) or channels (i.e. the media) to diffuse right-wing populist agenda items, right-wing populist parties are less likely to break through electorally. Thus, one of the main conclusions to be drawn from this thesis is that mainstream parties and the media do play a crucial role in the diffusion of right-wing populism. Taken together, they act as ‘gatekeepers’ who control the gateway to the electoral arena.

In line with previous research (Art 2006; Ellinas 2010; Pytlas 2015), the thesis shows that, particularly in the earlier phases of a party’s development, the electoral performances of right-wing populist parties depend to a large extent on exogenous factors, notably the degree of political and social ostracism they face in a given polity. More generally, the findings indicate that the reactions of civil society, mainstream political parties and the media play a crucial role in the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties.

A specific aim of the thesis was to explain why right-wing populist parties have been more successful in garnering electoral support in the Netherlands and Flanders

than in Wallonia and Luxembourg. To this end, the research set out to explore conventional explanatory variables, including socio-economic indicators (i.e. demand-side factors) as well as institutional and party organisational features (i.e. supply-side explanations). The findings show that demand for right-wing populist parties has been relatively constant across the Benelux region, whereas the supply of such parties has been comparatively weaker in Wallonia and Luxembourg than in Flanders and the Netherlands.

More precisely, in terms of demand, the thesis indicates that, throughout the Benelux region, broad societal changes brought about by post-industrialisation and globalisation have generated a sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream politics and helped pave the way for partisan dealignment (i.e. the weakening of traditional ties between voters and parties). Drawing on a broad range of sources including electoral studies, public opinion research and the existing secondary literature, the findings shows that although demand for the populist radical right may be slightly weaker in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg given the country's wealth, there is a potential breeding ground in all four cases. On the supply side, the thesis confirms that some structural features (notably the proportionality of the electoral system in the Netherlands and the availability of a pre-existing network in Flanders) have made it easier for right-wing populist parties to enter the political arena. Although all four polities under consideration have electoral systems based on proportional representation, comparatively higher barriers to entry may have weakened the supply of the populist radical right in Wallonia and Luxembourg.

Yet, while conventional demand- and supply-side theories provide a helpful starting point, they are insufficient to account fully for the variation in the success of right-wing populist parties in the Benelux. Specifically, they fall short in explaining the *timing* of the electoral breakthrough of the *Vlaams Belang* (VB) in Flanders and the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) in the Netherlands. After all, the VB had strong organisational capacity long before it managed to break through electorally in the late 1980s. Likewise, conventional theoretical models fail to explain why and how the LPF managed to mobilise so much support in a relatively short period of time in the early 2000s. In other words, demand- and supply-side explanations provide little insight into why right-wing populist parties were successful in accessing the public discourse and making their voices heard in the first place.

To answer these questions, the research then focused on the broader cultural and socio-political context in which party competition takes place. The thesis highlights the importance of discursive and political opportunity structures created by mainstream parties and the media. The findings show that their actions determine the ‘openness’ of the electoral market. Historical specificities help explain the different reactions that mainstream parties and the media have had towards the far right in the Benelux. In the Netherlands and Flanders, mainstream parties and the media have generated a relatively ‘open’ electoral market by providing an accessible environment in which right-wing populist parties can thrive. The decline of mainstream parties created opportunities for right-wing populist parties to politicise and monopolise new policy items, in particular issues pertaining to immigration and national identity. At the same time, related structural changes in the media landscape, including audience fragmentation as well as the twin processes of privatisation and commercialisation, have made the media more compatible with the ‘populist logic’. Taken together, mainstream parties and the media acted as ‘drivers’ on voter demand for, as well as party supply of, the populist radical right. Indeed, they contributed to increasing the salience of the immigration debate and enabled the radicalisation of the political discourse, thereby creating favourable opportunity structures for right-wing populist parties to influence the public debate.

By contrast, Wallonia and Luxembourg have been less affected by these tendencies; indeed, the media and mainstream parties have acted as ‘buffers’ by keeping the lid on voter demand and party supply. Different historical experiences have given rise to a relatively hostile political environment for far-right movements. Traditional cleavage structures have stayed comparatively intact, and support for mainstream parties has remained relatively stable. Indeed, voters have stayed comparatively loyal to established parties, notably the Social Democrats in Wallonia and the Christian Democrats in Luxembourg. These parties have successfully used state resources to maintain ties to their core electorates. This may have dampened the effect of what the late Peter Mair described as the ‘hollowing out of democracy’ (Mair 2013). As a result, demand for the populist radical right in Wallonia and Luxembourg is less pronounced than in Flanders and the Netherlands. In addition, media practitioners in these two polities generally adhere to demarcation, thereby

narrowing the discursive opportunity structures for right-wing populist parties to influence the public discourse. Although Luxembourg and Wallonia are certainly not immune to the ‘rise of the right’, these polities are less likely to witness the rise of a successful right-wing populist movement as long as media practitioners and mainstream politicians continue to uphold their strict demarcation policy.

Individually, the various factors listed above cannot explain the success and failure of the populist radical right in the Benelux. Taken together, however, they go a long way in accounting for variations in the electoral performances of the respective parties. As the traditional roles of the press and parties are changing in the sense that they are no longer the main ‘transmission belts’ between society and politics (Sartori 1976: 20-5), the findings presented in this thesis highlight the need to question the ways in which these changes might affect the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties. The remainder of this chapter therefore discusses the broader implications of the findings and identifies avenues for further research.

### 6.1. Theoretical Contributions

This thesis has provided a multifaceted, systematic analysis of potential factors that help explain the variation in the electoral fortunes of right-wing populist parties in the Benelux countries. By differentiating between electoral breakthrough and electoral persistence, and by moving beyond the two-dimensional demand- and supply-side framework, the thesis complements existing theoretical explanations. From a theoretical point of view, the thesis confirms the argument put forward by David Art (2006) that right-wing populist movements are less likely to break through electorally when the public sphere in which they operate is universally opposed to them. In other words, when mainstream parties and the media consistently restrict the discursive and political opportunity structures available to right-wing populist parties, these parties are less likely to succeed. Thus, mainstream parties and the media are not secondary players but key agents in the early stages of development of right-wing populist parties.

First, the findings indicate that the entry phase into the electoral arena is the most important moment in the life cycle of right-wing populist parties. Second, the research suggests that the timing and rigidity of the demarcation strategy vis-à-vis the populist radical right can help determine its effectiveness (see also Heinze

2018). In Luxembourg, there is a broad consensus among media practitioners and mainstream parties that maintaining an open society is crucial for the country's wealth. While this understanding has not been formalised, it appears to be significant in the sense that it is deeply ingrained and reflected in the values and decisions of key actors including politicians and media practitioners. In Wallonia, a formal political and media cordon was set up *prior* to the electoral breakthrough of a right-wing populist contender. Because the cordon has been formalised and institutionalised, it poses clear limits on what is considered politically and socially acceptable. This makes it difficult for right-wing populist parties to question these limits. In the Netherlands, by contrast, the boundaries of the political discourse were shifted by the centre-right. Indeed, the radicalisation of the political discourse was initiated by mainstream parties, and the media played an important role in perpetuating that discourse. In Flanders, a *cordon sanitaire* was set up after the VB had gained prominence. Although the political cordon persists, it was never fully 'watertight'. Given the late implementation and permissiveness of the cordon, it was inevitably less effective.

How far do the arguments presented above travel beyond the Benelux region? Specifically, how might the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis help us understand the variation in the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties across Western Europe and beyond? The qualitative research design as well as the small number of cases examined here restrict the generalisability of the findings beyond the four polities considered in this thesis. However, the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2 can serve as a useful analytical and conceptual tool with which to analyse other cases. In the following paragraphs, I probe the utility of the theoretical insights derived in this thesis. I do so by tentatively applying them to the two larger neighbouring countries: France and Germany. I thereby focus specifically on the role of mainstream parties and the media in the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties.

### **6.1.1. France**

There is hardly a case where the complicity of mainstream parties and the media has been more obvious than in France. According to Ellinas (2010), French mainstream parties sought to profit from growing public demands for cultural protectionism from the 1970s onwards. By politicising issues pertaining to national

identity, they created political and discursive opportunity structures for the rise of the *Front National* (FN). Indeed, '[t]oward the late 1970s, all mainstream parties started taking positions on a new axis of political contestation that was gradually supplementing the traditional competition of the Left and the Right over economic issues' (Ellinas 2010: 172). Unlike in most other cases, however, in France, the impetus for the right-wing turn came from the Left, following the politicisation of the immigration issue by the French Communist Party (PCF). In the 1970s, Communist mayors throughout France (who had been concerned about the impact of immigration on their constituencies since the 1960s) sought to reduce the number of immigrants in their localities by denying them access to housing and benefits (Ellinas 2010: 173). This drastic measure led to the radicalisation of the public debate, thereby generating new political space. However, the PCF was ill-positioned to exploit this space; in the early 1980s, the party's stance on immigration led to internal tensions, especially among the intellectuals, who felt that an anti-immigrant position would clash with the party's humanist ideals. This ultimately caused the party to withdraw the nationalist card:

The PCF's coalition with the Socialist government of François Mitterrand [following the 1981 elections] provided an additional impetus for de-radicalization. As soon as they took office, the Socialists, who prided themselves on their liberal social attitudes, sought to regulate the status of illegal immigrants and immigrant organizations (Ellinas 2010: 174).

Under Mitterrand, illicit immigration was regularised, and the death penalty was abandoned. These measures incentivised centre-right parties to radicalise their discourse (Bornschier 2012: 134). At the same time, the French Socialists actively sought to ensure the parliamentary representation of the *Front National* (Mayer 1998: 21). By intentionally increasing the opportunity structures of the FN, Mitterrand sought to weaken his biggest competitors, namely the centre-right Rally for the Republic (*Rassemblement pour la République* or RPR) and Union for French Democracy (*Union pour la Démocratie Française* or UDF). In 1982, when Jean-Marie Le Pen complained about a lack of media attention for his movement, Mitterrand convinced the leaders of French public television channels to increase their coverage of the FN. This had the effect of widening the discursive opportunity structures available to Le Pen, thereby allowing him to directly reach out to his voters. It also contributed to removing the stigma of extremism attached to the FN by granting the party legitimacy. Thus, the behaviour of French mainstream parties

and the media enabled the FN to enter the political arena. After entering the arena, the FN's image and discourse have become increasingly normalised, which ultimately paved the way for the party's *dédiabolisation* (or de-demonisation process) under Marine Le Pen since her takeover in 2011 (see Ivaldi 2016). The FN has since become firmly entrenched in the French party system. As a result, the positioning of mainstream parties and the media have become less influential in shaping the party's electoral success (Bornschier 2012: 122).

### **6.1.2. Germany**

While the French case seems to provide illustrative evidence for the validity of the theoretical insights put forward in this thesis, the German case appears to oppose them. Indeed, the German case is puzzling at first glance. Given the country's history with authoritarianism and National Socialism, the German public sphere was particularly averse to the emergence of a new far-right party. Using Germany as a 'non-case', David Art (2007) argued that the combined efforts of political elites, mainstream parties, the media and civil society to combat the far right made it extremely difficult for right-wing populist parties to recruit qualified personnel and break through electorally. In addition, the marginalisation and social stigma associated with the far right narrowed the discursive and political opportunity structures of right-wing populist parties. Yet, the 2017 German federal election saw the spectacular breakthrough of the right-wing populist 'Alternative for Germany' (*Alternative für Deutschland* or AfD). After winning 12.6 percent of the vote, the AfD became the third biggest party in Germany and was allocated 94 seats in the Bundestag. The rise of the AfD marked a serious break with the past and sent shockwaves through the German political establishment. As Lees (2018: 295-6) has observed, '[f]or the first time since the early 1950s, a political party had unlocked viable political space to the right of the CDU/CSU. Not only that, it became the third largest party grouping in the Bundestag.' In light of the particularly hostile environment, how then might we explain the success of the AfD?

First, the political context changed, and with it, the positioning of mainstream parties. Since the end of the WWII, the German centre-right (notably the two Christian Democratic sister parties, CDU and CSU) had played a key role in integrating the entire right-wing spectrum. Indeed, as Arzheimer (2015: 540) has noted, 'German elites stigmatised National Socialism and criminalised the use of

its symbols very early on whilst offering nationalists a home in the mainstream centre-right.’ At the same time, the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) had consistently downplayed the immigration question (Bornschiefer 2012: 138). In light of events that unfolded in the summer of 2015, however, the positioning of mainstream parties shifted. At the height of what became known as ‘the migration crisis’, Chancellor Angela Merkel decided to welcome tens of thousands of refugees to Germany. The shift of her ruling conservative Christian Democrats created political space on the right of Germany’s political spectrum. The AfD eventually managed to occupy that space. In light of the general animosity towards the far right in Germany, how could the AfD enter the political arena? Crucially, the AfD did not emerge as a right-wing populist party. As shown below, it was conceived as a moderate Eurosceptic party but then transformed into a right-wing populist party over time – after entering the electoral arena. By doing so, the party circumvented the ‘gatekeeping’ of mainstream party and media control.

#### *Right-Wing Populist Parties as ‘Trojan Horses’*

Founded in 2013 by a group of disaffected CDU members, including Bernd Lucke (an economics professor), Konrad Adam and Alexander Gauland (both well-known conservative journalists), the AfD was conceived as a single-issue anti-euro party with the sole aim to take Germany out of the Eurozone. Routinely portrayed as a ‘party of professors’ or an ‘economists’ club’, the AfD gained credibility and legitimacy through the support of academics and well-established former mainstream politicians, ‘which lent it a degree of *gravitas* unusual for a protest party’ (Patton 2017: 164). In its early days, the party could hardly be described as a far-right party. Based on an in-depth qualitative and quantitative content-analysis of the AfD’s 2014 EP election manifesto, Arzheimer (2015: 551) concluded that although the AfD was clearly Eurosceptic, it was neither populist nor radical, let alone extremist:

[T]he AfD is indeed located at the far-right end of Germany’s political spectrum because of its nationalism, its stance against state support for sexual diversity and gender mainstreaming, and its market liberalism. However, it does not qualify as ‘radical’: There is no evidence of nativism or populism in the party’s manifesto, which sets it apart from most of the other new right parties in Europe. Moreover, its Euroscepticism is of the ‘soft’ variety.

Indeed, the AfD entered the Bundestag in 2013 with a four-page manifesto, calling for the orderly dissolution of the Eurozone. At the time, the party ‘espoused a commitment to political asylum for the persecuted, did not deploy harsh anti-immigrant, anti-Islam rhetoric and generally cultivated a bourgeois public image’ (Patton 2017: 165). This allowed the party to build a ‘reputational shield’ (Ivarsflaten 2006), in other words, a legacy that can be used to deflect social stigma and fend off accusations of extremism. The AfD initially clearly sought to distinguish itself from right-wing populist parties in neighbouring countries. With successive leadership changes between 2015 and 2017, however, the party gradually assumed a more hard-line approach, particularly on issues pertaining to immigration, Islam and national identity (see Art 2018; Rensmann 2018). By 2016, the AfD’s programme had converged with those of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe (Patton 2017: 165). Thus, at the time the party entered the political arena, it was not a far-right party; instead, it transformed into a right-wing populist party after it had managed to break through electorally. In that sense, the party can be likened to a Trojan horse.

A similar observation can be made about UKIP, a far-right party that managed to break through in a country with a strong anti-fascist tradition (see Eatwell 2000). Just like the AfD, UKIP was founded by a university professor as a single-issue, Eurosceptic party with the sole aim of taking the UK out of the European Union (Weilandt 2018). Euroscepticism served as a ‘reputational shield’, in the sense that it enabled UKIP to mobilise voters on issues *other* than immigration. Dennison and Geddes (2018) have shown how the issue of Europe *preceded* the politicisation of immigration; unresolved tensions in the UK’s migration politics enabled UKIP to harness negative attitudes to the increasingly salient issue of immigration.

Over time, UKIP became increasingly nativist and anti-immigrant, thereby transforming into a classical right-wing populist party. In particular following Nigel Farage’s decision to step down as party leader in the aftermath of the 2016 Brexit referendum, UKIP appears to have tacked to the far right (*The Guardian* 2019). The cases of the AfD and UKIP hence do not contradict the theoretical findings presented here; rather, they highlight the importance of parties’ entry into the electoral arena. Future studies should examine how public responses to the rise of

right-wing populist parties in these polities changed over time, and how this shift has impacted their electoral trajectories.

## 6.2. The Future of Right-Wing Populism in the Benelux

While the *Parti Populaire* in Wallonia is unlikely to break through electorally given that mainstream parties and the media have recognised it as a right-wing populist party, the ADR in Luxembourg may turn out to be a ‘Trojan horse’. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the ADR was conceived in the late 1980s as a single-issue party with the aim of reforming the Luxembourgish pension system. Over time, the party took a rightwards turn and has gradually shifted towards the right end of Luxembourg’s political spectrum. The ideological development of the party remains to be seen at the time of writing (May 2019) – particularly following the upcoming retirement of the party’s moderate veteran ADR-MP, Gast Gibéryen, who announced that he hopes to step down from public office in the near future.<sup>146</sup>

Once parties have been granted media access, and once mainstream parties have chosen to engage with the populist radical right, this strategy ‘cannot easily be reversed’ (Heinze 2018: 305; see also Bornschier 2018: 228). In other words, after they have entered the electoral arena, disengagement strategies will become increasingly difficult to justify and hence unsustainable. Having entered the political arena, right-wing populist parties proceed to establish ownership over issues pertaining to national identity and increase the salience of the cultural axis of political competition. This sets into motion what Ruth Wodak (2015: 19) has called ‘the right-wing populist perpetuum mobile’.

In a nutshell, Wodak (2015) has shown that right-wing populist parties use rhetorical strategies that give rise to a vicious circle starting with provocations and accusations. Right-wing populist parties tend to purposely draw attention through scandals or by conveying double-messages (i.e. calculated ambivalence). This forces the media as well as mainstream politicians to respond. Right-wing populists then deny the offensive meaning of their statements by claiming victimhood. A ‘quasi-apology’ might follow, notably by referring to other people’s misunderstanding, which then gives rise to a new scandal. According to Wodak (2015: 20), ‘[t]his pattern illustrates how right-wing populist parties cleverly

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<sup>146</sup> Interview with Gast Gibéryen on 22 September 2016 in Luxembourg City.

manage to set the agenda and frame media debates; other political parties and politicians as well as the media are, in turn, forced to react and respond continuously to ever new provocations.’ By sending out mixed messages and then denying the offensive meaning behind them, right-wing populists constantly transcend and extend the limits of what is considered ‘acceptable’. This ultimately leads to the normalisation of the far right in the public sphere.

The Dutch case serves as a perfect illustration of the ‘right-wing populist perpetuum mobile’. Prior to the breakthrough of Pim Fortuyn, right-wing populist movements were consistently delegitimised by all other actors in the public debate. Indeed, Hans Janmaat and his ‘extremist centre movements’ were totally boycotted by mainstream politicians and media practitioners alike. Following Fortuyn’s breakthrough, right-wing populist actors have successfully been allowed to challenge the norms of public contestation. The implosion of the LPF paved the way for the rise of Geert Wilders, whose statements about immigration and Islam were much more radical than those put forward by Janmaat a decade earlier.

Since March 2019, Wilders appears to have become overshadowed by a far-right newcomer called Thierry Baudet, leader of the Forum for Democracy (FvD). The party became the largest in the Dutch upper house after winning nearly 15 percent of the vote in Dutch provincial elections. In his victory speech, Baudet made clear references to far-right themes. After claiming to be standing ‘amid the debris of what was once the greatest and most beautiful civilisation the world has ever known’, which he considers to be part of ‘a boreal civilisation’ that has come under attack from the inside by journalists, left-wing teachers and corrupted cartel politicians, and from the outside by migration, Baudet announced his ambition to reconnect the country to its ‘ancient roots and make it blossom again’ (see *Volkskrant* 2019). The word ‘boreal’ in particular raised a lot of discussion. Popularised by former FN-leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, the term is commonly used by extreme-right politicians as a synonym for the discredited term ‘Aryan’ and has since been widely recognised as a dog whistle to white supremacists (Kleinpaste 2019). After having been accused of extremism, Baudet claimed innocence and instead insisted that the media and mainstream parties had conspired against him. The electoral breakthrough of Baudet could indicate the start of a new phase in the history of right-wing populism in the Netherlands. While the evolution of the party

remains to be seen, Baudet's breakthrough cannot be understood in isolation; instead, this research indicates that it can be seen as a continuation of the radicalisation of the public discourse that was set into motion by the centre-right, and perpetuated by Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders.

### 6.3. Avenues for Further Research

This thesis has focused primarily on the reasons behind the variation in the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties. The findings raise a host of new questions. First, the research indicates that cartelisation and depoliticisation may not automatically be conducive to the rise of anti-system parties as predicted by Andeweg (2000). Thus, the argument put forward by Hakhverdian and Koop (2007) that support for populist parties tends to be higher in consensual than in non-consensual political systems may need to be revised, in the sense that consociationalism may be sustainable if certain conditions are met. Future studies should therefore seek to analyse under what circumstances cartelisation and depoliticisation are conducive to the rise of populism and anti-system parties.

Second (and related), further research is needed to examine why and how mainstream parties in Wallonia and Luxembourg have (thus far) managed to hold on to their core electorates. Their sustained electoral success may carry important lessons for Social- and Christian Democrats elsewhere. While these parties may not be spared from partisan dealignment and electoral decline in the future, it would be interesting to examine why their electoral success persisted at a time when similar parties elsewhere were losing support. For instance, it could be that the strategic use of state resources in combination with the maintenance of traditional cleavage structures and the politics of proximity (i.e. engrained, local political representation) provides an antidote to the rise of right-wing populist parties.

Third, it is unclear how the rise of right-wing populist parties in the Netherlands and Flanders and the failure of these movements in Wallonia and Luxembourg have affected the overall quality of democracy in these polities. Some scholars have argued that populism poses a clear threat to (liberal) democracy (Abts & Rummens 2007; Pappas 2019). By contrast, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) maintain that populism can be both a threat and corrective to democracy. Specifically, the authors argue that in unconsolidated (i.e. weak or new) democracies, populism has

mainly negative consequences, whereas it may have a limited positive impact in consolidated democracies. For instance, right-wing populist parties can mobilise disaffected voters and flag up issues that may otherwise not receive much attention. In the Netherlands and Flanders, right-wing populist parties managed to put forward issues that had not been seriously addressed by mainstream parties, thereby setting into motion of process of re-politicisation (Pellikaan et al. 2003). By contrast, in Wallonia and Luxembourg, issues pertaining to national identity and immigration appear to remain somewhat of a taboo topic. While this thesis has enhanced our understanding of the electoral trajectories of right-wing populist parties in the Benelux, it has not assessed how these trajectories have affected the overall state of democracy in these countries. The ways in which cartelisation and depoliticisation have impacted the overall quality of democracy in the Benelux is therefore an interesting (albeit complex and normative) question that merits further attention.

Lastly, given the drastic changes that have occurred throughout Europe over the past decades, both in terms of party politics as well as in the media landscapes, future studies should seek to determine what the future of ‘gatekeeping’ might look like. The changing nature of the media environment has contributed to the ‘mediatisation of politics’, which favours the personalisation of political leadership, thereby facilitating more direct means of communication between party leaders and the public (Kriesi 2014: 365). Moreover, the advent of social media has enabled politicians to directly communicate with their voters, thus circumventing the traditional media. Indeed, right-wing populist parties often resort to new media, which entail lower ‘communicative barriers to entry into the political market’ (Ellinas 2018: 276). This suggests that mainstream media outlets are losing their gatekeeping function; after all, they no longer seem to be the sole agenda setters.

Yet, as Esser et al. (2017: 377) have noted, while ‘there is much to suggest that online media are more receptive to populism, [...] it has not been conclusively proven with systematic empirical research that they are actually more populist than mainstream media.’ It is therefore ‘doubtful [at this point in time] whether the new media can match the effects of the mainstream or “old” media’, especially when it comes to granting legitimacy to right-wing populist parties (Ellinas 2018: 277). In light of changing patterns of (youth) media consumption, however, this is likely to change in the following decades. Future studies should therefore seek to analyse the

impact of new media on the success and failure of right-wing populist parties (see Gerbaudo 2018; Jacobs & Spierings 2018; van Kessel & Castelein 2016).

Finally, the societal role of political parties has changed over the past decades. It has almost become a cliché to state that political parties are in crisis. In his seminal book entitled *Ruling the Void*, Peter Mair (2013: 1) noted that ‘[t]he age of party democracy has passed.’ In an earlier paper, Mair (2003: 1) made the following observation:

Once regarded as a necessary component in the maintenance of representative government, and as an essential element in the stabilization and continued functioning of modern mass democracy, political parties are now often seen to be archaic and outmoded. [...] Little more than thirty years ago it would have been reasonable to question whether meaningful political life existed outside the world of parties. Nowadays, it seems more appropriate to ask whether political life still exists inside that world.

While we have witnessed the decline of traditional ‘mass parties’ (i.e. parties that were characterised by large memberships), we have also seen the rise of populist parties that criticise mainstream parties precisely for being out of touch with voters. This begs the question whether populist parties in general, and right-wing populist parties in particular, represent the nail in the coffin for the age of party politics, or whether they may be able to revitalise the latter.

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## Annex I: List of Interviews with Media Practitioners

	Name	Title (at the time)	Medium	Country	Date	Place
1	Jean-Paul Hoffmann	Director at Radio 100,7	Public Service Radio Station	Luxembourg	2.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
2	Alain Rousseau	Editor-in-Chief at RTL Television Luxembourg	Main TV channel; commercial with public service mission	Luxembourg	5.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
3	Roger Infalt	General Secretary of the Press Council; retired journalist at <i>Tageblatt</i>	Press Organisation; left-leaning daily newspaper, owned by the socialist trade union & affiliated with the Social Democratic party (LSAP)	Luxembourg	6.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
4	Guy Kaiser	Editor-in-Chief at RTL Radio Luxembourg	Main Radio station; commercial with public service mission	Luxembourg	8.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
5	Paul Peckels	CEO at Saint Paul Luxembourg S.A.	Largest publishing house in Luxembourg	Luxembourg	9.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
6	Richard Graf	Founding Member & Editor at WOXX	Weekly independent newspaper; previously affiliated with the Green Party	Luxembourg	12.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
7	Claude Karger	Director and Editor-in-Chief at <i>Lëtzebuerger Journal</i>	Daily newspaper with loose ties to the Liberal Party	Luxembourg	20.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
8	Romain Hilgert	Manager and Editor-in-Chief at <i>Lëtzebuerger Land</i>	Weekly independent newspaper	Luxembourg	20.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
9	Dhiraj Sabharwal	Deputy Editor-in-Chief at <i>Tageblatt</i>	Daily newspaper, owned by the Socialist trade union & affiliated with the Social Democrats	Luxembourg	20.9.16	Esch-sur-Alzette, LU
10	Jean-Lou Siweck	Editor-in-Chief at <i>Luxemburger Wort</i>	Daily newspaper, owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese & affiliated with the Christian Democrats	Luxembourg	20.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
11	Christophe Bumb	Political Journalist at <i>Luxemburger Wort</i>	Daily newspaper, owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese &	Luxembourg	22.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU

			affiliated with the Christian Democrats			
12	Jean-Claude Franck	Editor-in-Chief at Radio 100,7	Public Service Radio Station	Luxembourg	27.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
13	Pia Oppel	Deputy Editor-in-Chief at Radio 100,7	Public Service Radio Station	Luxembourg	27.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
14	Romain Kohn	Director of ALIA ( <i>Autorité luxembourgeoise indépendante de l'audiovisuel</i> )	Organisation that regulates audio-visual media located in Luxembourg (including RTL stations)	Luxembourg & Wallonia	28.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
15	Mike Koedinger	CEO & Founder at <i>Paperjam</i>	Monthly magazine, published in French and English by <i>Maison Moderne</i> , an independent publishing house	Luxembourg	24.10.16	Luxembourg City, LU
16	Jean-Paul Zens	Director of the Media and Communication Department of the Ministry of State of Luxembourg	N/A	Luxembourg	18.11.16	Luxembourg City, LU
17	Philippe Remarque	Editor-in-Chief of <i>Volkskrant</i>	Centre-left daily newspaper, published by <i>Persgroep</i> , formerly linked to the Catholic pillar	Netherlands	21.3.17	Amsterdam, NL
18	Cees van der Laan	Editor-in-Chief of <i>Trouw</i>	Centre-right daily newspaper, published by <i>Persgroep</i> , formerly linked to the Protestant pillar	Netherlands	22.3.17	Amsterdam, NL
19	Marcel Gelauff	Editor-in-Chief of NOS	One of the organisations that make up the Dutch public broadcasting service (NPO)	Netherlands	23.3.17	Hilversum, NL
20	Paul Jansen	Editor-in-Chief of <i>Telegraaf</i>	Daily tabloid newspaper, published by <i>Mediahuis</i>	Netherlands	23.3.17	Amsterdam, NL
21	Hans Nijenhuis	Editor-in-Chief of <i>Algemeen Dagblad</i>	Daily tabloid newspaper, published by <i>Persgroep</i>	Netherlands	24.3.17	Rotterdam, NL
22	Tom Cochez	Journalist at <i>Apache</i>	Membership based, investigative journalism platform	Flanders & Wallonia	27.3.17	Antwerp, BE

23	Kris Vanmarsenille	Editor-in-Chief of <i>Gazet van Antwerpen</i>	Flemish local tabloid newspaper, published by <i>Mediahuis</i>	Flanders	27.3.17	Antwerp, BE
24	Jean-Pierre Jacqmin	Director of News and Sports, RTBF	Francophone public service broadcaster	Wallonia	29.3.17	Brussels, BE
25	Ivan De Vadder	Political Journalist, VRT	Flemish public service broadcaster	Flanders	29.3.17	Brussels, BE
26	Bart Eeckhout	Editor-in-Chief (opinionated), <i>De Morgen</i>	Left-leaning daily newspaper, published by <i>Persgroep</i> , formerly linked to the Socialist pillar	Flanders	30.3.17	Kobbegeem (Asse), BE
27	Steven Samyn	Editor-in-Chief for TV, VRT	Flemish public service broadcaster	Flanders	31.3.17	Brussels, BE
28	Liesbeth van Impe	Editor-in-Chief, <i>Het Nieuwsblad</i>	Daily tabloid, published by <i>Mediahuis</i>	Flanders	4.4.17	Antwerp, BE
29	Bart Sturtewagen	Editor-in-Chief (opinionated), <i>De Standaard</i>	Daily newspaper, published by <i>Mediahuis</i> , formerly linked to the Christian Democrats	Flanders	5.4.17	Groot-Bijgaarden, BE
30	Francis Van de Woestyne	Editor-in-Chief, <i>La Libre</i>	Centre-right daily newspaper, published by IPN, formerly linked to the Christian Democrats	Wallonia	6.4.17	Brussels, BE
31	Kris Hoflack	General Editor-in-Chief, VTM	Main commercial television station in Flanders	Flanders	6.4.17	Vilvoorde, BE
32	Geneviève Thiry	Representative of CSA ( <i>Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel</i> )	Organisation that regulates audio-visual media in francophone Belgium	Wallonia	7.4.17	Brussels, BE
33	Stéphane Rosenblatt	Director of Programmes, RTL	Main commercial television station in francophone Belgium	Wallonia	7.4.17	Brussels, BE (via phone)
34	Véronique Lamquin	Deputy Editor-in-Chief, <i>Le Soir</i>	Daily newspaper, published by <i>Rossel</i>	Wallonia	7.4.17	Brussels, BE
35	Gerard Timmer	General Director, BNNVARA	One of the organisations that make up the Dutch public broadcasting service	Netherlands	10.4.17	Brussels, BE (via phone)
36	Christophe Déborsu	Political journalist, RTL	Main commercial television station in francophone Belgium	Wallonia	12.4.17	Brussels, BE

37	Dimitri Antonissen	Editor-in-Chief, <i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i>	Daily tabloid, published by <i>Persgroep</i> , formerly linked to the Catholic pillar	Flanders	19.4.17	Luxembourg City, LU (via Skype)
38	Joris Luyendijk	Dutch TV & freelance newspaper journalist; UK correspondent	N/A	Netherlands	12.5.17	London, UK
39	Arendo Joustra	Editor-in-Chief, <i>Elsevier Weekblad</i>	Independent weekly magazine	Netherlands	9.8.17	Cambridge, UK (via phone)
40	Hein Greven	Former Lobbyist	N/A	Netherlands	14.8.17	Amsterdam, NL
41	Pieter Broertjes	Former Editor-in-Chief of <i>Volkscrant</i>	Centre-left daily newspaper, published by <i>Persgroep</i> , formerly linked to the Catholic pillar	Netherlands	15.8.17	Hilversum, NL
42	Harm Taselaar	Editor-in-Chief, RTL	Commercial television station in the Netherlands	Netherlands	15.5.17	Hilversum, NL
43	Egbert Kalse	Deputy Editor-in-Chief, NRC	Daily newspaper published by <i>Mediahuis</i>	Netherlands	16.8.17	Amsterdam, NL
44	Simon-Pierre De Coster	Director of Legal Affairs, RTBF	Francophone public service broadcaster	Wallonia	28.9.17	Brussels, BE
45	Mark van Assen	Political Journalist, <i>Algemeen Dagblad</i>	Daily tabloid newspaper, published by <i>Persgroep</i>	Netherlands	29.9.17	Rotterdam, NL
46	Arie Elshout	Europe Correspondent for <i>de Volkskrant</i>	Centre-left daily newspaper, published by <i>Persgroep</i> , formerly linked to the Catholic pillar	Netherlands; Wallonia & Flanders	29.9.17	Breda, NL

## Annex II: List of Interviews with Politicians & Party Representatives

	Name	Title (at the time)	Party	Date	Place
1	Fernand Kartheiser	Member of Parliament	<i>Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei</i> (Alternative Democratic Reform Party or ADR)	21.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
2	Sylvie Mischel	President of the Women's Section	ADR	22.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
3	Gast Gybérien	Member of Parliament	ADR	22.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
4	Romain Houtsch	Parliamentary Assistant	ADR	28.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
5	Alain Kleeblatt	Parliamentary Assistant	ADR	28.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
6	Fred Keup	Campaign Leader of the <i>Nee.lu</i>	<i>Nee.lu</i> 2015 Referendum Campaign (now ADR)	22.11.16	Luxembourg City, LU
7	Mischaël Modrikamen	Party Leader	<i>Parti Populaire</i> (People's Party or PP)	10.5.17	Brussels, BE
8	Tom Van Grieken	Party Leader	<i>Vlaams Belang</i> (Flemish Interest Party or VB)	13.7.17	Brussels, BE

### Annex III: List of Experts Consulted

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Title (at the time)</b>	<b>Institution (at the time)</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>
1	Philippe Poirier	Research Chair in Parliamentary Studies & Assistant Professor in Political Science	University of Luxembourg	5.9.16	Esch-sur-Alzette, LU
2	Lucien Blau	Historian & Expert on the Extreme Right in Luxembourg	N/A	7.9.16	Dudelange LU
3	Kim Nommesch	Researcher & Media Expert, Project Manager	Centre for citizenship education	8.9.16	Luxembourg City, LU
4	Emilie van Haute	Assistant Professor in Political Science	<i>Université Libre de Bruxelles</i>	16.9.16	Brussels, BE
5	François Foret	Professor in Political Science	<i>Université Libre de Bruxelles</i>	16.9.16	Brussels, BE
6	Kris Deschouwer	Professor in Political Science	<i>Vrije Universiteit Brussel</i>	16.9.16	Brussels, BE
7	Jérôme Jamin	Professor in Law & Political Science	<i>Université de Liège</i>	23.9.16	Liège, BE
8	Jean Faniel	Managing Director & Political Scientist	<i>Centre de recherche et d'information socio-politiques (CRISP)</i>	20.10.16	Brussels, BE
9	Bart Maddens,	Professor in Political Science	<i>Katholieke Universiteit Leuven</i>	20.10.16	Louvain, BE
10	Patrick Dumont	Professor in Political Science	University of Luxembourg	21.11.16	Esch-sur-Alzette, LU
11	Benjamin de Cleen	Assistant Professor in Political Science	<i>Vrije Universiteit Brussel</i>	24.11.16	Cambridge, UK
12	Matthijs Rooduijn	Assistant Professor in Political Science	University of Utrecht	9.12.16	Utrecht, NL
13	Pytrik Schafraad	University Lecturer in Political and Corporate Communication	University of Amsterdam	23.3.17	Amsterdam, NL
14	Pascal Delwit	Professor in Political Science	<i>Université Libre de Bruxelles</i>	31.3.17	Brussels, BE
15	Teun Pauwels	Researcher & Political Scientist	Flemish Ministry of Education	3.4.17	Brussels, BE
16	Duncan McDonnell	Professor in Political Science	Griffith University	10.5.17	Brussels, BE
17	Fernand Fehlen	Sociologist	University of Luxembourg	7.6.17	Luxembourg City, LU

## Annex IV: Sample Questionnaire



Léonie de Jonge  
PhD Candidate (POLIS)  
University of Cambridge  
[Ld458@cam.ac.uk](mailto:Ld458@cam.ac.uk)  
+352 691 714 740

Nom :	Monsieur Simon-Pierre De Coster
Position :	Directeur juridique de la RTBF
Lieu & date :	Bruxelles, le 28 septembre 2017 à 9h30

**But de l'entretien :** Ma thèse de doctorat porte sur les partis populistes de droite dans les pays du Benelux. La question principale est la suivante : *Pourquoi les partis populistes de droite n'ont-ils pas (encore) connu le même succès électoral au Luxembourg et en Wallonie qu'aux Pays-Bas et en Flandre ?*

Comme je m'intéresse au paysage médiatique belge, j'aimerais vous poser quelques questions afin de comprendre la façon dont la RTBF a choisi de couvrir le populisme de droite et les enjeux qui s'y rapportent.

Voici une liste de questions que j'aimerais bien vous poser lors de l'entretien. Si vous le permettez, l'entretien sera enregistré et le contenu sera utilisé pour mon projet de thèse.

### Questionnaire préliminaire pour l'entretien (semi-directif) :

- 1) Quel est le rôle de la RTBF dans le paysage médiatique belge ?
- 2) Selon vous, quel est le rôle des médias dans la société ?
- 3) Est-ce qu'il y a des différences entre la VRT et la RTBF ? Si oui, lesquelles ?
- 4) Pouvez-vous me parler un peu du « cordon sanitaire médiatique » ? Est-ce qu'il existe véritablement ? Si oui, comment fonctionne-t-il ?
- 5) Comment la RTBF applique-t-elle ce cordon ?
- 6) Quelle est la ligne éditoriale de la RTBF vis-à-vis des partis populistes de droite ?
- 7) Quelle est la ligne éditoriale de la RTBF vis-à-vis de l'immigration ?
- 8) Est-ce que votre ligne éditoriale a changé dans les années passées, par exemple après les attentats, le Brexit, l'élection de Donald Trump ?
- 9) Selon vous, est-ce qu'il y a des différences entre les médias flamandes et francophones ?
- 10) Selon vous, pourquoi les partis populistes de droite n'ont-ils pas (encore) connu le même succès électoral en Wallonie qu'en Flandre ?
- 11) Est-ce qu'il vous reste des questions à me poser ?