

eupinions brief | March 2017

Who does support Geert Wilders?

After the electoral upsets in the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States, all eyes are set on the European election season that will unfold this year. Next stop is The Hague, where the performance of the right-wing populist Geert Wilders is raising eyebrows and the anatomy of his electorate is raising questions.

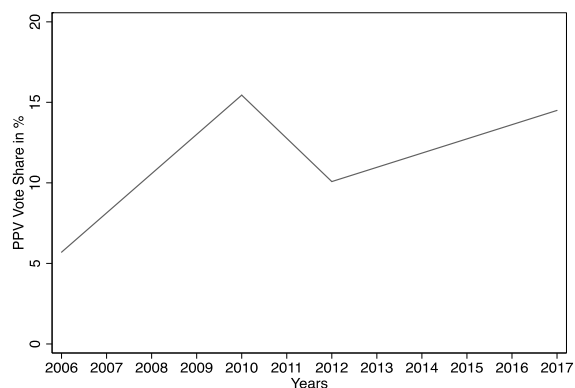
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The kick-off is the Dutch election on the 15th of March, followed by elections in France and Germany. The Dutch elections have attracted significant media attention from across the globe because of the strong showing of the anti-immigrant and anti-EU party of Geert Wilders, the Party for Freedom (Partij van der Vrijheid, PVV), in the polls. The PVV is by no means new to the Dutch political scene. Geert Wilders defected from the party of the current prime minister Mark Rutte prior to the 2005 referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty and has competed in Dutch parliamentary elections ever since. Figure 1 shows the vote shares and predicted 2017 vote share of the PVV since the 2006 parliamentary.

The party tripled its vote share between the 2006 and 2010 election from 5 to 15 per cent of the vote, and has ever since been hovering around 10-to-15-per-cent-of-the-vote.

Figure 1: Vote Share of PVV in Dutch Parliamentary elections



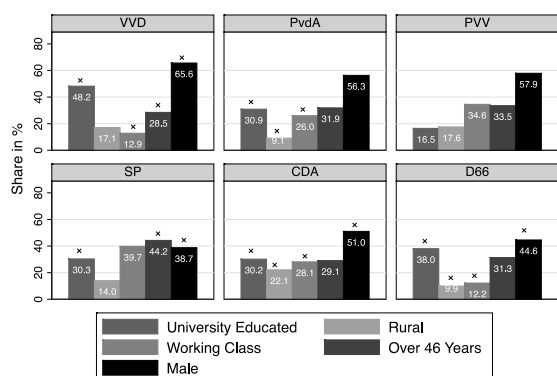
Notes: Figure entries represent the vote share of

the Party for Freedom in Dutch parliamentary elections since 2006. The 2017 entry is the predicted vote share based on the latest polling data from Peilwijzer.

Source: Official Dutch election results (kiesraad.nl) and for 2017 Peilwijzer.nl.

Geert Wilders and his PVV have thus been a force to reckon with in Dutch politics for over a decade now. His style and rhetoric are not new, but have gained recent international attention, as they seem to echo characteristics of the Brexit and Trump campaigns. Here we aim to shed light on how different PVV supporters are from those of other Dutch parties, if at all. In September 2016, we conducted a way of the eupinions survey on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, and asked Dutch respondents a host of questions about their party choice, background and issue preferences. Figure 2 pits respondents who stated that they support the PVV against those who would support the ruling Conservative Liberal Party (VVD) and the Labour Party (PvdA) as well as the Socialist Party (SP), Christian Democrats (CDA) and Centrist Liberal Party (D'66) in terms of their education, residency, class identification, age and gender. The crosses indicate that differences between PVV and other party supporters are statistically significant.

Figure 2: Demographic Profile of PVV supporters in comparison



*Differences with PVV supporters significant at p<.05

Notes: Figure entries represent the share of party identifiers that stated that hold a university degree (university educated), live in a rural area (rural), self identify as working class (working

class), are over 46 years or older (over 46 years), and are male (male).

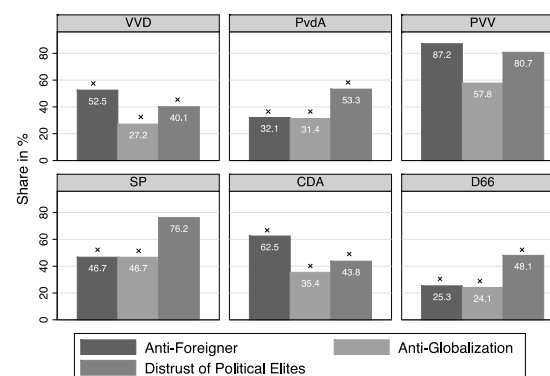
Source: eupinions September 2016.

The figure shows that PVV supporters really stand out from all other party supporters when it comes to education. Most PVV supporters in our sample do not have a university degree. The share of PVV supporters with a university degree is less than a fifth, and considerably lower compared to the share of university educated among supporters for other parties. Interestingly, also a fair share of PVV supporters, namely 34.6 per cent, identify themselves as working class. This share is only higher for the far left party SP. PVV supporters are also more likely to be male compared supporters for the conservative liberal VVD, far left SP, Christian democratic CDA and centrist D66.

What about the issue positions of PVV supporters versus supporters of other parties? We also asked respondents questions about their views concerning foreigners, globalization and the trustworthiness of political elites. Figure 3 shows the share of those who feel that there are too many foreigners, globalization is a threat, and that political elites cannot be trusted for the different party supporters.

Figure 3: Anti-Foreigner and Anti-Globalization Sentiment as well as Distrust in Political Elites of PVV supporters in comparison

Notes: Figure entries represent the share of



*Differences with PVV supporters significant at p<.05

party identifiers that stated that there are too many foreigners in the Netherlands (anti-foreigner), globalization is a threat (anti-

globalization) and political elites cannot be trusted (distrust of political elites).

Source: eupinions September 2016.

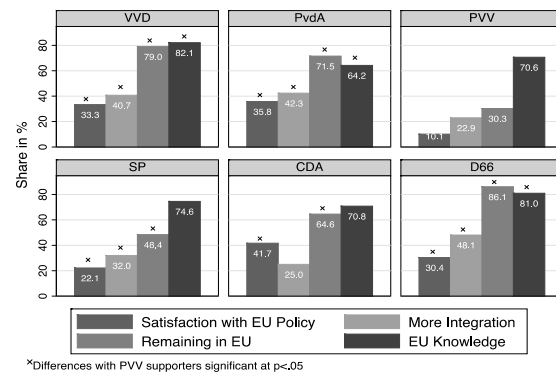
Figure 3 shows that PVV supporters display much more anti-foreigner and anti-globalization sentiment, and higher levels of political distrust compared to supporters of other parties. The only exception here is the supporters of the far left party SP who are also very distrustful of political elites. 87.2 per cent of PVV supporters think that there are too many foreigners in the Netherlands and 80.7 per cent view political elites are generally untrustworthy. Anti-globalization sentiment is still the most pronounced among PVV supporters compared to those of other parties, but seems not the main concern. 57.8 per cent of PVV voters think that globalization constitutes a threat rather than an opportunity.

Next to anti-immigrant, anti-elite and anti-globalization sentiment, Geert Wilders is also the most Eurosceptic Dutch political entrepreneur. The day after the Brexit vote, he took to twitter to congratulate the British people and demand an exit referendum in the Netherlands. He tweeted: 'Hurrah for the British! Now it is our turn. Time for Dutch referendum'.¹ Figure 4 shows the share of PVV supporters who feel satisfied with the overall policy direction taken by the EU, wish to see more political and economic integration in Europe, would vote for the Netherlands to remain in the EU if a referendum were to take place, and were able to answer EU knowledge questions correctly.²

As expected, PVV supporters display higher Eurosceptic sentiment compared to supporters of other parties. They are less likely to be satisfied with the EU policy direction, want less integration and more likely to vote for the Netherlands to leave the EU if a referendum were held today. There is one exception, namely the supporters of

the Christian Democratic CDA are equally likely view further integrative steps in Europe with a sceptical eye. Interestingly, figure 4 also suggests that the differences based on EU knowledge are less pronounced. Only supporters of the conservative and centrist Liberal parties (VVD and D66) display slightly higher EU knowledge levels, while supporters of the social democratic PvdA are less knowledgeable about the EU. Overall, PVV supporters seem to know quite a bit about the EU.

Figure 4: EU sentiment of PVV supporters in comparison



Notes: Figure entries represent the share of party identifiers that stated that they were satisfied with the policy direction at the EU level (satisfaction with EU policy), wished more political and economic integration in Europe (more integration), would vote for the Netherlands to remain an EU member if a referendum were held today (remaining in EU) and correctly answered at least one of two EU knowledge questions correctly (EU knowledge).

Source: eupinions September 2016.

This short overview of the profile of PVV supporters suggests that they stand out from the pack in four core respects:

countries had the same number of parliamentarians in the European Parliament. The shares shown in Figure 3 are those that answered to at least one of these two questions correctly.

¹ See <https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv/status/746199016128421889> (accessed 16th of November 2016).

² The EU knowledge questions asked respondents if Switzerland was a member of the EU and if all

Compared to supporters of the other main parties in the Dutch political landscape, PVV supporters are:

- less likely to have a university degree,
- display higher levels of anti-foreigner sentiment,
- are more likely to distrust political elites, and
- much more Eurosceptic.

Interestingly, the other party support base that PVV supporters display most similarities with is that of the far left SP. The exception here is anti-foreigner sentiment. Anti-foreigner sentiment is most pronounced among the PVV followed by party supporters of other parties on the right, the conservative liberal VVD and Christian democratic CDA.

Overall, these findings support the idea that Wilders is in a unique position in the Dutch political landscape as he could attract supporters from parties on both the left and right side of the political spectrum.

This may account for the strong foothold the PVV has gained over the past decade or so. This is not likely going to change anytime soon, regardless of what the outcome of the election on the 15th of March and the coalition negotiations that will follow might be. Although Geert Wilders frames himself as a political outsider, he and his party have become part-and-parcel of Dutch political landscape.

Data note:

The sample of n=14.936 was drawn by Dalia Research in August 2016 across all 28 EU Member States, taking into account current population distributions with regard to age (14-65 years), gender and region/country. In order to obtain census representative results, the data were weighted based upon the most recent Eurostat statistics. Calculated for a sample of this size and considering the design-effect, the margin of error would be +/-1.1 % at a confidence level of 95 %.

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