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Campaign Coverage from 1998 to 2006

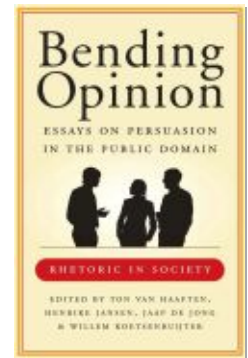
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# 17 Do New Parties Bring Personalization, a Narrow Issue Agenda and Populist Rhetoric?

Evidence from Dutch Election

Campaign Coverage from 1998 to 2006

JANET TAKENS, ANITA VAN HOOF, JAN  
KLEINNIJENHUIS AND WOUTER VAN ATTEVELDT

## 17.1 Introduction

In Western Europe an increasing number of new political parties have recently gained extensive popular support at the expense of established parties. These parties employ a communication style that attracts media attention. This chapter focuses on three of the characteristics of this communication style, namely an emphasis on party leaders (personalization), a narrow issue agenda, and the use of populist rhetoric. We study the rhetoric used by new political parties, while taking into account who is voicing this rhetoric, and which issues they are discussing.

New parties use these three elements of this communication style to persuade the public. Communication starts with an actor (a person or organization) who chooses to make a statement. In ancient times rhetoric was perceived as an art that was practised by powerful political leaders (Witteveen 1988, p. 42). Nowadays political stances are voiced by a large number of politicians. At the same time, political stances are often attributed to political institutions, such as political parties while new parties are usually personified by their political leaders.

The second element refers to the issues on which the public has to be persuaded. Scholars of rhetoric focus on the use of language to persuade the public, while limited attention is paid to the issues being talked about. However, the persuasive power of politicians does not only depend on their rhet-

oric quality, but also on the issues they discuss. A discourse is easier to understand when a limited number of issues are addressed. New parties are often founded to advocate a specific interest, which existing parties ignored according to these parties, and they emphasise this unique selling point by reinforcing their stances with regard to these issues, while disregarding other issues.

The third element of new parties' communication style regards the use of populist rhetoric, consisting of criticism of the political elite, and positive statements about "the people". Populist rhetoric can be used as a rhetorical technique to create sympathy for a party, and since new and unknown parties lack a stable core of constituency, they will have a stronger incentive to create sympathy.

Political parties are constantly competing for media attention, since for most voters the media are the most important source of political information. Given that recently established parties are still unknown to the public, media attention is even more important for new parties. We argue that the three characteristics of the communication style of new political parties attract media attention because they correspond to certain journalistic schemata. Prime examples are the inclination to cover individual politicians rather than political institutions (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003; Rahat and Schaefer 2007) and the tendency to cover negative news in general (e.g., Patterson 1993; Pfau et al. 1998; Semetko and Schönbach 2003) and conflict in particular (Kepplinger 2000; Paletz and Entman 1981). Furthermore, the media aim to decrease the complexity of the news by paying attention to a limited number of issues, and by covering the simple divide between "the people" and the political elite. This study examines media coverage of different categories of political parties by focusing on the relative attention given to party leaders, the breadth of the issue agenda, and the attention given to populist rhetoric. The present study examines these three core concepts in the media coverage of different party categories during four Dutch national election campaigns between 1998 and 2006.

### **17.2 Personalization, a narrow issue agenda and populist rhetoric**

This section elaborates on personalization, a narrow issue agenda, and populist rhetoric as characteristics of the communication style of new parties. Furthermore, we will address the question as to why new parties, other parties, and the media might be attracted to these three core concepts.

### 17.2.1 Personalization

In ancient times politics was conducted by powerful political leaders. Political rhetoric was perceived as an art that was reserved for those powerful men (Witteveen 1988, p. 42). In recent times, however, the prominence of individual politicians, labelled personalization, has a rather negative connotation. Personalization in politics is defined as “creating and using the prominence of leaders” (Schönbach 1996, p. 94). New parties might employ a personalized communication style, because they depend more strongly on their party leader than established parties. They have no party history and lack a recognisable party image. Since new parties cannot depend on the fame of administrators representing their party, a new and unknown political party needs an inspiring and well-known party leader to gain media attention and to reach the voter (Van Stipdonk and Van Holsteyn 1996, p. 131). Consequently, new parties will use the prominence of their party leaders to project a distinctive image of the party.

The question arises then as to whether the use of the prominence of a party leader is specific to new parties. All parties will try to project a distinctive party image, and personalization has been found to be present in different, interdependent contexts (Rahat and Schaefer 2007). In response to the prominence of successful leaders of new parties, other parties might be inclined to push their party leaders to the fore. For this reason, we expect that the coverage of established parties is more personalized in the years in which new parties were most successful.

The present chapter focuses on personalization in the news, which is defined as “a heightened focus on individual politicians and a diminished focus on parties, organisations, and institutions” in the media (Rahat and Sheaffer 2007, p. 67). The media favour news about actors above issues (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis, et al. 2003). When covering political actors, the media prefer news about individual politicians above abstract political institutions, such as political parties (e.g., Rahat and Sheaffer 2007). Wattenberg (1984, p. 91) argues that one of the main causes of the media’s preference for personalized news is the changing role of the media from “the prime reinforcers of partisanship”, covering parties and their stances, to more independent outlets (Wattenberg 1984, p. 91). The introduction and distribution of television news has accelerated this change “as acquaintance with personalities is much easier to convey through the visual media than knowledge about abstractions such as political parties” (Wattenberg 1984, p. 91). Stewart, Mazzoleni and

Horsfield (2003, p. 227) showed that the expectation that media prefer personalized coverage especially holds true for new parties. In most of the eight countries under study: “much of the media coverage of the neo-populist movements was expressed via reporting on the person of the movement’s leader(s)”.

Because new parties depend more strongly on their party leaders than other parties, we test whether the party leaders of new parties receive relatively more attention. We additionally study whether the salience of party leaders is especially high in the news coverage of the elections in which new parties made an upsurge.

H 1a: New parties are more often depicted as employing a personalized style than other parties.

H 1b: Party leaders are more often covered in the news in the elections in which new parties made an upsurge.

### 17.2.2 The breadth of the issue agenda

A discourse containing a limited number of issues is less complex, and therefore more easily understandable, than a discourse containing a larger number of issues. According to issue ownership theory, it is beneficial for political parties if the issues that they “own” receive media attention (e.g., Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996). Consequently, it is important that they reinforce their stances on the issues they are associated with by the public. New parties are often founded to advocate a certain interest (e.g., Krouwel and Lucardie 2008). Therefore, new parties often have a narrow issue agenda. One-issue parties, such as anti-immigration parties and parties for the elderly, form the clearest example. However, new parties that split from an established party also did so because of disagreement on one or a limited number of issues. To position themselves in the political field, new parties emphasize their unique selling points, which results in a narrow issue agenda.

Then the question arises as to whether this narrow issue agenda of new parties also affects the agenda of other parties. Existing parties usually have a broad issue-agenda because they are expected to express their opinion on a large number of issues in Parliament or Government. Previous studies have shown that the political policy agenda consists of a stable set of issues, which only changes under influence of certain events called “policy punctuations” (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Established parties are responsive to the agen-

das of new parties when these new parties are doing well (Krouwel and Lucardie 2008), which indicates that the upsurge of new parties can form a policy punctuating event: “When established parties face electoral decline they tend to mimic new parties in issue emphasis patterns” (Krouwel and Lucardie 2008, p. 297). In other words, established parties narrow their issue agenda when put under pressure by the popularity of successful new parties.

Politics and the media both have their own issue agenda, which are interconnected according to agenda-setting theory (e.g., McCombs and Shaw 1972). The breadth of the media agenda refers to the number of issues that receive a substantial amount of attention in the news. Previous studies have shown that during election campaigns the media focuses on a limited number of issues (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2007), as a low number of different issues makes the news easier to understand (Kleinnijenhuis 2003). The tendency to cover a limited number of issues might be amplified by the upsurge of new parties because of the news value of controversial issues introduced by these parties. Stewart, Mazzoleni and Horsfield (2003, p. 226) state that “the media, by virtue of their espousal of news values – such as timelines, proximity, and prominence – tend to focus upon dramatic and transitory issues rather than on a prolonged analysis of social or political phenomena”. When the media intensively cover a limited number of controversial issues, the attention given to other issues decreases and the issue agenda narrows.

Based on the assumption that new parties emphasize a limited number of controversial issues, new parties are expected to appear in the news with a narrower issue agenda than existing parties. We additionally test whether the depiction of the issue agenda of other parties in the news narrowed in the years in which new parties made an upsurge.

H 2a: New parties are more often depicted as having a narrow issue agenda than other parties.

H 2b: The issue agenda of established parties in the news is smaller in the election years in which new parties made an upsurge.

### 17.2.3 Populist rhetoric

Populism is an essentially contested concept (e.g., Taggart 2000; Canovan 1999). The discussion about populism centres on the question as to whether populism is a political ideology or a communication style. Some scholars argue that populist parties aspire to restoring the power of “the people”, while

others argue that it is a “normal communication style” (e.g., Jagers and Walgrave 2007), which is used instrumentally to gain political power. Agreement seems to exist on the defining elements of populist rhetoric: positive references to “the people”, and criticism of the political elite (Jagers and Walgrave 2006). The defining components of populist statements coincide with rhetorical techniques to garner the public’s sympathy. One of the techniques to create goodwill, distinguished by Andeweg and De Jong (2004, p. 54), is to discredit opponents. Cicero argued that the arousal of aversion, jealousy or contempt of opponents by a speaker would create sympathy for the speaker himself (Andeweg and De Jong 2004, p. 54). This technique corresponds with criticism of the political elite as a characteristic of populist rhetoric. A second technique for creating goodwill, praising the public (Andeweg and De Jong 2004), corresponds with the second element of populist rhetoric; i.e., positive statements towards the public. In conclusion, although populism might be an ideology, populist rhetoric can also be used as a technique to create sympathy with the own party.

New parties might use populist rhetoric for both instrumental and ideological reasons. Since new – and consequently unknown – parties lack supporters who sympathise with them, populist rhetoric, i.e., criticism of their opponents and praising the public, can be used to create sympathy. The use of populist rhetoric also stems from the self-assigned role of new parties as the defenders of neglected interests of the public. To emphasize that they defend the interests of “the people”, they refer positively to the public, and to call attention to those who should be blamed for the neglect of these issues they criticise the political elite. Populist rhetoric could also serve an ideological goal. Some new parties are formed because of their will to reform the political system or culture (Krouwel and Lucardie 2008), and they can use populist rhetoric to support their argument that certain powers should shift from “the corrupted political elite” to “the good people”.

The question then arises as to whether populist rhetoric is employed exclusively by new parties. Established parties might also use populist rhetoric to create sympathy. Since in democracies politicians are expected to represent “the people”, all politicians can be expected to refer positively to the public to some degree. The use of populist rhetoric by existing parties might increase under pressure of the electoral success of new parties, since the creation of sympathy becomes more urgent. Furthermore, it is inherent to politics that political parties disagree with each other, and therefore criticise other

parties in general and governing parties in particular. Different scholars have argued that politicians use criticism of other politicians instrumentally to increase politicians' media presence (Kepplinger, Brosius and Staab 1991; Bennett 2007; Kepplinger 2000). The introduction of new and controversial issues by new parties could catalyse the instrumental use of criticism on the deliverers of these issues.

Populist rhetoric in the news also consists of references to “the people” and criticism of the political elite, which either stem from journalists themselves or from sources like political or societal actors. Populist rhetoric corresponds with different schemata that are used by the media to cover politics. With its focus on the political elite and the public, populist rhetoric coincides with the focus of the media on actors instead of issues (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003, 2007). Contrasting opinions with regard to complex issues are difficult to convey, while the simple clash between the political elite and “the people” is much easier to get across. What is more, criticism of the elite is in line with the inclination of the media to cover negativity in general (e.g., Patterson 1993; Pfau et al. 1998; Semetko and Schönbach 2003) and conflict in particular (Kepplinger 2000; Paletz and Entman 1981). Stewart, Mazzoleni and Horsfield (2003) argue that in the insurgent phase of new parties, the media are attracted by the novelty of their communication style. In the insurgent phase, “charismatic leaders stage events appealing to the news media, engage in verbal extremism, and bluntly attack established parties and government policies”. Media are attracted by these “newsworthy realities” that they “cover comprehensively in their pursuit of editorial goals” (Stewart, Mazzoleni and Horsfield 2003, p. 221).

Because new parties are inclined to employ populist rhetoric, we test whether the media covered populist rhetoric more frequently in the news about new political parties than in the news about other parties. We additionally test whether populist rhetoric is in general used more often in the years in which new parties made an upsurge.

- H 3a: New parties are more often depicted as referring positively to “the people” than other parties.
- H 3b: Positive references to “the people” are more often covered in the news in the election years in which new parties made an upsurge.
- H 4a: New parties are more often depicted as criticising the political elite than other parties.

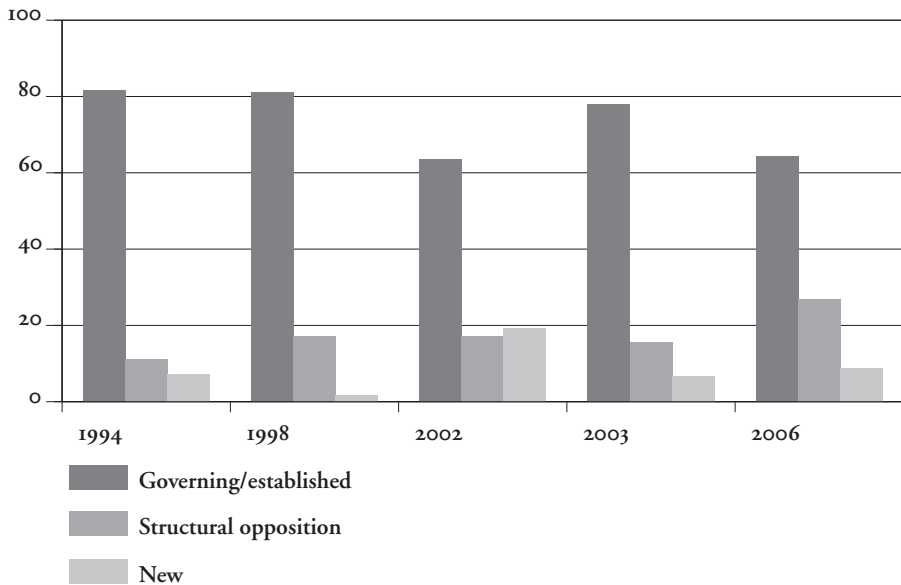


H 4b: Criticism of the political elite is more often covered in the news in the election years in which new parties made an upsurge.

#### 17.2.4 The Dutch case

Personalization, the breadth of the issue agenda and populist rhetoric will be studied in the context of the coverage of four successive Dutch national election campaigns held between 1998 and 2006. The Netherlands is an appealing context for studying personalization, the breadth of the issue agenda and populist rhetoric because of the recent upsurge of new political parties in that country. Since 1945, the Netherlands has witnessed an increase of electoral support for structural opposition and new parties at the expense of established parties. The success of new and structural opposition parties was most pronounced in the last fifteen years.

FIGURE 17.1 DISTRIBUTION OF THE VOTE



Throughout this chapter we will make a distinction between governing parties, non-governing established parties, structural opposition parties and new parties.<sup>1</sup> Figure 17.1 represents the percentage of votes that the four party categories received in the last five elections. In the 1998 election, none of the new parties was able to gain any parliamentary seats. In 2002, the new

anti-immigration party LPF, whose leader Pim Fortuyn was assassinated a few days before the election, made the largest upsurge ever witnessed in the Netherlands. Out of nothing, the party gained 26 out of 150 parliamentary seats. The party entered the coalition. The new conservative liberal party *Leefbaar Nederland* also won two seats. In the 2003 election the LPF lost 18 seats. Of the four contending new anti-immigration parties in 2006 only the anti-immigration party PVV of Geert Wilders was successful. The PVV gained nine seats. The Party for Animals gained two parliamentary seats. We will consider 2002 as the prime example of an election year in which new parties made an upsurge (28 seats). 2006 is also an election year in which new parties were successful (11 seats). Although in 2003 the new LPF was still quite successful (8 seats), in comparison with 2002, new parties were unsuccessful (-20 seats). In 1998, new parties were not successful at all (0 seats). In short, we consider 2006 and especially 2002 as years in which new parties made an upsurge.

### 17.3 Method

For this study, election coverage of two Dutch news broadcasts (the prime time news bulletins of public broadcaster NOS and commercial broadcaster RTL) and all subscription-based national newspapers (*De Telegraaf*, *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *Het Algemeen Dagblad* and *Trouw*) in the three months preceding the 1998, 2002, 2003 and 2006 Dutch national elections were analyzed. All articles in which either a political actor or a political issue was mentioned were included in the study.<sup>2</sup> This resulted in 19,196 included

<sup>1</sup> Governing parties are parties that governed at the time of the election. Established parties are parties that have been part of the coalition at least twice in the last 8 years, but that are currently not in Government. Structural opposition parties are parties that are represented in Parliament and which participated in the elections for the first time over four years ago. Finally, a new party is a party that is either not represented yet, or participated for the first time in the elections less than four years ago. This category contains parties such as the Party for Animals in 2003 and 2006, the anti-immigration party LPF in 2002 and 2003, and the anti-immigration party PVV in 2006.

<sup>2</sup> We defined a political actor as a political party, a member of Government, a Member of Parliament or a national political institution. A political issue is an article with one of the predefined political issues as the main subject of the article (e.g., unemployment and state finances).

articles and news items. The headline and lead of these newspaper articles, and the television news items were manually coded by teams of intensively trained coders using Semantic Network Analysis.

### 17.3.1 Semantic Network Analysis

The content of political news coverage was analysed by means of Semantic Network Analysis (SNA). With SNA, a network of relations between objects can be extracted from a text. SNA has important advantages over thematical content analysis, which consists of unitising a message and coding each of the units on one or more variables (Van Atteveldt 2008, p. 22). One of the main advantages of SNA is its flexibility. The method of analysis can be used to simultaneously study different elements of media coverage, such as the breadth of the issue agenda, populist rhetoric and personalization. A second advantage is that SNA results in network representations that represent the text as closely as possible (*ibid.* p.188). Due to the detailed coding, the coded units are semantically close to the original news coverage, which makes SNA a useful means of studying subtle elements of texts, such as the use of populist rhetoric.<sup>3</sup>

The coding of the newspaper articles and news bulletins was conducted using the Network of Evaluative Texts method (NET method) (e.g., Krippendorf 2008; Van Atteveldt 2008), a semantic network analysis method. The NET method divides a text into a number of so-called elementary statements that describe the relations between objects such as actors and issues in the form of *source: subject / predicate / direction of the predicate / object*. The subject refers to the actor or issue from which the energy in a sentence stems, while the object is the actor or issue at which the energy is directed. The predicate connects the subject and the object by association or disassociation. The quality quantifies the connection, ranging from -1 (maximal disassociation)

<sup>3</sup> Semantic Network Analysis could have been used to detect even more detailed characteristics of a text. The coded network of relations enables an analysis of the chains of reasoning in a text, by analyzing the coded elementary statements in conjunction. SNA also makes it possible to detect the modalities of the relations in a text. However, in the current study no distinction has been made between the modalities of the relations. Although news coverage of actual actions taken in favour or against the public might have an even bigger impact on the public than expressions of affection or disaffection, the exclusion of actions would provide a measure of populist rhetoric that better conforms to populist rhetoric as a rhetorical technique.

to +1 (maximal association). For example, in “Pim Fortuyn ridicules the socialist party”, the subject *Pim Fortuyn* is disassociated from the object *socialist party*. This results in the following elementary statement: *Pim Fortuyn / ridicules / -1 / socialist party*. The coding starts from an ontology, a predefined list of “knowledge objects”, from which coders draw the sources, objects, and subjects. The term “knowledge objects” is used as an overarching concept for political and societal actors and issues frequently found in the news. At the aggregate level, the elementary statements form a network of relations from which the presence of different elements of news coverage can be deduced.

### *Personalization*

Personalization in the news was measured by calculating the percentage of statements in the news in which a political party or a politician representing that party was mentioned containing a reference to the party leader. We compared the number of occurrences of the party leader with the occurrence of other individual politicians and the party itself. The number of occurrences of political actors was measured by counting the number of elementary statements with a political actor in the source, subject or object position.<sup>4</sup>

### *The breadth of the media agenda*

The breadth of the media agenda was measured by measuring the distribution of the attention paid to different main issues. We are interested in the differences in the diversity of the issues with which the different party groups are associated in the news. Therefore, we counted the number of relations in the network of coded sentences in which a party group was associated with each of the different main issues. We included all elementary statements containing an issue statement; i.e., statements in which a political party in the subject position was associated with an issue in the object position. All issues that appeared in the news were categorized in thirteen issue categories.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> If an elementary statement contained a political actor on the source, object and the subject position, only the actor on the source position was included in this study. Likewise, if the elementary statement only contains a political actor at the subject and object position, the subject is included in this study. Notice that a sentence can contain more than one elementary sentence. The sentence “Party A disapproves of Party B’s support of measure C”, for example, contains two elementary statements. Therefore both party A and party B would be included in our analysis.

breadth was measured by calculating the perplexity, a measure indicating the number of issues which receive a substantive and equivalent amount of attention (De Ridder 1984; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003).<sup>6</sup>

### *Populist rhetoric*

Populist rhetoric consists of positive references to “the people” and criticism of the political elite by a political party. The presence of populist rhetoric is measured by calculating the percentage of all statements in the news in which a political party in the object position is related to either “the people” or the political elite (a political institution, a governing party or a politician representing a governing party) in the subject position. In other words, we measured the number of statements in which a political party or one of its members associated or disassociated itself with either “the people” or the public. No distinction has been made between different modalities of the relation; i.e., both actions and affections are included in the analyses. Note that both associating and disassociating statements are taken into account. The tone of parties’ references to the public and the political elite was measured by calculating the mean direction of the relations expressed in the statements. The following examples illustrate the coding of populist rhetoric:

Examples of positive references to “the people”:

“Geert Wilders claims to solve the problems of the people.”

*Geert Wilders / claims to solve problems / +1 / people*

Example of criticism of the political elite:

“Pim Fortuyn attacks political culture of the Cabinet.”

*Pim Fortuyn / attacks / -1 / Cabinet Kok II*

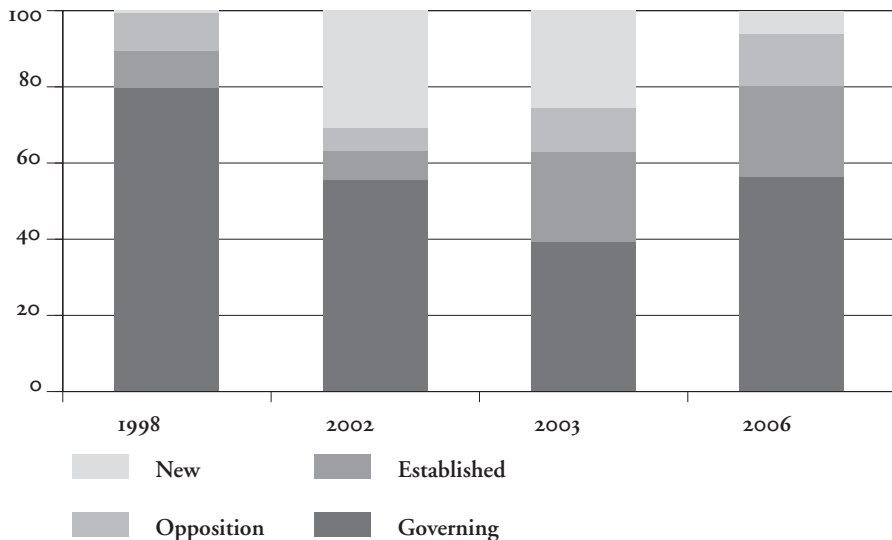
<sup>5</sup> The main issues are: Valence issues (e.g., the economy), financial issues, social security, health care, education, crime and national security, environment, administrative reform, infrastructure, Christian values, new left/progressive issues and European integration.

<sup>6</sup> The perplexity can be calculated using the following formula:  $diversity = \prod_{i \in issues} p_i^{-p_i}$  where  $p_i$  is the proportion of the attention devoted to an issue category in a certain news outlet. We calculated the perplexity rather than the commonly used entropy (which can be derived by taking the log of the perplexity) because the perplexity can be interpreted more intuitively. It represents the number of issues which received a substantive and equivalent amount of attention from a newspaper or broadcaster.

## 17.4 Results

Before we turn to personalization, the breadth of the issue agenda and populist rhetoric, we will give a brief overview of the amount of attention given to the four party types. Figure 17.2 shows the relative attention paid to the four different party categories in the news coverage of the four elections under study. Governing parties dominated the news, although the amount of attention given to these parties strongly fluctuates. Both the established parties and the structural opposition parties received relatively much attention during the last two elections. New parties were almost absent in the coverage of the 1998 elections (0.68%), whereas in 2002 they received almost one third of all the attention (30.70%). Notwithstanding their electoral decline, new parties still received a considerable amount of attention in 2003 (25.61%). While in 2006 the new parties were successful in gaining votes, the attention that the media paid to the new parties was relatively limited (5.94%). Since in 1998 less than 50 statements of the new parties were covered in the news, the coverage of new parties in 1998 is excluded from the analyses presented in table 17.1, table 17.2, and table 17.3.

**FIGURE 17.2** ATTENTION FOR DIFFERENT PARTY GROUPS



### 17.4.1 Personalization

Table 17.1 shows the relative attention given to party leaders in comparison to the attention given to other individual politicians representing the same party and the party itself. The percentages for the attention paid to individual politicians and the name of the party itself (not represented in this table) and the percentage of the attention given to party leaders would add up to 100 percent (column percentages). Hypothesis 1a is confirmed by the data represented in table 17.4. In the coverage of each of the elections under study, new parties' leaders appear the most often in the news (47.78%). The party leaders of governing parties appear the least often in the news (18.90%), which can be explained by the fact that many individual politicians representing governing parties are Ministers, and therefore draw a lot of attention. Hypothesis 1b also is confirmed. The election campaigns in which new parties were the most successful, 2002 and 2006, were the most personalized campaigns (respectively 27.13% and 27.12% attention paid to party leaders). The high average attention given to party leaders in 2002 is, however, exclusively caused by the prominence of new party leader Pim Fortuyn (61.98%). The party leaders of all other party groups received relatively less attention in 2002 than in other years. Especially governing parties' leaders were pushed to the background (11.00%). In 2006 the news coverage was truly more personalized. The relative attention paid to party leaders of all party groups was above average.

**TABLE 17.1** RELATIVE ATTENTION GIVEN TO PARTY LEADERS COMPARED WITH OTHER INDIVIDUAL POLITICIANS AND THE PARTY NAME

	1998	2002	2003	2006	Average
Governing parties	21,49	11,00	21,93	21,17	18,90
Established parties	18,27	23,77	27,24	35,35	26,16
Structural opposition parties	21,72	20,03	12,20	30,33	21,07
New parties	45,10	61,98	32,40	51,64	47,78
Average	21,43	27,13	20,74	27,12	24,10

Reading example: In 1998 the leaders of the governing parties received 21.49 percent of the attention paid to governing parties in that year, implying that other individual politicians and the party itself received 78.51 percent of the attention.

### 17.4.2 The breadth of the issue agenda

Table 17.2 shows the perplexity of the issue agenda, which represents the number of issues receiving a substantive and equivalent amount of attention in the news. We make a distinction between general news about issues (all issue news, top row), and issue statements of political actors (issue statements, bottom rows). The data presented in table 17.1 confirm hypothesis 2a. In each of the election years under study, new parties are represented as disseminating stances on the smallest number of issues (averagely 8.63 issues). In 1998 – the year in which new parties were the least successful – the overall media agenda was the most diverse (12.09 issues), while in 2002, the year in which the new anti-immigration party LPF made an upsurge, the media agenda was the least diverse (10.6 issues). These results seem to confirm hypothesis 2b. However, the breadth of the media agenda in 2003 was smaller than in 2006, while in 2003 new parties were less successful. Hence, these results are not in line with hypothesis 2b. The number of issues that the established parties and especially the governing parties covered in 2002 was lower than in other election years (respectively 9.79 and 9.82 issues). These results suggest that in 2002 the governing and established parties adjusted their issue agenda to the agenda of new parties.

**TABLE 17.2** BREADTH OF THE POLICY AGENDA (PERPLEXITY)

		1998	2002	2003	2006	Average
All issue news	Governing parties	12,09	10,60	11,12	11,53	11,33
	Issue statements of political parties					
Issue statements of political parties	Governing parties	11,58	9,79	10,99	11,37	10,93
	Established parties	10,24	9,82	9,65	10,17	9,97
	Structural opposition parties	9,83	11,22	10,52	10,87	10,61
	New parties		8,49	9,04	8,37	8,63
	Average	11,73	10,41	11,10	11,35	11,15

Reading example: The distribution of the attention given to different issues in 1998 corresponds with a perplexity of 12.09, which means that 12.09 issues received a substantive and equivalent amount of attention in the news in 1998.



### 17.4.3 Populist rhetoric

Table 17.3 shows the percentage of political parties' statements containing the first element of populist rhetoric – references to people – and the average tone of these statements. References to “the people” only are an indication of populist rhetoric if they are positive. In each of the election years, all parties expressed themselves in a positive way about “the people” (+ 0.44). On average, the established parties referred the most often to “the people” (2.74%). Hypothesis 3a, stating that new parties are depicted more often as referring positively to “the people” than other parties, is confirmed only for 2002, the year in which new parties were the most successful (3.28%). In the two subsequent election years, all other party groups referred more often to “the people” than did the new parties. Hypothesis 3b is not confirmed either. Although the attention given to references to “the people” increased sharply in 2002, when the new party LPF made an upsurge (2.86%), the salience of references to “the people” was even higher in 2003, when the new party LPF was far less successful (3.10%).

**TABLE 17.3** PERCENTAGE OF STATEMENTS CONTAINING REFERENCES TO THE PEOPLE

	1998		2002		2003		2006		Average	
	%	tone	%	tone	%	tone	%	tone	%	tone
Governing parties	0,57	0,60	3,02	0,51	2,98	0,04	2,15	0,21	2,18	0,34
Established parties	1,70	0,95	1,95	0,60	3,97	0,63	3,33	0,19	2,74	0,59
Structural opposition parties	0,38	1,00	1,45	0,78	3,20	0,47	1,44	0,40	1,62	0,66
New parties			3,28	0,41	2,49	0,44	0,94	0,40	2,24	0,42
Average	0,67	0,71	2,86	0,50	3,10	0,32	2,23	0,23	2,22	0,44

Reading example: In 1998 the governing parties referred in 0.57 percent of their statements in the news to people. The average tone of these statements is + 0.60 on a scale from -1 to +1.

The second element of populist rhetoric – criticism of the political elite – is represented in table 17.4. The table contains the percentage of party statements containing criticism of the political elite, and the average tone of these statements. The established parties criticized the political elite the most often (29.48%), while the structural opposition parties did so least often (17.70%).

It is striking that the governing parties referred to the political elite in 25.82 percent of all their statements, and that they did so with a negative tone (-0.10). The data represented in table 17.4 confirm hypothesis 4a, stating that new parties criticized the political elite most often, only for 2003. In 2003, more than half of the statements of new parties dealt with the political elite. Hypothesis 4b is not confirmed. In the election year in which the new parties were least successful, 1998, the news contained relatively the most references to the political elite (32.23%), while in one of the election years in which new parties were the most successful, 2006, the news contained relatively the least criticism on the elite (20.52%).

**TABLE 17.4** PERCENTAGE OF STATEMENTS CONTAINING CRITICISM OF THE POLITICAL ELITE

	1998		2002		2003		2006		Average	
	%	tone	%	tone	%	tone	%	tone	%	tone
Governing parties	33,94	-0,22	31,17	-0,21	18,70	0,08	19,46	-0,06	25,82	-0,10
Established parties	32,60	-0,65	32,04	-0,25	23,42	-0,36	29,89	-0,60	29,48	-0,46
Structural opposition parties	18,90	-0,54	24,12	-0,40	13,42	-0,82	14,36	-0,61	17,70	-0,59
New parties	5,71	-1,00	26,67	-0,46	51,35	-0,20	12,22	-0,31	23,99	-0,49
Average	32,23	-0,28	29,77	-0,27	21,35	-0,17	20,52	-0,29	25,97	-0,25

Reading example: In 1998 the governing parties referred in 33.94 percent of their statements to either the governing parties or political institutions. The average tone of these statements is -0.22 on a scale from -1 to +1.

## 17.5 Conclusion

This study analyzed the rhetoric of new parties in political news coverage. We focused on the source of the rhetoric, the number of issues that were addressed and the use of populist rhetoric. First, we tested whether new parties used the prominence of their party leaders more frequently, whether they had a narrower issue agenda than other parties and whether they employed populist rhetoric more often than other parties. Second, we examined whether the media covered these three elements of the communication style of new parties more frequently in the election years in which new parties made an upsurge.

Two of the three hypotheses with regard to the use of this communication style in the coverage of new parties were confirmed. As expected, the news about new parties was more personalized: the party leaders of new parties appeared relatively more often in the news. New parties were also portrayed as having a narrower issue agenda than other parties. However, our hypothesis with regard to the use of populist rhetoric by new parties was not confirmed. Only in 2002 did new parties refer most often positively to the public, and only in 2003 did they criticize the political elite most often. The first outcome can be explained by the introduction of populist rhetoric by Pim Fortuyn in 2006, and the latter by the criticism of the new LPF on its former coalition partners. We have to conclude that new parties use populist rhetoric only in specific circumstances.

Only some of our hypotheses with regard to the presence of the three characteristics of new parties' communication style in general news coverage were confirmed. The campaigns in which new parties made an upsurge were indeed the most personalized. Although the prominence of party leaders in 2002 can be explained by the omnipresence of Pim Fortuyn, in 2006 party leaders of all party types received relatively much attention. As expected, the general media agenda was the narrowest in 2002 and the broadest in 1998, but our hypothesis with regard to the breadth of the issue agenda was not confirmed because of the unexpectedly narrow issue agenda in 2003 and the relatively broad issue agenda in 2006. The relatively unsuccessful LPF was still omnipresent in the news in 2003, while in 2006 the new parties received little media attention in comparison with their electoral success. So, the mere presence of new parties in the news seems a better explanation for a narrow issue agenda than their electoral success. Our hypothesis with regard to populist rhetoric was not confirmed. Although the coverage of positive references to "the people", the first characteristic of populist rhetoric, increased in 2002, when the LPF made an upsurge, populist rhetoric remained present in the subsequent campaigns, especially in the coverage of other parties. The introduction of populist rhetoric by new parties appears to have legitimized the future use of populist rhetoric by other parties as well.

The results suggest that political parties reacted to the entrance of new parties in the political arena by adjusting to their communication style. The communication style of the LPF had the most noticeable impact on the communication style of other parties. Fortuyn managed to change political news coverage by gaining extensive media attention, by directing attention towards

a limited number of issues, and by introducing populist rhetoric. In 2002, even the governing parties referred in three out of ten statements to the performance of the political elite, with a mostly negative tone. This indicates that the upsurge of the LPF caused internal turmoil within the governing parties. Contrary to our expectations, they furthermore reacted by putting politicians other than their party leaders to the fore. This reaction might be caused by the failure of the heavily criticized political leaders to respond to the upsurge of the LPF. Finally, other parties made statements about a smaller number of issues in those years in which new parties were most successful. It would seem that the electoral success of new parties compels other parties to put emphasis on new parties' issues. The salience of new parties' issues forces their opponents to respond, making these issues even more salient.

Further research should answer the question as to whether parties actually did employ a communication style characterized by these elements or whether the media portrayed them as doing so. Although the portrayal of politics arguably has a larger impact on political attitudes than politicians' actual political behaviour, it would be interesting to know where the communication style originates. An analysis of political rhetoric during election campaigns in other forums, such as party manifestos, by means of content analysis or interviews with politicians, journalists and spokespersons could shed light on this question. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine whether the media in other multi-party democracies in which new parties made an upsurge, such as Austria and Belgium, also adjusted to the communication style of new parties. Semantic Network Analysis enables an even more detailed analysis of texts by taking the chains of reasoning and the modalities of relations into account. A more elaborate use of Semantic Network Analysis could provide additional insights in the use of populist rhetoric.

In conclusion, this study indicates that the media depict new parties as voicing rhetoric through their party leaders, while employing a narrow issue agenda, and the established parties as adjusting to that communication style when new parties gain popularity. A charismatic leader of a new party appeared to be able to influence political news coverage.

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