

“The rise of populism
in Europe can be
traced through
online behaviour...”

**POPULISM IN EUROPE:
NETHERLANDS**

Jamie Bartlett
Jonathan Birdwell
Sarah de Lange

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This research is based primarily on an online survey of Facebook supporters of the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV). The results do not, therefore, necessarily reflect the views of the Partij voor de Vrijheid. Demos is an independent think tank committed to undertaking innovative research in areas of public interest. We are non-party political. Our results are set out objectively and accurately without normative judgement.

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All errors and omissions remain our own.

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A note on terminology

This paper is the fourth in a series of country briefing papers released in 2012 about the online support of populist political parties and street-based groups in Europe. These papers are based on a dataset of approximately 10,667 Facebook supporters of these ‘nationalist populist’ parties in 11 European countries, which was published in the Demos report *The New Face of Digital Populism*, released in November 2011.¹ Further papers will be released throughout 2012.

Throughout this paper, we refer to two primary datasets by the following terminology:

- *Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) Facebook supporters*: The primary data source used in this report is a survey of 335 Facebook supporters of the PVV, collected by Demos during July and August 2011. All references to PVV supporters refer to this group unless otherwise stated.
- *Populist parties and movements (PPAM)*: In order to draw comparisons between PVV Facebook supporters and the Facebook supporters of nationalist populist parties elsewhere in Europe, throughout this paper we refer to the data set collected for *The New Face of Digital Populism*. This includes 10,667 Facebook supporters of nationalist populist parties and movements in 11 Western European countries. We refer to these as PPAM throughout.

We also draw on European-wide survey data from the Eurobarometer survey and the European Values Study to make comparisons where possible. These studies are cited where relevant below.

The last decade has witnessed a growth in nationalist populist parties and movements in many countries in Western Europe. These parties are defined by their opposition to immigration and multiculturalism, and concern for protecting national and European culture, particularly from immigrants from Muslim majority countries. On economic policy, they are often vocal critics of globalisation and the effects of international capitalism on workers' rights. This is combined with 'anti-establishment' rhetoric used to appeal to widespread disillusionment with mainstream political parties, the media and government. Often called 'populist extremist parties' or 'the new right', these parties do not fit easily into the traditional political divides. How these trends are related is not clear.

Geert Wilders and his Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) in the Netherlands are perhaps the best known of these new movements. Since its founding in 2004 (as *Groep Wilders*) the PVV has experienced a steady growth in public support and considerable electoral success. In the 2010 parliamentary election, the PVV won 24 seats, which made it the third largest party in the Netherlands, and gave it a key role in keeping the minority government of Mark Rutte in office. Wilders' decision not to support the minority government's budget deficit reduction programme led to the collapse of the coalition in April 2012, and a new parliamentary election will take place shortly after this paper has gone to print. While polls suggest that support for the PVV could be declining, the party and Wilders in particular remain significant actors in the Dutch political landscape.

The PVV places strong emphasis on the need to address immigration and what it sees as a failed multicultural policy. Its views on immigration — and especially Islam — have marked it as controversial and polarising. Wilders is well known for his staunch and often incendiary remarks about Islam, including likening the *Qu'ran* to *Mein Kampf*. The party is also known for its euroscepticism, with Wilders campaigning against the European Constitution in 2005. The economic crisis in Europe has made the PVV place more emphasis on its aggressive anti-Brussels position.

The PVV has been effective at using online communication to amplify its message, organise and recruit new supporters. This mixture of online and offline political activity is how millions of people relate to politics in the twenty-first century, particularly members of a younger, digital generation. This research aims to understand this new form of political engagement. The importance of social media websites to political movements can no longer be underestimated.

This report presents the results of a survey of 335 responses from Facebook fans of the PVV. It includes data on who they are, what they think, and what motivates them to shift from virtual to real-world activism.

In July 2011 we targeted adverts at individuals who were supporters of three PVV related groups on Facebook. On clicking the advert, individuals were redirected to a survey, which they were invited to complete. The survey and adverts were presented in Dutch, and were then translated back into English for the purposes of this report. The data were then weighted in order to improve the validity and accuracy of any inferences made about the online population. Although online recruitment in social research is widespread, self-select recruitment via social network sites brings novel challenges. Because this is an innovative research method, with both strengths and weaknesses, we have included a methodology section in an annex to this report.

Results

The PVV's support-base cannot be adequately understood through Facebook alone, and many PVV supporters are of course not on Facebook. The findings in this report refer specifically to PVV Facebook supporters — an important, but specific, sub-group of its overall support base. We also recognise that the Dutch version of Facebook (Hyves) is even more popular than Facebook in the Netherlands — but for reasons of consistency we decided to use Facebook throughout. As we set out in the methodology, this study is more exploratory than comprehensive, but does shed important and useful light on this group. It is with these caveats that the results are presented.

- *PVV Facebook supporters are predominantly male, but not particularly young.* More than three-quarters (77% per cent) are male and 23 per cent are female. This gender imbalance towards males is shared with other populist parties and movements (PPAMs) across Western Europe. Surprisingly, PVV Facebook supporters are older than other PPAM supporters (50 per cent are above 30 years, compared with a PPAM average of 37 per cent).
- *PVV Facebook supporters are not the 'losers' of globalisation.* Many supporters (37 per cent) have vocational training and unemployment among this group is not significantly higher than the national average (11 per cent compared with 9 per cent). Moreover, almost one in four are students. This high level of student support might be partly accounted for by the fact that Facebook users in the Netherlands have tended to be relatively highly educated, as Facebook is popular among university students.
- *PVV Facebook supporters are active demonstrators and party supporters.* PVV Facebook supporters are more likely to have taken part in a demonstration in the last 12 months than the average Dutch person (11 per cent vs 4 per cent) and 84 per cent voted for the PVV at the last general election.
- *PVV Facebook supporters are pessimistic about politics as an effective way to respond to their concerns.* Only 28 per cent of PVV Facebook supporters agreed with the statement that 'politics is an effective way to respond to my concerns' compared with a PPAM average of 35 per cent. They were not, however, too disillusioned to vote: only 13 per cent agreed with the statement 'it does not matter who you vote for', which is slightly lower than the PPAM average of 16 per cent.
- *PVV Facebook fans' top concerns are overwhelmingly Islamic extremism, immigration and crime.* These are the same top concerns cited by supporters of similar parties across Europe. However, the concerns about Islamic extremism are particularly significant here — probably a reflection of the importance given to it by Wilders.
- *PVV Facebook fans are no more pessimistic than the average Dutch voter.* While PVV Facebook supporters were pessimistic about the future of the Netherlands and their own future, their scores on both these measures were broadly in line with the average for the Dutch general public: 20 per cent of PVV Facebook supporters thought the Netherlands was on the right track — the same score recorded in the Eurobarometer poll for the population as a whole. Interestingly, PVV Facebook supporters were slightly more likely to believe the next 12 months would be better than the last (26 per cent) than the Dutch general public (22 per cent).
- *PVV Facebook fans are mistrustful of institutions.* On every measure tested, PVV Facebook fans were less trusting than the Dutch public of all public institutions, a trend that appears common across online supporters of many PPAMs. In particular, the legal system, the European Union and religious institutions score especially poorly, when compared with the Dutch average. However, the recent acquittal of Wilders of the charges of inciting hatred and discrimination did increase PVV Facebook supporters' trust in the legal system.
- *PVV Facebook fans are highly critical of the European Union.* When asked what the European Union meant to them, the PVV Facebook supporters' top five responses were negative; and they were far more likely than the Dutch general public to provide each of the top five negative responses. The most common responses were: 'waste of money' (68 per cent), 'not enough control at external borders' (56 per cent) and 'loss of cultural and national identity' (52 per cent).
- *Women appear to be the most motivated and disillusioned.* Although in a minority, female supporters were more disillusioned and motivated than male supporters on a range of measures. For example, they were more likely to vote for the PVV, to have

taken part in a protest, to cite Islamic extremism as their biggest concern (57 per cent compared with 33 per cent of men), to agree that Netherlands is on the wrong track, and to be negative about the European Union, and less likely to trust other people.

Although figures are small, disillusionment with mainstream parties and a belief in Wilders' integrity are as significant factors as Islam or immigration in driving PVV support. When asked why they joined the PVV, supporters were more likely than other similar parties to cite Wilders' integrity, saying that he could be trusted to speak honestly about difficult issues, unlike leaders of other parties.

Implications

Our task in this report is to illuminate the phenomenon of online supporters of the PVV and present the results objectively. We do not offer lengthy recommendations because formulating a response is a task for Dutch citizens and politicians. This is perhaps a more difficult task given the fluid and dynamic way many people now express their political preferences online, and the way social media allow for groups and individuals to network and mobilise faster than ever. We hope this research can inform that task.

What seems clear from our research is that concerns over Islamic extremism and anti-elite populism are resonating with a certain segment of the Dutch population. Certainly it appears that Wilders' narrative about Islam being a threat to democratic values in Europe (and therefore needs to be confronted) has been taken on by many of his supporters, which allows for these views about Islam to sit naturally within broader support for Western — and Dutch — values of liberalism, the rule of law and human rights. PVV Facebook supporters are extremely negative when it comes to the European Union. It is not a coincidence that Wilders has been directing more of his attention toward the European Union. By opposing the deficit reduction plan, and Brussels

more generally, Wilders can combine his critique of Islam and immigration with a broader story about out-of-touch elitist politicians making undemocratic decisions that do not represent the ordinary Dutch voter.

A significant proportion of the PVV Facebook supporters are driven by Wilders' approach to politics more generally, rather than his specific policies. In the open response question we asked probing motivations for supporting the PVV; the second most common response related to the honesty and integrity of Wilders compared with other politicians. Some supporters were highly critical of the Dutch model of 'consensus politics' and judged Wilders to be a useful balance, taking on subjects that other politicians do not dare to address. In some instances, PVV Facebook supporters thought that Wilders went too far — for example that he makes overgeneralisations about Islam — but that he is to be admired in having the courage to bring the subject up.

Although the PVV Facebook supporters differ from supporters of other similar parties surveyed for this research, in many ways they share a great deal in common. They tend to be young, male and motivated. Although not too disillusioned to vote, PVV Facebook supporters were significantly disenchanted with politics as an effective way to respond to their concerns — and this despite the electoral success of Wilders, his high media profile, and the impact the PVV has had on legislation through its support agreement with the previous government. Maintaining or restoring trust in political institutions is an extremely important challenge for most of Western Europe. In our Europe-wide survey we found that those online supporters who are also involved in offline politics appear to be more democratic, have more faith in politics, and be more likely to disavow violence. While the causal relationship between these attitudes is not clear, there is still evidence to suggest that encouraging more people to become actively involved in political and civic life, no matter how detestable people find their views (assuming they are within the parameters of incitement of hatred and racism legislation), is an important way forward.

1 Background

The PVV

The Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) was founded by Geert Wilders in 2004 (then named *Groep Wilders*) when he left the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). Initially a policy adviser and speechwriter within the VVD, Wilders was elected city councillor in Utrecht in 1997 and MP the following year.² He abandoned his support for the VVD after 14 years following a disagreement with the party over its support for Turkey's accession to the European Union.

Since 2006, the PVV has enjoyed considerable growth. In the 2006 parliamentary election, the party won nine of 150 seats. It grew rapidly following the assassination of Theo van Gogh and the Muhammad cartoon controversy — and in the 2009 European parliamentary elections, the party polled second, winning four of the 25 seats for the Netherlands.³ The following year it secured large gains in local elections, winning 21.6 per cent of the vote in Almere and 16.9 per cent in Den Haag. However, the party was unable and unwilling to field candidates in other municipalities. In the June 2010 parliamentary elections, the PVV won 24 seats (15 per cent of the vote — 1,454,492 votes).

That year the PVV formed a 'support agreement' (*gedoogakkoord*) with the VVD and Christian Democrats, whereby the PVV, though not technically part of the coalition government, would vote with them. This position of powerbroker, according to Wilders himself, granted the party 'enormous influence'.⁴ At Wilders' request, the coalition government attempted to outlaw the burka and the production of halal and kosher meat.⁵ The proposed burka ban has not yet passed parliament, while Upper House rejected the proposed ban on halal and kosher meat. The PVV had also hoped to hold

a referendum on the ban of minarets, which Wilders described as an ‘imperialist and ideological sign of domination’, but this is unlikely to take place in the foreseeable future.⁶

In April 2012 Wilders pulled out of the renegotiations of the agreement that aimed to deliver the fiscal consolidation required by the European fiscal pact. He went on to rail against the 3 per cent fiscal deficit norm set by ‘Brussels bureaucrats’, which triggered the collapse of the government. A parliamentary election has been called for 12 September 2012.

Current polls suggest that the popularity of the PVV could be declining. The latest polls, published on 15 August 2012, show that if the Dutch election were to be held today, the PVV would gain 14 to 18 seats in the parliament—a loss of six to ten seats compared with 2010. The losses could be caused by a number of scandals involving the PVV, including Wilders’ criticism of Queen Beatrice wearing a headscarf when visiting Abu Dhabi, the creation of a hotline for reporting problems with immigrants (particularly Polish immigrants), and the resignation of a number of PVV MPs including Hero Brinkman, Marcial Hernandez and Wim Kortenoeven.⁷ The polls also show that the Socialist Party, a eurosceptic party that is more left-leaning than the Dutch Labour Party, is increasing in popularity, and may even win the forthcoming election.⁸

Is the PVV a populist party?

For many, Geert Wilders and the PVV are among the leading and most recognisable representatives of new populist, nationalist right-wing parties. These parties are defined by their opposition to immigration and multiculturalism, and concern for protecting national and European culture, particularly from immigrants from Muslim majority countries.

However, Wilders considers himself to be a right-wing liberal, drawing some inspiration from Pim Fortuyn’s Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), supporting small government, law and order, a dislike of multiculturalism, and a tough anti-immigration stance. With its focus on ‘more security, less crime, less immigration and less Islam’,⁹ the PVV advocates

the preservation of Dutch identity and values that are seen as ‘under threat’ from ‘a tsunami of alien culture’.¹⁰ Castigating his political enemies as ‘multicultural cuddlers’, Wilders is a highly controversial figure known for his outspoken and incendiary comments on immigration and, most notably, Islam. In *Klare Wijn* (‘Clear Wine’), Wilders’ 2006 political manifesto, he set out ten key points, which included a five-year moratorium on non-Western immigration, smaller government, more emphasis on family education, and a more accessible health care system. Although the party has often been labelled as ‘far right’, Wilders himself has refused to align himself with other European far-right leaders such as Jean-Marie Le Pen or Jörg Haider.

Nevertheless, immigration, identity and especially Islam (see below) remain significant policy issues for the party and its followers. Wilders has claimed there is a direct connection between immigration and problems with welfare, housing, crime and transport. He has repeatedly called for restrictions on non-Western immigration and criticises the way multiculturalism is damaging Dutch society.¹¹

Aside from its political rhetoric vis-à-vis immigration and Islam, the PVV is also a vociferous critic of the European Union, claiming it erodes national sovereignty. The party aims to abolish dual citizenship and curb development aid and other ‘left-wing hobbies’, as it puts it, while advocating economic liberalism (eg in the form of tax cuts) and welfare chauvinism (eg in the form of a defence of the elderly and health care for natives).¹²

Some commentators have suggested the PVV’s rhetoric has recently shifted away from Islam, and toward a more anti-European Union position. Wilders has explicitly called for the complete disengagement of the Netherlands from Brussels as well as from the fiscal union.¹³ Much of Wilders’ critique of Brussels relates to what he views as its undemocratic, unrepresentative nature. He has claimed that in the wake of the European financial crisis, it is right for the Dutch to take control back from the ‘bureaucrats in Brussels’.¹⁴ Doing this would ‘defend our identity and fight against Islamization’.¹⁵

The party has come under renewed criticism in 2012 following the launching of a new website asking Dutch citizens to report issues with central and eastern European people, including competition for housing and jobs.¹⁶ The governments of Bulgaria, Poland and Romania have denounced the site.¹⁷

The PVV, Islam and counter-Jihad

Wilders is best known for his (often incendiary) criticism of Islam. He argues that Islam is not a religion, but rather a totalitarian political ideology like communism and fascism, and that it wants ‘to dominate the world’.¹⁸ He has stated that the *Qu’ran* should be banned in the Netherlands, and campaigns to stop what he views as the ‘Islamisation’ of the country. He advocates ending immigration from Muslim majority countries, supports banning the construction of new mosques, and in 2009 proposed a tax on hijab wearing by Muslim women.

Wilders in particular is closely associated with the ‘counter-Jihad’ movement, a network of bloggers and political activists who believe that Muslim immigrants threaten not only violence but also ‘demographic jihad’.¹⁹ In July 2010 Wilders announced the International Freedom Alliance, a network of groups and individuals ‘fighting for freedom against Islam’.

Wilders styles his critique of Islam as a defence of liberalism, questioning Islam’s stance on women’s rights and gay rights, and saying he is only ‘intolerant of the intolerant’ — while taking care to draw a distinction between Muslims and Islam, saying ‘I don’t hate Muslims. I hate their book and their ideology.’²⁰

These views have made Wilders highly controversial, and he is accused by various commentators, including US diplomats, of stirring up discord and disharmony.²¹ In 2011 Dutch writer Karel Kanits likened Wilders to Adolf Hitler, referring to him as a ‘bleached Führer’.²² Earlier the same year the annual Willem Arondéus lecture was cancelled after the PVV protested when it became apparent that historian

Thomas von der Dunk planned to compare the rise of the party to the rise of Nazism.²³ Anders Breivik declared himself to be a great admirer of Wilders: his ‘manifesto’, released shortly before he killed 77 people, contained numerous references to Wilders and described him as a person whom Breivik would like to meet.²⁴ Wilders was quick to distance himself from the Norwegian’s actions, claiming that they ‘fill [me] with revulsion’.²⁵

Wilders’ views have also resulted in legal troubles and threats to his own safety. Wilders was put on trial for inciting hatred and discrimination in the Netherlands in 2008 for his film *Fitna* and articles he had written.²⁶ He was acquitted in 2011 — when the presiding judge acknowledged that Wilders’ comments were made in the ‘context of a public debate about Muslim integration and multiculturalism, and therefore [were] not a crime [sic]’.²⁷ Wilders was also denied entry to the UK in 2011 as a threat to public safety, a decision that was overturned on appeal. As a result of his controversial comments, Wilders is the most protected politician in the Netherlands. In July 2010, the magazine *Inspire* announced that Wilders was on a ‘death list’ of an international Islamist terrorist network.

Organisational structure and leadership

Unusually, the PVV does not have any formal membership available to the general public or even its elected representatives; the only official member is Wilders himself,²⁸ and therefore he is believed to have unrivalled control over party policy. According to academics Sarah de Lange and David Art, Wilders’ emphasis on internal control stems from the lessons learned in the collapse of Pim Fortuyn’s party LPF. In 2007, Wilders was quoted saying: ‘I have learned my lesson from the LPF. I know what can go wrong when you open up the party to members too quickly.’²⁹

The lack of democratic practice within the PVV has led some figures either to leave or to criticise the way the party is run. In March 2012, MP Hero Brinkman resigned.³⁰ According to the Dutch media, Brinkman had been a vocal critic of the lack of democracy within the PVV, which

prevented any form of dialogue on official policy. Brinkman had also voiced his desire for establishing a youth wing of the PVV, which would fully open up the party.

Two further MPs resigned in 2012 — Hernandez and Kortenoeven — which has been taken as further evidence that Wilders is not listening to the calls for greater democratisation of the party. Hernandez and Kortenoeven ‘likened Wilders to a North Korean-style leader’, who was ‘cut off from reality’.³¹

PVV and voters

In socio-demographic characteristics, the electorate of the PVV resembles that of most PPAMs. It is characterised by an over-representation of lower educated voters, of men, and of younger voters (aged below 25). PVV voters do not appear to have a distinct socio-economic profile. Income, occupational status and unemployment do not clearly set PVV voters apart from other voters, although a few scholars argue that the lower working classes and middle classes are more likely to vote for the PVV than the higher classes. Active churchgoers are unlikely to support the party, although Catholics, especially when they are not practising, are more likely to vote for it.³²

Within the PVV electorate a distinction can be made between core supporters on the one hand and swing voters who frequently switch allegiances on the other hand. The socio-demographic profile of the core supporters of the PVV is more pronounced than that of the swing voters. Core supporters have lower levels of education than swing voters, are more likely to be male, and less likely to have higher incomes. Moreover, they are more likely to have voted for right-wing parties (eg the Christen-Democratisch Appèl, CDA, and VVD) in previous elections, and they are less likely to have abstained in elections. A clear difference in age between the two groups cannot be observed, however.³³

While the electorate of the PVV closely resembled that of other PPAMs in 2006, it has become more heterogeneous in recent years. Most notably, the gender gap has become smaller,

with increasing numbers of women voting for the party; the occupational profile of its electorate has become more diverse; and in 2010 the unemployed were no longer more likely to vote for it than the employed. In this respect, the electorate of the PVV has become a better representation of the Dutch population. At the same time, the education gap has become larger, with fewer higher educated and more lower educated voters supporting the party in 2010.³⁴ This development has led academics Mark Bovens and Anchrit Wille to conclude that a ‘diploma democracy’ exists in the Netherlands.³⁵

A number of explanations can be given for the individual level support for the PVV. They include anomie (alienation and purposelessness); distrust in mainstream political parties, politicians and political institutions; a desire to crackdown on crime; calls for more decision-making through referenda; euroscepticism; the perception that the Netherlands is being threatened by immigrants and/or Muslims; and sympathy for Wilders’ message and persona. Interestingly, citizens with high levels of political efficacy — the belief that you can have an impact on politics — are more likely to support the party than citizens with low levels of political efficacy. In other words, PVV voters believe that voting for the party is an effective way to bring about political change. Moreover, those voting for the PVV tend to self-identify as right wing, even though they would like to see income inequalities reduced.³⁶

PVV and social media

Wilders has been adept at using the social media Facebook and Twitter to spread his message and recruit. He currently has 198,482 followers on Twitter (@geertwilderspvv) and over 23,000 ‘likes’ on his official Facebook page. Interestingly, Wilders himself does not follow anyone on Twitter and prefers to use the platform purely to spread his political views. Research conducted by Burson-Marsteller collaborating with social media analytics company Klout shows that Wilders is among the top ten influential political voices online in the

Netherlands. This is despite making a relatively small number of ‘tweets’ (481) compared with other politicians such as Diederik Samsom of the PvdA (16,314 tweets) and Alexander Pechtold of D66 (5,130 tweets).³⁷

Wilders and the PVV have also recently used social media to lead campaigns against the European Union and Eastern European immigrants. In February 2012, Wilders launched an online hotline for people to submit complaints about migrants from Eastern Europe—leading to as many as 14,000 disturbances reported. The hotline was widely condemned by MEPs across the political spectrum, with some leading calls for the Dutch Government to ‘condemn and distance themselves from this deplorable initiative’. More recently, Wilders launched a campaign called ‘Stop the European Profiteers’, which urged the lowering of wages for European Parliament employees. It was reported that the campaign website received over 75,000 electronic signatures in less than three days.³⁸

2 Who are the PVV Facebook supporters?

This chapter presents the socio-economic, age and gender data of PVV Facebook supporters. Where possible, we present this information in the context of broader Dutch society and make comparisons to similar groups in Western Europe, as presented in the Demos report *The New Face of Digital Populism*.³⁹

Demographics and geography

Using Facebook's publicly available advertising tool it is possible to identify the age and gender of all Dutch users of Facebook, as well as the basic demographic information of Facebook members who express a preference for the PVV.

Across the country as a whole, Dutch Facebook users display an even gender split (49 per cent male and 50 per cent female), but among PVV's Facebook supporters, 77 per cent are male and 23 per cent are female (n=7,140). This gender imbalance towards males is shared with other populist parties and movements (PPAMs) across Western Europe and is also found in the electorate of the PVV.⁴⁰

Surprisingly, PVV Facebook supporters are older than those of similar parties surveyed in Europe: 50 per cent were over 30, compared with a PPAM average of 37 per cent (table 1). In this respect the Facebook supporters of the PVV differ from the electorate of the party, in which younger voters are overrepresented. PVV Facebook supporters are, however, younger than Dutch Facebook users in general — of whom 72 per cent are over 30. This could be a consequence of many young Dutch people preferring to use Hyves — a Dutch social networking site.

Table 1 Age group of PVV Facebook supporters (n=7,140) and supporters of Western Europe PPAMs (national statistics in brackets)

| Age group | PPV total (Netherlands total %) | Western Europe PPAMs (European total) (%) |
|-----------|---------------------------------|---|
| 16-20 | 19 (18) | 32 (19) |
| 21-25 | 18 (17) | 19 (17) |
| 26-30 | 13 (14) | 12 (14) |
| 31-40 | 22 (21) | 17 (21) |
| 41-50 | 18 (16) | 12 (15) |
| 51+ | 10 (15) | 8 (13) |

We cannot precisely pinpoint where PVV Facebook supporters are located, but we asked survey respondents what was the nearest large city to their location within 50km. Amsterdam was the closest city for 35 per cent, followed by Rotterdam (30 per cent), Eindhoven (22 per cent) and Groningen (7 per cent). Thus, the Facebook supporters of the PVV live primarily in the Randstad, the highly diverse, populated and urbanised western part of the Netherlands, while PVV voters often reside in the more peripheral and rural eastern and southern part of the country. In 2010, the PVV was especially successful in Limburg, the province from which Wilders hails.

Education and employment

We asked online supporters at what institution they gained their highest level of educational attainment, and whether they had had any professional education (table 2). A mere 1 per cent of PVV Facebook supporters has only finished elementary school (*basisschool*), 17 per cent has finished high school (*middelbare school*), 37 per cent has had vocational training (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*; MBO), 31 per cent has studied applied sciences (*hogeschool*; HBO) and 12 per cent has finished an educational programme at a university (*wetenschappelijk onderwijs*; WO).

PVV Facebook supporters form a more or less perfect representation of Dutch society in the education level they have attained.⁴¹ Surprisingly, the lower educated are not over-represented among the Facebook supporters of the PVV, while they are among Facebook supporters of other PPAMs, and among PVV voters. This might be partly because Facebook has always been particularly popular among university students.

Table 2 Highest educational attainment of PVV Facebook supporters, by gender and whether under or over age 30 (n=335)

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|-------------------|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Basisschool | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Middelbare school | 16 | 22 | 18 | 17 | 17 |
| MBO | 38 | 32 | 37 | 36 | 37 |
| HBO | 32 | 27 | 32 | 30 | 31 |
| WO | 12 | 14 | 12 | 13 | 12 |
| Geen | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 |

PVV Facebook supporters were slightly more likely to be unemployed than the average Dutch citizen (11 per cent vs 7 per cent), but slightly less likely than other supporters of PPAMs (11 per cent vs 14 per cent). Surprisingly, a very high proportion of supporters under 30 were classified as students (41 per cent) (table 3).

Table 3 Employment status of PVV Facebook supporters (n=335) (national statistics in brackets)⁴²

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|------------|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Employed | 69 | 56 | 56 | 76 | 66 |
| Unemployed | 7 | 22 | 4 | 18 | 11 (7) |
| Student | 22 | 21 | 41 | 2 | 22 |

Membership and involvement

To determine the extent to which PVV Facebook supporters are involved in offline activity, we asked respondents whether they voted for the PVV at the last parliamentary election and had participated in any demonstrations or street protests in the past six months (table 4).

Of the Facebook supporters we surveyed, 84 per cent reported having voted for the party at the last election, a significantly higher percentage than the PPAM average of 67 per cent. This suggests that online supporters of the PVV are active and highly motivated, even though they cannot formally join the party. However, 11 per cent reported having taken part in a street demonstration or protest in the past six months, a percentage that is considerably lower than the average PPAM supporter (11 per cent vs 26 per cent). Nevertheless, they were more likely to have protested than the Dutch public in general (11 per cent vs 3 per cent). Those over the age of 30 were significantly less likely to have taken part in a protest (11 per cent) than those below 30 (20 per cent).

Table 4 **Offline involvement of PVV Facebook supporters (n=335), by gender and whether under or over age 30 (national statistics in brackets)**

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|---|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Voted for PVV in the last election | 82 | 91 | 81 | 86 | 84 (16) |
| Taken part in a march or demo in last 6-12 months | 10 | 11 | 10 | 11 | 11 (3) ⁴³ |

3 Social and political concerns

We asked PVV Facebook supporters a number of questions about their social and political views, trust in people and political institutions, and opinions about the future for themselves and their country. Where possible, we compare results to the Eurobarometer Survey and the European Values Study in order to make many meaningful comparisons with national level data. We also draw comparisons with supporters of PPAMs throughout.

Top two biggest concerns

When asked to rank their top two social and political concerns from a list of 18 current issues, the most common responses from PVV Facebook supporters were Islamic extremism and immigration (table 5). In this respect, they mirror the top concerns of the supporters of similar parties across Western Europe.

Three of the four top concerns of PVV Facebook supporters were also top concerns among the average PPAM supporter. These were Islamic extremism (39 per cent PVV vs 24 per cent PPAM), immigration (28 per cent PVV vs 37 per cent PPAM) and crime (27 per cent PVV vs 17 per cent).

Islamic extremism was more of a worry for PVV Facebook supporters than for supporters of other PPAMs, which is unsurprising given the emphasis placed on the subject by Wilders. Interestingly, women were more likely to cite this as an issue compared with men (57 per cent vs 33 per cent). When compared to Dutch averages, it is clear that cultural identity and crime related issues are more important to PVV Facebook supporters than for the Dutch public overall, whose main worries are economic in nature: rising prices and

inflation (31 per cent), the healthcare system (31 per cent), the economic situation (26 per cent), pensions (22 per cent) and the education system (16 per cent).

Table 5 **Top two biggest concerns of PVV Facebook supporters (n=335), by gender and whether under or over age 30⁴⁴**

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|--------------------|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Islamic extremism | 33 | 57 | 38 | 40 | 39 (N/A) |
| Immigration | 30 | 22 | 30 | 26 | 28 (2) |
| Crime | 28 | 23 | 28 | 25 | 27 (6) |
| Economic situation | 16 | 9 | 12 | 18 | 15 (26) |
| Multiculturalism | 15 | 13 | 18 | 1 | 14 (N/A) |

Politics and voting

We also asked PVV Facebook supporters to tell us their views about the effectiveness of democracy in order to gauge the level of disillusionment they feel with mainstream political channels. In general, Facebook supporters of PVV are pessimistic about the effectiveness of politics, but are not too disillusioned to vote.

Only 13 per cent of PVV Facebook supporters agreed with the statement ‘it does not matter who you vote for’ (table 6), which compares with a PPAM average of 16 per cent. Thus, PVV Facebook supporters are not too disproportionately bitter and disenchanted to vote when compared with similar supporters in other countries.

Table 6 **Extent to which PVV Facebook supporters agree that it does not matter who you vote for, by gender and whether under or over age 30 (n=355)**

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|-------------------|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Agree entirely | 7 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 7 |
| Agree a little | 6 | 7 | 4 | 8 | 6 |
| Disagree a little | 14 | 13 | 11 | 16 | 14 |
| Disagree entirely | 67 | 64 | 69 | 63 | 66 |

However, PVV Facebook supporters remain cynical about the extent to which politics itself is an effective means to respond to their concerns (table 7): only 28 per cent of PVV Facebook supporters agreed with the statement ‘politics is an effective way to respond to my concerns’ compared with 35 per cent of supporters of other PPAMs. This is perhaps surprising given the electoral success of the PVV, and their ability to extract concessions from the minority government on the issue of immigration. Indeed, the electoral and legislative impact of PVV has been significant compared with other PPAMs. Despite this, it appears that PVV Facebook supporters remain disheartened by politics.

Table 7 **Extent to which PVV Facebook supporters agree that politics is an effective way to respond to their concerns, by gender and whether under or over age 30 (n=335)**

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|-------------------|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Agree entirely | 4 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 4 |
| Agree a little | 27 | 15 | 33 | 15 | 24 |
| Disagree a little | 31 | 36 | 33 | 32 | 32 |
| Disagree entirely | 18 | 27 | 11 | 30 | 20 |

The relationship between nationalist populist parties like PVV and far-right terrorists like Anders Breivik remains a top concern among academics, the media and intelligence services. Because of this, we included a question about the permissibility of violence in the survey (table 8). On this violence-related question, PVV Facebook supporters were more or less in line with supporters of other PPAMs: 24 per cent of PVV Facebook supporters compared to 26 per cent of PPAM supporters agreed with the statement ‘violence is acceptable to achieve the right outcome’.

Table 8 **Extent to which PVV Facebook supporters agree that violence is acceptable to achieve the right outcome (n=335)**

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|-------------------|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Agree entirely | 11 | 3 | 10 | 9 | 9 |
| Agree a little | 14 | 19 | 13 | 17 | 15 |
| Disagree a little | 16 | 25 | 21 | 15 | 18 |
| Disagree entirely | 38 | 40 | 35 | 41 | 38 |

It is important to stress that the results of this question should not be misinterpreted. Agreeing that violence is acceptable to ensure a certain outcome does not mean that PVV Facebook supporters are more prone than the general public actually to commit violence. There are unfortunately no baseline data on this question for European general populations, making inferences about the relevance of the responses difficult.

Personal and national optimism

The majority of PVV Facebook supporters were highly pessimistic about their country's future: 69 per cent disagreed either a little or entirely with the statement 'The Netherlands is on the right track'; 20 per cent agreed, and the remainder (11 per cent) 'did not know' (table 9). Compared to the Eurobarometer survey, which asked a similar question, we see that Facebook supporters of the PVV are not dissimilar from the Dutch population. According to the Eurobarometer (autumn 2011) question 'at the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in the Netherlands?', 20 per cent of Dutch citizens responded 'right direction' and 46 per cent responded 'wrong direction' (32 per cent thought neither one nor the other). It's worth noting that this high level of pessimism may have been influenced by the ongoing eurozone and sovereign debt crisis.

Interestingly, supporters of the PVV were more optimistic about their country's future than supporters of other PPAMs (20 per cent vs 10 per cent). This might be due to the influence the PVV has on policy-making through its position as a government support party.

Table 9 **Extent to which PVV Facebook supporters agree that The Netherlands is on the right track, by gender and whether under or over age 30 (n=335)**

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|-------------------|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Agree entirely | 4 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree a little | 17 | 11 | 15 | 17 | 16 |
| Disagree a little | 29 | 27 | 34 | 22 | 28 |
| Disagree entirely | 38 | 52 | 35 | 48 | 41 |

When asked whether they thought their own life would be better or worse in 12 months' time, PVV Facebook supporters were as optimistic as the PPAM average (26 per cent vs 27 per cent). Compared to the Dutch general public, PVV Facebook supporters also scored similar optimism scores. PVV Facebook supporters were slightly more likely than the Dutch general public to believe that the next 12 months would be better: 26 per cent vs 22 per cent (although 29 per cent vs 17 per cent thought they would be worse) (table 10).

Table 10 **PVV Facebook supporters' personal outlook for the next 12 months (n=335, national statistics in brackets)⁴⁵**

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|--------|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Better | 28 | 20 | 34 | 19 | 26 (22) |
| Worse | 28 | 32 | 17 | 40 | 29 (17) |
| Same | 42 | 46 | 47 | 38 | 43 (60) |

Attitudes toward the European Union

Consistent with the majority of respondents from PPAMs in other Western European countries, PVV Facebook supporters are more likely to have negative opinions of the European Union. When asked what the European Union means to them, the most common responses were all negative: ‘waste of money’, ‘not enough control at the external borders’, ‘loss of cultural and national identity’ and ‘more crime’ (table 11); these replies are similar to the average responses of supporters of other PPAMs when asked this question.

PVV Facebook supporters were far more likely than the Dutch general public to have these negative views. The Dutch general public as a whole has a far more positive image of the European Union, giving as the top three answers to this question: the Euro (55 per cent); freedom to travel, work and study anywhere in the European Union (52 per cent); and bureaucracy (35 per cent).

Table 11 What PVV Facebook supporters think about the European Union (n=335, national statistics in brackets)⁴⁶

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|--|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Waste of money | 67 | 70 | 64 | 71 | 68 (23) |
| Not enough control at external borders | 55 | 56 | 52 | 59 | 56 (15) |
| Loss of cultural and national identity ⁴⁷ | 49 | 61 | 45 | 59 | 52 (15) |
| More crime | 49 | 48 | 51 | 46 | 49 (13) |
| Bureaucracy | 44 | 51 | 43 | 49 | 46 (35) |

Trust in institutions and people

Trust in other people, as well as political and social institutions, is generally considered to be an important indicator of social capital in democratic societies. Similar to respondents from other PPAMs in Europe, PVV Facebook supporters display very low levels of trust towards political and social institutions compared with their national compatriots (table 12).

On almost every measure tested (except for trust in the army), PVV Facebook fans were significantly less trusting than the Dutch public of all political and social institutions, which is a common trend across online supporters of many PPAMs. Of particular note is the low level of trust recorded in the European Union and religious institutions (both 13 per cent) and the press (31 per cent). Trust among PVV Facebook supporters in the mainstream media was fairly high (31 per cent) compared with other PPAM supporters (12 per cent), which might be due to the arrival of the populist broadcasters PowNed and Wakker Nederland (WNL) in the public broadcaster system in 2009. The percentage is nevertheless low by Dutch standards, with 60 per cent of the Dutch population trusting the press. Interestingly, trust in the government was also fairly high (36 per cent) compared with the average PPAM supporter (20 per cent), which might be accounted for by the fact that Wilders was still supporting the government at the time the poll was conducted.

Table 12 Extent to which PVV Facebook supporters and the Dutch general public trust institutions (n=335)

| Institution | Tend to trust | | Tend not to trust | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| | PVV Facebook supporters (%) | Dutch public (%) ⁴⁸ | PVV Facebook supporters (%) | Dutch public (%) |
| Army | 70 | 71 | 26 | 21 |
| Police | 48 | 73 | 50 | 25 |
| Justice and legal system | 38 | 65 | 59 | 32 |
| Trade unions | 37 | 59 | 59 | 30 |
| Government | 36 | 45 | 61 | 51 |
| The press ⁴⁹ | 31 | 60 | 65 | 37 |
| European Union | 13 | 42 | 84 | 51 |
| Religious institutions | 13 | 35 | 83 | 54 |

Asked whether they are inclined to trust other people in general, only 30 per cent of PVV Facebook supporters said they thought that most people can be trusted (table 13). This is around the average figure for PPAM supporters (33 per cent), but 32 percentage points less than the average for the Dutch general public (62 per cent).

Table 13 Extent to which PVV Facebook supporters agree that people can be trusted (n=335, national statistics in brackets)⁵⁰

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|--|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| In general most people can be trusted | 32 | 26 | 26 | 35 | 30 (62) |
| In general most people cannot be trusted | 46 | 57 | 54 | 43 | 48 (37) |

Responses to recent events

In 2010/11, Wilders was charged with criminally insulting religious and ethnic groups and inciting hatred and discrimination, based on his film *Fitna* and a number of articles he had written about Islam. He was acquitted of all charges in late 2011.

We asked respondents whether that decision has affected their view of the judicial process. Interestingly it had for a significant number of people: 35 per cent claim it had increased their trust in the system as a result (table 14).

Table 14 PVV Facebook supporters' response when asked whether they had more faith in the judicial process after the action against Wilders

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Under 30 (%) | Over 30 (%) | Total (%) |
|---|----------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| Yes, I trust it more | 38 | 23 | 38 | 32 | 35 |
| No, the lawsuit has not effected my trust | 50 | 60 | 53 | 53 | 53 |

We also asked respondents what they thought about Wilders' approach toward Islam. This was an open text question, and 340 people responded.

We categorised the responses as negative, positive or neutral. Overall, 89 per cent of respondents liked Wilders' response, 6 per cent disliked it, and 5 per cent were ambiguous or undecided.

It was clear that among Wilders' supporters both his views and his willingness to express them are highly regarded, partly because of the way they contributes to public debate:

Very brave and important. Many will not miss Geert Wilders if he dies or decides to stop his political career. But personally I believe that his voice in the current debate is indispensable. Other politicians do not dare — not even in other words than those used by Geert Wilders — to point to the dangers of Islam. They are either convinced that those [dangers] are not there or that they cannot be named; a kind of 'appeasement' politics.⁵¹

Luckily there are people like him, otherwise we would already have nothing to say any more in our own country.⁵²

This often includes linking Islam to broader worries, such as the future of Europe, and individual rights:

Totally agree! I am terrified that my children (daughters) and wife will have to wear headscarves because we, in our so-called democracy, are voting for an Islamic party. When more than 50 per cent votes for such a party the Sharia becomes reality! And that is not what we want, right?⁵³

Justified. Why is the left so keen to accept the Islam and its oppression?⁵⁴

Other respondents were far blunter in how they saw Wilders' position regarding Islam, and the dangers of Islamisation in Europe:

[Wilders is] sensible and true. Islam is intolerant of those who think differently, believe differently, or have a different sexual orientation.⁵⁵

Fine. Read the Qu'ran, Hadith, Sunna and Sharia laws for yourself. This ideology and its supporters do not belong in the Netherlands or Europe.⁵⁶

Very good and he should continue by all means. These are facts: Islam is a problem. Look at the Middle East, misery everywhere. But, above all, look at Europe. Sweden, where 100% of the rapes is [sic] carried out by Muslim youth. London, where entire neighbourhoods are transformed into Sharia zones and where Muslims too often get the last word. France, where Muslims cut off entire streets to pray and couldn't care less about the law. These are just some examples of a Europe that is changing due to too many Muslims.⁵⁷

Some respondents raised concerns about Wilders' statements and views — for example, over-generalising — while at the same time still supporting him:

It is important to point to this, however in my opinion Geert Wilders often carries on too far. He cannot talk about any subject without bringing in Islam and that is a pity.⁵⁸

[Wilders' view is] fine, the danger is not the Muslims, but the extremists who organise terror and anti-Western sentiments.⁵⁹

I think Geert Wilders is a good man who says things that many people think. But he should not point the Netherlands to the dangers of Islam, but to the dangers of extreme believing. Because extreme Christians and the like are dangerous too. There are enough people who do follow Islam in a good way and pose no threat to the Netherlands. I think he should not lump all Muslims together.⁶⁰

4 Why do people support the PVV online?

The preceding chapter provides some indication of why PVV Facebook supporters are drawn to the party, but we also wanted respondents to describe what motivates their support in their own words. This chapter presents our findings on respondents' answers to an open-response question asking why they supported the PVV. Out of the 335 total survey responses, just over half (188) answered this question.

Table 15 provides a breakdown of the different categories that we used to code and classify the responses, which we placed in multiple categories if deemed relevant. The three most common replies were identified with the party's values and anti-immigration stance. We discuss the most frequently cited categories below, and give examples of some of the responses PVV Facebook supporters gave.

Table 15 **Reasons given by PVV Facebook supporters for joining the party (n=188)**

| | Male (%) | Female (%) | Age 16-20 (%) | Age 21-25 (%) | Age 26-30 (%) | Age 31-40 (%) | Age 41-50 (%) | Age 51+ (%) | Total (%) |
|------------------|----------|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Group values | 35 | 52 | 48 | 48 | 38 | 34 | 18 | 48 | 39 |
| Integrity | 15 | 21 | 13 | 26 | 19 | 16 | 14 | 8 | 17 |
| Anti-Islam | 17 | 13 | 11 | 7 | 18 | 22 | 22 | 24 | 16 |
| Disillusionment | 16 | 15 | 6 | 16 | 18 | 19 | 26 | 12 | 16 |
| Anti-Immigration | 14 | 6 | 10 | 8 | 18 | 18 | 8 | 8 | 12 |
| Identity | 10 | 13 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 13 | 22 | 8 | 11 |
| Other | 12 | 3 | 16 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 4 | 10 |
| Anti-EU | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Economic | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 3 |

Group values

Responses were classified in this category when respondents had cited, in general terms, the values, principles, norms, beliefs, aspirations or ideas of the PVV as reasons for supporting the party. PVV Facebook supporters cited ‘group values’ as often as other PPAM (39 per cent).

Integrity

Responses were classified in this category when respondents had explicitly mentioned that Wilders or the PVV could be trusted to speak the truth; spoke admiringly of the honest, straight talking and courageous approach of the party; or believed party members were consistent in their convictions — 17 per cent of PVV Facebook supporters mentioned this — more than the PPAM average of 9 per cent. Integrity of the party was the second most mentioned reason for joining the PVV, whereas for PPAMs overall it was the sixth. It is interesting to note that it was especially important for 21–30 year olds.

Many respondents thought that the party makes promises and keeps them:

*Because for too long nothing has happened in the Netherlands. The PVV lives up to the promises they make; that’s something the other parties can learn from!*⁶¹

In particular, there was a sense that the party is willing to take on difficult subjects in an honest way:

*Because it is the only party that tells it like it is and does not kiss the asses of the other parties.*⁶²

*The only party that speaks about what many people go through and wants to do something about it. That is, the problems with in particular Moroccan and Turkish Muslim youngsters who bother people in groups. I have encountered this often enough myself, so I speak from experience.*⁶³

*Stricter against scum. Dare to name problems with foreigners and not participating in backroom politics.*⁶⁴

*For the first time since Pim Fortuyn I can actually relate to statements by a politician.*⁶⁵

Anti-Islam

Responses were classified in the anti-Islam category when respondents criticised Islam, Muslims or Arabs. Around one in six (16 per cent) respondents cited this as the reason for joining — a higher proportion than for supporters of other PPAMs.

Many of the comments suggest that Wilders’ views on Islamisation has been influential:

*Because I totally agree with Geert Wilders, for once something needs to be done about the poverty in our own country, instead of millions going to countries which you will never get back. I support stopping the Islamisation of our country.*⁶⁶

*This is the only party that does something about the advance of Islam and all consequences thereof... Soon you will have nothing more to say in your own country!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*⁶⁷

*Because this party is closest to rationality and personal responsibility. Plus, I am COMPLETELY fed up with Muslims and their ‘religion of peace’.*⁶⁸

Disillusionment

Disillusionment with mainstream institutions — the ‘protest’ vote — is often posited as a factor in driving support for PPAMs. Responses were placed in this category when respondents expressed disenchantment with major political institutions, with the political elite or with the direction of their country.

Around one in six (16 per cent) supporters of the PVV cited these as the reason for joining. Many felt, in particular, that the PVV was the best option for change:

Because the other parties are obviously blind and take the wrong decisions. They listen to the people when forming a new government, but the people should then shut up afterwards.⁶⁹

The failing of politics, the dying democracy and the establishment's failure in defending the (superior) Western values.⁷⁰

Other

Respondents sometimes gave reasons for joining the PVV that were not easily classifiable into the categories given above.

Some provided extremely long and detailed responses, which illustrated the diversity of opinion held by some supporters.

Here is an example:

Because I think that the process of integration and of sending back failed asylum seekers needs to be speeded up. And that one should better look who of the asylum applicants can contribute to the Netherlands and that those [who are able to contribute] would then be allowed to stay and that all the rotten apples should be thrown out of the country. If not, it will become an even bigger mess in this small country. I have also voted for the PVV because we are moving more and more towards the American system when it comes to governing in the Netherlands, and that needs to come to an end. My wife is sick and is being sent round and round; people who benefit from their personal [health] budget lose it; medicines that are too expensive are no longer provided for our sick people who then have to sort it out for themselves and just rot away; while money does go into the care of those poor asylum seekers who then also get a free taxi ride to drive them to a doctor's post, and they have to pay nothing for health care... Nothing completely nothing and our own people have to pinch and scrape and then we haven't even started about development cooperation and support to other countries. I propose to just close our borders again!!!! Shorten the process of getting status [for asylum seekers] to less than the 28 days it is now. Deport asylum seekers faster. Align the rules of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers with those of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service; when you apply for asylum you are

here as a guest. If you then do not follow the rules or the law, one warning and [if that does not do it] there will be a plane, boat, etc, to deport you out of the country. This does not mean opening up the gates [for the asylum seeker] to then decide where you will stay (illegality that is). Give short shrift to 'fortune seekers' and better focus on the people who really deserve help... That is all I would like to share... [Things in] the Netherlands are increasingly allocated in an uneven manner and things are becoming worse every day. Act upon it and listen to your own people, that is my advice.⁷¹

Some concerns were specifically about welfare — and aggressively anti-left wing:

Because the PVV is my last hope to save The Netherlands from the verge of collapse. By being/becoming member of the PVV I can oppose the 'left scum'. The thought of how the left destroys the Netherlands angers me. Two of my acquaintances do not work, a so-called disease named Asperger... Acting pitiful and getting labelled. Nice additional social benefits and they are now nicely on holidays. I am a driver, work my ass off and had a company accident which left me at home with 70 per cent of my minimum income... Goodbye holiday and extra money... Pfff it has gotten to the point that you can better act to be pathetic here... That is also why I vote PVV, iron-hard approach to the people who act pathetic and use social benefits.⁷²

Annex: Methodology

The methodology employed for the collection and analysis of this data is set out in detail in *The New Face of Digital Populism*.⁷³ We therefore limit this section to PVV-specific issues.

For *The New Face of Digital Populism* we collected data from Facebook supporters of nationalist populist political parties or street-based movements drawn mainly across Western Europe. We ran a Facebook advert targeted at supporters of all parties and/or party leaders' Facebook pages over the summer of 2011. Each advert invited Facebook supporters of the group in question to click on a link, which redirected them to our online survey.

Our campaign ran over a three-month period, with no single advert being available for more than six weeks. On clicking the advert, participants were redirected to a digital survey page hosted by the website Survey Monkey, which set out the details and purpose of the survey along with an invitation to take part. The size of target population varied from country to country, depending on the size of the Facebook membership of the group in question. Table 16 gives the details of the data collected for the survey on the PVV.

Table 16 Data collected for survey on the Partij voor de Vrijheid

| | Date of survey | No of specific Facebook interest groups targeted | Size of population targeted | No of unique impressions | Total Facebook link clicks | Total survey responses | Final data set |
|-----|----------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| PVV | Jul-Aug 2011 | 3 | 7,140 | 1,102,927 | 892 | 355 | 335 |

The ‘unique impressions’ column lists the number of unique occasions the advert was displayed on the target audience’s Facebook sidebar. The click per impression ratio was relatively stable, at just under 0.1 per cent. The click to survey completion ratio was around 40 per cent. This non-response rate may be the result of some respondents deciding not to take part in the survey on reading the consent form. Our method to correct for non-response rates is discussed in the full methodology given in *The New Face of Digital Populism*. The size of the final data set was lower than the number of surveys completed because we removed incomplete surveys.

Data analysis and limitations

We decided to use Facebook principally because the site is a popular mode of communication for supporters of many of the groups and parties we surveyed.

In order to increase the validity of our results, we applied a post-stratification weight, using the known demographics of the online population to correct the sample’s balance of gender and age in line with the makeup of the group as a whole. To do this, we gathered background data on the composition of PVV’s Facebook group membership using Facebook’s advertising tool (which is freely available for any user to access). We gave each participant a weighted value on the basis of the prevalence of their demographic profile (age and gender) in the population at large. Although we achieved demographic representativeness — which can correct for systematic age or gender related bias — it is possible certain attitudinal self-selection biases exist, because this was a self-select survey. It is with this caveat that the results are presented.

While the use of a post-stratification weight is an improvement on the use of unweighted data, it cannot be automatically claimed as a reliable basis for making inferences about the offline group. The use of social network surveys is subject to a well-known technical and methodological critique focusing on the nature of self-entry interest classification on Facebook, the lack of content

reliability on social networking sites, and the lack of internet access and usage in the broader population, all of which are capable of biasing the results of the survey.

Therefore, we take care not to claim at any point in the text that our sample represents or reflects the official views of the group, or indeed of its offline membership.

Throughout the paper, we compare the PVV Facebook survey results to the pan-European study results presented in *The New Face of Digital Populism*.

In the background chapter, we undertook a short literature review of Dutch and English language material.

In chapter 2, the gender and age of each of the groups in question were collected directly from the publicly available Facebook group level data using the advertising tool mentioned above. This provides the most accurate results on the Facebook membership for each group. Results related to education, employment and involvement in the group are based on our weighted results.

In chapter 3 we give weighted results and provide comparative data where they are available from the 2008 European Values Survey or Eurobarometer survey. Where the questions are not worded identically, or there were additional answer options, this is expressly identified.

Chapter 4 is based on the analysis of an open text question about why individuals joined the PVV. This open question allowed respondents to answer as they wished. A Dutch translator coded the responses. We reviewed the content of the responses and created nine main categories for the responses, with a tenth category ‘other’. Responses could fall into multiple categories. We removed data relating to respondents who were not supporters of the PVV.

Ethical considerations

As this research focused on adolescents over the age of 16, no Criminal Records Bureau check was necessary; consequently, none was sought. Similarly, it was not necessary for us to obtain informed consent from participant parents or guardians as Social

Research Association ethics guidelines suggest such clearance should not be sought and is not required where investigating participants aged over 16. We sought and gained individual informed consent from all participants, who agreed to a consent statement presented at the start of the survey – failure to sign acceptance of this statement prevented them from participating further in the research. Although we targeted the survey only at people aged over 16, a small number of individuals stated they were under 16 when responding to the question about age. We immediately deleted data relating to these people.

We stated on the Facebook advert that we were representing Demos, and were undertaking a survey of Facebook members of the group in question. On clicking the advertisement link, the participant was redirected to the survey landing page. On that page we pointed out that leaders of each group had been informed about the survey. Before running the survey, Demos emailed each of the groups in question to let them know about the survey. On the landing page we also stated that we would be letting the party in question know about the results before they were made public. Before release, we emailed the parties and groups in question with the results where they pertained to their members.

We did not brief participants fully on the study's aims before completing the survey in order to avoid the exhibition of demand characteristics. We provided only a broad overview of the research at the start of the survey, and gave more detailed information on the project's aims only after the last question had been completed. We provided the contact details of the lead researcher to all participants to cover the eventuality that they had questions not covered by the debrief notes, but few participants made use of it.

We told participants that they could withdraw from the research at any time before completion, as part of a preface presented alongside the consent statement. Later we reminded them of this right when they completed the survey via a paragraph in the debrief notes, offering the possibility of immediate withdrawal via a check box. No participants opted to withdraw in this way.

We observed ethical and legal considerations relevant to the storage and handling of data; all data were kept digitally encoded in an anonymous format, and we didn't store any data capable of identifying any participants.

We prepared for the eventuality that the research uncovered information with serious security implications, particularly relating to participant support for violence; we took precautions to absolve the researcher of moral responsibility towards the disclosure of information to agents of the criminal justice system by ensuring that the survey did not ask for precise details of acts of violence or illegal political protest. In order to preserve participant confidentiality (the deliberate exclusion by data capture systems of IP addresses) we removed from the researcher the means to identify and incriminate individual participants.

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- 43 Demos survey figure provided is the percentage of respondents who answered 'yes' to the question: 'Have you taken part in a political march, protest, or demonstration in the last six months'. The European Social Survey (Round 5) figure provided is the percentage of respondents who

- answered 'yes' to the question: 'During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? Have you taken part in a lawful public demonstration?'
- 44 Demos survey respondents were asked 'Please rank your three biggest concerns in order of importance from the list below'. They were able to provide a maximum of three responses. The Demos survey figure provided is the percentage of survey respondents who ranked the relevant concern as their first or second biggest concern.
- 45 Both Demos survey respondents and *Eurobarometer* (autumn 2011) respondents were asked: 'Will the next 12 months be better, worse or the same when it comes to your life generally?'
- 46 Both Demos survey respondents and *Eurobarometer* (autumn 2011) respondents were asked: 'What does the European Union mean to you personally?' Both sets of respondents were allowed to select multiple options.
- 47 Demos survey figure provided is the percentage of respondents who selected the option 'loss of cultural and national identity'. The *Eurobarometer* (autumn 2011) figure provided is the percentage of respondents who selected the option 'loss of cultural identity'.
- 48 Demos survey respondents were asked: 'To what extent do you trust the following: [institution]'. *Eurobarometer* respondents were asked: 'For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust [institution]'. In each case respondents selected either 'tend to trust' or 'tend not to trust'. The percentages cited for 'government', 'European Union', 'political parties', and 'the press' are derived from *Eurobarometer* (autumn 2011). The percentages cited for all other institutions are derived from *Eurobarometer* (autumn 2010) as they do not appear in the later survey.
- 49 Demos survey respondents were asked whether they trusted 'The mainstream media'. *Eurobarometer* respondents were asked whether they trusted 'the press'.
- 50 Demos survey respondents were asked: 'To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "In general, most people cannot be trusted."' Respondents were able to select any one of the following options: 'agree entirely', 'agree a little', 'disagree entirely', 'disagree a little' or 'neutral'. The Demos survey figures provided are the percentages of respondents who selected 'disagree entirely' or 'disagree a little', or selected 'agree entirely' or 'agree a little'. The national statistics provided are drawn from the European Values Study, 2008, <http://zocat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zocat.gesis.org/obj/fCatalog/Catalog5>. Respondents who took part in the EVS were asked: 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?' Respondents were able to select any one of the following options: 'most people can be trusted', 'cannot be too careful' or 'don't know'. The EVS figures provided are the percentages of respondents who selected 'most people can be trusted' and 'cannot be too careful'.
- 51 Eer moedig en belangrijk. Vele zullen Geert Wilders missen als kiespijn als hij overlijdt of zijn politieke carrière stop zal zetten. Maar, persoonlijk geloof ik dat zijn stem in dit debat momenteel onmisbaar is. Andere politici, durven ook niet met andere woorden als Geert Wilders, de gevaren van de Islam aan te duiden. Zij zijn of overtuigd dat deze er niet zijn of dat deze niet genoemd mogen worden, een soort van 'appeasement' politiek.
- 52 Gelukkig zijn er nog mensen zoals hem anders Hadden we nu al niets meer te vertellen in ons eigen land

- 53 Helemaal mee eens! Ik ben als de dood dat mijn kinderen(dochters) en vrouw hoofddoeken moeten gaan dragen omdat wij, als zogenaamde democratie, op een islam partij gaan stemmen. Wanneer meer dan 50% stemt op zo'n partij is de sharia werkelijkheid! En dat willen we liever niet, toch?
- 54 Terecht. Waarom accepteert links de islam en haar onderdrukking toch zo graag?
- 55 Zinvol en is waar. Islam is intolerant naar anders denkenden anderweegs gelovigen en sexueel anders georiënteerden.
- 56 Prima. Lees zelf eens de koran, ahadiths, sunna's en sharia wetten. Deze ideologie en aanhangers horen niet thuis in Nederland of Europa.
- 57 Erg goed en hij moet er vooral mee doorgaan. Het zijn feiten, de Islam is een probleem. Kijk in het midden oosten, ellende overal. Maar kijk vooral ook in Europa. Zweden waar 100% van de verkrachtingen door moslim jongeren worden verricht. Londen waar hele wijken nu omgetoverd worden tot Sharia Zones en moslims veel te veel voor het zeggen krijgen. Frankrijk waar moslims hele straten afzetten om te bidden en lak hebben aan de wet. Dat zijn slechts enkele voorbeelden van een Europa dat veranderd dankzij veel te veel moslims.
- 58 Het is belangrijk dat hierop gewezen wordt, echter draaft Geert Wilders in mijn mening te vaak door. Hij kan geen enkel onderwerp aanbreken zonder de Islaam ter sprake te brengen, en dit vind ik zonde.
- 59 prima, de moslims zijn niet het gevaar, wel de extremisten die op afstand terreur en anti-westerse sentimenten opzetten.
- 60 Ik vind Geert Wilders een goede man die veel dingen zegt die veel mensen denken. Maar hij moet NL niet wijzen op de gevaren van de Islam, hij moet NL wijzen op de gevaren van het Extreme geloven. Want extreme christenen of wat dan ook zijn ook gevaarlijk. En er zijn genoeg mensen die de Islam wel goed volgen en echt geen bedreiging voor NL zijn. Ik vind dus dat hij niet alle Moslims over een kamp moet scheren.
- 61 'Omdat er al te lang niks gebeurt in Nederland. De PVV belooft dingen die ze nakomen, daar kunnen andere partijen nog iets van leren!'
- 62 'Omdat het de enige partij is die durft te zeggen waar het op staat en niet de hielen van de andere partijen doet likken.'
- 63 Enigste partij die spreekt over wat vele mensen meemaken en er iets aan willen doen. Namelijk de problemen met met name Marokkaanse, Turkse moslim jongeren die in groepen mensen lastig vallen. Zelf ook vaak zat meegemaakt dus spreek uit eigen ervaring!
- 64 Strenger tegen tuig. Problemen met buitenlanders durven te benoemen, en niet meedoen met achterkamertjes politiek.
- 65 'k kan me voor het eerst sinds Pim Fortuyn vinden in de uitlatingen van een politicus'
- 66 'Omdat ik het helemaal eens ben met Geert Wilders, er moet eens wat gedaan worden aan de armoede hier in ons eigen land i.p.v miljoenen naar landen die je toch nooit terug krijgt. Ik ben voor het stoppen van de islamisering in ons land.'
- 67 'Dit is de enige partij die wat doet tegen de oprukkende islam met alle gevolgen daarvan... straks heb je niets meer te zeggen in je eigen land!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!'
- 68 'Omdat deze partij het dichtst staat bij rationaliteit en eigen verantwoordelijkheid. Plus, ik heb het HELEMAAL gehad met Moslims en hun "religie van vrede".'

- 69 'Omdat de overige partijen duidelijk blind zijn en de verkeerde beslissingen maken. Ze luisteren graag naar het volk tijdens het kiezen van een nieuw kabinet, maar daarna moet het volk haar mond houden.'
- 70 'Het falen van de politiek, de stervende democratie en het falen van de gevestigde orde in het verdedigen van de (superieure) westerse waarden.'
- 7 'Omdat ik vind dat de verwerking van de intergratie en het terugsturen van uitgeprocedeerde asielzoekers sneller moet gaan en dat men beter moet kijken wie van de asielaanvragen wat kan betekenen voor Nederland en dat die dan mogen blijven en al de rotte appels weer uit het land gegooid worden want anders word het een nog grotere zooi in dit kleine landje. Tevens heb ik voor de PVV gekozen omdatwe steeds meer naar het Amerikaanse systeem gaan wat betreft het besturen van Nederland en dat moet afgelopen zijn. Mijn vrouw is ziek en word van het kastje naar de muur gestuurd in de ziekenhuizen, mensen die baad hebben met hun persoonlijke bedrag raken het kwijt, medicijnen die te duur zijnkrijgen onze eigen zieke mensen niet meer en moetenhet dus maar bekijken en wegrotten, terwijl er wel geld gaat in de zorg van Zielige asielzoekers die ook nog eens gratis een taxi krijgen om naar een dokterspost moeten en hen hoeven niets te betalen voor de zorg... niets helemaal niets en ons eigen volk moet krom liggen en dan hebben we het ook nog niet overontwikkelingshulp en steun aan andere landen. Ikstel voor gooi de grens weer dicht!!!!!! Verkort de status verkrijging nogmaals als de 28 dagen van nu. Zet de uitgeprocedeerde asielzoekers sneller het land uit. Verander de regels binnen het justitiele COA naar de regels van het IND, dus je komt hier asiel aanvragen dan ben je hier te gast, houd je je vervolgens niet aan de regels of aan de wet 1 waarschuwing en dan met het eerste vliegtuig, boot, enz het land uit. Dit betekend niet de poorten open zetten en zie maar waarje blijft (iligaliteit dus) Korte metten maken
- met gelukzoekers en men beter concentreren op de mensen die echt hulp verdienen... zo meer wil ik er niet over kwijt... Nederland word steeds oneerlijker verdeeld en gaat steeds berg afwaartser... doe er wat aan en luister naar het eigen volk das mijn tip.'
- 72 Omdat de PVV mijn laatste hoop is om Nederland nog te redden van de afgrond. Door lid te zijn/worden van de PVV kan ik tegen dat linse tuig ingaan..wordt kwaad bij de gedachten hoe links Nederland kapot maakt. 2 Kennissen van mij werken niet, zo genaamt een ziekte genoemd asperge... beetje zielig doen en krijgen ze een stempel. Lekker aanvullende uitkering en zijn nu lekker op vakantie. Ik ben chauffeur,werk me de tering heb een bedrijfs ongeval gehad en zit nu thuis met 70% van mijn minimum loon... weg vakantie en extra geld... pff het is nu zo dat je soms beter zielig kunt doen hier.. ook daarom stem ik PVV, kei hard aanpakken mensen die zielig doen en gebruik maken van aanvullende uitkeringen.
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Nationalist populist parties and movements are growing in support throughout Europe. These groups are known for their opposition to immigration, their ‘anti-establishment’ views and their concern for protecting national culture. Their rise in popularity has gone hand-in-hand with the advent of social media, and they are adept at using new technology to amplify their message, recruit and organise.

Geert Wilders and his Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) in the Netherlands are perhaps the best known of these new movements, enjoying steady growth since being founded in 2004. In the 2010 parliamentary election, the PVV won 24 seats, which made it the third largest party in the Netherlands, and gave it a key role in keeping the minority government of Mark Rutte in office. The PVV places strong emphasis on the need to address immigration and what it sees as a failed multicultural policy, with Wilders being well known for his often incendiary remarks about Islam.

This report presents the results of a survey of Facebook fans of the PVV. It includes data on who they are, what they think, and what motivates them to shift from virtual to real-world activism. It also compares them with other similar parties in Western Europe, shedding light on their growing online support, and the relationship between their online and offline activities. This report is the fourth in a series of country specific briefings about the online support of populist parties in 12 European countries, based on our survey of 13,000 Facebook fans of these groups.

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