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**Deciphering the Right-Wing Populism Mosaic in the Netherlands:
Exploring Cultural Backlash, Economic Insecurity, and Spatial Diffusion Theories**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the root causes of right-wing populism in the Netherlands, emphasising Cultural Backlash Theory, Economic Insecurity Theory, and Spatial Diffusion Theory. The research looks at how these theories explain the rise of right-wing populism in the Netherlands and how geographical diffusion drives support for right-wing populist parties. The literature review highlights the fundamental theories but goes one step further by dividing them into subthemes. Cultural Backlash Theory is divided into exogenous and endogenous components, whereas Economic Insecurity Theory is divided into short-term and long-term economic insecurity.

Hypotheses based on these concepts are developed and empirically tested using regression models, ANOVA, and spatial analysis. The findings show substantial associations between endogenous Cultural Backlash Theory components, short-term economic insecurity, and right-wing populism, as well as differences in populist attitudes across urban-rural divides. This indicates that a lack of political trust and short-term economic anxiety drives the rise of right-winged populism in the Netherlands. Furthermore, less urban municipalities vote more for right-wing populist parties compared to urban areas. Overall, this work contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of right-wing populism in the Netherlands, providing suggestions for future research and practical policies.

Keywords: Right-wing populism, Netherlands, Cultural Backlash Theory, Economic Insecurity Theory, Spatial Diffusion Theory, Regression models, ANOVA, Spatial analysis, Urban-rural divide

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1. Introduction

Populism is becoming a more prominent topic in global politics, capturing the attention of both researchers and politicians (Wirth et al., 2016). To thoroughly engage with the theories explaining the rise of populism, we must first define the term precisely. According to Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017):

Populism is defined as a thin-centered ideology based on the assumption that society is fundamentally separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite." It contends that political life should ideally reflect the general will, or *volonté générale*, of the people. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017)

This fundamental knowledge paves the way for a more in-depth investigation of the elements driving the populist movement.

The rise of populism has led to a variety of discussions in academic circles, with theorists attempting to understand its fundamental roots and manifestations (De La Torre, 2015; Bergh & Kärnä, 2022). In most scholarly discussions, two significant hypotheses have emerged: the cultural backlash theory and the economic insecurity theory, proposed by Inglehart and Norris (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). While these theories provide valuable insights into the dynamics of populism, the scholarly community is still divided on which theory provides a more thorough explanation for its rise (Schäfer, 2021; Ausserladscheider, 2019).

During this academic debate, the study of populism has grown into a diverse discipline, distinguished by national comparison studies, case studies, and theoretical questions. However, reaching a definite consensus on the adequacy of one theory over the other has been difficult (Schäfer, 2021; Ausserladscheider, 2019). This difficulty underlines how intricate and situation-specific populist movements are. Indeed, since each nation is unique and because different social, political, and economic factors interact, the root cause of populism appears to defy easy labelling under a single theory that explains its emergence (Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022).

In light of this research setting, this thesis seeks to add to the developing area of populism studies through an innovative approach. Rather than sticking to a range of theories, this study aims to examine their components and assess their significance in understanding the rise of populism. By conducting an in-depth analysis of the political landscape in the Netherlands to the cultural, economic, and geographical elements that may have aided in the rise of populism, this thesis seeks to break down this complex mosaic of factors that have brought populism to the forefront, shedding light on the interplay between ideology, policy, and societal dynamics.

The Netherlands provides an interesting case study for this thesis. The recent parliamentary elections, marked by the victory of Geert Wilders' far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), ignited the interest of scholars and sparked heated debate across Europe (De Vrieze, 2023; Van Kessel, 2023; Schaart, 2023). With the PVV emerging as the largest party in the Dutch parliament, winning 37 seats, the election result highlights the transformations in the Dutch political landscape (Kirby & Holligan, 2023). In contrast to the elections of 2021, this transformation entails the victory of the PVV, the demise of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the introduction of the New Social Contract (NSC), and the establishment of the GL-PvdA alliance, which consists of the GreenLeft (GL) and the Labour Party (PvdA). In addition, Democrats 66 (D66) witnessed a decline in seats, while the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) had an increase. This indicates a significant reallocation of seats in the House of Representatives, with a tendency towards right-wing domination (NRC, 2023). As Wilders works to form prospective alliances, the consequences of this electoral activity echo not just in the Netherlands but throughout Europe (Schaart, 2023).

The PVV's election success mirrors a more significant trend of increasing populism in Europe, marked by anti-immigrant emotions, authoritarian opinions, and anti-establishment passions (Noury & Roland, 2020; Bergh & Kärnä, 2022). Wilders' anti-Islam rhetoric and suggestions for hardline measures, such as bans on mosques and Islamic headscarves, appeal to a part of the voters dissatisfied with conventional politics and concerned about the overflow of immigration (Damhuis, 2023; Verkiezingsprogramma, n.d.). Against rising concerns about immigration, diversity, and existential security, the PVV's election victory serves as an interesting case for a more nuanced understanding of the origins and dynamics of populism in the Netherlands (Damhuis, 2023).

In this thesis, I provide an in-depth study of the possible reasons for the emergence of populism in the Netherlands, focusing on the cultural backlash, economic insecurity, and spatial diffusion that are considered drivers for this phenomenon (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Florida, 2021). This research aims to uncover the attraction of populism and its ramifications inside Dutch society by studying the electoral environment, policy agendas, and societal divides. It strives to provide insights into the complex web of dynamics driving contemporary political processes in the Netherlands and their implications for European democracies, using empirical research and theoretical frameworks.

Therefore, the research question for this thesis is as follows: To what extent do Cultural Backlash Theory and Economic Insecurity Theory explain the rise of right-wing populism in the Netherlands, and what role does spatial distribution play in shaping support for right-wing populist parties? To answer this research question, this thesis begins with a review of the literature, which examines critical concepts and previous studies on cultural backlash, economic insecurity, and spatial diffusion as drivers of populism. The methodology section then describes the quantitative research approaches employed in this thesis. The results section presents the empirical data, emphasising key patterns and relationships. This is followed by a discussion section that analyses the findings in light of the theoretical framework and current literature, focusing on the implications for understanding the rise of right-wing populism (RWP) in the Netherlands. The thesis finishes by summarising significant findings, noting study limitations, and making recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

This literature study examines three theories that will be utilised to address the research question in this thesis. First is the cultural backlash theory (CBT), followed by the economic insecurity theory (EIT), and finally, the spatial diffusion theory (SDT). Their importance in recognising the rise of populism will be investigated, as each theory provides different perspectives into the fundamental mechanisms driving populist trends, providing light on the complex interaction of economic, cultural, and geographical elements.

2.1 Cultural Backlash Theory (CBT)

CBT results from a "silent revolution" within post-industrial societies, where younger, more educated generations prioritize post-materialist values such as environmentalism and individual autonomy. In contrast, older, less-educated generations associate these shifts with threats to their traditional way of life (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Cultural 'wars' between progressive and conservative ideologies have become more pronounced in Western democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and EU countries. This sparked a backlash among previously dominant groups, motivated by concerns about cultural displacement and perceived status loss. Notably, expressions of this reaction, such as the "Make America Great Again" narrative and Brexit, highlight concerns about demographics and cultural liberalism (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Inglehart and Norris (2016) suggest that the rise in support for populist parties is a reaction to major cultural transformations in Western nations. They argue that these shifts, particularly among the less educated and older demographics, have fueled polarisation, creating a wedge between generations.

Schäfer (2021) challenges this narrative by giving empirical evidence that casts the validity of CBT into question. Schäfer discovers minor generational polarisation in cultural attitudes and finds no apparent relationship between authoritarian principles and populist tendencies. Such findings call into question the direct link between cultural dissatisfaction and populist support, given Schäfer's argument for a more nuanced approach to the growth of populism.

Manunta et al. (2024) claim that while economic hardship and cultural reaction may serve as parallel explanations for populism, the former has more predictive potential for populist "thin ideology". They propose that CBT is mediated by identity crisis, indicating, like Schäfer, that a more sophisticated process is at work.

Ausserladscheider (2019) adds to this by arguing that, while financial status may no longer be the most crucial factor, cultural resentment of progressive principles, nationalism, and racism remains critical in influencing support for far-right parties. This approach emphasises the complex character of

populist appeal, including economic and cultural components. This emphasises that the evidence suggests that CBT is not the sole factor of populism, as academics such as Mols and Jetten (2021) and Manunta et al. (2024) have said.

Contrary to these arguments, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018) critically assess CBT's relevance to populism. They argue that while cultural contrasts between "the elite" and "the people" are essential in populist discourse, CBT in its current form fails to explain the different ideological bases of populist movements effectively.

Babst et al. (2024) add to the discussion by emphasising the link between views towards migration and support for RWP parties. However, they warn against equating xenophobia with cultural reaction, highlighting the need to distinguish between nativism and economic concerns.

Bajo-Rubio and Yan (2019) place the debate within the setting of illiberal democracy, arguing that RWP parties frequently promote conservative, nationalist agendas that contradict liberal democratic values. Their investigation highlights the ideological complexities of populist movements, which combine anti-immigrant attitudes with criticisms of liberal institutions.

In conclusion, the literature on CBT provides varying viewpoints on its importance in understanding the rise of populism. While some studies emphasise its importance in comprehending societal upheavals, others doubt its explanatory ability in light of empirical discoveries contradicting long-held notions. A complex approach considering economic, cultural, and political interactions is required to thoroughly understand populist occurrences.

2.2 Economic Insecurity Theory (EIT)

According to the economic insecurity theory, financial upheavals, whether caused by macroeconomic cycles, crises, or technical advancements, can foster anger and discontent, laying the groundwork for forming populist parties and sentiments (Margalit, 2019). This section dives into the scholarly debate over economic insecurity theory's relevance and empirical validity in explaining populism.

Manunta et al. (2024) present empirical data supporting economic suffering and cultural reaction as alternative causes for populism. However, they observe that financial hardship has a considerably more significant predictive effect for populist than ideology. They emphasise the importance of identity threat, mainly belonging, as a partial mediator of economic suffering and cultural reaction trends.

Contrary to widespread opinion, Jetten and Mols (2021) question the idea that economic distress is a simple explanation for populist support. They emphasise the complicated interplay between economic downturns and populist voting patterns, emphasising that while some individual-level analyses demonstrate an association between unemployment and populist voting, such findings are not consistently repeated across research. Furthermore, they advise against assuming a direct link between economic downturns and increasing support for populist parties, as macro-level national developments frequently do not match this assumption.

Ausserladscheider (2019) adds to this discussion by emphasising the transforming effect of economic development on public expectations and class relations. According to this viewpoint, economic disturbances may exacerbate resentment, creating fertile ground for far-right groups to rally support.

Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018) place economic insecurity into the larger context of globalization's winners and losers. They contend that, while economic developments linked with globalisation have produced winners and losers, the story of "losers of globalisation" channelling their economic anxieties into support for populist parties is not widely accepted. They warn against oversimplifying the link between economic insecurity and populist support, citing empirical data that paints a more complex picture at both the aggregate and individual levels.

According to Bajo-Rubio and Yan (2019), the rise of populism is not just driven by economic disturbances but rather by a variety of variables. They argue that, in addition to economic upheaval, cultural concerns caused by immigration and societal change have a substantial impact on populist rhetoric and support.

In conclusion, the literature on the EIT provides various perspectives on its significance in understanding the rise of populism. While some studies suggest the transformational effects of

economic upheavals on societal dynamics, others warn against oversimplifying the link between economic distress and populist support. It appears combating populism requires a thorough understanding of the interaction between economic, cultural, and political issues.

2.3 Spatial Diffusion Theory (SDT)

According to what I call spatial diffusion theory, which is more of a construct, political attitudes and behaviours spread across geographic regions, resulting in regional patterns of political preferences and voting behaviour (Florida, 2021; Dijkstra et al., 2019). Henceforward, I will refer to this construct as spatial diffusion theory, as multiple literary sources can be grouped under this umbrella term of spatial diffusion. This section discusses the scientific debate around spatial diffusion theory and its application to understanding populism in the Netherlands.

Florida (2021) presents empirical evidence of geographical sorting and regional divide in US elections, most notably in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. Support for Trump was concentrated in areas with blue-collar workers, lower income and education levels, lower density, and higher religiosity. In contrast, support for Clinton and Biden was associated with larger metropolitan areas, greater density, higher income and education levels, lower religiosity, and higher concentrations of immigrants and the LGBTQ+ population. This regional split demonstrates the role of geographic variables such as density in affecting political choices, with denser places likely to be more Democratic. Florida emphasises the fractal-like character of differences in knowledge-based capitalism, which appear across regional scales and lead to discontent on both the right and left.

De Vries (2017) advances the concept of the cosmopolitan-parochial divide, which extends beyond the typical economic left-right dimension and impacts voting decisions independently. This gap reflects people's experiences during financial crises, notably the Eurozone crisis, with the hardest impacted opting to favour parochial parties. This approach emphasises the importance of economic insecurity in creating political attitudes and choices, implying that regional diversity in political behaviour is inextricably tied to financial situations. Interestingly, this argument concentrates on pro or

anti-EU sentiments rather than the degrees of urbanity within a country and how they connect with voting trends.

The literature on spatial diffusion theory is scarce, but it emphasises the relevance of geographical conditions in determining political views and behaviours. The cosmopolitan-parochial gap and geographical sorting seen in election dynamics illustrate the intricate interaction of economic factors, cultural attitudes, and spatial surroundings in driving political change. Additional studies would be beneficial in shining light upon the methods by which geographical dissemination affects populist movements in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

In conclusion, the literature on economic insecurity, cultural backlash, and geographical diffusion theories offers a variety of viewpoints on the factors driving populism. While economic conditions, cultural attitudes, and geographical locations all contribute to the phenomena of populism, according to the literature, the interplay between these elements is complicated and multidimensional. The literature demonstrates this intricacy and multidimensionality of theories and concepts. For example, Manunta et al. emphasise that economic hardship and identity threat are better predictors of populist thin ideology (2024). Ausserladscheider highlights the transforming implications of economic progress on public expectations and class relations (2019). These varied viewpoints show that comprehending populism requires a sophisticated grasp of political, cultural, and economic interactions.

To fully comprehend the dynamics of populist movements, creating an integrated theoretical framework that combines the insights from different theories will be crucial. This theoretical framework will serve as the foundation for the following chapters, providing a complete study of the mechanisms driving populism in the Dutch setting. This paradigm will shed light on the complex sources of populist feeling by combining ideas from cultural backlash, economic insecurity, and geographical diffusion theories. Furthermore, by separating these ideas and studying their separate components, this method will give an in-depth understanding of the precise mechanisms driving the rise of populism in the Netherlands.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter begins by studying the cultural backlash theory, emphasising distinguishing between its external and endogenous components. It then digs into the economic insecurity theory, dividing it into short-term and long-term manifestations. Finally, the chapter discusses the SDT. The insights gained from the literature examined in the previous chapter and the material discussed below will be synthesised to inform the implications of these theories for the current study. Furthermore, they will serve as the foundation for empirical testing to assess their relevance and application in the context of this study.

3.1 Cultural Backlash

CBT contends that current populist movements in liberal democratic governments stem from comprehensive social reactions to progressive cultural advances (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). This idea is particularly relevant in the debate over whether cultural or economic factors influence people's support for RWP parties. According to this theory, older generations and less educated groups see cultural advancements threatening established values and practices, resulting in further sentimentality and opposition to change.

Over the last several decades, Western nations have experienced a significant increase in progressive ideas, as seen by greater support for post-materialist concepts like tolerance, diversity, and cosmopolitanism. However, this transition has prompted resentment among some who think their traditional values and way of life are being destroyed (Moran & Littler, 2020). This cultural reaction is multifaceted, encompassing negative attitudes towards immigration, diversity, and a perceived loss of national identity (Moran and Littler, 2020; Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Drawing on Verboord et al.'s framework (2023), this thesis will explicitly distinguish between the exogenous ("cultural") and endogenous ("institutional") dimensions of cultural backlash, clarifying the degree to which populism is shaped by deeply ingrained cultural values versus assessments of political performance (2023). In contrast, while some scholars focus solely on cultural backlash, this

study will delve into the interplay between the exogenous and endogenous dimensions, as outlined by Verboord et al. (2023).

3.1.1 Exogenous and Endogenous Dimensions

Exogenous components of cultural backlash theory primarily concern societal trends and value orientations. This element entails rejecting post-materialist and cosmopolitan principles such as environmental protection, peace movements, gender equality, and accepting different lifestyles (Verboord et al., 2023). Exogenous variables include ideological extremism and Euroscepticism, which indicate a more considerable dissatisfaction with the direction of societal development and the perceived power of elite players. This component is further characterised by adopting authoritarian principles and anti-elite views, which indicate scepticism towards established institutions and a desire for societal change (Ruzza, 2009; Verboord et al., 2023). This presents the first hypothesis:

H1(Exogenous): Higher levels of societal dissatisfaction with progressive cultural values (exogenous factors) are positively associated with support for RWP parties.

Endogenous factors, on the other hand, concentrate on internal issues, including political party support and individual assessments of institutional effectiveness. This factor emphasises the importance of cultural grievances and the loss of faith in governmental institutions and media players (Li, 2018; Verboord et al., 2023). Endogenous indicators include a sense of alienation and dissatisfaction among certain groups of society, particularly those who feel marginalised by societal changes and see a mismatch between their beliefs and the dominant cultural norm (Verboord et al., 2023). This presents the second hypothesis:

H2(Endogenous): Higher levels of dissatisfaction with institutional effectiveness (endogenous factors) are positively associated with support for RWP parties.

In essence, differentiating between the exogenous and endogenous elements of the cultural backlash theory sheds light on the fundamental mechanisms fueling populist support in liberal democratic cultures. This framework thoroughly explains the complicated interplay between cultural change, political beliefs, and institutional trust by studying social processes and individual views. This presents our third hypothesis:

H3(CBT): The combination of exogenous and endogenous factors (cultural backlash theory) has a positive association with support for RWP parties.

3.2 Economic Insecurity

Economic insecurity, which has emerged as another subject in debates on RWP, has frequently been related to fundamental changes in the global financial order in recent years (Rodrik, 2021; Ausserladscheider, 2019). It contends that financial instability caused by globalisation and technical improvements has sparked a populist reaction among those harmed by these changes, particularly marginalised parts sometimes referred to as the "losers of globalisation" (Margalit, 2019). This portion of the population, which is suffering increased economic vulnerability and disenfranchisement, is more likely to harbour resentment and discord towards the elite system, leading them to support right-wing parties that advocate protectionist and nationalistic policies (Margalit, 2019; Rodrik, 2021; Ausserladscheider, 2019).

While these theories of the populist vote provide reasonable explanations, they also pose theoretical and empirical questions about the extent to which economic shifts typically trigger populist reactions, as well as the relative importance of economic variables to populist emotion. Furthermore, it raises concerns about applying this concept in the case of the Netherlands. As a result, this thesis will employ Rebechi & Rohde's framework (2022) to divide economic insecurity into short-term economic insecurity (STEI) and long-term economic insecurity (LTEI), attempting to comprehend the complex interplay between economic insecurities and broader societal dynamics to elucidate the drivers of RWP comprehensively. The STEI will be highlighted first, followed by an explanation of the LTEI.

3.2.1 Short-Term Economic Insecurity (STEI) & Long-Term Economic Insecurity (LTEI)

According to Rebechi & Rohde (2022), STEI captures people's immediate or near-immediate experiences with economic vulnerability. It includes employment insecurity, fluctuating income, and financial uncertainty. As globalisation accelerates and economic systems adapt, individuals are increasingly vulnerable to fast changes in their economic circumstances. The reduction in economic opportunities, stagnating income, and unstable work create a growing sense of unease among many of the population (Rebechi & Rohde, 2022). This vulnerability can transfer into political sentiments favouring protectionist policies and nationalist language, especially when combined with concerns about competition from immigrants in the labour market (Rebechi & Rohde, 2022). This presents our fourth hypothesis:

H4(STEI): Higher levels of short-term economic insecurity are positively associated with support for RWP parties.

On the other hand, LTEI indicates ongoing concern caused by extended economic struggles and structural disturbances. It goes beyond the present economic situation to include more profound cultural developments that have degraded economic stability over time (Rebechi & Rohde, 2022). LTEI is caused by a decline in economic possibilities, a lack of social mobility, and the disintegration of the social safety net. Persistent economic misery, such as extended periods of an economic downturn in certain regions, may instil pessimism and disillusionment in populations (Rebechi & Rohde, 2022). Rebechi & Rohde define LTEI as chronic insecurity that leads people to support simple political narratives that blame economic problems on external sources like immigration or globalisation (2022). In line with LTEI and EIT in general, we will outline hypotheses 5 and 6:

H5(LTEI): Higher levels of long-term economic insecurity are positively associated with support for RWP parties.

H6(EIT): The combination of short-term and long-term economic insecurity (economic insecurity theory) has an association with support for RWP parties.

In conclusion, analysing economic insecurity in the context of RWP highlights the complex interplay between financial variables and political opinion. Although it is acknowledged that economic changes serve as triggers for populist movements, uncertainties remain regarding the specific processes and relative significance of economic factors. This thesis uses Rebechi & Rohde's paradigm, which distinguishes between short-term and long-term economic insecurity, to resolve these complications. This approach thoroughly comprehends the factors that propel RWP in the Netherlands by examining transient weaknesses and long-term structural disruptions. To conclude the EIT and CBT, we also have to present our final hypothesis regarding these theories, which is as follows:

H7(CBT + EIT): The combination of cultural backlash theory (both exogenous and endogenous) and economic insecurity theory (both short-term and long-term) has an association with support for RWP parties.

3.3 The Spatial Diffusion Theory

Albeit not a theory in the classic sense, a paradigm critical to understanding the emergence of RWP has emerged over recent years: geography (Florida, 2021).

Political events, such as Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 US presidential election and the UK's Brexit vote, have reignited the debate on political geography, emphasising the significant disparities in political preferences between the urban and rural areas (McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2021; Florida, 2021). This concept, commonly known as the "geography of discontent", gains significance in light of the pronounced spatial patterns observed in these events (McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2021; Dijkstra et al., 2019).

The Netherlands' distinctive geographical structure, with its dense population and mix of urban and rural regions, provides a unique case study (Algan et al., 2018; Van Leeuwen et al., 2020).

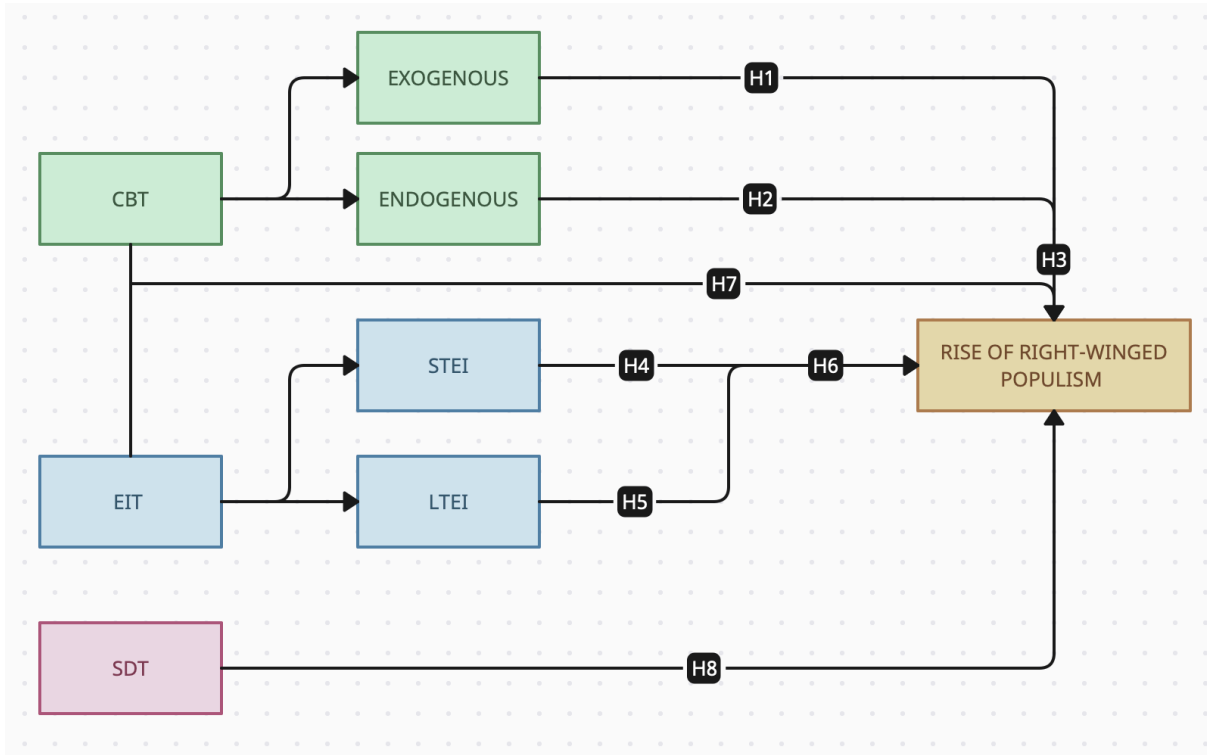
Preliminary observations into voting trends in previous elections indicate a possible geographical component to the development of RWP, implying a potential link between urbanity and political leanings (NOS, n.d.). The hypothesis of this possible link is supported by the "geography of discontent" theory, which suggests that populist reaction stems from perceptions of disenfranchisement and neglect in underserved areas (McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2021).

Academics like Florida and De Vries have emphasised how important geography is to comprehending populist feelings. Thus, this research investigates how the Netherlands' degree of urbanisation affects the country's support for RWP parties. This brings us to our final hypothesis:

H8(SDT): Higher levels of support for RWP parties are found in less urbanized areas.

An overview of the hypotheses is provided in Table A1 in the Appendix. Furthermore, a conceptual framework has been created to demonstrate the many theories, hypotheses and mechanisms that potentially contribute to the rise of populism (see Figure 1). The study will use the spatial diffusion theory to classify areas according to how urbanised they are to determine if voter support for these political movements correlates with where they are from. The methods used to examine this link will be described in detail in the methodology chapter, which will serve as the base for this thesis.

Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework



4. Methodology

The methodology for evaluating the CBT and the EIT will be described at the start of this chapter. It will then take a different method to investigate the SDT. The emphasis will be on defining the procedures for collecting and interpreting data and any other pertinent aspects of each theoretical framework.

4.1 Cultural Backlash vs Economic Insecurity

4.1.1 Data Collection

This study draws on data from the European Social Survey (ESS), a cross-national survey intended to monitor and analyse public attitudes and behaviours across Europe. The ESS dataset provides a comprehensive perspective on social, political, and cultural developments throughout time, making it an essential resource for studying the rise of populism in the Netherlands.

The dataset under investigation was methodically generated using the Datafile Builder (Wizard) available on the ESS website (ESS | Sikt, n.d). Variables in the dataset were chosen following the theoretical frameworks defined for examination, as shown in Table A2 in Appendix A. Most of the variables in this process were derived from the empirical research of Inglehart & Norris (2016), which served as the primary source of information for the selection criteria for the variables. If additional variables from the same dataset were added to the theoretical framework explaining populism's growth, they were included. These decisions were based on a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature and the variables' compatibility with the dataset.

Since RWP was not explicitly included in the ESS dataset, an additional variable was included in addition to the variables taken from the dataset. Thus, the populism index was employed to get a score matching the ESS round in the dataset (Populismindex, 2024). Experts from Timbro Epicenter created this index, which is comprised of experts from a network of European free-market think tanks (Timbro, 2020).

4.1.2 Data Analysis

During the first step of data cleaning, caution was taken to detect and replace non-meaningful values, such as 77 (Refusal), 88 (Don't know), and 99 (No response), with NA (missing data) or blank values. Eliminating these numbers eliminates possible biases in following analytical steps, allowing for a more accurate interpretation of results. This stage provides the foundation for creating a clean and reliable dataset, which is critical for obtaining meaningful insights into the phenomena under investigation.

To maintain sample representativeness and account for the complex survey design, this analysis applies post-stratification weighting, which includes the design weight. The post-stratification weight matches the sample with known population totals for crucial variables, improving the accuracy and reliability of survey-based estimates. Using post-stratification weight, this study aims to provide a detailed understanding of the causes driving the growth of populism in the Netherlands across several

temporal junctures. This methodological technique allows researchers to deal with differences in survey responses while capturing the larger socio-political milieu that fosters populist beliefs.

Following data weighting and cleaning, the data was standardised to a 0-100 scale for easier comparison. Given that the data ranged from 1-6, 1-5, 1-3, and so on, this change was necessary to create particular variables, such as those related to long-term economic instability. Standardisation was done by translating the variables into a consistent 0-100 scale, which aligns with the empirical work of Inglehart & Norris (2016), to achieve increased sensitivity, ease of interpretation, accuracy, and compatibility with statistical analytic methods.

Regression models were rigorously designed to investigate the relationships between variables relevant to this thesis. Simple and multiple linear regression analyses examined the complex links between cultural backlash, economic insecurity, and RWP scores. To give extensive insights into the determinants of RWP in the Netherlands, the results will be cautiously evaluated and presented using tables and detailed explanations.

4.2 Spatial Diffusion

4.2.1 Data Collection

An alternate technique was used because of the lack of a suitable variable in the European Social Survey (ESS) dataset to include the spatial diffusion theory directly. This entailed using the results of the 2023 elections to explore this part of the thesis. The method required the construction of a new dataset for every municipality in the Netherlands, which included the proportion of votes cast for each political party represented in the Dutch parliament's second chamber. Parties without representation in the second chamber, such as Splinter, BVNL, and LEF, were omitted from consideration. Election data was obtained from [Verkiezingsuitslagen.nl](https://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl).

Following the production of this information, municipalities were classified based on their urbanity levels, using Platform 31 categories and Central Bureau of Statistics guidelines. These classifications are: *Zeer sterk stedelijk* (very strongly urban), *Sterk stedelijk* (strongly urban), *Matig*

stedelijk (moderately urban), *Weinig stedelijk* (little urban), and *Niet-stedelijk* (non-urban)(Can et al., 2022). Each municipality was then granted a populist score based on their voting behaviour in three scenarios: Scenario 1: Utilizing the votes for PVV¹ and FVD²; Scenario 2: Incorporating the votes for PVV, FVD, and JA21³; Scenario 3: Including the votes for PVV, FVD, JA21, and BBB⁴.

While PVV and FVD have established populist ratings accessible from Poppa-data.eu, with PVV scoring 10/10 and FVD receiving 8.907/10, giving values to JA21 and BBB proved difficult due to their position as relatively young parties (Meijers & Zaslove, 2020). Despite this, JA21 and BBB were included in the research due to their populist sentiment, according to several scholars. After a comprehensive evaluation of their manifestos and critical assessments, ratings of 6.5/10 for JA21 and 5.5/10 for BBB were determined for this study. BBB scored 5.5/10 because, while juxtaposing rural residents against the pictured urban elite and casting doubt on scientific findings, it displays populist tendencies, but it does so in a way that is less antagonistic and more cooperative than the more radical positions of FVD and PVV (Delfgou, 2023; Van der Haak, 2023). As a result, its populism is less pronounced and conclusive. JA21, on the other hand, received a score of 6.5 out of 10, which indicates that it is a moderate populist party that places itself between the more radical PVV and FVD and the less populist BBB. It also references the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" less frequently (Nijhuis et al., 2023; Delfgou, 2023). The restrictions resulting from this decision will be thoroughly discussed in the limits section of this study.

The calculation of the populist score per municipality was derived through weighted averages of party votes. These exact formulas can be found in Appendix Table A3. In this design, the highest populist score is 1000, attained when the entire municipality votes for PVV, and the smallest value is 0, reflecting an absence of votes for PVV, FVD, JA21, or BBB. Lower ratings indicate fewer populist voting tendencies within municipalities.

¹ Party for Freedom, a far-right populist party (Delfgou, 2023)

² Forum for Democracy, a RWP and Eurosceptic party (Delfgou, 2023)

³ Right Answer 2021, a right-wing conservative and Eurosceptic party (Delfgou, 2023)

⁴ Farmer-Citizen Movement, a populist agrarian party focused on rural issues (Delfgou, 2023)

4.2.2 Data Analysis

This study used a multi-step approach to examine the geographical dynamics of RWP in the Netherlands, emphasising the effect of urbanisation levels on populist sentiment. The study used statistical analysis and data visualisation to investigate the association between urbanisation and populist ratings. All data analysis was carried out using R-studio.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the effect of urbanisation levels on populist ratings. This statistical test assessed if there were significant variations in populist attitudes between urbanisation groups. The F-statistic and its corresponding p-value were used to evaluate the significance of these differences.

Following the ANOVA results, Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test was used to make pairwise comparisons between urbanisation categories. This post-hoc test sought to find particular variations in populist scores across various levels of urbanisation, hence offering insights into the spatial distribution of RWP.

Visual representations, such as figures and tables, were used to demonstrate the regional distribution of populist ratings and explain the findings. Maps and graphs were utilised to highlight differences in populist feelings between situations and locations, allowing for a clearer understanding of the urban-rural gap in RWP.

5. Results

This section will first examine the CBT and EIT using linear regression models. With these models, I aim to determine the individual predictive potential of components drawn from these theories in understanding the growth of RWP in the Netherlands.

Following the regression analysis, the emphasis will be on investigating the geographic pattern of populist emotions using an ANOVA and comparing geographical maps and graphs. This spatial research seeks to reveal the geographical dynamics of RWP, offering light on how urbanisation levels and regional features impact the prevalence of populist concepts in various parts of the Netherlands. This section provides a complete understanding of the multiple reasons driving the rise of RWP in the Netherlands by combining regression analysis with geographical research.

5.1 Cultural Backlash vs Economic Insecurity

The rise of RWP in the Netherlands has raised questions about its fundamental causes. The first portion of the research question, to what extent cultural backlash and economic uncertainty contribute to the explanation of RWP's rise in the Netherlands, is the focus of this investigation. The study explores elements drawn from the CBT and EIT frameworks to answer this issue. These elements, which include the short- and long-term economic insecurity from EIT and the exogenous and endogenous aspects from CBT, are examined to determine their individual and combined predictive potential on the populist index. The individual and group linear regression models are displayed in Table 1. Models 1 through 7 are then discussed in this table.

Table 1 – Linear Regression Models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
	β -coefficient [95% CI]	β -coefficient [95% CI]	β -coefficient [95% CI]	β -coefficient [95% CI]	β -coefficient [95% CI]	β -coefficient [95% CI]	β -coefficient [95% CI]
<i>Endogenous</i>	1.08 [0.21 – 1.96] *				1.25 [-0.50 – 3.00]		0.55 [1.93 – 3.03]
<i>Exogenous</i>		0.88 [-0.19 – 1.96]			-0.20 [-2.02 – 1.62]		-0.00 [-2.32 – 2.32]
<i>Longterm</i>			0.65 [-1.24 – 2.53]			0.37 [-1.04 – 1.78]	0.02 [-2.31 – 2.34]
<i>Short-term</i>				1.31 [0.35 – 2.26] *		1.27 [0.23 – 2.30] *	0.86 [-1.02 – 2.74]
<i>Observations</i>	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
<i>R²/R² adjusted</i>	0.504/0.442	0.310/0.224	0.073/-0.043	0.555/0.499	0.578/0.457	0.509/0.369	0.621/0.318

*P-value <0.05

Individual Linear Regression Models

Models 1-4 were constructed to independently elucidate each component's predictive capacity, aligning with the theoretical frameworks of CBT and EIT. The research showed that the populist index and the endogenous dimension had a significant positive association ($\beta = 1.0842$, $SE = 0.3802$, $p = 0.0214$). With an F-statistic of 8.134 ($p = 0.0214$), the endogenous dimension and its components may

account for around 36.56% of the variation in the populism index. This research highlights institutional distrust and internal political grievances, which aligns with CBT's endogenous feature.

There was no significant difference in the populist index predicted by the exogenous components ($\beta = 0.8824$, $SE = 0.4655$, $p = 0.0946$). With an R-squared of 0.31, the model's explanatory power appears limited. This result aligns with CBT's external component, emphasising cultural norms and value orientations.

Moreover, the populist index was not substantially predicted by the LTEI ($\beta = 0.6493$, $SE = 0.8174$, $p = 0.45$). The model's R-squared was 0.0731, which denotes a poor ability to explain. This result is consistent with the EIT's long-term economic insecurity component, which includes persistent worries resulting from structural economic disruptions.

In conclusion, there was a noteworthy positive association between STEI and the populist index ($\beta = 1.3090$, $SE = 0.4143$, $p = 0.0134$). With an R-squared of 0.5551, the model had strong explanatory power. This result highlights first-hand experiences with economic vulnerability and is consistent with EIT's short-term economic insecurity component.

Multiple Linear Regression Models

The combined predictive value of the CBT and EI components was evaluated using models 5 and 6. The populist index was not substantially predicted by either the exogenous dimension ($p = 0.798$) or the endogenous dimension ($p = 0.136$) in Model 5, which did not show statistical significance (F-statistic = 3.629, $p = 0.08293$). Furthermore, this model lost the association between the endogenous dimension and the rise of RWP, in contrast to the individual model. This implies that the relationship between external and endogenous components could not entirely explain the growth of populism.

With STEI appearing as a significant predictor ($p = 0.0232$) while LTEI did not ($p = 0.5570$), Model 6 demonstrated statistical significance (F-statistic = 4.794, $p = 0.04881$). This implies that distinct effects on populist sentiment may result from long-term and short-term economic insecurity.

Ultimately, Model 7 included every element from the CBT and EIT frameworks. The Populism Index was not substantially predicted by any predictor variables, as indicated by their non-significant p-values, despite the model having a reasonable explanatory power (R-squared = 0.6212). Furthermore,

the non-significant F-statistic ($F = 2.05$, $p = 0.2255$) implies no discernible improvement in prediction from the combined model over the intercept-only model.

The endogenous dimension and short-term economic insecurity, for example, showed strong predictive power; however, the combined models could not yield clear proof that the CBT and EIT frameworks effectively explained the rise of RWP in the Netherlands. For an in-depth understanding of the factors contributing to populism in the Dutch context, further research may be necessary to examine new predictors and improve theoretical frameworks.

5.2 Urban-Rural Divide

Statistical Tests

An ANOVA was used to determine the effect of urbanisation levels on populist scores in the Netherlands. The results showed a statistically significant variation in populist ratings across urbanisation categories (Table 2). This suggests that urbanisation levels have a visible impact on the prevalence of RWP views among the general population.

Table 2 - ANOVA

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sum Sq</i>	<i>Mean Sq</i>	<i>F value</i>	<i>Pr(>F)</i>
<i>Scenario 1</i> ⁵	4	54641	13660	3,276	0,0118*
<i>Scenario 2</i> ⁶	4	55646	12912	3,327	0,0108*
<i>Scenario 3</i> ⁷	4	185098	46275	10,720	3,45E-08*

*Statistically significant

After the significant ANOVA results, the HSD test was employed to conduct pairwise comparisons between urbanization categories. The aim was to identify specific differences in populist scores among different levels of urbanization. Tukey's HSD test revealed many significant variations

⁵ Scenario 1: PVV, & FVD

⁶ Scenario 2: PVV, FVD, & JA21

⁷ Scenario 3: PVV, FVD, JA21 & BBB

between urbanisation groups, shedding light on the geographical dynamics of RWP in the Netherlands, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3 - TUKEY HSD

TUKEY HSD

SCENARIO 1		SCENARIO 2		SCENARIO 3	
Urbanity	<i>P adjusted</i>	Urbanity	<i>P adjusted</i>	Urbanity	<i>P adjusted</i>
Not – Moderate	0.9999936	Not – Moderate	0.9999996	Not – Moderate	0.1677040
Strong – Moderate	0.9999912	Strong – Moderate	0.9999971	Strong – Moderate	0.8794263
Little – Moderate	0.9678890	Little – Moderate	0.9714448	Little – Moderate	0.1503672
Very Strong – Moderate	0.0205022*	Very Strong – Moderate	0.0182396*	Very Strong – Moderate	0.0005777*
Strong – Not	0.9999073	Strong – Not	0.9999850	Strong – Not	0.0199364*
Little – Not	0.9893064	Little – Not	0.9874000	Little – Not	0.9913328
Very Strong – Not	0.0289969*	Very Strong – Not	0.0281173*	Very Strong – Not	0.0000010*
Little – Strong	0.9512636	Little – Strong	0.9604313	Little – Strong	0.0090048
Very Strong – Strong	0.0251177*	Very Strong – Strong	0.0215742*	Very Strong – Strong	0.0066534*
Very Strong – Little	0.0032680*	Very Strong – Little	0.0029627*	Very Strong – Little	0.0000003*

*Statistically significant $p < 0.05$

The most striking finding was a considerable difference in populist ratings between the most urban (Very Strong) and least/less urban groups. Comparisons between Very Strong Urban and Moderate Urban (p-value = 0.0205, 0.0182, and 0.0006), Not Urban (p-value = 0.029, 0.0281, and 0.000001), Strong Urban (p-value = 0.0251, 0.0216, and 0.0067), and Little Urban (p-value = 0.0033, 0.00296 and 0.0000003) all revealed statistically significant disparities in populist sentiments. This shows that more urbanised areas have significantly greater levels of RWP than less urban areas.

While the emphasis was on comparing the most and least urban regions, no significant differences were found between specific pairings of less urban categories. For example, comparisons between Not Urban and Moderate Urban, Strong Urban and Little Urban, and Moderate Urban Stedelijk and Little Urban Stedelijk yielded no statistically significant differences in populist ratings. This suggests that the urban-rural split is principally seen in the distinction between highly urbanised areas and all other groups.

Furthermore, the number of differences differed between comparisons, with the discrepancy between Very Strong Urban and Little Urban exhibiting the most remarkable difference. This implies

that urbanity significantly impacts RWP beliefs, with the least urban regions having the most significant levels of populism.

Geographical Populist Sentiment Distribution

Figures 2, 3, and 4 examine populist ratings among Dutch municipalities based on voting behaviour. These data shed light on the spatial distribution of populist attitudes under various scenarios, revealing differences in populist scores based on including certain political parties in the computations.

In Figures 2 and 3, which depict scenarios 1 and 2, respectively, when JA21 was used to calculate the populist score, there is little to no visible variation between municipalities. This implies that the introduction of JA21, an RWP party, has no significant impact on the general distribution of populist sentiment in the Netherlands.

Figure 3 - Spatial Distribution Scenario 1

Figure 2 - Spatial Distribution Scenario 2

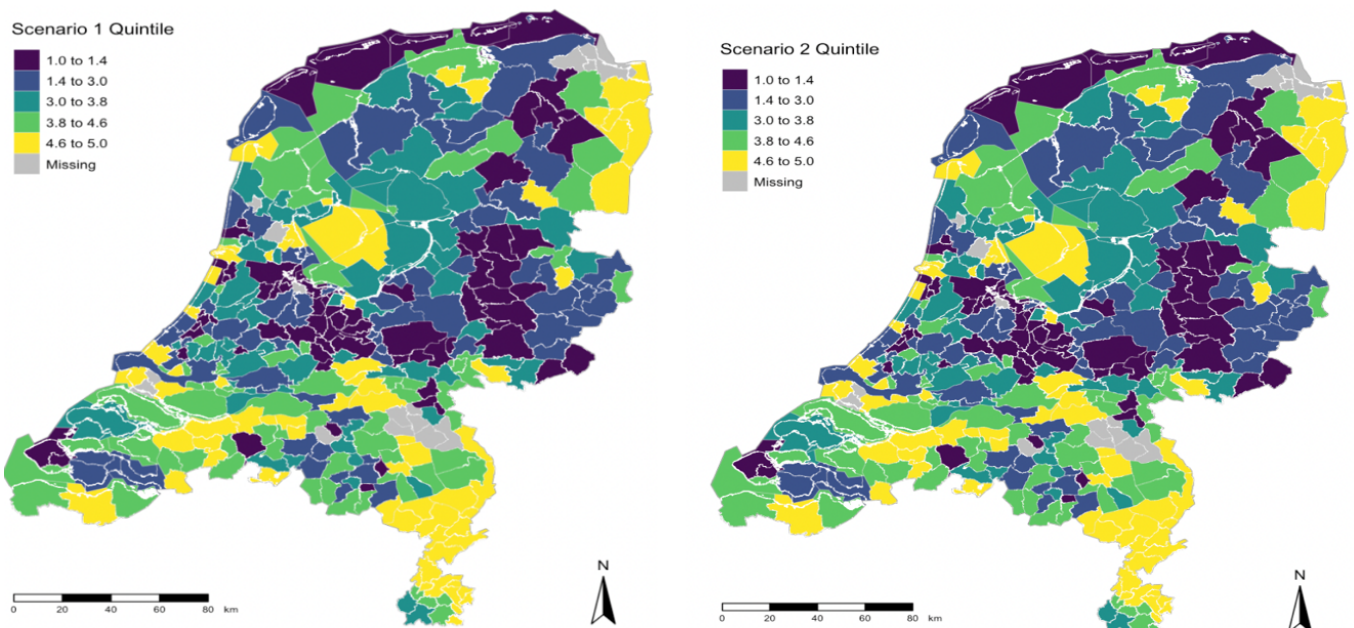


Figure 2: Populist scores among Dutch municipalities based on voting behaviour, scenario 1 (PVV, FVD). Figure 3: Populist scores among Dutch municipalities based on voting behaviour, scenario 2 (PVV, FVD, JA21). A score of 1 reflects low populist voting scores, and 5 reflects high populist voting scores.

However, when BBB, which is thought to tilt towards populist attitudes, is included in the calculation (Figure 4)⁸, intriguing patterns emerge. Populist scores tend to be lower in the "Randstad" region, which includes Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague, as well as other heavily urbanised districts in the Netherlands' west. In contrast, the country's southern and eastern areas have greater populist scores.

Overall, Figures 2, 3, and 4 provide a first insight into the spatial distribution of populist scores throughout Dutch municipalities, stressing the need for more research to fully understand the underlying factors creating populist emotions across different areas of the country.

Figure 4 - Spatial Distribution Scenario 3

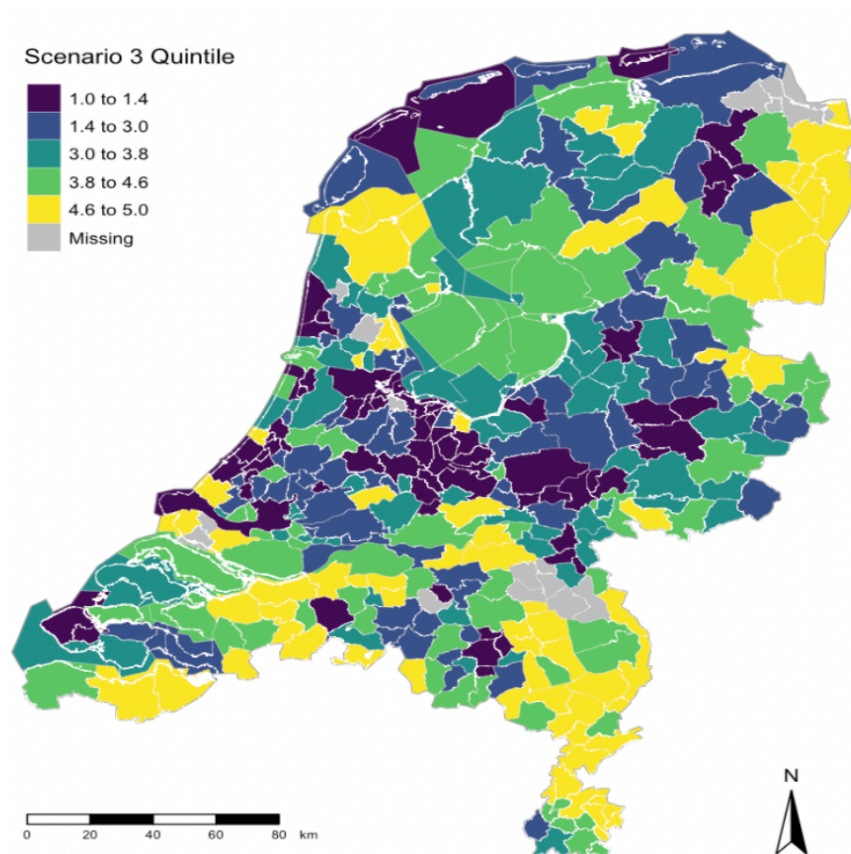


Figure 4: Populist scores among Dutch municipalities based on voting behaviour, scenario 3 (PVV, FVD, JA21, BBB). A score of 1 reflects low populist voting scores, and 5 reflects high populist voting scores.

⁸ The spatial distribution maps shown in this section show the official municipal boundaries of the Netherlands. As a result, bodies of water, such as the IJsselmeer, are included in the computation and depicted in color on the maps.

Comparison of models

The geographical dynamics of RWP in the Netherlands were studied using an analysis of populist scores at various degrees of urbanisation. Figure 5 depicts the variance in populist ratings from the least to the most urban locations, as seen in scenario 3. This scenario considered the vote patterns of key RWP parties such as BBB, PVV, JA21, and FVD, offering insights into municipalities' populist tendencies.

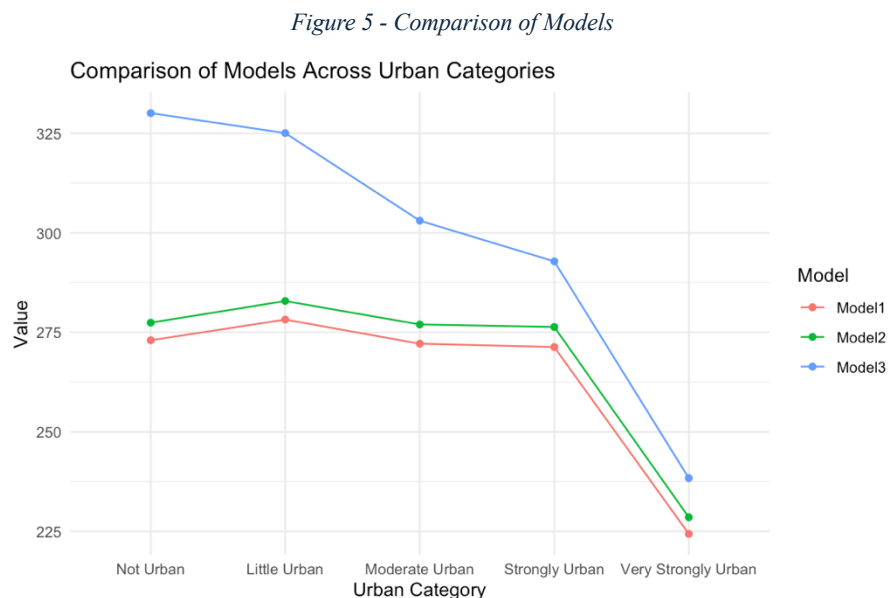


Figure 5 shows an apparent fall in populist ratings as urbanisation levels grow. This tendency is constant across all three models tested, demonstrating a strong link between urbanisation and RWP. Notably, the most urban category and other urbanisation levels differ significantly in all scenarios, emphasising the importance of urban-rural differences in fostering populist emotions.

As described above, the results in Figure 5 are supported by the statistical analyses performed using ANOVA and Tukey's HSD test. These studies found a statistically significant difference in populist scores across urbanisation categories, with more urbanised regions having much greater levels of RWP than less urban areas.

Furthermore, even when the individual parties (BBB, PVV, (JA21)) are excluded, the significant disparity between the most urban group and other urbanisation levels persists. This suggests that the observed urban-rural difference in populist sentiments goes beyond specific party memberships, emphasising the broader spatial dynamics that underpin RWP in the Netherlands.

Overall, the data in Figure 5 provide persuasive evidence of regional heterogeneity in RWP, with urbanisation levels significantly impacting populist beliefs. These findings highlight the necessity of considering the geographical dimension when understanding the causes of populism, and they have consequences for policy initiatives targeted at tackling populist movements in modern democracies.

6. Discussion

This chapter starts by interpreting the results. It seeks to give a complete understanding of the reasons for RWP's rise in the Netherlands. The discussion is organised to analyse the CBT and the EIT, focusing on their individual and combined predictive power. It investigates the spatial distribution of populist feelings between urban and rural areas, offering insights into geographic implications on political beliefs. Finally, the chapter explores the study's limitations and implications and makes recommendations for future research and policies.

6.1 Interpretations

6.1.1 Cultural Backlash and Economic Insecurity

The results of the separate simple linear regression models and the ensuing multiple linear regression models provide insight into how successfully the CBT and EIT components predicted the rise of RWP in the Netherlands.

Model 1 – Endogenous Factors of CBT and Populism.

Commencing with the individual models, the research shows a significant positive association between the populist score and the endogenous sub-theory within CBT, which is consistent with the internal political grievances, and therefore H2 is accepted. The finding could be justified by the political trust issue that affects Dutch society. Populist attitudes and parties flourish in an environment where there is mistrust of political establishments and authority (Li, 2018).

Similar to other situations, political mistrust in the Netherlands encourages non-institutionalized engagement, which populist parties might take advantage of. Populist parties could

change their discourse and style of governance to appeal to disgruntled citizens, capitalising on the increasing disenchantment of the political system (Masala, 2020). This is often the supply-demand dynamic within populism that fits perfectly within this scenario. The capacity to galvanise disgruntled people and direct their resentment towards the establishment is a crucial electoral advantage for populist parties, facilitating their notable ascent in Dutch politics (Masala, 2020; Li, 2018).

Model 2 (Exogenous Factors of CBT and Populism) & 3 (LTEI Factors of EIT and Populism)

Conversely, the rise of RWP was not significantly predicted by the exogenous components or the LTEI; therefore, H1 & H5 are rejected. This result aligns with the cultural patterns and values emphasised by the external aspect of CBT and the persistent worries resulting from structural economic disruptions covered by the long-term economic insecurity element of EIT, respectively.

This could be because immigration is still a major issue for RWP parties, mainly because it stirs up resentment and anxiety. Nevertheless, the reaction to immigration is part of a larger cultural backlash against globalisation and progressive values (Podobnik et al., 2017). This broader social tendency, which is covered by the exogenous feature of CBT, might help to explain why immigration by itself is not a reliable indicator of the long-term rise of RWP in the Netherlands but rather an igniting factor (Shehaj et al., 2019; Benabbes & Dib, 2023).

Moreover, the following mechanism might account for the non-significant relationship between the rise of RWP and LTEI. Statistical models may not instantly show how long-term economic uncertainty affects RWP. Populist feelings can be shaped by the interaction of economic instability with several socio-political elements, such as institutional discontent and cultural reaction (Guiso et al., 2024). Particularly in the Dutch context, this intricate interaction may lessen the LTEI's direct predictive potential in predicting the growth of RWP.

Model 4 - STEI Factors of EIT and Populism

On the other hand, STEI showed a significant positive association with the populism index, consistent with the short-term economic fragility that the EIT's short-term economic insecurity

component highlights; therefore, H4 is accepted. This association can be explained through the mechanism of economic anxiety and its close relation to economic insecurity (Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022).

According to Oxendine (2019), feelings of status anxiety, low government confidence, and views of systemic unfairness are all fueled by economic inequalities and insecurity, which makes it easier for populist ideologies to gain traction. Populist politicians capitalise on these fears by pledging to overthrow dishonest elites and reinstate the status that has been lost, which resonates powerfully with those who are facing financial uncertainty. As a result, there is a feedback loop whereby economic instability feeds support for populism, eroding democratic trust and social cohesiveness (Oxendine, 2019).

Applying this concept to the US, Agostinone-Wilson (2020) demonstrates how support for populist politicians is driven by concerns about living standards and downward mobility, especially among those suffering economic uncertainty. Because populist politicians frame economic struggles against believed dangers from immigrants and minorities, these economic worries get entwined with fears of cultural and ethnic identity. This narrative generates cultural discontent and economic anxiety, increasing the attractiveness of populist groups (Agostinone-Wilson, 2020).

Consequently, how economic insecurities, highlighted by STEI, are framed culturally and politically exploited by populist politicians might account for the positive association between STEI and populism. Populists successfully take advantage of economic disruptions' psychological and social repercussions, preying on the weaknesses of those facing financial instability to win support for their objectives.

Model 5 & 6 – CBT individually and EIT individually

Turning to the multiple linear regression models, Model 5 failed to show statistical significance, indicating that the rise of populism might not be entirely explained by the interplay between exogenous and endogenous dimensions on its own; therefore, H3 is rejected. By contrast, Model 6 demonstrated statistical significance, in which short-term economic insecurity significantly predicted populist

sentiment, while long-term economic insecurity did not. Therefore, H6 is rejected since this research does not entirely prove the hypothesis. Model 6 examined the combined influence of both LTEI and short-term economic insecurity (STEI) instead of the individual effect of solely STEI and LTEI in models 3 and 4. This suggests that the impact of economic insecurity on populist sentiment may differ.

When taken together, the decrease or inhibition of the individual impacts of each dimension may cause the endogenous factor's lack of significance in Model 5 when paired with the exogenous model. Furthermore, the effects of the endogenous dimension may be hidden or confounded by the exogenous components, reducing their statistical significance. This emphasises how crucial it is to thoroughly analyse how many dimensions and factors interact to comprehend the dynamics of populism.

In Model 6, short-term economic insecurity emerges as a significant predictor, while long-term economic insecurity does not demonstrate statistical significance. This suggests that, compared to structural economic challenges over time, immediate economic concerns may have a more immediate and noticeable impact on populist sentiment. This could be due to the immediate nature of short-term economic effects, which might make them more evident to people and, as a result, more potent in influencing their political beliefs and actions (Guiso et al., 2024). People could be more prone to react to short-term concerns. More permanent and societal structural concerns like income inequality or globalisation could raise concerns other than inflation or job losses, directly impacting their everyday lives (Guiso et al., 2024).

Model 7 – CBT & EIT combined

Finally, Model 7 combined all CBT and EIT framework components, but there was no association with the populism index; therefore, H7 was rejected. This implies that although certain elements, like the endogenous dimension and short-term economic insecurity, showed robust predictive ability, the combined models could not prove that the CBT and EIT frameworks successfully explained the rise of RWP in the Netherlands.

Multiple viewpoints on CBT's role in explaining the rise of populism can be found in the literature; some research highlights the methodology's usefulness in understanding societal upheavals, while others doubt its capacity to explain the phenomenon. Comparably, the literature on EIT presents a range of viewpoints regarding its importance in comprehending the rise of populism, emphasising how economic disruptions alter societal dynamics and issue a warning against oversimplifying the relationship between financial hardship and populist support (Guiso et al., 2024).

In summary, the results of the regression models highlight the intricate interactions between political, cultural, and economic elements that have potentially fueled the rise of RWP in the Netherlands when analysed in light of the research on CBT and EIT. Among the examined regression models, Model 1 showed a significant association between endogenous factors and populism. Furthermore, Model 4 showed a significant association between populism and STEI. Model 6 demonstrated some degree of success, underscoring the importance of STEI in explaining the rise of right-winged populism. Nevertheless, the results of Models 2, 3, 5, and 7 were not statistically significant, suggesting that there is minimal explanatory capacity to explain the factors that promote populism. These results imply that future studies should focus on expanding the pool of predictors to investigate and strengthen theoretical frameworks.

6.1.2 Spatial Diffusion

The ANOVA and HSD test results about the differences in populist sentiment across urban and rural areas urge one to reflect critically on the concepts from the literature on spatial diffusion. The statistically significant variance in populist ratings within urbanisation groups is consistent with the idea put out by spatial diffusion, which holds that political beliefs diffuse geographically, giving rise to unique voting and political preference patterns. Due to the statistically significant findings regarding the rural-urban divide, H8 is accepted.

Florida emphasises how geographic factors, such as population, influence political decisions (2021). The results of this study align with the geographical divide seen in US elections when support for various candidates is concentrated in areas with unique socioeconomic features. RWP attitudes are

concentrated in less urbanised regions. Florida's theory on the fractal structure of regional differences in knowledge-based capitalism offers one answer that could potentially be applied (Florida, 2021).

Florida's (2021) findings in the United States and their applicability to the Netherlands demonstrate parallels in the impact of the urban-rural difference on political attitudes. Geographic characteristics like urbanity are linked to political preferences, especially in electoral conditions. In the Netherlands, like in the United States, urbanisation levels significantly influence the support for RWP notions, with non-urban regions showing higher levels of support. This urban-rural divide highlights geography's critical role, providing essential insights into the universal drivers of populism and the mediating effect of spatial variables on political attitudes and behaviours.

One potential explanation for this rural-urban divide argues that with their societal norms and feeling of authenticity, rural areas might serve as an ideal environment for anti-politics and support for populist parties (Förtner et al., 2020). Additionally, the literature mirrored the findings in the Netherlands regarding the impact of socioeconomic disparities and the decline of public services in peripheral regions on residents' feelings of discontent and populist sentiments. These findings regarding the dichotomy between urban and rural populist sentiments are consistent with similar patterns in neighbouring or Western European countries (Förtner et al., 2020; Bourdin & Torre, 2022).

The substantial differences in populist assessments across highly urbanised and less urbanised regions highlight the complex interplay between populist views and urban-rural divides. The results imply that the geographical dimension, particularly urbanisation levels, plays a significant role in driving variations in populist sentiments within a country, even though the literature on spatial diffusion theory emphasises the significance of economic conditions and cultural attitudes in shaping political views (Bourdin & Torre, 2022).

In conclusion, combining the results obtained from this investigation and the perspectives gained from spatial diffusion literature enhances the comprehension of the elements contributing to the rise of RWP in the Netherlands. In this section, we have rejected and accepted a set of hypotheses; however, due to many hypotheses, an overview is provided before moving on to the limitations. Therefore, Table 4 outlines the accepted and rejected hypotheses. This table and Table A1 in the Appendix can serve as a reminder of the most important findings.

Table 4 - Accepted/Rejected Hypotheses

Rejected/Accepted	Hypotheses
Accepted	H2, H4, & H8
Rejected	H1, H3, H5, H6, & H7

6.2 Limitations

This thesis has several limitations related to the research approach and the available literature on particular subjects. The primary source of methodological constraints is the timeframe selected for studying CBT and EIT. The ESS dataset, which covers 2002 to 2022, does not adequately represent the most critical year for the Netherlands, especially given the notable changes in RWP shown by the PVV's electoral triumph in 2023. This restriction may help explain the low significance level demonstrated in the exogenous component, mainly because immigration was a major issue in the most recent elections and is a staple of RWP rhetoric. Additional study is required to determine if these electoral changes affect the political landscape or if other variables have a greater impact.

Another methodological constraint is the absence of an all-inclusive populism indicator designed exclusively for the Netherlands. Current indices generally depend on election outcomes, which happen infrequently (usually every four years), making it challenging to measure yearly fluctuations in populist sentiment precisely. A more sophisticated method that considers populist positions derived from manifestos and professional evaluations may offer a more accurate picture of populism's state in a particular year. Therefore, I recommend creating such an index for better analysis.

Furthermore, there could be limitations regarding the variables used for CBT and EIT depending on the availability of the ESS dataset. The subjective nature of variable inclusion may not fully capture the core of each theory, creating possible bias and lowering the explanatory value of the models despite efforts to match variable selection with known literature.

Moreover, subjectivity is included in the research by assigning self-assessment populism ratings to parties such as JA21 and BBB based on their populist inclinations. Although ratings have been chosen by carefully evaluating manifestos and academic opinions, different evaluations may

provide different outcomes. Furthermore, the lack of updated information about parties such as BBB in well-established databases makes evaluating their populist position much more complex, which might affect the accuracy of the findings.

The dataset for SDT analysis was created by manually assembling the voting percentages from the 2023 elections, which presents another limitation. The potential for typographical mistakes during data entry increases bias and might compromise the accuracy of the findings.

Finally, one significant restriction is the lack of research on the role of urbanisation in the Netherlands as a populist catalyst. The country's high population density suggests that urbanisation processes may significantly influence political beliefs. Nonetheless, the lack of adequate research in this area restricts investigating its possible impact on populist attitudes in the Dutch setting.

6.3 Implications

The study's findings reveal valuable new information on the components that contributed to the rise of RWP in the Netherlands. By examining their individual segments, I clarified CBT, EIT, and SDT's potential to anticipate populist sentiments.

This study would benefit policymakers, providing crucial information on how to address the rise of populism effectively. The significant positive association between the endogenous components of CBT and populist support emphasises the necessity of rebuilding political trust. Furthermore, the vital link between STEI and populist attitude demonstrates the rapid influence of economic anxiety on political behaviour. Policymakers should prioritise measures that give immediate economic relief since this can help reduce the short-term economic anxieties that fuel populist support, resulting in a more stable and equal society. Finally, the study emphasises the importance of geography, namely the urban-rural split, in forming political perspectives. This would be the final significant consideration for policymakers.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study enhances the understanding of the various drivers of RWP. This study confirms earlier results on the importance of political trust and short-term economic insecurity and sheds additional insight into the geographical features of populist

support. Policymakers may establish more effective methods to address the rise of RWP and promote democratic stability in the Netherlands and worldwide by addressing the core causes of political distrust, economic insecurity, and geographical disparities.

Overall, this thesis contributes to theoretical discussions on populism. It is feasible to counteract the factors that fuel RWP and produce a more inclusive and stable democratic society using a comprehensive strategy considering political, economic, and geographical elements.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, interpretations, and implications, several suggestions are made to better understand and address the rise of RWP in the Netherlands. These recommendations are based on this thesis's CBT, EIT, and SDT frameworks. The suggestions provide policymakers with options for addressing societal issues that lead to populist populism. It is crucial to highlight that these recommendations are not policy prescriptions but suggestions for addressing the underlying reasons driving populist behaviour.

First, creating initiatives to restore trust in political institutions is critical. The endogenous component of CBT was significantly associated with the rise of RWP, highlighting the importance of political distrust. To solve this, more transparency in government activities is required. Increased citizen participation in decision-making processes and the implementation of strong anti-corruption measures are also needed. These efforts have been demonstrated to boost institutional confidence, which can help alleviate the complaints that populist parties exploit (Kim et al., 2018).

Second, offering urgent assistance to individuals experiencing economic distress is essential. The STEI component of EIT showed a significant association with a rise in right-wing populist support, showing the influence of short-term economic insecurity. Policies providing short-term financial assistance, such as improved unemployment insurance, job retraining programmes, and targeted economic stimulus measures, should be implemented. These reforms can alleviate the immediate economic anxiety that fosters populism (Carranza et al., 2020).

Moreover, tackling the spatial diffusion of populist feeling calls for a dual strategy. Tailored policies that address the particular demands of rural and urban areas are essential. In rural regions,

efforts should be directed towards increasing public services, economic prospects, and connections. In cities, it is critical to address social integration and housing difficulties. Furthermore, investing in regional development initiatives to boost economic growth and raise living conditions in economically disadvantaged regions might help moderate possible populist tendencies (Broz et al., 2021). However, detailed research is required to understand the factors generating these emotions and modify policy accordingly.

Regarding research recommendations, it is critical to create a thorough populism index for each nation yearly to reflect annual swings in populist opinion more appropriately. This index should include election outcomes, party manifestos, and expert judgements. Such a metric would allow for a more exact and dynamic understanding of populism. Furthermore, research into the unique influence of urbanisation on political sentiments in densely populated nations such as the Netherlands is essential. In-depth research into how urbanisation processes impact political ideologies and populist support, considering variables such as migration patterns, housing, and social services, can yield valuable insights. This research emphasises the need for more targeted approaches to address urban-rural differences successfully.

These initiatives should prioritise restoring political trust, reducing economic insecurity, fostering cultural inclusion, and eliminating regional inequities. A comprehensive strategy may be used to minimise the factors fueling RWP while also strengthening democratic stability in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

7. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate the following research question: "To what extent do Cultural Backlash Theory (CBT) and Economic Insecurity Theory (EIT) explain the rise of right-wing populism in the Netherlands, and what role does spatial distribution play in shaping support for RWP parties?" Through a comprehensive assessment of the predictive powers of CBT and EIT, reinforced by SDT, the study has produced a detailed understanding of the multiple processes leading to the rise of RWP in the Dutch context.

Endogenous elements in CBT, including political distrust and internal grievances, are associated with the rise of RWP, emphasising political trust and unhappiness as crucial causes. The STEI component of EIT is also a significant predictor of populist sentiment, suggesting that immediate economic anxiety, including job losses and inflation, affects support for RWP more than long-term economic issues. The geographical study found that RWP beliefs are more prevalent in less urbanised regions, demonstrating that geography influences political choices. This urban-rural gap matches worldwide trends, highlighting the importance of geographical determinants in forming political beliefs.

The scientific approach, which included regression models and geographical analysis, successfully reflected the complexities of populist sentiment. However, limitations include using the ESS dataset and lacking a complete populist indicator for the Netherlands. Future studies should focus on developing a more nuanced populism index and investigating the influence of urbanisation on political sentiments.

These results have important policy implications. The relationship between political distrust and populist support necessitates actions to reestablish political trust through openness, citizen involvement, and anti-corruption policies. Addressing short-term economic concerns through focused aid might lessen populist appeal. The urban-rural difference in populist feeling demands targeted solutions, which should be examined further.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that CBT and EIT have some explanatory power for the rise of RWP in the Netherlands, with political distrust and short-term economic anxiety appearing as significant factors. The function of geographical diffusion clarifies the geographic foundations of populist support. These findings add to a more complete knowledge of the varied character of RWP, providing valuable insights for both research advancement and practical policymaking.

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Appendix

Table A1 – Hypothesis Overview

Hypothesis	Explanation
<i>H1(Exogenous)</i>	<i>Higher levels of societal dissatisfaction with progressive cultural values (exogenous factors) are positively associated with support for right-wing populist parties.</i>
<i>H2(Endogenous)</i>	<i>Higher levels of dissatisfaction with institutional effectiveness (endogenous factors) are positively associated with support for right-wing populist parties.</i>
<i>H3(CBT)</i>	<i>The combination of exogenous and endogenous factors (cultural backlash theory) has a positive association with support for right-wing populist parties.</i>
<i>H4(STEI)</i>	<i>Higher levels of short-term economic insecurity are positively associated with support for right-wing populist parties.</i>
<i>H5(LTEI)</i>	<i>Higher levels of long-term economic insecurity are positively associated with support for right-wing populist parties.</i>
<i>H6(EIT):</i>	<i>The combination of short-term and long-term economic insecurity (economic insecurity theory) has an association with support for right-wing populist parties.</i>
<i>H7(CBT + EIT):</i>	<i>The combination of cultural backlash theory (both exogenous and endogenous) and economic insecurity theory (both short-term and long-term) has an association with support for right-wing populist parties.</i>
<i>H8(SDT):</i>	<i>Higher levels of support for right-wing populist parties are found in less urbanized areas, suggesting that spatial diffusion theory can explain the geographical distribution of populist support in the Netherlands.</i>

Table A2 – Variable Selection per Theory

Theory	Sub-Theory	Variable Name
<i>CBT</i>	Endogenous	Trstep, trstlgl, trstpbc, trstplt, trstppl, trstprr
	Exogenous	Freehms, imbgeco, imueclt, imwbent, impcntr, imdfetn, imsmetn, imprtrad
<i>EIT</i>	STEI	Stfecco, hincfel, uemp3m
	LTEI	uempl2m, uemp5yr

Table A3 – Populist Score Formulas

Scenario	Formula
<i>Scenario 1</i>	$1 = (\% \text{ of PVV Votes} * 10) + (\% \text{ of FVD Votes} * 8.906897)$
<i>Scenario 2</i>	$2 = (\% \text{ of PVV Votes} * 10) + (\% \text{ of FVD Votes} * 8.906897) + (\% \text{ of JA21 Votes} * 6.5)$
<i>Scenario 3</i>	$3 = (\% \text{ of PVV Votes} * 10) + (\% \text{ of FVD Votes} * 8.906897) + (\% \text{ of JA21 Votes} * 6.5) + (\% \text{ of BBB Votes} * 5.5)$