Bachelor thesis

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'The correlation between geographic features and the rise of populism in eastern rural Groningen'

Figure 0 (Unknown, 2018)

Index

1. Summary

The last ten years, populism has developed itself into one of the most prolific ways of practicing politics. Its influence has grown rapidly, and does not seem to slow down in the near future. Charismatic political leaders on the right are dominating the public debate, but what are the causes of this new anti-establishment sound? And what are the correlations between populism and measurable geographic trends on a regional scale?

This thesis focusses on the correlation between several spatial features and the growth of anti-establishment populism in the eastern rural part of Groningen (ERG), using the following central question:

'To what extent is there correlation between specific geographic circumstances and the rise of anti-establishment sympathies in eastern rural Groningen?'

The first part of the thesis researches populism as a whole, building a thorough literature framework. The second part of the research mostly contains data gathering, processing and statistical analysis. The final part combines these aspects, to draw conclusions on the political and geographical context of the region.

The end result is a significant regression model, used to find correlations between specific geographic features and the growth of populism in the region. Even though in the end the geographic variables did not relate to populism, this thesis shines a light on the features of today's most distinctive political trend. It also analyzes the development of perhaps Groningen's most forgotten region, and visualized these developments using comprehensive statistical models.

2. Introduction

In this section of the thesis context of the region of interest will be provided, as well as a short historic overview.

2.1. Background to the study: regional context

Eastern Rural Groningen (ERG) was traditionally a socialist stronghold. The Socialist Part (SP) has often been the biggest party in regional and local administrations. The New Communist Party of the Netherlands was once the second largest party in de municipality of Reiderland, getting 28% of the votes, only second to the Labour Party. And even more recently there has been a strong socialistic movement in ERG, with multiple seats in the local council and an alderman as executive (Sitalsing, 2006). In the 2012 elections, these socialist anti-establishment sympathies somewhat decreased.

Figure 1 Results of national elections, 2012 (Nouws, 2013)

While the election results were still leftist, the most chosen party was Labour (Nouws, 2013) – with a progressive and collaborative agenda. And even though the Labour Party was vocally critical of the status-quo, they had rather progressive and supportive views all around. Figure 1 shows the election results and showcases the Labour-majority within Groningen.
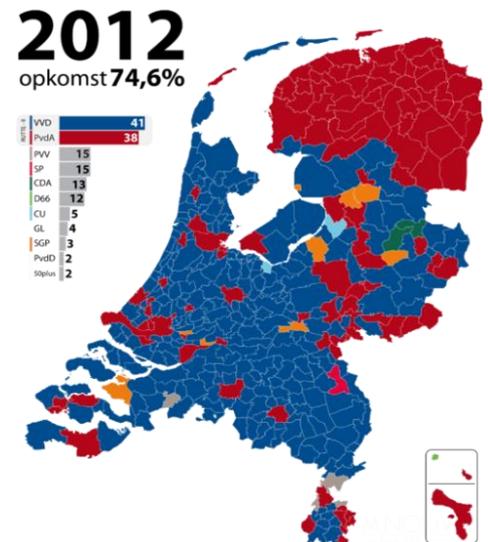
The progressive majority of the Labour Party evaporated in the 2017 national elections. An often mentioned cause for this dramatic decrease in voters, was the neo-liberal policy of the Labour Party in collaboration with People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (the right-winged Liberals, or VVD). It seemed like the people in ERG had lost their trust in the Labour Party, and as a result grew more suspicious of the large and well established elitist parties, to which they now also counted Labour.

A consequence of this suspicion was not only a return back to form (an anti-establishment mindset, represented by the Socialist Party), but also a tug to the populist and conservative right: the Freedom Party.

This populist trend in ERG is shown on the thematic maps below (figure 2, 3 and 4.). When looking at the maps, various trend can be interpreted:

-The 'elitist' parties decreased in size, and the anti-establishment parties have grown in ERG.
-Both the far left (SP) and the far right (PVV) increased their influence in ERG.
-Populism has grown fast in ERG, compared to the national trend.
-The 'tug to the right' has grown very fast in ERG, compared to the national trend.

There are multiple explanations for this notable trend, mostly on a regional and local scale.
First of all, the national disappointment in the collaboration between the Labour Party (PVDA) and the Liberals (VVD). Their policies have been unpopular among the socialists and social democrats, for it had been considered to be too right-winged: many leftist voters had hoped for a more socially progressive program. Their disappointment and frustration have led to more extreme voting outcomes, and the internal struggles within the PVDA only made things worse for the social-democrats (Sommer, 2017). The disappointment in the leftist titan was severe.
Secondly, there are the regional earthquake problems. The people of ERG have been fed up with the inconsistent policy of the national government.

As a result, there have been growing feelings of frustration and the government has thus far failed to deliver on most of their promises, which fuels the overarching distrust of the 'elitist' governing parties: the VVD and PVDA.

Third, there were problems with asylum seekers, economic migrants and refugees. The struggles of integration were mostly felt on a regional and local scale: towns and neighborhoods close to asylum centers experienced a notable rise in theft, disruptions of the public order, acts of aggression and sexual intimidation (Vissers, 2018). The local residents, again, blamed the overarching governing parties for their ineffective policies.
These three factors fueled the rise of right-winged populism (the Freedom Party), rebirthed the far-left anti-establishment support (the Socialist Party) and caused the fall of the wide-spread support for the governing Labour party (the PVDA). According to NRC Handelsblad, the rise of the Freedom Party originated due to an increase in protest voters: often high-educated middle class voters, who did not vote *for* the Freedom Party, but *against* the status-quo of the established governing parties (De Mik, 2017).

This thesis aims to explore the growth of anti-establishment populism within ERG, using a spatial scope. The social, cultural and political causes have been discussed thoroughly, but this research focusses on the spatial influences on this notable cultural shift. What geographical factors relate to the recent increase of anti-establishment sympathies in eastern rural Groningen?

The research focusses on five municipalities within Groningen:
-Vlagtwedde
-Bellingwedde
-Pekela
-Oldambt
-Stadskanaal

Some of these municipalities have fused with each other or others in the 2017-2018 period. The geographic data for these newly formed municipalities is very limited: almost no demographic data is available. More on this in later chapters.

TK 2017
Grootste partij per gemeente

■	VVD
■	PVV
■	CDA
■	D66
■	SP
■	GL
■	CU
■	SGP

Josse de Voogd
Data: NOS, Geodan

TK 2017
Tweede partij per gemeente

■	VVD
■	PVV
■	CDA
■	D66
■	SP
■	GL
■	CU
■	SGP

Josse de Voogd
Data: NOS, Geodan
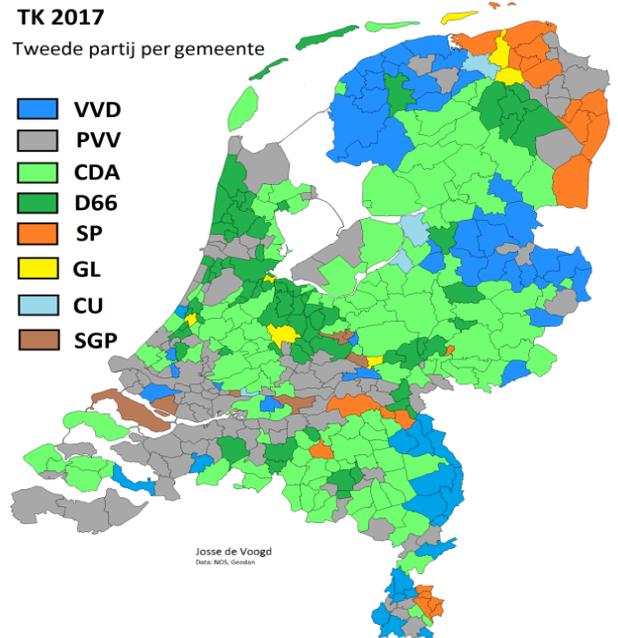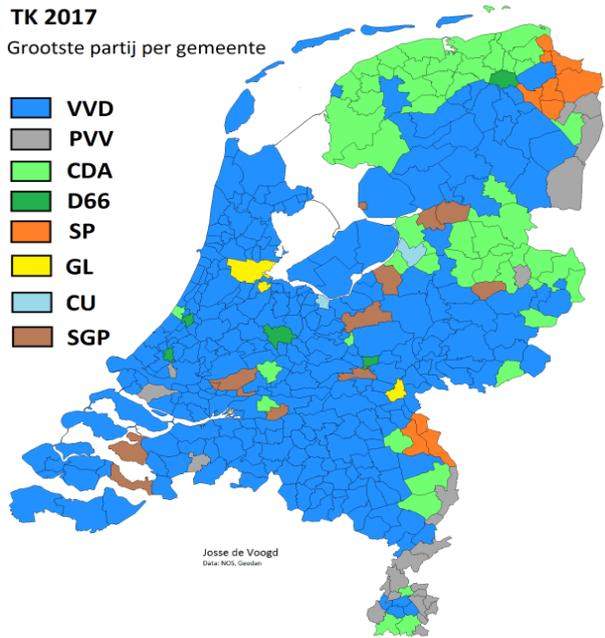
Figure 2 Maps of the largest and second largest parties in the Dutch national elections (De Voogd, 2017)

'Populisme'

%
0 - 19
19 - 22
22 - 25
25 - 29
29 - 33
33 - 53

PVV+SP+50PLUS

Josse de Voogd
Data: ANP, Geodan
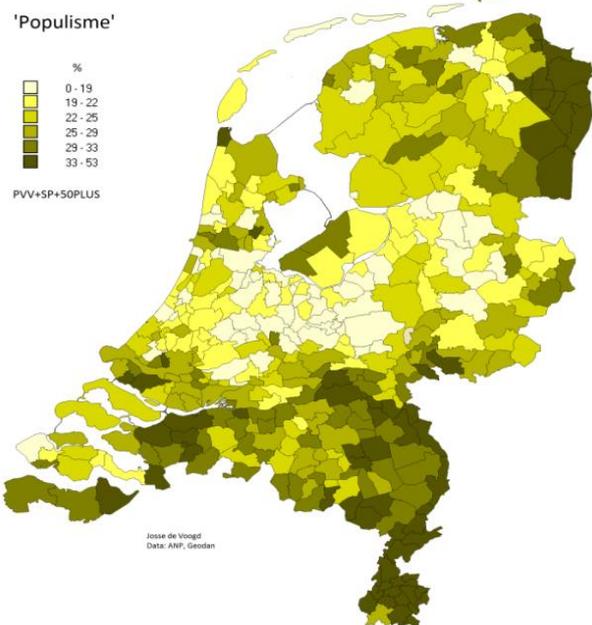
Figure 3 Increase in Populism (De Voogd, 2017)

Ruk naar rechts

verlies rechts*

winst rechts
0-3
3-6
6-9
9-14,6

Josse de Voogd
2017
Data: ANP, Kiesraad, Geodan

* VVD, PVV, CDA, CU, SGP, VNL, FvD

Figure 4 Tug to the right (De Voogd, 2017)

2.2. Research problem

In this section the central question is defined, and also describe supporting secondary questions which were used to explore the research problem.

2.2.1 Central question

The aim of this thesis is to explore the possible spatial correlation for the rise of anti-establishment sympathies and right-winged populism in the ERG-region, visualized on the map on the right. It is established that disappointment and frustra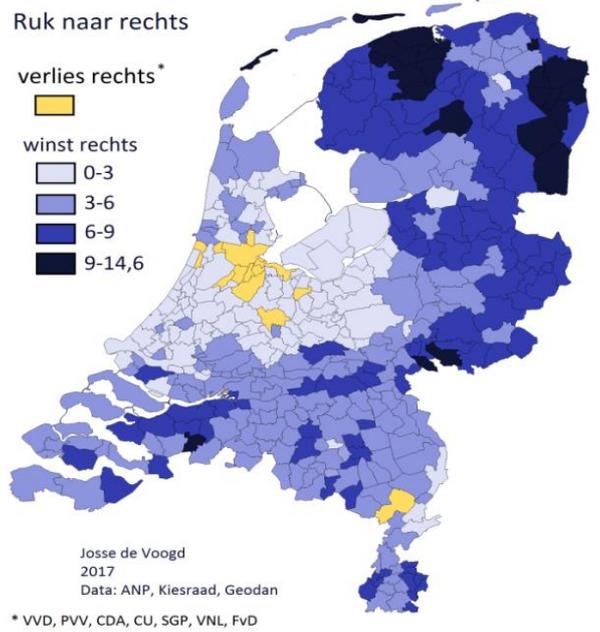tion pointed at the governing parties, combined with rural inequality (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018), have led to this relatively new trend.

The goal will be to explore and discover specific spatial correlation between this cultural shift and spatial features of the specific municipalities within the region. Thus, the central question of this bachelor thesis will be:
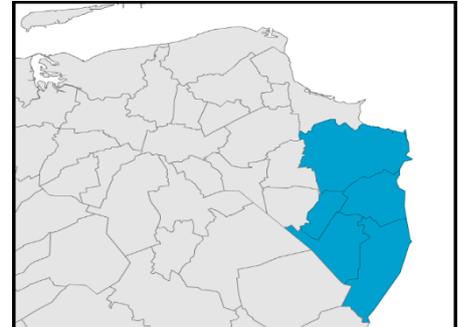

Figure 5 the ERG region (CBS, 2019)

´To what extent is there correlation between specific geographic circumstances and the rise of anti-establishment sympathies in eastern rural Groningen?´´

The central question serves two major purposes.

First of all, it **tests the theory that spatial factors influence political preference**. There will be a research if this general trend is also observable in the region of interest: it checks if these hypotheses are indeed correct or at least provable.

The specifics of these factors will be distinguished in our second supporting question. Secondly, answering the central question gives us somewhat of a **diagnosis of the situation**. It will give us a better image and situation report, which can be used for future cases.

2.2.2 Secondary questions

In order to find a satisfying answer to this central question, there will be a need of secondary questions to further specify the specific features of the region. The secondary questions will also be used to define the aforementioned specific spatial circumstances, and the most vital themes of the thesis. With this in mind, the following secondary questions have been chosen:

1. What are the characteristics of anti-establishment populism[1]?
2. What are the spatial characteristics of the ERG-region?
3. What geographic features correlate with political preference ERG?

The secondary questions follow an ordered pattern. First, the symptoms of the case are distinguished. After that, the region in which these symptoms occur is further specified. In the last question these two factors are combined in such a way that a relationship may become visible, which helps in finding the overarching answer to the central questions.

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[1] This section will also contain a list of political parties that fit within the chosen definition.

2.3 Structure

The thesis will consist of six main chapters. In this chapter, the structure of this thesis will be presented.

1. **Summary**

   The first chapter of this paper rendered a short summary of the focus points within this bachelor project.

2. **Introduction**

   The main purpose of this chapter is to provide regional context and introduce the reader to the central- and secondary questions of the research.

3. **Theoretical Framework**

   Chapter three gives and in-depth view of the literature research, as well as an overview of the key points an definitions. It also specifies certain details within the central and secondary questions.

4. **Methodology**

   This part of the paper focuses on methods of research, ethics, chosen variables, statistical measures and clear definitions of our political variable.

5. **Results**

   This section answers the secondary questions and uses these answers to provide insight in the central questions. It also connects these results with the literature research.

6. **Conclusions**

   Goes into the main conclusions and reflects on the bachelor project as a whole. Also provides recommendations for further research.

Aside from the main sections within this thesis, there will also be a **bibliography** for all the used sources and separate sections for **appendices**.

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter of the research proposal will build a theoretical foundation on which the bachelor thesis will be built upon. It consists of several sub-chapters, all serving the main point: exploring the literature, themes, concepts and theories that are relevant for the central question of this thesis.

3.1 Orientation: a contrast between spatial variables and socio-cultural variables

In this part of the framework there will be an analysis of two scientific articles concerning the same phenomenon: the rise of (anti-establishment) populism and possible causes for this relatively new trend in politics. The two articles that are being evaluated will be appointed article 1 and article 2. Their full titles are as follows:

A1: The Revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it) by Andres Rodríguez-Pose (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018)
A2: Becoming politically discontented: Anti-establishment careers of Dutch nonvoters and PVV voters by Roy Kemmers (Kemmers, 2015)

While the two articles choose a different approach in finding suitable causes for the rise of anti-establishment populism, there are some interesting similarities in the overall analysis of the theme: the rise of (right winged) populism in mostly western countries. First of all, both articles recognize the rise of modern populism and try to find explanations, within their respective fields, for this observation. Furthermore, both articles suggest that the rise of modern populism is strongly linked to anti-establishment movements and right-winged conservatism; most left-winged and progressive movements within populism are left out of consideration. This does not mean such movements do not exist, but both articles do give the impression that these left-winged 'flavours' are not as distinctive as their right-winged In short: the articles mostly focus on right-winged and conservative populism.

Secondly, both articles observe that the so called 'elite' still considers the rise of populism as a temporary setback- a nasty but still curable disease. Both authors emphasize this unintentional arrogance.
In his article, Kemmers states that *'it is not surprising that in much of the social-scientific literature these issues are not simply observed, but 'diagnosed'; they are consequently not merely phenomena in need of an explanation, but also in need of a 'remedy'* (Kemmers, 2015). Rodríguez-Pose states that the causes of the populist 'disease' (i.e. inequality and feelings of being left behind) were ignored, and sometimes not even recognized: *'Territorial inequality was mostly dismissed as ancillary or even irrelevant'* (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Even with all the recent evidence, such as the US elections and Brexit referendum, the established governments still seem reserved in the acknowledgement of the current situation: many established parties still consider populism as a temporality and have mostly failed to diagnose its causes.

The last striking similarity between the articles is one of the main causes for modern populism: the feeling of being unheard and left behind, distrust in governing parties, and disconnection[2] with the established society. These are considered centrifugal forces by both authors.

While both articles recognize and describe similar themes and subjects, their approach differs. Article 1 has a spatial approach and relies on the '*core-periphery*'-concept, with an emphasis on rural-urban relationships. It compares different regions and links these regions to voting behavior and outcome. Regional inequality is being put against interpersonal inequality, and the difference between those two is one of the major explanations the article gives for modern populism in general. Article 1 relies heavily on *quantitative research methods* (Burt, et al., 2009) and describes several examples of the rise of populism on a global scale, though the article is Europe-orientated. It recognizes one major cause for modern populism: the underestimation of regional inequality and the overestimation of economic and interpersonal factors. This form of misconception strengthens itself, and is thus hazardous. Article 2 has a clear focus on sociology. It uses mostly *qualitative research methods* (Burt, et al., 2009), primarily in-depth interviews with a sample of anti-establishment voters (the Dutch Party of Freedom) and nonvoters .While article 2 tries to interpret a global trend, its approach is on a national scale: it describes the situation for a certain Dutch population. In contrast to article 1, it mentions three very specific causes of the growing anti-establishment movements, instead of one major cause:

1. The introduction of charismatic political entrepreneurs such as Fortuyn and later Wilders;

2. The 'awakening' through books and articles and more recently social media;

3. The internal struggle of people, resulting in asking existential questions (which in turn results in an anti-establishment and sometimes pro- conspiracy attitude).

This thesis will use factors of both articles and expand severely on these themes with additional literature. The themes of interest are the correlations between voting outcomes (mainly anti-establishment results) and spatial features.

The main theme of the thesis will be to use spatial observations to interpret a cultural shift.

3.2 Advanced literature research: additional characteristics and information

Aside from a short warming up exercise, in which we compared two scientific articles based on their main points, we have done additional research on the causes, impact and influences of modern populism. The objective of this research was to complete the picture *before* we start our actual research. What exactly is the role of populism within politics and how is this role experienced in modern time? Our advanced literature research is based on multiple scientific peer reviewed articles and books on the topic. Our advanced literature research have led to some interesting points of discussion and points of view.

We will continue to explore populism by first deepening our understanding of the specific characteristics of populism. After this, we will look at some points of discussion.

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[2] The first article focus is mostly on spatial and economic disconnect, while the second article specifies the social and cultural disconnection.

3.2.1 Specification of the populist characteristics

In our advanced literature research, we have investigated the key-features of populism. The in-depth results of this research are elaborated on in the *results* section of this thesis, and these elaborations will not be repeated in this sub-chapter. Instead, we will note the key-features of the populist mentality, and refer to the results-section for further detail:

- A corrupt *elite* vs the righteous *people* with very little nuance between the people in each group (Stavrakakis, 2017);
- The use of scapegoats (Wodak, 2017): Jews, the EU, Liberals, Refugees, Islam, etc;
- Strong, charismatic leaders at the centre of their politics;
- Conservative values: family roles, traditional culture, gender roles, strong military (Wodak, 2017);
- Dualism and symbolism: us vs. them, good vs. evil, elite vs. people, left vs. right (Woerdman, 2013);
- Only *their* party can save the country from (cultural) downfall (Wodak, 2017).

3.2.2 Other results of the literature research

Aside from the various characteristics of populism, there are other notable new pieces of information. We will address these additional points in this short sub-chapter.

First of all, the progressive but arrogant view that populism is a vicious and unreasonable disease is counter effective (Stavrakakis, 2017). Rebelling (and underestimating) against populism is the source of its appeal: the fight between populism and established politics is what gives it its right to exist in the first place. Without struggle there can be no populism, since populism can only exist in a divided socio-cultural landscape (Mudde, 2017).

Secondly, there is the main point of populist parties. They target key-problems within society which clearly have been underestimated by the established parties (Fuest, 2017). Downplaying the actual problems because the way populist *address* the problems is not only counterproductive, but also arrogant and unfair.

Putting all the blame of the recent political shift on the populist movements, would be unjust. Populism is most of all a symptom of a bigger issue: the general lack of trust in political representatives (Fuest, 2017). Opposing populism will not be effective if the overall trust in politics is not restored. This should be the main objective: showing credible alternatives and overall understanding of those that have felt left behind or forgotten.

Lastly, there is a discussion if populism is a style of politics, or full-grown ideology. In most cases, the distinction is not binary (Rydgren, 2017) . It is sometimes rather hard to distinguish the absolute pro-populist parties and the anti-populist parties. Because of this, it may be more useful to see populism as a spectrum with multiple variables, instead of a hard and binary border.

3.3 Regarding the central question: what is known?

So far, there has been said a lot about the causes for the rise in populism on several scales. Contrary to what is often believed, populism is not a poor man's 'disease'. Even the very rich have been pulled in by this new trend, as was discussed in the before mentioned article (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). The rise of populism has been the strongest in the areas considered 'forgotten' or past their (economic) prime (Wodak, 2017). It is in these regions where frustration and disappointment in the established governing parties grew the largest. This process if often further fueled by unfortunate actualities. In the ERG region, these are mostly the so-far failed earthquake policy, refugee- and immigrant problems and the lack of economic perspective (De Mik, 2017). Other triggers for the anti-establishment sympathies may be the

rise of a charismatic leader (Fortuyn, Wilders, Baudet), a 'spiritual' awakening accelerated by social media, or a general internal struggle (Kemmers, 2015).

3.4 Regarding the central question: what is unknown?

Even though there are many pieces of information in general about anti-establishment and right-winged populism, most of it is focused on a different region (Brexit, the 2016 US elections, Brazil, etc.) or even on an entirely different scale – global instead of local. The central question is about the spatial, measurable factors of the region and tries to find a relationship between these features and the observable cultural shift. To answer this question, there are two unknown factors: the specific spatial features of ERG and in what way these features may have caused the shift. It is mostly the possible relationship between observations and features that are at this point unknown.

3.5 Regarding the central question: what will be added?

The central question of this thesis is relevant for a number of reasons, and adds to the existing literature in a number of ways. We will highlight the four most important ones.

First of all, answering the question gives insight in this particular case. ERG is, within the Netherlands, unique in its abrupt tug to the right and the growth of populism (De Voogd, 2017). The answer to this thesis' central question could explain in further detail how this came to be. Secondly, insight in this specific case may also provide answers for comparable regions within the Netherlands (recognizable on the maps of chapter 1 of this paper), or even outside of the Netherlands (e.g. the regions mentioned in Rodríquez-Pose's article). Thus, if a suitable answer is found, this answer may be widely applicable in other regions with the same context. Thirdly, a suitable answer to this thesis' central question could be used to predict other 'vulnerable' regions based on spatial features. If anti-establishment populism is indeed seen as a problem, it would be interesting to handle in a predictive way, instead of dealing with it when it has already formed tension within the region.

The final point brings the second and third point in practice. An answer to this central question could provide new insights, based on spatial policy. If it possible to quantify the geographical factors that contribute to the rise of populism, then policy can anticipate on this new trend.

4. Methodology

In this section there will be a description of the chosen methods of academic research. After that, there will be an overview regarding the ethical considerations within this thesis.

4.1 Research methods

Before we start collecting data, we first need to dive into the literature. Earlier in this research, there has been a short analysis of what is known and what is unknown with the bounds of the research question. The mentioned articles are all peer-reviewed and published in the last ten years. This way, we can make sure all the used articles are reliable, recent and relevant. The first step of the research project will be to explore our relevant literature.

The research mostly uses **secondary data** (Clifford, et al., 2016) to investigate the themes and concepts of the central question. This choice was made because there is a lot of useful data available: voting outcomes, spatial features, population statistics, population spread / density, etc. The data we will use is based on the datasets of institutions like CBS, the website of the Groningen municipality, EduGis and the main website for electoral results. Because the central question deals and the hypotheses test for a statistical relationship, we prefer the use of **quantitative data** for our research. This makes the use of powerful **parametrical statistical tests** easier, and thus provides more reliable test results (Burt, et al., 2009). Since we prefer parametric tests to non-parametric tests, we also prefer large datasets with normally-distributed data[3]. A preferable option is a **multiple linear regression model** (Burt, et al., 2009)**.** Using this flexible model, we could research the relationship between our independent variables and our dependent variable.

At the bottom of this page the conceptual model is visualized, showing the main structure of the research. Note the distinction between the already explored geographic factors (which were defined in the literature framework), and the unexplored geographic variables (which this research focusses on).
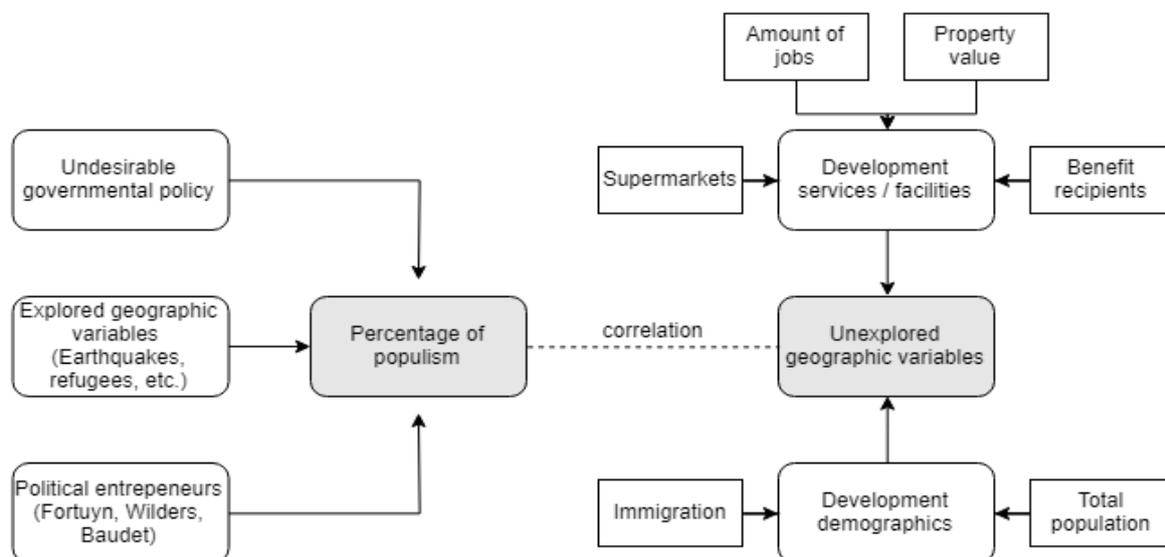

Figure 6 Conceptual model / research structure(Own Work)

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[3] However, due to the *Central Limit Theorem*, the data does not need to be normally distributed if we have large datasets (Burt, et al., 2009). It is still preferred, since it makes the test more reliable.

4.2 Ethical considerations

Since the research methods mostly consist of analyzing secondary (quantitative) data, the ethical consideration primary concern the handling, storing and sharing of data. The data is mostly anonymized already: voting results, population statistics and spatial features. So even though this data may be sensitive, the probability of privacy violations are significantly lower (Clifford, et al., 2016). The same goes for the general power relations in the field. Most of the data collection will be of secondary nature and literature research. While there are still power relations in play here, the issue is minimalized.

The impact of reporting our research on the rise of populism in ERG is a double edged sword. One the one end, our goal is to properly describe spatial correlation for the voting outcomes in an objective and a verifiable manner. We do, however, consider the growth of populism (and to a lesser extend also general anti-establishment parties) as a negative and undemocratic trend. While there are various scientific sources that confirm this political position, it is still a somewhat subjective assumption. This means we have to consider our own political bias and make sure to net let this influence the results and conclusions of our research.

4.3 Chosen variables, dataset and sample size

In the linear regression model, five independent variables will be tested against one dependent variable. The aim of this thesis is to see if the model is significant, if there is a relationship between the variables and how strong this potential relationship is and in what direction. There will be accounted for the regional differences between the municipalities, and the time period (2008-2018), by taking either the average or the total of all the municipalities within the region. The dependent and independent variables that are used in the linear regression model:

Dependent (verkiezingsuitslagen.nl, 2008-2018)

Percentage of votes for anti-establishment parties in the municipalities within ERG, in all major elections 2008-2018, using data available through verkiezingsuitslag.nl. When there were multiple elections in a year, we will use the mean of those election outcomes in our model. Years without elections will not be added to the model.

Independent[4] (CBS, 2008-2018)

-Immigration (numbers)	dataset through	CBS.nl
-Mean average property value (in euros, x1000)	dataset through	CBS.nl
-Total amount of jobs (x1000)	dataset through	CBS.nl
-benefit recipients (numbers)	dataset through	CBS.nl
-Mean number of supermarkets per km2.	dataset through	CBS.nl
-Total population	dataset through	CBS.nl

Because the different municipalities are bordering each other and often cohere (such as total population and immigration), the independent variables and dataset are *not* total independent from each other. Also, since the research focuses on a relatively small time frame, the dataset will be relatively small.

These negative factors have been canceled out by using the growth-statistics: the relative difference per year in percentages. This way, the dataset will account for its own dependence on each other and its small size (Venhorst, 2019).

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[4] The independent variables will be added as a set. Aside from being independent variables, they also serve as each other's control variables.

The sample consists of five municipalities and uses information from a period of ten years (2008-2018). It uses major elections of the following years:

2017   (House of Representatives)
2015   (Provincial states)
2014   (European Parliament)
2012   (House of Representatives)
2011   (Provincial states)
2010   (House of Representatives and municipal elections)
2009   (European Parliament)

The regression model uses these seven outcomes for the five municipalities. The total sample consists of 35 cases. While this is not a large sample, regression is still possible (Venhorst, 2019) since it uses the *growth* data instead of the raw data (as was said in the previous chapter). This means the municipalities can be considered somewhat independent from each other. Even though the sample size is moderate, the chosen statistical approach is still possible.

5. Results

In this chapter, we will answer the supporting questions and work to answering the central question. After that we will evaluate our results based on the theoretical framework.

5.1. What are the characteristics of anti-establishment populism?

In our surface analysis we found out that populist parties make a distinct separation of the ordinary people and a corrupt elite. The populist parties represent the underdog: the neglected but hard working, persistent man. The established parties, on the other hand, represent the corrupt and evil elite: a mighty power that should be fought against (Stavrakakis, 2017).

Sometimes a third group is distinguished: the outsiders such as immigrants, refugees, Jews, Brussels, etc. This group is for the populists the biggest enemy, and only *their* party would be able to defend against this nemesis (Wodak, 2017).

The interesting point in this worldview, is the undemocratic nature of it. Since they *-and only they -* defend the ordinary people, there can never be a coalition or collaboration with other parties: this would mean comprising their prime principles (Rydgren, 2017).

Another characteristic of populism is the assumption of homogenous social groups. There is *one* elite and *one* ordinary people, with matching goals and no further differences within their specific groups. This logic is obviously flawed: what if someone does not fit in or identify with either group (Woerdman, 2013)? Populist parties deny this stratified reality.
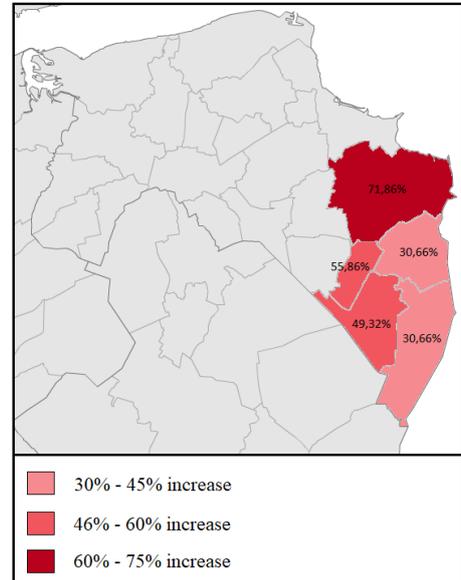

Figure 7 The growth of populistic votes in percentages, 2008-2018 (OwnWork, 2019)

Furthermore, there is the Messiah-like message.

Most populist parties are led by a charismatic, but also strict leader: *'the (more or less) charismatic leader of the respective party who oscillates between the roles of Robin Hood and strict father'* (Wodak, 2017). This leader needs to fit a certain image: fighting an uphill battle (Mudde, 2017), being the underdog, being attacked by the corrupt elitist media, etc. He also needs to offer simple solutions for complex problems, spreading the message that the elitist solutions are only meant to discourage and confuse the ordinary people (Fuest, 2017). The leader needs to radiate conservative values such as family, white supremacy and traditional gender roles. There must be a clear message that the progressive, globalist worldview is way too complicated for the common good and thus should be rejected as a whole (Wodak, 2017).

Populist parties lean toward a Manichean worldview (Wodak, 2017). They claim they are in a constant, primal battle between two extremes: good versus evil, ordinary versus elite, corruption versus purity. And, as has been said before, only they (and more specifically their leader) are able to win this noble battle. This worldview comes with its own sense of utopia. For a populist, a utopia is always based on the past: they strive to get back to the golden ages, where the family roles and its values where in its prime (Rydgren, 2017). This also means that they in practice reject a progressive, future based worldview.

The endgame is to get back to a past situation ('the Golden Days'), which was effectively stolen from the people by the ´corrupt elite´, and has been the cause of conflict ever since. Based on the standards set before, we consider the following major parties populistic in nature:

-PVV
-FVD
-SP
-DENK
-50 PLUS

Aside from the major political parties, we also consider most of the local parties within region to have populistic tendencies. In ERG, the local parties focus on getting back power and autonomy from the national government in The Hague. They claim to protect local priorities, since the established government has failed them. Insinuating that the established parties renounced their duties at serving the people, and only *their* party can get back the power, these small and local parties are deemed populistic.

5.2. What are the spatial characteristics of the ERG-region?
In this chapter there will be a visualization of the chosen spatial variables. Both the dependent and independent variables will be described in a general manner, using graphs. These graphs are submitted to the appendices.

5.2.1. Trends of the independent variables
To discover the main trends, we have made a bar-chart for each independent variable (Appendix I). In these charts, either the mean or the sum of each variable is visualized.

-The total population within the ERG has declined over the last ten years, with about 5000 inhabitants (about 4,6%). This decline has been relatively steady, with no major drop-offs.

-The mean percentage of immigrants within the region has slightly increased the last ten years: a rise of 0,3% can be observed, with a spike between 2013-2016 (about 1,5%).

-Property value has also decreased the last ten years, especially since 2010 (170k) and 2016 (143k). Since 2016, it has begun to increase slightly each year.

-The total amount of jobs within the region was in 2018 (33.900) at about the same level as 2008 (34.500), although there was a slight decrease. It has risen steadily since 2015 (31.400).

-The amount of benefit recipients has increased drastically between 2012 and 2013: 13,900 vs. 37,650 (about 270%). This rise van be recognized in every municipality. It is possible that new laws and policy [5]have been implemented in this time period, granting more inhabitants benefits. More research needs to be done on this topic.

-The mean amount of supermarkets in the direct area (3 km radius) has decreased the last ten years (from 2,86 to 2,68). The largest decrease has been the last five years (3,02 in 2013 to 2,68 in 2018).

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[5] There have been changes in policy on this subject in this period, but none of these changes can explain such an increase.

5.2.2. Trends of the dependent variable

As can be seen in Appendix II, the mean amount of votes on a populist party has risen fast the last ten years. The largest increase[6] was between 2012 (27,3%) and 2015 (49,3%), an increase of 22% in just three years. The overall increase between 2009-2018 was about 14,74%.

The figure at the bottom of this page shows the mean percentage of populism per municipality ERG, both overall and per year. The mean percentage overall is highest in Pekela, with almost half of the votes going to populistic parties. The percentage is lowest in Stadskanaal, with less than a third of the votes. The graph visualizes what was stated before: populism was at its lowest in 2012[7] and peaked in 2015.
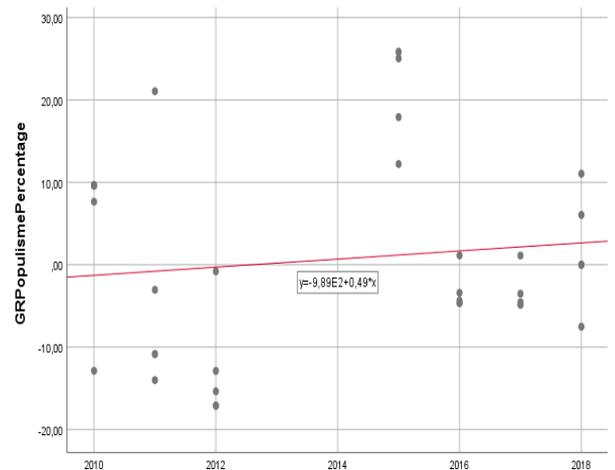

Figure 8 Mean growth line of populism

As Appendix II shows, the *growth* of populism has *not* increased rapidly over the years, but has fluctuated: sometimes the growth increases, sometimes decreases and sometimes it stagnates. As a result, the *mean growth line* has been fairly stagnant. This is visualized best by the scatterplot at the top-right: while the percentage of populism has risen, the mean speed of the increase has been about constant[8] and thus has *not* risen.
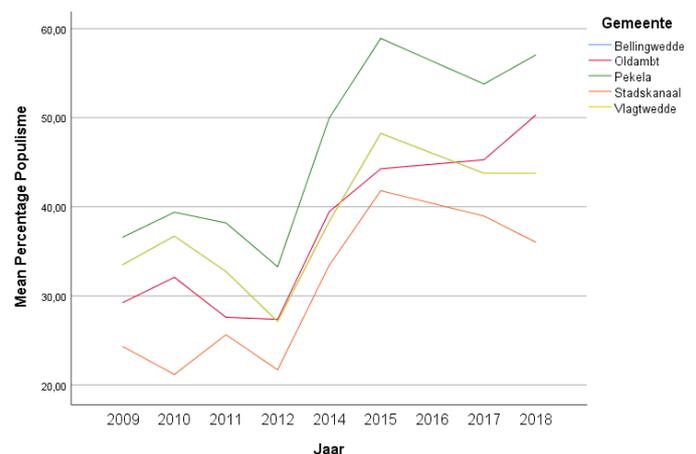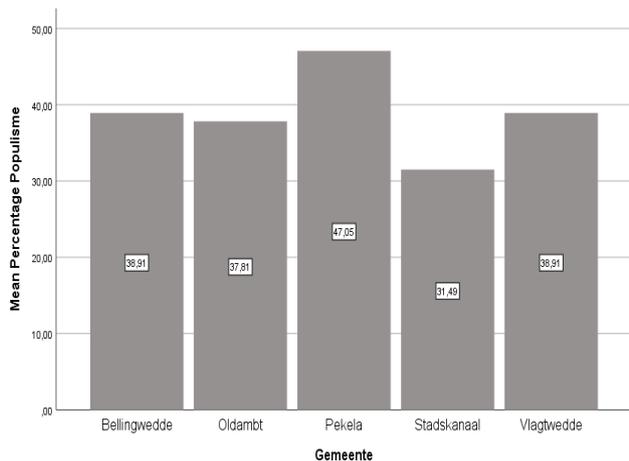

Figure 9 Mean percentage of populism per municipality overall and per year

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[6] The analysis did not count the 2019 elections, but at this point it is known that these elections scored relatively high.

[7] This is supported by the literature: in 2012 VVD and PVDA won the elections, both being pro-establishment.

[8] There has been a small increase in speed growth, but this increase does not match the rapid increase of the overall percentage of votes.

5.3. What geographic features correlate with political preference in ERG?

Appendix III shows the results of the regression model (*forward* method); the coefficients can also be seen in figure 11 on this page. The model is highly significant at the chosen 0,10 P-value. The tolerance levels of the variables are acceptable (<10).

Almost none of the independent variables are significant, meaning there is no linear relationship between the growth of the selected features and the growth of populism. There is one exception: the development of supermarkets. The model shows that when the amount of supermarkets in the direct area decreased, populism rose significantly (a negative relationship, -1,067). The scatterplot on this page (figure 10) visualized this linear relationship. This will be elaborated on in further chapters.

Since only the supermarket-variable contributes significantly to the model, only this variable is in the final model; this characteristic of the *Forward*-method of regression makes certain that only the variables that explain the variance within the data are added. Since no other variables are statistically significant, no other variables are implemented in the model. They can, however, be found in the *excluded* table. The final model accounts for 36.7% of the variance. The model is limited by the relatively small sample size: this issue was explained in chapter 4 and will be elaborated on in further chapters.

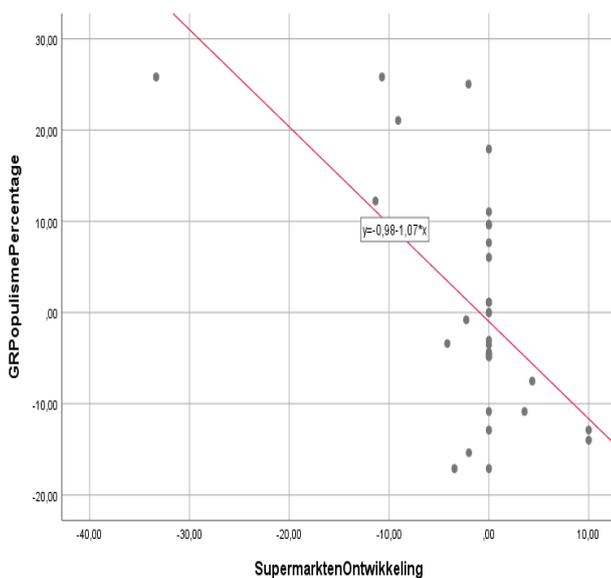**Figure 10 Correlation growth populism and growth**

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,606[a]	,367	,348	9,94434

a. Predictors: (Constant), SupermarktenOntwikkeling

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-,985	1,727		-,570	,573
	SupermarktenOntwikkeling	-1,067	,244	-,606	-4,374	,000

a. Dependent Variable: GRPopulismePercentage

Excluded

Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance
1	Groei Migratie	,091[b]	,599	,553	,105	,839
	Groei Woningwaarde	,049[b]	,335	,740	,059	,910
	BanenOntwikkeling	,011[b]	,073	,943	,013	,939
	GRUitkeringen	-,218[b]	-1,589	,122	-,270	,973

a. Dependent Variable: GRPopulismePercentage

b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), SupermarktenOntwikkeling

Figure 11 Coefficients of the model: included and excluded

5.4. Answering the central question

To what extent is there a correlation between specific geographic circumstances and the rise of anti-establishment sympathies in eastern rural Groningen?

There is a <u>very limited correlation</u> between the specific spatial features and the rise of populism within the ERG.

Only one variable contributed significantly, and it is possible that this is due to an outlier in the dataset[9]: the scatterplot above shows this outlier in the top-left corner. Even if the supermarkets and populism growth correlate, this is not a logical outcome. The decrease in supermarkets is likely a symptom of a different phenomenon: a region with decreasing services, a <u>shrinking population</u> and a general decrease of livability. So, while the supermarkets correlate with the growth of populism, this does not mean there is a causal relationship: there could be other factors in play, which were not accounted for by an extended set of control variables. The supermarket-variable is in this case considered a proxy – it is an indicator for a larger trend, but is not a logical relation on itself: it proves the that being isolated or 'forgotten' does indeed correlate with anti-establishment tendencies (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

To conclude: **there is no *logical* significant linear relationship between the chosen variables and the growth in populism within the ERG region**. There may be non-linear correlations between the variables, but these were not tested for within the context of this research. This means we accept the null-hypotheses of no significant relationship.

5.5. Recap: connection to theoretical framework

The theory named several socio-cultural causes for populism, which some of we were able to capture in a regression model, such as migration (Kemmers, 2015) among others. An overall decrease of value (housing prices, amount of jobs, etc.) and services (e.g. supermarkets) within the region contributed to frustration and a regional feeling of being 'forgotten' (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). The measurable factors within these socio-cultural processes were taken into account within the model. As is turns out, the factors that *should* relate to the rise of populism (De Mik, 2017), do *not* correlate with populism within the ERG-region. This disconnect between the literature and results could mean that the role of the variables noted in the literature were overestimated: their role within the phenomenon was smaller than anticipated. Meanwhile, the excluded factors (decrease of trust in politics, increase of charismatic charlatans, social media, etc.) could have been more relevant. These factors, however, are hard to implement in a regression model: within the ERG, there is no reliable quantitative data on these topics that could be used.

Overall, the statements found in the literature do not match up with what was measured within this specific region. Other factors may have been more interesting to look at, but these would have been difficult to implement in a quantitative statistical model since the data available for the municipalities within the region is limited or even nonexistent on a regional scale. Furthermore, adding more variables to a regression model risks a false indication of a high r-square (Burt, et al., 2009).

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[9] The specific case within the dataset was double-checked: no mistakes were made in the processing of the data.

6. Conclusions and reflection

This chapter focusses on the main conclusions of this thesis and shortly reflects on the product as a whole.

6.1. Main conclusions

While the regression model as a whole is significant, the chosen variables do not correlate with the rise of populism in a meaningful way: they are either insignificant within the model or not logical in practice. The independent variables were chosen based on the literature research and were used in a quantifiable manner. Several other factors that came out of the literature research were not added to the model, since they were hard to quantify in a meaningful way (political distrust per municipality, charisma per political leader, etc.). While this research did not find spatial causes for populism, it was able to high-light the key features of populism. The research was also able to describe and analyze several interesting factors / features of the ERG-region, such as migration and housing prices. The research also gained more insight in the growth of populism within the region, based on yearly development specified per municipality.

6.2. Reflection

The strength of this research lies in the extensive literature framework and the thorough statistical analysis, which include graphs, scatterplots, regression models and bar charts. The research focusses on a regional scale without using sight of general (inter)national trends, effectively applying political and socio-cultural theory on a highly-relevant subject. The research gave insight in populism as a whole and the specific geographic trends within the municipalities and the ERG-region as a whole. As a analysis and descriptions of geographical factors, this thesis was a success.

The weaknesses of this research lie in the dependence on municipality-specific quantifiable data. This is particularly tricky, since some of these municipalities have fused in the last few years. Since we were interested in a relatively short time period with a limited amount of elections, our dataset was rather small. Another complication was the lack of independence between the municipalities of interest: they all bordered or influenced each other. A setback was the lack of data for 2019, where populism peaked. While the voting outcomes were available, the data on our independent variables were not: initially the aim was to add 2019 to the analysis, but we had to exclude it since we lacked extended data. This has been distinctive for the research – a lack of data lead to a limited sample size. When the sample would have been larger, the regression and analysis would have been much more powerful. The final regression model was still significant, but it is expected that a larger dataset would have resulted in a better model (Burt, et al., 2009). However, since the ERG is a region with very specific voting patterns, extending the research to more municipalities would also lead to skewed conclusions.

The flaws of this research were mostly rose from a shortage of usable data, resulting is a small sample. The strengths of this thesis lie in the *analysis* and *description* of the data that was available, mostly in the populism-research and the extensive statistics.

6.3. Recommendations for further research

Further research could focus on four aspects.
Firstly, the correlation between populism and supermarkets within the region. Extensive research needs to be done on this topic: there is definitely a correlation, but at this point it is unknown what causes this correlation within the region.

Secondly, the drastic increase of benefit recipients. This rise can be recognized in all the municipalities of interest, but cause for this rise has not been found. More research on regional- and national policy may clarify this sudden increase.

Third, the research could be repeated with the same variables but in a different (but similar) region. It could be interesting to discover whether the variables are significant in another region.

Lastly, the research could be repeated with a different set of geographic variables. We know that the regression model was effective, but the variables were not. Perhaps adding a different set of independent variables could bring a stronger correlation with the rise of populism.

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Appendices
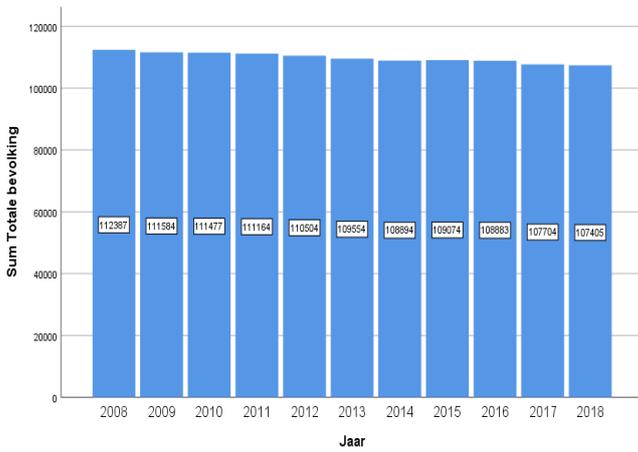
I.   Statistics of the independent variables
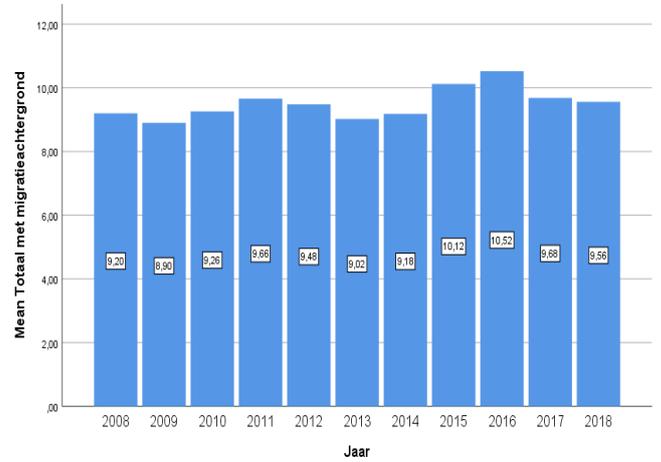

Figure 12 Total population ERG

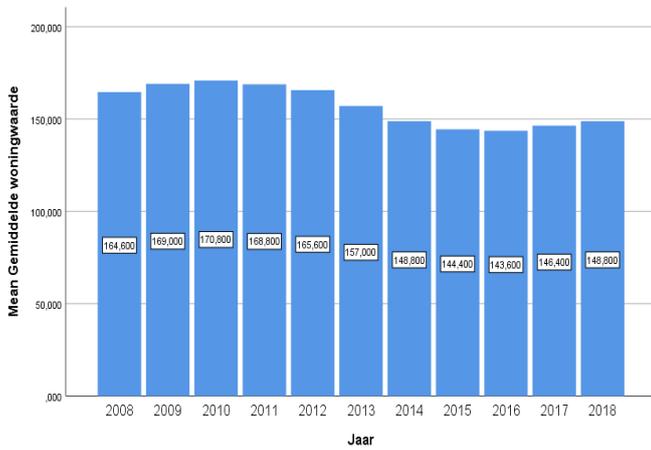

Figure 13 Mean percentage of immigrants

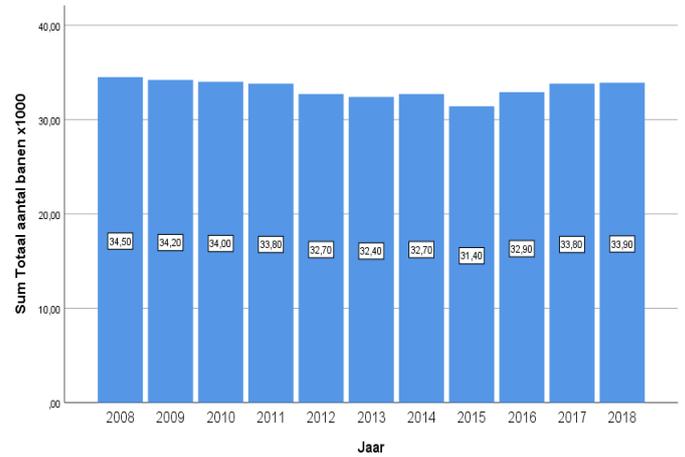**Figure 14 Mean proporty value**

Figure 15 Total amount of jobs x1000
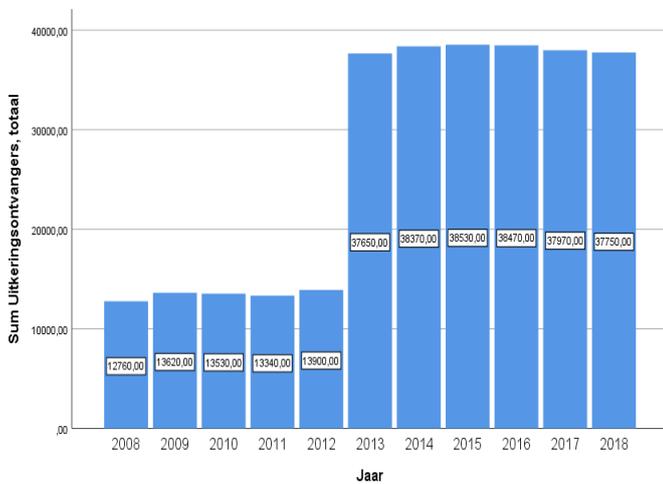

Figure 16 Total benefit recipients
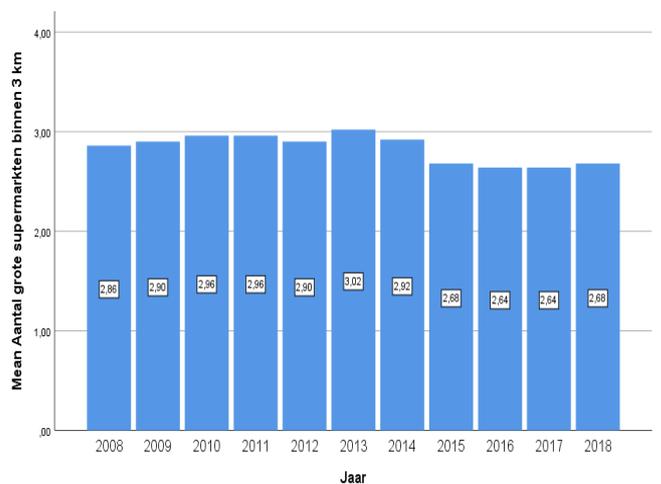

Figure 17 Mean amount of supermarkets in 3km
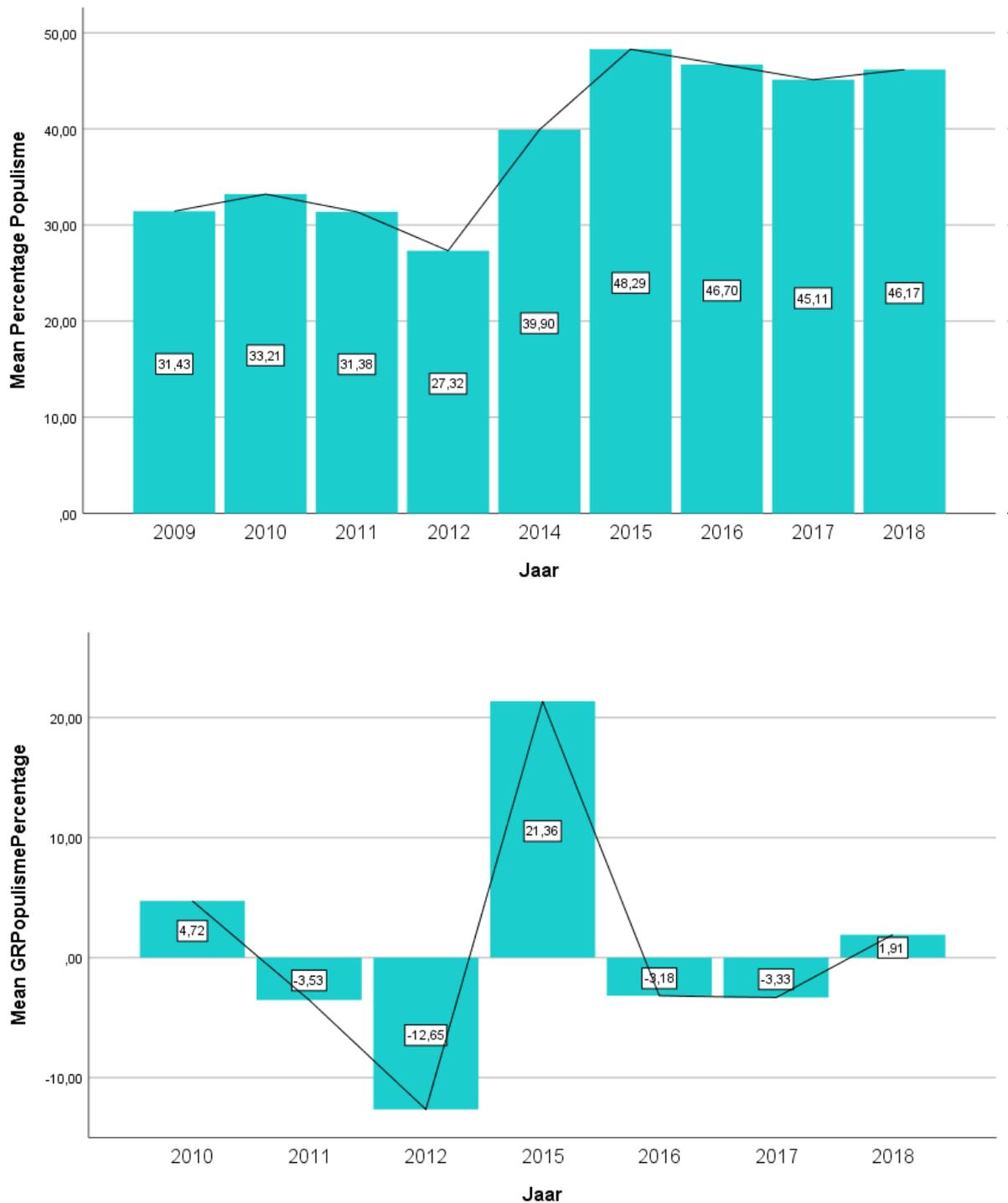
II.   Statistics of dependent variables

Figure 18 Mean populism and mean growth of populism per year

III. Multiple linear regression model report

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Supermarkte nOntwikkeling	.	Forward (Criterion: Probability-of-F-to-enter <= ,050)

a. Dependent Variable: GRPopulismePercentage

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,606[a]	,367	,348	9,94434

a. Predictors: (Constant), SupermarktenOntwikkeling

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1891,886	1	1891,886	19,131	,000[b]
	Residual	3263,366	33	98,890		
	Total	5155,252	34			

a. Dependent Variable: GRPopulismePercentage

b. Predictors: (Constant), SupermarktenOntwikkeling

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-,985	1,727		-,570	,573
	SupermarktenOntwikkeling	-1,067	,244	-,606	-4,374	,000

a. Dependent Variable: GRPopulismePercentage

Excluded Variables[a]

Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance
1	Groei Migratie	,091[b]	,599	,553	,105	,839
	Groei Woningwaarde	,049[b]	,335	,740	,059	,910
	BanenOntwikkeling	,011[b]	,073	,943	,013	,939
	GRUitkeringen	-,218[b]	-1,589	,122	-,270	,973

a. Dependent Variable: GRPopulismePercentage

b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), SupermarktenOntwikkeling