

The Wilders Divide:
Judgment in Dutch Politics

Rinze Leenheer

University of Twente

Abstract

This research looked at the effect of motivated reasoning on the way people judge information from politicians in the Netherlands. Participants were presented with pairs of conflicting statements made by Geert Wilders. They were then asked to rate these inconsistencies from severe to not severe at all. Results show that participants who had positive feelings about Geert Wilders rated inconsistencies as less severe than people who felt neutral about him. People who felt negatively about Wilders rated the inconsistencies more severe than both other groups. These findings are in line with previous research done in America, and show that when strong feelings are involved people tend to use motivated reasoning instead of cold cognitive reasoning. Results also show that when faced with favorable or unfavorable information, when strong feelings are involved it does not matter if this information comes from a favorable or unfavorable source. In this case prior attitudes overshadow any effects that source might play.

Introduction

Getting insight in political motivation of people has always been an important topic for researchers and political parties alike. The predominant models of judgments and decision-making used in political science are “bounded rationality” models (Simon, 1990). Bounded rationality models work on the premise that people are rational within limits imposed by cognitive shortcuts and heuristics (due to limited information, limited time and cognitive limits of the mind). When looking at political partisanship (being devoted to or biased in support of a party, group, or cause) there is also a body of research that points to another set of limits to rational judgment imposed by emotion-biased or motivated reasoning. In other words, reasoning in a way as to produce emotionally preferable conclusions (Kunda, 1990).

Motivated Reasoning

According to Westen motivated reasoning can be seen as a form of implicit affect regulation in which the brain converges on solutions that minimize negative and maximize positive affect states (Westen & Blagov, 2007; Westen, 1985, 1994, 1998). Such processes were already described by Freud (1933) using the term “defense” to indicate the processes by which people can adjust their cognitions to avoid aversive feelings such as anxiety and guilt. In this paper the term motivated reasoning is used because of its widespread use (even though all reasoning is generally motivated, by emotions such as interest, excitement and anxiety (Westen, 1985). Neural network models of motivated reasoning show that in situations when affect plays an important part, the brain tries to come up with solutions that simultaneously satisfy two sets of constraints: cognitive constraints (maximizing goodness of fit to the data) and emotional constraints (maximizing positive affect and minimize negative affect) (Westen, Feit, Arkowitz, & Blagov, 2005; Thagard, 2003; Westen, 1998). People seem to gravitate toward decisions that

maximize expected utility, trying to optimize current or anticipated affect (Simon, Krawczyk, & Holyoak, 2004; Mellers, 2000; Westen, 1985). “The same processes of approach and avoidance, motivated by affect or anticipated affect, may apply to motivated reasoning, such that people will implicitly approach and avoid judgments based on their emotional associations” (Westen, Blagov, Harenski, Kilts & Hamann, 2006, p. 1). In ‘the motivated construction of political judgments’ Taber, Lodge and Glathar (2001) observe that the dismissal of a remark, made by a candidate from the opposing party that corresponds with partisan’s own political views, can be explained because people are inclined to process information in such a manner that they can preserve their prior beliefs and affect. Thus existing beliefs and affect direct the processing of new information (Redlawsk, 2002). This is linked with the theory of cognitive dissonance which states that people have a motivational drive to minimize the difference between their attitudes and behavior by changing them or rationalizing in such a way that they become more harmonious.

Opposite to motivated reasoning lies ‘cold’ (or emotionally neutral) reasoning. This is a form of reasoning in which emotions play no part and in which decisions are made on the basis of the facts that are presented. Although one can argue that there is no such thing as ‘reasoning completely void of emotion’ and therefore also no true cold reasoning (Kunda, 1990; Westen, 1985).

In his book ‘The political brain’ Drew Westen paints an interesting picture of how self proclaimed political partisans respond and react to politics and political messages. In one experiment (Westen et al., 2006) both ‘hardcore’ democrats and republicans were presented quotes from politicians from both sides. There were two quotes from the same politician that strongly contradicted each other. Results showed that test subjects were inclined to reason away this contradiction for politicians from ‘their’ party while condemning the contradictions for

politicians from the opposite party. The observation of partisanship having a strong effect on people's behavior is not new. In Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes book 'The American voter' (1960) it was already observed that partisanship acts as a heuristic for guiding many political beliefs. The research by Westen et al. (2006), shows that for 'hardcore' partisans it (partisanship) does not just guide their beliefs, but that it makes almost no difference what their candidate or the other parties candidate says, their mind is already made up and their choice is set in stone.

Dutch Politics

Of all the features of the American political system that might cause the impact of emotions, arguably the most important one is the fact that American politics is candidate centered politics. This is tellingly illustrated by the fact that candidate evaluations are the strongest predictor of vote choice. If voters identify with one party but like the candidate of the other party better, they mostly vote for the latter candidate (Rosema, 2007). The question is whether in political systems and elections in which candidates play a less important role, similar processes can be observed. Traditionally Dutch politics is more party orientated. Research therefore has almost always focused on parties, like the research done on the role of emotion on voting behavior by Rosema (2007).

However in recent years political debate in the Netherlands has heated up. It started with Pim Fortuyn and the debate about the multicultural society. But it has become even fiercer with the arrival of Geert Wilders and his newly formed party the PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid, translated: party for freedom). Geert Wilders has a very outspoken opinion on foreigners, especially on Muslims. This makes Geert Wilders a very controversial politician with a large part of the Dutch population strongly supporting him but also with a large part despising him. His party currently has nine seats in Dutch parliament (from a total of 150) and recent polls estimate

he would get about twenty-five seats if elections were held now (www.politiekebarometer.nl, week nr 2 2010). This suggests he has quite a large following (over 16% of the voting population) which makes his opponents more outspoken as well because they see him as a real political threat now.

It would be very interesting to see if Geert Wilders has ‘divided’ (between people who think he is great and people who despise him, so that emotional feelings are strong) enough so that similar results as in Westen et al. (2006) would be found when confronting Geert Wilders supporters and opponents with several inconsistencies in his statements and or actions. For example, Geert Wilders wants all mosques to give full transparency when it comes to financial gifts they receive (from abroad). On the other hand Geert Wilders receives a lot of foreign financial gifts for his foundation ‘Vrienden van de PVV’ and refuses to disclose the identity of the donators (Groen & Kranenberg, 2009). So the question becomes: will people who support Geert Wilders marginalize inconsistencies in his statements/actions while Wilders haters judge him very harshly on these same statements/actions.

H1: Feelings about Geert Wilders are strong enough that his supporters will rate contradictory statements made by him less severe than his opponents.

Westen (2006) however did not use any ‘neutral’ subjects in his experiment due to time limitations imposed by the U.S. presidential election cycle and the difficulty in finding people without any party preference in the midst of a polarized election. Although a lot of Dutch people seem to have a firm opinion about Geert Wilders, there will certainly be enough people who do not feel strongly for or against him. It will be interesting to see how they react to the statements. They will probably not use ‘motivated reasoning’ in their decision making but ‘cold cognitive

reasoning’.

H2: Participants who rate Geert Wilders as ‘neutral’ will have an opinion on the statements that lies in between that of the Geert Wilders supporters and opponents.

Information Source

As an added variable it would be interesting to include the source of these inconsistencies. In other words, will the (perceived) reliability of the source of the inconsistencies have a mediating effect on the judgment of Wilders supporters and opponents when assessing the inconsistency in them? Different sources have different (perceived) reliability, for example Wikipedia is trusted less by most than a renowned newspaper like for example “De Volkskrant” or “de NRC” (Kioussis, 2001). The bias of the source refers to factors that are perceived to influence the expected difference between the source's report and the true state of nature. This gives a source a certain amount of credibility. The effect from a certain source's information will get bigger with increased credibility. However, the reverse is also true (Pornpitakpan, 2004). For example, a Republican might be considered a biased source of information about a Democrat who is running for office. Since Wilders' PVV is considered a rightwing party most of his followers consider themselves rightwing. His fiercest opponents mainly come from the leftwing side. Most newspapers in the Netherlands are also considered either rightwing or leftwing orientated. The biggest perceived reliability difference in source for both supporters and opponents will therefore probably be between a rightwing and a leftwing news source (Birnbbaum & Stegner, 1979; Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). To keep other factors constant two sources of the same medium type will be used. The newspapers Telegraaf and Volkskrant will be used because they have a clear rightwing and leftwing image respectively. A

recent survey on vote choice for the European Parliament of readers from different Dutch newspapers (by Maurice de Hond on June 4th 2009, www.peil.nl) for instance showed that Telegraaf readers were most likely to vote PVV (43%), where Volkskrant readers had the lowest percentage of PVV voters (4%). And the opposite was true for the leftwing parties PvdA (labour party), SP (socialist party) and GroenLinks (left progressive party). See Appendix A for a complete overview.

This leads to four different cases: Wilders supporters and the leftwing source, Wilders supporters and the rightwing source, Wilders opponents and the leftwing source and Wilders opponents and the rightwing source. It is expected that the leftwing source will amplify reactions of the Wilders supporters as opposed to a rightwing source. The inconsistencies that are presented might be seen as leftwing propaganda and will therefore be reasoned away easier. The second case is the opposite of the first, which leads to the following hypotheses.

H3a: An unfavorable (leftwing) source will amplify the effect of motivated reasoning for Wilders supporters, leading to lower inconsistency ratings than with a favorable (rightwing) source.

The third case is Wilders opponents and the leftwing source. Here the possible propaganda bias of the leftwing newspaper will probably have no effect. As Earle and Cvetkovich (1995) point out, trust may remain high even when there is an obvious vested interest as long as this interest coincides with that of the audience. For the fourth case: Wilders opponents and a rightwing source, it will be a bit more difficult to predict an outcome. Here the opponents get favorable news from a source they might be hesitant to trust. Will they be more inclined to believe favorable news because they would not normally expect a rightwing source to

provide unfavorable news about Wilders? No theories were found to predict a clear expected outcome for this case. Therefore it will be all the more interesting to see if Wilders opponents rate inconsistencies from the rightwing source higher than from the leftwing source because they would not expect the rightwing source to present these inconsistencies.

H3b: Wilders opponents will rate the favorable inconsistencies presented by the unfavorable (rightwing) source higher than from a the favorable (leftwing) source.

Perceived reliability could also be moderated by the prior attitudes of the audience. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) suggested that people who are in favor of an opinion that is presented, will consider the communication as fair and unbiased. People with an opposing view will consider the exact same communication as propagandistic and unfair. If people have strong beliefs about a subject and they consider these beliefs important, they are very resistant to change these beliefs (Zuwerink & Devine, 1996; Tormala & Petty, 2002). If the source turns out to have little effect on the participants' scores it might be because the effect of prior attitudes is much greater than that of the source. Therefore an alternative to H3a and H3b will be presented.

H4: Source will have no effect on the inconsistency ratings from both Wilders supporters and opponents, due to the effects of prior attitudes.

Methods

Participants

Participants consisted of people visiting the internet forums weerwoord.nl and

politiekdebat.nl (both are Dutch political debate forums), on which a link to the online survey was posted as well as people who received a request to participate through a direct email (initial mail went out to acquaintances of the author and had the request to forward the email to their acquaintances). In the end there were 91 people who filled in the survey completely. Of these 91 participants 52 were male and 39 were female ranging in age from 21 to 77 with an average of 44 years.

Task and procedure

Participants were asked to participate in an online survey either by a forum post or a direct email. After following the link participants were presented with the online survey. They were welcomed with a short text providing some information about the survey and where then asked to fill in their sex and age. The next part of the survey had participants rate four well known Dutch men, Philip Freriks (news anchor), Geert Wilders, Wouter Bos (political leader of the PvdA, the largest leftwing political party in the Netherlands) and Andre Rieu (well known violin player), and two newspapers (Telegraaf and Volkskrant) on a feeling thermometer (an illustration of the thermometer as it was used in the survey can be found in Appendix C). Feeling thermometers were introduced in 1964 by the American National Election Study (ANES) and have since become standard tools in political based surveys (Wilcox, Sigelman & Cook, 1989). Feeling thermometers offer both greater validity and reliability over the more traditional 7 point scales (Alwin, 1997). Then similar to the research done by Westen (2006) participants were presented with a statement from Wilders, followed by a contradicting statement (there were three pairs of statements for Geert Wilders, all statement sets can be found in Appendix B) and the question to rate this inconsistency (from severe to not inconsistent at all on a five point likert scale). Then a page with a possible explanation for the previously presented contradiction was shown. Finally, participants were asked to reevaluate their previous conclusion about the

inconsistency in light of the newly offered explanation. The same procedure was repeated but now with statements from Andre Rieu, the famous violin player (those statement sets can also be found in Appendix B, again there are three sets of two statements). The statements all had a source mentioned at the bottom of each quote. For a single participant the source for all the quotes was either the Volkskrant or the Telegraaf. This was done by randomization built into the survey. No statement sets were presented for Philip Freriks and Wouter Bos. Geert Wilders was a very ‘hot topic’ at the time of research. To prevent people from getting immediately defensive (or offensive) by ‘another Geert Wilders survey’ the survey was presented as looking into judgment on statements made by well-known Dutch people. To this end Philip Freriks (as another neutral well-known Dutch man) and Wouter Bos (as a political opposite to Geert Wilders) were added to the rating stage to serve as distracters.

Apparatus

The online survey was hosted on a server from the University of Twente. The survey was in basic html (using forms). The feeling thermometer was coded in flash by the author himself and has labels identical to the ones used by the NES only translated into Dutch (see appendix C for an illustration of the thermometer as it was used in the survey).

Results

Looking at the data, 68 of the participants rated Geert Wilders negative (<40 on the feelings thermometer) 14 rated him neutral (between 41 and 59) and 9 rated him positive (>60).

Results clearly show that participants who judged Geert Wilders higher on the feelings thermometer were less prone to see the contradictions presented in the sets of statements (correlations between thermometer scores and statement scores range from -0.50 to -0.58 with

$p < 0,01$).

Furthermore, when the data is split in groups according to their rating of Geert Wilders, the average scores for all the Geert Wilders statement sets is highest for the Wilders opponents and lowest for the supporters. Higher scores here mean that participants rated the contradictions between the Wilders statement sets as more apparent. The neutral group had scores in the middle of the other two groups (see Table 1). Using ANOVA these differences are shown to be significant for all statement sets ($p < 0,00$) (Table 2). This means there is a significant difference between the three groups. However it does not mean that there is a significant difference between each of the two groups (i.e. opponent and supporter, neutral and supporter and neutral and opponent). So the differences between each of the groups still have to be tested for significance.

Table 1
Descriptives of Wilders Statement Sets

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Statement Set 1	Opponent	68	3,53	,70
	Neutral	14	3,07	,62
	Supporter	9	2,22	1,09
	Total	91	3,33	,83
Statement Set 2	Opponent	68	3,34	,70
	Neutral	14	2,71	,61
	Supporter	9	2,22	,83
	Total	91	3,13	,79
Statement Set 3	Opponent	68	3,38	,77
	Neutral	14	2,71	,73
	Supporter	9	2,00	,87
	Total	91	3,14	,89

Table 2
ANOVA of Wilders Statement Sets

		df	F	Sum of Squares	p
Statement Set 1	Between Groups	2	13,62	14,68	,00
	Within Groups	88		47,43	
	Total	90		62,11	
Statement Set 2	Between Groups	2	12,89	12,78	,00
	Within Groups	88		43,63	
	Total	90		56,42	
Statement Set 3	Between Groups	2	15,16	18,23	,00
	Within Groups	88		52,92	
	Total	90		71,14	

Correlations between the statement sets are all high (between 0,54 and 0,62). Performing a reliability analysis on the three statement set scores using Cronbach's alpha, yields a value of 0,81 which is good. Considering these values, it seems justified to aggregate the scores from the three 'Geert Wilders' statement sets for all further analyses between the three groups (supporter, neutral and opponent).

ANOVA is used once more, but this time with the aggregate score from the statement sets and post hoc Bonferoni to compare the three groups to each other. When comparing the ratings from the supporter and the opponent groups, the difference between the aggregate scores on the Wilders statement sets turns out to be significant with $p < 0,00$. Comparing the opponent group with the neutral group gives a similar result with $p < 0,00$. Finally the neutral group compared to the supporter group also shows the expected difference in scores and significance, $p = 0,02$. See Tables 3 and 4 for a complete overview.

Table 3
Descriptives of Wilders Statement Sets Aggregate

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Opponent	68	10,25	1,76
Neutral	14	8,50	1,34
Supporter	9	6,44	2,35
Total	91	9,60	2,13

Table 4
Post Hoc Bonferoni for Wilders Statement Sets and Opponent, Neutral and Supporter Groups

(I) AntiNeutPro	(J) AntiNeutPro	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
Opponent	Neutral	1,75*	,00
	Supporter	3,81*	,00
Neutral	Opponent	-1,75*	,00
	Supporter	2,06*	,02
Supporter	Opponent	-3,81*	,00
	Neutral	-2,06*	,02

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

This seems to be enough evidence to confirm the first hypothesis, Wilders supporters do indeed rate the level of the contradictions significantly lower than the Wilders opponents. The second hypothesis can also be confirmed. The scores of people who rate Wilders neutral lie neatly in between the scores of the supporters and opponents.

When looking at the neutral celebrity (Andre Rieu) statistics show that there is some correlation between the scores on the feeling thermometer and the manner in which people rate the contradictions. But only the correlations for question 6 is significant (-0,34 $p < 0,00$).

Splitting the participants in opponent, supporter and neutral Andre Rieu groups, yields a similar pattern as was seen for the Wilders groups. The opponent group has the highest score the supporter group the lowest and the neutral group scores fall in between (except for question 5

where the opponent group actually has the lowest score but this can probably be explained by the low number of people in the opponent group) (see Table 5). When performing an ANOVA on all groups however the differences between them are not significant (see Table 6) comparing the groups two at a time is therefore irrelevant as the differences will all turn out to be insignificant.

Table 5
Descriptives of Rieu Statement Sets

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Statement Set 4	Opponent	5	2,80	,84
	Neutral	23	2,48	,79
	Supporter	63	2,37	,73
	Total	91	2,42	,75
Statement Set 5	Opponent	5	2,40	1,14
	Neutral	23	3,26	,69
	Supporter	63	3,05	,77
	Total	91	3,07	,79
Statement Set 6	Opponent	5	3,20	,45
	Neutral	23	3,09	,79
	Supporter	63	2,78	,79
	Total	91	2,88	,79

Table 6
ANOVA of Rieu Statement Sets

		df	F	Sum of Squares	p
Statement Set 4	Between Groups	2	,89	,99	,42
	Within Groups	88		49,14	
	Total	90		50,13	
Statement Set 5	Between Groups	2	2,61	3,11	,08
	Within Groups	88		52,49	
	Total	90		55,60	
Statement Set 6	Between Groups	2	1,77	2,16	,18
	Within Groups	88		53,51	
	Total	90		55,67	

The exculpatory statements which logically explained away the contradiction of the

previous two statements did sometimes change participants rating of the contradiction resulting in them rating it less severe the second time. However there were no significant differences between supporter, opponent or neutral groups or between Wilders and Rieu.

Source Effects

When looking at the impact of the source on the participants ratings there was a clear difference between the different groups (supporter, neutral, opponent for both Wilders and Rieu) and their rating of the two newspapers on the feelings thermometer. For instance the Wilders opponent group rated the Volkskrant much higher than the Telegraaf (61,57 vs 39,46 $p < 0,00$). Their rating for the Volkskrant was also much higher than the Volkskrant rating from the neutral and supporter groups (61,57 vs 44,57 $p < 0,01$ and 61,57 vs 52,22) the difference with the supporter group is not significant however. And their rating of the Telegraaf was much lower than those of the other groups (39,46 vs. 50,79 and 50,89) (see Table 7). The three Andre Rieu groups did not differ significantly in their newspaper appraisals.

Table 7
Descriptives of Telegraaf and Volkskrant Thermometers for Wilders Opponent Neutral and Supporters Groups

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Thermometer Telegraaf	Opponent	68	39,46 ^a	20,81
	Neutral	14	50,79	16,28
	Supporter	9	50,89	10,66
	Total	91	42,33	19,88
Thermometer Volkskrant	Opponent	68	61,57 ^{a,b}	16,30
	Neutral	14	44,57 ^b	17,72
	Supporter	9	52,22	27,68
	Total	91	58,03	18,77

a. The difference between the opponent Telegraaf and Volkskrant ratings is significant at the $p < 0,00$ level

b. The difference between the Opponent and Neutral Volkskrant ratings is significant at the $p < 0,01$ level

Despite the differences in ratings of the newspapers on the feelings thermometer, the source (Telegraaf or Volkskrant) seemed to have no effect on the contradiction ratings. There is no evidence to support H3a. It was expected that Wilders supporters would reason away the inconsistencies from the statement sets easier when they were presented by an unfavorable source (Volkskrant). Looking at the scores however the opposite seems true. The inconsistency rating is higher for the Volkskrant than the Telegraaf (7,40 vs. 5,25) but this difference is not significant. H3b stated that Wilders opponents would rate the inconsistencies higher when the source was the Telegraaf as opposed to the Volkskrant. Looking at the data the inconsistency rating with Telegraaf as source is almost identical to the one where the Volkskrant is the source (10,24 vs. 10,26). This difference is very small and clearly not significant. Evidence seems to point to the alternative H4 instead. Which states that the effect of prior attitudes will be so strong that any source effects are overshadowed. See Table 8 for an overview of the data.

Table 8
Descriptives of Wilders Opponent, Neutral and Supporter
Groups Split by Telegraaf vs Volkskrant

AntiNeutPro		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Opponent	Telegraaf	34	10,24	1,26
	Volkskrant	34	10,26	2,16
	Total	68	10,25	1,76
Neutral	Telegraaf	7	8,00	1,00
	Volkskrant	7	9,00	1,53
	Total	14	8,50	1,34
Supporter	Telegraaf	4	5,25	2,06
	Volkskrant	5	7,40	2,30
	Total	9	6,44	2,35

Conclusion and Discussion

This study set out to investigate if motivated reasoning plays a role in Dutch politics. Specifically the way people judge statements made by political figures they have strong opinions about. It looks as though Geert Wilders is indeed polarizing enough to keep both his strong opponents as well as his strong supporters from making purely objective decisions when judging statements by or about him. The results correspond with those found by Westen et al. (2006), where MRI research showed that American political partisans used motivated reasoning when confronted with statements made by their or the opposing candidate. This research shows that these results are not limited to American politics. Dutch people are just as likely to use motivated reasoning in their judgments when they feel strongly (negative or positive) about a political figure. Unlike the paper by Westen et al. (2006), this study also looked at people that had no strong positive or negative opinion on the featured politician. Their ratings on the inconsistencies presented in the statement sets fell right in the middle of the supporter and opponent groups. This strengthens the conclusion that when it comes to a political figure people have very strong opinions on (in this case Geert Wilders), they tend to make judgments based more on their feelings about the person. Whereas people who have a more neutral standpoint are more inclined to just look at the facts that are presented. On a whole it strengthens the theory of voters being guided by motivated reasoning as previously suggested by Lodge & Taber (2000), Redlawsk (2002) and Westen et al (2006) among others. In addition it challenges the image of the voter as a rational Bayesian updater who is capable of being persuaded by new information (Achen, 2002, 2006; Gerber & Green, 1999).

When looking at a more neutral celebrity, in this case famous violin player Andre Rieu, the different groups (supporter, neutral and opponent) do not rate the inconsistencies

presented in his statement sets significantly different. This indicates that even though people have negative or positive feelings about a person, this does not always mean they will let their emotions control their judgment. Motivated reasoning only seems to occur when people not only have positive or negative feelings about a person but they have to have strong feelings about what this person represents for them. For most people this seems to occur when the person in question is a politician with a very outspoken opinion and (evidently) not when he or she is 'only' a famous violin player. The obvious question then is, where the 'threshold' lies, if there even is one. For instance would motivated reasoning come in to play for statements made by a famous athlete? Although this threshold is probably very personal, it seems like an interesting topic for future research.

Source Effects

This paper also tried to identify the role the source of the statements, that people had to make judgments about, plays. The hypothesis was, that rightwing orientated participants would be more inclined to mistrust unfavorable information about their candidate when it came from an unfavorable leftwing newspaper. This would then result in them rating the inconsistencies lower than when they were presented by a favorable rightwing source. Leftwing orientated participants were expected to rate inconsistencies presented by the rightwing paper higher than those presented by the leftwing paper, because they would not expect this favorable news from a rightwing source. Although the leftwing participants rated the leftwing paper (Volkskrant) much higher than the rightwing paper (Telegraaf), no significant impact of the source on the contradiction ratings was found for any of the groups.

It could be that the source was not featured prominently enough. However, this seems unlikely because the logo of the source newspaper was presented clearly beside each statement as can be seen in Appendix B. Based on the results, the most likely conclusion is that the source

does not play a significant role when judging these type of contradictions because the effect of prior attitudes overshadows it. Participants notice the source the information comes from, but the reaction based on their prior beliefs is so strong that the source has not enough influence to affect their opinion. Nevertheless it might be good for future research to get a more definitive answer on the role that the information source plays (or does not play) when it comes to forming judgments about statements by persons people feel strongly about. This research should at least rule out that participants simply do not notice the source, by bringing it to the participants attention at the start or asking questions about it afterwards.

Practical application

The conclusions made in this paper should be taken into consideration by politicians who are trying to sway voters over to their side. For maximum effect they should focus on the people who do not feel strongly about them be it positive or negative. The people that already feel strongly connected to the politician will not be turned away easily even if the politician says something they might not fully support. People that really do not like the politician will not react positively to him even if he tells them what they want to hear. The group of people that does not feel strongly about the politician be it positive or negative however can be persuaded by presenting them with favorable information and positive facts. Politicians should of course beware that there are limits to this phenomenon. As for the source of the message this should not be a big concern as it is likely to have little impact on how the message is received. Thus politicians do not have to worry where and by whom their message is published.

Limitations

It has to be noted that because the way participants were 'recruited' (through direct mails and political forums), the group used here can not be considered as a random sampling of Dutch people. The percentage of Wilders supporters here for instance was not as high as the percentage

of votes he gets in the recent political polls (10% vs 16%). Of course there might just be a difference between the amount of people who really like Geert Wilders and who vote for him. But because participants were grouped by the ratings they themselves gave at the start of the survey, this should not have significant impact on the results that were found.

Disclaimer

Finally a sort of disclaimer: in the comment section of the survey a few people were worried that the survey was meant to provide ‘anti Wilders results’. The research here has nothing to do with Wilders specifically. To test the paper's hypothesis a well known person that people have strong feelings about was required. In the authors view, Geert Wilders simply fitted this description the best at the time the paper was written. The results of this paper do not show that people who like Geert Wilders are gullible and can not see his flaws or simply believe everything he says. The results show that when people have strong feelings about a (in this case) political figure they are prone to react emotionally rather than purely fact based. This results in people who really like this person to more easily reason away unfavorable information about him or her. On the other hand people who really do not like the person are all too happy to see every little detail that could be considered unfavorable. The results that were found here should be recreatable with any other political figure people feel strongly positive and negative about.

References

Achen, C. H. (2002). Parental Socialization and Rational Party Identification. *Political Behaviour* 24(2), 141-170.

Achen, C. H. (2006). *Expressive Bayesian Voters, Their Turnout Decisions, and Double Probit: Empirical Implications of a Theoretical Model*. Unpublished manuscript, Princeton University.

Alwin, D. F. (1997). Feeling Thermometers Versus 7-Point Scales: Which Are Better? *Sociological Methods and Research* 25(3), 318-340.

Birnbaum, M. H., & Stegner, S. E. (1979). Source Credibility in Social Judgment: Bias, Expertise and the Judge's Point of View. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37(1), 48-74.

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller W. E., & Stokes D. E. (1960). *The American voter*. New York: Wiley.

Chaiken, S., & Maheswaran, D. (1994). Heuristic Processing Can Bias Systematic Processing: Effects of Source Credibility, Argument Ambiguity, and Task Importance on Attitude Judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 66(3), 460-473.

Earle, T. C., & Cvetkovich, G. T. (1995). *Social Trust: Toward a Cosmopolitan Society*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Freud, S. (1933). *New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis*. Standard edition 22, 3–128. London: Hogart Press.

Gerber, A., & Green, D. (1999). Misperceptions about Perceptual Bias. *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, 189-210.

Groen, J., & Kranenberg, A. (2009, June 20). Giften voor proces-Wilders uit VS gaan naar partijkas. *De Volkskrant*. Retrieved from <http://www.volkskrant.nl/binnenland/>

Hovland C. I., Janis, I. L., & Kelley, H. H. (1953). *Communication & Persuasion*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kiousis, S. (2001). Public Trust or Mistrust? Perceptions of Media Credibility in the Information Age. *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(4), 381-403.

Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(3), 480–498.

Lodge, M. & Taber, C. (2000). Three Steps Toward a Theory of Motivated Political Reasoning. In A. Lupia, M. McCubbins, & S. Popkin (Eds.), *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality* (pp. 183-213). London: Cambridge University Press.

Mellers, B. A. (2000). Choice and the relative pleasure of consequences. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(6), 910–924.

Pornpitakpan, C. (2004). The persuasiveness of source credibility: A critical review of five decades evidence. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 34(2), 243-281.

Redlawsk, David P. (2002). Hot Cognition or Cool Consideration: Testing the Effects of Motivated Reasoning on Political Decision Making. *Journal of Politics* 64, 1021-1044.

Rosema, M. (2007, September). *How passionate is the electorate? A study of emotion based voting in party-centered politics*. Presented at the 4th ECPR Conference, Pisa Italy.

Simon, D., Krawczyk, D. C., & Holyoak, K. J. (2004). Construction of preferences by constraint satisfaction. *Psychological Science*, 15(5), 331–336.

Simon, H. A. (1990). Invariants of human behavior. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 41, 1–19.

Taber, C.S., Lodge, M., & Glathar, J. (2001). The motivated construction of political judgments. In J. H. Kuklinski (Ed.), *Citizens and Politics: Perspectives from Political Psychology*. (pp. 198-226). New York : Camebridge University Press.

Thagard, P. (2003). Why wasn't O. J. Convicted? Emotional coherence in legal inference. *Cognition and Emotion*, 17(3), 361–383.

Tormala, Z. L., & Petty, R. E. (2002). What doesn't kill me makes me stronger: The effects of resisting persuasion on attitude certainty. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 1298–1313.

Westen, D. (1985). *Self and society: Narcissism, collectivism, and the development of morals*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Westen, D. (1994). Toward an integrative model of affect regulation: Applications to social-psychological research. *Journal of Personality*, 62(4), 641–667.

Westen, D. (1998). The scientific legacy of Sigmund Freud: Toward a psychodynamically informed psychological science. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124(3), 333–371.

Westen, D., Feit, A., Arkowitz, J., & Blagov, P. S. (2005). *The role of emotion in the making and unmaking of presidents: Emotional constraint satisfaction in social, political, and everyday judgment*. Atlanta, GA: Emory University.

Westen, D., Kilts, C., Blagov, P., Harenski, K., & Hamann, S. (2006). Neural basis of motivated reasoning: An fMRI study of emotional constraints on partisan political judgment in the 2004 U.S. Presidential election. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 18(11), 1947–1958.

Westen, D. (2007). *The political Brain: The role of emotion in deciding the fate of the nation*. New York: Public Affairs.

Westen, D., & Blagov, P. (2007). A clinical-empirical model of emotion regulation: From defenses and motivated reasoning to emotional constraint satisfaction. In J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation*. (pp. 373-392). New York: Guilford.

Wilcox, C., Sigelma, L., & Cook, E. (1989). Some Like It Hot: Individual Differences in Responses to Group Feeling Thermometers. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 53(2), 246-257.

Zuwerink, J. R., & Devine, P. G. (1996). Attitude importance and resistance to persuasion: It's not just the thought that counts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(5), 931–944.

Appendix B: Contradiction statements

Below are pictures of all the contradicting statement sets and the exculpatory statements.

Geert Wilders:

Web Enquete					
Nu u een verklaring gelezen hebt, in hoeverre bent u het nu nog eens met de stelling dat er sprake is van een tegenstrijdigheid tussen de twee stellingen (u kunt eventueel de standpunten en verklaring hieronder nogmaals doornemen).		Helemaal mee oneens	Mee oneens	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Standpunt 1:					Bron: <i>De Telegraaf</i>
<i>Geert Wilders wil dat alle moskeeën volledige openheid geven met betrekking tot giften die zij uit het buitenland ontvangen.</i>					
Standpunt 2:					Bron: <i>De Telegraaf</i>
<i>Geert Wilders ontvangt veel giften uit het buitenland voor zijn stichting "Vrienden van de PVV" hij weigert om de identiteit van deze donateurs vrij te geven.</i>					
Verklaring:					
<i>Geert Wilders z'n stichting doet geen rare dingen. Sommige moskeeën hebben zich schuldig gemaakt aan radicaliseren van jongeren. Het is dus logisch dat zij wel moeten kunnen aantonen dat hun giften niet van extreem islamitische organisaties komen.</i>					
Ga door naar de volgende pagina:				Verder	

Standpunt 1:					Bron: <i>De Telegraaf</i>
<i>Wilders zegt niets tegen moslims te hebben maar enkel tegen de islam in opstand te komen. Hij vindt dat hij duidelijk onderscheid maakt tussen 'de ideologie islam' aan de ene kant en 'moslims' aan de andere kant.</i>					
Standpunt 2:					Bron: <i>De Telegraaf</i>
<i>"Ik heb genoeg van de islam in Nederland: geen moslimmigrant er meer bij."</i>					
En: <i>"Hun gedrag vloeit voort uit hun religie en cultuur. Je kunt dat niet los van elkaar zien."</i>					
Verklaring:					
<i>Het is natuurlijk heel makkelijk om een paar losse quotes van Geert Wilders er bij te halen om een eerdere uitspraak van hem te ontkrachten. De context van deze quotes wordt bijvoorbeeld niet eens gegeven.</i>					

Standpunt 1:

Wilders wil een belasting invoeren voor personen die een hoofddoek dragen.

Bron:

de Volkskrant

Standpunt 2:

Wilders vindt niet dat er een belasting moet komen voor andere religieuze kledingstukken zoals het joodse keppeltje of een christelijk kruisje om iemands nek.

Bron:

de Volkskrant

Verklaring:

Keppeltjes en kruisjes worden niet gebruikt om vrouwen te onderdrukken. Er is dus een groot verschil tussen deze religieuze kledingstukken en het hoofddoekje waardoor belasting op hoofddoekjes en niet op andere religieuze kledingstukken gerechtvaardigd is.

Andre Rieu:

Standpunt 1:

Andre Rieu heeft altijd gezegd dat je zijn muziek alleen echt goed kunt ervaren door een concert bij te wonen.

Bron:

de Volkskrant

Standpunt 2:

De concerten van Andre Rieu zijn vaak in grote stadions. De akoestiek is daar vaak erg slecht en de muziek moet erg versterkt worden waardoor de geluidskwaliteit vrij slecht is.

Bron:

de Volkskrant

Verklaring:

Het gaat bij concerten natuurlijk om de beleving en de sfeer en in mindere mate om de geluidskwaliteit van de muziek.

Standpunt 1:

Andre Rieu is afgelopen zomer te zien geweest in zijn eigen real life soap op de TROS.

Bron:

de Volkskrant

Standpunt 2:

"Natuurlijk begrijp ik dat je als artiest regelmatig op de tv wilt komen. Maar een real life soap zoals bijvoorbeeld Jan Smit dat doet vind ik echt te ver gaan. Zoiets zou ik zelf in elk geval nooit doen."

Bron:

de Volkskrant

Verklaring:

In de real life soap van Andre Rieu stond zijn concert tour door Australië centraal. Het ging dus niet zozeer over zijn prive leven.

Standpunt 1:

Andre Rieu heeft een hekel aan critici die zijn muziek slecht vinden. Volgens hem beledigt je hiermee de mensen die zijn muziek wel goed vinden.

Bron:

De Telegraaf

Standpunt 2:

Andre Rieu heeft vaak kritiek op bekende popsterren omdat hij vindt dat hun liedjes muzikaal gezien erg slecht gemaakt zijn.

Bron:

De Telegraaf

Verklaring:

De critici die Andre Rieu's muziek slecht vinden hebben alleen kritiek op de manier waarop hij de nummers uitvoert (de show er omheen). Bij de kritiek die Andre Rieu geeft gaat het om de liedjes zelf.

Appendix C: Feeling Thermometer

Below is a picture of the flash based feeling thermometer that was used in the online survey.

