

**LEFT NATIONALISM AS A COUNTERFORCE:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GERMANY AND THE
NETHERLANDS IN COMBATING FAR-RIGHT
MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN EUROPE**

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the strategic role of left nationalism in Western Europe, where it positions itself as a counterforce to far-right ideologies that have gained traction by exploiting economic anxieties and social insecurities. By emphasising social equality and inclusivity, left nationalism aims to unify diverse societal groups and uphold democratic values against authoritarian tendencies, offering a cohesive vision that contrasts with the divisive rhetoric of the far right.

Left nationalism is a relatively underexplored concept compared to mainstream nationalism or right-wing nationalism. It combines advocacy for national sovereignty with the promotion of inclusive, progressive values that align with left-wing ideologies. This research will explore how these seemingly contradictory elements are reconciled and mobilised to counter the far-right's appeal. The focus on Western Europe provides a comparative perspective due to the diversity in political culture, history, and the extent of far-right influence across different countries. By examining left nationalism in this context, the thesis can provide insights into the effectiveness and limitations of such strategies in various political environments.

The thesis will focus on two prominent left-wing politicians: Sahra Wagenknecht in Germany and Lilian Marijnissen in the Netherlands. By analysing their political discourse and the articulation of left nationalist rhetoric, this research aims to shed light on how left nationalism is being employed as a potential counterforce to far-right movements in these two countries.

The research question for this thesis is: "How do Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen articulate and employ left nationalist rhetoric in their political discourse, and to what extent does this form of left nationalism function as a strategic response to counter the rise of far-right movements in their respective countries?" This question is particularly relevant given the current political climate across Western Europe. By examining the use of left nationalism as a strategy against far-right narratives, this thesis seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature and provide insights into how left-wing politicians are adapting their rhetoric and strategies in response to the changing political landscape. Existing literature often concentrates on the defensive measures of traditional parties or the overall shift in political discourse toward more conservative and nationalist rhetoric. This thesis aims to fill this gap by specifically examining how left nationalism is utilised as a strategy against the far-right narrative.

The Netherlands and Germany have been selected for a case study of left nationalism. The comparative analysis between the Netherlands and Germany provides insights into how left nationalism is manifested within each nation. Both countries feature a complex interplay of political dynamics that make them ideal for studying the interaction between left nationalism and rising far-right movements.

This analysis aims to deepen our understanding of left nationalism's role as a counterforce to these movements across Europe.

The Netherlands, known for its progressive social policies and a strong labour movement, and Germany, with its significant historical and contemporary political challenges, both offer fertile ground for examining left nationalism. These nations are characterised by their multiparty systems, which include prominent left-leaning parties such as Germany's Die Linke and the Netherlands' Socialist Party (SP). Such political environment allows for an exploration of how left nationalist strategies evolve in response to domestic and EU-wide issues.

Both countries have witnessed the rise of far-right parties, such as the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany and the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands. Studying the responses of left nationalist movements alongside these far-right influences provides insights into their adaptive strategies and narratives. Additionally, the role of the media in both countries, which frequently highlights political events, underscores the relevance of these nations in understanding broader European trends.

The methodology of this thesis employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses and a discourse analysis. The corpus includes a detailed examination of a number of speeches of key figures such as Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen. These speeches, noted for their influence on political discourse, are analysed for their content on nationalism and identity politics. Each speech not only exemplifies the core ideologies and rhetorical strategies of left nationalism but also represents important moments in the broader discourse surrounding nationalism and social policies in Europe. Additionally, interviews with these leaders enrich the analysis by providing deeper insights into the strategic responses and ideological underpinnings of left nationalism. Lastly, media coverage and electoral outcomes are also studied to gauge the public and political impact of left nationalist rhetoric.

The qualitative component focuses on these primary sources to deeply understand the rhetorical strategies and ideological foundations of left nationalism as articulated by prominent political figures in Germany and the Netherlands. Discourse analysis will uncover the underlying messages, appeals to identity, and emotional resonance within their rhetoric. The analysis will concentrate on how these leaders articulate themes of immigration policies, social justice, criticism of political and neoliberal elite, national sovereignty and pride, examining how they position themselves as alternatives to more exclusionary nationalist movements.

In addition to the discourse analysis, the methodology includes a detailed examination of media coverage. Media sources selected for analysis include national newspapers and online media platforms

to ensure a comprehensive view of media portrayal. A mix of mainstream and alternative media sources, as well as outlets across the political spectrum, will be included to maintain balance and avoid bias.

By employing these methods, the qualitative analysis of this thesis will provide a detailed and critical examination of how left nationalism is articulated and represented in political speeches and media discourses. This approach will enhance our understanding of the strategic and ideological dimensions of left nationalism and offer insights into its potential to reshape political narratives in the face of rising far-right movements in Europe.

In the quantitative section of this thesis, an analysis will be conducted on election data and survey responses to gauge the public sentiment and voting behaviours concerning left nationalism in the Netherlands and Germany. The election results for the Netherlands will be sourced from the official government website, ‘Verkiezingsuitslagen’, which provides detailed results from various elections. For Germany, the data will be sourced from the Federal Returning Officer’s website, which includes comprehensive statistics on federal elections.

Additionally, survey data will be utilised from several sources. The ‘Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek’ (NKO) offers detailed insights into the behaviour and attitudes of Dutch voters. The European Values Study provides extensive data on the values and beliefs of Europeans, including their views on nationalism and immigration.

While textual analysis and quantitative data analysis have been commonly used in research on political ideologies and movements, their specific application to studying the dynamics between Left Nationalism and Far-Right movements in Western Europe is relatively novel. By integrating these methods, I aim to offer a comprehensive understanding of how left nationalism functions in Western Europe.

The thesis is structured into four main chapters, each addressing different aspects of left nationalism. Chapter 1 lays the theoretical framework and outlines the methodology, focusing first on nationalism studies and then engaging on discourse analysis techniques used to scrutinize the rhetorics of left nationalism. In this chapter the mixed-methods approach will be introduced, based on quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter 2 contextualizes the case studies of Germany and the Netherlands, providing a background on left nationalism within each nation and explaining the selection of these cases for their broader relevance to European trends.

Chapter 3 focuses on the analysis of key speeches by Wagenknecht and Marijnissen, identifying themes and examining how left nationalist ideologies are communicated. Chapter 4 expands the scope to media and public discourse, analysing how these speeches are portrayed in the media and their reception by the public, supported by survey data on electoral results and public opinion. This is done to gauge the public and political impact of nationalist rhetoric. The thesis concludes by combining the findings from each chapter to discuss the broader implications of left nationalism for future research. It

assesses the potential of left nationalism to promote a more inclusive and equitable political landscape in Europe, while also considering the risks it poses in terms of political polarisation and its impact on European integration.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to establish a robust theoretical and methodological foundation for the analysis of left nationalism as an inclusive ideological response to far-right movements in Western Europe. By outlining a clear theoretical backdrop and articulating the methodological tools employed, this chapter sets the stage for a comprehensive understanding of how left nationalism operates within, and reacts against, the broader political dynamics in Western Europe.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

1.1.1. Left Nationalism

Left nationalism embodies a unique approach within the broader spectrum of left-wing political movements, offering a compelling counter-narrative to the exclusionary tendencies often associated with right-leaning nationalism. Scholars like Caiani and Weisskircher (2021) and Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn (2022) have thoroughly examined how proponents of left nationalism envision a cosmopolitan, post-national Europe. This vision prioritizes inclusivity and directly opposes traditional nationalist, racist, and intolerant attitudes. Unlike typical nationalist groups that celebrate the nation-state and often reject multiculturalism and immigration, left nationalists express criticism towards the European Union (EU) for its perceived lack of transparency and democratic accountability (Caiani and Weisskircher 2021: 220). Nevertheless, they fundamentally support the EU and European integration as ideals, viewing Europe as a progressive project that necessitates overcoming or radically transforming the 'ancient' nation-state model, which they argue fosters exclusionary nationalism (Caiani and Weisskircher 2021: 229). Left nationalists argue for a reimagined Europe where cooperation and unity transcend historical national boundaries, promoting a form of nationalism that is inclusive rather than divisive.

This progressive stance extends to how left-wing parties use nationalism strategically. Some left nationalists emphasize cultural nationalism in a way that promotes national pride and solidarity among diverse groups within the nation, embracing inclusivity. Others focus on economic nationalism, championing policies that protect local industries and workers from the pressures of global economic forces (Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn 2022: 408). This form of economic nationalism supports broader left-wing goals of equity and justice, connecting them with the nationalistic aim of economic sovereignty (Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn 2022: 410). The movement also focuses on the empowerment of "the people" within a democratic framework, as discussed by Eklundh (2017: 135). Left nationalism challenges the disconnection between the state and its citizens, advocating for a reclamation of sovereignty that places legitimate political power back into the hands of the populace. It seeks to counter the dominance of elite structures and restore democratic legitimacy at both national

and local levels (Eklundh 2017: 136-137). The strategic deployment of nationalism serves as a tool for garnering political support, particularly in regions with pronounced separatist sentiments. This showcases how left nationalists blend nationalism with broader social justice objectives to harness nationalist sentiments for progressive ends.

Moreover, left nationalism merges progressive values with aspects of traditional conservatism, particularly in its emphasis on protecting national sovereignty and cultural identity. This combination allows left nationalists to champion progressive social policies (such as gender equality, LGBTQ rights, and robust social services) while still appealing to those who might traditionally align with conservative platforms. By integrating these progressive policies into a nationalistic framework, left nationalists aim to construct a broader electoral coalition that unites diverse constituencies around a shared vision of national identity and social progress (Duina and Carson 2020: 28).

Left nationalism is strategically distinctive in its use of nationalism, particularly in regions with strong regional identities or separatist movements. In these contexts, left-wing parties may employ nationalist rhetoric tactically, not as a core ideology but to garner political support and address local grievances (Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn 2022: 409). This approach allows them to harmonize global ideals with national concerns, creating a unique blend of universal left-wing values with the particularistic aspects of nationalism.

Left nationalism critically engages with traditional notions of sovereignty, particularly in the context of national autonomy against external entities such as the European Union. The movement reevaluates national sovereignty to ensure it serves democratic and populist goals, thereby challenging traditional conservative or reactionary nationalist discourses. It seeks to redefine terms like "sovereignty" and "fatherland" to strip them of their regressive connotations and align them with progressive aims (Eklundh 2017: 137).

1.1.2. History of Left Nationalism

Nationalism emerged from left-wing ideologies in the late 18th century but later became associated predominantly with right-wing movements, particularly the extreme right. This historical shift has posed significant ideological challenges for left-wing parties. The left-wing parties are now compelled to address the "national question" by balancing their universalist ideologies with the inherent particularism of nationalism. This balance is crucial as traditional working-class support has waned and right-wing populist parties have gained ground by advocating for welfare chauvinist agendas, which prioritize natives over immigrants and oppose globalisation to defend a "national welfare state" (Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn 2022: 409-410).

The ideological spectrum within the left ranges from radical groups to moderate social democrats, each adopting differing stances on nationalism. Through detailed comparative case studies, Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn (2022) shed light on how various left-wing parties across Europe have

navigated these challenges. They reveal that while some parties have adopted nationalism instrumentally to counteract separatist threats, others have redefined national identity in a way that aligns with social-democratic values. These strategic engagements often reveal deep ideological tensions within left-wing parties, which promote a thin, inclusive version of national identity focused on civic values such as solidarity and diversity.

Historically, left nationalist movements have primarily interacted with far-right movements as ideological opponents, given their fundamental differences in interpreting and applying nationalism (Laxer 2001). In response to the growing influence of far-right movements, sometimes left nationalist parties adjust their strategies. This may involve adopting a more inclusive nationalism or incorporating nationalist rhetoric to reclaim the concept from the far-right. Such strategic shifts can be contentious within the parties themselves. On rare occasions, political circumstances might necessitate coalitions between diverse groups, including left nationalists and far-right entities, especially in parliamentary systems characterized by a fragmented political landscape (Laxer 2001: 12). However, these coalitions tend to be highly unstable and riddled with internal strife, reflecting deep-seated ideological conflicts.

Left nationalism has also been re-examined for its progressive potential in response to globalisation. Ryan and Worth (2010) critique efforts to redefine nationalism within progressive frameworks, noting that these efforts often fall into the divisive traps that have historically plagued nationalist movements, particularly in post-colonial settings. They highlight a historical shift where Marxist research was called to re-engage with the concept of nationalism, moving away from its traditionally negative connotations within Marxist thought. However, despite these efforts, left nationalism often reverts to nationalist strategies as a foundational element, which ultimately inhibits a sustained strategy capable of transcending the nation-state.

1.1.3. Left vs Right Nationalism

The exploration of this left nationalism by Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn (2022) and Custodi (2020), alongside insights from Halikiopoulou et al. (2012) and Halikiopoulou and Vlandas (2019) and studies by Huber and Schimpf (2017) and Salmela and Von Scheve (2018), provides a comprehensive understanding of its characteristics, strategies, and implications.

The euroscepticism of both right and left nationalism underscores their emphasis on preserving national sovereignty, although for different reasons. Right-wing nationalism is driven by a desire to protect cultural and ethnic homogeneity (Halikiopoulou et al. 2012: 414). Parties on the radical right perceive the EU as a threat to national identity, fearing that deeper integration will dilute cultural distinctiveness and undermine traditional values. Their euroscepticism stems from concerns over the EU's influence on national borders, immigration policies, and cultural norms, with a strong emphasis on maintaining control over these aspects to preserve national integrity (Halikiopoulou et al. 2012).

Conversely, left-wing nationalism arises from opposition to the capitalist and neoliberal policies that the EU is perceived to champion. Radical left parties view the EU as a mechanism for enforcing economic policies that favour market interests at the expense of workers' rights and social welfare. Their form of nationalism advocates for protecting national autonomy from economic dictates imposed by external powers, which they argue serve the interests of a global capitalist elite rather than the working class (Halikiopoulou et al. 2012: 417). Euroscepticism of the radical left is therefore rooted in a commitment to safeguarding national economic policies that promote social justice and equitable resource distribution.

The impact of left-wing and right-wing nationalist parties on democratic systems also varies. According to Huber and Schimpf (2017: 153), left-wing nationalist tend to support the inclusion of ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups within their definition of 'the people,' advocating for social equality and inclusive policies. This orientation generally results in more positive effects on minority rights. In contrast, right-wing nationalist often promote exclusionary policies that negatively impact minority rights, typically defining 'the people' in narrow ethno-cultural terms and excluding certain groups based on nationality, religion, or immigration status (Huber and Schimpf 2017: 155).

Additionally, the emotional processes driving nationalist movements on both the political right and left reveal key differences in the targets of resentment and the emotional mechanisms at play. Right nationalism often channels its resentment against cultural and political elites, accusing them of prioritizing the interests of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities over the native population (Huber and Schimpf 2017: 156). This form of nationalism leverages fear, insecurity, and resentment, often leading to xenophobic and exclusionary narratives. In contrast, left nationalism targets the political and economic establishments responsible for austerity policies and economic inequality. This movement is driven by emotions such as anger and indignation, which are directed specifically at entities like international financial institutions and local elites deemed responsible for social injustices. Unlike right nationalism, left nationalism tends to acknowledge and share feelings of shame among its constituents, transforming these emotions into a sense of collective empowerment and solidarity (Huber and Schimpf 2017: 156).

The emotional dynamics of these movements are influenced by their different approaches to handling negative emotions like shame. Right nationalists often repress shame, which then manifests as aggression towards out-groups. In contrast, left nationalists are more likely to acknowledge and share their experiences of shame, fostering a collective identity that is empowered rather than victimized (Salmela and Von Scheve 2018: 440). This highlights how right and left nationalist differ not only in their ideological targets but also in their emotional appeals and strategies. These differences are crucial for understanding how each movement mobilizes its base and frames its grievances against the backdrop of broader socio-economic changes.

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach that views language as a form of social practice, which is integral to understanding the dynamics of social power, ideologies, and identities within political contexts. This approach is particularly important because it moves beyond merely describing linguistic features to interpret the underlying social relations, power structures, and ideological processes reflected and shaped through language.

Critical Discourse Analysis is selected for this thesis due to its comprehensive approach to studying language as a social practice deeply intertwined with power structures and ideological constructs. In this thesis, CDA will be applied to analyse the political speeches and media texts that articulate or contest themes of left nationalism in Germany and the Netherlands. The analysis will focus on how language influences public policy debates and the broader political implications of the discourse used by key figures in these discussions. The use of CDA also facilitates a comparative analysis of discursive strategies in Germany and the Netherlands, shedding light on how similar ideologies might be articulated and received differently due to varying cultural and political contexts. This comparison is invaluable for understanding the adaptability and effectiveness of left nationalist ideologies in different national environments.

CDA, as described by Wodak (2001), is an interdisciplinary method used to examine how discourse, or language in use, influences and is influenced by social and political contexts. This approach combines elements of both linguistic and sociological analysis to delve into the intricate ways in which power dynamics, ideologies, and societal structures are embedded within and perpetuated through discourse. A central aspect of CDA is its focus on the historical context of discourse. Understanding the historical backdrop is crucial as it shapes contemporary communication and societal norms. By considering historical influences, CDA aims to uncover how past events and contexts continue to impact present-day discourse. CDA places significant emphasis on the relationship between text and context. It scrutinizes texts within their specific contexts to explore the dynamic interplay between language and social practices. This detailed examination helps to elucidate how discourse both shapes and is shaped by societal norms and practices (Wodak 2001).

The theoretical foundation of this thesis draws on the work of Norman Fairclough (1995) who has significantly contributed to the development of CDA. Fairclough's model treats discourse as a multi-dimensional practice that influences and is influenced by social structures. His approach guides the examination of texts at three levels: text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. This allows for an exploration of how language operates across textual, discursive, and social dimensions to produce and reproduce power relations (Fairclough 1995).

The objectives of employing CDA in this thesis include dissecting how left nationalist ideologies are constructed, challenged, and maintained through political discourse in Germany and the Netherlands. It aims to explore how the language used in political contexts reflects and influences power dynamics, shaping public perceptions and policies towards left nationalism. Additionally, this thesis will perform a comparative analysis of discursive strategies across these two countries, providing insights into how similar ideologies are articulated and received differently due to cultural and political variations.

1.2.2. Mixed-Methods Analysis

The second methodology used will be the mixed-methods analysis. This decision is justified by the complex nature of the subject matter. The topic of this thesis encompasses both subjective aspects, such as ideological narratives and discourse strategies and measurable phenomena, such as electoral outcomes and survey data. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this thesis aims to capture a more comprehensive view of the subject, allowing for a deeper and better understanding of how left nationalism functions and is perceived within these political contexts.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative data in this thesis involves a process where both sets of data inform each other. Quantitative data can identify areas of significance that require further exploration through qualitative means, such as detailed analysis of specific speeches or media texts highlighted by their impact on public opinion polls or election outcomes. This integrated approach not only enriches the analysis but also enhances the reliability and validity of the research findings. By corroborating evidence from both qualitative and quantitative sources, the study can provide a more persuasive argument about the role and effectiveness of left nationalism in countering far-right movements.

1.2.2.1. Qualitative Data

This thesis employs qualitative methodologies to explore the ideological and rhetorical dimensions of left nationalism within the Netherlands and Germany. The qualitative component is important for understanding the complex interplay of political dynamics in these nations, both known for their progressive social policies and multiparty systems, which feature prominent left-leaning parties like Germany's Die Linke and the Netherlands' Socialist Party (SP).

The primary sources for the qualitative analysis include speeches by key figures: Sahra Wagenknecht of Germany and Lilian Marijnissen of the Netherlands, whose rhetoric significantly influences the political discourse on left nationalism. The selection of these speeches is due to their relevance to the themes of nationalism and their pivotal roles in their respective political landscapes.

The analysis begins with a detailed examination of the speeches using discourse analysis techniques. This includes focusing on linguistic features such as metaphors, framing techniques, and

narrative structures to uncover the underlying messages, appeals to identity, and the emotional resonance within the rhetoric. This process aims to elucidate how these leaders articulate themes of nationalism and social welfare, positioning themselves as alternatives to more exclusionary nationalist movements. Media reports are also scrutinized to assess how left nationalism and its opposition to far-right movements, as utterances of Wagenknecht and Marijnissen, are portrayed in public discourse. A variety of sources, including national newspapers and online media platforms, are analysed. This approach includes both mainstream and alternative media outlets across the political spectrum to ensure a balanced perspective and avoid bias.

Critical discourse analysis of media is employed to understand how left nationalism is represented in the media, focusing on the types of narratives emphasized and the framing of left nationalist leaders and their policies. This analysis helps to gauge the public and political impact of left nationalist rhetoric and to understand how it is shaped by and shapes media coverage.

This qualitative analysis provides a comprehensive view of how left nationalism is articulated, represented, and perceived within political speeches and media discourses. By doing so, it enhances our understanding of the strategic and ideological dimensions of left nationalism and offers insights into its potential to reshape political narratives in the face of rising far-right movements in Europe.

1.2.2.2. Quantitative Data

To complement the qualitative analysis in this thesis, quantitative methods are employed to objectively measure and analyse data related to left nationalism. This approach involves the use of survey results and electoral data, which provide empirical evidence to assess the prevalence and impact of left nationalist ideologies and their counteractions against far-right movements in Germany and the Netherlands. Quantitative data for this study will be collected from two primary sources.

The first one being electoral data. This data will include detailed voting patterns and election outcomes which highlight the political influence and success of left nationalist parties such as Germany's Die Linke and the Netherlands' SP. Data is sourced from official election results websites such as verkiezingsuitslagen.nl for the Netherlands and bundeswahlleiter.de for Germany. These sources provide detailed electoral outcomes that are essential for analysing the performance of left nationalist parties over time.

The second primary source is survey results. To capture public opinion on left nationalist ideologies, results from surveys conducted by reputable polling organizations will be utilized. These surveys are designed to gauge the public's perception and acceptance of left nationalist ideologies compared to far-right ideologies, providing a snapshot of current societal sentiments. Public opinion data is gathered from the Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, Stichting KiezersOnderzoek and the European Values Study europeanvaluesstudy.eu.

Insights from qualitative analysis, such as identified themes or rhetoric from speeches and interviews, will help interpret the quantitative data. For instance, if a specific nationalist narrative identified qualitatively appears to resonate, subsequent quantitative analysis will assess if there is empirical support for these insights through changes in electoral support or survey responses. Significant findings from quantitative analysis, like a surge in electoral support, will prompt a detailed qualitative examination of related speeches, media coverage, or political strategies during those periods. This ensures that quantitative trends are contextualized within the rich qualitative data provided by content analyses and interviews. The final synthesis will involve constructing a narrative that seamlessly combines both qualitative and quantitative findings. This narrative will clarify how left nationalist ideologies influence and are influenced by factors such as electoral success, media portrayal, and public perceptions, providing a holistic view of their effectiveness and role within the political landscapes of Germany and the Netherlands. This integrated approach will not only detail the operational dynamics of left nationalism but also evaluate its effectiveness and public perception, thereby offering critical insights into its potential impact on European political developments.

CHAPTER 2: CASE STUDIES: GERMANY AND THE NETHERLANDS

This chapter explores the development and impact of left nationalism in Germany and the Netherlands, providing a comparative analysis of how these movements have emerged within the political landscapes of Western Europe. The selection of Germany and the Netherlands as case studies is informed by their unique yet comparably significant roles in the broader context of European political dynamics. Both countries offer valuable insights into the strategic adaptations of left nationalism in response to the global rise of far-right movements and the shifting sands of political allegiance among the electorate. By examining these two case studies, this chapter aims to illustrate and compare how the two chosen case studies engage with left-nationalism, exploring how these movements redefine national identity, policy priorities, and electoral strategies in the face of far-right challenges. The comparative analysis will also provide a deeper understanding of the conditions under which left nationalism can serve as an effective counterforce to far-right ideologies, assessing both its successes and limitations within diverse political settings.

2.1. Overview of Left Nationalism in Germany and the Netherlands

2.1.1 The Netherlands

The Dutch left, historically robust in political influence, has experienced a significant decline, particularly noticeable since the 1990s and starkly evident in the 2021 elections when they secured only 33 out of 150 parliamentary seats. This trend persisted in subsequent elections, with losses concentrated among smaller, more radical parties. The 2023 election results reinforced these trends, with the left continuing to struggle to regain its former influence. Attempts by the Green Left party and the Labour Party, PvdA, to form a new centre-left alliance did not substantially increase their electoral share (Kleinpaste and Huijzer 2023). The persistent perception of ideological confusion and disconnection from pressing societal issues further hampered their electoral success. Media narratives and public perceptions reflect this stagnation, often portraying the left as ideologically confused and unable to present a compelling political vision. This perception fuels the view of the left as outdated and disconnected from current societal concerns like economic stability and social welfare, which are central to the electorate's interests today (Kleinpaste and Huijzer 2023).

A notable strategic shift within the Dutch left has been the re-emergence of nationalism in their rhetoric. This new form of left nationalism diverges significantly from traditional, often right-leaning, exclusionary nationalism by prioritizing social inclusivity and national interests over ethnic or racial exclusivity. It represents a concerted effort to reclaim notions of national pride and sovereignty, typically dominated by right-wing parties, and to frame them within a context of social justice and economic policy prioritization in the face of globalisation (Boomsma and Kleinpaste 2013). This

adaptation reflects broader socio-political shifts, including economic downturns and increasing disparities exacerbated by globalisation. Such conditions have spurred a resurgence of nationalist sentiments, historically not significant in the Netherlands until the rise of right-wing parties like Janmaat's Centrum Democraten in the 1990s, which initially failed to gain substantial traction.

Left-wing parties in the Netherlands, including the SP, have begun to articulate a form of "progressive nationalism (Boomsma and Kleinpaste 2013)." This stance emphasizes the importance of national identity and cultural citizenship but remains inclusive and welcoming to newcomers, distancing itself from the xenophobic or racially charged nationalism associated with right-wing ideologies (Boomsma and Kleinpaste 2013). This nuanced approach to nationalism seeks to balance national identity with global integration, advocating for a political community that values solidarity and social upliftment within national boundaries while remaining open to international influences. It involves a re-engagement with national narratives and an intellectual commitment to framing social justice within the context of national sovereignty. This is not merely reactionary but reflects a strategic realignment intended to reclaim national sentiments from the political right, appealing to voters who feel alienated by globalist policies (Joustra 2020).

The concept of "anti-nationalist nationalism," as explored by Kešić and Duyvendak (2016), characterizes this nuanced form of nationalism. It is not overtly xenophobic or chauvinistic but is expressed subtly through cultural rather than political means. This form of nationalism has emerged in response to the rise of right-wing populism, which tends to define Dutch identity in exclusionary ethnic, cultural, or racial terms. Anti-nationalist nationalism represents an attempt by left-leaning parties to redefine nationalism in a way that addresses the challenges posed by right-wing populism while retaining a focus on cultural identity.

The SP's evolution is particularly illustrative of the broader changes within leftist parties in the Netherlands. Initially grounded in Maoist ideology, symbolized by their tomato logo with a small star, the SP has shifted significantly. Under the leadership of Emile Roemer, the party saw a surge in popularity as it tapped into discontent with EU-imposed austerity measures. Roemer advocated for not exceeding the Maastricht Treaty's budget deficit limits and called for a referendum on the EU fiscal pact, aligning the SP with a broader Eurosceptic sentiment prevalent across the political spectrum (Pauly 2012).

This period marked a significant transition for the SP, from revolutionary rhetoric to a more conservative, nationalist stance, focusing on domestic stability and resistance to EU policies. This strategic pivot allowed the SP to challenge centrist parties effectively and expand their political influence significantly (Pauly 2012). Lucassen (2024) suggests that for left nationalism to regain relevance, it must construct a narrative that combines fundamental criticism of neoliberalism with a realistic and inclusive approach to migration. This strategy could recapture the trust and support of

voters who feel left behind by the current political discourse, potentially leading to a revival of left-wing influence in Dutch politics.

The evolution of left nationalism in the Netherlands mirrors a broader European trend where left-wing parties increasingly incorporate nationalist elements into their platforms. These movements are reshaping their agendas to move away from traditional internationalism towards a focus on national issues, redefining the concept of the nation in terms of inclusivity and shared cultural values. This strategic shift aims to make the left more appealing to voters concerned about globalisation, immigration, and national identity, potentially enabling these parties to regain traction in the Dutch political landscape (Boomsma and Kleinpaste 2013; Joustra 2020).

2.1.2. Germany

In the 2000s, Germany underwent a significant transformation described by Antonio Gramsci as a "passive revolution" (Belina 2013: 278). This term refers to state-led restructuring that shifted the welfare state towards a workfare state. The red-green government implemented Agenda 2010, which introduced drastic changes to the labour market and social security, creating a new stratum of working poor and lowering overall wages to boost Germany's global competitiveness. This economic restructuring led to increased economic disparities and weakened the bargaining power of labour unions, fundamentally altering Germany's socio-economic fabric (Belina 2013: 280).

Alongside these economic changes, a cultural hegemony emerged that intertwined economic competitiveness with nationalist sentiments. Public discourse increasingly blamed economic problems on the poor and foreigners, both domestically and internationally, diverting attention from systemic issues. The rise of nationalism was further fuelled by media portrayals and public debates that supported xenophobic and nationalistic views. A notable manifestation of this was the popularity of Thilo Sarrazin's controversial book, *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010), which blamed social and economic issues on non-German ethnic groups and advocated for policies favouring economic elites (Belina 2013: 280-81).

Left nationalist movements have responded to these challenges by critiquing the neoliberal economic policies and the nationalist rhetoric that frames socio-economic issues in terms of national identity and ethnic characteristics. These movements strive to counteract the cultural hegemony that justifies social inequalities and economic hardships through xenophobia and nationalism. They emphasize the need for inclusivity, solidarity, and structural reforms to address the root causes of Germany's socio-economic challenges (Belina 2013: 283).

In the media, left nationalism in Germany, exemplified by movements like 'Aufstehen', is often portrayed with scepticism due to its flirtation with nationalist rhetoric, similar to strategies employed by far-right parties. This narrative is particularly pronounced as these leftist movements attempt to

reclaim voters who have shifted towards far-right parties like the AfD, which has effectively branded itself as an anti-capitalist and anti-immigrant force (Göpffarth 2019). The media scrutiny increases as these left movements incorporate anti-globalisation and anti-immigration stances traditionally associated with the right, blurring traditional political lines.

Public perception of left nationalism has evolved to be cautious and mixed. Initially, there might have been some positive reception among traditional left-wing voters disillusioned with the mainstream social democratic parties' pro-globalisation policies. However, the continued overlap with far-right themes, particularly on immigration, has likely alienated some of the left's base while failing to significantly curb the rise of the far-right (Göpffarth 2019). This blending of left and right positions under nationalist banners has raised concerns about the normalization of nationalism within the German left, potentially reshaping the political landscape in unpredictable ways.

The change over time in public perception seems to hinge on the increasing visibility and electoral success of far-right parties, which have capitalized on the disenchantment with globalisation and the EU (Göpffarth 2019). As left-nationalist movements like 'Aufstehen' attempted to counter this rise through similar rhetoric, they risked reinforcing the very sentiments they aimed to oppose, leading to a critical and often sceptical public and media reception.

The far-right AfD has similarly capitalized on the growing disenchantment with the social democratic SPD and the stagnation of the far-left 'Die Linke', attracting about a million former supporters from these parties in the 2017 federal elections. This shift was especially big in East Germany. The AfD has increasingly adopted economic policies that appeal to traditional left-wing voters, challenging Die Linke's representation of East Germans (Göpffarth 2019).

The left nationalist rhetoric has indirectly influenced German mainstream politics as well. For instance, the CDU has proposed reforms to the pension system that consider the socioeconomic conditions of East Germans who suffered job losses post-reunification (Göpffarth 2019). This suggests that the presence of populist movements has pushed traditional parties to address the economic grievances that these movements emphasize.

However, the strategy of employing left nationalist rhetoric carries risks. 'Aufstehen' has struggled to resonate with younger voters, primarily appealing to an older, more conservative base. Furthermore, the movement's anti-immigration stance, while attracting some right-wing praise, risks empowering the AfD rather than containing it (Göpffarth 2019). This paradox highlights the complex dynamics at play as left nationalist movements attempt to redefine German politics by leveraging economic nationalism and populist sentiments. Initially, 'Aufstehen' saw a surge in interest, marked by extensive media coverage and significant online registrations. However, this interest diminished over time as the public grew wary of the movement's orchestrated nature and questioned its genuine grassroots credentials. The movement's strategy to position itself as a centrist force against both the far-

right and overly progressive left failed to resonate, leading to its diminished influence and critiques of its strategy as misaligned with broader left-wing values of inclusivity and solidarity (Slobodian and Callison 2019).

The portrayal of left nationalism in German media and public perception, as described in Pausch's (2018) text, shows a complex and often contentious landscape. The media narrative frequently focuses on internal conflicts within the left, particularly between prominent figures such as Sahra Wagenknecht and Katja Kipping, which overshadow broader political debates. These internal disputes are characterized by harsh rhetoric, accusations of "terror" and "mobbing," leading to a perception of the party as disunited and focused on infighting rather than on substantive policy issues (Pausch 2018).

Public perception of left nationalism appears to be influenced by this portrayal of internal strife, contributing to a stagnation in the party's popularity and an inability to capitalize on broader social and political shifts that might favour leftist policies (Pausch 2018). The left is seen as unable to move beyond past identities and adapt to new political realities, struggling with its own ideological contradictions and a lack of coherent direction.

2.2. Representativeness for Case Selection and Sources

The case study focuses on Germany and the Netherlands to explore the discourse and dynamics of left nationalism in Europe, providing a nuanced examination against the backdrop of rising far-right ideologies. Germany, as Europe's largest economy with a complex political history, offers a fertile ground for studying the resurgence of left nationalism led by figures such as Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen. This resurgence is often seen as a response to socio-economic disparities and growing immigration issues. In contrast, the Netherlands, known for its liberal political tradition and significant role in European affairs, presents a scenario where left nationalism emerges as a critique of mainstream liberal policies. This comparison allows for a comprehensive analysis of how left nationalism can manifest in different political, social, and economic contexts.

The choice of Germany and the Netherlands is grounded in their representativeness of broader Western European trends, each providing insights into the national discourses that shape policy responses to European integration and globalisation. Politically, both countries feature vibrant democracies, yet they differ significantly in their political structures and party landscapes. Socially, they are diverse, with significant immigrant populations that influence national debates on identity, integration, and social cohesion. Economically, as major EU economies, they face the impacts of economic globalisation, with varying policies that influence views on economic justice, welfare, and national sovereignty.

Primary sources for the case study include six speeches and two interviews with key figures such as Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) and Lilian Marijnissen (SP), who articulate left nationalist ideologies. Their

roles in influencing both public opinion and policy direction are central. For instance, Marijnissen's speeches, accessible through SP's official channels, and Wagenknecht's interviews, such as those in *Der Tagesspiegel* (a reputable German centrist liberal newspaper known for its comprehensive political coverage) provide valuable insights. Media coverage from national newspapers and online media platforms is also crucial. The selection includes a range from more centrist to left-leaning media outlets, like *De Groene Amsterdammer*, a Dutch magazine that delves into social and political issues, providing nuanced positions of left nationalism.

The trustworthiness of these sources is assessed based on their editorial standards, historical accuracy, and influence in public discourse. Both *Der Tagesspiegel* and *De Groene Amsterdammer* are considered reputable within their respective contexts, offering reliable information that reflects broader media narratives and public opinion.

To ensure that the sources accurately represent left nationalist discourse, they are chosen based on their authoritative voices, impact on public discourse, and the diversity of perspectives they provide. This ensures a balanced view of how left nationalism is discussed and perceived across the political spectrum. This approach not only enhances the depth of the analysis but also ensures its applicability to broader discussions on political ideologies in Western Europe.

2.3. Wagenknecht and Marijnissen

In understanding the resurgence and adaptation of left nationalism within Germany and the Netherlands, it is important to consider the personal influences and leadership styles of two key figures: Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen. Both leaders have shaped the discourse and strategies of their respective countries weaving their personal ideologies and nationalistic elements into their political narratives.

2.3.1. Sahra Wagenknecht

Sahra Wagenknecht is a prominent figure in German politics, known for her critical stance on neoliberal economic policies and her advocacy for a renewed form of socialism that integrates nationalist elements (Nachtwey 2023). As a former leading member of "Die Linke" (The Left Party), and later "Aufstehen" and "BSW", Wagenknecht has been instrumental in shaping the party's policies and ideological direction. Her academic background in economics and her eloquent oratory skills have made her a significant voice in debates on Germany's economic and social policies (Nachtwey 2023).

Wagenknecht's unique position in German politics lies in her ability to articulate a version of left nationalism that diverges significantly from both the traditional internationalist left and the conservative right (Stokes 2024). She argues that genuine social justice can only be achieved by addressing the nation-state's role in protecting economic sovereignty and social welfare from the forces

of global capitalism. This perspective has resonated with a segment of the German electorate that feels alienated by mainstream political parties' embrace of globalism (Stokes 2024).

Wagenknecht's rhetoric often emphasizes the protection of German workers and industries from what she perceives as the exploitative mechanisms of international markets and EU policies. By doing so, she attempts to reclaim notions of national sovereignty and pride from the far-right, repackaging these within a leftist framework that prioritizes social equity and solidarity. This blend of leftist and nationalist elements is evident in her criticisms of free trade agreements, EU economic policies, and her advocacy for more stringent controls on capital flows and immigration to protect domestic labour markets (Nachtwey 2023).

2.3.2. Lilian Marijnissen

Lilian Marijnissen is a prominent Dutch politician and the former leader of the Socialist Party in the Netherlands. She stepped into this role in 2017, succeeding Emile Roemer. Marijnissen's background is deeply rooted in activism and labour rights, influenced by her upbringing in a family with strong ties to socialist and trade union movements. Her father, Jan Marijnissen, was a former leader of the SP, which gives her a direct link to the foundational principles and evolution of the party (Eijdsen 2023).

As the former leader of the SP, Marijnissen has focused on reinvigorating the party's agenda and outreach amid changing political landscapes in the Netherlands and broader Europe. Her leadership is marked by a shift towards incorporating nationalistic elements into the party's traditional socialist framework (Eijdsen 2023). This strategy aims to address growing concerns among voters about globalisation, immigration, and national identity; issues that have predominantly benefited right-wing parties in recent electoral cycles.

Under Marijnissen's leadership, the SP has attempted to address the socio-economic insecurities that fuel right-wing populism by promoting a protective, yet inclusive, national identity. Her approach involves highlighting the importance of national sovereignty in economic and social policy, while advocating for policies that ensure fairness and justice for the working class. This nuanced balance seeks to offer an alternative to both the globalist perspectives of liberal parties and the restrictive nationalism of the far right. (Eijdsen 2023)

The exploration of left nationalism in Germany and the Netherlands through the political activities and rhetoric of Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen provides valuable insights into the left nationalist parties in Western Europe. This chapter has critically examined how these two countries utilize nationalism and respond to the socio-economic challenges posed by globalisation and European integration. The analysis in the subsequent chapters will build on these findings to examine more deeply the discursive strategies of Wagenknecht and Marijnissen. It will explore how their speeches and public interactions continue to shape the discourse around nationalism and left-wing politics, influencing both

national and European political landscapes. Additionally, the next chapters will delve into the public and media reactions in greater detail, providing a comprehensive view of the impact of left nationalism on the broader political discourse.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS OF SPEECHES

This chapter analyses speeches by Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen, focusing on four key themes: Immigration Policies and Economic Security, Social Justice and Economic Protectionism, Criticism of Political and Neoliberal Elites, and National Sovereignty and Pride. These themes were chosen because they represent the core elements of left-nationalist discourse and highlight the intersection of economic, social, and political concerns in the speakers' rhetoric. This thematic approach allows for a comparative examination of their rhetorical strategies and policy positions, revealing similarities and differences in their approaches to addressing contemporary political challenges. The analysis employs several methodologies to dissect the speeches: discourse analysis to explore the structure and argumentative flow; and an examination of rhetorical devices such as metaphors and rhetorical questions that enhance persuasive impact.

This analysis aims to uncover the central themes that resonate with the political and ideological frameworks of Wagenknecht and Marijnissen. It assesses the effectiveness of their strategies in persuading and engaging their audiences. The analysis evaluates the impact of these speeches on public opinion and their broader political landscapes. This is crucial for understanding the intersection of political messaging and voter engagement against the backdrop of rising nationalist sentiments in Europe. It provides a comprehensive view of how left nationalist leaders navigate complex and often controversial stances to communicate with a diverse electorate.

3.1. Speeches

This study examines six speeches due to their representative nature and impact on public and political discourse.

Sahra Wagenknecht's General Debate in the Bundestag in 2018 is a critical discourse where she targets neoliberal economic policies and austerity measures. Wagenknecht emphasizes national sovereignty, protectionism, and economic justice, arguing that globalisation and the European Union's economic policies have exacerbated income inequality and social disparity. She advocates for a shift towards socially responsible economic policies that prioritize the well-being of citizens over corporate profits.

In her Rally for Peace in Berlin in 2023, Wagenknecht's speech takes on a different yet equally important issue. At this public rally, she calls for peace and criticizes military interventions and defence spending, arguing that vast military expenditures divert resources away from essential social programs and public services. By advocating for a foreign policy focused on diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution, Wagenknecht aligns her message with broader anti-war sentiments and calls for a reorientation of national priorities towards domestic welfare and international peace.

Wagenknecht's address at the First Federal Party Day of BSW in 2024 delves into her vision for a new political direction, focusing on building a broad-based movement for economic and social justice. She critiques the traditional political elites and calls for a more inclusive and participatory political process. This speech is significant as it outlines her strategic approach to creating a new political force in Germany, emphasizing the need for unity among various social groups and political movements to achieve meaningful change.

Lilian Marijnissen's Europa Lecture in 2019 is a comprehensive critique of the European Union's current economic and political policies, advocating for a more democratic and socially responsible Europe. She emphasizes the importance of solidarity among EU member states and calls for reforms that prioritize social welfare and economic equality. This speech is crucial in understanding Marijnissen's broader vision for Europe's future and the role the SP intends to play in shaping EU policies.

Marijnissen's SP Congress Speech in 2023 addresses economic inequality and social justice, sharply criticizing the Dutch government's neoliberal policies and austerity measures. She calls for progressive taxation, enhanced social services, and increased support for the working class. By highlighting the need for fair wealth distribution, Marijnissen positions herself and the SP as champions of the underprivileged, advocating for systemic changes to ensure that economic growth benefits all segments of society rather than a select few.

In her SP Party Council Speech in 2023, Marijnissen focuses on the adverse effects of austerity measures, emphasizing the struggles of low-income families and the deterioration of public services. She advocates for stronger labour protections, fair wages, and public investment in essential services such as healthcare and education. By presenting a vision of an inclusive and equitable society, Marijnissen aims to galvanize support for policies that protect the vulnerable and promote social cohesion.

3.1.1. Sahra Wagenknecht

Immigration Policies and Economic Security

Sahra Wagenknecht has consistently articulated her views on immigration from a distinct economic perspective. Central to her discourse is the concern that unregulated immigration can lead to adverse effects on the German labour market, such as job competition and downward pressure on wages, particularly impacting vulnerable segments of the workforce.

In her speech at the "Aufstand für Frieden" in Berlin, Wagenknecht (2023) emphasizes the economic dimensions of immigration policy: "Wir müssen sicherstellen, dass unsere Arbeiter vor unfairem Konkurrenz geschützt sind (Wagenknecht 2023)."¹ By using the phrase "unfaire Konkurrenz"

¹ "We must ensure that our workers are protected from unfair competition."

(unfair competition), Wagenknecht frames immigration as a potential threat to the livelihoods of local workers. By framing immigration as potentially exacerbating inequalities and threatening the livelihoods of local workers, Wagenknecht strategically appeals to the economic anxieties prevalent among segments of the German electorate. This rhetorical strategy positions her as a defender of economic justice within her party and underscores her commitment to advocating policies that promote social and economic fairness.

In her speech at the inaugural Federal Party Congress of the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) in 2024, Wagenknecht emphasized the need for a balanced immigration policy. She stressed the importance of addressing both humanitarian considerations and economic stability:

"Wir müssen eine Einwanderungspolitik entwickeln, die sowohl humanitären Anforderungen gerecht wird als auch die wirtschaftliche Stabilität unseres Landes gewährleistet. Unkontrollierte Zuwanderung hilft weder den Einheimischen noch den Zuwanderern, sondern führt zu einem Wettlauf nach unten bei den Arbeitsbedingungen (Wagenknecht 2024)."²

By juxtaposing "humanitäre Anforderungen" (humanitarian requirements) with "wirtschaftliche Stabilität" (economic stability), Wagenknecht presents a pragmatic approach that recognizes the benefits of immigration while cautioning against its potential negative impacts when left unchecked. The phrase "Wettlauf nach unten" (race to the bottom) underscores her concern that uncontrolled immigration could lead to a deterioration of working conditions for both locals and immigrants.

Wagenknecht's critique in the Generaldebatte im Bundestag further contextualizes her stance within a broader critique of globalisation. She challenges policies that prioritize global capital over local labour, arguing that unchecked immigration could exacerbate economic disparities within Germany. By framing immigration as an economic issue with profound implications for social cohesion and national identity, Wagenknecht aims to shape public discourse and policy discussions on the need for a more balanced approach to managing migration flows.

Through critical discourse analysis, it becomes evident that Wagenknecht strategically employs language to appeal to the economic concerns of her constituents while advocating for a nuanced immigration policy. By emphasizing the potential threats to local workers and the need for a balanced approach, she positions herself as a rational voice in the immigration debate, committed to promoting inclusive economic growth and social stability.

Social Justice and Economic Protectionism

² "We need to develop an immigration policy that meets humanitarian requirements while ensuring the economic stability of our country. Uncontrolled immigration helps neither the locals nor the immigrants but leads to a race to the bottom in working conditions."

Sahra Wagenknecht's speeches consistently highlight the intersection of social justice and economic protectionism as foundational to her political agenda within BSW. Her advocacy for policies that aim to redistribute wealth and shield the economically vulnerable underscores a commitment to fostering a fairer and more equitable society in Germany. In her discourse, Wagenknecht articulates a vision of social justice that is inseparable from economic fairness. She emphasizes the imperative to redistribute wealth more equitably and protect the most vulnerable members of society:

"Wir müssen wieder reden über gesellschaftliche Ungleichheit, weil das tut keiner. Über uns, über die Enteignung der Fleißigen: Seit 20 Jahren sinken die Kaufkraft der Löhne in Deutschland, und in vielen Branchen sinkt sie schon wesentlich länger. Es gibt immer mehr Berufe, die früher einen bescheidenen Wohlstand ermöglicht haben und in denen die Einkommen heute so sind, dass man mit ihnen nie die Chance auf ein halbwegs gutes Leben hat, auf ein Mindestmaß an sozialer Sicherheit, auf eine solide Familienplanung oder gar auf ein eigenes Häuschen oder eine eigene Wohnung. Und das muss sich doch wieder ändern in unserem Land! (Wagenknecht 2018)"³

Here, Wagenknecht draws attention to the long-term decline in wage purchasing power and the erosion of economic security for many professions. Critical discourse analysis reveals Wagenknecht's strategic use of language to appeal to sentiments of fairness and solidarity among her audience, positioning herself as a champion of social welfare policies within her party and beyond.

During her speech in the Bundestag, Wagenknecht extends this principle by advocating for robust social welfare programs and improved labour conditions. She argues passionately:

"Es ist doch bekannt wie heute bei Ryanair bei Amazon bei der Deutschen Post seinen vielen anderen Unternehmen mit Mitarbeitern umgesprungen wird und es sind ihre Gesetze die das möglich machen die möglich machen dass Menschen in schlecht bezahlten Jobs gedemütigt werden oder dass sie als Leiharbeiter und Dauer befristete der Wirkung ihrer Arbeitgeber in besonderem Maße ausgeliefert sind die möglich machen dass Arbeitslose im Jobcenter schikaniert werden als würden sie um Almosen

³ "We need to talk again about social inequality, because no one is doing that. About us, about the expropriation of the diligent: For 20 years, the purchasing power of wages in Germany has been declining, and in many sectors it has been declining for much longer. There are more and more professions that used to enable a modest prosperity and in which incomes today are such that one never has the chance of a reasonably good life, of a minimum of social security, of solid family planning, or even of one's own little house or apartment. And that has to change again in our country!"

betteln und dabei handelt es sich oft um Menschen die jahrelang geschuftet und in die Sozialversicherung eingezahlt haben (Wagenknecht 2018)."⁴

Here, she links economic protectionism with social justice, contending that by safeguarding local industries and enhancing labour standards, Germany can foster greater economic equality and social cohesion. She criticizes the legal framework that allows for the humiliation and economic vulnerability of workers in precarious employment conditions. This perspective highlights her strategic alignment with policies aimed at bolstering national welfare systems and shielding workers from the adverse effects of globalisation.

CDA of Wagenknecht's speeches on social justice and economic protectionism underscores her efforts to position herself as a progressive voice advocating for policies that address socio-economic inequalities within Germany. Her emphasis on redistributive measures and economic nationalism reflects a strategic alignment with the ideological framework of BSW, while also appealing to broader public sentiments regarding fairness and social cohesion. By advocating for policies that prioritize the welfare of ordinary citizens over corporate interests and global market forces, Wagenknecht seeks to foster a political discourse centred on economic justice and national sovereignty.

Criticism of Political and Neoliberal Elites

Sahra Wagenknecht's speeches often critique political and neoliberal elites, employing rhetoric that resonates with audiences disillusioned by mainstream parties. One powerful example comes from her 2018 speech in the Bundestag:

"Diese Regierung, sie spaltet nicht nur unser Land, sie ist auch noch besonders teuer mit ihrer Politik. Da fördern sie überall, bei Bauvorhaben, Autobahn oder Schulsanierungen, sogenannte öffentlich-private Partnerschaften, wobei die Partnerschaft regelmäßig darin besteht, dass die öffentliche Hand gemolken wird und die privaten Investoren risikofrei hohe Renditen absahnen. Und genau deshalb sind solche Projekte immer teurer, als wenn der Staat selbst investiert. Und trotzdem fördern Sie das mit ungebrochener Begeisterung (Wagenknecht 2018)."⁵

⁴ "It is well known how employees are treated at Ryanair, Amazon, Deutsche Post, and many other companies today, and it is your laws that make it possible for people in poorly paid jobs to be humiliated, or for them to be particularly vulnerable as temporary and contract workers to their employers' whims. These laws also make it possible for the unemployed to be harassed at job centres as if they were begging for alms, even though many of them have worked for years and paid into social insurance."

⁵ "This government not only divides our country, it is also particularly expensive with its policies. They promote so-called public-private partnerships everywhere, in construction projects, highways, or school renovations, where the partnership regularly consists of the public sector being milked and private investors skimming off high returns without risk. And that is precisely why such projects are always more expensive than if the state invested itself. And yet you continue to promote this with unbroken enthusiasm."

This quote encapsulates Wagenknecht's critique of the government's economic policies, which she argues serve the interests of private investors at the expense of the public good. By using a phrase like "öffentliche Hand gemolken wird" (the public sector is being milked) Wagenknecht exposes what she sees as the government's misplaced priorities and its disconnect from the needs of ordinary citizens. This stark language reinforces her populist appeal, positioning her as a voice for those marginalized by established political structures. Critical discourse analysis reveals deeper layers in Wagenknecht's speeches on this theme. Her characterization of political elites as detached and out of touch serves to construct a dichotomy between them and the populace, framing her party as a viable alternative that understands and represents the interests of ordinary people. This dichotomy is crucial in populist discourse, where political legitimacy is often asserted by contrasting the perceived authenticity of grassroots movements with the perceived artificiality of elite governance. Wagenknecht strategically employs this discourse to mobilize support by tapping into widespread discontent with the ruling class, thereby reinforcing her party's image as a defender of the common citizen against an indifferent and self-serving elite.

Sahra Wagenknecht's speech during the General Debate in the Bundestag on November 21, 2018, exemplifies her adept use of critical discourse analysis to mount a robust challenge against neoliberal elites and mainstream political ideologies. Through a sophisticated deployment of rhetorical strategies, she constructs a compelling narrative that critiques neoliberal economic policies as detrimental to ordinary citizens while advocating for alternative approaches that prioritize social welfare and economic stability for the people against the failings of neoliberalism.

Wagenknecht employs metaphorical language to frame neoliberal economic policies as 'economic plagues' that threaten the well-being of ordinary citizens. By likening these policies to destructive forces, she dramatizes their impacts and underscores their perceived harm. For instance, she might use metaphors such as: "Neoliberalismus ist wie eine wirtschaftliche Plage, die sozialen Strukturen zersetzt und die Bürger in wirtschaftliche Unsicherheit stürzt (Wagenknecht 2018)."⁶ The term "Plage" (plague) is a highly emotive and evocative word choice that conjures images of widespread devastation and suffering. By equating neoliberal policies with a plague, Wagenknecht intensifies the emotional impact of her critique, emphasizing the severity and urgency of the issue. This metaphorical depiction aims to evoke strong emotional responses among her audience, underscoring the need to address the negative consequences of neoliberalism swiftly and decisively.

Wagenknecht's critique extends beyond mere rhetorical flourish; it is substantiated by her analysis of specific policies and their impacts on everyday lives. In her speeches, she often contrasts the priorities and actions of political elites with the lived experiences of ordinary Germans, highlighting

⁶ "Neoliberalism is like an economic plague that corrodes social structures and plunges citizens into economic uncertainty."

how policies crafted by disconnected elites fail to address pressing societal issues, such as economic inequality and social justice.

The rhetorical strategy of critiquing political elites aligns with broader populist movements in contemporary European politics. Populist leaders across the ideological spectrum often capitalize on a perceived disconnect between traditional political elites and the electorate to gain support. By framing herself as an outsider challenging the status quo, Wagenknecht not only critiques existing power structures but also positions herself as a credible alternative capable of effecting meaningful change. This dual strategy of critique and promise serves to mobilize support by appealing to voters' desires for a more responsive and accountable political system.

National Sovereignty and Pride

Sahra Wagenknecht consistently emphasizes the importance of national sovereignty and pride in her speeches, framing these concepts as critical to shaping Germany's future. She argues passionately for greater autonomy in economic and social policies, asserting: "Unsere nationale Souveränität ist entscheidend für die Zukunft Deutschlands (Wagenknecht 2018)."⁷ This underscores her belief that reclaiming and safeguarding national sovereignty is essential for addressing the complex challenges confronting Germany in the modern era.

In her critique of the European Union (EU) and its policies, Wagenknecht contends that Germany's ability to make independent decisions is compromised by the EU's economic and regulatory frameworks. She highlights how these frameworks can undermine Germany's national interests, pushing for policies that prioritize the country's sovereignty. In her "Aufstand für Frieden" speech, Wagenknecht argued passionately for policies that prioritize Germany's national interests over EU directives, stating:

"Wir wollen nicht, dass Deutschland sich immer weiter in diesen Krieg hineinziehen lässt, so lange, bis der Krieg möglicherweise hier ist. Das wollen wir auf gar keinen Fall. Und dagegen wehren wir uns. Und deswegen sind wir hier auch so zahlreich. Nein! Schluss wieder mit dem Krieg! (Wagenknecht 2023)"⁸

This quote powerfully conveys Wagenknecht's stance against Germany's involvement in foreign conflicts, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine. She argues that such involvement risks escalating the conflict and ultimately bringing the war to Germany itself. This position reflects her

⁷ "Our national sovereignty is crucial for Germany's future."

⁸ "We don't want Germany to be drawn further and further into this war until the war is possibly here. We absolutely do not want that. And we are defending ourselves against that. And that's why we are here in such large numbers. No! Stop the war again!"

broader advocacy for national sovereignty and non-intervention, prioritizing Germany's peace and stability over participation in external conflicts driven by EU or NATO commitments.

Wagenknecht's invocation of national sovereignty serves multiple rhetorical purposes in her discourse. Firstly, it taps into nationalist sentiments and pride in Germany's historical and cultural identity, appealing to voters who prioritize national autonomy over supranational governance. By framing sovereignty as crucial for Germany's future, she positions herself as a defender of national interests against perceived external pressures and interventions. Wagenknecht's critique of the EU reflects a broader critique of globalisation and neoliberalism, which she argues have led to economic policies that benefit multinational corporations at the expense of national economies. This critique resonates with voters concerned about economic globalisation's impact on job security, social welfare, and cultural identity. Wagenknecht's rhetoric on national sovereignty constructs a dichotomy between national self-determination and external influence, portraying the EU as a force that diminishes Germany's ability to protect its industries, workers, and social fabric. This narrative not only critiques EU policies but also reinforces Wagenknecht's populist appeal by positioning her as a champion of national pride and sovereignty.



Source: zdf.de

3.1.2. Lilian Marijnissen

Immigration Policies and Economic Security

In her speeches, Lilian Marijnissen emphasizes the intersection of immigration policies and economic security, critiquing the Dutch government's approach and advocating for reforms to protect the working class. At the SP Congress, Marijnissen asserts, "We moeten zorgen voor een eerlijke verdeling van de

welvaart in ons land (Marijnissen 2023),⁹ highlighting her commitment to fair wealth distribution and social equity. Through CDA, we can see that Marijnissen's use of the phrase "eerlijke verdeling" (fair distribution) appeals to the audience's sense of justice and equality. By framing wealth distribution as a matter of fairness, she positions her party's policies as the morally correct choice, implicitly critiquing the current government's approach as unjust.

Marijnissen critiques current immigration policies, arguing that they often exacerbate economic disparities. She points out that uncontrolled immigration can lead to labour market saturation, wage suppression, and increased competition for jobs, which disproportionately affects vulnerable workers. In her Europa Lecture speech, she states:

“Het is niet goed voor de samenlevingen van Europa als er honderdduizenden Polen in West-Europa werken maar ook honderdduizenden Oekraïners in Polen, om daar weer de banen te vervullen die nu niet meer door die Poolse migranten worden gedaan. Natuurlijk is het mooi als mensen overal kunnen studeren en werken, maar waarom zou dat vrije verkeer van werknemers in naam de van interne markt helemaal ongereguleerd moeten zijn?” (Marijnissen 2019).¹⁰

Marijnissen highlights the scale of migration within Europe and its potential impact on local job markets. She questions the unregulated nature of free movement of workers within the internal market, suggesting that some form of regulation may be necessary to address the economic challenges posed by large-scale migration. By providing concrete figures, she lends credibility to her argument and creates a sense of urgency around the issue.

A significant portion of Marijnissen's rhetoric focuses on the necessity of progressive taxation to address these issues. She argues that higher taxes on the wealthy and large corporations are essential to fund public services and reduce inequality. Her call for progressive taxation is grounded in the principle that those who have more should contribute more to the common good, thereby alleviating the economic pressures that immigration can exacerbate.

Marijnissen's vision extends to the protection of workers and the most vulnerable in society. She argues that neoliberal policies, including those related to immigration, have led to precarious working conditions, wage stagnation, and a lack of affordable housing. She calls for policies that ensure fair wages, better working conditions, and affordable housing for all.

⁹ “We must ensure a fair distribution of wealth in our country.”

¹⁰ “It is not good for European societies if there are hundreds of thousands of Poles working in Western Europe but also hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians in Poland, to fill the jobs that are no longer being done by those Polish migrants. Of course it is great if people can study and work everywhere, but why should the free movement of workers in the name of the internal market be completely unregulated?”

Social Justice and Economic Protectionism

Lilian Marijnissen's speeches are deeply rooted in the themes of social justice and economic protectionism, reflecting her commitment to addressing economic inequality and advocating for policies that safeguard the interests of ordinary citizens. Her rhetoric is focused on critiquing the Dutch government's economic policies, which she argues exacerbate inequality, and proposing substantial reforms to promote wealth redistribution, better social services, and increased support for the working class.

A recurring theme in Marijnissen's rhetoric is her rejection of corporate-centric policies. She argues that the current economic model is too focused on benefiting large corporations at the expense of ordinary people. This critique is rooted in the belief that the government should prioritize the well-being of its citizens over corporate profits. In her SP Party Council speech, Marijnissen asserts: "We moeten een economie bouwen die werkt voor de mensen, niet voor de multinationals (Marijnissen 2020)."¹¹ This quote encapsulates her vision of an economy that prioritizes human welfare over corporate interests. By advocating for policies that support small businesses, protect workers' rights, and ensure fair competition, Marijnissen aims to create a more just and equitable economic system.

Marijnissen's speeches collectively present a vision for a just society where economic policies are designed to benefit everyone, not just the wealthy elite. She envisions a society where wealth is fairly distributed, public services are robust and accessible, and everyone has the opportunity to lead a dignified life. This vision is grounded in the principles of social justice, fairness, and collective responsibility. Her rhetorical strategy includes invoking historical and contemporary examples of economic injustice to highlight the urgency of her proposed reforms. By drawing on the experiences of ordinary people and illustrating the tangible impacts of economic policies, Marijnissen makes a compelling case for change. Her speeches are designed to resonate with those who feel left behind by the current economic system and to mobilize support for her vision of a more just and equitable society.

Marijnissen advocates for reclaiming democratic control over the economy to ensure it benefits all people, not just corporate elites. In her Party Council speech, she states:

"De tijdgeest is aan het kantelen, niet alleen de lente hangt in de lucht maar ook de politieke verandering. Ik voel het niet alleen elders in de wereld maar ook hier bij ons... En volgens het Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau zijn de meeste Nederlanders het hier hartgrondig mee eens en recente demonstraties laten ook zien dat heel veel mensen hier daadwerkelijk de straat voor op willen gaan. En ik trek op dit moment door het land voor avonden met mensen die voor onze samenleving in de publieke sector werken en

¹¹ "We must build an economy that works for the people, not for the multinationals."

ik hoor overall hetzelfde namelijk dat het tijd is voor wederopbouw en dat hoort ons aanvalsplan nummer 1 (Marijnissen 2020).”¹²

Marijnissen's use of the metaphor "de lente hangt in de lucht" (spring is in the air) suggests a sense of hope and renewal, implying that the time is ripe for political change.

Marijnissen's rhetoric and policy proposals are driven by a commitment to creating a society where economic protectionism ensures that the benefits of growth are shared more equitably. Her speeches articulate a vision of social justice that challenges the existing economic order, calling for reforms that protect the vulnerable and promote the well-being of all citizens. Through her focus on progressive taxation, robust public services, workers' rights, and the rejection of corporate-centric policies, Marijnissen presents a comprehensive agenda aimed at achieving a more just and equitable society.

Criticism of Political and Neoliberal Elites

Lilian Marijnissen's speeches are notable for their robust criticism of political and neoliberal elites. She argues that these elites are out of touch with the reality of ordinary people and that their policies serve corporate interests rather than the public good. Her rhetoric is aimed at mobilizing support among those who feel disenfranchised and abandoned by the current political establishment.

In her Europa Lecture, Marijnissen delivers a scathing critique of the European political elite, accusing them of prioritizing corporate interests over the needs and wishes of ordinary citizens:

"Maar een paar jaar later was de politiek weer in zijn ivoren toren terug gekropen. De Europese grondwet, ontdaan van titel en kaft, werd via het verdrag van Lissabon alsnog doorgevoerd. Het NEE van de mensen werd rücksichtslos opzij geschoven en daarmee ook onze democratie. De Haagse elite degradeerde Nederland tot een provincie van de Europese superstaat-in-spe. De politiek accepteerde dat wat ooit was begonnen als een project voor vrede en veiligheid, nu een neoliberaal paradijs werd voor de grote bedrijven (Marijnissen 2019).”¹³

¹² "The zeitgeist is shifting, not only is spring in the air but also political change. I feel it not only elsewhere in the world but also here with us... And according to the Social and Cultural Planning Office, most Dutch people wholeheartedly agree with this and recent demonstrations also show that very many people actually want to take to the streets for this. And at the moment I am traveling through the country for evenings with people who work for our society in the public sector and I hear the same thing everywhere, namely that it is time for reconstruction and that is our attack plan number 1."

¹³ "But a few years later, politics had crawled back into its ivory tower. The European Constitution, stripped of its title and cover, was still pushed through via the Treaty of Lisbon. The people's NO was ruthlessly pushed aside and with it our democracy. The Hague elite degraded the Netherlands to a province of the aspiring European superstate. The politicians accepted that what had once begun as a project for peace and security had now become a neoliberal paradise for big business."

The phrase "rücksichtslos opzij geschoven" (ruthlessly pushed aside) underscores the disregard for public opinion and the lack of democratic accountability. By describing the Netherlands as being degraded to a mere "provincie" (province) of the European superstate, Marijnissen suggests a loss of national sovereignty and autonomy. The characterization of the EU as a "neoliberaaal paradijs" (neoliberal paradise) for large companies further reinforces her critique of the elite's prioritization of corporate interests over the public good.

Marijnissen links this critique of the European elite to a broader criticism of neoliberalism, which she argues has captured both Dutch and European politics at the expense of the public good. In her Party Council speech, she declares:

"En nu opeens, nu opeens is armoede een veelkoppig monster, hoor je dat ook al die politici zeggen. Het is zo'n gemakkelijke manier om je te verschuilen en het is zo'n slap excuus om niks te doen. Want SP'ers, wij weten als geen ander: armoede is geen veelkoppig monster. Armoede is gewoon een politieke keuze (Marijnissen 2020)."¹⁴

This quote is crucial as it links the actions of the political elite to the tangible decline in public services, painting a clear picture of the negative impact of their policies. Marijnissen's use of repetition in "nu opeens, nu opeens" (now suddenly, now suddenly) emphasizes the abruptness and insincerity of the political elite's newfound concern for poverty.

Marijnissen also emphasizes the lack of accountability and transparency among political elites. She argues that there is a significant disconnect between the decisions made by politicians and the will of the people. She criticizes the government's handling of various economic and social issues, suggesting that the political elite operates in a bubble, insulated from the everyday struggles of ordinary citizens. She believes that the current political system is undemocratic and unresponsive to the needs of the populace. To counter this, Marijnissen advocates for a more participatory and transparent political process. She calls for greater involvement of ordinary citizens in decision-making and for policies that are designed to benefit the many rather than the few.

Marijnissen's criticism of political elites is also intertwined with her broader critique of neoliberalism. She argues that the neoliberal agenda, championed by the political elite, has led to increased inequality, job insecurity, and a weakened social safety net. By linking the actions of political elites to the broader neoliberal framework, she situates her critique within a larger ideological context, thereby strengthening her argument. In her speeches, Marijnissen uses a variety of rhetorical techniques to underscore her points. She employs metaphors and analogies to vividly illustrate the disconnect

¹⁴ "And now suddenly, suddenly poverty is a many-headed monster, you hear all those politicians say that too. It is such an easy way to hide and it is such a weak excuse to do nothing. Because SP'ers, we know like no other: poverty is not a many-headed monster. Poverty is simply a political choice."

between political elites and ordinary citizens. For instance, she describes the government's economic policies as “een spel voor de rijken, terwijl de rest toekijkt (Marijnissen 2023),”¹⁵ painting a picture of an exclusive game where the majority are mere spectators. This metaphor effectively conveys the idea of exclusion and inequality perpetuated by elite-driven policies.

Marijnissen's rhetoric is designed to resonate with those who feel disenfranchised by the current economic system. She uses inclusive language to foster a sense of shared purpose and collective responsibility among her audience. By framing her arguments in terms of fairness, justice, and solidarity, she seeks to mobilize support for her alternative economic vision. Her critique of neoliberal elites is not just about economic policies but also about political power dynamics. Marijnissen argues that the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few has led to a corresponding concentration of political power, undermining democratic processes and accountability.

National Sovereignty and Pride

Lilian Marijnissen's speeches frequently emphasize national sovereignty and pride, reflecting her belief in the importance of maintaining Dutch autonomy in economic and social policy decisions. She argues that reclaiming and preserving national sovereignty is crucial for safeguarding the interests of ordinary Dutch citizens against external pressures and influences, particularly those stemming from neoliberal globalisation and European Union policies.

In her Europa Lecture, Marijnissen strongly criticizes the erosion of national sovereignty and democratic control caused by European integration, particularly in economic policy:

"Om het beschadigde vertrouwen en groeiende wantrouwen van veel mensen serieus te nemen en het vertrouwen te herstellen is er meer democratie nodig. De steun van de mensen voor de manier waarop we samenwerken. De SP stelt een nieuw verdrag voor. Een vrijheidsverdrag. Dat verdrag leggen we voor aan de mensen door middel van een referendum. In dit verdrag kunnen we regelen dat de Europese samenwerking écht vrij wordt, waarmee landen de mogelijkheid krijgen op onderdelen niet of niet meer mee te doen met de interne markt. Niet om de samenwerking op te blazen, maar juist omdat we Europese samenwerking heel belangrijk vinden en erkennen dat landen niet hetzelfde zijn (Marijnissen 2019).”¹⁶

¹⁵ "a game for the rich, while the rest watches"

¹⁶ "To take the damaged trust and growing distrust of many people seriously and to restore trust, more democracy is needed. The support of the people for the way we work together. The SP proposes a new treaty. A freedom treaty. We will present this treaty to the people by means of a referendum. In this treaty, we can ensure that European cooperation becomes truly free, giving countries the opportunity not to participate in parts of the internal market. Not to blow up the cooperation, but precisely because we consider European cooperation very important and recognize that countries are not the same."

This statement underscores her commitment to ensuring that the Netherlands retains control over its own policies and decisions, free from undue external influence. The phrase "écht vrij" (truly free) suggests that the current form of European cooperation is not genuinely free, implying constraints on national sovereignty.

Marijnissen critiques the European Union's economic and regulatory frameworks, arguing that they often undermine national sovereignty and limit the Netherlands' ability to pursue independent economic and social policies. She contends that EU regulations and mandates frequently prioritize market interests and corporate profits over social welfare and public interests. In her speech at the SP Party Council, she states, "De Europese Unie dwingt ons tot beleid dat niet in het belang is van onze burgers, maar van de grote bedrijven (Marijnissen 2020)."¹⁷ This quote is pivotal as it highlights her belief that EU policies can conflict with national interests and hinder the Dutch government's ability to enact policies that truly benefit its citizens. The use of the word "dwingt" (forces) implies a lack of agency and autonomy, suggesting that the Netherlands is compelled to act against its own interests.

A key aspect of Marijnissen's rhetoric on national sovereignty involves advocating for economic policies that protect Dutch industries and jobs from the adverse effects of globalisation. She argues that unfettered free trade and open markets have led to job losses, wage suppression, and economic instability for many Dutch workers. Marijnissen's emphasis on national pride is also evident in her calls for policies that reflect Dutch values and priorities. She believes that the Netherlands should be able to define its own social and economic policies based on its unique context and needs, rather than conforming to external standards imposed by international bodies.

¹⁷ "The European Union forces us into policies that are not in the interest of our citizens, but of the big corporations."



Source: SP

3.2. Cross-Comparative Analysis

The comparison between Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen provides a rich context for analysing the use of rhetorical strategies, effectiveness, and the overall impact on their respective parties and national politics. Both leaders harness the power of nationalist rhetoric to advance left-wing agendas within Germany and the Netherlands, albeit through somewhat different approaches.

Both Wagenknecht and Marijnissen use emotive and direct language to appeal to a sense of national integrity and social justice, however, the content and focus of their appeals diverge to reflect their specific national contexts. Wagenknecht's rhetoric is marked by a strong critique of globalisation, economic injustices, and a rallying call against the perceived elitism of the European Union. She emphasizes German sovereignty and criticizes EU policies for undermining Germany's economic and social fabric. Wagenknecht frequently uses historical references and a strong appeal to German identity to galvanize support, particularly focusing on economic protectionism. In contrast, Marijnissen focuses more on redefining nationalism away from xenophobia and towards inclusivity. She links the EU's neoliberal policies directly to the erosion of Dutch national sovereignty and social rights. Her speech is laden with appeals to traditional Dutch values and a call for a return to a more democratic and less centralized European structure.

Evaluating the effectiveness of their rhetoric involves examining public and media reactions as well as subsequent political developments. Wagenknecht has been effective in mobilizing a segment of the German population that feels left behind by globalisation and disillusioned with traditional party politics. Her ability to articulate the frustrations with economic policies resonates strongly with her

audience, evidenced by significant applause and engagement during her speeches. Similarly, Marijnissen's repositioning of the SP around a critical but nuanced stance on EU integration has tapped into widespread discontent in the Netherlands about the overreach of Brussels. Her approach garners support from those who are sceptical of the EU but wary of aligning with right-wing nationalists.

Both leaders have significantly influenced their parties' positions and the broader national discourse, although with varying degrees of success. Wagenknecht's speeches and her positioning have pushed Die Linke and later her own party BSW towards a more critical stance on the EU and immigration, aligning the party with a broader nationalist left agenda. This has stirred some internal conflict within the party but has also solidified a base of support among working-class voters. Under Marijnissen's leadership, the SP has embraced a form of progressive patriotism that seeks to reclaim nationalism from the far-right. This strategic pivot is intended to broaden the party's appeal by integrating social justice with national sovereignty, impacting the national discourse on what it means to be a nationalist in contemporary Dutch politics.

CHAPTER 4: MEDIA AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

This chapter examines the media coverage and public discourse surrounding the speeches and political activities of Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen. It aims to understand how their messages are communicated, received, and interpreted within the broader public and media landscape. This analysis explores how the media shapes and reflects public opinion concerning their advocacy for left nationalism, focusing on three main aspects: coverage of the speeches, reactions and commentary on the speeches, and survey data on electoral results and public opinion in Germany and the Netherlands.

The selection process for media coverage involves choosing a diverse range of articles and reports from mainstream news outlets, alternative media, and interviews that focus on key public appearances and speeches by Wagenknecht and Marijnissen. The chosen sources reflect different political and editorial perspectives, providing a comprehensive view of the media landscape.

Section 4.2. explores the electoral impact of left nationalist rhetoric in Germany and the Netherlands. By analyzing recent electoral results and public opinion surveys, this thesis investigates shifts in voter behaviour and party positions. The discussion will encompass the resonance of themes central to left nationalism, such as views on the EU, immigration, and economic policy. Additionally, I will examine regional variations, demographic shifts, and the broader implications for the political landscapes in both countries. Through this analysis, I aim to understand the potential for left nationalist movements to shape future political dynamics.

4.1. Public and Media Reactions

This section of the chapter delves into the public and media reactions to the speeches and political stances of Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen, focusing on their advocacy for left nationalism. This analysis seeks to understand how their messages are communicated through various media channels and the subsequent public reception. The reactions are categorized based on the same themes discussed in Chapter 3: Immigration Policies and Economic Security, Social Justice and Economic Protectionism, Criticism of Political and Neoliberal Elites, and National Sovereignty and Pride. By examining a diverse range of media responses, from mainstream news to alternative outlets, I aim to understand the broader impact of left nationalist rhetoric on public opinion and discourse in Germany and the Netherlands. This exploration will provide insights into the effectiveness of their communication strategies and the challenges they face in shaping public perception.

4.1.1. Sahra Wagenknecht

Immigration Policies and Economic Security

The formation and ideological stance of the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) have been widely discussed in the media, with particular focus on Wagenknecht's critical views on immigration policies. The article "Wer, wenn nicht wir?" (Maurer and Hübscher 2024) highlights BSW's emphasis on national sovereignty and critiques of EU immigration policies, which Wagenknecht argues undermine the economic security of German workers. This stance has garnered mixed reactions.

Media outlets like *Tagesschau* (Vorreyer 2024; Vorreyer 2023) and *ZDFheute* (Guschl 2024) have reported on her speeches with a balanced tone, presenting both her arguments and the counterarguments. *Tagesschau* reports:

"Wagenknecht betont, dass unkontrollierte Zuwanderung die Konkurrenz um Arbeitsplätze verschärft und die Löhne drückt, was die wirtschaftliche Sicherheit der deutschen Arbeiter bedroht. Sie argumentiert, dass die politischen Eliten von billigen Arbeitskräften profitieren, während die gewöhnlichen Arbeiter die Lasten tragen müssen (Vorreyer 2024)." ¹⁸

This quote highlights Wagenknecht's central argument that uncontrolled immigration has negative economic consequences for the working class.

However, Wagenknecht's rhetoric on immigration has drawn criticism for its potential to align with far-right sentiments, as noted by Juana Guschl (2024) in *ZDFheute*:

"Tatsächlich scheinen die Anhänger des BSW eher pessimistisch auf die eigene wirtschaftliche Lage zu schauen. Im ZDF-Politbarometer vom Februar zeigt sich: Während etwas mehr als die Hälfte der Befragten ihre persönliche wirtschaftliche Lage als gut einschätzen, sagt das nur knapp jeder dritte Anhänger des BSW (Guschl 2024)." ¹⁹

This quote suggests that BSW attracts voters who feel economically insecure and dissatisfied with the current government. The contrast between the majority of respondents viewing their economic situation positively and the significantly lower proportion of BSW supporters doing so implies that BSW's appeal is particularly strong among those who feel left behind economically. While addressing these concerns is important, critics warn that an overly nationalist or anti-immigrant stance could foster societal divisions rather than solutions. The challenge for BSW will be to develop an immigration policy that

¹⁸ "Wagenknecht emphasizes that uncontrolled immigration exacerbates job competition and depresses wages, threatening the economic security of German workers. She argues that the political elites benefit from cheap labour while ordinary workers bear the burdens."

¹⁹ "In fact, BSW supporters seem to take a rather pessimistic view of their own economic situation. The ZDF Politbarometer from February shows: While just over half of those surveyed rate their personal economic situation as good, only about one in three BSW supporters say the same."

balances economic concerns with principles of fairness and inclusion, without resorting to rhetoric that could be exploited by far-right elements.

Social Justice and Economic Protectionism

Wagenknecht's speeches emphasize social justice and economic protectionism, linking economic protectionism with broader social welfare policies. The article "Tritt gegen Ampel" (MDR 2024) discusses BSW's platform, which focuses on higher wages, better pensions, and enhanced social benefits. Wagenknecht criticizes the current government coalition for driving Germany into crises, advocating for political renewal and unity among party members.

The media coverage highlights her calls for economic protectionism and social justice, resonating with voters who feel left behind by globalisation and traditional party politics. Wagenknecht's arguments are framed around the idea that economic protectionism is necessary to shield German workers from the negative impacts of globalisation and to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are distributed more equitably.

Publications such as *Der Spiegel* (Buchsteine and Feldenkirchen 2024) and *Tagesschau* (Vorreier 2024) have reported on her emphasis on economic protectionism, noting that her speeches often draw on historical examples to legitimize her stance. The articles present both supportive and critical perspectives on Wagenknecht's emphasis on economic protectionism. *Der Spiegel* reports:

"Konkrete politische Forderungen bleiben dagegen selten. Wagenknecht fordert einen höheren Mindestlohn und ein Rentensystem „wie in Österreich“. Eine Reform des Gesundheitssystems (wie genau diese aussehen soll, sagt sie nicht). Energie müsse bezahlbar sein und Wirtschaftssanktionen, die nicht Russland, sondern dem eigenen Land schaden, müssten abgeschafft und „alle Belastungen für Landwirte“ zurückgenommen werden (Buchsteine and Feldenkirchen 2024)."²⁰

This quote highlights several of Wagenknecht's key policy proposals aimed at improving social welfare and protecting German economic interests. By calling for higher wages, better pensions, and more affordable energy, she appeals to voters who feel left behind by the current system. Her criticism of economic sanctions that harm German interests reflects her protectionist stance.

Supporters argue that her focus on economic protectionism is a pragmatic response to the challenges posed by globalisation. By prioritizing the protection of local industries and jobs, they believe Wagenknecht is advocating for a more sustainable and fairer economic model that benefits the

²⁰ "Concrete political demands, on the other hand, remain rare. Wagenknecht calls for a higher minimum wage and a pension system "like in Austria". A reform of the health care system (she does not say exactly what this should look like). Energy must be affordable and economic sanctions that harm not Russia but one's own country must be abolished and "all burdens on farmers" must be reversed."

working class. This view is echoed in media outlets like *Taz* (Feddersen 2023) and *World Socialist Web Site* (Nowak 2024; Schwarz 2024), which support her calls for higher wages and better social benefits. *Taz* states:

"Ihre Befürworter sehen in Wagenknechts Betonung des wirtschaftlichen Protektionismus eine pragmatische Antwort auf die Herausforderungen der Globalisierung. Durch die Priorisierung des Schutzes lokaler Industrien und Arbeitsplätze, glauben sie, dass sie ein nachhaltigeres und gerechteres Wirtschaftsmodell fördert, das der Arbeiterklasse zugutekommt (Feddersen 2023)."²¹

This quote reflects the viewpoint of Wagenknecht's supporters who see her policies as practical solutions to the economic disadvantages brought about by globalisation. They argue that protecting local industries and jobs is essential for creating a more equitable economic environment.

However, not all reactions are positive. Critics argue that economic protectionism could lead to isolationism and hinder Germany's competitiveness in the global market. Publications like *Table.Media* (Weidenbach 2024) express concerns that her policies could lead to trade wars and economic stagnation. They argue that while social justice is important, it should not be pursued at the expense of open markets and international cooperation. *Tagesspiegel* expresses these concerns:

"Gleichzeitig inszenierten sich besonders die Grünen als „Gutmenschen“, denen jede Kröte wichtig sei. Diese „Diskrepanz zwischen aufgeblasenem Moralismus dieser angeblichen Fortschrittskoalition und ihrer in Realität zutiefst amoralischen Politik“ treibe die Menschen um (Betschka and Schulze 2023)."²²

This passage reflects a common criticism of her rhetoric; that it sets up a false dichotomy between "elite moralism" and the practical concerns of ordinary people. Critics argue that this framing oversimplifies complex issues and could fuel populist resentment rather than constructive solutions. The challenge for Wagenknecht will be to develop a coherent platform that balances calls for social justice and economic protectionism with realistic policies for a globalized world. While her message clearly resonates with some voters, she will need to provide more concrete details and address criticisms to build a broad-based movement.

²¹ "Her supporters see Wagenknecht's emphasis on economic protectionism as a pragmatic response to the challenges of globalisation. By prioritizing the protection of local industries and jobs, they believe she is promoting a more sustainable and fair economic model that benefits the working class."

²² "At the same time, the Greens in particular staged themselves as "do-gooders" to whom every toad is important. This "discrepancy between the inflated moralism of this supposed progressive coalition and its deeply amoral policy in reality" is what drives people."

Criticism of Political and Neoliberal Elites

Sahra Wagenknecht is vocal about the disconnect between political elites and the general populace, accusing mainstream parties of being out of touch with ordinary people's realities. Wagenknecht portrays political elites as self-serving and disconnected from the struggles of the working class, arguing that they prioritize their own interests over those of the people they are supposed to represent.

Media coverage frequently emphasizes this aspect of her rhetoric. Articles in publications like *Tagesschau* (Vorreyer 2023) discuss her critique of the political establishment, noting how her supporters view her criticism as a necessary challenge to a system increasingly detached from the needs of ordinary people. They see her as advocating for a more democratic and responsive political system. *Tagesschau* comments: "Wagenknecht wirft den politischen Eliten vor, selbststüchtig und von den Kämpfen der Arbeiterklasse abgekoppelt zu sein, und argumentiert, dass sie ihre eigenen Interessen über die der Menschen stellen, die sie vertreten sollen (Vorreyer 2023)."²³ This quote encapsulates Wagenknecht's critique of political elites, painting them as indifferent to the hardships faced by ordinary citizens. The accusation that they prioritize "ihre eigenen Interessen" (their own interests) over those of the people they represent underscores the sense of betrayal and disillusionment felt by many voters. Wagenknecht's rhetoric seeks to highlight the disparity between the governing class and the governed, portraying herself as a voice for the disenfranchised.

In a *Tagesspiegel* interview, Betschka and Schulze (2023) frame her as a prominent critic of current economic and social policies, highlighting her commitment to social justice and economic fairness. "Ihre Anhänger sehen in ihrer Kritik an den politischen Eliten eine notwendige Herausforderung für ein System, das zunehmend von den Bedürfnissen gewöhnlicher Menschen abgekoppelt ist (Betschka and Schulze 2023)."²⁴ This quote illustrates the belief among Wagenknecht's supporters that her outspoken critique is essential for addressing the systemic issues within the political establishment. They argue that her approach brings much-needed attention to the disconnection between political decisions and the realities of everyday life for many citizens.

Critics argue that despite her rhetoric of social justice, the party's actual policies align more with right-wing, pro-capitalist ideologies. This is evident in a quote from Peter Schwarz's (2024) analysis of BSW's European election manifesto for the *World Socialist Web Site*:

"The BSW's European election manifesto is a right-wing, pro-capitalist programme. There is nothing in it that could not be found in the same or a similar form in the programmes of the Christian Democrats (CDU), Social Democrats (SPD), Liberal Democrats (FDP), Greens or even the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Insofar

²³ "Wagenknecht accuses political elites of being self-serving and disconnected from the struggles of the working class, arguing that they prioritize their own interests over those of the people they are supposed to represent."

²⁴ "Her supporters see her criticism of political elites as a necessary challenge to a system increasingly detached from the needs of ordinary people."

as it criticises the European Union, it does so not from the left, from the standpoint of the common interests of the European working class, but from the right, from the standpoint of the national interests of the corporations and banks (Schwarz 2024)."

This quote directly challenges the notion that Wagenknecht and BSW represent a genuine left-wing alternative to neoliberal elites. Schwarz (2024) argues that their manifesto is fundamentally right-wing and pro-capitalist, sharing many similarities with the programs of mainstream parties and even the far-right AfD. He contends that their critiques of the EU are rooted not in a defence of workers' interests, but in a nationalist defence of German corporate interests. The critique raised by Schwarz highlights a significant contradiction between Wagenknecht's rhetoric and the actual policies proposed by BSW. While she frequently challenges neoliberal elites and calls for social justice, the party's manifesto appears to align more closely with right-wing, nationalist, and pro-capitalist ideologies. This discrepancy raises questions about the authenticity and coherence of Wagenknecht's position as a left-wing alternative to the neoliberal status quo.

These critical perspectives raise important questions about the coherence and implications of Wagenknecht's rhetoric. While her critiques of neoliberalism and calls for social justice clearly resonate with many voters, the actual policies proposed by BSW appear to align more closely with right-wing, nationalist, and pro-capitalist ideologies. As the party seeks to build a broader movement, it will need to grapple with these contradictions and provide a more substantive alternative to the neoliberal status quo beyond mere rhetoric.

National Sovereignty and Pride

Sahra Wagenknecht's emphasis on national sovereignty and pride is a recurring theme in her speeches, garnering support from voters who feel alienated by EU policies. She critiques EU regulations and advocates for more autonomous national policies, positioning Germany's autonomy as crucial for its future. Wagenknecht frequently uses patriotic language and historical references to evoke a sense of national pride and sovereignty, arguing that Germany should reclaim its autonomy from the EU and prioritize the interests of its own citizens, rather than being subjected to external influences.

Media coverage often highlights this aspect of her rhetoric. Articles in publications like *Die Welt* (2024) discuss her critique of EU regulations and her calls for greater national sovereignty. Supporters of Wagenknecht argue that her emphasis on national sovereignty is a necessary response to the challenges posed by globalisation and the overreach of EU policies. They believe that by reclaiming national sovereignty, Germany can better protect its economic interests and ensure the welfare of its citizens. This perspective is reflected in various media outlets, which report on the support she garners for her stance. For example, in a discussion on her nationalist themes, supporters are quoted as saying: "Die Wiedererlangung der nationalen Souveränität notwendig ist, um Deutschlands wirtschaftliche

Interessen zu schützen und das Wohlergehen seiner Bürger zu gewährleisten (Die Welt 2024)."²⁵ This quote illustrates the belief among Wagenknecht's supporters that her calls for national sovereignty are a pragmatic approach to addressing the issues caused by globalisation and EU policies. They argue that national autonomy will enable Germany to craft policies that are more attuned to the needs of its people.

However, this focus on national sovereignty has attracted criticism for its nationalist overtones. The article "The Right-Wing Roots of Sahra Wagenknecht's Party in Saxony, Germany" (Nowak 2024) links BSW's orientation to historical right-wing elements within East German political traditions, critiquing its manifesto for supporting nationalist and xenophobic policies. The article states: "BSW's nationalist rhetoric can be exclusionary and may foster division within society (Nowak 2024)." This critique suggests that Wagenknecht's nationalist rhetoric can be problematic, as it may promote exclusionary attitudes and exacerbate social divisions. The mention of the party's manifesto supporting nationalist and xenophobic policies raises concerns about the potential consequences of an overly nationalistic stance.

Impact on Public Opinion

The impact of Wagenknecht's speeches on public opinion is significant but complex. While her rhetoric resonates with a segment of the population that feels left behind by globalisation and disillusioned with traditional party politics, it also attracts criticism for its nationalist overtones. The article "The Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance adopts a right-wing manifesto for the European elections" (Schwarz 2024) suggests that BSW's platform, despite its social justice rhetoric, is fundamentally right-wing and pro-capitalist. This duality in Wagenknecht's messaging reflects the broader ideological shifts within parts of the European left, blending traditional left-wing concerns about social justice with nationalist elements that emphasize national sovereignty and cultural integrity.

By articulating a form of nationalism that claims to protect and include the working class, Wagenknecht challenges the traditional power dynamics between the political elites and the general populace. She portrays herself and her party as aligned with the people against the elites, attempting to reshape the power structures within German society. Her speeches draw on the historical context of German reunification and the economic transformations that followed, which have left segments of the population feeling marginalized. By referencing these events, she legitimizes her arguments and connects with the historical experiences of her audience.

Wagenknecht's ability to attract significant media attention and public debate indicates her influence on the political landscape. Her speeches resonate with voters who feel unrepresented by current parties, positioning her as a credible alternative to both the mainstream left and the far-right.

²⁵ "Reclaiming national sovereignty is necessary to protect Germany's economic interests and ensure the welfare of its citizens."

The media coverage often highlights the tension between her nationalist rhetoric and her commitment to social justice, reflecting the broader ideological shifts within parts of the European left.

4.1.2. Lilian Marijnissen

Immigration Policies and Economic Security

Lilian Marijnissen's leadership of the SP has been marked by her focus on immigration policies and economic security. Her speeches often critique the neoliberal policies of the European Union, arguing that they prioritize corporate interests over the welfare of ordinary people. In an interview with *NU.nl*, Marijnissen emphasized the need to limit labour migration to prevent exploitation and protect housing and public services:

"Wij pleiten vooral voor het beperken van de arbeidsmigratie aangezien dat druk zet op de huisvesting en de voorzieningen. Bovendien zijn deze werknemers vaak de dupe van uitbuiting. Het is dweilen met de kraan open. Dat zien we terug als we in de buurten komen. Bewoners zien de leefbaarheid in hun wijk verslechteren. Uitzendbureaus kopen massaal betaalbare koopwoningen op om die te splitsen en er arbeidsmigranten in te zetten (Basekin 2023)."²⁶

This quote highlights Marijnissen's argument that unchecked labour migration can lead to the exploitation of vulnerable workers and strain local housing and public services. By using vivid imagery like "dweilen met de kraan open" (mopping with the tap running), she emphasizes the futility of addressing the consequences of labour migration without tackling the root causes. The concrete examples of residents seeing their neighborhoods deteriorate and employment agencies buying up affordable homes to house migrant workers further illustrate the tangible impact on communities. By emphasizing these consequences, Marijnissen presents her stance as a necessary measure to protect both migrant workers and local residents.

Media coverage of her speeches reflects the SP's commitment to protecting the vulnerable against neoliberal economic policies. In an article discussing the SP's need to return to its core themes, Pim van den Dool writes in *NRC Handelsblad*:

"Marijnissen wil in deze campagne veel explicieter gaan benoemen dat FVD er volgens haar helemaal niet voor de gewone man en vrouw is. 'Als ik Baudet hoor zeggen dat

²⁶ "We mainly advocate limiting labour migration since it puts pressure on housing and facilities. Moreover, these workers are often the victims of exploitation. It's mopping with the tap open. We see that when we come into the neighbourhoods. Residents see the quality of life in their neighbourhood deteriorating. Temporary employment agencies are buying up affordable owner-occupied homes en masse to split them up and put migrant workers in them"

hij geen superstaat wil, maar samenwerking wel belangrijk vindt, denk ik: dat zeggen wij al twintig jaar. En Forum heeft het over de elite en het partijkartel, maar kijk naar hun stemgedrag in de Kamer. Bij de aanpak van belastingontwijking door multinationals of exorbitante topsalarissen geeft Forum niet thuis (Dool 2019).”²⁷

This quote demonstrates Marijnissen's efforts to position the SP as the true defender of working-class interests, in contrast to right-wing populist parties like Forum for Democracy (FVD). By calling out FVD's inconsistencies and their failure to support measures that would benefit ordinary people, such as tackling tax avoidance and excessive executive salaries, Marijnissen presents the SP as the genuine advocate for economic justice. This quote also reflects her strategy of directly confronting and exposing the contradictions in the rhetoric of her political opponents.

Critics express concern over her nationalist overtones and potential alignment with exclusionary policies. Articles in publications like *Trouw* (Schmid 2023) emphasize the risks of her rhetoric aligning with exclusionary nationalist movements. They argue that while her focus on economic security is valid, it should not come at the expense of fostering inclusive and fair immigration policies. Critics argue that while her emphasis on economic security is important, it should not come at the expense of inclusive and fair immigration policies. They warn that her approach could reinforce divisive sentiments and undermine social cohesion in the Netherlands.

Social Justice and Economic Protectionism

Lilian Marijnissen advocates strongly for social justice and economic protectionism in her speeches. She positions the SP as a defender of workers' rights and social equity, emphasizing the need for policies that prioritize local industries and workers over global economic forces. Marijnissen's speeches often underscore the importance of economic protectionism as a pragmatic response to globalisation's challenges. She argues that by protecting local industries and jobs, the Netherlands can foster a fair economic model that benefits the working class. An article titled "Nog nooit won de SP onder Lilian Marijnissen" ("The SP has never won under Lilian Marijnissen"), authored by Schmidt (2023), highlights the SP's enduring support for Marijnissen despite electoral setbacks: "Marijnissen blijft klassieke SP-thema's benadrukken zoals sociale rechtvaardigheid en arbeidsexploitatie (Schmidt 2023).”²⁸ This quote from Schmidt underscores Marijnissen's commitment to traditional SP values of social justice and economic protectionism, which she views as crucial for addressing inequalities exacerbated by globalisation.

²⁷ "In this campaign, Marijnissen wants to state much more explicitly that, in her opinion, FVD is not at all for the ordinary man and woman. 'When I hear Baudet say that he doesn't want a super state, but that cooperation is important, I think: we've been saying that for twenty years. And Forum talks about the elite and the party cartel, but look at their voting behaviour in the House. When it comes to tackling tax avoidance by multinationals or exorbitant top salaries, Forum is not at home.'"

²⁸ "Marijnissen continues to emphasize classic SP themes such as social justice and labour exploitation."

Supporters of Marijnissen argue that her advocacy for economic protectionism is essential for shielding Dutch workers from the adverse effects of globalisation. They believe that prioritizing local industries and jobs will lead to a fairer distribution of economic benefits and improve social equity. In an interview with *NU.nl*, Marijnissen emphasizes the importance of increasing the minimum wage to address economic inequality:

"Nee, natuurlijk zullen de loonkosten stijgen, maar ondertussen gaan de winsten ook omhoog. Het kan niet zo zijn dat de lonen vervolgens achterblijven en de prijzen stijgen. Mensen gaan er dan op achteruit (Basekin 2023)."²⁹

This quote exemplifies Marijnissen's commitment to promoting social equity through economic policies that prioritize the well-being of workers over corporate interests.

Critics, however, argue that Marijnissen's emphasis on economic protectionism could lead to isolationism and hinder the Netherlands' competitiveness in the global market. Publications like *BNNVARA* (Van der Starre 2019) express concerns: "Sommige vrezen dat haar beleid kan leiden tot handelsoorlogen en economische stagnatie, en stellen dat sociale rechtvaardigheid belangrijk is maar niet ten koste moet gaan van open markten en internationale samenwerking (Van der Starre 2019)."³⁰ This critique highlights concerns about the potential negative economic consequences of Marijnissen's protectionist policies, suggesting a delicate balance between social justice goals and maintaining economic competitiveness.

Criticism of Political and Neoliberal Elites

Marijnissen frequently criticizes political and neoliberal elites and their policies, positioning the SP as a defender of the common people. Marijnissen's rhetoric includes strong criticisms of political elites, accusing them of being disconnected from the realities of ordinary citizens. Her speeches often use emotionally charged language and historical references to legitimize her arguments and resonate with common fears and frustrations. She portrays the political elites as self-serving and out of touch with the struggles of the working class, arguing that they prioritize their own interests over those of the people they are supposed to represent.

In an article from *De Groene Amsterdammer* titled "Alle ballen naar het midden" ("All balls to the middle"), Coen van de Ven discusses the shift in political debates towards the centre and the struggle for visibility among parties. He highlights Marijnissen's criticism of the term "bestuurscultuur" (administrative culture) and her warning against turning "bestaanszekerheid" (livelihood security) into

²⁹ "Marijnissen often relies on historical examples to justify her stance, suggesting that a return to more protectionist policies could revitalize the economy and ensure social justice for all citizens."

³⁰ "No, of course wage costs will rise, but in the meantime profits are also going up. It cannot be the case that wages then lag behind and prices rise. People will then be worse off"

a similarly hollow phrase: "Laten we van "bestaanszekerheid" niet dezelfde holle term maken als van "bestuurscultuur".³¹ Zij had zich als altijd opgeworpen voor de minima, mensen in armoede, of uitgedrukt in klasse: de onderklasse (Ven 2023)."³¹

Media coverage highlights her critique of neoliberal policies and her advocacy for workers' rights. For instance, *NRC* (Dool 2019) has reported negatively on her speeches, emphasizing her arguments against economic policies that prioritize corporate interests over the welfare of ordinary people.

"Marijnissen stelt dat neoliberal beleid heeft geleid tot grotere economische ongelijkheid en sociale onrechtvaardigheid. Ze pleit voor een rechtvaardiger economisch model dat prioriteit geeft aan de behoeften van de arbeidersklasse (Dool 2019)."³²

This quote from *NRC* encapsulates Marijnissen's fundamental critique of neoliberalism. Neoliberal policies typically emphasize deregulation, privatization, and free market principles which, according to Marijnissen, have exacerbated disparities between the wealthy and the working class. She contends that these policies prioritize corporate interests over societal welfare, leading to economic inequality and social injustice. Marijnissen's advocacy for a more equitable economic model underscores her commitment to addressing these issues by promoting policies that protect workers' rights and enhance social benefits. Media outlets like *De Groene Amsterdammer* (Ven 2023; Engelen 2021) support her calls for higher wages and better social benefits. These publications present Marijnissen's critique of neoliberal elites in a positive light, emphasizing her commitment to social justice and her efforts to challenge a system that has become increasingly unequal and unfair.

Critics caution that Marijnissen's rhetoric against political elites may exacerbate polarization and distrust in political institutions. They argue for a more nuanced approach that encourages constructive dialogue and collaboration, rather than reinforcing divisions within society. The articles show that while Marijnissen's criticism of political elites resonates with supporters who see it as a necessary challenge to a disconnected system, it also raises concerns among those who fear it may contribute to increased polarization and erosion of trust in political institutions.

National Sovereignty and Pride

Marijnissen argues passionately that the Netherlands should reclaim its autonomy from the EU, asserting that Dutch interests should take precedence over external influences. Marijnissen often

³¹ "Let's not make "livelihood security" the same hollow term as "administrative culture". She had always stood up for the minimum, people in poverty, or expressed in class: the underclass."

³² "Marijnissen argues that neoliberal policies have led to increased economic inequality and social injustice. She advocates for a more equitable economic model that prioritizes the needs of the working class."

employs patriotic language and historical references to evoke a sense of national pride and sovereignty among her audience.

Marijnissen's emphasis on protecting Dutch workers is highlighted in discussions about labour migration and migrant worker exploitation. According to "De SP moet weer terug naar de klassieke thema's" by Dool (2019), she advocates for a permit system to regulate labour migration, ensuring it genuinely benefits Dutch society. She criticizes current policies that she believes exploit laborers from Eastern Europe, aligning her stance with the SP's commitment to social justice and fairness. "Arbeidsmigratie wordt door Marijnissen aangemerkt als een kritieke kwestie, waarbij de uitbuiting van Oost-Europese arbeidsmigranten en bredere sociale implicaties worden benadrukt (Dool, 2019)."³³ This emphasis on national sovereignty and the prioritization of Dutch interests aligns with Marijnissen's broader critique of EU policies that she believes undermine the country's autonomy.

Media coverage often underscores Marijnissen's critique of EU regulations and her calls for greater national sovereignty. Supporters argue that her emphasis on national sovereignty is essential to safeguarding the Netherlands' economic interests and maintaining the welfare of its citizens in the face of globalisation. In the article from *NRC Handelsblad*, Marijnissen discusses her vision for a new European architecture based on voluntary cooperation between sovereign states: "De weg naar meer Europese integratie, daarentegen, leidt naar de overdracht van steeds meer nationale bevoegdheden aan de ongekozen functionarissen van de Europese Commissie, en is daarmee onverenigbaar met een betekenisvolle definitie van democratie en verzorgingsstaat (Dool 2019)."³⁴ Marijnissen argues that further European integration would result in the transfer of national powers to unelected EU officials, which she considers incompatible with a meaningful definition of democracy and the welfare state. By advocating for a new European architecture based on voluntary cooperation between sovereign states, she emphasizes the importance of national autonomy in preserving democratic principles and maintaining a strong welfare state.

Impact on Public Opinion

Lilian Marijnissen's speeches and leadership have had a notable but complex impact on public opinion in the Netherlands. Her emphasis on social justice, economic protectionism, and criticism of neoliberal policies resonates with a segment of the population that feels marginalized by globalisation and disillusioned with traditional party politics. Marijnissen's rhetoric appeals particularly to voters who are concerned about labour exploitation, economic inequality, and the protection of workers' rights. Supporters of Marijnissen appreciate her steadfast commitment to social equity and labour rights. They

³³ "Labor migration is identified by Marijnissen as a critical issue, highlighting the exploitation of Eastern European migrant workers and broader social implications. She advocates for a permit system to ensure that hiring labour migrants is genuinely necessary."

³⁴ "The path to more European integration, on the other hand, leads to the transfer of more and more national powers to the unelected officials of the European Commission, and is therefore incompatible with a meaningful definition of democracy and the welfare state."

view her critiques of EU neoliberal policies and her calls for regulated immigration and economic protectionism as necessary measures to ensure the welfare of Dutch workers. Her speeches, which frequently invoke historical examples and patriotic language, successfully connect with voters who prioritize national sovereignty and economic justice. However, Marijnissen's rhetoric also attracts criticism for its perceived nationalist overtones and potential exclusionary implications. Critics argue that her focus on national sovereignty and regulated immigration could foster division within society and alienate immigrant communities.

4.1.3 Wagenknecht and Marijnissen

The public and media reactions to the speeches of Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen illuminate the intricate dynamics of leftist political rhetoric in contemporary Europe. Both leaders, though geographically and politically distinct, share a common focus on critiquing neoliberal policies and advocating for social justice. However, their approaches and the subsequent public reception reveal significant differences in strategy and impact.

Sahra Wagenknecht's rhetoric is deeply intertwined with themes of national sovereignty and economic protectionism. Her speeches, often laden with criticisms of EU immigration policies, argue that uncontrolled immigration undermines the economic security of German workers. This stance garners mixed reactions, with applause from supporters who appreciate her tough stance on immigration and critiques of globalisation. Her emphasis on economic protectionism, historical references to post-war Germany, and criticisms of political elites resonate with voters disillusioned by traditional party politics. However, her nationalist overtones and potential alignment with far-right sentiments raise concerns about fostering division within society. Critics argue that her approach could alienate immigrant communities and promote isolationism, hindering Germany's competitiveness in the global market.

In contrast, Lilian Marijnissen's leadership of the SP in the Netherlands emphasizes social justice and economic protectionism within a framework that critiques neoliberal EU policies. Marijnissen advocates for regulated immigration to prevent labour exploitation and protect Dutch workers. Her speeches emphasize the need for higher wages, better social benefits, and a fair economic model that benefits the working class. While her focus on labour rights and social equity resonates with supporters who feel marginalized by globalisation, her rhetoric also faces criticism for potential nationalist overtones. Critics warn that her emphasis on national sovereignty and regulated immigration could foster societal division and alienate immigrant communities, despite her commitment to social justice.

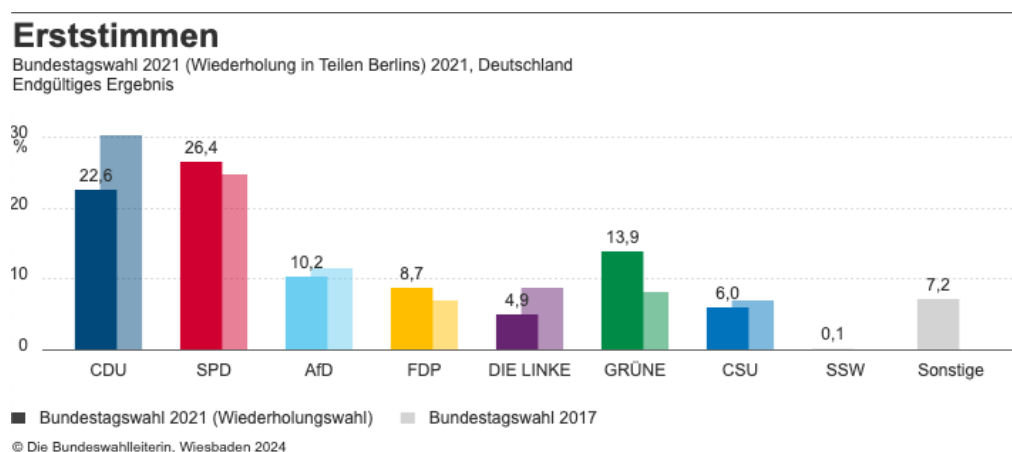
Both Wagenknecht and Marijnissen employ critiques of political elites and neoliberal policies to position themselves as defenders of the working class. Wagenknecht's emotionally charged language and historical references aim to legitimize her arguments and connect with common frustrations,

portraying political elites as out of touch with ordinary people's realities. Similarly, Marijnissen's speeches criticize the disconnect between political elites and the general populace, advocating for a more democratic and responsive political system. Media coverage of both leaders often highlights their critiques of neoliberal elites, resonating with voters who feel left behind by economic changes.

The impact of their rhetoric on public opinion is significant but multifaceted. Wagenknecht's speeches resonate with a segment of the population that feels left behind by globalisation and disillusioned with traditional party politics. Her ability to attract significant media attention and public debate indicates her influence on the political landscape. However, her nationalist rhetoric also attracts criticism for potentially fostering exclusion and division within society. Similarly, Marijnissen's emphasis on social justice and economic protectionism appeals to voters concerned about labour exploitation and economic inequality. Her critique of neoliberal policies and calls for regulated immigration and economic protectionism are seen as necessary measures to ensure the welfare of Dutch workers. Yet, her rhetoric also faces criticism for its perceived nationalist overtones and potential exclusionary implications. The public and media reactions to the speeches of Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen highlight the complexities and challenges of leftist political rhetoric in contemporary Europe.

4.2. Electoral Results and Survey Data in Germany and the Netherlands

In analysing the electoral impact of left nationalist rhetoric by Sahra Wagenknecht and Lilian Marijnissen in their respective countries, Germany and the Netherlands, it is essential to delve into the shifts in voter behaviour and party positions over time. This analysis employs recent electoral results and public opinion surveys to examine how themes central to left nationalism, such as views on the EU, immigration, and economic policy, might have influenced voting patterns.



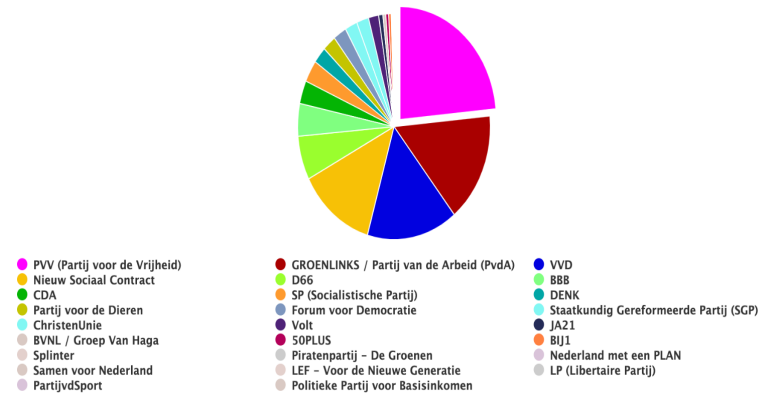
Source: Bundeswahlleiterin.de (26 september 2021)

In Germany, Wagenknecht's rhetoric, which often merges social justice issues with a critique of globalisation and EU policies, seems to resonate with a specific segment of the electorate. This segment is characterized by voters who feel disenfranchised by the mainstream political narratives and economic policies that, in their view, favour multinational corporations and neglect the local workforce. Analysis of electoral results, particularly from the 2021 Bundestag elections, shows a stabilization of support for Die Linke in regions where economic disenchantment is prevalent, although the party did not see a significant increase in overall votes (Bundeswahlen 2021). In the 2021 elections, the SPD emerged as the winner, gaining 5.2 percentage points, which is indicative of a shift towards centre-left policies among the general populace (Bundeswahlen 2021). The CDU/CSU recorded their worst result in history, indicating a significant decline in support for traditional conservative policies. This shift could suggest that voters are looking for new solutions to current problems, which could benefit left nationalist parties if they manage to position themselves correctly. The Left Party, however, suffered losses, securing only 4.9% of the vote, barely crossing the electoral threshold for parliamentary representation. This was a significant drop from previous performances and highlights the challenges faced by the party in maintaining its base (Neu and Pokorny 2021: 6). Instead, there appears to be a consolidation of the base, suggesting that while Wagenknecht's appeal is solid among existing supporters, it may not be attracting new voters in large numbers.

The Left Party's decline in voter support, particularly in Eastern Germany, its traditional stronghold, indicates a disenchantment among its core voters. Many of these voters have historical ties to the party that originated from East Germany's ruling socialist party before reunification (John 2021). The loss in these areas might suggest a dissatisfaction with the party's current direction or a response to new political dynamics, such as the rise of the AfD, which has successfully attracted votes with its nationalist rhetoric (Neu and Pokorny 2021: 7).

The Greens and the FDP made gains, particularly among younger voters, driven by issues like climate change, education, and digitalization. This demographic shift shows a generational divide in priorities, which may influence future left nationalist strategies. Younger voters are more concerned with global issues but are also receptive to new economic narratives that promise more national control and economic fairness, areas where left nationalist rhetoric can resonate (John 2021).

The regional variations in voting behaviour are particularly telling. The SPD's gains in western Germany contrast with the mixed results in the East, where the Left Party's decline was most pronounced. This suggests regional disparities in economic development and political priorities, which left nationalists like Wagenknecht could capitalize on by tailoring their messages to regional needs and sentiments (Neu and Pokorny 2021: 7-8).



Source: *Verkiezingsuitslagen.nl* (22 November 2023)

The situation in the Netherlands offers a slightly different perspective. The political landscape is highly fragmented, with many small parties vying for attention. The SP, under Lilian Marijnissen, has attempted to redefine its nationalist stance to gain broader appeal.

Under Marijnissen's leadership, the SP has attempted to reposition itself to gain ground amid the Netherlands' shifting political landscape. Public opinion data from the "Burgerperspectieven 2023" report indicates a slight decline in trust towards traditional political structures and a growing scepticism about the EU's impact on national sovereignty. However, the SP has not significantly capitalized on these sentiments at the polls. The 2021 and 2023 general elections did not bring substantial gains for the SP, which suggests that while the rhetoric aligns with a portion of public sentiment, it has not yet converted effectively into broader electoral success.

The SP has struggled to maintain its electoral presence amidst this fragmentation. The rise of new parties and shifting alliances has diluted traditional party loyalties, posing a challenge for the SP as it tries to articulate a form of nationalism that is progressive yet distinct from the xenophobic tendencies of right-wing populists (Stichting KiezersOnderzoek Nederland 2021).

Surveys indicate a significant public appetite for reform, with many expressing disillusionments with traditional governance frameworks. Marijnissen's strategy involves repositioning the SP to better address these concerns by integrating national sovereignty with social justice. This approach aims to resonate with voters who feel left behind by globalisation and liberal economic policies, yet it requires careful navigation to avoid alienating those wary of nationalism's traditional connotations (Miltenburg et al. 2023: 22).

Interestingly, survey data from both countries indicate a nuanced picture of voter behaviour. In Germany, a portion of the electorate appears increasingly sceptical of the EU and concerned about immigration policies. Still, this has not translated into a sweeping shift towards left nationalism, possibly due to the complex association of nationalism with right-wing parties. In the Netherlands, there is evidence of growing discontent with how democracy functions and the perceived influence of the EU, yet this has not led to a surge in support for Marijnissen's version of left nationalism, which

suggests other factors at play, such as party dynamics and coalition possibilities, which may be influencing voter decisions.

The analysis of electoral results and public opinion in Germany and the Netherlands highlights the nuanced relationship between left nationalist rhetoric and voter behaviour. While there are opportunities for left nationalists to gain ground by addressing economic inequities and national sovereignty, they face the dual challenge of distinguishing their version of nationalism from right-wing populism and adapting to a rapidly changing political landscape. As such, the future of left nationalism in Germany and the Netherlands will likely depend on these leaders' ability to adapt their strategies to changing political climates and voter expectations, potentially reshaping their parties' positions to better align with emerging public sentiments. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for predicting their movements' trajectories and devising strategies that resonate with voters increasingly sceptical of traditional political offerings.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored the evolving landscape of left nationalist rhetoric in Europe, focusing on the political strategies of Sahra Wagenknecht in Germany and Lilian Marijnissen in the Netherlands. By analysing their speeches, media representations, and public reception, we have gained significant insights into the dynamics of left nationalism and its implications for combating far-right movements.

Wagenknecht and Marijnissen blend social justice policies with themes of national sovereignty to appeal to disillusioned working-class voters. This approach seeks to reclaim patriotic narratives from the far-right while addressing economic insecurities and social inequalities. Both politicians emphasize protecting national interests and sovereignty, particularly in economic policies, immigration, and European integration.

Wagenknecht's rhetoric highlights the failures of neoliberal policies and the social and economic disparities they create. She advocates for stronger social safety nets, fair wages, and equitable economic opportunities, positioning these issues within a framework of national interest. Similarly, Marijnissen focuses on economic justice, emphasizing robust welfare policies, healthcare access, and education. By framing these issues in terms of national pride and sovereignty, both politicians offer a left-wing alternative to far-right nationalism.

The effectiveness of left nationalism, as advocated by Sahra Wagenknecht in Germany and Lilian Marijnissen in the Netherlands, in providing a counter-narrative to the increasing influence of far-right movements was a central theme for this thesis. By focusing on how these leaders position left nationalism as a progressive alternative to the exclusionary and often xenophobic rhetoric of far-right groups, this analysis has attempted to understand if and how left nationalism can appeal to similar voter bases in Europe without sacrificing core progressive values.

The emergence of left nationalist rhetoric presents both opportunities and challenges in combating far-right movements. On one hand, by addressing economic and social grievances, left nationalism can divert support away from far-right parties. This is particularly important in regions where economic insecurities and social inequalities are prevalent, as these issues are often exploited by far-right movements to gain support. On the other hand, the overlap in nationalist themes requires careful navigation to avoid reinforcing xenophobic sentiments. Left nationalist politicians must ensure that their rhetoric remains inclusive and does not alienate minority groups or perpetuate exclusionary narratives. This balance is delicate, as the use of nationalist themes can easily be misinterpreted or co-opted by far-right movements.

Both Wagenknecht and Marijnissen have strategically positioned their parties to address national issues that resonate deeply with the electorate, often overlapping with concerns typically mobilized by far-right parties. This includes themes of national sovereignty, economic protectionism,

and cultural integrity, all framed within a progressive context that vehemently opposes the exclusionary and divisive policies of the far-right.

In Germany, Wagenknecht's approach involves a critical assessment of globalisation's impact on the German working class. Her critique of EU economic policies and free trade agreements aims to align with the economic concerns of voters who have traditionally swayed towards far-right parties like the AfD. This alignment is tactical, intended to bring back or retain voters who may feel betrayed by the perceived pro-globalisation stance of mainstream left-wing parties. However, Wagenknecht ensures that her nationalist rhetoric is coupled with a strong emphasis on social justice and economic equality, distinguishing it from the ethnic and racial nationalism promoted by the far-right.

Similarly, in the Netherlands, Marijnissen's version of left nationalism also attempts to redefine traditional notions of nationalism. By focusing on protecting workers from globalisation's adverse effects and emphasizing social welfare systems, Marijnissen's rhetoric appeals to a broad base of voters. Her inclusive approach to nationalism (which explicitly rejects the xenophobia inherent in far-right ideologies) is intended to resonate with both native Dutch citizens and immigrants, promoting a unified national identity that values social justice and equality.

The electoral success of these left nationalist approaches in countering far-right movements is complex and varies significantly between the two countries. In Germany, the resurgence of the far-right has been marked by significant electoral gains by the AfD, particularly in regions suffering from economic stagnation and industrial decline. Wagenknecht's Die Linke and later Aufstehen and BSW have attempted to counter this by appealing to the same voter base with a message that emphasizes economic fairness and national autonomy. However, despite these efforts, Die Linke has faced challenges in expanding its base significantly beyond its traditional strongholds. While it has succeeded in retaining a core group of left-leaning voters, it has struggled to make inroads among those who have drifted towards the AfD, driven by cultural and immigration-related anxieties that Wagenknecht's economic-focused nationalism may not fully address.

In the Netherlands, the political landscape is highly fragmented with numerous parties competing for votes across the political spectrum. Marijnissen's SP has aimed to carve out a space by advocating a progressive form of nationalism that addresses economic insecurities while promoting inclusivity. Despite these efforts, the SP has not seen significant electoral gains in recent years. The Dutch political environment, with its proportional representation system, allows for a wide array of political parties to gain representation, making it challenging for any single party to dominate the discourse around nationalism. Marijnissen's efforts to counter far-right populism have been commendable but insufficient to significantly alter the electoral dynamics, which remain influenced by a complex interplay of economic, cultural, and social factors.

Leaders like Wagenknecht and Marijnissen face a significant challenge in balancing populist appeal with progressive values. This challenge is rooted in the need to address the concerns of voters attracted to far-right parties' simplistic solutions, without compromising their core left-wing principles. The primary task for these leaders is to navigate a delicate path between addressing legitimate economic grievances and avoiding the scapegoating of immigrants and other marginalized groups, a tactic often employed by the far-right. They must redefine nationalism in a credible and attractive way, which involves not only rearticulating the concept of patriotism but also reevaluating how national interests are defined and pursued in a globalized world. Wagenknecht and Marijnissen employ different rhetorical strategies to achieve these goals. Wagenknecht often uses more confrontational language, drawing on metaphors of economic patriotism and invoking historical German figures to stir national pride. She tends to identify specific "enemies" and proposes radical, sweeping changes. In contrast, Marijnissen adopts a more measured tone, focusing on shared values and systemic issues rather than specific antagonists. She typically advocates for incremental reforms within existing systems.

These differences are evident in their approaches to key themes such as economic justice, national identity and immigration. Wagenknecht's rhetoric aligns more closely with traditional left-wing populism, while Marijnissen's strategy represents a more moderate, consensus-oriented form of left nationalism. The opportunity for both leaders lies in offering a robust alternative to the far-right, one that combines a strong defense of national interests with a progressive agenda prioritizing social justice, economic equality, and inclusivity. However, the effectiveness of left nationalism is still limited by several factors, including the ability to articulate a clear and compelling alternative to far-right narratives and address the broader societal and economic issues fueling populist sentiments.

As the political landscape continues to evolve, the challenge for left nationalists will be to adapt their strategies to better meet the needs of an increasingly disillusioned electorate. This may involve reshaping their parties' positions to align more closely with emerging public sentiments. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for predicting the trajectory of left nationalist movements and devising strategies that resonate with voters who are increasingly skeptical of traditional political offerings. The success of Wagenknecht and Marijnissen will ultimately depend on their ability to offer compelling visions of national identity and economic justice that resonate with an increasingly diverse and globalized electorate, while maintaining their core left-wing principles.

These findings have several broader implications for combating far-right movements in Europe. There is a need for progressive forces to reclaim and redefine nationalism in inclusive and socially just terms. Emphasizing common values, shared identity, and collective well-being, while unequivocally rejecting xenophobia and racism, is essential for building a cohesive and equitable society.

Policymakers must prioritize policies that address the root causes of economic insecurities and social inequalities. This includes developing robust social safety nets, fair labour practices, and

equitable economic opportunities. By addressing these underlying issues, progressive leaders can reduce the appeal of far-right movements and promote social cohesion.

Effective communication strategies are also crucial in shaping public discourse. Progressive politicians must engage with both mainstream and alternative media to ensure balanced representation of their policies and counter far-right narratives. This involves actively participating in media discussions, using social media to reach broader audiences, and promoting media literacy to help citizens critically engage with media content.

This thesis opens several avenues for future research. Comparative studies of left nationalist movements in different European countries can provide deeper insights into their strategies and effectiveness in various political contexts. These studies should examine how different political, economic, and social environments influence the development and reception of left nationalist rhetoric.

Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of public opinion on left nationalism over time can reveal trends and shifts in political attitudes. These studies should focus on understanding how changes in economic conditions, social policies, and political landscapes impact public support for left nationalist movements.

Investigating the role of digital media in shaping and disseminating left nationalist rhetoric can enhance our understanding of its influence on public discourse. This research should explore how social media platforms, online news outlets, and digital communication tools are used by left nationalist politicians to reach and engage with their audiences.

Evaluating the impact of specific policies advocated by left nationalist politicians on voter behaviour and far-right support can provide practical insights for policymakers. These evaluations should assess the effectiveness of policies in addressing economic and social grievances, reducing far-right support, and promoting social cohesion.

The exploration of left nationalism in Europe, as embodied by Wagenknecht and Marijnissen, reveals a political landscape in flux, where traditional ideological boundaries are being redrawn. This thesis has illuminated the intricate dance between progressive ideals and nationalist sentiments, challenging our preconceptions about the left-right political spectrum. What stands out is how complex modern politics really is; it's not just about left versus right anymore, but about balancing economic, cultural, and national concerns all at once. The struggle of these politicians to craft a progressive nationalism that can effectively counter far-right narratives while remaining true to leftist principles highlights the profound challenges facing European democracies. As we look to the future, the role of reimagined left nationalism in countering the appeal of far-right movements remains a critical area of study. The ongoing evolution and impact of these movements warrant continued attention and analysis from

scholars and policymakers alike, as they strive to address the underlying issues fuelling nationalist sentiments.

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