Populists as Chameleons?
An Adaptive Learning Approach to the Rise of Populist Politicians

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Abstract

This paper envisions populism as a vote- and attention-maximizing strategy. It applies an adaptive learning approach to understand successes of populist party leaders. I assume that populists are ideologically flexible and continually search for a more beneficial policy position, in terms of both electoral support and media attention, by retaining political claims that yield positive feedback and discard those that encounter negative feedback. This idea is empirically tested by analyzing the Dutch populist leader Pim Fortuyn and the development of his stance about immigration and integration issues. In contrast to the conventional wisdom, the results do not show any empirical support for the claim that Fortuyn was ideologically driven by the opinion polls or by media publicity during the 2002 Dutch parliamentary election campaign. The findings thus suggest that populist parties are perhaps less distinctive in their strategies from mainstream parties than often claimed.

Keywords: adaptive learning, political party strategies, populism, anti-immigration parties

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1.   Introduction

During the past decades, we have regularly witnessed remarkable surges of populist parties. The stunning success of Beppe Grillo's Five Star movement at the Italian general elections in 2013 provides a prominent example. Often, these anti-establishment challengers are running on a right-wing exclusionist platform, although left-wing populists have emerged as well, such as Die Linke in Germany (Rooduijn et al., 2012). The central tenet of populism is that it pits the ordinary, virtuous people against the allegedly corrupt and unresponsive (political) elite (Mudde, 2004).

 Simply put, there are three possible ways of explaining the performances of political parties (Rydgren, 2005; Mudde, 2007). First, scholars have explained the electoral fortunes of populist parties by pointing at demand-side factors, such as economic hardships and social unease about immigration and cultural diversity. Second, the literature has focused on political opportunity structures. In particular, this approach stresses that niche parties can only flourish when the established parties provide them with a 'political space' or leave topics untouched that outsiders can exploit.

Although these two perspectives have featured dominantly in the literature on right-wing populism, they share a limitation: by relying on external factors, they both portray challengers as passive players. In contrast, in the third perspective, the so-called internal supply-side approach, the agency of these parties is the key factor (Carter, 2005; Goodwin, 2006). As Mudde put it:

> *'irrespective of how favourable the breeding ground and the political opportunity structure might be to new political parties, they merely present political actors with a series of possibilities. In the end, it is still up to the populist radical right parties to profit from them'*
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> (2007: 264; cf. De Lange and Art, 2011).

The notion that populist entrepreneurs are able to shape their own destiny fits Taggart's (2000) observation that populism has a chameleon-like character: it can be attached to various political ideologies, both left and right. Thus, apart from the anti-establishment rhetoric, populism finds highly diverse expressions in conjunction with varying specific circumstances. Mazzoleni (2003: 5) likewise points outs that populism, 'thanks to its chameleon-like nature, may adapt to different contexts'. This flexibility is often linked with a party structure of a strong central leadership that allows this kind of party behavior (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008).

To date, prevailing party-centric accounts on the fortunes of challenging niche parties often neglect to elaborate what rules of thumb party leaders can use to respond to the public and strategically adjust their message, in order to engineer their success. Moreover, thorough empirical assessments of hypotheses on chameleon-like behavior are scarce.

The two-fold contribution of this paper is that it addressed both gaps. First, by applying an adaptive learning approach, it theoretically underpins internal supply-side explanations of populist successes by providing realistic mechanisms according to which party leaders are able to improve their position (Kollman et al., 1992). It explains how populist politicians -- or any politician for that matter -- can shape their own fate by learning from feedback and adjust their stances accordingly.

The second but related contribution to the existing literature on populism is that this paper will also actually empirically probe the notion of adaptive learning. Is the ideologically flexible character often ascribed to populists justified? Put differently, do populist challengers adapt their stance in response to electoral support and media attention?

To illustrate my argument, I will consider the remarkable rise of populist leader Pim Fortuyn in the run-up to the Dutch national elections in 2002. He was assassinated a week before the elections, but his party nonetheless won fifteen percent of the vote in an election that saw the greatest voter movements in Dutch parliamentary history. This breakthrough seems a very appropriate case for our test, as it provides a most likely case: if the notion of ideological adaptation holds anywhere, it should hold in this case. Indeed, Fortuyn has often been accused of mainly being driven by opinion polls and press headlines (see e.g. Pels, 2003). Several political observers proclaimed that Fortuyn's ideas were totally subordinated to his strive for power and attention. Consequently, it is often asserted, Fortuyn completely lacked any consistent and well-considered ideological principles.

The empirical part of this paper will first investigate if Fortuyn indeed adapted his stance concerning the integration and immigration issue during the 2002 Dutch election campaign. Second, I will investigate if Fortuyn's political agenda evolved during the period *preceding* his political career. Perhaps new political entrepreneurs mainly adjust their viewpoints before they enter the political arena. Once an actor is engaged in an electoral campaign, obvious modifications of one's policy stance could cause severe repercussions. Thus, the second research question is to what extent Fortuyn adapted his stance during the period while he was still a political commentator (1994-2001). Distinguishing two periods is in line with the insight that right-wing populists might face different dynamics after they have gained a foothold in the party system (Bornschier, 2012).

The relevance of these questions extends beyond this particular Dutch case, as the answers can enhance our understanding of the performances of populists throughout Western Europe. Since many voters across Europe have lost their party loyalty, parties have become increasingly vulnerable to the entrance of newcomers.

2. Theoretical Background
2.1 The nature of political competition: the 'new' cultural dimension and shifts in the public debate

Before elaborating the notion of adaptive learning, we have to address two issues: What are the relevant traits for a political party? And what selective pressures do political parties face?

We concur with many other scholars that the core feature of a party is its policy position (likewise see e.g. Budge, 1994; Adams, 2001). Concerning the second issue, most studies on the responsiveness of political parties have focused the electorate, such as the party's vote share and mean voter position.

This study deviates from most previous research in two crucial respects. First, most researchers focus on the traditional socio-economic left-right divide. However, in order to understand the success of the populist radical-right, we need to include new issues concerning immigration and globalization. These issues play an increasingly important role in most Western democracies, also in the Netherlands (Kriesi et al., 2008; 2012). Van Kersbergen and Krouwel (2008: 400) stress that 'the epicentre of political competition has shifted from economic or left-right issues to non-material issues such as national identity, immigration, asylum, law and order, and the future of European integration'.

Second, numerous scholars have argued that a media-centered pattern of political communication has emerged (Mancini and Hallin, 2004) and that party democracy is being replaced by an 'audience democracy' (Manin, 1997). This argument implies that political parties face a second selection mechanism: performances in the mass media. Fortuyn was well aware of the importance of this second selective force. He noted that 'one can go out on the streets and give speeches in rooms for hundreds of people, but the

impact is negligible. (...) Elections have become media battles. To reach voters, one cannot do without the NOS [the Dutch public broadcaster]' (quoted in Oosthoek, 2005: 23).

This argument leads us to derive party positions from a content analysis of the party's statements in the public debate, instead of using party manifestos. Consequently, politicians are able to shift on a much smaller time-scale. Whereas party programmes are generally only delivered once during election times, analyzing the course of a political debate implies that a party ideology consists of a time series of statements and is thus a dynamic property, being shaped over time.

2.2 Choosing between power and ideals

The fundamental question is whether, and to what extent, parties change their policy positions. The assumption that parties are driven by power was summarized by Downs (1957: 28) as follows: 'parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies'. However, parties face a difficult choice between 'power' and 'ideals' (Kitschelt, 1995). When parties adapt their ideology, it can imply 'losing part of their original identities' and the erosion of support from orthodox members (Dézé, 2004: 20).

I assume that mainstream parties are reluctant to adjust their viewpoints, in order to avoid the risks related to change. Their party leaders are driven by ideals and concerned about their policy preferences: they try to convince the electorate. In contrast, I expect that populist entrepreneurs seek to 'say what the people like to hear' and thus inclined to continually pick up signals from society and accordingly adjust their views. In sum, to paraphrase Laver (2005), we can label mainstream party leaders 'Stickers' and populists 'Hunters'. Hunting behavior fits the disposition of a 'business-firm party', which main distinctive trait is that policy positions are developed like products within firms, based on 'focus groups, survey research and local trials to test their feasibility and popularity' (Krouwel, 2006: 261).

In accordance with an evolutionary framework, I do not assume a priori that stressing immigration and integration issues is advantageous for a populist challenger or not. I expect that populists learn during the course of a campaign which message works best. Obviously, adaptation does not necessarily prescribe that parties should refrain from stressing the most controversial and radical elements in their platform. Radical parties can also be electorally penalized for moderating their policy programmes, in which case they should be viewed as being a 'prisoner of their ideology' (Adams et al., 2006: 516). Adams and colleagues (2006) found that the niche parties they investigated were electorally punished when they moved to the mean voter position.

It has often been argued that populists tend to concentrate on one or very few controversial issues, such as xenophobia and nationalism (Mazzoleni, 2003: 5). True, populist radical-right parties have often attempted to seize on the immigration issue. However, since the work of Kitschelt (1995) it is acknowledged that in order to optimize their appeals, these parties will diversify their messages. Kitschelt argued that the addition of neoliberal pro-market views is a necessary condition to achieve success. Concentrating on only a select set of topics can thus be counter-productive. Mudde concludes that immigration has at best been the *main* issue of *some* parties in *certain* periods of time (1999: 190). Karapin (1998) similarly argued that overreliance on the immigration issue and disregard of other issues have in fact hampered far-right parties in Germany and Britain. The choice of issues is thus 'an extremely important aspect of a party's self-identification because the emphasis on particular issues can either attract or repel voters' (Cole 2005: 209). We extend this argument to the expectation that stressing the immigration issue and neglecting other

issues (or vice versa) is not only relevant for the electorate, but can also either enhance or harm newsworthiness and prominence in the eyes of journalists and media gate keepers.

2.3 Causes of party ideology change: adaptive learning

I rely on the notion of adaptive rationality (Kollman et al., 1992; Laver, 2005; Bendor et al., 2011): positive outcomes increase the probability that the associated behavior will be repeated, whereas negative outcomes reduce it. This resembles the 'past results' hypothesis of Ian Budge (1994). According to this hypothesis, political parties can learn from the past by considering two pieces of information: the direction of their policy shift during the most recent period, and whether their vote rose of fell during the most recent period. A party provides more of the same – namely, it continues further in the same direction as last time – when it has gained votes, and it changes its policy direction in the opposite direction compared to the last time when it has lost votes. Concerning populist parties, the literature offers many scattered illustrations, descriptions and anecdotes of strategic manoeuvring and adaptive policy shifts of niche challengers, but detailed and systematic studies are scarce (for an exception, see Adams et al., 2006).

The first general conclusion of previous research on the responsiveness of mainstream political parties is that they do not have a strong inclination to adapt to changes in their environment. Although the results are not unequivocal -- due to the diversity in research designs -- the general picture that emerges resembles the earlier conclusion of Budge (1994): parties are generally reluctant to alter their ideologies (e.g. Adams et al., 2006; Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009; Somer-Topcu, 2009). Policy shifts are generally slow, minor and infrequent (Tavits 2007). Findings of McDonald et al. (2004: 860) similarly find that 'parties are principled and consistent, not opportunistic and vote grabbing'. For the Netherlands (1971-2002) in particular, Pennings (2005) found that parties are not very responsive to voter priorities.

The second common thread in the literature is that mainstream parties do not seem to be influenced by positive results, but only by negative results. For example, Adams and colleagues (2004, 2006) showed that past election results did not affect the direction of the parties' current policy shifts. Nevertheless, parties shifted in response to the changing attitudes of voters, but only when the public opinion clearly moved in a disadvantageous direction (Adams et al. 2004). Somer-Topcu (2009) finds that parties shift less, the more their previous vote share increased. These findings only partially confirm the 'past results model' of Budge (1994) – which assumes that parties should deliver more of the same in case they gained votes – and are more in line with a Pavlov strategy. This boils down to maintaining a position that resulted in successes, and shifting away from positions that caused failures (Nowak and Sigmund, 1993).

This resembles the notion of loss aversion postulated by Kahneman and Tversky (1979). They demonstrated that humans have the tendency to strongly prefer avoiding losses to acquiring gains. This is analogous to the 'negativity bias': people pay significantly more attention to negative rather than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001).

With regard to the public debate, we follow Koopmans and Muis (2009) and distinguish prominence (visibility), public disapproval and criticism (dissonance) and positive public reactions (consonance). It is plausible that populist right-wing parties consider dissonance predominantly as negative, because they need to avoid becoming subject to delegitimization (Bos et al., 2011). Loss aversion, on the other hand, implies that visibility and supportive reactions do not cause any policy position shifts. To conclude, I expect that only electoral losses and dissonance cause position shifts, and electoral gains and consonance do not lead to any shifts as in that case 'staying put' is preferred.

3. Data and Variables
3.1 Dependent variable: characteristics of political claims

The researched time span starts at the moment Pim Fortuyn publicly announced his intention to participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections, most likely with Liveable Netherlands (LN), on August 20th, 2001. It ends at May 6th, 2002, the day Fortuyn was assassinated. Hand-coded political claim analysis (PCA) data were collected, which covers all claims regarding the issues of ethnic relations, citizenship, minority integration, asylum and immigration during the campaign, as well as all claims of populist right-wing actors. A claim consist of the purposive and public articulation of political demands, calls to action, proposals, criticism, or physical attacks (Koopmans et al., 2005: 24). It is not identical to an individual statement. A speech, press conference, or interview is coded as one strategic action in the public discourse, although several topics might be addressed and different persons might be criticized. PCA codes each political claim only once. Thus, one action that repeatedly appeared in different media outlets is not duplicated.

For the analysis of the 2002 election campaign, Fortuyn's claims were derived from articles in two national newspapers (*NRC Handelsblad* and *De Telegraaf*) and the daily eight o'clock television news bulletin of the public broadcaster (*NOS Journaal*). The fourth set of sources consisted of the statements, press releases, and columns that appeared on the party websites of LN and LPF, in *Elsevier* magazine, and on the website of *Business Class*, a bi-weekly television show.[1] The final dataset consists of 160 claims of Fortuyn.

For the research on the evolution of Fortuyn's views during the period preceding his political career, we choose the time span from January 1994 until September 2001. The claim-making pattern is captured by coding his weekly columns in *Elsevier*.

Party platforms are generally assessed in two distinct ways (Benoit and Laver, 2006): one can focus on the *positions* on various policy dimensions (a directional approach) or on the relative *importance* of each policy issue (a saliency approach).

First, I examined Fortuyn's *position* on immigration and integration issues. Claims in favour of a deterioration of the position of immigrants or minorities, or expressing a negative attitude towards these groups got a score of -1. Conversely, a positive attitude or improvement received +1. Ambivalent and neutral claims got a zero. When a claim is 'unclassifiable' in terms of the direction, the directional score is missing. As we will see, there is hardly any directional variance to explain, and therefore the analysis will be mainly devoted to issue saliency.

Saliency is captured by the issues Fortuyn chose to address. A maximum of three different issues was coded for each claim. Subsequently, a distinction was made between substantive and non-substantive claims. Examples of the latter are the announcement of the names of the candidates of the party, or the assertion that one does not want to form a government with a certain opponent party. The main distinction is the question if a substantive claim made by Fortuyn contained the topic of the multicultural society or not.

Cross-validating party issue positions and salience from different sources, Helbling and Tresch (2009) found that whereas there were no differences between party positions, issue saliency based on media measurements deviated from expert surveys and party manifestos. A discrepancy between the 'real' party saliency and issue saliency reported by the media indicates that gatekeepers can distort the emphasis measurement.

Our coding procedure partly avoids this distortion because claims that repeatedly appeared in the news are not duplicated.

3.2 *Explanatory variables: the public debate and electoral support*

Electoral support

The amount of electoral support is the percentage of people that reported the intention to vote for Fortuyn's party if parliamentary elections would be held, using data gathered by *Synovate Interview-NSS*. I considered a voting intention for LN as support for Fortuyn from August 20 th on. In the second week of February 2002, Fortuyn was forced to step down as leader of LN and founded his own party (LPF) merely two days later. I will still consider a voting intention for both LN and LPF as support for Fortuyn during the three weeks after these events, thus until the municipal election on March 6th. Many voters may have been uncertain whether or not Fortuyn was still associated with LN during this period, particularly because he remained the party leader of Liveable Rotterdam, the local branch of LN. After the municipal elections, only support for the LPF was included in the independent variable.

The public debate

For the analysis of the 2002 election campaign, the public responses were derived from articles in two newspapers (*NRC Handelsblad* and *De Telegraaf*) and the daily eight o'clock television news bulletin of the public-service broadcaster (*NOS Journaal*).

The three elements of mass media performances are the amount of visibility, dissonance, and consonance (cf. Koopmans and Muis, 2009). *Visibility* is measured by the prominence of claims. We combined different elements: 1) Is the claim reported on the front page (newspaper) or during the first news item (television news)? 2) Is the claim the first claim mentioned in the article or in the news item? 3) Is the claim referred to in the headline of the article or during the introduction of the news? 4) Does the claim appear in two or three media outlets? 5) How many times is the claim repeated in follow-up articles?[2] The variable consists of the summed score and has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70, which indicates acceptable reliability. The total amount of visibility during a week is divided by the number of claims made by Fortuyn.

Dissonance counts the number of negative public reactions by other actors to Fortuyn. It includes all public criticism directed to or referring to Fortuyn and his political party. This includes also indirect reactions, for instance, when someone urged the leader of the social democratic party to take a stronger stance against the viewpoints of Fortuyn. *Consonance* is the extent to which Fortuyn and his party were supported. Ambivalent or neutral reactions were also counted as instance of consonance as we assume that such reactions – although not unequivocally supportive – enhanced the legitimacy of his political message.[3]

The public responses have been further specified: it was coded to which particular claim of Fortuyn they referred or which issue(s) they addressed. The relative degree of visibility for Fortuyn's immigration claims is calculated by distracting the average visibility of his claims containing all other substantive issues from the average visibility of his immigration claims. The relative degree of consonance for immigration and integration claims is operationalized by the difference between the total number of positive/neutral reactions on these particular topics during the past seven days and the amount of positive/neutral reactions on all other issues. Likewise, the relative amount of public disapproval of Fortuyn's views on immigration and integration issues is the balance between the following two counts: dissonance on all other mainstream political issues is subtracted from the amount of dissonant claims that include immigration and integration issues.

For the period 1994-2001, the claims for the construction of the independent variables were derived from articles in four newspapers: *NRC Handelsblad*, *de Volkskrant, Algemeen Dagblad* and *Trouw*.

The measurements for resonance, dissonance and consonance are identical as described above. Visibility, however, is differently measured and refers to three elements. It captures the number of claims of Fortuyn that reach the newspaper, the number of newspapers in which a claim appears, and how many times a claim is repeated in follow-up articles. Again, an actor cannot make a repetition-claim and resonance-claim at the same time. Resonance is coded first in that case.

4. Results[4]
4.1 Direction and saliency during the 2002 election campaign

Table 1 depicts the amount, share and direction of the immigration and integration claims of Fortuyn per month. The average direction for the total period is -0.80. For comparison: similar measurements of Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2003) and Kriesi et al. (2008) show a value of -0.52 and -0.29 respectively. These significantly lower scores could be due to two causes. First, the researched time span differs. We examined a longer range, and our analysis stops at the moment that Fortuyn was assassinated. In contrast, the data of Kriesi et al. cover the two months before the May elections and the period researched by Kleinnijenhuis et al. starts November 20th. Second, our PCA method is less affected by the amount of prominence and responses that statements of politicians receive, than the core sentence approach. For instance, Fortuyn's proposal for a general amnesty for asylum seekers who waited for at least five years for a residence permit, reached the headlines of most newspapers and received much attention on the TV news.

Our average direction score is more in line with other measurements that are not media-based. Concerning the item immigration, the LPF scores 18.3 points on a twenty-point scale according to an expert survey (Benoit and Laver, 2006), and according to the Dutch voters (The Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2002), the average position on integration is 6.3 on a seven-point scale (see Van Holsteyn et al., 2003). Converted into a +1 to -1 scale, these two scores yield values of -0.83 and -0.76 respectively.

Table 1. The amount, share and direction of immigration and integration claims of Fortuyn per month (August 20th, 2001-May 6th, 2002)

Month	immi (n)	mean direction	other issues (n)	share immi (%)	non-sub-stantive (n)	total (n)	opinion poll (%)
Aug	3	-1.00	0	100	1	4	0.9
Sep	7	-1.00	2	78	1	10	1.7
Oct	5	-1.00	4	56	1	10	2.7
Nov	2	-1.00	6	25	1	9	5.8
Dec	2	-1.00	5	29	1	8	7.8
Jan	1	-1.00	7	13	3	11	11.6
Feb	8	-0.75	9	47	6	23	13.5
Mar	8	-0.88	6	57	29	43	14.7
Apr	2	-0.50	15	12	7	24	11.7
May	11	-0.45	6	65	1	18	13.9
total / average	49	-0.80	60	45	51	160	

The average direction per month, shown in the third column in Table 1, shows only limited support for shifts in Fortuyn's stance. There is hardly variation in his political message. The only indication of moderation of Fortuyn over time consists of three positive, and four ambivalent/neutral claims. These claims refer to Fortuyn's above-mentioned general amnesty plan. He made these claims on May 3rd, only three days before his death, to the surprise of his political opponents. Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2003: 58) suggest that supporters attracted by earlier tough statements were not scared off, while moderate voters who were still in doubt were attracted, because they needed extra confirmation that Fortuyn was not a racist. This might indeed have worked out this way, but it is difficult to explain this particular action by adaptation. Given past experiences, we cannot understand this action in terms of learning from successes of previous moderations.

Table 1 also shows the amount of claims about the 'multicultural society' and the amount of claims that contained any other substantive topic. The average share of immigration and integration claims is approximately 45 per cent. This indicates that Fortuyn was apparently frequently dismissive of these issues and often found other topics more important. There is no clear trend in Fortuyn's statements towards less or more emphasis on the issues of ethnic relations and immigration.

Anyhow, Fortuyn did not introduce or intensify claims about multicultural issues in the wake of the terrorist attacks in the USA on September 11th, 2001. These attacks presumably fuelled fear and anger about Muslims, but Fortuyn cannot be accused of populist behavior, in the sense that he was suddenly directed at tapping these feelings in order to exploit them politically. Before September 11th, he already pleaded repeatedly for a 'Cold War against Islam'. In *Elsevier* (August 25th), for instance, he stated that 'the greatest threat to world peace comes from Islam'.

4.2 Predicting the saliency during the 2002 campaign

To investigate fluctuations in emphasis, a dataset was constructed with the claims as units. An investigation of aggregated scores per time span (for instance, the amount of immigration claims per week) is less appropriate, because one has to take the total amount of substantive claims into account. Alternatively, the dependent variable could consist of the relative amount of statements devoted to immigration and integration issues, compared to the total amount of statements. I did not choose for this option either, since in that case we are faced with a higher chance of extreme scores when the total amount of claims is low.

A logistic regression was used, whereby the binary dependent variable scores one when a substantive claim made by Fortuyn dealt with immigration and integration issues, and zero if it dealt with other issues instead. I used the software package Stata and relied on Long and Freese (2006); their book provides a comprehensive description of how to use regression models for categorical dependent variables. To illustrate the procedure, the specification of **Model 3** (see **Table 2**), which predicts the probability of a substantive claim of Fortuyn about immigration/integration, is given by the formula (1) as follows:

$$log_e \left[\frac{\hat{\pi}}{1-\hat{\pi}}\right] = a + b1 \text{ Balance previous claims (t-1)} + b2 \text{ Balance visibility (t-1)} + b3 \text{ Balance}$$
consonance (t-1))+ *b4* Balance dissonance (t-1) + *b5* Immigration claims other actors (t-1)
+ *b6* Change opinion poll (t-1) + *b7* Change opinion poll (t-1) * Balance previous claims (t-1)   (**1**)

where π is a conditional probability of the form $P(Y=1| X_1...X_p)$. That is, it is assumed that "success" is more or less likely depending on combinations of values of the predictor variables.

I investigate the impact of feedback (opinion polls and discursive success) on subsequent claim making of Fortuyn by giving each particular instance of claim making its own specific 'past' (denoted as t-1) that consists of the previous seven days.[5] The quantities of interest (predictor variables) considered in this model are prominence in the public debate (X_2; visibility), positive public reactions (X_3; consonance), and negative public reactions (X_4; dissonance). The interaction term (X_7) indicates the presence of adaptive behavior concerning the opinion polls (see likewise e.g. Adams *et al.*, 2006). It indicates that the shift in the opinion poll should be evaluated in combination with the adjustments in claim making Fortuyn made in the previous time period (X_1). Adaptation means that the more the vote share increased while concentrating on the issues of immigration and integration (t-1), the higher the chance of an immigration claim (t). It also implies that Fortuyn was inclined to present a broader ideological programme when the increased vote share had been accompanied with a stronger emphasis on other issues than Islam and asylum seekers.

Table 2. Logistic regression of the probability of a substantive claim of Fortuyn about immigration/integration (August 20th, 2001-May 6th, 2002)

	(1) OR	z-value	(2) OR	z-value	(3) OR	z-value	(4) OR	z-value
Balance previous claims (t-1)	1.23*	1.87	1.25**	2.03	1.29**	1.97	1.34**	2.26
Balance visibility (t-1)	0.80*	-1.87	0.80*	-1.94	0.77**	-2.08	0.77**	-2.09
Balance consonance (t-1)	0.93	-0.40			0.98	-0.10	0.99	-0.06
Balance dissonance (t-1)	0.96	-0.49			0.95	-0.70	0.94	-0.82
Balance resonance (t-1)			0.95	-0.86				
Immigration claims other actors (t-1)	1.02	1.17	1.02	1.16	1.03	1.21	1.02	1.08
d.Opinion poll (t-1)					0.72*	-1.75		
d.Opinion poll (t-1) * balance previous claims (t-1)					1.01	0.17		
Increase opinion poll (t-1)							0.74	-1.18
Decrease opinion poll (t-1)							0.64	-1.10
Decrease opinion poll (t-1) * balance previous claims (t-1)							1.06	0.33
Pseudo R	0.06		0.06		0.08		0.08	
n	108		108		108		108	

* *p* < 0.10; ** *p* < 0.05; *** *p* < 0.01 (two-tailed test)

Table 2 shows that when Fortuyn had more strongly stressed immigration topics during the previous week, compared to other issues, he tended to emphasize the immigration again in a subsequent claim. This short-term continuity is understandable, given the fact that it is hard to come up with a completely new message at every follow-up occasion. For instance, he almost literally repeated his

statements from the above-mentioned plea for a 'Cold War' with Islam in an interview with the newspaper *Rotterdams Dagblad,* on the *Business Class* website, and in the *CDA Magazine*.

Regarding the impact of visibility, we observe a negative effect in line with the 'alternation model' (Budge, 1994), which holds that a party follows a zigzag pattern. Contrary to my expectation, the propensity of an immigration statement was *lower* when the relative degree of media visibility during the previous week was higher.[6]

Furthermore, we find no evidence for shifts in Fortuyn's priorities that can be attributed to adaptation to the tone or the amount of public reactions. The findings show that the probability is not affected by the relative degrees of dissonance and consonance during the previous seven days. Resonance (all public reactions combined) of immigration and integration issues compared to other issues does not have any impact either (**Model 2**).[7]

As explained above, concerning the impact of opinion polls (**Model 3**), adaptation prescribes that the more the vote share increased while stressing the issues of immigration and integration, the stronger the tendency to deliver more of the same. However, the effect of the interaction term is insignificant.

The opinion polls themselves have a negative impact, although the effect is only marginally significant at the ten per cent level. Apparently, Fortuyn deployed his 'unique selling points' immigration and integration when he was confronted with losses, and put relatively more emphasis on all other substantive issues when he was in a 'winning mood'.

Finally, **Model 4** represents adaptive learning with a negativity bias towards the opinion polls. The interaction term is now composed as follows: Decrease opinion poll (t-1) * Balance previous claims (t-1). Thus, it now only includes the declines in support (this variable is zero otherwise) to test the expectation that Fortuyn *only* shifted when he *lost* electoral support. This should have led to a higher probability when the losses were accompanied by a lower level of immigration claims, and to a lower probability when they were accompanied by a strong emphasis on immigration. However, in this case we do not find any evidence for adaptation either.

4.3 Predicting the saliency during the preceding period (1994-2001)

We now turn to the period before Fortuyn entered the political arena. Obviously, measurements of electoral support for Fortuyn are not available during this period. Therefore, adaptation refers only to the struggle for the scarce resources visibility, resonance and legitimacy in the mass media.

Figure 1 depicts the number of *Elsevier* columns of Fortuyn that addressed the multicultural society, per month. Fortuyn did not change his views in this regard: he had advocated strict policies ever since 1994 (cf. Pels, 2003: 201). For instance, one of his first columns in 1994 was titled: 'The Netherlands is full!'. In contrast, the amount of emphasis was not stable over time. In total approximately 16 per cent (n=60) of the claims deal with immigration and integration issues.

The total amount of substantive attention for Fortuyn is shown in **Figure 2**. This is the summed score of all statements of Fortuyn that reached the four newspapers, its repetitions, and all reactions. In February 1997 attention peaked as a result of the fuss about Fortuyn's book *Against the Islamization of Our Culture*. In a notorious television debate, Marcel van Dam (a former MP for the Labour Party) stated that this book exploited potential fears against foreigners and reminded at the way in which the Dutch National Socialist Movement had attempted to gain votes in the 1930s.

Figure 3 shows the degree to which immigration and integration issues account for the fluctuations in attention. Remarkably, until February 1997 immigration and integration issues were not the most important cause of publicity.

The peak of attention in February 1997 was not caused by increased claim-making of Fortuyn at that particular moment; over the years, he continually attempted to insert his political views into the public debate in various ways (besides his weekly column). He published ten books between 1994 and 2001, addressing various topics such as unemployment, social security policies, norms and values in politics, the Israelian-Palestinian conflict, and European unification. Approximately 25 per cent of the visibility of Fortuyn was a result of claims he made about the multicultural society; and these issues caused 50 per cent of the amount of criticism.
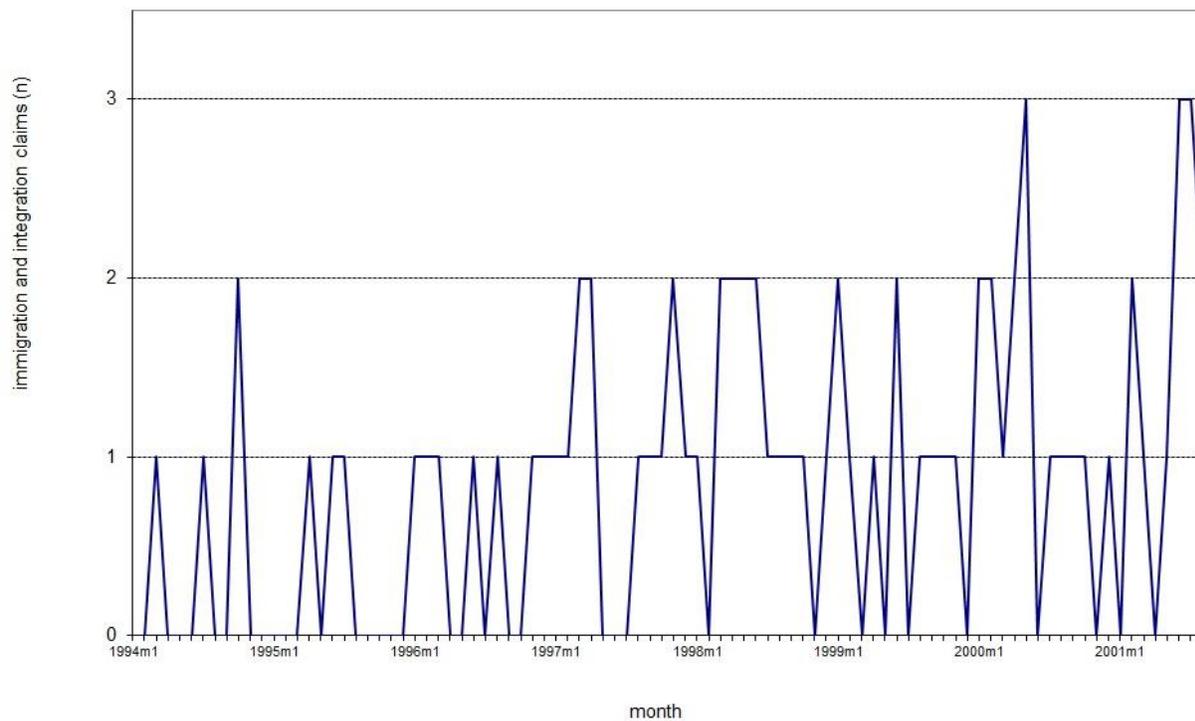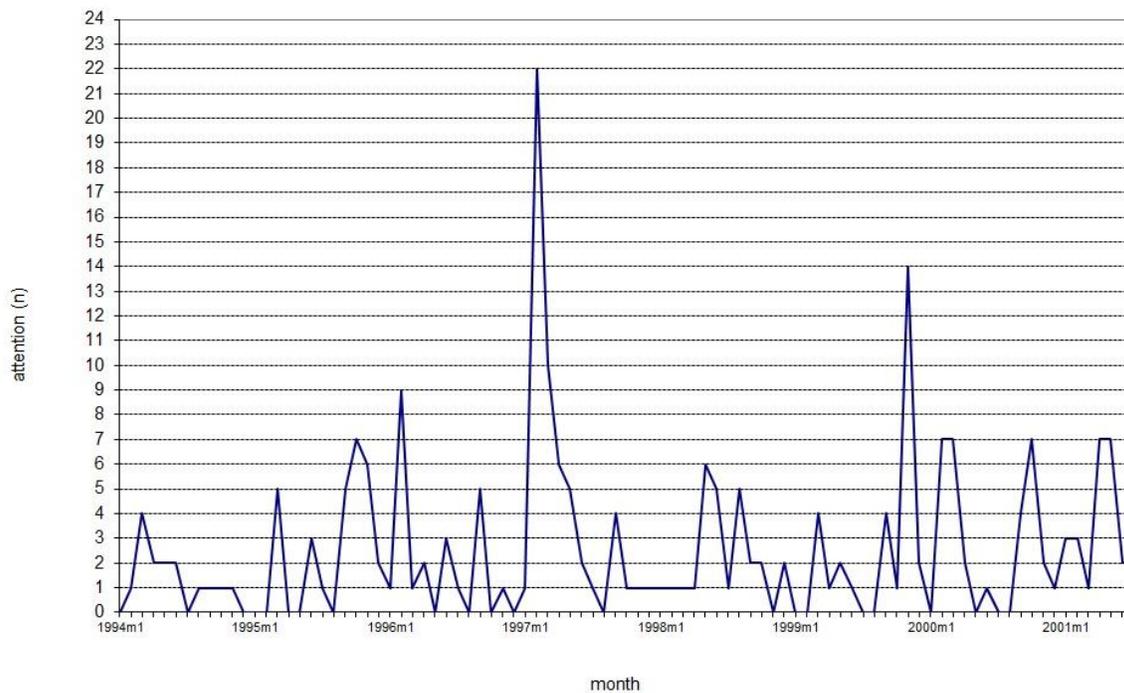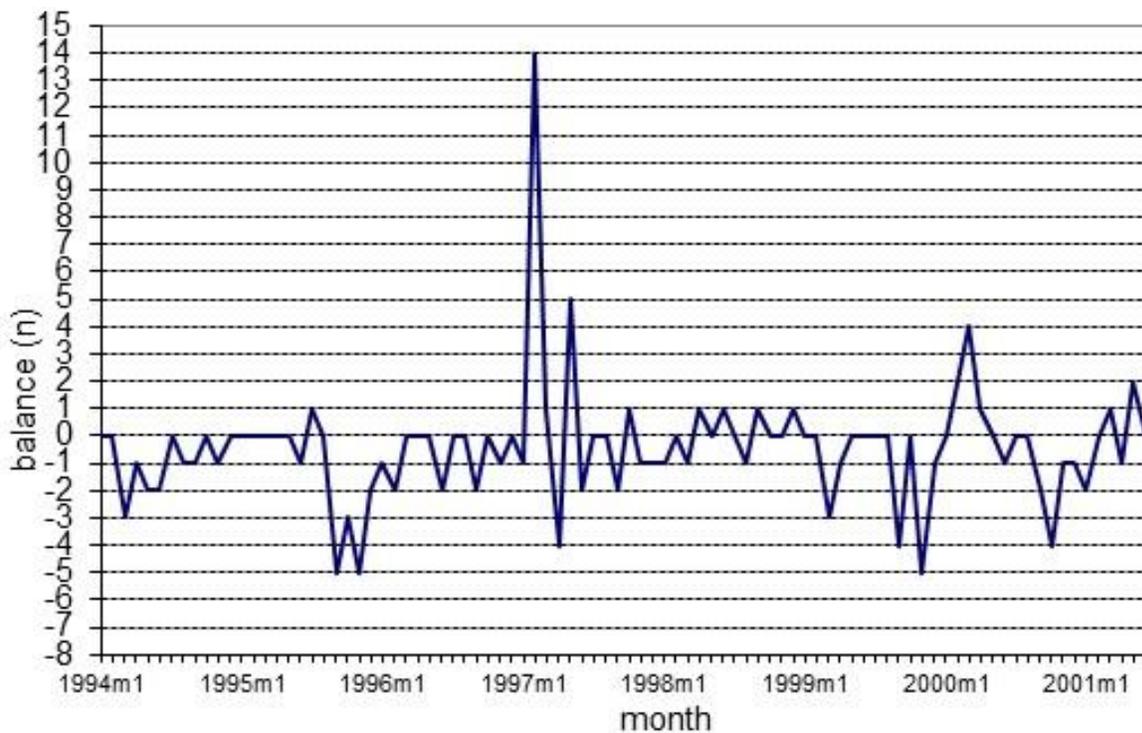

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Table 3 shows the results of censored (i.e., Tobit) regressions of the number of *Elsevier* columns that dealt with immigration issues per month. The dependent variable is left-censored; the largest category is a zero score (Fortuyn did not make any immigration claims) and this value can obviously not turn negative. I used Stata's tobit command. Fortuyn wrote these weekly columns between January 1994 – September 2001; the number of observations is 90 months (N=90).

I hypothesized that Fortuyn was inclined to select issues that generated positive feedback and less likely those associated with negative feedback. In contrast, dissonance clearly had a positive impact. The more negative the balance (between the amount of criticism on Fortuyn's views on the multicultural society and amount of criticism on other issues), the stronger his tendency to address immigration claims in the subsequent month. This is in line with the motto that 'no news is bad news.' Controlled for shifts in dissonance, we do not find a similar additional effect of consonance. The effect of visibility is in the expected direction, but not significant.[8]

Table 3. Tobit regression of the amount of substantive claims of Fortuyn about immigration and integration, per month (Jan 1994 - Aug 2001)

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	coeff	t-value	coeff	t-value	coeff	t-value
Amount of immigration claims (t-1)	0.28*	1.86	0.28*	1.86	0.28*	1.86
d. Immigration claims other actors (t-1)	$1.25e^{-3}$	-0.15	$1.26e^{-3}$	-0.15	$127.e^{-3}$	-0.15
d. Asylum seekers influx (t-1)	$0.35e^{-3}$*	1.67	$0.35e^{-3}$	1.66	$0.35e^{-3}$*	1.67
Balance visibility (t-1)	0.16	1.21	-	-	0.16	1.21
Balance consonance (t-1)	-0.14	-0.96	-0.14	-0.96	-0.14	-0.88
Balance dissonance (t-1)	0.42**	2.44	0.41**	2.36	-	-
Visibility immigration (t-1)			0.16	0.71		
Visibility other issues (t-1)			-0.15	-1.07		
Dissonance immigration (t-1)					0.42*	1.88
Dissonance other issues (t-1)					-0.41	-1.60
Pseudo R	0.07		0.07		0.07	
n	90		90		90	

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test)

Note: e^{-3} = multiply times 10^{-3}

The positive effect of the lagged dependent variable implies that the claim-making pattern displayed continuity. Having stressed immigration during the previous month makes saliency in the subsequent month more likely. Furthermore, the influx of asylum seekers is positively associated with the number of columns in *Elsevier* that addressed these issues, although the statistical significance is marginally below the ten per cent level. Finally, the results show that the number of public claims on immigration and integration issues made by all other actors did not affect Fortuyn's behavior.[9]

In **Models 2** and **3** the variables visibility and dissonance are replaced by the two components of which these variables are constructed. When we include both the negative reactions on immigration topics,

and the negative reactions on other topics (instead of one variable for the balance between these two), the debit and credit side complement each other (see **Model 3**).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

In a review article on the radical right, Kitschelt (2007: 1189) pleas for 'more sophisticated behavioral models of parties' strategic calculations, along the lines suggested by Laver (2005)'. For instance, are radical right parties 'standpatters' who hardly adjust their positions? Or do they try to improve their support by using trial and error?

This paper's main contribution is that it implemented Kitschelt's suggestion. It did not find empirical support for the claim that Fortuyn was ideologically driven by opinion polls and mass media during the Dutch 2002 election campaign. These results thus paint -- to paraphrase McDonald et al. (2004: 860) -- 'a flattering picture': Fortuyn did not modify his political message for strategic reasons I have hypothesized. This does not necessarily imply that Fortuyn never changed his mind at all; it just points out that, to the extent that Fortuyn's political views were not fixed, we cannot account for this in terms of adaptation to the electorate or to mass media performances.

My conclusion is in line with most prevailing empirical research on the responsiveness of political parties: they do not have a strong inclination to adapt to changes in their environment. Fortuyn was thus in this sense a normal party leader. This outcome suggest that populist parties are perhaps less distinctive from mainstream parties in their behavioral guidelines than often claimed.

Agent-based models of party competition can provide more insight why. Laver and Sergenti (2012: 220) conclude that satiable leaders systematically outperform insatiable vote-seeking leaders. The latter 'look gift horses in the mouth' and *always* explore for more votes, even if they are doing very well. In contrast, satiable leaders never disturb favorable situations. In such evolutionary games and simulation models, rules and behavior can be *hardwired*, instead of *softwired* (Macy 1996). Theories about party responsiveness have often assumed softwired agents, which implies that adaptation proceeds by reinforcement or by imitation. Party leaders can adapt their positions in response to their previous behavior and successful policy stances can jump from one organism to another. In contrast, if agents are hardwired and programmed with a certain fixed ideology, fluctuations should be interpreted as random error around a fixed policy position. McDonald et al. (2007) labelled such parties 'homeostatic wanderers'. They concluded that this behavioral category -- i.e. moving around one's mean position -- is the modal outcome.

Concerning media visibility, Fortuyn even behaved in clear contrast to what I denoted a populist strategy, which prescribes to maintain and reproduce behavior that is associated with rewards. In contrast to the hypothesized 'win-stay, lose-shift' pattern, the conclusion is that when gatekeepers and journalists gave more prominence to the statements of Fortuyn concerning the multicultural society, he was inclined to *diminish* the emphasis in subsequent claims. Simultaneously, when claims about other topics were more prominently displayed in the news, he subsequently stressed immigration and integration, presumably in order to reassure voters who deem these issues important.

This alternation pattern is perhaps understandable in the light of the aim to compensate for the distortion of the party's actual profile caused by the public discourse. Journalists and commentators can accentuate the party's anti-immigration profile by giving its messages more prominence or not. When a party leader's principal mission is to reflect the policy stance of its current constituency, we would expect a self-corrective response in order to satisfy both extremist and moderate supporters (see likewise e.g.

Budge, 1994; Adams et al., 2004). Thus, they will react to any media distortion of the actual party position in a counterbalancing way.

The logic behind such a party-positioning strategy could be interpreted as another variant of adaptive behavior (instead of vote- or attention-maximizing), which is guided by being representative for one's current supporters. It has been labelled 'aggregator' by Laver (2005) and 'partisan constituency representation' by Ezrow et al. (2010). Similarly, Dinas and Gemenis (2010) argued that when extreme parties have distinguished themselves in the public debate, they are in a position to present more middle-of-the road policy stances in their party manifesto. Inversely, when the everyday mass media discourse presents a picture of small ideological differences, a party has a stronger incentive to differentiate itself in its party manifesto.

The second question in this paper was to what extent the ideology of Fortuyn changed through a process of cultural evolution before he entered politics. Did he alter his views due to adaptation during the run-up to the decision to finally embark upon a political career in 2001? The main finding was that public disapproval on Fortuyn's views on immigration and integration issues resulted in a stronger emphasis on these issues in subsequent claim making. Populist leaders face a trade-off between being provocative (in order to guarantee newsworthiness) and being taken seriously as a legitimate actor (Bos and Van der Brug, 2010). Responding positively to dissonance mainly reflects the first aim. Adaptive learning from feedback over time about what issues were apparently controversial yet ignored in Dutch politics explains why Fortuyn entered politics with an anti-immigration agenda, rather than any other unique selling point. It thus theoretically underpins the observation that Fortuyn developed from Marxist to nationalist over the years (Lucardie and Voerman, 2012; Pels, 2003; Wansink, 2004)

Ideological rigidness during election campaigns could be explained in two ways. First, being trustworthy and distinguishable from other parties seems to function as a tremendous brake. Constantly adjusting one's stance could be electorally harmful, because voters will punish inconsistency and unreliability. The more often a party shifts, the more its constituency gets confused about whether this party corresponds to its views or not.

Second, politicians face a highly complex and uncertain environment in which not all information is self-evident. Polls do not provide complete information on what actually influences voting behavior. Budge (1994) similarly questions if the election results from four years ago can provide much unequivocal information and can be usefully extrapolated to a contemporary situation. Therefore, a party may generally as well follow its own preferences.

Perhaps the information provided by polls might be less ambiguous when all party performances are observed simultaneously. We have focused on individual learning, but party leaders might also exhibit vicarious (social) learning. This entails that strategic shifts are guided by looking at previous shifts, and corresponding fortunes, of competitors. Future research could further investigate the role of this second way of adaptive learning (see e.g. Rydgren, 2005; Van Spanje, 2010).

The distinction between being softwired (flexible) and hardwired (fixed) ideologies has important implications for our understanding of the emergence and rise of niche party contenders. Without flexibility at the individual level, adaptation processes can only occur at the level of the population. Thus, if all parties are inclined to 'stay put' and voters' preferences and priorities change, the only way to update the connection between the popular and political agenda is via the 'deaths' and 'births' of political parties or political actors. Obviously, the supply-side of the political market can also be renewed through shifts in political leadership instead of the deaths of entire parties. King (2002: 5) argues that, due to the political

leader's impact on the ideology and image of a party, the indirect influence of leadership on election outcomes is often enormously important.

If it is true that established political parties are rigid, we should simply accept the fact that new political entrepreneurs will now and then emerge and break through, like, in the Netherlands, the LPF or more recently the Freedom Party of Geert Wilders. This is something to be celebrated, rather than feared. With hardwired agents, this is the only way to ensure a proper functioning of modern parliamentary democracy, where the link between the preferences and priorities of voters and parties is considered to be crucial.

Notes

1. For the coding of the websites, the digital archive of the ARCHIPOL project of the Documentation Centre for Dutch Political Parties was used. See: http://www.archipol.nl/english/index.html
2. The rate of repetition was logged. It is measured independently of resonance because repetitions that occurred in the context of direct reactions to Fortuyn's statements were excluded.
3. This decision did not significantly affect the results. Additional analyses show that excluding neutral and ambivalent reactions yield substantively similar results.
4. All statistical calculations and graphics were made using the software package Stata. I used *tsline* to draw all figures of the time-series data.
5. This means that two claims made on the same day have the identical values for all explanatory variables. For all analyses, VIF statistics of the independent variables were inspected which did not indicate any multicollinearity problems.
6. Including both elements of the balance separately yields insignificant effects. Nevertheless, the direction of the impact of immigration visibility is negative, and that of other substantive issues is positive (its z-values are -1.62 and 1.46 respectively).
7. Models with both elements of the balance (e.g. separately including dissonance on immigration, and dissonance on other issues) also yield insignificant results.
8. When the variable dissonance is omitted, the effect of consonance remains insignificant, but the effect of visibility then becomes significant at the 5 percent level (t=1.99).

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