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The Dutch Parliamentary Elections of 2002:
Fortuyn versus the Establishment.

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Abstract

During the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2002 the new party 'List of Pim Fortuyn' has won 26 seats at the cost of the established parties, most notably the PvdA and the VVD which both hoped to win the elections. After the election, they had fallen to a shared third position. Why could one outsider without a well-developed party organisation arrive at such a smashing electoral victory? We argue that personality, media attention, party campaigns and candidate behaviour are not the main answers. Who wants to understand Fortuyn's victory must study his victims. We show that the programmatic convergence of the established parties has made them look indistinguishable in the eyes of many voters. This perceived lack of a democratic choice has strengthened the feeling of many voters that the established parties have become part of the state and have lost their capacity to sense the problems of ordinary citizens, let alone to solve them. Fortuyn effectively used this discontent by means of right-wing populism. Although Fortuyn was pictured as a right-wing extremist, we show that this is not the case when his manifestos are compared with other European parties.

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1. Introduction

The latest elections of 15 May 2002 belong to the most exciting and debated elections which ever took place in the Netherlands. The main reason is that a new party (List Pim Fortuyn) has been able to challenge the established parties successfully. Fortuyn was a rightist (but, as we will show, not extreme-right) populist who managed to mobilise the public opinion against the ‘purple cabinet’ of the Labour Party (PvdA), the conservative liberals (VVD: the main rightist party) and the much smaller progressive liberals (D66). These parties governed in two cabinets: Purple I (1994-1998) and Purple II (1998-2002). The cabinets included D66 in order to be better able to bridge the gap between the left and right. It is named “purple” because it combines the “red” of the PvdA and the “blue” of the VVD. It was introduced in 1994 as a fresh new wind in Dutch politics, which was said to replace the old-fashioned centre politics of the Christian Democrats. The electoral defeat of the Christian democrats enabled a coalition between the main left and right parties. This meant a fundamental change of the relation between the VVD and PvdA. Whereas these parties did not accept each other as ‘coalition partners’ in the 1940s and 1950s, they now embrace each other. PvdA, VVD and D66 felt relieved, because finally they were able to govern without the CDA which had been dominating all Dutch cabinets until 1994 (Dittrich 1987). But the public support for this new political cooperation has been falling quickly and rather unexpectedly since Wim Kok announced his retreat as party leader in September 2001.

Fortuyn has been the catalyst of the latent and massive discontent with purple cabinets that are (said to be) not able to deliver physical, social, economical and medical security. He has been able to convince large groups that this cabinet has failed on all main policy areas which is expressed by the title of his latest book (which is also his election manifesto): “The ruins of the purple cabinets” (Fortuyn 2002a). In 1994 the Netherlands experienced an earthquake election in which the ‘natural’ governing party, the Christian democratic CDA, lost 20 seats. In 2002 a completely new party wins 26 seats, which is unprecedented in the Dutch political history. What this means is that the ‘cartel party model’, in which colluding parties become agents of the state and employ the resources of the state to ensure their own collective survival, has been seriously challenged by an entrepreneurial party which is based on the initiatives of an outsider (Katz and Mair 1995).

How can we account for this transformation of the party system into an open battlefield in which winners and losers come and go and in which established positions are becoming non-existent anymore? Why do right-extremism, right-wing populism and regionalism bring previously “frozen” party systems into flux? The answer to this question is pressing, since the electoral success of right-wing newcomers is not a purely Dutch phenomenon. The rise of rightist-populist and extreme right parties and candidates is taking place in several established European democracies, especially (but not exclusively) those with a strong Christian democratic tradition: Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, Denmark. We will argue that the main cause is not the personality of Fortuyn and not the (mis-) achievements of the purple cabinets. Instead, the success of Fortuyn is strongly based on the convergence between the main parties since 1977. In order to demonstrate this, we will present a longitudinal and comparative analysis of the policy positions on the main conflict dimensions on the basis of election manifesto data.

2. The reshaping of the Dutch party system

Dutch politics has long been dominated by confessional parties from Catholic and Protestant origin. Until 1994, they have not only been present in all cabinets, but they have also been dominating these cabinets as so-called 'strong parties' since the KVP/CDA has been able to veto the cabinet composition (Laver and Shepsle 1996). Especially the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), the merger of the three main confessional parties, has been very successful in this role. This was partly due to the way Ruud Lubbers operated as a Prime Minister in the period November 1982 to May 1994. He was able to attract the electoral support of many voters (not merely Christians) by propagating a business-like approach to policy-making, which was needed in order to tackle the problems resulting from the crisis of the welfare state. But with his withdrawal from politics his party fell into a deep gap and his successor Elco Brinkman was not able to equal his popularity. A similar situation occurred in 2002 when Ad Melkert, the successor of Prime Minister Wim Kok (PvdA), has not been able to equal the popularity of his predecessor (even his own party had to admit this during the election campaign)¹. He resigned directly after the election results became public. Other established parties are in electoral problems too. D66 has always been fluctuating strongly among elections and during 2002 they lost nearly half the vote share of 1998.

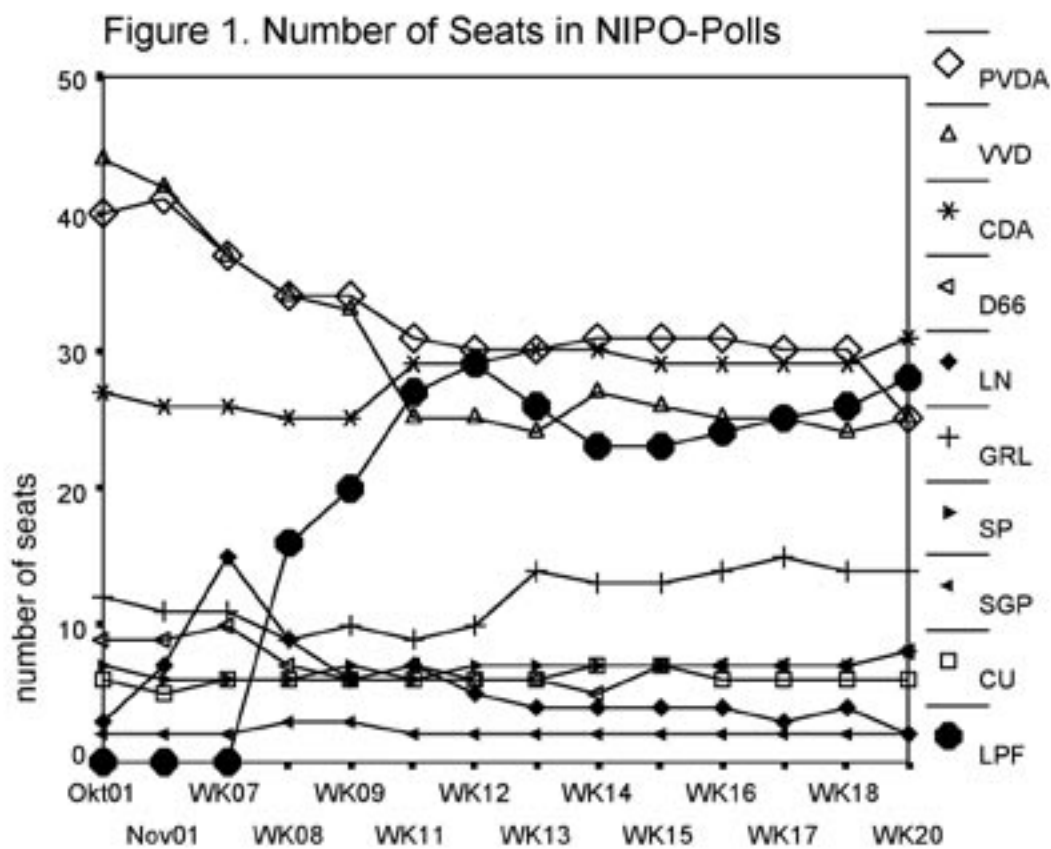
The shaky position of established parties opens the gate for newcomers. The most challenging ones are List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) and Livable Netherlands (Leefbaar Nederland (LN)). The latter originated from a group of local parties, which successfully challenged the dominant position of national parties at the local level². They are populist in arguing that local politics needs local parties in order to be able to know what the people need on a daily basis. In October 2001 Liveable Netherlands (LN) gathered three seats in the NIPO-opinion poll³. Immediately after this party announced on 23 October that Pim Fortuyn was the most preferred first candidate on the party list ('lijsttrekker') the number of predicted seats rose to seven in November 2001 (Figure 1).

Fortuyn has been professor in the social sciences, was proudly homosexual and has become well known and popular for his sharp opinions which he presents in his books and newspaper articles, debates and presentations (Fortuyn 2001a; 2001b, 2002a; 2002b). He spoke out against immigration and high taxation, accused the Dutch government of poor performance, described the Islam as a "backward culture" (Fortuyn 2001a), argued that the Netherlands was full up with 16 million people, cautioned about the expansion of the European Union. He stressed that he was not against immigrants, but he questioned their ability to assimilate into a liberal and racially tolerant culture and argued that immigration had to be curbed in order for the Netherlands' liberal social values to survive. This message was not understood by most of the international press, which consequently described him as a right-wing extremist and racist.

Fortuyn clearly was a maverick politician who courted controversies with his robust style (blunt, outspoken, and flamboyant) which has been unprecedented in Dutch politics. Fortuyn's outspoken opinions nearly caused him to fail as a challenging political entrepreneur. In the weekend of 10-11 February 2002 he was forced to leave Liveable Netherlands after he advocated the abolishment of article 1 of the Dutch Constitution (guaranteeing freedom and shelter from discrimination). This far reaching opinion originated from Fortuyn's bad feelings against the Moslems in the Netherlands: he wants to be able to discriminate them if they do not fully comply with the Dutch way of living (such as speaking the language and adhering to

the Dutch culture, including its tolerance!). After leaving Livable Netherlands he founded the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). This immediately led to a drop of the seats of LN in the opinion polls (Figure 1).

The LPF was extremely successful during the local elections on 6 March (week 10) in Rotterdam where Fortuyn lives. His party became the largest party in Rotterdam with 35% of the votes, which is a remarkable achievement since this city has been dominated by the social democrats (PvdA) during the whole of the post-war period. Fortuyn made it clear that it is his goal is to repeat this electoral success on the national level by becoming the largest party (and hence Prime Minister) after May 15. This announcement was first met with scepticism, but after his local victory the national political establishment (above all the PvdA and VVD) was literally stunned and not able to react promptly to this major challenge.



Since this event he was taken seriously by the media who weekly reported the opinion polls as summarised in Figure 1. This Figure shows the predicted number of seats, starting from October 2001 and from week 7 in 2002 on a weekly basis until 2 days before the elections (week 20). The figure demonstrates how strong the electoral appeal of Fortuyn was. The established national party leaders were not able to respond convincingly to his appearances and provoking remarks during talk shows. Prominent party members and elites reacted by urging their own 'lijsttrekker' to confront Fortuyn, but they were mostly not willing or able to do so in a very successful manner. The position of the lijsttrekkers of the VVD and the PvdA

was openly questioned by party members which is not a strong position vis-à-vis the populist Fortuyn. Only Paul Rosenmöller, heading the Green Left, was able to beat him once and equal Fortuyn once during an election debate (coinciding with the dip in Figure 1 after week 12). Two prominent former VVD-leaders even started to 'help' Hans Dijkstal who was heading the VVD-list. EU-commissioner Bolkestein (VVD) expressed two weeks before the elections his contempt for Fortuyn by stating that if Fortuyn would become Prime Minister the Netherlands would completely lose its face ("reveal a preposterous figure") in the international arena. Fortuyn, from his part, called Bolkestein a coward who left the country instead of helping to solve the main problems.

Whereas Fortuyn and Livable Netherlands are unstable newcomers who just entered the electoral arena, the Christian Union (a fusion of two existing Orthodox Protestant parties) and the Socialist Party are two stable 'newcomers' with each around six to seven seats. The success of these new parties underlines the vulnerable position of established parties. This process is accompanied by several factors which all indicate that voters have changed: the rise of the floating vote and the fall of turnout and party membership. Voters are becoming less attached to party politics and delay their vote to the last moment (as far as they intend to vote at all). During the elections of 1989 only 8% of the voters changed from parties. In 1994 this percentage has doubled and in 1998 25% of the voters changed from parties (Thomassen et al. 2000). Peter Mair (2002) has shown that in the 1990s the Netherlands has the second highest electoral volatility and mean total vote for new parties in Europe (after Italy). These are all indicators for an increased vulnerability of the political elites which further open the gates for new parties.

Ten days before the elections something happened that shocked Europe in general and the Dutch electorate in particular. On 6 May the popular Pim Fortuyn was murdered after a radio talk outside the studios in Hilversum by a white male who is believed to be a Green activist. The day after, the government decided not to postpone the elections after having heard the strong wish of the LPF-party and family members and some of the established parties. They argued not to disrupt the democratic process because of a violent act. Wim Kok accepted this line of argumentation by stating that the Dutch democracy should be considered strong enough to overcome this tragic event. This decision was considered to be problematic by many commentators because the LPF mainly was Fortuyn. The other members on the list were hardly known by the public. Many expected that his death would make Fortuyn even more attractive to voters because of his appeal as a 'Messiah', freeing the population from the old political establishment by bringing new ideas and practices in, will become stronger and cannot be defied by anything he says or does, simply because he isn't around anymore. This opens the possibility that many votes will go to a person who cannot represent the ideas he has expressed towards the voters.

To what extent the candidates can fulfil Fortuyn's promises is, of course, uncertain. The past Dutch experience indicates that new parties without strong leaders or a coherent ideology are not likely to survive in the long run (i.e. the Farmer Party, the Elderly Party, the (racist) Centre Party etc.). The first poll after his death (which was also the last one before the elections (in week 20)) shows that LPF was predicted to win extra 2 seats since Fortuyn's death. This is at the cost of the PvdA whose first candidate Melkert was said by some commentators to be responsible for a climate in which the murder could take place, because of this 'demonising' attacks on Fortuyn. Other commentators fiercely rejected this accusation, but the effect on the voters seems there. What remains then, two days before the elections is a stunning battlefield:

The two governing parties who had the strongest starting positions at the beginning of the campaign lost their top ranking positions in the polls and were replaced by an opposition party (the CDA) and by the newcomer LPF. The lijsttrekker of the CDA, Van Balkenende, is also a newcomer because he replaced the Jaap De Hoop Scheffer as CDA-‘lijsttrekker’ in September 2001. The latter had to leave after an internal crisis on the leadership of the party. The sudden drop of PvdA and VVD in favour of the CDA and LPF during the last two days before the elections was heavily reinforced on the election day itself. The Purple cabinet was smashed way.

What is of interest here is why one person is able to pose such a serious threat to the established political parties. Many commentators believe that this is mainly due to the capacity of Fortuyn to mobilise voters who have hitherto been unsatisfied with or not interested in politics. We argue that Fortuyn’s success was only possible because of long-term convergence of the established parties. The PvdA and VVD have been so eager to govern and to grow on the 20 seats that had been left behind by the CDA in 1994, that they neglected to sharpen their arguments against each other for the long period of eight years. Although the performance of the purple cabinet was considered to be not very bad (due to a booming economy), the governing parties lost their credibility in the eyes of many voters (Hoogerwerf 1999; Becker et al. 2001; Van Schie 1997). Large groups felt that the established parties were largely indistinguishable from each other, apart from their common feature that they were not able to solve social problems. Plans and promises stemming from these parties for the upcoming four years were met with scepticism by journalists and commentators because, so they said, these parties have had eight years of time to work on these problems.

In a comparative essay (‘Survey’) of *The Economist*, published on 3 May, it was shown that there is no reason to exaggerate these problems because they are relatively small (or even non-existent) compared with other countries. As far as these problems exist, they cannot explain the success of Fortuyn. We will show empirically how parties converged on the main conflict dimensions and with what effects on the basis of a content analysis of election manifestos. This analysis shows the importance of the programmatic profile of parties and how dangerous it is for parties to neglect their distinct position vis-à-vis each other. When voters have little to choose because programmatic differences are unclear or remain unspoken, they become susceptible to the challenges by newcomers. The Dutch electoral system is open enough to make these challenges realistic, especially since the electoral volatility is rising rapidly.

3. The positioning of parties on salient policy dimensions

Although most voters are not reading election manifestos, they are still crucial for determining what parties stand for. These documents provide voters and commentators the main tool to distinguish between political parties on the main issues and conflict dimensions. In this sense, manifestos enable voters to make a choice, which influences the cabinet composition and future policies. Since voters do not compare these documents on all main issues themselves, they rely on simplified representations of these documents. It has been shown empirically that citizens with a moderate level of political knowledge are still able to position parties adequately on the basis of their knowledge of the ideological positions of parties (Van der Brug 1997). Ideology stands here for a summary state point on a multitude of specific issues (as listed in Table 2) and is used as a simple yardstick to infer the content of election manifestos.

Table 2. Overview of four types of issues forming the two main conflict dimensions in the Netherlands			
Left issues	Right issues	Progressive issues	Conservative issues
Anti-imperialism	Military: positive	Anti-growth economy	Economical productivity
Peace	Individual Freedom	National Way of Life: negative	National Way of Life: positive
Internationalism: positive	Constitutionalism: positive		
Democracy	Governmental and Administrative Efficiency	Multi-culturalism: positive	Multi-culturalism: negative
Market regulation	Free enterprise	Traditional morality: negative	Traditional morality: positive
Economic planning	Incentives to induce enterprise	Environmental protection	
Protectionism: positive	Protectionism: negative		
Controlled economy	Economic orthodoxy (thrift and saving; strong currency)		
Nationalisation	Welfare State Limitation		
Welfare state: expansion	Law and Order		
Education expansion	Social Harmony		
Labour groups: positive			
Source: Klingemann et al. 1994; Budge et al. 2001 The left-right scale is computed as: Left issues minus Right issues. The progressive-conservative scale is computed as: Progressive minus Conservative issues. The maximum value of the scale is 100 (all emphasis is on left or progressive issues) . The minimum value is -100 (all emphasis is on right or conservative issues).			

According to Downs, all issue positions of parties can be reduced to a single ideological liberal-conservative dimension (Downs 1957). We will assume, however, a more-dimensional policy space. The Left-Right continuum and the Progressive-Conservative divide are known to be the most salient conflict dimensions in the Dutch context (Irwin and Van Holsteyn 1989; Middendorp 1991; Laver 1995). The former is clearly related to socio-economic differences on income, work, social insurance, economic growth and the intervening role of the government. The latter is related to norms and values and the individual freedom to act (or not to act) in social and cultural terms. Although these notions are still contested, it is common knowledge that they are important in the shaping of the preferences of voters (Klingeman et al. 1994; Pennings and Keman 1993; Van Wijnen 2001).

The large majority of voters is able to position parties on both dimensions rather consistently. In a similarly fashion we will position parties on two salient dimensions on the basis of the coded party manifestos. We employ a revised version of the left-right scale, which was introduced by Klingemann et al. on the basis of a factor analysis (Klingemann et al. 1994). We have adapted this scale slightly by removing and overlapping items. The full description of these variables is published in Budge et al (2001). The progressiveness-conservatism scale is based on a selection of issues that are dominant in the Dutch debate on norms and values. These issues also figured prominently during the election campaign in 2002.

Most election programs of established parties in Western democracies have been coded

with a coding scheme of 56 issues. This has the disadvantage of a lack of flexibility (once the documents have been coded, they cannot be changed anymore), but also the advantage of comparability, i.e. the ability to compare parties from different countries and time periods with each other (see for an overview of the limits and possibilities: Laver 2001; Pennings and Keman 2002). This coding scheme has been applied to the Dutch draft manifestos that normally do not differ a lot from their final versions⁴.

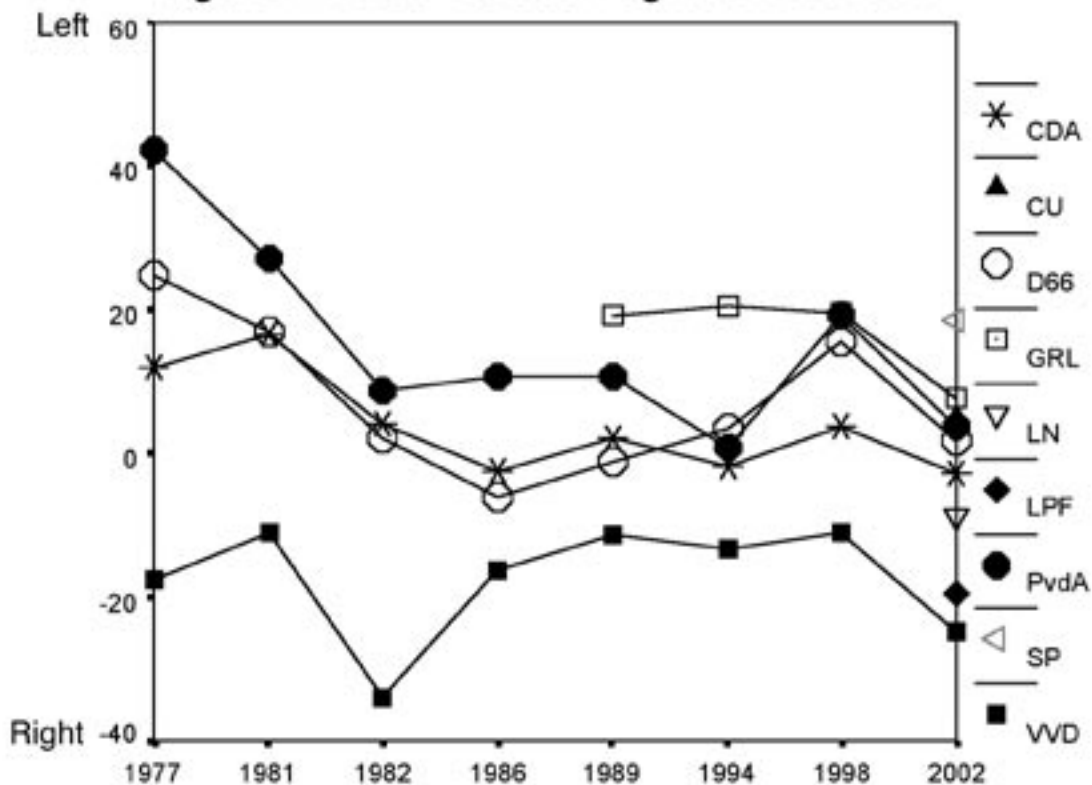
Many political scientists have demonstrated that the positions that parties take on the Left-Right dimension influence both the individual voting behaviour and the chance of parties to participate in government (Laver 1995; Van der Brug 1997). This also goes for the divide between progressive and conservative although it is generally less recognisable and salient. This dimension remains important in the Netherlands because it is linked to opinions on religious norms and values which large groups (have been) attached or which figured prominently during the period they grew up as a child. The combination of both dimensions reveals the political-ideological battlefield or policy space, which is decisive for the competition and future cooperation between parties (Irwin and Van Holsteyn 1999). In order to avoid any misunderstanding of the parties, we present a small overview of the competing parties and their electoral fortunes.

Party	Party Family	1989	1994	1998	2002	98-02 +/-
Socialist Party (SP)	Socialist	-	2	5	9	+4
Green Left (GRL)	New Left/ecologists	6	5	11	11	0
PvdA	Social-Democrats	49	37	45	23	-22
D66	Left Liberals	12	24	14	7	-7
Liveable Netherlands (LN)	Regional Populist	-	-	-	2	+2
CDA	Christian-Democrats	54	34	29	43	+14
VVD	Conservative Liberals	22	31	38	23	-15
List Pim Fortuyn (LPF)	Right-wing populist	-	-	-	26	+26
SGP, GPV, RPF (CU=RPF+GPV)	Orthodox Christians	6	7	8	6	-2
CD, CP86	Extreme (near racist) right	1	3	0	-	-
Others		0	7	0	0	-

Source: Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2001; Teletekst

Table 3 reveals the strong fluctuations in electoral support for the main parties. Whereas established parties profited from each other's losses in 1994 and 1998, in 2002 it is a newcomer that attracts many voters (also from voters that would not have voted otherwise). Table 3 indicates that Dutch politics is in flux. But why and how? In order to understand these drastic electoral changes, one has to look at developments through time. They are best expressed by the left-right movements of the Dutch parties in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Left versus Right since 1977



In case of the newcomers we see, of course, no movement but a single position in 2002. Figure 2 shows that there has been a considerable convergence between 1977 and 2002. We will specify the trends per party or groups of parties:

- The PvdA has moved from a pronounced left position (in 1977) towards a left-centre position. As a result, the PvdA has lost voters that could not recognise themselves anymore in this new position, but at the same time it has improved its prospects to govern (Hillebrand and Irwin 1999). This strategic choice can be explained from several factors that pushed the PvdA towards a more moderate policy stance, such as the weakening of labour unions, the rise of neo-liberalism, the budgetary discipline that is imposed by the EMU-Treaty etc. It is also related to a well-known dilemma regarding the electoral trade-off of social democratic strategy. In the presence of left-libertarian competitors like the Green Left and D66 and (to a lesser degree) the SP, the social democrats can choose to maximise votes (by moving to the left) but fail to win the median voter and therefore have only limited bargaining power over government formation. The alternative option is to maximise their bargaining power by controlling the median voter but sacrifice votes to their left-libertarian competitors (Kitschelt 1999: 328). Kitschelt has argued that the moderate strategy is most attractive and least costly in the face of a weak left-libertarian competition and little centrist competition. In the Dutch case it is clear that the combined votes of left-libertarian parties is relatively large and that the centrist competition is very strong. This makes the choice of the PvdA to opt for a cabinet with the VVD extra risky because of the difficulties to maintain their core support (Aarts, Macdonald and

Rabinowitz 1999; Irwin and Van Holsteyn 1999).

- D66 has also moved from a radical left to a near centre position. The ambition of D66 was to replace the CDA as a pivotal party in Dutch politics. And it has succeeded in doing so during the Purple cabinets, but it is unlikely to continue to do so in the near future because a new Purple cabinet is highly unlikely, given the recent massive sentiments against its policies.

- More recently, the Green Left is growing towards a middle position because it explicitly has the ambition to govern in a CDA-PvdA-Green Left cabinet. The Green Left has a record of good prospects in opinion polls, but disappointing results during elections. In 2002 this pattern was repeated. For this reason an office-seeking strategy could result in higher payoffs than a vote-seeking position. Besides, the Socialist Party (SP) is to the left of the Green Left so that this position (needed to attract more voters) is already occupied.

- The CDA takes a rather stable position in the middle and rather pragmatically moves to the left and right in a cyclical manner, following the general trend of the other parties. This is what one would expect from a party that has strong office-seeking motives. It is remarkable that the orthodox Protestant Christian Union (CU) is economically to the left of the CDA which was recognised by the other parties (in particular by the Green Left).

- The VVD takes a relatively stable position with occasional moves to the (far) right, as in 1982 and 2002. It moves further to the right in 2002. This is understandable since the VVD has no ambition to govern with the PvdA in the new cabinet (as announced by Hans Dijkstal during the election campaign).

- The List Pim Fortuyn is slightly to the left of the VVD and hence Fortuyn did not try to reach voters to the far right of the VVD. One reason is that Fortuyn was mainly office seeking: he liked to picture himself as the new Prime Minister. He favoured a coalition with the CDA and the VVD. In order to cooperate with the CDA, he could not move too far to the right. Livable Netherlands takes position between LPF and the CDA, which gives it a more moderate profile than the List Pim Fortuyn does.

In general we can draw two conclusions. In the short run, we see a sharp contrast between 1998 when most parties moved to the left, whereas in 2002 most parties moved to the right. 1998 was obviously an election year in a period of economic prosperity in which parties could easily promise to spend more on social goals than in 2002 when the economic prospects are far less optimistic.

In the long run, the Dutch party system is becoming more and more scattered. Until 1989 several parties merged and brought about the joint parties of the CDA and the Green Left. In 1989 there were only five main alternatives. In 2002, however, there are eight alternatives that have divided the available policy space around the centre into small subsections, so that the policy space between parties has become smaller. This convergence between parties and the scattering of the party system have intensified the party competition. It has also been conducive to a higher electoral volatility, because the distances between parties are becoming so small that it becomes easier for voters to switch between parties. Hence, the growing number of floating voters is induced by programmatic convergence since the 1970s. The changes have transformed the main parties in the centre (CDA, PvdA, D66) into catchall parties which all seek the median voter position on the two most salient issue dimensions. During the government formation in 1994 and 1998 we have indeed seen that these three parties managed to take the median party position on either the left-right or the progressive-conservative dimension, whereas

these positions were for a long time claimed by only one party: The CDA (Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2001). In 2002 the CDA has regained its median position on the left-right and on the progressive-conservative dimension which puts it in a strong bargaining position. However, this position is also weakened by the fact that the long-term payoffs of the feasible alternatives to choose from (a right-wing CDA-VVD-LPF cabinet versus a centre-left CDA-PvdA-GRL) are uncertain. In case of the CDA-VVD-LPF combination the CDA has to cooperate with a right-wing majority within the cabinet (LPF + VVD) which is less comfortable than a strong position in the middle which it occupied in most cabinets before 1994.

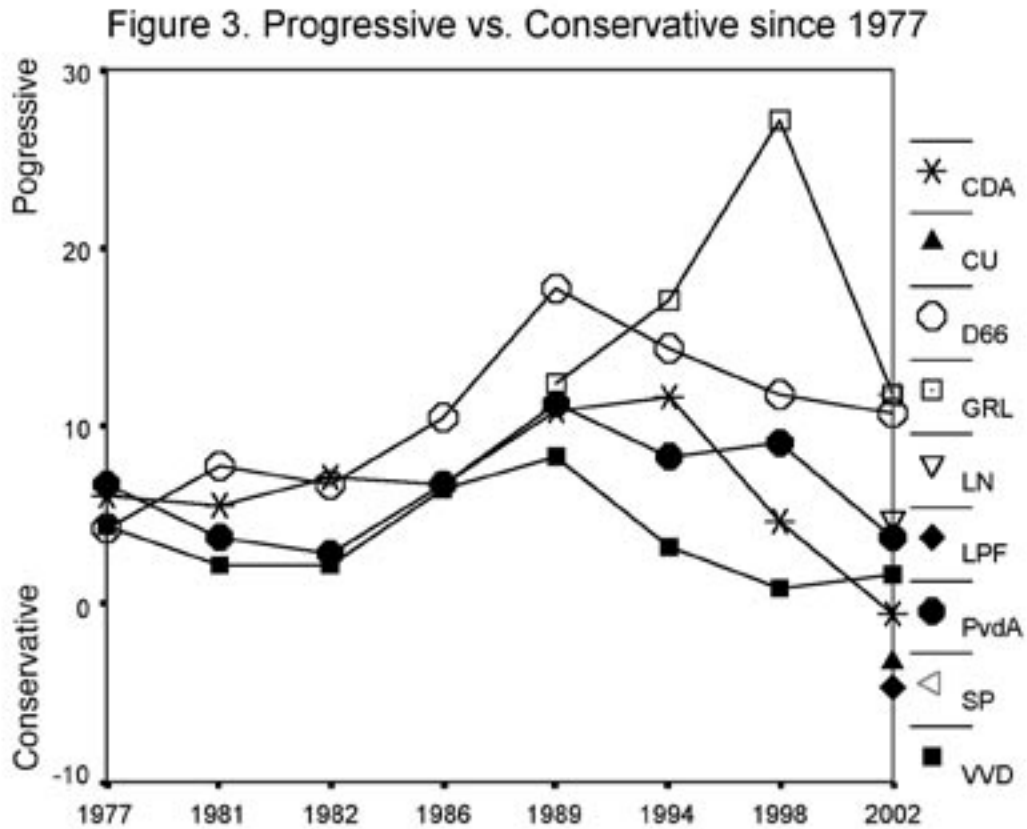


Figure 3 shows the movements on the Progressiveness-Conservatism scale. On this conflict dimension the convergence does not dominate. Since 1977 the party positions have become more diverse. During the 1980s there is a trend towards more progressiveness. In the 1990s, however, several parties move towards a more conservative policy stance. The only exception is the Green Left which moved in the contrary direction. But in 2002 it moves to a more conservative position that is still the most progressive one (identical to the Socialist Party). The conservative position of LPF (even more conservative than the CU) is remarkable given the emphasis that Fortuyn puts on liberal values regarding homosexuality, drugs use and euthanasia. However, these values were stressed during the campaign partly in order to compensate for the extreme right image and also to protect the Dutch culture from the supposedly anti-liberal Islamic influence. Hence, Fortuyn defines the Dutch national values different than the confessional parties do, but also not fully opposite to them as he adheres to confessional values too (Fortuyn 2000b)

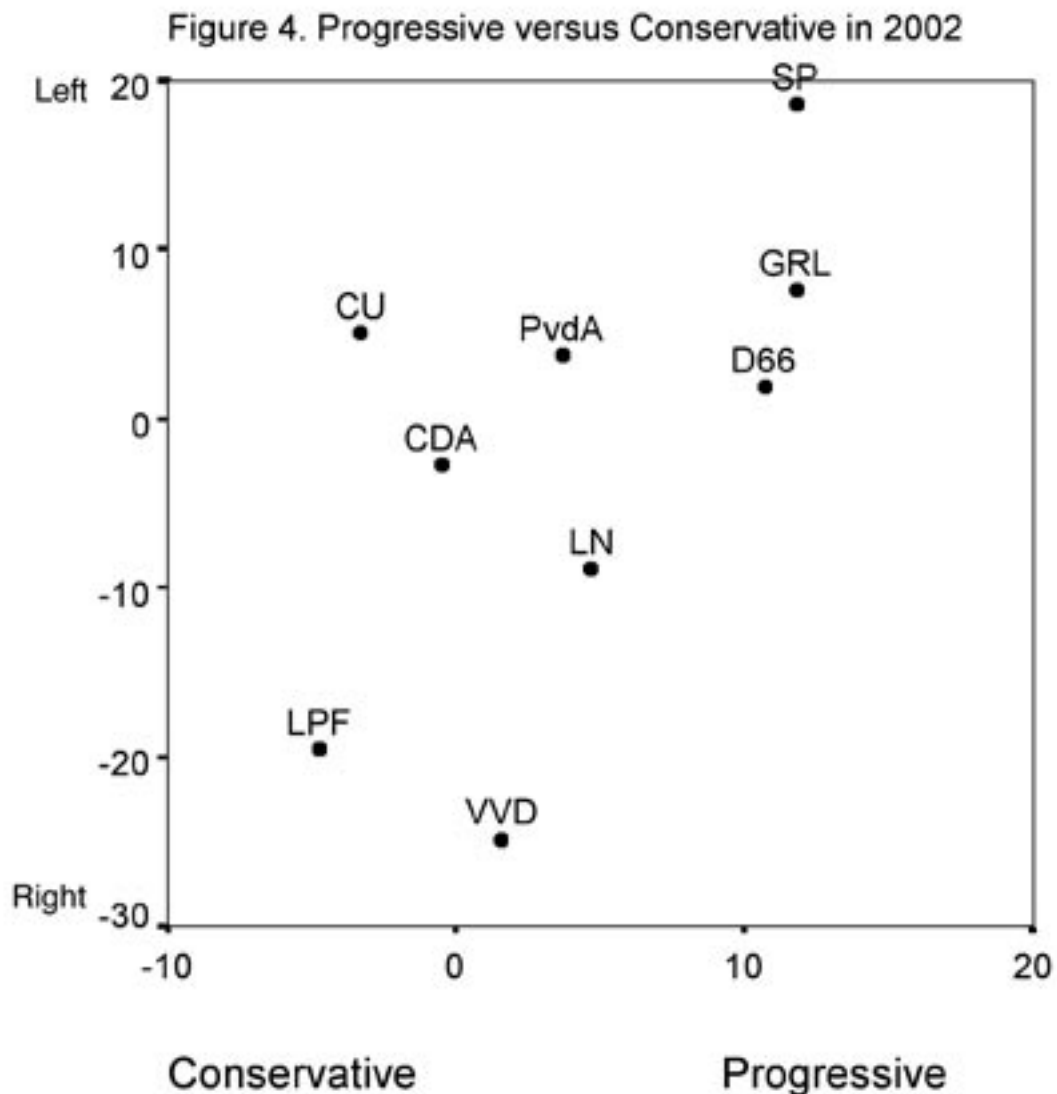


Figure 4 positions all parties on a two-dimensional map of the left-right dimension and the progressive-conservative dimension in 2002. The plot shows that three parties are left and progressive: the SP, the Green Left and D66. The reverse, conservative and right, is applicable to the list of Fortuyn (LPF) and the VVD. In the centre we find four parties of which two are confessional (CU and CDA), the PvdA is social democratic and LN is a populist-regionalist newcomer. The CU positions itself in left-right terms similarly as D66 and the PvdA, whereas the CDA takes the most central position on this dimension. This is the most favourite position of this party because it ideally enables the party to bridge the gap between left (PvdA) and right (VVD). D66 has successfully challenged this middle position in 1994 and (to a lesser extent) in 1998, but has now chosen a position more to the left because it knows that it will fail to maintain its position in 2002. Moving to the left will give this party some of its original radical identity back. The plot clearly shows the attack of Fortuyn (LPF) and LN from two frontiers. Fortuyn attracts voters from the VVD and voters orientated to the right of the centre. LN intended to do so towards the PvdA and the centre-left orientated voters, but was far less successful than Fortuyn because the latter is far more pronounced and effective in criticising the established parties on their achievements. After his break with LN, Fortuyn saw the PvdA as his most important competitor and it is remarkable that his rise (at least in the opinion polls) did more electoral damage to the VVD than to the PvdA until the last few days before the elections, when the PvdA lost and the VVD won (see Figure 1).

The rank order of the parties on the progressive-conservative scale is clearly different from the left-right scale. The LPF is the most conservative party, directly followed by the Christian Union. The VVD is more progressive than the CDA since the VVD favours strongly the individual freedom to express oneself culturally and sexually in a liberal fashion whereas the CDA does not. The CDA favours a restoration of norms and values in which individuals are restricted in their behaviour in the sense that they have to adapt their way of life to conservative family-values. The LPF is conservative in the sense that it defines the Dutch way of life as dominant in which immigrants have to adapt by speaking the language and by integrating in the neighbourhood. This conservative orientation is an important similarity and both parties do not exclude each other from government (Fortuyn even preferred a coalition with the CDA). Judged solely on the basis of this conflict dimension, a coalition of CDA-VVD-LPF would be most feasible. On the basis of the left-right divide this coalition would be conceivable too, but with more distance between the CDA on the one hand and the VVD/LPF on the other. Such a cabinet would clearly be balanced to the right, which could cause tensions within the CDA between a left and right faction (as has happened before during the 1980s).

4. International comparisons

Until now we have described the policy convergence in the Netherlands and its consequences for the Dutch party system. We have seen that there has been a move to the right during the recent elections and a successful rise of a rightwing populist party. Fortuyn wants to close the borders for new immigrants, but those already in the country can stay as long as they adapt to the Dutch culture. When a similar point of view was expressed in the 1980s by the rightwing extremist Centre-Democrats it encountered no large public support and it was heavily opposed as an abject party that should be abolished (according to many commentators). In the 1990s Frits Bolkestein (VVD) presented similar ideas but adopted them within a normal democratic discourse by positioning the VVD on this issue between the Centre Democrats and the PvdA (Tilly and Fennema 1998). In 2002 Fortuyn builds further on this by stating

that anti-immigration is a precondition for the survival of Dutch culture and prosperity. From 'abject' in the 1980s, anti-immigrant positions have become acceptable and even sound. Even the CDA first candidate explicitly stated: "The multicultural society has failed". According to him, immigrants have to integrate, accept the Dutch cultural norms and values and speak the Dutch language.

This raises the obvious question: Is the Netherlands, being internationally well known and respected for its tolerance towards minorities, not tolerant anymore? Is Fortuyn the Dutch Jörg Haider? This question is justified by the general rise of support for right-wing extremist or right-wing populist views in Western Europe. During the French Presidential elections in April 2002 the extreme-right Le Pen was able to defeat the socialist Jospin and entered the second round against Chirac. In Austria Jörg Haider was not only able to attract many votes with rightist and nationalist views, but also managed to form a coalition government which made the EU launch measures which were later on disposed of: Haider was more or less accepted. In Italy the rise of Berlusconi, the Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord are examples of parties that gain massive electoral support by means of populist opinions which often stress the importance of national and regional values and interests which should be protected against higher authorities and lower cultures. In other countries similar trends are taking place. In Switzerland we have Blocher, in Belgium is the Vlaams Blok from Dewinter and in Denmark the successful rise of the Dansk Folkepartit headed by Pia Kjaersgaard. In short, right-wing extremist groups and populist statements are gaining electoral support in Western Europe. This makes these parties more acceptable to the public and their participation in government (as in Italy and Austria) is also becoming an option.

But the main question is: are these parties comparable? The manifesto data are well suited to answer this question because they are coded with a coding scheme that enables cross-sectional comparisons through time. Figure 5 compares the Dutch parties with a selection of parties in Western Europe. These are 'conservative' parties from the UK and Norway and conservative Christian democratic parties from Germany and Norway. It turns out that the ideas of Fortuyn and the VVD are compatible with the mainstream conservatism in Europe. The Dutch CDA is less conservative, probably because this party has to survive in a cultural context of individualisation and secularisation which is traditionally somewhat stronger in the Dutch context than elsewhere (among the OECD countries, the Netherlands ranked highest on the postmaterialism-scale in 1990, see Halman and Nevitte 1996: 248). The CDA is more alike the Kristlig Folkepartit, whereas the CDU/CSU is typically rightist-conservative. The spatial representation of parties in Figure 5 illuminates that the Dutch drift towards conservatism and rightist views is not as radical as elsewhere.

Figure 5. Dutch and European Conservative Parties

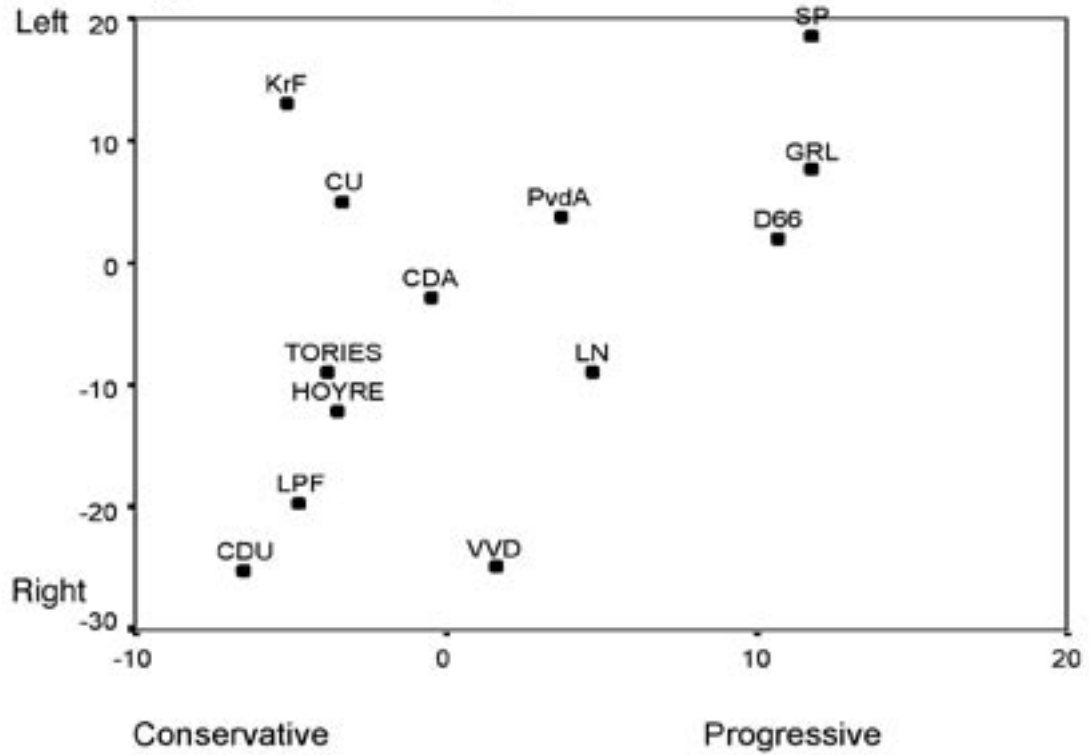
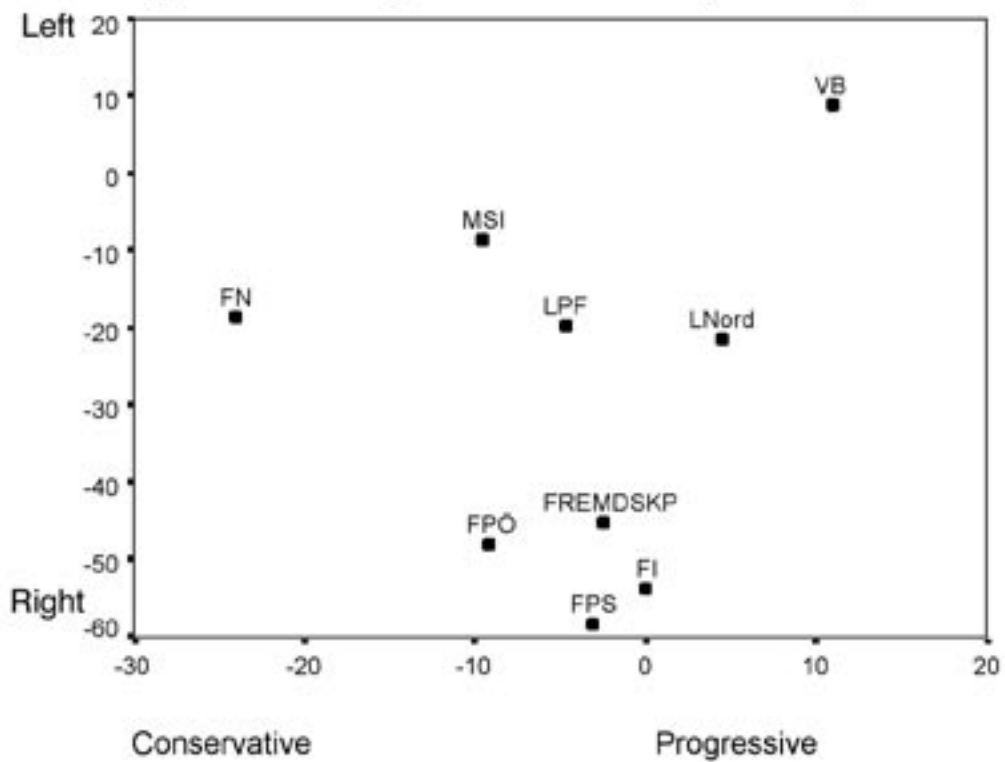


Figure 6. Pim Fortuyn and the Extreme Right in Europe



Where does this leave Pim Fortuyn internationally? With which parties should we compare his views? This was a hot issue during the Dutch election campaign that gave rise to many speculations by journalists who compared Fortuyn with Filip Dewinter, Jörg Haider and even with Le Pen. Fortuyn himself reacted fiercely against these comparisons and rejected them as attempts to ‘demonise’ his person. He warned the established politicians that if something would happen to him (because of these accusations) they should be hold responsible.

Figure 6 shows that LPF is not right-wing extremist if we use the FPÖ, the FI, FPS and the Fremkridtspartit as benchmarks. As expected, from all these parties, the Front National is evidently the most extremist one. It is striking that the Lega Nord and the Vlaams Blok are not taking right-wing extremist policy positions in their most recent manifestos⁵. Both parties are regionalist parties that try to reach as many voters as possible. They differ from rightist-conservative parties in that they are xenophobic, but at the same time strive against natives, i.e. Belgians who are not Flemish and Italians who do not live in the north.

Although Fortuyn is positioned far away from Haider and Le Pen his views incorporate elements of the right-wing extremist discourse in a playful manner. This becomes apparent when we confront his views with the main themes of right-wing extremism: ethnic nationalism, anti-materialism, anti-parliamentarianism, and conspiracy theory (Fennema 1997). Fortuyn’s views are, strictly speaking, not based on ethnic nationalism but on civic nationalism since he accepts that fully integrated immigrants are as Dutch as natives are. Fortuyn appears materialistic (with his suits, ties, Jaguar and cigar) but his views are anti-materialist in that he defies the individualisation and fragmentation of society and the lack of social solidarity. His attitude towards the parliament is not hostile, but he is negative about most parliamentarians. The conspiracy theory is also implicitly part of his views in that he thinks that the Dutch nation is not as strong as it should be according to the ideology of ethnic superiority. It is further weakened by failing politicians who form a closed circuit in order to fulfil their own needs instead of those of the Dutch people. Fortuyn has toned down and reformulated a selection of elements of right-wing extremism in such a way that it appears to many as a just and challenging new way of looking at politics. In the 1980s, Janmaat propagated the issue of anti-immigration and the idea that the Netherlands is too crowded to let more people in. The established parties and the public opinion regarded his point of view as abject and disgusting. In 2002 it has become a central part of Fortuyn’s range of thought which, as a whole, is presented and also accepted as new and challenging by a large minority of the electorate.

Anti-immigration was Fortuyn’s trick to attract the attention of the public. Bolkestein (VVD) tried to do this in previous elections but was less successful because he was an insider and member of the party cartel. Fortuyn was an entrepreneur who managed to transform his weak position as a complete outsider into his strongest asset: “it is me or them”. He said that the established parties are not capable to solve the problem of immigration because they do not recognise it since they have shut themselves completely of from what ordinary people experience on a daily basis. The earlier electoral success of Liveable Netherlands in local elections was based on the same populism and paved the way for Fortuyn.

5. Conclusions and discussion

During the Dutch election of 2002 the established parties were challenged by new parties, of which the List Pim Fortuyn has been the most successful one, at least until the murder on its 'lijsttrekker'. The VVD entered the election campaign with the solemn belief that it would become the largest party. But within only 11 weeks time they fall from a shared first position with the PvdA (weeks 7 and 8) to a fourth position in week 18. In the same period a totally new party, resting solely on the campaign of one single person, was able to become the second largest party and also to become a potentially acceptable governing party after the elections.

The success of this party is to be explained mainly by the behaviour of the established parties themselves and not so much by that of the challenging parties. Fortuyn's strong personality was an important short-term precondition for his success. But, compared with the other parties, Fortuyn's programmatic ideas, proposals and solutions to problems were not very sophisticated. What was convincing, however, was his ability to attract popular attention and to expose the vulnerabilities of the current political elites in ways that made him look as the better alternative. The underlying long-term process which made this possible is convergence.

The potential danger of convergence is well known in the political science literature. When parties have an incentive to adopt increasingly "centrist" positions, there is a risk that they disappear in a "black hole" since radical parties displace them from the outer flanks of the political space (Rabinowitz, MacDonald and Listhaug 1991). The overall picture is that there has been convergence on the left-right dimension since 1977 so that the political centre has become crowded. The main reasons why this has happened are:

1. Established parties favour the office-seeking option and therefore want to increase the chance to govern by taking a moderate policy chance.
2. The electoral defeat of the CDA in 1994 (losing 20 seats) has put a huge bonus on policy convergence because there were 20 empty seats to fill in the centre of the policy space which is pivotal in the Dutch system (allowing parties to take the median position)

However, one major effect is that the voters get disorientated when it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between political parties now that the two main left and right parties are united in one government. The left-right ideology provides the voters with a very effective instrument to judge where parties stand vis-à-vis their own preferences. When this instrument is swept away because party positions are becoming less distinguishable, then the motivation to vote for established parties becomes weaker. During the Purple cabinets this effect has become extra strong because the PvdA and the VVD have signed very detailed government declarations in order to prevent that these parties would frequently clash on policy issues (Thomson 1999; De Vries 1999). One consequence is that the debate among governing parties is seriously hampered by detailed agreements and this is also frustrating the opposition parties. This situation strengthens the impression among particular groups of voters that all parties are alike: governing parties and opposition parties are all representing a type of politician which is not very concerned with solving real-world problems in a way that matters for citizens. The Dutch National Election Studies show that this attitude is present among large parts of the electorate during all elections and it is seriously strengthened by the party behaviour described above (Thomassen et al. 2000). The governing parties have given priority to their short-term interest (catching votes from the CDA and to make sure that the Purple Cabinet will not collapse due to internal conflicts) and have neglected their long-term interest to maintain their credibility towards the voters.

Convergence fundamentally affects the way the Dutch party system works. It increases the number of possible coalitions since the policy distance between parties has grown smaller. Competition becomes more intense because many votes can be won or lost due to incidents since voters are more easily prepared to switch between parties given the small distances between them. Cooperation becomes potentially more inclusive since the votes are getting scattered over more parties so that more parties are needed to form a government (in 2002 at least three parties are needed). Hence, the convergence has enlarged the possibilities for cooperation (in government) and competition (during the elections). At the same time these changes have made parties and party elites more vulnerable. Parties have become increasingly interchangeable in the way voters value them. The same goes for the elites in the way the party organisation treats them: two first candidates have been disposed of at the beginning of the campaign (namely of the CDA and of LN). During the campaign there were intense discussions on the capabilities of most leaders, also within the parties themselves. The initially strong leadership positions of Melkert (PvdA) and Dijkstal (VVD) were constantly debated during the campaign and both resigned directly after the elections because of their electoral defeat.

The successful rise of the newcomer LPF indicates that the neglect of the established parties to offer voters a real choice has ultimately undermined their own cartel position. The cartel party is likely to be replaced by an entrepreneurial party with a stronger role for non-politicians as cabinet ministers, and for targets and performance instead of ideology. Fortuyn has proven that the entrepreneurial party can beat the cartel party in the Dutch system. This political fact gives the elections in 2002 the status of a landmark, not only in Dutch but also in European electoral history.

Notes

¹ Two days before the elections the PvdA suggested that Ad Melkert will not automatically become Prime Minister in case the PvdA would become the largest party. Melkert was informally withdrawn from the campaign and replaced by Wim Kok who appealed to the voters to vote sensible since their vote cannot be withdrawn and will affect policy-making in the upcoming four years. This was interpreted by many as a warning against an ‘emotional vote’ on the murdered Pim Fortuyn.

² The success of local parties was expressed during the local elections of 6 March 2002 in which they won many seats at the cost of ‘national’ parties (see below). These results show that the PvdA, VVD and D66 had already lost much of their electoral support 2 _ months before the elections. The opposition party CDA was the only established national party which won a significant number of local seats. The local elections proved that the established parties can be beaten. These victories made that Fortuyn’s incredible claim was not ignored by the media: “make no mistake, I will become Prime Minister!”.

Party	Seats (total)	Plus/minus
Local	2188	+328
CDA	2152	+86
VVD	1504	-156
PvdA	1455	-231
Green Left	432	+34
Livable Netherlands	333	+251
CU	331	+26
D66	278	-54
SGP	241	+11
SP	143	-2
Others	23	-197

Source: <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/fotos/raadsverkiezingen/Verkiezingen.gif> (consulted 15 May 2002)

³ The NIPO-poll is based on a fixed group of 1200 respondents which has also been researched during the previous elections. Its competitor is the Interview/NSS-poll which is based on a group of respondents which changes every week. Interview/NSS predicted 19 seats for LPF in week 18, whereas NIPO predicted 26 seats. The low prediction for LPF by Interview/NSS is mainly due to the interviewing per telephone which make people reluctant to admit that they vote for Fortuyn (before his death). After his death this reluctance disappeared and the LPF won 5 seats in this poll. The error margin is 5% (7.5 seat per party). Source: NRC Handelsblad, 28 January 2002, Volkskrant 15 May 2002..

⁴ In case of LPF, the official summary of Fortuyn’s book ‘The Ruins of the Purple Cabinets’ has been used. It is accessible on URL: <http://www.lijst-pimfortuyn.nl/party.php?goto=english> (consulted 15 May 2002).

⁵ In case of the Vlaams Blok the latest available data are from 1995. The previous programmes are estimated by Budge et al. (2001) as -2.33 on left-right and 7 on progressive-conservative. In 1995 the score on left-right=8.79 and on progressive-conservative it is 10.9. In 1995 there was a strong emphasis on welfare state expansion (9.2% versus 6.1% in the previous programmes) and on environmental protection (9.9% versus 3.5% in the previous manifestos). On immigrants the VB is more radical than LPF (VB wants all non-European immigrants to return to their country), but this point of view is described in a few sentences in a document of more than 150 pages. The LPF-document is only 5 pages. These differences in size hinder the comparability. Furthermore, the viewpoints of Fortuyn were further nuanced during the election campaign (in April he wanted to legalise all illegal immigrants with a non-criminal background if a majority in parliament would agree to close to borders for most asylum seekers). In order to achieve a better comparison between LPF and VB a more detailed coding scheme and method would have to be devised (see Pennings and Keman 2002 for a discussion of a new methodology to estimate policy positions).

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