**WZB**

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**The Rise of Right-Wing Populist
Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands**

**A Discursive Opportunity Approach**

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discussion paper

## Abstract

The question addressed in this paper is how to explain the dramatic rise of Pim Fortuyn's right-wing populist party during the campaign for the parliamentary elections in the Netherlands in 2002. Fortuyn succeeded in attracting by far the most media attention of all political actors and his new party won 17 percent of the votes. We analyze how this new populist party managed to mobilize such an amount of attention and support so suddenly and so rapidly. We use the notion of "discursive opportunities" and argue that the public reactions to Pim Fortuyn and his party played a decisive role for his ability to further diffuse his claims in the public sphere and to achieve support among the Dutch electorate. The predictions of the effects of discursive opportunities are empirically investigated with longitudinal data from newspapers and opinion polls. To study these dynamics of the competition over voters' support and over space in the public debate during the election campaign, we use an ARIMA time-series model as well as a negative binomial event count model with lagged variables to account for the time-series structure of the data. We find that discursive opportunities have significantly affected the degree to which Fortuyn was successful in the competition for both voter support, and media attention. Public visibility, resonance and legitimacy in the media significantly affected the opinion polls and higher degrees of legitimacy and negative claims on the issue of immigration and integration in the media by others increased the opportunities for Fortuyn to further diffuse his viewpoints and to become the main political opinion-maker during the turbulent election campaign of 2002.

## Zusammenfassung

Das vorliegende Papier geht der Frage nach, wie sich der dramatische Aufschwung der rechtspopulistischen Partei Pim Fortuyns während des Wahlkampfs zu den niederländischen Parlamentswahlen 2002 erklären lässt. Pim Fortuyn gelang es, verglichen mit den anderen politischen Akteuren die weitaus größte Aufmerksamkeit der Medien auf sich zu lenken, und seine Partei gewann auf Anhieb 17 Prozent der Stimmen. Die Autoren untersuchen, wie es dieser neuen populistischen Partei gelingen konnte, so plötzlich und schnell ein solches Maß an Aufmerksamkeit und Unterstützung zu mobilisieren. Unter Verwendung des Begriffes „diskursiver Gelegenheiten"  wird argumentiert, dass die öffentlichen Reaktionen auf Pim Fortuyn und seine Partei entscheidend dazu beitrugen, dass er seine Forderungen in der Öffentlichkeit weiter verbreiten und Unterstützung unter den niederländischen Wählern finden konnte. Die vorhergesagten Effekte der diskursiven Gelegenheiten werden empirisch mit Längsschnittdaten aus Zeitungen und Meinungsumfragen untersucht. Die Analyse der Dynamik des Wettbewerbs um die Gunst der Wähler und um öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit in den Debatten erfolgt mittels eines ARIMA Zeitreihenmodells und eines negativen binomialen event count Modells mit zeitversetzten Variablen, um die Zeitreihenstruktur der Daten angemessen zu berücksichtigen. Die Autoren stellen fest, dass der Erfolg von Fortuyn im Wettbewerb um sowohl Wählerunterstützung als auch Medienaufmerksamkeit signifikant von diskursiven Gelegenheiten beeinflusst wird. Öffentliche Sichtbarkeit, Resonanz und Legitimität in den Medien übten einen signifikanten Einfluss auf die Meinungsumfragen aus. Ein höheres Maß an Legitimität und eine größere Zahl von negativen Forderungen zum Thema Immigration und Integration, die von anderen in die Medien getragen wurden, erhöhten für Fortuyn die Gelegenheiten, seine Ansichten zu verbreiten und im Verlaufe des turbulenten Wahlkampfs 2002 zum wichtigsten politischen Meinungsmacher aufzusteigen.

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# Introduction

Until 2002, anti-immigration parties in the Netherlands had failed to make any significant impact on Dutch elections. The stunning success of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn in the Dutch elections of May 2002 therefore constitutes a remarkable deviation from the traditionally low scores of radical right parties in this country. In the parliamentary elections of 1998, the radical right party *Centre Democrats* (CD) of Hans Janmaat did not receive any votes and lost the meagre three seats they had achieved in 1994. Only a few years later the dramatic rise of Pim Fortuyn broke records in Dutch and European political history. The *List Pim Fortuyn* (hereafter: LPF) won 26 seats, achieving by far the most impressive result ever for a new party in Dutch national elections. Also, the parties of the incumbent government coalition suffered an unprecedented defeat (Van Holsteyn & Irwin 2003). Such a high percentage (30.7 per cent) of aggregated electoral gains and losses of parties was without precedent (Van Praag 2003). The elections were also very exceptional in an international perspective. They are among the four most volatile elections of all 390 national elections in Western Europe since 1900 (Mair 2002). The breakthrough of the LPF was also remarkable with regard to the role of the media. Newcomer Pim Fortuyn was the most often mentioned politician in the media during the election campaign. More strikingly even, he got 24 per cent of all attention, which is the same amount as the politicians on the second, third, fourth, and fifth positions taken together (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003).

The central question of this paper is how to explain this striking outcome: what are the causes of the rise of Pim Fortuyn and his political party? For a satisfactory answer to questions about this sudden political change, the public opinion as well as the debate in the media should be taken into account. To date, scholars who use a discursive opportunity approach have mainly focused on opinions and claims expressed in the public debate (e.g. Ferree et al. 2002; Koopmans & Olzak 2004). This study pursues to enlarge the scope of these studies by also taking the general public opinion as measured by opinion polls into account. It goes without saying that the aggregated public opinion is not necessarily identical to the aggregated publicized opinion in the media. Therefore, our analysis of the rise of Fortuyn will refer to two elements. First, we look at his success in the public opinion, as expressed by the amount of people who said they intended to vote for this new anti-immigration party in opinion polls. Secondly, we analyse the public claims made by Fortuyn and his party, which indicates the extent to which he was able to publicly express his opinions and viewpoints in the media. Our central argument is that, in combination with the electoral potential and the political space available, discursive opportunities help explain both the increase in public claim making of Pim Fortuyn and the electoral success of his LPF.

Much of the previous academic work on the rise of anti-immigration parties has tended to focus on the structural conditions that have facilitated the emergence or 'breakthrough' of radical-right parties. It has focused on two main sets of factors: demand-side and supply-side (for a review of recent work, see Van der Brug & Fennema 2007). The former refer to the conditions that have created a social and cultural "reservoir" to be exploited by far-right political parties, such as value change and structural cleavages related to the modernization process (e.g. Betz 1994; Eatwell 2000; Ignazi 2003). Supply-side factors include political and institutional aspects, which social movement scholars have labelled as "political opportunity structures," such as the structure of the electoral system, the responses of established actors, and the dynamics of party alignment, demarcation, and competition (e.g., Betz 1994; Kitschelt 1995; Koopmans et al. 2005). These political opportunity structures provide the radical right with a political niche to be exploited.

We agree that these two sets of necessary conditions or facilitating factors are relevant and important if one studies the breakthrough of anti-immigration parties and populist right-wing mobilisation like the rise of the LPF in the Netherlands. However, we do not think that the answer to the question how it was possible that the public opinion and media debate could change so dramatically within such a short time span can be found in comparatively slow political and institutional changes or value shifts in the electorate (see likewise Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003: 14). Of course, structural and political conditions are important to explain why certain changes are possible or likely. But to understand these short-term changes it is more useful to look at a factor that can, first of all, change within short periods of time, and second, that is visible for people: the public debate in the media. In the absence of fertile structural conditions and attendant grievances, political entrepreneurs will not be able to successfully mobilize public support. But such grievances, we argue, are to an important extent amplified and to some extent even generated within the public discourse.

We want to avoid the shortcoming of only focussing on the demand-side or on structural political opportunities by building on theories on social movements and media influence that emphasize how public discourse provides opportunities for mobilization. The public sphere is where political parties or social movements can test the efficacy of different mobilization strategies, and where opportunities and constraints become visible by way of the public actions and reactions of other actors. To capture this role of the public sphere, scholars have developed the notion of *discursive opportunities* (Ferree et al. 2002; Ferree 2003; Koopmans & Olzak 2004; Koopmans et al. 2005). Following this theoretical lead, we will show that the key to understanding the success of Fortuyn lies in the dynamics of the public debate, and particularly in the ways in which other actors reacted to his claims.

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## Theoretical Perspectives

*Demand-side explanations: socio-economic conditions and grievances*

A classic example of the demand-side approach is *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1980[1960]). The key point of the authors is that someone's socio-economic background will be translated into a political orientation. Concerning the ultimate reasons for shifts in voting behaviour, it implies that we should look for long-term structural changes. According to this view, the electoral revolt of 2002 must somehow have found its root in increasing feelings of discontent among the population.

A familiar argument holds that worsening economic conditions increase dissatisfaction with an incumbent government. But in view of the socioeconomic situation in the Netherlands in 2001, the claim that the rise of Fortuyn was a result of the country's economic performance is not convincing. According to a survey by *The Economist*, the Dutch economy was at the time remarkably healthy and experienced an impressive growth under the incumbent government.[1] The unemployment rate was 6.6 per cent in 1990 (a moderate level compared to other countries of the European Union) and declined during the nineties to 3.5 per cent in 2000, a considerably lower rate than in most other EU member countries (CPB 2001).

A more convincing demand-side explanation is that immigration and cultural diversity resulted in a new cleavage. Theories of "ethnic competition" state that support for radical- right parties is generated by an increased sense of threat by immigrants (Scheepers et al. 2002). In this view, a high influx of immigrants may increase subjective perceptions of increased ethnic competition (even if perceptions are not justified) and people become receptive to ideologies and charismatic leaders who designate specific racial or ethnic minorities as responsible for social problems (Eatwell 2000: 415).

Detailed investigations at the individual level seem to offer some support for ethnic competition accounts. Voting decisions for the LPF were to an important extent based on the content of the political issues that the LPF advanced, most importantly its position on the issues of integration and immigration (Fennema & Van der Brug, 2006).  Fortuyn made it acceptable to publicly speak the previously unutterable and his viewpoints on the issues of immigration and integration tapped into the fears of ordinary Dutch people and matched their live experiences of minority-related crime and segregation in cities and schools. Fortuyn's rhetoric, which largely focused on the number of immigrants in the country and their supposed lack of respect for the Dutch way of life, struck a chord with some sections of the population.

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1  *The Economist*, May 4, 2002

*Table 1:* *The opinion of the Dutch population on the multicultural society and the degree of satisfaction with the government (percentages, 1997-2002)*

|  | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *The influx of asylum seekers should…* | | | | | | |
| Be possible without restrictions | 8 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 7 |
| Be restricted | 73 | 76 | 75 | 75 | 76 | 77 |
| Be completely halted | 19 | 15 | 17 | 16 | 17 | 16 |
| *Dutch ethnic minorities should…* | | | | | | |
| Be able to maintain their own culture | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Be able to maintain their own culture to a large extent | 7 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| Neither maintain their own culture, nor adapt to Dutch culture | 35 | 35 | 36 | 34 | 34 | 32 |
| Adapt to a large extent to Dutch culture | 28 | 29 | 29 | 30 | 32 | 33 |
| Adapt completely to Dutch culture | 26 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 25 | 28 |
| *Amount of satisfaction with the government* | | | | | | |
| Very satisfied | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Satisfied | 36 | 41 | 33 | 38 | 37 | 24 |
| Neither satisfied, nor unsatisfied | 48 | 44 | 48 | 46 | 45 | 45 |
| Unsatisfied | 13 | 11 | 15 | 13 | 14 | 24 |
| Very unsatisfied | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 6 |

Source: CBS (2006)

However, if we take a closer look at the perceived grievances, it appears that the opinions of the Dutch on the issue of the multicultural society and admittance of asylum seekers were rather stable during the late 1990s (see Table 1).[2] The limited and very gradual increase in the number of people who felt that immigrants should adapt to Dutch culture (from 54 per cent in 1990 to 61 per cent in 2002) indicates that there was widespread support for a more assimilationist approach to integration policies long before the breakthrough of Fortuyn. The surge of the LPF in 2002 cannot be ascribed to a sudden change in the opinion climate on immigration and multiculturalism. Objective immigration figures do not suggest a link between the rise of the LPF and increased ethnic competition either. Data provided by the Dutch Bureau of Statistics (CBS 2007) show that the monthly numbers of people who migrated to the Netherlands were relatively stable during the 1990s and early 2000s (see Figure 1). The numbers of refugees requesting for asylum even decreased from 52,580 in 1994 to 32,550 persons in 2000. The number of accepted applications decreased as well.

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2  These figures are in line with similar stable findings presented by Fennema & Van der Brug (2006) on support for multiculturalism and Coenders et al. (2006) on support for ethnic discrimination.

*Figure 1:       Monthly immigration figures in the Netherlands, 1990-2002*
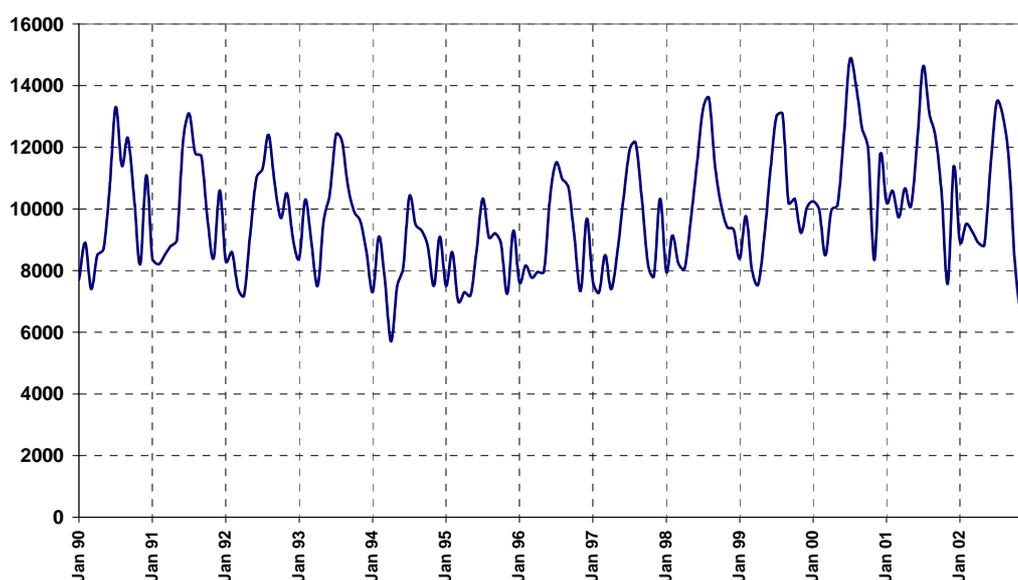


Source: CBS (2007).

Table 1 above also shows that the amount of dissatisfaction with the incumbent government was stable until the year 2002, when Fortuyn's advance was already well underway. Because these are average yearly figures, it is not possible to precisely indicate when the clear shift in the degree of dissatisfaction with the incumbent government from 16 per cent in 2001 to 30 per cent in 2002 set in. It seems most likely that the rise of Fortuyn incited dissatisfaction, rather than the other way round (see also Van der Brug 2003).

With the benefit of hindsight, the success of the LPF seems easy to understand in terms of an outburst of a long-existing but unnoticed stream of discontent with the official political myth that Dutch multicultural policies were a success. But the breakthrough calls for an explanation that goes beyond the socio-structural model of voting behaviour, since the social conditions and electoral preferences that supposedly caused the surge of an anti-immigration party did not vary much in time and hence cannot account for the success of Pim Fortuyn. A primarily socio-economic or ethnic competition approach has problems explaining sudden breakthroughs and electoral dynamics (Eatwell 1998; see also Norris 2005). A crucial weakness of theories about the 'demand' of voters is that they cannot deal with striking short-term fluctuations, and can only point towards necessary conditions that were met. Adriaansen et al. (2005) state that the *potential* electoral success for a party like the LPF already existed for at least eight years. Already in 1994 support for multiculturalism was weak and more than 60 per cent of the population held the opinion that minorities had to adapt to 'Dutch culture' (Adriaansen et al. 2005: 234). Coenders et al. (2006) and Scheepers et al. (2003) likewise point out that the Fortuynist potential had already been present many years before Pim Fortuyn entered the political stage. We have to conclude that

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social-structural and grievance theories offer at best a partial explanation for the rise of Pim Fortuyn.


*Supply-side explanations: political opportunities*

The concept of political opportunity structure (e.g., McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994; Kriesi et al. 1995) has gained widespread popularity in the literature on social movements. The basic idea is that the capacity to mobilize depends on opportunities and constraints offered by the political-institutional setting. Xenophobic and radical-right claim-making and success are affected by the institutional characteristics of a political system (e.g., its electoral system) and by dynamic aspects of the political process. As our case concerns developments over time within one polity, only the second set of factors seems relevant for the case at hand.

An important aspect here is whether established parties, which are in electoral competition with radical-right parties, already occupy the electoral terrain of the radical right. The average position of established parties and the political space they leave to radical-right actors affects the openness of a political system to new anti-immigrant parties (Betz 1994; Kitschelt 1995; Van der Brug et al. 2005; Arzheimer & Carter 2006). Koopmans et al. (2005) argued on the basis of data for the 1990s that in the Netherlands there was a moderate potential for the emergence of a radical-right party because established left and right parties occupied positions relatively close to one another on immigration and integration issues, leaving a space on the right that could potentially be exploited by an anti-immigrant party. Several other authors have also pointed to the favourable opportunity structure because of the ideological position of the mainstream right party, the conservative-liberal VVD, which left a gap on the right end of the electoral spectrum that the newcomer LPF could profit from. The "purple government," which brought together the social-democratic left (PvdA) and liberal-right (VVD) in one consensus-based coalition increased convergence in mainstream party positions (Pellikaan et al. 2003; Pennings & Keman 2003; Van Holsteyn & Irwin 2003, Van Holsteyn et al. 2003).


*The role of the public debate: Discursive opportunities*

Critics of political opportunity structure theory have correctly pointed out that a factor such as "political space" has no meaning if people do not become aware of it. Such awareness must arise on the basis of information that becomes publicly available, and the statements and actions of elite actors that are visible to the public. Theories of "discursive opportunities" aim to address this question how structurally given political opportunities become publicly visible.

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This argument starts from the assumption that the public sphere is a bounded space for political communication characterized by a high level of competition (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). Just as protests that receive no media coverage at all are in the words of Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993: 116) "nonevents," regime weaknesses and openings that do not become publicly visible may be considered "non-opportunities," which for all practical intents and purposes might as well not exist at all. Only a minority of all attempts at public claims-making receive the media attention that is necessary to reach wider audiences. We define *discursive opportunities* as the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message's chances of success in the public sphere (Koopmans 2004; Koopmans & Olzak 2004).

From communications and media research we know that "news values" of journalists shape decisions that make a given story newsworthy (Galtung & Ruge 1965; Harcup & O'Neill 2001). The actions of gatekeepers produce the first and most basic type of discursive opportunity that we can distinguish: *visibility*. Visibility depends on the number of communicative channels by which a message is included and the prominence of such inclusion. Visibility is a necessary condition for a message to influence the public discourse, and, other things being equal, the amount of visibility that gatekeepers allocate to a message increases its potential to diffuse further in the public sphere (Koopmans 2004; Koopmans & Olzak 2004)

We envision the communication environment of any particular public actor as the source of two further types of discursive opportunity: resonance and legitimacy. We do not only focus on Pim Fortuyn's own discursive mobilization strategies, but also on the (largely strategically unanticipated) reactions that the emergence of Fortuyn and his party met with in the public debate. Political newcomers are likely to remain stillborn if they do not succeed in provoking reactions from other actors in the public sphere. The degree to which an actor and his messages provoke such reactions we refer to as *resonance*. Messages that resonate, whether negatively or positively, become in the eyes of journalists and editors more relevant and the actors behind them more "prominent," which increases the speaker's chances to gain more space for his or her opinions.

Following the dictum "any publicity is good publicity" it may to some extent not matter whether reactions are supportive or critical, but in other respects it is also likely to be relevant what the balance is between negative and positive responses. The balance between negative and positive reactions we call *legitimacy*. It is defined as the degree to which, on average, reactions by third actors support an actor or her claims more than they reject them. Defined in this way, legitimacy can vary independently of resonance. Highly legitimate messages may have no resonance at all because they are uncontroversial, while highly controversial messages may have strong resonance (e.g. Fortuyn's statements about the "backwardness" of Islamic culture).

We extend the above arguments by hypothesizing that visibility, resonance, and legitimacy will not only improve the opportunities for an actor to further increase the frequency of his publicly visible claims, but also help improve an actor's support in opinion polls. We claim that actors that receive prominent media attention (visibility), which draw many reactions from other political actors (resonance), and which receive more support than criticism (legitimacy) will be more successful in mobilizing voter support.

The effects of legitimacy are potentially ambiguous. One might expect legitimacy to have a positive effect on the public opinion and space for similar subsequent messages, because legitimacy signals agreement with a party's position. However, highly legitimate statements often provoke few reactions from other actors, i.e. they have low resonance, which may in turn reduce an actor's opportunities to mobilize media attention and electoral support. However, for a new anti-immigration party, we assume that gaining legitimacy in the public sphere might be more important than seeking to attract more attention by formulating controversial statements. According to Fennema & Van der Brug (2006), one of the main reasons that the earlier radical-right party of Hans Janmaat failed was that the message of the former had been widely and consequently delegitimized and considered "politically incorrect" by all other actors in the public debate.

## Research Design: Data and Variables

To obtain data on the discursive opportunity variables and the claim making of Fortuyn, we used content analysis. Data were retrieved from articles in two national newspapers, the liberal *NRC Handelsblad* and the conservative *Telegraaf* (using the Lexis Nexis data base) from August 2001 until the day of the murder of Pim Fortuyn, May 6th 2002. The public debate will be limited to the written press. We will use political claims analysis (hereafter: PCA), which finds its origin in the field of social movement research (Koopmans et al. 2005: 23-27). It quantifies both contentious and conventional forms of political action and at the same time grasps the discursive elements of claims (see also Koopmans & Statham 1999).

A claim is defined as "a unit of strategic action in the public sphere that consists of the purposive and public articulation of political demands, calls to action, proposals, criticism, or physical attacks, which actually or potentially affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors" (Koopmans et al. 2005: 24). A typical claim consists of an actor (the subject) undertaking some sort of strategic political action to get another actor, the addressee, to do something regarding a third actor, the object. Claims must be the result of purposive action and political in nature. Examples of coded claims are *"Prime Minister Balkenende rejects the principles of multiculturalism and thinks a civics*

*course should become compulsory,"* or *"Hans Wiegel* [ex-leader of the VVD] *blames Fortuyn for being a populist and states that Fortuyn`s ideas are built on quicksand. He summons Dijkstal* [the current VVD leader] *to finally address Fortuyn."*

The temporal frame of our analysis runs from the third week of August 2001 – when Fortuyn announced his entry into politics – through the first week of May 2002 – just before the murder of Fortuyn. The scores of the 'media variables' are aggregated, resulting in weekly scores. This implies that the unit of analysis (a 'case') is not only a certain amount of claims or certain characteristics of a claim but a combination of time and score. In this analysis, the order of the observation is as important as the observation itself (in contrast with common cross-sectional analyses). The time sequence is a critical element in determining causation and crucial to analyze changes.

*Dependent variables*

*The amount of public claims making by Fortuyn:* the weekly count of the number of claims made by Fortuyn and his party.

*The public opinion on Fortuyn*: For the measurement of the Fortuyn's success in mobilizing the support in public opinion, we use data gathered by the polling agency *Interview/NSS.* Their **Political Barometer** measures levels of support for the various parties for each week during the period under investigation. The political barometer gives a reliable and valid picture of the amount of support among the Dutch population for all political parties. The results of these polls are reported every Friday, and therefore we have chosen Saturdays as the demarcation line between weeks, our units of observation. Support for Fortuyn is measured by the percentage of people that reported the intention to vote for Leefbaar Nederland ("*Liveable Netherlands*", hereafter LN) or the LPF when asked for their party choice if parliamentary elections would be held the next day.

At the end of August 2001, Fortuyn announced his intention to join a political party and enter the political arena, most likely with the LN party. We will consider a (intended) vote for LN as support for Fortuyn from that moment on. In the second week of February 2002, Fortuyn was forced to step down as party leader of LN after an interview in the *Volkskrant* in which he called Islam a "backward" religion. Immediately after Fortuyn's ejection from LN, many commentators thought that Fortuyn's short political career was over. However, Fortuyn founded his own party (the LPF) two days later. We will still consider a (intended) vote for both the LN and LPF as support for Fortuyn during the three weeks after these events, in particular because Fortuyn remained the party leader of Leefbaar Rotterdam (the local branch of LN) for the elections for municipal councils that were held on May 6. Thus, for many voters it may have been unclear during this

period whether or not Fortuyn was still associated with LN. After the municipal elections, only the support for the LPF was included in the dependent variable.[3]


*Independent variables*

Discursive opportunities are measured by (1) the amount of visibility in the media, (2) the amount of resonance in the media, and (3) the amount of legitimacy in the media.

*Visibility* is defined as the extent to which the claims made by Fortuyn are visible in the newspapers. Our measure of visibility distinguishes claims that were reported prominently from those that were reported less prominently. We combine different elements of prominence into a composite indicator: 1) is the claim reported on the front page?; 2) is the claim the first claim mentioned in the article?; 3) is the claim referred to in the headline of the article?; 4) does the claim appear in both newspapers? 5) how many times is the claim repeated in follow-up articles?[4] The variable consists of the summed score on each of the items and has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.67, which is evidence of a fair scale and indicates acceptable reliability.[5] To avoid an overlap between the dependent and independent variable, the total amount of visibility in a week is divided by the number of claims made by Fortuyn. In other words, our visibility measure indicates the average visibility of the claims made by Fortuyn in a given week.

*Resonance* is measured by counting the number of reactions by other actors to Fortuyn. This can also be an indirect reaction, for instance, when someone urges the leader of the Social-Democratic party to take a stronger stance against the viewpoints of Fortuyn. All instances of claim making that are directed to or referring to Fortuyn and his political party are included.

*Legitimacy* is measured by coding the extent to which Fortuyn and his party are supported or criticized. The indicator scores the average tone across all claims referring to Pim Fortuyn. We computed the average position of all reactions on a

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3  We performed our analyses also including a dummy variable for the three weeks after the resignation of Fortuyn as leader of LN and until the municipal elections, in order to check whether our decision on how to deal with this confusing period had affected our results. The results are however very similar and the dummy variable is not signi-ficant.

4  The rate of repetition was logged. It is measured independently of resonance be-cause repetitions that occurred in the context of direct reactions to Fortuyn's state-ments were excluded.

5  We additionally considered the item "is there a photograph illustrating the claim?", which was however removed from the scale because it correlated very poorly with other items and thus seems to refer to a different dimension of prominence.

scale ranging from -1 (negative reaction) to +1 (positive reaction). A zero was coded for claims that express an ambivalent or neutral position.[6]

*The amount of claims on immigration and integration.* One of Fortuyn's unique selling points was his viewpoint on the issue of the multicultural society. It may have been the case that other actors have created further opportunities for claims making by Fortuyn by also making restrictive claims about immigration and integration. Alternatively, such claims may also have undermined Fortuyn's uniqueness in this regard and thereby have reduced his opportunities for further claims. For that reason, the number of negative claims on immigration or integration during a week will also be taken into account. To avoid confounding of independent and dependent variables, claims made by Fortuyn on this issue were excluded from this variable.

*The impact of 9/11.* We use a dummy variable to capture the effect of a potentially influential event that took place during the election campaign: the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11 (week no. 4 in our data). We explored both the temporary and the permanent effect of this event. The dummy variable applicable for an event with a temporal effect is set equal to 1 in that particular week. Modeling a permanent effect entails that the time period is divided into two parts: before (score 0) and after the event (score 1).

*Unemployment and immigration.* Data with regard to unemployment and immigration were retrieved from the Dutch Bureau of Statistics (CBS 2006; 2008).[7] Because these are monthly figures, an intrapolation procedure was carried out to create weekly rates.

## Analysis and Results

*Determinants of public opinion support for Fortuyn*

We will start with an analysis with support for Fortuyn in public opinion polls as the dependent variable. To estimate the effects of the media variables, immigration, unemployment and the attacks of September 11 on the public opinion during the election campaign, we use Box-Jenkins transfer modelling (see e.g. McCleary & Hay, 1980). A Box-Jenkins analysis can only proceed if all variables have stationary means and variances. The first step in order to derive an ARIMA-

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6  A zero for the amount of legitimacy was also coded in those rare cases where there were no statements referring to Fortuyn or his party during a given week.

7  Instead of monthly immigration figures, we also considered the monthly influx of asylum seekers. However, asylum seeker numbers show a similar declining trend as the general immigration figures and using this variable instead of total immigration does not influence the results.

model is to check whether variables in the model have stationary means and variances. An inspection of the opinion poll series shows that the variance and mean of the time series increase as the level of the series increases, so the series has to be made stationary. This is also what a graph of the polls indicates (see Figure 2). The time series is made stationary by log-transformation and differencing. The explanatory variables are likewise inspected, and logged and differenced in case of non-stationarity.[8] The most common unit-root test is the Augmented Dickey-Fuller test, which shows that none of the variables contains a unit root (which implies that all series are now stationary).

The second step is an inspection of the autocorrelation and partial auto-correlation functions. These functions show a single spiking (and almost significant) ACF at lag 1 and decaying PACF's, which indicates a moving average component with lag 1. A univariate ARIMA-model shows a significant coefficient for a moving average parameter at lag 1. The residuals are "white noise," which means that there is no remaining autocorrelation in the residuals. Similar "noise models" were developed for all independent variables in the analysis except for the dummy intervention variable.[9]

*Figure 2:* *Percentage of voters intending to vote for Pim Fortuyn per week (August 2001 – May 2002)*
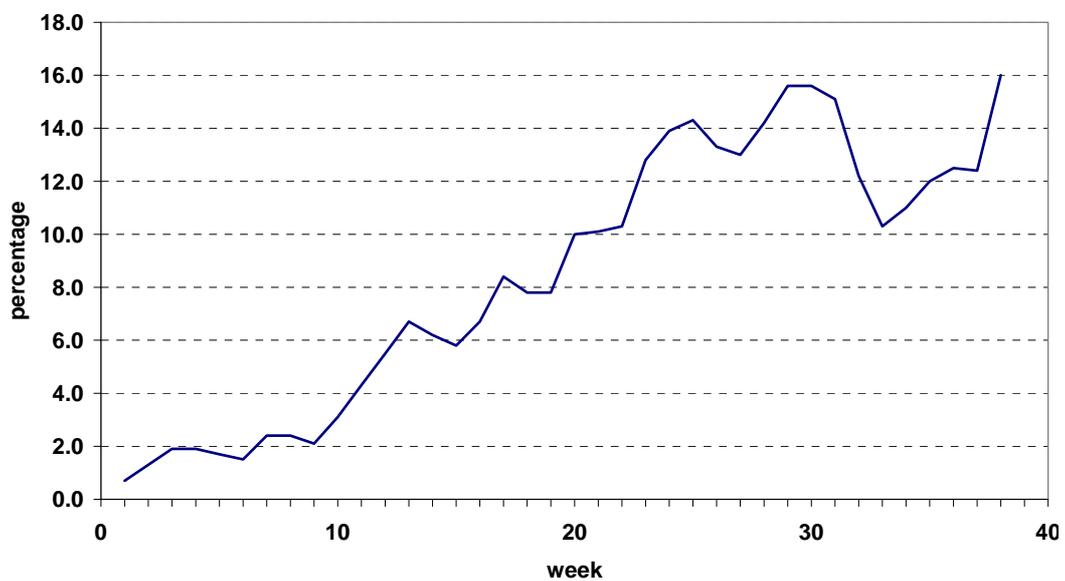


Note: Week 1 starts 18 August, 2001
Source: Interview/NSS

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8  In order to arrive at stationarity in both level and variance the following variables were transformed: visibility; unemployment (differenced); immigration and resonance (logged and differenced) and amount of negative claims on immigration/integration (logged).

9  See McCleary & Hay (1980: 243) for a good discussion why the relationship can only be interpreted when the cause variable is a white noise process.

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*Table 2:        Determinants of public opinion support for Pim Fortuyn, 2001-2002*

| | Model 1 coefficient | t-value | Model 2 coefficient | t-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moving average (t-1) | -0.47*** | -3.21 | -0.34* | -1.98 |
| 9/11(t-1) | 0.07 | 0.38 | -0.04 | -0.23 |
| unemployment (t-1) | 1.55 | 0.74 | 0.29 | 0.15 |
| immigration (t-1) | -0.52 | -0.45 | -0.97 | -1.00 |
| Visibility (t-1) | | | 0.06*** | 2.89 |
| Resonance (t-2) | | | 0.08** | 2.39 |
| Legitimacy (t-2) | | | 0.11** | 2.06 |
| Negative claims immigration (t-1) | | | 0.03 | 1.19 |
| RMS | .040 | | .025 | |
| AIC | -10.98 | | -24.69 | |
| N (weeks) | 38 | | 38 | |

* p<0.10  ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01

Table 2 shows the results of the first model with the predicted impact of the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, the unemployment rate, and immigration. In this model it is assumed that 9/11 has a long-term (permanent) impact with a delay of one week and therefore the intervention is lagged one period. The interpretation of the transfer function depends on the fact that the variables are differenced. A shock has the effect of increasing the *change* in the dependent variable by a certain amount of units (Enders 2004: 257). However, the table shows that the intervention does not have a significant effect. An alternative model (not shown in the table) in which it is assumed that 9/11 only had a temporary effect leads to the same conclusion. We also have to conclude that unemployment and immigration have not affected the opinion polls during the election campaign. For immigration, this is hardly surprising since, as we indicated earlier, the rise of Pim Fortuyn occurred during a period when immigration figures had already been on the decline for about two years. Unemployment did increase slightly during the period of Fortuyn's rise, but on a very low level, from 3.5 per cent in August 2001 to 3.9 per cent in May 2002.

In the second model in Table 2, the other explanatory variables are added. As expected, the public discourse has a significant influence on the polls. Visibility, resonance, as well as legitimacy have significant positive effects and lead to in-creases in public opinion support for Fortuyn. The impact of the variables on the polls is lagged, and strongest at the first lag (for visibility) and the second lag (for resonance and legitimacy). This implies that efforts of other political actors to de-legitimize Fortuyn by making negative claims about him or his party in the public sphere had an ambiguous impact. On the one hand, a lack of legitimacy under-mined public opinion support for Fortuyn, as expressed in the weekly polls. But

on the other hand, because negative reactions added to the total number of reactions to Fortuyn (resonance), such criticisms were partly also counterproductive.

A change in the amount of negative claims on immigration or integration does not turn out to be significant, although the sign is in the expected direction This is consistent with several other studies that take the amount of media coverage into account (e.g. Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart 2007; Walgrave & De Swert 2004), which show a positive influence of issue attention on anti-immigration party success. However, the study of Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart (2007) did not control for the visibility, resonance, and legitimacy of Fortuyn's claims. What our results suggest is that net of these effects of discursive opportunities, media attention for the issue of immigration was not a significant cause of Fortuyn's success in the opinion polls.

Not surprisingly, adding these variables increases the explanatory power of the model as indicated by the mean square root of the squared residuals summed over all time periods (RMS) - the standard goodness of fit measure in time-series analysis (Clarke et al. 1990). The RMS decreases from 0.040 to 0.025. The smaller the RMS, the smaller the error and the better the fit of the model. Also, a lower AIC (Akaike Information Criterion) points to a better fit of the model.[10]

## *Determinants of Fortuyn's claim-making success*

As our second dependent variable we now turn to the investigation of the rate of claim making by Fortuyn, i.e. the amount of successful attempts by Fortuyn to publicly air his position and viewpoints. Figure 3 shows the amount of claims made by Fortuyn in our two media sources for each week. This variable is an event count, which has the characteristic that its values are discrete and non-negative. King (1989) explains why in that case an ordinary least squares regression (OLS) is inappropriate (King also presents a good discussion and application of event count data).

In addition, we are confronted with overdispersion in the dependent variable, which means that we are more likely to see both a large number of lower counts and a number of very high counts, as is shown in Figure 4. Thirty per cent of the weeks have a zero score, which means that in these weeks Fortuyn was not able to insert any new claims in the public discourse. However, in overdispersed data there is positive contagion across events, and one count (observation) increases

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10 The Ljung-Box Q statistic, which tests the significance of autocorrelation at each lag (see e.g. Enders 2004) indicates the absence of autocorrelation in the residuals for all models. Its significance value is less than or equal to 0.05 for 20 lags.

*Figure 3:*      *Weekly count of the number of claims by Pim Fortuyn*
                      *(August 2001 – May 2002)*
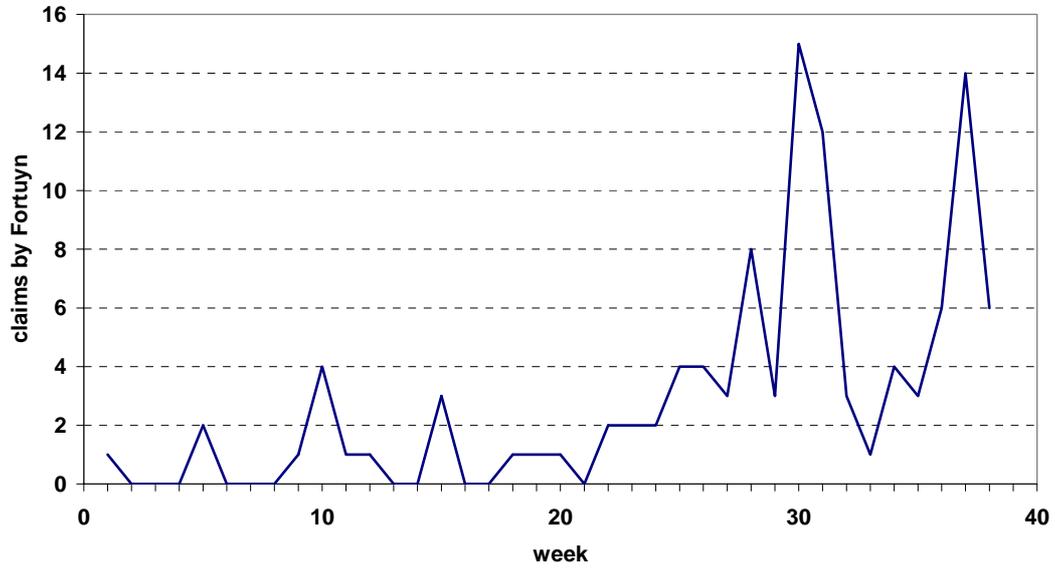


*Note:* Week 1 starts 18 August, 2001

*Figure 4:*      *Density distribution of the weekly number of claims made*
                      *by Pim Fortuyn*
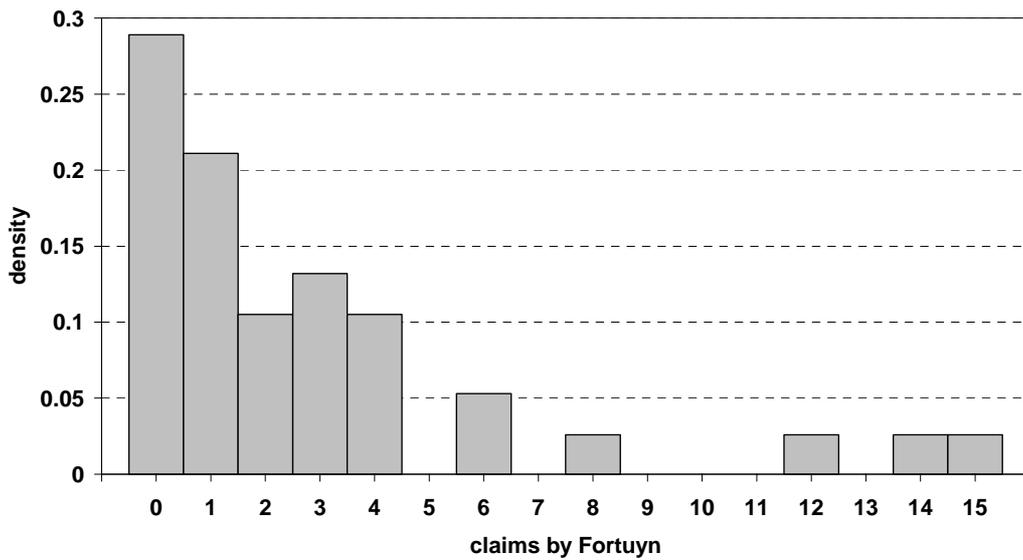
the likelihood of observing additional events in the same period.[11] This positive contagion implies that we have more variability than for an independent Poisson process, and therefore we will use a negative binomial distribution for the dependent variable in our model instead (Long & Freese 2006). To model the time-series character of these event counts we include a lagged dependent variable event count as a regressor in the model.

Table 3 shows the results of a negative binomial regression model with the number of claims by Fortuyn as the dependent variable. In the first model, only 9/11 (with a long duration effect), unemployment, immigration and a first-order autoregression of the dependent variable are included. We find both an autoregressive effect and a strong relationship between a change in the unemployment rate and the amount of claims by Fortuyn in the subsequent week.

*Table 3:*     *Determinants of the rate of publicized claim making by Pim Fortuyn, 2001-2002*

|  | Model 1 coefficient | z-value | Model 2 coefficient | z-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Claims Fortuyn (t-1) | 0.07** | 2.21 | 0.05 | 1.29 |
| 9/11(t-1) | 1.33 | 1.19 | 0.62 | 0.55 |
| Unemployment (t-1) | 4.25** | 2.20 | 1.74 | 0.76 |
| Immigration (t-1) | 0.00 | -0.36 | 0.00 | 0.78 |
| Visibility (t-1) |  |  | 0.07 | 0.46 |
| Resonance (t-1) |  |  | 0.00 | -0.11 |
| Legitimacy (t-1) |  |  | 0.03** | 2.25 |
| Negative claims immigration (t-1) |  |  | 0.07** | 2.46 |
| Opinion polls (t-1) |  |  | 0.18** | 2.57 |
| Constant | -15.12* | -1.75 | -9.66 | -1.10 |
| Log pseudolikelihood | -72.18 |  | -65.81 |  |
| Wald Chi-Square | 28.37*** |  | 65.56*** |  |
| N (weeks) | 38 |  | 38 |  |

* p<0.10  ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01

The second step is to investigate the effects of the discursive opportunity variables. In this second model, the amount of negative claims by other actors on immigration and integration, as well as support for Fortuyn in opinion polls are also included. The model fit statistics (Wald Chi square and log pseudo-likeli-

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11 A good illustration of overdispersion because of positive contagion is counting antelopes. Since antelopes are herd animals, when you see one, you will probably observe some more. So counts of antelopes will probably violate the assumption that one event has no effect on the likelihood of observing additional events in the same period.

hood) point to a better model. After adding these variables, both the autoregressive effect and the impact of unemployment are no longer significant.

It appears from our second model that a there is no relationship between the degree of visibility of the claims of Fortuyn and the number of public claims by Fortuyn one week later. Resonance does not show an effect either. Legitimacy, however, has a positive impact, as in the earlier analysis with opinion polls as the dependent variable. The more support for Fortuyn in the public debate, the more Fortuyn is able to express his position and viewpoints through the print media in the subsequent week. The results also show a positive influence of the number of negative immigration claims. This means that other actors have created further opportunities for claims making by Fortuyn by also making restrictive claims about immigration and integration. The analysis supports the expectation that restrictive claims on the immigration issue served as an additional opportunity for the political newcomer. The opinion polls also have a strong positive effect. The general conclusion is that approval (as indicated by opinion poll support from the general public and supportive statements by other actors in the media) enables a new political party to further make its standpoints known and heard in the public sphere.


## Summary and Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we set out to examine the spectacular rise in the Netherlands of the new populist right party headed by the charismatic Pim Fortuyn in 2002. Pim Fortuyn´s party succeeded in attracting by far the most media attention of all parties and out of the blue won 17 per cent of the votes. Dissatisfaction with multicultural policies offered a fertile ground for a populist anti-immigration party. Fortuyn's viewpoints on the issues of immigration and integration tapped into the fears of ordinary Dutch people and matched their lives experiences of minority-related crime and segregation in cities and schools. But these socio-economic conditions and grievances cannot explain the explosive political career of Fortuyn. The immigration figures had been relatively stable during the 1990s and were declining since 2000, and the country's economy was healthy. Research shows that long before the emergence of Fortuyn, there was an electoral *potential* for an anti-immigration party.

The political opportunity structure perspective adds to our understanding of this potential for a radical-right party. One of the most relevant facilitating factors for the emergence of the radical right is the political space made available to it by the policy positions of mainstream parties. However, empirical evidence suggests that such an electoral *niche* had already been present much longer. During the election campaign of 1998 the Dutch political elite was still able to stick to its commitment to multiculturalism by mobilizing "political correctness" to delegitimize the then active anti-immigration party. Like the grievance and ethnic

threat arguments, the political opportunity perspective is useful to identify the existence of an electoral potential, but it cannot explain why this potential lay fallow for so long and was then so suddenly and spectacularly seized upon by Pim Fortuyn.

We have advanced the argument that electoral potentials and political opportunities have to be made visible in the public discourse in order to become behaviourally relevant. We use the notion of "discursive opportunities" to capture the publicly visible opportunities and constraints for the claim-making behaviour of political parties. We have shown that indeed media attention for Pim Fortuyn and the public reactions to his party played a decisive role to explain the remarkable degree to which he was able to mobilize support and express his claims in the public sphere. Applying this perspective to the explanation of both support for Fortuyn in opinion polls and his claim-making success in the media, we showed that all three types of discursive opportunities that we distinguished – visibility, resonance and legitimacy – were relevant for understanding the rise of Pim Fortuyn and his party.

Public visibility, resonance, and legitimacy in the media significantly affected the public opinion support for Fortuyn. Support by other actors in the public sphere was beneficial and criticism harmful for his position in the weekly polls. However, this is not to say that ventilating critical reactions in order to undermine the legitimacy of political opponents is always the best strategy in the competition for votes. Negative reactions to Fortuyn also served as an important indirect channel that, contrary to the intention of those who criticized Fortuyn, partly boosted popular support for him, by creating more resonance and visibility for his claims.

With regard to Fortuyn's own claim-making success, we found that an average positive tone among all claims referring to Fortuyn (a higher degree of legitimacy) significantly increased the rate at which Fortuyn was able to publicly air his positions and viewpoints. Reesonance and visibility did not have a direct impact on Fortuyn's claim making, although they were relevant in an indirect sense by increasing his support in opinion polls. One of Fortuyn's unique selling points – his position on the issue of the multicultural society – was not undermined when other actors also made restrictive statements about immigration and integration. On the contrary, they created further opportunities for claims making by Fortuyn. The opinion polls also had strong positive effect: the more support for Fortuyn in the public opinion, the more space was given to Fortuyn to express his positions and viewpoints in the media.

Combining the results for the two dependent variables, we can identify a dynamic feedback process in which the reactions by the media and by other politicians to Fortuyn (visibility, resonance, and legitimacy) raised Fortuyn's popularity among the electorate. In turn, Fortuyn`s support in opinion polls, combined with direct support that he drew from other political actors and failed attempts by other politicians to steal his thunder by also making anti-immigrant claims, raised the

rate of claims by Fortuyn that made it into the media. When other political actors again reacted to Fortuyn's increased public profile, and the media presented his claims more prominently, the spiral of discursive escalation was given a further swing and Fortuyn's star rose yet further in the opinion polls. This process of multiple feedback explains why political relations that had been relatively stable, and an election campaign that was expected by most observers to become very dull suddenly spiralled out of equilibrium and gave rise to the greatest landslide in Dutch electoral history.[12] We believe that the relevance of these findings and the theoretical perspective of discursive opportunities that accounts for them extend beyond the case of Pim Fortuyn and can add to a more general understanding of the dynamics of sudden political transformations, shifts, breakthroughs, and breakdowns.

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12 Our results thus provide support for the "punctuated equilibrium" view on policy shifts, which Baumgartner & Jones (1993) borrowed from evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould (e.g., Gould 1989).

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