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ORIGINAL PAPER

Dead Man Walking: The Affective Roots of Issue Proximity Between Voters and Parties

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Abstract Do voters like the party they already agree with or do they agree with the party they already like? Previous studies have suggested a link from preferences to perceptions. However, such a causal link has not been convincingly demonstrated. Most issue voting studies have adopted the basic premise of spatial models of voting—that voters compare parties' positions with their own ideal points and apply a rule to choose among these parties. Drawing on a natural experiment, this study shows that perceptual agreement between parties and voters is endogenous to voters' party affect. We use the murder of a Dutch politician amidst the data collection period of the 2002 Dutch election study. The death increases respondents' feelings for his party without providing information about its issue stances. This upward shift in feelings translates into a significant increase in the perceived level of proximity with the party. The design also allows us to explore the mechanism bringing parties and voters closer. Rather than taking up the party's stances, voters move a party's positions closer to their own views when their feelings for that party increase. The findings challenge established assumptions about the theoretical underpinnings of spatial models of voting. They support classic notions of voter

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projection and lend credence to recent theories of attitudinal change, which are based on coarse thinking and uninformative updating.

Keywords Projection · Persuasion · Issue proximity · Perception bias · Party placement · Pim fortuyn · Netherlands

Introduction

In his 2011 Presidential address to the American Political Science Association, Henry Brady suggested that spatial diagrams of politics 'should be iconic for political science in much the same way as supply-and-demand curves in economics' (2011, p. 312). Since Black's path-breaking work on committee voting (1958) and Downs's spatial representation of party competition (1957), spatial models have dominated the issue voting literature (Carmines and Stimson 1980; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Enelow et al. 1986; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Lachat 2008; Shepsle and Boncheck 1997) and have constituted a key analytical tool in research on political representation (Dalton 1985; Powell 2000). These models posit that citizens have beliefs about where actors stand on various issue domains and opt for the actor closest to their ideal point. Any change in citizens' perceptions of where actors stand on issues is attributed to rational updating: perceived proximity affects party or candidate preferences, and not vice versa.

The unidirectional nature of this relationship has been challenged by a significant strand of the political behavior literature. Drawing on work in the field of social psychology, these studies have suggested that the observed proximity of political actors and citizens is in part the result of ex post rationalizations of citizens' preferences for these actors, formed on grounds other than the positions espoused by these actors (Brody and Page 1972; Judd et al. 1983; Krosnick 1990; Lenz 2012; Markus and Converse 1979; Page and Jones 1979; for an early review of this literature see Ottati and Wyer 1993). This phenomenon can manifest itself through two non-mutually exclusive conditions. First, citizens may locate issue positions of an actor they support closer to their own views on the issue, a process known as 'projection' (Sherif and Hovland 1961). Second, they may adopt the position of an actor they support, which is referred to as 'persuasion' (Granberg 1983, 1985).

Early attempts to address the presence of projection and persuasion have been based on surveys, in which respondents are asked to locate themselves and parties on various issue scales and to also reveal their party preferences (Markus and Converse 1979; Merrill and Grofman 1999; Merrill et al. 2001; Johnston et al. 2003; Lewis and King 1999; Macdonald et al. 2007). Although some of these studies have pointed to the presence of projection, detecting the flow of causality with only this information at hand is arguably impossible. Recent experimental studies have shed some light on this question, but the findings have not definitively attributed the causes of bias. For example, various studies have used survey experiments, providing either complete (Claassen 2009; Tomz and Van Houweling 2008) or incomplete (Tomz and Van Houweling 2009) information about parties' positions on issue scales, as a way to assess the relative performance of competing spatial

models of voting. Other studies also refer to party stances but focus on the way information (or its lack thereof) interplays with prior partisanship in generating attitude or opinion change about issues and parties' stances (Gaines et al. 2007; Lenz 2009; Tomz and Van Houweling 2014). The underlying question in these studies is how information about parties' policy stances affects party evaluations. The reverse causal link, however, remains understudied: how does change in party affect influence voters' perceived proximity to the party?

To address this question we would ideally require the following setting: an exogenous intervention causes considerable unidirectional change in voters' affective party sentiments without providing any information about the party's position on relevant issues, and without providing voters reason to reposition on any relevant issue. This shock should be as good as randomly assigned to a subgroup of a representative sample of the electorate. Moreover, information about voters' opinions and perceptions about parties' positions on various issues should be available. This setting should refer to real parties, to real elections, and should be based on real information flows.

The 2002 Dutch general election campaign provides a unique scenario similar to the ideal design described. The murder of anti-immigration party leader Pim Fortuyn caused a sudden bump in voters' evaluation of his party, the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), without providing additional information about its issue stances. The event is unlikely to lead voters to revise their views on any key policy issues, as Fortuyn's killer was a mentally ill, native Dutch person who did not make any statement about the murder until months after the election.[1] The assassination happened while fieldwork for the 2002 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (abbreviated 'DPES 2002') was underway. Thus, some respondents were interviewed before Fortuyn's assassination, and others after, in a pseudo-random way.[2]

We use this case to see if a shift in voters' affective evaluations of the LPF, caused by the murder, affected their perceptions of their distance to the party in terms of issue positions.[3] We assess to what extent this change in proximity is due to projection as opposed to persuasion effects. We evaluate how the effects varied across issues more versus less strongly associated with the LPF. Rational updating, the only case in which the core premise of spatial models of electoral competition is left unaffected, would manifest itself as no impact of the exogenous shock. However, the results of our analyses indicate that voters bring the party closer to their own positions, and that they do so mainly for those issues on which the party's views are unknown. This finding is hardly compatible with the idea of rational

[1] The reasons for the assassination remained unclear in the 9 days that remained until the election. The seven main national newspapers speculated in 20 articles about the suspect's possible motives for killing Fortuyn (search string in the LexisNexis database: "*motief OR motieven AND Volkert*" from 7 until 15 May 2002). No clear reason was given in any of the articles. In fact, in 17 out of 20 articles it was explicitly stated that his motive was unknown and that it could have been anything, including that he was Fortuyn's former student—or his former lover.

[2] However, given the design of the survey, some confounding of treatment assignment remained. As described below, we ensure covariate balance by using genetic matching on a set of pretreatment covariates.

[3] By affective party evaluations, we do not mean long-standing party identification, which would be anyway impossible given that the LPF was only established three months before the assassination.

updating. By contrast, it suggests that voters heavily engage in what is known as projection.[4]

Our findings extend the previous literature in at least two ways. First, we show that the extent to which voters believe that a party holds an issue position they like is influenced by how much they like that party. Failing to account for this link likely makes that issue appear more predictive of voting for that party than it actually is. Second, the policy issues we examine vary in the degree to which they are emphasized by the party under investigation. This variation allows us to disentangle the two phenomena, exploring whether this rationalization bias is driven more by projection than persuasion.

Theoretical Basis and Previous Work

A key pillar of rational choice theories of voting, proximity theory rests on the idea that individuals hold informed opinions about political issues, form perceptions about parties' stances on these issues and maximize their utility by choosing their closest alternative. Accordingly, change in party preference is caused by new information that prompts voters to change their preferred issue policies, their perceptions of parties' stances, or both.

Psychologists understand perceived agreement between voters and parties quite differently. The departure point of these studies is Heider's (1958) balance theory, which postulates that positive sentiments towards an object lead to positive assessments of features linked to this object. In the context of spatial voting, the theory predicts that, in trying to achieve balance between their attitudes towards a party and their judgements about its issue stances, individuals will agree more with a party they support (Blais et al. 2001; Jessee 2009; Papageorgiou 2010). To the extent that preferences dominate over perceptions, perceptions of the party's issue positions will be distorted as a result of the voter's affect towards the party (Granberg and Brent 1983; Granberg et al. 1988). This is generally known as *projection*. Projection effects' mirror image are *persuasion* effects, whereby voters form or update their issue perceptions in concordance to their preferred party's issue stances (Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Price 1989).[5]

Previous studies have focused on the interplay between party evaluations and issue proximity. On the one hand, voters might save resources by following party cues (Bartels 2002). Thus, instead of forming their own preferences over issues,

[4] It could be that the event sheds light on the party's position on exactly these issues. We discuss and rule out this possibility in a separate section dedicated to the examination of competing explanations.

[5] Projection refers to the process whereby individuals project parties' views onto their own positions. This phenomenon is also known as assimilation, but we stick here to the more frequently used term projection. Notice that projection here means something completely different from the more common usage of the term in Freudian psychology. Furthermore, both projection and persuasion have their negative counterparts. With regard to projection, voters are deemed to disagree more with parties or candidates they dislike (Newcomb 1968; Kinder 1978), a phenomenon known as 'contrast.' 'Negative persuasion effects' occur when individuals try to avoid the position advocated by a party they dislike (van der Brug 2001). Neither of them is considered here, since our focus is on the effect of an *upward* shift in party preferences. We do look at these phenomena, however in the online appendix when we examine the case of a negative shift in presidential affective evaluations.

they can take the shortcut of just adopting the issue positions held by their preferred party (Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Price 1989). This process—persuasion—is particularly pronounced when voters feel uncertain about their own policy preferences (Lee 2007). From a dynamic perspective, change in party stances is likely to also cause change in individuals' issue orientations (Lenz 2012). Voters learn parties' new stances and update their own views accordingly (Lenz 2009).

On the other hand, individuals might not have a clear view of parties' stances on a given issue. In these situations, projection appears to dominate, with voters projecting their own views onto parties (Grand and Tiemann 2013; Merrill and Grofman 1999; Tomz and Van Houweling 2009). From a dynamic perspective, new information that might cause a voter to see the party's position as incongruent is either disregarded or interpreted through a partisan lens (van der Brug 2001; Carsey and Layman 2006). This implies very high barriers to opinion change (Gaines et al. 2007). Even when voters do come to recognize that their preferred party holds uncongenial issue positions, they may stick to their party preference by judging the rival party to be an even worse alternative than before (Groenendyk 2012). Alternatively, any change in voters' issue orientations might be accompanied by change in their perceptions of parties' positions. Two Dutch studies that used the Chernobyl accident as a natural experiment provide evidence for this pattern. Both Visser (1994) and van der Brug (2001) used the 1986 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study, which consisted of two waves, one before and one right after the accident. Respondents of both waves became more critical of nuclear energy and, importantly, more likely to also place their preferred party towards the same extreme of the scale.[6]

Although these studies provide some support for the presence of projection effects, they all build on the idea that change in proximity between voters and parties arises when voters obtain new information, information that either shifts their beliefs about where parties stand or shifts their own issue preferences. This logic leaves out the most pertinent implication of rationalization bias, namely that perceptions are linked to preferences in an affective way that does not depend on informative cues. Any "shock" that shifts people's affective evaluations of the party is expected to generate instances of either projection or persuasion. This possibility represents the trademark of rationalization bias, but such instances have been largely ignored in this literature.[7]

[6] Although the second wave takes place a month after the accident, the saliency of the event generates incentives for parties to openly refine their positions on this issue. Consequently, the design cannot preclude that instead of projection, the mechanism driving increase in proximity is simply rational updating as both voters and parties become more sceptical about nuclear energy.

[7] Even if its main focus is quite different, there is one study that looks at the impact of affective orientations on perceived proximity. Prior to the February 2008 Connecticut presidential primary Gerber et al. (2010) sent a mailing to a random sample of unaffiliated registered voters who, in a pretreatment survey, leaned toward a political party. The mailing informed the subjects that only voters registered with a party were able to participate in the upcoming presidential primary. Subjects were surveyed again in June 2008. The authors find that in the follow-up those forced to choose a party ended up evaluating the party and its leader more positively than those not contacted. However, the study finds no partisanship effects on change in policy orientations. "Forced" partisans did not become more likely to align to party's policy positions. As the authors argue, one possible reason for this null finding is the salient nature of the issues (keeping troops in Iraq and taxing the rich) and the short time frame of the experiment.

Imagine, for example, that between t_0 and t_1 a party in government gets credit for the unanticipated elimination of a terrorist attack. If public opinion becomes more positive towards the party as a result of this achievement, we can examine whether this shift in affect also causes changes in the level of subjective agreement between voters and the party on an unrelated issue, say, redistribution: it may be that voters move their redistribution preferences closer to the party's position (persuasion effects) or that they perceive the party to be nearer to their own redistribution issue position (projection effects). Insofar as the party's achievement does not provide any signal about a change in the party's policy with respect to this issue, rational placement would predict that the upward shift in party affect is not followed by any change in perceived proximity on the redistribution issue scale. In this case, we can readily distinguish between observable implications of rational updating and those of projection versus persuasion.

In this paper, we build on this exact idea. The design of our study is based on an exogenous shock, the killing of Pim Fortuyn, that provides a setting in which rational updating and projection or persuasion bias lead to different predictions. The rational updating framework predicts no change in voter opinion on any issue and no change in their perceptions of the LPF's stand on any issue. If, on the other hand, projection or persuasion is operating, we should observe an increase in subjective agreement between voters and the party as a result of Fortuyn's assassination. If projection is dominant, voters' own positions will be stable but their views of the LPF's position will be assimilated to those positions. If persuasion is dominant, we should find voters adjusting their own issue positions to be closer to those thought to be held by the LPF. We test these divergent expectations by distinguishing between survey respondents who were aware of Fortuyn's death and voters who were not aware of this event, comparing their level of perceived proximity with the party. The next section provides more information about the design and how it helps us examine the presence of projection and persuasion effects.

Research Design

We use data from the three-wave Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES) 2002. Fortuyn was murdered on May 6, 9 days before the election day and amidst the fieldwork of the first wave, which took place during the 31 days immediately before election day. Of all pre-election-wave respondents ($N = 1904$), 78 % were interviewed before the assassination, and 22 % after. Our analysis mainly focuses on comparisons between these two groups. We compare the two groups on four policy issues available in wave one of the DPES 2002. These are: asylum seekers—scaled from "admit more asylum seekers" (1) to "send back as many asylum seekers as possible" (7); crime—scaled from "the government acts too tough on crime" (1) to "the government should act tougher on crime" (7); income redistribution—scaled from "income differences should be increased" (1) to "income differences should be decreased" (7); and euthanasia—scaled from "forbid euthanasia" (1) to "allow euthanasia" (7). For each issue, a perceived proximity scale has been created by using the absolute distance between a respondent's own

position and her placement of the LPF on that issue.[8] We first examine whether respondents interviewed *after* Fortuyn's assassination placed themselves and the LPF closer to each other than those interviewed *before*, which would be an indication that projection and/or persuasion was taking place. In a next step, we decompose our measure of perceived proximity, examining the voter and party issue measures separately to assess whether there is evidence for projection, persuasion, or both.

The DPES 2002 study's design included a random sample of the population, drawn at the beginning of the study. However, as is typical with nation-wide face-to-face election studies, the study did not employ a rolling-cross sectional design. Thus, the moment each interview was conducted was not randomly assigned. As a result, particular parts of the sample (e.g., those living in rural areas which are relatively difficult to reach) were interviewed later in the polling period. This led to a slight overrepresentation of these groups among respondents interviewed after the murder. While the pseudo-random nature of the design is strong, we conduct matching[9] in order to take such differences into account, creating exchangeable groups, based on observable characteristics, on the basis of which we assess the effect of the assassination on voter's perceptions.[10]

Figure 1 shows the balance achieved after matching. The minimum *t* test p-value measuring the mean difference between the treatment and control groups is $p = 0.28$ (having voted for the liberal party VVD in 1998). The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test confirms that there is also balance in the distributions of the two groups with respect to the multi-valued covariates shown in Fig. 1. Moreover, an omnibus test—presented in the online appendix—suggests that the overall balance between the two groups approaches the standards of a truly randomized experiment.

[8] Let V_{ij} denote the position of individual *i*, P_{ijp} the position of party *p* in a given issue *j* as perceived by individual *i* and U_{ijp} $|P_{ijp}$ the utility function of *i* with respect to *p* conditional on P_{ipj}. The absolute proximity is based on the following utility function: U_{ijp} $|P_{ij} = -|V_{ij} - P_{ijp}|$. When a quadratic proximity measure is used, the results are substantively identical (shown in the online appendix).

[9] An alternative approach is instrumental variable (IV) estimation, whereby the interview date serves as an instrument of the LPF feeling thermometer score. While the interview date is pseudo-random, balance statistics indicate that there is confounding of the instrument. In the presence of confounding, it is advantageous to conduct matching even as a precursor to IV estimation (Keele and Morgan 2013). Within the matched dataset, we opted for a more straightforward comparison between those interviewed before and those interviewed after the murder. In so doing, the analysis estimates intent-to-treat effects. We also conducted IV estimation on the matched data set, and results are substantively identical (shown in the online appendix).

[10] As there are fewer 'treated' than 'untreated' respondents in our data, we match each person interviewed after the murder to a person interviewed before the assassination, conditional on observable characteristics *X*. We use genetic matching: a nearest neighbor matching method with balance optimization (Diamond and Sekhon 2013; Sekhon and Mebane 1998; Sekhon 2011, see also the online appendix).

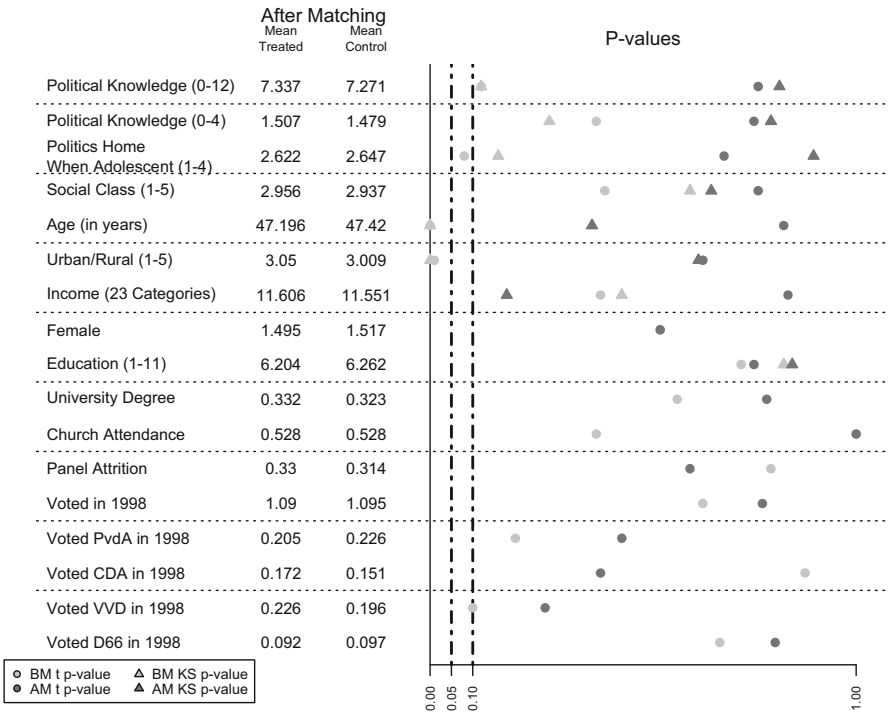

Fig. 1 Balance statistics. *Note* The *gray dots* present the p-values from the difference-of-means test between treated and control group from the unmatched dataset (BM). The *black dots* represent the p-values from the matched dataset (AM). *Circles* represent a *t* test p-value and triangles represent a Kolmogorov–Smirnov (KS) test p-value. The values of the first political knowledge variable (which ranges from 0 to 12) denotes the number of correct answers to various questions about Dutch politics. The second political knowledge variable classifies respondents into five categories, from low (0) to high (4) levels of political knowledge. "Politics discussed at home when adolescent" varies from "not at all" (1) to "often" (4). Social class is coded as follows: working class (1); upper working class (2); middle class (3); upper middle class (4); and upper class (5). The urban–rural variable ranges from very urban (1) to rural areas (5). Income is coded in 23 categories, from lower to higher levels of income. Men are coded '2' and women '1.' The 1–11 scale of education ranges from lower to higher levels of educational attainment. University degree is '1' if respondents have a degree from a higher education institution and zero otherwise. Church attendance is coded '1' if respondents never go to church and zero otherwise. Panel attrition is coded '1' if the respondent participated in all three waves of the study and zero otherwise. The last five variables are binary indicators classifying respondents according to their turnout (1: voted; 2: did not vote) and vote choice (0–1: voted for labelled party) at the previous national parliamentary elections, in 1998

The Exogenous Shock: Fortuyn's Death and Feelings for his Party

A precondition for examination of the role of party affect in party and voter placement is change in voters' party evaluations. In our case, it is needed that evaluations of the LPF considerably changed right after the assassination. One could use various indicators of party affect but we opt for a feeling thermometer scale, which constitutes a standard measure of warmth with political figures (Winter and Berinsky 1999).

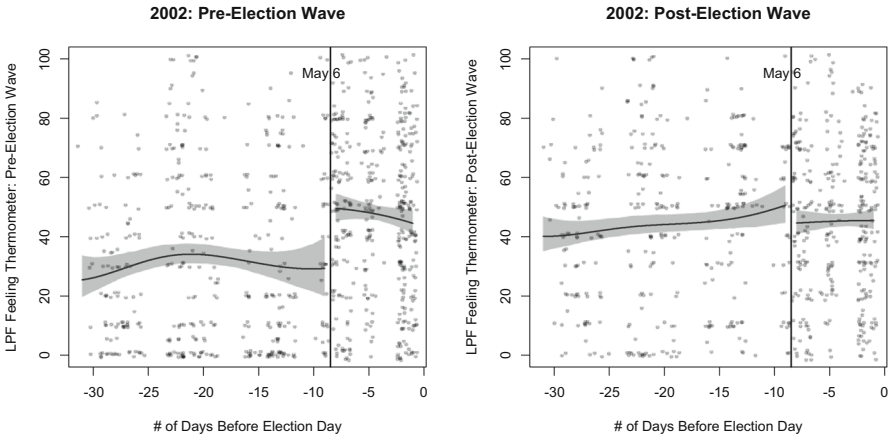

Fig. 2 Feelings for the LPF before and after the 2002 election. *Note* The graphs display feeling thermometer scores for the LPF before the election (*left panel*) and after the election (*right panel*), both according to the date of the *pre-election* interview. The *vertical solid lines* distinguish between respondents who were interviewed before the murder and those interviewed after in the first wave of the study. A *local regression line* has been fitted into the scatterplot, and 95 % bootstrapped pointwise confidence intervals are denoted by the *gray areas*

Figure 2 shows thermometer scores for the LPF among respondents interviewed before (left panel) and after (right panel) the election. Respondents are sorted according to the date they were interviewed in the *pre-election* wave. A local regression line has been fitted into the scatterplot (solid line), and 95 % confidence bands are denoted by the shaded area.

As shown in the left panel of Fig. 2, the murder generated a marked upward shift in respondents' evaluations of the LPF. Despite some fluctuation, this difference persisted until the election. The feeling thermometer score for the LPF among those interviewed before the murder is 32.5, on average, whereas the equivalent figure for those interviewed after that date is 47.6. This means that we find a 15.1 gap, which is highly statistically significant (std. error 2.0).

In the right panel of Fig. 2 we show the same respondents' LPF feeling thermometer scores in the postelection wave, still sorted by the date of their *pre-election* interview. In the postelection wave of the panel every respondent has received "treatment", i.e., knowledge of the assassination. This comparison serves as a test of the validity of the design.[11] We would expect that, once everyone has knowledge of the assassination, the two groups would be indiscernible in their attitudes towards the LPF. This is what we find, with an average difference of only 1.7 points (s.e. of 2.0). The similarity of opinions in the postelection wave provides strong evidence that the difference in opinions observed in the pre-election wave was not due to unobservable differences between the treatment and control groups.

[11] The test serves as a "reverse" placebo test. In placebo tests, none of the comparison groups has taken the treatment; here both groups have taken the treatment. Consequently, we expect no difference in their evaluations of the LPF.

Results: Rational Updating Versus Rationalization

Rationally, the murder of Fortuyn should not have affected voter's own issue positions or their perceptions of where the LPF stands. But that is not what we find. The results are shown in Fig. 3. We compare issue proximity scores of respondents who were interviewed before versus after Fortuyn's assassination. Proximity is measured through the (absolute) distance between respondent and the LPF on each of these 1–7 issue scales, giving each outcome variable a range of 0–6. The top panel of Fig. 3 depicts the mean absolute proximity of respondents before and after the murder. The bottom panel depicts the average treatment effects, the differences in these absolute proximity scores between those interviewed before and after the murder. The negative point estimates indicate that the perceived distance between respondents and the LPF is smaller for those interviewed after the assassination than for those interviewed before. We observe an increase in proximity between respondents and the LPF on all four issues that were included in the pre-election questionnaire.

Although the results vary in magnitude and statistical significance, they point in the same direction. For three of the four issues—asylum seekers, crime and redistribution—the gap between respondents and the LPF significantly ($p < 0.05$) diminishes after the murder. The increase in proximity is quite remarkable with regard to two issues (asylum seekers and redistribution) and more modest with respect to crime. No statistically significant difference is observed concerning the issue of euthanasia, arguably the only issue not in any way related to LPF's core issue, immigration.[12]

The dynamic interpretation given to the results of Fig. 3 might raise concerns as we do not compare the same respondents over time but different sets of respondents before and after the assassination. This interpretation is based on the following premise: if both groups were informed about the murder, they would have similar proximity scores. To test this assumption, we implemented the same analysis using all issue scales available in the two post-election waves of the study as dependent variables. Much like the analysis of the LPF thermometer scores in the right-hand panel of Fig. 2, these issue placements serve as a "reverse" placebo test, whereby both comparison groups are now "treated", i.e. know about the murder. This is because those who were interviewed before Fortuyn's murder in the pre-election were of course aware of the murder by the time of the post-election waves. Accordingly, the two groups of respondents should now be statistically indistinguishable in their perceived proximity to the LPF. Indeed, this is the case, as shown in Fig. 4. Consistent with the hypothesis that the gap in perceptual agreement is due to the murder of Fortuyn, when everyone is aware of the event, we find no significant difference between the two groups on any of these issues.

As a next step, we assess the durability of these effects. Although the event seems to have brought voters and the LPF closer on most issues, this shift might have

[12] Further analysis based on the ranking of parties in terms of their vicinity to the respondent suggests that these effects extend to a rank-order comparison of parties. The LPF was positioned closer to respondents not only in absolute terms but also compared to the other main parties that contested the 2002 general election. These analyses are avaliable in the online appendix.

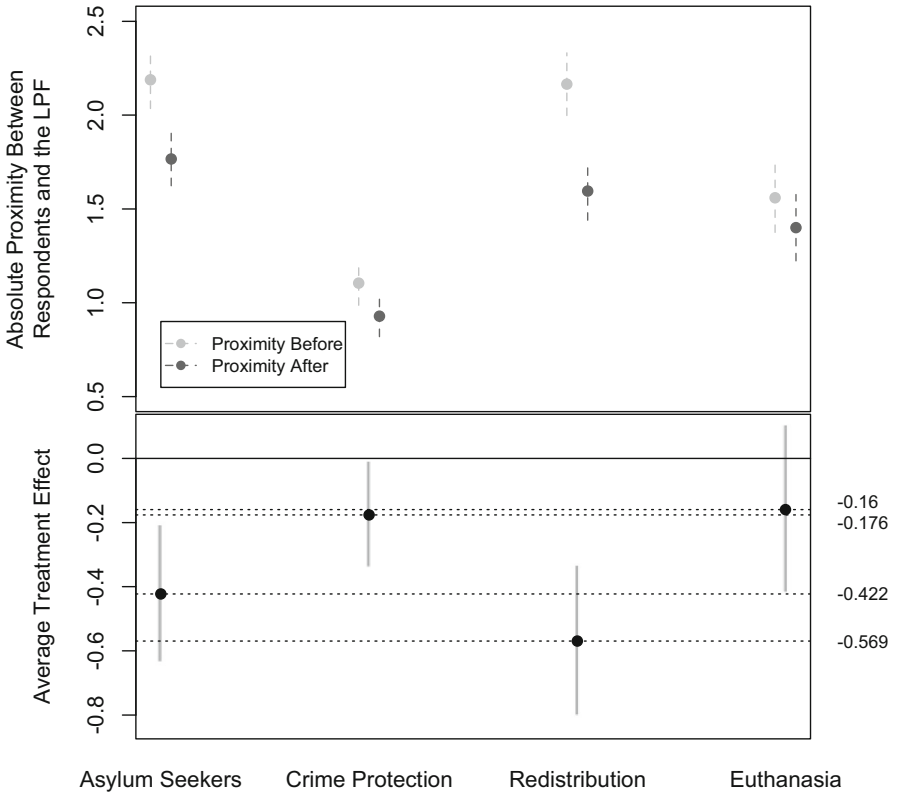

Fig. 3 Perceived agreement between the LPF and respondents on various issues, before and after Fortuyn's assassination. *Note* The *top panel* shows the average absolute proximity between respondents and their placement of the LPF, both before and after the murder. In the *bottom panel*, *dots* denote mean differences between those interviewed before and those interviewed after the murder. The *gray spikes* indicate 95 % confidence intervals. All four issues were included in the pre-election questionnaire (so that some respondents were asked about the issue before the assassination, and others after). N = 820, N = 808, N = 687 and N = 597 for asylum seekers, crime, redistribution and euthanasia, respectively

disappeared after the initial shock among the public and the media had faded away. Since both groups of pre-election respondents (those interviewed before and those interviewed after the murder) are aware about the assassination in subsequent waves, we cannot use this comparison as a way to assess the longevity of the effects. However, we can compare the same respondents in multiple waves. In particular, we compare the responses of those respondents who were interviewed before the assassination in the first wave with their responses on the same issues in subsequent waves. The only issue question from the first wave that is repeated in subsequent waves is the question about asylum seekers, which is repeated only in the third wave of the study. Using this item, we can examine whether respondents interviewed before the assassination in the first wave of the study came closer to the LPF when interviewed a year afterwards. The average change in the proximity scale between the first wave and the third wave is -0.272 ($p < 0.01$). So, the respondents who had

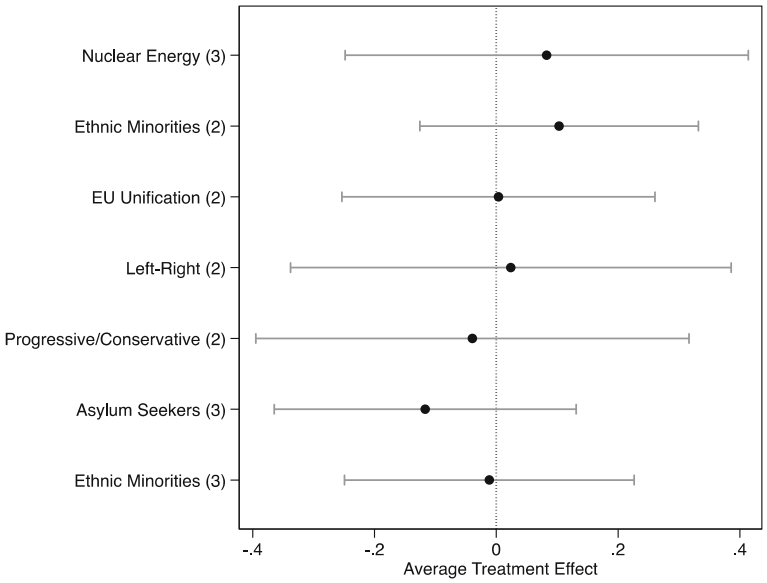

Fig. 4 Perceived agreement between the LPF and respondents on various issues, asked in the post-election waves of the study. *Note*: *Dots* present the mean differences between those interviewed before and after the assassination of Fortuyn, on issues asked in the post-election wave of the study and when everyone knew about the assassination. The *numbers* in parentheses on the *vertical axis* indicate in which wave each item has been included

been interviewed before Fortuyn's death also came to perceive the LPF's stance on the asylum seekers issue considerably closer to their own views. In contrast, respondents who were interviewed after the murder did not seem to move significantly closer to LPF in the third wave of the study. The average difference in proximity between the two waves is -0.037 ($p < 0.67$). Combined, the two findings strengthen our confidence in our interpretation of the estimates reported in Fig. 3.

Projection or Persuasion?

Voters and the LPF have come closer as a result of the murder. Is this because voters have moved towards the LPF's positions—a persuasion effect?[13] Or is it because voters have come to perceive the LPF as less extreme without updating their own positions—a projection effect? Or are both persuasion and projection equally salient? To produce estimates for persuasion and projection we decompose the proximity measure into its constituent parts, i.e., the scale measuring the LPF's

[13] An important caveat in this analysis is that persuasion effects might be confounded by an overall shift to conservatism as a result of the murder, with those interviewed after the murder expressing more conservative issue positions (closer to the positions of the LPF, a far right party). Evidence from social psychology suggests that in trying to manage threat and uncertainty, individuals lean towards more right-wing policies (Jost et al. 2007). To the extent that this mechanism operates here, it creates a more favorable setting for the presence of persuasion—for which we still find only limited empirical support.

position and the scale measuring respondents' issue stances. Each of these measures is used as a separate dependent variable regressed against a binary indicator denoting respondents interviewed after Fortuyn's assassination. The coefficent attached to this variable represents an estimation of the overall shift towards one of the two extremes of each issue scale. For example, for the issue of asylum seekers, when we use party placement as the dependent variable a negative coefficient implies that after the assassination people locate the LPF in a more tolerant position, as projection would predict. When using self-placement as a dependent variable, a positive coefficient would represent a shift towards more anti-immigration stances among those interviewed after the murder, as persuasion would predict. We employ this estimation strategy for all four issues.

The problem with this exercise is that the two outcome variables—party and self-placement—might not be linearly independent. To address this problem we use a seemingly unrelated regressions (SUR) estimation. SURs correct the bias arising from the correlation between the errors of the two equations. Because we expect the effects of persuasion and projection to operate in opposite directions, we compare the absolute values of the two coefficients.[14]

Table 1 presents the results. For each issue, the first column presents the average difference in self-placement between the two groups and the second column displays the same difference in party placement. On the issues of asylum seekers and redistribution, the gap between those interviewed before and those interviewed after the murder is significant only when looking at party placement. No significant shifts are found concerning the other two issues for either party or voter issue placement. In all instances but euthanasia, the absolute value of projection effects is higher than the absolute value of persuasion effects. However, these differences are notable only when looking at redistribution. On the issues of crime and asylum seekers this gap is very small. As the last row of the table shows, when trying to gauge the statistical significance of these differences, we find no instance in which the observed gap between self- and party placement reaches conventional levels of statistical significance. Out-of-sample generalizations are hard to make on the basis of this evidence.

The last two columns use the only issue scale—asylum seekers—available in two waves. We look at the difference in self- and LPF placement on this issue among the same respondents, interviewed in the first wave and before Fortuyn's death and then again in the third wave of the study, after the 2002 election. Employing the same estimation strategy we find that respondents place the LPF significantly more to the left of the scale after the assassination, without changing significantly their own issue stances. Although the difference between these two estimates is not statistically significant, it does again provide suggestive evidence in favour of projection. Taken as a whole, Table 1 provides tentative evidence that projection is more salient than persuasion. This conclusion notwithstanding, there are important nuances in these results that need to be taken into consideration.

[14] We also performed an IV estimation, without however correcting for the error correlation between the equations. The results, shown in the online appendix, are if anything more supportive of the presence of projection effects.

Table 1 Persuasion vs Projection

	Asylum seekers		Crime protection		Redistribution		Euthanasia		Wave 3–Wave 1: Asylum seekers	
	Self (1)	LPF (2)	Self (1)	LPF (2)	Self (1)	LPF (2)	Self (1)	LPF (2)	Self (1)	LPF (2)
"Post-Assassination"	0.195 (0.103)	−0.201 (0.066)	0.111 (0.085)	−0.124 (0.087)	−0.121 (0.111)	0.411 (0.134)	−0.100 (0.157)	−0.039 (0.121)	−0.075 (0.048)	−0.240 (0.044)
N	820		808		687		597		699	
Chi-Sq. (1df) of independence	3.41 ($p = 0.065$)		68.60 ($p < 0.0001$)		22.86 ($p < 0.0001$)		28.22 ($p < 0.0001$)		3.29 ($p = 0.070$)	
Chi-Sq. (1df): Test (1) = (2)	0.00 ($p = 0.967$)		0.01 ($p = 0.925$)		2.33 ($p = 0.127$)		0.41 ($p = 0.521$)		6.72 ($p = 0.009$)	

"Post-Assassination" is a dummy for respondents interviewed after the murder. The columns titled "self" denote the analysis with self-placement as a dependent variable. The columns titled "party" denote the analysis with LPF issue placement as a dependent variable. The third row presents the Breush-Pagan test for the independence of the two equations. The fourth row presents a test for the statistical significance in the absolute values of the coefficient of "Post-Assassination" between self and party placement. The last column compares the same respondents, initially interviewed before the assassination, between the first and the third wave of the panel study. Estimates stem from an individual-fixed effects seemingly unrelated regression

An archetypical case of an anti-immigration party, the LPF focused on positioning itself as tough on immigration and tough on crime (Dinas and van Spanje 2011; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003; van Spanje 2011; van der Brug 2003; van Praag 2003; van Holsteyn and Irwin 2003). The party's views on income redistribution and euthanasia, by contrast, were hardly known to the public. Indicatively, the perceptual agreement of the LPF's position on asylum seekers (van der Eijk's $\alpha = 0.85$) and crime ($\alpha = 0.77$) are much higher than for redistribution ($\alpha = 0.28$) and euthanasia ($\alpha = 0.41$).[15]

Previous studies suggest that when parties' signals are clear they are more successful in transmitting their political views (Feldman and Conover 1983). Balance theory also predicts this pattern, as the link between perceptions and preferences is expected to be stronger when parties provide unambiguous views on a given issue. Thus, we expect stronger persuasion effects when a voter has a clear idea of a party's position on a particular issue and stronger projection effects when voters are ambivalent about where a party stands on a given issue. Because of the LPF's clear stance on the issues of crime and asylum seekers, we thus expect that persuasion is more important for these issues, whereas projection is a more likely driving force with regard to redistribution and euthanasia.

However, we primarily find projection—most prominently for the issue of redistribution. When persuasion was expected (asylum seekers) the move seems to be at least equally driven by projection. When projection was expected (redistribution), this is the predominant source of rationalization bias. Taken as a whole, all tests indicate that projection effects are highest for the issue of redistribution. Redistribution, together with euthanasia, is the issue the LPF mentioned the least in its political communication, and thus it is the issue that is least likely to be primed by individuals in the aftermath of the assassination. This adds up to a strong case against the assumption of spatial modeling that voters' movement on policy issues is strictly driven by rational updating.

Robustness Checks

We address three competing explanations that, if they hold, could provide rational cognitive-based grounds for the effect attributed here to projection.[16] First, it might be that, after Fortuyn's death, respondents answered the questions about the LPF with a different party in mind. After all, the LPF was Fortuyn's party; other members of the party received considerably less media scrutiny. The murder of the leader and founder of the party might thus create ambiguity about whether the party would remain loyal to Fortuyn's stances or whether there would be some change in the policy profile of the party.

[15] Van der Eijk's (2001) alpha coefficient is an agreement measure that is bound between −1 (complete disagreement) and +1 (complete agreement), see van der Eijk (2001). To avoid confounding from the treatment, the estimation employs only respondents interviewed before the assassination.

[16] Although the key findings from all analyses executed in this section are discussed, as a way to save space some of the actual results are delegated to the appendix. Unless otherwise noted, all analyses use the matched dataset.

From the outset, it seems that being such an exemplary case of a personalistic party helped the LPF to retain continuity in its policy profile, even after the leader's death (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003; van der Brug 2003; van Holsteyn and Irwin 2003). It is, for instance, indicative that after Fortuyn's death the party did not nominate another leader for the 2002 election—a decision signaling the loyalty of the party to the leader's legacy. Empirical evidence indicates that voters still had Fortuyn and his ideas in mind when evaluating the party and that the assassination did not change this perception at least until election day. The association between feeling scores for Fortuyn and his party after his death was almost identical to that association before it. Furthermore, a feeling thermometer for Fortuyn correlated even better with perceived proximity to the LPF than a feeling thermometer for the party did on all four issues, both before and after the murder. Combined, these facts provide evidence that respondents before and after the murder had the same party in mind—or, rather, they had the same person in mind.[17]

Another way to assess whether Fortuyn's death blurred voters' perceptions about the LPF's issue stances is to examine whether the variance in LPF placement increased after the murder. We do that by looking at the variance in voters' location of the LPF before and after the murder. All four issues are used. Since campaign messages provide information about party platforms, one might expect lower variance in voters' perceptions of parties' stances as we approach the poll day. To better adjust for such trending effects, we use the other parties as reference points. Thus, we compare the results for the LPF with those from four other parties for which the same issue questions are asked. The results from this exercise appear in Fig. 5.[18] On the one hand, concerning the party's two core issues—asylum seekers and crime protection—the change in variance is small and indistinguishable from the other parties. With regard to redistribution and euthanasia, on the other hand, the variance in LPF positioning seems to change more than for the other parties. That said, the observed difference is rather small and not statistically significant.[19] Moreover, in both cases the variance decreases after the murder—a pattern not easily compatible with the idea that the event brought ambiguity about where the party stood.[20]

Second, it might be that the event has provided information to voters and it might be that this information brought them closer to the LPF. There are two reasons that make it difficult, however, to reconcile our results with this explanation. First, if subjective agreement were due to rational updating as a result of the information

[17] These results are shown in the online appendix.

[18] Concerning all four issue questions included in the 2002 DPES, respondents have been asked to position not only the LPF but four other parties as well: the christian democratic CDA, the social democratic PvdA, the right-wing liberal VVD, and the left-wing liberal D66.

[19] A variance ratio test to reject the null of no difference in the variance of responses before and after the assassination provides the following p-values: 0.38 (asylum seekers); 0.73 (crime); 0.13 (redistribution); 0.12 (euthanasia).

[20] That said, the decline in variance might signal more information about the LPF's stances after the event. Although this result does not explain away our results concerning asylum-seekers and crime, it might play a role in the projection effect found for redistribution. We address the information hypothesis in detail in the following paragraphs.

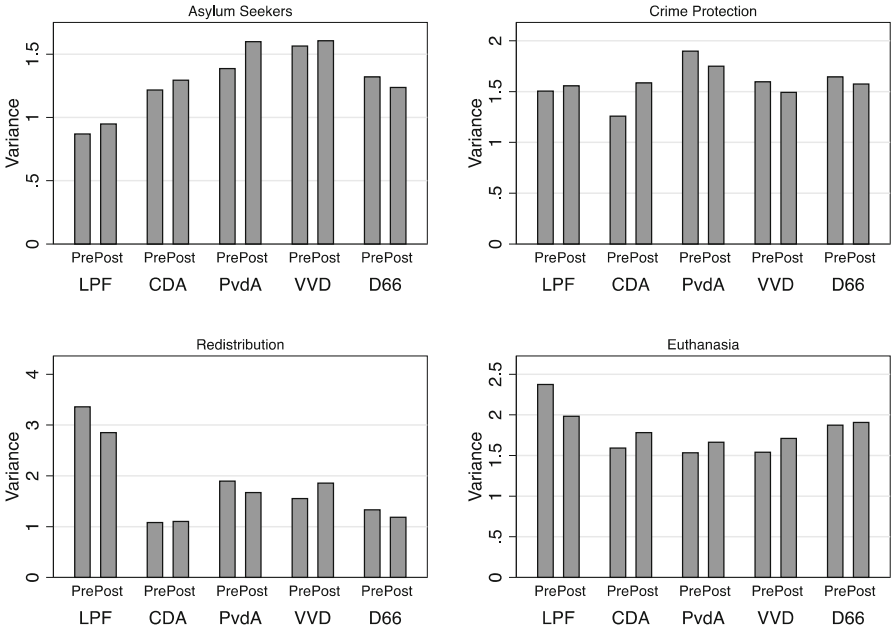

Fig. 5 Variance in party placements before and after Fortuyn's death. *Note* Within each party the *first column* denotes the variance before the murder and the *second column* denotes the variance after the murder

provided by the assassination, it should be primarily driven by persuasion effects, with voters becoming tougher on the asylum seekers issue. What we see is that projection effects are more important in moving the LPF closer to respondents. Second, the largest effect we find relates to redistribution, which is difficult to connect to the murder at all.

A third concern relates to the role of media coverage. Although the campaign stopped immediately after the assassination, one could still argue that the media might have painted a more sympathetic and moderate picture of Fortuyn's political views after his death. If so, this may have led some voters to update their beliefs about this politician, positioning his party on less extreme positions as a result. Once again, it is difficult to see how such media discourse may have affected voters' perceptions about the LPF on the issue of redistribution—an issue seldom discussed in relation with the LPF. That said, it might be that redistribution and welfare issues are linked to immigration, on which the LPF had unambiguous views. We thus try to examine empirically the new information hypothesis in a systematic way. We provide six complementary tests.

Our departure point is that media signals should point toward a particular direction, hence evoking a unidirectional shift of perceptions about the party's stances. This means that voters should perceive the party as more centrist irrespective of whether they are located in a more centrist or in a more extreme position than the party on each issue scale. Consequently, we can test whether these

shifts are uniform, as media effects would imply, or whether their direction depends on voters' location relative to the party. We implement two different analyses. First, we focus on the issue of asylum seekers, which is the only issue scale that is also asked in a post-election wave (the third wave) of the study. We use only individuals interviewed before the assassination and compare their responses regarding the placement of the LPF on this scale between the first and the third wave. The scale ranges from 1 to 7 with higher scores indicating more anti-immigration attitudes. Projection predicts that voters bring the LPF more to the left of the scale if they hold more centrist positions and more to the right if they hold more anti-immigration stances than the party. Media coverage suggests that people locate the LPF in a more centrist position irrespective of where they are located in the same issue scale.[21] Figure 6 presents the results from this exercise. We divide responses into three baseline (pre-murder) categories on the basis of whether they placed themselves to a more pro-immigration position than the LPF (*Left*); to a more anti-immigration position (*Right*); and whether they were in the same point as the LPF (*Same*). The figure displays three boxplots, each one for each baseline category. The vertical axis denotes the difference in LPF placement between the two waves. If the media coverage story operated, we could expect all three boxplots to be similar to the first one, which looks only at respondents located at the left of the LPF. Indeed these respondents are more likely to place the party more to the left after the event. In contrast, those located at the right of the party locate it more to the right, as shown in the second bloxplot. Finally, no difference is observed, as one would expect on the basis of projection, among those located in the same position as the LPF. Taken as a whole these results seem more compatible with the projection mechanism than with the media coverage explanation.

The second analysis is more limited because it lacks a within-subject comparison. We simply compare those interviewed before and after the murder on the three issues in which we have found evidence for projection (redistribution, asylum seekers, and crime). To implement this analysis we need to make a strong assumption, which, however, has been partially supported by the previous analyses. In particular, we assume that there has been no persuasion, i.e., respondents' self-placements in any of these issues are unaffected by the assassination. If we are willing to make this assumption, we can again classify respondents in two categories, according to whether they are located to the left or to the right of the LPF.[22] Within each category, we compare those interviewed before and those interviewed after with regard to their average positioning of the LPF on each issue scale. The first panel of Fig. 7 denotes the results for asylum seekers, whereas the

[21] Importantly, the hypothesis that respondents locate the LPF in more centrist positions after the event might not be driven only by media coverage. For instance, since Fortuyn held radical views on the issue of asylum seeekers, people might anticipate a move towards more centrist positions once a new leader is appointed. In our tests we thus focus on whether such a move towards centrist positions has taken place, without investigating whether this move stems from media coverage or from other sources.

[22] We cannot anymore use those located at the same position as the LPF because for them the only movement as a result of the event would be driven by moving themselves along this category, which is ruled out by assumption. In other words, when implemented among those located at the same position as the LPF, this between-subject comparison provides no information about either the news or the projection mechanism.

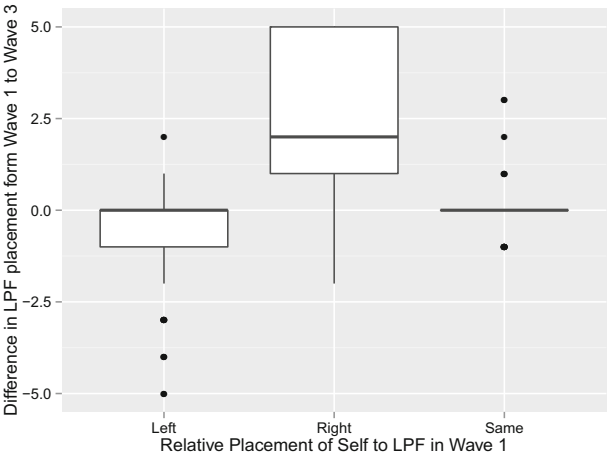

Fig. 6 LPF placement in the first and third wave for those interviewed before the murder. *Note* Positive (*negative*) scores on the *vertical axis* indicate that the LPF is put more to the right (*left*) in wave three than in wave one. The *solid horizontal line* in each *box* denotes the median placement for each group, whereas the *upper* and *lower bounds* of each *box* capture the area between the 25th and the 75th percentile

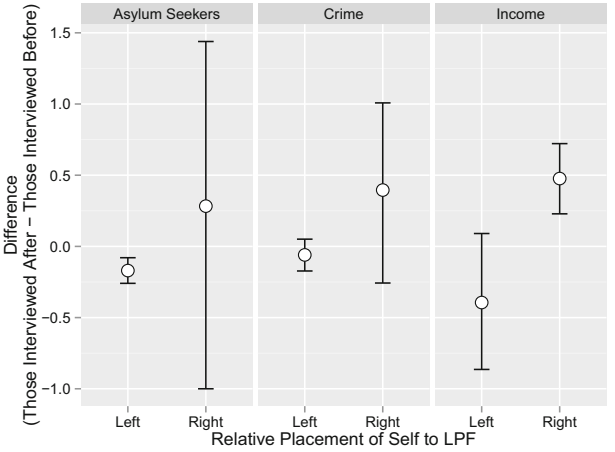

Fig. 7 Difference in LPF placement before and after the assassination. *Note* The *vertical axis* shows the difference in average LPF placement between those interviewed before and those interviewed after the event. Positive (negative) scores on the *vertical axis* indicate that the LPF is put more to the right (*left*) among those interviewed after the murder. *Dots* are point estimates and spikes denote the 95 % bootstrapped confidence intervals

second and third panel present the results for crime and redistribution respectively. Given that the LPF is overwhelmingly placed at extreme positions in the scales of asylum seekers and crime, the estimates are accompanied by high levels of uncertainty. Even so, we still find that respondents tend to bring the party in their own direction, irrespective of whether this means more to the right for those located

in more extreme positions than the LPF or more to the left for those located in more centrist positions than the LPF. The shifts towards the right are actually larger in magnitude on all three issues. Once again, this pattern comes closer to the projection mechanism than to the media coverage mechanism.

A third test for the media coverage mechanism is more indirect and builds on the possibility of priming effects (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). According to the priming hypothesis, new political information becomes readily accessible in memory and thus acquires more weight in people's political judgements.[23] According to this logic, if new information about the LPF's stances became available after the event, this information might not only have changed people's views about LPF's positions but might also have increased the saliency of the issues to which this information applies. Following the standard practice in the priming literature (Krosnick and Kinder 1990), we examine the priming hypothesis by interacting a dummy that denotes respondents interviewed after the murder with each issue proximity variable. If priming effects operate, proximity should matter more in voters' evaluations after the murder. Using both the LPF feeling thermometer score and LPF vote intention as dependent variables, we find no evidence in favour of the priming hypothesis, however. The interaction coefficients are always indistinguishable from zero and very small in magnitude.[24]

A fourth test is shown in Fig. 8, which cuts the window of treated units according to the number of days that had passed after the assassination. If all the effects are due to media coverage, one would expect that they should materialize only after some days had passed since the assassination. To test this argument, we repeat the main analysis but using only subsets of the treated groups. In each graph we see the average treatment effect conditional on the number of days after the event that have been included in the analysis (from 1 to 8 days). We use both the matched and the unmatched data and find practically identical results. We present the results from the matched dataset in Fig. 8 and provide the unmatched results in the online appendix. We see that the main effect remains stable across windows for all three issues. Expectedly, the confidence intervals widen as we shrink the window of observations. Importantly, however, the point estimates are still very close to those found with the full set of observations. This evidence is again more compatible with the idea of projection than with the media/information explanation.

A fifth test builds on the idea that the murder itself or the way it dominated the media the last days before the election might have helped voters to construct opinions about the LPF's position on various issues. Thus, respondents who would otherwise have no clear view of where the party stands on these issues might use

[23] Although there are competing explanations of the effects attributed to priming effects (Lenz 2010), we do not explore them here because we only want to use a plausible side-effect of this theory as an alternative explanation for our affect-driven mechanism.

[24] The results are shown in the Online Appendix. The only exception in the null findings is the issue of redistribution. When using the feeling thermometer as a dependent variable, the interaction between proximity and "Post-Assassination" is positive, which means that proximity between respondents and the party on this issue weakens as a predictor of LPF evaluations (proximity is measured by distance and thus is negatively associated with party evaluations). This is the opposite of what the priming hypothesis would expect. No significant pattern is observed when vote intention is used as the dependent variable.

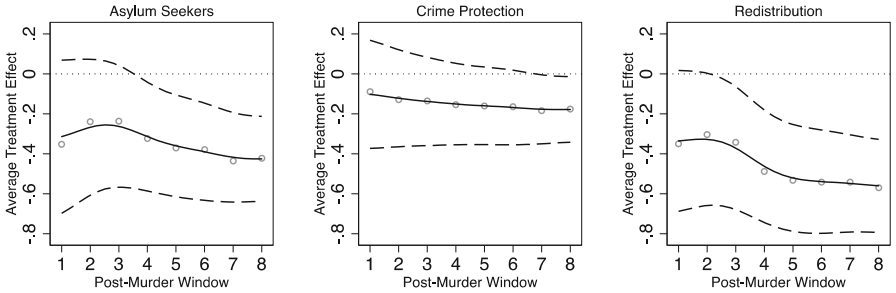

Fig. 8 The main results using smaller windows for treated observations. *Note* Numbering on the *horizontal axis* follows the number of days after the murder the respondent was interviewed. All curves are local polynomials with Gaussian kernels and bandwidth of 0.8. The *dots* denote the actual ATEs and the *dashed curves* capture the 95 % confidence intervals

these information flows to form such opinions after the assassination. To test this idea, we create a binary variable that switches on for respondents who fail to locate the LPF on each issue scale. Since the campaign provides information about parties' platforms one would expect a downward trend in DKs as we approach the election, even in the absence of the murder. To adjust for such trending effects, we include in the analysis all other parties respondents were asked to place on the issue scales. We transpose the data into a long format, using the Individual × Party as observation. We interact a dummy that denotes responses about the LPF with another dummy denoting respondents after the murder. This interaction represents the difference between the LPF and other parties in the change in the proportion of DKs after the event. We implement this analysis for each issue separately. Full results are shown in the Online Appendix (Table A.6). In no instance do we find a significant difference between the LPF and the other parties. In three out of four issues, the change in the proportion of DKs for the LPF is statistically indistinguishable from zero. The only issue in which there is a significant change in the DKs for the LPF is the issue of asylum seekers. Even there, however, we find an increase in the percentage of non-response (from 1.4 to 3.5 %). Evidently, this result is not easily compatible with the media information hypothesis.[25]

The sixth test builds on the following idea: If the way the campaign evolved after the murder provided electorally relevant information to voters, it is reasonable to expect a shift in subjective proximity not only with respect to the LPF but also with respect to the other parties contesting the election. A change in the information set of voters is unlikely to affect only one party, as parties are inclined to respond to new information and the media to report their reactions.

We test this claim by considering how respondents placed other parties on the issue scales. Figure 9 compares the average proximity between voters and each of these parties among the treatment group and among the control group. There is no

[25] That said, increasing non-response after the event might signal an increase in the level of uncertainty about the LPF's stances as a result of the murder. To the extent that uncertainty leads to differences in the positioning of the LPF, non-response might pose a threat to inference. That said, the levels of missingness remain very low even after the murder.

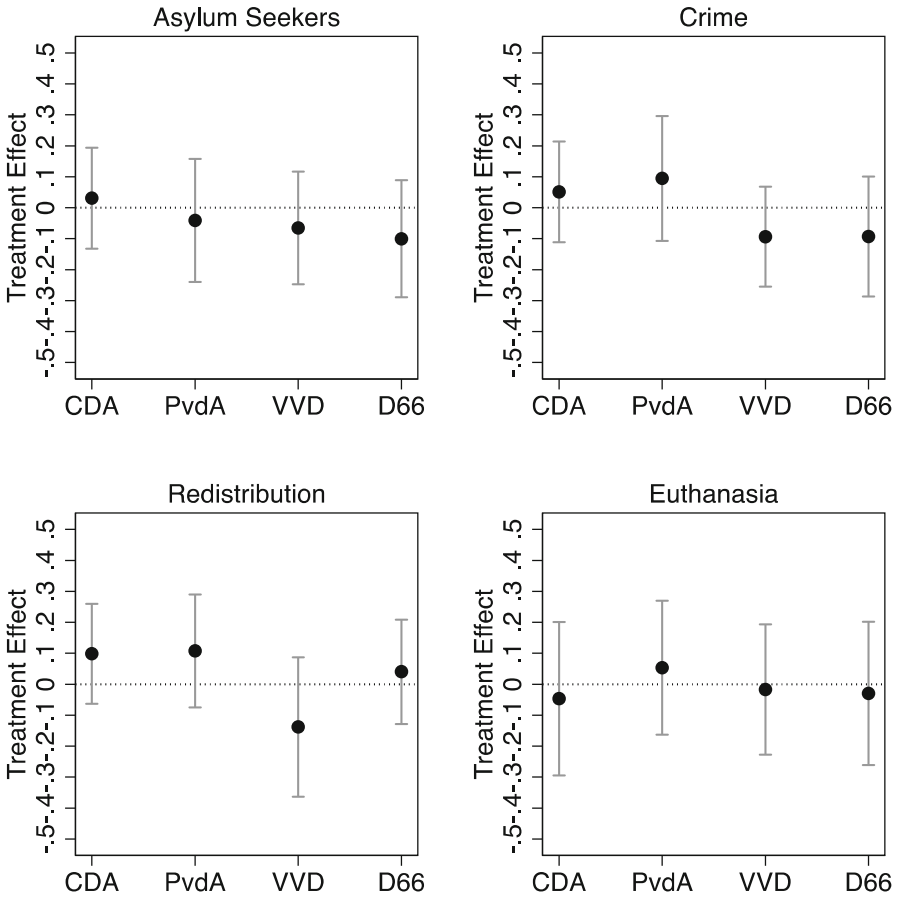

Fig. 9 Change in perceptual agreement between respondents and other parties, before and after the assassination. *Note* The estimates replicate the lower panel of Fig. 3, using different parties instead of the LPF to measure change in perceived proximity between voters and parties as a result of the murder. The matched 2002 pre-election wave data set is used in this analysis. Starting from the left-most entry in the figure, N = 813, N = 821, N = 817, N = 790, N = 824, N = 824, N = 829, N = 808, N = 806, N = 813, N = 801, N = 788, N = 806, N = 816, N = 824 and N = 794

instance in which this gap reaches statistical significance at any conventional level. When compared to Fig. 3, the magnitude of these differences is also substantially smaller. Clearly, the evidence provided here leads us to reject the idea that the increase in proximity found between voters and the LPF is due to the murder changing the information at voters' disposal.

The third point of concern refers to the generalizability of these results. Fortuyn was a new figure in Dutch politics with extreme views on several issues. Would the findings hold when considering more mainstream political actors? Moreover, the shock is death-related and induces a positive shift in people's perceptions. Would projection and persuasion still operate with a negative shift in preferences, not related to the death of a politician?

To address these questions, we have replicated our analysis based on a different case. We focus on President Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal, a case from a different political system, which refers to a more established politician and entails a negative shift in preferences. The design is based on the 1972–1974 ANES panel study, in which respondents were interviewed before and after Nixon's involvement in the scandal was revealed. Nixon's feeling thermometer score decreases dramatically as a result of the scandal. The event does not provide information about the president's views on political issues. To address the time lapse between the two waves we validate our design by using feelings towards another candidate, George Wallace, as a placebo test. We find a significant decrease in proximity between respondents and Nixon on all five issue scales that are available. The effects are again driven more by projection than by persuasion.[26] So, just as in the Fortuyn case, voters' feelings towards Nixon affected voters' perception of his political positions. No consistent pattern is found for Wallace (this analysis is described in full detail in the online appendix). The results strengthen our confidence in the generalizability of our conclusions to other political actors in other countries and at other time points.

An Illustration of the Relevance of Projection Bias to Spatial Modeling

In the previous analyses we used Fortuyn's assassination as an exogenous shock to examine the diverging expectations of rational updating and rationalization bias. We found substantial evidence for such bias, driven mainly by projection and less by persuasion. In this section we build on these findings, assessing their importance for spatial modeling. We illustrate how projection and persuasion can contaminate inferences based on spatial models. This analysis is not based on the murder and thus we include only respondents interviewed before that date to avoid having the event contaminate our inference.

Column 1 of Table 2 presents findings from what can be considered a standard approach to the examination of the impact of issues on party evaluations. Evaluations towards the LPF, measured with a 0–100 thermometer scale, are regressed on all four issue proximity indicators. Quite unsurprisingly, the strongest association between party evaluations and issue perceptions is found for the issue of asylum seekers; no substantial effect of euthanasia is found. Quite surprisingly, the issue of redistribution has a considerable effect (still column 1). Based on these results, one would be led to infer that the issue of redistribution was almost as important in voters' evaluations of the LPF as the issue of asylum seekers.

As we have demonstrated, however, voters' perceptions of the LPF's redistribution stance are particularly contaminated by projection. Our argument is that, as redistribution is a key issue to voters, their need for consistency creates incentives for voters to bring their preferred party closer to their own ideal point. If

[26] Given that the information shock is negative for the popularity of Nixon, the shift in preference actually generates the negative image mirrors of projection and persuasion, which are called contrast and negative persuasion respectively.

Table 2 Perceived issue proximity and LPF evaluations, before the murder

	Issues and LPF evaluations: individual party placements	Issues and LPF evaluations: mean party placements
Asylum seekers	−8.04 (0.95)	−9.45 (0.99)
Crime	−5.11 (1.31)	−1.68 (1.34)
Redistribution	−4.36 (0.95)	4.34 (1.19)
Euthanasia	−1.08 (0.94)	0.88 (0.87)
N	272	402

Entries are OLS coefficients after regressing feelings for the LPF on the absolute proximity between respondents and the LPF on each of the four issues. Individual-level party placements of the LPF are used in the first column and mean party placements are used in the second column. Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses. The matched dataset is used, so as to enable comparisons with the results presented in the previous sections

rationalization is mainly driven by projection, as we found to be the case here, it is further facilitated by the party's ambiguous signals on this issue.[27] Lacking informative cues about where the LPF stands on redistribution, respondents positioned the party in accordance with their level of affinity towards it. The result is a misleadingly strong association between feelings for the LPF and proximity to the LPF on redistribution. This way, standard spatial modeling would lead to conclusions that are clearly off.

Let us test this interpretation. If the correlation between proximity in redistribution and evaluations of the LPF is due to projection bias, accounting for such bias should reduce this correlation. We test this by using the same party position for each respondent instead of each respondent's individual party placement. Following previous literature (Macdonald et al. 2007), we replace individual voters' positioning of the LPF with the aggregated mean of this positioning on each of the four issues and rerun the analyses presented in column 1 of Table 2. The results of this exercise appear in column 2.

The effect of the redistribution proximity term on evaluations for the LPF vanishes when we account for projection bias. The only issue that appears to exert a significant negative impact on LPF evaluations is that of asylum seekers. Thus, projection bias changes the substantive interpretation of the reasons underlying the vote for one of the electorally most successful anti-immigration parties the world has ever witnessed, the LPF.

Conclusion

By making use of a natural experimental setting, this study finds that party affect exerts a nontrivial effect on the level of perceived proximity between voters and parties. Respondents who were asked about the LPF's policy issue positions after its

[27] Such a need for rationalization is absent when voters are asked about the issue of euthanasia, because this is not a key electoral issue and thus the need for consistency between party preferences and perceptions is weaker.

leader's death tended to locate the party closer to their own views. Not paying attention to such projection effects might result in invalid inferences, as the example of redistribution and LPF support showed. Thus, the results provide support to an important strand of the political psychology literature, which adverted about the estimation problems arising from the presence of rationalization bias. However, although previous studies had already pointed to this problem, they had not provided causal evidence for the impact of affective shocks on perceived proximity. Moreover, a common (often implicit) assumption in these studies is that projection bias affects all issues equally. The evidence provided here suggests that this assumption may often be violated, especially if the issues in question vary in the clarity of party signals provided to voters. This variation is likely to distort inference regarding the relative weight attached to various issues. Furthermore, we find that rationalization bias seems more likely to be driven by projection than persuasion. Taken as a whole, these findings have three important implications.

First, the evidence for projection gives credit to previous studies (e.g., Aldrich and McKelvey 1977; Giger and Braeuninger 2011) that model the data generation process of subjective agreement starting from the presumption that voters respond to questions on party positioning in two steps. In a first step, they choose a point on an issue scale. In a next step, they place parties on this scale according to their own position, their information about the party's stands, and—as we show here—their level of affect toward this party. It seems that in this affective process that brings voters and parties closer, voters distort parties' positions more than their own issue stances.

Second, the results touch upon existing theories of political cognition and political learning. Issue voting has always been treated as one of the main pillars of rational choice theory of voting precisely because the effects are deemed to stem from cognitive, information-based party and voter placement in the issue space (Clarke et al. 2004). Focusing on the affective roots of voters' issue perceptions qualifies this logic and helps to shed light on the limits of individual rationality in mass political decision-making. By the same token, the results question the information-based logic of Bayesian learning (Achen 1992, 2002; Grynaviski 2006). Instead, they lend support to new theories of persuasion, which draw on associative and categorical thinking (Mullainathan et al. 2008). People do condition on data while updating their views. However, this process might often be uninformative, based on individuals' tendency to group situations within the same category and to apply the same model of inference to all contexts within the same category. The lack of differentiation between co-categorized situations leads to a message that is informative in one context guiding responses in a different context where the message does not apply. This phenomenon is known as "coarse thinking" (Mullainathan et al. 2008).

Third, to the extent this logic is correct, it qualifies the standard causal path employed in voting research, i.e. the funnel of causality, which assumes that perceptions are formed prior to affective evaluations (Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Merrill Shanks 1996; Bartle and Crewe 2002). Our results call for a refinement of this assumption. For voters, it seems, perceptions of proximity between themselves and the parties form part of a more encompassing category of party

evaluations, which also includes more affective sentiments about parties. Information about the murder is useful with regard to affective sentiments but not perceptions of proximity. However, it seems that voters change their perceptions of proximity because they think about perceptions and preferences as different contexts of the same encompassing category. It is about time for students of electoral behavior to take such "coarse thinking" seriously.

That said, it is important to also point out that our findings do not question spatial models in general, but only those based on micro-level mechanisms subject to rationalization bias. For example, macro-level models, such as those typically found in the political representation (Persson et al. 1997; Erikson et al. 2002) or the political economy literature (Milanovic 2000) are not distorted by perceptual biases. This permits them to simulate the aggregate consequences of shifts in party position.

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