BANDWAGON EFFECTS
WITHOUT
BANDWAGON VOTERS

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Introduction

The traditional image of the bandwagon voter is epitomized by a quote from one of the first academic survey studies of voting behavior: “Just before the election it looked like Roosevelt would win so I went with the crowd. Didn’t make any difference to me who won, but I wanted to vote for the winner” (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1968 [1944]: 108; emphasis in original). At the time there was concern that the new commercial public opinion polls that were being produced by George Gallup and others were influencing such voters. In fact, the concern predates the development and rise of these polls. In his analysis of so-called straw polls, the forerunners of modern polls (see e.g., Smith, 1990), Robinson described such voters as “voters who have no well-defined political convictions, and who swing with the tide, their chief desire being to vote with the winner. Straw polls indicate the probable victor, and thus unfairly deliver this ‘bandwagon’ support to the majority party” (Robinson, 1932: 138). At least since then, there has emerged an image of the bandwagon voter as uninformed, unconcerned, and lacking in political convictions. The only concern of such a voter is to go with the winner.

George Gallup fought long against the idea that his polls were unduly influencing voters. In his address to the AAPOR in 1965, he stated: “No amount of factual evidence seems to kill the bandwagon myth. Our early experience indicated no evidence of a bandwagon movement among voters in national elections - at least none that we or anyone else could either detect or measure. (…) Now, after thirty years, the volume of evidence against the bandwagon theory has reached staggering proportions, and yet many writers continue to allude to this theory as an accepted fact” (Gallup, 1965: 546).

Now, in a new century and after another forty years of experience, the same myth is still very much alive. Its immortality is indicated by the fact that numerous politicians, consultants, journalists, and voters sincerely believe in its existence. In a British study 45 per cent thought that polls had a lot or a fair amount of influence (Broughton, 1995: 195). A recent Dutch study (2005, n=505; see Van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2006) showed an even more widespread belief that voters are influenced by polls. Of the respondents with an opinion on poll effects over 80 per cent thought that public opinion polls had an impact on their fellow voters. And as long as “politicians and consultants believe there is such a thing and strive to create it by looking like a winner” (Sabato & Simpson, 1996: 247; emphasis in original), the myth will live on. And scholars perpetuate the ‘myth’: “(…) polling and media coverage have increased the importance of the bandwagon
effect.” (Renstrom & Rogers 1989, 137). Stated concisely, the belief continues that “[i]n politics people love to jump on the bandwagon of a winner” (Warren, 2001: 209).

In some countries, the belief among politicians that polls have an improper influence on uninterested, uninformed, and unconcerned voters has been put into practice by enacting legislation to prohibit the publication of poll results, generally in a period just preceding an election. Perhaps the largest country to have imposed such a ban, and the most well-known case, is France, which in 2002 reduced its ban from seven days to 24 hours. France is not the only country with this kind of regulations. In 2002 at least 30 countries had embargos on the publication of polls prior to the day of the election (see Spangenberg, 2003).

George Gallup had possibly commercial as well as idealistic reasons to attempt to kill the bandwagon myth. Yet maybe the reason that he and others have not been able to destroy the myth is that it is not a myth at all, at least in part. This paper will argue that it is even quite likely that voters may move in a certain direction, including towards the winner. The myth is not that they do it, but why they do it. This article will show that the voters who use information from public opinion polls are not necessarily uninterested, uninformed and unconcerned. It is this part of the myth that this paper will debunk.

The setting: the Dutch Parliamentary election of 2003

One of the problems faced by researchers who have tried to establish polling effects outside the laboratory is establishing whether a bandwagon (or other effect) has actually occurred. The Dutch general election of January 22, 2003, however, seems to be an ideal case in which to study possible effects. Of all possible effects of opinions polls that have been defined, the bandwagon metaphor remains the strongest, so one would preferably examine bandwagon voters in a bandwagon context. The movement in voter preferences as tracked by the polls in January 2003, clearly follows the bandwagon pattern (see e.g., Simon, 1954)

In many respects the election of January 2003 was an extension of the election of May 15, 2002 (see e.g., Acta Politica, 2003; Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2004). The partners of the so-called purple coalition of the PvdA (Labor Party), VVD (Liberal Party) and D66 (social-liberal Democrats 66), had suffered dramatic losses in 2002. The PvdA fell from 45 seats in 1998 to only 23 seats, the VVD from 38 to 24 and D66 from 14 to 7.
Christian-Democratic CDA (+ 14) and the new List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), which entered the Lower House or Second Chamber with 26 seats (out of a total of 150), were the major winners. However, the new governing coalition of CDA, LPF and VVD that was subsequently formed lasted only 87 days and already fell on October 16, 2002. New elections were called for January 22, 2003.

During the autumn, opinion polls showed that the PvdA had recovered some of its heavy losses, but throughout November and December 2002 its results were quite stable, varying between 27 and 29 seats. Not even the election by the party members of a new political leader, the popular youthful Wouter Bos, in November 2002, resulted in any gains for the party (Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005: 22-24).

Because of the holiday season, the first major campaign event was a television debate on Friday, January 3, i.e., less than three weeks before Election Day (see Van Praag & Geijtenbeek, 2005). During the first 20 hours following this debate, there was much discussion, but no consensus, concerning who had won or lost the debate. This dramatically changed on Saturday evening when a commercial broadcaster (RTL-News) opened its evening news broadcast with the leader: ‘Wouter Bos strong winner of election debate; Zalm [leader of the VVD] the loser’. This conclusion was based upon a sample of 150 respondents, of which the verdict on Zalm was based on the opinion of a total of 17 (!) VVD voters (Van Praag & Geijtenbeek, 2005: 124) - but this did not affect the news report, nor its impact.

On Monday, January 6, the most well-known pollster in the Netherlands, Maurice de Hond, reported in the television program De Stem van Nederland (The Voice of the Netherlands) that the PvdA had jumped from 28 to 35 seats. This was followed two days later by a NIPO poll presented in the current affairs program 2Vandaag revealing that the PvdA had gained five seats. The PvdA clearly had picked up ‘momentum’ (see e.g., Bartels, 1985; 1987; 1988), a concept related to the classical bandwagon effect in both its vageness and the voters that are assumed to be affected by it. According to Popkin “this slippery concept known as momentum” is troubling “because it suggests that a mindless following of the mob, not reasoned policy preferences, determines who wins the nomination” (1991: 117). In this respect, momentum is closely related to classical bandwagon voting.

From January 6 on, horse race journalism centered on which party, the fast-rising PvdA or the slowly declining CDA, would emerge as the largest party after the election (see for the analysis of news reports Van Praag & Brants, 2005; Heijting & De Haan,
2005). This is extremely relevant in the Dutch context, since the largest party obtains the initiative in the formation process of a new coalition Cabinet and the leader of this party is a strong candidate for the office of Prime Minister (see e.g., Andeweg & Irwin, 2005: 110-122). The PvdA rose from 29 seats to over 40 seats in the polls in only three weeks (Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005: 23). The day before Election Day, for the first time during the election campaign the PvdA was the largest party according to all major pollsters with 43 to 45 seats; the CDA had 42 seats in all final polls (NRC Handelsblad, January 22, 2003). At least at an aggregate level, this is exactly the pattern one might expect to find if bandwagon effects are present - a rapid rise in support just prior to the election for the party that was considered the ‘winner’ of the election. In this respect, there was a bandwagon; the question is whether it was produced by bandwagon voters? Were voters jumping on the PvdA bandwagon and were they uninterested, unconcerned, uncommitted, and uninformed?

Investigating bandwagons and bandwagon voters

A classic bandwagon consists of three elements: 1) under influence of the polls; 2) at the last minute; 3) voters choose to support the apparent winner. To investigate whether a bandwagon has occurred and whether it was produced by bandwagon voters, we examine the interaction between these three variables and a set of additional variables that are related to interest, information, concern, and commitment. The data upon which the analysis here is based are taken from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES) that was carried out following the 2003 election (for the design of this study, see Irwin, Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005).

Voting for the winner

From the discussion above, it is clear that the Labor Party (PvdA) was the major winner in the 2003 election. In the study, voters were asked after the election for which party they had voted. This variable has been dichotomized with those reporting having voted for the Labor Party in one category and all those voting for other parties in the other category.
Late deciders

It is not strictly necessary that a bandwagon occur in the very late stages of an election campaign, but it is such bandwagons or the fear of such bandwagons that have led legislatures to pass legislation forbidding the publication of opinion polls in the days or weeks prior to an election. Since this seems to be a major concern, it is fortunate that we can investigate a possible bandwagon in this time period. As described above, the surge to the Labor Party occurred in the final three weeks before the election of 2003. In the DPES 2003, respondents were asked to indicate when they had reached their decision concerning their vote choice. A trend has been noted in the Netherlands and elsewhere towards delaying this decision until closer to Election Day. In fact, in 2003, 7 per cent of the respondents reported that they did not decide until Election Day itself and 16 per cent reported that they had only decided during the last days of the election campaign. Seventeen per cent reported that they had reached their decision during the last weeks, 11 per cent in the last months, and 49 per cent said they had decided much earlier.

Unfortunately, this standard DPES question does not fit well with the specifics of this particular 2003 election. Clearly the 23 per cent who in this case decided during the last days or on Election Day are potentially bandwagon voters, but so too might be some of those who decided during the last weeks. To be on the safe side, those deciding during the last weeks have been included with those deciding earlier. Thus the size of the group of potential bandwagon voters may be underestimated.

Influence of polls

One of the major problems encountered by any study of the effects of polls is how to establish who may or may not have been influenced. In laboratory experiments, the possible effects of polls can be isolated and manipulated, but in real-life situations it is more difficult to define and measure such subtle effects. Some have tried to establish influence by indirect means, others have relied simply upon asking survey respondents to report whether they had or had not let poll results enter into their decision concerning how to vote. For the British case, for example, in a 1979 study, 3 per cent of British voters admitted having been influenced by polls at the general elections (Worcester, 1991). In a 1987 study, the number who reported influence was 9 per cent (McAllister & Studlar, 1991: 725). Kavanagh, however, is more modest in his estimation of self-reported influence of polls on British voters: “For what it is worth, only 2 to 3 per cent of voters admit that they are influenced by the polls” (1995: 118).
The Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2003 first asked respondents whether they had encountered poll results in the media prior to the election. About 5 per cent said they never or almost never came across polls, 10 per cent reported they saw them ‘now and then’, 30 per cent said ‘frequently’ and about 55 per cent said they came across polls ‘very often’. The voters who had seen polls were asked a follow-up question: ‘What do you think? Did these opinion polls have an influence on the choice you made on January 22? Did they influence you a lot, a little, or not at all?’ Almost 79 per cent indicated they were not influenced by the polls at all; 7 per cent said, on the other hand, that they were influenced a lot and 14 per cent indicated some influence (Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005: 33). This figure is higher than in the British studies just cited, but since the question is asked so seldom it is difficult to know whether such a figure is high or not..

Skeptics have questioned the use of self-reporting as a means of determining which voters may have been influenced by polls. We see, however, no reason to question these self-reports any more than any other responses given by respondents. The two previous questions, vote choice and timing of the decision, both rely upon self-reporting, as do so many estimates ranging from attitudes to social characteristics as age, religiosity and social class. For those who are concerned that although voters are able to report on their personal and social characteristics, they are unable to understand their own decision-making, two arguments can be given. First, in earlier research, Van Holsteyn has shown that Dutch voters are highly capable of explaining their own decision-making if one simply asks them ‘Why did you vote for this party?’ (Van Holsteyn, 1994; 2000). Second, in the same Dutch election study in 2003, voters were also asked two additional questions concerning whether the televised debates or a so-called vote matcher might have influenced their vote. The percentage (27 per cent) reporting that their decision was influenced by the televised debates during the campaign was slightly higher than the percentage for polls. Given the importance that election debates played during this campaign (see above), this is not surprising. Also, almost one-third said they had made use of a vote matcher during the campaign, and among these 19 per cent (almost 6 per cent of the total respondents) said that the results obtained had influenced their vote choice.

1 A vote matcher is a program available on various Internet sites in which one can answer a number of questions concerning one's own personal issue positions. The program then calculates which political party one is closest to. These sites have become quite popular in the Netherlands. For 2003 it was estimated that over 2.2 million people (out of a population of some 10 million voters) had made use of one particular vote matcher, De Stemwijzer, while several other vote matchers were available as well (NRC Handelsblad, 22 January 2003; see also Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005: 59-66).
Thus, Dutch voters seem to be able to distinguish between factors that may or may not have influenced their vote decision. For the analysis here, those who said they were either influenced a little or a lot have been combined into a single group, consisting of 21 per cent of the voters.

**Bandwagon characteristics**

The three aforementioned variables can define potential bandwagon voters and we will examine whether the interactions among these variables indicate that a bandwagon has indeed occurred. As said, we are particularly interested in the characteristics of potential bandwagon voters. The consensus or probably even stereotype has been that such voters are uninterested, uninformed, unconcerned and uncommitted. The Dutch election study contains a number of variables that relate to such concepts. The following variables, which have all been dichotomized for this analysis, have been included in the analysis:

- political interest (very or fairly, 91%; not interested, 9%);
- read national news (always or often, 59%; occasionally or never 41%);
- talk about politics (joins in conversations, 83%; listens or takes no part, 38%);
- reads campaign news (always or often, 60%; occasionally or never, 40%);
- watched televised debates (watched more than one, 62%; watched one or less, 38%)
- change in political interest during past year (increased, 48%; same or decreased, 52%);
- politics is important for me personally (important, 84%; not important, 16%);
- the governing coalition that is formed is important to me personally (matters much, 73%; some or not, 27%);
- the governing coalition that is formed is important for the country (matters a lot, 57%; does not matter so much, 43%);
- political knowledge score (high, 43%; low, 57%);
- internal political efficacy (high, 46%; low, 54%);
- external political efficacy (high, 41%; low 59%);
- political cynicism (high, 53%; low 47%).

These variables cover a broad range of characteristics of the voters, surely enough to determine whether the negative image of bandwagon voters is deserved or not.

**Method**

In this analysis, there is no attempt to explain a dependent variable with one or more independent variables. Voting for the Labor Party, deciding late, and being influenced
by polls are not factors that make one uninterested, unknowledgeable, or whatever.
Interest, knowledge, efficacy, and the like may have an impact upon the timing of the
decision, but less so on the vote choice. If related to influence by polls, it is not clear
what would be the dependent and independent variables. Instead, we are simply con-
cerned about the interactions among these variables. The technique for analyzing the
interaction among a set of variables used here is log-linear analysis (results produced by
SPSS version 15). The analysis is exploratory and is concerned with all interactions
among the variables, without defining any of the variables as dependent.

Log-linear analyses have been calculated for the three variables (Labor vote, timing of
decision, and influence of polls) with each of the other variables. The model employed
is the so-called saturated model in which all interactions are included and thus the ob-
served frequencies are fully reproduced by the analysis. We are not concerned here to
identify a reduced model that might best account for the observed frequencies; instead
we are concerned to identify which interactions provide a statistically significant contri-
bution to the reproduction of the observed frequencies. To determine this, the parameter
estimates (as standard normal deviates) are listed in the three tables below.

<p>| Table 1. Parameter estimates (as standard normal deviates) for models of interaction between PvdA voter, late decider, influenced by polls, and various indicators of interest (I) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political interest</th>
<th>Read national news</th>
<th>Talk politics</th>
<th>Read campaign news</th>
<th>Watched debates</th>
<th>Change in political interest last year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>.66</td>
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<td>-.57</td>
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<td>.33</td>
<td>-1.28</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PvdA<em>polls</em>I</td>
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<td>.10</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.99</td>
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<td>-1.96</td>
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<td>.34</td>
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<td>-.46</td>
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<td>5.88</td>
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<td>12.50</td>
<td>12.55</td>
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<td>-.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>21.15</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>10.53</td>
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</table>

p < .05 in italics; p < .01 in bold
Table 2. Parameter estimates (as standard normal deviates) for models of interaction between PvdA voter, late decider, influenced by polls, and various indicators of knowledge and concern (C)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Politics is important for me</th>
<th>Coalition matters to me personally</th>
<th>Coalition matters to country</th>
<th>Political knowledge</th>
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<td>1.22</td>
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<td>late<em>polls</em>C</td>
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<td>-.68</td>
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<td>-1.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>PvdA*polls</td>
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<td><strong>4.04</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.45</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.58</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late*polls</td>
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<td><strong>8.04</strong></td>
<td><strong>9.69</strong></td>
<td><strong>9.65</strong></td>
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<td>PvdA*C</td>
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<td>-10.11</td>
<td>-10.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>late</td>
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<td>-8.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td><strong>20.50</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.73</strong></td>
<td><strong>-3.33</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.85</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05 in italics; p < .01 in bold

Table 3. Parameter estimates (as standard normal deviates) for models of interaction between PvdA voter, late decider, influenced by polls, and various indicators of cynicism and efficacy (E)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Internal political efficacy</th>
<th>External political efficacy</th>
<th>Political cynicism</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>.27</td>
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<td>PvdA<em>polls</em>E</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td><strong>5.32</strong></td>
<td>-.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05 in italics; p < .01 in bold

These three tables (1-3) examine groups of variables: interest, knowledge and concern, and efficacy and cynicism. Interactions that are considered to be significant are listed in italics (for p < .05) and bold (p < .01). Since the standard normal deviates are compared to the normal equation, the critical values are 1.96 and 2.58 respectively. However, it should be noted that one standard text recommends a critical value of 4.00 in order to counter the risk of increasing Type I error due to multiple testing. One should therefore interpret any values in the table that are less than 4.00 with some caution.
The first question to be answered is whether a bandwagon for the Labor Party occurred in January 2003. The results from the three tables provide evidence that this was the case. The interaction effect of voting for the PvdA and influence of the polls is significant in all cases. This bivariate interaction can be seen in the following cross-tabulation Table 4. Voters for the PvdA were considerably more likely to indicate that they were influenced by the polls than were voters for other parties (29 versus 18 per cent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. Vote choice and influenced by polls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Influenced by polls</td>
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A second indication of a bandwagon can be found in the interaction effect between the timing of the decision and influence by the polls. Table 5 shows that voters who made their decision during the last days or even on Election Day were almost three times as likely to indicate that public opinion polls had influenced their decision as did those who had decided earlier for whom they would vote.

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<th>Table 5. Timing of decision and influenced by polls</th>
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<td>Decided last days or Election Day</td>
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Deciding late and being influenced by the polls support the conclusion reached from the discussion of the aggregate results that there was indeed a Labor bandwagon in 2003. However, when turning to the second and more important question here, no support can be found in these tables for the conclusion that the voters who created this bandwagon were uninterested, uninformed, unconcerned, or uncommitted. In no case does the standard normal deviate value exceed the Tabachnik and Fidell criterion of 4.00 for achieving statistical significance. In Table 3, one value exceeds the lower criterion set by the SPSS program, but examination of the bivariate relationship reveals that those who watched more than one election debate were more likely to report being influenced by the polls than those watching only one or none. In addition, those who reported an increase in their political interest during the past year were more likely to report being
influenced by polls, although the Z-value does not achieve statistical significance. Both of these relationships are the opposite of what would be expected from the negative image of rather unsophisticated bandwagon voters. Also reaching statistical significance at the lower level is the interaction between cynicism and influence by the polls. It is the case that those who are higher in cynicism are slightly more likely to be influenced by polls, but it can be questioned whether cynicism reflects a lack of commitment or just the opposite, i.e. concern for the political and electoral system.

Several of the bivariate interactions between late deciding and political interest achieve statistical significance. The evidence, however, is mixed. It is true that those who read about the campaign less often, talk politics less, and watched fewer debates are slightly more likely to have been late deciders in 2003. On the other hand, those who reported that their interest in politics had increased during the past year were more likely to be late deciders. The results are also mixed for variables related to political concern. Those who said that which coalition was formed mattered less to them were more likely to be late deciders, but those who said that politics was important to them personally were also more likely to be late deciders.

Finally, none of the three-way or four-way interactions achieve significance. One must therefore conclude that there is no empirical evidence to suggest that bandwagon voters are less interested, less informed, or less concerned than other voters. This finding strongly contradicts the negative image of bandwagon voters that has developed among scholars, journalists, and politicians. However, before burying the myth, the question can be asked, if it is not uninterested, uninformed and unconcerned voters who are jumping on the bandwagon, what were the motivations of those voters who joined the surge to the Labor Party in 2003? What were these bandwagon voters attempting to achieve? What calculations did they make?

Voter calculations

To fully understand the impact of public opinion polls on voters requires a broader conceptualization of the possible uses of polls by voters (e.g., Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2

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2 The significant values for the various univariate effects are not substantively interesting because they simply reveal that the distribution of these variables differed from an equal 50-50 split. This was already seen in the discussion of the variables in the analysis.
2000; Hardmeier, 2008). One problem is that, in particular in multi-party systems, the possibilities go far beyond the bandwagon (and underdog) effects that are so often mentioned. The choice to join a groundswell of support for a party may be a quite well-informed and well-calculated choice, based upon the dynamics of the electoral system, the party system, and the circumstances of a specific election. To illustrate this, we can examine the group of late-deciding Labor voters who were influenced by polls in 2003 more closely.

Any vote choice is made within the context and constraints of the party system and electoral system (Miller & Niemi, 2002; see for the Netherlands, Andeweg & Irwin, 2005). The Netherlands has a proportional system that allows representation in Parliament with only 0.67 per cent of the national vote. This makes the system extremely proportional (Lijphart, 1999: 162) and this low threshold and the ease of ballot access allow many parties to be on the ballot (19 for the elections of January 22, 2003) and achieve representation in the Lower House of Parliament (9 after the elections of 2003). However, most parties can be grouped into party families. For example, four parties are generally considered to be leftist parties. These include the Labor Party (PvdA), the Socialist Party (SP) the GreenLeft Party (GroenLinks) and even D66. So if a voter has a leftist political orientation, it is possible or even likely that he or she feels some degree of sympathy for each of these four parties (see e.g., Tillie, 1995). Yet at an election only a single vote may and can be cast. Choosing which of these political parties to support may not always be a simple matter.

Elsewhere we have demonstrated that voters who wait until late in the campaign before determining their vote may not be searching for information concerning the various parties, politicians or policy proposals, but wait until late in the campaign in order to formulate their expectations concerning the outcome of the election and the resultant balance of power among the parties that will influence the process of coalition formation. (Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2008). Based upon these expectations, which in their turn are predominantly based on public opinion polls (Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2002), they may alter the party for which they cast their vote. Here we investigate the decisions made by those voters who cast a Labor vote in 2003.

A portion of the 2003 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study was a panel study that began before the previous election in May 2002. The panel is formed by 1287 respondents who were interviewed before and after the 2002 election and again following the January 2003 election. We thus have a unique opportunity to examine their vote choice.
calculus and the influence of polls, since we have information concerning their attitudes and preferences from surveys taken far before the opinion polls in 2003 could have been an influence. When these voters were interviewed in early 2002, they simply could not have known that the next elections would be scheduled for January 2003.

From Table 6, it is clear that those voters who knew long in advance of the 2003 election that they would vote for the Labor Party were generally voters who had voted for the party in 2002 as well, 74 and 81 per cent. Of those who decided late in the 2003 campaign to vote PvdA, only 32 and 33 per cent had voted for this party in 2002. This means that about two-thirds of these late deciders had not voted at all or voted for another party in 2002 and shifted to the PvdA in 2003. These are the voters who jumped on the PvdA bandwagon.

In 2002 the respondents had been asked to indicate their feelings towards the various political parties on so-called feeling thermometers, ranging from 0 for cold feelings to 100 for warm feelings, with 50 as neutral point. In addition, voters were asked to indicate their future voting behavior on a scale from 0 (will never vote for this party) to 10 (will certainly vote for this party at some time in the future). These questions were asked after the 2002 election, long before the 2003 election. The average scores for the various groups are presented in the second and third rows of Table 6. Early deciders in 2003 already had the most positive feelings towards the Labor Party in 2002. This is hardly surprising, since these are clearly the core of consistent voters for the party. However, those who decided late to vote for the Labor Party in 2003 were only somewhat less positive towards the party at the earlier time period (65 and 66), figures that are between 13 to 20 points higher than those of voters who did not vote for the party in 2003. Bandwagon voters thus clearly had positive feelings towards the Labor party long before the 2003 election.

Row three of Table 6 indicates the average score in 2002 for the likelihood that a voter will vote for the Labor Party in the future. Again, the core support of the early decides is evident. These voters have average scores of 8.5 and 8.9 that they will vote for Labor in the future, which they indeed do in 2003. Those who did not vote for the Labor Party in 2003 also had already indicated in 2002 that it was rather unlikely that they would do so in the future; their scores range between 3.4 and 4.7. The crucial figures, however, are those who decided late to vote for the Labor Party in 2003. In 2002 they had already indicated an affinity for the party by average scores of 7.2 and 7.3 that they were fairly likely to vote for the Labor Party in the future.
Based on the feeling thermometer scores and the change of voting for the party in the future, it is clear that late deciders in 2003 already had pre-existing positive feelings towards this party. Row four of Table 6 provides crucial insight into the vote calculus of these voters. We take a score of 8 or higher on the future vote scale to be an indication of a strong affinity for a party. With the large number of parties available to Dutch parties, it is possible to have such affinities for more than a single party. The fourth row of Table 6 contains those voters who in 2002 who gave a score of 8 or higher to two or more of the parties on the left of the political spectrum. Such voters have strong affinities for two or more of the leftist parties, and thus at any election must choose only one for which to vote. Here the percentage of respondents who gave a score of 8 or higher on the future vote scale is presented. A score of 8 or higher may be considered an indication of strong political affinity for a party. And, in particular, if one gives such a score to more than one political party, then it is necessary to choose between such strong affinities when making the final vote choice.

These results show that after the election of 2002, certain voters had strong affinities for more than one of the parties of the left. Among those who knew well in advance they would vote for the PvdA in 2003, 18 per cent report such multiple affinities. Among these core Labor supporters, a number of voters also have an affinity for other leftist parties. For late-deciders who were not influenced by the polls, the percentage is similar (17 per cent). However, for late-deciders in 2003 who were influenced by the polls, the percentage rises to 22 per cent. This means that so-called bandwagon voters in 2003
were in a position of having to choose between several parties that they felt strongly about. Above it was demonstrated that these voters were well-informed and interested. Apparently they have used their expectations from the polls concerning the outcome of the 2003 election as a way of determining which of the parties they felt positively towards deserved their vote. In 2002 most had voted for another party, in 2003 they chose the party that was in the race to become the largest party in the Netherlands and consequently the party that might get the initiative in the forming of a new governmental coalition after the elections, the Labor Party.

Conclusion

The bandwagon is not a mythical creation and need not be destroyed. This research has shown that bandwagon effects do occur, that is, groundswells of support do occur. In January 2003, the Dutch PvdA rose rapidly in the polls from about 29 seats to more than 40 seats in less than three weeks time. It is not the image of the bandwagon that needs to be revised but the image of those who have jumped on. The classic bandwagon was purely for recreation. Fun-loving, but otherwise uninterested, uncommitted, and uninformed voters jumped on, their ranks swelling as it proceeded, did not care where they were going, as long as they could ride along with the winner. However, the bandwagon here was not carrying these ‘bandwagon voters’. Those climbing on the wagon were at least as interested, informed and committed as other voters.

Rather than a bandwagon for entertainment, the new, improved model is a means of transportation. It is a fuel-efficient bus, employed by informed and calculating voters to reach the desired political destination. The voters riding the PvdA bus in 2003 already had sympathy for the party in 2002, but for whatever reasons had not supported the party at the elections in that particular year. However, after the new party leader won the first debate, more and more of these voters switched their votes, seeking to make the PvdA the largest party. They climbed on the bandwagon.

Although one black swan may be considered sufficient to reject the theoretical statement that ‘All swans are white’, one Dutch case study may not be enough to provide definite rejection of the established image of bandwagon voters. However, it does provide more than sufficient cause for scholars, journalists, and politicians to seriously reexamine their view of such voters. Scholars should perform additional studies to
attempt to support (or reject) the findings presented here. Journalists should broaden their vision to have a more positive image of how voters employ polls to determine their votes. And politicians should think twice before calling for (or passing) legislation that would deprive voters of vital information that they need for making a reasoned choice.

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