

Old institutions, new issues

Can Dutch consensus democracy cope with a more demanding electorate?

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Abstract

In recent decades, the Netherlands has gone through substantial societal and political change, while the formal institutions of consensus democracy have essentially remained the same. There is an academic debate on the question whether such institutions can provide high-quality democracy if strong ties between political elites and the electorate can no longer be taken for granted. Trends over time in the quality of Dutch democracy are assessed and it is determined whether these trends can be ascribed to societal and political change. Based on democratic theory, responsiveness, accountability and satisfaction are used as criteria. These indicators are measured using longitudinal datasets, in particular the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys and automated content analysis of party manifestos and government declarations. It is found that parties are becoming more responsive to voters due to a highly demanding electorate and competitive elections. As parties need to make more promises, they find it harder to keep them, causing a decline in accountability and satisfaction. Simultaneously, compromises in coalition negotiations and increasing fragmentation make it harder for the electorate to attribute responsibility for government policy and keep hold governments accountable. Reforms are suggested to address these issues, which is possible within the current institutional framework but can be encouraged by institutional changes that decrease proportionality of the electoral system.

Introduction

The Netherlands, once Lijphart's (1968) leading example of consensus democracy, has gone through substantial changes in the last few decades. The traditional pillars have crumbled down, decreasing the traditional influence of religious and class divisions on the way people vote (Van der Kolk 2000: 133-135) while boosting electoral volatility to exceptionally high levels (Mair 2008). Recent elections have shown substantial party system change and much has been written about the rise of new populist movements, in particular Pim Fortuyn's LPF (Akkerman 2005; Pennings and Keman 2003; Van Holsteyn, Irwin and Den Ridder 2003). Moreover, extreme parties are growing and the electorate is becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the political establishment. Many no longer trust the elites to govern in their best interest. Despite these large societal and political changes, institutional arrangements have remained the same (Deschouwer 2001: 214; Pennings and Keman 2008: 168). The Dutch combination of a highly proportional electoral system with a low electoral threshold and weakly organized parties has been blamed for the instability of the party system (Aarts and Thomassen 2008: 231; Krouwel and Lucardie 2008: 279). Recent changes pose the question whether the framework of consensus democracy is still capable of dealing with the new problems of an increasingly demanding electorate.

Consensual institutions have both advantages and disadvantages. While suitable for divided societies in which the elites and their electorates largely agree, they cannot deal with conflicts between elites and the electorate well (Andeweg 2000: 530). In the latter case, the institutions associated with adversarial politics provide a more effective mechanism to keep elites accountable to the population. Hence, a good fit between societal conflicts and the framework chosen is required. Given the rise of electoral volatility and populism and the increasing dissatisfaction with politics, it is doubtful whether the system still fits well in the Netherlands. If a mismatch between the political system and society has indeed emerged, then one would expect a deterioration of the quality of democracy because the population would no longer have the means to control government policy effectively.

To evaluate the quality of Dutch democracy, I use the criteria developed by the University of Essex Human Rights Centre (2009) and the model of democracy as posed by Keman (1997b: 167). Within this framework, parties are expected to offer policy choices that

the electorate wants (responsiveness) and form party governments that address those issues (accountability). Democracy requires both responsiveness and accountability to be effective and this is achieved by parties showing vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy seeking behaviour. Government policies may or may not lead to the outcomes desired by the voters (satisfaction), causing them to adjust their preferences and providing a feedback loop to the next elections. It is also important to note that, especially in the context of increasing voter expectations, parties may be tempted to promise more than they can deliver. This creates a tension between the aspects of quality of democracy and requires them to be investigated simultaneously.

It should be noted that, although the Netherlands has displayed exceptionally high levels of change, there is good reason to believe that similar developments also affect other countries. As individualization and secularization progress, party systems are 'defrozen' and traditional cleavage structures get lost (Dogan 2001: 101). Reasons for consensus democracy cease to exist while inertia and political culture keep consensual institutions alive (Armingeon 2002: 159). All over Europe, partisan attachment from voters and partisan control over government have weakened (Schmitt 1983). Mass immigration occurs in most European countries and the concerns it causes allow populist parties to gain a foothold in many party systems. Moreover, the media has become increasingly influential (Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder 1998). By focussing on (perceived) problems and failures of the government and by giving many parties a platform, they provide a valuable service to democracy. However, by giving government parties much negative attention, participation in government becomes more of a risk for vote-seeking parties and competition with traditional mainstream parties is increased. The ability to govern is further hampered by electoral fragmentation, which means that more parties must cooperate before policy can be made. Increasing calls for direct democracy are yet another difficulty, because it would allow the opposition to block government policy whenever it can convince the electorate. Hence, governments cannot meet increasing demands and government authority decreases (Schmitt 1983). Due to the highly proportional Dutch electoral system these changes are likely to have observable consequences in the Netherlands earlier than elsewhere (Aarts and Thomassen 2008: 231; Krouwel and Lucardie 2008: 279), but the developments that appear to cause them are present in other countries as well.

This research serves as an empirical assessment of the Dutch situation in the light of Andeweg's (2000) thesis that consensus democracy is less suitable for countries with elite-voter conflicts. If this reasoning is correct, then one should see that current demographic and political changes lead to a decrease in the quality of democracy because elite behaviour cannot be held in check by the old consensual institutions. This theory is opposed to Lijphart's (1999) observation that consensus democracies do at least as well as majoritarian ones and tend to be "kinder and gentler". According to this theory, one would not expect to see major problems with the quality of Dutch democracy as the same institutions were considered highly successful before. Besides investigating the impact of societal change in consensus democracies, I also consider to what extent there is a tension between the various components of the quality of democracy mentioned in the literature. Since responsiveness, accountability and satisfaction influence each other, they must be considered together when evaluating political systems.

This research serves as an audit of current Dutch politics and indicates whether there are any weak links in the Dutch chain of democratic control. Such weak links could serve as an indication of whether changes might be desirable in order to make Dutch political politics more responsive, more accountable or more satisfactory for the electorate. Depending on the outcomes, this could mean either that the Dutch political system should be retained as it is or that it should be reformed to a more competitive system. As other democracies are confronted by similar problems, such an advice would also have implications for institutional choice in other current consensus democracies and in emerging democracies.

Literature review

The political situation in the Netherlands

Consensus democracy

Ever since Lijphart (1968) sketched of the political situation in The Netherlands as one in which elites resolve the societal conflicts through negotiation rather than competition, the Netherlands has been known as a prototypical example of consensus democracy. In the scholarly literature there is a debate on the merits of the institutional arrangements that characterize this form of democracy.

Although it is widely accepted that, as Lijphart argues, consensus democracy allows large societal divisions to be bridged and may even prevent civil war in extremely divided societies (Shapiro 2002: 249-250), the democratic credentials of consensus democracy are often put into question. Common criticisms are a lack of accountability (Andeweg 2000: 530; Pennings 2005: 31-32; Thomassen 2000: 216) and responsiveness (Pennings 2005: 31), lack of a real opposition (Andeweg 2000: 530), the ability of minorities to change or block decisions supported by a majority (Andeweg and Irwin 2005: 224; Armingeon 2002: 162) and slow decision making (Andeweg and Irwin 2005: 224; Armingeon 2002: 162; Breeman et al 2009). It has also been observed, on the other hand, that consensus democracies are among the best-performing democratic states (Lijphart 1999), that their governments have high legitimacy (Andeweg and Irwin 2005: 223), that the levels of equality between their citizens are higher (Armingeon 2002: 162; Lijphart 1999) and that their policies tend to be aimed at the longer term and are more successful (Armingeon 2002: 163).

Given the differences between consensus democracy and more adversarial forms of democracy, it becomes clear that both have strong points and weak points. This brings Andeweg (2000) to the conclusion that both styles of democracies can be appropriate in certain situations but not in others. Consensus democracy can be used to settle down conflict between societal groups, while adversarial democracy is more suitable to address conflicts between the elite and the masses. The former corresponds with a limited conception of democracy in which the primary goal is just to avoid tyranny, while the latter serves the more ambitious goal of keeping elites responsive and accountable by promoting

competitive behaviour. Andeweg's conclusions contrast against Lijphart's (1999) main finding, namely that consensus democracy is empirically shown to be at least as good as the alternative in each case.

Despite numerous societal and political changes in the Netherlands, as is discussed in the next section, the formal institutional framework that has established consensus democracy in the Netherlands has barely changed at all (Deschouwer 2001: 214; Pennings and Keman 2008: 168). Most notably, if one considers Lijphart's (1999) criteria, proportional representation, the multi-party system, coalition government, corporatism, bicameralism and decentralization have survived unchanged. Oversized coalitions have become less common than in the years just after the Second World War, but still occur occasionally; the last one was the cabinet-Kok II (1998-2002). Besides continuity in formal institutions, elites also continue their old behaviour; although there has been a period of polarization, elites are once again willing to cooperate (Andeweg and Irwin 2005: 42).

Given the lack of institutional change, it is notable from an international perspective that some other countries did go through major reforms in the same time period. Italy, Japan and New Zealand, for example, all introduced new electoral systems with the aim to improve accountability (Scheiner 2008). Although reforms initially led to disappointment and eventually did not solve all problems, each reform did lead to improvements regarding the primary concerns that triggered it (ibid.: 165-166).

Societal and political changes

Since the time in which Lijphart (1968) wrote about the Dutch "politics of accommodation", there have been major changes in the Dutch society. The pillars based on class and religion broke down even as he was writing (Dekker and Ester 1996; Van der Kolk 2000: 133, 135; Van Praag and Uitterhoeve 1999: 116-117), traditional values got out of fashion (Van Praag and Uitterhoeve 1999: 114-115), elections became more volatile (Dalton 2002: 22; Mair 2008) and resulted in more fragmentation (Andeweg and Irwin 2005: 221; Sartori 2005: 12) as swing voters became more common (Van Praag and Uitterhoeve 1999: 117) and more demanding (Schmitt 1983; Van Praag and Uitterhoeve 1999: 119). Traditional theories linking voters and parties – such as the 'heartland model' that specifies the link between religion, class and parties – no longer hold due the rise of strategic voting (Irwin and Van

Holsteyn 2008: 43). More issues are discussed due to competition over a new 'immigration' dimension (Irwin and Van Holsteyn 2008: 43) or a 'material-postmaterial' dimension (Van Wijnen 2000a: 142). It is clear that the fall of the pillars has led to substantial societal change which cannot leave politics unaffected.

At the same time, the government has become less capable of solving people's problems, as power has shifted away to the international arena (Keman 2008: 150-151), local government (Van Praag and Uitterhoeve 1999: 121) and the market (Van Praag and Uitterhoeve 1999: 119). People's trust in institutions and satisfaction with democracy are no longer self-evident (Andeweg and Irwin 2005: 228; Dekker, De Hart and Van den Berg 2004: 184) and their attachment to parties is dwindling (Dekker, De Hart and Van den Berg 2004: 190), while the media has become an important factor in politics (Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder 1998). Taken together, there is good reason to believe it has become harder for governments to keep the population satisfied.

The societal changes discussed coincide with change in party competition. Fast adjustments of the Dutch party system have been attributed to the very low electoral threshold (Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Krouwel and Lucardie 2008: 279) as well as weak party organizations and frequent party leadership change (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). In this case, however, there is no clear trend. While originally convergence in both party positions (Thomassen 2000: 208; Van Wijnen 2000c: 168-169) and voter positions (Van Praag and Uitterhoeve 1999: 118) was observed, more recent accounts have reported that Dutch politics are becoming more polarized (Pennings and Keman 2008: 158). The original account held that voters have started to act more according to the traditional model of democracy, picking the party closest to their preferences rather than a fixed party (Thomassen 2000: 206). As a consequence, parties have started to compete for voters in the middle of the ideological spectrum and are converging (ibid.: 208). Issues have depoliticised to avoid inter-party conflict, causing voters to have difficulty distinguishing the parties (ibid.: 206) whose positions are increasingly unclear (ibid.: 216). The new account observes that right-wing parties are attempting to imitate the polarization strategy that the left wing used previously (Pennings and Keman 2008: 173). As a result, Dutch politics are now becoming more and more adversarial (Pennings and Keman 2008: 158). According to Pennings and Keman

(2008), this can be attributed to the declining strength of the Christian democrat pivot party which, in turn, is eventually a consequence of depillarization.

The rise of populism

Having considered the traditional consensus democracy in the Netherlands and the major societal and political changes that have occurred since then, I now turn to the present phase of Dutch democracy. In particular, there has been an extensive debate in the literature on the significance of the 2002 election in which Pim Fortuyn's newly established party LPF (List Pim Fortuyn) obtained 17% of the seats and immediately entered into a government coalition with two traditional parties. Even though the cabinet lasted for only three months and the LPF lost most of its seats in the subsequent election, many argue that the LPF has had a lasting impact on Dutch parties, which still use the issues brought to the attention by the LPF to capture its voters (Akkerman 2005: 344; Pennings and Keman 2003). In particular, scholars have been working to find how this new party can be classified and what can explain its large impact. These questions are especially important because the rise of Geert Wilders' in the 2006 elections makes one wonder to what extent this event is similar and whether it means that there will be a permanent populist presence in Dutch politics. Akkerman (2005: 351) predicts that there will be a new party to fill the void left by the LPF.

Regarding the nature of the LPF, there is a general consensus in the scholarly literature that it is right-wing and populist, but not extremist (Akkerman 2005; Pennings and Keman 2003; Van Holsteyn, Irwin and Den Ridder 2003). This can be shown from cross-national comparison of party manifestos (Pennings and Keman 2003) as well the fact that it did not attempt to overthrow the democratic system but rather reform it to make politics more open and shift power from elites to the people (Akkerman 2005: 339). Moreover, its main message was a defence of traditional liberal values such as the secular nature of the state and freedom of expression (ibid.: 346, 349). One of the major achievements of this party was its ability to quickly establish issue ownership of the crime and immigration issues (ibid.: 80) based on its unprecedented success in the media (Van Holsteyn, Irwin and Den Ridder 2003: 73).

The ability of the LPF to capture a large section of the electorate has been attributed to several developments in Dutch politics. According to Pennings and Keman (2003),

programmatic convergence of the traditional parties during the 'Purple' government combined with high volatility made it possible for Fortuyn to position himself a gap in party positions. Populism can be taken as a natural mechanism of representative democracy to repair a situation in which parties have become elitist and non-responsive (Akkerman 2005: 338). Both Akkerman (2005: 345) and Van Holsteyn, Irwin and Den Ridder (2003) reject the idea that a shift to the right caused the rise of LPF, arguing that voters did not change positions but were confronted with a new situation due to the addition of a new choice. This development was further accelerated by the increasing role of the news media and the fact that politicians were more media-savvy than before, which provided politicians with a powerful platform to present their positions to the electorate (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003). Hence, there appears to be agreement that party strategies rather than shifts in the electorate caused this dramatic event.

Democratic theory

Responsiveness

To be able to discuss responsiveness, it is important to first determine what it means. This term is used more often than it is defined, but Keman does provide an explicit definition: "political and societal actors in a liberal democracy ought to articulate and aggregate those issues that are perceived in society as *problematical*, that is to say, be 'responsive'" (Keman 1997a: 18; emphasis in original). This definition stresses in particular that it is important for parties to emphasise the right issues, namely those that are widely considered as problems, so that voters can select a party that addresses them. Others, such as McDonald et al. (2004: 847-849), also stress the temporal dimension. Parties are responsive if they are willing to adjust their position over time in reaction to new problems in a reliable way. In this sense, highly ideological parties that do not change positions are considered unresponsive. Despite these differences, it is clear from both approaches that there should be some relationship between problems experienced in society and promises parties make to address them.

There is much discussion on the role and nature of party responsiveness in keeping democracy vital. Depending on one's conception of democracy and the way in which voters use their vote, party responsiveness may be either essential or completely unnecessary. Within Downs' (1957) framework of spatial competition, it is predicted that parties (at least

in two-party systems) actively move along the political spectrum to find the median voter. This is considered desirable because it ensures that parties give the electorate what it wants. The other extreme is the 'thermostat model', in which the median voter alternates his or her vote between parties to get the policy mix he or she desires (Eichenberg and Stoll 2003; Soroka and Wlezien 2005), voting for a right-wing party whenever state expenditures are too high and for a left-wing party if they are too low. In this case it is not important whether parties move, since voters care mostly about the long-term average. If the parties stay put with some ideological distance between them, this makes it easier for voters to identify which party to vote for. While Downs assumes that parties are purely vote-seeking, the 'thermostat model' allows for more ideological policy-seeking parties. Hence, depending on the kind of party behaviour, either model might be valid (McDonald et al. 2004) as long as parties respond in predictable ways to be able to offer the voter meaningful choice. In this section, I elaborate on the debate about responsiveness and ideology in the literature based on the distinction between ideological and responsive parties.

I first discuss theories which hold that parties need not be responsive, but should rather hold stable ideological positions that allow voters to distinguish them. In particular in two-party systems, this system is known as the 'thermostat model' (Soroka and Wlezien 2005). If one supposes that the median voter is halfway between the two parties, he or she can alternate his or her vote between the parties to achieve the desired policy on the long term. Eichenberg and Stoll (2003) show that this model also works in multi-party systems. Budge (1994) also holds that parties should be ideological rather than responsive, but argues that in multi-party democracies it is coalition formation rather than alteration of government that causes the median voter to be represented. Party positions can vary without converging, for example because the parties polarize when elections are expected to be non-competitive or because parties keep a more or less fixed position with respect to some reference party (ibid.: 461). Adams (2001: 127) argues that convergence is not only unnecessary, but also unlikely because voters expect certain ideologies from the parties, based on their previous experiences with them.

I now continue with Downs' (1957) model of spatial competition, in which responsiveness is the key to representation of the median voter. These models assume that parties are not ideologically motivated, but are rather purely vote-seeking. In this view,

convergence to the median voter is desirable. It is important to note that this model is based on the assumption of a two-party system with only a single dimension of competition, in which case the median always exists. According to Adams (1999: 259-260) there exist equilibria for any number of dimensions if one assumes that votes are not cast deterministically, but that rather each voter randomly picks a party with probabilities based on his or her rational evaluation of the benefits the party would provide him or her. Although most models of spatial competition apply only to two-party systems, the easy case, Keman (1997b: 181) argues that they are in fact also important in the Netherlands. Although there are many parties and complete convergence is not expected, there is a pivot party that participates in nearly every government. If this party – the CDA since 1977 and its predecessor KVP before that – is responsive to the median voter, it can pick its more ideological coalition partner based on its closeness to that voter. When public sentiment shifts to the left, the pivot party governs with the labour party (PvdA), and when it shifts to the right it governs with the liberals (VVD). If the pivot party would not be responsive, government coalitions would not represent the median voter accurately. Another reason for responsiveness in the Netherlands is keeping parties in line with their own electorate, which can be achieved by assessing the electoral results of previous shifts (Budge 1994: 461). This is particularly important if each party has a more or less fixed group of supporters, as was the case in the era of pillarization.

It has been shown that different models of party competition are found in the literature, with different implications for the significance of responsiveness. These models are complementary rather than competing and depend on the model of party competition in the country being investigated. In particular, responsiveness is associated with vote-seeking behaviour, convergence with office-seeking behaviour and ideology with policy-seeking (Strøm 1990). Each of these theories of party behaviour suffers from empirical and theoretical shortcomings, in particular because they are static and do not consider the institutional context (ibid.: 568-569). Non-competitive multiparty institutions (as found in the Netherlands) encourage office seeking and policy seeking, while responsiveness is a sign of vote-seeking behaviour (ibid.: 592-593).

Accountability

Accountability is defined in the literature in various ways. It can be phrased as “the idea that actors representing the people will act according to their pledges made to the public and attempt to solve the existing and perceived problems” (Keman 1997a: 18-19), but many scholars mostly use the term to refer to the possibility of the electorate to punish parties that have not kept to their pledges (Anderson 2007: 277; Urbinati and Warren 2008: 396). In particular, this punishment involves removal from public office after perceived bad performance. Another way to define it, commonly used from a rational choice perspective, is the existence of a principal-agent relationship between voters and politicians (Anderson 2007: 277). This means that citizens delegate power while keeping the possibility to monitor and, if needed, replace their agents. The ability of citizens to monitor their representatives is not explicit in every definition, but follows implicitly from the (contested) assumption that citizens are capable of assessing their performance.

There is some debate on the merits of accountability in the literature, one extreme holding the position that it is the essence of democracy and the other that it is an idealized concept that is not realistically feasible in any democracy. The perceived importance of accountability figures prominently in some common definitions of democracy: “Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them” (Schumpeter 1942: 269) and “at a minimum, it seems to me, democratic theory is concerned with processes by which ordinary citizens exert a relatively high degree of control over leaders.” (Dahl 1971: 3). In both cases, it is stressed that accountability is the core of democratic government, Schumpeter using the definition focussed on punishment and Dahl, similar to Keman 1997a: 18-19, using only the result that politicians do what the people want them to do.

Even though accountability is considered important for democracy, there are also those who question whether it is realistically possible for the population to assess to what extent politicians perform well and to punish them if needed. Citizens have too little information (Anderson 2007: 279; Papadopoulos 2003: 486) and are too much influenced by values and predispositions (Anderson 2007: 279) to be able to assess government performance, in particular regarding economic policy. Moreover, it is often hard for them to attribute responsibility to the correct party (Anderson 2007: 279) and make up the balance if

some things go well and others turn out badly (Papadopoulos 2003: 488). Furthermore, their evaluations concern the expectations of the future rather than reflections on the past as accountability would require (Papadopoulos 2003: 487). Even if voters do punish incumbents, the incumbents often do not perceive it as such (Papadopoulos 2003: 488).

It is once again important to also consider institutions. Strøm (2000) distinguishes ex-post and ex-ante accountability, the former referring to the punishment of those politicians who failed to keep their word and the latter to the selection on beforehand of candidates that are unlikely to do so. This difference relates to the distinct mechanisms of accountability between presidentialism and parliamentarism (Strøm 2000: 269). Ex-post accountability is high in presidentialism, where there are multiple channels of accountability, and low in parliamentarism, where government is directly accountable only to parliament. As a consequence bargaining is less transparent in parliamentary democracies than in presidentialism and it is harder for the electorate to monitor it (ibid.: 281). This is compensated by higher ex-ante accountability, as parties are sufficiently strong in parliamentary systems to select candidates that are likely to stick to the party program (ibid.: 278). Hence, 'traditional' (ex-post) accountability may not as important for parliamentary democracies as it is in presidential ones.

Regarding the factors that influence the degree of accountability, the central question is whether it is clear who is responsible for policy (Powell and Whitten 1993). Whenever this is unclear, for example if compromises have to be made due to proportional representation and coalition government (Anderson 2007: 282; Urbinati and Warren 2008: 399), if there was no clear mandate from the voters (Papadopoulos 2003: 486) or if the opposition has policy influence (Powell and Whitten 1993: 393), accountability is inhibited.

Satisfaction with government

If political actors are both responsive and accountable, one would expect them to address the problems experienced by the electorate. This, however, does not by itself mean that the voters are satisfied with the outcomes of their policies. In the model of democracy posed by Keman (1997a), there is a feedback loop from policies to voters. Policies, and in particular their effectiveness, shape voter's preferences and influence the next elections. Satisfaction is important by itself because it indicates whether democracy performs well, but is also

important because satisfied voters are more likely to support incumbents while dissatisfied ones are more likely to vote for opposition parties (Van Wijnen 2000b: 161). In this section, I consider factors that determine satisfaction with government policy.

Most of the literature finds that economic performance is the most important factor to determine whether the electorate is satisfied or not (Van Wijnen 2000b: 160; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000: 183). However, different components of economic performance have different effects. Cusack (1999: 654) finds that high economic growth causes the electorate to be satisfied with the government, while low unemployment and low inflation cause them to be satisfied with the democratic system as a whole. If satisfaction plays a role in the vote, one would expect incumbent government parties to receive more votes in times of high economic growth and fewer in times of recession.

Although the state of the economy is widely considered to be important for satisfaction, alternative accounts are also found in the literature. Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder (1998), for example, find that the media play a dominant role by influencing public opinion on government policy. By reporting on political actors fighting election campaigns, people's perceptions of the performance of the outgoing coalition are changed.

Methodology

There is no obvious way to determine how political positions of voters, parties and governments can be determined and related to each other, which has resulted in a large body of literature debating the various methodological approaches. The debate considers both what to measure and how to measure it. These two aspects are discussed in turn here.

When determining what to measure, there are two kinds of issues that are considered in the literature: positional issues and valence issues (Van Wijnen 2000b: 153). The former kind of issue is politically controversial and different actors advocate policies that are diametrically opposed, while in the latter case parties largely agree on the intentions of the policy but assign it a different level of priority. Typical examples of the former are the left-right dimension regarding the size of the state and ethical issues such as the legality of abortion or gay marriage, while reducing unemployment, conserving the environment and fighting crime are examples of the latter (ibid.: 153-154). The different nature of these kinds of issues causes a division in the literature, with the more traditional Downsian rational

choice models of electoral competition focussing on positional issues, while some more recent studies use models of issue ownership that are based on valence issues (Van der Brug 2004: 209-210). In the former case, both parties and voters have a certain position on each issue and voters select the party that is closest to them on one or more dimensions. According to the latter models, parties can obtain 'ownership' of issues by stressing them and voters then choose the party that 'owns' the issue that is most salient for them (Budge and Farlie 1983).

Regardless of what is measured, one also has to choose how to measure it. There is an especially fierce debate on the way in which party positions should be measured. According to Ray (1999: 384), at least three methods have been used: party manifestos, mass public surveys and expert surveys. Party manifestos are relatively easy to obtain for each election and represent the idea of what is arguably the most authoritative source of information: the party itself (Budge and Laver 1993: 503). Unfortunately, however, the quality and comparability of the data obtained depends much on the coding scheme used (Ray 1999: 284-285). Surveys of the mass public also allow one to derive party positions, either by using average self-positions of respondents that vote for them or by asking people directly about the perceived position of the parties. Unfortunately, average voter positions cannot be used when party are to be compared to their electorates and data on the perceived position of the parties is scarce (*ibid.*: 285). Expert surveys allows for comparison between voters and parties, reduces the random spread found in mass public surveys and are cheaper to conduct but, once again, data is often not available (*ibid.*: 285). In sum, party manifesto coding is attractive due to data availability but has attracted criticism due to the influence of the coding scheme. In particular it has been found that the Comparative Manifestos Project, which is widely used to determine party positions, suffers from unreliability because different coders use codes in different ways (Mikhaylov et al. 2008). A promising alternative is offered by automated coding, which is coder-independent, reproducible and allows one to easily change coding schemes (Pennings and Keman 2002).

Research question

The literature reveals disagreement regarding the merits of consensual institutions; while some argue that they yield a second class democracy and are preferable only if democracy is not otherwise possible (Andeweg 2000), others maintain that consensus democracy can provide at least the level of quality that traditional democracy does (Lijphart 1999). There is no agreement on what criteria a 'high-quality' democracy should meet either. I measure this quality according to the criteria of democratic theory, which is further elaborated in the next section, to get a general overview of how well the system performs in a situation of societal change. The Netherlands is a suitable case because of its consensual institutions, which used to work well, have been preserved while society and politics have changed substantially. Moreover, changes occur quickly and are clearly visible due to its highly proportional electoral system.

This leads to the following research question: 'to what extent did societal and political changes influence the quality of Dutch democracy?' The societal and political changes considered are those mentioned in the introduction and further elaborated on in the literature review, such as depillarization, secularization, decreasing influence of class voting, increasing demands by the electorate, reduced trust in politicians, increasing electoral volatility, a more fragmented party system and increasing influence of the media. The 'quality of democracy' is taken to refer to responsiveness, accountability and satisfaction with government and the relationship between them. In the theoretical framework, I elaborate on the way in which these concepts are used.

Besides indicating what will be investigated, this research question also implicitly places some subjects outside the scope of this thesis. In particular the processes of societal and political change are considered to be so interrelated that they cannot be untangled. I do not aim to pinpoint one or several specific developments as the main cause, as each of them reinforces the others. Regarding the quality of democracy, I investigate the relationship between voters, parties and governments rather than the outcomes of their policies.

Theoretical framework

This research is embedded in the framework of democratic theory, which argues that democracy can be seen as a means to translate societal problems into policies to address them, and in particular uses the ideas from mandate theory. For a party-based representative democracy such as the Netherlands, mandate theory means that parties promise to solve societal problems, voters provide parties with a mandate for these solutions in elections, parties then form a government and this government then creates policies to address the societal problems (Keman 1997b: 169-170). Hence, if democratic government performs well, one expects to find parties that are responsible and accountable and citizens that are either satisfied with government policy or, if they are not, attempt to remove the government from office through democratic means.

There are major institutional differences between democracies. Institutions determine actor's room for manoeuvre and structure the power relationships between actors (Keman 1997a: 13-14). In the context of consensus democracy in the Netherlands, the most central institution is a system of proportional representation with a single district and a threshold of only 0.67%. This system is known to inhibit single-party majorities and promote multi-party systems, especially when the threshold is low (Blais and Massicotte 2002: 59-60). As a result, the Netherlands has a multi-party system and has always been governed by coalitions. Another important institution is corporatism, which further confirms that the Netherlands has institutions that one would expect in a consensus democracy. Using Lijphart's (1999) criteria, the Dutch institutions are a clear example of consensus democracy on executives-parties dimension while it is about halfway on the federal-unitary dimension. On the latter dimension, the Netherlands is reasonably decentralized and has a bicameral parliament but does not provide much autonomy to regions. In this research, I focus on the executives-parties dimension.

An important drawback of coalition government is a lack of accountability, since it is not possible for the electorate to "throw the rascals out" (Blais and Massicotte 2002: 59-60). This is also the case in the Netherlands, which can be seen from the fact that there has never a complete change in the party composition of the government since the Second World War. Because coalitions always have to be formed, it is barely possible to predict government

policies from just election results. Instead, negotiation between party elites determines the composition of government. This is not much of a problem if these elites represent a large part of the population that trust 'their' elite to act in their best interest, but the literature shows, such a situation no longer exists in the Netherlands. Religious voting and class voting have declined sharply (Van der Kolk 2000: 133-135) and volatility has increased dramatically (Mair 2008). Moreover, fragmentation of the party system gives elites even more liberty in composing coalitions; to complete the desired coalition to majority status, one just has to convince one of many small parties to join in.

Given the considerations described above, I expect current institutional arrangements to become detrimental to the quality of democracy as societal and political changes progress. As voters get more demanding, elections more competitive and the media more influential, parties will need to make ever more promises be able to convince swing voters and to 'survive' in debates that are broadcast live. I therefore expect responsiveness to increase. This, as such, would be a positive development within the framework of democratic theory.

After the elections, however, elites are relatively free to pursue their own aims rather than represent their voters, as mandate theory would require. Party elites can compose the coalition that best suits their interests, not necessarily taking into account which parties were punished in elections or what fraction of the population is represented in the new cabinet. This is, in fact, also what the 'minimal winning coalition' proposition would predict based on rational party behaviour to maximize the influence of the party on the cabinet (De Winter 2002: 174). From the perspective of consensus democracy, oversized coalitions would be used to achieve maximal inclusiveness (Lijphart 1999), but as this is not enforced by formal institutions there remains little incentive for political actors to sacrifice power in the current environment, which has become more competitive. Although this gives parties a large influence on government policy, they also made many promises in the election to capture swing voters and it is unlikely that they can address all of the problems of their electorates. Promises that cannot be fulfilled are easily discarded by presenting them as having been impossible to realise in the coalition negotiations. This is expected to reduce the degree to which policies correspond with party manifestos and is particularly the case for small parties, which have little bargaining power *vis-à-vis* larger coalition parties as they are

easily replaced if fragmentation is high. As a result, the coalition agreement also need not represent the problems experienced by the electorate. This means that not just accountability to parties, but also accountability to the electorate as a whole is expected to decrease.

As the government cannot address all problems experienced by the voters that brought it into power, it is to be expected that satisfaction with governments decreases. If my hypothesis of decreased inclusiveness holds, an additional factor increasing dissatisfaction is the fact that fewer people feel represented in the government. As a result of the dissatisfaction of voters with government, one would then expect that voters punish the parties that make up the government (Van Wijnen 2000b: 161), causing incumbents' vote shares to go down. It should, however, be taken into account that the literature mentions important confounding factors with regard to satisfaction. Satisfaction with government is influenced by both economic performance (Cusack 1999: 654; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000: 183; Van Wijnen 2000b: 160) and reports in the media on the election campaign for the next elections (Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder 1998). Taken into account the fact that coalition government and the lack of a clear mandate from the voters make it harder to attribute government policy to specific parties (Anderson 2007: 282; Papadopoulos 2003: 486; Urbinati and Warren 2008: 399), satisfaction may have less influence on the vote as compromises become more watered-down and the party system becomes more fragmented. If this is shown to be correct, the lack of a reward and punishment element may well be a serious issue for Dutch democracy.

Methodology

Case selection and logic of comparison

To investigate the impact of societal change on the quality democracy within the framework of consensual institutions, I focus on the case of the Netherlands in the years 1971-2006. The Netherlands is a particularly interesting case because formal institutions have barely changed while there has been substantial societal and party system change, making it suitable for longitudinal analysis (Pennings and Keman 2008: 168). The derivation of my hypotheses is based on the combination of consensual institutions with the societal changes described in the literature review. This limits generalizability to countries in which this combination occurs. However, as argued in the introduction, most of the changes mentioned are to be expected in many other countries as well. The Netherlands can be considered a most likely case for deterioration of democracy, because low electoral threshold and weakly organized parties facilitate quick change (Aarts and Thomassen 2008: 231; Krouwel and Lucardie 2008: 279). This means that a negative conclusion (no deterioration) can be generalized to other consensus democracies.

As this research is conducted as a case study, it is not possible to make an explicit comparison between a system with consensual institutions and another without them. It would be hard to find two such cases which are going through similar processes of societal change, as institutions are in part a reflection of how society is or used to be. Generalization is therefore limited to traditional consensus democracies. However, as has been shown in the literature review, much is known about the impact of institutions on our variables of interest. Hypotheses have been derived from well-known characteristics of consensus democracy, in particular proportional representation and coalition government, which have been found in comparative research. Although I cannot reach firm conclusions about the influence of consensus democracy by itself, I implicitly compare this case with the cases that have been the foundations of current knowledge of the working of adversarial democracies. In particular, the Westminster model has been researched often and is used by Lijphart (1999) as the typical example of a non-consensual democracy. Hence, it implicitly serves as an alternative to which the Dutch institutions are compared.

Regarding the impact of societal change, comparison occurs over time. No major institutional changes occur in the years being investigated, but there has been substantial societal change. For this reason, the comparison over time can be considered a most similar systems design, the institutions being controlled for and the quality of democracy being explained from societal change. It should be noted that depillarization was already nearly completed in 1971, the start of the period I investigate, but it is still considered one of the important societal changes because it has shaped the later developments to a large degree. The main confounding variable I found in the literature that remains to be taken into consideration is the state of the economy, as bad economic performance is known to cause dissatisfaction with government (Cusack 1999: 654; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000: 183; Van Wijnen 2000b: 160). The choice of the time period is determined by the fact that no regular election surveys were held before this year, which means that there is no comparable data about what motivated voters for the earlier elections. The chosen period contains numerous important political events, such as cooperation between the progressive parties, merger of the main confessional parties into CDA, the left-wing polarization strategy, the first cabinet without the pivot party and the rise of Pim Fortuyn.

It is important to note that the various components of quality of democracy I distinguish cannot be completely separated. As argued in the theoretical framework, it is harder to be accountable if many promises have to be made to attract voters. The resulting compromises lead to limited successes in addressing the problems of the voters, yielding widespread dissatisfaction. Dissatisfied voters are more likely to change parties, making elections more volatile, offering opportunities for new protest parties and requiring parties to be ever more responsive. Although there is only one 'case', the Netherlands, there are measurements at each election in the period investigated to determine how voters evaluate the outgoing government coalition and what problems they would like the new one to solve, to determine what promises parties make to their potential voters and to determine the policy goals of the new government coalition after its formation. At the same time, societal change becomes ever more influential. This results in the model shown in Figure 1.

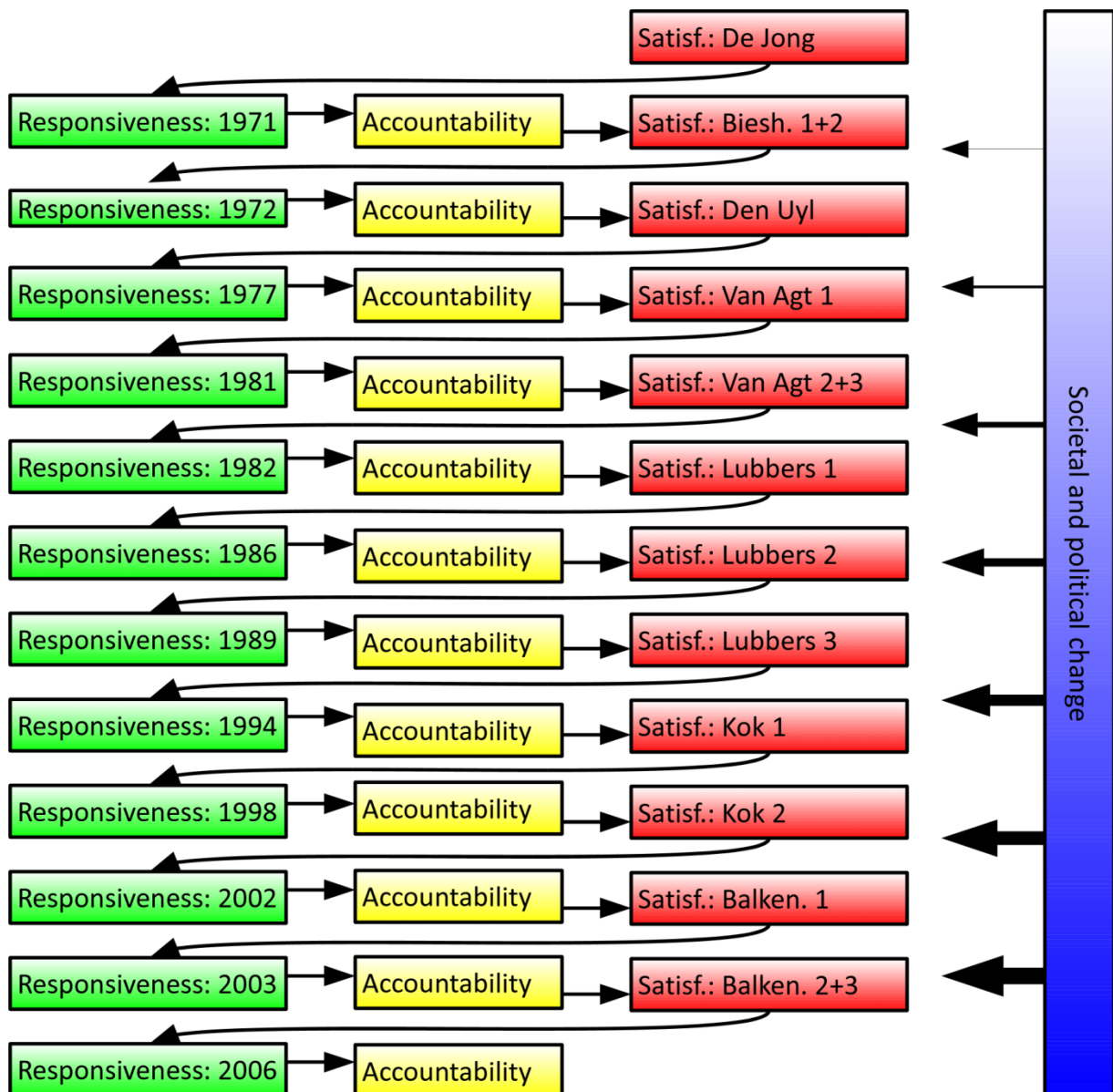


Figure 1: causality and logic of comparison; the democratic cycle for the elections and cabinets under consideration.

Data collection

Since this research is performed using a time series design, one of the most important considerations is the degree to which the variables can be compared over time. This precludes using data from one-shot surveys, requiring longitudinal studies instead. Content analysis is especially suitable for comparison over time, since documents written by actors involved capture historical situations well while coding them together according to a single coding scheme yields comparable results. The same goes for surveys organized for each election, as long as the research design and questions asked are very similar between the surveys. As these considerations for data collection also affect operationalization of the

variables needed to perform this research, I discuss data collection in this section and operationalization in the next.

The core data used for this research consists of survey data to measure most important problems experienced by voters, their evaluation of government performance and the vote they cast in the parliamentary elections. This data has been collected as a part of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Survey project (Stichting Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek 2006), which covers every election in the Netherlands since 1971. In most years, this survey was conducted as a panel study, interviewing the same random sample both before and after the elections. This allows one to link respondents' perceptions during the election campaign to their actual vote, which I need to, for example, measure the impact of satisfaction with the outgoing government on the next elections.

Besides data on voters, I also need to know how parties and governments position themselves. As mentioned, content analysis is highly suitable for longitudinal studies. Material for almost every party and government coalition is still available for almost every election and provides an indication of the goals political actors set for themselves at that time. In this way, it differs from other sources of data such as expert surveys, which do not provide complete coverage and which depend to some extent on the actors involved in the assessment and the exact questions they were asked, which makes them less suitable for comparison over time. I also did not use the Comparative Manifestos Project (Klingemann et al. 2006) dataset. Although it does offer a wealth of data derived from hand-coded content analysis of party manifestos and government declarations, its coding scheme does not represent problems experienced by voters sufficiently well (Pennings and Keman 2002) and there is large uncertainty because each document is coded by only a single coder (Mikhaylov et al. 2008). Instead, I use a computer program to code party manifestos and government declarations using a self-made dictionary. This approach is discussed in more detail in the section on operationalization. The original texts of party manifestos and government declarations were obtained from the Comparative Manifestos Project (Klingemann et al. 2006) or, for parties and years not (yet) included in this project, from Documentation Centre Dutch Political Parties (Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen 2009) and the Dutch National Information Service (Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst 2009).

Operationalization

Responsiveness

In this research, I use Keman's (1997a: 18) definition of responsiveness, measuring to what extent parties promise to address the problems of their voters. Unlike the alternative definitions, the time dimension is not explicitly made part of the concept to responsiveness since the 'thermostat model' (Eichenberg and Stoll 2003; Soroka and Wlezien 2005) and McDonald et al. (2004: 847-850) show that there is no need for parties to shift positions over time for voters to have enough choice. Although changes over time are not considered explicitly, my definition does imply that problems mentioned by the party should correspond with the (potentially changing) problems identified by the electorate at any point in time. A party that does not change its manifesto may become more responsive if the electorate shifts towards it or less responsive if it shifts away from it.

As discussed in the section on data collection, voter positions are derived from election surveys while party positions are determined through content analysis of election manifestos. The main issue in operationalizing responsiveness is ensuring that both sources of data are coded in such a way that they can be linked together. Coding schemes for most important problems also differ between the various years of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys, with large differences between the levels of detail of the various coding schemes. For example, the 1994 coding scheme consists of 373 categories while there were only 38 different codes in 2002. To be able to compare between years as well as link most important problems to party positions, I recoded all of them into a single 36-category coding scheme which is shown in Table 1. This was achieved by merging codes of the original coding schemes until either the new code was represented in each edition of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Survey or there was not meaningful way to combine it with any of the other codes.

Table 1: coding scheme to determine most important problems for voters, parties and governments.

1110	Elderly	2420	Recreation	3430	Welfare (too much)
1120	Health care	2430	Spatial planning	3510	Public transport
1210	Discrimination/racism	2510	Employment	3520	Traffic
1310	Energy	2520	Labour	4110	Agriculture
1320	Environment	3110	Economy	4210	Crime
1410	Other	3210	Media	4220	Police/judiciary
1510	Youth	3310	Bureaucracy	4310	Drugs
2110	Education	3320	Corruption	4410	Ethical/religious
2210	Incomes/prices	3330	Fraud	4510	Immigration
2310	Inequalities	3340	Politics	4610	Europe
2320	Welfare	3410	Government expenditure	4620	International relations
2410	Housing	3420	Taxes	4710	Social relations

Although the coding scheme in Table 1 is non-positional because it does not consist of pairs of opposed viewpoints, an implicit positional aspect is present in some cases. This is particularly clear for issues about which opinions in the electorate can be diametrically opposed. Regarding welfare provisions, for example, those who complain on the subject are likely to consider coverage or payments to be insufficient. It would be inappropriate to place those that specifically complain that the level of benefits is too high in the same category and therefore categories 2320 and 3430 both cover welfare, the one representing opinions directly opposed to the other. Another example is immigration. Those who mention this as a problem will probably prefer to limit immigration and are coded as 4510 while those who worry about the poor position of immigrants in society are more likely to mention discrimination or racism as a problem, which corresponds with code 1210. In this case, the opinions need not be completely opposed, but are still fundamentally different and call for carefully making a distinction. Healthcare and education are typical examples of non-positional (valence) codes. Although different people attach different priorities to these issues, it is to be expected that everyone prefers good education and good healthcare. Matters such as these are placed in the same group every time a related problem is mentioned.

Based on the codes derived from the most important problems identified by voters, I have created a list of words that, when mentioned in a party manifesto, suggest that the authoring party believes this topic to be important. This approach is based on the idea that manifestos discuss only topics on issue areas in which the party enjoys a strong reputation,

rather than discussing trade-offs made or criticizing other parties' positions (Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003: 329-330). Based on the assumption that words with policy implications generally refer to the same viewpoint each time they are used, word frequencies can be used as a proxy for party viewpoints. To achieve this efficiently and accurately, I used a new computer program (ManifestoCoder) that counts word frequencies and helps building dictionaries. Because there are multiple manifestos for each party, it is possible to compute how strong words correlate with (groups of) parties. By combining this information with their general number of occurrences, it is possible to automatically select those words that have both party-political meaning and occur sufficiently often to impact results. They are then categorized manually, which allows one to efficiently build a dictionary that is both accurate and sufficiently complete.

In previous research, the hand-coded manifestos from the Comparative Manifestos Project (Klingemann et al. 2006) have often been used to estimate party positions, while Laver, Benoit and Garry (2003) have previously introduced an approach to analyse manifestos using fully automatically generated dictionaries. Both approaches differ fundamentally from my approach. Because my coding scheme is based on voter preferences in the investigated period, the problem that coding schemes do not adapt to changes over time (Benoit en Laver 2007: 133) is alleviated. There is also no need to use reference texts to calibrate my scale, as the dictionary has been created manually. This prevents the need to assign a-priori scores, which would affect the results (ibid.: 134). Because my program determines which words are most important based on all manifestos, no specific parties or years have more influence on the scale than others. The downside of this approach is that it is more inductive, making comparison between countries and over longer periods of time harder. This is, however, a more general problem as the meaning of terms changes over time and is different between countries (ibid.: 133), which would always makes the use of a fixed dictionary problematic if such comparison is needed. Another downside compared to Laver, Benoit and Garry (2003: 317) is the fact that I cannot compute estimation errors, which they derive from the variation in left-right scores of the words in a text. Since voter problems are mostly valence rather than positional issues, I cannot compute to what extent opposed intentions can be found in a text.

Having discussed how voter problems are coded and how party positions are estimated, I now turn to the way in which these are linked together. The simplest approach would be to group respondents based on the party for which they vote and count the number of times each problem is mentioned for each party. This approach is, however, insufficient as parties should not only address the problems of their actual voters but should be particularly mindful of the problems that potential voters experience. It would result in ignoring those people that considered voting for the party but did not because it does not address the problem they consider most important. Instead, I estimate the probability of respondent X voting for party Y for each pair (X, Y) based on demographic variables. This fits with probabilistic rational choice models of voting such as employed by Adams (1999: 259-260). To estimate the probability, the party voted for is predicted from demographic variables in a logistic regression. Next, for each party, the most important problems are summed for the entire sample weighed by the probability of the respondent with the problem voting for the party, reflecting the fact that a vote-seeking party would do well to specifically address the problems of those people that are likely to vote for it. Finally, correlations between party priorities and voter priorities can be computed to give an indication of the extent to which there is agreement between them.

Accountability

As in Keman (1997a: 18-19), accountability is taken to mean the degree to which parties stick to their promises towards the electorate. An accountable government works on addressing the problems that the coalition parties promised to solve. The reward/punishment aspect is separated and becomes part of the assessment of the electorate of government policy, as this part cannot be decoupled from the question whether the electorate is satisfied with government policy. An accountable government should preferably address in particular those issues that the voters for those parties wanted to be addressed. This is not obvious from the previous point, as parties with blackmail potential may have influence that greatly exceeds what would be reasonable based on their vote share (Hofferbert and Klingemann 1990). Moreover, it is quite possible that the promises that the parties themselves find most important are not the same ones that motivated people to vote for those parties. In this case it is quite possible that only the former are addressed while the latter are sacrificed in coalition negotiations.

Although in general it can be hard to determine the composition of government, the situation is rather simple in the Netherlands. Regular cabinets have always been coalitions with a parliamentary majority, so that there is no need for additional parties to support the cabinet. This is not the case for 'rump' cabinets, such as Biesheuvel II, Van Agt III and Balkenende III in the period investigated. However, such cabinet are not formed due to elections but due to cabinet crises and elections are held as soon after their formation as is considered reasonably possible. Another simplification is the fact that all parties in coalitions supply ministers. Due to these informal rules in Dutch coalition making, the parties in the cabinet are the same as the parliamentary base that supports it and there is little doubt for the voters which parties should be held accountable for government policy.

There are several kinds of documents that can be used as a source of information on government policy intentions in the Netherlands: government agreements ('regeerakkoord'), government declarations ('regeringsverklaring') and speeches from the throne ('troonrede'). The former two are the result of the coalition negotiations and represent those policies that coalition parties have been able to agree on. Although they are not formally binding, government parties will generally not allow much deviation from them to avoid upsetting the balance in the coalition. Government agreements often prescribe intended policies in some detail, while government declarations are summaries of the issues that the coalition parties consider most important. The speech from the throne is read each year and, besides policy intentions, also discusses recent events. This makes it less suitable for automated operationalization of policy intentions. The choice between government agreements and government declarations involves a trade-off. While the former tend to be considerably longer, which is desirable in text analysis to achieve higher statistical accuracy (Benoit en Laver 2007: 132), the latter focus only on high-priority issues and therefore stay closer to the idea of a 'most important problem'. I have chosen to use government declarations to make government positions more comparable to the information available for voters and parties.

Accountability is computed by determining how well government declarations correspond with both party positions and voter positions. Government declarations are considered important expressions of government policy as they are the result of substantial negotiation between parties and therefore parties have to stick with them to a large degree

to avoid breakdown of the coalition. By coding them using ManifestoCoder, in the way and using the same dictionary as the party manifestos, one can estimate government priorities. If the coalition parties in parliament are sufficiently powerful *vis-à-vis* the executive, the government declarations should reflect their priorities well. As with the operationalization of responsiveness, the correlation is computed to determine how well governments address the problems that the coalition parties promised to solve.

As a second measure of accountability, the correspondence between government priorities and voter most important problems is computed. If coalition parties prioritize those promises that their voters find important, then there should be a high correlation between most important problems of coalition voters and the issues that are addressed in the government declaration. In fact, given Budge's (1994) argument that compromises made in coalition building are a means to create policies close to the preferences of the median voter, one would expect that in a well-functioning democracy there should even be a high correlation with the problems experienced by the electorate as a whole.

Satisfaction

If democracy works well, then one would hope government policies to address people's problems. Besides satisfaction with government policy being important by itself, it also plays a role in holding governments accountable. One would hope that at the time that new elections are held, people evaluate how well the government did and involve this in their decision in the voting booth, allowing satisfactory governments to continue and throwing the rascals out if the government performed badly. Hence, my definition of satisfaction has two components, satisfaction as such and the effect satisfaction has on the vote, the latter of which is similar to some definitions of accountability. As mentioned in the previous section, my definition of accountability involves only the degree to which government parties keep their promises and does not consider whether the electorate punishes or rewards governments.

Satisfaction with government policy is subjective as it does not refer to government performance as such, but only to people's assessments of government performance. Although it would also be interesting to find out whether governments perform well using objective yardsticks and to consider whether such measurements tend to be related with

subjective satisfaction, there is little reason to assume that performance directly influences the vote (that is, without popular satisfaction as an intervening variable) and it is outside the scope of this research. The measurement of satisfaction is obtained by a recurrent question in the Dutch Parliamentary Election Survey asking respondents whether they are (1) very satisfied, (2) satisfied, (3) neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, (4) dissatisfied or (5) very dissatisfied with government policy. This yields a measurement of satisfaction as a five-point Likert scale.

To determine to what extent voters hold political parties responsible for satisfaction with their policies, I perform regression analysis at the level of the individual voter. If voters hold parties responsible, those voters who are satisfied with government policies should be more likely to vote for a government party than those who are dissatisfied. It should, however, be considered that people who voted for a government party in the previous elections probably already agreed with the plans of that party on beforehand. Moreover, people are likely to stick with the same party because they feel related to it in another way than policy agreement or do not make an independent choice at every election. For this reason, it is appropriate to control for the party voted for the previous time to avoid overestimating the effect of satisfaction on the vote. The demographic variables that influence how likely it is a priori that a voter will vote for some party also confound the results if not controlled for. If a respondent would be unlikely to vote any coalition party based on demographics, his or her dissatisfaction with government policy may not have influence the decision to vote for an opposition party much.

To be able to control for demographic variables, I once again use party-respondent pairs as cases in a regression analysis. As the dependent variable, a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent voted for the party, is dichotomous, it is appropriate to use logistic regression. The main independent variable is the interaction between the respondent's evaluations of government policy with a dummy variable indicating whether the party was in coalition. My hypothesis is that a positive assessment of government policy makes a vote for a coalition party more likely, while dissatisfaction would increase the odds of the respondent voting for an opposition party. This would yield a positive coefficient for the interaction term. To control for people voting for the same party without considering government performance, a dummy variable measuring whether the respondent voted for

the party in the previous elections is included as well. I expect that this variable should have a positive coefficient, signalling that people do repeatedly vote for the same party. Finally, I also control for the a priori probability of voting for a party based on demographic variables. If this probability is high for some party-respondent pair, the voter has little reasonable alternative but to vote for that party, an effect which should not be ascribed to satisfaction with government policy. This a priori probability is estimated using a logistic regression, in the same way as was done for the responsiveness computation. To assure that there is a linear relationship between this probability and the dependent variable, its logit is used in the model. This is needed as the dependent variable is also logit-transformed in logistic regression.

Societal and political change

The variables described before are used as both dependent and independent variables because of the cyclic nature of my model of democracy, while the main independent variable, societal and political change, still remains to be discussed. This variable is considerably harder to operationalize than the previous ones. As was found in the literature review, there have been many developments in Dutch society. These developments are deeply interrelated and many of them are hard to operationalize in such a way that they can be evaluated separately.

As was depicted in Figure 1, the impact of societal and political change is taken to increase over time. This assumption is based on the literature, which describes many gradual processes of change, each of which proceeds in the same direction. Hence, each dependent variable is tested first for its development over time. Here, 'time' is operationalized as the year in which the observation (that is, the parliamentary election) took place. A possible alternative would be to simply count elections and use the sequence number of the election to operationalize time. This would be appropriate if the expected phenomena are caused by the election itself rather than the time period in between. However, as the processes of change described in the theoretical framework continue between elections, one would expect more change from one election to the next if they are further apart, making natural time the most appropriate operationalization.

If there is no clear trend over time or there are significant exceptions from the trend that cannot be explained, then there is no evidence of societal and political change playing a substantial role. If there is a clear trend over time for which all important deviations can be explained satisfactorily, this is not by itself sufficient to conclude that the trend must be caused by the processes of societal and political change considered in this thesis. Because time is at best an indirect operationalization of societal and political change, there are myriad other possible explanations for such a trend. Hence, a trend over time is considered necessary but not sufficient for establishing a relationship between societal change and the dependent variables.

Besides evaluating the trend over time, I also consider whether some of the causal mechanisms described in the theoretical framework can be confirmed by the facts. This involves the operationalization of several of the components of societal change. Unfortunately, because the main independent variable is a very broad process, it is not feasible to operationalize and test all of individual processes of change. For example, the increasing influence of the media is a commonly recurring factor in the literature but operationalizing and measuring of the influence of the media separately would be so involved as to warrant a complete research. My argument is that, due to the interrelatedness of the various components of the process of societal and political change which is established in the literature, showing that the main causal mechanisms influence quality of democracy is sufficient once the trend over time has already been established.

Interpretation of results

Using the operationizations described above, I can compute to what extent parties are responsive, governments are accountable (to both party manifestos and voter concerns), voters are satisfied and coalition parties are rewarded or punished for their policies. This data is available for all twelve Dutch parliamentary elections from 1971 to 2006. As there are relatively few measurements and many phenomena to explain variation in them – the developments mentioned in the section on societal and political change are used as independent variables and the state of the global economy is considered to control for it – statistical analysis is not suitable for interpreting these data. Regression analysis with the proper independent and control variables would leave very few degrees of freedom. Instead, I use a qualitative approach, explaining the results from more in-depth investigation

of Dutch politics and the individual elections. I assess the general trend over time as well as the causal mechanism from the theoretical framework. Next, I consider which elections deviate from this trend and whether it can be explained why they do. If both the trend and the causal mechanism are confirmed with no cases left unexplained, then it is plausible that the observed effect can be ascribed to social change.

Analysis

Responsiveness

In the theoretical framework, it was argued that responsiveness is expected to increase due to more demanding voters, more competitive elections and more influential media. Figure 2 clearly shows that there has indeed been an increase, but that there is quite some variation even between elections that were held close together. Does this variation support the theory that responsiveness is related with societal change? If so, one would expect that parties are most responsive when these effects were strongest.

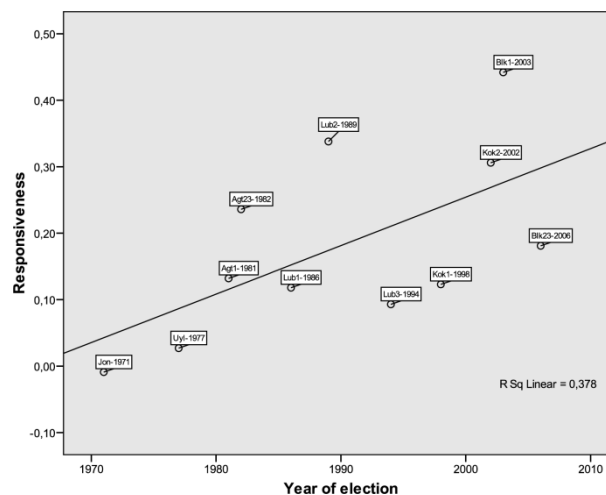


Figure 2: party responsiveness in Dutch elections by year; the labels specify the outgoing cabinet and the year of the elections; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (2006) and party manifestos.

Table 2 shows the median number of most important problems reported per respondent for each election. The median rather than the mean has been used to avoid giving small groups with many problems undue influence and because some editions of the election survey limited the number of responses to 5 or 7; this makes means incomparable, but does not affect the median. In most years, the median respondent has two important problems. Voters were more demanding in 2003, which is clearly the year with the highest responsiveness. Conversely, people were less demanding in 1971, 1994 and 1998, which coincides with some important cases of the responsiveness going below the trend line. This does, however, leave high responsiveness in 1989 and low responsiveness in 2006 unexplained.

Table 2: median number of most important problems reported per respondent, based on recoded problems; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (2006).

Year	Median number of problems per respondent
1971	1
1972	2
1977	2
1981	2
1982	2
1986	2
1989	2
1994	1
1998	1
2002	2
2003	3
2006	2

The next step is to determine whether competitive elections are an important factor. For elections to be competitive, it should be unclear on beforehand what the electorate will do. One possible proxy for this is the degree to which there is agreement within the electorate on the performance of the outgoing cabinet. If many are satisfied then the coalition can expect to win and if many are dissatisfied then the opposition can expect to win. If there is disagreement then parties' viewpoints in the election campaign have more influence on the results and more competitive elections are to be expected. Figure 3 confirms the relationship between competitive elections and responsiveness and shows that the high level of responsiveness in 1982 and 1989 can be explained from highly competitive elections (note that the most competitive elections are near the mean level of satisfaction in the middle of the graph, while less competitive elections are on the left and on the right). It should be noted that the 2003 election following the Balkenende I cabinet have been omitted from the graph; because it is both an outlier (high responsiveness) and very influential (very high dissatisfaction), it would completely determine the result if it were included. Dissatisfaction in this case may have been due to its very early fall (after only three months) rather than policy dissatisfaction, while its high responsiveness was previously explained from exceptionally demanding citizens. If one excludes this case, it is credible that high responsiveness is related with competitive elections.

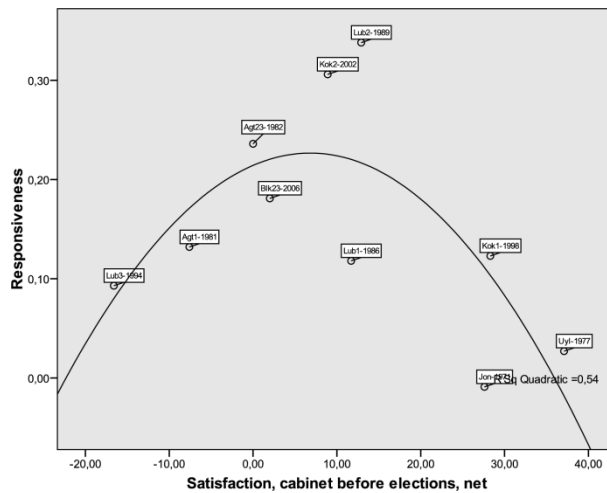


Figure 3: relationship between satisfaction with the outgoing government and responsiveness; the 2002 election has been omitted because it was both an outlier (highest responsiveness) and a highly influential point (very low satisfaction), completely determining the trend line; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (2006) and party manifestos.

Except for the low responsiveness in the 2006 election, each election that deviates from the trend line in Figure 2 has been explained from societal changes. I cannot measure the third development mentioned, increasing influence of the media, and there is no indication that the deviation can be explained from low media attention. All in all, it is clear that responsiveness increases over time and there is some indication that this is indeed due to societal change as described in the theoretical framework. This model cannot, however, account for all variation in responsiveness.

Accountability

In a multi-party democracy such as the Netherlands, parties have to bargain to build coalitions and agree on policy. It has been argued that, as voters get more demanding and parties more responsive, it is harder for parties to keep all their promises in these negotiations. As such, one would expect accountability to decrease over time. Figure 4 shows that there is indeed a trend of decreasing accountability. It is notable that the Kok-I and Kok-II cabinets, the positive exceptions, faced less demanding electorates according to Table 2 while the Balkenende II cabinet faced the most demanding electorate and also showed by far least accountability. The right-hand graph confirms that responsiveness is also part of the explanation, given that the predictions for these cabinets are more accurate based on responsiveness than on time.

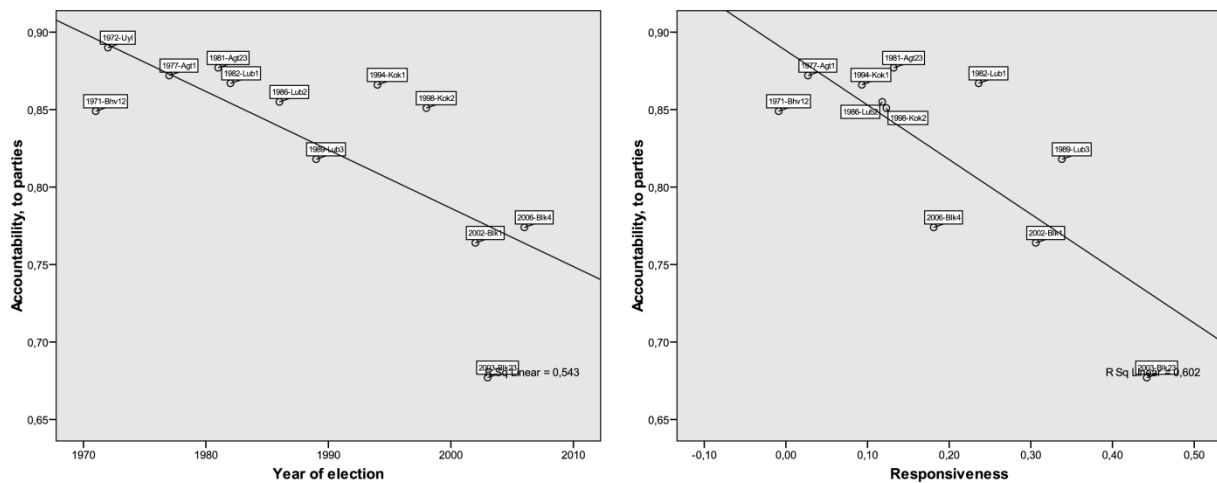


Figure 4: accountability of government to parties in Dutch elections by year and by level of responsiveness; the labels specify the year of the elections and the incoming cabinet; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (2006), party manifestos and government declarations.

As the party system becomes more fragmented and minimal winning coalitions more common, cabinets include small parties with little bargaining power and a smaller section of the electorate is represented in the coalition. This introduces the possibility that coalitions, even when staying reasonably close to the party manifestos of the participating parties, do not represent the preferences in the electorate well and therefore presents another threat to accountability. Moreover it was argued that, when compared to majoritarian systems, proportional representation makes it harder for electorates to punish governments that are perceived as having performed badly. Figure 5 shows that accountability to voters has not decreased; it was relatively high in the elections in the 1980s and low both before and afterwards. This makes the hypothesis that vanishing ties between voters and elites decreases accountability implausible.

The period of high voter accountability starts with the merger of the three main religious parties into CDA and ends with its dramatic loss in the 1994 elections. It was argued that increasing fragmentation decreases the ability of voters to punish governments, decreasing accountability and this pattern supports that hypothesis. The right-hand graph in Figure 5 confirms that such a relationship does indeed exist. To further test the argument that reward or punishment by the electorate influences accountability, Figure 6 shows the relationship between these variables. This graph confirms that, whenever voters considered performance of the previous cabinet in the voting booth, the next cabinet will pursue policies closer to their preferences. All in all, the causal mechanisms explaining voter

accountability are mostly confirmed but the expected trend is not visible because fragmentation has not increased much when compared to the start of the period under investigation.

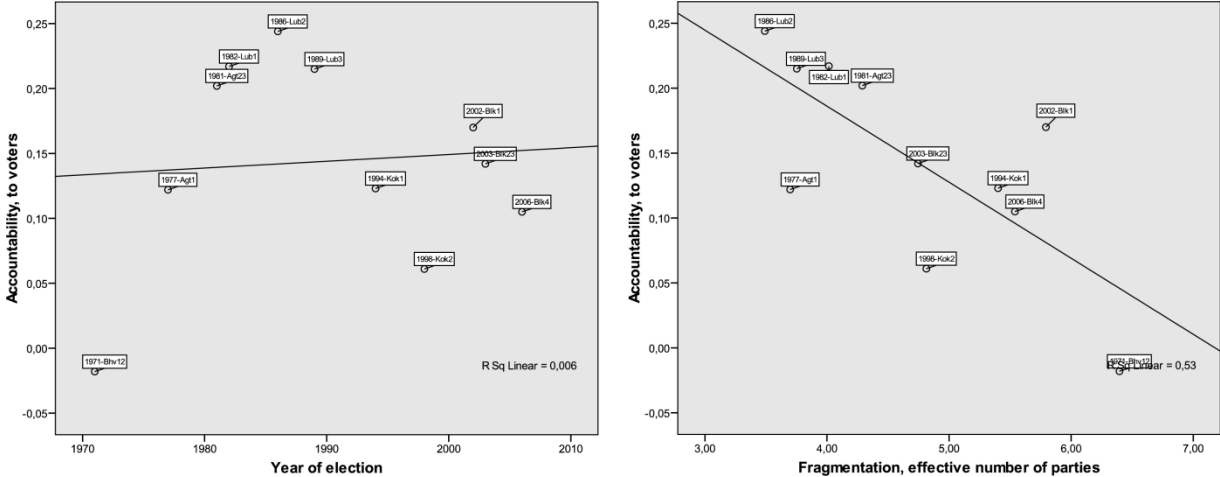


Figure 5: accountability of government to voters in Dutch elections by year and by level of fragmentation; the labels specify the year of the elections and the incoming cabinet; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (2006), party manifestos, government declarations and Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (2007).

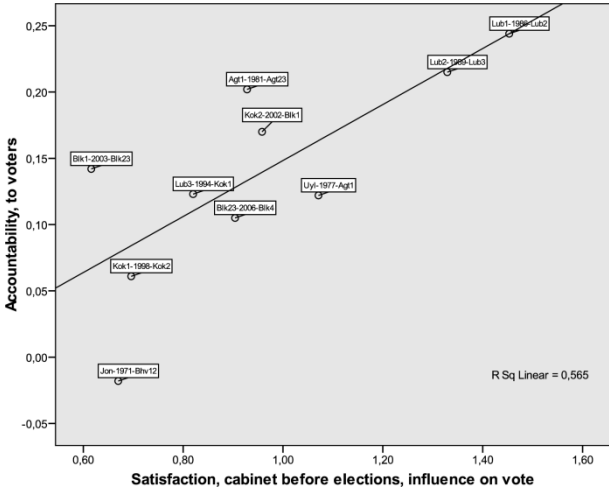


Figure 6: effect of reward/punishment based on satisfaction on accountability to voters; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (2006) and government declarations.

Satisfaction

It has been predicted that, given the inability of governments to solve the many problems experienced by the electorate, satisfaction decreases over time. However, there are important confounding factors also influencing satisfaction, such as the state of the economy and which actors are successful in the media depiction of the election campaign. Figure 7 shows that satisfaction with government policy is indeed decreasing, but there is much variation between cabinets. In particular, people were much more satisfied with the

Kok I cabinet in the 1998 election than would be expected. Again, it is seen that people were much less satisfied with Balkenende I than with any other cabinet. The expected link with responsiveness – the more cabinets promise the harder it is to keep those promises – exists, but is again weak and has a number of exceptions. Figure 8 shows that, as was found in the literature, economic growth is a strong predictor for satisfaction with government policy. This explains the high level of satisfaction with Kok I cabinet, as the economy performed very well in the year before the election, as well as part of the low satisfaction with Balkenende I. Hence, although satisfaction does appear to decrease over time because governments promise too much, the Netherlands is quite a typical democracy with regard to the relationship between economy and satisfaction with government policy.

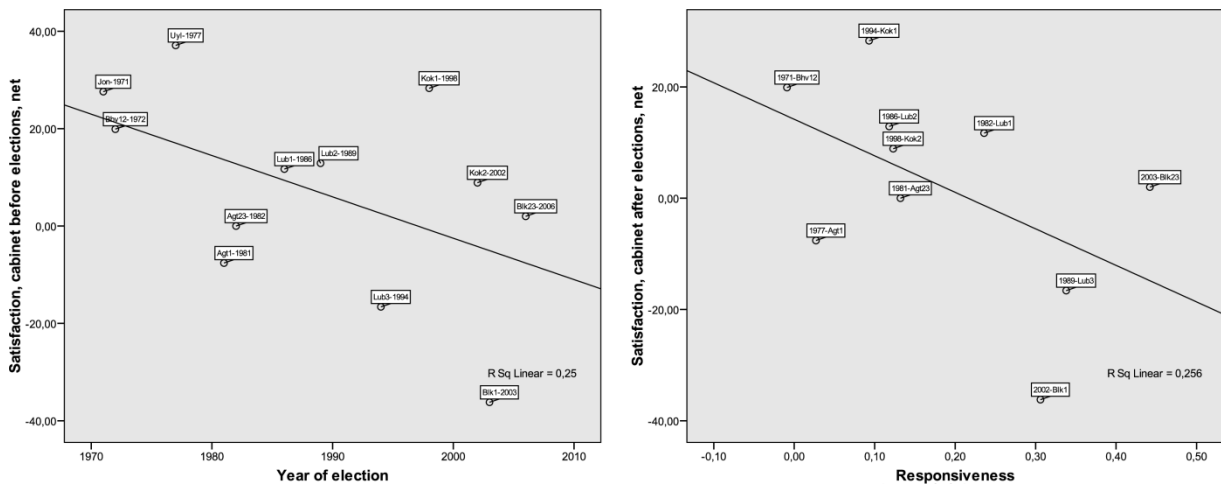


Figure 7: satisfaction with government policy in Dutch elections by year and by level of responsiveness; the labels specify the outgoing cabinet and year of the elections; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiesonderzoek (2006) and party manifestos.

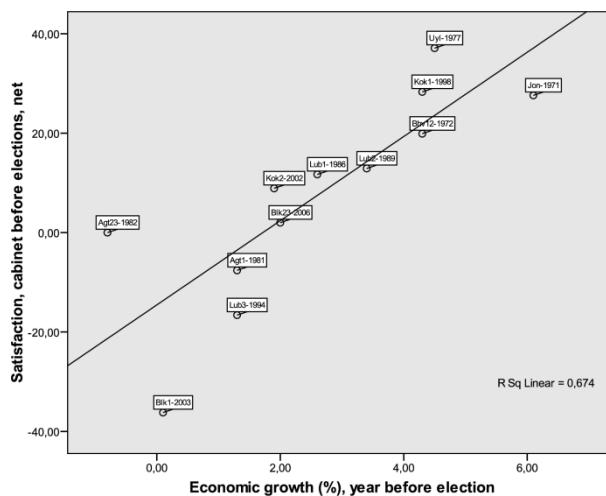


Figure 8: satisfaction with government policy in Dutch elections by level of economic growth; the labels specify the year of the elections and the outgoing government; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiesonderzoek (2006) and Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (2009).

Besides a decrease in satisfaction, it was also predicted that, as traditional ties between parties and elites fade away, people are more likely to punish governments for unsatisfactory performance (and, conversely, reward governments that perform well). However, coalition formation and multi-party democracy make it harder to assign responsibility for government policy and decrease reward and punishment.

Figure 9 shows that there is no clear trend over time. It is clear, however, that the Lubbers I and II cabinets are exceptional in the degree to which satisfaction with government influenced the vote after they left office. Both cabinets had a clear right-wing profile, with large cuts in government expenditure (Parlementair Documentatie Centrum 2002b) and the establishment of the Wassenaar agreement as a means to keep the wage level down in exchange for more employment. It is plausible that this clear profile made it easier for voters to make up their mind. This argument is further supported by the fact that the Den Uyl cabinet, which had an unusually strong left-wing profile (Parlementair Documentatie Centrum 2002a), also scores highly. These cases strongly contrast against the De Jong cabinet which, although consisting of centre-right parties, created new welfare provisions, introduced the minimum wage and empowered works councils (Parlementair Documentatie Centrum 2002c). The other low-scoring cabinet, Balkenende I, barely had time to develop any profile whatsoever, given the fact that it lasted for only three months. This suggests that, besides the reasons mentioned in the theoretical framework, a clear ideological profile also increases attribution of government policy to coalition parties.

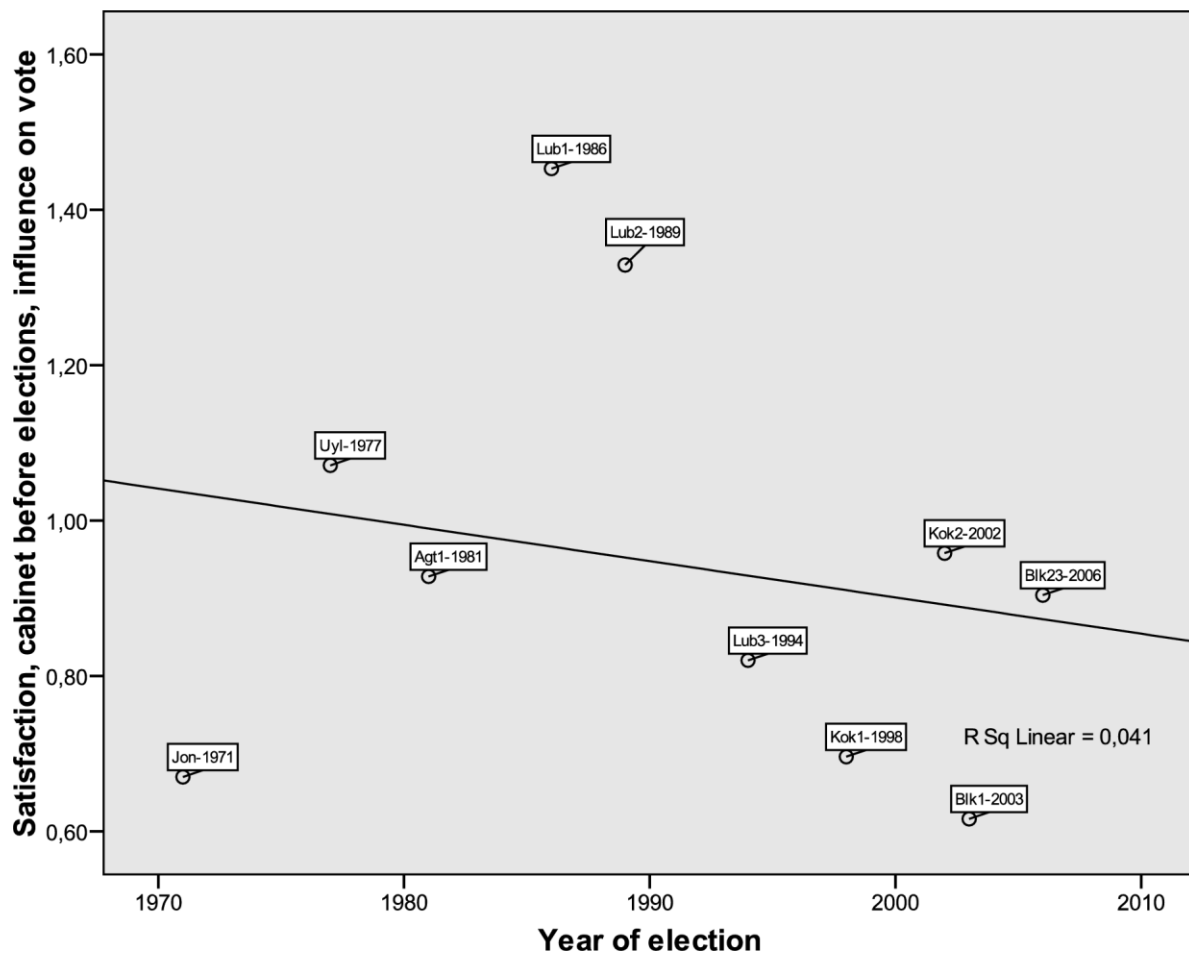


Figure 9: effect of satisfaction with government policy on the vote in Dutch elections by year of the elections; the labels specify the outgoing government and the year of the elections; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (2006).

To test the causal mechanisms developed in the theoretical framework, Figure 10 shows the effects of accountability to parties and fragmentation. Based on the hypothesis that coalition government decreases the ability to attribute policy to parties due to compromises, those governments that had to compromise less and therefore have higher accountability to parties should show more policy attribution. This appears to be the case, although Balkenende II/III appears to be an exception. This may be due to the fact that D66, which had little influence on policy from the start on, had been removed from the cabinet before the elections. If D66 had not been counted as a government party, accountability to parties would have been higher and the cabinet would better fit the pattern. As has been argued in the theoretical framework, fragmentation should decrease the ability of voters to attribute policy to parties and this is shown to indeed be the case. Here Den Uyl is the clearest outlier, but it should be noted that the three parties that made up the core of the cabinet, PvdA, D66 and PPR, had formed a pre-electoral alliance including a common programme. Due to

this unique situation, it was clear that government policy could be attributed to each of these parties. If the three parties are counted as one, the effective number of parties is reduced to 4.8 and the cabinet fits the pattern well.

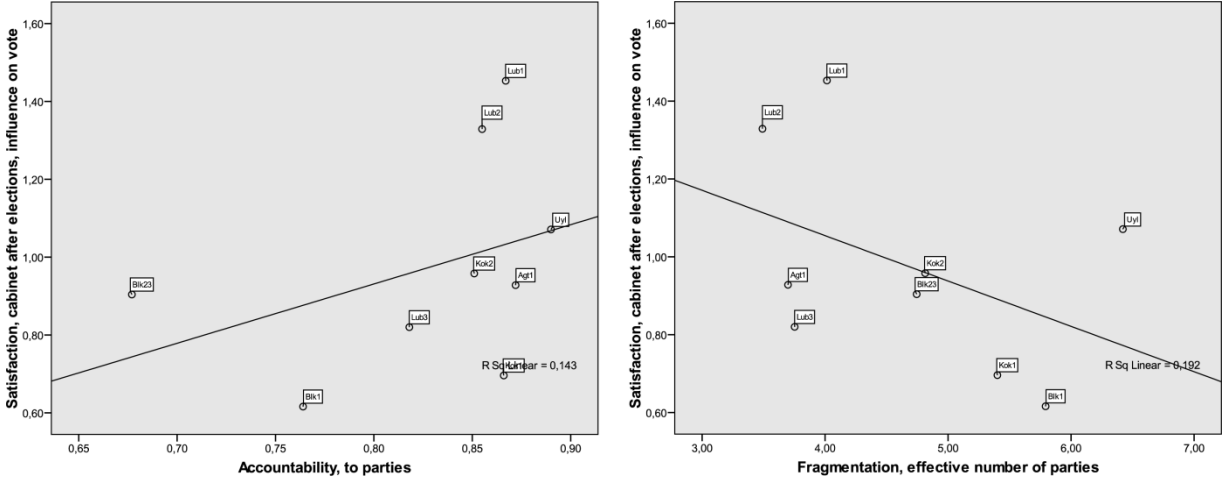


Figure 10: effect of satisfaction with government policy on the vote in Dutch elections by government accountability to parties and by fragmentation; the labels specify the outgoing government and the year of the elections; source: own computations based on Stichting Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (2006), party manifestos, government declarations and Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (2007).

Conclusions

Using three indicators based on the framework of democratic theory and departing from hypotheses derived from the institutional arrangements of consensus democracy, I have assessed the quality of democracy in the Dutch elections since 1971. As predicted, I have found that parties have become more responsive to voters but are not capable of maintaining their promises in coalition negotiations, leaving voters increasingly dissatisfied. There is, however, no clear trend in the degree to which government policy represents the problems of the electorate, which means that lacking accountability is compensated in part by the increases in responsiveness. Moreover, voters still reward those cabinets that implement satisfactory policies and punish those that do not. All in all, the situation has not been shown to be so problematic that it threatens democracy, but social change does seem to have caused some deterioration that warrants attention. Given the fact that most causal mechanisms of the relationships between responsiveness, accountability and satisfaction were confirmed, democratic theory is supported by the Dutch case.

It has been shown that increasing demands by the electorate, the need to form coalitions and fragmentation of the party system are key drivers in the trend towards unaccountability and dissatisfaction. Although it is mentioned in the literature that the rise of Fortuyn has had a lasting impact, I found no evidence that this has been an important factor in the indicators I investigated. Accountability was particularly low for the cabinets since Fortuyn, but this has been explained from a trend of increasing responsiveness which started even before the 'rise of populism'. The Balkenende I cabinet which included Pim Fortuyn's LPF led to much dissatisfaction, but this can be ascribed to its very early fall. However, as this was rather recent, more evidence may surface as new cabinets come and go.

Not enough is known about the first key driver, increasingly demanding voters, for me to be able to provide recommendations that allow this development to be stopped. Regarding the other key drivers, however, some possibilities exist. The merger of political parties and the formation of pre-electoral coalitions would reduce the need for compromise after elections, decrease fragmentation and increase clarity to the voter, making elections more competitive. Even within the current institutional framework, both possibilities have

occurred (respectively the creation of the CDA and to progressive cooperation leading to the Den Uyl cabinet). Such developments could yield cabinets with clearer ideological profiles, which I have found to encourage reward/punishment behaviour by voters. According to the literature, this would induce parties to be more accountable.

The research question is answered in the affirmative; societal and political change has to some extent influenced the quality of Dutch democracy, mostly but not entirely in a negative sense. However, although the main issues I found are associated with consensual institutions and societal and political change does make them worse, they can be addressed without institutional change if parties adjust their behaviour. This is realistically possible within the current institutional setting, as pre-electoral coalitions and mergers have occurred in the past. However, institutional can help change actors' behaviour by changing their room for manoeuvre (Keman 1997a: 13-14). In this particular case, institutions that benefit large (coalitions of) parties would encourage cooperation between parties. This could be implemented by making the electoral system less proportional, for example by introducing an electoral threshold, or by providing special benefits to the largest party. In sum, current institutions are not the entire problem but do not help address the current issues either.

All in all, my results support democratic theory while both Andeweg's and Lijphart's theories are confirmed to some extent; less proportional institutions could fit the situation better (Andeweg 2000) but proper democracy is shown to be possible with the consensual institutions if parties behave properly (Lijphart 1999). Accountability and satisfaction have been identified as weak points in the Dutch chain of democratic control and reforms are suggested that, in the light of the observations, might be able to address them. Future work could include a cross-national analysis to isolate the effect of consensual institutions by itself, as the findings from this study can only be generalized to countries with such institutions. Moreover, I observed that voters tend to apply more reward/punishment behaviour in elections following cabinets having a clear ideological profile. This finding should be theoretically explained and tested more based on a rigorous definition of clear ideological profiles.

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Appendix: CD-ROM

Contents

This thesis comes with a CD-ROM that includes source code of the ManifestoCoder program as well as the SPSS syntax used to derive the results I found. To respect copyrights of the organizations that supplied them, original party manifestos and dataset files have not been included. To be able to run the syntaxes, one should copy the contents of the CD-ROM onto the hard disk, obtain the datasets from the right holders and place them in the correct directories. Each of the datasets can be obtained for free, at least for students and staff of universities. The directories in which these files should be placed contain a file named “!missing files.txt”, which indicates where to obtain the missing files and how to name them.

- ManifestoCoder\
 - Directory containing the ManifestoCoder program.
- ManifestoCoder\clusters.txt
 - Clusters of manifestos (by parties and groups of parties) used to identify relevant terms for dictionary.
- ManifestoCoder\codes.txt
 - Dictionary used to code party manifestos.
- ManifestoCoder\gpl-3_0.txt
 - The text of the GPL 3 license, which specifies under which conditions the ManifestoCoder program may be distributed and modified.
- ManifestoCoder\run.bat
 - Batch file to run ManifestoCoder with default settings.
- ManifestoCoder\Usage instruction for ManifestoCoder.pdf
 - Instructions for using ManifestoCoder.
- ManifestoCoder\bin\ManifestoCoder.exe
 - Windows binary for the ManifestoCoder program.
- ManifestoCoder\in\
 - This directory contains party manifestos, which can be supplied to ManifestoCoder in either plain text (*.txt) or rich text (*.rtf) format.

- ManifestoCoder\out\
 - After executing the “run.bat” script, annotated party manifestos are stored in this directory.
- ManifestoCoder\src\
 - Source code for the ManifestoCoder program.
- Spss\
 - Directory containing SPSS syntax used to perform the analyses for this thesis.
- Spss\computations.sps
 - SPSS syntax used to perform most computations that for the basis of this thesis. Download the missing files in the “datasets” directory before running.
- Spss\scatterplots.sps
 - SPSS syntax to produce the scatterplots presented in this thesis. These plots are based on the data in the “datasets\scatterplots.sav” file.
- Spss\datasets\
 - This directory contains datasets used by the SPSS syntax.
- Spss\datasets\out-codes.txt
 - Output of the ManifestoCoder program, used by “computations.sps” to determine party positions.
- Spss\datasets\scatterplots.sav
 - The most important results copied from the “computations.sps” syntax, copied from the SPSS output. Used by “scatterplots.sps”.
- Spss\results\
 - Used by “computations.sps” to store datasets containing intermediate results.
- Spss\syntax\
 - Syntax files invoked by “computations.sps”.

How to reproduce

Coding the manifestos

To code the party manifestos, follow the steps listed below.

- Copy the “ManifestoCoder” directory to the hard disk.

- Obtain the files specified in “in\! missing files.txt” and place them in the “in” directory.
- The PDF files obtained from the Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen must be converted to plain text files. I used Microsoft Office Document Imaging (shipped with Microsoft Office 2007) to recognize text in those files that did not already include it.
- Delete “in\! missing files.txt” so that it is not processed as if it were a party manifesto.
- Run “run.bat”.

The “out-codes.txt” file that is created contains the totals resulting from coding the manifestos and is read by SPSS in the next step. The “out-terms.txt” and “out-words.txt” files contain matches per dictionary entry and per word, to allow one to improve the dictionary. Party manifestos annotated with codes are stored in the “out” subdirectory.

Computing values for the relevant variables

The next step is to compute the dependent and independent variables used in this research. Since the “out-codes.txt” file is provided on the CD-ROM, this can be done without running ManifestoCoder first. For a full reproduction, run ManifestoCoder and copy the resulting file into the “Spss\datasets” directory after the first step specified below.

- Copy the “Spss” directory to the hard disk.
- Obtain the files specified in “datasets\! missing files.txt” and place them in the “datasets” directory.
- Open the “computations.sps” file in SPSS; for SPSS to use the correct directories you must open it by double-clicking the file when SPSS was previously closed, as all paths are specified relative to the file.
- Run the syntax.

The relevant output is in the “OutputAnalysis” output window, while the “OutputProcessing” window contains intermediate steps. The most important output from the former window has been copied into “datasets\scatterplots.sav”.

Creating the scatter plots

To avoid having to run the entire script just to obtain the scatter plots in this thesis, they are created using a separate script for which the required dataset is provided on the CD-ROM.

Follow the steps below to run it.

- Copy the “Spss” directory to the hard disk.
- Open the “scatterplots.sps” file in SPSS; for SPSS to use the correct directories you must open it by double-clicking the file, as all paths are specified relative to the file.
- Run the syntax.

The output of this syntax was used for the scatter plots in this thesis.