

Economy and culture in the 2010 Dutch election

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Introduction

In addition to the traditional cleavages that dominated political competition during most of the twentieth century, a number of issues related to the globalization process have made their appearance on the lists of important national problems. Among these are issues related to national immigration policies, the cultural integration of immigrants and in the case of European Union member states also the speed and the scope of European unification.

Globalization processes have given rise to a new structural conflict between 'winners' and 'losers' of globalization (Kriesi et al. 2008). Denationalization and a new global division of labor differentially affect various groups in Western societies, just as they do in other regions of the world. The winners are entrepreneurs and workers in economic sectors that stand to benefit from an increasingly international economic competition. In Western societies, these are the sectors that typically require highly qualified employees. A high level of education and a cosmopolitan attitude characterize these winners. The losers on the other hand include persons who depend for their living on traditional, protected sectors of the economy, persons with low levels of formal education who identify with the national community and thus have a more parochial outlook.

Kriesi and his associates have labeled the conflict between winners and losers of globalization as a conflict between integration and demarcation. They argue that, in the first decade of the 21st century, the integration-demarcation conflict manifests itself in an economic and in a cultural dimension. Both will be gradually embedded into existing social-economic and cultural conflict dimensions. These existing social-economic and cultural conflict dimensions can be traced back to the origins of party formation and political competition in West-European societies, but have been redefined several times since (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Franklin 1992; Evans 1999). The embedding hypothesis thus predicts that old antagonisms will absorb new conflicts.

In addition, Kriesi et al. expect that the mainstream political parties in Western Europe will have a sufficient adaptive capacity. Established political parties have shown time and again that they are able to reposition themselves in order to accommodate new issue demands. The adaption hypothesis states that mainstream parties will take up new values and interests in due time. This process of adaptation is often associated with high electoral volatility and in the end "[i]t may be that some parties remain the same only in name" (Kriesi et al. 2008: 14).

The case of the Netherlands

How has the integration-demarcation conflict permeated elections in the Netherlands? To be sure, electoral volatility has been extremely high in the past ten years, in fact already since the early 1990s. Figure 1 illustrates that the net number of seat changes at parliamentary elections in the past twenty years has been much higher than in the preceding decades¹. This increased volatility reflects both the rise and fall of new political parties (parties for elderly citizens in the early 1990s; Fortuyn's LPF in the early 2000s; Wilders' PVV in 2006 and 2010; the Socialist party SP over the whole period) and the associated electoral fortunes of established parties.

Figure 1 about here

Increased volatility can also be observed in the growing hesitation among voters which party to vote for. In 1971, one of every five voters made their vote choice only in the final weeks before the election; the corresponding figure in 2010 was one of every two voters.

Despite this increased volatility, embedding and adaptation are not the first words that come to mind when observing the political developments in the Netherlands over the past ten years. It is not the case that the new conflict between integration and demarcation is unimportant for Dutch voters. In fact, results from the Dutch national election studies convincingly show that the Dutch voters considered problems associated with globalization processes as very important already in 1994 (seven years before Pim Fortuyn's rise to the political stage). In 1994, more than a quarter of the Dutch voters spontaneously mentioned problems related to minorities and refugees as the most important political problem for the Netherlands. However, it has been shown that the evaluation of political parties in the Netherlands increasingly points to a new dimension of conflict, which can be interpreted as the same integration-demarcation conflict, suggesting that 'embedding' did not occur, at least not until the 2006 elections (Aarts and Thomassen 2008).

Secondly, the rise of new political parties suggests that the national political space of the Netherlands has been transformed (Kriesi and Frey 2008). And the adaptation process of mainstream parties to this new conflict is far from clear. Political parties advocating strong views on problems of integration have been successful in parliamentary elections in the past decade. Kriesi and Frey state that in response to the rise of Fortuyn's LPF the mainstream parties, by employing strategies of accommodation and

¹ The Second Chamber of the Dutch parliament consists of 150 seats.

cooptation, succeeded in marginalizing the LPF but had to move in the direction of cultural conservatism for this. They observe an increasing discrepancy between polarization on the voters' side (the demand side) and a continuing lack of polarization among political parties (2008: 181-182). Their analyses do not take the two most recent parliamentary elections of 2006 and 2010 into account. Which role do issues associated with the integration and demarcation dimensions nowadays play in Dutch politics? How have the changing economic circumstances affected voting in the 2010 election?

Research questions

In this paper we aim to clarify the role that various issues have played in recent elections in the Netherlands. Our focus will be on the two most recent elections of 2006 and 2010. For these two elections, we will investigate which problems the voters considered to be the most important for them and for the country as a whole, and how these perceptions are related to voting behavior. The research questions that we address are:

- (1) How did the self-placement and the placement of parties on new issues regarding the economy and culture develop among voters between 1994 and 2010?
- (2) To what extent were these issues in this period absorbed into existing conflict dimensions?
- (3) How were these issues related to voting behavior?

Before answering these questions, however, we shortly describe the political system, the main actors and the main issues being discussed in parliament.

Elections in the Netherlands

Electoral system

The Second Chamber of the Dutch parliament is elected by a system of list proportional representation. For all practical purposes, the country is regarded as a single district. The electoral threshold is set at 0.67 percent of the valid votes (the 'electoral divisor'). In other words: a party competing in the election has to collect 1/150 of the valid votes in order to win its first seat. Remaining seats are distributed over parties winning at least one seat according to the d'Hondt formula (largest averages). Votes are cast for one individual candidate one of the party lists. Voters normally select the top candidate (the party leader), but they increasingly cast preferential votes for other candidates. Candidates who obtain more

than 25 percent of the electoral divisor qualify for a seat based on preferential votes. This happens quite often. In 2010, for example, 32 candidates including the party leaders received more than 25 percent of the electoral quota. It rarely occurs, however, that through this mechanism candidates obtain a seat who would otherwise not have been elected through the list order. In 2010, for example, only two candidates who would otherwise not have been elected won a seat in parliament. The parliamentary term is four years, but elections may be called early when the government loses support in parliament or confronts insurmountable internal conflicts. In fact, the last government that completed its full term was the PvdA-VVD-D66 coalition of 1994-1998.

Cabinet governments are expected to be based on a parliamentary majority. Since no single party has come close to a majority of the seats since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1917/1919, this means that the cabinets are always based on coalition of two, three, four, or even five political parties. The outcome of parliamentary elections is usually open for different interpretations. Individual parties may lose or gain seats, but parliamentary majorities may be constructed from winning or losing parties, or combinations of both.

The low threshold of the electoral system was chosen deliberately in the early 20th century when proportional representation was adopted, in order to get a true reflection of the political convictions of the electorate. When the process of dealignment started in the 1960s, the low threshold also facilitated the entrance of new parties in parliament. This aspect of the electoral system simultaneously underscores the need for established parties to adjust to changing social and political circumstances, and the difficulties in doing so.

Political parties and the party system

The party system of the Netherlands could for a long time be described as two-dimensional. After World War II, social class produced divisions between parties of the right (the Conservative/Liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, VVD) and parties of the left (predominantly the Social-Democratic Labor Party, PvdA and various smaller radical left wing parties). On the other hand, religiosity accounted for various Catholic and Protestant parties (Andeweg and Irwin 2005).

This party system, which formed the basis of the pillarized political system of most of the 20th century, started to crumble in the 1960s. Newcomers booked short-term (Farmers' Party BP, Shopkeepers' Party NMP) or long-term (D66) successes. The three main Christian parties merged into a Christian Democrat Appeal (CDA), which for at least some time stopped the long-term downward trend in their electoral

results. Four smaller left-wing parties (the communist CPN, the radical PPR, the pacifist PSP and the evangelical EVP) merged into a new Green party, GroenLinks. The Socialist party SP, which had its origins in ultra-left, Maoist groups in the 1970s, started a long march through the institutions leading to its entry in parliament in 1994 and almost 17 percent of the vote in the 2006 election.

The 1990s saw the rise and downfall of parties for elderly citizens (AOV, Unie55+). In the 2000s Pim Fortuyn's LPF was electorally very successful. Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV), was formed after this former VVD MP broke away from his party in 2005 over a party conflict about the future accession of Turkey to the European Union. The party since then distinguished itself as a radical anti-Islam party.

The number of effective parties in parliament has invariably been very high in the Netherlands, reaching a new record of 6.7 in 2010.

The 2006 election²

The CDA-VVD-D66 coalition which was formed after the 2003 elections faced several political crises, many of them related to the aforementioned integration-demarcation conflict. On June 1 2005, for example, the EU constitutional treaty was put to a consultative national referendum. The referendum showed an unexpectedly high turnout (63%) and a decisive defeat (61%-39%) of the constitutional treaty (Aarts and Van der Kolk 2006). The referendum exposed a deep gap between the opinions on European integration of the governing parties, the opposition parties PvdA and GreenLeft on the one hand, and the opinions of the PVV, SP and some smaller Christian parties on the other.

By the end of 2005, new tensions arose within the cabinet about the participation of Dutch forces in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The D66-ministers initially opposed Dutch participation, and the party threatened to step out of the cabinet. On February 2, 2006, a large majority of the Second Chamber supported the mission, but D66 did not. Its ministers stayed on, but its parliamentary leader resigned.

The municipal elections of March 7, 2006 showed large gains for the left opposition parties SP and PvdA, and losses for the coalition parties. VVD-parliamentary leader Van Aartsen resigned and the party organized an election for the new leadership among its members. One of the contenders was minister for Integration Rita Verdonk, an outspoken and controversial proponent of strict immigration and integration policies.

² The following section is adapted from Aarts and van der Kolk 2007.

In May 2006, a television documentary provided evidence that VVD MP Ayaan Hirsi Ali had lied about her identity and past when applying for asylum in the Netherlands in 1992. In a reaction, minister Verdonk stated that she now considered Hirsi Ali's naturalization void. The next day, Hirsi Ali gave up her seat in parliament. The conflict between Verdonk and Hirsi Ali deeply divided the VVD and further alienated D66 from the coalition. As a consequence of the debates about this issue, D66 supported a vote of no-confidence against Verdonk (which failed to get a majority), and the D66 ministers resigned from the cabinet, which lost its parliamentary majority as a result. The Balkenende-III cabinet, a caretaker minority government of CDA and VVD, was formed and an election was called on November 22.

At the start of the campaign for the 2006 parliamentary election many observers expected a close race between CDA and PvdA. In the end, the CDA took 8 seats more than the PvdA. The loss of PvdA compared with 2003 was remarkably high. Also, practically all polls had underestimated the gain of the Eurosceptic left-wing SP and of the equally Eurosceptic right-wing PVV. The SP more than doubled its seats in parliament, and the PVV entered parliament with 9 seats. The orthodox-reformed ChristenUnie won according to expectations, and the Animal Party took two seats. The loss of the VVD was also expected. Yet, its result carried a major surprise. Five days after the election, when the preferential votes had been counted, the VVD's #2 Rita Verdonk appeared to have won more votes than the party leader Mark Rutte – an unprecedented event.

Table 1 about here

Table 1 summarizes the results of the 2006 election, together with the preceding elections of 2002 and 2003 and the 2010 election. The Balkenende-IV coalition was formed by February 22, 2007, after a 92-days coalition formation (Aarts and Van der Kolk 2007). The Christian-democrats of Balkenende changed their former coalition partners, the conservative-liberal VVD and the progressive-liberal D66, for the social-democratic PvdA and the orthodox-protestant ChristenUnie.

The 2010 election³

Balkenende-IV was the fourth government coalition in a row that did not complete its parliamentary term. The direct cause of its fall was an escalating conflict between the main coalition parties CDA and PvdA about the end of Dutch military participation in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

³ The following section is adapted from Aarts and van der Kolk forthcoming.

mission in Uruzgan (Afghanistan), which had already caused considerable tensions in the Balkenende-II coalition. After a debate in November and December 2007, the mission was extended until August 2010 and the Dutch troops in Uruzgan were to be redeployed by December 2010. The PvdA opposed continuation of the Uruzgan mission whereas the CDA wanted to discuss a prolongation. After weeks of increasing tension between the coalition partners, the PvdA ministers announced in the early morning of February 20 that they would step out of the government.

Disagreement about the ISAF mission was the direct cause of the government's fall, but the coalition had shown various signs of weakness since its start in 2007. Tensions arose within the government coalition on several issues, including the ethics of pre-natal diagnosis, participation in the Joint Strike Fighter (F-35) production program of the United States, and broadening the right of dismissal by employers.

In September 2007, the government decided not to hold another referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, which replaced the Constitutional Treaty that was rejected in 2005 referendums in France and the Netherlands. The Lisbon Treaty was ratified by the Dutch parliament in June and July, 2008.

In the summer of 2008, the banking crisis started in the United States and soon spread over Europe as well. The large Dutch financial sector weathered the storm but mostly with the help of government loans, and in the case of the Fortis/ABN-AMRO bank even through nationalization. The government also announced various measures to help private enterprise (e.g. allowing temporary reduction of working hours), discussed long-term adjustments (increasing the formal general pension's age from 65 to 67 in 15 years time) and initiated a law to simplify planning procedures in the construction and road-building sectors, thus facilitating the start of new projects in these sectors of the economy (Crisis and Recovery Act).

The banking crisis and its aftermath destroyed the financial groundwork of the 2007 coalition agreement. When preparing the 2010 budget, the coalition parties decided to plan cutbacks of about 35 billion euro by 2015. Rather than taking the lead themselves, the coalition parties established twenty committees consisting of high-level civil servants, covering all public policy domains. The Crisis and Recovery Act passed the Senate on March 16, 2010, but other long-term policy measures were postponed as well as a result of the government crisis. The choice of financial and economic measures and the pace of their implementation thus became the core topics of the 2010 election campaign.

The Dutch parliamentary election of June 9, 2010, resulted in a fragmented parliament with ten parliamentary parties, the largest of which – the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) -

secured just over 20 percent of the valid votes (up from almost 15 percent in 2006). The largest victory (from 5.9 to 15.4 percent of the vote) was won by Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV). Wilders' main opponents in parliaments, Democrats 66 (D66) and GreenLeft, also improved their previous result. The governing Christian-Democrats (CDA) of prime-minister Jan-Peter Balkenende, and their recent coalition partners Labor Party (PvdA) and Christian Union (CU) suffered a combined loss of more than a quart, with CDA almost halved.

After the cabinet had lost its parliamentary majority in February, 2010, all established political parties in the Netherlands prepared for an election in which the economic, welfare-state related and budgetary problems of the country would play the key role. It is at least remarkable that the focus on economic and financial policy measures during the election campaign did not result in an election outcome that reflected this focus. Simply put: the campaigns were mainly about economics, but the election proved to be about something else as well. Geert Wilders' PVV is known for its anti-Islam viewpoints, not for its economic program.

In conclusion, key political debates in the Netherlands in the past seven years have clearly shown various conflict dimensions, which cannot easily be simplified into a simple two-dimensional space. The discussion about international military involvement, for example, brought together left- and right-wing parties, on both sides of the integration-demarkation dimension in their opposition to the continuation of the military mission.

The evolution of new issues 1994-2010

The success of challenging parties in the first decade of the century raises the question how the new conflict dimension associated with globalization has developed in the Netherlands. Do we observe the emergence of distinct party positions on the issues associated with this new conflict dimension? And do we observe a development in the direction of embedding and adaptation of the new issues by existing conflict dimensions and existing political parties?

Since 1994, the Dutch national election studies have included, among various other issues, position issues about the integration of ethnic minorities and the unification of Europe. These two issues can be seen as representing the cultural and the economic sides of the new conflict dimension resulting from globalization. In almost all election years since 1994, the respondents of the Dutch national election

study have been asked to position the main political parties and themselves on these issues. The set of parties is not exhaustive, and some parties have been dropped or have appeared only later than 1994. The trend lines therefore do not cover the full period for all parties. The available data do however provide a good picture of the development of these issues over time.

Integration of minorities

The question about the integration of minorities was worded as follows:

“In the Netherlands some think that foreigners should be able to live in the Netherlands while preserving their own culture. Others think that they should fully adapt to Dutch culture. Where would you place the CDA on a line from 1 to 7, where 1 means preservation of own culture for foreigners and 7 means that they should fully adapt?”

Figure 2 about here

Figure 2 shows the mean positions of the political parties and of the respondents on this scale from 1994 until 2010. In the period until 2006 the mean perceived party positions of the major parties tended to move somewhat towards the “adjust” position, but after 2006 the tendency seemed to be in the reverse direction.

The most interesting aspects of figure 2 concern the average position of the respondents and the average perceived position of VVD, LPF and PVV. Over the whole period, the average respondent position tended towards the “adjust” position. More importantly, the respondents positioned themselves on this issue at one side of most of the main political parties, between CDA and VVD. In most elections (2003 is the exception) the VVD came closest to the respondents’ average position. The LPF in 2002-03, and the PVV in 2010 were perceived to be on the extreme “adjust” side of this issue. This was also where the largest electoral gains were expected. LPF and PVV thus filled a part of the issue scale where an electoral demand could be expected. At least over the course of these 15 years, instead of adaptation we observe the rise of new political parties with an outspoken view on this issue.

European unification

In the Netherlands, the economic dimension of globalization is best represented by the position that parties and voters have towards the extent of European unification. In the Dutch election studies, a position issue has been included since 1994 on this topic. The question wording is as follows:

“Some people and parties think that the European unification should go further. Others think that the European unification has already gone too far. Where would you place the CDA on a line from 1 to 7, where 1 means that the European unification should go even further and 7 that the unification has already gone too far?”

This question has been asked since 1994 for the main political parties and for the respondent. The same parties have been included as in the case of integration of ethnic minorities. In the 2003 election study, the question has been skipped.

Figure 3 about here

The development of positions on European unification is a bit different from that of the integration issue, but there are also important similarities. As in the case of integration, the mean respondent position is skewed towards one pole of the scale: the position that European unification has already gone too far. Until 2002, the respondents on the average choose a position on the scale that is out of the bounds provided by the established parties, PvdA, CDA and VVD. In 2002, Fortuyn's LPF is clearly regarded as more opposed to further integration than the average respondent. In 2010, Wilders' PVV has assumed this position, just as in the case of the integration issue. From 2006 onwards, the respondents' position practically coincides with that of the SP – a party with a rather conservative program when it comes to cultural issues, and otherwise outspoken left-wing.

European unification became a widely discussed topic in the Netherlands in the campaign leading to the June 1, 2005 referendum on the Constitutional Treaty (see above). From the early 2000s onwards, we observe a growing polarization, or better clarity on the European unification issue. On the one hand, parties like D66, CDA, PvdA and VVD are perceived to be pro-unification. These parties have been the main pillars of government since the 1960s. On the other hand, the respondent is accompanied by SP, LPF and PVV on the anti-unification side. European unification provides another example of an issue that can stand for the new economic dimension in politics (as opposed to the old dimension that is represented by classic issues such as the desired level of income inequality within a country) but which thus far has not been adapted by the established parties. Instead, new parties that have a sharp profile on this issue, have made large electoral gains.

Other evidence for the embedding of new issues?

If the issues of integration of minorities and European unification are to be absorbed by existing conflict dimensions, we would expect that the correlation between the positions that voters assume on these various issues would increase over the years. In the Dutch election studies, questions about three “established” issues have been asked since the 1970s. These issues are: desirable level of income inequality, permissiveness of abortion/euthanasia, and the extent to which nuclear energy should be produced in the Netherlands. In addition to the two “new” issues of integration of minorities and European unification discussed above, the studies also include the attitudes towards admitting asylum seekers (refugees) in the Netherlands, which can be regarded as another indicator of the conflict dimensions of globalization. Finally, positions on the left-right scale have been assessed in all studies.

We have computed correlation coefficients between these issues in all election years. When the new issues would be absorbed, we expect increasing correlation coefficients between these new issues, and with established issues such as income differences and left-right ideology.

Here we present only a brief account of our findings.⁴ At the start of our time series in 1994, left-right self-placement is moderately correlated with the issues of income differences and nuclear energy, and weakly with the euthanasia issue. Of the new issues, European integration is not connected at all with the rest. From 1998 onwards, we observe a slightly stronger correlation between self-placement on European integration and integration of minorities, and especially between the latter and the (newly included) issue of asylum seekers. From 2002 onwards, left-right self-placement appears to be moderately correlated with integration and with asylum seekers as well. The 2003 and 2006 election studies show basically the same pattern as the 2002 election. Finally, in 2010 the European integration issue is correlated as well with asylum seekers, integration, and left-right. Although very few of these correlation exceed the $|\cdot 40|$ level, we can conclude that there are weak signs of an embedding process among the voters.

Perceived problems and voting in 2006 and 2010

Cultural integration of minorities and attitudes towards the extent of European unification – two issues representing the new conflict dimension of globalization – have shown some evolution over the past 15 years. The party positions tend to be slightly more distinct than they were, and new political parties

⁴ The full tables with correlation coefficients can be obtained from the authors.

have taken distinct positions on these issues. The mean position of all respondents, however, is still located on one side of the political spectrum. Dutch voters on average are clearly more outspoken against the multicultural society and against further European integration than the main established parties.

Position issues such as cultural integration and European unification provide useful information about the adaptation of the party system to new conflict dimensions. However, these issues cannot inform us what the elections were about in the eyes of the voters. We now turn to the latter question.

The Dutch parliamentary election studies of 2006 and 2010 included CSES Module 3, and consequentially several questions into the most important political problems were included. After the election, open-ended questions were asked about what for the respondent *personally* was the most important issue in the election, and what according to the respondent was at the time the most important problem *for the Netherlands*. These questions have been developed in the context of sociotropic versus pocketbook voting – i.e., voting based on considerations on the state of the economy or on considerations about one's personal finances. Since the questions were open-ended, they give some insight into what the 2006 and 2010 elections were about from the voter's perspective. When the categorized answers to the open-ended questions are tabulated with party choice, it is also possible to see to what extent party choice is connected to problem perception. Up to two answers to the open-ended questions have been coded, but as only a small minority of respondents gives more than a single answer, we will use only the first-mentioned problems.

Table 2 about here

Most important issue for the voter

Table 2 summarizes the answers to the question what the most important issue was for the respondent, in 2010 and in 2006, and how these answers are related to party choice. We first discuss what the most important issues for the respondent were. In 2006, issues under the heading of social policies stand out, which were mentioned by 31 percent of the respondents. Social policies include welfare state provisions (retirement age, unemployment benefits, disability benefits) but also policies regarding health care. Issues regarding the economy and taxes come second, with 18 percent of the respondents mentioning these. Thirdly, integration issues (which include problems associated with ethnic minorities) were seen by 13 percent of the respondents as the most important issue in the election for them personally.

In 2010, problems associated with the economy and taxes dominated the list. More than half of the respondents now mentioned these problems as the most important for them personally, which represents an impressive shift from the 18 percent in 2006. In 2010, social policies came in second, mentioned by 24 percent of the respondents. Integration and other problems were mentioned by considerably fewer respondents.

Issues and voting behavior

To what extent were the problems that respondents saw as the most important to themselves in an election related to voting behavior? In 2006, there were clear differences in voting behavior among those persons who mentioned issues related with social policies, compared with the other respondents. Those for whom social policies were the most important issue in the election tended to vote more often for PvdA and SP, and less often for VVD and CDA. The differences with the electorate as a whole are unambiguous. Similarly, respondents who mention issues related to the economy or to taxation tended to vote more often for VVD and CDA, and less often for PvdA and SP. Especially the relatively large number of people choosing CDA or VVD in this group is impressive. Among those who found integration the most important issue, support for the PVV is disproportionately high.

Noteworthy is the relatively large support in 2006 for CDA among those respondents who mention political problems as the most important. Political problems include, for example, the cabinet formation (which is often a complicated process), the large number of parties, the distribution of seats and the general functioning of politics.

In 2010, when most respondents mentioned economic and taxation issues as most important for them, these respondents tended to vote more often for the VVD. Wilders' PVV was less popular among these respondents. Support for other parties did not differ much from the electorate as a whole. Respondents who mentioned issues related to crime and terrorism, or to integration tended to vote overwhelmingly for the PVV. But the proportions of respondents mentioning these latter issues were in 2010 considerably lower than in 2006.

Summing up, for the voters themselves the 2006 election was mainly about social policies, economy and taxes, and integration issues. In 2010, issues related to the economy and taxes were by far the most important for the voters themselves, with social policies as second. Mentioning either social policies or the economy and taxes as most important issue, was associated with party preference according to the familiar left-right divide: VVD and CDA were often preferred by those concerned about the economy and

taxes, and PvdA and SP by those concerned about social policies. People mentioning problems of integration often voted for PVV.

Most important problem for the Netherlands

Table 3 provides an overview similar to that of table 2, but now for the first answer to the open-ended question what is currently the most important problem *for the Netherlands*.

Table 3 about here

In 2006, problems of politics (30 percent) and of integration (27 percent) were mentioned most often. Social policies follow, with 14 percent of the respondents mentioning these. The single problem mentioned most often was the cabinet formation, followed by immigration policy, integration policy, and the functioning of politics. Many voters thus saw different core issues in the 2006 election for themselves and for the country as a whole. For themselves, social policies and the economy were the most important. But for the country, political problems and issues of integration dominated.

In 2010, the problems mentioned for the country were more congruent with the respondents' personal concerns. Almost half of the respondents first point to the economy and taxes as the most important category of problems for the country – a figure comparable to that for the respondents themselves. But in 2010 too, political problems are mentioned by a large minority of 28 percent – hardly less than in 2006. Problems of integration were now mentioned by no more than 5 percent. This is remarkable in the light of the electoral victory of the PVV (15 percent of the vote), which is usually portrayed as a one-issue anti-Islam party.

In summary, Dutch voters in 2006 most often mentioned politics and integration as the most important types of problems facing the country. In 2010, these were the economy and taxes, and politics. For themselves, the voters in both 2006 and 2010 primarily referred to the economy and taxes, and to social policies as the most important issues of the election. Many voters regard politics as the most important problem facing the country, although for themselves it has a lower priority.

Issues and voting behavior

Turning now to the voting behavior of respondents who mention specific categories of important problems, we see that in 2006 the voting behavior of those who mentioned integration hardly differs from the electorate as a whole. Integration was regarded as an important problem for the Netherlands,

but was not clearly associated with different voting behavior. People mentioning political problems tend to vote more often for the VVD and less often for the PvdA, but the differences are not great. Mentioning social policies is associated with a higher probability of voting PvdA or SP, and a correspondingly lower chance of voting VVD.

In 2010, it is practically impossible to find a specific pattern in voting for persons mentioning one or another category of problems. The most visible exception is the high percentage (23 percent) of PVV-voters among those who mention integration as the most important problem for the Netherlands. But in 2010 this group consisted of only 5 percent of the respondents.

Specific patterns of voting behavior are much clearer when the respondent is asked for the issues that in the election were the most important for him- or herself than when the question is into the most important problem for the country as a whole. Issues of integration and immigration were considered to be important especially in the 2006 election. In the 2010 election, the economy was the core topic. All in all, with few precious exceptions these analyses provide hardly any evidence that the electoral success of political parties can be directly traced back to the problems that voters themselves identify – for them or for the country as a whole. At the same time almost a third of the voters in both 2006 and 2010 pointed to political problems as the most important for the country. We see this as a (weak) sign of dissatisfaction with the current state of politics in the Netherlands.

Conclusion and discussion

The main aim of this paper was to investigate to which extent new conflict dimensions associated with globalization have manifested themselves in recent elections in the Netherlands. The Netherlands offers an interesting case for closer scrutiny, since electoral volatility has reached a very high level and new challenging parties from the right and from the left have been very successful, even if only in the short run. The 2010 election, the first parliamentary election in the Eurozone since the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, has attracted attention from observers worldwide because of the success of Geert Wilders' outspoken anti-Islam party PVV. What was the 2010 election about, and in which respects did it differ from earlier elections? We posed three research questions, to which we now turn again.

- (1) How did the self-placement and the placement of parties on new issues regarding the economy and culture develop among voters between 1994 and 2010?

We have shown that on the issues of integration and European integration the voters have consistently taken a position on one side (the anti-side) of the issue scales. The positions of the established parties, as perceived by the voters, have not changed much over the 1994-2010 period, even though we have observed some weak polarization on the issue of European unification. Most importantly, we have observed that newcomers to Dutch politics, especially LPF, PVV and SP, have assumed positions on these new issues that are distinct from those of the established parties and relatively close to the position of the mean respondent. We interpret these developments as signs that the adaptation process of existing parties predicted by Kriesi et al. (2008) is not yet occurring in the Netherlands.

- (2) To what extent were these issues in this period absorbed into existing conflict dimensions?

We have also argued that over time the correlations between old and new issues, especially between integration, asylum seekers, left-right and European integration have slowly increased. We interpret this change as a weak sign of the embedding process that Kriesi et al. (2008) have predicted.

- (3) How were these issues related to voting behavior?

Using open-ended CSES questions about the most important issues for the respondents themselves and for the country as a whole, we have shown that that for the voters themselves the 2006 election was mainly about social policies, economy and taxes, and integration issues. In 2010, issues related to the economy and taxes were by far the most important for the voters themselves, with social policies as second. For the country, political problems and issues of integration and immigration were considered to be important especially in the 2006 election. In the 2010 election, the economy was the core topic and political problems were also mentioned very often. So to answer the core question of this conference: this is what the elections supposedly were about. But the selection of the most important problem was in both 2006 and 2010 only weakly related to party choice, and then only for the issues that were important to the voters themselves. In other words, we have observed to a small extent a specific variety of "pocketbook voting" – applied to social policies and the economy and taxation. In contrast, the perceived state of the nation appears to be of little consequence for the voting decisions of Dutch citizens.

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Figure 1. Volatility of results for Dutch parliamentary elections, 1959-2010

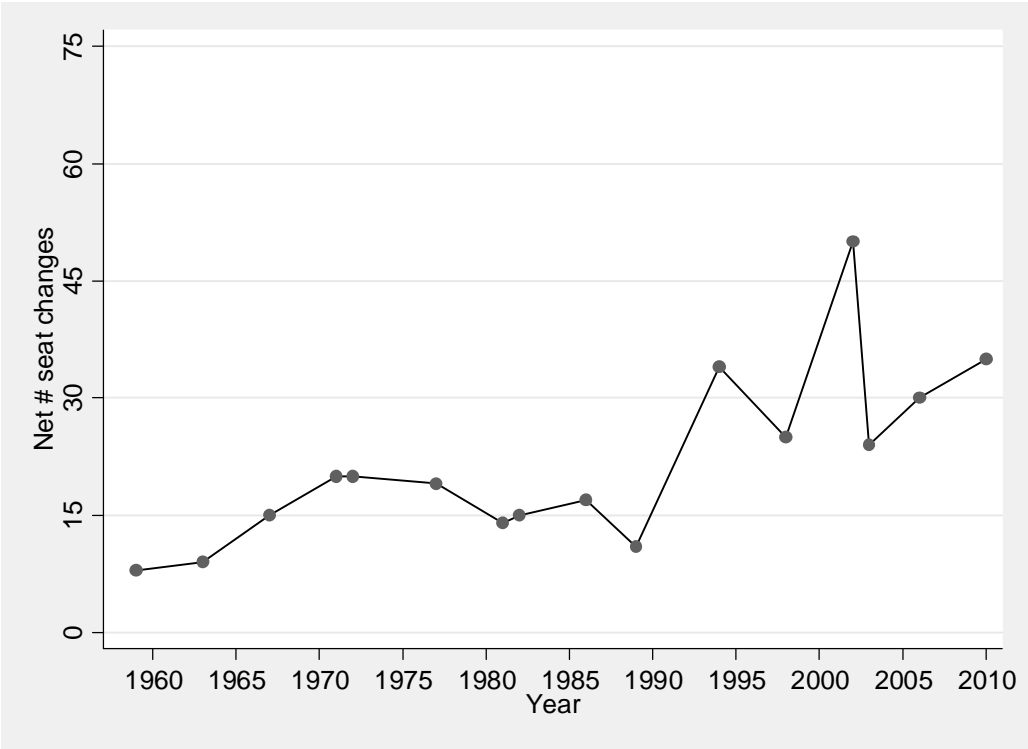


Figure 2. Perceived party positions and position of respondent on integration of minorities

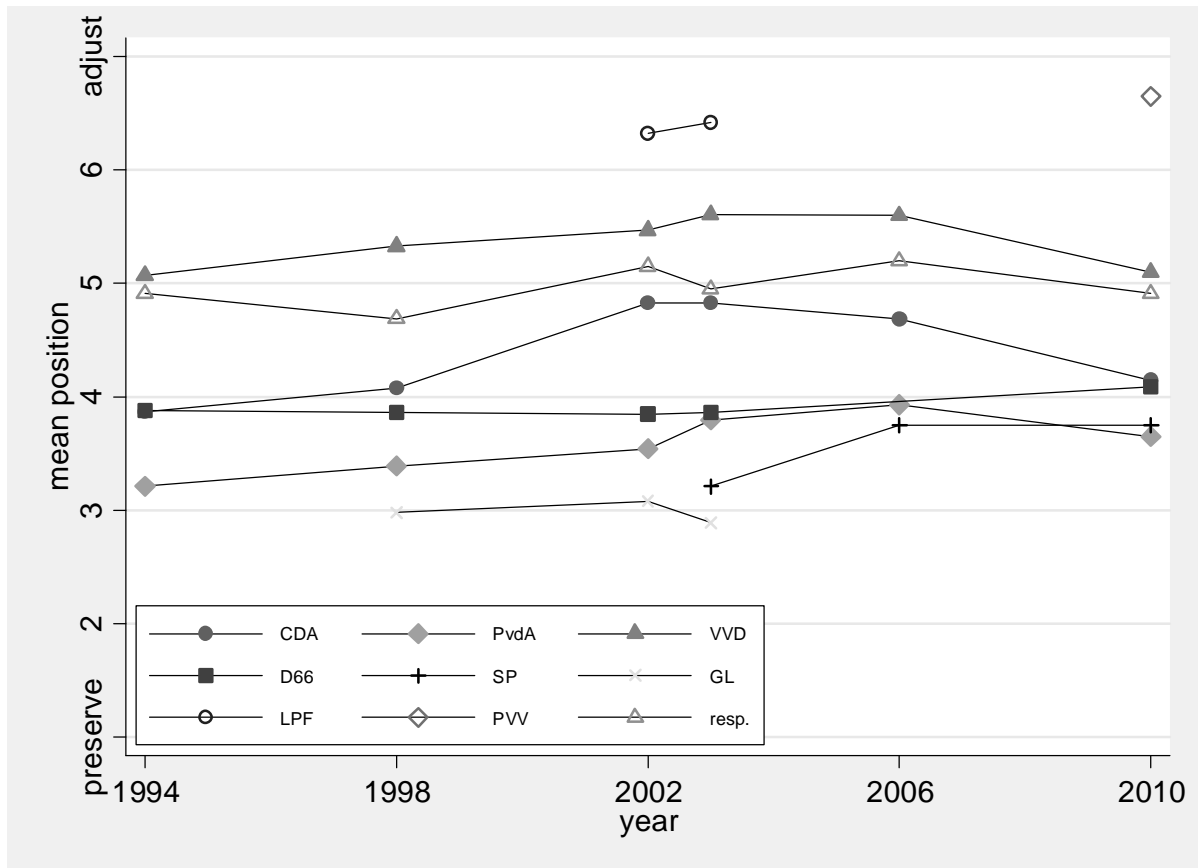


Figure 3. Perceived party positions and position of respondent on European unification

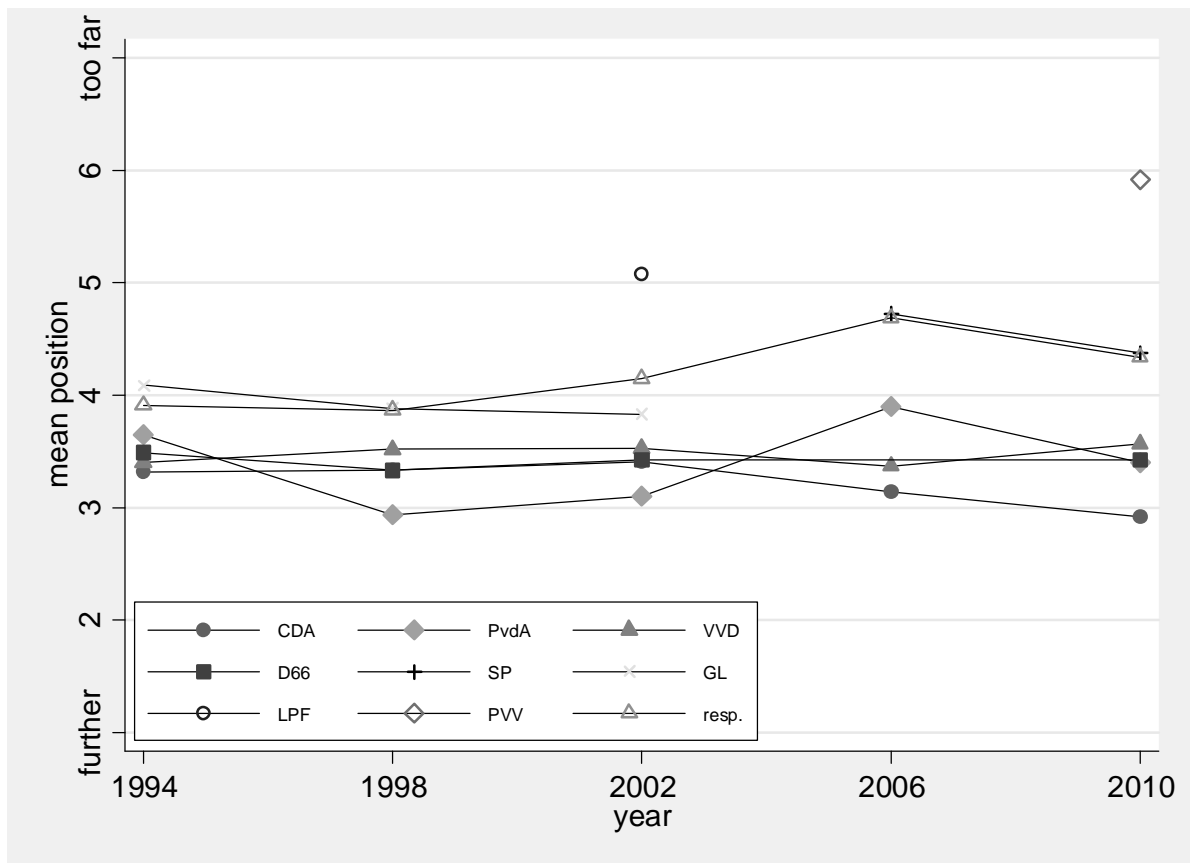


Table 1. Election results Second Chamber of parliament 2002-2006

Party	Party leader 2010	2010		2006		2003		2002	
		%	seats	%	seats	%	seats	%	seats
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	Mark Rutte	20.5	31	14.7	22	17.9	28	15.4	24
Labour Party (PvdA)	Job Cohen	19.6	30	21.2	33	27.3	42	15.1	23
Freedom Party (PVV)	Geert Wilders	15.4	24	5.9	9	--	--	--	--
Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)	Jan Peter Balkenende	13.6	21	26.5	41	28.6	44	27.9	43
Socialist Party (SP)	Michiel Roemer	9.8	15	16.6	25	6.3	9	5.9	9
Democrats 66 (D66)	Alexander Pechtold	6.9	10	2.0	3	4.1	6	5.1	7
Green Left (GL)	Femke Halsema	6.7	10	4.6	7	5.1	8	7.0	10
Christian Union (CU)	André Rouvoet	3.2	5	4.0	6	2.1	3	2.5	4
Political Reformed Party (SGP)	Kees van der Staaij	1.7	2	1.6	2	1.6	2	1.7	2
Party for the Animals (PvdD)	Marianne Thieme	1.3	2	1.8	2	0.4	0	--	--
Proud of the Netherlands (TON)	Rita Verdonk	0.6	0	--	--	--	--	--	--
Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF)	--	0.3	0	0.2	0	5.7	8	17.0	26

Table 2. Most important problem for the voter and voting behavior, 2006 and 2010

Party	Economy and taxes		Crime and terrorism		Integration		Social policies		Income and employment		Politics		Other		Total	
	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006
VVD	31	27	20	22	8	19	9	6	13	8	11	12	10	10	21	14
PvdA	16	11	3	15	16	16	20	28	29	31	32	22	21	16	18	20
PVV	7	4	45	11	49	19	12	3	3	1	11	2	4	2	11	5
CDA	12	40	9	24	4	18	14	21	3	15	13	34	8	23	11	25
SP	8	9	9	9	3	9	18	22	23	27	0	15	7	19	11	17
D66	9	0	3	0	4	3	5	2	8	2	9	1	17	3	8	2
GL	6	1	3	2	6	3	5	4	5	5	4	3	18	12	7	5
CU	3	1	1	4	1	2	3	6	5	2	0	1	5	7	3	4
SGP	1	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	1	1
Not	6	5	7	9	7	5	9	5	11	6	15	6	3	3	7	5
Total	51	18	4	3	5	13	24	31	3	7	3	8	10	21	1,853	1,989

Table 3. Most important problem for the Netherlands and voting behavior, 2006 and 2010

Party	Economy and taxes		Crime and terrorism		Integration		Social policies		Income and employment		Politics		Other		Total	
	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006
VVD	22	14	23	11	22	14	14	9	13	10	24	17	14	15	21	14
PvdA	17	16	9	11	19	19	20	27	13	24	17	17	24	20	18	20
PVV	10	9	18	8	23	6	12	4	9	1	10	5	7	3	11	5
CDA	11	27	9	35	10	27	13	23	15	23	12	26	8	22	11	25
SP	10	14	16	15	11	12	18	20	17	25	10	16	6	19	11	16
D66	9	0	5	3	2	3	7	1	4	0	9	1	11	3	8	2
GL	7	6	0	1	2	4	6	4	6	7	6	5	17	6	7	5
CU	4	3	5	3	1	4	2	5	6	2	4	4	2	5	3	4
SGP	1	1	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	1
Not	7	7	16	12	6	6	5	6	13	8	6	4	8	4	7	5
Total	47	6	2	4	5	27	7	14	3	4	28	30	7	15	1,844	2,085