

# Mechanisms of Issue Congruence: The Democratic Party Mandate

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## Abstract

Issue congruence between voters and parties can be achieved if voters and parties follow the party mandate model. A central requirement of this model is that parties fulfil their electoral mandate. This article studies collective party mandate fulfilment by comparing parties' election manifestos with the parliamentary speeches of their politicians in two countries: a typical consensus democracy, the Netherlands, and a typical majoritarian democracy, the United Kingdom. The central question is whether a difference in collective mandate fulfilment exists between these two types of democracy. Contrary to previous findings, this study finds that such a difference does not exist, at least not with regard to the two countries analysed. This can be explained by the way in which the party mandate is conceptualized. The article also analyses the development of party mandate fulfilment over time and finds no evidence for the idea that collective mandate fulfilment is declining.

**Keywords:** political representation, issue congruence, political parties, party mandate, British politics, Dutch politics

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The policy link between voters and party politicians has received considerable attention (Powell 2000; Blais and Bodet 2006; Powell 2009; Golder and Stramski 2010). Not only is congruence between the opinions of politicians and voters desirable from the perspective of democratic theory, policy differences are also increasingly important to understand how people vote (Van der Eijk and Franklin 2009). The party mandate model provides a mechanism for establishing issue congruence: voters authorize parties to pursue a set of policies on their behalf (Thomassen 1994). An important requirement for this model to work is that parties observe their mandates.

Most work on the question of mandate fulfilment compares parties' election manifestos with government policies (Klingemann et al. 1994; Royed 1996; Mansergh and Thomson 2007). While this is a good way to measure to what extent government parties manage to put their pledges into action, it ignores the representative dimension of authorization, most importantly the role of parliament. This article takes a different approach: it compares the electoral party competition with the *parliamentary* party competition. An important advantage of this approach is that it allows the study of mandate fulfilment by both government and opposition parties.

It remains an open question which type of institutional setting creates the most suitable circumstances for a proper functioning party mandate system (Klingemann et al. 1994; Mansergh and Thomson 2007; Powell 2009). In particular, there is debate on the merits of consensus and majoritarian democracy (Lijphart 1999). The findings of existing studies of issue congruence and the party mandate are mixed. Related to this is the question how the functioning of the party mandate model changes over time. The literature on electoral behaviour and party position change suggests that both voters and parties have changed significantly over the last fifty years. How have these changes affected party policy representation? This results in two related research

questions. First, does a difference exist between majoritarian and consensus democracies in terms of parties' (collective) mandate fulfilment? Second, how has mandate fulfilment developed over the last sixty years?

The article studies these questions with regard to two cases: one typical majoritarian democracy, Great Britain, and a typical consensus democracy, the Netherlands. It compares parties' election manifestos with their MPs speeches in parliament, which are analysed using the novel *Wordfish* text analysis algorithm. The novel approach and data used here present a picture of mandate fulfilment that runs counter to the prevailing wisdom.

### **The party mandate model**

If it is desirable to have a link between the preferences of voters and those of their representatives, one should be interested in how this is achieved. More specifically, what kind of (institutional) mechanism can bring about such linkage between voters and politicians? A particularly influential answer to this question has been presented by proponents of the party mandate model (APSA 1950; Ranney 1954; Thomassen 1994). They argue that a choice between competing parties with different electoral programs can bring about issue congruence.

The traditional way in which the party mandate model is conceived is that it provides the winning party a *mandate for government* (Ranney 1954). In the ideal type situation there are only two parties, one of which will receive the support of a majority of voters and will go into government. This party is then said to be mandated to carry out its electoral commitments. If it does so indeed, there is a link between the will of (the majority of the people) and the policies of the government.

An alternative way to look at the party mandate is by treating it as a *parliamentary mandate*. This view considers whether parties fulfil their *representative* role in a good way: do

political parties take similar policy stances before and after elections? This is important, first, because parliament usually is the principal (public) political arena. From the perspective of representative democracy this makes the way in which parliament operates a highly relevant question. Democracy, it can be argued, does not only require that the decisions that are made reflect the will of the people, but also that the opinions and interests of the people are taken into account in the actions that representatives take. Second, parliament presents a vital link in the ‘chain of representation’ (Müller, 2000). Whereas existing studies have often compared the start of the chain, the preferences of the electorate, with (almost) the end, government decisions, this study focuses on a smaller section of the representative chain, namely the link between voters and their party representatives in parliament. This sheds more light on what happens between the act of voting and the decisions that are eventually made. Furthermore, it is important to know for voters if parties’ electoral positions are a good predictor of their parliamentary behaviour to avoid adverse selection problems (Müller, 2000).

### **Approach**

Previous research into mandate fulfilment has been conducted in either of two fashions: the *pledge approach* or the *saliency approach* (Klingemann et al. 1994; Royed 1996; Mansergh and Thomson 2007). Both approaches are concerned with the extent to which the electoral mandate is translated into government policy output, either in the form of governmental decisions (the pledge approach) or government spending (the saliency approach). Thus, both approaches take a *government* mandate perspective, comparing parties’ promises to what the government does. From this perspective the mandate of opposition parties is not very important, because the opposition party lost the election and has in fact no mandate to govern.

From the perspective of political representation, however, opposition parties' mandates are as important as government parties' mandates. The fact that opposition parties are not in government, either because they lost the election or because they were left out in the government formation process, does not alter the fact that their voters should be able to expect representation along the lines of the opposition party's mandate. Opposition parties might want to adjust some of their policy positions in order to be able to defeat the government at the next election (especially in majoritarian systems), but their voters should be able to expect a degree of congruence between what opposition parties say before and after elections. While the losing party in an election may have failed to win a mandate to government, it still managed to gain a mandate to represent in parliament.

By shifting the focus from the *government* mandate to the *parliamentary* mandate one can present a more inclusive picture of mandate fulfilment, incorporating both government and opposition parties. Rather than comparing parties' pledges to government policy outcomes, I compare how parties behave during the election to their behaviour in parliament, or more specifically what they *say* before and after elections. Of course, requiring parties simply to act in parliament according to their electoral mandate is in a way less demanding than actually having to implement the pledges. This is why one should expect that levels of mandate fulfilment are relatively high. Whereas the actual implementation can be frustrated by many external factors, such as economic growth, civil society opposition or legal procedures (Mansergh and Thomson 2007), how parties behave in parliament is very much their own choice – the fact that some policies are difficult to implement is no excuse for not pursuing them. This does, however, not imply that parliamentary 'talk is cheap': parliamentary debates are not a philosophical debate devoid of any real-world implications. In some ways parliamentary debates may be conceived as

very long motivations of parliamentary voting behaviour (Proksch and Slapin 2009). Parties and MPs have incentives to vote in line with their speeches if only to avoid criticisms of other parties and negative media attention. Thus, while it may be easier to talk about things in parliament than to actually get them done, making a speech does bear certain costs.

The existing approaches differ with respect to what they study: the pledge approach looks at specific electoral pledges in election manifesto, while the saliency approach measures party issue saliency. The pledge approach only looks at part of the picture: it cannot deal very well with a changing policy agenda and is one-sided in that it only looks at the question whether pledges are enacted – not whether what is enacted is pledged (Louwerse 2011). The saliency approach offers a more comprehensive test of party mandate fulfilment, although it is limited to a particular understanding of the nature of party competition (Budge 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006). As it tests whether parties' electoral issue priorities are related to government spending patterns, it is well suited to measure changes in the political agenda (Klingemann et al. 1994). However, it ignores parties' position differences to a large degree: talking a lot about a particular subject does not necessarily imply that a party also wants to spend more on it nor what specific policies it wishes to pursue (Royed 1996: 52-54). In addition, issues that do not directly relate to government spending at all, such as regulation and medical-ethical issues, cannot be taken into account in the analysis.

The application of spatial theory to the party mandate mitigates these problems and allows researchers to shift from studying the government mandate to the parliamentary mandate. It does so by offering a party system approach to the question of the party mandate. Rather than looking at the fulfilment of pledges by individual parties, it looks at the congruence of the electoral party competition and the parliamentary party competition. Instead of looking whether

specific pledges have been fulfilled, I study whether the structure of the party competition (that is parties' positions relative to each other) is similar before and after elections. To put it simply, if the social-democrats are to the 'left' of the Christian-democrats during the election, we also expect them to be in that position in the parliamentary competition. By comparing the structure of the party competition, one can compare the electoral and parliamentary competition even when the parliamentary agenda changes.

This shift from a party-level to a party system-level analysis is similar to the one that Golder and Stramski (2010) have proposed in the context of issue congruence. They argue that the existing one-to-one congruence measures (congruence between a single voter and a single party) and many-to-one congruence measures (congruence between all voters and the median legislator or the government) should be appended by a measure of many-to-many congruence: whether the distribution of voter preferences is similar to the distribution of legislators' preferences. Much alike, I argue that the analysis of the party mandate should be extended by analysing the congruence between parties' pre-election positions and their parliamentary positions. A voting decision is, after all, a choice *between* parties: if the configuration of parties is very different between the electoral and parliamentary arena, a voters' decision may not have been optimal. The electoral competition should be a good predictor of where parties stand in parliament *in relation to each other*. Thus, this study shifts the analysis from *individual* mandate fulfilment to what may be called *collective* mandate fulfilment.

The mandate itself is conceptualized here with respect to two dimensions. First, there is the question of what parties talk about or *issue saliency*. It can be argued that the issues that matter most to parties during elections should also be the most important issues in parliament (cf. Budge 2001). The second aspect is what parties actually say on these issues or *issue*

*positions*. Parties' relative issue positions on issue dimensions should be similar before and after the election if their mandate is to be deemed fulfilled.

### **Explaining differences in mandate fulfilment**

The first research question is how the institutional setup of a country is related to *collective* mandate fulfilment. Is there a difference between *majoritarian* (or countries with majoritarian or plurality electoral systems) and *consensus* democracies (countries with proportional electoral systems) (Lijphart 1999)? This difference between two types of institutional settings has been central in the literature on issue congruence (Powell 2000; Blais and Bodet 2006; Golder and Stramski 2010) and mandate fulfilment (Thomson 2001; Klingemann et al. 1994). In terms of issue congruence majoritarian and consensus democracies seem to be similar, although some authors argue that consensus democracies outperform majoritarian countries (Powell 2000). Pledge fulfilment studies, on the other hand, have found that majoritarian democracies perform better in terms of pledge fulfilment (Mansergh and Thomson 2007). How then, do institutions relate to *collective* mandate fulfilment?

The traditional argument is that majoritarian democracies show higher levels of mandate fulfilment, because their characteristic single-party governments are in a better position to enact their electoral pledges than the coalition governments usually found in consensus democracies (Thomson 2001: 174). Majoritarian democracy provides a short 'chain of representation' from voters to a single party government that can do exactly what it promised, whereas coalition governments in consensus democracies have to compromise and can therefore not enact the whole of their election manifesto. This argument is, however, primarily directed at the

*government* mandate, not the *parliamentary* mandate. In parliament, parties in a coalition government are relatively free to outline their own policy position, as long as this does not threaten the stability of the government. In fact, this is one of the major roles of the parliamentary party group: to voice the viewpoints of the party, rather than the coalition. However, in the case of single party government in majoritarian democracies there is usually no distinction between the position of the government and that of the parliamentary party: the government is also the frontbench of the parliamentary party group. This restricts their parliamentary behaviour, because as the government they are directly responsible for the resulting policies and accountable for the whole of government (in the broad sense of the word). Government party back-benchers do have some liberty to voice authentic party policy stances, so we would expect them to be closer to the electoral position of the party than the front bench. All in all, I expect that there is no difference in the extent to which government parties in majoritarian democracies are able to fulfil their parliamentary mandates compared to government parties in consensus democracies.

Collective mandate fulfilment by opposition parties is expected to be relatively low in majoritarian democracies. Opposition parties in majoritarian parliaments generally have few powers (Döring 1995). The other major party is in government and there normally is little that the opposition can do about it. Majoritarian opposition normally involves opposing what the government wants, even when it had originally been in the opposition party manifesto. Consensus democracies are characterized by relatively powerful parliaments, for example in terms of setting their own agenda and powerful committee systems (Döring 1995; Sieberer 2011). Furthermore, the opposition is usually not united, but consists of several parties that do not necessarily agree on an alternative for the current government. As a result, these parties do

not have a dominant strategy to oppose every government proposal: as much as they want to pose as an alternative for the government parties, they also need to distinguish themselves from the other opposition parties. It seems much more attractive to stay true to their electoral mandate and try and use parliamentary prerogatives to influence policy – often not without success: Mansergh and Thomson (2007) found that opposition parties in countries with proportional representation are able to implement more of their pledges than those in non-proportional countries.<sup>1</sup>

Taking these arguments together, I argue that there is reason to expect that collective mandate fulfilment is higher in consensus democracies than in majoritarian democracies:

**Hypothesis 1:** Collective mandate fulfilment is higher in a consensus democracy than in a majoritarian democracy.

The second question of this paper is whether collective mandate fulfilment has changed over time. The literature on party change suggests that the process of dealignment has made electoral politics more volatile (Daalder and Mair 1983; Dalton 1984; Katz and Mair 2009). Parties no longer cater to a specific socio-demographic constituency, but try to catch all voters or rather occupy a specific niche in a cartelized party system. One can distinguish two arguments about the influence these changes have had on the representative relationship between parties and voters. Some authors argue that parties are no longer agents of the people, but rather agents of the state (Katz and Mair 1995). Parties are merely a public utility that is supplied by the state to offer citizens a way of influencing politics (Van Biezen 2004). In addition, the end of the Cold War has fostered a process of globalisation and European integration; politicians have put major

areas of policy-making outside the realm of the traditional (national) political institutions. This has severely limited the stakes of the electoral competition (Katz and Mair 2009, 754). Just as democratic elections are, according to Katz and Mair (1995, 22) “dignified parts of the constitution”, one could argue that election manifestos are merely a part of this electoral ritual and have little substantive impact. The room for political influence by voters is limited, because of the party cartel: parties may pretend to cater to specific voter groups, but in fact offer little choice to citizens. This leads to a decline of the representative link and also to the extent that parties fulfil their mandates (Mair 1997). After all, in a cartel party system, parties have little incentive to adhere to their promises as ex post electoral control mechanisms do no longer function properly, because the difference between winning and losing in politics has diminished (Katz and Mair 1995). This leads to the expectation that collective mandate fulfilment has declined over time:

**Hypothesis 2:** Collective mandate fulfilment has declined over the last sixty years.

Kitschelt (2000) argues that the opposite is true: because the links between parties and particular constituencies have declined, the electoral market is now more competitive than before. Parties have much to win and lose in elections and will therefore listen better to voters than in the past. Kitschelt argues that the political cartel cannot successfully limit electoral competition: there is always a possibility that new parties enter the political arena. Indeed, the relative success of radical right-wing populist parties seems to suggest that if there was a cartel, it could not prevent the entrance of significant challengers (De Lange 2008). All in all, this seems to suggest that in order to keep citizens satisfied, parties should be better motivated to

implement their manifesto than in the past. In essence, the above hypothesis is also a test of Kitschelt's counter-argument: if no evidence of a decline is found, but rather of an increase in mandate fulfilment, this would lend support to his argument.

## **Data and methods**

This article uses original data collected from twelve elections and the subsequent parliamentary periods in the Netherlands and Great Britain. While ideally a large number of cases would be used to test the two hypotheses, this would be very resource intensive – even with computer-assisted techniques. The selection of two typical cases, one majoritarian democracy (Great Britain) and one consensus democracy (the Netherlands), provides a research design that allows to draw inferences from a limited number of cases. The two selected countries are placed on opposite ends of Lijphart's (1999) *executive-parties* dimension, which captures differences in electoral and party systems, the type of government and corporatism/pluralism, while they are relatively similar in terms of GDP per capita, democratic history and EU membership. To compare mandate fulfilment over time, I have selected one election per decade between 1950 and 2010 – the selected cases are not consecutive as to limit the direct influence from one selected election to another.

Parties' issue saliency and positions are estimated by means of computer-assisted analysis of election manifestos and parliamentary debates. The choice to analyse text is motivated by the need to collect data for quite some time in the past and the need to compare parties' policy preferences on a rather short time-scale (before and after elections) for which other sources, such as (expert) surveys are not suitable. Party manifestos, while certainly not the only message that

parties present to voters during elections, are regarded as the most authoritative statement of a parties' policy views (Klingemann et al. 2006; Pellikaan et al. 2007). Parliamentary speeches compare most directly to manifestos as they are both political texts. I opted to analyse speech rather than voting behaviour because the latter captures only a small subset of parliamentary behaviour and is often strategically motivated (Proksch and Slapin 2009, 589-590).

The estimates of issue saliency for each party are derived from a dictionary-based content analysis technique. For each of the 20-odd major issue categories in the Comparative Agenda Project's (Breeman et al. 2009; UK Policy Agendas Project 2010) coding scheme, a list of keywords has been drawn up (the dictionaries). Each paragraph of text was classified into the category of which the keywords appeared most frequently (corrected for the length of the keyword list). The same dictionaries were used for each set of election manifestos and the parliamentary speeches from the subsequent period. The paragraphs that remained unclassified by this method, e.g. if no keywords could be found or there was a tie between issue categories, were estimated by means of a Support Vector Machine (Fan et al. 2008). The classified categories were used here as training set. This procedure yields reasonably reliable classifications: machine-human coder reliability for a subset of the data yields a Krippendorff's alpha between .6 and .7.

The issue position estimates were acquired by applying Wordfish, a novel approach that distils parties' issue positions from word counts in political texts (Slapin and Proksch 2008; Proksch and Slapin 2008). The underlying assumption of the Wordfish algorithm is that parties that use similar words have a similar policy position, or to put it more formally, that word counts are a function of parties' issue positions. The advantage of this method over other methods of automated content analysis, such as Wordscores, is the fact that no reference

texts are needed, e.g. one does not have to ‘instruct’ the computer what is ‘left’ and what is ‘right’, but policy positions are derived directly from the data (cf. Laver et al. 2003). The method has shown to produce valid and reliable estimates for the analysis of manifestos and parliamentary speech, although it has not yet been used to compare those two sources (Proksch and Slapin 2009). It is exactly this comparison that provides a challenge for applying the Wordfish algorithm, because word usage in election manifestos is in most cases quite different from word usage in parliamentary speech. Manifestos are carefully crafted written documents, usually composed by multiple authors, while parliamentary speeches are usually single-authored or made up on the spot. These differences make it difficult to directly compare manifestos with parliamentary speech using a word count based algorithm. This is, however, not strictly necessary for the research question at hand. The idea of collective mandate fulfilment is that there is congruence between the electoral and parliamentary competition, i.e. that parties’ *relative* positions are similar. Thus, it is sufficient to analyse parliamentary speeches and manifestos separately and compare the resulting estimates of parties’ *relative* issue positions on issue dimensions.

Wordfish produces one-dimensional estimates of party positions. While a single dimension might be adequate to capture the competition in some countries, such as Great Britain, the party competition in other countries, such as the Netherlands, is usually regarded to be multidimensional (Pellikaan et al. 2007). To distinguish between parties’ positions on different issues Wordfish can be applied to separate pieces of text. For example, to capture parties’ positions on the issue of foreign affairs, one can select the parts of the manifestos or parliamentary debates that deal with that issue and run a Wordfish analysis on only those texts. In this way, I was able to distinguish between parties’ positions on four to eight of issue

dimensions, depending on the case at hand. The selection of relevant text was based on the text classification procedure described above. However, a number of the 20 issue categories in that analysis contained too little text to arrive at robust Wordfish estimates. Therefore, I combined the 19 or 20 (Netherlands) issue categories to a smaller number: five categories in Britain and four (1952-1977) respectively eight (1982-2006) for the Netherlands. The combinations were based on a substantive understanding of the issues, and are largely comparable to the dimensions that other party position estimation techniques use (Laver 2006; Lowe et al. 2011). This resulted in party positions on between four and eight issue dimensions. The subsequent analysis compares parties' positions on these dimensions before the election with those in parliament.<sup>2</sup> One observation in the subsequent analysis is thus a parties' saliency of or position on an issue dimension in a particular time period (election and subsequent parliament).

## **Results: Types of democracy**

### *Issue saliency*

The first aspect of collective mandate fulfilment is that parties talk about similar things before and after elections: issue saliency congruence. Issue saliency was expressed as the percentage of text that was devoted to a particular issue. I first estimated an OLS regression model that explains parliamentary issue saliency by electoral issue saliency. How well does a parties' attention for an issue during the election predict its attention for that issue in parliament? To establish whether there was a difference between parties from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the model also includes a country dummy variable and the interaction effect between manifesto issue saliency and the country dummy. The results are presented as model 1 in

Table 1. The coefficient for issue saliency manifesto shows that one percentage point more issue saliency in parliament leads to a predicted .477 percentage points increase in parliamentary issue saliency, in the Netherlands. To estimate the effect for the British parties, we have to add to this the coefficient of the interaction effect (Issue saliency manifesto \* UK). The net effect for Britain is 0.572, which is significantly higher.

[Table 1 about here.]

The data thus suggest that mandate fulfilment in terms of issue saliency is higher in the United Kingdom than in the Netherlands. However, this seems to be the result the fact that British parties are more alike in terms of issue saliency. For instance, all parties talk much more about macro-economy than about foreign trade, both in their manifestos and in parliament, which makes issue saliency levels higher than in the Netherlands. The most important aspect about issue saliency in terms of the collective mandate, is, however that parties' that talk much more about an issue in their manifesto *compared to other parties*, also talk more about it than other parties in parliament. This is *relative* issue saliency congruence, which was studied by including the mean issue saliency in parliament (for a specific issue in a specific case) in the model. When parties 'just' follow average attention for an issue very closely, this coefficient will be high at the cost of the predictive power of the issue saliency of that issue in their own manifesto. The model also includes the interaction between this variable and the country dummy variable, to estimate the difference between the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The very high coefficients for the mean issue saliency in parliament in model 2 show that the between-issue variation of issue saliency is much larger than the between-parties issue saliency. Once mean parliamentary issue saliency is added to the model, the predictive value of a party's

manifesto issue saliency drops significantly. For the Dutch observations, it is only 0.121 and for the British parties it is even as low as 0.02 (not significant). The difference between the two countries is significant. The conclusion is that while in absolute terms the British parties show higher levels of issue saliency congruence, in relative terms the Dutch parties score higher.

### *Issue positions*

The second aspect of collective mandate fulfilment, issue position congruence, was analysed in two ways. First, I calculated a simple difference score between a party's (relative) electoral position and its (relative) parliamentary position. For the UK, I differentiated between the frontbench and the backbenchers (except for the Liberals who were all treated as the party's frontbench, because of their small size), because of the different roles they play in parliament<sup>3</sup>. Figure 1 displays the mean of those scores, weighted by the saliency of each issue. The grey dots display the score for each party, while the black line indicates an over-time trend based on the six elections selected for this study. There are notable differences between parties, in some cases ranging from (almost) no difference between electoral and parliamentary positions to a difference of 1.5, which is quite large, bearing in mind that we are dealing with parties' positions on standardized dimensions, which effectively run between -2 and +2. In addition, there is a substantial difference between time periods: in the 1970s (and to a lesser extent the 1960s), differences between electoral and parliamentary positions are larger than in other years. This can be understood in light of the transformation of politics from the post-war welfare state compromise to the neo-liberal synthesis. Given these between-parties and over-time differences, the difference between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands is only very small.

[Figure 1 about here.]

To test whether the observed difference between the Netherlands and the United Kingdom is significant, I estimated a regression model, much alike the one used above.<sup>4</sup> The dependent variable is a party's relative issue position in parliament. The independent variables are its relative issue position in the manifesto, a country dummy variable and the interaction of these two variables. The coefficient of manifesto position indicates how much the parliamentary position changes when the manifesto position changes by one point. This is 0.614 points for the Netherlands; for Britain one has to add 0.077 for the interaction effect, which results in a net effect of 0.691. Thus, parties do not, on average, follow their manifesto position perfectly, but the level of congruence is quite reasonable. The difference between the Netherlands and Britain is, however, not significant.

[Table 2 about here.]

The regression analysis was based on data that differentiated between frontbench and backbenchers in the British cases. There is, however, an argument to be made that the 'party line' of any party is represented by the frontbench rather than the backbenchers. After all, while statements of the frontbench are considered to represent what the parliamentary party thinks and wants, speeches by backbenchers are not considered to necessarily present the party line – and usually present multiple positions reflecting the respective 'wings' within a party. Model 2 fits this interpretation by including only the frontbench observations. Here, the coefficient for the Dutch parties remains virtually the same as in the previous analysis 0.625, while the coefficient for the British parties drops significantly to 0.337. Apparently, mandate fulfilment for British frontbenchers is substantially lower than for its backbenchers. Closer inspection of the data learns that this is related to two features. First, the position of the government party frontbench is

consistently more moderate than that of its backbenchers. Taking into account that scores have been standardized, this implies that the positions of the backbenchers are closer to the party's electoral positions. Second, the position of the Liberals/Liberal Democrats changes quite substantially between elections and parliament: during elections they usually oppose the incumbent government, while they take more of a middle ground in parliament. This lowers their levels of mandate fulfilment, which has a negative effect on the levels of mandate fulfilment of the three frontbenches combined.

Although there is some evidence that the Dutch parties score better than their British counterparts, other analyses are inconclusive. Therefore, I have to conclude that hypothesis 1 that stated that a consensus democracy performs better than a majoritarian democracy in terms of collective mandate fulfilment is not supported by the data.

## **Results: Changes over time**

### *Issue saliency*

Whether collective mandate fulfilment has changed over time is analysed by calculating a measure of issue saliency congruence, which measures the percentage of party attention before and after an election that has not shifted (cf. Pedersen 1979). If a party's issue saliency for each issue is exactly the same in the electoral and parliamentary competition, thus when it devotes exactly as much attention to each issue in both arenas, their congruence score equals 100. The score is 0 when a party only talks about issues in parliament which it did not at all discuss in the manifesto. The congruence formula is:

$$congruence_p = 100 - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n |saliency.manifesto_{ip} - saliency.parliament_{ip}| \quad (1)$$

Where  $p$  is a party and  $i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n$  are the issues.

[Figure 2 about here.]

The mean congruence scores for Britain and the Netherlands are displayed in Figure 2. Over the whole research period, there was an increase of issue saliency congruence in both countries. For Britain, the increase took place between the 1950s and 1980s, while congruence in the Netherlands followed a more erratic, but gradually upward, pattern.

[Figure 3 about here.]

A similar pattern is found when adapting the regression model presented above to analyse over-time change. In order to do this, I included dummy variables for each time period (instead of the country dummy variables), with the first as the reference category. In addition, I included the interaction effect between each of the time period dummy variables and the manifesto issue saliency. Thus, the model explains parliamentary issue saliency by means of manifesto issue saliency, time period and their interaction. As the standard regression table with interaction effects is rather difficult to interpret, I present a graphical representation (Figure 3) of the total effect of manifesto issue saliency on parliamentary issue saliency in each time period (the regression table is available from the author) (Brambor et al. 2006). This shows that in the 1950s (which includes one election and subsequent parliament from each country) one percentage point more saliency in manifesto leads, on average, to 0.4 more percentage points of issue saliency in parliament. Over time, the coefficient becomes significantly larger: in the 2000s cases, the marginal effect of manifesto saliency on parliamentary saliency is about 0.7. These findings are

statistically significant: the error bars for the earlier periods do not overlap with those of the later periods. The lower panels present the analysis for each country separately. From it, one may deduce that the overall increase of manifesto saliency is mainly the result of an increase in the Dutch cases. While there is also a slight increase in the British cases, this fails to achieve statistical significance. This reflects a larger degree of stability in the issue agenda in the United Kingdom, which was also observed above.

The increase in issue saliency congruence in the Dutch case can be explained by two factors. Firstly, the length and nature of election manifestos has changed. While manifestos in the 1950s were short pamphlets in which only the most important policy issues were discussed, modern manifestos read almost like an encyclopaedia in which the reader may find a party's position on a broad range of issues. Debate in parliament has always focused on a relatively broad range of issues. Thus, by making their manifestos more encompassing parties have increased the congruence between manifesto and parliamentary issue saliency. Second, political competition has changed substantially in the Netherlands. Until the end of the 1960s, elections were almost like a census: voting behaviour could be explained very well by religion and class (Andeweg and Irwin 2009). Elections were very much about mobilization, and, in order to do this, parties needed to stress issues that mattered to their voters. In parliament, however, they could focus on a broader range of issues in the interest of the state. As this structure of 'pillarization' declined, parties were less certain about their electoral basis. Talking about similar issues in parliament and in the manifesto became more important.

### *Issue positions*

In the discussion of Figure 1 above I made some preliminary remarks on over-time changes in party position congruence. The distances between parties' relative electoral and parliamentary

positions indicate that the 1970s score particularly poorly in these terms. Overall, there seems a slight decline of the distances in the Netherlands, with the 2003-2006 case showing the lowest distance scores of the six Dutch cases. In Britain, the 1983-1987 and 1992-1997 cases showed the lowest distances between manifesto and parliament positions. Generally, over-time changes in party position congruence seem to be small, but rather show an increase of congruence over time than a decrease.

[Figure 4 about here.]

Whether the patterns found in Figure 1 are statistically significant was studied by means of a regression model, which was very similar to the one presented for issue saliency congruence over time: parties' parliamentary issue positions were explained by means of manifesto issue positions, dummy variables for each time period (first time period as reference category) and the interaction between these dummy variables and manifesto issue positions capturing change over time. Figure 4 presents the marginal effects for each time period (the regression table is available from the author). Note that the confidence intervals are much larger than in the previous analysis, because the number of observations for parties' positions is lower. The pooled analysis of Dutch and British observation shows that congruence was consistently higher in the last three time periods than in the first three, although only one difference (between the 1990s and 1970s cases) actually achieves statistical significance. Essentially the same pattern holds when analysing the two countries separately: somewhat of a decline until the 1970s, then higher levels of congruence in the 1980s and 1990s. Only with regard to the cases in the last decade, there seems to be more of a difference between the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In the UK, issue position congruence has declined (not significant), while it remained more or less stable in the Netherlands. The overall picture is that there is certainly no decline of issue position congruence

– where there are over-time differences, these show an increase of issue position congruence over time. Therefore, the second hypothesis is rejected.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

This article focused on one aspect of the party mandate model: party mandate fulfilment. The findings here regarding the difference between consensus and majoritarian democracy in terms of mandate fulfilment seem to be at odds with those of earlier studies. Pledge fulfilment studies found that majoritarian democracy shows higher levels of pledge fulfilment than consensus democracy (Mansergh and Thomson 2007). Klingemann et al. (1994) found that the linkage between manifesto issue saliency and government spending priorities is clearer in majoritarian countries – although Great Britain did not do particularly well in their analysis, it clearly outperformed the Netherlands. My analysis shows that differences between the two countries are small, but if there are any they suggest that consensus system of the Netherlands shows higher rather than lower levels of mandate fulfilment than the majoritarian British case. How can these differences be explained? First, this article has compared parties' manifestos to their parliamentary behaviour, rather than government policy output. In this fashion, the (parliamentary) mandate of opposition parties is taken more fully into account. As I argued above, there is reason to expect that opposition parties are relatively in a better position to enact their parliamentary mandate in consensus democracies. Whereas one-party governments are in a better position to enact specific manifesto policies than coalition governments, in terms of parliamentary policy representation, majoritarian and consensus democracy are on equal footing.

Second, I have studied the 'collective' mandate of parties: rather than looking at specific pledges of individual parties, I compared party competition before and after elections. This allows for a more inclusive comparison, as it does not just look at whether parties pursue in

parliament what they promised, but also how their parliamentary behaviour relates to their electoral mandate. Exactly because one-party governments are in a good position to implement pledges, pledge-making has become very much a strategic game in majoritarian democracies, with parties and media keeping tallies on the implementation of pledges. As a result, parties might try to avoid making certain pledges. These strategic elements have less influence on a spatial analysis of party position: if a party decides to avoid making certain pledges (and thus has a centrist electoral position), but does implement these policies (meaning a more outspoken parliamentary position), the spatial analysis will pick up on a change in a parties' position.

The above result has consequences for the debate on institutional reform. Discussions on institutional reform in Britain and the Netherlands regularly refer to the relative advantages of both political systems (e.g. Power Inquiry 2006: 180-217). Many of these arguments relate to the degree of linkage between voters and politicians. For example, one of the proponents of introducing majoritarian elements into the Dutch democracy has argued that this would lead to higher levels of issue congruence, because of higher levels of mandate fulfilment (Van Thijn 1967). This is what I coined the 'chain-of-representation' argument: majoritarian democracy offers a clear chain of representation (one party wins a majority and forms a government), which would ensure that parties are better able to implement their mandates (Ranney 1954). Indeed, if the criterion is that government parties fulfil their election pledges in government, majoritarian democracy seems to be the system of choice (Royed 1996; Thomson 2001). My findings, and indeed those of studies of issue congruence (Powell 2000; Blais and Bodet 2006; Golder and Stramski 2010), suggest that in terms of collective policy representation (in parliament) there either is not much of a difference between institutional arrangements or that proportional (consensus) democracies fare better. While there

might be other reasons to choose for one institutional arrangement or the other, participants in the institutional reform debate should use the ‘chain-of-representation’ argument more cautiously.

More caution is also warranted with regard to the often-heard claim that party representation is in decline. My analysis did not find evidence of a decline of collective mandate fulfilment. On the contrary, issue saliency congruence has increased in the Netherlands. These findings seem to support, at least to a degree, the arguments put forward by Kitschelt (2000) on how party (system) change would affect political representation. Because parties’ traditional links with specific groups in society (based on class or religion) have diminished, they need to be more sensitive to what voters want and to take better notice of their manifesto rather than less. Voting behaviour is by no means unstructured, but voters are more inclined to change between ideologically proximate parties than in the past (Van der Meer et al. 2012). The reason that I do not find an increase of all aspects of mandate fulfilment might be that the mechanisms described by Kitschelt will first and foremost lead to an increase of policy responsiveness: parties responding to changes in public opinion. While this might be the case, the current article shows that changes in electoral behaviour do not bring British and Dutch parties to abandon their electoral mandates.

Because this article is limited to an analysis of two countries, inferences about the population of democracies should be made with caution. Nevertheless, it shows that the spatial approach to the party mandate offers an addition to the existing approaches, because it allows us to look at party mandate fulfilment at the party system level. Computer-assisted content analysis techniques enable the analysis of a lot of political text, which would have been unfeasible by hand. While these techniques should be applied with care, doing so yields new insights in how

parties operate. Further research can focus on the further improvement of the current techniques, but also on a better understanding of collective party mandate, taking into account more countries and focusing more explicitly on the differences between government and opposition parties' mandate fulfilment. In 2010, exceptional governments were elected both in Britain (a full-fledge coalition) and the Netherlands (a minority government with majority support in parliament). Therefore, these cases arguably provide new evidence concerning the relationship between institutions and party mandate fulfilment.

## Notes

1. While studying the difference between opposition and government parties' mandate fulfilment in majoritarian and consensus democracies is beyond the scope of the current article. The argument here is merely that taking opposition parties into account in the study of the mandate will lead to a different expectation concerning overall mandate fulfilment in different democratic system.
2. Details regarding technical issues involved in the application of Wordfish to parliamentary speech and manifestos are available from the author's website: <http://english.tomlouwerse.nl/>.
3. The findings in this article would not be significantly altered if this distinction is not made.
4. I weighted the cases by the manifesto word count, to take the uncertainty of the Wordfish into account.

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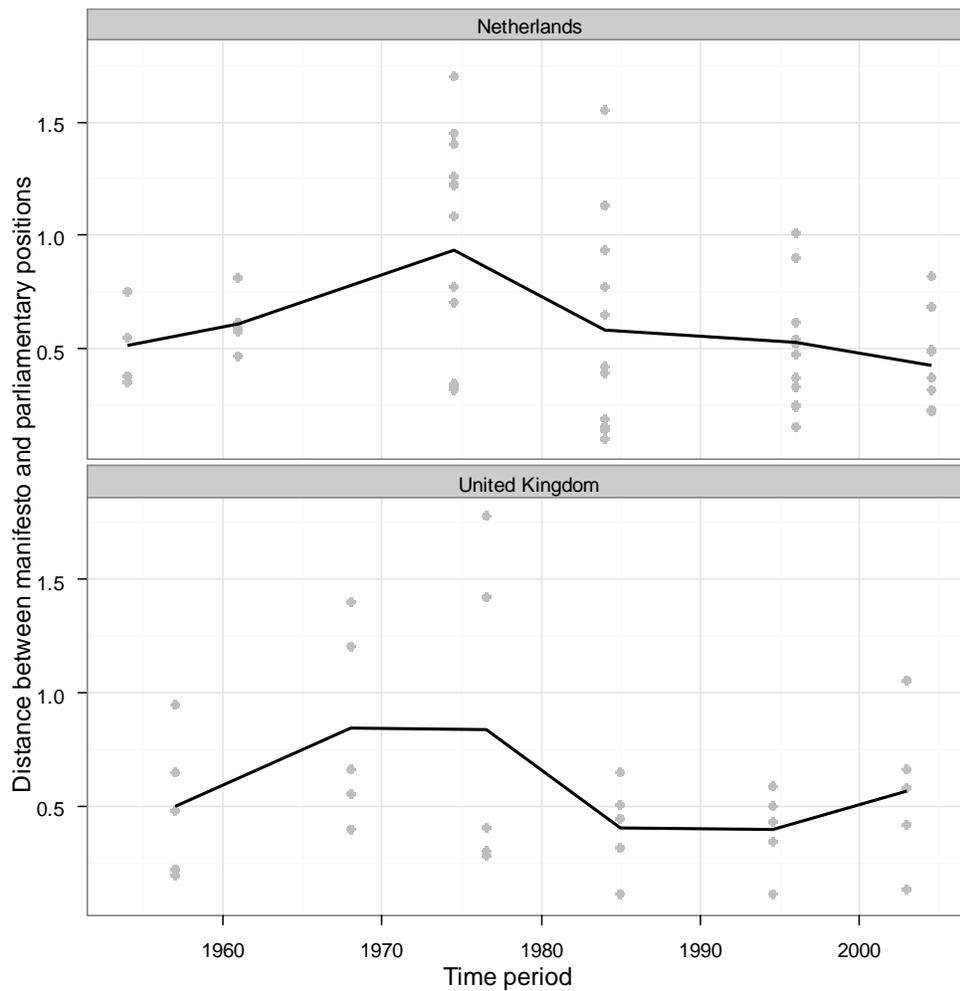
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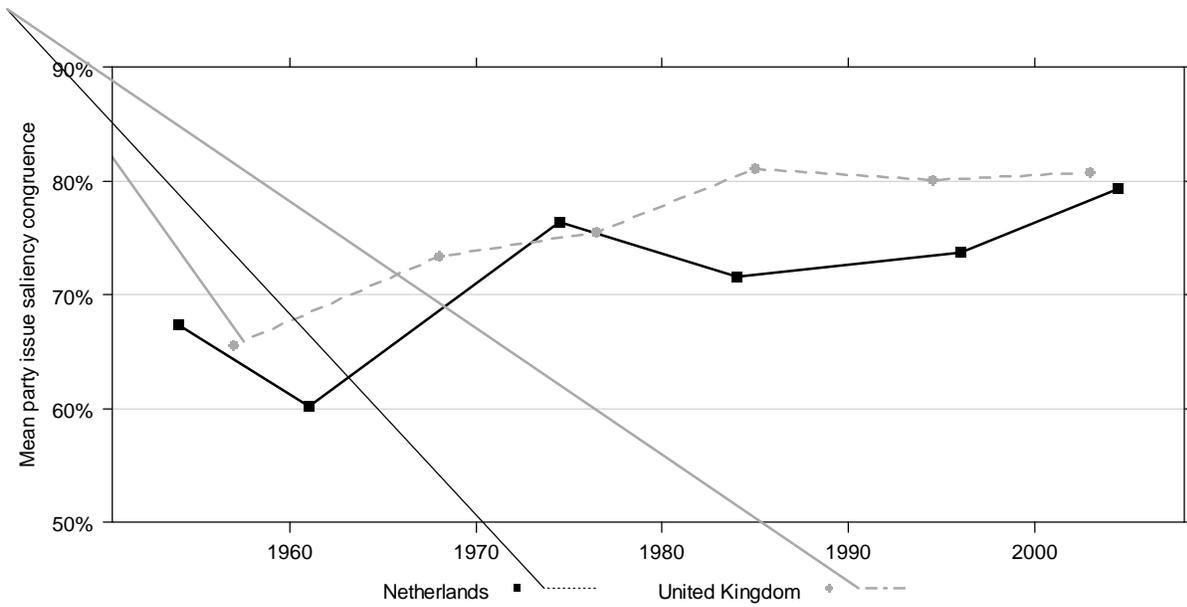
## Figures

Figure 1: Distances between electoral and parliamentary positions



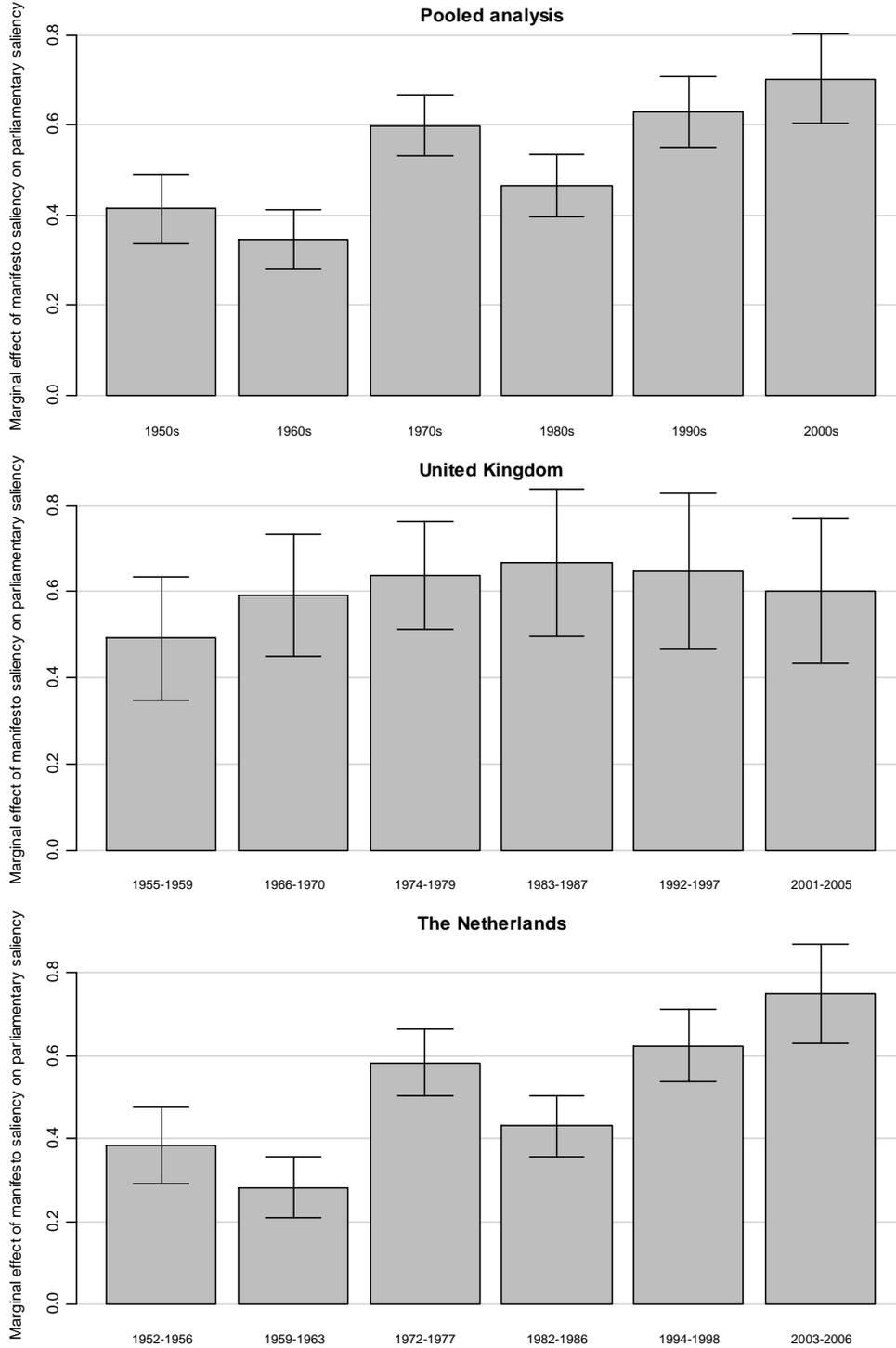
Note: The Figure displays the mean distance between a party's electoral and its parliamentary positions on each of the issue dimension, weighted by the saliency of those dimensions (grey dots). The black line indicates the average of those values per country per period. The Figure only includes the selected cases for this study, plotted at the midpoint of the parliamentary period.

Figure 2: Mean issue saliency congruence score



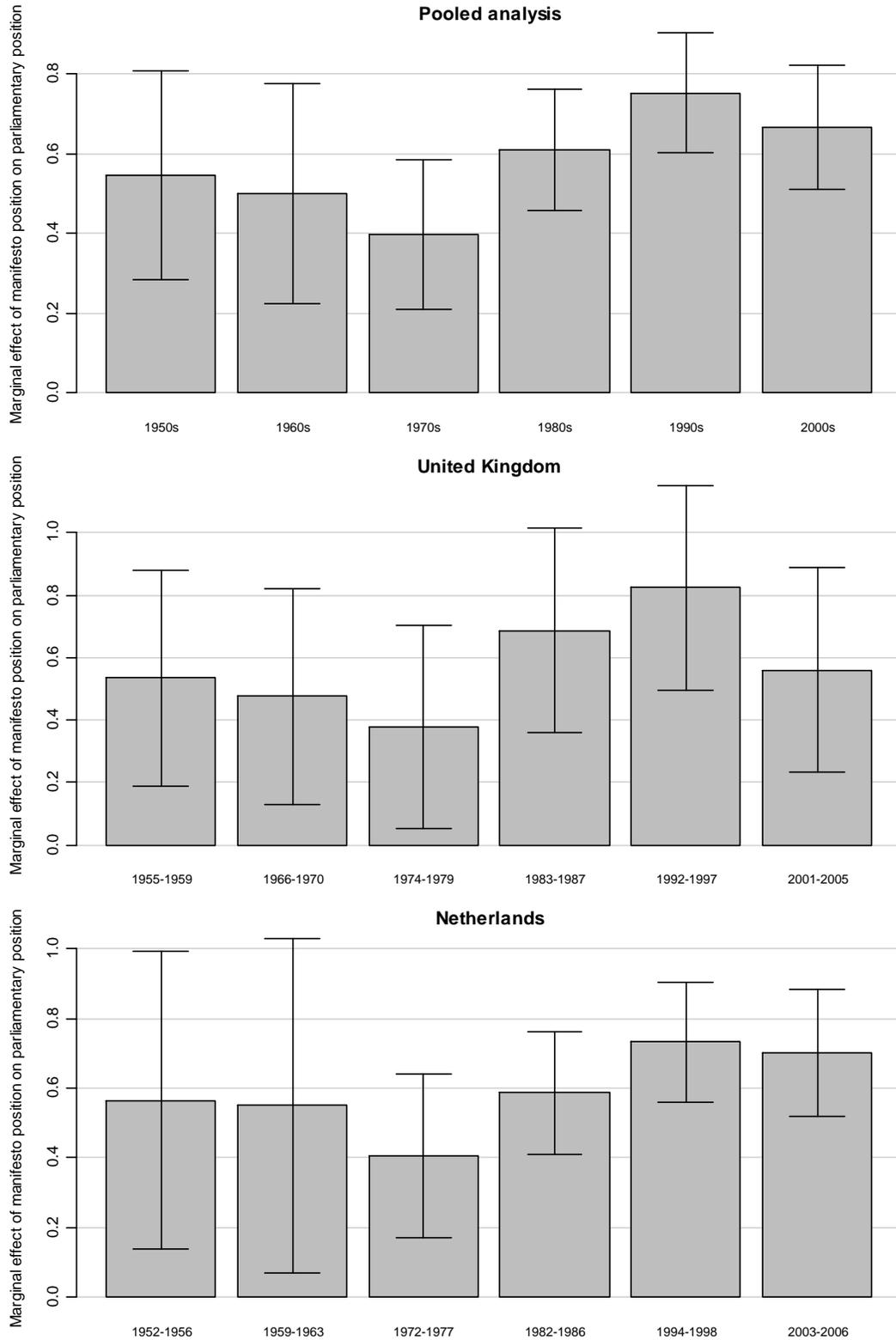
Note: The Figure only includes the selected cases for this study, plotted at the midpoint of the parliamentary period.

Figure 3: The effect of manifesto issue saliency on parliamentary issue saliency in different time periods



Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals

Figure 4: The effect of manifesto issue positions on parliamentary issue positions in different time periods



Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals

## Tables

Table 1: Explaining parties' issue saliency in parliament

	Model 1	Model 2
(Intercept)	0.026* (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Issue saliency manifesto	0.477* (0.018)	0.121* (0.014)
UK	-0.005 (0.003)	0.000 (0.002)
Issue saliency manifesto * UK	0.125* (0.038)	-0.110* (0.033)
Mean issue saliency Parliament		0.890* (0.020)
UK * Mean issue saliency Parliament		0.101* (0.042)
<i>N</i>	1502	1502
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.410	0.785
adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.409	0.784
Resid. sd	0.031	0.019

Ordinary Least Squares regression estimates. Standard errors in parentheses

\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$

Table 2: Explaining parties' issue positions in parliament

	Model 1	Model 2 (Frontbench)
(Intercept)	0.030 (0.042)	-0.003 (0.042)
Manifesto position	0.614* (0.041)	0.625* (0.044)
Country: UK	-0.042 (0.064)	0.063 (0.086)
Manifesto position * Country: UK	0.077 (0.065)	-0.288* (0.092)
<i>N</i>	440	382
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.489	0.365
adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.486	0.360
Resid. sd	21.103	0.712

Ordinary Least Squares regression estimates. Standard errors in parentheses

\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$