

Chapter 7

The party mandate in historical perspective

Institutions are normally rather stable. This is certainly the case for parliamentary party politics in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Even parties, which have incentives to adapt to the context they operate in, seem to change only gradually. However, over longer periods of time these gradual changes can be observed. Because the dataset used here ranges from the 1950s to the 2000s, I should be able to observe changes in party representation if these occur.

7.1 The decline of political representation

An extensive literature on the decline of parties and on the decrease in trust of parliaments and governments suggests that the quality of party representation has worsened over time. In chapter 3, I outlined three developments that lead to the hypothesis that the mandate fulfilment has declined: dealignment of voters, the changing role of political parties in terms of organization and their relationship with society and the state and changing goals of political parties.

These three developments have been gradually changing parties from mass organizations with specific socio-demographic constituencies attached to particular core ideologies to political entrepreneurs that look for the marginal vote within a system of limited competition. Parties in the past had certain fixed beliefs which they tried to implement in parliament and in government, which should lead to a high congruence between manifesto and parliamentary behaviour. A political entrepreneur, however, adjusts his position for maximal gains, in terms of votes and office. Especially if one believes that policy has become a means, rather than an end, it should follow that congruence will only be upheld if it is beneficial to the entrepreneur. If the party believes that it can increase its

vote share at the next elections by adopting a different policy position – even in the current parliament, it is expected to do so. Voters are aware of this and their trusts in party pledges and the ability of politicians to deliver has declined (Andeweg, 2003: 156). In chapter 3 I formulated two hypotheses relating to the congruence of issue saliency and issue positions over time:

Hypothesis 7: The congruence between electoral party issue saliency and parliamentary party issue saliency has declined over time.

Hypothesis 8: The congruence between parties' electoral issue positions and parties' parliamentary issue positions has declined over time.

7.2 What parties talked about

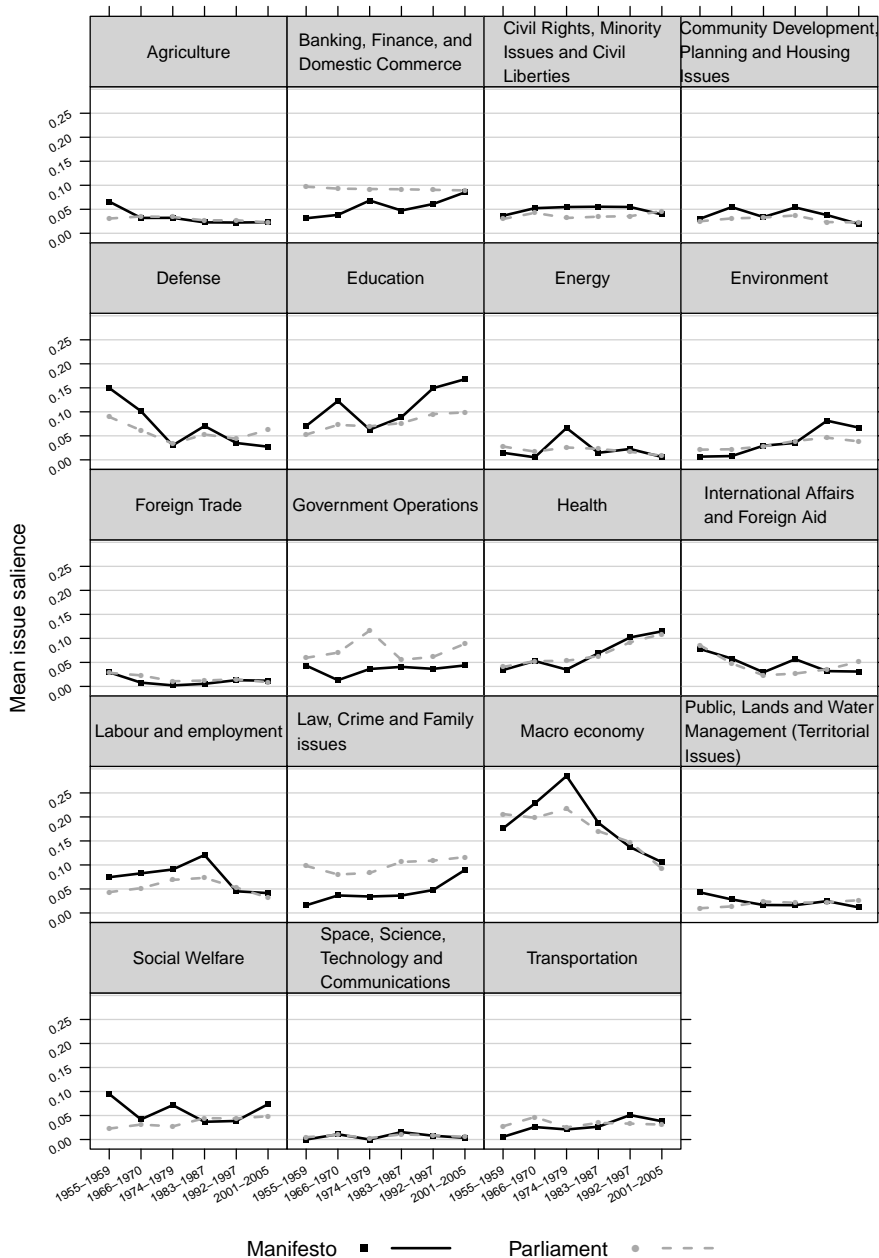
What parties talk about is an important aspect of the party mandate. Over time, some issues have become more important in parties' manifestos and parliamentary debates, while other issues have become less salient. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 present general patterns of party issue saliency in election manifestos and in parliamentary debates, measured as the proportion of text parties devote to particular topics. Mean issue saliency shows how important topics were historically in manifestos and in parliament¹.

Some issues have become more important in British politics, such as Education, Health, Transportation and Law, Crime and Family Issues. These issues have become more salient both in parliament as well as in the electoral manifestos. The attention for other issues has declined, i.e. Defense, Marco-economy and International Affairs and Foreign Aid. In the Netherlands, Civil Rights, Migration and Integration, Environment, Healthcare, Justice Courts and Crime, Energy, Transport, Science, Technology and Communication, and Democracy and Government have become more salient. The issues Enterprises, National Trade and Commerce, Housing and City Planning, and Defence show a decline in importance. For other issues, there are differences between years (i.e. Labour), but there is no clear trend². Overall, there seems to be a decline in issues related to in-

¹One could argue that over-time comparison of issue saliency is problematic, because the exact meaning of certain categories does change over longer periods of time (Pellikaan et al., 2003). For example, abortion may be framed as a women's rights issue in the 1960s, while it may be perceived to be rather a religious issue in the 1990s. While this may be an issue in some cases, it should not affect the general patterns found here. It would, for example, be hard to argue that the increase of saliency of environmental issues is merely the result of a different understanding of particular subjects. Furthermore, the over-time comparison concerns issue saliency rather than issue positions, which might indeed be more sensitive to changes in understanding of party policy competition (Louwerse, 2009).

²The trends described in the text show statistical significance in an analysis of variance of manifesto issue saliency levels, where time period was the independent variable. The coefficients are reported in appendix tables A.6 and A.7 on page 230-231. A similar analysis for parties' parliamentary issue saliency showed statistically significant differences over time for almost all issues, because inter-party differences are smaller in parliament than in the manifesto.

Figure 7.1: Mean issue saliency in the United Kingdom



ternational affairs and 'general' economic issues, while specific socio-economic issues, such as Healthcare and Education, post-materialist issues, such as the Environment, and issues relating to migration have become more salient both in Britain as well as in the Netherlands.

From the perspective of the party mandate it does not really matter what parties talk about per se, but that they talk about the same issues during elections and in parliament. One way of comparing the congruence of party issue saliency between manifesto and parliament is by calculating a party issue saliency congruence score. The formula for this congruence score is similar to the well-known formula for electoral volatility (Pedersen, 1979). It measures the percentage of a party's attention that has not shifted between the election manifesto and parliament³. If a party's issue saliency is the same for all issues during elections and in parliament, the congruence score is 100. If a party mentions only one set of topics in the election manifesto and a completely different set of topics in parliament, the score amounts to 0:

$$\text{congruence}_p = 100 - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n |\text{saliency.manifesto}_{ip} - \text{saliency.parliament}_{ip}| \quad (7.1)$$

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

Figure 7.3 shows the average congruence scores in Britain and the Netherlands (per decade). Both countries display an increase of issue saliency congruence. Parties are more congruent in terms of issue saliency now than in the past. The levels are slightly higher in Britain than in the Netherlands, which is consistent with the findings in chapter 5. Levels in Britain have increased between the 1950s and the 1980s, but remained stable thereafter. In the Netherlands, a sharp increase in issue saliency congruence is visible between the 1960s election and the 1970s election. Over the most recent three elections, issue saliency congruence gradually increased slightly.

The increase in issue saliency congruence can be partly explained by the increased length of manifestos. Figure 7.4 shows the average length of party manifestos over time. There is a marked increase in manifesto length both in Britain and the Netherlands, especially from the 1960s to the 1970s. In recent years, manifesto length has stabilized in Britain, while it kept increasing in the Netherlands. There is a strong relationship between the length of a manifesto and the effect of manifesto saliency on parliamentary saliency (Figure 7.5). For very short manifestos this marginal effect is only 0.4, while for very long manifestos the effect is about 0.7. This means that for parties with very short manifestos, each percentage point of attention for an issue in their manifesto adds 0.4 percentage

³For ease of interpretation the 'volatility' formula has been adapted, so that 0 means low congruence and 100 high congruence.

Figure 7.2: Mean issue saliency in the Netherlands

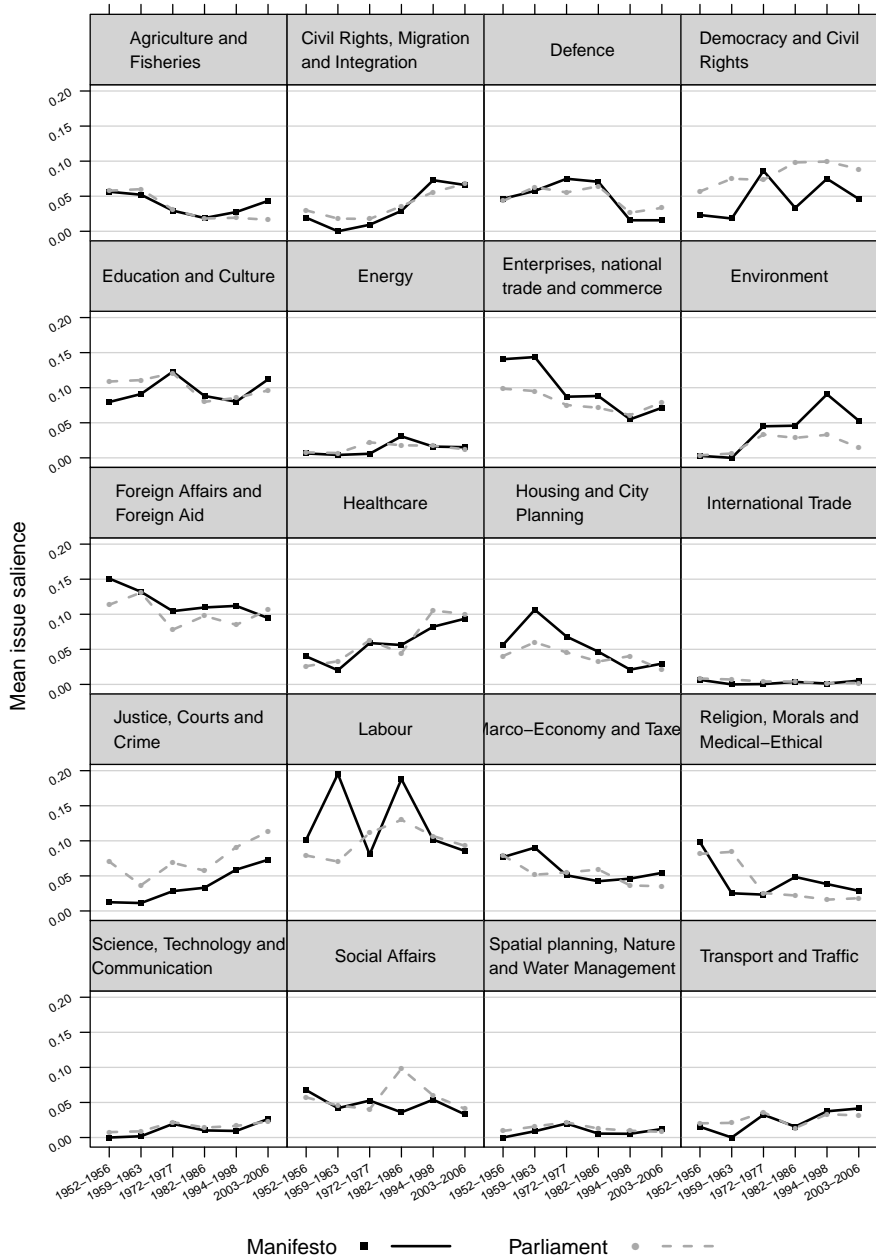
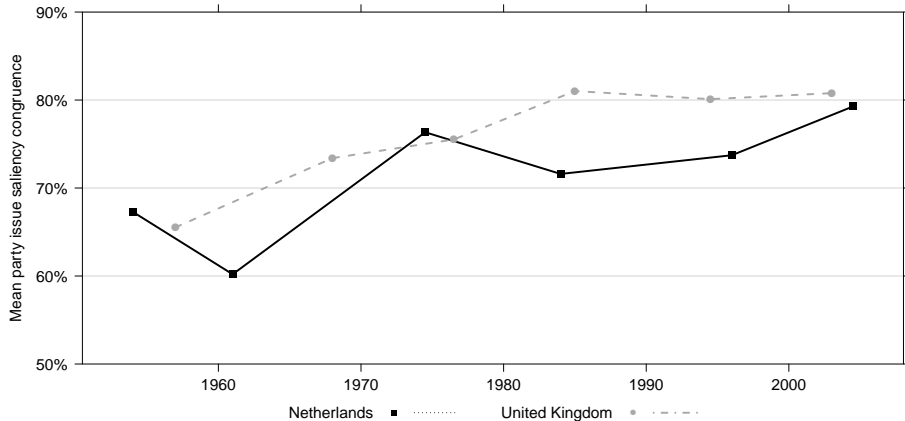


Figure 7.3: *Mean issue saliency congruence score*

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

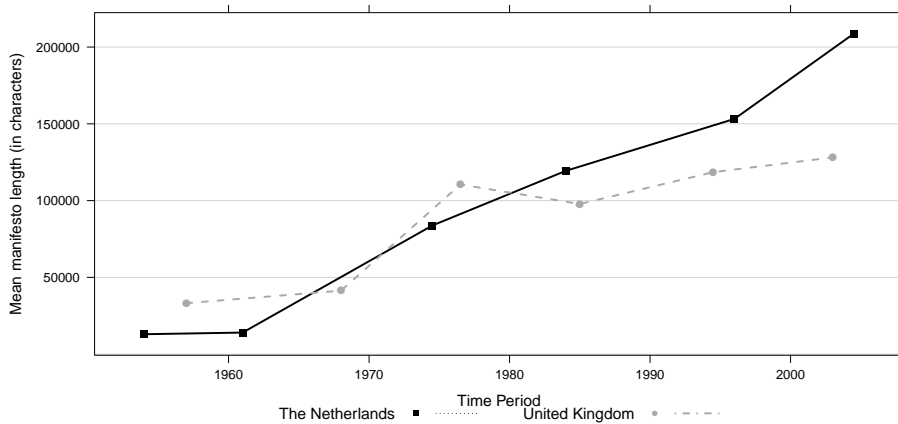
point to their parliamentary issue saliency of that issue, while for parties with very long manifestos each percentage point of manifesto saliency of a particular issue is estimated to lead to a 0.7 percentage point increase of their parliamentary issue saliency of that issue⁴.

The reason that longer manifestos are usually better when it comes to issue saliency congruence lies in the level of detail that longer manifestos provide. Manifestos come in different flavours. There are very long manifestos with detailed policy proposals on many issues, the 'encyclopedia' type. Other manifestos are short pamphlets that try to get across the issue (positions) that really matter to a party. These short manifestos tend to focus a limited number of issues. In other words, the 'topic concentration' is high: the party devotes a lot of space to a limited number of issues. In parliament, parties pay attention to a broader range of issues and they tend to be more alike in terms of their issue priorities. Topic concentration is thus generally lower in parliament. Therefore, poor congruence for parties with short manifestos can be explained by a difference in topic concentration between the manifesto and parliamentary debates.

The normalized Herfindahl index measures the topic concentration in manifestos and parliamentary debates (Hirschman, 1964; Breeman et al., 2009). It ranges from a perfectly equal distribution of attention at a value of zero to exclusive focus on one issue, with value one. Thus, a value of zero means that a party

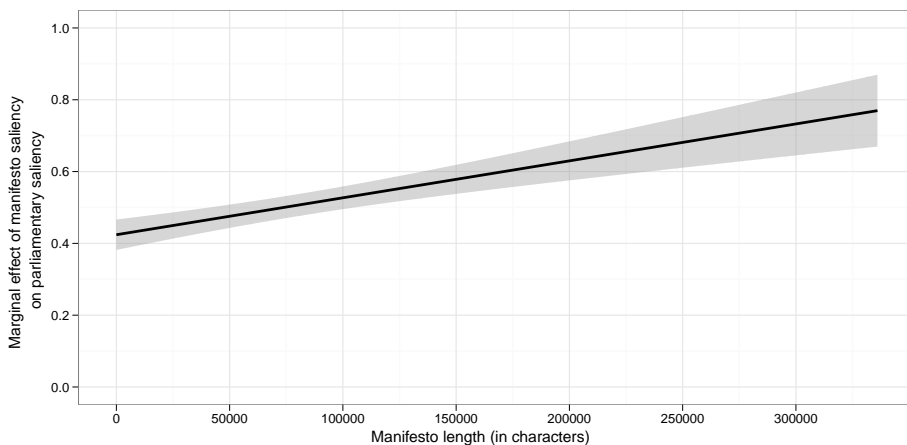
⁴Figure 7.5 is a graphical presentation of the marginal effect of manifesto saliency in a regression model where parliamentary saliency is the dependent variable and manifesto saliency, manifesto length and the interaction of these two variables are the independent variables. The regression table is included as table A.5 on page 229.

Figure 7.4: Mean length of party manifestos over time



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

Figure 7.5: Marginal effect of manifesto saliency on parliamentary saliency for various manifesto lengths



Note: Shaded area indicates 95% confidence interval.

dedicates all of its manifesto or parliamentary speech to a single topic, while a value of one indicates that a party dedicates equal amounts of words to each issue. Figure 7.6 shows topic concentration in manifestos and parliament over time. Levels of topic concentration were high in the manifestos of the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the Netherlands. The normalized Herfindahl index shows levels above 0.10 for the Netherlands in the 1960s, which is substantially higher than in other years. Topic concentration plays a smaller role in Britain; levels are more similar over the years, peaking in the 1970s, when parties devote on average over 25 per cent of their manifesto to Macro-economic issues. In Parliament, topic concentration is rather stable in both countries and generally lower than in the manifestos. Over time, the gap between topic concentration in manifestos and topic concentration in parliamentary speeches has declined in both countries.

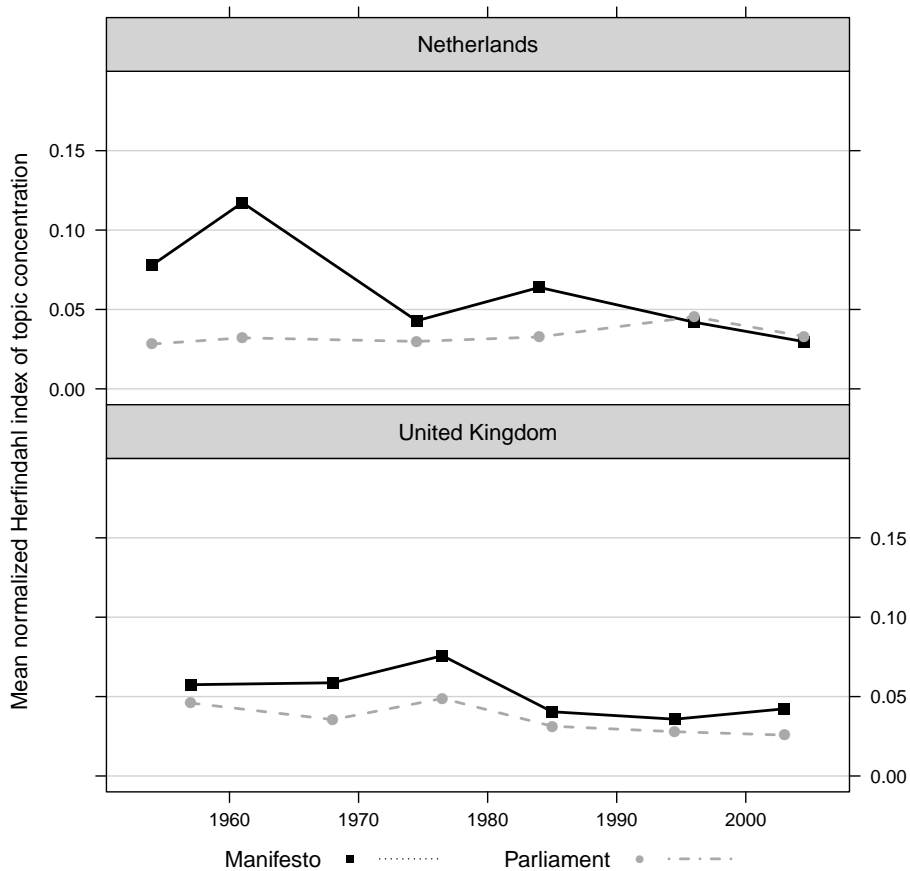
Thus, parties' manifestos were shorter in the past. As a result, these manifestos focused on a limited number of topics (topic concentration was high). In parliament, topic concentration has been low throughout the period of investigation. The gap between high topic concentration in manifestos and low topic concentration in parliamentary debates partly explains the relatively low levels of issue saliency congruence in the 1950s and 1960s.

The second way to measure the congruence of parties' issue saliency in manifestos and in parliament is by means of an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis. I fitted a statistical model in which a party's issue saliency in parliament was explained by party issue saliency in the manifesto. A perfect congruence would be achieved when the intercept of this model equals zero and the coefficient equals one (Achen, 1978). The historical variation was studied by adding 'time period' dummy variables to this model, one for each but one of the cases (an election and the subsequent parliament), and the interaction between the year dummy variables and the manifesto saliency. This way the marginal effect of manifesto saliency on parliamentary saliency in each parliamentary period can be estimated. The model thus allows to compare the predictive effect of manifesto issue saliency on parliamentary issue saliency over time, providing an estimate of the statistical significance of the between-year differences.

Figure 7.7 presents a graphical representation of the marginal effect of manifesto saliency on parliamentary saliency. It simply displays what the total effect of manifesto saliency was on parliamentary saliency in each included parliament. This eases interpretation as compared to a standard regression table with interaction effects (Brambor et al., 2006; Kam and Franzese Jr., 2007)⁵. The top diagram provides an estimate of the marginal effect in the whole dataset, including both Britain and the Netherlands. The trend is increasing from a marginal effect of around 0.4 in the 1950s to almost 0.7 in the 2000s. This means that congruence has increased during that period. The length of the error bars in this

⁵The regression table is included in the appendix as table A.3 on page 227.

Figure 7.6: *Topic concentration in manifestos and parliamentary debates*



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

graphic suggests that the differences are larger than those that are to be expected by chance. There is an increase, rather than the hypothesized decrease, of issue saliency congruence over time.

The model has also been fitted separately for Britain and the Netherlands, which allows for a direct comparison with the congruence scores in figure 7.3 and for the study of country-specific patterns. The regression analysis finds a slightly different pattern for Britain than the congruence measure in figure 7.3. Although the 1955-1959 period shows the lowest levels of congruence in both analyses, the differences between the time periods are clearly smaller in figure 7.7. The figure shows that the confidence intervals are rather large, probably as a result of the fact that the number of observations is low for Britain (N=342). Therefore, none of the differences are statistically significant. The marginal effects in the six Dutch cases are similar to the congruence measure displayed in figure 7.3. There is low congruence in the 1950s and 1960s, a clear improvement in the 1970s, then a lower score in the 1980s and again an increase afterwards. The tendency is thus towards higher levels of party issue saliency congruence, instead of lower levels. The data on saliency shows no support for hypothesis 7 that outlined an expected decline of issue saliency congruence. On the contrary, I observe an increase in congruence of party issue saliency in the Netherlands and (at least) stability in Britain.

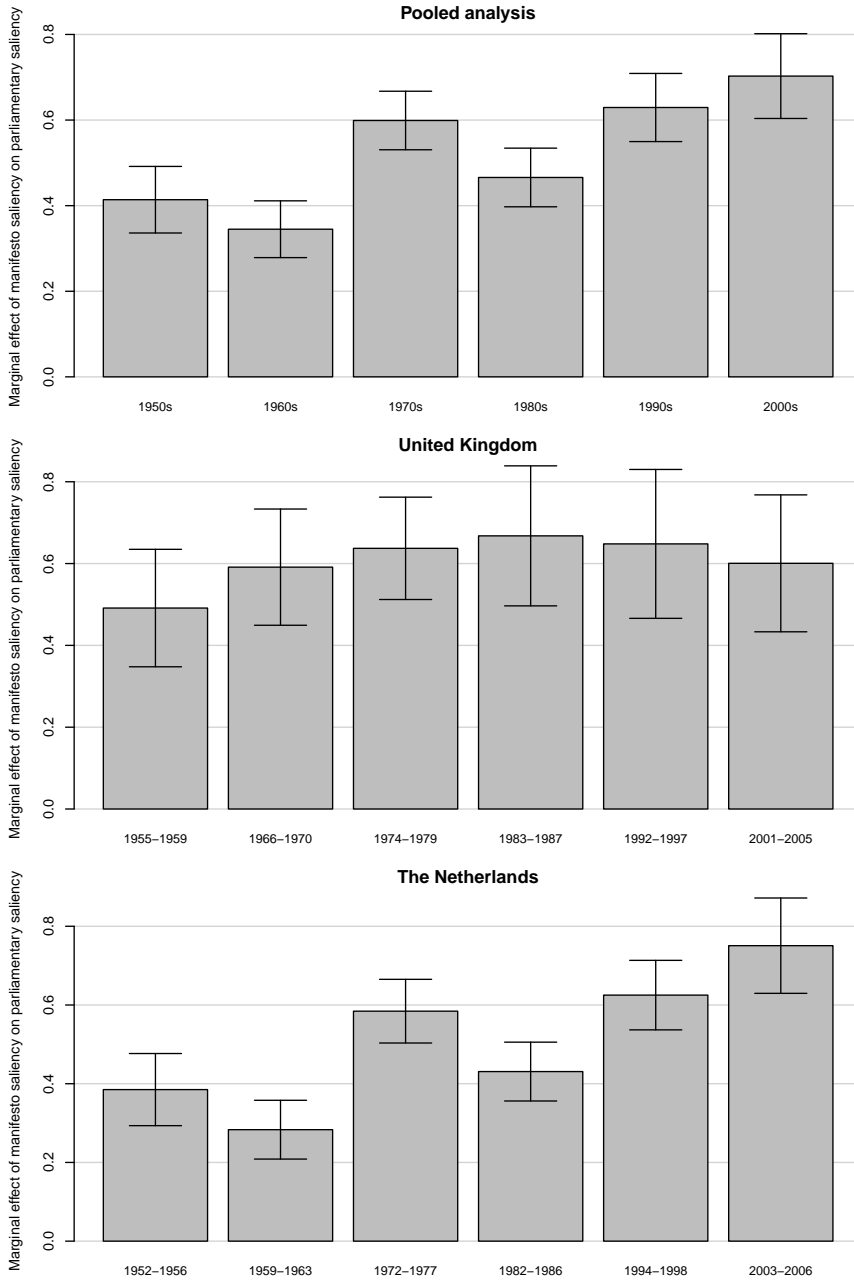
7.3 What parties said

In chapter 5 I discussed the spatial models of party competition in elections and subsequent parliaments in detail. Without repeating the descriptive aspect of that analysis, the most important historical variations in the congruence of the spaces of competition will be outlined here in more detail. These findings will be backed up by a statistical analysis of the congruence of positions.

The electoral and parliamentary spaces of competition presented in chapter 5 showed a fairly high degree of stability over time both in terms of what issues were relevant and how parties were ordered. Issues related to the economy, health care and education have high saliency levels and generally produce a traditional left-right pattern both in the British as well as in the Dutch cases. Although other issues have become more important over time, such as the environment and migration, the economy-issues explain the positions of parties in the space very well. In the Netherlands, religious issues have become less salient over time, but the ordering of parties has become clearer.

British Labour governments are estimated to be rather centrist, compared to their back-benchers. This is especially clear in the 1966-70 and 1974-79 parliaments. As the estimated positions are *relative* positions, one cannot necessarily conclude from this that the Labour government was very right-wing. What is clear, however, is that the Labour back-benchers are positioned strongly to the left of the Labour government. Although Conservative governments are also

Figure 7.7: *The effect of manifesto issue saliency on parliamentary issue saliency in different time periods*



Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals

shown to be more moderate than their back-benchers, the differences are much smaller there. The 2001 parliament does present some sort of a change here. The Labour back-benchers are estimated to be on the left of the government, but the difference is far smaller than in the two other cases where Labour was in government. Indeed, the literature suggests that Blair had less trouble with his back-benchers than Wilson (Cowley and Stuart, 2004: 227).

During the Conservative governments of 1983 and 1992, the spaces of competition showed a large degree of congruence. Both the electoral and parliamentary spaces showed a clear Lab-Lib-Con ordering on most issue dimensions. In addition, the government's position was clearly in the centre, corresponding to the position of the Conservative manifesto. The years of polarization clearly brought about a high degree of correspondence between manifesto and parliamentary space of competition.

The Dutch cases show a small increase in congruence between the electoral and parliamentary spaces of competition over time. The 1950s and 1960s show congruence, especially in preserving the PvdA-Religious Parties-VVD competition. In 1959, however, the parliamentary space of competition displayed a larger difference between the PvdA and the Religious parties than the electoral competition, presumably because of coalition dynamics. The 1970s and 1980s show more incongruence, especially the 1972-1977 case which shows low levels of congruence (see appendix A.3.5). The 1982-1986 case shows more similarities between the manifesto and parliamentary competition, although the large positional differences for some of the smaller parties (PPR, PSP, EVP) lowers the overall congruence scores. The 1994 and 2003 cases display relatively congruent solutions – at least the positional changes that do occur can largely be explained by coalition dynamics. Interestingly, the smaller parties seem more stable than in the 1970s and 1980s, which suggests that these parties have professionalized in terms of producing a more inclusive manifesto, but also that these parties' manifestos and parliamentary speeches are more closely connected to those of the larger parties, adding to a more stable space of competition.

The analysis of the structures of the Dutch spaces of competition reveals no deterioration of the congruence between the structures of the electoral and parliamentary space of competition. On the contrary, the spaces seem slightly more congruent in later years. The influence of the coalition is a stable factor in the Netherlands: in all cases, government parties get (even) closer together and the main opposition parties distance themselves from the government, with a few notable exceptions.

Statistical analysis of the data can be used to substantiate the findings presented above. I present two ways of measuring the congruence of the policy spaces (Achen, 1978). The first is based on the absolute difference of the party positions on each of the issue dimensions. The second analysis uses the information on the manifesto position of a party on an issue dimension to predict a party's position in parliament. The first technique presents an intuitive measure of party policy congruence, while the second approach offers an estimate of statistical

significance.

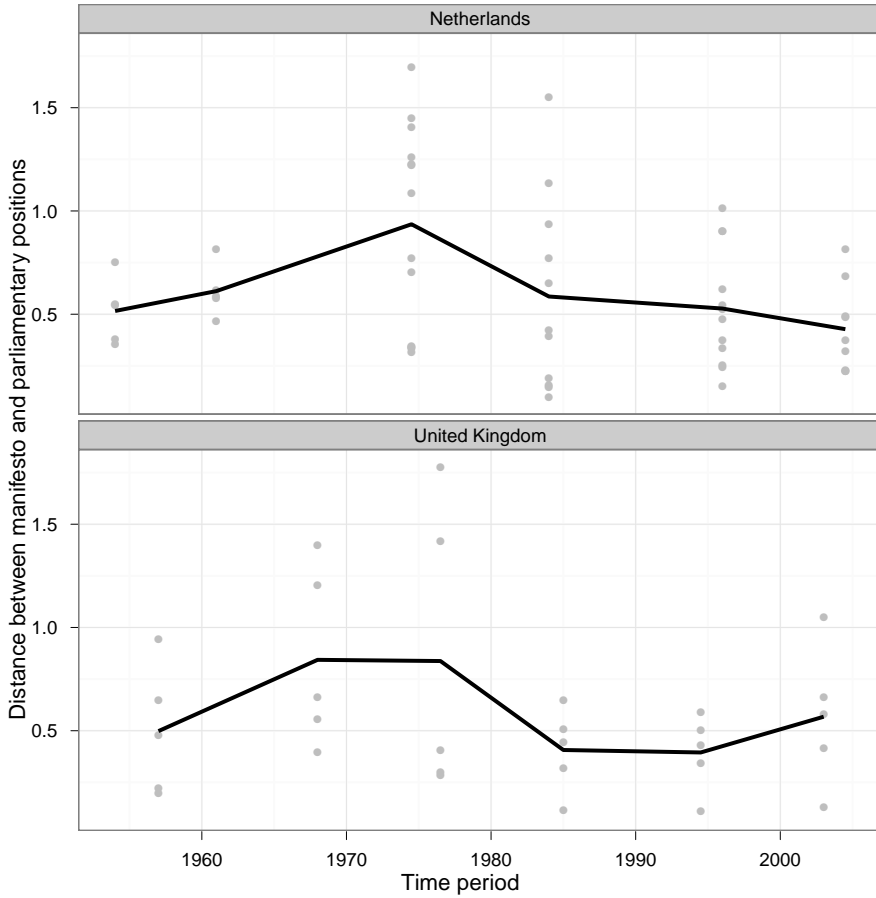
The first measure is simply the (weighted mean of the) distance between a parties' manifesto and its parliamentary issue position (see figure 7.8). The Dutch figure shows mean distances of around 0.6 with the 1972 as the outlier, which confirms my earlier conclusion about the low congruence in 1972. It should be noted that the range of values is high in 1972 and 1982: some parties deviated very strongly from their manifesto position, while other parties remained very close to these position. For other years the range is much smaller, most notably for 1952 and 1959. The increase in congruence that I observed from the spatial representations is not so high in the statistical analysis. This data suggest that congruence in the Netherlands is relatively similar over time.

The median distances are generally slightly lower in the United Kingdom than in the Netherlands, although the difference is not very large. The largest drop in the mean distance occurs between 1974-1979 and 1983-1987. The clear differences between Conservatives and Labour that were apparent in these years of polarization in British politics did indeed seem to result in higher levels of congruence. After that, levels of incongruence steadily, but slowly increase to almost 0.6. The range of values is large for the 1966-1970 and 1974-1979 cases. Differences between parties within each time period are larger than differences between the time periods.

The second measure that was used to analyse the historical trends in the congruence between the electoral and parliamentary spaces of competition made use of a regression analysis. After all, I am interested in the question whether the manifesto spaces of competition are good *predictors* of the parliamentary spaces of competition. The model is in fact very similar to the regression model used for the saliency data. Taking a party's position on an issue dimension as the dependent variable, its position on that dimension in its manifesto was taken as the main explanatory variable. Furthermore dummy variables were added for each (but one) of the election-parliament combinations. The model also includes an interaction effect between the manifesto position and each of the dummy variables. This way, I can capture the historical variation in the predictive power of the manifesto position. Figure 7.9 presents the marginal effect of the manifesto position on the parliamentary position in each decade⁶. The top figure that pools the observations from both countries shows that the marginal effect of the manifesto position has declined somewhat (although not significantly) between the 1950s and 1970s. After the 1970s, there is an increase of this marginal effect, peaking in the 1990s. The confidence intervals are, however, rather large which means that none of the effects found here are statistically significant. The number of observations is very low in Britain (25 party issue positions per election-year) and there are large differences between parties as figure 7.9 shows. In the Netherlands, the pattern is similar to Britain: a non-significant decline between the 1950s and 1970s, and afterwards an increase in the marginal effect of the mani-

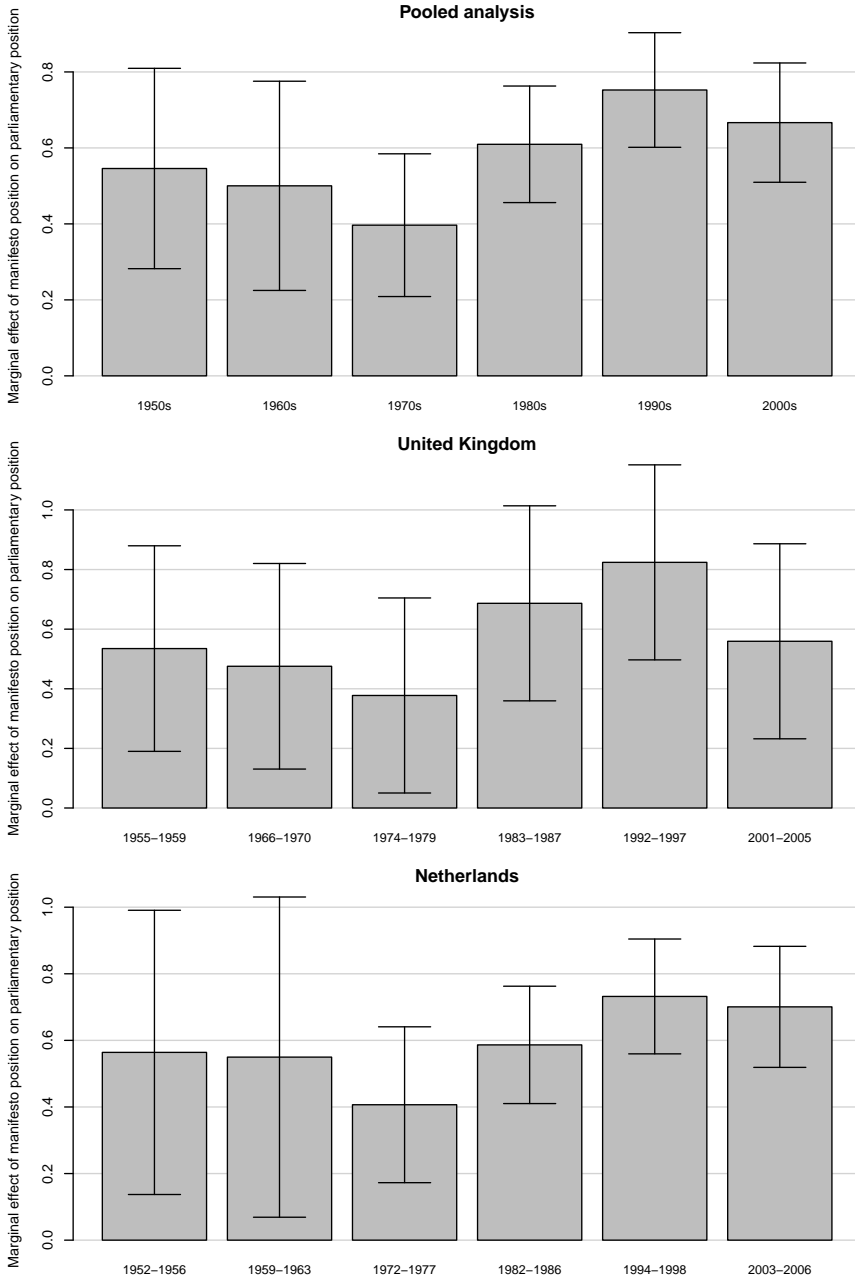
⁶The regression table is included as table A.4 on page 228.

Figure 7.8: Distances between electoral and parliamentary positions



Note: This is a reprint of figure 5.20 on page 139. 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 7.9: *The effect of manifesto issue positions on parliamentary issue positions in different time periods*



Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals

festo issue position. Despite the different settings and systems in the Netherlands and Great Britain, the over-time patterns of issue position congruence are thus remarkably similar.

7.4 Conclusion

Insofar as there is historical variation in the congruence between parliament and manifesto, there is an increase of the congruence rather than a decrease. Most of the effects found are not statistically significant, but those that were pointed at an increase of congruence. Therefore, I have to reject hypotheses 7 and 8 as there is clearly no historical decrease in the congruence levels. What does this mean for the theories that predict such a decrease? Three arguments can be made: parties' faithfulness in the past should not be overestimated, the development parties went through has had positive results for the party mandate and one should look for different explanations of the lack of trust in political parties.

Parties were not perfect when it came to mandate fulfilment in the past. The days of mass parties are easily taken as an ideal-type reference point for the analysis of political parties; this introduces the risk of equalizing the practice of the mass party with the theory of the mass party. In theory, the mass party did rely on broad public support, but in practice party membership was far from universal (Katz et al., 1992). The ideal-type mass party encompasses bottom-up decision-making, but in practice it was more top-down. The stability of the Dutch political system in fact depended on the willingness of party leaders to overcome the segmentation in society by consensual government (Lijphart, 1968). They had to reach compromises on the important issues of the day. Such compromises can only be reached if parties are willing to deviate from their manifesto. One reason to shy away from compromise is the possibility of electoral punishment: voters might not like the compromise and change parties. However, in the 1950s and 1960s electoral volatility was low in the Netherlands. Voters were loyal to their party. This created the much-needed room for compromise between parties. This practice seems to have had a negative influence on mandate fulfilment.

In Britain, struggles between Labour's party organization and the parliamentary party over decision-making authority and the right to instruct the parliamentary group date from the very beginning of the party (Judge, 1999: 77-80). The Conservative party has long been explicitly organized hierarchically, with the leadership elections limited to the members of parliament and policy making largely the prerogative of the party leader. Only in the last decade or so has the party changed in this respect. In theory, the mass party fights for the interests of its cleavage-based constituents. However, in practice the closed nature of elections, with voters traditionally voting for the party along cleavage lines, allows parties a lot of policy flexibility. Manifestos did not need to be very long, because voters were readily aware of the policy differences between parties – at least in

the parties' perception – and their vote was in any case not primarily based on policy, but on class membership.

The changes in the nature of political competition and political parties are not necessarily bad for the ability of parties to fulfil their political mandate. Parties' relationships with voters are no longer taken for granted and, probably as a response to this, manifestos have become longer and deal with a broader range of topics. This has increased the congruence between the electoral and parliamentary competition in terms of issue saliency. Increased electoral volatility and the availability of poll data makes parties more aware of what voters think; their response to voter's opinion may be more strategic, but as long as the strategy dictates to fulfil the mandate and listen to voters concerns, there is no objection from the theory of representation. The very fact that parties have become more vote-seeking also leads to more awareness of voters' opinions. Parties have lost something, the attachment to a core constituency defined by the relevant political cleavages, which made sure party policy was relatively stable. On the other hand, this loss has increased public scrutiny of what parties promise, do and whether they listen to the voters. This can help to foster the congruence of the electoral and parliamentary competition.

The finding that the congruence between the electoral and parliamentary competition has not decreased over time does not imply that voters are plainly wrong when they talk about not trusting parties to do what they promise. The congruence between elections and parliament is after all not perfect: parties' priorities and positions are similar between election and parliament, but certainly not in exact correspondence. However, the data present in this chapter does not support the thesis that mandate fulfilment has worsened over time. This finding calls for an alternative explanation of voters' discontent with parties' performance and party mandate fulfilment in particular (see Naurin, 2007). In the conclusion of this book, I will offer avenues for further research on this question.

