

The Netherlands: Two forms of nationalization of provincial elections

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9.1. Introduction

Regional government in the Netherlands has had scant attention in the literature. Country experts agree that provincial government is not perceived as important by Dutch citizens. Van Deth and Vis (2000, p.103) write that provinces are for most citizens an ‘invisible government tier’ and Hendriks (2004, p.149) describes provinces as ‘the authorities’ authority’, that is an authority that is only visible and relevant to the authorities and civil servants of central government, provinces, and local authorities (see also Andeweg and Irwin, 2005, p.172-3 and Hulst, 2005, p.101). The public opinion data presented in the online appendix of the book confirms this picture. On the question which tier of government has the most impact on their daily life 28 per cent of the respondents opted for the provincial and municipal government whereas 61 per cent mentioned the national government. As a result scholars tend to ignore provincial institutions when dealing with subnational government in the Netherlands because ‘local government in the Netherlands is virtually a synonym for municipal government’ (Toonen, 1990, p.291). Therefore, it is not surprising that only few contributions analyze Dutch provincial elections. According to Van den Braak and Gosman (2012) there is only one academic source on voter behavior in provincial elections (Van der Eijk et al., 1992), the reason being that provincial elections are ‘so-called second-order elections’. A similar picture comes to the fore in contributions which have looked at aggregate provincial election results: local elections are placed in a national context, by political parties, by the media, and by voters which leads to a low propensity to turnout for provincial elections (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005, p.172-3; Hendriks, 2004, p.152-3; Van Deth and Vis, 2000, p.103).

The explanation for the perceived irrelevance of the province is often ascribed to the ‘pillarization’ of Dutch society. Pillarization refers to a system whereby state subsidies enable groups with their own way of thinking to create their own world containing everything from kindergartens to athletic clubs, trade unions and political parties (De Rooy, 1997). Dutch society consisted of a Catholic, Protestant, Social-Democratic and Liberal pillars –although the latter two pillars were less organized– which were represented at the statewide level, respectively, by the *Katholieke Volkspartij*, the *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* or the *Christelijke Historische Unie*, the *Partij van de Arbeid*, and the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*. The party elites of the pillars kept the grass root organization under control and negotiated at the elite level which resulted in a tradition of consensus, compromise and coalition (Daalder, 1964; Lijphart, 1968).

The segmented society was as evident at the provincial level as it was at the national level and voters supported the party within the pillar in all elections (see below). The fact that Dutch provinces this century have been confined to playing a subordinate, supporting role is attributed by Toonen (1996) to the fact that the vertical pillar system has, *en passant*, been an effective system for coordinating interprovincial relations and solving interprovincial conflicts. The social foundations of the vertical pillars have been concentrated heavily in the regions (see below), and because the pillar system has worked reasonably well as a framework for achieving consensus and framing policies, the provinces have been reduced increasingly to a technical and legal supporting role (Hendriks, 2004). However, several scholars have noted that the pillarized society has ceased to exist from the 1970s onwards (Van Mierlo, 1986). Dutch voters are floating and easily switch from one party to another in subsequent elections (Aarts and Thomassen, 2008; Mair, 2008). This development raises the question how Dutch voters vote in more recent provincial elections.

In this chapter I will argue that provincial elections in the Netherlands may be characterized as highly nationalized. However, the manifestation of nationalization has changed over the years. Before ‘depillarization’, that is before the 1970s, Dutch voters tended to cast their vote for the same party in national and provincial elections. After the 1970s, the provincial election becomes the typical second-order election in which turnout is low, parties in statewide government loose, and opposition and new parties gain votes.

The next section discusses the general characteristics of provincial institutions and elections in the Netherlands. Sections three and four analyze congruence between provincial and national elections and explore second-order election effects. In the fifth section I discuss the extent of regionalization of the vote. I consider some contextual variables which may facilitate the high degree of second-order election characteristics for provincial elections in the final section.

9.2. Regional government and regional elections

Dutch provinces have a long history of autonomy. In 1581, Dutch provinces formed the Republic of the United Netherlands which can be described as a confederation. The provinces were autonomous and, in large part, only matters of defense and foreign policy were decided at the republic level. Not all provinces may rely on an autonomous history. *Brabant*, *Drenthe*, *Limburg* and *Vlaanderen* were so-called ‘Common Lands’ (*Generaliteitslanden*) and were directly governed by the parliament of the confederation. Seven provinces were represented in the confederal parliament: *Holland*, *Zeeland*, *Gelderland*, *Utrecht*, *Friesland*, *Overijssel*, and *Groningen*. The Republic of the United Netherlands was succeeded by the Batavian Republic in 1795 and the provinces of *Drenthe* and *Noord Brabant* became the eighth and ninth provinces of the Netherlands. The Batavian Republic, however, did not survive for long. In

1806, Louis Bonaparte acceded to the throne of the Kingdom of Holland and the provinces were reduced to French *départements*. Again, developments went fast and, after Napoleon's defeat, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands was established in 1815 and this kingdom included the Belgian provinces as well. In 1830, Belgium became independent and the province of *Limburg* was divided amongst the two countries and in the Netherlands the province of *Holland* was divided into two provinces a year later (North Holland and South Holland). The borders of the 11 provinces have not shifted since then but in 1986 a 12th province (*Flevoland*), consisting almost entirely of reclaimed land, was created.

The contemporary constitutional status of the provinces dates back to the Constitution of 1848 and the Law on Provinces of 1850. According to the Constitution, provinces can be dissolved or established by an Act of Parliament (Art. 123). Provinces have the power to regulate and administrate their own internal affairs but may be required to provide regulation by the central authorities (Art. 124). Each province has three main organs (Art. 125-131): the provincial council, the provincial board and the Queens' Commissioner. The elected body is the provincial council (*Provinciale Staten*) which is directly elected for four years. The provincial council varies in size from 39 to 55 seats since 2007 but before the number of seats varied between 35 to 82 seats for the terms before 1960, and between 43 and 83 seats for the years in between 1960 and 2007. Provincial elections are held under universal suffrage since 1919 and, similar to national elections, all provinces use list based PR electoral systems in which each province functions as one electoral district and there are no thresholds. Provincial elections take place at the same date (horizontal simultaneity), but have not been held at the same date as lower chamber, local or any other election or referendum. Provinces are allowed to hold a 'consultative and corrective' referendum but have up to date never held one.

The provincial government responsible for daily affairs is the provincial board (*Gedeputeerde Staten*) which consists out of six members elected by the council from among their own

members to serve four-year terms of office. The provincial board is presided by the Royal Commissioner or Queens' Commissioner (the *Commissaris van de Koningin*) whose candidacy is proposed by the provincial council but is appointed by the national government and who is both a representative of the central government as well as the chief executive of the provincial administration.

The policy portfolios of the provinces have increased over the years. Whereas formerly activities of the provinces were concerned primarily with the maintenance of water control works, care of the mentally ill and sometimes the supply of potable water and of electricity, now they also have responsibility for physical planning, social-economic affairs, nature conservation, agriculture, environment, transport and cultural matters (Harloff, 1987; Hendriks, 2004; Hooghe et al., 2010; Hulst, 2005). In addition, a 1994 reform abolished *ex ante* central controls and limited central government supervision to *ex post* legality controls. Despite the size of their policy portfolio, provinces have limited fiscal autonomy. Central government grants account for over 90 per cent of provincial revenues most of which are conditional in nature. Provinces have authority over some minor taxes and may set the rate, within limits set by the central government, for taxes such as fees on water pollution, a ground water tax and a surcharge on the motor vehicle tax (Hooghe et al., 2010, p.111).

Provincial elections matter for statewide politics. Senators in the upper house are elected by members of the provincial assemblies from national party lists submitted separately in each province (Art. 155 Constitution). Each provincial delegate casts a vote for a candidate, and votes are weighted by provincial population so that the final distribution of seats across provinces is proportional to their populations. Before 1983, the members of the provincial assemblies elected a third of the members of the Senate every two years. Since 1983, the elections have taken place every four years following provincial elections (Hooghe et al., 2010, p.148-9). The upper house has a veto on all legislation and on constitutional

amendments. There are no intergovernmental meetings between provinces and the national government. The interests of the provinces are represented by an interprovincial organization (*Interprovinciaal Overleg*) which discusses national policies affecting the provinces with the central government and its role is mainly restricted to consulting and providing information. We may derive some expectations regarding congruence between provincial and national elections. Given their large policy portfolio and their shared rule powers in the upper chamber we may expect that regional interests are represented in provincial elections leading to large dissimilarities in the vote. In addition, the policy portfolio has increased so we may expect increasing incongruence between the national and provincial vote over time. In contrast, given the relevance of provincial elections for national politics we could also expect a high interest of statewide parties and voters in provincial elections leading to minor differences in the vote and turnout rates. Provincial elections are held non-simultaneously with lower chamber elections but are held horizontal simultaneously. Under these conditions, provincial elections may gain the status of ‘barometer’ or ‘referendum’ elections which may attract opposition voters. This leads to the expectation that second-order elections could play a large role, that is turnout in provincial elections is lower than for national elections and there is an anti-government swing. The next sections explore congruence of the vote, second-order election effects and regionalized election behavior in Dutch provincial elections and evaluates in how far the expectations pan out.

9.3. Congruence of the vote

A common way to investigate the connection between regional and national elections is to look at congruence of the vote. Schakel (2013) identifies three conceptualizations of congruence of the vote. Party system congruence (NN-RR) compares the national election

result for the country as a whole with the election results for a particular province. The two other conceptualizations are developed to tease out the variation in party system congruence. Electorate congruence (NN-NR) keeps the election constant (national, N) and compares a particular provincial electorate (R) with the statewide electorate (N). Election congruence (NR-RR) keeps the provincial electorate (R) constant but varies the type of election (national, N and regional, R). Hence, election congruence (NR-RR) informs us about the degree of vote switching of regional electorates between regional and national elections whereas electorate congruence (NN-NR) may enlighten us about dissimilarities between vote shares due to differences in characteristics of electorates. Figure 1 displays averages for three measurements of congruence of the vote. Each national election held between 1946 and 2010 is compared to the result of a provincial election held closest in time.

[Figure 9.1 about here]

Figure 9.1 reveals a remarkable pattern. Until the 1970s, party system and electorate incongruence are just below 25 per cent whereas election incongruence is low and does not exceed five per cent. In 1977, party system and electorate incongruence sharply decline more than ten per cent and fluctuate around ten per cent afterwards. A reverse pattern may be observed for election congruence which starts increasing rapidly as of the mid-1960s to reach almost 20 per cent at the start of the 1970s. Afterwards the measurement decreases and fluctuates around ten per cent. A clear watershed between a pre- and post-1970 period in congruence of the vote comes to the fore when one focuses on the correlation between the measurements. Before 1970, the trend in party system congruence moves in close tandem with the pattern of electorate congruence. However, post-1970, party system congruence closely follows the trend for election congruence. How may we interpret these patterns?

Congruence of the vote was comparatively low pre-1970, especially considering that practically all national parties competed in all provincial elections and that there were no region-specific parties. Despite this, the dissimilarity between party systems was high and reached almost 25 per cent. At the same time voters did not switch their party support as is evidenced by the low figures for election incongruence (below five per cent). More than 95 per cent of the electorate voted for the same party in provincial and national elections. The source for the high dissimilarity between the provincial and lower chamber vote has to be found in differences between provincial and national electorates.

During the pillarization era, Dutch society was religiously divided. Catholics dominated the southern provinces of North *Brabant* and *Limburg* and protestants formed the majority of the confessional vote in the northern provinces of *Drenthe*, *Groningen* and *Friesland*, whereas the remaining six provinces were mixed although either the protestant or catholic vote was structurally higher. The territorial concentration of catholics and protestants was extremely high. For example, in *Limburg*, the *Katholieke Volkspartij* (Catholic Party) managed to obtain more than 75 per cent of the votes in all national and provincial elections held between 1946 and 1966. In contrast, the protestant parties *Christelijk Historische Unie* and *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij*, were able to attract more than 38 per cent of the votes in *Friesland* over the same time span.

The picture is dramatically different as of the 1970s. Electorate congruence hovers around eight per cent as opposed to 20 per cent during the era of pillarization. One development in particular may account for the sharp decline in electorate incongruence. The catholic and protestant confessional parties merged into one Christian Democratic Party (*Christelijk Democratisch Appèl*) in 1977. Due to deconfessionalization and the decline of the church-state cleavage, the confessional parties were losing votes at a high rate to new non-

confessional and postmodernist parties such as the *Pacifistische Socialistische Partij* (1957), *Democraten '66* (1966), *Politieke Partij Radicalen* (1968), and *Democratisch-Socialisten '70* (1970) and the party leaders hoped to counter this development by merging the confessional parties into one party and by accommodating the ideology of the new party to modern times. The Christian Democratic Party was able to attract the protestant vote in the north as well as the catholic vote in the south and electorate incongruence dropped significantly as a result. In the era of depillarization differences in the party system measurement seems to be highly correlated with changes in election congruence since electorate congruence remains constant. This means that vote switching between lower chamber and provincial elections is driving the observed pattern. The next section explores in how far second-order election effects contribute to vote switching.

9.4. Second-order election effects

Dutch provincial elections are held at the same time but they never coincided with lower chamber elections or with municipal elections. As hypothesized above, the coincidence of regional elections may have ‘nationalizing’ effects in the sense that provincial elections may obtain the status of referendum or barometer elections in which voters are inclined to vent their spleen about national instead of provincial government (Jeffery and Hough, 2009). Furthermore, citizens do not think that provinces play a large role in their daily lives. Dutch provinces are irrelevant in the perception of the voters and may be described as an ‘authorities’ authority’ since the provincial tier acts as an inter-locur between national and local government. Therefore, we may expect strong second-order election effects, that is, an anti-government swing and low turnout. On the other hand, provincial elections matter for national politics. The members of the provincial parliaments (*provinciale staten*) elect the

members of the upper chamber of parliament (*Eerste Kamer*). This upper chamber has veto-rights for all legislation and may be considered as a potential powerful opponent of the lower chamber. In addition, public opinion data presented in the online appendix of the book shows that trust in provincial and municipal government (64 per cent) is almost as high as for national government (66 per cent). Therefore, we may also expect *not* to observe second-order election effects. Figure 9.2 displays average turnout figures for national and provincial elections with their standard deviations.

[Figure 9.2 about here]

Turnout is high for all elections before 1970 and drops thereafter which coincides with the abolishment of compulsory voting in 1970. Turnout drops significantly for provincial elections and it attracts about 70 per cent of the voters for the provincial elections held between 1970 and 1986 and about 50 per cent afterwards. This is a low number compared to national elections which attracts about 80 per cent of the voters since the abolishment of compulsory voting. Compared to turnout in local elections we may even hypothesize that provincial elections are third-order elections. Since 1987, turnout for provincial elections has been between four and 13 per cent lower than for local elections. Clearly, Dutch voters do not find the provincial elections important, but for the elections held before 1987, provincial turnout has been consistently higher (up to 7 per cent) than local turnout.

The standard deviations for national elections are small which tells us that provinces do not deviate much from each other. However, turnout deviates somewhat more for provincial elections. It appears that the southern provinces *Noord Brabant* and *Limburg* score lower than average whereas the northern provinces of *Drenthe*, *Friesland* and *Groningen* score higher than average.

Another characteristic of second-order elections is that government parties lose votes to the expense of opposition and new parties. Figure 9.3 displays vote share differences between the provincial and previous national election for government and opposition parties for all provincial elections since 1946.

[Figure 9.3 about here]

A clear distinction between the elections before and after 1980 may be observed. Until the election of 1982 government and opposition parties tended to obtain similar vote shares in provincial and lower chamber elections although there is a tendency for government parties to lose vote share. Obviously, pillarization contributed to low second-order election effects for the pre-1982 provincial elections. Voters were floating away from confessional parties in the 1970s but this did not result directly in an increased anti-government swing in provincial elections. A typical second-order election pattern can be observed for the elections since 1982. Government parties lose and opposition parties gain vote share. In addition, the losses and gains are considerable in size with a maximum loss of almost 15 per cent in 1991 and a maximum gain of about ten per cent in 1999. The standard deviations are relatively low for all elections which indicate that voters in most provinces behaved in a similar way. This suggests that provincial elections have always been second-order and nationalized to high extent but that the manifestation of nationalization has changed over time: similar and congruent voting patterns for regional and national elections during the pillarization period but a clear anti-government and, to a lesser extent, a pro-opposition swing during depillarization including the most recent elections.

Despite the clear second-order election pattern for the elections since 1982, the magnitudes of losses and gains vary considerably between elections. If provincial elections are truly second-

order then we may predict the extent of the anti-government swing by the placement of the provincial election in the national election cycle. In other words, vertical simultaneity may be an explanatory factor. As explained in the introduction one may expect small vote share losses for government parties close to the national election and larger losses the further away one gets from the national election with the highest losses incurred at mid-term. The electoral cycle of lower chamber elections are four years so we may expect the largest losses when provincial elections are held two years (or 730 days) after the lower chamber election. Table 9.1 displays average change in vote share for government and opposition parties for each provincial election since 1982 together with the number of days between a provincial election and the previous national election.

[Table 9.1 about here]

The association between the number of days between the national and provincial election and change in vote shares is striking. The Pearson correlation coefficient between days and government party vote share change is -0.77 and that for opposition parties $+0.52$. Most provincial elections since the 1980s have taken place within one year from the national election. Second-order election theory predicts that there is a ‘honeymoon-period’ within one year from the national election in which the government party should gain vote share (Jeffery and Hough, 2001). There is clearly no ‘honeymoon-period’ in the Netherlands but judging from the provincial election held in 1991 –the only election which took place more than one year later after the national election– the changes in vote share during the ‘honeymoon-period’ are dampened. Probably, the losses and gains in vote share would increase substantially when provincial elections were to be held around mid-term during the national election cycle.

The anti-government and pro-opposition swing of the post 1982 provincial elections might be related to turnout. As can be seen in figure 9.2, there is a clear difference in turnout between the 1982 (70 per cent) and 1987 (69 per cent) provincial elections and the elections since 1991 (about 50 per cent). The decrease in turnout coincides with stronger anti-government and pro-opposition swings in figure 9.3. However, if we correlate the days between the provincial and national election with provincial turnout we obtain a mildly positive association (Pearson r : 0.29). The difference in turnout for national and regional elections is a bit more strongly and negatively associated with the number of days between the elections (Pearson r : -0.40). This means that it is probably not the level of provincial turnout as such which drives second-order election effects. Rather, lower turnout for second-order elections may coincide with differences in the composition of the electorate because opposition voters are more likely to turn out 'to make a point' than are government supporters to express their satisfaction (Jeffery and Hough, 2009).

The overall picture which arises from the analysis is that provincial elections may be described as typical second-order elections. Does this mean that there is no room at all for regionalized election behavior? In the next section I explore this question.

9.5. Regionalization of the vote

One way to assess regionalized election behavior is to explore in how regional voters are able to send a signal to regional government. During the era of pillarization, there was one-party rule by the Catholic party in the provinces of *Noord Brabant* and *Limburg*. However, the voters did not hold the provincial government accountable because their vote was 'fixed' for religious reasons. In the era of depillarization, oversized, multiparty coalition governments are the norm at both the national and provincial level which leads to high government

incongruence (30 to 55 per cent). In addition, at the provincial level coalitions which include (far) left and (far) right parties occur regularly and the Queen's Commissioner, the head of the provincial government, is appointed by central government. Provincial assemblies elect the representatives for the upper chamber (*Eerste Kamer*) but the upper chamber does not manifest itself as a worthy opponent to the lower chamber. Dutch governments are often oversized coalition governments which may rely on majorities in the lower as well as in the upper chamber. All these features together make it very difficult for voters to hold parties accountable and provincialized voting behavior is therefore unlikely.

Another indicator of regionalization is to look at the strength of non-statewide parties in provincial elections. Figure 9.4 displays average strength for non-statewide parties for provincial and lower chamber elections.

[Figure 9.4 about here]

Non-statewide parties (NSWP) have not participated in national elections at all. Interestingly, there were no non-statewide parties in provincial elections until 1966 with the introduction of the *Fryske Nasjonale Partij* in *Friesland*. The next NSWP to come to the electoral scene is *Partij Nieuw Limburg* in *Limburg* in 1987 and since 1995 at least nine NSWPs have participated in provincial elections in the Northern provinces of *Drenthe* (*Drents Belang*; *Partij voor het Noorden*), *Friesland* (*Provinciaal Belang Friesland*; *Partij voor het Noorden*) and *Groningen* (*De Groningers*; *Partij voor het Noorden*) and the southern provinces of *Noord Brabant* (*Brabant Partij*), *Zeeland* (*Partij voor Zeeland*; *Zeeuws Belang*; *Zeeuwsch Vlaamse Partij*), and *Limburg* (*Limburgs Belang*). The vote share for NSWPs has been modest, except for the *Fryske Nasjonale Partij* which obtains about ten per cent of the votes in Friesian provincial elections. For the 2003-07 term 19 out of a total of 764 seats (2.5 per

cent) were occupied by NSWPs and for the 2007-11 period the figure was 13 out of a total of 564 seats (2.3 per cent).

It is not surprising that NSWPs appear in the northern and southern provinces. In *Friesland* a minority of people speak their own Friesian language and *Limburg* has a history of its own; it belonged to Belgium between 1830-39, was part of the German confederation between 1839-67, was incorporated in the Kingdom of the Netherlands afterwards, and its separate history is still reflected in recent times in that the 'Queen's Commissioner' is addressed as 'Governor' and the seat of the provincial government (*Provinciehuys*) is called the '*Gouvernement*'.

Despite the presence of center-periphery cleavages with regard to language and history, none of the NSWPs have an outright autonomy claim except for the *Fryske Nasjonale Partij* (Friesian National Party) which asks for regional autonomy in order to be better able to protect the Friesian language, culture and sports (Hemminga, 2006). The other NSWPs want to represent regional interests in a broad sense but do not claim for more autonomy. For example, the *Partij voor het Noorden* (Party for the North) aims to merge the three Northern provinces and would like to see that the Northern provinces profit more from the gas revenues (*Partij voor het Noorden*, 2012), the *Partij voor Zeeland* (Party for Zeeland) acts on behalf of local and regional interests in Zeeland in general (*Partij voor Zeeland*, 2012), and *Drents Belang* (Drenthe's interests) is in favor of direct democracy in order to secure the representation of local and regional interests (*Drents Belang*, 2012).

The (small) rise in NSWPs coincides neatly with the end of pillarization of Dutch society and the increased second-order election effects since 1982. The decline in dominance of the religious parties and the subordinate position of the provincial election to the lower chamber election provides electoral space for NSWPs to thrive. Voters with a distinct regional identity may be more inclined to turnout in provincial elections than statewide party supporters.

Several characteristics of the peripheral provinces may add to an intensification of the center-periphery and/or an urban-rural cleavage. The northern and southern provinces are relatively poor. The relative GDP per capita compared to the country average in *Zeeland* and *Limburg* is about 90 per cent whereas it is just above 80 per cent for *Drenthe* and *Friesland* for the years 1995-2008 (EUROSTAT, 2011). *Groningen* is the richest province in the Netherlands with a GDP average of 148 per cent but this mainly due to the presence of a large gas reservoir in the North Sea which revenues accrue to the Dutch central state rather than to the provincial government and this is not accounted for in the EUROSTAT data. In addition, the three Northern provinces and *Zeeland* are characterized by the absence of big cities and only *Emmen*, the capital of *Drenthe* appears in the list of the largest 30 cities in the Netherlands. In sum, the increased second order characteristics of provincial elections may have resulted in an increased opportunity for political entrepreneurs to exploit regional distinctiveness of the peripheral provinces. Nevertheless, the vote share for NSWPs remains modest and regionalized election behavior is absent in national elections. NSWP representation in the upper chamber of parliament has so far been restricted to one senator (out of a total of 75) who represents most of the provincial NSWP parties but some other minor parties as well.

9.6. Discussion

The 'one scientific study' on Dutch provincial elections mentioned in the introduction focused on the campaign during the 1991 provincial election. The conclusion is clear, the media (both national and provincial) reports on the provincial election almost exclusively from a national perspective and provincial elections are second-order elections (Van der Eijk et al., 1992). This chapter arrives at the same conclusion, however, the way in which provincial elections are nationalized has changed over time. During the time of pillarization, voters voted similar

in national and provincial elections as is evidenced by an analysis on congruence between the national and provincial vote. As of the 1970s, and especially since the 1980s, Dutch provincial elections may be characterized as typical second-order elections in which (1) turnout is low, (2) which produce a substantial anti-government and pro-opposition swing, and (3) where small and new parties, in particular non-statewide parties, may thrive.

Turnout is exceptionally low even though provincial elections are relevant for national politics via provincial representation in an upper chamber of parliament. On the contrary, turnout declined at the time that provincial elections became more important for statewide government. Before 1983 the members of the provincial assemblies elected a third of the members of the Senate every two years. Since 1983, upper chamber elections have taken place every four years following provincial elections. Average turnout for the provincial election before 1983 (but after the abolition of compulsory voting in 1970) was 76 per cent whereas it is only 54 per cent for the elections held thereafter.

An explanation for the strong second-order election effects may be the highly centralized party system which supersedes and dominates the effects from provincial institutional authority. All parties, but a few exceptions, that participate in national elections participate across the statewide territory. Given that the Netherlands use one electoral district to allocate seats and that a party only needs 0.67 per cent of the vote to obtain a seat, the incentives are there to participate in all '*kieskringen*' since every vote brings you closer in obtaining a seat. The largest statewide parties in the Netherlands are highly centralized and candidates for the provincial party lists are proposed by the provincial branch but decided by the central party (Lundell, 2004). Next to this, senators in the upper house are elected by members of the provincial assemblies from national party lists with little influence from provincial and local branches. This indicates that the internal party organization of the major statewide parties may play a vital role in the linkage between provincial and national elections in the Netherlands.

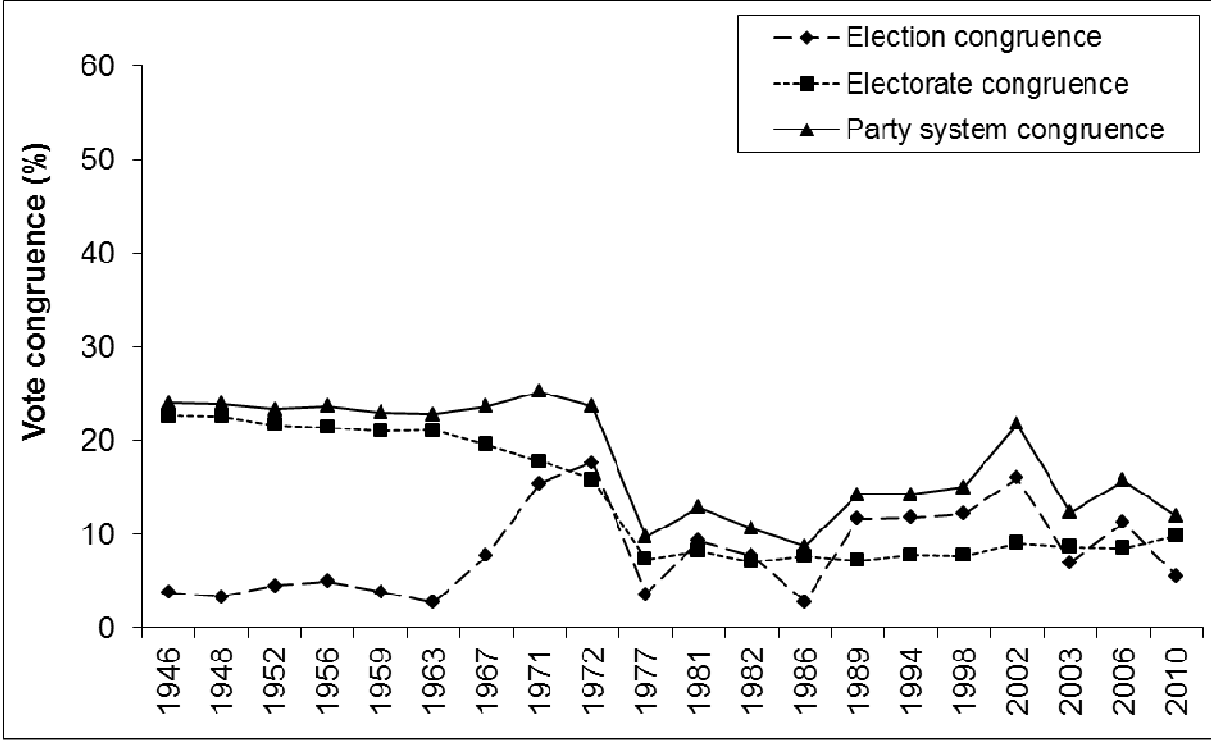
The finding that institutional power does not seem to have an effect may also be ascribed to the highly centralized nature of the fiscal system in the Netherlands. Fiscal relations between the center and the provinces reduce provincial governments to deconcentrated statewide government administrations. This hypothesis gains face validity when one realizes that provinces rely heavily on central government grants. More than 90 per cent of their revenues come from grants and a majority of these grants come with strings. In addition, own taxes account for only 5.1 per cent of subnational revenue (see the online appendix of the book). A final factor may lie in the non-visibility of provincial government to the voters. As discussed above, the role of provincial government may be described as an ‘authorities’ authority’, that is an authority that is only visible and relevant to the state authorities. The authority of provinces is mostly of a regulatory nature, provinces develop plans according to which local governments have to act and make policy. Citizens do not realize how much of their daily life is regulated by the provinces just as with the European Union. Perhaps the fate for all elections to ‘regulatory governments for other governments’ is that they will always be second-order as long as they remain invisible for voters.

There is some evidence for regionalization of Dutch provincial elections in that non-statewide parties seem to gain ground in recent elections. Nevertheless, their vote share may be considered modest at best and does not exceed ten per cent of the provincial vote.

Furthermore, it seems likely that non-statewide party success is mainly a by-product of second-order election effects produced by low turnout. With low turnout, the relative proportion of regional versus statewide party supporters might be higher because the former may be more inclined to cast their vote. It is questionable whether the Dutch non-statewide parties would gain similar vote shares when provincial turnout would increase.

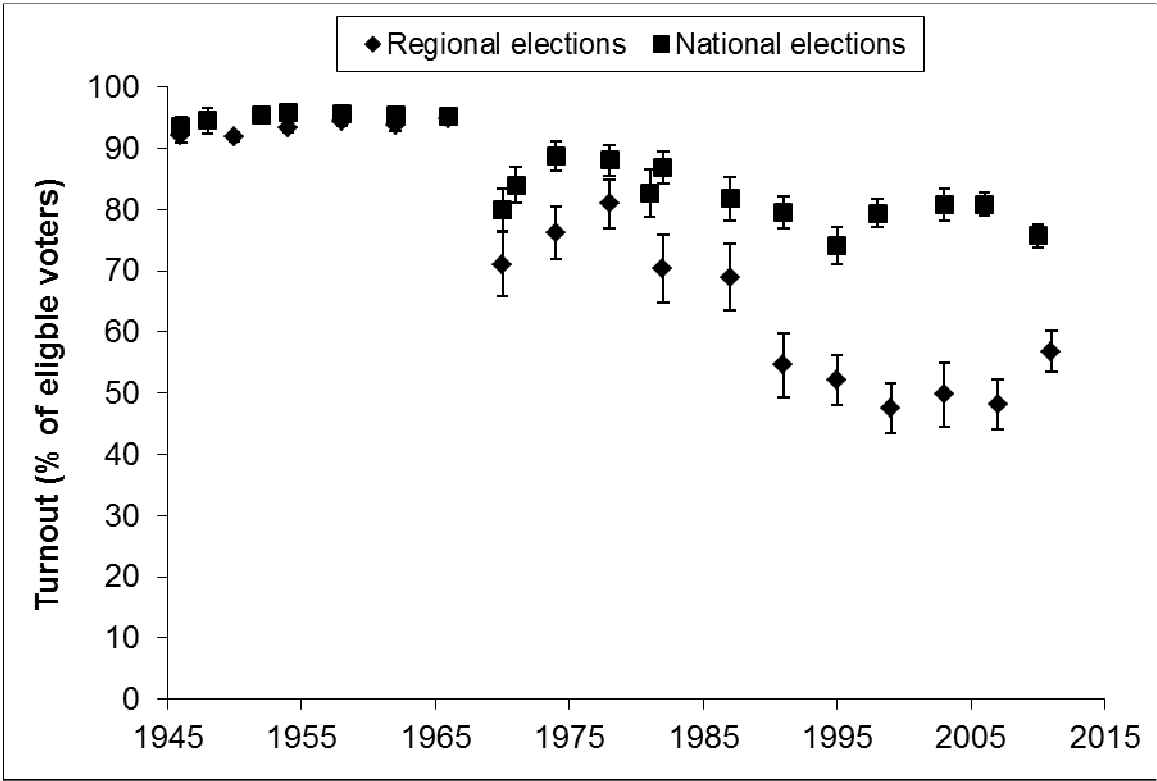
The Netherlands: Two forms of nationalization of provincial elections

Figure 9.1: Congruence between the national and regional vote



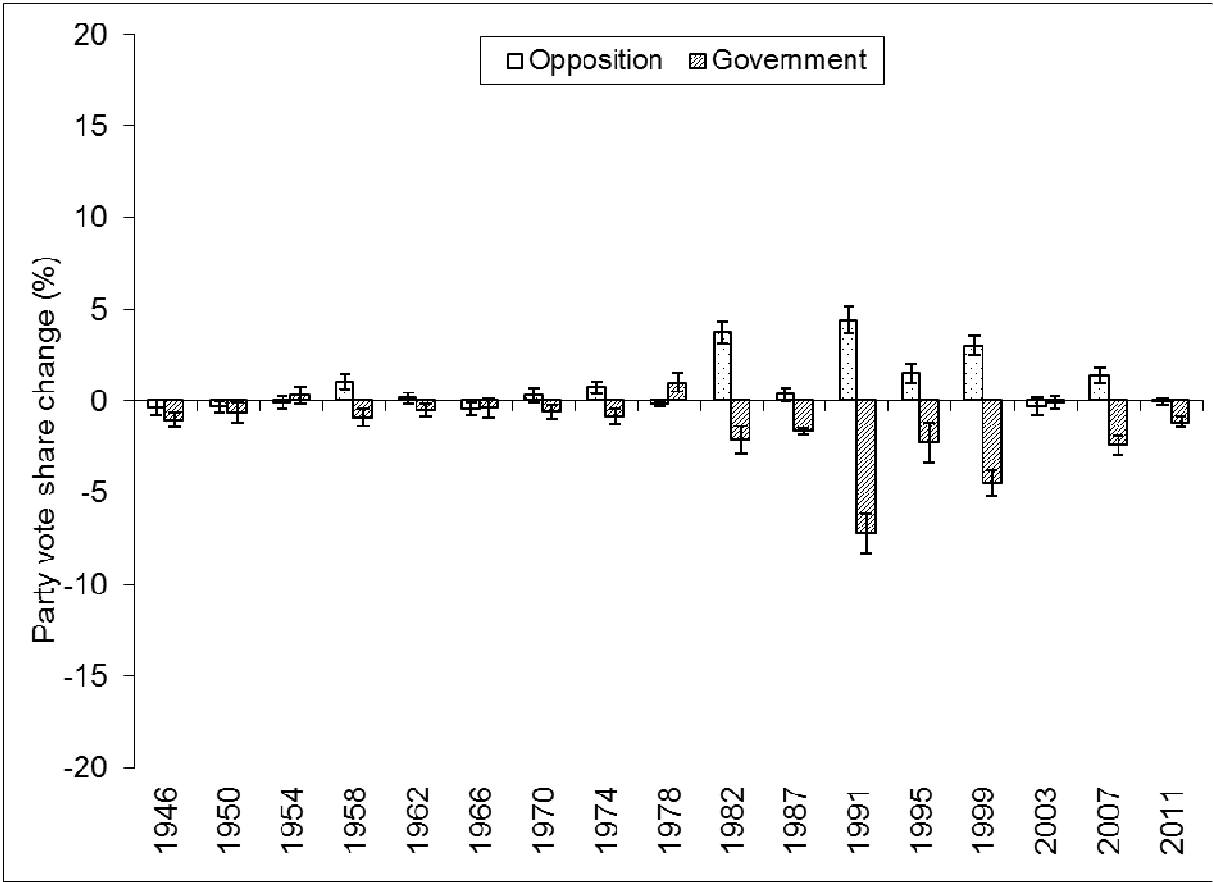
Notes: Shown are average dissimilarity scores. See the introduction for the formula. More details can be found in the Dutch country excel file.

Figure 9.2: Turnout in regional and national elections



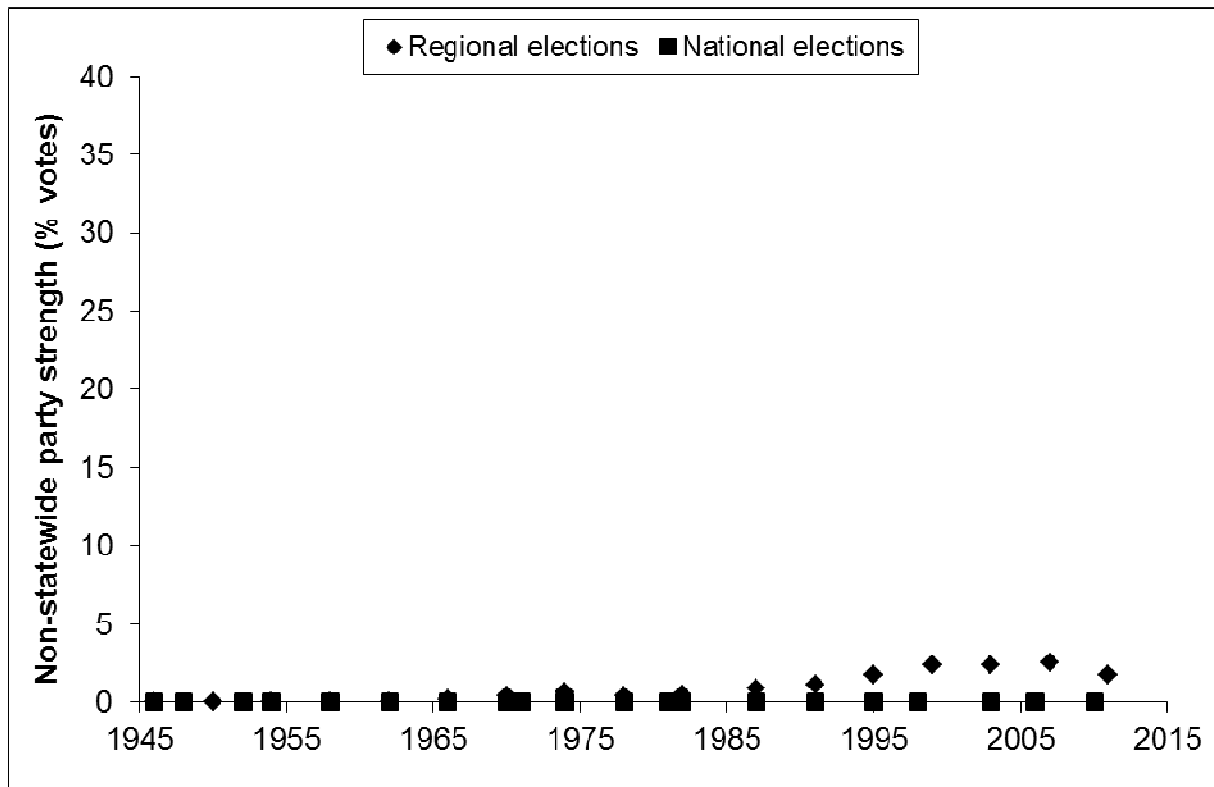
Notes: shown are average turnout rates and their standard deviations per national and regional election. More details can be found in the Dutch country excel file.

Figure 9.3: Change in party vote shares between regional and previous national elections



Notes: The figure displays changes in total vote share for parties in national government and opposition. Shown are regional averages and their standard deviations. More details can be found in the Dutch country excel file.

Figure 9.4: Non-statewide party strength in regional and national elections



Notes: Shown are average vote shares obtained by non-statewide parties in regional and national elections. More details can be found in the Dutch country excel file.

Table 9.1: Change in vote share in provincial elections since 1982.

Provincial election	Days after national election	Average change in vote share	
		Government parties	Opposition parties
24 March 1982	302	-6.17	5.46
18 March 1987	301	-3.33	0.89
6 March 1991	546	-14.48	8.83
8 March 1995	309	-6.84	3.09
3 March 1999	301	-13.44	9.66
11 March 2003	48	-0.32	-1.04
7 March 2007	105	-4.83	6.07
2 March 2011	263	-3.49	-0.34

Notes: Shown are average changes in provincial election vote shares for government and opposition parties in statewide government. The *Partij Voor de Vrijheid* which provides support for the minority government of the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* and the *Christelijk Democratisch Appél* since 2010 is considered as a government party.