The blind corner of political representation

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1. Introduction

The literature on the state of representative democracy in advanced industrial democracies shows a remarkable paradox. On the one hand there is a body of literature arguing there is a crisis of democracy or at least a challenge to the democratic institutions in the world of established democracies, not because people no longer support democracy as a system of government but because new and more emancipated generations of people demand more democracy and a more direct involvement in the processes of decision-making (Dalton 2004; Inglehart 1977; Klingemann and Fuchs 1995). Also, the rise of populist parties across Western Europe in particular, successfully claiming that the established parties have lost contact with ‘the people’ suggests that the traditional processes of political representation are no longer effective, i.e. they no longer manage to connect the policy preferences of the people to public policy.

There is another body of literature, however, providing empirical evidence that the process of political representation is quite effective, that elections are an effective instrument of democracy, successfully linking the policy preferences of citizens to the policy preferences and legislative behaviour of their representatives in parliament and eventually to public policy (McDonald and Budge 2005; Powell 2000; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Thomassen 2009). In this paper we critically review this latter conclusion. We argue that much of the literature on political representation offers a too optimistic picture of the effectiveness of the process of political representation in advanced industrial democracies. This is because most of these studies, in particular comparative studies, are based on the congruence on the left-right dimension of (the relevant part of) the electorate on the one hand and either the position of their representatives in parliament or public policy on the other hand. They implicitly or explicitly assume that representativeness on the left-right dimension automatically implies
representativeness on a range of other issues as well. We argue that this assumption is at least disputable. Using empirical data from the Netherlands we show that on specific issues elections seem to fail as an instrument to connect the policy preferences of a large part of the electorate to the policy positions of their representatives in parliament. It is our contention that this is precisely because these issues are at best poorly related to the left-right dimension.

In the next section we present a short overview of the normative assumptions underlying most empirical research on the effectiveness of political representation processes. In section three we critically assess comparative studies of political representation. In section four we argue that for parties on the left it might be difficult to represent their voters on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. In section five we introduce the Dutch representation studies, followed by an assessment of the representativeness of political parties in the Netherlands on a number of issues in section six. Also, building on earlier studies on ‘dynamic representation’, we assess to what extent individual political parties and the party system as a whole are flexible enough to close the gap between their own policy positions and those of the voters.

2. Elections as instruments of democracy

In order to assess the effectiveness of the system and processes of political representation one needs evaluation criteria. Without exception, although often implicitly so, these criteria are deduced from normative theories of democracy.

In this paper we follow a main stream in modern political representation research, and start from the normative view that:

a. The purpose of political representation is to connect people’s policy preferences to public policy, and

b. Elections are the main instrument to connect people’s policy preferences to public policy.
This view can be translated into a chain of principal-agent relationships in which each consecutive agent is expected to implement the will of his principal (see figure 1). If that is the case public policy at the end of the chain will be congruent with the will of (the majority of) the people. Or as Arnold-Foster once phrased it:

‘How is this country governed? *By the Government*, is the first answer that you will be likely to give, and in a way the answer is right. *But who governs the Government?* The answer is that Parliament does. But last of all, *who governs Parliament?* And the answer to that is that the *People of this Country* govern parliament. And so you will see that the real answer to the question ‘Who governs the country’ is that ‘*The country governs itself*’.

**Figure 1**

![Diagram](image)

This view on representative democracy is anything but self-evident, neither from an empirical nor from a normative perspective. It reflects a *populist* rather than a *Madisonian* (Dahl 1956) or *liberal* (Riker 1982) theory of democracy in which representative democracy is seen as a ‘sorry substitute for the real thing’ (Dahl 1982: 13), the real thing being direct democracy in which the people themselves decide on major policy issues. In the liberal theory of democracy in contrast, representative democracy is seen as a form of government sui generis that should not be modelled after direct democracy. As a consequence it has a different view with regard to each of the links in figure 1. Members of Parliament are *not* supposed to implement the will of the people but to be their *trustees*, behaving in the interest of the people but not necessarily following their instructions. Government is *not* just an executive committee of (the majority in) Parliament but – in line with the separation of powers principle – has its own
responsibilities. It is *accountable* to Parliament but is *not bound* to a mandate of Parliament. Elections are an instrument of making the government and (Members of) Parliament accountable to the people, but they do not convey a policy mandate of the people (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999).

In this paper we follow most of the empirical literature on political representation by deducing our criteria for the assessment of the system of political presentation from the first view. In Arnold-Foster’s phrasing of the mandate theory of political representation there is no specific role for political parties. However, in modern representative democracy nobody has seriously contested Schattschneider’s famous dictum ‘Modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties’. A translation of mandate theory into a model of political representation in which political parties play a key role is the Responsible Party Model or party government model. This model can be summarized by way of a number of requirements that need to be met in order to make elections an instrument of democracy in the sense of an instrument connecting the policy preferences of the people to public policy (see e.g. American Political Science Association 1950; Katz 1997; Thomassen 1994).

**Responsible Party Model**

1. Voters do have a choice, i.e. they can choose between at least two parties with different policy views.
2. The internal cohesion of political parties is sufficient to enable them to implement their policy views.
3. Voters do vote according to their policy views, i.e. they choose the party that represents their policy preferences best. This in turn requires that:
   1. Voters do have policy preferences
   2. Voters are aware of the differences between the programmes of different political parties.
4. The policy views of both political parties and voters are constrained by a single ideological dimension.
The Responsible Party Model is usually described in terms of the first three requirements only. However, as I more extensively argued elsewhere (Thomassen 1999; Thomassen 1994), these requirements are insufficient to ensure that government policy does follow the will of the (majority of the) people. Even when all voters vote according to their issue positions, the election outcome does not necessarily convey an electoral mandate on a single policy issue. Political parties offer a package deal to the voter. By voting for a particular party, voters are forced to vote for the whole package, even though they might favour another party on some issues. Therefore, as Dahl puts it: ‘all an election reveals is the first preferences of some citizens among the candidates standing for office,’ for ‘we can rarely interpret a majority of first choices among candidates in a national election as being equivalent to a majority of first choices for a specific policy’ (Dahl 1956: 125-27). As a consequence, there is no logical relationship between the electoral majority and the policy majority on any specific issue. The only solution to this paradox is the assumption that both political parties, in the composition of their programs, and voters, when they decide which party they should vote for, are constrained by the same one-dimensional ideology – that is, conforming the basic elements of the Downsian model. Only then it is absolutely clear where the electoral majority stands policy wise (Thomassen 1994). Like in Downs’ work the most likely candidate for such a role in Western democracies is the Left-Right dimension. This means that in order to function effectively, the model should be rephrased in terms of this dimension, i.e. political parties should mainly compete on the Left-Right dimension and voters should vote according to their proximity on this dimension to the parties on offer.

3. The Left-Right dimension as an instrument of linkage

In this paper we focus on the fourth requirement, the requirement that the policy views of both political parties and voters are constrained by a single dimension. If this is the case, and
political parties mainly compete on this dimension and voters vote according to their position on it, elections can indeed serve as an instrument to connect the policy preferences of the people with the policy positions of their representatives in parliament and eventually with public policy.

From a theoretical perspective the dominance of a single ideological dimension is extremely attractive. It not only solves a logical paradox, it also facilitates the communication between the political elites and the mass public. As Downs argues: ‘Voters do not know in great detail what the decisions of the government are, and cannot find out except at a significant cost………Under these conditions, many a voter finds party ideologies useful because they remove the necessity of his relating every issue to his own philosophy. Ideologies help him focus attention on the differences between parties; therefore, they can be used as samples of all the differentiating stands. With this short cut a voter can save himself the cost of being informed upon a wider range of issues’ (Downs 1957: 98). Ideologies are equally useful for political parties: ‘Each party realizes that some citizens vote by means of ideologies rather than policies; hence it fashions an ideology which it believes will attract the greatest number of votes’ (Downs 1957: 100). In other words, political parties use ideology as a short cut in the same way as the voters do. ‘Ideology helps parties avoid the necessity of relating each policy decision directly to voter reaction, thereby reducing the cost of decision-making’ (Downs 1957: 101-2).

There is a wealth of empirical evidence that once the requirements of the Responsible Party Model are rephrased in terms of the left-right dimension, these requirements are amazingly well met. Over the years several authors have ‘asserted that the left-right dimension obtains a superior all-inclusive status within the hierarchy of cleavages’ (Sani and Sartori 1983). In this interpretation the left-right dimension does not just reflect the ideological component of the class cleavage but is a kind of ‘super-issue’ encompassing various issue domains (Inglehart
and Klingemann 1976). Empirical research seems to confirm that the left-right dimension is indeed the main dimension of contestation across Europe (e.g. Sani and Sartori 1983; Schmitt and Thomassen 2009). Voters in general have no problem locating themselves on the left-right dimension; they have a clear perception of where the main political parties stand and they vote in large numbers for the party nearest to their own position on this dimension (Van der Brug et al. 2009; Van der Brug and Van der Eijk 1999; Van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005). Political parties live up to their promises once they are in government and steer government policy according to their ideological position (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Thomson 1999).

As a consequence, the left-right dimension seems to be an effective instrument of political representation, connecting people’s policy preferences to parties’ positions in parliament and to public policy. Empirical research tends to confirm a strong congruence between voters’ positions on the left-right dimension on the one hand and the position on the same dimension of the political parties they voted for and public policy on the other hand (Klingemann 1995; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; McDonald and Budge 2005; Powell 2000; Thomassen and Schmitt 1999). What all these studies prove is that the process of political representation is effective on the left-right dimension, but they do not really prove that all relevant policy dimensions are encompassed or constrained by this single dimension. If this were the case one would expect more or less the same degree of congruence between voters and the party they voted for on each and every issue. And yet time and again empirical research proves that this is not the case at all. In particular on issues like law and order, immigration and more in general the place of ethnic minorities in society, and European Unification, huge differences between party elites and their rank and file have been observed. Political parties on the left in particular seem to represent their voters quite poorly on such issues. What these findings seem to suggest is that people’s position on such issues can hardly
be predicted by their position on the left-right dimension, in other words that they are *not*
constrained by the left-right dimension. If this is the case the left-right dimension is doomed
to fail as an instrument of linkage with regard to such issues. If political parties compete on
the left-right dimension and voters vote according to their position on this same dimension
because it is the most salient dimension to them, they might possibly vote for the ‘wrong’
party with regard to issues that are not constrained by the left–right dimension and therefore
be poorly represented on these issues. This would in particular be the case if at the elite level
issue dimensions are differently correlated with each other than at the mass level.

4. There is more on earth than Left-Right.

It is our contention that this might very well be the case with regard to issues related to the so-
called libertarian-authoritarian dimension. This is anything but a new discussion. The idea
that the space of political conflict in most modern Western societies can be reduced to a single
ideological dimension was never undisputed. More than fifty years ago Lipset argued that
‘The gradual realization that extremist and intolerant movements in modern society are more
likely to be based on the lower classes than on the middle and upper classes has posed a tragic
dilemma for those intellectuals of the democratic left who once believed the proletariat
necessarily to be a force for liberty, racial equality, and social progress.’ (Lipset 1966: 97)²,
‘In some nations working-class groups have proved to be the most nationalistic sector of the
population. In some they have been in the forefront of the struggle against equal rights for
minority groups, and have sought to limit immigration or to impose racial standards in

Lipset also pointed to the problem of political representation caused by this phenomenon:
‘The poorer strata everywhere are more liberal or leftist on economic issues; they favour more
welfare state measures, higher wages, graduated income taxes, support of trade-unions, and so forth. But when liberalism is defined in noneconomic terms - as support of civil liberties, internationalism, etc. – the correlation is reversed. The more well-to-do are more liberal, the poorer are more intolerant.’ (Lipset 1966: 101-2).

Since the political elites in general tend to belong to the well-to-do people and in particular to the better educated people, the logical consequence is a problem of political representation among the parties on the left where the political elites combine a left attitude on social-economic issues with a libertarian attitude on immaterial issues whereas their voters – assuming they vote according to social-economic issues – combine a leftist attitude on social-economic issues with an authoritarian or conservative stand on immaterial issues. As a consequence political elites will hardly be representative of their rank and file on such issues. The problem can be summarized as in table 1. If Lipset’s argument is correct most voters on the left will be in quadrant A where no political parties are, whereas the political parties and political elites on the left are in quadrant C³.

Table 1

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If Lipset had made his observations today they could not have been more accurate. Once again, both the number and the content of the relevant dimensions of electoral competition have become a matter of discussion. This discussion is strongly related to the rise of populist
parties. The success of these parties can hardly be understood in the framework of either the traditional cleavage structure or the simple left-right framework. For example, Kriesi et al. argue that the antagonism between winners and losers of the contemporary process of ‘globalization’ leads to a conflict between *integration* and *demarcation*. They expect that the new conflict dimension will reinforce the classic opposition between a pro-state and a pro-market position while giving it a new meaning. The pro-state position is likely to become more defensive and of a more protectionist nature, while the pro-market position is likely to become more assertive in favour of the enhancement of national competitiveness on world markets. But they also expect that the cultural dimension will increasingly take on an ethnic or nationalist character. Also, they expect that new issues like European integration and immigration will be integrated into this cultural dimension. The demarcation pole of the new cultural cleavage should be characterized by an opposition to the process of European integration and by restrictive positions with regard to immigration. They suggest that established parties are repositioning and realigning themselves as a result of the rising new conflict. Accordingly, the increasing volatility in West European elections cannot only be interpreted, as is usually done, as the result of increasing issue-voting on the part of the electorate, but also as a result of this repositioning and realigning of established parties. A spatial analysis of the media coverage of the electoral campaigns of political parties in six European countries confirmed the existence of a two-dimensional party space. They also found that the positions of parties usually vary as strongly with respect to the cultural issues as with respect to the economic ones. Both dimensions are polarizing. Furthermore, the cultural dimension has been gaining in importance as it has become the primary basis on which new parties or transformed established parties seek to mobilize their electorate (Kriesi et al. 2008; Kriesi et al. 2006).
5. Political representation in the Netherlands

In the remaining part of this paper we try to assess to what extent this ongoing discussion on the dimensionality of the space of political conflict can shed some light on the effectiveness of the system of political representation in the Netherlands. The main reason to focus on the Netherlands is that Dutch politics seems to be in a state of turmoil. If we take electoral stability as an indicator the Netherlands have become one of the most instable democracies in Western Europe. Three of the parliamentary elections since 1994 were among the nine most volatile elections in the history of Western Europe since 1950\(^4\) (Mair 2008). Moreover, both in 2002 and 2006, most of this volatility was due to the unprecedented successful breakthrough of new populist parties. In 2002 the LPF (List Pim Fortuyn), the political movement of Pim Fortuyn, won 26 of the 150 seats in parliament, becoming the second largest party in parliament, just a few months after it had been founded. It fell apart equally fast because of internal conflicts, but in the 2006 elections two other populist parties, one on the left and one on the right were almost equally successful. The PVV (Party for Freedom), an offspring of the liberal conservative VVD and lead by Geert Wilders, won 9 seats whereas the SP (Socialist Party) which had been represented in parliament since 1994, won 26 seats.

Also, the murder of Pim Fortuyn in 2002, just a few days before the elections, and later of the journalist Theo van Gogh by a Muslim youth, and the overwhelming ‘nee’ of the Dutch electorate in the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005, against the will of the major political parties in Parliament, together representing 85% of the seats in parliament, made not only many a foreigner wonder what had become of the Netherlands, once the prototype of consociational politics and tolerance.
In contrast to many comments in the media, analyses of the behaviour of the electorate in the 2002 elections clearly indicate that the Fortuyn revolt cannot simply be interpreted as a revolt against the political establishment or as the result of a sudden change in public opinion with regard to issues of immigration. Although it is true that people had become more negative about immigrants and multicultural society, a more plausible explanation seems to be that the LPF moved into a gap in the electoral market (Van Holsteyn, Irwin, and Ridder 2003). It was able to introduce a new line of conflict - the cultural one - that had been ignored by the political elite, but was highly salient to the electorate (Pellikaan, Lange, and Van der Meer 2007). As far as this potentially salient issue dimension was deliberately kept from the political agenda by the established political parties, the Fortuyn revolt can indeed be interpreted as a successful revolt against the established party system.

Therefore, in a similar vein as Kriesi et al. several students of Dutch politics have argued that these recent developments in Dutch politics have changed the space of competition. By focusing on the issues of immigration and multiculturalism Fortuyn managed to redefine the political agenda, adding a new dimension of competition to Dutch politics in the process (Pellikaan, Van der Meer, and Lange 2003).

These interpretations suggest that the established political parties did not effectively represent their voters on issues that we above identified as being part of the libertarian-authoritarian dimension: issues of immigration and the integration of ethnic minorities, internationalization (Europeanization) and law and order. In this section we try to assess to what extent this is the case.

Also, we try to assess how political parties and the party system react to the gap between party elites and their rank and file: do they try to close the gap, either by trying to convince their voters to change their mind or by moving toward their voters’ position? Does the party
system react to this gap by the rise of new political parties trying to represent voters who are not well represented by the traditional parties?

In order to answer these questions we analyse data from two longitudinal studies in the Netherlands. The first one is the ongoing series of National Election Studies (DNES\textsuperscript{5}) that started in 1971; the second one is the series of surveys among members of the Dutch Parliament (MP-study) that started in 1972\textsuperscript{6}. Because of the strong ties between the principal investigators of the two studies there always was a certain overlap between the questionnaires used in both studies, in particular with regard to policy issues\textsuperscript{7}. Unfortunately, the consistency across levels and across time is less than it could have been due to changes in question format and the selection of issues.

In addition to the left-right scale there is only a single issue question that was included in all relevant studies, both at the mass- and elite level. This is a question about income policy, asking respondents whether incomes should become more equal or remain as they are\textsuperscript{8}. However, both a question on law and order that was first asked in the early 1970s and questions on the integration of ethnic minorities and European Unification enable us to assess the congruence between voters and their representatives on the second dimension distinguished above as well.

6. The representativeness of Members of Parliament

Is the representativeness of Members of Parliament different for different issue domains?

Figures 2.1 through 2.3 present mean positions of voters and MPs of the four major parties on the left-right dimension and the one issue for which we have a longer time series, i.e. people’s opinions on the equality of incomes. On the issue of law and order we do have a short time
series at the elite level, but not at the level of the electorate. We still include the data on this issue here because of its importance as an indicator of the libertarian-authoritarian dimension.

**Figures 2.1 thru 2.3 about here**

To some extent the findings on the left-right dimension are the least interesting, because the left-right dimension as such is void of content. Still, we can observe two interesting phenomena. First, in the 1970s the MPs of the then four largest parties strongly differ from their voters in terms of left-right. Whereas the voters of the three parties mostly to the left position themselves to the right of their MPs, the opposite is true for the VVD. Whether we should give a substantive interpretation to these differences is not really clear. Although there is a difference between voters and MPs in absolute terms, the rank order of parties is the same at both levels. Therefore, it is probably wrong to interpret this phenomenon as a failing process of political representation. What it really seems to mean is that the polarization among the political elites is stronger than among their rank and file. A second interesting phenomenon is that this polarization seems to flatten out until the end of the century and then increases again. The development of opinions on income differences follows a more or less similar pattern.

The issue of law and order is the most interesting one from the perspective of this paper. It enables us to test the hypothesis that the representativeness of MPs will be relatively poor on issues related to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension, in particular among parties to the left. In 1972 this hypothesis seems to be corroborated. There is indeed quite a gap between PvdA-voters and their MPs in 1972, a gap that does not exist for any of the other major parties. Unfortunately, voters were not asked for their opinion on this issue in the election studies after 1972. Therefore, we cannot follow the development of this gap over time. However, it is
most unlikely that PvdA-voters have moved towards a more libertarian position after 1972. If that assumption is correct, we can conclude that the predicted gap between PvdA-voters and their MPs only existed in the 1970s, a period in which the party was taken over by ‘New Left’, a radical wing of the party, mainly consisting of young members.

The development of the position of PvdA-MPs also reveals an interesting process of dynamic representation (cfr. Holmberg 1997; Schmitt and Thomassen 2000; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995). In 1990 the MPs had finally moved to the position where their voters were already in 1972! Therefore, this is a clear case where the political elites follow the mood of their voters rather than the other way around.

Is the gap we found between voters and their representatives, due to the fact that the issue of law and order is not constrained by the left-right dimension? In a previous publication (Thomassen 1999) we showed that the correlations between issue positions at the level of the mass public in general are too low to make a distinction between issues. The extent to which issue positions are constrained by the left-right dimension is far less among the mass public than among MPs. This is exactly what we would expect. However, at both levels the extent to which opinions on law and order are constrained by the left-right dimension (Pearson correlation coefficients .24 and .76 respectively) is no less than for any of the other issues. But this is not the case for the issues of the integration of ethnic minorities and European Unification, the issues that were first introduced in the MP-study of 2001. The correlations between left-right position and the position on these issues among MPs are not higher than among the mass public (minorities: .30 vs. .31; European integration: .11 vs. .03).

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 about here
In addition to these analyses at the individual level, we made scatter plots of the positions of both voters and MPs in the early 1970s on the left-right dimension on the one hand and the issues of the equality of incomes and law and order on the other hand. These plots confirm what we discussed already: on both dimensions the polarization among MPs is much stronger than among the voters. In particular on law and order the differences between the party electorates are rather small. In both plots party means tend to follow the main diagonal, in particular at the elite level. This means that there is a certain correlation between the two issues and the left-right dimension. However, this correlation is anything but perfect. CDA-MPs tend to be left-oriented on income policy but conservative on law and order. Figure 3.2 also reveals an interesting case of dynamic representation although of a different kind than what we usually see in the literature. As mentioned before the PvdA moved towards a radical left and libertarian position in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In reaction to this development a group of dissatisfied members broke away from the party and participated as a separate party in the elections of 1972 under the name DS70 (Democratic Socialists). It won an impressive 8 seats in the 1971 parliamentary elections, 6 of which were left after the 1972 elections. As can be seen in figures 3.1 and 3.2 the MPs of this new party position themselves more or less at the same position as the PvdA on the left-right dimension and the equality of incomes but at a far less libertarian position on law and order. This is closer to where the PvdA voters are (together with the voters of most of the other parties). This might be seen as a self correction of the party system: in particular in political systems with a low electoral threshold as the Dutch system new political parties can easily move in where the existing political parties leave a vacuum, in this case the space defined by a left orientation combined with a conservative position on law and order. This is to say that DS70 took up a position in quadrant A in table 1, i.e. the quadrant that we argued tends to be empty on the
elite side. However, in contrast to our expectation both their own voters and PvdA-voters seem to be closer to the main diagonal than this new party.

**Figures 4.1 thru 4.6 about here**

The two studies after the turn of the century offer a second possibility to see to what extent political parties represent their voters better on classic left-right issues than on issues related to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. These latter issues refer to the tolerance toward ethnic minority groups (should they completely adapt to Dutch society or are they allowed to keep their own culture) and the issue of European integration.

In figures 4.1 through 4.6 the positions of MPs and voters of each party on the left-right dimension are plotted against their position on the issues of income differences, the integration of minorities and European integration, both for 2001 and 2006. As expected, the positions of both voters and MPs on the issue of the equality of incomes are more or less located on the main diagonal, both in 2001 and 2006. Both on the issue of integration and European Unification the situation is different. In 2001 all party groups with the exception of the SP are still more or less on the main diagonal on the issue of the integration of minorities, with the MPs of Green-Left and the PvdA on the more libertarian side of the scale. All MP-groups with the exception of the SP are more libertarian than their voters. In 2006 there is hardly any variation left among the voter groups of the three main parties, PvdA, CDA and VVD. They all are at an almost similar position on the conservative side of this issue. Only the Green-Left voters are on the libertarian side of the scale. For the PvdA in particular this means that they are quite representative of their voters on the left-right dimension but not on the integration issue. Therefore, on this issue we see exactly the pattern that was first discussed by Lipset, i.e. a problem of representation that is specifically applicable to the left where voters – in contrast to their representatives - combine a left position on social-economic
issues with a conservative position on issues related to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension.

On the issue of European integration the lack of representativeness is even more outspoken.

With the exception of the SP again both the MP- and voter-groups are more or less on the diagonal, but in a totally different part of the plot. Whereas all MP-groups with the exception of the SP and the CU are on the pro-further-European integration side of the scale\textsuperscript{13}, all voter groups are on the other side of the scale, more or less in the same order as their representatives. This pattern reveals a very general problem of representation on the issue of European Unification that came to an outburst in the 2005 referendum when an overwhelming 62\% of the voters rejected the Constitutional Treaty, whereas all parties represented in this plot except the SP and the CU (Christian Union) had declared themselves in favour of it. This plot therefore reveals that this sudden clash between the political elites and the mass public was less of an ‘unfortunate accident’ than many observers were willing to believe. The referendum only created an institutional opportunity to bring a slumbering conflict between political elites and the mass public to the surface.

Finally, let us come back to the question how dynamic both individual political parties and the party system are, i.e. to what extent do they adapt to changes in policy preferences among their voters? The ‘Fortuyn revolt’ in 2002 suddenly mobilized the dissatisfaction with the ‘multi-cultural society’ that for a long time had been central in public policy, and in particular in the policy views of the parties on the left. The reaction of the political elites in 2002 clearly revealed they had been caught by surprise and obviously were not aware that the mood of the country had changed.

But had it really changed? Although there are no long term data on people’s attitudes on these issues it is most unlikely that this is the major development. Both the questions on the integration of ethnic minorities and on European integration have been asked in the National
Election Study since 1994. Although the electorate has moved slightly towards the position that minorities should completely adjust to Dutch culture as figures 4.2 and 4.4 reveal, this movement is limited. Most of the electorate had been on the conservative side of this issue for as long as we can observe. In the perception of the electorate the main parties have moved in the same direction but up until 2006 there was an impressive difference between where the voters stood and where they perceived the PvdA in particular. On European integration the situation is even more dramatic. Ever since 1994 the average positions of voters have consistently been outside of the range of the perceived average positions of the major old political parties. Throughout the period since 1994 the three main parties (PvdA, CDA and VVD) were hardly distinguished by the voters when it comes to their views on European Unification whereas the electorate is very clearly leaning towards the position that European unification has gone too far (Aarts and Thomassen 2008).

This lack of congruence between voters and their representatives could remain hidden as long as the main dimension of contestation was the left-right dimension, forcing the electorate to vote for a party that in many cases hardly represented their attitudes on issues related to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. The outburst of political dissatisfaction after the turn of the century was not due to a sudden change of opinion among the electorate but to a combination of two developments. First, issues related to immigrants and minorities, law and order and crime, had become more salient over the years. One of the questions that have consistently been asked in the National Election Studies is what people considered as the main problem facing the Netherlands. Whereas in the late 1970s unemployment (a typical socio-economic issue) was considered as the major problem, this suddenly changed in the early 1990s. From then on problems related to minorities and refugees were seen as the most important problem, together with issues related to crime and public order. In particular the issues related to minorities and asylum seekers were deliberately kept off the political agenda.
by almost all political parties because they were regarded as the issues of the extreme right with all its standard associations with fascism and Nazism (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). All this issue domain was waiting for was a political entrepreneur mobilizing at least part of the electorate on this issue dimension. This is exactly what Fortuyn did in 2002. He brilliantly changed the main dimension of contestation from the left-right dimension to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension.

In terms of dynamic representation this development can be seen as an adaptation of the party system to a situation in which there was hardly a place in the party system for voters feeling uneasy with the changes they perceived in Dutch society. This adaptation was not only represented by Fortuyn’s movement. As observed before, his movement was short-lived, but this is not to say that the policy dimension he successfully competed on has become less salient. On the extreme right side ‘the list Wilders’, a political party without members, has become a powerful movement. Wilders left the VVD in 2004 because he refused to accept his party’s position that Turkey under certain conditions should be admitted as a member of the EU. In 2006 his new party won 9 seats in parliament, whereas it became the second largest party in the European Elections in June 2009. On the left the SP has been quite successful representing a left position on socio-economic issues combined with a conservative position on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. It won them 26 seats in the 2006 parliamentary elections.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 about here

With its permissive electoral system the Dutch party system easily reacts to changing circumstances by the rise of new parties. But how dynamic are the established parties? Do they react to changes in the mood of the country and of their traditional electorate in
particular? Since these changes only became clear to them in the elections of 2002 and the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 we might expect them to adapt their positions on issues related to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension between 2001 and 2006. In figures 5.1 and 5.2 the mean positions of MPs in 2001 on the issues of the integration of ethnic minorities and European Unification are plotted against those in 2006. On the first issue most parties are on or close to the main diagonal, meaning that hardly any change has occurred. None of the major parties seems to have given in to what most of them would see as a mood of intolerance\(^\text{17}\).

The issue of European integration shows a different picture. On this issue the two most libertarian parties, Green-Left and D66 have seen no reason to adapt their position. Their electoral niche is mainly among the better educated part of the population who are both libertarian and pro-European integration. But PvdA and VVD are above the main diagonal, which means that they shifted their position towards a more euro-sceptical position. They were both challenged by a competitor at the same position as they are on the left-right dimension but much closer to where their voters are on the issue of European Integration, the SP and the list Wilders respectively\(^\text{18}\).

**In conclusion**

In this paper we argued that both mainstream political representation research and the process of political representation in Western democracies itself might have a blind corner. This is the case when the process of political representation is based on the left-right dimension but not all issue positions are constrained by this dimension, either at the mass or elite level or at both levels. If this is the case, the process of political representation will not be effective for the issues which are not. We argued that this situation is likely to occur with regard to issues related to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. We hypothesised that this dimension is
correlated with the left-right dimension at the elite level, but not at mass level. At the latter level – in contrast to the political elites - people tend to combine a left with an authoritarian attitude. As a consequence political parties on the left will have a problem representing their voters on the latter dimension. Since there are clear indications that the latter dimension is getting more important, it is most likely that this problem has gotten worse over the last decades and it might be one of the reasons why populist parties have become so successful. We tried to assess the validity of this argument on the basis of data from the Netherlands. Although the data tend to sustain the argument, the evidence is mixed and not always equally convincing. The main party at the left, the PvdA, did indeed fail to represent its voters on the issue of law and order but closed this gap already in the early 1990s. A similar problem occurred in the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century with regard to the issues of the integration of ethnic minorities and in particular European Unification. However, on this latter issue all main parties were representing their voters rather poorly.

We argued that the rise of populist parties in the Netherlands is due not just to the gap between political elites and the mass public on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension but rather to the growing salience of this dimension among the electorate.

Finally, we tried to assess how the party system and individual political parties managed to cope with this problem. We came to the conclusion that in a political system with a low electoral threshold like in the Netherlands a self-correction of the system can easily occur because new parties will jump in when the established parties neglect a part of the political space where a significant part of the electorate is located. Even if these new parties are only flash parties, they force the established parties to close the gap between their own and the electorate’s position by moving into the direction of the electorate. This is clearly what happened in the Netherlands. In contrast to what seems to be happening in other countries (Holmberg 1997; Holmberg 2009) the dynamics came from below. Dutch political parties
desperately tried to adapt to their voters’ policy preference on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. Whether or not this will help them is hard to tell since it will be difficult for them to conquer the issue ownership on this kind of issues.
Appendix 1. Dutch Representation Studies.

The Dutch data used in this paper originate from a series of representation studies performed in the years 1972, 1979, 1900, 2001 and 2006. Only the first study, in 1972, was designed as a mass-elite study. Principal investigators of this first representation study were Philip Stouthard and Jacques Thomassen (Tilburg), Hans Daalder (Leiden) and Warren Miller (Michigan). For a book-length report see (Thomassen 1976). The later studies were not designed as mass-elite studies but because of a close cooperation with the National Election Studies (see http://www.dpes.nl) it was still possible to ask a limited number of issue questions comparable across levels and over time. For the main publications of the successive MP studies see (Andeweg and Thomassen 2007; Van Schendelen, Thomassen, and Daudt 1981; Thomassen, Van Schendelen, and Zielonka-Goei 1992).
References


Holmberg, S. 2009. Dynamic Representation from Above. Paper read at Comparative Perspectives on Political Representation, at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver.


Figure 2.1 Left-right positions; voters and MPs 1972-2006

Figure 2.2 Positions on income differences; voters and MPs 1972-2006
Figure 2.3 Positions on law and order voters and MPs; 1972-1990

![Law and Order Graph]

Figure 3.1 Left-right positions and income differences; voters and MPs 1972

![Left-right Positions and Income Differences Graph]
Figure 3.2 Left-right positions and law and order; voters and MPs 1972
Figure 4.1 Left-right positions and income differences; voters and MPs 2001
Figure 4.2 Left-right positions and integration of minorities; voters and MPs 2001
Figure 4.3 Left-right positions and European unification; voters and MPs 2001
Figure 4.4 Left-right positions and income differences; voters and MPs 2006
Figure 4.5 Left-right positions and integration ethnic minorities; voters and MPs 2006
Figure 4.6 Left-right positions and European integration; voters and MPs 2006
Figure 5.1 Integration ethnic minorities; MP positions 2001 and 2006
Figure 5.2; European unification; MP positions 2001 and 2006
One might take the argument even one step further. The model as presented here connects voters’ policy preferences to the parties representing them in parliament, but not necessarily to government and government policy. Therefore, (cfr. Downs’ objections against multi-party systems and coalition governments) one might argue that even further assumptions are needed if we want the model to ensure that the will of the people is connected to public policy McDonald, M.D, and I Budge. 2005. *Elections, Parties, Democracy. Conferring the Median Mandate.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Powell, G.B. 2000. *Elections as Instruments of Democracy. Majoritarian and Proportional Visions.* New Haven: Yale University Press. Adding these assumptions leads to what one might call the hard version of the Responsible Party Model:

1. Voters do have a choice, between two identifiable future governments, with different policy views.
2. The internal cohesion of political parties is sufficient to enable them to implement their policy views.
3. Voters do vote according to their policy views. This in turn requires that:
   1. Voters do have policy preferences.
   2. Voters are aware of the differences between the programmes of different political parties.
4. The policy views of both political parties and voters are constrained by a single ideological dimension.
5. The party or coalition winning the elections takes over the government
6. And implements its policy program

The chapter ‘Working-class authoritarianism’ was first presented at a conference in 1955, 


In fact this is not really correct. In 1972 CDA did not exist yet. It originated in 1977 as a fusion of three religious parties, ARP, KVP and CHU. In order to make the data comparable over time we grouped the three parties together for 1972.


We only included the parties represented by at least 3 MPs in the survey. As far as parties were not, this is a function of their size. In all MP-surveys the response rate is above 90%.

After winning only 1 seat in the 1977 elections it disappeared again.

This confirms the well known horse shoe pattern found in studies on party positions on left-right and euroean Unification. See e.g. Schmitt and Thomassen 2009.

Admittedly Fortuyn himself was difficult to catch in such general terms. Coquetting being gay he was extremely libertarian on moral issues. This was exactly the reason why he turned against the Muslim world and the Islam which he considered as a backward and oppressive religion and culture.

According to a poll in mid-June 2009 he would 28 seats in parliament. This movement is often interpreted as an irrational movement from the far left to the far right. However, it is anything but a giant step for voters who mainly take into account issues like the integration of ethnic minorities, the influx of foreigners and European Integration.
This finding is somewhat surprising because in the public debate after 2002 all major political parties have tried to overbid each other by hardening their position on this issue.

‘Wilders’ is not in any of our figures because there is no elite-mass match in our data. In 2006 when the last of our MP-surveys was conducted it was only represented in parliament by Wilders himself.