Political parties and the democratic mandate : comparing collective mandate fulfilment in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands
Louwerse, T.P.

Citation
Louwerse, T. P. (2011, June 22). *Political parties and the democratic mandate : comparing collective mandate fulfilment in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17723

Chapter 2

Towards a spatial approach to the party mandate

Most representative democracies rely on political parties for policy representation. Voters have a say in decision-making by voting for a party the policies of which they support. This mandate theory, mandate model or 'doctrine of responsible party government' enables citizens to influence policy (Ranney, 1954; Thomassen, 1994). The voters' decision who to elect as their representative is also a choice between different policy programs. The basic idea of the mandate model is straightforward: voters make a choice between substantially different policy alternatives put forward by parties. Parties are expected to try to fulfil their pledges in parliament ('the parliamentary mandate') or in government ('mandate for government'). This system provides policy linkage between voters and parties.

2.1 Political representation: linking citizens and representatives

The party mandate model is a model of political representation. Representation is a multi-faceted concept: the short definition of representation as 'to make present again' does not greatly enhance our understanding of it. In her seminal book on the concept of representation, Hannah Pitkin (1967) offers four perspectives on representation: formal representation, symbolic representation, descriptive representation and representation as 'substantively acting for'. In politics, she argues, the latter is the most fruitful perspective. Someone is called a political representative not merely as a result of formal procedures (formal representation), or because he symbolizes something (symbolic representation) or because he shares characteristics with a group of people (descriptive representa-

tion). Political representation is defined by the action it involves. A good representative is not he who followed the electoral procedures conscientiously, but he who acts in a proper way. Naturally, the question what the 'proper way to act' is has been the focal point of many debates, as will be outlined below.

Rehfeld (2006) criticizes Pitkin's focus on representation as 'substantive acting for'. He argues that one must distinguish between being a representative in the formal sense and acting as a good representative substantially. Someone may be a bad representative in substantive terms, but a representative nonetheless. According to Rehfeld, Pitkin is too radical in her rejection of formal accounts of representation. While Rehfeld's conceptual clarification is helpful, it does not affect Pitkin's core argument. Her argument is that the substantive dimension of representation tells us more about the function(ing) of political representation than the formal dimension. The question here is not so much whether certain people *are* representatives, but how they *substantively act* as representatives.

What is the proper way for a representative to act substantively? The debate on this question has focused on the linkage between citizens and representatives. The question was whether constituents should *instruct* their representatives and tell them exactly *how* they want to be substantively represented, or whether they should *entrust* this to the judgement of their representatives (Pitkin, 1967). This question lies at the heart of the *mandate-independence* controversy.

The 'mandate' position is held by those who believe that the represented should be able to provide their representatives with a (legally) binding set of instructions (Manin, 1997). The idea is that the represented should have control over their representative. This can either be achieved by having the right to recall him or by binding him legally to a set of instructions. This mandate would not originate from the representatives, as is common today with the practice of writing election manifestos, but from the represented. The representative receives instructions from the represented. In parliament, the representative would be bound to these instructions: there is limited room for compromise - if the representative would want to go beyond his mandate, he would have to go back to his constituents. One example is the practice in the Dutch United Provinces in the 17th and 18th century, which Mill cites as a typical example of delegation (Mill, 1862). The delegates to the States-General were not only provided with detailed instructions, "they had to refer back to their constituents, exactly as an ambassador does to the government from which he is accredited" (Mill, 1862: 233).

Proponents of *trusteeship* can be found on the 'independence' side of the controversy. They argue that no form of mandate or instruction should be given, because every representative should represent the interests of the represented, the public or the nation as he judges best (Eulau et al., 1959). Furthermore, it is argued that parliament should be a deliberative assembly, a place where different arguments are outlined and debated, where people might change their minds if they are convinced by the rationality of other arguments, and where consensus is sought (Pettit, 2009). It is argued that parliament cannot be a delib-

erating assembly if everyone is bound to a mandate. The trustee view originates in the pre-democratic parliaments of Great Britain (Judge, 1999: 47) and rests on the idea that parliament should not only be "an expression of various opinions, interests and grievances within society, it should also try to reconcile them in policies which would serve the best interests of the nation" (Birch, 1964: 28). Edmund Burke was a strong defender of this position and his works are still often cited in defence of representatives' independence (most famously his Speech to the Electors of Bristol, 1949). J.S. Mill put forward some very different views on representation from Burke, but agreed with him that by binding representatives to pledges constituents "can reduce their representative to their mere mouthpiece" (Mill, 1862: 234). Leibholz went even further, by not only rejecting the imperative mandate, but arguing that it does not constitute representation at all:

> The idea of an imperative mandate thus contradicts the very nature of representation.

> (Leibholz, 1966: 73, my translation)[1]

This quote points at the basic problem of the mandate-independence controversy: both sides tend to exaggerate the extremism of the other side's position and stress that only their approach is really compatible with the concept of representation. In a sense, either side is both right and wrong. They are wrong in their *reductio ad absurdum* of their opponents' arguments, but correct to point out that their position highlights essential parts of the concept. However, both sides destroy the concept of representation by extrapolating the part that they got right to the whole of the concept (Pitkin, 1967: 151). Representation is making something present which is, however, literally not present. One cannot represent when ignoring the opinions of the represented completely (then one does not make present what is not present), nor can one represent by exactly reproducing their instructions (because then the represented is in fact present). Contemporary accounts of trusteeship thus tend to argue that trusteeship ('interpretive responsiveness') does require authorization (Pettit, 2009: 75), while many proponents of delegation no longer support an imperative mandate, at least not in the context of political representation (Ranney, 1954). In addition, it has been pointed out that the delegate/trustee debate really collapses three conceptual distinctions of the aims of a representatives, their sources of judgement and responsiveness to electoral sanction (Rehfeld, 2009).

2.2 The party mandate model

Political parties have become very important in most democracies. Contemporary government usually is *party* government (Castles and Wildenmann, 1986;

---

[1]"Der Gedanke eines imperativen Mandates widerstreitet hiernach ganz allgemein dem Wesen der Repräsentation."

Blondel and Cotta, 2000). As a result, the question of mandate or independence does no longer play just between voters and their representative, but also between representatives and their parties (Pitkin, 1967: 147). Members of parliaments are in many respects more a representative of their party than directly a representative of their constituents: after all, most voters cast their ballot for a party rather than for a person (Thomassen and Andeweg, 2007; Van Holsteyn and Andeweg, 2008). The importance of parties can be observed in parliamentarians' voting behaviour: most representatives follow the party line when voting. Although many representatives say that they preserve the right to vote differently concerning issues of conscience, the extent to which they actually do 'rebel' against their party line varies strongly between countries (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2007; Judge, 1999; Norton and Cowley, 1996). Many constitutions resolve that representatives are not to take instructions (from their constituents or parties) when casting their vote (the so-called 'free mandate'). In practice, this constitutional rule is combined with party discipline and rather detailed party manifestos. The free mandate still exists, but only in the sense that a representative will in most countries not loose his seat when he crosses the floor. A member of parliament who regularly opposes his or her party should be prepared to pay a price in terms of political influence and a smaller chance of re-election. Therefore, the free mandate is the exception rather than the rule: under 'normal' circumstances a party observes its manifesto and an individual representative follows his party. Even if parties do in reality not always behave in a unified manner, analysing representation in modern (European) democracies in terms of parties does more justice to their roles than to analyse representation in terms of individual politicians.

The party mandate model is an attempt to overcome the mandate-independence controversy by taking the role of the party into account. (Miller and Stokes, 1963: 45). Parties are generally organized around a policy programme or an ideology[2]. This provides an opportunity for voters to elect a party representative with whom they agree: if parties present policy programmes before the election, voters vote for the party who's programme they prefer and parties pursue their programmes in parliament or government, the party mandate provides linkage between the preferences of the electorate and the behaviour of parties (Ranney, 1954; Thomassen, 1994). If there are only two parties, one of them will win the election and form a government: in such a case there is linkage between voters preferences and government action[3] (Ranney, 1954).

By presenting a policy program before the election, parties commit them-

---

[2]This is however not strictly necessary for the mandate model to work. As long as parties present a policy programme before an election and they stick to this programme in parliament, voters have information on what these parties want and can use this information for their vote.

[3]In section 2.2.2 the objections to the interpretation of the party mandate model as a system of linkage between citizens and government policy will be discussed. These objections are especially important when more than two parties compete in elections, which is a rather common occurrence in contemporary European democracies.

selves to particular actions. Parties are not instructed to pursue particular policies, but supported if they do. Thus, the party mandate model fits neither the 'mandate' nor the 'independence' position: parties are not bound to instructions from their constituents, nor are they completely free to do whatever they want. Parties decide on their own manifesto. They have complete freedom of what (not) to promise. However, when a promise has been made, parties are expected to keep it.

The model places on the party and the individual representative the obligation to act according to their electoral mandate (Schedler, 1998). Mandates that are not observed are retrospectively 'meaningless' (Schedler, 1998: 194-5), at least in terms of policy congruence[4]. However, the party mandate model does not propose that the party mandates should be *legally* binding. The party mandate is a vehicle of representation, instead of a legal contract. It gives parties the freedom to implement their policy commitments in a way that they seem fit, as long as they honour their commitments. No legal action can be taken if parties fail to fulfil their mandate: the ultimate sanction is electoral loss at the next elections[5] (Ranney, 1954).

Proponents of trusteeship might object to the party mandate model because it limits parties' freedom to act as they please in parliament. Indeed, the party mandate model does offer voters a chance to choose between policies, an opportunity that is not available in the strict *trustee* role conception. It is concurrent with Mill's argument that while no man of conscience should surrender his own judgement, "the electors are entitled to know how he means to act; what opinions, on all things which concern his public duty, he intends should guide his conduct" (Mill, 1862: 245). When voting for someone because you trust him to be an able and competent member of parliament, it is hard to imagine, especially in times of general education, that this trust is not at least partly dependent on the parties' (or candidate's) policy stances (Budge and Hofferbert, 1990: 113). Voting should not be regarded solely as the transformation of private opinions into a collective opinion; neither should policy matters be excluded from the act

---

[4]Keeping promises is often also regarded as a moral obligation (Schedler, 1998: 192); parties are expected to stick to their electoral contracts just as private citizens are expected to keep their civil contracts. This moral obligation is, however, not necessarily a part of the doctrine of the party mandate: parties are primarily expected to keep their promises for the sake of responsible party government, not because it is generally the right thing to do.

[5]This points to a paradox in the party mandate model: it involves primarily ex ante controls (e.g., voting for a party with a particular manifesto: prospective voting), but without the threat of ex post controls these promises will probably not be enacted upon (e.g., punishing a party at the next election if it does not fulfil its mandate: retrospective voting). In reality, these two control mechanisms are combined in a single election. The voters must thus judge parties' records as well as the prospects parties offer (Manin, 1997; Mansbridge, 2003). This can lead to dilemma's for voters who for example do not like the record of the incumbent party nor the policy plans of the opposition party. Voters will thus have to weigh the importance of punishment and policy plans respectively. While this is not necessarily a problem for all voters in all elections, the 'dual' function of elections can blur the function of the electoral choice (Manin, 1997: 183). Van der Eijk and Franklin (2009: 208) show that in practice most voters vote prospectively.

of voting.

Contemporary political parties and politicians portray their activities in terms of the mandate model. Manifestos get longer and more detailed and parties in and outside parliament remain rather coherent and disciplined (Green-Pedersen, 2007; Thomassen and Andeweg, 2007; Norton and Cowley, 1996; Norton et al., 1996). If parties support mandate theory, they should observe their promises. There is no theory of representation which involves making pledges and not observing them.

2.2.1 Ex ante and from above

What the party mandate means in terms of the mandate-independence controversy can be clarified by looking at Andeweg and Thomassen's typology of political representation (2005). This typology consists of two dimensions: the control mechanism and the direction of representation (see table 2.1). The control mechanism looks at how the represented can make sure that the representatives do what they want. The idea stems from the application of the principal-agent framework to politics (Strøm, 2003; Lupia, 2003). In this framework, the relationship between representative and represented is described as an act of delegation from principal (represented) to agent (the representative). However, once the act of delegation has occurred the principal has no direct control over the agent's actions. For example, once a member of parliament is chosen a voter cannot force him to vote one way or another in parliament. The result might be that the agent acts in a way contrary to the demands or interests of the principal. To avoid this *agency loss*, the principal can use multiple strategies to control the agent. Some of these strategies have mainly to do with the selection of the agent. As this happens before the act of representation, these are called *ex ante* control mechanisms. Alternatively, a principal can try to control the agent by monitoring him and if necessary (threaten to) not re-elect him. As these strategies are employed after the representative act, these are called *ex post* control mechanisms.

The direction of representation indicates who takes the initiative in the representative relationship (Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996; Andeweg and Thomassen, 2005). In representation from below, voters have particular policy preferences; it is the task of the representatives to translate these views into party and government policy. One critique of this model is that many citizens do not have given (exogenous) policy preferences. They rather develop views in response to the proposals put forward by representatives (endogenous preferences). This is called representation from above: here parties enter the political arena with particular policy preferences and seek support from voters. Voters do not need to have exogenous policy preferences, but they can develop their preferences in response to what the parties put forward. Voters make a choice between competing representative claims (Saward, 2006: 314). By making these representative claims, parties constitute the representative relationship (Saward, 2006: 305).

Table 2.1: *Modes of Political Representation[a]*

		Control mechanism	
		Ex Ante	*Ex Post*
Direction	*From above*	Authorization	Accountability
	From below	Delegation	Responsiveness

[a] Source: Andeweg and Thomassen (2005)

Andeweg and Thomassen (2005) have combined control mechanism and direction into a typology of the modes of political representation (see table 2.1). This results in four modes of political representation: authorization, accountability, delegation and responsiveness. The party mandate model is essentially a form of authorization: parties take the initiative and present distinct policy programmes to voters (from above) who vote for the party of which they like the manifesto best (ex ante). Although the party mandate model could also work when voters have a large say in the composition of the party manifestos (from below), this is not necessary for the model to provide linkage. In addition, most parties do provide some opportunity for party members to decide on the manifesto, but this is generally limited. Thus, the party mandate model is an ex ante control mechanism which is directed from above: parties put forward programmes before elections, which essentially gives voters a choice between policies.

2.2.2 Objections to the party mandate model

The party mandate model works as an ex ante selection mechanism: voters support parties with which they agree, while parties make and keep electoral promises. Whether this model works in practice is an empirical question. However, some have argued that the model cannot work in practice, because it is logically incoherent. From a logical perspective, the main problem with the mandate theory is that even if voters and parties act as they should, the party mandate is not necessarily the "people's policy mandate" (Thomassen, 1994). Two arguments from social choice theory have been put forward in this respect: the Ostrogorski-paradox and Arrow's General Possibility Theorem. The former highlights the problems of party representation, while the latter provides major objections to that idea that individual preferences can always be translated into a social preference in a democratic way.

The Ostrogorski-paradox is essentially the problem of parties presenting 'fixed menus' to voters (Rae and Daudt, 1976). Parties offer policy programs which consists of combinations of specific policy proposals. However, if one party wins the election, this does not guarantee that a majority of voters also agrees with each policy proposal of that party. The paradox can best be explained by looking at the example in table 2.2. There are four groups of voters: groups

Table 2.2: *An example of the Ostrogorski paradox*

	Policy area 1	**Policy area 2**	**Policy area 3**	*Party Choice*
Voters A (20%)	X	Y	Y	Y
Voters B (20%)	Y	X	Y	Y
Voters C (20%)	Y	Y	X	Y
Voters D (40%)	X	X	X	X
Electorate policy preference	X	X	X	

A, B and C each consist of 20% of the vote while 40% of the voters belong to group D. For each of three policy areas the voters prefer party X's or party Y's position. For example, voters in group A support party X's position on policy 1, and party Y's position on the other policy areas. It is assumed that the voters are rational and that all voters find all policy themes equally important. Voters in group A will vote for party Y, because they agree with that parties' policies two out of three times. Following this reasoning, the electors in groups A, B and C should vote for party Y and the members of group D should vote for party X. Thus, party Y wins 60 % of the vote and party X 40%. However, when looking at voters' support for parties' positions on each of the policy areas, one can easily see that a majority supports party X's position on each of the policy areas. Party representation can thus distort popular support for separate proposals.

This distortion is not present when all proposals can be subsumed into a single policy dimensions on which all voters agree, or, in other words, if preferences are 'single-peaked' (Black, 1958; Thomassen, 1994; Downs, 1957). In such a case all voters agree that support for party X's position on policy 1 implies supporting its position on policies 2 and 3 as well. The existence of a single overarching policy dimension is subject to debate (McDonald et al., 2007). There is considerable evidence that voters are able to place themselves and political parties on such a dimension: the Left-Right dimension (Benoit and Laver, 2006). However, this does not mean that the Left-Right dimension incorporates all issues without error. Even a voter who places himself on the exact same spot on the Left-Right dimension as the party of his choice will most probably disagree with this party on a number of issues. Parties offer package deals; this limits the voters' choice. Therefore, policy voting in practice is not expressing unlimited support for the whole manifesto of a party, but a comparative assessment of party manifestos. A politician is simply wrong when he says: "This proposal was in our manifesto, we won the elections, so this is what the people want". He is even wrong when saying: "This proposal was in our manifesto, so this is

what our voters want". One can only say that voters for a particular party did not oppose the proposal in question so much that they voted for another party or abstained.

Arrow's General Possibility theorem states that there is no decision rule that makes for a proper translation of individual preferences into a collective preference ordering, at least no procedure that complies with four basic (democratic) criteria (Riker, 1982; Arrow, 1963):

1. Universal Domain: All possible combinations of preferences should be allowed in the decision-making procedure. Individuals must be free to rank the alternatives as they like. The decision rule (electoral procedure) must come up with a collective ordering of preferences for each combination of individual preferences (decision set). The last criterion is sometimes separately mentioned as 'Collective Rationality'.

2. Pareto Optimality: If all individuals prefer alternative x to alternative y, the outcome of the procedure must be that x is socially preferred to y.

3. Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives: The social choice between two alternatives should not be influenced by a third alternative.

4. Non-dictatorship: The social welfare function should not be dictatorial. There should not be one individual whose choice always determines the outcome of the decision-making procedure, regardless of the preferences of all others.

Arrow's General Possibility Theorem states that these conditions are inconsistent if more than two alternatives exist. One well-known example is Condorcert's *vote paradox* (Riker, 1982). In this example the simple pairwise majority rule is used: if a majority prefers an alternative x to any other alternative, this alternative x is socially preferred. This decision rule meets the criteria of nondictatorship (there is not one individual who determines the outcome under all circumstances), pareto optimality (if all individuals prefer x to y, a majority supports x and is thus socially preferred) and the independence of irrelevant alternatives (the social choice between x and y does only depend on people's preferences of x and y). However, the criterion of the Universal Domain is violated. For example, when voters' preferences are ordered as in figure 2.3 the pairwise majority decision rule does not produce a collective ordering of preferences. No alternative defeats both other alternatives in a pairwise vote, for example alternative x is socially preferred to alternative y, but not to alternative z. This is the classic example of a voting cycle, where each alternative is defeated by at least one other alternative.

Arrow has shown that no decision rule can meet all four criteria. From this it follows that no electoral system is the 'best' or 'fairest' translation from votes to seats. This means that if a party 'wins' the election, it wins the election under the current electoral system. Even if the Ostrogorski-paradox is not present (for

Table 2.3: *An example of a voting cycle*

	Voters		
	a	*b*	*c*
1st preference	*x*	*z*	*y*
2nd preference	*y*	*x*	*z*
3rd preference	*z*	*y*	*x*

example if all party voters wholeheartedly and without exception support the whole manifesto), the parties' policies are supported by the people according to the rules of the current electoral system. Except for a pure two-party majority system, the electoral system may influence the outcome: when employing a different, equally 'fair and democratic' system the result may be different (Riker, 1982: 21-113).

The Ostrogorski paradox and Arrow's theorem do not apply to all patterns of individual preferences. If policy alternatives (or parties) can be placed in a low-dimensional policy space, the dimension-by-dimension median position will in many cases be preferred by the majority of voters (Tullock, 1967; Adams and Adams, 2000). Tullock (1967) has argued that Arrow's theorem does not cause any trouble in most real-world situations. Voting cycles do not occur in many cases – especially with many voters and few choices – because political competition can often be structured in a low-dimensional space (Tullock, 1967). The important contribution of the Ostrogorski paradox and Arrow's theorem is *not* that party representation and direct democracy are necessarily flawed in every single case, but that there *could* be a problem. As a result, the mandate of the election winner cannot be simply equated with 'the will of the people'.

These criticisms are particularly consequential for the party mandate as a 'mandate for government', as described in the 'doctrine of responsible party government' (Ranney, 1954). In this version of the party mandate model, voters can choose between two parties, which results in one of these parties winning the elections and forming the government. However, the Ostrogorski paradox learns that the fact that one of these parties wins the elections does not necessarily mean that a majority of the population supports all of the winning party's pledges. They might even reject all of them. Thus, the mandate cannot be used as policy linkage between the majority of the people and government policy. It can however still function as a mechanism to enhance the representative linkage between parliamentary parties and voters. In this version, the party mandate gives voters a choice between parties and a mechanism to control their representatives: the 'parliamentary mandate'. This does not guarantee that parties' policies are actually supported by a majority of their voters, but the electorate can use them as an aid to making their electoral choice.

It should be noted that the alternatives of (party) policy representation – dir-

ect democracy or (party) representation without aiming at policy linkage – do not solve the problems put forward in the Ostrogorski paradox and Arrow's theorem. Direct democracy suffers from exactly the same problem as representative democracy when it comes to Arrow's General Possibility Theorem. Furthermore, voting as the choice between policy packages may result in more coherent policies than direct democracy does, for the latter does not offer any guarantee as to the coherence of the resulting policies. The public may vote in favour of lower taxes and higher public spending, for example, blaming politicians for high budget deficits. The other alternative, no policy representation, is equally unattractive and also implausible. Voting for people on the basis of trust may just as well involve voting on policy issues, because people tend to trust politicians with similar opinions better (Miller and Listhaug, 1998).

The outcome of the vote is not the 'will of the people', but it shows voters' support for parties with particular electoral programmes. After all, voting does require at least some effort (abstaining is easier). Therefore, the act of expressing support for a party implies at least some sense of support for what a party proposes. At the very least, elections do grant voters the possibility to reject some policies in advance. The election outcome is not 'the will of the people', but at least voters knew and accepted that their party of choice was going to pursue particular policies.

A different attempt to mitigate the problems put forward by social choice theory, the Median Mandate, acknowledges that only rarely a single party does win a majority of the vote (a government mandate). McDonald and Budge (2005) argue that voters do influence policy in another way, namely by determining the median position. The median position on a single-peaked policy scale is the only position preferred by a majority over all other positions: the median voter theorem (Black, 1958: 18). This means that the position of the median voter and, by implication, the party of the median voter is the only justifiable outcome from the perspective of democratic majority rule. If the median legislator is very close to the median voter on this policy scale, legislation will reflect the median voters' opinion, for the parliament will adopt legislation if it is supported by the median legislator. McDonald and Budge show that this is often the case: the median voter is close to the median legislator and to the government (for the government also needs the support of the median legislator). Of course this is only true if the median position is occupied by the same party for all policy dimensions or if all policy dimensions are essentially the same (the Left-Right dimension), otherwise there would be different median positions for different issues. McDonald and Budge are convinced this is rarely the case (McDonald and Budge, 2005: 43).

An essential feature of the Median Mandate theory is that it depicts mandates not as lists of pledges by political parties, but as positions on policy dimensions. This is different from the government mandate, which does not require voters to compare manifestos in a single framework: voters will vote for a manifesto they like best and whichever manifesto it is, will be fully implemented by the party

that wins the election. The Median Mandate argues that voters' opinions are taken into account, because the median legislator will reflect the median voter's position on a policy dimension. For the Median Mandate to be effective, party pledges/manifestos are to be positioned on a policy scale. The study of mandate fulfilment should thus also focus on parties positions on policy dimensions, before and after elections.

Whether mandates are based on the majority rule or on the median voter, any form of mandate requires parties to stick to their manifesto: "Parties are *supposed* to define the policy alternatives for electors and then to advance these in government or parliament. If they did not, decision-makers would act outside the frame of reference used by voters, and, therefore, popular preferences would not have a 'necessary connection' with policy output" (McDonald and Budge, 2005: 192, emphasis in original). Thus, McDonald and Budge *assume* that promises are in fact implemented. This is in fact one of the three *empirical requirements* that need to be fulfilled for the party mandate to work.

2.3 Does the party mandate model work?

The party mandate model works if three requirements are met (Thomassen, 1994). First, parties must offer clear and competing policy manifestos. If not, voters have no choice. Second, voters must make their electoral choices based on policy issues. If not, their vote is meaningless in terms of policy; their support for a particular party does not mean that they also support that party's policies. Third, parties must fulfil their policy mandate. Otherwise, what is decided in parliament is different from what voters intended to be decided.

2.3.1 Differences between parties

The first step in the mandate model consists of parties presenting distinct policy manifestos. If parties are all very similar, there is not much choice. This question is generally studied by looking at the content of party manifestos. By comparing party manifestos, one may find out whether they are all the same or actually rather different.
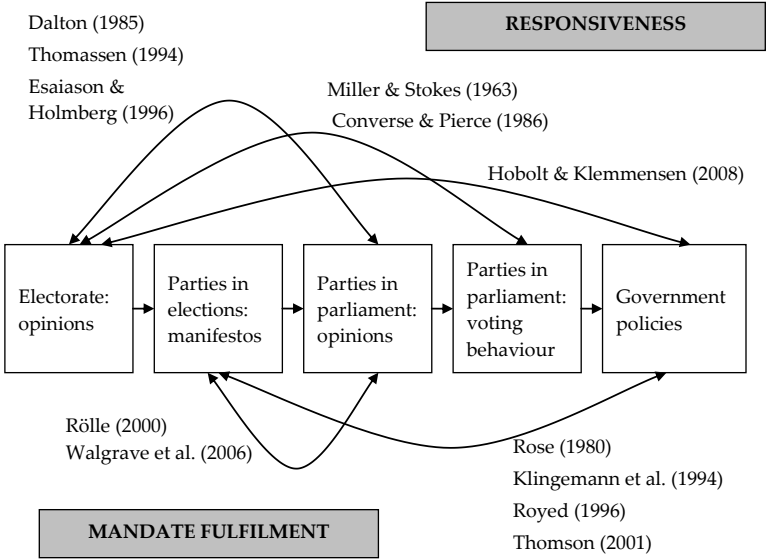
The complaint that 'parties are all the same' and that 'it does not matter who to vote for, because they all want the same thing' is often heard. It has been shown that polarization of party positions on the Left-Right dimension has declined (Green, 2007). Parties' positions on the economic role of the state have converged to a degree. Communist parties have largely disappeared or have been reformed in European countries and many social democratic parties embraced 'Third way' policies in the 1990s. Some argue that valence issues have become the most important topic of debate during election campaigns: parties try to prove their competence on a number of issues, e.g. 'we are better at reviving the economy' (Stokes, 1966). Parties do not generally disagree on the policy

direction, but they compete over who will do better at achieving these goals. However, the decline of Left-Right polarization does not necessarily mean that all differences between parties have disappeared. Green-Pedersen (2007) argues that the traditional left-right divide has been largely replaced by competition over a number of issues, for example environment, law and order and immigration. Parties do take opposing stands on a lot of (important) issues (Royed, 1996; Franzmann and Kaiser, 2006; Pellikaan et al., 2003). Kriesi et al. (2006) map party positions based on content analysis of newspaper articles. They measure both party positions and issue saliency. Their main finding is that in most countries two policy dimensions can be found (economy and culture) on which parties take differing positions (Kriesi et al., 2006: 950). Thus, party competition has not disappeared, but the traditional (economic) left-right divide has been supplemented with other issues. Old differences between parties have given way to new issues, such as the environment, Europe and immigration. There is some evidence that party policy competition has become less polarized in the 1980s and 1990s, but this does not mean that all parties have become exactly alike (Pennings and Keman, 2008). Moreover, new competitors can serve to broaden the electoral choice when it has become limited, e.g. the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) and *Socialistische Partij* (SP) in the Netherlands, *die Linke* in Germany and the *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF) in Denmark. The structure of party competition has changed in many countries. Parties do, however, still present distinct policy manifestos.

2.3.2   Policy voting

The second mandate step consists of voters voting for parties they agree with. One can take two approaches to establish whether they do. On the individual level, one may study whether voters do indeed vote for the party with which they agree most. These studies find that policy issue congruence between a voter and the political parties is among the most important determinants of voting behaviour. Although not everyone might vote for the party that is closest to them, people are more likely to vote for a party that is close to them, for example on the Left-Right scale, than for a party that is far away (Merrill III and Grofman, 1999; Rosema, 2004; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009). An alternative to this 'proximity voting' model is *directional voting*, which predicts that people will vote for the most extreme party that stands for the policy direction they want to take (Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989; Macdonald et al., 2007). For example, a moderate left-wing voter is predicted to vote for a radical left-wing party in order to maximize the chance that public policy will change in the desired left-wing direction. Although the party mandate model is often perceived in 'proximity voting' terms, it does actually not really matter whether voters use 'proximity' or 'directional' voting, at least for the study of party mandate fulfilment: as long as parties' electoral positions are good predictors of their parliamentary positions, their manifestos provide an adequate tool for voters to make their electoral choice, irrespective of how voters make their choice.

Figure 2.1: *Research into the party mandate*

Dalton (1985)

Thomassen (1994)

Esaiason &
Holmberg (1996)

RESPONSIVENESS

Miller & Stokes (1963)

Converse & Pierce (1986)

Hobolt & Klemmensen (2008)

Electorate:
opinions

Parties in
elections:
manifestos

Parties in
parliament:
opinions

Parties in
parliament:
voting
behaviour

Government
policies

Rölle (2000)

Walgrave et al. (2006)

MANDATE FULFILMENT

Rose (1980)

Klingemann et al. (1994)

Royed (1996)

Thomson (2001)

On the system level, one may study whether the chosen representatives do indeed have similar opinions as their constituents. The advantage of taking the latter approach is that it takes the effects of the electoral system into account. When voting is over, what is the congruence between voters' and parties' opinions? This type of research may be labelled 'policy responsiveness'. Here, the opinions of the electorate (or the constituents of a single party) are compared to representatives' opinions or voting behaviour (see figure 2.1).

Studies into policy responsiveness have been conducted in two fashions. The first studies were conducted in the United States, where constituents' opinions were compared to the opinions of their representative[6]. Miller and Stokes used their famous diamond-shaped model to explain the connections between the two (Miller and Stokes, 1963). This diamond consists of four variables, namely the constituency's attitude, the representative's attitude, the representative's perception of the constituency's attitude and his roll-call behaviour (Miller and Stokes, 1963: 50). Miller and Stokes studied the relationship between those elements, for example between the constituency's attitude and the representative's roll-

---

[6]Because of the electoral system and the weak parties in the United States, these studies tend to focus on individual candidates.

call behaviour. They found a rather strong connection between the constituents' opinions and the representative's roll-call behaviour on some issues, but a weak connection on other issues.

In countries without single-member districts or countries where parties dominate, studies tend to define constituencies in term of party voters. Their mean position on policy dimensions is compared to the mean position of party representatives on the same policy dimensions (Thomassen, 1976; Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996; Norris, 1995; Barnes, 1977; Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999; Powell, 2000, 2006, 2009; Golder and Stramski, 2010). Other studies have compared voters' opinion with MPs' self-reported opinions (Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996), voting behaviour (Converse and Pierce, 1986) or government policy positions (Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008). Most studies show a rather high correspondence of party voters' and party MPs' self-placements on the left-right policy scale. On separate issues, for example EU issues (Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999), there is often relative policy congruence, but not absolute policy congruence. This means that the ordering of party voters is equal to the ordering of parties, but the absolute positions of parties and their voters are not the same.

Studies into responsiveness generally draw a positive picture of policy responsiveness. Party voters and party parliamentarians share similar opinions, though congruence is admittedly not perfect. Some studies do find variation across time and countries[7], but in general there is correspondence between the positions of parties and party voters.

2.3.3 Mandate fulfilment

The third step in the mandate model is that the parties fulfil their mandate. Studies in this field compare the party preferences in election manifesto to either policy output or the party preferences in parliament (see figure 2.1). Most studies use the former type of comparison, although some studies do compare party election pledges to their parliamentary position.

One of the often-heard criticisms to the party mandate model is that parties do not fulfil their promises (Naurin, 2007). Parties are said not to be interested in policy, merely in the spoils of office. Rather than fulfilling their electoral pledges, parties will be more interested in anticipatory representation: parties will act in a way they think will win them the next election (Mansbridge, 2003). Election pledges may be a useful tool during elections, however once these are over, parties busy themselves only with winning the next elections (Ferejohn, 1986: 7).

---

[7]The hypotheses and findings of studies into policy responsiveness are insightful to the study of the party mandate. Therefore, the next chapter will discuss some of the findings of these studies in greater detail.

The pledge approach

One approach to the study of mandate fulfilment is the *pledge approach* that checks whether parties' election pledges are translated into government policy. These studies draw a rather positive picture of mandate fulfilment (Thomson, 2001; Royed, 1996; Kalogeropoulou, 1989; Rose, 1980; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007). They report pledge fulfilment percentages ranging from 50% to 84% for government parties in Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007: 317). For opposition parties these rates were generally somewhat lower, ranging from 24% to 45%, which supports the government mandate theory. However, the difference between government and opposition parties in terms of pledge fulfilment was not very large in Ireland (50% vs. 45%) and only moderately large in the United States (60% vs. 49%) and the Netherlands (57% vs. 33%). Sometimes government and opposition pledges are identical, so fulfilling the governments' pledge automatically means fulfilling the opposition party's pledge. However, 40% of the implemented pledges of Irish opposition parties were *not* in direct agreement with the government parties' pledges. This does to a certain extent limit the voters' choice for government policy, because policies were enacted that a majority of voters did not support. If the elections are to have an effect, the policy output should depend on which parties win the elections. If all parties will pursue the same policies in government, what differences does the act of voting make?

The saliency approach

A different approach to the study of electoral mandate fulfilment is the saliency approach. Saliency is a measure of how important an issue is to a party. The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) has measured issue saliency in manifestos in many countries over a long period of time. Their dataset provides estimates of the relative emphasis of parties on a range of issues by categorizing each sentence in a party manifesto in one of their 54 policy categories. A number of studies use these data to explain government spending patterns (Klingemann et al., 1994; Petry, 1995, 1988, 1991; Budge and Hofferbert, 1990; King et al., 1993). These studies find a moderately strong connection between the relative emphases on policy issues in party manifestos and government spending in the subsequent parliamentary period. There are, however, considerable differences between countries. In the Netherlands and Belgium only the relative emphasis on policy issues in manifestos did explain variance in spending patterns (the agenda model), irrespective whether a party was in government after the election. In other countries being the government party did also matter (the mandate model): spending was better explained by the manifesto issue saliency of parties that got in office after the elections. In some countries long-term ideology was of additional importance (the ideology model). On average the best model could explain 50% of spending variations in every country (Klingemann et al.,

Table 2.4: *Approaches to the party mandate*

	Pledge approach	**Saliency approach**	**Spatial approach**
Object of comparison	Pledge	Emphasis (saliency) of issues	Party issue saliency and position
Fulfilment test	Enactment	Correspondence with spending	Similarity in two arena's
Representation-acquiring arena	Elections	Elections	Elections
Representation-enacting arena	Government	Government	Parliament and/or Government
Level of comparison	Party level	Party level	Party level & Party-system level

1994). However, King and Laver point out that this variation could also have been explained by simply looking at the spending patterns in previous years. If one corrects for autocorrelation, party manifestos have only small explanatory power (King et al., 1993: 746).

Rölle (2000) does not compare manifestos to spending patterns, but manifestos to parliamentary debates. He finds that the relative attention for issues in party manifestos is reflected in party's attention for these issues in parliament (in terms of how long they speak on the issue). Walgrave et al. (2006) test the manifestos influence on the government's legislative agenda in Belgium. They find that party manifestos do to some extent predict the government legislative agenda (although this finding is not significant).

Limitations of the existing approaches

The pledge and saliency approaches offer different views as to what 'fulfilling the party mandate' entails. The pledge approach focuses on the particular pledges that parties make in their manifestos. Both the object of comparison as well as the level of comparison is the pledge (see table 2.4). Manifesto pledges are judged to be enacted or not. The saliency approach takes the party's issue saliency as the object of comparison. It is tested whether parties' priorities are put into practice by looking at how much governments spend in different issue areas. Both methods compare the electoral promises of parties with the policy actions

of governments. Thus, the arena where they acquire their representative mandate (the 'representation-acquiring arena') is the election. In the election, voters authorize parties to act on their behalf. The political arena where the mandate is to be fulfilled (the 'representation-enacting arena') is the government. This is the political arena where parties are expected to act upon their mandate (in terms of fulfilling pledges or spending on certain issues).

The two existing approaches to mandate fulfilment offer interesting empirical results. However, the way these approaches conceptualize and operationalize the party mandate is not self-evident, as is illustrated by the differences between the two approaches. In particular, three of the aspects of the pledge and saliency approaches lead to a limited view of party mandate fulfilment: the *object of comparison*, the choice for government as the *representation-enacting arena* and the *level of comparison* (see table 2.4).

The first criticism is related to the *objects of comparison* of the pledge and saliency approach. The pledge approach takes manifesto pledges as the object of comparison. Basically, party manifestos are reduced to lists of pledges. Although pledges are, to a degree, informative of a party's policy program, the manifesto also provides insight in the more general position of a party. By only looking at the fulfilment of pledges, one suffers from three types of adverse effects: *agenda* effects, *specificity* effects and *strategic* effects. Agenda effects occur when the political agenda changes and some of the pledges of parties are no longer relevant, while new policy issues become salient. Often, these new policy issues relate to the manifestos in broad terms, but not at the level of the specific pledges. For example, when former prime minister Blair decided to invade Iraq in 2003, his actions did not break a single election pledge, but was arguably at odds with the general foreign policy message that Labour's 2001 manifesto had contained (Labour Party, 2001). In the opposite case a party proposes to cut taxes on real estate, but in government does not do so; instead it introduces a subsidy for home-owners, which is equally beneficial to home-owners. Does this party break its mandate? It does not do what it promises, but the aim or direction of the policy (helping home-owners) is identical. Generally, the pledge approach seems ill-positioned to deal with these changing external circumstances and changing political agendas.

Specificity effects are the result of a difference in the level of specificity of manifestos and policy output. In many instances, governmental policy proposals are more specific than the manifestos or concern issues that manifestos do not explicitly deal with. Rose (1980) estimates that about 90% of government policy actually originates from within ministerial departments, not manifestos. This points to the one-sidedness of the pledge approach's comparison: it tests whether pledges are enacted, but not whether what is enacted has been pledged. The large number of policy proposals that does not refer back to a pledge will often relate to the party manifestos in a broader sense, for example to the general policy position parties take in their manifesto, as I will argue below. A full-fledged test of the party mandate needs a two-way comparison: do parties act

upon their mandate *and* do their actions reflect their mandate?

Strategic effects are the result of parties treating pledge-making as a strategic business. Parties can often choose (not) to include pledges on certain policies in their manifesto. For example, if a party promises to increase the number of windmills, subsidize solar panels, ban nuclear energy and promote biomass energy in its manifesto, and the party does just that in government (it enacts its pledges), but it also builds a dozen environment-unfriendly coal plants, voters may not exactly be happy with the party's record on the environment. What is not said in the manifesto ('we will build coal plants') is thus just as important as what is. These strategic effects are likely to be more pronounced if pledges are heavily scrutinized, for example in countries where single party government is the norm. Those parties can easily be blamed for not fulfilling their manifesto pledges; there is no compromise or coalition to hide behind. As a result, pledge making becomes a highly strategic game. On the one hand parties want to promise a lot to win the election, on the other hand they do not want to promise too much, fearing they would not be able to deliver. Under those circumstances, the most attractive strategy is to arouse expectations without making too many 'hard' pledges. Any analysis of parties' electoral position will have to take these strategic effects into consideration; my argument is that pledges are probably the most strategic elements of the manifestos.

The saliency approach is far less sensitive to the agenda, specificity and strategic effects. It involves comparing parties' policy priorities (issue saliency) with government spending on these issues (Hofferbert and Klingemann, 1990; King et al., 1993; Klingemann et al., 1994). A party's mandate is deemed to be fulfilled if the spending priorities of governments mirror the issue priority of that party. However, in practice these spending categories are very broadly defined, for example as 'education' or 'social policy'. This makes the comparison rather imprecise (Royed, 1996). One could imagine, for example, that parties want to cut back on some social policies, while expanding other social policies. Additionally, many issues cannot simply be expressed in money, such as medical-ethical issues, traditionalism, immigration and integration (Royed, 1996). Although the saliency approach does mitigate most of the problems of the pledge approach, the resulting approach is focused too much on what parties talk about instead of what they actually say.

The second criticism is directed at the *representation-enacting arena* that both approaches identify: government. Both the pledge approach and the saliency approach compare party election manifestos with government policy: they test to what extent parties' election manifestos influence government policy. That is an interesting and important question, especially from the *government* mandate point of view (Powell, 2000: 8). However, parliamentary systems basically have two representational steps. First, electors choose their representatives in parliament. Second, these representatives explicitly or implicitly support a government (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2005: 514). By focusing on government decisions or policy outcomes, parliament is almost wholly ignored. In a sense,

it is the 'black box' of mandate fulfilment studies[8]. In addition, the government mandate is very vulnerable to the objections outlined above. The Ostrogorski paradox shows that the mandate cannot be interpreted as majority support for the enactment of each and every election pledge of a winning party (Rae and Daudt, 1976; Pettit, 2009). The mandate can, however, serve as a control mechanism in the representative relationship between voters and parties, and should therefore be studied as such.

Looking at government policy output ignores the mandate of opposition parties. "Although the Government have a mandate, so do Opposition Members" , John Major said in his first parliamentary debate as the opposition leader (House of Commons Debates, 1997). The mandate of the opposition parties cannot be properly studied by looking at (government) policy output. Opposition parties naturally have far less control over government policies than governing parties. There is little point in blaming the opposition for being unable to translate their pledges into government policies. The test for the opposition parties' mandate fulfilment is what they do in parliament. One can study whether both government and opposition parties present similar views in parliament as in their manifesto [9]. The pre-electoral party positions would thus have to be compared with parliamentary proceedings, rather than policy output. Research so far has focused on the government mandate; the mandate to represent in parliament (or parliamentary mandate) should be given more attention in empirical research.

A third limitation of the pledge and saliency approach is that these study the mandate (only) at *the party level*. They test whether a Labour election pledge has been translated into government policy or whether spending on social affairs can be explained by how much parties talk about issues. In this approach, the policy output is related to individual parties' pledges or issue saliency, which gives a measure of mandate fulfilment for each party[10]. However, the party mandate model is actually an institutional mechanism. It provides linkage because there is something to choose between. Representation is not simply the sum of individual actions by individual parties. It is an institutionalized arrangement, which should be studied as such:

> Political representation is primarily a public, institutionalized arrangement involving many people and groups, and operating in the complex ways of large-scale social arrangements. What makes it representation is not any single action by any one participant, but the

---

[8]Rölle (2000) and Walgrave et al. (2006) are notable exceptions.

[9]Powell (2000) distinguishes between 'government mandates' views and 'representative delegates' views of prospective representation. Whereas policy output is a good indicator only for the fulfilment of government mandates, parties' parliamentary behaviour is an adequate measure for the quality of 'government mandates' and 'representative delegates'.

[10]In the terminology of Golder and Stramski (2010), the pledge and saliency approach view the mandate in terms of 'many-to-one' relationships, comparing multiple parties' pledges or issue saliency to one policy output.

over-all structure and functioning of the system, the patterns emerging from the multiple activities of many people.

(Pitkin, 1967: 221-222)

Thus instead of focusing on whether Labour has implemented its pledge to reform the National Health Service (NHS), or whether the *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA) has fulfilled its promise to hold an Iraq enquiry, the main interest of researchers into the party mandate should be whether the party mandate model works as a system, whether the parliamentary party competition is a good reflection of the electoral party competition. If this is not the case, a voter's electoral choice has been made on the basis of poor information: if a voter wants to base his electoral choice on policy issues, he needs to be certain that the information that is available about what parties will do in parliament is correct.

The difference between the party level and the party system-level of comparison has already been acknowledged in policy responsiveness studies. Weissberg (1978) distinguished 'dyadic' and 'collective' representation, where dyadic representation looks at the relationship between a representative and its constituents and collective representation studies the relationship between the whole representative assembly and all citizens. More recently, a similar point has been made by Golder and Stramski (2010), who distinguish between 'one-to-one' representational relationships, 'many-to-one' relationships and 'many-to-many' representational relationships. The 'collective' or 'many-to-many' representation studies investigate whether parliament *as a whole* represents the opinions of the people *as a whole*. These types of analysis are especially valuable when assessing the quality of substantive representation (Golder and Stramski, 2010). Studies of the party mandate model will benefit from a similar change in perspective: from the study of individual parties' pledges or issue saliency to studying whether the party mandate model works *on the system level*.

2.4 The spatial approach to the party mandate

The application of spatial theory to the question of the party mandate mitigates the three problems identified above. Before I further substantiate this claim, I will shortly outline the characteristics of spatial theory. Spatial analysis of party positions is the "workhorse theory of modern legislative studies" (Cox, 2001: 1). It is used in many applications involving the measurement of policy preferences of parties (and indeed other political actors). In its most basic form, it represents party issue positions on a single issue dimension. The Left-Right divide is probably the most well-known example of this (Benoit and Laver, 2006). Left-Right is often presented as a super-issue which subsumes all other relevant political divides. In other spatial analyses a multi-dimensional space is used, where a socio-economic dimension is combined with, for example a religious divide (Pellikaan

et al., 2003; Kriesi et al., 2006). Spatial models are very flexible in their application: one can build models with one dimension or many, with orthogonal or oblique dimensions.

A central assumption of the spatial analysis of party preferences is that those preferences can be expressed as positions on a continuum or in a space (Ray, 2007). This implies that there is some coherence in the specific party proposals on an issue. For example, parties that present one left-wing proposal are also inclined to support other left-wing proposals[11]. If this is not the case, there is no coherent issue dimension. In many studies these types of issue dimensions are used to position actors on a policy issue (e.g. Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999; Powell, 2006; Blais and Bodet, 2006; McDonald and Budge, 2005). Many people are able to position themselves on these types of dimensions, even when the substance of the dimension is not entirely clear as is the case with the Left-Right dimension (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976).

The application of spatial analysis to the question of the party mandate mitigates the three problems that the pledge and saliency approaches face (see table 2.4). By looking at parties' positions on issue dimensions one circumvents the problem of comparing specific pledges. Instead of expecting that parties fulfil a list of specific policy pledges, one expects that parties at least take similar positions on issue dimensions and, therefore, similar positions in the electoral and parliamentary spaces of political competition. The problem of government-focus can be solved by looking at parties' parliamentary behaviour instead of government policy-making. This does not only open up the 'black box' of political representation, but also allows to study the mandate fulfilment of both government *and* opposition parties[12]. Thirdly, spatial analysis offers a possibility to study party issue preferences at the system level. By positioning parties on issue dimensions, one can directly compare parties' preferences. As a result, one does not necessarily have to compare what a single party said before and after elections, but it is possible to compare the ordering of parties' preferences on issue dimensions before and after elections. Thus, the level of analysis is changed from the party level to the party-system level.

In this study two indicators are used to estimate party policy preferences: party issue saliency and party issue positions. The object of comparison is thus not the pledge or the issue saliency, but party issue saliency as well as party issue position. Party issue saliency captures how important a particular issue (dimension) is to a party. For example, one might reasonably expect that environmental issues are important for green parties. A party issue position captures what parties say on the issue. The scale or dimension on which this issue position is expressed can be defined a priori, for example Benoit and Laver's (Benoit and

---

[11]This probabilistic version of the assumption generally fits better with real-world party behaviour than a deterministic version where supporting the most far-reaching proposal would automatically imply support for less far-reaching proposals.

[12]It is, however, also possible to take government policy-making as the 'representation-enacting arena'.

Laver, 2006) Taxes vs. Spending dimension, which ranges from 'Promotes raising taxes to increasing public services' to 'Promotes cutting services to cut taxes'. Another approach is to estimate positions on dimensions (or in spaces) that are not defined a priori. In such cases the dimension or space is induced from the variation between parties, for example in terms of their voting behaviour or their choice of words. Examples include procedures to model voting behaviour in parliament (Poole, 2005) and procedures to estimate policy positions of actors via text analysis (Slapin and Proksch, 2008). Both types of dimension can be used for the spatial analysis of the party mandate. Traditionally, spatial analyses have focused on party issue positions, not so much on issue saliency. It is, however, relatively easy to study party issue saliency within the same approach (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2006). Issue saliency and issue positions are complementary: first, one looks at how important issues are to parties, secondly one studies parties' positions on each of those issues.

Party issue saliency and positions on multiple issue dimensions can be used to construct a 'space of competition' (Sani and Sartori, 1984). This space captures all relevant issues over which parties compete. It is different from the ideological space, which defines all ideological differences between parties. The 'space of competition' only includes those issues over which parties actually compete in elections or in parliament (Pellikaan et al., 2003). Parties' positions in the ideological space and those in the space of competition will often be similar, but not necessarily. Some ideological divisions between parties might play only a small role in the electoral competition. The 'space of competition' captures what the elections and parliamentary competition are really about: what are the salient issues and how different do parties think about those issues? In this study I will take account of parties' positions on issue dimensions as well as parties' positions within this space of competition. The analysis can thus be conducted on two different levels: the party level and the level of the space of party competition.

The congruence of the electoral and parliamentary competition is studied by looking at two distinct elements. The first element is whether the properties of the 'electoral space' and the 'parliamentary space' are similar. Is the space one-dimensional or multidimensional? How do different issues contribute to the space, e.g. do parties' positions on economic issues correspond with those on democratic reform or not? These questions relate to the characteristics of the space itself. The *space* of the electoral and the parliamentary competition is congruent when the dimensionality is similar and issues contribute to the space in a similar way. The second element refers to parties' positions in those spaces, which is called the *structure* of competition. That is, are parties positioned similarly during the electoral and parliamentary competition? The congruence of the structure of the party competition depends on how similar the configuration parties' positions in the electoral and parliamentary space are. To put it simply, if Labour is to the left of the Conservatives during the election campaign, one would expect them to also be to the left of the Tories in parliament.

The limitations of the proposed approach are twofold. First, taking similar positions on issue dimensions before and after elections or to have similar positions in the spaces of electoral and parliamentary competition is a rather modest requirement. One may argue that even if parties fulfil this requirement, there is still ample room for misrepresentation. Second, it may be objected that taking similar issue positions in parliament as in the manifesto is generally not a problem; instead, translating promises into policy is problematic: that is where parties fail. Both criticisms are directed at the severity of the requirements. Taking similar positions on issue dimensions in parliament is relatively easy compared to translating specific pledges in policies. This being true, we should therefore expect that all parties will meet the former requirement. Furthermore, if parties do not meet these requirements, it is their deliberate choice. Failing to translate pledges into policy may have several causes beyond the scope of the party, for example reduced economic growth (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007: 319) and opposition from civil society and business. This may be reasons that parties cannot achieve their policy goals, but it is not automatically a reason to change these goals. What parties say in parliament is of course also subject to external influence, but in the end parties choose their own words. Even if circumstances change, parties can take similar positions on issue dimensions relative to other parties. Only in case of radically changing circumstances would large positional differences of parties be expected.

2.5 Conclusion

The mere length of contemporary election manifestos seems to indicate that today's political parties support the mandate model of political representation. Parties provide detailed policy plans for the upcoming parliament seemingly in order to provide voters with a choice.

The mandate model of political parties is concerned with the question how a representative should act. Central to the idea of mandates is that promises have to be kept. The mandate model presents a top-down and ex-ante linkage between voters and political parties: parties present their policy programs (ex-ante) and voters can only choose between these manifestos (top-down). It should be noted that the party mandate model does not guarantee the outcome of the election to be 'the will of the people'. Voters are limited to choose between pre-defined menus, a system which does not guarantee that they support every proposal in a party's manifesto. Furthermore, the electoral system in place may influence the outcome of the election. Thus, a party cannot claim that it represents 'the will of the people'. Its constituents have expressed support for the party and its policies, knowing what its opinions are, but the vote for a party does not imply that people support each and every party policy.

Does the party mandate model work in practice? Existing studies show that party manifestos are generally different enough to provide voters with a sub-

stantive choice, that voters are at least to some extent guided by policy issues when casting their vote and that (government) parties fare rather well in implementing their electoral pledges. The studies into the fulfilment of electoral pledges are, however, limited in three respects. First, current research into the fulfilment of electoral pledges focuses on the government mandate: it compares all pledges to policy decisions by the government. This makes the results mainly interesting for government parties, while opposition parties are really ignored, because these have little say in government policy. Alternatively, one may study whether opposition and government parties do ventilate similar opinions in parliament as in their manifestos. This 'parliamentary mandate' has received little attention to date. Second, existing studies look either at specific pledges or at issue saliency. Little attention has been paid to parties' issue positions, as is common in election studies and responsiveness research. Thirdly, the existing approaches have looked at the influence of parties' pledges of issue saliency on government policy output: the party mandate is studied at the *party* level. Representation is, however, primarily an 'institutionalized arrangement' (Pitkin, 1967). Our main concern should not be whether individual parties fulfil pledges, but whether the party mandate model *as a system* works.

The spatial approach to the party mandate mitigates the problems that existing methods have. Instead of looking at lists of pledges, parties are positioned in a political space of competition. If the responsible party model is to work, the properties of the electoral and parliamentary spaces should be similar and so should the structure of the electoral and parliamentary competition. If not, the link between voters' opinions and those of the representatives would be impaired. By extending existing research into the fulfilment of electoral mandates in this fashion, the practice of party representation in parliament, which is especially important in non-majoritarian democracies, but also valuable for assessing the role of opposition parties in majoritarian democracies, can be more fully understood.