



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The Role of Policy Preferences in the Dutch National Elections of 1998

Wijnen, P. van

Citation

Wijnen, P. van. (1999). The Role of Policy Preferences in the Dutch National Elections of 1998. *Acta Politica*, 34: 1999(2-3), 200-235. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450655>

Version: Publisher's Version
License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)
Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450655>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The Role of Policy Preferences in the Dutch National Elections of 1998

Pieter van Wijnen

Abstract

On three structural issues, parties and voters appear to have been considerably less polarized in 1998 than in the preceding period 1986-1994. Furthermore, no new issues seem to have arisen in 1998 that might have evoked a level of political controversy similar to that of the preceding period. Nevertheless, citizens' issue and ideological orientations are still important for an understanding of the election result. Together, such orientations explain 20 per cent of the vote choice and are in this sense more important than demographic variables of a pillarized voting model (16 per cent explained variance). Despite the alleged end of ideological polarization, left-right ideology is still the most important policy variable affecting vote choice. Position issues and valence issues had an equally large effect on individual voting behaviour. However, due to considerable public consensus on the saliency of valence issues, position issues are more important in explaining voting behaviour than valence issues.

1 Introduction

The crucial importance of policy-based voting behaviour for linking citizens' policy preferences with government policies in representative democracies is widely recognized. Yet, until the 1980s little attention was paid to the impact of citizens' policy opinions on electoral outcomes in the Netherlands. Two explanations can be given for this phenomenon. First, for a large part of the twentieth century the Dutch political system could be described as the archetype of a segmented society, the so-called system of 'verzuiling' or pillarization (Lijphart 1968; see Aarts & Semetko, this issue). At elections, a vast majority of citizens supported the party that represented the pillar (subculture) with which they identified themselves (Thomassen 1983). Belonging to a social class and a religion were conducive to identification with one of the pillars, which in turn was highly influential on the final vote decision. As such, voting behaviour could be characterized as merely an affirmation of group membership. This does not preclude the possibility that vote preferences were correlated with policy opinions. However, encapsulation and socialization of

the mass electorate by pillar-allied organizations presumably made both party preferences and political attitudes highly dependent on the citizens' social backgrounds (Houska 1985; Michels 1993; Thomassen 1991). Until the mid-1960s, party choice for a majority of the Dutch electorate could be correctly predicted from the voters' religious denomination, frequency of church attendance, and social class. Policy preferences did not seem to have an independent effect on voting decisions. Second, there has been, and still is an institutional barrier for policy-based voting behaviour in the Netherlands. Partly due to an electoral system of nationwide and absolute proportional representation with a threshold of only 0.67% of the valid vote, none of the political parties has ever succeeded in winning a majority of the votes in national elections. Political parties in search of executive power must engage in post-election bargaining with competitors on the policy programme of the new coalition government. Usually after the elections, it is not immediately clear which combination of parties will constitute the new cabinet, let alone what kind of policies will be implemented in the forthcoming incumbent period (Andeweg & Irwin 1993). The inability of citizens to give a clear policy mandate to political elites can be considered a major disincentive to voting behaviour motivated by policy considerations.

Despite the persistence of this institutional barrier, there has been a marked rise in scholarly attention for the influence of citizens' policy orientations on Dutch electoral outcomes during the past twenty years (e.g. van Cuilenburg et al. 1980; van der Eijk & Niemöller 1983; Irwin et al. 1987; Middendorp & Kolkhuis Tanke 1990; Middendorp 1993; Schmeets 1995; van der Eijk 1995; Aarts 1995; Kaashoek 1995; Aarts, Macdonald & Rabinowitz 1999). Certain societal and political changes are likely to have been an impetus for the growth in research on policy voting.

First, similar to other Western advanced industrial democracies, the importance of social class and religious cleavages for explaining Dutch voting behaviour has declined dramatically in the past thirty years (Andeweg 1995; Eisinga, Felling & Lammers 1992; van der Eijk & Niemöller 1992; Nieuwbeerta 1995), whereas no new enduring alignments seem to have appeared. The absence of new alignments is reflected in an increased electoral volatility at the individual level since the mid-1960s. As a result, one can expect that less stable factors, located further forward in the well-known Michigan 'funnel of causality', like candidate evaluations, issue opinions and evaluations of government policies, have become more important in the explanation of vote choice.

Second, the major parties have abandoned electoral strategies aimed at mobilizing a narrow, demographically-defined grass-roots support. This development has partly been the result of an observed decline in cleavage voting (Koole 1992). Instead, political parties have, to an increasing extent, been engaged in an open competition with other parties for the votes of the same

groups of citizens. This competition mainly takes place on relatively volatile factors like policy platforms, policy performance and trust in party leaders.

1.1 Research questions

The central topic of this article is the importance of policy-based voting behaviour in the elections for the Second Chamber in 1998. Two questions are addressed: are conditions for policy voting fulfilled, and which type of policy voting can be observed to which degree among the electorate? The conditions for policy voting will be examined by assessing the extent to which parties offered the voters a substantial range of different policy stances. The importance of individual citizens' policy preferences in the determination of voting behaviour is assessed by looking at the issues and ideological orientations that led citizens to vote for certain parties, and the importance of policy orientations in determining the election outcome.

The remainder of this article is structured in the following way. First, the theoretical model that serves as a basis for analysing policy voting is outlined. After a brief description of some salient issues in Dutch politics, the positions of parties on issues and ideological orientations is discussed. Finally, the electoral impact of citizens' policy preferences and their importance in explaining voting behaviour is modelled and estimated.

2 A theoretical model to explain voting behaviour

Our theoretical framework for examining policy voting is based on the 'Funnel of Causality' metaphor of the Michigan election studies (Campbell et al. 1960; Miller & Shanks 1996). In the Michigan model, factors distantly related to politics are translated into political attitudes before influencing the individual vote decision. Demographic characteristics of voters supposedly lead to relatively stable, long-term and general political predispositions. In turn, volatile, short-term and specific political attitudes are to a large extent moulded by these political predispositions.

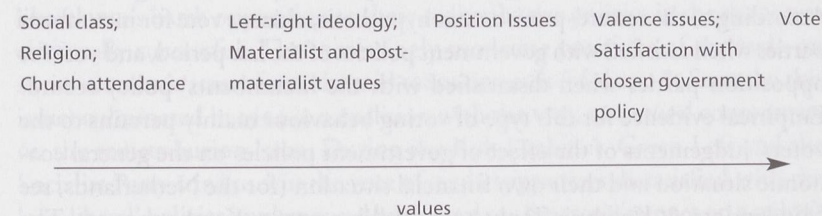
For an empirical analysis of Dutch voting behaviour, the Michigan model has to be further specified and operationalized. The main non-political characteristics of Dutch citizens relevant for their party preferences relate to socio-economic stratification, denomination and church attendance. These characteristics refer to the cleavages out of which the Dutch party system arose at the end of the nineteenth century. Although they have become less important in the period since the mid-1960s, nevertheless, it has been shown recently that social class and religion are substantially related to citizens'

political attitudes and voting behaviour (e.g., Andeweg 1995; Nieuwebeerta 1995).

The concept of party identification, a pivotal political predisposition in the Michigan model, has proven not to be very suitable for explaining Dutch voting behaviour (Thomassen 1976; van der Eijk & Niemoller 1983), and it will therefore be disregarded here. Previous research has shown that identification with a position on an ideological left-right dimension is the most important long-term political predisposition among Dutch citizens (van der Eijk & Niemoller 1983). A second set of predispositions is composed of materialist and postmaterialist value orientations (van Deth & Geurts 1989).

Attitudes of voters are less stable with respect to opinions on concrete issues. Such opinions are determined by voters' socio-economic characteristics, their political predispositions, and the current political agenda. Regarding concrete issues, a distinction can be made between position and valence issues. Voters' evaluations of parties on position issues are supposed to be determined by the parties' relatively stable policy platforms. Party evaluations on valence issues are expected to be mainly composed of more volatile evaluations of actual conditions on issue areas and competence of incumbent parties in handling these conditions. Research (see, for example, Maddens 1994) has shown that voters' perceptions of the importance of valence issues are much more volatile than their opinions on position issues.

Therefore, party evaluations on position issues are considered to be causally antecedent to party evaluations on valence issues.¹ The following causal sequence serves as our point of departure:



The influence of *left-right ideology* and *position issues* on voting behaviour is assumed to follow the logic of Downsian spatial proximity theories. Citizens develop party preferences on the basis of the level of utility they associate with parties' policy stances. In the spatial model, utility provided by a party is inversely related to the distance between the voters and the party's positions on policy dimensions. Utility maximizing voters will therefore vote for the party whose policy platform most closely resembles their own policy preferences.

The theories of issue ownership and retrospective voting address the way in which *valence issues* affect voting preferences. The theory of issue ownership

(Budge & Farlie 1983a) states that during election campaigns parties do not compete for the vote on all salient issues. Instead they selectively emphasize their 'own' issues. These issues are either an essential part of the party's ideology, or policy matters on which party elites think they represent the majority opinion of the electorate or for which they have a good reputation in problem solving. Guided by a vote seeking motive, party leaders are inclined to speak about generally approved policy goals (valence issues), such as a clean environment and low unemployment, without addressing potentially controversial ways in which these goals can be realized. They will try to win votes on these valence issues by claiming that their party puts more emphasis on, and is more competent with regard to the issues than other parties. Generally speaking, parties will have built a long-term reputation among the public for valence issues. Research on the issue ownership theory in Great Britain and the Netherlands has shown that social democratic and other progressive parties tend to emphasize the valence issues of social justice, full employment and good environmental conditions. Christian democratic, market-oriented liberal, and conservative parties are inclined to stress the valence issues of economic growth and low levels of inflation, state deficit, taxation and crime (Budge & Farlie 1983a; Kleinnijenhuis & de Ridder 1997). In sum, the issue ownership theory highlights the crucial importance of valence issues in voting behaviour. Citizens are expected to develop strong preferences for the parties that strongly emphasize the national problems they consider important, and that are considered competent in solving these problems.

In theories of retrospective voting (e.g. Key 1961; Fiorina 1981) the calculus used by citizens for the voting decision is quite simple and straightforward. According to the reward-punishment hypothesis, citizens vote for incumbent parties when satisfied with government policies of the last period, and vote for opposition parties when dissatisfied with the incumbents' policy record. Empirical evidence for this type of voting behaviour mainly pertains to the voters' judgements of the effect of government policies on the general economic situation and their own financial situation (for the Netherlands, see Middendorp & Kolkhuis Tanke 1990; Pellikaan 1987; Kaashoek 1995). The dominant position in the literature is that retrospective voting is about voters' judgements of the competence of the incumbent government in handling valence issues. However, it is equally plausible that citizens base their level of satisfaction with policies of the incumbent government on the similarity between the incumbents' and their own stances on position issues. Irrespective of whether retrospective judgements of government policy refer to position or valence issues, these judgements will be located closer to the final vote choice in the funnel of causality than the voters' opinions on position issues.

3 The saliency of issues

The available data from the Dutch parliamentary election study of 1998 allow an empirical investigation of the influence of seven position issues on voting behaviour. Respondents were asked to place six parties and themselves on seven-point scales for these issues. They are: income differences, euthanasia, nuclear energy, asylum seekers, ethnic minorities, social benefits and European integration. More details about the question wordings can be found in Appendix 1. On five valence issues, unemployment, environmental pollution, crime, refugees, and the healthcare system, respondents were requested to indicate how important they think these issues are for certain parties and how important they think these issues are for themselves. Because it can be questioned whether the refugee problem is a valence or a position issue, it has not been included in the subsequent analyses. Thus, four valence issues remain.

Before analysing the influence of issue opinions on citizens' voting behaviour, it is useful to describe how these issues became politicized and how, in the course of time, the issues have been handled by political parties and responded to by the mass public. This will facilitate meaningful interpretations of the empirical results. How the government dealt with these and other issues in the 1994-98 period, is the topic of Hoogerwerf's contribution to this issue.

The issues of the desired *level of income differences in society* and *the level of social benefits* can be regarded as typical manifestations of a socio-economic ideological conflict dimension. Income differences became a highly salient issue during the left-oriented Den Uyl cabinet (1973-1977). The slogan of this cabinet was 'the spread of knowledge, power and income'. The conservative liberal vvd's harsh opposition to these redistributive policies in the 1970s was electorally successful. The increasingly moderate positions of the pvda on socio-economic issues from the mid 1980s onwards (cf. Aarts & Semetko this issue) culminated in 1994 in a coalition with the vvd, its natural counterpart on the redistribution issue. During the Kok-I cabinet, Green Left and the Socialist Party tried to win the vote of pvda supporters dissatisfied with the 'neo-liberal' policies implemented by the pvda as the vvd's 'puppet on a string'.

The issue of *euthanasia*, the question whether or not a doctor may be permitted to terminate the life of a patient at his or her own request, is a manifestation of a conflict between confessional and secular value orientations. The policy matter of euthanasia entered the political agenda in the early 1980s. In 1993, a bill was accepted by parliament that implied a more permissive regulation of euthanasia. In this new regulation euthanasia remained illegal; however, doctors would not be prosecuted for euthanasia if they worked in accordance with certain strict procedural guidelines. Since then, the issue has been more or less shifted from the parliamentarian to the judicial realm, where the debate continued on the legal interpretation of the new regulations. In the

coalition agreement of 1994 the pvdA-vvd-D66 cabinet announced that it would not introduce new bills on euthanasia.

The issue of using *nuclear energy* can be seen as an indication of conflict between materialist and postmaterialist value orientations. By the end of the 1970s the deployment of nuclear energy had become a highly controversial issue in Dutch politics. A broad social movement was mobilized whose aim was to close the two operational nuclear power plants and to prevent the building of new plants. In the aftermath of the 1986 Chernobyl accident, a preliminary decision to build more nuclear plants was postponed indefinitely by the government. Since then, controversy in Dutch politics about the usage of nuclear energy has declined considerably. In the period 1986-1994 the issue was more or less taken off the political agenda, by advocates as well as antagonists of nuclear energy. A few months after the purple coalition had taken office in 1994, in the first serious test for the intra-coalition relations, parliament provisionally decided to put the two existing nuclear plants out of operation early in the next century.

Cultural integration of ethnic minorities rapidly became a highly salient issue after the entrance in 1982 of the extreme right, xenophobic Centre Party with one seat in parliament. The opinion became widespread that the growing number of people from foreign countries with their own religion, language and cultural habits, combined with a prolonged period of economic recession and rise in unemployment, would result in a structural growth in electoral support for extreme right parties. From the beginning of the 1990s onwards, other parties also started to discuss the minorities issue in the media. Especially the then leader of the vvd, Bolkestein, stressed the need for better integration of ethnic minorities in Dutch culture and society. The public controversy these statements aroused dominated the media agenda in the ensuing years. At the 1994 election, the most frequent response to an open-ended question about the most important national problems referred to problems concerning ethnic minorities (Aarts 1995). In the 1994 election, the issue of cultural integration of ethnic minorities was an important theme of the vvd electoral campaign. This led many commentators in the media to explain the vvd's considerable electoral gain with their emphasis on the minorities issue.

An issue related to cultural integration of ethnic minorities is the question of *admittance of asylum seekers*. During the 1990s there was a rapid increase in the number of people from conflict areas abroad, who wanted to start a new life in the Netherlands, with or without a legal permission of residence. The extreme right CD/CP was the first party to emphasize this issue in the early 1980s. In the 1990s, especially in the 1994 elections, the vvd also stressed the importance of a more restrictive asylum policy and proposed the establishment of quota and increased efforts to send back so-called illegal foreign residents. The vvd stances on the ethnic minorities and asylum seekers issue were

frequently criticized by the progressive party fractions in parliament. pvdA, D66 and GroenLinks regularly accused the vvd of trying to make electoral profits by activating latent racist and xenophobic attitudes within the public.

It was not until the 1993 Maastricht Treaty that the *pace of European integration* became a moderately salient issue among the public. For decades, the Dutch public had shown high levels of support for European unification, and no fear whatsoever of losing its national identity. The main political parties have always shown virtual unanimity on the desirability of a fast and extensive European integration. However, since the mid-1990s the vvd has attempted to develop a party profile on Europe distinct from the other large parties. Several times, party leader Bolkestein emphasized the importance of being less 'idealistic' about unification as a goal in itself. The Dutch government should put more effort in serving the national interest in EU policy-making, for example on the question of financial contributions to the EU (the Netherlands is a net payer to the EU). Furthermore, the vvd made it clear that the main purpose of the EU should be the establishment of a single common market and much less the establishment of coordinated social policies. The vvd leader also expressed reluctance to a broadening of the EU in the near future to include the ex-communist East European states and Turkey.

Similar to other European countries, during the recession years of the 1970s and 1980s there was a precipitous rise in *unemployment* in the Netherlands. In the period 1977-1986 unemployment was the most frequently mentioned national problem in the country (Aarts 1995: 178). Under favourable economic conditions in the 1990s, the level of unemployment decreased substantially. Nevertheless, in 1994 unemployment was still regarded as the second most important problem facing the country. For the Kok-1 coalition (1994-98), a further reduction of unemployment was one of the most important goals to be realized.

Alarming messages in the media about developments in environmental conditions made *environmental pollution* the most important issue in the 1989 national elections. In 1994, however, this issue had lost much of its prominence (cf. Aarts & Semetko in this issue). Nevertheless, in the period 1994-1998 problems related to environmental conditions continued to be high on the agenda of both parliament and government.

An issue that has become a frequent topic of public debate in the 1990s is *crime*. Throughout the 1990s, public attention for the crime issue rose rapidly, fuelled by intensive media reporting on procedural and operational blunders of civil and judicial authorities in their fight against organized crime. In addition, there has been a growing concern among politicians and the public about the lack of safety 'on the streets'. In the 1994 Dutch parliamentary election study, respondents rated crime as a more important problem than, for example, pollution, welfare fraud, the budget deficit, and pensioners' incomes.

Finally, in the period 1994-98 the *healthcare system* was a frequently discussed topic in cabinet and parliament. Privatization of the health insurance system was one of the most important decisions taken by the Kok-I cabinet (cf. Hoogerwerf in this issue). This privatization was expected to have far-reaching financial consequences for lower income groups. Another regular matter for debate was how to curtail the steadily rising costs of healthcare. In the month preceding the 1998 national elections, a serious conflict arose between government, employers and employees working in the healthcare sector concerning salaries and working conditions.

4 The policy positions of parties

4.1 Public issue salience in the 1998 election

Having described the role of some familiar issues in Dutch politics before 1998, we can now formulate expectations about the salience of these issues among the public and the degree of issue polarization between parties at the time of the 1998 elections.

It is expected that, because the two main antagonists on the *socio-economic conflict dimension* PVDA and VVD jointly implemented policies on social welfare in a hitherto unusual coalition, distinctions between the main parties on socio-economic issues have become somewhat blurred in the public perception. Given the strong association of socio-economic issues with a general left-right dimension, the differences between parties on the left-right dimension have probably decreased as well. But, since matters related to the distribution of income remained a frequent topic of debate among political elites and interest groups, it is also expected that these matters were still perceived as important by the public.

Since *euthanasia* had not (or hardly) been on the political agenda in the period 1994-1998, it is expected that this issue was not perceived to be highly salient by the public at the time of the 1998 elections. Therefore, citizens' opinions on this issue are expected to be at most indicators of latent confessional or secular value orientations. If this is the case, substantial differences in positions on euthanasia are expected to persist between the secular and confessional parties.

As the debate on *nuclear plants* had come to a consensus with which apparently most of the public and political elites could live, it is expected that the issue of nuclear energy had a low salience among the public in 1998 and did not invoke a high level of party polarization. Given a low level of public salience, opinions expressed by citizens on nuclear energy are likely to indicate at most latent materialist or postmaterialist value orientations.

The public debate on *European unification* and the more Euro-sceptic attitude displayed by VVD politicians in recent years gives rise to the expectation of an increased saliency of this issue and a clear distinction between the positions of VVD and the other major parties.

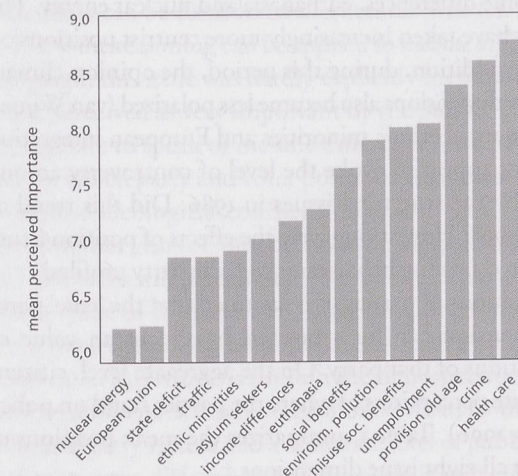
Given the distinct party profiles displayed by parties and the persistent high levels of media attention in the 1990s, it can be expected that the issues of *cultural integration of ethnic minorities* and *admittance of asylum seekers* were highly salient during the 1998 election and have led to clear differences between the party positions, as perceived by the public.

The sharp decrease in the *unemployment rate* after the short recession of the early 1990s is most likely to have led to a decrease in the saliency of this issue in comparison with other policy areas. Given the persistent prominence of the environmental issue on the political agenda during the preceding decade, one can expect that *environmental pollution* was still perceived as an important problem by the public. Frequent media attention and debates in parliament and cabinet on the policy matters of *crime* and *healthcare* are also expected to have led to a high level of salience among the public.

Let us now look at the available evidence. Which policy matters were considered important by the public, and could therefore be described as salient issues in the 1998 election?

The Dutch parliamentary election study of 1998 contains questions about the perceived importance of twelve issues on a ten-point rating scale ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 10 (very important). The exact question wordings can be found in Appendix I. Figure 1 shows the average rating scores of the issues.

Figure 1 Salience of issues among the public
Mean perceived importance on 10-point rating scales.



Of the twelve problems presented, those perceived as most salient by the electorate are the healthcare system, crime, and the level of benefits for the elderly. Also perceived as highly salient are the abuse of social provisions, the level of unemployment, environmental pollution and the level of social welfare benefits. Problems considered as moderately important are euthanasia, the level of income differences in society, admittance of asylum seekers, the budget deficit, ethnic minorities and traffic problems. Problems regarded as relatively unimportant are the European Union and nuclear energy.

These results indicate that valence issues were considered more important by the public than position issues. An adequate healthcare system, reduction of crime, less abuse of social provisions, a lower unemployment rate and less environmental pollution are generally accepted goals in society. Typical position issues like the differences in income, euthanasia and nuclear energy are only weakly to moderately salient. As mentioned before, in the recent past these position issues have been highly controversial in Dutch politics. But, in line with our discussion above, given a moderate level of saliency, citizens' opinions on income differences, euthanasia and nuclear energy can alternatively be viewed as respective indicators of socio-economic, secular-confessional and materialist-post materialist ideological orientations.

4.2 Party profiles on position issues and left-right at the 1998 elections

Earlier research (van der Brug 1996; van Wijnen 1998; see also Aarts & Semetko in this issue) has shown that in the period 1986-1994 the main parties (PvdA, CDA, VVD and D66) became steadily less polarized on the left-right dimension and on the structural issues of income differences, euthanasia and nuclear energy. The PvdA and CDA in particular have taken increasingly more centrist positions on these policy dimensions. In addition, during this period, the opinion climate among citizens on the policy dimensions also became less polarized (van Wijnen 1998). The relatively new issues of ethnic minorities and European integration in the 1994 election did not appear to evoke the level of controversy among parties and voters caused by the structural issues in 1986. Did this trend of depolarization continue in 1998? How strong were the effects of position issues and the left-right dimension on voting behaviour given the party profiles?

In order to assess the positions of parties, it is assumed that the 'true' party position on a policy dimension can be measured by the mean value of respondent-perceived positions of that party. On the aggregate level, citizens appear to have quite accurate perceptions of where the parties stand on policy matters (e.g., van der Brug 1996). Table 1 summarizes the mean positions of parties and respondents on all eight issue dimensions.²

Table 1 Mean party and respondent positions

	GL	PvdA	D66	CDA	VVD	GPV	Respondent
Nuclear energy	6.20	5.08	4.90	4.44	3.68	4.58	5.37
European unification	3.88	2.94	3.33	3.33	3.52	4.59	3.87
Euthanasia	5.10	4.96	5.24	2.62	5.03	1.46	5.16
Income differences	5.71	5.49	4.52	4.26	2.74	4.23	4.96
Asylum seekers	2.95	3.22	3.79	3.80	5.41	4.01	4.36
Ethnic minorities	2.98	3.39	3.86	4.08	5.33	4.81	4.69
Social benefits	3.24	3.48	4.02	4.20	5.06	4.27	3.79
Left-right	2.84	4.25	5.07	6.23	7.18	7.35	5.36

At a glance, the issues of *nuclear energy* and *European unification* appear not to have been very important for the vote. On these policy matters, differences between the main parties are relatively small. Besides, nuclear energy and European unification are not regarded by the electorate as highly important issues. Survey results indicate that the efforts on the part of the VVD to develop a distinct profile on the European unification issue were hardly successful.

A substantial level of polarization can be seen on the issues of *euthanasia* and *income differences*. By 1998, however, *euthanasia* was not a 'real' issue in the sense of being strongly emphasized by parties and perceived as highly salient by the public. The still visible differences between CDA and GPV on the one hand, and the secular parties on the other hand may be explained by two factors. Either the public still knows the 'principal' separate party positions on the basis of which the compromise between parties was built in the early 1990s, or the distinct party positions indicate party differences on a more general, secular-confessional ideological conflict dimension. In the second explanation, euthanasia can be considered a structural issue (cf. Lane & Ersson 1987).

The same reasoning can be applied to *income differences*. During the election campaign, this issue was hardly explicitly mentioned by these six parties, nor was it perceived as very important by the public. Therefore, it might be more appropriate to speak of income differences as a structural issue or as an issue area on which party and voter positions are indicators of positions on a socio-economic ideological conflict dimension. The results show that despite a record of four years of joint decision-making on socio-economic policies, PvdA and VVD were still perceived by the public as having quite different positions on the issue of incomes. An interesting phenomenon in comparison with previous elections is the shift of the CDA from a right towards a moderately left position on this issue. As a result, the right spectrum, favouring an increase in income differences, has become monopolized by the VVD. Given a reasonably polarized party system and a moderate level of public salience, the expectation is that income differences and euthanasia will still significantly affect vote

preferences, whether as 'real' issues or as ideological orientations.

Asylum seekers and *ethnic minorities* were perceived by the public as moderately salient. On the admittance of asylum seekers, substantial differences can be found between the positions of the VVD and those of the other parties. Regarding cultural integration of ethnic minorities, the main differences are between VVD and GPV on the one hand, and the rest of the parties on the other. Given these findings, one can expect that the salient issues of asylum seekers and ethnic minorities had a substantial impact on the decision whether or not to vote for the VVD.

Given a relatively high level of salience among the public and a variety of party positions, public controversy on the level of *social benefits* is expected to have had a considerable effect on party preferences.

Finally, despite an alleged end of ideology in the Netherlands, voters apparently still perceive substantial differences between the main parties on a general *ideological left-right dimension*. However, when taking party size into account, a large subset of the party system (PvdA, CDA, D66) is now located at a leftist or rightist position close to the centre. GroenLinks (and the SP) were the only parties with a distinct left profile, while VVD and GPV (and SGP and RPF as well) had a markedly right ideological position. The clustering of VVD and the orthodox religious parties on the left-right dimension suggests that the concepts of left and right refer in Dutch politics to both a socio-economic conflict dimension and a secular-confessional dimension (cf. Mid-dendorp 1991).

Given the substantial range of positions taken by parties on the left-right dimension, one can expect that during the 1998 elections voters were still able to use the concepts of left and right in deciding for which party they would vote.

It has been suggested before that on the structural issues of income differences, euthanasia and nuclear energy and on the left-right dimension, the differences between the party positions in 1998 were substantially smaller than at the time of the 1994 election. In addition, public opinion about these four policy dimensions had converged further during the 1994-98 period.³ Furthermore, the polarization of parties and the public in 1998 on the issues of European integration, asylum seekers, ethnic minorities and social welfare benefits were markedly lower than the level of controversy on left-right ideology and the three structural issues in earlier elections. In conclusion, the available data for the 1998 elections show a continuation of a depolarization of parties and the public on position issues and the general left-right dimension, which has been observed since 1986.

4.3 Party emphasis on valence issues

As we explained above, parties are expected to have distinct profiles on valence issues on the basis of differences in emphasis. Did the parties in the 1998 elections indeed differ substantially in their emphasis on valence issues, as predicted by the issue ownership theory? The data allow an examination of issue ownership on unemployment, environmental pollution, crime and healthcare.⁴ Respondents were asked to indicate on a ten-point rating scale how important they think these issues are for PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, Green Left and GPV. Given the predominance of certain policy areas in their ideologies (as indicated by party manifestos, election campaigns, legislative and executive behaviour during the past period), certain patterns of issue ownership can be expected. It is expected that the public will perceive the PvdA as the party that will put most emphasis on a reduction of unemployment and Green Left as the party that will put most emphasis on a cleaner environment. Given their longstanding reputation as being thorough on crime, CDA and VVD are expected to be perceived as 'owners' of the crime issue. The quality of the healthcare system is not an issue that has been emphasized by particular parties in the past decades. Therefore, there are no initial expectations on issue ownership for this policy area. The cell entries in Table 2 depict the mean scores of respondent-perceived issue emphasis of the parties.

Table 2 Issue emphasis of parties on valence issues

Issue emphasis	PvdA	VVD	CDA	D66	GL	GPV
Unemployment	8.3	7.2	7.3	7.4	7.6	6.9
Environmental pollution	7.4	6.6	7.0	7.4	8.8	6.7
Crime	7.6	7.9	7.8	7.4	7.2	7.6
Healthcare	7.8	7.1	7.6	7.9	7.6	7.2

By and large, parties are not perceived as spectacularly different on these four valence issues. The range of the rating scores across the parties is not larger than about two units on a ten-point scale. Nevertheless, there are some notable differences that support the expectations. In the perception of the public, the PvdA gives more attention to the problem of unemployment than other parties. For Green Left, environmental pollution is a more important issue than for other parties, in particular compared with CDA, VVD and GPV. The public perceives only small differences between the parties' emphasis on crime and healthcare. The differences between the rating scores are not larger than one unit. The parties most strongly associated with solving the problem of crime

are CDA and VVD. The parties that put the least emphasis on this issue are D66 and Green Left. The problems involved with the healthcare system are perceived as most urgent for the PVDA and D66. The VVD and GPV are perceived to give the lowest priority to the healthcare problem.

In conclusion, issue ownership was present in the 1998 election to a certain extent, especially on unemployment and environmental pollution. Assuming that citizens base their party preference on similarities between parties and themselves and on the saliency of valence issues, the following voting patterns can be expected to occur. The more importance a citizen attaches to the problem of unemployment, the more likely it is that he/she will vote for the PVDA. Similar expectations can be had for environmental pollution and voting for Green Left, crime and voting CDA or VVD, and healthcare and voting PVDA or D66.

5 The importance of policy orientations for voting behaviour

5.1 Operationalization of a model of voting behaviour

In the 1998 elections, no new position issues seemed to have arisen that were as controversial as the three structural issues (income differences, euthanasia and nuclear energy) in 1986. In addition, party differences in emphasis on four salient valence issues appeared to be – at most – moderate. Does this relatively low distinctiveness of party profiles imply that citizens' policy orientations were not important when deciding which party they should their vote for?

To make a proper assessment of the influence of policy orientations on voting behaviour, the correlations between these two variables should be controlled for the influence of other vote-determining factors. The assumption that the theoretical model presented above, which was based upon the 'funnel of causality', gives a correct and parsimonious explanation of Dutch voting behaviour will be tested. The available data allow for a test of the following empirical model of voting behaviour:

Party preference = F (satisfaction with government policy,
saliency of valence issues,
distance on position issues,
materialist/postmaterialist value orientations,
distance on left-right ideology,
social class,
religious denomination,
church attendance)

Satisfaction with government policy and saliency of valence issues refer to the voter's judgment of parties with regard to their emphasis and competence on generally accepted policy goals. Voters are expected to reward incumbent parties when satisfied with their policies, and to prefer parties that stress valence issues they themselves consider important. Distances on position issues and left-right ideology refer to the voter's evaluations of parties according to Downsian spatial proximity models. Materialist and postmaterialist value orientations are expected to have an impact on issue opinions and party preference. Based on Inglehart's theory, postmaterialist value orientations should lead to left-wing orientations on environmental, ethical and lifestyle issues, and preferences for postmaterialist parties.⁵ Social class, church membership and church attendance have been included in the model as control variables.

This empirical model is operationalized as follows. The response options to the survey question into general satisfaction with the governments policies of the past four years ranged from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Satisfaction with government policy is included in the model as an interval level variable. The respondent's saliency perceptions of unemployment, environmental pollution, criminality and healthcare are part of the model as interval variables on a 1-5 scale.⁶ For position issues and the left-right dimension, distance between respondent and party is operationalized as the absolute difference between the 'objective' party position (average voter-perceived position of the party) and the voter's self-placement. Postmaterialist value orientations are measured by a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not the respondent found two postmaterialist policy goals more important than two materialist policy goals. Finally, the operationalization of the cleavage variables is summarized in Appendix 1.

Some previous analyses of Dutch voting behaviour were based on the disputable assumption that the parties are choice alternatives ordered along a single dimension (the left-right dimension, see van der Eijk & Niemöller 1987, 1992; or the materialist/post-materialist value dimension, see van Deth & Geurts 1989). In that case, party preference could be operationalized as the position of the preferred party on this dimension. Another frequently used approach in analyses of voting behaviour is the use of non-ipsative measures (in varying degrees) of party preference, e.g., sympathy ratings for parties and probabilities of future vote (e.g. Tillie 1995; van der Eijk et al. 1996). In this article, party preference will be operationalized as the party actually voted for, without making the stringent assumption that the choice alternatives are ordered on a single dimension. Thus the dependent variable is nominal-level. The reason for choosing the actual vote choice instead of non-ipsative preference measures is guided by our interest in the influence of policy preferences on the actual election outcome.⁷

Given the nominal measurement level of the dependent variable, the most appropriate method for a multivariate analysis of voting behaviour is the multinomial logit model. A special type of multinomial logit models is the conditional logit (CL) model. This discrete choice model has been developed by McFadden (1974) as a device to model individual choice processes. In the CL model, the probability that an individual chooses one of a set of discrete alternatives is dependent on characteristics of both the individual and the alternatives. This specification makes the CL model useful for an explicit empirical test of spatial proximity models. (See Appendix 2 for further details on the CL-model.) In conditional logit models, the effect of a party-voter distance on a certain issue on the vote can be estimated with one parameter. This specification is based on the assumption that all parties are evaluated to an equal extent by citizens on a certain policy dimension. However, in real politics, parties can be observed to differ in emphasis on certain position issues and ideological conflict dimensions. A plausible expectation is that the impact of a policy distance on party preference will be greater when a party puts more emphasis on a particular policy dimension. This idea can be operationalized by the specification of a policy-distance parameter for each separate party.

5.2 The effect of policy preferences on voting behaviour

Table 3 presents the estimated parameters of two CL models specified according to the model in the previous section. In both models, the CDA is the reference category, which implies that coefficients for the effects of individual characteristics on utility for the CDA have been set to zero (see Appendix 2). Coefficients for the effects of individual characteristic variables on voting behaviour (policy satisfaction, salience of valence issues, social class and religion) are not shown, given the fact that parameter values in CL models for the effects of individual characteristics are dependent on the reference category chosen and are therefore not directly interpretable. The effects of individual characteristics on voting behaviour will be addressed later on. The coefficients in Table 3 for position issues and left-right ideology indicate the expected change in the log odds ratio of voting for a certain party relative to voting for any of the other parties when the distance between a voter and this party on a policy dimension increases by one unit on a seven-point scale.

In the first model, presented in the second column of the table, policy-distance effects are constrained to be equal across the parties. The cell entries in columns 3 to 8 depict the coefficients of the second model with party-specific policy-distance effects. The results for the first model give an overall impression of the influence of position issues and left-right ideology on voting behaviour. The coefficients for the first model, in the second column, show

the importance of left-right ideology in comparison with separate position issues. The influence of left-right ideological distance on vote choice (-0.68) is at least twice as much as the effect of distance on single position issues. The most influential position issues are the structural issues of euthanasia, income differences and social benefits. Given the relatively low saliency of the first two issues, these findings can alternatively be interpreted as vote effects of orientations on respectively a secular-confessional and a socio-economic conflict dimension. The 'issues' of nuclear energy and asylum seekers have a moderate impact on vote choice, while integration of ethnic minorities and European unification do not have a significant effect on voting behaviour.

Columns 3 to 8 in Table 3 show the estimated parameters of the model with policy-distance effects for the separate parties.⁸

The results for the second model clearly show that parties gain and lose votes to a different extent on the basis of different policy dimensions. Vote preferences for PvdA are mainly determined by party-voter similarities on income differences and nuclear energy. Position issues affecting a vote choice for the CDA are income differences, social benefits and especially euthanasia. A vote choice for the VVD is primarily the result of party-voter congruencies on the issues of income differences, social benefits and asylum seekers. Euthanasia is the most important position issue affecting a vote preference for D66. A preference for D66 is also substantively determined by party-voter similarities on the issues of income differences and asylum seekers.

The effect for euthanasia indicates that a vote choice for Green Left is to a large extent determined by a libertarian-authoritarian conflict dimension. Other position issues on which Green Left draws electoral support are income differences and integration of ethnic minorities. Finally, position issues with an impact on voting for the Calvinist party GPV are euthanasia and ethnic minorities. However, in this case the non-significant effects for the other position issues might have resulted from unreliable estimates, because very few respondents in the sample report to have voted GPV.

The main parties PvdA, CDA, VVD and D66 are evaluated to an approximately equal extent on their positions on a general left-right dimension. For Green Left, this dimension seems to be somewhat less important in the pursuit of votes. Congruencies between voters and the GPV on the left-right dimension do not seem to have a significant effect on a vote preference for this party.

The results reported in Table 3 partly confirm the expectations about the influence of position issues on the voting decision. As expected, the low saliency of and controversy on *European unification* is accompanied by insignificant effects of this issue on the vote decision. Although the issues were hardly explicitly mentioned by the parties under investigation during the election campaign, voters were still able to perceive substantial differences between the VVD and other parties on *income differences* and *nuclear energy* and

Table 3 Conditional logit model with and without party-specific issue effects

	Model I	Model II					
		PvdA	CDA	VVD	D66	GL	GPV
Euthanasia	-.33	*	-.38	(-.14)	-.46	-.35	-1.65
Income differences	-.38	-.29	-.25	-.46	-.34	-.27	*
Nuclear energy	-.16	-.26	(-.09)	(-.09)	*	(-.22)	*
Social benefits	-.25	(-.08)	-.20	-.38	(-.19)	(-.20)	*
Asylum seekers	-.19	(-.12)	*	-.28	-.39	*	(-.42)
Ethnic minorities	(-.08)	*	*	*	*	-.24	-1.05
European Unification	(-.14)	*	*	*	*	*	*
Left-right ideology	-.69	-.76	-.70	-.74	-.68	-.54	(-.30)
Adjusted Rho 2	.35	.36					
Log Likelihood	-1213.37	-1190.20					
N	1205	1205					

Entries are effects on log odds ratios

* indicates that no parameter was estimated.

Effects in brackets are not significant at the .05 level in a one-tailed test.

differences between the Christian parties and other parties on *euthanasia*. This is reflected in a persistent influence of these structural issues on the decision whether or not to vote for the mentioned groups of parties. Despite a high level of public controversy on the *integration of ethnic minorities* throughout the 1990s, this issue appeared only to be influential in the decision whether or not to vote for Green Left. Bivariate analyses (not included here) showed clearly that a substantial number of citizens with right-wing opinions on the integration of ethnic minorities voted for pvdA, in spite of the left position of this party on the issue. The *level of social benefits* is regarded as a salient issue by the public and at the same time parties show sizeable differences in position on this issue. Nevertheless, only the CDA and VVD seem to attract and distract voters by their party positions on the social benefits issue. Another salient and controversial issue, *allowance of asylum seekers*, has a notable effect on the decision whether or not to vote for VVD and D66. Given the emphasis displayed by pvdA and Green Left on the asylum seekers issue in the years preceding the election, one might have expected equally strong effects for these parties as well. Bivariate analyses might explain the small effect for the pvdA and the non-significant effect for Green Left: pvdA and Green Left voters appeared to be substantially more right-wing on the asylum issue than their preferred parties. Vote preferences for Green Left appeared to be somewhat less determined by left-right orientations than a vote decision for pvdA, CDA, VVD or D66. A tentative explanation for this result is that postmaterialist issues like the environment do not exclusively mobilize the support of voters with

outspoken leftist orientations on a socio-economic conflict dimension, which is the dimension most correlated with left-right orientations. The finding of a non-significant effect of left-right ideology on voting for the GPV is not surprising, given the fact that the GPV manifests itself to voters mainly on the secular-confessional conflict dimension.

As mentioned before, parameter values of logit models for individual characteristics are dependent on the reference category chosen. A second problem with logit models is that the effects of independent variables on the *unconditional* probability of choosing a certain alternative are non-linear. This implies that the size of the effect of a certain independent variable on the dependent variable is attributable to the initial values of all independent variables. The following questions on vote effects of policy preferences still need to be addressed. First, what is the impact of individual and party-specific characteristics on the *unconditional* vote probabilities for parties? Second, how strong is the vote effect of position issues and left-right ideology in comparison with valence issues and general satisfaction with government policy? Finally, what is the impact of policy preferences on voting behaviour in comparison with demographic characteristics of social class and religion? All three questions can be answered with one research strategy. The first thing to do is to predict for the so-called mean voter the vote probabilities for all six parties. The mean voter is defined here as the voter with sample mean values on the independent variables. The predicted vote probabilities for the mean voter are at the same time the predicted aggregate vote shares obtained by the parties.

Substituting the sample mean values of independent variables and estimated parameters in equation (3) in Appendix 2 gives the *model predicted vote shares* of the parties.⁹ Now the effect of a single independent variable on vote choice can be assessed by looking at changes in the predicted vote probabilities for the parties as a result of a change in the independent variable from the sample mean value to another value. In order to compare different independent variables with different scales, Table 4 shows the changes in predicted vote probabilities as a result of a one standard deviation increase in an independent variable away from the sample mean value. The results refer to the model with party-specific policy distance effects.

The cell entry in Table 4 for euthanasia and the CDA, for example, shows that when the distance between the mean voter and the CDA on euthanasia increases by one standard deviation, the probability of the mean voter choosing the CDA decreases with 6%. An alternative interpretation is that such a change in policy distance is expected to lead to an electoral loss of the CDA with 6% of the total number of votes. The estimated changes in vote probabilities for position issues and left-right ideology reported in Table 4, lead to the same conclusions as Table 3. Due to the very low vote probabilities predicted by the model for

Table 4 Standardized effects on vote choice

	PvdA	CDA	VVD	D66	GL	GPV
Euthanasia	*	-.06	-.03	-.04	-.02	.00
Income differences	-.07	-.03	-.10	-.03	-.01	*
Nuclear energy	-.06	-.01	-.02	*	-.01	*
Social benefits	-.02	-.02	-.07	-.02	-.01	*
Asylum seekers	-.03	*	-.05	-.04	*	.00
Ethnic minorities	*	*	*	*	-.01	.00
Unemployment	.04	-.01	-.03	-.01	.01	.00
Environmental pollution	.05	-.05	-.06	.01	.04	.00
Crime	-.03	.02	.02	-.01	-.02	.00
Health care	.01	.01	.00	-.01	-.01	.00
Satisfaction with government policies	.05	-.03	-.02	.00	-.02	.00
Postmaterialism	.01	-.02	.00	.00	.00	.00
Left-right ideology	-.14	-.07	-.12	-.05	-.02	.00
Social class	-.13	-.01	.09	.05	-.01	.00
Confessional index	-.13	.27	-.09	-.06	-.01	.00

Entries are changes in predicted vote probabilities for the mean voter when independent variables increase by one standard deviation.

* indicates no parameter estimated.

the GPV, it was not possible to assess the impact of variables on unconditional vote probabilities for this party.

These results underline that, in accordance with our expectations, preferences for a party are positively determined by perceived salience of a valence issue when this party puts more emphasis than other parties on the issue in question. An increase in perceived salience of unemployment leads to an increase in predicted probability of voting PvdA and, to a lesser extent, Green Left. Citizens who find the problem of environmental pollution more important than the average, are more likely to vote PvdA, Green Left or D66. The environmental issue appears to be the most powerful variable affecting a vote preference for Green Left.

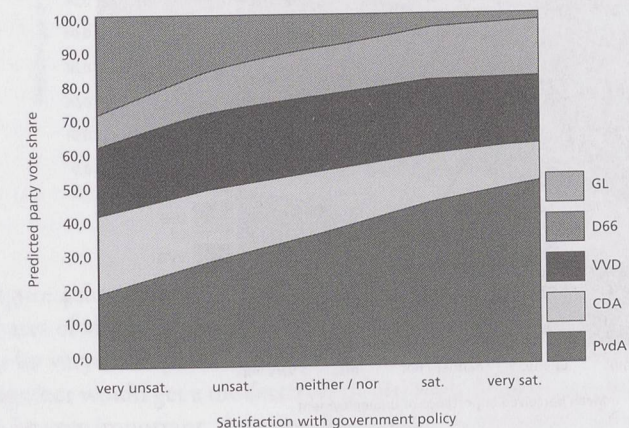
A higher level of perceived salience of crime is expected to increase the probability of voting CDA or VVD. The more citizens think that healthcare is an important issue, the more likely they are to vote for PvdA or CDA. Reported changes in vote probabilities indicate that the PvdA has been the only incumbent party to win votes from citizens who differed from the mean voter profile by a higher level of satisfaction with the government policy of the past few years. The electoral fate of D66 appears to be unaffected by this issue. The numerical position of the VVD even appears to be negatively influenced by high levels of satisfaction with the policies of the outgoing cabinet.

Table 4 shows clearly that with respect to the size of vote effects, valence issues and satisfaction with government policy have been just as important as position issues. Despite the frequently discussed demise of the pillarized voting model, demographic characteristics related to social class and religion still have a considerable influence on the vote decision in comparison with policy orientations. This pertains especially to vote preferences for PvdA, CDA and VVD. Cleavage variables and policy preferences influence the vote preferences for D66 and GL to an approximately equal extent.

5.3 Policy orientations and changes in aggregate party vote shares

Generally speaking, party positions on the left-right dimension and on specific position issues are relatively stable in the period between two elections. In addition, there are usually no drastic changes in the opinion distribution of the total electorate on these policy dimensions between two succeeding elections. This implies that citizens' evaluations of parties on position issues and the left-right dimension are unlikely to be important explanations for aggregate gains and losses in votes of parties. Previous research for the Netherlands (for example, Aarts 1995) has shown that aggregate perceptions of the salience of valence issues are quite volatile over a longer period of time. This also holds true for the public's general satisfaction with government policies in the past incumbent period. Therefore, the public's perceived salience of valence issues and their satisfaction with past government policy are potentially powerful explanations of changes in aggregate party vote shares between two elections.

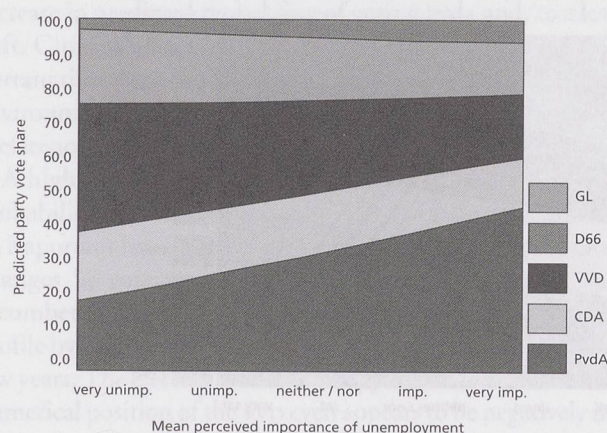
Figure 2 Satisfaction with government policies and predicted party vote shares



Figures 3-5 show how the distribution of votes obtained by parties might have been in the case of different distributions of the public opinion, with regard to satisfaction with government policy and with regard to the valence issues of unemployment, environmental pollution and crime, respectively. The methodology used to assess the changes in predicted vote shares is to replace the actual sample mean value of a specific variable by fictitious mean values while holding the other independent variables constant at the sample mean value.

Figure 2 shows how the electoral strength of incumbent and opposition parties would have been effected had the voters been less or more satisfied with government policy than was actually the case. The figure clearly indicates that with a less satisfied electorate, the pvdA would have won remarkably fewer votes. When the electorate changes from a very unsatisfied to a very satisfied public on government policy, the vote share obtained by the pvdA is expected to increase by 31%. The other incumbent parties appear to have been far less dependent on the public's satisfaction with government policy. Across the different conditions, the range of predicted vote shares is 8% for D66 and only 3% for the VVD. Especially Green Left would have won more votes under an electorate more dissatisfied with the policies of the purple coalition. A shift from a most satisfied to a least satisfied electorate would imply a 26% increase in votes for Green Left. The strength of the opposition party CDA appears to be only moderately dependent on satisfaction with the incumbent government's policies. Across the conditions, the range of expected vote shares for the CDA is 12%. In conclusion, especially the pvdA seems to have profited from a relatively high level of satisfaction among the public with the policies of the outgoing coalition. Green Left in particular appears to have won seats by a successful appeal to the dissatisfied section of the public.

Figure 3 Public salience of unemployment and predicted party vote shares



Figures 3 to 5 show the potential effect of specific valence issues on the vote decision. Figure 3 shows that when the saliency of unemployment among the public increases, the expected proportion of votes for the pvdA increases significantly (range of 20%). At the same time, the proportion of votes obtained by CDA and VVD together would decrease by 23%.

Figure 4 Public salience of environmental pollution and predicted party vote shares

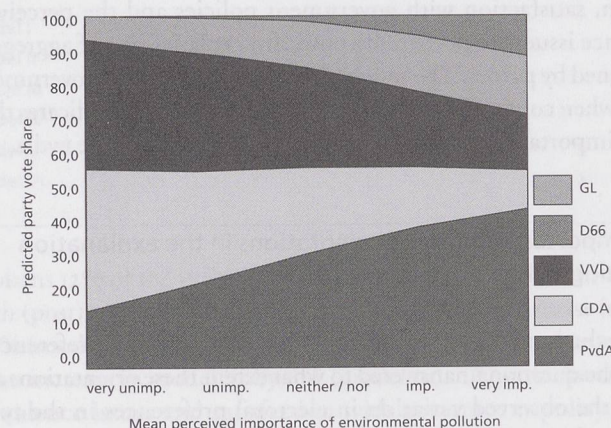


Figure 5 Public salience of criminality and predicted party vote shares

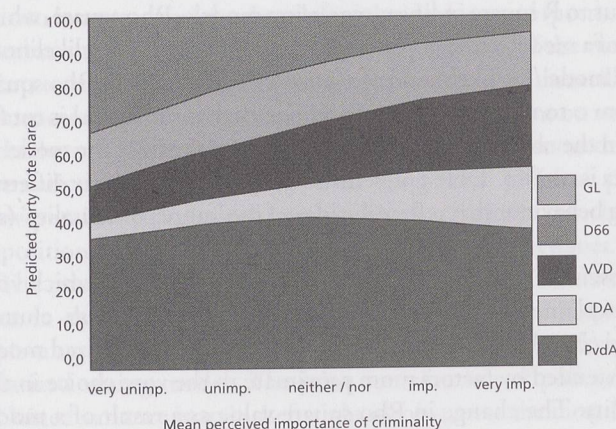


Figure 4 shows the large potential influence of the environmental issue on vote shares of all the main parties. If all voters considered the environmental issue to be very unimportant, the progressive parties pvdA, D66 and Green Left together would get a modest 23% of the votes. If all voters perceived the issue to be very important, this vote share would increase to 74% of the votes.

Finally, Figure 5 presents the vote effect of the perceived salience of crime. The pattern shows clearly that an increased salience of crime leads to a steady rise in the proportion of the vote for CDA and VVD and a precipitous decline in the vote share obtained by Green Left. If the salience is changed from 'most unimportant' to 'most important' condition, CDA and VVD together would gain 26% while Green Left would lose 26% of the votes. The vote shares of PvdA and D66 appear to be hardly affected by the issue.

In conclusion, satisfaction with government policies and the perceived salience of valence issues are potentially powerful explanations of aggregate vote shares obtained by parties. The much higher satisfaction with government policies in 1998 when compared with the previous, 1994 election indicates that this factor is an important explanation for the electoral gains of the PvdA.

5.4 The importance of policy orientations in the explanation of voting behaviour

We have shown the importance of policy orientations for vote preferences. This still leaves the question unanswered to what extent these orientations are able to explain the observed variation in electoral preferences in the 1998 election. A large influence of a policy orientation on voting behaviour does not necessarily coincide with a large contribution to the explanation of variance in voting patterns. McFadden's *Rho square* is a goodness-of-fit measure for logit models analogous to *R square* in linear regression models. *Rho square*, which indicates the fit of a model to the observed data, is defined as $(1 - \log \text{likelihood of the estimated model} / \log \text{likelihood of a constants only model})$. *Rho square* values range from 0 to 1. A *Rho* value of 0 indicates that the model is totally unable to explain the observed data. When *Rho* is one, the fit of the model to the observed data is perfect. Table 5 presents *Rho square* values for six different models of voting behaviour that reflect the idea of the 'funnel of causality' (see above).¹⁰

Model I represents a model of pillarized voting behaviour, in which vote choice is only explained by demographic variables of social class, church membership and church attendance. In models II to VI, this pillarized model is successively extended by factors more proximate to the vote choice in the funnel of causality. The change in *Rho square* value as a result of a model extension indicates the explanatory power of certain policy orientations in addition to that of causally antecedent factors.

For the elections of 1998, social class, religious denomination and frequency of church attendance together explain 16% of the variance in voting behaviour (model I). When left-right ideology is added to this model, the value of *Rho square* increases to 28% (model II), which means that left-right ideology

Table 5 Explanatory power of models of voting behaviour

	Social class, religion	Left-Right ideology	MPM values	Position issues	Valence issues and policy satisfaction	Rho 2
Model I	x					.16
Model II	x	x				.28
Model III	x	x	x			.28
Model IV	x	x	x	x		.34
Model V	x			x	x	.31
Model VI	x	x	x	x	x	.36

explains 12% of the variance in vote choice. A further extension of the model with (post)materialist value orientations leads to an increase in fit by less than 0.5% (model III). The inclusion of position issues in the vote explanation leads to an increase in model fit by 6% (model IV). The contribution to model fit by valence issues and satisfaction with government policy, in addition to cleavage variables, position issues and left-right ideology, is a small 2% (model VI). Model V shows that there is considerable overlap in the contributions of left-right ideology and position issues to explained variance. A model in which the two long-term orientations left-right ideology and (post)materialist value orientations are omitted, is still able to explain 31% of the vote. This finding points towards the so-called endogeneity problem in unravelling the separate influences of position issues and ideological orientations on voting behaviour. Most theories (for example, the 'funnel of causality') assume that citizens' issue orientations are moulded by their long-term political predispositions. However, it is equally well conceivable that citizens can change their predispositions as a result of intense preferences on salient issues.¹¹

The results for the six models presented in Table 5 lead to the conclusion that, in the 1998 elections, policy orientations were more important for explaining peoples' party preferences than the demographic variables of the pillarized voting model. The joint contribution of policy orientations to explained variance is 20%. Left-right ideology was the most important vote-explaining policy orientation (12%), followed by position issues (6%) and valence issues (2%). The earlier analyses showed that valence issues and satisfaction with government policies were at least as important as position issues. The relatively low importance of the four valence issues and retrospective policy evaluations for voting behaviour can be explained by the high agreement on these issues. A large majority of the public expressed that unemploy-

ment, environmental pollution, crime and healthcare were very important topics in politics. In addition, a high proportion of citizens was satisfied with the policy record of the Kok-I cabinet.

6 Conclusion and discussion

In the past ten years media reports about the end of the ideological dispute in Dutch politics have been abundant. Many commentators have attributed this so-called end in particular to the conversion of the pvdA in the 1980s from a polarizing, socialist left party to a consensus-seeking pragmatic party. This shift was to a large extent regarded as a response to a changing global opinion climate on the relationship between politics, economics and society. In the aftermath of the break-up of the East-West ideological conflict and the apparent bankruptcy of the Keynesian interventionist state model, there would arise a global hegemony of the free market model with limited state intervention. Within the pvdA in particular the necessity was felt to get rid of 'old dogmas' and to renew the party's manifesto in response to recent developments in a post-industrial society. Party leader Wim Kok announced that it was high time for the pvdA to 'shake off the ideological feathers'. Meanwhile, from the early 1990s onwards, the Christian democratic CDA had generally tried to take on a less right-wing profile on socio-economic issues. In addition to increasing consensus in the socio-economic realm, in the 1990s the main Dutch parties seemed to have ended a number of fundamental disputes on ethical, environmental and national security matters that were highly salient in the 1970s and 1980s. As a result, all parties tended to take increasingly similar stances on policy matters.

The empirical analyses for the 1998 election presented in this paper indeed showed a continuation of depolarization of the main parties on the general left-right dimension and on the main conflict dimensions in Dutch society. This decreased party polarization in the 1990s has been first and foremost embodied in a stable coalition between pvdA and vvd in the period 1994-1998. Simultaneously, controversies on structural policy dimensions have markedly declined among the public. Relatively new issues in 1998 do not seem to evoke the level of controversy among parties and the public that was still present during the mid 1980s. These findings support the hypothesis that, in Lijphart's terminology, the Dutch political system is moving into the direction of a depoliticized or 'cartel' democracy.

When the parties take increasingly similar positions on issues and the public becomes less divided on these issues, one would expect two possible scenarios for the importance of policy voting in the 1998 elections. The first is that citizens' policy orientations play a minor role in their decision for which party

they should vote. A second possibility is that citizens resort to valence issues as a criterion for the formation of party preferences.

Multivariate analyses showed that despite a decreased polarization, orientations on position issues and especially left-right ideology are still important for understanding why citizens voted for certain parties. Salient valence issues and retrospective policy judgements appear to have a large influence on the vote decision, at least as much as the effect of position issues. The way in which these valence issues affect voting behaviour is well in accordance with expectations of issue ownership theory. The reason why valence issues and satisfaction with government policy are only moderately able to explain the observed variations in voting patterns is the high level of public agreement on the importance of valence issues and the policy competence of the government.

If the decrease in polarization of parties on position issues and ideological orientations continues in the near future, it would not necessarily lead to a weaker link between government policies and citizens' policy preferences. Empirical analyses in this paper showed the large potential dependence of election outcomes on citizens' attitudes on valence issues and policy satisfaction. If parties continue to differ in the emphasis on and competence for valence issues and policies in general (as perceived by the public), then voters still have something to choose. The resulting type of representative democracy will have more resemblance to a liberal Madisonian than to a Rousseauite ideal type of democracy.

Appendix 1: Survey questions and construction of variables

For full details, the reader is referred to the Dutch parliamentary election study 1998 (Aarts, van der Kolk & Kamp 1999).

Respondent's perceived importance of national problems

Respondents were asked to give their own positions on a ten-point rating scale for the following items:

(a) Income differences; (b) Integration of ethnic minorities; (c) Nuclear plants; (d) Heavy traffic on the highways; (e) Environmental pollution; (f) Unemployment; (g) Euthanasia; (h) European Union; (i) State financial deficit; (j) Level of social benefits; (k) Securing a good provision for the old age; (l) Misusing social benefits; (m) Refugees and asylum seekers; (n) Crime; (o) Healthcare.

Respondent's perceived party emphasis on valence issues

Respondents were asked to indicate their perception of party issues emphasis on a ten point rating scale for PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, Green Left and GPV, for the following issues:

(a) Unemployment; (b) Cleaner environment; (c) Fight against crime; (d) Healthcare.

Position issues and left-right ideology

Respondents were asked to indicate their own position and the perceived positions of PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66, Green Left and GPV for seven position issues and a general left-right dimension on seven-point left-right scales (ten-point for left-right ideology). Only the poles are presented here.

Euthanasia should be forbidden (1) – doctor should always be allowed to conduct euthanasia at the patient's request (7).

Differences in income should become larger in our country (1) – differences in incomes should become smaller (7).

The Netherlands should admit more *asylum seekers* (1) – The Netherlands should send back as many asylum seekers as possible (7).

European unification should be further extended (1) – European Unification has already gone too far (7).

Foreigners and ethnic minorities should be able to live in the Netherlands while keeping the habits of their own culture (1) – foreigners and ethnic minorities should adjust completely to Dutch culture (7).

New *nuclear reactors* should be built in the Netherlands (1) – no nuclear reactors should be built at all (7).

Social welfare benefits are much too low (1) – social welfare benefits are much too high (7).

For the empirical analyses, scores on the *ten-point left-right scales* were linearly transformed to scores on seven-point left-right scales.

Satisfaction with government policy

'Can you tell me with this showcard how satisfied or unsatisfied you are generally with what the government has done over the past four years?'

Response options were very satisfied/satisfied/neither satisfied nor unsatisfied/unsatisfied/very unsatisfied. Satisfaction with government was included in the analyses as a metric variable ranging from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

Postmaterialist value priorities

Respondent was asked to pick the first, second and third desirable goal from:

(a) Maintaining order; (b) More say in politics; (c) Fight rising prices; (d) Freedom of speech.

Respondents who gave (b) and (d) as first and second priority were coded as pure postmaterialists. Postmaterialist value priority was included in the analyses as a dummy variable, with score 1 for pure postmaterialists and 0 for other respondents.

Social background variables

Social class position was measured on the basis of a respondent's self-image. Response options in the survey item were lower working class, upper working class, lower middle class, upper middle class and upper class. The variable social class in empirical analyses is at a metric measurement level, ranging from 1 (lower working class) to 5 (upper class).

Religiosity has been measured by an index, capturing church membership and frequency of church attendance. The index was constructed by the following formula: dummy variable for denomination (membership of either a Protestant or Catholic church is score 1; otherwise score 0) multiplied by indicator for frequency of church attendance. The indicator for church attendance can take the values 1 (never), 2 (seldom/sometimes), 3 (2,3 times a month) and 4 (every week). The reason for putting Catholics and Protestants together in the religiosity index is to avoid zero cell problems in the logit analyses. A drawback of this solution is the underestimation of the effect of religiosity on voting for the orthodox Protestant GPV.

Appendix 2 Conditional logit analysis

The statistical technique of Conditional Logit (CL) analysis has been developed on the basis of discrete choice theory. In choice situations, individuals are assumed to choose from a finite set of discrete alternatives the alternative that maximizes their personal utility. The level of utility that an individual receives from a chosen alternative is dependent on characteristics of the individual and characteristics of the alternative. Given the impossibility of detecting all characteristics influencing the utility provided by an alternative, the utility functions for the alternatives are modelled as stochastic in empirical analyses. A utility function in discrete choice theory is therefore called a *random utility model*. This model is defined as:

$$U_{ij} = \beta_j X_{ij} + \gamma_j A_i + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

Utility provided by alternative j to individual i (U_{ij}) is a linear function of characteristics of alternative j relative to individual i (X_{ij}), characteristics of individual i (A_i) and an unobserved random component ε_{ij} . The β -coefficients can be assumed to be equal across alternatives or to vary across alternatives. In order to get the model identifiable and estimable, for one of the J alternatives the γ -coefficients are set to zero. Assuming that ε is uncorrelated across observations and has the following Gumbel extreme value cumulative distribution function,

$$F(\varepsilon_{ij}) = \exp(-\exp(-\varepsilon_{ij})) \quad (2)$$

McFadden (1974) has proven that the predicted probability of individual i choosing alternative j (i.e. the probability that alternative j gives the highest level of utility to individual i) is given by:

$$P_{ij} = \exp(\beta_j X_{ij} + \gamma_j A_i) / \sum_{k=1}^J \exp(\beta_k X_{ik} + \gamma_k A_i) \quad (3)$$

The CL model can be expressed in terms of log odds ratios, with respect to an alternative j and a reference alternative k .

$$\ln(P_{ij}/P_{ik}) = (\beta_j X_{ij} + \gamma_j A_i) - (\beta_k X_{ik} + \gamma_k A_i) \quad (4)$$

Vote effects of party-voter distances on issues and ideology, as presented in table X, are the β coefficients in equation (4). A one unit increase in the distance between party j and individual i on an issue (i.e., a one unit increase in X_{ij}) is expected to lead to a change of β_j in the log odds ratio of choosing party j versus choosing any other party.

Maximum likelihood estimates of the CL-parameters are obtained with the Newton-Raphson algorithm. CL-analyses for this article have been conducted with the Limdep 7 software programme.

A crucial assumption for multinomial logit models (like conditional logit) is the so-called *Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives* (IIA). IIA implies that the odds ratio for choosing between two alternatives is not dependent on characteristics of a third alternative. Equation (4) is a direct expression of this assumption. In the absence of IIA, the errors ε_{ij} are uncorrelated across observations. In analysis of voting behaviour, the IIA assumption would, for example, be violated if the choice set of the voter consists of two parties with the same or very similar positions on issues. A discrete choice model that does not assume IIA is the multinomial probit model (MNP). Correlations between errors are parameters of the MNP model. The estimation of an MNP model with n choice alternatives involves the numerical integration of a $n-1$ dimensional cumulative normal density function. With six choice alternatives this task is computationally extremely demanding for current standard software programmes. Therefore no MNP models have been estimated in this article. In order to test the IIA assumptions, all analyses reported here have been rerun after leaving out each of the parties consecutively. The results appear to be robust.

Notes

1. The effect on vote choice of candidate evaluations will not be considered here. Bivariate and multivariate analyses for the 1998 elections showed disproportionately strong correlations between candidate evaluations (trust in political leaders) and party preference, in comparison with other vote determinants. It is therefore expected that survey-reported evaluations of candidates are to a large extent rationalizations of party preferences already present. This does not preclude the possibility that candidate evaluations do affect vote preferences. However, it is likely that the available items from the Dutch parliamentary election studies are not suited for disentangling the reciprocal causal effects between candidate evaluations and vote preferences.

2. Note that part of the data presented in Table 1 were – in a rescaled format – also presented in Aarts & Semetko, this issue. However, this table presents the 1998 data in more detail.

3. Analyses of the public's disagreement on position issues and left-right ideology – not reported here – were based on Van der Eijk's perceptual agreement scores for respondents self-placements on policy scales. See van der Eijk (1998) for further details on perceptual agreement scores.

4. We explained before why the refugee issue, for which comparable data are available, is not included in our analyses.

5. On a materialist/postmaterialist dimension, the parties under consideration can be placed in the following categories; GL: mainly postmaterialist; PVDA and D66: mixed

category; CDA, VVD and GPV: mainly materialist.

6. The multivariate analyses performed in this article require that the independent variables do not differ widely in range. For this reason, the original 1-10 scales for saliency ratings were converted into 1-5 scales.

7. Non-ipsative measures of party preference like party sympathy ratings and probability of future vote-scores are appropriate tools for an assessment of the influence of policy preferences on the *potential* electoral support for parties. Due to their non-ipsative nature, these ratings and scores are less suitable for an explanation or prediction of aggregate vote shares obtained by parties.

8. Due to constraints in the number of parameters that can be estimated, it was not possible to model the effects of seven position issues and left-right ideology for each of the six parties in addition to the effects of other independent variables. Therefore, a first model was estimated with all 48 policy-distance effects and without valence issue effects. The second model (presented in the table) was estimated without position issue effects with absolute t-values below 1 in the first model.

9. The sample used for the logit analyses in this article has been weighted on reported party choice. This implies that the relative proportions of respondents having voted for one of the six parties is equal to the relative proportions of the number of votes actually obtained by these parties in the 1998 elections. It should be kept in mind that the sample does not contain the voters of all the parties that obtained seats in parliament in 1998. Voters for the SP, GPV and RPF are not part of the sample. The results only refer to the choice set PVDA-CDA-VVD-D66-GL-GPV. Tables and figures presented can only give meaningful information on the predicted changes in party vote shares within this 'partial' party system as a result of changing conditions.

10. The table presents adjusted Rho square values, i.e., adjusted for sample size and number of estimated parameters.

11. The coefficients for model v (Table 5) show that when the influence of position issues is not controlled for general left-right ideology, the effect parameters for these position issues are substantially higher. However, the position issue parameters for model v remain considerably lower than the left-right parameter of model vi. Models v and vi yield the same conclusions regarding the relative importance of specific position issues for voting behaviour.

Bibliography

- Aarts, C.W.A.M. (1995), 'Nationale problemen, partijcompetentie en stemgedrag', in: J.J.M. van Holsteyn and B. Niemöller, *De Nederlandse Kiezer 1994*. Leiden: DSWO Press.
- Aarts, K., H. van der Kolk and M. Kamp (1999), *Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 1998*. Amsterdam: Steinmetz Archive.
- Aarts, K., S.E. Macdonald and G. Rabinowitz (1999), 'Issues and party competition in the Netherlands', *Comparative Political Studies* 32, pp. 63-99.
- Alvarez, R.M. and J. Nagler (1998), 'When models and politics collide: Estimating models of multiparty elections', *American Journal of Political Science* 42, pp. 55-96.
- Andeweg, R.B. and G.A. Irwin (1993), *Dutch Government and Politics*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Andeweg, R.B. (1995), 'Afscheid van de verzuiling?', in: J.J.M. van Holsteyn and B. Niemöller, *De Nederlandse Kiezer 1994*. Leiden: DSWO Press.
- Brug, W. van der (1996), *Where's the Party? Voter's perceptions of party positions*. Amsterdam: Department of Political Science.
- Budge, I. and D. Farlie (1983a), *Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue-Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-Three Democracies*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Budge, I. and D. Farlie (1983b), 'Party competition - selective emphasis or direct confrontation? An alternative view with data', in: H. Daalder and P. Mair (eds.), *Western European Party Systems: Continuity and Change*. London: Sage.
- Campbell, A., P.E. Converse, W.E. Miller and D.E. Stokes (1960), *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.
- Cuilenburg, J.J. van, J. Kleinnijenhuis and G.P. Noordzij (1980), 'Kiezers en issues: over politiek-inhoudelijke afweging', *Acta Politica* 15, pp. 289-318.
- Dalton, R.J. (1996), *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies: Public Opinion and Political Parties in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany and France* 2nd edn. Chatham: Chatham House Publishers.
- Davis, O.A., M.J. Hinich and M.P. Ordeshook (1970), 'An expository development of a mathematical model of the electoral process', *American Political Science Review* 64, pp. 426-448.
- Deth, J.W. van, and P.A.Th.M. Geurts (1989), 'Value orientation, left-right placement and voting', *European Journal of Political Research* 17, pp. 17-34.
- Downs, A. (1957), *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Eijk, C. van der (1995), 'Strijdpunten en politieke voorkeuren', in: J.J.M. van Holsteyn and B. Niemöller (eds.), *De Nederlandse Kiezer 1994*. Leiden: DSWO Press.
- Eijk, C. van der (1998), 'Measuring agreement in ordered rating scales', in: M. Fennema, C. van der Eijk and H. Schijf (eds.), *In Search of Structure. Essays in Social Science and Methodology*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.
- Eijk, C. van der, and B. Niemöller (1992), 'The Netherlands', in: M. Franklin, T. Mackie and H. Valen (eds.), *Electoral Change. Responses to Evolving Social and Attitudinal Structures in Western Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eijk, C. van der and B. Niemöller (1983), *Electoral change in the Netherlands*. Amsterdam: CT-Press.
- Eijssinga, R., A. Felling and J. Lammers, 1992. 'Confessie, inkomen en partijkeuze, 1964-1992', *Mens en Maatschappij*, 69, pp. 6-25.
- Enelow, J.M. and M. Hinich (1984), *The Spatial Theory of Voting: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fiorina, M. (1981), *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Granberg, D. and S. Holmberg (1988), *The Political System Matters. Social Psychology and Voting Behavior in Sweden and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Houska, J.J. (1985), *Influencing Mass Political Behavior: Elites and Political Subcultures in the Netherlands and Austria*. Berkeley: University of California/Institute of International Studies.
- Irwin, G.A., J.J.M. van Holsteyn, C. van der Eijk and B. Niemöller (1987), 'Verzuiling, issues, kandidaten en ideologie in de verkiezingen van 1986', *Acta Politica* 22, pp. 129-179.
- Kaashoek, R. (1995), 'Economie en stemgedrag', in: J.J.M. van Holsteyn and B. Niemöller, *De Nederlandse Kiezer 1994*. Leiden: DSWO Press.
- Key, V.O. (1966), *The Responsible Electorate*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Kleinnijenhuis, J. and J. de Ridder (1997), 'Effects of issue priorities in the news on voting preferences: the 1994 election campaign in the Netherlands', in: P.B. Boorsma, K. Aarts and A.E. Steenge (eds.), *Public Priority Setting: Rules and Costs*. Dordrecht/ Boston/London: Kluwer.
- Koole, R. (1992), *De opkomst van de moderne kaderpartij: veranderende partijorganisatie in Nederland 1960-1990*. Utrecht: Het Spectrum.
- Lane, J.-E. and S. Ersson, 1987. *Politics and Society in Western Europe*. London: Sage.
- Lijphart, A. (1968), *The Politics of Accommodation. Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lipset, S.M. and S. Rokkan (1967), 'Cleavage structures, party systems and voter alignments: an introduction', in: S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan (eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.
- McFadden, D. (1974), 'Conditional logit analysis of qualitative choice behaviour', in: P. Zarembka (ed.), *Frontiers of Econometrics*. New York: Academic Press.
- Michels, A.M.B. (1993), *Nederlandse politieke partijen en hun kiezers (1970-1989)*. Enschede: Faculteit Bestuurskunde.
- Middendorp, C.P. (1989a), 'De betekenis van links-rechts zelfplaatsing en haar effect op stemgedrag', *Mens en Maatschappij* 64, pp. 86-99.
- Middendorp, C.P. (1989b), 'Ideologie en stemgedrag in Nederland', *Acta Politica* 24, pp. 171-190.
- Middendorp, C.P. (1991), *Ideology in Dutch Politics: the Democratic System Reconsidered, 1970-1985*. Assen / Maastricht: Van Gorcum.
- Middendorp, C.P. (1992), 'Left-right self identification and (post) materialism in the ideological space: their effect on the vote in the Netherlands', *Electoral Studies* 11, pp. 249-260.
- Middendorp, C.P. and P.R. Kolkhuis Tanke (1990), 'Economic voting in the Netherlands', *European Journal of Political Research* 18, pp. 535-555.
- Middendorp, C.P., J.W. Luyten and R. Doooms (1993), 'Issue voting in the Netherlands: Two-dimensional issue-distances between own position and perceived party position as determinants of the vote', *Acta Politica* 28, pp. 39-60.
- Miller, W.E. and J.M. Shanks (1996), *The New American Voter*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nieuwbeerta, P. (1995), 'The democratic class struggle in post war societies: Class voting in twenty countries, 1945-1990', *Acta Sociologica* 39, pp. 345-383.
- Pellikaan, H. (1987), 'De beoordeling van het economisch beleid van het kabinet-Lubbers', in: J.J.M. van Holsteyn, G.A. Irwin and C. van der Eijk (eds.), *De Neder-*

- landse kiezers '86*. Amsterdam: SWIDOC.
- Sani, G. and G. Sartori (1983), 'Polarization, fragmentation and competition in Western democracies', in: H. Daalder and P. Mair (eds.), *Western European Party Systems: Continuity and Change*. London: Sage.
- Schmeets, J.J.G. (1995), 'Het minderhedenvraagstuk als politiek issue bij de verkiezingen van 1994.' Paper presented at the Dutch annual political science conference in Soesterberg, 1-2 June.
- Stokes, D.E. (1963), 'Spatial models of party competition', in: *American Political Science Review* 57, pp. 368-377.
- Thomassen, J.J.A. (1976), 'Party identification as a cross-cultural concept: its meaning in the Netherlands', *Acta Politica* 10, pp. 36-56.
- Thomassen, J.J.A. (1983), 'Veranderingen in partijorientaties', in: J.J.A. Thomassen, F. Heunks, J.W. van Deth and E. Elsinga, *De verstomde revolutie. Politieke opvattingen en gedragingen van Nederlandse burgers na de jaren zestig*. Alphen aan den Rijn: Samson.
- Thomassen, J.J.A. (ed.) (1991), *Hedendaagse democratie*. Alphen aan den Rijn: Samson H.D. Tjeenk Willink.
- Wijnen, P. van (1998), 'Towards a more rational electorate? Trends in issue voting in a multiparty system, the case of the Netherlands 1971-94.' Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Boston, 3-6 September.