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Geographical Representation Under a Single Nationwide District: The Case of the Netherlands

Previous studies have demonstrated the common occurrence of constituency focus in parliamentary questions, which is most often attributed to electoral incentives. If an electoral system makes use of a single nationwide district, however, these district-oriented electoral incentives do not apply. MPs may still substantively represent a geographical region, because they are motivated to stand up for a specific region for other reasons. This article explores the extent to which Dutch MPs pay attention in parliamentary questions and debates to specific regions. We find that those with stronger ties to a region, and especially MPs who reside in a region, are more likely to mention it in parliamentary questions and speeches. In addition, we find that this effect is stronger for provinces where regional attachment among residents is relatively stronger.

Introduction

Geographical representation is almost always studied in the context of local constituencies (e.g., Fernandes, Won, and Martins 2020; Martin 2011; Russo 2021). MPs pay attention to their local area because they rely on local constituents for their reelection (Carey and Shugart 1995; Kellermann 2016), but previous research also suggests that geographical representation is not purely driven by these local electoral incentives (Martin 2011; Zittel, Nyhuis, and Baumann 2019). This article contributes to the literature on geographical representation by focusing on a case

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where there are no local constituencies because elections are organized in a single nationwide electoral district. This helps us to look beyond local electoral incentives to look at what drives geographical representation in the absence of geographically defined constituencies.

In general, one would expect an MP in a single nationwide district to primarily act as party member representing a socially defined group of voters, rather than acting as a local or regional representative. We argue that even in the absence of strong *electoral* incentives for local representation, voters will desire some degree of geographical representation. We explore the extent to which MPs pay attention to regional representation in a system without subnational electoral districts: the Netherlands. Given the fact that the entire country is a single district, the electoral system does not tie an MP to a specific region. This makes it an interesting case from an international-comparative perspective to explore the extent and explanations of geographical representation when district electoral incentives are absent.

The absence of local constituencies does not imply that voters see no need for geographical representation. In the 2017 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study, almost 40% of the voters said they either fully agree or agree with the statement that every region or province should have MPs (Van der Meer, Van der Kolk, and Rekker 2017). Not only voters think that regional representation is important: in the Dutch Parliamentary Study of 2017, 74% of the participating MPs indicated they found it relatively or very important to represent their own region (Andeweg and Van Vonno 2018, 13–14).

Given that both MPs and voters think geographical representation is important, the question which comes to mind is whether there actually is a form of geographical representation in the Netherlands, and if so what the mechanism behind this form of representation is. After all, none of the MPs have an electoral link to a specific region, since they are both selected and elected in a nationwide district. If there is geographical representation, this must be affected by other factors.

Our research question is: *to what extent and why are Dutch MPs more likely to represent a specific region?* We will explore three possible explanations for regional representation by MPs. The first one originates from the MP themselves. We argue that it is more likely that an MP mentions a region in parliamentary speech and questions if they are born in that region, received education

there, or currently lives in that region—in other words, that an MP represents a region he or she has ties with. The second explanation relates to patterns of preference voting: we expect that MPs who receive more preference votes in a specific region are more likely to defend the interest of that region. Even though preference voting in the Netherlands rarely make a difference in which candidates are elected, gathering such support provides candidates with a stronger position within their party, which may be a reason to cultivate a regional following. Furthermore, we expect this effect to be stronger if the MP has ties with that region. Finally, we expect that it is more likely that the interests of a region are represented by an MP if voters in that region feel stronger regional attachment. Voters in these regions are more likely to value geographical representation in their region and ask MPs from their area to perform that role.

Our analysis focus on the Dutch lower house of parliament between 2017 and 2021. We analyze the attention of MPs to provinces in parliamentary questions and debates. For each of a total number of 169 MPs, we explain the share of references to each of the 12 provinces. This makes our study different from most other studies on geographical representation, because those studies normally look at the attention MPs pay to their own constituency. In the absence of MPs having a local constituency, we look at the attention an MP pays to *each* of the 12 provinces. We explain attention to each province by looking at the ties an MP had to each province, the relative share of preference votes received in that province, and the regional attachment experienced by voters in the relevant province. If our expectations hold, we would observe that MPs pay more attention to provinces with which they have personal links, where they receive a large share of preferential votes, and when regional attachment in the province is relatively high. Our results indeed indicate an association between attention to a province and having links with that region, most clearly being a resident, particularly in regions where regional attachment is strong. Preference voting does not seem to be related geographical representation in our data.

Surrogate Geographical Representation

The recent contribution to the conceptual literature on representation by Wolkenstein and Wratil (2021, 862) helps to understand geographical representation without local constituencies.

They refer to the concept of surrogate representation. Mansbridge defines this form of representation as “representation by a representative with whom one has no electoral relationship—that is, a representative in another district” (2003, 522). However, this definition does not lend itself to apply the concept to a system with a single nationwide district. Wolkenstein and Wratil (2021, 867–69) argue that the use of the concept of surrogate representation is therefore unnecessarily limited to systems which use SMDs. They argue that, if Mansbridge’s definition is applied, this is *territorial* surrogate representation and other forms can be distinguished as well: partisan surrogation and party-list surrogation.

Party-list surrogation is especially relevant to the question of geographical representation in absence of local constituencies. According to Wolkenstein and Wratil, “[t]his occurs when a constituent identifies as her representative an elected legislator on the list of the party that she voted for” (2021, 867). From the perspective of an MP this means that the MP decides to represent constituents who did not vote for them, either because the constituent voted for another candidate from the same party or even because he or she voted for another party. From the perspective of the voter this means that a voter expects that an MP represents his or her interests, even though he or she did not vote for that MP. According to Wolkenstein and Wratil parties in PR systems might “organize representation as surrogation (presenting candidates as representatives of imagined constituencies, e.g., MPs for voters interested in certain issues or in certain territorial parts of the country)” (2021, 869).¹

In the Netherlands, some parties indeed pay specific attention to descriptive geographical representation when compiling the candidate list (Andeweg, Irwin, and Louwerse 2020, 86). Such parties try to create a well-balanced list with candidates, with regional origin being one of the factors taken into consideration. It might be that the only goal of political parties in presenting such balanced lists is to show voters that they care about all regions, maybe in the hope of attracting some additional voters. However, it might also be possible that—once elected—MPs actually start representing specific regions.

Recent empirical research confirms that MPs also pay attention to regional matters for other reasons than electoral incentives alone (Kellermann 2016; Martin 2011; Russo 2011, 2021; Zittel, Nyhuis, and Baumann 2019). Russo (2021) found that in Italy the personal background and political experience of an MP

are associated with territorial representation. If an MP is elected in a district to which they have stronger ties—for example being born and raised there—the MP is more likely to defend the interest of that district by asking questions about their district (also see Russo 2011). Similarly, Zittel et al. (2019) find support for the effect of an MP's political and biographical localness on the level of geographical constituency representation. Fernandes et al. (2020) argue that Portuguese MPs are more likely to devote time to regional interests in parliamentary speeches if they are dependent on a local *selectorate*. In addition, research has shown that Portuguese MPs might be more inclined to ask questions about topics when their district faces problems related to this topic (Borghetto, Santana-Pereira, and Freire 2020). While the incentive to cultivate a personal vote may be an important explanatory factor, the electoral system alone does not explain why some MPs focus more on geographical representation than others (Kellermann 2016; Martin 2011).

If MPs indeed feel they should represent certain regions, the question is what determines whether an MP represents a certain region. Our first explanation for why Dutch MPs might represent a region is related to the background of the MP. We expect MPs to be more attentive to regions with which they have personal ties: being born, educated, and/or residing there. First, if a candidate is partially selected by their party for their regional ties, this provides an incentive to act accordingly. Thus, while regional representation is less clearly linked to *reelection*, some candidates might depend on their regional ties for *reselection*. Second, even if candidates do not depend on regional links for reselection, they might find it appropriate to represent their own region (Zittel, Nyhuis, and Baumann 2019). As said earlier, in the Dutch Parliamentary Study of 2017, 74% of the participating MPs indicated they found it relatively or very important to represent their own region (Andeweg and Van Vonno 2018, 13–14). Finally, MPs are likely to be more exposed to information about their own region, for example, via regional media as well as enquiries from citizens who reach out to an MP who lives in their region to highlight a regional issue—even if this is less common in the Netherlands than in other countries. If we think back to the concept of surrogation: the idea is that although there is no direct electoral link an MP might feel responsible to represent a certain region. We argue that the MP might be more inclined to defend the region they have ties with. Another potential mechanism is that having ties to a region increases an

MP's empathy for that region, and therefore they feel the interests of that region should be defended. We therefore expect an association between regional ties and attention to that region in parliamentary questions and speeches by an MP:

H1 (regional ties hypothesis) An MP with local ties to a region is more likely to refer to that region in parliamentary questions and debates than to other regions.

Elections in the Netherlands are formally organized in 20 electoral districts, but they mainly have an administrative purpose, and effectively we can speak of a single nationwide district (Andeweg 2005). The Dutch system does allow for preferential voting, however: voters have to select one candidate, and candidates who obtain more than a quarter of the nationwide electoral quota will be elected out of list order. This preference vote system can be used to express a preference for a specific candidate, although only a handful of candidates are usually elected due to this system. Despite this limited impact on who is elected, in recent elections 20% to 25% of the voters make use of the option to cast a preference vote. Therefore, although an MP might not be elected because of preference votes, preference votes are an indication of an MP's popularity. Moreover, the MP is also able to see whether there are specific regions where they are more popular. If a relatively large group of voters in a certain region supports that candidate, the candidate might take that as an incentive to support that region. An MP might receive more preference votes in a certain region, because they paid more attention to that region in the previous legislative term. In that case, the preference votes can be seen as a reward for representing a region, or an encouragement to continue to do so. Because of this endogeneity we cannot establish causality in our observational analysis, but we can test whether there is an association between preferential voting and geographical representation. We expect that:

H2a (preference vote hypothesis) The more preference votes an MP receives in a region, the more likely they are to refer to that region in parliamentary questions and debates.

Candidates receive a large part of their votes in the electoral district where they live (Nagtzaam 2019). Almost without

exception, candidates receive relatively more votes in their own (administrative) district than in the rest of the country. And this effect is quite substantial as well, implying that this regional vote does not simply represent support from family and friends. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that this effect is even stronger at the municipal level (Nagtzaam 2019, 70–71). This might be because voters tend to use the information they have about the local roots of a candidate as a cue for the likelihood that a candidate will represent the region or express their local identity (e.g., Campbell et al. 2019; Schulte-Cloos and Bauer 2021). Therefore, although the electoral system itself does not create a strong incentive to cultivate a personal vote, it still might be advantageous for some candidates to pay attention to the region in order to attract local preference votes. High preference vote numbers might also benefit candidates in other ways than only obtaining a seat in parliament, for example, by being able to obtain a more important position and policy portfolio within their parliamentary party group (André et al. 2017; Louwerse and van Vonno 2021; Nagtzaam 2019). We therefore expect that preference votes are mainly associated with regional geographical representation in the regions an MP has ties with. Therefore we expect that a candidate who receives a relatively high number of preference votes in a region they have ties with will be more inclined to pay attention to that region once elected.

H2b (preference vote interaction hypothesis) The association between regional ties and geographical representation (H1) is stronger if an MP received a relatively high number of preference votes in their own region compared to other regions.

We do not expect the associations of regional ties and preference votes with acts of geographical representation to be equally strong for all MPs. In Ireland for example, Dáil Deputies from outside Dublin ask more local questions than Dáil Deputies from Dublin (Martin 2011). Also, if we look closer to the previously mentioned figures about the importance voters attach to having an MP from one's own region, and MPs attach to regional representation, we see an important difference for the Netherlands. MPs from the main urban area in the Netherlands (*Randstad*) are less attached to regional representation (45%) than MPs from other provinces (86%) (Andeweg and Van Vonno 2018, 13). This suggests that an MP is more likely to refer to a region if the region is perceived to be underrepresented or if voters in that region have

a stronger regional identity. In addition, voters from outside the Randstad (the Western part of the country) find it slightly less important that they have an own representative, compared to other parts of the country (see [Table 1](#)).

Therefore, it makes it plausible that MPs are also more likely to represent the interest of a certain region if voters in that region have a stronger regional attachment. Again, we believe that regional attachment mainly has an influence on the previously mentioned relationships and act more as a reinforcement. Therefore we expect the following:

H3a (Regional attachment hypothesis) An MP is more likely to refer to a region where regional attachment is high than to a region where regional attachment is low.

H3b (Regional attachment interaction hypothesis) The association between regional ties and geographical representation (H1) as well as the association between preference votes and geographical representation (H2a) are stronger if inhabitants of a province feel a stronger regional attachment.

Hitherto we have discussed *that* MPs represent their regions, but not *how*. MPs have different tools at their disposal in order to represent regional interests. In this article, we will focus on two ways an MP might refer to a geographical region: by submitting written questions to a minister or speaking about the region in parliamentary debates. We expect that the associations in the previous hypotheses are stronger when it comes to submitting questions. First of all, when an MP participates in a parliamentary speech, they are seen as the party spokesperson. The Dutch parliament is

TABLE 1
Every region or province should have MPs, per region

Category	North	East	West	South	Total
Agree	47.2%	35.3%	26.2%	37.6%	33.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	20.3%	31.1%	37.7%	31.8%	32.9%
Disagree	12.7%	21.1%	24.9%	17.1%	20.8%
Fully disagree	4.7%	5.6%	7.5%	6.1%	6.4%
Total (N)	212	408	803	444	1867

Source: DPES 2017 (Van der Meer, Van der Kolk, and Rekker 2017)

highly specialized, which means that each MP has their own policy portfolio, which contains a (partly depending on party group size) limited number of policy areas for which that MP is responsible (Otjes and Louwerse 2021). For most debates, speaking time is limited per party group. Therefore, if an MP would like to address a regional issue related to the portfolio of a colleague, this would result in a reduction of time available for the party specialist. Such an intervention in the portfolio of another MP is therefore unlikely, as it might create friction within the party group. And indeed, research shows that MPs have relatively more freedom within their own portfolio, but they are expected not to interfere with the portfolios of their copartisans (Mickler 2017, 188–89). In conclusion, the MP will have less freedom to pursue interests outside of their policy portfolio and, subsequently, it will be less likely for an MP to refer to their own region. Questions, on the other hand, are a more individualistic tool (although parties still have a say in what MPs may ask or not [see, for example, Mickler 2017]). An important distinction is that, contrary to speaking time in debates, the number of questions an MP or party can ask is unlimited. If the question deals with an issue that is within the remit of a colleague's portfolio, MPs can submit the written question together. Therefore, questions give MPs more freedom to refer to their own region, without creating internal conflict. Therefore, if an MP refers to their own region in a written question, provided it does not contradict general party policy, there is no incentive for the party to forbid the MP to submit the question. At worst, asking the question has no effect, while it might positively affect the popularity of an MP or the party in a certain region. Less salient regional issues are therefore easier to address in a question, making questions an ideal instrument to represent geographical interests:

H4 (parliamentary instrument hypothesis) The own-region hypothesis, preference votes hypotheses, and regional attachment hypotheses find stronger support when looking at parliamentary questions than at parliamentary debates.

The Dutch Case

We consider the Dutch case a least likely case for geographical representation. First of all, because of the electoral system,

which as we argued above, is effectively a single nationwide district of magnitude 150. The electoral districts primarily have an administrative function, and while parties are allowed to present different lists of candidates in the different districts, most parties do not make use of this option. Parties present the same (or almost the same²) list of candidates in all districts, and therefore there is no link to elected MPs and a specific district (see also Andeweg 2005). MPs therefore are not elected on behalf of or in a district or region.

The second reason for treating the Dutch case as least likely is the high level of specialization of Dutch MPs, which makes it less likely that an MP pays attention to specific regional interests. The Dutch parliament has a strong and specialized committee system, resulting in division of labor and highly specialized MPs (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011, 667; Otjes and Louwerse 2021). MPs (especially in larger parties) are the spokesperson of that party for a specific policy area. Therefore, when, for example, a healthcare issue in the province of Groningen is discussed, it is much more likely that the healthcare specialist within the party deals with the issue than an MP with ties to Groningen.

Third, the impact of regional selectorates in candidate selections is limited. For the case of Portugal, Fernandes, Won, and Martins (2020) show the selectorate to have an impact on geographical representation, but in the Netherlands regional or local party chapters have no role in (pre-)selecting candidates for the national parliamentary election. Although previously, the role of local party branches was larger, nowadays most parties use a ‘one-member, one-vote’ system when it comes to approving the candidate list, either at a party congress or in an online vote. This makes it relatively hard for local or regional chapters to organize in order to improve regional representation on the national candidate list (Schumacher and Giger 2017). Only a few parties use other systems to approve the candidate list: the PVV has no form of internal party democracy, the SP and SGP have party congresses with regional delegates, and the ChristenUnie uses a mixed system with regional delegates and membership vote at its party congress (Andeweg, Irwin, and Louwerse 2020, 69). All in all, changes to the candidate list proposed by the party leadership are few and far between.

Data and Methods

In order to test our hypotheses, we conducted two multilevel linear regression models with random intercepts for MPs and

regions: one for speeches and one for questions. We define regions based on the 12 provinces in the Netherlands.³ The data is structured at the MP by province level: for each MP, there are 12 entries in the dataset, one for each province.

Measuring Whether Speeches or Questions Are Regional

Two dependent variables are used in the analyses: one to measure the share of questions asked by an MP related to a certain region and one to measure how much an MP speaks about a region. The data necessary for these variables was obtained from the website of the *Tweede Kamer* (Tweede Kamer 2021). To decide whether questions and speeches had a regional component, we rely on quantitative text analysis and a dictionary approach (see also Zittel, Nyhuis, and Baumann 2019).

We created two different corpora: one containing all questions submitted during the 2017–21 legislative period and one containing all contributions from MPs to parliamentary debates.⁴ In the Netherlands, political parties normally have spokespersons for each policy area. An MP participates in debates on their own policy area, and not on other topics. Therefore, an MP is limited to what they can say, or at least on which topics they can contribute. There are no rules which limit the amount of questions an MP can ask, although parties might have internal rules which limits what an MP can or cannot do.

We use a dictionary approach to count the number of references to each region. Our general strategy when creating these dictionaries was to try to avoid false positives, and therefore we may accept a few false negatives (more so than the other way around). The chances of false positives are higher than in previous studies of constituency representation because we measure attention for each MP for each province (not only their own constituency). The dictionaries are therefore relatively short and included (1) the name of the province itself and the names of all municipalities in that province,⁵ (2) the term referring to the inhabitants of the province, and (3) the name of 10 regional divisions, which are between the level of the province and municipality,⁶ including the names of the 25 Municipal Health Services and NUTS 3 regions.⁷

With regard to speeches, we scored each paragraph⁸ of at least 10 words. For each paragraph, we counted the number of words included in each of the 12 province dictionaries. If at least

one word was counted for a specific province, that paragraph was marked as a regional paragraph for that province. Thus, it is possible that multiple provinces are linked to the same paragraph.

Finally, for each MP the total number of scored paragraphs were counted, and for each province the number of paragraphs were scored as related to that province. To determine how often an MP refers to a region, we divide the number of paragraphs related to a province by the total number of paragraphs of that MP. So for each MP we end up with 12 scores, one for each province. We use a relative measurement of the regional attention to account for differences in the total speech length between MPs. Since our main interest is in how much attention an MP pays to a certain region, using absolute numbers would be problematic if there are large differences between the total number of paragraphs for different MPs. Using a relative measurement deals with this problem.

In total, 2,273,436 paragraphs were scored, for 190 MPs. After exclusion of MPs who spoke fewer than 100 paragraphs⁹ and MPs who became minister or junior minister when the cabinet formed after the election took office, we end up with 169 MPs and 2,264,352 scored paragraphs. After an initial coding round, we manually coded 200 random speeches to check for computer-human coding reliability. We calculated a Krippendorff's alpha, which was 0.686.¹⁰ We adjusted the coding scheme based on commonly observed misclassification errors.¹¹ We again applied the dictionaries to the speech corpus and manually coded 200 random speeches. The Krippendorff's alpha after the second round improved to 0.794. A closer look to both manual coding rounds showed that we got more false negatives than false positives, which is in line with our strategy.

Table A1 in the online supporting information provides descriptive statistics for each province. Groningen and Noord-Holland are most often mentioned. For Noord-Holland this might be explained by the fact that it is a large and important province, including the national capital of Amsterdam. The fact that Groningen scores this high is most likely caused by the many discussions about earthquake damage as a result of natural gas extraction. Figure A1 provides a more detailed look at the relative number of questions asked by MPs in each province. The figure shows that for each province only a relatively small number of MPs asks (more) questions related to a province.

The same approach was followed for (written) questions. We determined the relative number of regional questions for each MP

x Province combination for a total of 158 MPs.¹² MPs who became minister of junior minister again were excluded. In addition, MPs who only asked fewer than 10 questions are excluded from the analysis.¹³

Some descriptive statistics per province are given in Table A2 in the online supporting information. We again see high scores for Noord-Holland and Groningen, but the differences with other provinces are smaller for questions. In addition, Figure A2 is presented in the online supporting information, for which the conclusions are also quite similar as the one we draw for the parliamentary speeches.

Independent Variables

Our four most important independent variables relate to the regional ties an MP has with a province. These four variables are: (1) place of birth, (2) place of primary or secondary education, (3) place of tertiary education, and (4) place of residence. This data is derived from the biographical archive of PDC (delivery date 26-2-2021),¹⁴ with the exception of the places of residence, which were obtained from the Open Data portal of the *Tweede Kamer* (Tweede Kamer 2021). For each MP x Province entry in the dataset, we coded whether the MP had a particular link with the province, for example, the province in which the MP was born (1) or not (0). The data about place of residence and place of birth was complete; however, for education the information was not complete for all MPs. In addition, we created a variable *regional ties*, which is the sum of the scores of these four variables (the four items scale reasonably well, Loevinger's $H = 0.40$).

For both speeches and questions we ran two models, one with the four separate variables and one with the regional ties variable. The regional ties variable is included as a factor variable, since we do not expect that this relationship is necessarily linear. Since the number of MPs with four regional ties to a single province is very small, the last two categories (three and four ties) are combined into a single category. Table 2 gives an overview of the available data on regional ties. If data (on education) for an MP was missing or the MP was born abroad, the relevant variable was coded as 0 for all provinces.¹⁵ In addition, Table 3 shows some information about the overlap between the different regional ties.

Our analysis includes several other independent variables. In order to test for the *regional hypothesis*, we include a proxy for *regional attachment*. Here we use data from the 2021 European Quality of Government Index (the EQI) (Charron, Lapuente, and Bauhr 2021). For each province, we calculated the average score of Dutch respondents on the following question: “People might feel different levels of attachment to where they live and to Europe, on a scale of 1-10 with ‘1’ being ‘not at all’ and ‘10’ being ‘very attached’, how closely attached do you feel about your region in the Netherlands?” We mean-centered this variable, so that negative values represent a lower than average (7.532) regional attachment and positive values mean higher than average level of regional attachment. The mean-centered variable ranges from -0.526 for Flevoland to 0.514 for Friesland.

To test for the association between regional representation and preference votes hypothesis, we included an indicator for the number of *preference votes* an MP obtained in a province, relative to the number of preference votes in all other provinces:

$$Votes = \frac{\text{Votes MP in province}}{\text{Votes own party in province}} - \frac{\text{Votes MP in rest of the country}}{\text{Votes own party rest of the country}}$$

We add control variables to measure whether an MP was a *party group leader* (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0), whether the

TABLE 2
Regional ties

Category	Speeches	Questions
MPs included	169	158
MP x Province combinations	2028	1896
Regional ties		
Place of birth	Complete (12 abroad)	Complete (10 abroad)
Primary or secondary education	58 missing	53 missing
Tertiary education	22 missing	20 missing
Place of residence	Complete	Complete
Number of ties		
No ties	1663 (82.0%)	1553 (81.9%)
1	195 (9.6%)	181 (9.5%)
2	93 (4.6%)	90 (4.7%)
3	59 (2.9%)	55 (2.9%)
Four ties	18 (0.9%)	17 (0.9%)

TABLE 3
Overlap between regional ties

Regional tie	N	% overlap with:				Average ties
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
Place of birth (1)	179		52.0	34.1	43.6	2.30
Primary or secondary education (2)	135	68.9		35.6	44.4	2.49
Tertiary education (3)	217	28.1	22.1		42.9	1.93
Place of residence (4)	193	40.4	31.1	48.2		2.20

The table shows the overlap between the different regional ties, at the MP*province level. For example, we know the place of residence from (all) 193 MPs. 40.4% MPs were born in the same province as were they currently reside. The table also shows the average number of ties when we, for example only look at those MP*province cases when place of residence equals 1, in this case 2.20.

Clarification of some numbers:

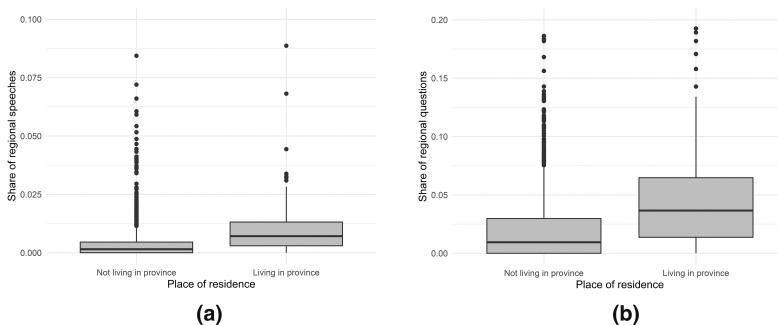
- The N of place of birth is 179, which is lower than the N of place of residence. This is because 14 MPs included in the dataset were not born in the Netherlands.
- The N of Tertiary education (217) is higher than the number of MPs included in the dataset (193). This is because some MPs obtained tertiary education in multiple provinces.
- The same applies to primary or secondary education, were the N = 135 does not mean that we have information of 135 MPs.

MP belonged to a party which was part of the *coalition* (1) or not (0) and the log of *number of seats* of an MP's party. Finally, we controlled for the *size of a province* by including number of residents of a province, as large provinces are more likely to be discussed by all MPs.

Results

Figure 1 displays the relative number of regional speeches and questions for province of residence versus provinces where an MP does not reside (Appendix B in the online supporting information provides similar figures for the other ties). The share of regional speeches and questions is higher for province of residence, a first indication that regional ties have an effect on referring to the own region. However, while there are some outliers, for most MPs the share of regional questions and speeches is still relatively low, which was to be expected given the electoral system as well has high specialization of MPs in party groups. On average 5.5% of all questions of an MP relate to the province where the MP lives. For speeches, this is even lower: 1.2% of the paragraphs. This is much lower than in some other countries. Of all parliamentary questions asked by Irish Parliamentarians between 1997 and 2002, 44.1% were local (Martin 2011, 478). In Italy, more than one-third of all questions asked between 2006 and 2008 refer to the district of an MP. However, the distribution is highly skewed: most MPs only ask a few questions about their district, while a few ask many

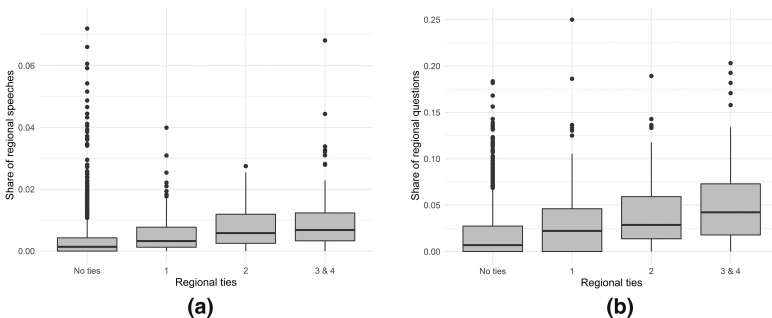
FIGURE 1
Share of Regional Speeches (a) and Questions (b) for Province of Residence Versus Share of Regional Speeches and Questions for Provinces Where an MP Does Not Reside.



(Russo 2011, 293). A highly skewed distribution of local questions is also visible in other countries (e.g., Chiru 2021; Zittel, Nyhuis, and Baumann 2019). In Germany, 6.2% of questions asked during the 17th legislative term had a reference to the district of the MP who asked the question, which is closer to the Dutch figure of 5.4% questions about an MP's province of residence, although we have to note that Dutch provinces have more inhabitants than German constituencies (Zittel, Nyhuis, and Baumann 2019).

Figure 2a displays the relative attention to a region in speeches, broken down by the number of regional ties. Those with no ties to a province mention it on average in 0.4% of their speeches, while those with three or four ties mention it on average in 1.1% of their speeches. This suggests a (small) positive effect of the number of regional ties on the share of mentions that region receives from the MP. This relationship is stronger for parliamentary questions (see Figure 2b). Those with no ties to a province mention it on average in 2% of their questions, while those with three or four ties mention it on average in 5.5% of their questions. In Appendix C in the online supporting information, the same boxplots are shown for each province separately. They show a mixed pattern, but in line with our expectation, the positive relationship seems to be especially visible in the provinces of Groningen, Friesland, and Limburg, those far away from the Randstad. Most references in speeches and questions are to the names of municipalities: 54 and 64% respectively (see Table D1 in the online supporting information). Most of the other references are to the name of the province (31 and 23% respectively). This is in line with the relative

FIGURE 2
Regional Speeches (a) and Questions (b) by the Number of Regional Ties.



importance of these levels of government: municipalities are generally regarded as more important than provinces (Andeweg, Irwin, and Louwerse 2020, 187).

While these descriptive patterns are indicative, a more encompassing test of our hypotheses requires us to look at the results of the multilevel linear regression analysis (see Table 4 and 5).¹⁶ To discuss the regional ties hypothesis (H1), we can look at the regional ties variable in model 1 and the separate categories in model 2 (place of birth, place of primary/secondary education, place of tertiary education, and place of residence). Generally, the results are in line with the expected regional ties hypothesis: those with stronger ties to a region mention it a larger share of speeches and questions. In line with our parliamentary instrument hypothesis (H4), this effect is stronger for parliamentary questions than for speeches. Those with one regional tie ask about 0.6 percentage point more questions about that region than those with no ties, and this difference is 2 percentage points for those with two ties and 3.5 percentage points for those with three or four ties to a region. Thus, having more ties leads to asking even more regional questions. For speeches, the relationships are somewhat weaker: having one, two or three, or four regional ties leads to referring more to the own region in parliamentary debates, but especially for the first two categories, the effect is very small. MPs with three or four regional ties refer to their own region in about 0.7 percentage point more paragraphs.

Model 2 shows that the type of tie to a region is important: more recent ties, particularly current place of residence, have a stronger relationship with geographical representation. While no ties (place of birth, primary or secondary education, tertiary education, and place of residence) have a substantial negative association, only the latter two are both positive and statistically significant. Moreover, the association of place of residence with regional attention is also stronger than the one for tertiary education: MPs who live in a region ask 2.8 percentage points more questions about that region than those who do not live in that region, while the effect for attending tertiary education in the region is 1 percentage point. So, regional ties definitely seem to be related to referring to a region, and this especially applies to an MP's current place of residence. The associations found in the speeches model are smaller, yet follow the same pattern.

In the speeches model, none of the main associations for the other independent variables are significant. In the questions

Geographical Representation Under a Single Nationwide District: The Case of the Netherlands

TABLE 4
Speeches

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 2
(Constant)	0.0021	0.0017	0.0020
Regional ties			0.0020
1	0.0015	0.0007	
2	0.0023	0.0011	
Three or four	0.0067	0.0016	
Place of birth			0.0010
Place of residence			0.0010
Primary or secondary education			0.0010
Tertiary education			0.0020
Coalition	0.0001	0.0006	0.0000
Seats	0.0002	0.0011	0.0000
Regional attachment	-0.0008	0.0025	-0.0010
Parliamentary Group	-0.0002	0.0009	0.0000
Leader			0.0010
Votes	0.0145	0.0101	0.0100
Province—Size (x 100,000)	0.0001	0.0001	0.0000
Regional ties (1) *	0.0251	0.0245	
Votes			
Regional ties (2) *	-0.0107	0.0229	
Votes			

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

	Model 1	Model 2	
Regional ties (3/4) *	0.0043	0.0343	
Votes			
Place of birth * Votes		0.0140	0.0330
Place of residence *		-0.0490	0.0230 *
Votes			
Primary or secondary educ. * Votes		0.0350	0.0300
Tertiary education *		0.0080	0.0260
Votes			
Regional ties (1) *	0.0017	0.0026	
Regional att.			
Regional ties (2) *	0.0000	0.0036	
Regional att.			
Regional ties (3/4) *	0.0136	0.0051	**
Regional att.			
Place of birth *		-0.0020	0.0040
Regional att.			
Place of residence *		0.0130	0.0040 **
Regional att.			
Primary or sec. Educ. *		0.0030	0.0040
Regional att.		0.0030	0.0030
Tertiary education *		0.0290	0.0350
Regional att.			
Regional attachment	0.0396	0.0334	
* Votes			
AIC	-13,284	-13,291	

(Continues)

Table 4 (Continued)

	Model 1	Model 2
BIC	-13,172	-13,162
Log likelihood	6662	6668
Observations	2016	2016
Groups(MPs)	168	168
Groups(Provinces)	12	12
Variance:	0.0000	0.0000
MPs(intercept)	0.0024	0.0024
Variance:	0.0000	0.0000
Provinces(intercept)	0.0086	0.0086

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Regression coefficients with standard errors.

TABLE 5
Questions

	Model 1			Model 2		
(Constant)	0.0175	0.0067	*	0.0181	0.0066	**
Regional ties						
1	0.0062	0.0029	*			
2	0.0199	0.0043	***			
Three or four	0.0340	0.0059	***			
Place of birth				0.0060	0.0041	
Place of residence				0.0275	0.0049	***
Primary or secondary education				-0.0001	0.0045	
Tertiary education				0.0094	0.0034	**
Coalition	0.0047	0.0028		0.0047	0.0028	
Seats	-0.0100	0.0049	*	-0.0104	0.0050	*
Regional attachment	-0.0035	0.0076		-0.0037	0.0074	
Parliamentary Group Leader	0.0003	0.0054		0.0003	0.0054	
Votes	0.0150	0.0463		0.0289	0.0456	
Province—Size (x 100.000)	0.0009	0.0002	**	0.0009	0.0002	**
Regional ties (1) * Votes	0.1773	0.1023				
Regional ties (2) * Votes	0.2261	0.0882	*			
Regional ties (3/4) * Votes	-0.0614	0.1360				
Place of birth * Votes				-0.2090	0.1272	
Place of residence * Votes				-0.0218	0.0996	
Primary or secondary educ. * Votes				0.1353	0.1208	
Tertiary education * Votes				0.1268	0.1055	
Regional ties (1) * Regional att.	0.0180	0.0104				
Regional ties (2) * Regional att.	0.0091	0.0141				
Regional ties (3/4) * Regional att.	0.0820	0.0195	***			
Place of birth * Regional att.				0.0015	0.0142	
Place of residence * Regional att.				0.0560	0.0164	***
Primary or sec. Educ. * Regional att.				0.0251	0.0148	

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

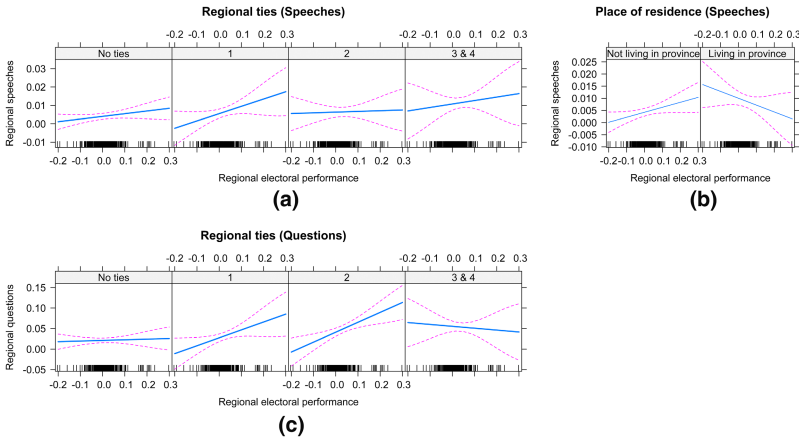
	Model 1		Model 2	
Tertiary education *			0.0156	0.0121
Regional att.				
Regional attachment	0.1537	0.1471	0.0572	0.1553
* Votes				
AIC	-7372.1		-7377.0	
BIC	-7261.2		-7249.4	
Log likelihood	3706.1		3711.5	
Observations	1896		1896	
Groups(MPs)	158		158	
Groups(Provinces)	12		12	
Variance:	0.0001	0.0115	0.0001	0.0115
MPs(intercept)				
Variance:	0.0000	0.0069	0.0000	0.0068
Provinces(intercept)				

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Regression coefficients with standard errors.

model, only party size (seats) and province size are significant. Relatively more regional questions are asked if the province is larger and if the party is smaller. These associations are not very strong, however. What is important here is that we do not find support for the preference vote (H2a) and regional attachment (H3a) hypotheses.¹⁷ In general MPs do not seem to be more inclined to pay attention to either region where they receive more preference votes or where regional attachment is low.

To test the preference votes interaction hypothesis and the regional attachment interaction hypothesis, we need to look at the interaction effects between each of these variables and the regional ties variables. We first look at the interaction effects between regional ties and the relative electoral performance of an MP in a province (see also Figure 3 for effect plots for the variables in model 1 and the significant variables from model 2). The evidence for such an interaction between preference votes and regional ties is weak. Most of the interaction terms in the models for speeches and questions are not significant. If we look at the regional ties variables in model 2, we only find one significant coefficient: for place of residence in the speeches model (see also Figure 3, plot B). However, this association is negative. If we look at the region ties variable each time in model 1, at first a positive association seems visible. For questions the regression coefficients for one regional tie and two regional ties are positive, and for two regional ties, they

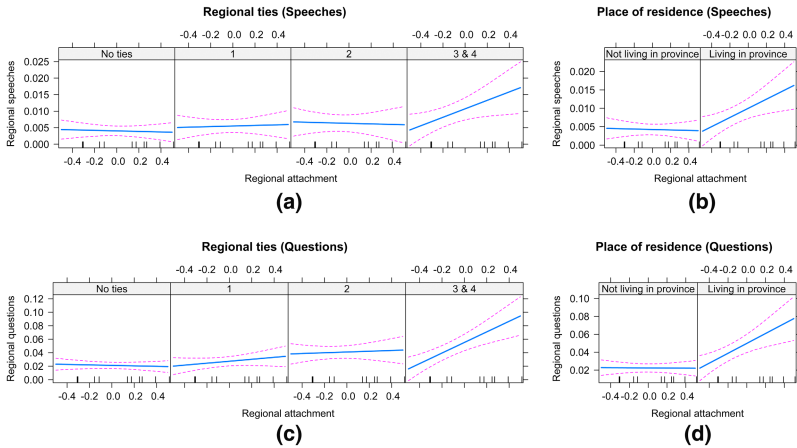
FIGURE 3
Interaction Effects Electoral Performance and Regional Ties.



are also significant. However, the category three or four regional ties is not significant and even has a negative coefficient for questions. One tentative explanation is that for those with very strong ties to a region, the electoral incentive matters less for their regional representation than for those with weaker ties to a province. For speeches none of the coefficients are significant, and the pattern is also different. The interaction with one regional tie is still positive, with two regional ties, it is negative, and with three or four regional ties, it is positive again. Thus, for questions, there is some evidence that there indeed might be an interaction between electoral performance and regional ties. But in general the evidence is very weak.

The interaction effect between regional ties and regional attachment shows evidence in support of the regional attachment hypothesis (see also Figure 4 for significant variables). We hypothesized the association between regional ties and geographical representation to be stronger in provinces where regional attachment is higher. In the Netherlands, regional attachment is higher in provinces further away from the main urban area (Randstad), such as Groningen, Friesland, Zeeland, and Limburg. We find indeed stronger associations between regional ties and acts of geographical representation the stronger regional attachment is: the

FIGURE 4
Interaction Effects Regional Attachment and Regional Ties.



coefficients for the interaction effect with three or four regional ties are statistically significant (see also plot A and C in Figure 4). In model 2 for both speeches and questions, the interaction effect between place of residence and regional attachment are significant (see also plot B and D in Figure 4), but the others are not. This seems to suggest, in line with our general findings regarding regional ties, that especially an MP's current place of residence has a substantial effect, and birthplace and places of education are less important.

The last interaction effect which is included in the model is between regional attachment and electoral performance. This effect is positive in all models, but in none of them is the effect significant. In addition, we ran models with a three-way interaction between regional ties, regional attachment, and votes to test Hypothesis 3b that the preference vote effect would be supported more in provinces with high levels of regional attachment (see Appendix E in the online supporting information). Only one variable was significant (primary or secondary education in model 2 for questions), but overall we can conclude that we do not find support for the hypothesized relationship (H3b).

Conclusion and Discussion

Geographical representation in parliament plays a role even when elections are held in a single nationwide district. Our analysis shows that having regional ties is related to the extent to which MPs refer to these regions in parliamentary speeches and, more strongly, in the written questions MPs ask. Having more ties with a specific region is associated with higher levels of geographical representation, and the most recent ties seem to be particularly important in this respect—especially place of residence, and to a lesser extent the place of tertiary education. The overall share of references to regions is lower than in some other country cases (Portugal, Ireland), but Dutch MPs pay about as much attention to the province they live in as German MPs pay attention to their local constituency. Moreover, the evidence for the relationship between regional ties and regional representation is quite strong and substantively relevant. This is in line with earlier work in systems with electoral districts, which suggested that electoral incentives are not the only thing driving regional representation (Kellermann 2016; Martin 2011). The number of preference votes an MP receives in a region and regional attachment were not related to acts of regional representation in our analysis of Dutch MPs between 2017 and 2021.

We find evidence in favor of a regional attachment interaction hypothesis: in regions where inhabitants identify more strongly with their province, we find stronger geographical representation, especially among MPs who currently live in that province. Contrarily, we find only weak evidence for the importance of regional preference votes. For those with some ties, but not the strongest ties, the relative share of regional preference votes seems to matter.

Overall, this suggests that indeed regional representation is something that MPs feel is a good thing, particularly those living outside of the *Randstad* area (Andeweg and Van Vonno 2018). MPs in the Netherlands pay attention to the region they have ties with, even if they do not seem to have (strong) electoral reasons for this. This observation substantiates the argument in the international-comparative literature that geographical representation is not driven purely by electoral incentives, but that the appropriateness of such behavior is a relevant factor, especially outside central regions (Martin 2011; Zittel, Nyhuis, and Baumann 2019).

What this tells us is that electoral incentives are not always necessary for geographical representation. But we have to consider the limitations of our analysis, in particular regarding the measurement of regional representation. First, when it comes to determining when a region was mentioned our approach to creating the dictionaries was, as we explained, conservative. We focused on avoiding false positives, but this comes at the cost of potential false negatives. Our validation by means of random manual coding was promising, but it did identify more false negatives than false positives. Second, our approach distinguishes between regional and nonregional questions or paragraphs in speeches, but it does not measure the intensity of the regional focus in a single question or paragraph. In addition, because of our measurement decisions, we perhaps are missing some—less explicit—regional references. Future work could further improve these measures, for example, via the use of Named Entity Recognition (Fernandes, Won, and Martins 2020) or Correlated Topics Models, as well as by including more parliamentary terms.

The data on regional ties was another limiting factor: for quite a few MPs, there was no information about the place where they received primary or secondary education, and for some MPs, data on the place where they received tertiary education was also missing (or they simply did not follow tertiary education). Perhaps this explains weaker effects for these variables, although we are convinced by the observation that it is mostly recent ties that seem to matter: place of residence and, to a lesser degree, place of tertiary education. We do not find an association for the place of primary or secondary education, but also not for place of birth. In addition, there might also be other regional ties which we did not consider in our study. One which comes to mind is political experience at the local level. This can have an effect on the electoral success of candidates at the national level (Tavits 2010) and might therefore be an interesting tie to study in further research.

Substantively, we focus on regional representation and MPs' ties with regions and find evidence of an association between the two: MPs ask more regional questions about regions with which they have ties. One could argue that regional representation can also be done by MPs who do not have ties to a particular region at all. While our descriptive statistics on the number of questions MPs ask about their “own” regions might thus neglect this Burkean type of “virtual” representation, the literature on descriptive representation suggests that shared characteristics between

representative and represented are important (Mansbridge 1999), and our analysis shows that indeed MPs are more likely to refer to regions they have ties with than to other regions. We are also not able to say exactly what causes the effect regional ties have on mentioning these regions in parliament, and whether mentioning the regions is a substantive of more symbolic form of representation. It might, for example, be that the MP is just more inclined to use examples of the region they are most familiar with when addressing more general, nationwide issues. This also shows that further research is necessary. Further studies could focus both on the context in which MPs refer to a region and also, for example, on whether the attention MPs pay to regional issues actually have an impact on policymaking. In addition, we only focused on individual MPs in this study, without looking at possible differences between political parties. The ideology of a political party might also influence to which area MPs pay more attention (e.g., social democrats might have a stronger focus on areas with a higher percentage of people belonging to the working class). Further research could focus on such party differences.¹⁸ In addition, it might be that region attention is something which is orchestrated by the party, rather than stemming from an individual MPs' initiative. Our assumption is that regional references are, at least partly, individual decisions taken by MPs. Regional references could also be a coordinated effort on behalf of the party leadership. Based on our data, we are not able to settle this issue; further research is necessary to lift this party curtain.

Our results show—also in comparisons with other studies (see, for example, Zittel, Nyhuis, and Baumann 2019)—that the percentage of questions which refer to regions is higher than might be expected. Geographical representation thus matters, even under a single nationwide district and in the absence of constituency-level electoral incentives.

Data Availability Statement. The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Dataverse at doi:[10.7910/DVN/U999MC](https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/U999MC).

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NOTES

1. Or, parties can also decide to opt for nonsurrogate representation. In that case, all MPs represent all voters of a party.

2. Some parties present different list in all districts, but only near the end of the list. They, for example, present a list with 30 candidates, with the first 26 candidates being the same in all districts and in each district four local candidates.

3. While municipalities would also have been an option, these vary greatly in size (from under 1000 to over 870,000 inhabitants), and there are about twice as many municipalities as MPs.

4. We excluded all contributions to a debate from the MP who was the (acting) Speaker in that debate.

5. Each municipality consists of different places (cities, towns, villages). We considered including the names of these places. However, many places have names which are also commonly used words, such as *Boer* (farmer), *Dieren* (animals), and *Noorden* (North). For some of these villages, it was obvious that they should be excluded, but for many places, it was ambivalent whether references were made to the place name or not. In line with our conservative approach, we therefore decided not to include the names of the places.

6. Statistics Netherlands (CBS) distinguishes more regional divisions (CBS 2021), but some of them cover multiple provinces. These are therefore not included in our dictionaries.

7. An additional advantage is that some of these regions are named after larger areas that are commonly used to refer to parts of provinces (e.g., Veluwe and Twente).

8. The official report of the Tweede Kamer subdivides speeches into paragraphs.

9. We remove these MPs because they contributed so little in parliamentary debates that the results would hardly be informative. With only 100 paragraphs, it is highly likely that they only contributed to a handful of debates.

10. For the purpose of calculating the Krippendorff's alpha, for each speech we only considered the province which scored highest in the dictionary approach if two or more provinces were scored.

11. First, we added the word to refer to the inhabitants of a province to the dictionary. Second, in the preprocessing of the texts stage (both for speeches and questions), we removed university names to exclude any references to places at which universities were located (i.e., "Leiden University") as most of these

references were not geographical, but rather referred to research done at the university. Third, for the province of Noord-Brabant, we included “Brabant” as an alias.

12. This number of MPs is different than the number of MPs included in the analysis for speeches. This is correct, and a result of our selection criteria of 100 paragraphs and 10 questions. If an MP, for example, only asked eight questions, but was more active in parliamentary debates, the MP is included in the analysis based on speeches but not in the analysis based on questions.

13. We remove those MPs because—compared to others—10 questions is really low, and the relative proportion of regional questions might be highly influenced by the small number of questions, but this would then be meaningful compared to others.

14. More information can be obtained from PDC by email: 170@pdc.nl.

15. We also ran the models presented in the article only with MPs for which the data was complete (speeches, $N = 103$; questions, $N = 97$). For almost all variables, effect sizes (and significance) did not substantially change in these models.

16. One case in all speech models presented in this article was highly influential (with a Cook’s distance above 3 in all models). Therefore, all cases related to this MP (12, one for each province) were removed from the analyses.

17. As alternative to regional attachment, we also ran the models presented in the text with “distance to The Hague” (i.e., the city where the parliament is located), operationalized as travel time by car in minutes from the province capitol to The Hague. In none of the models was this variable significant nor did it (substantively) impact the other effects.

18. Appendix F in the online supporting information contains a short exploration of differences between political parties. In this appendix, we show that in all political parties MPs pay more attention to the province in which they currently reside, than to other provinces. However, for some parties the difference is larger than for others. The relative high number of parties and small number of MPs within a party makes it difficult to test explanations based on our current dataset. That is why we do not further focus on party differences but stress the importance of further research on this issue.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

Appendix S1 Supporting Information