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Explaining the Breakdown of the Religion–Vote Relationship in The Netherlands, 1971–2006

GIEDO JANSEN, NAN DIRK DE GRAAF and ARIANA NEED

This article examines the extent to which changes in the effect of religion on voting in The Netherlands since the 1970s can be explained by 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' approaches. The first includes religious integration and education. The latter category encompasses the restructuring of the party system and changes in party positions. Hypotheses are tested employing logistic and conditional logistic regression analyses of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (1971–2006) supplemented by data from the Comparative Manifesto Project. Weakening religious integration largely explains the decline of political boundaries between non-religious voters and Catholics and Calvinists. In line with earlier research, the article finds that the creation of a single Christian Democratic Party (CDA) has reduced the religion–vote relationship. However, this merger effect largely disappears after taking into account party positions. Moreover, party positions influence the religion–vote association: the effect of religion on voting increases as religious parties emphasise traditional moral issues in their manifestos.

Introduction

International comparative research has frequently addressed changes in the relationship between religion and voting behaviour. Many researchers have signalled an erosion in the ability of religion to explain political party choice (Dalton 2002; Dogan 1995; Franklin *et al.* 1992). Despite this prevalent view, others demonstrated relatively stable associations between religion and voting in Western European countries (Elff 2007; Knutsen 2004; Raymond 2010) or even a slight increase of the effect of religion on voting in recent European Parliament elections (Van der Brug *et al.* 2009). Explanations of these trends often consider social changes such as secularisation to be their primary source (Broughton and ten Napel 2000;

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Knutsen 2004; Norris and Inglehart 2004). Secularisation implies that religion becomes less important in the lives of individuals, that the social and political influence of religious organisations declines and/or that the engagement in political life by religious organisations declines (Manza and Wright 2003: 300–301). Declining levels of church attendance are assumed to weaken the capacity of churches to influence the voting behaviour of their members. It is also suggested that the religion–vote relationship declines as a result of rising levels of education and affluence causing voters to become less reliant on ‘simple religious heuristics to govern all aspects of their lives, including how they vote’ (Manza and Wright 2003: 301).

To date, few studies have examined the relevance of political factors in explaining changes in the effect of religion on party choice. We argue that, next to social change, political changes are crucial in understanding why the influence of religion on voting behaviour differs from election to election. For this purpose, we borrow two theoretical approaches from the class voting literature – a ‘bottom-up’ approach related to the composition of electorates and the relevance of specific divisions in society, and a ‘top-down’ approach related to the extent to which parties appeal to voters (cf. Evans 2000; Evans and Whitefield 2006; see also Jansen *et al.* 2011). From the latter perspective, patterns in the religion–vote relationship reflect characteristics of the party system or of individual parties rather than social changes related to secularisation. In this study, we simultaneously investigate social and political factors in explaining changes in the effect of religion on voting behaviour. The hypotheses and empirical tests in this study focus on trends in the religion–vote relationship in The Netherlands during the period 1971–2006.

The Netherlands during this period provides an interesting case for the study of both social and political factors that may explain changes in the religion–vote relationship. For a long time, the impact of religion on Dutch politics could be regarded as a textbook example of religious segmentation (see for example the monumental work of Lijphart 1968). Religious cleavages ran deep, not only between the religious and non-religious share of the population, but also between Catholics and Protestants, and among different Protestant denominations. Protestants affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederlands Hervormd*) and Protestant Church can be distinguished from those who belong to more orthodox Calvinist or Re-reformed churches (*Gereformeed*) (see Janse 1985). The Netherlands is also illustrative of the alleged decline of the religion–vote relationship in Western Europe. Research has repeatedly shown that religious-based voting has declined in The Netherlands over the past decades (Eisinga *et al.* 1997; Irwin and Van Holsteyn 2008; Need 1997; Van der Kolk 2000).

A well-known outcome of Dutch religious segmentation was the ‘pillared’ political system. The Dutch party system inherited separate political parties linked to different denominational groups. In this sense, The

Netherlands forms an almost natural experiment, because, in the period under study, two party mergers occurred between different religious parties. In 1977, the major Catholic, Protestant and Calvinist parties merged into one party – the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) – and in 2002 two minor Protestant parties merged into the Christian Union. Hence, the Dutch case provides a unique opportunity to investigate if, and to what extent, the supply of party alternatives is related to changes in the religion–vote relationship (see also De Graaf *et al.* 2001). We use data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES) between 1971 and 2006. Summarising the above, the question we address is: *to what extent can ‘bottom-up and ‘top-down’ explanations account for changes in the effect of religion on party choice in The Netherlands between 1971 and 2006?*

We contribute to the literature in three interrelated ways. First, we not only aim to translate the ‘top-down’ perspective from the class voting literature to the relationship between religion and vote, but also to theoretically and methodologically integrate it with the ‘bottom-up’ perspective. We begin by re-addressing a question raised by De Graaf *et al.* (2001) about the extent to which the formation of the CDA led to sudden religious de-alignment. De Graaf *et al.* (2001) assume a process of blurring boundaries. In this research, we explicitly test to what extent trends in the effect of religion on voting are brought about by weakening church attendance and the growing effects of education. Because we investigate a longer period we are also able to investigate the consequences of the more recent political merger in 2002.

Second, we follow recent innovations in cleavage voting studies by actually measuring party positions (Achterberg 2006; Elff 2009; Evans *et al.* 1999; and Oskarson 2005). For this purpose we employ data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge *et al.* 2001; Klingemann *et al.* 2006). Most studies looking into political explanations for trends in class- or religious-based voting have often inferred rather than formally tested for political influences.

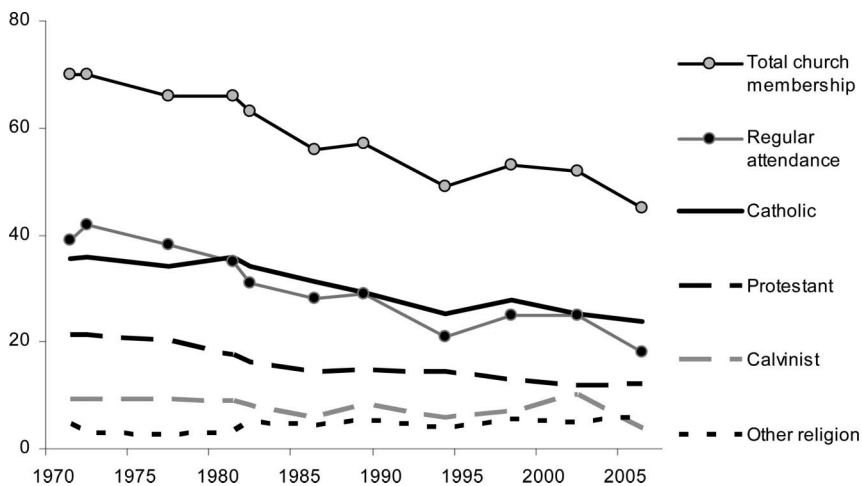
Third, we make methodological progress by employing conditional logistic (CL) regression analysis (cf. Alvarez and Nagler 1998; Elff 2009; McFadden 1974). Conditional logistic models accommodate scientific improvement in the field of cleavage voting research because the model allows combining case-specific variables with choice-specific variables. By showing how political supply can influence the importance of religious cleavages for electoral behaviour, our results are not only relevant for The Netherlands. There are large cross-national differences in the presence, strength and denominational affiliation of religious parties. Over time, political parties, including those with a religious affiliation, often changed their ideological orientation and policy preferences (Keman and Pennings 2006). This study provides a better understanding of the extent to which the supply of political options strengthens or weakens social cleavages in politics.

Bottom-up: Changes in the Religious Structure of The Netherlands

We first examine changes in the religious structure of The Netherlands. Figure 1 shows that the proportion of church members has fallen significantly. It also reveals a more or less linear downward trend of both church attendance and church membership over a 35-year period. Total church membership dropped from 70 to 45 per cent and regular church attendance (i.e. at least once a month) dropped from 39 to 18 per cent. Figure 1 also shows that the decline in church membership runs more or less parallel for Catholics and Protestants, dropping respectively from 37 per cent and 23 per cent in 1971 to 24 per cent and 12 per cent in 2006. The total membership of Calvinist groups constituted about 10 per cent over the whole period.

If the influence of religion on the political behaviour of individuals is assumed to be declining due to sociological processes such as secularisation and the growth of individualism, this decline is also assumed to be relatively gradual and unidirectional. Yet the observed changes in the religious structures and secularisation processes do not necessarily produce a decline in the religion–vote relationship. Although church membership or church attendance may decline, levels of religious voting can remain stable among those who remain in church. The changes in the sizes of the different religious categories can be defined as compositional changes. We therefore need to distinguish compositional changes from the blurring of religious boundaries. The finding that religious divisions are reflected by differences in value orientations is well-established in the political science literature (Aarts and Thomassen 2008; De Koster and Van der Waal 2007; Knutsen 2004; Nelsen

FIGURE 1
TREND IN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP, CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND
DENOMINATION IN PERCENTAGES BETWEEN 1971 AND 2006



Source: DPES (1971–2006).

et al. 2001; Raymond 2010). Religion and religious membership are often associated with traditional views on moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality and gender relations, sometimes more broadly labelled as ‘cultural conservatism’ (Middendorp 1991). The decline of religious divisions in politics may be attributed to a decrease in moral values. Growing homogeneity between religious and non-religious groups may have reduced a sense of shared identity and interest among members of religious denominations. We assume that the process of blurring religious divisions is unidirectional and relatively gradual, leading to converging political behaviour. We therefore expect that: *the association between denomination and votes for religious versus non-religious parties becomes generally weaker (H1)*.

Secularisation implies that religious identity, beliefs and values may be reduced because church attendance is declining. Church attendance is important because, as integration theory (Durkheim 1879 [1967]) suggests, during religious rituals the norms of religious groups are not only transmitted but also confirmed. The more often people attend church the more their social, cultural and political values reflect the religious norms that are transmitted during religious services. Therefore, people who attend church frequently hold a more conservative ideology than infrequent attendees (Felling and Peters 1986). We may expect that religious values cause church attendees to vote for parties that stand for traditional moral values, which in The Netherlands are usually the confessional parties. The cultural and normative boundaries between religious and irreligious voters may blur not only because church members attend church less often (compositional explanation), but also because the moral authority and spiritual guidance of religious leaders declines in a secularising society, which reduces the impact of church attendance as such. Compared to earlier decades, clergymen today may not only be less successful in enforcing religious norms but may also put emphasis on different values during religious services. We therefore formulate the following hypothesis: *the association between church attendance and votes for religious versus non-religious parties becomes generally weaker (H2)*.

A decline in the impact of church attendance on voting could explain why the association between denomination and religious party choice is weakening. We know that church members attend church less frequently over time. Hence, we formulate a hypothesis about the extent to which changes in church attendance affect the denomination–vote relationship¹: *the decline of the association between denomination and votes for religious versus non-religious parties diminishes when we take church attendance into account (H3)*.

Another implication of the secularisation process is associated with the rising levels of education in post-industrial societies. Because more educated people generally adhere to more individualistic and liberal norms than their less educated counterparts, they are less often religiously affiliated and more often leave their church (Need and De Graaf 1996). More highly educated

church members are expected to have a less traditional world view than church members with a lower level of education. An increasing level of education may therefore blur the cultural boundaries between religious and irreligious voters. Our expectation is that: *the decline of the association between denomination and votes for religious versus non-religious parties diminishes when we take education into account (H4).*

Top-down Changes: Political Change in The Netherlands

Changes in the Positions of Religious Parties

The implication of the secularisation process is that changes in the social structure of societies produce changes in political choices, therefore shaping the religion–vote relationship ‘bottom-up’. Parties are considered to respond to changes in societal circumstances. However, in class voting research it is commonly held that, due to the shrinking size of the working class, politicians, and socialists in particular, aim to secure the survival of their party by seeking support from the middle class, which in turn leads them to alienate themselves from the working class (Przeworski and Sprague 1986). According to this view, the outcomes of party behaviour are contributions to, and not mere reflections of, the evolution of political cleavages. From this ‘top-down’ perspective, Evans *et al.* (1999), for example, explained that class voting in Britain declined between 1964 and 1997 as a result of the Labour Party’s move to the centre. Kalyvas (1996) has translated this ‘Dilemma of Electoral Socialism’ to the consequences of the electoral strategy of confessional parties in the nineteenth century. Historically, confessional parties gave emphasis to religious issues. But their religious nature hindered Christian Democrats from successfully mobilising non-religious voters. In order to maximise the numbers of votes, Christian parties had to de-emphasise religion without destroying the confessional character of the party. This ‘Confessional Dilemma’ induced Christian parties to redefine the position of religion in politics. In the late nineteenth century, Christian Democrats broke their organisational dependence on the Church, and reinterpreted their religious identity by replacing specific and detailed religious doctrines by general and abstract moral values (Kalyvas 1996: 242–44). Therefore, confessional parties ‘contributed to making religion less relevant for politics’ (Kalyvas 1996: 245). This stands in contrast to a simple ‘bottom-up’ process. Paradoxically, Kalyvas (1996: 256) remarks that, by eroding their members’ links to the church religious parties – once formed to bring religion back into society and politics – this process reinforced general secularisation. A similar argument for the Dutch case is made by De Graaf *et al.* (2001: 3), who argue that the merging of the major Catholic, Protestant and Calvinist parties in 1977 (a survival strategy to counter their electoral weakness) into one Christian Democratic party has ‘replaced specific linkages between denomination and party with a more diffuse relation’.

Rather than simply reflecting social changes, a ‘top-down’ perspective on cleavage voting suggests that changes in political choices may reinforce the blurring of religious boundaries.

Although limited, the literature contains some empirical evidence of the ‘top-down’ way in which religion relates to voting behaviour. Studying Britain, Germany, The Netherlands and Norway, Oskarson (2005) demonstrates that the strength of the religion–vote relationship correlates with polarisation regarding traditional values at the party level. She argues that ‘the impact of social cleavages on party choice will not only depend on how pronounced or widely spread the cleavages are, but also on how the parties relate to the cleavages present in the electorate’ (Oskarson 2005: 103). Other research on Western Europe (Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and The Netherlands) shows that regular church attendees favour parties with relatively traditionalist positions, whereas non-churchgoers prefer parties with relatively modern positions (Elff 2009). Assuming interactions between religious categories and the extent to which political parties are culturally conservative, we hypothesise that *Church members are more likely to vote for a party relative to non-church members if it embraces a more traditional moral position (H5a)*. Second, *the more individuals attend church, the more likely they are to vote for a party holding a more traditional moral position (H5b)*.

Following this line of reasoning, changes over time in the ideological position of parties may result in a decline or increase in the association between religion and vote. We expect that religious parties, in appealing to the growing number of secular voters, de-emphasised religious issues in their campaigns. Keman and Pennings (2006) showed that political choices converge with respect to economic dimension. This is due to many Social Democratic as well as Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe, including those in The Netherlands, moving to the centre of party systems during the 1990s. Analogous to the move of Labour parties towards the centre due to the shrinking size of the manual class, we expect that religious parties became less traditionalist as a response to the decline in numbers of church members. Discussing the position of Christian Democratic parties, Keman and Pennings (2006: 110) argue that: ‘in trying to keep the median voter they apparently felt compelled in view of secularization and economic constraints to moderate their moral views and traditional values’. In calling less attention to morality policies, we assume that the distinct political voice of religious groups is reduced. We thus expect that *the decline of the association between denomination and vote diminishes when we take the differences and changes into account with respect to the positions of parties regarding traditional moral values (H6)*.

Mergers between Religious Parties in The Netherlands

After World War II there were three major religious parties in Dutch politics. The oldest, the ARP (Anti-Revolutionary Party), was founded in

1879. The ARP received strong support from Calvinists and other orthodox Protestants. A second political party for Protestants was founded in 1908 when the CHU (Christian Historical Union) split from the ARP. The CHU was orientated toward the Dutch Reformed Church and received support primarily from liberal Protestants (Van Holsteyn *et al.* 2000). The dominant religious party in the post-war period was the KVP (Catholic People's Party), which usually attracted around 30 per cent of the vote (mainly Catholics). In the 1960s, votes for religious parties began to decline, and the CHU and KVP in particular lost much support. As a reaction to their electoral weakness, the KVP, CHU and ARP eventually participated in a common list in the 1977 election and officially merged into a single party (CDA) in 1980 (Ten Napel 1990; Pijnenburg 1994).

After the formation of the CDA, other confessional parties, mainly appealing to orthodox Protestants, continued to exist in the Dutch party system. Although these minor 'Re-reformed' (*Gereformeerde*) parties (the Political Reformed Party, SGP, the Reformed Political Alliance, GPV, the Reformed Political Federation, RPF) did not join the CDA, two of them (GPV and RPF) merged into the Christian Union in 2002. Both the SGP and Christian Union (CU) are much more conservative than the CDA with respect to moral issues. On economic issues, the Christian Union takes a more leftist position than the CDA, and the label 'minor right' (*klein rechts*) that was used to summarise the CU predecessors no longer suffices (Pellikaan 2002).

Our hypothesis about the effect of political restructuring takes a different form than the 'bottom-up' hypothesis of general and gradual religious de-alignment. We expect to find that, if political choices have had any autonomous effect, the changes in the relationship between religion and vote will be more time-specific and more group-specific. First, following the study by De Graaf *et al.* (2001), we look for changes in the association between religion and vote after the formation of the common Christian Democrat party list in 1977. We assume that the links between specific denominations and the new CDA are less strong than the links with individual parties had been before. At the same time, we postulate that the CDA will be more successful in attracting non-religious people than the KVP, CHU and ARP were, since it is less strongly associated with specific denominations. As a result, we expect the association between religion and vote to go down after 1977. Second, we look for changes in the religion–vote association after the formation of the Christian Union. We may expect that the new CU would appeal less to some orthodox Protestants, partly because the party name no longer contains an explicit reference to either Protestantism or the Reformation. A denomination-neutral name and more left-leaning profile may have made the party more attractive to non-Calvinists. Although the vote share of the CU and its predecessors has always been small, we expect the association between denomination and vote for religious versus non-religious parties to go down as a result of the party merger. Our hypothesis is that: *the association between denomination and votes for religious versus*

non-religious parties shows an abrupt decline after the 1977 election, when the CDA came into existence (H7a) and after the 2002 election when the CU came into existence (H7b).

Data and Measurement

To test our hypotheses, we use survey data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES) covering the Dutch national elections between 1971 and 2006. We use information on church membership, church attendance, party choice and some social background characteristics from 11 election surveys²: (1971 $N=2,495$, 1972 $N=1,526$, 1977 $N=1,856$, 1981 $N=2,305$, 1982 $N=1,541$, 1986 $N=1,630$, 1989 $N=1,745$, 1994 $N=1,812$, 1998 $N=2,101$, 2002 $N=1,574$ and 2006 $N=2,623$). The combined dataset, after selection of valid information on the relevant variables, contains 16,129 respondents. The operationalisation of our variables is discussed below.

Party choice. All respondents were asked ‘Did you vote in the parliamentary elections on [date]?’ If so, the subsequent question was asked: ‘Which party did you vote for?’ First, we contrast religious parties (CDA, KVP, ARP, CHU, RKPN, RPF, GVP, CU, SGP) with all other parties (1/0) for use in binary logistic regression. Ultimately, we employ conditional logistic regression, distinguishing between four major party groups in The Netherlands on the basis of the De Graaf *et al.* (2001) classification. Next to a category for religious parties, we combine parties of the old left (PvdA, DS70, CPN, SP), new left (D66, GroenLinks, PPR, PSP, EVP) and liberal right (VVD, BP, NMP).³ The rearrangement of the data, required to fit the conditional logistic model, together with the model specification and estimation procedure, are discussed later.

Religion. Religious denomination is measured using the question whether respondents consider themselves a member of a particular church or religious community: we distinguish between respondents without a religious affiliation, Catholics, Protestants, Calvinists and those belonging to another religion. In our analysis, the ‘non-members’ – those without a religious affiliation – are the reference category.

Education. We measure educational level as the number of years it normally takes to complete a certain level of education. The educational categories in the original files are recoded using the conversion tables of Ganzeboom and Treiman (2009). In general this results in a metric running from: 6 years for complete primary education (= 0) to 17 years for complete university-level education.

Church attendance. Respondents were asked how often they attended religious services: (1) at least once a week; (2) two or three times a month;

(3) once a month; (4) several times a year; (5) Never. We recoded this such that a high score refers to more attendance (0–4).

A party's traditional moral positions. To determine the position of religious parties, we use data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge *et al.* 2001; Klingemann *et al.* 2006). The CMP datasets are based on content analyses of election programmes of political parties contesting national elections. The quantity and direction of statements by parties, measured in sentences in a programme, are classified in 56 policy categories. With regard to the traditionalist positions of parties, we use the emphasis placed in the manifestos on positive statements about 'traditional morality'. This item was measured as the percentage of sentences of the total text dedicated to 'favourable mention of traditional moral values; prohibition, censorship and suppression of immorality and unseemly behaviour; maintenance and stability of family, and religion'. Because our dependent variable consists of party groups instead of individual parties, we constructed a weighted mean of this scale by party group for each election year. The weight of a party within this group is determined by its vote share in percentages. Because the CMP data only includes 'significant' parties, not all parties are covered; that is, the positions of minor religious parties (RPF, GVP, SGP)⁴ are not included when calculating the position of the religious party group.

Analysis

We divided our analyses into three stages. First, we show the results over time of the denomination–vote relationship. For this purpose, we employ logistic regression with a binary dependent variable contrasting religious parties with other parties. The results of this model will be presented in figures as odds ratios for religious groups to cast a religious vote relative to the unaffiliated. Second, we present the parameter estimates of multivariate logistic regression models, to formally test to what extent declining trends in the effect of church membership on voting are accounted for by 'bottom-up' changes (declining effect of church attendance, increasing effect of education) and/or 'top-down' changes in the party structure (CDA merger in 1977, CU merger in 2002). Finally, we use conditional logistic regression models to test to what extent changes in traditionalist party positions account for changes in the religion–vote relationship.

Modelling Changes in the Religion–Vote Relationship in The Netherlands

First, we show the results over time of the denomination–vote relationship. We present logistic regression analyses regressing voting for a religious party on dummy variables identifying Catholics, Protestants, Calvinists, and those having another religion. The reference group is those without a denomination. To allow for changes over time, we add year dummies with 1971 as the

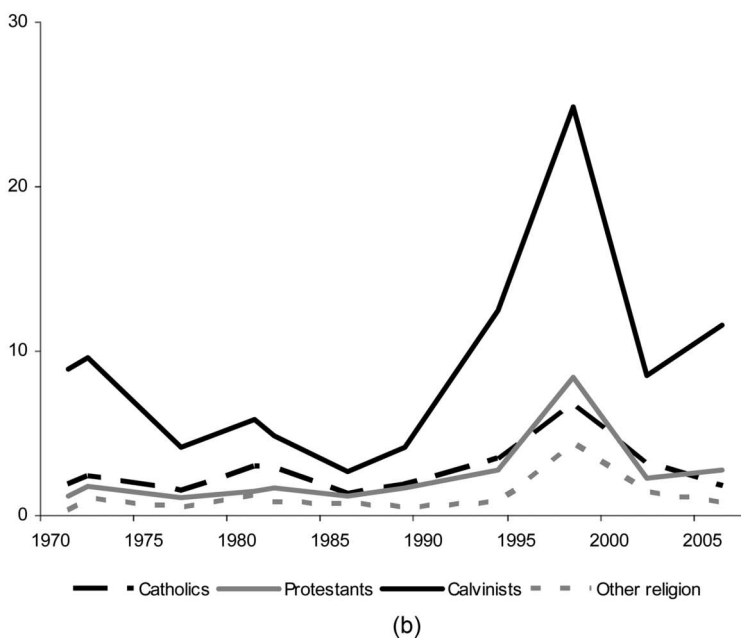
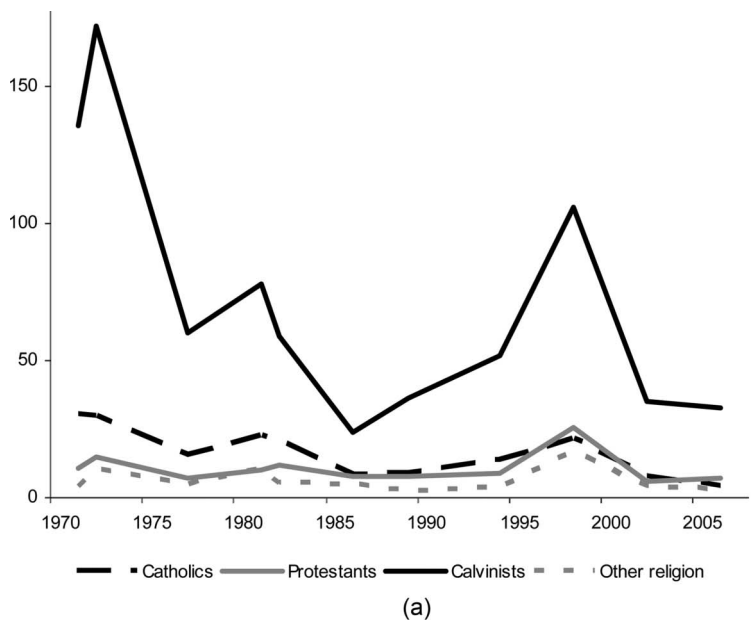
reference, as well as interactions between year dummies and the religious groups. In Figure 2a, we present for each denomination for each year the odds ratio of voting for a religious party versus any other party as opposed to the non-members.

It is clear that the odds of casting a religious vote are highest for Calvinists followed by Catholics, Protestants and those with another religion. In 1972, the odds of Calvinists voting for a religious party versus any other party were 172 times the odds of the non-members voting for a religious party. For Catholics and Protestant and those with another religion, the 1972 odds of voting religiously were, respectively, 30, 15 and 11 times higher compared to non-members. There has been a strong decline of the denomination–vote relationship after the 1970s. The odds that Calvinists will vote for a religious party, although peaking again in 1998, eventually dropped to 30 times higher than the odds of non-members in 2006. The odds of Catholics and Protestants casting a religious vote relative to non-members dropped from respectively 30 and 15 in 1972 to 8 in 1986. From 1986 onwards there is hardly any difference left relative to non-members between Protestants and Catholics. Together with the other religious people, their odds of casting a religious vote are about 4–10 times higher compared to non-members throughout the 1986–2006 period.

In Figure 2b we control for church attendance. Since the association of church attendance with voting for a religious party declined over time (see Table 1), we allowed church attendance to change linearly over time. We find that almost the whole trend can be interpreted by taking church attendance into account (note that we reduced the y -axis by a factor of 5 compared to Figure 2a). The results indicate that, accounting for a declining effect of church attendance, the odds of Catholics voting for a religious party are about the same in 1971 and 2006 (about 2 times higher than non-members). The odds of Protestants are about 2 times higher in 2006 than in 1971. In 1972, the odds of Calvinists casting a religious vote are about 16 times higher than that of non-members. In 1986, this ratio drops to about 3, but rises to 25 in 1998 and 12 in 2006. We conclude that the decline of church attendance and therefore religious disintegration among church members is almost fully responsible for the decline in, and for the convergence of, religious-based voting. However, religious disintegration cannot account for the increase in the religion–vote relationship between 1986 and 1998.

To test our hypotheses formally, we present several logistic regression models. In our first model in Table 1, we tested for changes over time in the association between denomination and vote. To get a parsimonious model, we allow each denomination parameter to vary linearly over time. With 1971 as a baseline, all religious groups are significantly and substantially more likely to cast a confessional vote than those without a denomination. The odds of voting for a confessional party in contrast to non-members are ($e^{3.28}$) 26 times higher for Catholics, 9 times higher for Protestants, 97 times higher for Calvinists and 5 times higher for other religious groups. However,

FIGURE 2
 (A) UNCONTROLLED ODDS RATIOS FOR VOTING FOR RELIGIOUS PARTIES
 (NON-MEMBERS AS REFERENCE GROUP). (B) CONTROLLED ODDS RATIOS FOR
 VOTING FOR RELIGIOUS PARTIES (NON-MEMBERS AS REFERENCE GROUP)



Source: DPES (1971–2006).

TABLE 1
LOGISTIC REGRESSION FOR VOTING FOR RELIGIOUS PARTIES VERSUS ALL OTHER PARTIES IN THE NETHERLANDS, 1971–2006

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	Linear trends	s.e.	Linear trends and bottom-up changes	s.e.	Linear trends and top-down changes	s.e.	Linear trends, bottom-up and top-down changes	s.e.
	b		b		b		b	
Constant	-3.29***	(0.12)	-2.86***	(0.15)	-3.45***	(0.16)	-2.98***	(0.18)
Year (1971 = ref.)								
1972	-0.18**	(0.09)	-0.05	(0.10)	-0.22**	(0.09)	-0.09	(0.11)
1977	0.03	(0.10)	0.10	(0.11)	0.43**	(0.19)	0.45**	(0.20)
1981	0.15	(0.10)	0.23**	(0.11)	0.45**	(0.18)	0.48**	(0.19)
1982	-0.11	(0.10)	-0.05	(0.12)	0.16	(0.18)	0.18	(0.19)
1986	0.52***	(0.11)	0.56***	(0.13)	0.70***	(0.17)	0.68***	(0.19)
1989	0.65***	(0.12)	0.76***	(0.14)	0.78***	(0.17)	0.83***	(0.19)
1994	-0.01	(0.13)	-0.17	(0.16)	0.02	(0.19)	-0.23	(0.21)
1998	0.04	(0.14)	-0.21	(0.17)	-0.01	(0.20)	-0.36	(0.22)
2002	0.73***	(0.15)	0.52***	(0.18)	0.96***	(0.18)	0.72***	(0.21)
2006	1.12***	(0.15)	1.01***	(0.21)	1.30***	(0.18)	1.13***	(0.23)
Age	0.02***	(0.00)	0.01***	(0.00)	0.02***	(0.00)	0.01***	(0.00)
Gender (male = ref.)	0.06	(0.04)	-0.02	(0.04)	0.06	(0.04)	-0.02	(0.04)
Denomination (non-members = ref.)								
Catholic	3.28***	(0.11)	0.72***	(0.15)	3.42***	(0.17)	0.73***	(0.21)
Protestant	2.24***	(0.12)	0.18	(0.15)	2.44***	(0.18)	0.34*	(0.21)
Calvinist	4.58***	(0.16)	1.72***	(0.20)	5.02***	(0.23)	2.19***	(0.27)
Other religion	1.70***	(0.20)	-0.60**	(0.24)	1.74***	(0.20)	-0.61**	(0.24)
Trend								
Year* Catholic	-0.05***	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)	-0.03***	(0.01)	0.03***	(0.01)
Year* Protestant	-0.01*	(0.01)	0.03***	(0.01)	0.02*	(0.01)	0.07***	(0.01)
Year* Calvinist	-0.04***	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	0.06***	(0.02)
Year* Other religion	-0.01	(0.01)	0.02**	(0.01)	-0.02**	(0.01)	0.02***	(0.01)

(continued)

TABLE 1
(Continued)

	Model I Linear trends		Model II Linear trends and bottom- up changes		Model III Linear trends and top- down changes		Model IV Linear trends, bottom-up and top-down changes	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Bottom-up								
Education in years			–0.07***	(0.01)			–0.07***	(0.01)
Year*education in years			0.00***	(0.00)			0.00***	(0.00)
Church attendance			0.84***	(0.03)			0.85***	(0.03)
Year*church attendance			–0.01***	(0.00)			–0.01***	(0.00)
Top-down								
CDA merger since 1977					–0.46**	(0.23)	–0.35	(0.24)
1977*Catholic					–0.73***	(0.25)	–0.80***	(0.27)
1977*Protestant					–1.11***	(0.33)	–1.42***	(0.35)
CU merger since 2002								
2002*Catholic					–0.43**	(0.21)	–0.54**	(0.22)
2002*Protestant					–0.67***	(0.24)	–0.80***	(0.26)
2002*Calvinist					–0.32	(0.32)	–0.62**	(0.34)
df	20		24		26		30	
–2LL	15699.2		14159.4		15680.8		14131.6	

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; $N = 16,129$.

there are clearly time interactions for all denominations. Between 1971 and 2006, the odds that Catholics will vote for religious parties relative to the non-members fell from 26 to about 5 ($e^{3.28 - (35 * 0.05)}$). There is an even stronger decline for Calvinists. In 1971 the odds of Calvinists voting for a confessional party were 97 times higher than for unaffiliated voters, but this becomes ($e^{4.58 - (35 * 0.04)}$) 24 times in 2006. These results support hypothesis 1. Compared to the earlier research of De Graaf *et al.* (2001), which covered fewer elections and did not find any linear trend for Protestants, we now find a linear decline in the effect of denomination on vote for all major religious groups.

In model II, we add the 'bottom-up' changes to the model. We include variables for education in years and church attendance, and allow these effects to vary linearly over time. With respect to church attendance, model II demonstrates two things: first, the effect of church attendance gradually declines, supporting hypothesis 2. The main positive effect of church attendance shows that in 1971 the odds of voting for a religious party are higher as one attends church more often. The negative year*church attendance interaction implies that the effect of church attendance is declining over time. Second, hypothesis 3 is also supported: besides a compositional explanation, i.e. a decrease in church attendance among church members (which appeared to be the most important interpretation), the decline of the church attendance–vote association also accounts for part of the decline of the denomination–vote association. Model II shows that the odds of all religious groups casting a vote for a religious party relative to unaffiliated voters have dropped. With 1971 as a baseline, the odds for Catholics fall to 2 ($e^{0.72}$), for Protestants to nearly 1, and for Calvinists to 5.5. Moreover, the decline in the effects of being Catholic or Calvinist, relative to non-members, are also no longer significant. For Protestants, their denomination now becomes increasingly important, i.e. up to an odds ratio of 3.5 ($e^{0.18 + (35 * 0.03)}$) in 2006. Model II therefore suggests that, with the exception of Protestants, the extent to which church members attend religious services is of decreasing importance for casting a vote for a confessional party. This and the reduction of church attendance largely interprets the decline in the effects of being Catholic, Protestant and Calvinist.

The main negative effect of education indicates that the odds that one votes for a religious party in 1971 are about 7 per cent ($1/(e^{-0.07})$) lower after each year of education. The positive year*education interaction suggests that the effect of education becomes less strong over time. Although the effects of both education and church attendance are significant, it is largely church attendance that accounts for the decline in the effect of denomination on voting. When we estimate model II without church attendance, the effects of the year*denomination interactions are the same as in model I. Hypothesis 4, stating that the decline of the association between denomination and voting becomes less strong when we take education into account, is refuted.

In model III, we test the political change of hypotheses 7a and 7b. To test whether the association between denomination and vote for religious versus non-religious parties shows an abrupt decline after the 1977 election when the CDA came into existence, we include an interaction between denomination and a dummy that indicates the 1977 merger. This way we test whether there was an abrupt decline in confessional voting which coincides with formation of the CDA. We also included an interaction between denomination and a dummy indicating the 2002 election when the Christian Union was formed. In support of hypothesis 7a, the estimates indeed show that, compared to non-members, the 1977 CDA merger seems to be responsible for a decline in confessional voting for Catholics ($e^{-0.464}$), Protestants ($e^{-0.732}$) and Calvinists ($e^{-1.108}$). That is, after the CDA merger the odds of Catholics voting for a religious party fell to 60 per cent of their pre-1977 level, whereas the odds for Protestants fell to about a half and the odds for Calvinists to a third of their original level. The 2002 interactions suggest that there was also an abrupt decline in the effects of being Catholic and Protestant after the 2002 election. After 2002 the odds of voting for a religious party also fell to about 60 per cent ($e^{-0.432}$) of their level before 2002 for Catholics, and to about a half for Protestants ($e^{-0.674}$). The 2002 elections did not affect the odds of confessional voting for Calvinists.

In model IV, we include the ‘bottom-up’ changes (i.e. education, church attendance) and ‘top-down’ changes (i.e. party mergers) simultaneously. The results indicate that, accounting for both types of changes, the gradual decline of the association between denomination and vote is accounted for, but abrupt decreases associated with political changes remain. We find that the odds of confessional voting for all major denominations even gradually increase in the period 1971–2006, but show sudden decreases after 1977 (for Protestants and Calvinists) and 2002 (for all denominations). It is, however, unlikely that the decline of the religion–vote relationship in 2002 can be attributed solely to the CU merger. Votes for the Christian Union (and its predecessors) only cover a small share of the total votes for religious parties. And given the Protestant identity of the party we would not expect the merger to have affected the odds of casting a religious vote for Catholics.

Moreover, the 2002 elections were heavily influenced by the parliamentary entrance of another newcomer, the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). But although the rise of the LPF caused massive shifts among the electorate, it is also unlikely to be primarily responsible for the abrupt decline in the relationship between religion and vote in 2002. There is no obvious relationship between specific denominations and voting LPF.⁵ Moreover, research on the 2002 Dutch elections has shown that people who frequently attend church were even less likely to vote for the LPF than those who never attend church (Van der Brug 2003; Lubbers and Güveli 2007). It is therefore not plausible that the decline in the religion–vote association was caused by religious voters that moved away from confessional parties to the LPF. This model supports the idea that, after accounting for the weakening of religious

integration and the ‘depillarisation’ of the party system, there may be other political factors that affect the religion–vote association. In other words, accounting for church attendance perhaps explains much of the decline in the effect of church membership on voting, and party mergers may explain sudden decreases in this effect. But these factors leave unexplained why the odds of voting for a religious party for all denominational groups now increase over time.

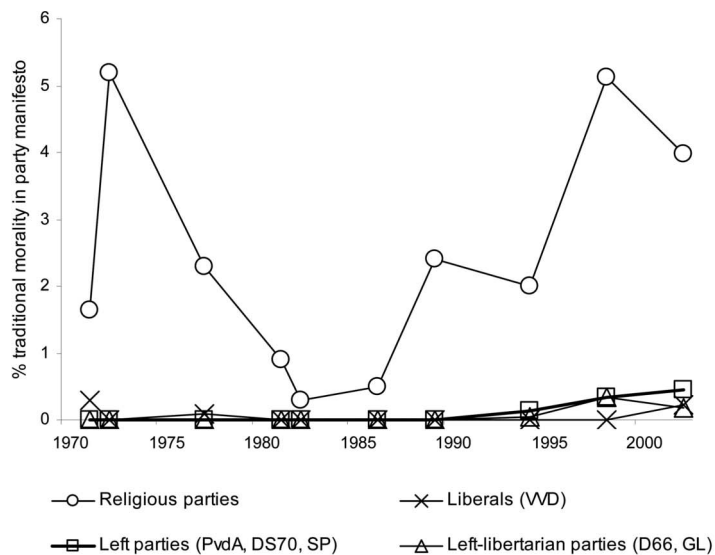
Traditional Moral Positions of Parties and the Religion–Vote Relationship

Next, we test another version of the ‘top-down’ approach by including the changes and differences in positions of political parties. First, we look at the changes in the emphasis on traditional values in the manifestos of political parties between 1971 and 2002. Unfortunately, there are no manifesto data available for the 2006 Dutch elections. In Figure 3a we not only present the positions regarding traditional morality for religious parties, but we also show the positions of the Dutch liberals, left-wing parties and new-left parties. Figure 3a shows that religious parties have mentioned issues of traditional morality less often in their manifestos since the 1970s, but only until 1982. There is hardly any variation among the other political parties over time.⁶ After 1982, traditional values become more salient again in the party programmes of religious parties. The common perception that the Christian Democrats in The Netherlands adjusted their party programme to the changing religious structure of society by de-emphasising traditionalist issues is therefore not supported by the pattern in Figure 3. It seems that the traditionalist position of the religious party group in 2002 is at about the same level as in 1972.

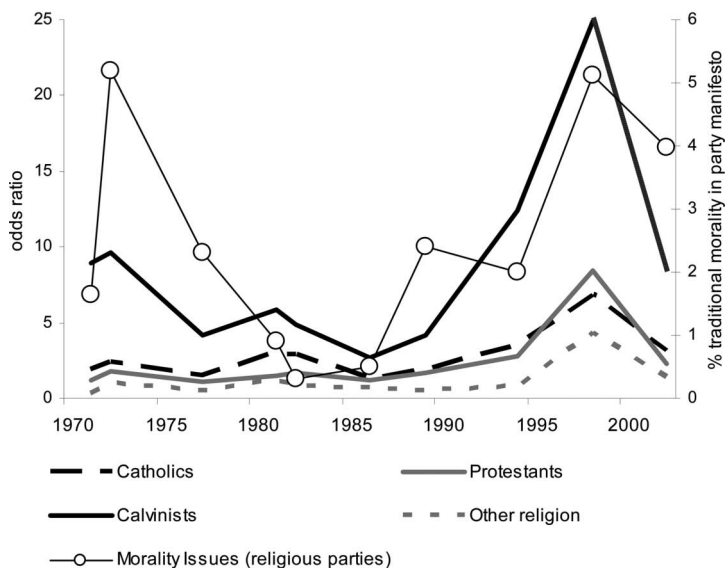
In Figure 3b, we overlay the manifesto pattern for religious parties with the patterns in religious-based voting as reported in Figure 2b (namely, controlled for the gradual declining effect of church attendance). We clearly observe that, for Calvinists, variation in the odds ratios of voting for a religious party relative to unaffiliated voters follows a very similar pattern to the emphasis on traditional values in the manifestos of religious parties. In addition, the increase of the effects for Catholics, Protestants and those with another religion from 1986 onwards seems to coincide with an increase of the salience of traditionalist issues in religious party programmes. Because we are analysing the odds of casting a religious vote relative to the non-members, this figure suggests that the manifesto positions may especially influence those without a denomination. The more religious parties emphasise issues related to traditional moral values, the less non-members may be inclined to vote for these parties relative to voters with a religious affiliation, causing the odds ratios to increase. These results seem to confirm the ‘Confessional Dilemma’ of Christian Democratic parties.

To test hypotheses 5 and 6 about the differences and changes in party positions regarding traditional values, we apply conditional logistic

FIGURE 3
 (A) EMPHASIS OF TRADITIONAL MORALITY ISSUES IN PARTY MANIFESTOS BY POLITICAL PARTY GROUP. (B) CONTROLLED ODDS RATIOS FOR VOTING FOR RELIGIOUS PARTIES (NON-MEMBERS AS REFERENCE GROUP) AND THE EMPHASIS OF TRADITIONAL MORALITY ISSUES IN PARTY MANIFESTOS OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES



(a)



(b)

Source: Comparative Manifesto Project (2001, 2006).

regression (Alvarez and Nagler 1998; McFadden 1974). In order to employ CL estimation, it is necessary to use a multi-category dependent variable, similar to multinomial logistic (MNL) regression. Next to religious parties, we therefore distinguish between three other major party groups in The Netherlands: the old left (PvdA, DS70, CPN, SP), new left (D66, GroenLinks, PPR, PSP, EVP) and liberal right (VVD, BP, NMP). Respondents voting for another party are now excluded from the analysis ($N=13,569$). Like a MNL model, the CL model can simultaneously estimate binary log-odds for multiple contrasts among party alternatives. But the CL model also allows the combination of case-specific variables with choice-specific variables. In our analysis the individual-specific variables are the same that we used in the binomial logistic models. The choice-specific variable is the emphasis placed on traditional moral issues by each party group at each election. This way we are able to examine what happens as parties take more traditionalist positions, whether changing party positions are indeed responsible for changes in the religion–vote relationship.

To fit CL models, we rearrange the structure of our dataset by ‘stacking’ the data matrix into a person-choice file. In a person-choice file, each respondent has a separate row in the data matrix for each category of the dependent variable. In our data that is four rows per respondent. Next to dummy variables indicating party groups, we construct another binary variable indicating the actual choice made by a respondent. This binary variable is the dependent variable in the CL model. The four-category party group variable, usually the dependent variable in the MNL models, is now included as an independent variable (Hendrickx 2000). These party group dummy indicators correspond with the intercept term of the MNL model. The emphasis on traditional morality is included using one parameter. The effects of individual-specific variables on different choice contrasts are modelled as interactions between dummy variables of party groups and the individual-specific variables (Hendrickx 2000; Long and Freese 2006).

In model I of Table 2, we report the estimates of a CL model without choice-specific variables. Without choice-specific variables, the CL model is equivalent to the MNL model (Long and Freese 2006). Although individual-specific effects are modelled as interactions with dummy indicators for party groups, we report them in similar fashion to standard MNL effects. In model I, we present the individual-specific estimates for voting for a religious party using different reference categories for party choice. We include the same individual-specific variables as in model IV of Table 1, with two exceptions. First, we cannot include the CU merger in this model. Because there is no CMP data available for 2006, the election of 2002 is the latest one in this analysis. Second, because we include choice-specific variables that vary between elections we are unable to include year-dummy indicators. With respect to voting religious versus old left we find an increase in the effect of being a Protestant, but no over-time change for Catholics or Calvinists. With respect to voting religious versus new left, model I shows

TABLE 2
 CONDITIONAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION FOR VOTING FOR RELIGIOUS VS. OLD LEFT/NEW LEFT/LIBERAL RIGHT PARTIES IN
 THE NETHERLANDS, 1971–2002

	Model I: Religious vs.			Model II: Religious vs.		
	Old Left b (s.e.)	New Left b (s.e.)	Liberal b (s.e.)	Old Left b (s.e.)	New Left b (s.e.)	Liberal b (s.e.)
<i>Party-specific variables</i>						
Old Left	ref.	2.26*** (0.15)	2.51*** (0.14)	ref.	2.25*** (0.15)	2.49*** (0.14)
New Left	-2.26*** (0.15)	ref.	0.25 (0.17)	-2.25*** (0.15)	ref.	0.24 (0.17)
Liberal	-2.51*** (0.14)	-0.25 (0.17)	ref.	-2.49*** (0.14)	-0.24 (0.17)	ref.
Religious	-2.97*** (0.16)	-0.71*** (0.18)	-0.46*** (0.17)	-2.84*** (0.16)	-0.59*** (0.19)	-0.34* (0.18)
Emphasis on traditional morality				-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)
<i>Individual-specific variables</i>						
Year (1971 = ref.)	0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Gender (male = ref.)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.21*** (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.20*** (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)
Denomination (non-members = ref.)						
Catholic	0.78*** (0.19)	-0.05 (0.23)	0.00 (0.21)	0.89*** (0.19)	0.08 (0.23)	-0.11 (0.22)
Protestant	0.16 (0.18)	0.28 (0.24)	-0.50** (0.21)	0.29 (0.19)	0.41 (0.25)	-0.37* (0.21)
Calvinist	2.49*** (0.33)	1.15*** (0.34)	1.65*** (0.39)	2.61*** (0.33)	1.26*** (0.35)	1.78*** (0.40)
Other religion	-0.63** (0.28)	-0.76*** (0.34)	-1.48*** (0.3)	-0.63** (0.28)	-0.77** (0.34)	-1.48*** (0.30)
Trend						
Year* Catholic	0.01 (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Year* Protestant	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Year* Calvinist	0.03 (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
Year* Other religion	0.03** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.03** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)
Bottom-up						
Education in years	0.07*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.15*** (0.02)
Year* education in years	0.003*** (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.002*** (0.00)	-0.002*** (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.002*** (0.00)
Church attendance	0.90*** (0.04)	0.77*** (0.05)	0.83*** (0.05)	0.90*** (0.04)	0.77*** (0.05)	0.83*** (0.05)
Year* church attendance	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)

(continued)

TABLE 2
(Continued)

	Model I: Religious vs.		Model II: Religious vs.	
	Old Left b (s.e.)	New Left b (s.e.)	Old Left b (s.e.)	New Left b (s.e.)
Top-down				
CDA merger since 1977				
1977*Catholic	0.01 (0.14)	0.87*** (0.18)	0.08 (0.17)	0.61*** (0.20)
1977*Protestant	0.08 (0.18)	0.07 (0.27)	-0.09 (0.2)	-0.16 (0.27)
1977*Calvinist	-0.62 (0.43)	-0.58 (0.41)	-0.85* (0.47)	-0.33 (0.22)
df	57		58	
-2LL	29456.4		29438.7	
	Model III: Religious vs.		Model IV: Religious vs.	
	Old Left b (s.e.)	New Left b (s.e.)	Old Left b (s.e.)	New Left b (s.e.)
<i>Party-specific variables</i>				
Old Left	-2.24*** (0.15)	2.24*** (0.15)	-2.25*** (0.15)	2.25*** (0.15)
New Left	-2.47*** (0.14)	-0.23 (0.17)	-2.49*** (0.14)	-0.24 (0.17)
Liberal	-2.72*** (0.17)	-0.48** (0.19)	-2.81*** (0.16)	-0.56*** (0.19)
Religious	-0.19*** (0.04)	-0.19*** (0.04)	-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.10*** (0.03)
Emphasis on traditional morality	0.11*** (0.05)	0.11*** (0.05)	0.11*** (0.05)	0.11*** (0.05)
Traditional morality *Catholic	0.19** (0.06)	0.19** (0.06)	0.19** (0.06)	0.19** (0.06)
Traditional morality *Protestant	0.18*** (0.08)	0.18*** (0.08)	0.18*** (0.08)	0.18*** (0.08)
Traditional morality *Calvinist	0.19*** (0.08)	0.19*** (0.08)	0.19*** (0.08)	0.19*** (0.08)
Traditional morality *Other				
Traditional morality *Church att.			0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
<i>Individual-specific variables</i>				
Year (1971 = ref.)	0.05*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)
Gender (male = ref.)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.21*** (0.06)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.20*** (0.06)

(continued)

TABLE 2
(Continued)

	Model III: Religious vs.			Model IV: Religious vs.		
	Old Left b (s.e.)	New Left b (s.e.)	Liberal b (s.e.)	Old Left b (s.e.)	New Left b (s.e.)	Liberal b (s.e.)
Denomination (non-members = ref.)						
Catholic	0.81*** (0.21)	0.00 (0.24)	0.05 (0.23)	0.90*** (0.19)	0.08 (0.23)	0.12 (0.22)
Protestant	-0.06 (0.23)	0.08 (0.28)	-0.68*** (0.24)	0.29 (0.19)	0.42* (0.25)	-0.36* (0.21)
Calvinist	2.30*** (0.39)	0.99** (0.41)	1.51*** (0.44)	2.61*** (0.33)	1.29*** (0.35)	1.78*** (0.4)
Other religion	0.81*** (0.21)	-0.95*** (0.35)	-1.65*** (0.32)	-0.62** (0.28)	-0.75** (0.34)	-1.47*** (0.3)
Trend						
Year*Catholic	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Year*Protestant	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Year*Calvinist	0.01 (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)
Year*Other religion	0.02 (0.02)	0.03* (0.02)	0.05*** (0.02)	0.03** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)
Bottom-up						
Education in years	0.07*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.15*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.15*** (0.02)
Year*education in years	0.003*** (0.00)	0.001* (0.00)	0.003*** (0.00)	0.003*** (0.00)	0.001* (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)
Church attendance	0.90*** (0.04)	0.77*** (0.05)	0.83*** (0.05)	0.88*** (0.05)	0.75*** (0.06)	0.81*** (0.05)
Year*church attendance	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
Top-down						
CDA merger since 1977						
1977*Catholic	-0.25 (0.17)	0.60*** (0.21)	-0.18 (0.19)	-0.21 (0.15)	0.63*** (0.19)	-0.15 (0.18)
1977*Protestant	0.09 (0.22)	0.07 (0.3)	-0.08 (0.24)	-0.15 (0.19)	-0.18 (0.27)	-0.32 (0.21)
1977*Calvinist	-0.65 (0.48)	-0.61 (0.47)	-0.89* (0.52)	-0.84* (0.43)	-0.80* (0.41)	-1.07* (0.47)
df	62			59		
-2LL	29424.3			29437.8		

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; $N = 13,659$.

linear increases in denomination effects for almost all religious groups relative to the unaffiliated. With respect to voting religious versus liberal right we find that the differences relative to the non-religious become larger for Catholics and Calvinists. We find that in the reference year, holding constant for education and church attendance, Protestants were even slightly more likely to vote for a liberal party than for a religious party ($1/e^{-0.50}$). Based on a linear trend we find that in 2002 Protestants were about ($1/e^{-0.50+31*0.04}$) 2 times more likely to vote for a religious party relative to a liberal party.

In model II we include the choice-specific variable ‘emphasis on traditional morality’. The estimate of this effect is negative (-0.08). This implies that, accounting for all individual-specific variables in the model, party groups with more traditionalist positions are less likely to be chosen. To test whether the inclusion of traditionalist party positions can explain the linear trends in denomination effects, we model interactions between denominational groups and the emphasis on traditional morality in party manifestos. This way we test whether the effect of parties’ traditionalist position varies between religious groups, with the non-religious as the reference. The results are reported in model III. The main effect is negative (-0.19). Bearing in mind that non-members are the reference category, this indicates that a party is less likely to be chosen by secular voters the more morally traditionalist it is. And supporting hypothesis 5a, the positive coefficients for the interaction estimates imply that the more traditional the position of a party group, the more likely people of this religious category will be to vote for that party group compared to the non-religious. For most denominations, the interaction effect largely compensates the main negative effect, which indicates that parties with more traditional moral positions deter secular voters rather than attract religious voters.

On the whole, model III shows weaker linear trends in the effects of denominational groups than model II. With respect to religious versus old left voting, the initial linear trends are fully accounted for. We also find no linear trends in the voting behaviour of Protestants and Catholics with respect to the religious versus new left party contrast. Only for the religious versus liberal right party contrast could we not interpret the linear trends by accounting for denominational differences in the effect of traditional party positions. By and large, we find support for hypothesis 6, although we interpreted linear increase rather than linear decrease.

In model IV, we test hypothesis 5b by investigating whether the traditional position of parties affects the association between church attendance and vote. The interaction effect between the manifesto scale and church attendance is, however, not significant. This indicates that there is no evidence that the effect of church attendance is influenced by the emphasis on traditional values in manifestos of political parties. Moreover, in model IV we notice no substantial change in the trend of church attendance. We find no support for hypothesis 5b.

Conclusions

This study reaffirms that there is a clear decline in the association between church membership and vote in The Netherlands. For the most part this decline seems to have taken place before 1986. For Catholics and Calvinists in particular we observe convergence in voting behaviour compared to non-affiliated voters. This study aimed to account for such changes by simultaneously examining ‘bottom-up’ social and ‘top-down’ political changes. From the ‘bottom-up’ perspective, the decline of the political boundaries between religious groups is largely explained by declining church attendance. Declining church attendance, as an indicator of religious disintegration, suggests that church members adhered less to conservative religious norms and the values preached in churches. The difference in voting between liberal Protestants and non-members was already relatively small in the 1970s. Therefore, the initial decline of the association between being a Protestant and confessional voting is only weak.

From the ‘top-down’ perspective, we find that, in addition to the linear trends, the merging of religious parties into the CDA reduced the effects of denominational groups on religious party choice (see also De Graaf *et al.* 2001). The CDA merger seems to be particularly responsible for a decline in confessional voting among Calvinists and Protestants. Covering more elections than De Graaf *et al.*, we also found that the religion–vote association dropped after the 2002 elections, coinciding with the political merger of two minor Protestant parties into the Christian Union. The party mergers not only had the effect of reducing the religion–vote association; we also find that they mattered even after the linear trend is fully accounted for by the changing church attendance–vote relationship. We conclude that, apart from ‘bottom-up’ social changes, political interruptions are important in the processes of religious de-alignment, supporting the political choice argument about a ‘top-down’ influence. This finding is important because the CDA merger itself was a reaction to secularisation and the waning electoral power of the major denominational parties. It shows that the ‘bottom-up’ approach can be seen apart from the ‘top-down’ approach, but not the other way around. Social changes may be gradual in nature, but can provoke sudden political changes, leading to abrupt changes in political alignment.

By implication, future research could consider to what extent programmatic changes can explain time-specific ‘jumps’ or ‘drops’ in the effect of church membership on voting. This may be promising because, after controlling for ‘bottom-up’ changes, we found a U-curve for the denomination–vote association in The Netherlands that strongly resembles the emphasis over time of religious parties on traditional moral issues. In the present study, we were able to show that party positions matter. As parties take more traditionalist positions, this increases the effect of church membership. Non-affiliated voters in particular are less likely to vote for parties that hold traditional moral positions. We therefore conclude that parties with more traditional moral positions deter secular voters rather

than attracting religious voters. In this sense, Kalyvas' 'Confessional Dilemma' (1996) still exists.

The Dutch case suggests that if a religious party wants to maximise its vote share in a secularising society it should de-emphasise traditional moral values. The dilemma associated with this electoral trade-off is, however, not unique to The Netherlands (Elff 2009). Confronted with ongoing secularisation, Christian Democrats all over Europe may be forced to reconsider their moral views and traditional values (Keman and Pennings 2006). The finding that characteristics of the party system as well as characteristics of individual parties may influence the strength of the religion–vote relationship is therefore not just relevant for The Netherlands. Countries in Western Europe display a large variation with respect to religious parties. Our results suggest that the presence or absence of religious parties, and the existence or lack of formal ties to specific religious groups, may strengthen or weaken the religion–vote relationship in modern democracies. We leave it up to other researchers to investigate the impact of 'top-down' factors more exhaustively, including other party characteristics like the religious affiliation of party candidates or leaders, or incumbency and implemented morality policies.

We also made progress by employing conditional logistic regression because the model allows us to combine case-specific variables with choice-specific variables. In our analysis, the individual-specific variables were used to test whether changes in the social background of the electorate were responsible for the decline in the religion–vote relationship. Simultaneously, we used information on party positions as a choice-specific variable. The conditional logistic model therefore not only enables more stringent tests of 'top-down' theories, but also facilitates the solution to an empirical problem in comparative research, i.e. how to deal with the fact that party positions are not fixed over time and space. The CL model is not a new analysis technique (cf. McFadden 1974), but, as Alvarez and Nagler (1998) have argued, the difference between the CL and the multinomial model are not widely recognised in political science. The same, we could add, holds for political sociology investigating the impact of social cleavages on voting behaviour. Only very recently was the CL model first adopted in cleavage voting research (Elff 2009). As far as we know, this study is the first in which conditional logit models are employed to examine the effects of religion on voting in a single country over time. We therefore encourage other researchers to explore possibilities of this model still further, to explain variation in cleavage voting both within and between countries.

Notes

1. We may also expect that conservative religious values are of decreasing relevance for party choice. Aarts and Thomassen (2008), for example, have shown that value orientations over euthanasia were strongly associated with voting for the CDA in 1989, but that this

association virtually disappeared in 2006. Questions on euthanasia and abortion are, unfortunately, not consistently available in the full range of DPES surveys. We therefore cannot test with this data-set whether changes in the impact of religious beliefs could interpret the decline of the denomination–vote relationship between 1971 and 2006.

2. We excluded the 2003 survey because after the 2002 election the government survived for only a short period and researchers had to organise a new election survey quickly and the respondents partly overlapped between the 2002 and 2003 surveys.
3. PvdA = Labour Party; DS70 = Democratic Socialists '70; CPN = Communist Party of The Netherlands; SP = Socialist Party; D66 = Democrats '66; PPR = Political Party Radicals; PSP = Pacifist Political Party; EVP = Evangelical Peoples Party; VVD = People's Party for Freedom and Democracy; BP = Farmers Party; MNP = New Middle Party; RKPN = Roman Catholic Party Netherlands.
4. For the 2002 elections the Christian Union is included in calculating the mean value of the religious party group. The CU only modestly affects the weighted value of the combined scores, because it attracted 2.54 per cent of the votes compared to 27.93 per cent that went to the CDA.
5. A logistic regression of voting LPF in 2002 controlled for age, gender, education and church attendance ($N=1556$) shows no significant ($p < 0.1$) differences between denominations. With the non-religious as the reference group the parameter estimates (b , se) are: Catholics (0.25, 0.23), Protestants (−0.22, 0.33) Calvinists (−0.37, 0.48), other religions (0.05, 0.46). Church attendance has a significant negative effect (−0.345, 0.08). People who attend church more often were less likely to cast a vote for the LPF in 2002.
6. When we use the emphasis in the manifesto placed on negative statements about 'traditional morality' there is only a slight variation among the other political party groups, and only in the first elections. The overall variation among all party groups is much less pronounced than reported in Figure 3a.

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