

Political death and survival in The Netherlands

Explaining resignations of individual cabinet members 1946-2009

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1. Ministerial resignation and survival

Resignation by cabinet ministers is a major political event. Invariably, a ministerial resignation is covered on the front page of newspapers and is prime time footage for the television networks. Also, it is a source of speculation and a hotly debated topic. Many political commentators argue that ministers should step down more often. Resignation is seen as the ultimate, and in fact mandatory, sanction in the system of ministerial responsibility and political accountability to parliament. In any event, an individual resignation can be a powerful way for a government to show that it cares about popular opinion, whether expressed through parliament, the media or opinion polls. Instead of having to wait for the rascals to leave office by the end of their term, the public can actually see that the rascals are thrown out early (and replaced by new ones). Recent British evidence suggests that resignations indeed boost government popularity, if only temporarily (Dewan and Dowding 2005).

Far less is known, however, about the incidence, the patterns and the causes of ministerial resignation. How often do ministers resign, what explains the likelihood of their resignation and what can account for the duration of their survival in office? These are important questions in terms of the accountability of government vis-à-vis parliament, and eventually the public at large. However, research into ministerial resignation is still in its infancy. A handful of papers have focused on a few single countries - mostly Great Britain and Germany (e.g. Fischer et al. 2006, Berlinski et al. 2009), and only very recently the first edited volume was released that brings together several pioneering studies from different European countries (Dowding and Dumont 2009). Even though these initial studies are far from conclusive, they hint at some general patterns.

The first pattern that emerges from the literature is that resignation rates vary greatly between countries, and that constitutional factors are likely to account for these differences. Coalition governments generally have far fewer ministers leaving

office than single-party governments. This is because prime ministers in coalition governments are more hesitant to replace weak ministers, as this may upset one of the coalition parties. In single-party governments this is easier, because there is no risk that the party may leave government (Dowding and Dumont 2009). This is why the British prime minister can afford to reshuffle government regularly, and silently shuffle out weaker colleagues instead of waiting for them to be subjected to fierce public criticism at a later stage. In Germany, by contrast, it is very uncommon for individual ministers to resign from office before the end of their term (Fischer and Kaiser 2009). But there are more constitutional factors at play. Ireland has recorded only few resignations, but its cabinets are relatively small and the government composition alternates between single party governments and coalitions, minority and bare majority governments (Coakley and Gallagher 1993: 19; O'Malley 2009). France has a tradition of frequent government resignations as opposed to the resignation of individual ministers (Kam and Indridason 2009), and the same is true for Italy where governments only stabilized after Berlusconi first took office in 1996 (Verzichelli 2009). The only counter-intuitive example would be Belgium, which is characterized by federal coalition governments that consist of many parties, but also with very high resignation rates. This is because Belgian ministers are keener to accept positions at the international, the regional or even local level than their colleagues in other countries are (Dumont et al. 2009).

Secondly, the Belgian example shows that individual cabinet members may step down for a variety of reasons. He or she may be forced to resign after a political scandal or a departmental error, or he may be replaced in a cabinet reshuffle. But ministers may also be offered more prestigious positions elsewhere in government or at the European or international level. And finally, there can also be other, more personal reasons for individual ministers to step down voluntarily. These may be policy disagreements, but also health reasons.

The existing research reveals very little about the reasons why ministers actually decide to step down. Several inventories have been made of motivations for resignation of ministers, which however do not explain why some ministers actually step down, whilst others remain in the cabinet (Fischer et al. 2006, Bovens and Wever 2008). Fischer et al. (2006) counted 111 cases in Germany between 1969 and 2005 where the possibility of ministerial resignation was seriously considered in the media, but only 14 of these eventually lead to a forced resignation. Similarly, in Britain 273

calls for resignation were made between 1945 and 2007, of which just under half actually resigned (Berlinski et al. 2009: 72). Only Berlinski et al. (2007) have proposed an explanatory model for ministerial tenure in the United Kingdom, a country which is characterized by a majoritarian political system and also a relatively high turnover rate of individual ministers.

This paper works towards a political survival model of individual ministers in the Netherlands, a country characterized by proportional representation and coalition governments. It first tries to establish the turnover rate of individual cabinet members. How many of them actually step down from office, and to what extent are they forced to do so? What is the resignation hazard for individual ministers? Next we will try to explain individual resignation and survival. Do ministerial survival chances have structural determinants? It seeks to answer these questions for all cabinet members between 1946 and 2009.

Types of resignation

In this paper we focus on *individual* resignations only. Ministers will often resign collectively, for example when the entire cabinet resigns when it has reached the end of its term, or because it feels it has lost the confidence of a majority of parliament. Also, in political systems with coalition governments, political disagreements within the cabinet may cause coalition partners to withdraw their support, resulting in the resignation of a complete faction. These *collective* resignations are not the scope of this paper, we only focus on the political survival of individual ministers. There are different forms of individual resignation. The main distinction we make in this paper is between resignations that are coerced, and resignations that are voluntary.

Voluntary resignations can occur for a variety of reasons. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, ministers can be pulled to more prestigious functions outside the cabinet (Fischer et al. 2006), or they can take up a different post within the cabinet as the result of a re-shuffle. Sometimes, ministers choose to step down because of health reasons, and some regrettably die in office. All these forms have in common that the resignation of the minister is not the explicit or implicit outcome of a negative judgment – or the anticipation of such a negative judgment - by parliament, the coalition, or the minister's own party, on the performance of the minister.

Coerced resignations can take place within the cabinet as a result of an internal conflict, or because parliament adopts a vote of no-confidence in an individual minister. Ministers may also be asked to step down by their party leader. In other cases, ministers anticipate such a request and choose to resign as an honourable way out. Coerced resignations are politically much more significant as they are at the apex of the accountability of ministers.

We must admit that in some cases the line between coerced and voluntary resignation is hard to draw. There is a small number of cases in Dutch parliamentary history in which malfunctioning ministers have been given the face saving opportunity to officially resign for health reasons, or in which it could be said that they have been ‘promoted’ to another position outside the cabinet as a form of political damage control. We provide an overview of all resignations and our qualification of the nature of the resignation in the appendix.

Data collection and operationalization

In order to investigate the structural determinants of individual ministerial resignation, we have constructed a data set for all members of all Dutch cabinets between 1946 and 2009. This was done on the basis of the biographical archives of the Parliamentary Documentation Centre (PDC) of Leiden University which has recorded extensive biographies of all cabinet members.¹ This data set includes both senior and junior ministers (*staatssecretaris*). Within this data set we made a subset of all cabinet members who individually resigned. For each of these individual cabinet members we recorded the date of the formal appointment by the Queen² and the date of the formal acceptance by the Queen of his or her resignation, and calculated the number of days her or she spend in office.³

¹ These can be found at <http://www.parlement.com>.

² As listed in the Royal Decree (*Koninklijk Besluit*) which carried the *contraseign* of the prime minister.

³ In the case of sudden, politically motivated resignations, the official date of the resignation often will be a few days after the factual resignation. According to Dutch constitutional practice, the resignation is not accepted by the Queen until a successor is appointed, in order to prevent a vacuum in the system of ministerial responsibility. Therefore, in most cases, the formal moment of resignation coincides with the appointment of a successor. In some cases, eg when it takes more time to find a successor, one of the other cabinet members is appointed as minister *ad interim*. These *ad interim* appointments were not listed as appointments and resignations.

As was explained earlier, we do not consider collective resignations. However, we have counted individual resignations of members of so called ‘demissionary’ cabinets as individual resignations. In The Netherlands, when a cabinet has offered its resignation to the Crown, it is asked by the Queen to stay in office until a new cabinet is installed. This usually may take many weeks if not months. For the purpose of this paper, if an individual member of such a demissionary cabinet steps down, this is regarded as an individual resignation. These can be highly politicized events, such as the forced resignation of the then demissionary ministers Hirsch Ballin and Van Thijn in the wake of the IRT-policing affair, or of the ministers Donner and Dekker in 2006 after the publication of the highly critical report on the fire in the Schiphol airport detention centre.

For each individual case we listed the reason for resignation⁴, recorded a number of personal data, such as age when assuming office, gender, parliamentary experience, and added political data, such as party background (including the number of seats in Parliament, established party or new to Parliament or government – eg DS’70 and the LPF). We also recorded how many votes of no-confidence were tabled against the individual minister. These data were obtained from the database of the lower house of the Dutch Parliament.⁵ Records however do not go back before the second Van Agt cabinet, which took office in 1981. Additionally, for every party in government we calculated if it was needed to achieve a parliamentary majority for the cabinet or if it was superfluous.

Political death and survival 1946-2009

The number of resignations

Since the end of the Second World War until 2009, the Netherlands has had 26 governments, starting with the first Beel cabinet in 1946 until the Balkenende IV cabinet which took office in 2007. These 26 cabinets comprised of 718 senior and junior ministers. Of these, 106 individually stepped down. About one third (37) of these individual resignations can be considered as coerced resignations and about two

⁴ This too was based on the information provided by the PDC. In some cases, when the information was ambiguous, we consulted additional sources, such as the archives of the *NRC Handelsblad*.

⁵ Also available on-line via www.parlando.sdu.nl and www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl (We are grateful to mr. M. Leeftang for compiling the information for us).

third (69) as voluntary. Figure 1 summarizes how many ministers were in the Dutch government from 1946 to 2009, and how many of them were forced to resign, or stepped down voluntarily.

Figure 1 Ministerial resignation in the Netherlands 1946-2009

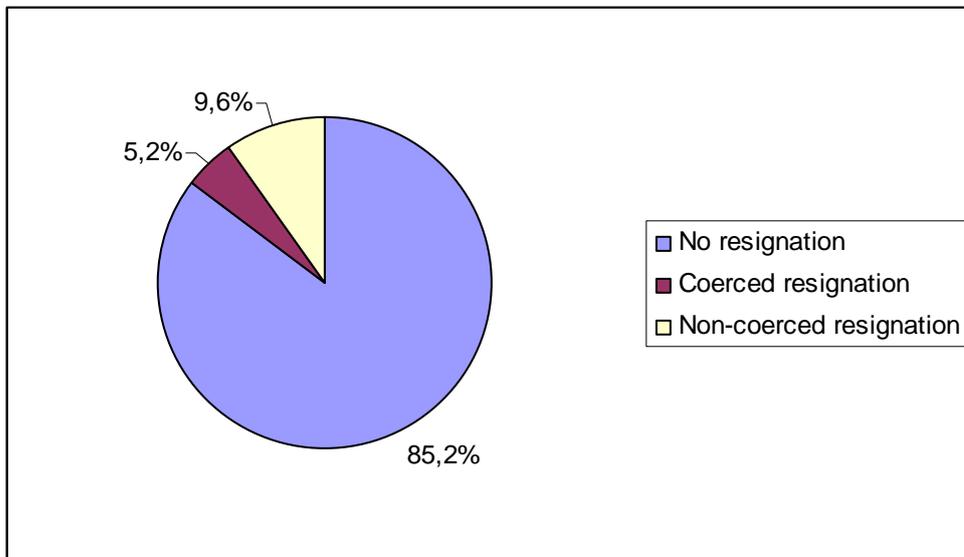


Figure 1 shows that only a small portion of ministers actually resigns before the end of their tenure (or rather: until the end of cabinet), and that most resignations that do occur are not coerced. 85.2 percent of all ministers survived until the end of their term, while 9.6 percent left voluntarily to accept positions elsewhere or for health reasons. The politically most interesting resignations are the coerced ones. These account for 5.2 percent of the total.

Of the 37 ministers who have been forced to leave the Dutch government since 1946, fifteen left because of a loss of confidence. In some of these cases a majority of parliament explicitly adopted a motion that could be interpreted as a vote of no confidence. Examples of this are junior Defence minister Kranenburg who resigned in 1958 after the First Chamber asked him to reconsider his position, and the resignation of Justice minister Hirsch Ballin in 1994 in the aftermath of the IRT policing affair. In a number of other cases the loss of confidence is somewhat more implicit and ministers resign after severe criticism from parliament. Examples of this are Defence minister Schokking who resigned in 1950 after his reorganization plans met with severe criticism in both chambers of Parliament, or junior minister for Social Affairs

Linschoten who resigned in 1996 after he was severely criticized in parliament for his appointment policy regarding the board of an agency. In other cases ministers resign because they have lost the confidence of their own party, such as the resignation of CDA junior minister Brokx in 1986, or the recent dismissal of PvdA minister Vogelaar. Fourteen ministers left after an internal conflict within the cabinet or within their own department. Examples of the latter are the resignation of junior ministers Glastra van Loon in 1975 and Nijs in 2004. Another seven ministers stepped down because of personal reasons. These tend to be the more juicy cases for the parliamentary press, such as the resignation of Defence minister Van den Bergh in 1959, because of his involvement with a married woman, or the resignation of junior Defence minister Schwieterd in 1982, who had to step down after three days in office because he had pretended to have a masters degree in political science and to have been a lieutenant in the army.

The resignations are not equally divided over the 26 cabinets. Table 1 shows that the number of early resignations fluctuates. Governments with high resignation rates are followed by more stable ones. The early post-war cabinets, which struggled with the decolonization in Indonesia, have a relatively high number of ministers that resign from their post. From the late fifties until the early seventies very few individual cabinet members resigned – which may have to do with the fact that a number of these cabinets was short lived. Only three ministers left government early from the Marijnen cabinet up until the Biesheuvel I cabinet. In the seventies, we see a rise in the number of resignations. Most of them are voluntary and regard members of demissionary cabinets who resigned in order to take a seat in parliament after the elections.⁶ Another peak in the number of resignations concerns the second and third Lubbers cabinet in the late eighties and early nineties. This turbulent period is followed by the relative tranquility of the Kok cabinets, which lost only two members due to forced resignations. Finally, the four more recent Balkenende cabinets are probably the most turbulent in the post war history. So far, none of these cabinets completed its tenure and, also regarding their relatively short periods in office, a high number of its ministers involuntary stepped down.

⁶ Before 1983 the Dutch constitution did not allow members of a demissionary cabinet to also take a seat in parliament after they were elected.

Table 1 Ministerial resignations by cabinet, 1946-2009

	1946-48 Beel 1	1948-51 Drees 1	1951-52 Drees 2	1952-56 Drees 3	1956-58 Drees 4	1958-59 Beel 2	1959-63 De Quay
No resignation	14 73,7%	22 84,6%	21 91,3%	20 83,3%	21 84,0%	14 100,0%	24 85,7%
Non-coerced resignations	3 15,8%	2 7,7%	2 8,7%	3 12,5%	3 12,0%	0 0,0%	2 7,1%
Coerced resignations	2 10,5%	2 7,7%	0 0,0%	1 4,2%	1 4,0%	0 0,0%	2 7,1%
N	19	26	23	24	25	14	28

	1963-65 Marijnen	1965-66 Cals	1966-67 Zijlstra	1967-71 De Jong	1971-72 Bies- heuvel 1	1972-73 Bies- heuvel 2	1973-77 Den Uyl
No resignation	25 100,0%	27 93,1%	21 100,0%	26 96,3%	28 100,0%	18 72,0%	23 59,0%
Non-coerced resignations	0 0,0%	1 3,4%	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	6 24,0%	15 38,5%
Coerced resignations	0 0,0%	1 3,4%	0 0,0%	1 3,7%	0 0,0%	1 4,0%	1 2,6%
N	25	29	21	27	28	25	39

	1977-81 Van Agt 1	1981-82 Van Agt 2	1982 Van Agt 3	1982-86 Lubbers 1	1986-89 Lubbers 2	1989-94 Lubbers 3	1994-98 Kok 1
No resignation	27 71,1%	32 100,0%	22 100,0%	30 93,8%	22 71,0%	19 54,3%	26 96,3%
Non-coerced resignations	8 21,1%	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	1 3,1%	4 12,9%	11 31,4%	0 0,0%
Coerced resignations	3 7,9%	0 0,0%	0 0,0%	1 3,1%	5 16,1%	5 14,3%	1 3,7%
N	38	32	22	32	31	35	27

	1998-2002 Kok 2	2002-03 Balkenende 1	2003-06 Balkenende 2	2006-07 Balkenende 3	2007- Balkenende 4	Total
No resignation	29 85,3%	25 86,2%	26 86,7%	23 92,0%	27 90,0%	612 85,2%
Non-coerced resignations	4 11,8%	0 0,0%	2 6,7%	0 0,0%	2 6,7%	69 9,6%
Coerced resignations	1 2,9%	4 13,8%	2 6,7%	2 8,0%	1 3,3%	37 5,2%
Total	34	29	30	25	30	718

These figures cannot easily be compared to findings from other countries. Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008) made a similar inventory for eighteen democracies between 1945 and 1999, but they only include nine portfolios per government and do not provide a breakdown per country. Berlinski et al. (2009) count 591 resignations in the United Kingdom between 1945 and 2007 and 273 calls for resignation that did not result in one, but do not mention how many ministers assumed office. The same is true for Fischer and Kaiser (2009) who find 57 preliminary resignations in Germany between 1949 and 2007, of which 17 were coerced. For Germany too, the total number of ministers in that period is not given. Therefore, we have no indication if the ratio of ministerial resignation in the Netherlands that we found is high or low compared to other countries.

The length of ministerial tenure

When ministers resign, how long have they been in office? On average, Dutch ministers stay in office for 805 days, which is a good two years. Junior minister Bijlhout of the LPF has had the shortest career. She assumed office in the first Balkenende cabinet in the afternoon of July 22, 2002 and was forced to step down only 9 hours later (her official resignation was accepted two days later). In the days before she assumed office, she had vehemently denied allegations that she had been a member of the Bouterse militia in her former homeland Surinam after the military coup in the early eighties. However, on the day of her inauguration a television station produced pictures of her dressed in the militia uniform. On the other extreme, CDA minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin was forced to leave in May 1994 after having been in office for four and a half years. A majority of the newly elected parliament, more or less by accident (because of the new balance of parties after the elections and the absence of a substantial number of members of his own party who were at the recording of a tv show) accepted a motion of the opposition in which it was expressed that he was not to supervise the reorganization of a part of the police force.

The time that a minister stays in office, thus, varies greatly. Furthermore, not all cabinets last equally long; in fact most governments do not complete the full term of four years. This naturally also affects individual resignation patterns. If, for example, a cabinet survives for only two years, it is not possible to know how long an individual minister would have been able to stay in office if the entire cabinet had not

fallen. A measurement how long an individual minister can maintain his position, therefore, is constrained by the lifespan of the full cabinet. In other words: if some governments would not have fallen before the end of their term, the number of individual resignations would also have been higher. Therefore, timing of both individual resignation and the longevity of a cabinet are essential factors to take into account.

This means that for an investigation of the determinants of the survival of individual ministers, this time dependency needs to be controlled for. A method that is generally applied in such situations is survival analysis. It uses all the available information on the duration of a dependent variable (in our case: the lifespan of an individual minister) and classifies this duration in two categories: duration until the occurrence of the event (in our case: individual resignation), or duration until measurement stops (in our case: resignation of the full cabinet). It then aggregates all this information and computes the ‘hazard function’ of all ministers together: that is, the odds that a minister resigns for every point in time. This way, the duration of a ministerial tenure can be measured while taking account of the lifespan of government as a whole.

The shape of a hazard function is difficult to interpret, but a derivate of it is more useful to interpret. Figure 2 below shows the ‘cumulative survivor function’, which, on the basis of the hazard function, computes what the odds are that a minister stays in office over time. The horizontal axis in Figure 2 refers to time, while the vertical axis refers to the chance that a minister stays in office.

Figure 2 Survivor function for all resignations, 1946-2009



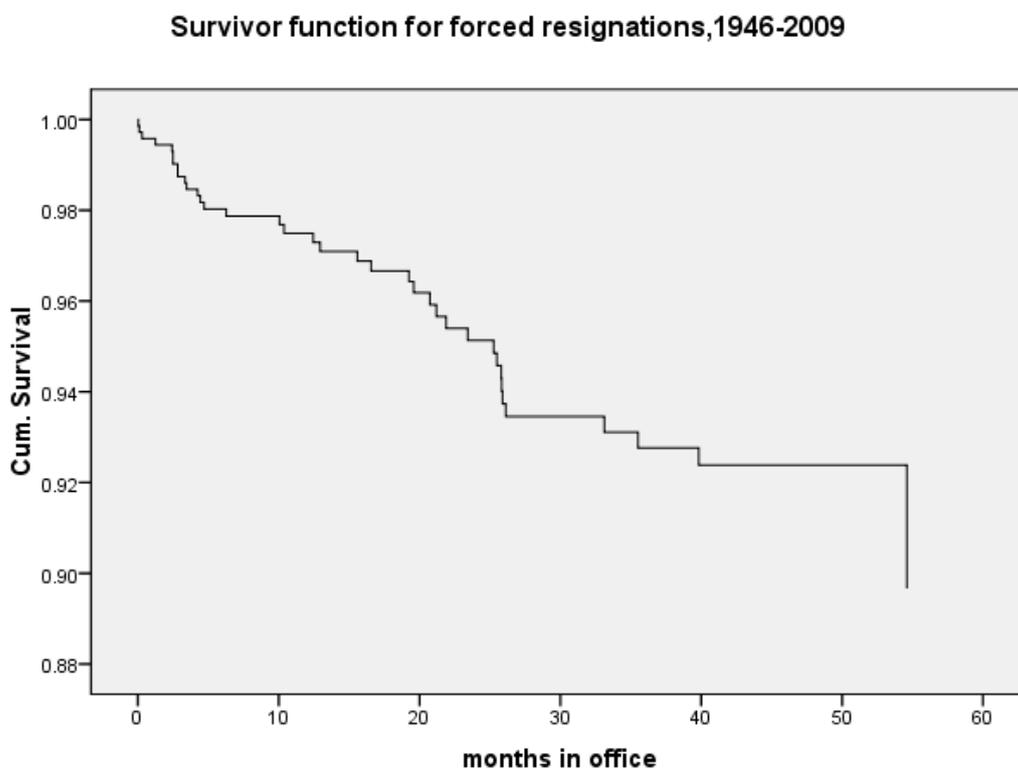
The line in Figure 2 thus indicates the chance that a minister stays in office. It refers both to ministers who were forced to resign, as well as to those who stepped down voluntarily. The survivor function shows a fairly stable condition during the first 50 months, which corresponds to a 'normal' cabinet lifespan of four years. The odds of survival gradually go down from 100% at day one, to 80% when a government is outgoing after the normal term has come to an end. This means that generally, chances are about 20 percent that a new minister will not stay in office for four years. After this 'normal' term, many ministers leave government, while the incumbent government still continues to govern until a new government is ready to take its place.

One may notice that the figure above shows that there is a chance of about 20 percent that a minister will not survive for four years, while the proportion of ministers that have actually resigned early is only 14.8 percent. The difference is simply caused by the fact that many cabinets fall before the end of their term. The line is based on the data on ministers of whom their cabinet actually survived for the indicated amount of time. The beginning of the line in Figure 2 therefore contains

information on all ministers who have ever started, whereas the end of the line is based on far fewer ministers.

The above survivor function in Figure 2 includes all resignations, both coerced and voluntary. It does not show that the coerced resignation chances have quite a distinctive pattern. Figure 3 below shows the survivor function only for those who were forced to leave.

Figure 3 Survivor function for forced resignations only, 1946-2009



In comparison with the previous figure, the survivor function is less smooth. This is because the number of forced resignations is only 37 over the full period of 1946 to 2009. We can however observe that the general shape of the curve is different. First of all, the line ends at a survival chance of about 93 percent after four years. This means that the chances that a minister is forced to leave within four years is about seven percent. But second, the resignation pattern itself also looks different. Where the line for all resignations (figure 2) goes down steadily until the full formal term of a government is over, the line for the coerced resignations goes down steadily until the first two years of a government have passed. There is a slight drop in the survival

chances at mid-term (24 months), but after that the chances of a forced resignation are much lower, or even practically absent after three years. The apparent drop at 55 months is caused by a single minister: only one government stayed in office for that long (the Lubbers III cabinet), and, as briefly referred to before, its minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin resigned only shortly before the new government took over office.⁷

Again, it is difficult to compare the survivor functions for the Netherlands with those for other countries. Several other studies have presented survivor functions, but without exception they all present separate figures per government within countries (Berlinski et al. 2007, Dowding and Dumont 2009). This makes it impossible to generalize reliably above the level of individual governments and thus gives no sound indication of the length of ministerial tenure in countries as a whole, especially when evidence from the same country points in different ways between governments.

So far, thus, we have shown that there are different forms of ministerial resignation. The proportion of ministers resigning early is 14.8 percent, and the proportion of ministers who were forced to leave is 5.2 percent. But as the above survivor functions have shown, these figures are time-dependent. For the cabinets that did actually survive for the full term of four years, the survival rate of individual ministers is lower. Further, while the survival chances for all ministers go down smoothly, the picture is a bit more erratic when only the coerced resignations are considered. Here, survival chances go down smoothly until mid-term, after which it first drops visibly and then stays at approximately the same level.

Explaining resignation and survival

These proportions and survival chances describe the whole population of Dutch ministers from 1946 to 2009. But can we also dissect which ministers have higher survival chances than others? Why is it that some ministers are forced to step down while others can remain in the cabinet? Of course this has to do with the specific issue that was at stake, but can we find more structural determinants behind each specific case?

The analysis now turns to exclusively explaining the odds of a coerced resignation. There are several arguments why the resignation and survival chances of

⁷ Ed van Thijn, minister of the Interior, who also had been involved in the IRT-affair, was forced to resign on the same day as Hirsch Ballin. However, he had been in office for a few months only.

ministers may vary. These reasons are drawn from different literatures. The small literature that attempts to explain coerced individual ministerial resignations points to two clusters of factors: endogenous factors, such as the personal characteristics of individual ministers on the one hand, and exogenous factors, such as the political context within which he or she had to operate on the other hand. We will discuss a series of arguments why some ministers may be forced to step down while others are not and will turn them into testable hypotheses.

Argument 1: Personal background

The literature on ministerial resignation is still in its infancy. One of the most relevant papers is that of Berlinski et al. (2007), who have tried to explain survival rates in the United Kingdom for all ministers from 1945 to 1997. They conclude that five personal attributes affect their survival chances. The British case suggests that men are more likely to resign early than women. Similarly, older ministers are more likely to be coerced to step down than younger ones. The same is true for junior ministers; they are also more likely to resign early. Perhaps counter-intuitively, they also find that ministers who have served in another cabinet in the past have lower survival rates. Finally, they found an effect of having an elite educational background. Ministers that graduated from public schools or from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge have higher survival rates. This last factor, however, is difficult to transpose to the Dutch case for lack of similar elite educational institutions.

There is another difference between British and Dutch ministers that may be relevant in this regard. Because of the separation of powers between the executive and the legislative, members of the cabinet in The Netherlands are not a member of parliament, with the exception of members of demissionary cabinets. Also, there is a long tradition to recruit ministers from outside parliament. As a result, a substantial number of cabinet members have little or no parliamentary experience. This may contribute to lower survival rates because these ministers have no network in parliament and they may fail to understand the formal and informal rules of engagement regarding parliament. We therefore hypothesize that previous parliamentary experience will contribute to individual ministerial survival.

Regarding personal background factors we formulated 5 hypotheses, mostly along the lines of the findings of Berlinski et al. (2007):

- H1. Male ministers are more likely to be coerced to step down than their female colleagues.
- H2. Older ministers are more likely to be forced to step down than younger ministers.
- H3. Junior ministers are more likely to be forced to resign than regular cabinet ministers.
- H4. Ministers who have served in past governments are more likely to be coerced to resign than 'first-time' ministers.
- H5. Ministers who have no previous experience as member of Parliament are more likely to be forced to step down than ministers who do have.

Argument 2: Calls for resignation

An argument that has been reiterated a number of times in the small literature on resignations is that ministers enjoy a given amount of credibility once they assume office, but every little incident will eat away some of it. Even if they survive a resignation call, a next call may be harder to survive. The result is that ministers accumulate resignation events up to a threshold after which a minister has no other choice but to resign (Berlinski et al. 2009: 69, Bovens and Wever 2008, Fischer et al. 2006: 710). Evidence from Germany, for example, shows that most ministers resign after the first or second resignation event, but there has also been a minister who has survived no less than six calls for resignation before falling over the seventh (Fischer et al. 2006: 721).

This argument, however, cannot be tested in conjunction with the previous argument, or with the three arguments that will follow later. This is because a call for resignation is not a structural determinant of ministerial resignation. It is an event that is not independent from the resignation itself: a call for resignation can also be caused by the same variables that cause the resignation itself, and not all ministers face a parliamentary call for resignation before they are forced to step down. But despite this, there is a compelling argument that political damage in the end may lead to a resignation. Therefore, this argument will be tested, but its analysis is kept separate from the analysis of the other determinants.

H6. The more resignation calls ministers accumulate in Parliament, the higher the chance that they will eventually be forced to leave.

Argument 3: Coalition dynamics

In multi-party systems like the Dutch, it seems plausible that coalition dynamics within a government matter. As findings from other European countries show, whether a weak minister has to leave or not depends on the goodwill of the coalition partners. The team of ministers consists of prominent members of several different parties, and if one party feels antagonized it may withdraw all its members from government, thereby bringing down the entire cabinet. But in cases where the support of a particular party is not strictly necessary to secure a majority in parliament, i.e. when a government is oversized, there are fewer incentives to keep weak ministers in the team (Lijphart 1999: 136; Dowding and Dumont 2009: 13).

Ministers who serve in minority governments or in minimal-winning coalitions are in this respect quite safe. On the other hand, ministers who hold office in an oversized coalition can easily be disposed of, as long as their party can be done without. The same is true for those ministers who are not acting for a political party, a common feature in Dutch government in the first years after the war.⁸

Furthermore, there have been two occasions on which a party that was newly elected to Parliament also entered government directly. The last time this happened was in 2002, when LPF – of which its leader Pim Fortuyn was assassinated a few days before the election – was voted into Parliament as the third biggest party. It entered the new government, and is still well-known for its many internal conflicts, power games and high turnover of ministers and party leaders. Generalizing to all new parties that enter Parliament and government simultaneously, we therefore hypothesize that the ministers of such parties are more likely to be forced to step down, as the internal allocation of powers and responsibilities within such new parties is fragile.

⁸ Several cabinets were formed as interim-cabinets after the fall of a previous government, in preparation of new elections. For those cabinets, none of the factions in Parliament has an electoral interest in keeping ministers in office *per se*. All such cases were coded as “not necessary for a parliamentary majority”.

- H7. Ministers of government parties that are not needed for securing a bare parliamentary majority, and ministers who are not acting for a political party, have higher resignation chances than other ministers have.
- H8. Ministers acting on behalf of parties that are new to both parliament and government have higher resignation chances than other ministers have.

Argument 4: Depillarization

In the first decades after the war, Dutch society was characterised by deep social and political cleavages between Catholics, orthodox protestants, socialists and liberal-conservatives. Large parts of civil society were organised and interconnected on the basis of religious affiliation or social stratification. These were the so called ‘pillars’. Each pillar had its own unions, interest groups and political party. During the course of the 20th century a consociational style of politics was developed in order to accommodate these cleavages and the centrifugal forces that resulted from them. This politics of accommodation (Lijphart 1968) involved a tendency to depoliticise conflicts and to run cabinets in a businesslike or technocratic fashion. Ministers, particularly in the more technical departments, were often recruited from outside politics, even to the extent that they had no political affiliation. In the sixties the pillars started to crumble and Dutch society, as elsewhere, became much more politicised. From 1963 onwards, the majority of cabinet ministers are no longer professional specialists or former departmental high-flyers, but rather experienced politicians. Ministers are increasingly recruited from parliament and political parties, also because of increasing competition between political parties and thus less secure career prospects for MP’s (Bakema and Secker 1990). In 1966, with the landslide victory of D66, a self confessed anti-pillarization party, politicization and polarization started to replace the politics of accommodation in Parliament. One could argue that the first post- pillarization cabinet is the Biesheuvel I cabinet, which took office in 1971. We therefore hypothesize that in the post–pillarization years previous political experience will enhance the chances of ministerial survival.

- H9. After 1971, previous political experience as a minister or in parliament becomes more important and will reduce the chance of resignation.

Argument 5: Departmental context

A forced resignation is the political equivalent of capital punishment. It is one of the most severe consequences of political failure, and one may assume that this ‘punishment’ will only be applied when serious issues are at stake. Political saliency, therefore, may be an important determinant of ministerial resignation. One may assume that ministers will run a higher risk of coerced resignation if they are perceived as failing in dossiers that are politically sensitive. Consequently, one may assume that in a given cabinet not all ministers run the same risk, because some departments deal with more politically sensitive dossiers than others. A relevant indicator for the degree of departmental political saliency is the number of written parliamentary questions. The higher the annual number of questions for a department, the higher the political saliency of its portfolio.

Research into the number of parliamentary questions between 1981 and 2008 (Benschop 2009) shows indeed an uneven distribution of parliamentary questions among the departments. The ministry of Justice is the frontrunner. The minister and the junior minister receive the highest number of parliamentary questions of all departments. Many of these questions have to do with crime figures, prisons, refugees and immigrants. Particularly from 1994 onwards, the annual numbers increase sharply and in 2008 the minister of Justice had an all time record of over 500 parliamentary questions (BZK 2009: 24). Other ministries with relatively high numbers of questions are the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Social Affairs and Employment during the economic recession of the mid eighties, Traffic and Water Management in the late nineties

H10. Ministers of departments that deal with highly political salient dossiers, as measured by the number of parliamentary questions, have higher resignation chances.

Operationalization and method of analysis

The empirical analysis is split in two parts. The first part considers all the structural factors that may affect coerced resignations: the personal background of ministers, coalition dynamics, depillarization, and departmental context. In order to analyze the effect of all independent variables, a special type of regression method is used: Cox

Regression, also known as ‘survival analysis’. Cox Regression is specifically tailored to duration models, in which the effect of several independent variables is assessed on the occurrence of events that are time-dependent.

The dependent variable in a Cox Regression model is the ‘hazard ratio’. Because it is not known how long an individual minister would have survived in office had his cabinet not fallen as a whole, effective political survival time is always an incomplete measurement. Cox regression takes account for this fact, by treating the dependent variable (e.g. coerced individual resignation) as time-dependent. On that basis, it first calculates the general hazard rate (i.e. the odds of a resignation given a specific point in time), and then it works out the additional hazard rates for specific independent variables. This way, the effect of all the independent variables can be interpreted as higher or lower resignation chances than the average resignation chances of ministers.

The cumulative survival function in Figure 3 is derived from this hazard ratio. The independent variables refer to the arguments mentioned above and are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Composition of the independent variables

Variable	Composition
<i>Personal background</i>	
Gender	Dummy variable; 1=female
Age	Age when assuming office
Rank	Dummy variable; 1=junior minister
Ministerial experience	Dummy variable; 1=previous experience in cabinet
Parliamentary experience	Dummy variable; 1=previous experience in parliament
<i>Coalition dynamics</i>	
Surplus party	Dummy variable; 1=party is not necessary for achieving a parliamentary majority (or minister is not member of any party, or cabinet as a whole is an interim cabinet ⁹)
New party	Dummy variable; 1=party has been elected into Parliament for the first time and is in the government coalition directly (DS'70 and LPF)
<i>Depillarization</i>	
	Not coded; the results are split between the period before the Biesheuvel government took office in 1971, and since.
<i>Departmental context</i>	
Salient issue areas	Dummy variable; 1=Justice, Foreign Affairs, Social Affairs & Employment or Traffic & Water Management.

For each independent variable, the results of the Cox Regression analysis will show how much higher or lower the coerced resignation chances are.

The second part of the analysis focuses on the calls for resignation. As mentioned before, this argument will not be tested in conjunction with the other arguments because a call for resignation can as much be a cause for actual resignation as a consequence of the other independent variables. Therefore, the analysis of this argument will be in the form of a simple cross tabulation. Also, because of limited data availability the analysis of this argument does not go back to before 1981.

⁹ Interim cabinets are sometimes formed when a fallen government is not capable of staying in office preparing an election. Either way, no party in parliament has an (electoral) interest in keeping these ministers in government.

Results

Structural determinants of early resignations

Table 3 below shows the results of the Cox Regression analysis, that includes nearly all independent variables. In order to show the effect of depillarization the results are split between the period before 1971 and afterwards. The coefficients in the table show how much difference each independent variable makes with respect to the average hazard function. In short, the figures show how much more or less particular ministers risk to be forced to leave office. A figure of 1.00 indicates that a variable makes no difference, 0.50 means that the chances of an early resignation are half, and 2.00 means a hazard that is twice as big.

Table 3 Hazard ratios from Cox regression models

	Full model		Parsimonious model	
	1946-1971	1971-2009	1946-1971	1971-2009
<i>Personal background</i>				
Gender (female)	0.000	0.868	-	-
Age	1.050	1.033	-	-
Rank (junior minister)	0.367	0.990	-	-
Ministerial experience	0.615	0.666	-	-
Parliamentary experience	0.219	0.489*	-	0.482*
<i>Coalition dynamics</i>				
Surplus party	1.533	2.417	-	-
New party	n.a.	2.079*	-	1.908*
<i>Departmental context</i>				
Salient issue areas	0.418	0.802	-	-

Entries are exponential beta scores. * significant ≤ 0.10 , ** significant ≤ 0.05 .

The first two columns in Table 3 include all independent variables for the period before 1971 and after. Several important conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. First of all, the table shows that very few factors actually produce an effect. Gender, age, rank and previous ministerial experience were found to be significant predictors in the British case (Berlinski et al. 2007), but in the Dutch case these variables produce no significant effect. The same is true for surplus parties: their ministers are not likely to survive any shorter or longer than their colleagues from other parties.

The results do however show that the structural determinants why ministers are forced to resign early vary over time. Before depillarization, ministers who lacked previous parliamentary experience did not risk a coerced resignation any more than other ministers. But from 1971 onwards, the effect of parliamentary experience becomes clearly visible: it reduces the risk of a coerced resignation by half. The changing interplay between parliament and government clearly affects the survival chances of ministers. Also, ministers of new parties have an almost double resignation hazard – an effect that is mainly caused by the LPF's many failings, but which is additional to a lack of parliamentary experience, which its ministers also featured. This effect is only seen after 1971, because no new parties entered government between the war and that year.

Also, it is not possible to point to 'risky' departments. In our analysis, we coded which departments are subject to most parliamentary questions (Benschop 2009) and took that as a proxy of the salience of issue areas. This political salience does not influence the survival chances of Dutch ministers.¹⁰ The only relevant predictors of early resignations are previous parliamentary experience of ministers, and membership of new parties entering both parliament and government.

The effect of calls for resignation

Additionally, we counted the number of votes of no-confidence that were tabled against all individual ministers since 1981. We kept this independent variable separate from the other, because a resignation call may well be an intermediary variable between the previously investigated structural factors and an actual resignation. Table 4 shows a cross tabulation of the number of resignation calls and coerced resignations.

¹⁰ To be sure, we repeated the analysis with dummy variables for each department (not reported in the table), but here too no significant effects were found.

Table 4 Resignation calls and coerced resignations

	Number of resignation calls since 1981 (per minister)						Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Not forced to leave	267	27	6	4	1	1	306
Forced to leave	15	4	3	0	0	0	22
Total	282	31	9	4	1	1	328
Chi Square: 13.398** Pearson's R: 0.103*							

* significant ≤ 0.10 , ** significant ≤ 0.05

Table 4 shows that there are only seven ministers who were forced to leave after resignation calls were tabled against them. The data do not show, however, if those seven ministers were later forced to leave as a result of the political damage that was inflicted upon them by means of the respective resignation calls. Nonetheless, most of the ministers who were forced to leave did not receive any resignation call, and most ministers who did receive one survived. The table does show, though, that there is a weak relationship. For every resignation call tabled in Parliament, resignation chances increase by 10 percentage points (Pearson's R). The table also shows that ministers are not 'out' after two strikes. Instead, they are safe after that; when a minister has survived his second vote of no confidence he is also likely to survive all the rest.

Conclusion and discussion

This paper has investigated the turnover rate of individual cabinet members in the Netherlands. On average, 14.8 percent of all ministers step down individually before the end of the cabinet. A total of 5.2 percent does not step down voluntarily, but is forced to do so because of an internal conflict within the cabinet, because of a loss of confidence of the party or of the parliament, or because of personal reasons. The total number of resignations is 106, of which 37 are coerced. These bare figures show that the number of resignations in the Netherlands is much smaller than in the United Kingdom (Berlinski et al. 2009), but greater than in Germany (Fischer and Kaiser 2009).

We observe that the number of resignations fluctuates between governments. On the whole, however, the number of coerced resignations is on the increase, which

does not correspond to the popular image that nowadays' ministers can get away with their blunders after a simple apology. In fact, ministers are sent home more often than ever before. Whereas only four ministers per decade were forced to leave in the 1950s to the 1970s, this has steadily risen to nine since Balkenende took office in 2002. The number of voluntary resignations, however, fluctuates more.

Next, we looked at the timing of resignations and observed that forced resignations follow a pattern that is different from all resignations together. The survival rate with respect to all types of resignation together has a slowly but steadily decreasing pattern. This shows that ministers who leave office may do so at any moment. For the forced resignations, however, the survival rate shows that these are more concentrated in the first two years of a ministerial tenure.

Finally, we looked at a number of possible determinants for coerced resignations. We hypothesized that personal factors, calls for resignation, coalition dynamics, depillarization and departmental context all affect a minister's survival chances. In sum, it appears that only one personal background factor effectively matters; since the 1970s previous experience in parliament reduces resignation chances by half. This finding testifies to the changing relations between the legislature and the executive, in which the executive no longer always has the upper hand but in which practical knowledge of the workings of the parliament is a major asset. Additionally, there is an organizational factor that matters; ministers of new parties that enter both parliament and government are also more likely to be sent home. The question if a governing party can be done without with respect to maintaining a parliamentary majority, however, is not an issue. Table 5 below gives an overview of the maintained and rejected hypotheses.

Table 5 Maintained and rejected hypotheses

H1. Male ministers are more likely to be coerced to step down than their female colleagues	Rejected
H2. Older ministers are more likely to be forced to step down than younger ministers	Rejected
H3. Junior ministers are more likely to be forced to resign than regular cabinet ministers	Rejected
H4. Ministers who have served in past governments are more likely to be coerced to resign than ‘first-time’ ministers	Rejected
H5. Ministers who have no previous experience as member of Parliament are more likely to be forced to step down than ministers who do have	Maintained
H6. The more resignation calls ministers accumulate in Parliament, the higher the chance that they will eventually be forced to leave	Maintained, up to 2 calls
H7. Ministers of government parties that are not needed for securing a bare parliamentary majority, and ministers who are not acting for a political party, have higher resignation chances than other ministers	Rejected
H8. Ministers acting on behalf of parties that are new to both parliament and government have higher resignation chances than other ministers have	Maintained
H9. After 1971, previous political experience as a minister or in parliament becomes more important and will reduce the chance of resignation	Maintained for parliamentary experience
H10. Ministers of departments that deal with highly political salient dossiers, as measured by the number of parliamentary questions, have higher resignation chances	Rejected

Even though the literature on the length of ministerial tenure is scarce, the results presented in this paper show that patterns of ministerial survival are to a high degree institutionally determined. All factors that significantly affect the resignation

chances of British ministers (Berlinksi et al. 2007) prove to be irrelevant to the Dutch case. The number of calls for resignation, as proposed by others (Berlinksi et al. 2009, Bovens and Wever 2008, Fischer et al. 2006), indeed relates to actual resignation, but only to a limited degree. After a minister has survived two votes of no confidence, history shows that he will then also survive all the following ones.

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