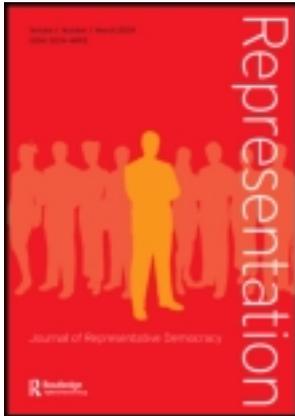


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THE BLIND CORNER OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Jacques Thomassen

Much of the literature on political representation provides empirical evidence that elections successfully link the policy preferences of citizens to the policy preferences of their representatives in parliament and to public policy. However, most of these studies are based on the congruence on the left–right dimension rather than on specific issues. Using empirical data from the Netherlands we show that on specific issues elections seem to fail as an instrument to connect the policy preferences of a large part of the electorate to the policy positions of their representatives because these issues are poorly related to the left–right dimension.

1. Introduction

The literature on the state of representative democracy in advanced industrial democracies shows a remarkable paradox. On the one hand the rise of populist parties across Western Europe in particular, successfully claiming that the established parties have lost contact with 'the people', suggests that the traditional processes of political representation are no longer effective, i.e., they no longer manage to connect the policy preferences of the people to public policy.

There is another body of literature, however, providing empirical evidence that the process of political representation is quite effective, that elections are an effective instrument of democracy, successfully linking the policy preferences of citizens to the policy preferences and legislative behaviour of their representatives in parliament and eventually to public policy (McDonald and Budge 2005; Powell 2000; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).

In this article we argue that this latter body of literature offers a too optimistic picture of the effectiveness of the process of political representation in advanced industrial democracies. This is because most of these studies, in particular comparative studies, are based on the congruence on the left–right dimension of (the relevant part of) the electorate on the one hand and either the position of their representatives in parliament or public policy on the other hand. They implicitly or explicitly assume that representativeness on the left–right dimension automatically implies representativeness on a range of other issues as well. We argue that this assumption is at least disputable. Using empirical data from the Netherlands we show that on specific issues elections seem to fail as an instrument to connect the policy preferences of a large part of the electorate to the policy positions of their representatives in parliament. We argue that this is precisely because these issues are at best poorly related to the left–right dimension.

In the next section we discuss the limitations of studies of political representation based on the left–right dimension only. In the third section we make an assessment of the representativeness of political parties in the Netherlands on a number of issues. In the fourth section, building on earlier studies of ‘dynamic representation’, we explore to what extent individual political parties and the party system as a whole are flexible enough to close the gap between their own policy positions and those of the voters.

2. The Limitations of the Left–Right Dimension as an Instrument of Linkage

Over the years, several authors have ‘asserted that the left-right dimension obtains a superior all-inclusive status within the hierarchy of cleavages’ (Sani and Sartori 1983). In this interpretation the left–right dimension does not just reflect the ideological component of the class cleavage but is a kind of ‘super-issue’ encompassing various issue domains. Empirical research seems to confirm that the left–right dimension is indeed the main dimension of contestation across Europe (e.g., Sani and Sartori 1983; Schmitt and Thomassen 2009). Voters in general have no problem locating themselves on the left–right dimension; they have a clear perception of where the main political parties stand and they vote in large numbers for the party nearest to their own position on this dimension (Van der Brug and Van der Eijk 1999; Van der Brug et al. 2009; Van der Eijk et al. 2005). Political parties live up to their promises once they are in government and steer government policy according to their ideological position (Klingemann et al. 1994; Thomson 1999).

As a consequence, the left-right dimension seems to be an effective instrument of political representation, connecting people’s policy preferences to parties’ positions in parliament and to public policy. Empirical research tends to confirm a strong congruence between voters’ positions on the left–right dimension on the one hand and the position on the same dimension of the political parties they voted for and public policy on the other hand (Klingemann 1995; Klingemann et al. 1994; McDonald and Budge 2005; Powell 2000; Thomassen and Schmitt 1999).

However, all these studies prove that the process of political representation is effective on the left–right dimension, but they do not really prove that all relevant policy dimensions are encompassed or constrained by this single dimension. If this were the case, one would expect more or less the same degree of congruence between voters and the party they voted for on each and every issue. And yet, time and again, empirical research proves that this is not the case at all. In particular on issues like law and order, immigration and, more generally, the place of ethnic minorities in society, and European integration, huge differences between party elites and their rank and file have been observed. Political parties, especially those on the left, seem to represent their voters quite poorly on such issues (Thomassen 1976, 1999; Van der Brug 2008; Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). What these findings seem to suggest is that people’s positions on such issues can hardly be predicted by their position on the left–right dimension, in other words that they are *not* constrained by the left–right dimension. If this happens the left–right dimension is doomed to fail as an instrument of linkage with regard to such issues. If political parties compete on the left–right dimension and voters vote according to their position on this same dimension because it is the most salient dimension to them, they might possibly vote for the ‘wrong’ party with regard to issues that are not constrained by the left–right dimension and therefore be poorly represented on these issues. This would in particular be the case if at the elite level issue dimensions are differently correlated with each other than at the mass level. This is what we refer to

as the blind corner of both political representation and political representation research: the almost exclusive focus of congruence studies on the left–right dimension might conceal voters' unequal representation across issue dimensions.

It is our contention that this might very well be the case with regard to issues related to the so-called libertarian–authoritarian dimension. This is anything but a new discussion. The idea that the space of political conflict in most modern Western societies can be reduced to a single ideological dimension was never undisputed. More than 50 years ago Lipset argued that

The poorer strata everywhere are more liberal or leftist on economic issues; they favour more welfare state measures, higher wages, graduated income taxes, support of trade-unions, and so forth. But when liberalism is defined in noneconomic terms – as support of civil liberties, internationalism, etc. – the correlation is reversed. The more well-to-do are more liberal, the poorer are more intolerant. (Lipset 1966: 101–2)

Since the political elites in general tend to belong to the well-to-do people and in particular to the better educated people, the logical consequence is a problem of political representation among the parties on the left where the political elites combine a left attitude on social-economic issues with a libertarian attitude on non-economic issues whereas their voters—assuming they vote according to social-economic issues—combine a leftist attitude on social-economic issues with an authoritarian or conservative stand on immaterial issues. As a consequence, political elites will hardly be representative of their rank and file on such issues.

The problem is summarised in Table 1. If Lipset's argument is correct, most voters on the left will be in quadrant A where no political parties are, whereas the political parties and political elites on the left are in quadrant C.¹

If Lipset had made his observations today, they could not have been more accurate. Once again, both the number and the content of the relevant dimensions of electoral competition have become a matter of discussion. This discussion is strongly related to the rise of populist parties. The success of these parties can hardly be understood in the framework of either the traditional cleavage structure or the simple left–right framework (e.g., Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008).

3. Political Representation in the Netherlands

In the remaining part of this article we try to assess to what extent this ongoing discussion on the dimensionality of the space of political conflict can shed some light on the effectiveness of the system of political representation in the Netherlands. The main reason to focus on the Netherlands is that Dutch politics seems to be in a state of turmoil. If we take electoral stability as an indicator, the Netherlands have become one of the most instable democracies in Western Europe. Three of the parliamentary elections since 1994 were among the nine most

TABLE 1
Two-dimensional space of political conflict

	Left	Right
Authoritarian	A	B
Libertarian	C	D

volatile elections in the history of Western Europe since 1950² (Mair 2008). Moreover, both in 2002 and 2006, most of this volatility was due to the unprecedented successful breakthrough of new populist parties. In 2002 the LPF (List Pim Fortuyn) won 26 of the 150 seats in parliament, becoming the second largest party in parliament, just a few months after it had been founded. It fell apart equally fast because of internal conflicts, but in the 2006 elections two other populist parties, one on the left and one on the right were almost equally successful. The PVV (Party for Freedom), an offspring of the liberal conservative VVD, led by Geert Wilders, won nine seats whereas the SP (Socialist Party), a radical socialist party which had been represented in parliament since 1994, won 25 seats. The PVV was the main winner of the 2010 elections, increasing its number of seats in parliament to 24.

Also, the murder of Pim Fortuyn in 2002, just a few days before the elections, and later of the journalist Theo van Gogh by a Muslim youth, and the overwhelming 'nee' of the Dutch electorate in the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005, against the will of the major political parties in parliament, together representing 85% of the seats in parliament, made not only many foreigners but also some Dutch observers wonder what had become of the Netherlands, once the prototype of consociational politics and tolerance.

In contrast to many comments in the media, analyses of the behaviour of the electorate in the 2002 elections clearly indicate that the Fortuyn revolt cannot simply be interpreted as a revolt against the political establishment or as the result of a sudden change in public opinion with regard to issues of immigration. Although it is true that people had become more negative about immigrants and multicultural society, a more plausible explanation seems to be that the LPF moved into a gap of the electoral market (Van Holsteyn et al. 2003). It was able to introduce a new line of conflict—the cultural one—that had been ignored by the political elite, but was highly salient to the electorate (Pellikaan et al. 2007). As far as this potentially salient issue dimension was deliberately kept from the political agenda by the established political parties, the Fortuyn revolt can indeed be interpreted as a successful revolt against the established party system.

Therefore, several students of Dutch politics have argued that these recent developments in Dutch politics have changed the space of competition. By focusing on the issues of immigration and multiculturalism Fortuyn managed to redefine the political agenda, adding a new dimension of competition to Dutch politics in the process (Pellikaan et al. 2003).

These interpretations suggest that the established political parties did not effectively represent their voters on issues that we above identified as being part of the libertarian–authoritarian dimension: issues of immigration and the integration of ethnic minorities, European integration and law and order. In this section we try to assess to what extent this is the case.

Also, we explore how political parties and the party system react to the gap between party elites and their rank and file: do they try to close the gap, either by trying to convince their voters to change their mind or by moving toward their voters' position? Does the party system react to this gap by the rise of new political parties trying to represent voters who are not well represented by the traditional political parties?

In order to answer these questions we analyse data from two longitudinal studies in the Netherlands. The first one is the ongoing series of National Election Studies (DNES³) that started in 1971; the second one is the series of surveys among members of the Dutch Parliament (MP-study) that started in 1972.⁴ Because of the strong ties between the principal investigators of the two studies there always was a certain overlap between the questionnaires used in both studies, in particular with regard to political issues.⁵

Unfortunately, the consistency across levels and across time is less than it could have been due to changes in question format and the selection of issues. Here we limit ourselves to comparisons across levels and time on issues with an identical question format.⁶ In addition to the left–right scale there is only a single issue question that was included in the same question format in all relevant studies, both at the mass- and elite level. This is a question about income policy, asking respondents whether incomes should become more equal or remain as they are.⁷ However, both a question on law and order that was first asked in the early 1970s and questions on the integration of ethnic minorities and European integration enable us to assess the congruence between voters and their representatives on the two dimensions distinguished above.

Is the effectiveness of the process of political representation different for different issue domains? Figure 1 presents the mean positions of voters and MPs of the four major parties on the one issue for which we have a longer time series, i.e., people's opinions on the equality of incomes. On the issue of law and order we do have a short time series at the elite level but not at the mass level. We still include the data on this issue here because it is the most interesting one from the perspective of this article. It enables us to test the hypothesis that the representativeness of MPs will be relatively poor on issues related to the libertarian–authoritarian dimension, in particular among parties to the left. In 1972 this hypothesis seems to be corroborated. There is indeed quite a gap between PvdA-voters and their MPs in 1972, a gap that does not exist for any of the other major parties. Unfortunately, voters were not asked for their opinion on this issue in the election studies of 1977 and 1989. Therefore, we cannot follow the development of this gap over time. However, it is most unlikely that PvdA-voters have moved towards a more libertarian position after 1972. If that assumption is correct, we can conclude that the predicted gap between PvdA-voters and their MPs was gradually bridged between 1972 and 1990.

The development of the position of PvdA-MPs reveals an interesting process of *dynamic representation* (cf. Holmberg 1997; Schmitt and Thomassen 2000; Stimson et al. 1995). In 1990 the MPs had moved to the position where their voters were already in 1972! Therefore, this is a

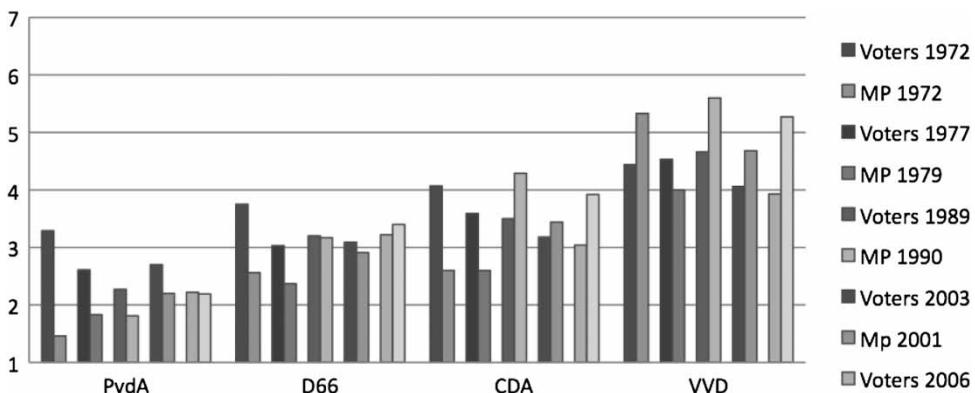


FIGURE 1

Positions on income differences; voters and MPs 1972–2006

Notes: 1 = Income differences should be reduced; 7 = Income differences should remain as they are (but see note 7).

clear case where the political elites follow the mood of their voters rather than the other way around.

Is the gap we found between voters and their representatives due to the fact that the issue of law and order is not constrained by the left–right dimension? In a previous publication (Thomassen 1999) we found that the correlations between issue positions at the level of the mass public in general are too low to make a distinction between issues. The extent to which issue positions are constrained by the left–right dimension is far less among the mass public than among MPs. This is exactly what we would expect. However, at both levels the extent to which opinions on law and order are constrained by the left–right dimension (Pearson correlation coefficients 0.24 (mass level) and 0.76 (MPs) respectively) is no less than for any of the other issues. However, this is not the case for the issues of the integration of ethnic minorities and European integration, the issues that were first introduced in the MP-study of 2001. The correlations between left–right position and the position on these issues among MPs are not higher than among the mass public (minorities: 0.30 (MPs) vs. 0.31 (mass); European integration: 0.11 (MPs) vs. 0.03 (mass)).

In addition to these analyses at the individual level, in Figures 3 through 5 the positions of MPs and voters of each party in 2006 on the left–right dimension are plotted against their position on the issues of income differences, the integration of minorities and European integration. As expected, the positions of both voters and MPs on the issue of the equality of incomes are more or less located on the main diagonal. However, on the issues of ethnic minorities' integration into the Dutch society and European integration the situation is different. On the issue of the integration of minorities (multiculturalism) there is hardly any variation among the voter groups of the three main parties, PvdA, CDA and VVD. They all are at an almost similar position on the conservative side of the issue space (i.e., integration). Only the Green-Left voters are on the libertarian side of the scale (i.e., multiculturalism). For the PvdA in particular this means that they are quite representative of their voters on the left–right dimension but not on the minority integration issue. Therefore, on this issue, we see exactly the pattern that was first discussed by Lipset, i.e., a problem of representation that is specifically applicable

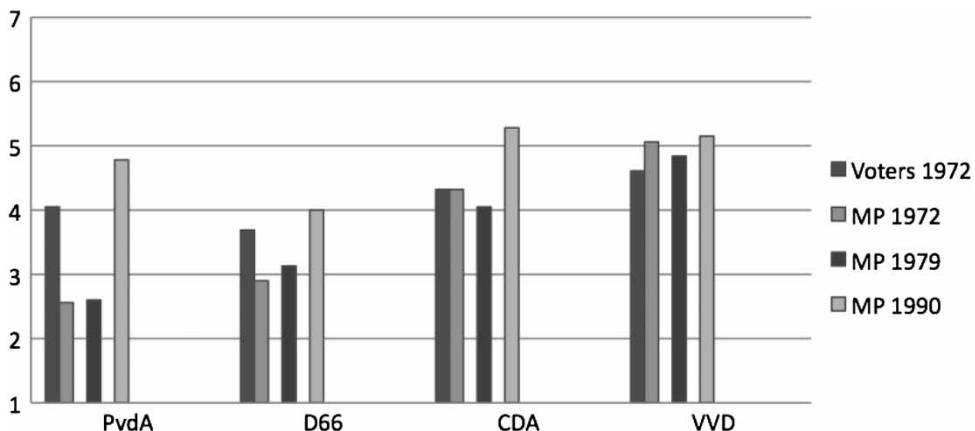


FIGURE 2

Positions on law and order voters and MPs; 1972–1990

Notes: 1 = Government is too heavy-handed; 7 = Government should take a harder line.

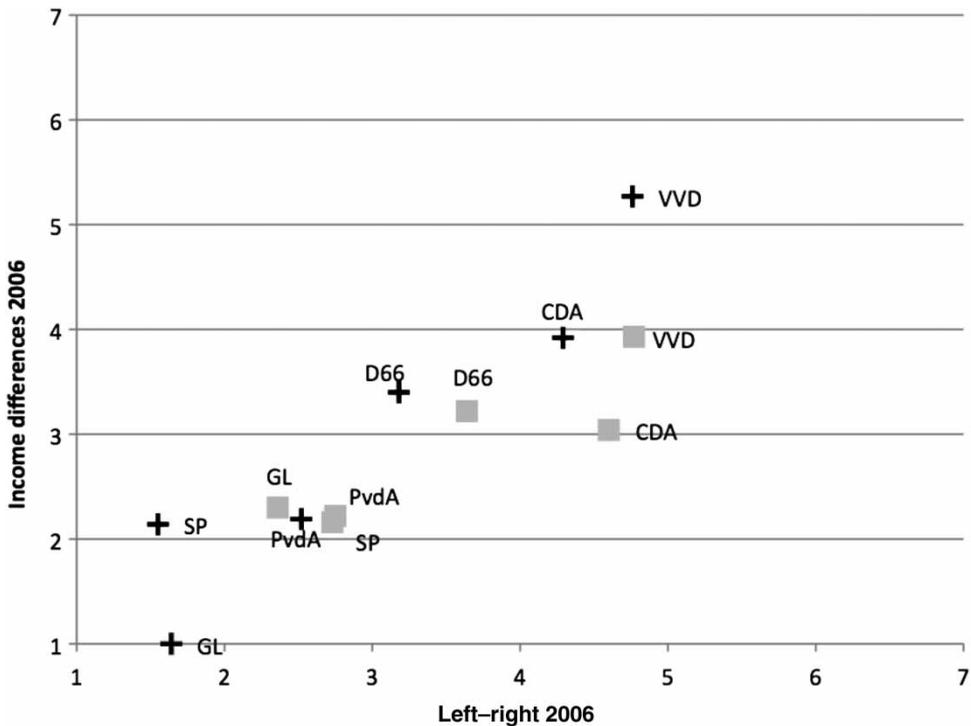


FIGURE 3

Left–right positions and income differences; voters and MPs 2006

Notes: 1 = Left; 7 = Right; + = MPs; □ = Voters.

to the left where voters—in contrast to their representatives—combine a left position on social-economic issues with a conservative position on issues related to the libertarian–authoritarian dimension. On the issue of European integration, the lack of representativeness is even more outspoken. With the exception of the SP, both the MP- and voter-groups are more or less on the diagonal, but in a totally different part of the plot. Whereas all MP-groups with the exception of the SP⁸ and the CU (Christian Union) are on the pro-further-European integration side of the scale,⁹ all voter-groups are on the other side of the scale, more or less in the same order as their representatives. This pattern reveals a very general problem of representation on the issue of European integration that came to an outburst in the 2005 referendum when an overwhelming 62% of the voters rejected the Constitutional Treaty, whereas all parties represented in this plot except the SP and the CU had declared themselves in favour of it. This plot therefore reveals that this sudden clash between the political elites and the mass public was less of an ‘unfortunate accident’ than many observers were willing to believe. The referendum only created an institutional opportunity to bring a slumbering conflict between political elites and the mass public to the surface.

4. Dynamic Representation

Finally, let us come back to the question how dynamic both individual political parties and the party system are, i.e., to what extent do they adapt to changes in policy preferences among their voters? The ‘Fortuyn revolt’ in 2002 suddenly mobilised the dissatisfaction with

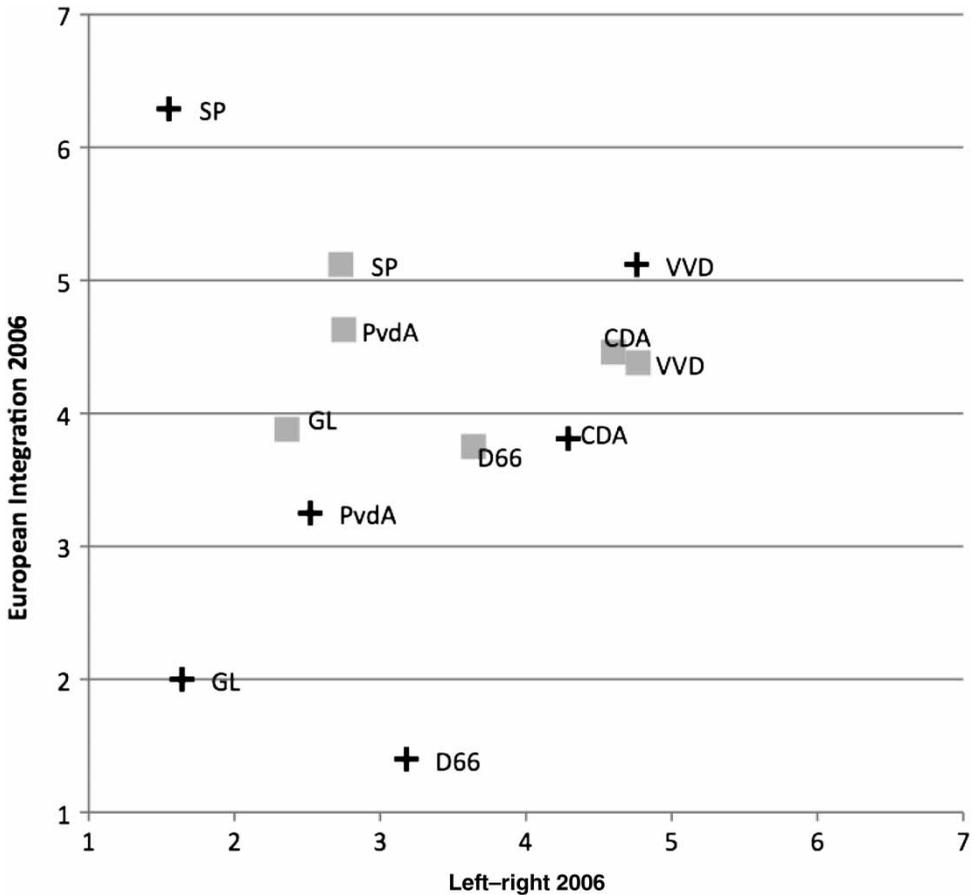


FIGURE 4

Left-right positions and integration of immigrants; voters and MPs 2006

Notes: 1 = Immigrants should be allowed to live in the Netherlands with the right to uphold all the customs of their own culture; 7 = Immigrants in the Netherlands should assimilate completely to Dutch culture.

the 'multicultural society' that for a long time had been central in public policy, and in particular in the policy views of the parties on the left. The reaction of the political elites in 2002 clearly revealed they had been caught by surprise and obviously were not aware that the mood of the country had changed.

But had it really changed? Although there are no long-term data on people's attitudes on these issues it is most unlikely that this is the major development. Both the questions on the integration of ethnic minorities and on European integration have been asked in the National Election Study since 1994. Although the electorate has moved slightly towards the position that minorities should completely adjust to Dutch culture, this movement is limited. Most of the electorate had been on the conservative side of this issue for as long as we can observe. In the perception of the electorate the main parties have moved in the same direction but up until 2006 there was an impressive difference between where the voters stood and where they perceived the PvdA in particular. On European integration the situation is even more dramatic. Ever since 1994 the average positions of voters have consistently been

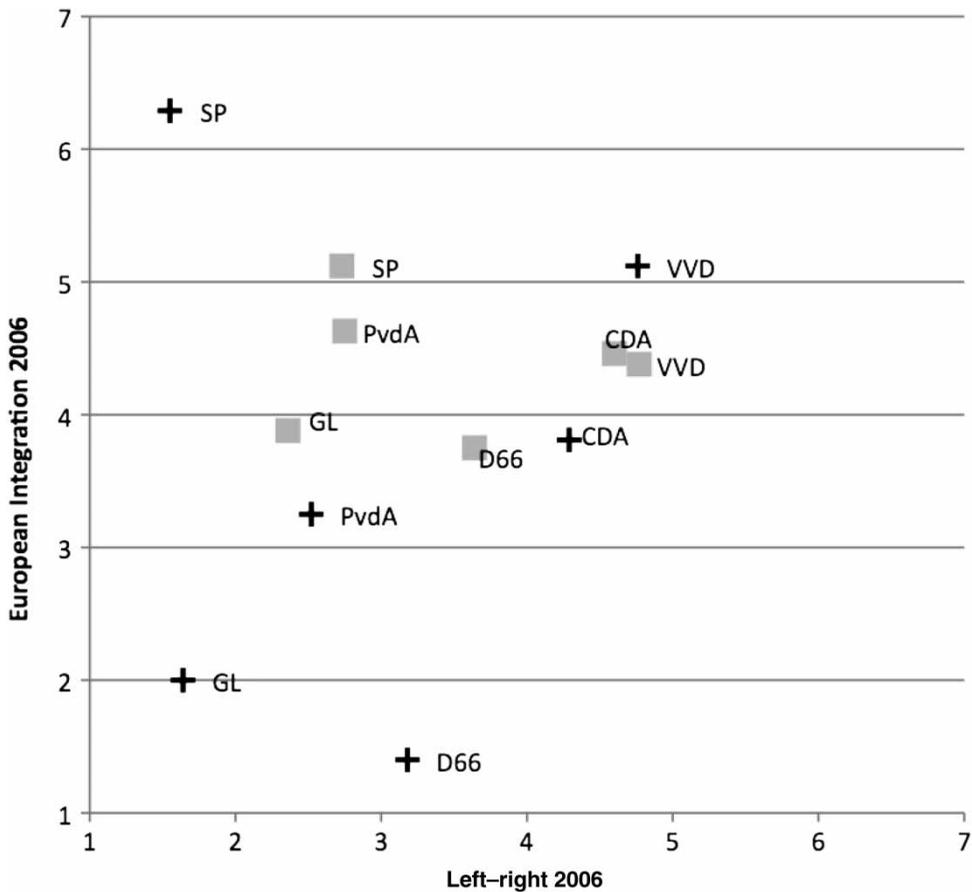


FIGURE 5

Left-right positions and European integration; voters and MPs, 2006

Notes: 1 = European integration should go much further; 7 = European integration has gone much too far.

outside of the range of the perceived average positions of the major old political parties. Throughout the period since 1994 the three main parties (PvdA, CDA and VVD) were hardly distinguished by the voters when it comes to their views on European integration whereas the electorate is very clearly leaning towards the position that European integration has gone too far (Aarts and Thomassen 2008).

This lack of congruence between voters and their representatives could remain hidden as long as the main dimension of contestation was the left-right dimension, forcing the electorate to vote for a party that in many cases hardly represented their attitudes on issues related to the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. The outburst of political dissatisfaction after the turn of the century was not due to a sudden change of opinion among the electorate but to a combination of two developments. First, issues related to immigrants and minorities, law and order and crime, had become more salient over the years. One of the questions that has consistently been asked in the National Election Studies is what people considered as the main problem facing the Netherlands. Whereas in the late 1970s unemployment (a typical socio-economic issue) was considered as the major problem, this suddenly changed

in the early 1990s. From then on problems related to minorities and refugees were seen as the most important problem, together with issues related to crime and public order. In particular the issues related to minorities and asylum-seekers were deliberately kept off the political agenda by almost all political parties because they were regarded as the issues of the extreme right with all its standard associations with fascism and Nazism (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). All this issue domain was waiting for was a political entrepreneur mobilising at least part of the electorate on this issue dimension. This—and this is the second development—is exactly what Fortuyn did in 2002. He brilliantly changed the main dimension of contestation from the left–right dimension to the libertarian–authoritarian dimension.¹⁰

In terms of dynamic representation this development can be seen as an adaptation of the party system to a situation in which there was hardly a place in the party system for voters feeling uneasy with the changes they perceived in Dutch society. This adaptation was not only represented by Fortuyn’s movement. As observed before, his movement was short-lived, but this is not to say that the policy dimension he successfully competed on has become less salient. On the extreme right side the PVV has become a powerful movement.

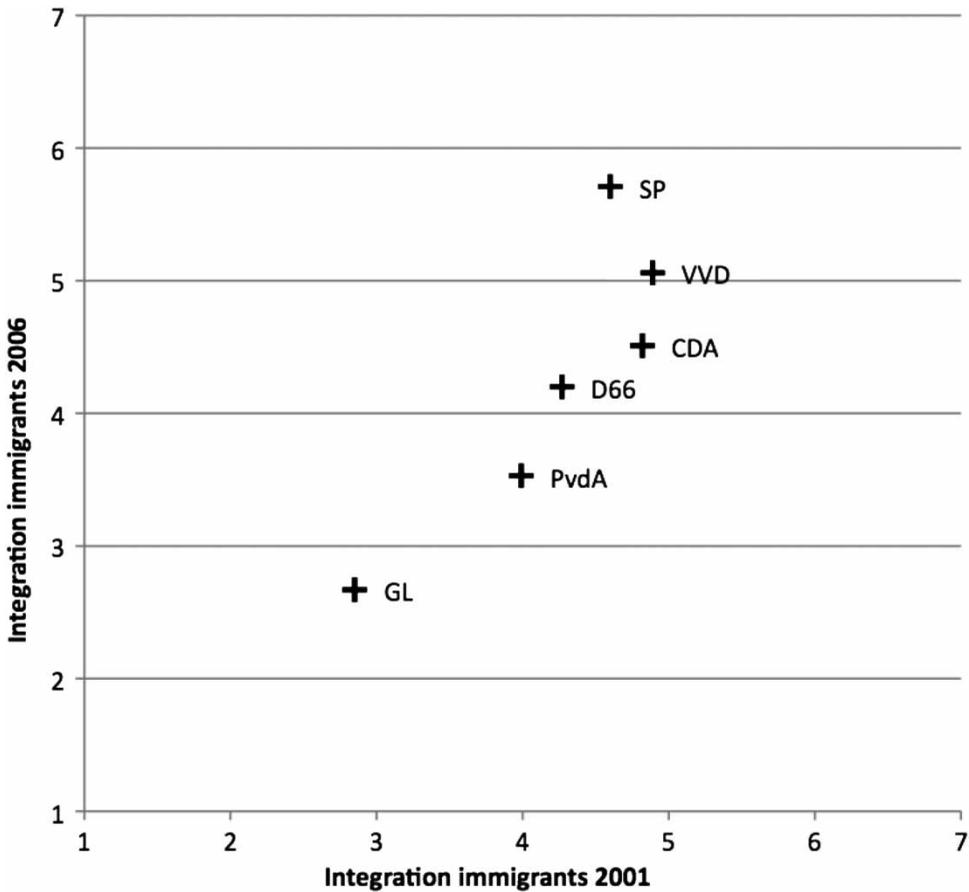


FIGURE 6

Integration immigrants; MP positions 2001 and 2006

Notes: 1 = Immigrants should be allowed to live in the Netherlands with the right to uphold all the customs of their own culture; 7 = Immigrants in the Netherlands should assimilate completely to Dutch culture.

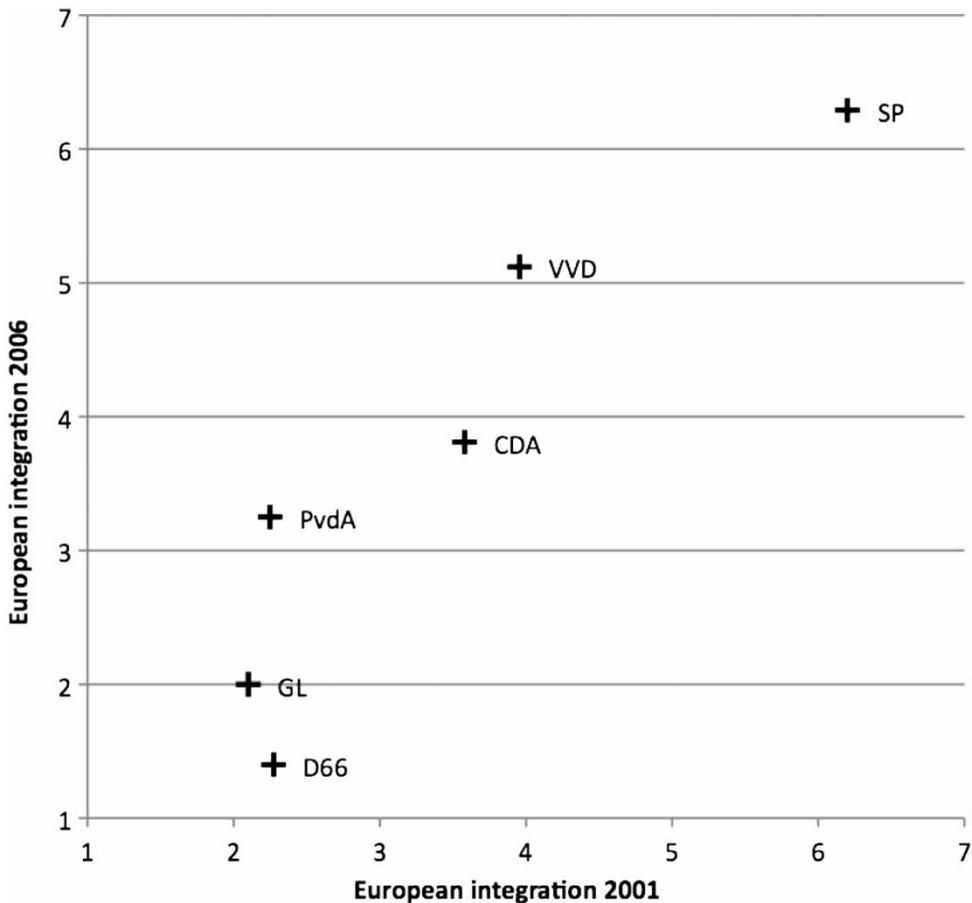


FIGURE 7

European integration; MP positions 2001 and 2006

Notes: 1 = European integration should go much further; 7 = European integration has gone much too far.

On the left the SP has been quite successful representing a left position on socio-economic issues combined with a conservative position on the libertarian–authoritarian dimension.¹¹

With its permissive electoral system the Dutch party system easily reacts to changing circumstances by the rise of new parties. But how dynamic are the established parties? Do they react to changes in the mood of the country and of their traditional electorate in particular? Since these changes only became clear to them in the elections of 2002 and the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 we might expect them to adapt their positions on issues related to the libertarian–authoritarian dimension between 2001 and 2006.

In Figures 6 and 7 the mean positions of MPs in 2001 on the issues of the integration of ethnic minorities and European integration are plotted against those in 2006. On the first issue most parties are on or close to the main diagonal, meaning that hardly any change has occurred. None of the major parties seems to have given in to what most of them would see as a mood of intolerance.¹²

The issue of European integration shows a different picture. On this issue the two most libertarian parties, Green-Left and D66 have seen no reason to adapt their position. Their

electoral niche is mainly among the better educated part of the population who are both libertarian and supportive of European integration. But PvdA and VVD are above the main diagonal, which means that they shifted their position towards a more euro-sceptical position. They were both challenged by a competitor—the SP and the PVV¹³ respectively—located at the same position as they are on the left–right dimension but much closer to where their voters are on the issue of European integration.

In Conclusion

In this article we argued that both mainstream political representation research and the process of political representation in Western democracies itself might have a blind corner. This is the case when the process of political representation is based on the left–right dimension but not all issue positions are constrained by this dimension, either at the mass or elite level or at both levels. In this scenario, the process of political representation will not be effective for the issues which are not. We argued that this situation is likely to occur with regard to issues related to the libertarian–authoritarian dimension. We hypothesised that this dimension is correlated with the left–right dimension at the elite level, but not at the mass level. At the latter level—in contrast to the political elites—people tend to combine left with authoritarian attitudes. As a consequence, political parties on the left traditionally have a problem representing their voters on the libertarian–authoritarian dimension. Since there are clear indications that this dimension is getting more important, it is most likely that this problem has gotten worse over the last decades and it might be one of the reasons why populist parties have become so successful.

We tried to assess the validity of this argument on the basis of data from the Netherlands. Although the data tend to sustain the argument, the evidence is mixed and not always equally convincing. The main party on the left, the PvdA, did indeed fail to represent its voters on the issue of law and order but closed this gap already in the early 1990s. A similar problem occurred in the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century with regard to the issues of the integration of ethnic minorities and European integration. However, on this latter issue all main parties were representing their voters rather poorly.

We argued that the rise of populist parties in the Netherlands is due not only to the gap between political elites and the mass public on the libertarian–authoritarian dimension but also to the growing salience of this dimension among the electorate.

Finally, we tried to assess how the party system and individual political parties managed to cope with this problem. We came to the conclusion that in a political system with a low electoral threshold like in the Netherlands a self-correction of the system can easily occur because new parties will jump in when the established parties neglect a part of the political space where a significant part of the electorate is located. Even if these new parties are only flash parties, they force the established parties to close the gap between their own and the electorate's position by moving into the direction of the electorate. This is clearly what happened in the Netherlands. In contrast to what seems to be happening in other countries (Holmberg 1997, 2009) the dynamics came from below. Dutch political parties desperately tried to adapt to their voters' policy preference on the libertarian–authoritarian dimension. Whether or not this will help them is hard to tell since it will be difficult for them to conquer the issue ownership of this kind of issues.

NOTES

1. For a similar argument, see Van der Brug (2008) and Van der Brug and Van Spanje (2009).

2. The Pedersen index of electoral volatility in these three elections was 21.5 (1994), 30.7 (2002) and 20.3 (2006) respectively. See Mair (2008).
3. See www.dpes.nl.
4. In fact there was an earlier study in 1968 but hardly any of the questions asked in this study are comparable with the later studies.
5. The 1972 study was explicitly designed as a study of political representation and was part of a series of representation studies initiated by Warren Miller in particular. See Miller et al. (1999).
6. On all questions respondents were asked to place themselves on a seven- or nine-point rating scale. Although the question wording for the questions used here is identical across time and levels the length of the scales is not always identical. In the MP studies usually nine-point scales are used whereas seven-point scales are the standard instrument in the mass studies. In order to make these formats comparable the nine-point scales were transformed into a seven-point scale. Further details can be obtained from the author.
7. And even this question is not completely comparable across time since in the 1980s the 'right' pole of the scale was changed in 'income differences should become larger'.
8. The SP was the first party to recognise the traditional problem of the left, by positioning itself in cell A of table 1.
9. This confirms the well-known horse shoe pattern found in studies on party positions on left–right and European integration. See, e.g., Schmitt and Thomassen (2009).
10. Admittedly Fortuyn himself was difficult to catch in such general terms. Coquetting being gay he was extremely libertarian on moral issues. This was exactly the reason why he turned against the Muslim world and the Islam which he considered as a backward and oppressive religion and culture.
11. According to recent opinion polls many voters shifted from the SP to the list Wilders. This movement is often interpreted as an irrational movement from the far left to the far right. However, it is anything but a giant step for voters who mainly take into account issues like the integration of ethnic minorities, the influx of foreigners and European Integration.
12. This finding is somewhat surprising because in the public debate after 2002 all major political parties have tried to overbid each other by hardening their position on this issue.
13. The PVV is not in any of our figures because there is no elite-mass match in our data. In 2006 when the last of our MP-surveys was conducted it was only represented in parliament by Mr Wilders himself.

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Appendix 1. Dutch Representation Studies

The Dutch data used in this article originate from a series of representation studies performed in the years 1972, 1979, 1990, 2001 and 2006. Only the first study, in 1972, was designed as a mass–elite study. Principal investigators of this first representation study were Philip Stouthard and Jacques Thomassen (Tilburg), Hans Daalder (Leiden) and Warren Miller (Michigan). For a book-length report see Thomassen (1976). The later studies were not designed as mass–elite studies but because of a close cooperation with the National Election Studies (see www.dpes.nl) it was still possible to ask a limited number of issue questions comparable across levels and over time. For the main publications of the successive MP studies see Andeweg and Thomassen (2007); Thomassen et al. (1992); Van Schendelen et al. (1981). Detailed information on the data used in this article can be obtained from the author.

Appendix 2. Dutch Political Parties

CDA = Christen Democratisch Appel (Christian Democratic Party)

D66 = Democraten 66

GL = GroenLinks (Green Left)

PvdA = Partij van de Arbeid (Labour Party)

PVV = Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom)

SP = Socialistische Partij (Socialist Party)

VVD = Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy)