

Comparing spaces of electoral and parliamentary party competition

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How parties behave in parliament should be determined by their electoral mandate. That is a core aspect of party mandate theory (Ranney, 1954; Pitkin, 1967; Thomassen, 1994). Party representation should provide a link between citizens and politicians. Voters should be enabled to make an informed electoral decision. Therefore parties' election manifestos should be a good predictor of how parties will actually behave after those elections. But are they? Previous studies show reasonable levels of mandate fulfilment in different Western countries (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Klingemann et al., 1994). Probably an even more important question is how we can explain variation in mandate fulfilment. The most important explanation relates to the institutional design of a country: majoritarian countries with electoral systems that favour the plurality winner are often opposed to consensus democracies with proportional electoral systems (Lijphart, 1999). The main research question of this paper is therefore: *does party mandate fulfilment differ between majoritarian and consensus democracies?*

This paper presents a new approach to this question. It focuses on the party system level characteristics of the party mandate model: that the structure of the electoral space of party competition is congruent with the structure of the parliamentary space of competition. This is different from the existing studies that focus strongly on the individual party mandate. The 'spatial' approach is applied here to cases from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. This provides new insights in the differences between majoritarian and consensus democracies in terms of party mandate fulfilment, which in turn has consequences for the way we theorize about democracy and institutional design.

1 The party mandate

Elections provide voters with a choice between the competing parties. Parties usually present election manifestos to the voters, containing their policy plans for the subsequent parliamentary and governmental period. A voter can indirectly influence policy-making by choosing a party that best represents their interests, wishes or views. This party mandate model hinges on three requirements, namely that (a) parties present diverging manifestos, (b) voters base their electoral choice on the content of these manifestos and (c) parties fulfill their electoral mandate. This paper focuses on the last requirement, namely that parties 'do what they promised'.

Usually party mandate fulfilment is studied by looking at the enactment of specific policy pledges ('the pledge approach') or the congruence between issue saliency in manifestos and governmental spending ('the saliency approach') (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Klingemann et al., 1994). This paper takes a somewhat different approach to the study of the party mandate. This so-called 'spatial approach' looks not at the fulfilment of specific pledges by individual parties, but at the congruence of the electoral and parliamentary party competition (Pitkin, 1967: 222). Parties' issue positions in parliament

should reflect their (relative) positions during the elections. After all, voters make their electoral choice based on the electoral competition between parties. If the electoral competition is not a good predictor of the parliamentary competition, the party mandate model breaks down.

The spatial approach to the party mandate takes a party-system level perspective of the party mandate. It looks not at what governments do after elections, but at parties' *parliamentary* mandates. This is important from two perspectives. First, parliaments are places where representative democracy comes to life. They are not only places of decision-making and scrutiny, but also the location where the act of representation performed. This is where representatives voice the concerns of their constituents, where they deliberate and decide in line with the fulfillment of their representative duty. The practice of parliamentary politics might fall short of this idealized description, but a parliament that completely fails to perform its representative function in the public plenary session will quickly lose public trust. Second, by focusing on a part of the representational relationship, some of the claims why policy linkage fails can be studied. Comparing manifesto policies with parties' parliamentary behaviour sheds light on the black box of policy linkage between voters and governments. It also helps to understand the representative mandate of opposition parties.

2 Majoritarian versus consensus democracy

The party system-level perspective on the party mandate taken here fits very well with the institutional explanation of mandate fulfilment. A well-known classification of political systems uses the type of electoral system as the pivotal element (Rae, 1967; Gallagher and Mitchell, 2005). One group consists of countries with a proportional electoral systems, where parliamentary seats are distributed roughly according to the percentage of the vote parties get. The other group is made up of countries with plurality or majority voting systems. Each single-member districts chooses one member of parliament, which leads to disproportionality that favours the large parties. As a result, the largest party usually wins a majority of seats and can form a single-party government. In proportional systems, coalition government is the rule. Lijphart (1999) has extended the distinction between electoral systems into a typology of regimes which contrasts consensus democracies (with proportional electoral systems) and majoritarian democracies (with plurality systems).

Existing analyses suggest that majoritarian democracies are better equipped to provide party mandate fulfilment than consensual systems (Klingemann et al., 1994; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007). After all, majoritarian democracies are characterized by single party governments, which have ample opportunity to implement their manifesto pledges. However, this relationship does not necessarily hold when looking at the party mandate in parliament. Firstly, mandate fulfilment in parliament concerns both governing and opposition parties' mandates, while existing studies have only looked

parties' government mandates (that is, whether parties' promises were translated into government policy or public spending). While government parties in majoritarian democracies might be better able to stick to their pledges than government parties in consensus democracies, I expect the reverse to hold for opposition parties. Opposition parties in majoritarian democracies are relatively powerless: they have little control over the parliamentary agenda and their initiatives are easily blocked by the majority party (Döring, 1995). As a result, their default position is to oppose government policy, regardless of their own manifesto pledges. Opposition parties in consensus democracies have much more opportunities to pursue their own policies in parliament. They are also in need of keeping a distinct profile, because there are usually several opposition parties. Simply opposing the governing parties does not distinguish one opposition parties from the others. The most viable strategy seems to be to stick to the election manifesto and criticize the government from that perspective.

Secondly, the role of the coalition agreement in consensus democracies fosters mandate fulfilment (Andeweg and Bakema, 1994; Timmermans and Andeweg, 2000; Müller, 2000). The very fact that parties need to negotiate after elections necessitates a clear demarcation of party positions before the elections. Of course, some room for maneuver after the elections is needed to be able to reach a compromise, but providing a clear starting point seems to be more important, observing the increasing length of the manifestos. In majoritarian democracies this function of the manifesto as starting points for coalition negotiations does not play a role. Instead, parties are induced to promise just enough to make them win the elections. There is no need for specific pledges if a party is sure it will win, especially because post-electoral scrutiny of pledge fulfilment by news media is relatively strong. There is obviously a limit to what parties can get away with, but they will be induced to make only 'easy' pledges and leave the 'hard' ones out. Pledge making in majoritarian democracies is therefore more of a strategic business than in consensus democracies. The spatial approach to the party mandate taken here does not look at the fulfilment of specific pledges, but parties' policy positions on issue dimensions. Not making pledges on a certain topic, but pursuing a radical agenda in parliament will have a profoundly negative effect on mandate fulfilment defined in these terms. A party's manifesto issue position would in such a case be neutral, while its parliamentary position would be extreme: a noteworthy change in relative issue position.

These mechanisms lead to the hypothesis that *party mandate fulfilment is higher in consensus democracies than it is in majoritarian democracies*. This expectation finds support in the literature on policy responsiveness, which looks at the congruence of party policy positions and those of their voters. These studies find no difference between the two types of democracies (Blais and Bodet, 2006; Golder and Stramski, 2010) or higher congruence in countries with proportional electoral systems (Powell, 2000, 2009).

3 Data and measurement

This paper employs a most similar systems design comparing the majoritarian system of the United Kingdom with the consensus system of the Netherlands. These two countries are very different on the main explanatory variable (democratic regime type), while similar in other respect (long-term democracies, similar levels of welfare). For both countries six elections and the subsequent parliaments were selected, roughly one in each decade (see table 1). This increases the number of observations and additionally allows observation of changes over time.

For each of the cases, the relevant manifestos and parliamentary debates were acquired in digital format. The texts were split by issue categories, applying the classification scheme of the Comparative Agendas Project (Baumgartner et al., 2008; Breeman et al., 2009). Each paragraph was classified based on a dictionary of key words for each issue category. Those categories that could not be (unambiguously) classified, were classified in a secondary procedure in which a Support Vector Machine (SVM) used the classified paragraphs to predict the classification of the remaining paragraphs (Fan et al., 2008). This procedure produces relatively reliable codings, when comparing it to manual classification of the paragraphs (Louwerse, 2010). For the subsequent analysis, the number of categories was reduced as to make sure that enough text was available to estimate parties' issue positions reliably (see table 1).

Parties issue positions were estimated using Wordfish (Slapin and Proksch, 2008; Proksch and Slapin, 2008). This algorithm uses information about the number of times each unique word is used in each text (i.e. a manifesto or a set of parliamentary speeches by members of a single party) to estimate parties' issue positions on a single dimension. The idea is that parties' choice of words is motivated mainly by their policy orientation. From the observed patterns of word use, we can estimate parties' policy position. Simply put: parties that often use the same words are likely to have similar policy positions. In reality I found that although policy orientation is important, parties' word usage is probably also influenced by other factors, such as the competition between opposition and incumbent parties in (British) election manifestos. This is something to take into account in the subsequent analysis of the data. The large advantage of Wordfish is obviously that it allows the analysis of large amounts of texts, such as four years of parliamentary debates.

One limitation of automated content analysis using word counts is that they are not suitable for comparing different types of texts, such as manifestos with parliamentary debates (Laver et al., 2003). Trying to do this will normally result in all manifestos tending to one side of the scale and the parliamentary estimates to the other. This is not very surprising if one takes into account that manifestos are usually carefully written texts with many people working on them, while parliamentary debates are spoken texts which are

Table 1: *Overview of observations*

Country	Periods	Issue categories
United Kingdom	1955-1959	Economy; Environment; Foreign Affairs and Defence; Government Operations; Law and Order and Migration
	1966-1970	
	1970-1979	
	1983-1987	
	1992-1997	
	2001-2005	
Netherlands^a	1952-1956	Economy, Health Care and Education; Foreign Affairs and Defence; Postmaterialist issues; Religion, Morals and Medical-ethical
	1959-1963	
	1972-1977	
	1982-1986	Economy; Health Care and Education; Environment; Foreign Affairs and Defence; Migration; Justice, Courts and Crime; Democracy and Civil Rights; Religion, Morals and Medical-Ethical
	1994-1998	
	2003-2006	

^a For the Netherlands different issue categories were used for the first three and last three time periods, reflecting a difference in the level of detail of manifestos and parliamentary debate.

usually prepared only by MPs and their aides. Furthermore, there is a parliamentary lingo that is not usually seen in manifestos. I have worked around this problem by applying separate Wordfish analyses to the manifestos and the parliamentary debates. The result is that the estimates cannot be compared in absolute terms (e.g. one cannot say that ‘Labour has moved one point to the left’), but it nevertheless can be observed in relative terms (e.g. ‘Labour and the Liberal Democrats are positioned more closely to one another’). While some may regard this as a limitation, this approach actually fits well with the spatial approach to the party mandate: instead of looking at the change in individual parties’ positions, I look at the congruence of the party issue competition. Furthermore, by using two completely separate analyses, one does not in any way ‘force congruence’ upon the data.

Two particular aspects of the Wordfish estimation in the Dutch and English cases should be mentioned. Firstly, to increase the robustness of the analyses, I included the manifestos of the previous and subsequent elections and I split the parliamentary speeches per year. This does not directly affect the estimate of the documents of interests, but makes the estimation of the word parameters more robust. However, when estimating multiple party positions over a time, with parliamentary debates or manifestos from different years, the Wordfish algorithm may pick up on differences in word usage between years rather than between parties. This is particularly the case with Foreign Affairs, which might be dominated by the war in Bosnia in one year and a

crisis in Cyprus in the next. When this effect was apparent (parties showing very similar positions in specific years, but very different positions between years) words that discriminated well between years but not between parties were removed¹. A second issue concerns the position of the government in the United Kingdom parliament. The government represent the party line of the governing party². However, the government have a constitutionally different position from other groups in parliament (i.e., the government party backbenchers and the opposition parties). The government have to defend proposals, rather than criticize them, they have to answer questions rather than ask them. This translates into a rather different usage of words. This problem is tackled by excluding the government from the initial Wordfish analysis. Its position is estimated in a second stage, using the word parameters of the initial stage. As the initial analysis does contain the government backbenchers, it is likely that words relating to policy differences have high *informativeness* scores, while words that tell apart the government from all other groups (including backbenchers) have low informativeness scores. Some caution is warranted for the interpretation of these government positions, for its estimate might be biased towards being moderate³.

The procedure described above resulted in a dataset with parties' issue position estimates concerning both their manifesto as well as their parliamentary debate position. The parliamentary position is based on a weighted average of the individual-year estimates obtained with Wordfish.

4 Qualitative analysis: spaces of competition

The strength of the spatial approach to the party mandate used in this paper is that it allows to compare the structure of party competition during elections and in parliament (Pellikaan et al., 2003; Benoit and Laver, 2006; Aarts and Thomassen, 2008: cf.). This structure can be visualized by combining the information of parties' issue positions into spatial representations of party competition. The spaces of competition are constructed using classical multidimensional scaling (Borg and Groenen, 1997). The issue positions on each issue dimension is first multiplied by the square root of the average issue saliency, to ensure that the most talked-about issues, are weighted more heavily in the spatial representation. Secondly, the Euclidean distance between parties is calculated. This distance matrix is then used to create a two-

¹Specifically, I calculated a Gini coefficient indicating how different word usage between years was and one indicating how different word usage between parties was. If the between-years coefficient was higher than the between-parties coefficient, that particular word was exempted from the analysis.

²As opposed to the the Netherlands, where there is a difference between the ministers of a governing party and the (leadership of) the parliamentary party.

³This does not imply that the governments' positions are depicted entirely corrected. A similar procedure has been applied for the estimation of minor parties (not displayed in this paper), and these are in many cases found to be rather extreme, even if their position is estimated via the ex-post procedure outlined here.

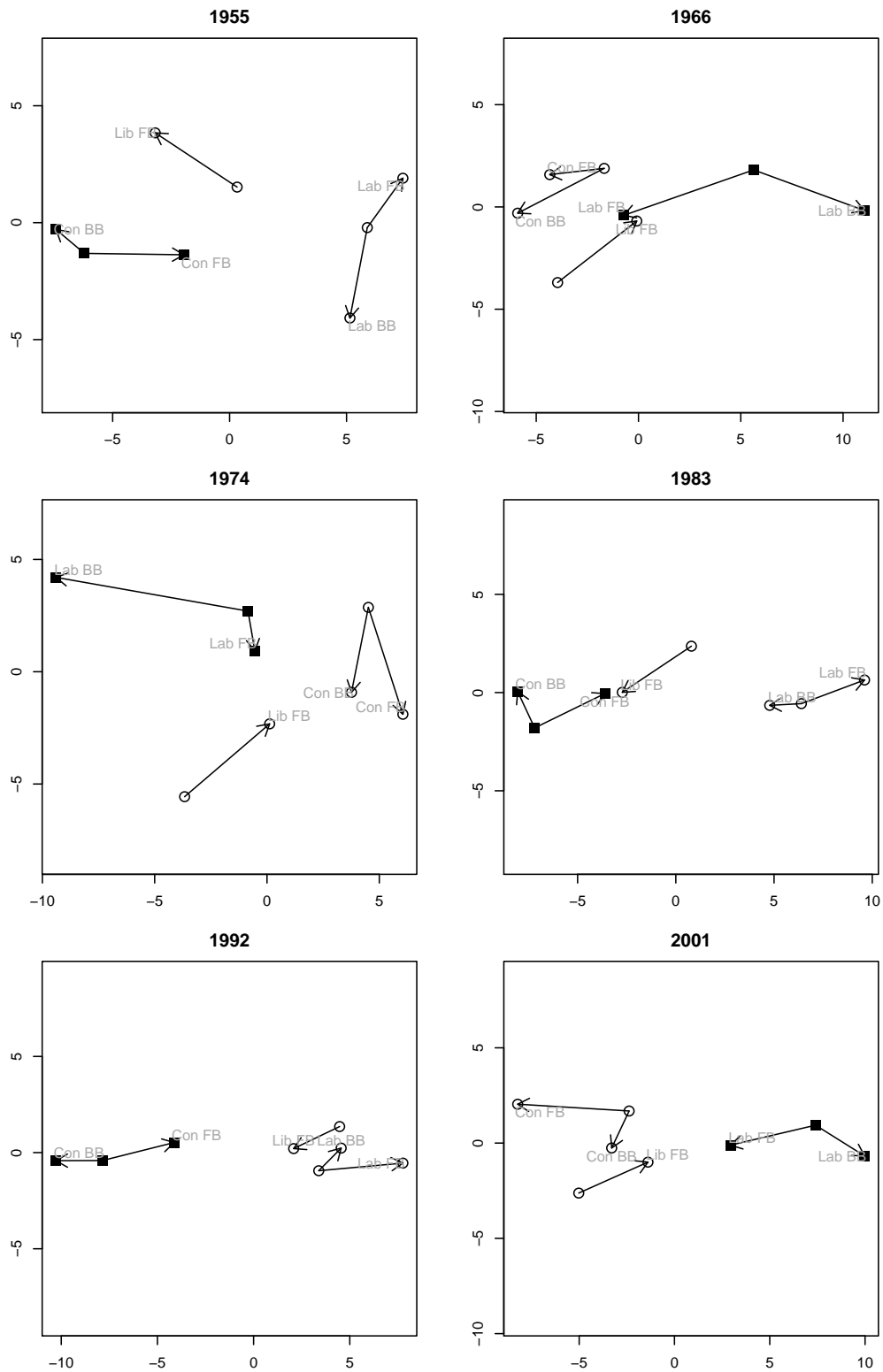
dimensional picture of the party positions in a particular election or a particular parliament using classical multidimensional scaling. I found that while in some cases a one-dimensional solution would suffice, a two-dimensional solution was most appropriate in most cases.

As the electoral and parliamentary spaces were estimated separately, these cannot directly be compared with one another. However, it is possible to re-scale and rotate the spaces (using a Procrustes transformation) so that they match as close as possible. This transformation does not in any way alter the interpretation or substantive meaning of the individual spaces. It allows us to compare the congruence of the spatial configurations. Figures 1 and 2 include rotated electoral and parliamentary spaces that are superimposed on each other. Arrows have been drawn connecting a party's position in the electoral space and its position in the parliamentary space. Party position changes should be interpreted in relative terms, e.g. a party was relatively further away from another party in parliament than during the elections⁴.

The spaces of electoral and parliamentary competition do generally bear resemblance to each other, as was expected. Exact congruence is, however, almost never obtained. In the British cases, three general sources of incongruence can be identified. Firstly, the frontbench of the government party (that is, the government itself) 'moves' to the centre of the space (in relative terms). Although part of this movement may be explained by the way of estimating the government's position, this is still a remarkable finding. Indeed, some observers of British politics have argued that the position of the British government is more accommodating than is usually assumed (Rose, 1980; Kalitowski, 2008). Moreover, we should take into account that the government has to defend the entire business of government, much of which is only in minor ways influenced by partisan preferences (e.g. many bills originate from Whitehall, not from the party manifestos and how the government deals with incidents or crises is usually not a party political issue). Secondly, the government party backbenchers do not assume such an accommodating stance (at least not in relative terms). There is quite some variation over time in the relative distance between the government and its backbenchers: it appears to be large in 1966 and 1974, but relatively small since 1983. Overall, the Conservative governments are located closer to their backbench colleagues than the Labour governments. Thirdly, the manifesto position of the Liberals is in most cases in opposition to the incumbent party, while their parliamentary position is in all cases except 1955-1959 relatively moderate. When an incumbent Labour government called for the election, the Liberals were usually positioned more extremely in the electoral space than in the cases a Conservative government called for it. Thus, their positional change is largest when Labour was the incumbent government, resulting in lower congruence levels

⁴Note the spaces depicted in figures 1 and 2 have not been rescaled (diluted), because the original sizes have substantive meaning (a function of parties' standardized issue position and the mean issue saliency of an issue) and are comparable between election and parliament

Figure 1: Comparison of electoral and parliamentary spaces of competition, United Kingdom



Note: FB = Frontbench, BB = Backbench. Government parties are indicated by black squares, Opposition parties with transparent circles.

between the spaces of electoral and parliamentary competition.

In the Dutch spaces, the number of parties varies significantly between the 1950s and 1960s (only five) and 1994 (thirteen)⁵. Therefore, the pictures of the more historically distant elections look less distorted, but this should not be misinterpreted as higher level of congruence per se. The worst case in terms of congruence is the 1972 election and subsequent parliament. Parties move literally all over the place and no clear pattern of movement can be observed, except maybe a parliamentary distinction between smaller (mainly opposition) parties and larger (mainly government) parties. Much higher levels of congruence have been reached in the more recent elections, especially the 2003 case which shows very similar structures in the spaces of electoral and parliamentary party competition. A general pattern in all elections is that governing parties seem to 'move closer' to one another, while the opposition parties move away from the average position of the governing parties. This pattern is most clear in the 1994-1998 parliament, with the social-democrat PvdA and social-liberal D66 moving considerably closer to the conservative-liberal VVD.

The congruence of the spaces can be numerically expressed as a Mantel statistic (Mantel, 1967). Basically, the Mantel statistic is the correlation coefficient between the two distance matrices, one for the manifesto space and another for the parliamentary space. Note that the Mantel statistic is usually slightly lower if the number of parties is lower, but from up to five parties the statistic is relatively robust and can be compared between configurations with differing numbers of parties⁶. A Monte Carlo test provides an indication whether the congruence of two spaces is just random or significantly different⁷. For Britain, the Mantel statistic is based on the shift of five different 'actors': for the two main parties I distinguish between the front-bench' and backbenchers' parliamentary position. Naturally, the different benches did compete the election with the same manifesto. This may cause the congruence estimates for Britain to be on the low side⁸.

The mantel statistics by and large confirm the visual inspection of the spaces of competition (see figure 3). The last three decades show relatively high levels of congruence, while the 1960s and especially the 1970s show low

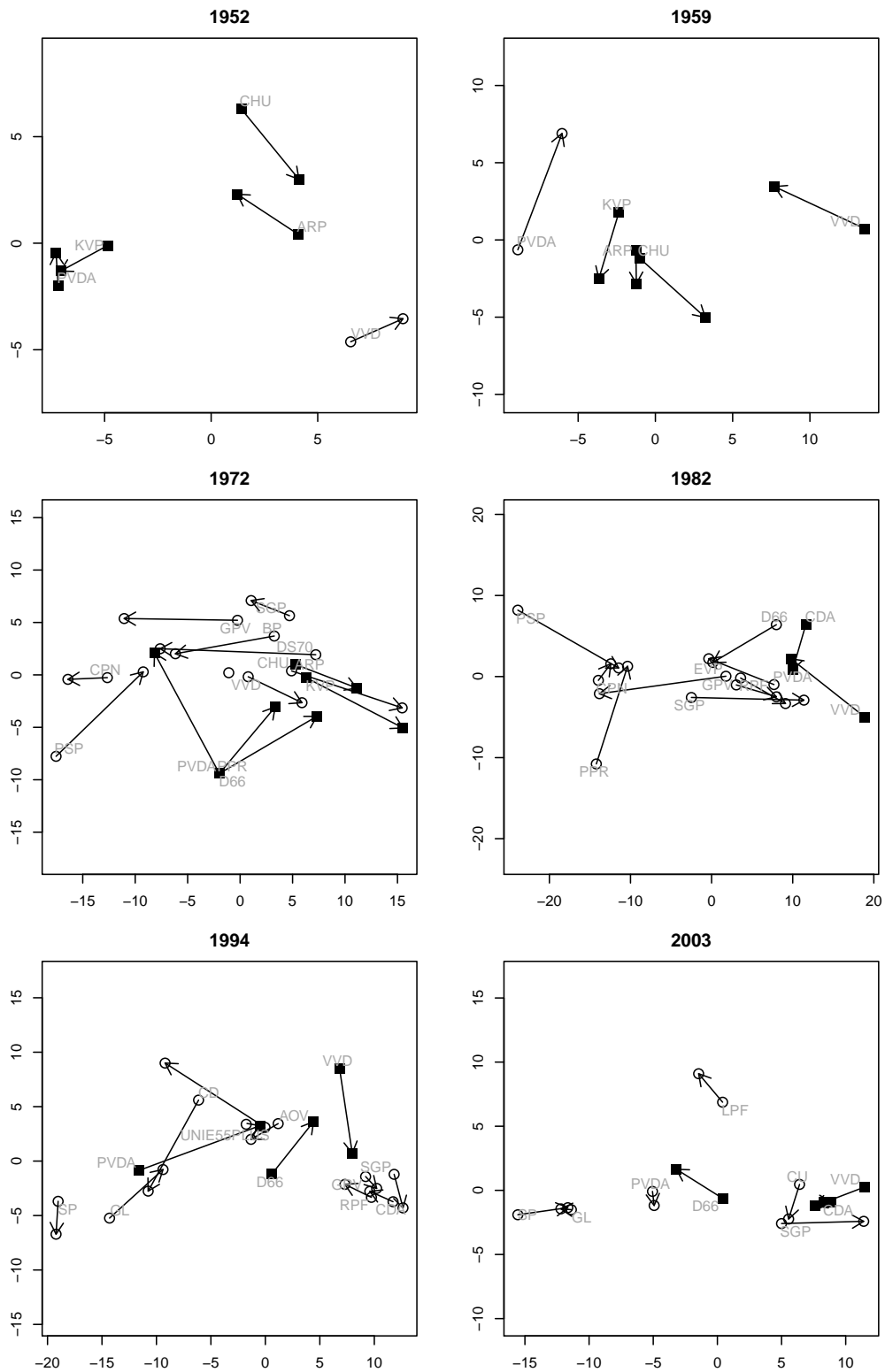
⁵Some parties have been excluded in certain cases because they did not present a manifesto at that time.

⁶The procrustes correlation coefficient m_{12} provides another way of measuring congruence, but is a lot more sensitive to the number of parties included in the analysis: a lower number of parties will result in a much higher correlation coefficient. Therefore, I rely on the Mantel statistics, despite its limitations (Jackson, 1995).

⁷This test is performed by calculating random permutations of rows in one of the distance matrices. It was performed using the function `mantel.randtest` in package `ade4` for R (Dray and Dufour, 2007; R Development Core Team, 2010).

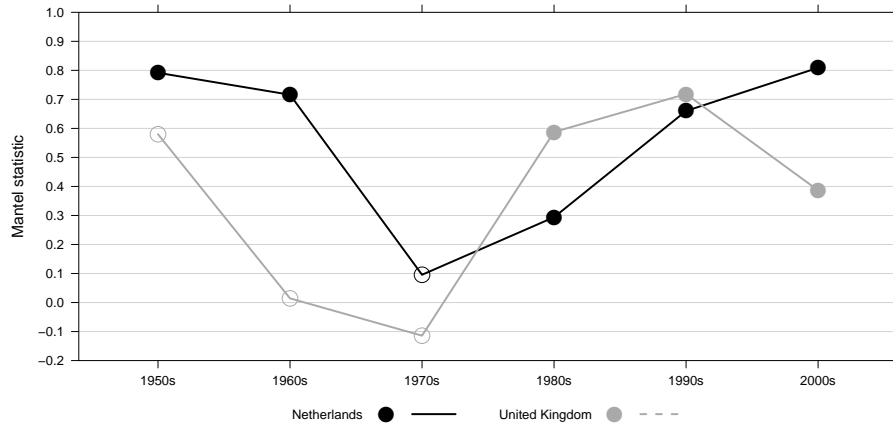
⁸Congruence estimates of only the three parties are very uncertain and can only be said to be 'significantly' different from random if party positions are extremely similar between spaces. This is easy to imagine: three randomly drawn points in a two-dimensional Euclidean space can relatively easy be Procrustes transformed to meet any other triangular space. For five points the probability of doing this is much lower.

Figure 2: Comparison of electoral and parliamentary spaces of competition, Netherlands



Government parties are indicated by black squares, Opposition parties with transparent circles.

Figure 3: Congruence of policy spaces



Note: filled points indicate that the mantel statistic is significant at the 90% level, transparent points indicate that it is not.

levels of congruence⁹. In Britain, the congruence is the lowest in the three elections when Labour were the incumbents. In the Netherlands, the 1972 election provides an outlier to otherwise relatively congruent structures of competition¹⁰.

5 Quantitative analysis

The comparison of the electoral and parliamentary spaces of competition provides insights in the congruence of patterns of party competition. This general picture can be made more specific by analyzing the predictive power of parties' electoral issue positions for their parliamentary issue positions. Note that the comparison concerns parties' *relative* issue positions, so I am in a way still analyzing the system of party competition rather than individual parties' behaviour. I use a straightforward linear regression model, in which a parties' relative issue position in parliament is the dependent variable and its position on that issue during the election as the independent variable. In addition, I include a dummy interaction variable, country, which equals zero for the Netherlands and one for the United Kingdom. The interaction between country and the manifesto position taps into the difference between

⁹The fact that the 1955-1959 spaces show no significant congruence has probably more to do with the low number of parties (5 actors) than a total absence of congruence (compare with the top-left panel in figure 1).

¹⁰A close analysis of party position estimates in this case reveals that this is probably the result of the analysis technique, because it estimates that the two main competitors of the left and right (PvdA and VVD) are almost in the same position in parliament, while they were not in government together (see Louwerse, 2010).

the Netherlands and the United Kingdom¹¹

Table 2: *Explaining parties' issue positions in parliament*

	Model 1	Model 2 (Frontbench)
(Intercept)	0.030 (0.042)	-0.003 (0.042)
Manifesto position	0.614* (0.041)	0.625* (0.044)
Country: UK	-0.042 (0.064)	0.063 (0.086)
Manifesto position * Country: UK	0.077 (0.065)	-0.288* (0.092)
<i>N</i>	440	382
<i>R</i> ²	0.489	0.365
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.486	0.360
Resid. sd	21.103	0.712

Standard errors in parentheses

* indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Model 1 in table 2 displays the results of this analysis. The manifesto position is quite a good predictor for the parties' parliamentary position: if parties are 1 unit to the right of the centre during the elections, they are on average 0.61 units right-of-centre on the parliamentary issue dimensions. At least, this is the effect for the Dutch parties. In the United Kingdom the effect is slightly stronger, which results in a positive interaction effect between country and manifesto position, but this difference fails to achieve statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). Thus, there is no significant difference between Dutch and British parties in terms of mandate fulfilment. The predictive power of a party's manifesto position on an issue for its parliamentary issue position is similar in both countries.

The second model in table 2 strengthens this observation. This second model only includes the observation for the frontbench actors in the United Kingdom parliament, that is the Government, the Official Opposition's shadow cabinet and the Liberals. This model shows that congruence between electoral and parliamentary positions is actually *lower* in Britain than in the Netherlands ($p < 0.05$). One reason for this difference is the relatively moderate policy position of the British government: no matter how extreme its manifesto, the government takes a reasonably centrist position, as I have discussed above.

Based on the various analysis of the electoral and parliamentary structures of the spaces of party competition, there is insufficient support for the

¹¹Cases have been weighted by the number of words included in the manifesto estimate in the position, because a manifesto estimate based on a short piece of text is less certain than an estimate based on a lot of text. An unweighted analysis yield similar results, while the coefficient of the interaction variable is slightly negative in this case ($p > 0.05$).

hypothesis that party mandate fulfilment is higher in consensus democracies than in majoritarian democracies. The results suggest that there is no significant difference between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, which implies that it is unlikely that majoritarian and consensus democracies are unlikely to show such a difference.

6 Discussion and conclusion

The spatial analysis of party mandate fulfilment in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands reveals that there is no support for the hypothesis that consensus democracies show higher levels of mandate fulfilment. I find no difference in mandate fulfilment between the two countries, which means that it is unlikely that there is a difference between majoritarian and consensus democracies. This has important implications for democratic theory and the debate on institutional design, which has hitherto suggested that majoritarian democracies have an edge when it comes to the party mandate. It also has consequences for political debates on institutional reform, which are of continuing relevance, certainly in the United Kingdom. Arguments pointing at the superiority of Westminster systems in terms of party mandate fulfilment should be placed under considerable doubt.

The difference between my findings and those of earlier studies into the party mandate can be explained by the different approach taken here (Klingemann et al., 1994; Royed, 1996; Thomson, 2001; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007). Instead of looking at the fulfilment of specific pledges, I have looked at party mandate fulfilment at the party system level: the congruence of the structures of electoral and parliamentary party competition. This allows a more encompassing comparison between the 'electoral mandate' and 'parliamentary behaviour', which is also more consistent with theoretical insights on the character of political representation as an institutional phenomenon.

The new content analysis techniques that have allowed me to study the vast volume of parliamentary documents have been shown to produce valid results. However, in some cases the analysis clearly fell short, such as the 1972-1977 case in the Netherlands. The quality of computerized content analysis techniques improves rapidly, which would allow an even more reliable and robust application of the spatial approach. Obviously, the study of other countries would further strengthen the findings presented here. The method of comparing structures of competition can be extended even further. One could, for example, compare the structure of electoral competition as determined by voters' perspective, by the manifesto version of this space, and parliamentary talk to parliamentary votes. Research in this fashion promises to produce many new insights in the process of party representation.

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