Understanding the Dynamics of Politial and Societal Polarisation: Exploring Elite Polarisation, Mean Partisan Polarisation, Issue Salience, and Anti-Systemness.

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1. Introduction

Recent history has once again shown that polarisation is a major challenge in present and future society. When different groups in society have conflicting beliefs regarding a political viewpoint, political polarisation occurs, with division growing between different political groups or parties (Schedler, 2023). Societal polarisation, on the other hand, goes beyond political differences and can also be about differences in values, beliefs or behaviour between individuals or groups in a society (Maggino & Fattore, 2019).

It is important to research both political and societal polarisation, as polarisation can strongly influence democratic processes. For instance, polarisation can make formations or shaping policies more difficult (McCoy & Press, 2022). In addition, polarisation plays a role in increasing (societal) fragmentation and reducing social cohesion (Martini & Torcal, 2019). Public discourse can also diminish out of fear of conflict between groups with conflicting opinions (McCoy & Press, 2022). Overall, studying political and societal polarisation is crucial for understanding the complexities of contemporary societies and political systems.

The degree of polarisation, especially concerning immigration, is a much-discussed issue in Dutch elections. For instance, Sipma et al. (2021) conclude that after the 2021 second chamber elections, Dutch people hold a generally more moderate stance on social issues. Immigration is being talked about more and more in recent years, making it a salient policy issue, as has been concluded by (Ford et al., 2015).

Past research on this has been done by Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010) looking at both political and societal polarisation in second chamber elections between 1994 and 2006 in the Netherlands. They observed trends on societal and political polarisation regarding immigration, and very large differences are shown in the trends depicting

these variables. Political polarisation appears to be quite unstable between 1994 and 2006, with a trend line reflecting highs and lows. Societal polarisation, on the other hand, remains at a fairly stable level. This study also looked at how elite polarisation, mean partisan polarisation, and issue salience affect political and societal polarisation. This showed that the trend lines of mean partisan polarisation and issue salience are very similar to the trend line of political polarisation. In contrast, the trend line of elite polarisation, is very similar to the trend line of societal polarisation.

However, a lot has changed in recent years. A first development is the rise of social media, which may have changed the ways political parties communicate with voters (Rainie, 2012). Regarding (societal) polarisation these new ways of communication can increase polarisation by feeding young voters polarised information by creating information bubbles (Ohme, 2019).

Secondly, increased fragmentation of the political system also plays a major role here in elections and when looking at polarisation. In the second chamber, fragmentation has been at a post-war high since 2021 (Sipma et al., 2021). According to Martini and Quaranta (2014), fragmentation is linked with dissatisfaction with the democratic system. But does this increasing degree of fragmentation and polarisation go hand in hand?

In the third place two major crises hit Europe. The migration crisis happened in 2015, which caused many more refugees to come to the Netherlands, and increases issue salience and can change people's opinions and voting behaviour in relation to immigrants (Ford et al., 2015). Barna & Koltai (2019) provide evidence that the migration issue was heavily politicised; and became a more salient issue in election campaigns across Europe. The corona pandemic also had a disruptive impact on society. A study of Daniels et al. (2021) shows that people who experienced Covid viewed

diversity less positively, which may impact on their views about immigration policy.

Overall, these societal developments in recent years makes it important to look again at the trends of societal and political polarisation. Have new theories developed in the meantime that can explain these developments? To investigate this, we look at four different variables, namely responsiveness to political elites, representation of the mean partisan, issue salience, and anti-systemness.

One possible mechanism that could possibly explain polarisation is the degree of responsiveness to political elites, as described for instance by Bosco and Verney (2020) or Hahm, Hilpert, and König (2022), in which party activists or party elites take more extreme positions than their constituents and thus increase polarisation. Furthermore, there is the representation of the mean partisan, as it has been found by Dreyer and Bauer (2019) that the position of the electorate has an effect on the position of political parties, and thus may affect the degree of polarisation. Issue salience will also be addressed as a possible factor that can influence polarisation. Especially in the wake of the migration crisis, immigration is a very salient issue (Hutter and Kriesi, 2022), and it has been shown by Borbáth, Hutter and Leininger (2022) that the increased salience of this issue can lead to more polarisation around it. Dislike of the democratic process in the Hague is also an important issue which can be found in studies written by, for example, Sipma et al. (2021). Local parties are nowadays big winners in local and provincial elections in the Netherlands which can be linked to aversion to The Hague and globalisation (Otjes, 2018). Schmitt and Franzmann (2020) also find a relation between dissatisfaction with the democratic system and an increase in polarisation in their research.

This present article will look at both the trends in societal and political polarisation regarding immigration in the second chamber elections in the Netherlands between 2010 and 2021, and compares them with trends of four different variables, namely responsiveness to political elites, representation of the mean partisan, issue salience, and dissatisfaction with the democratic system.

The main question of this research paper is: "Can trends in political and societal polarisation be explained by trends in elite polarisation, mean partisan polarisation, issue salience, and anti-systemness?"

To answer the main question, this article will look at two sub-questions, namely "1. How have trends in political and societal polarisation developed since 2010?" and "2. What do trends in elite polarisation, mean partisan polarisation, issue salience, and anti-systemness look like since 2010?". The theories mentioned in the main- and sub-questions will be looked at using hypotheses which will be expanded upon in the theories chapter.

Firstly, this paper will look at different theories. Starting off with defining different kinds of polarisation, and looking further into different mechanisms that might have an effect on polarisation. From these theories, four hypotheses are derived which will be tested in the data chapter. Furthermore, the research design of this research will be explained after which, the results will be analysed. Lastly, a conclusion will be drawn up.

2. Defining political and societal polarisation

2.1 Political polarisation

Polarisation is about two things: first, the degree of identification experienced within a group. Second, it is about the degree of alienation between different groups. (Esteban & Ray, 1994) Regarding political polarisation, these groups express themselves as political parties that together adopt the same position regarding a certain type of policy and are thus together forming a policy coalition (Indridason, 2011). These coalitions can change size when parties start adopting different positions on a policy, or because party sizes change after winning or losing seats after an election cycle (Oosterwaal & Torenvlied, 2010). So party size can also affect polarisation, without parties shifting additionally on the political spectrum. Besides party size, polarisation is also magnified as the distances between coalitions widen because parties adopt more divergent stances on a policy at the extreme ends of a policy scale (Indridason, 2011).

2.2 Societal polarisation

Societal polarisation on the other hand forms as citizens identify with groups of, for example, a certain conviction, and thus polarisation increases as the distance between groups with different beliefs is perceived as increasing (Jjilani & Smith, 2019). In societal polarisation, much like political polarisation, the amount of polarisation also increases when these groups increase in size, so when a certain movement or conviction gains more followers (Oosterwaal & Torenvlied, 2010). Polarisation is at its height when two opposing groups that are roughly about the same size take opposite stances on a policy scale (Esteban & Ray, 1994).

3. Defining mechanisms driving societal and political polarisation

3.3 Responsiveness to political elites

The impact of political elites on political polarisation is noteworthy. Political parties tend to be more responsive to their party members, who are typically more ideologically extreme than the general public. This means that if a political party's members are more left or right-leaning, the party may shift in that direction, regardless of the electorate's stance on the political spectrum. Gallop and Greene (2021) posit that elites may not quickly adapt to their voters since the risk of losing voters has not been an effective enough threat. Therefore, political elites may continue catering to their extreme party members rather than altering their platform to better align with the broader public. Bosco and Verney (2020) conducted a study of the political cycle in Spain, Greece, and Italy from 2019 to 2020 and found that party elites were responsible for political polarisation in southern Europe. This indicates that elite polarisation can lead to increased political polarisation throughout society. Moreover, Hahm, Hilpert, and König (2022) suggest that elite polarisation can affect the degree of division concerning European Union integration. They discovered that affective polarisation, or the extent to which people hold negative feelings towards those with differing political views, was more pronounced in areas where political elites were more polarised on the issue of European integration.

This implies that elite polarisation can contribute to polarised societies on significant issues. To summarise, political elites' responsiveness to their party members can lead to political polarisation, even if voters maintain the same stance on the political spectrum. Elite polarisation may contribute to broader societal polarisation, which can have implications for issues like European Union integration, but also immigration for

example. This leads us to our first hypothesis, which states that if polarisation of political elites increases, so will political and societal polarisation.

3.4 Representation of the mean partisan

Political polarisation can be influenced by the representation of the mean partisan, since political parties tend to respond to the mean position of their constituency, which can result in an increase in political polarisation if the mean partisan position is more extreme (Adams et al., 2005). According to Reiljan (2020), affective polarisation and hostility towards other parties may also contribute to political polarisation, as partisans in both the United States and party systems in Europe are known to be highly hostile to competing parties. Dreyer and Bauer (2019) suggest that increasing ideological polarisation may also incentivise political parties to adopt more extreme positions, resulting in a feedback loop that further increases political polarisation. However, their research indicates that moderate voters abstain from voting when a political party represents a more moderate position which causes them to instead opt for more extreme positions, suggesting that higher voter turnout may help reduce political polarisation.
In summary, political parties' responsiveness to the mean position of their constituency can contribute to political polarisation, and affective polarisation and opposition to other parties may exacerbate the divide. Increasing ideological polarisation can also result in more extreme political positions, but voting can potentially moderate these effects. Our second hypothesis thus states that more polarisation of the mean partisan will lead to more political and societal polarisation.

3.5 Issue salience

The degree to which an issue is perceived as important by individuals in a society is called issue salience. This can have a significant impact on political polarisation, especially when it comes to cultural issues. One such issue is immigration, which is salient in North-West Europe and has been politicised for a considerable amount of time. The migration crisis of the last decade reinforced the politicisation of immigration, leading to increased polarisation on this issue. Hutter and Kriesi's (2022) research shows that politicising immigration during times of crisis can result in stronger anti-immigrant attitudes and the emergence of right-wing populist parties. Similarly, European integration's issue salience in Western Europe has contributed to the rise of right-wing radical political parties. Borbáth, Hutter, and Leininger (2022) also suggest that this issue has played a part in polarising European societies. Some individuals perceive European integration as a threat to national identity and sovereignty, leading to the rise of political parties that hold anti-EU and anti-immigration beliefs. This, in turn, further fuels polarisation on these issues.

Thus, issue salience plays a critical role in shaping political polarisation, especially when it comes to cultural issues like immigration and European integration. The politicisation of these issues can lead to stronger anti-immigrant attitudes and the emergence of right-wing populist parties, which contribute to increased polarisation in society. Therefore, it's crucial to comprehend the factors that contribute to issue salience and develop effective strategies to address the underlying concerns that lead to these issues. Our third hypothesis builds on this and states that the more salient an issue is, the more polarised politics and society will be.

3.6 Anti-systemness

Schmitt and Franzmann's (2020) research on party system polarisation provides insights into how anti-systemness influences polarisation. Their hypothesis suggests that the greater the dissatisfaction of voters with the democratic system, the higher the degree of polarisation. This is because voters tend to support parties on the extreme ends of the political spectrum in elections when they disagree with the current political system. However, the study's results partially contradict the initial hypothesis. The researchers found that higher satisfaction with the democratic system actually leads to an increase in polarisation, which is contrary to the expected result that greater dissatisfaction leads to more polarisation. A deeper analysis of the data revealed a paradoxical relationship between anti-systemness and polarisation. When ignoring the variance between countries, there is a positive correlation between anti-systemness and polarisation. Nevertheless, taking into account the variance between countries shows a negative correlation, which suggests that anti-systemness alone does not determine the level of polarisation. Other factors like the ones described above, such as the political context and cultural norms, also influence the connection between anti-systemness and polarisation.

To sum up, anti-systemness is an important factor in comprehending political polarisation. Nonetheless, the relationship between anti-systemness and polarisation is intricate and is determined by various factors. Since in this research variance (between countries) is not taken into account, our fourth hypothesis goes along with Schmitt and Franzmann (2020) in stating that the more voters are dissatisfied with the democratic system, the more political and societal polarisation will increase.

4. Data collection and data processing

In order to look at both political and societal polarisation in Second Chamber elections in the Netherlands, first of all, data must be available to measure these specific variables. To this end, both the party programmes of all parties that have gained seats in the second chamber since 2010 were used. Besides this, in this paper we make use of data of the LISS (Longitudinal Internet studies for the Social Sciences) panel administered by Centerdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands), namely the available data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES). This survey is conducted every election cycle and provides insight into the voting behaviour and attitudes on various issues of groups of Dutch citizens. Both the data from the party programmes and the DPES are available for all Second Chamber elections between 2010 and 2021. Besides this, the current study will replicate the methods used by Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010), and for consistency and the ability to compare and add to the data from 2010 we need to replicate on new data, using the exact procedures for operationalisation and measurement.

We follow Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010) in applying the Esteban-Ray polarisation measure (Esteban and Ray, 1994). Here, actors who hold the same position on an issue are placed together within a coalition, between which the degree of polarisation is measured. Thus, not only the size of the parties is taken into account but also fragmentation within the party system, for example (Indridason, 2011). This polarisation measure is then calculated for our four variables for each year that parliamentary elections have been held in the Netherlands since 2010 to indicate trends.

First, it looks at the degree of political polarisation between the political parties in the Second Chamber in the Netherlands and their attitudes towards ethnic integration policy, also known as political polarisation. By analysing the party programmes of the Second Chamber parties between 2010 and 2021, the values needed to calculate the Esteban-Ray polarisation measure were collected. Based on a few keywords, namely: 'minorities', 'immigrant', 'multiculturalism', 'assimilation', 'pluriform', 'multi-ethnic', 'immigrant', 'stranger', 'identity', 'newcomer', 'adaptation', 'struck roots', the party manifestos were searched. We carefully replicate Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010) in calculating a score for political polarisation at the time, and for consistency, these same terms have been adopted now. Furthermore, no additional topics emerged from the results of this study that could not be found using the keywords mentioned above.

Using the passages that emerged from the party programmes, a scale from 1 to 7 was created in which three different variables concerning ethnic integration policy were assigned a value. These three variables are 'multiculturalism', 'preserving own culture', and 'responsibility for integration'. When a political party indicates a positive attitude towards a multicultural society and thus considers multiculturalism as something positive in their party programme, a value of +1 is assigned to this party for the election year in question. However, when a party has a negative attitude towards multiculturalism or a multicultural society, a score of -1 is assigned. A score of 0 is assigned to a party when it is neutral on this variable, or when this issue is not highlighted at all in their party programme.

This same system is then applied to the other two variables as well, so when a party indicates in their party programme that they take a positive view of ethnic minorities retaining their own culture when they come to the Netherlands they get a +1, and parties

11

that take a negative view of this and thus think ethnic minorities should adapt to Dutch culture get a -1. Again, parties that remain neutral on this issue or do not mention this issue in their party programmes get a score of 0.

Finally, the variable 'responsibility for integration', where a party is assigned a score of +1 when they feel that responsibility for integration lies mainly in the hands of the government. In contrast, when a party believes that this responsibility lies in the hands of the ethnic minority itself, this party is assigned a score of -1. Again, as soon as a party programme does not mention this issue or remains neutral about it, this party gets a score of 0 on this variable.

When each political party has a score for the above three variables, these scores can be added together. This is done by taking 4 and subtracting the sum of the scores from this, so when a party has a positive score on all 3 variables (1+1+1=3), this party's position is (4-3=)1. When a party has only negative scores, this results in a score of (4-(-1-1-1)=)7. A completely neutral party thus remains at position 4.

A complete overview of all the scores administered to the political parties can be found in table 1.

Table 1

Scores of political parties on the ethnic integration scale

	2010				2012				2017				2021			
	M	C	I	Position	M	C	I	Position	M	C	I	Position	M	C	I	Position
Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD)	0	-1	-1	6	0	0	-1	5	-1	-1	-1	7	-1	-1	0	6
Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA)	+1	+1	-1	1	0	+1	0	3	+1	+1	+1	1	+1	+1	0	2
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	-1	-1	-1	7	-1	-1	-1	7	-1	-1	-1	7	-1	-1	-1	7
Christen-Democratisch Appèl (CDA)	-1	-1	0	6	0	0	+1	3	-1	-1	0	6	0	+1	0	3
Socialistische Partij (SP)	+1	+1	0	2	0	+1	0	3	+1	0	+1	2	+1	0	+1	2
Democraten 66 (D66)	+1	+1	0	2	+1	0	0	3	+1	0	+1	2	0	+1	+1	2
GroenLinks (GL)	+1	+1	+1	1	0	0	+1	3	+1	0	+1	2	+1	0	+1	2
ChristenUnie (CU)	0	+1	+1	2	0	+1	0	3	0	-1	0	5	0	-1	0	5
Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (SGP)	-1	0	-1	6	-1	0	-1	6	0	-1	-1	6	-1	0	-1	6
Partij voor de Dieren (PvdD)	0	+1	-1	4	0	0	+1	3	0	0	+1	3	0	0	+1	3
50Plus	-	-	-	-	0	0	-1	5	0	0	-1	5	0	0	0	4
DENK	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+1	+1	+1	1	+1	+1	+1	1
Forum voor Democratie	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-1	-1	-1	7	-1	-1	-1	7
Volt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+1	0	+1	2
JA21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-1	-1	-1	7
BBB	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	-1	-1	6
BIJ1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+1	+1	+1	1

Source: Party manifestos of Dutch political parties in the Second Chamber, 2010-2021.

To calculate the variable political polarisation, the above-mentioned position of political parties is taken, and the number of seats of parties holding the same platform positions is added up. By including the relative size of the parties in the Second Chamber in the calculation, it is taken into account that smaller parties, for example, also have a lesser effect on polarisation. The result of the Second Chamber elections that particular year is used to calculate the proportions between the number of seats per platform position and the total number of seats. Using all these data, the Esteban-Ray polarisation measure is calculated to use it to show the trends in political polarisation in recent years.

Next is the variable societal polarisation, which will again be calculated using the Esteban-Ray polarisation measure. The data needed for this is taken from the Dutch Political Election Studies (DPES), looking at a question on ethnic integration policy. This question reads "Should ethnic minorities be able to live in the Netherlands while preserving all customs of their own culture?". This question was answered by respondents who could choose answers on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 stands for "ethnic minorities should be able to preserve the customs of their own culture", and 7 stands for "ethnic minorities should completely adjust to Dutch culture". When calculating the Esteban-Ray polarisation measure, coalitions were formed by adding together the number of respondents who chose an answer option between 1 and 7 to calculate the proportion. This proportion, together with the coalition respondents' position on the ethnic integration policy scale leads to the Esteban-Ray polarisation measures for election years since 2010.

Elite polarisation, the third variable, like societal polarisation, focuses on ethnic integration policy. However, this only includes the results of a subgroup of DPES respondents, namely party elites. Previously, in Oosterwaal and Torenvlied's (2010)

study, this variable was measured using party members. However, the question of whether a respondent is a member of a political party is no longer asked in the DPES. Instead, in this study, the question whether a person is adherent to a political party, and if so, which one, was used. Next, only those respondents who indicated that they were convinced adherent or very convinced adherent to a political party were selected, and they were again broken down into coalitions according to their answer to the question on ethnic integration policy. This proportion of respondents of the total who were convinced or very convinced adherent, combined with their position on the 7-point scale, was used to calculate the Esteban-Ray polarisation measure.

In calculating the fourth variable, mean partisan polarisation, we first calculated the mean score on the ethnic integration policy scale for each subgroup in the DPES of voters for a political party. Next, the proportion was calculated by the part of respondents who voted for this political party compared to the total number of respondents and, combined with the average policy position of these party voters, the Esteban-Ray polarisation measure was calculated.

The fifth variable, issue salience, looks at a subgroup in the DPES of respondents who indicated that minorities is one of their top 5 most important national problems in the Netherlands. The percentage of this subgroup as part of the total amount of respondents in the DPES was taken as a measure of this variable.

The last variable, anti-systemness, relates to dissatisfaction with the democratic system and is thus measured using a question in the DPES in which respondents indicate where they fall on a scale from not at all satisfied to very satisfied with the Dutch democratic system. For the calculation of this variable the percentage of respondents who answered to be dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the Dutch democratic system of the total amount of respondents is taken to form a trendline for the election years since 2010.

In light of recent events with the fall of the Dutch cabinet, one might ask whether political parties still represent their voters, especially when it comes to immigration. This is examined using a variable created by combining political polarisation and mean partisan polarisation, called 'distance to the mean partisan'. By measuring the distance between the mean voters to a particular party, and analysing the position of that party itself, it can be argued whether voters and parties are still aligned on this issue.

5. Research/analysis

First, this analysis will look at trends in political and societal polarisation. Frequency distributions and trends for these two forms of polarisation will be analysed and compared for the election years between 2010 and 2021. Next, the remaining four variables will be highlighted using trend lines and possible explanations for the trends seen will be examined.
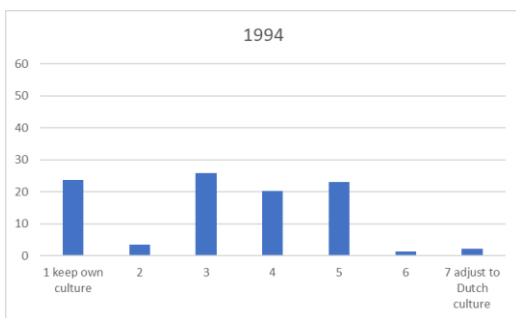
Figure 1.1; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010).
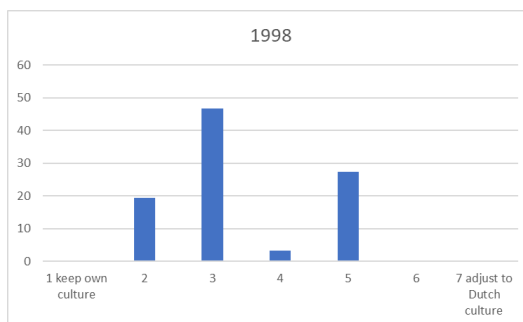
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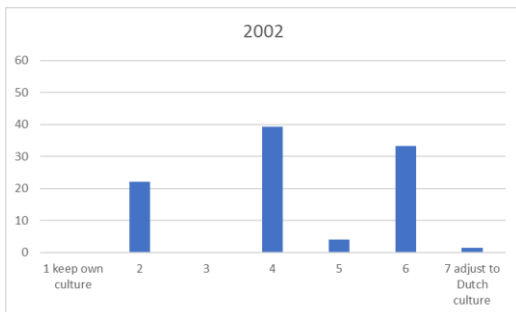
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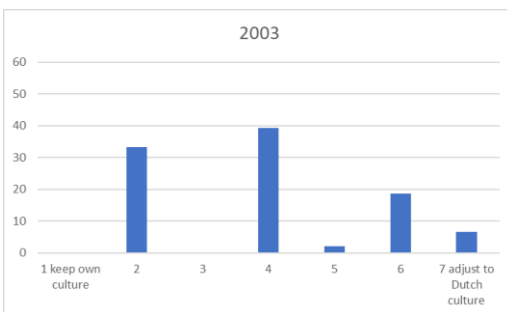
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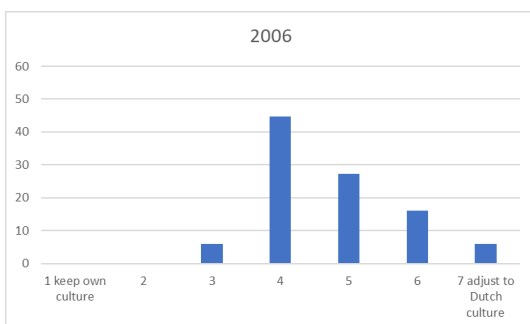
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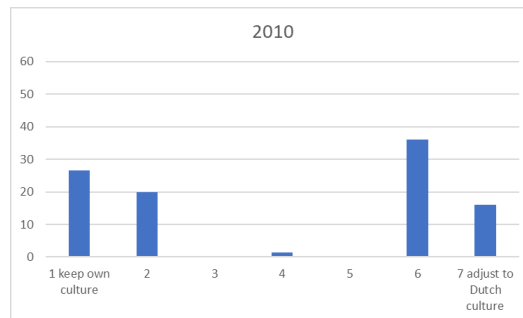
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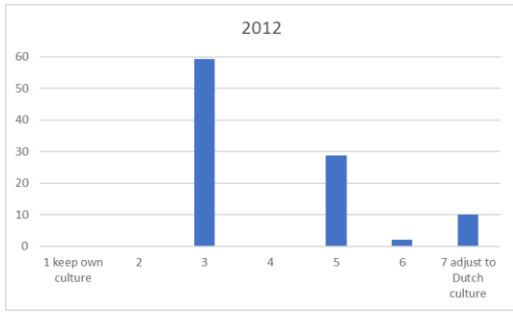
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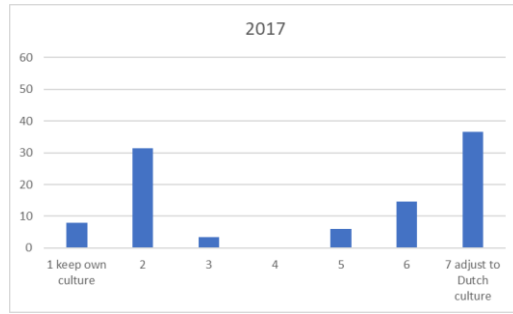
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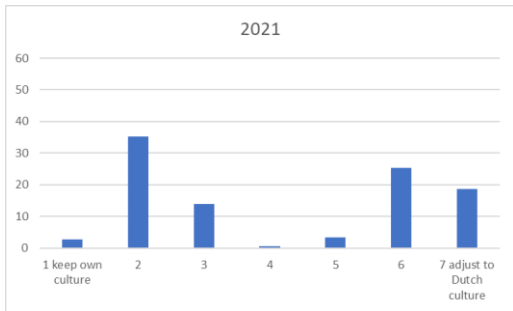
Figure 1.9: Own calculations.

Figures 1.1 through 1.9 show the distributions of the number of seats obtained by the parties per platform position regarding ethnic integration policy. Data from 1994 to 2006 come from research by Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010) which shows that in 1994, Dutch politics regarding ethnic integration policy was characterised by a division into seven different coalitions, representing a range of views, from extreme xenophobia to greater tolerance. Over time, there were notable changes in party coalitions and the emergence of larger coalitions. The impact of the Fortuyn movement in 2002 resulted in significant transformations, with three dominant coalitions dominating the political landscape. However, party dynamics fluctuated, leading to varying levels of tolerance and xenophobia. In 2006, a shift towards moderation was observed among the previously tolerant parties, while a new party, the PVV, adopted an extremely xenophobic stance.

It is striking to see that in 2010, two large groups form at the extreme ends of the spectrum, and in the middle there is only one relatively small party, the Party for the Animals (PvdD). At the more tolerant end of the spectrum, the Labour Party (PvdA) holds position one together with the Green Left (GL). Also at this end of the spectrum, the Socialist Party (SP), Democrats 66 (D66), and the Christian Union (CU) together find themselves in position two. At the other end of the spectrum, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), and the Political Reformed Party (SGP) are in spot 6. The sum of these parties that together comprise more than a third of the Second Chamber creates a slight spike visible at this position. There is only one party at position 7, namely the Party for Freedom (PVV).

It is remarkable to see that in 2010 this moderate middle has disappeared and both the Labour Party and GroenLinks both move from position 4 to position one. D66 and the Christian Union also moved up a place from 3 to 2. This shift is further highlighted in an increase in the number of seats these parties won in 2010.

Between 2010 and the next Second Chamber elections in 2012, the political spectrum also changed quite a bit. For instance, the parties at the tolerant end of the spectrum have all moved to a more moderate position 3. This also applies to the CDA, a party of relative size that used to be in position 6 has also moved to position 3. A new party also became part of the Second Chamber this year, namely 50Plus, which also places itself at a moderately xenophobic position 5. The SGP remains stable, almost in the number of seats and in their position on this scale. For the PVV, this is also partly true, they too remain at the same xenophobic position as they were in 2010. However, they lost more than a third of their seats in the Second Chamber this election cycle.

Then, between 2012 and 2017, the absolute middle remains empty, with no party scoring at position four. The peak at position three that was visible in 2012 has split

again, and the parties previously at this position have mostly moved to a more tolerant stance at position one or two. Exceptions are the ChristenUnie, which has moved to position 5, and the CDA which has moved back to a more xenophobic position 6, leaving only the Party for the Animals in position 3. The SGP again remains steady in position 6 with just as many seats as they had the previous election year. Also noteworthy is the sharp increase in the number of parties with seats in position 7. Besides the PVV, which rose by a third in seats compared to 2012, the VVD, the largest party in the Netherlands at the moment, also moved to position 7. In addition, two new parties entered the Second Chamber, namely DENK and Forum voor Democratie (FvD). It is interesting to note that these parties are both at the extreme end of the spectrum regarding ethnic integration policy. Indeed, DENK scores very tolerant, coming in at position one. Forum for Democracy, on the other hand, scores quite xenophobic and ends up in position 7.

Between 2017 and 2012, four new parties again joined the Second Chamber, namely Volt, JA21, the BoerBurgerBeweging (BBB), and BIJ1. Here too, a dichotomy is visible, with BIJ1 and Volt taking fairly tolerant positions of 1 and 2 respectively, compared to the BBB and JA21 scoring relatively xenophobic with positions 6 and 7 respectively. However, no other increase is visible at these extremes of the spectrum. The Labour Party, for example, moves from position 1 in 2017 to a slightly more moderate position of 2 in 2021, which may explain a slight increase at this position. Similarly, the CDA's shift back to position 3 causes a decrease at the more xenophobic end of the spectrum to a more moderate, or slightly tolerant stance. With the VVD's shift from position 7 to position 6, the peak on the right side of the spectrum also decreases, and the large number of seats the VVD takes with them shows a slight increase at their new position. Also at this position is the SGP, which again remains

stable in the number of seats they hold, and the position they are at. The PVV, Forum

for Democracy, and JA21 are the only three parties remaining at position 7. All these

three parties are quite outspoken about foreigners and migrants in their party manifestos

which explains their xenophobic position on this scale. A more moderate, slightly

xenophobic position on this ethnic integration policy scale is held by the ChristenUnie

on position 5. Alongside this, 50PLUS is the only party in the middle on position 4.

With this, the extreme peaks on either side of the spectrum become less extreme, and

2021 is the first year since 1994 in which all positions on the ethnic integration scale are

represented, indicating a decrease in political polarisation.
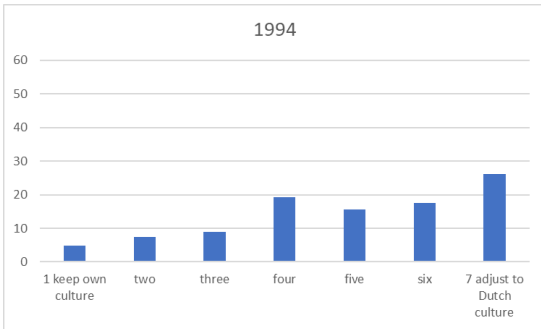
Figure 2.1; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010).
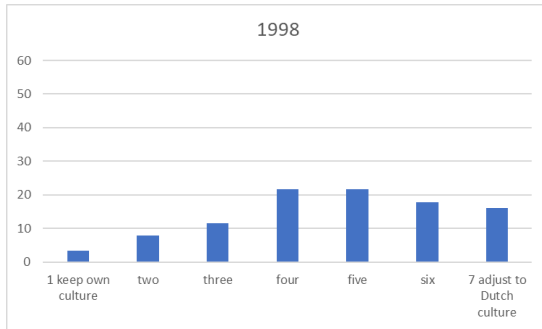
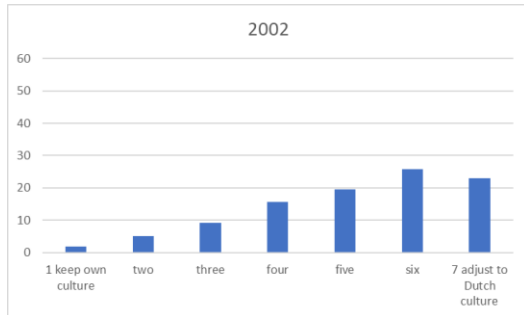*Figure 2.2; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010).*

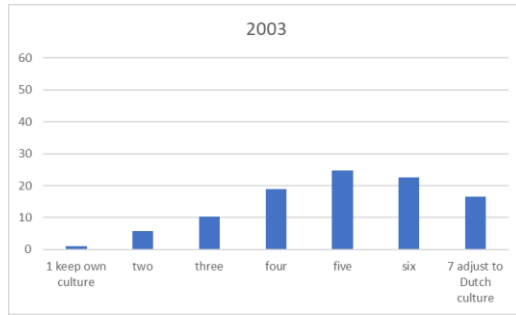*Figure 2.3; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010).*

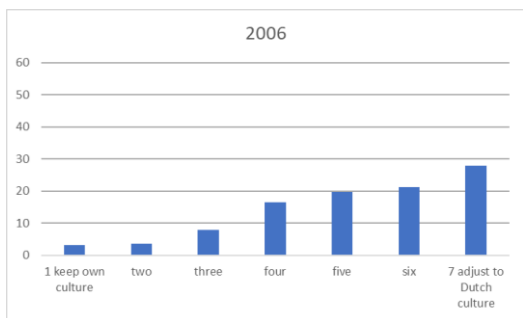*Figure 2.4; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010).*

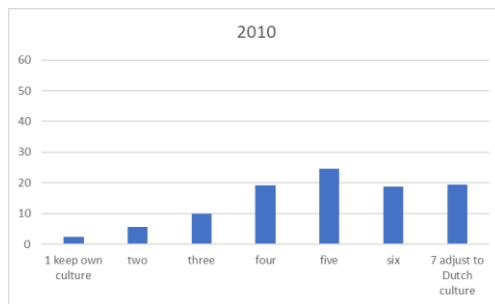*Figure 2.5; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010).*

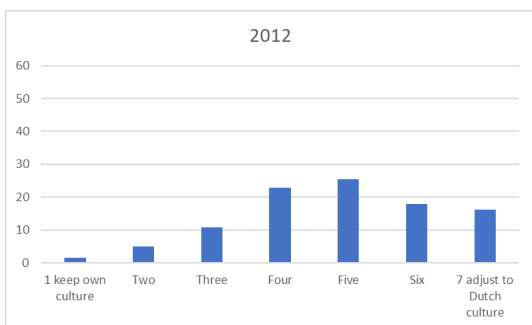*Figure 2.6; Source: Own calculations.*

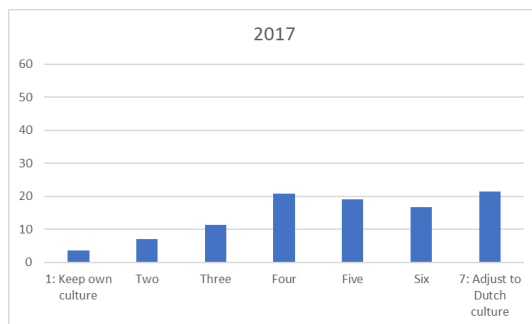*Figure 2.7; Source: Own calculations.*

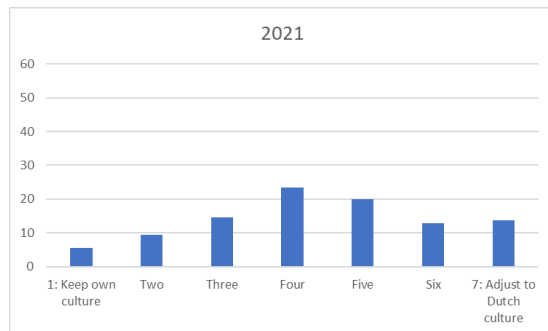*Figure 2.8; Source: Own calculations.*

Figure 2.9; Source: Own calculations.

Societal polarisation and the distribution of the number of respondents who answered the question on ethnic integration policy in the DPES is depicted in figures 2.1 through 2.9. Data between 1994 and 2006 obtained by Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010) indicated that Dutch citizens consistently exhibit a preference pattern towards ethnic integration policy, with a skew towards more conservative positions. The majority of citizens align around position five on a seven-point scale. However, minor fluctuations are observed, such as a decrease in xenophobic views in 1998 and a decline in tolerant views in 2002 and 2003. In 1994 and 1998, mainstream Dutch parties diverged from the citizens' preferences, but by 2006, there was greater alignment between political parties and the electorate's preference distribution, which leans towards more xenophobic positions.

Relative to the frequency distribution of political parties, it is striking to see that respondents occupy positions less strongly at the ends of the ethnic integration policy scale. In contrast, every election year, every position is occupied. Overall, the average position of Dutch respondents does lie at the more conservative end of the spectrum. After respondents of the DPES moved further towards the right between 1994 and 2006, and took a rather moderate to xenophobic stance in the 2006 election year (Oosterwaal and Torenvlied, 2010), the peak in 2010 is back at 5, just slightly more conservative

than the middle. Slight peaks thereafter are visible at positions 4, in the middle, and 7, on the xenophobic side of the spectrum. In 2012, this peak at position 7 decreases and respondents move more towards the middle. The numbers at position 4 rise and remain only narrowly behind those at position 5. In 2017, another slight shift towards more xenophobic attitudes can be seen, with most respondents placing at position 7. The middle also remains strong with a significant number at position 4. In 2021, more of a movement towards the middle is again visible, with a relatively strong decrease at position 7 and a strong peak at position 4.

Overall, then, a trend can be seen in which citizens become increasingly moderate when it comes to ethnic integration policy and thus move further towards the middle. When looking further back, a strong pull to the right can also be seen between 1994 and 2006, with a clear peak at the most xenophobic position, position 7, in 2006. Since 2010 you can see this peak declining again and it is visible that people actually adopt an increasingly moderate attitude when it comes to ethnic integration policy.

When comparing political and societal polarisation, it can be seen that in 2010 the more xenophobic side of the spectrum is represented both politically and socially. This can also be seen in 2017 and 2021 with a group of political parties on the right representing these citizens well in their attitude towards ethnic integration policy. This is less the case in 2012 as here in political polarisation the peak on the xenophobic side of the spectrum disappears slightly, but it is still visible in societal polarisation. On the contrary, the more tolerant side of the political spectrum is over-represented, with low scores at positions 1 and 2 in society versus some peaks at these positions in politics. Overall, it can be argued that society is thus becoming more moderate on this issue, while politics is more split in two and more at the ends of the political spectrum.
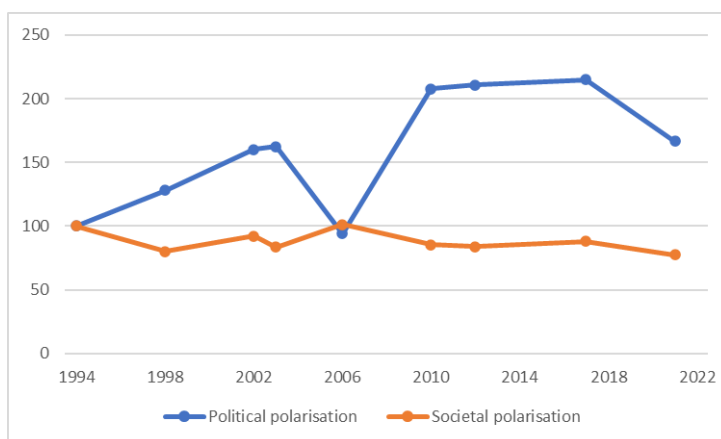
Figure 3; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010) & Own calculations.

For both political and societal polarisation, the Esteban-Ray polarisation measure was also calculated to track trends in polarisation. Figure 3 shows the trendlines of political and societal polarisation where the new data from this research is combined with the data from Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010) to form a trendline between 1994 and 2021. When put in a more long-term perspective, societal polarisation remains fairly stable. It decreases a bit, especially between 1994 and 1998, and 2017 and 2021 but overall there are no big changes visible. Looking more closely, between 2010 and 2012, a slight decrease of about 2 per cent is first visible, then a slight increase of a total of 4 per cent between 2012 and 2017. Like political polarisation, the value of societal polarisation falls the most between 2017 and 2021, this time by about 12 per cent, leading to societal polarisation falling by almost 10 per cent between 2010 and 2021. Political polarisation however has more ups and downs. After 1994 it increases until it reaches its first peak in 2003, after which in 2006 it comes down again to slightly below our starting point. This drop is quite remarkable, since the rest of the trend line generally shows an upward trend, and could even possibly indicate a measurement error. Between 2006 and 2010 it takes a jump and the amount of political polarisation

more than doubles between these election years. Political polarisation increases slightly between 2010 and 2012, and between 2012 and 2017, with increases of 1 and 2 per cent, respectively. However, a sharp decline of more than 20 per cent is visible between 2017 and 2021. This means that between 2010 and 2021, political polarisation decreased by almost 20 per cent over time. Thus, between 2010 and 2017 it remains relatively stable, before it decreases a bit again between 2017 and 2021. An explanation for this might be the rise in seats that D66 won in the 2021 election. They became the second largest party in the Netherlands that year and with a score of 2 on the ethnic integration scale they are a nice counterbalance for the largest party, VVD, who scored a 6 on this scale.

6. Hypotheses

This study looked at four possible explanations of the trends in political polarisation and societal polarisation highlighted above. These variables are responsiveness to political elites, mean partisan polarisation, issue salience, and anti-systemness. The trend lines for these variables are shown in the figures below. Figure 4.1 shows the variables on election years between 2010 and 2021, and in figure 4.2 they're combined with the data from Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010) to visualize trends since 1994.
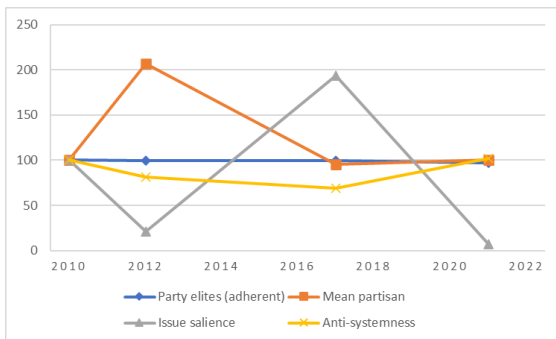
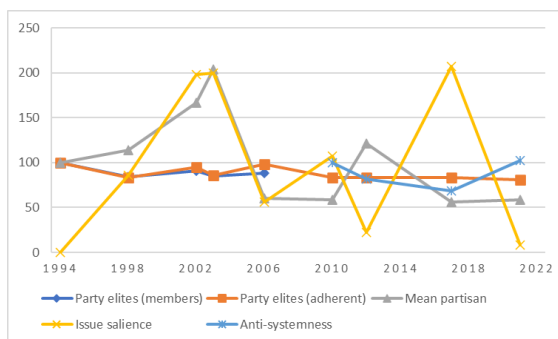

Figure 4.1; Source: Own calculations

Figure 4.2; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010) & Own calculations.

6.1 Responsiveness to political elites

Looking at the variable responsiveness to political elites, it can be seen that this value remains fairly stable from 2010 to 2021. A minimal drop is visible in 2012, after which the degree of polarisation rises slightly again in 2017. However, the degree of elite polarisation still remains lower than in 2010. Between 2017 and 2021, however, a slightly larger decrease in elite polarisation is visible, with a difference compared to 2010 of -4 per cent. It is possible that the corona crisis had an effect on this. Research by Daniels et al (2021) found that this health crisis caused people to view minorities differently, and this may be the reason for the more proportional distribution on the

seven-point ethnic integration scale among political elites leading to the decline in elite polarisation.

In figure 4.2 with data since 1994, responsiveness to political elites is shown both measured by only the party members, and by people who stated they are convinced adherent or very convinced adherent to a political party since the party member variable is not available in all publications of the DPES. Their trend lines show they do not differ much between 1994 and 2006, and that overall this variable is the most stable throughout the years.

Our first hypothesis predicted that more polarisation of political elites leads to more political and societal polarisation. Compared to both political polarisation and societal polarisation, the drop in elite polarisation between 2010 and 2021 corresponds somewhat, though to a much lesser extent. The decrease in the polarisation measure compared to 2010 is for political polarisation 20 per cent, societal polarisation 10 per cent and elite polarisation only a bit more than 3 per cent. All 3 variables thus remain fairly stable between 2010, 2012 and 2017, after which a decline is visible in the degree of polarisation between 2017 and 2021 but it does vary in size for each variable. Looking at the trendline that shows 1994 to 2021, elite polarisation shows a striking resemblance with societal polarisation. Both trend lines stay fairly stable, just below the 100% line and show a slight increase in 2006.

6.2 Representation of the mean partisan

Mean partisan polarisation, on the other hand, shows a more extreme trend line, with a peak in 2012 reaching as much as twice the level of polarisation as in 2010. In 2012, the gap between the two largest parties, VVD and PvdA, and the other parties is very

large. Because the VVD and PvdA are also of relatively the same size, this creates a high score on polarisation, especially now that the PVV has lost 9 seats this year but is still the 3rd largest party in the Second Chamber. After 2012, however, this peak decreases again by about 110 per cent, before coming down in 2017 just slightly below the 2010 value. Yet between 2017 and 2021, the trend line creeps back up just slightly, back to the 2010 level, so that mean partisan polarisation between 2010 and 2021 increased by only a little over half a percent in total.

In the longer term, mean partisan polarisation shows a strong peak in 2003 with a score of twice as much polarisation compared to 1994. After this, mean partisan polarisation dips again, after which a slight peak is seen in 2012. After this, it flattens out again to the same level of 2006 and 2010.

The second hypothesis predicted that an increase in mean partisan polarisation leads to an increase in political and societal polarisation. The peak between 1994 and 2003 is both visible in mean partisan polarisation and political polarisation, but after this the resemblance is lost. When mean partisan polarisation is compared to political and societal polarisation, few similarities can be found, mainly due to the sharp rise in mean partisan polarisation in 2012, which is absent from political and societal polarisation.

6.3 Issue salience

Issue salience, like mean partisan polarisation, shows a dip in 2012, although it is much less prominent. Between 2010 and 2012, issue salience decreased by about 85 per cent, after which this variable started to rise again. Between 2012 and 2017 there is an increase of more than 150 per cent which means that in 2017 issue salience is higher than in 2010. A reason for this increase can be the migration crisis which hit Europe

around this time. However, this increase does not last until 2021, meaning issue salience has decreased by almost all compared to 2010.

All variables except for issue salience are standardized on 100 in 1994 in figure 4.2 shown above. Due to the very low score of 0.2% on this variable in 1994 it is standardized at 0% to accurately represent the percentage of respondents who stated that migrants were in their top 5 most important national problems. Looking at trends in issue salience since 1994, it is noticeable that this variable knows many ups and downs. It has high peaks in 2002 and 2003, and again in 2017, but inbetween those years it falls sharply.

Our third hypothesis predicts that when there's an increase in issue salience, political and societal polarisation will increase as well. The decrease in issue salience around 2012 and increase in 2017 is again not reflected in the trend lines of political and societal polarisation. Looking back since 1994 the rise in issue salience between 1994 and 2003 bears a strong resemblance with political polarisation, but here the similarities end. Where issue salience plummets in 2012, political polarisation is at a new high, suggesting that the trends visible in issue salience do not resemble those of political polarisation and societal polarisation.

6.4 Anti-systemness

Lastly, the variable anti-systemness, showing a slight decrease in 2012 compared to 2010. The variable anti-systemness decreases even more between 2012 and 2017. Between 2017 and 2021, increases again and in 2021 it rises slightly above the value of 2010. This can be partly due to the increase of new parties in the Second Chamber, as the relation between fragmentation and dissatisfaction with the democratic system is

also shown by Martini and Quaranta (2014). This however does not explain the decrease in anti-systemness between 2010 and 2017.

Because the variable anti-systemness was not a part of the data generated by Oosterwaal and Torenvlied (2010), it is still standardized on 2010 in figure 4.2. When put in perspective, it stays relatively stable over the years, with a small dip visible in 2012 and 2017.

Regarding our fourth hypothesis that predicts that the more dissatisfied respondents are with the democratic system, the more polarised politics and society will be, the trend line of the variable anti-systemness shows little correspondence with the trends seen in political and societal polarisation. This is mainly due to the dip of the variable anti-systemness in 2017 which again is not reflected in political or societal polarisation. Especially the rise in anti-systemness between 2017 and 2021 does not correspond to the decline in political and societal polarisation.

6.5 Distance to mean partisan

Looking at the divergent trend lines of the different variables described above, we can ask ourselves whether the political parties in the Second Chamber still represent their voters, as well as the electorate. For this purpose, the variable distance to the mean partisan was calculated, which represents the difference between the score of each political party in the Second Chamber on the seven-point ethnic integration scale that was retrieved from the political parties' party manifestos, and the mean scores on this same ethnic integration scale of voters per political party.
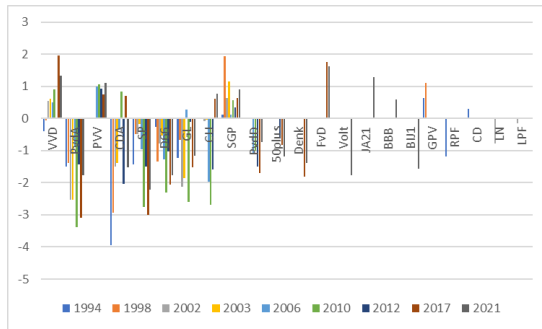
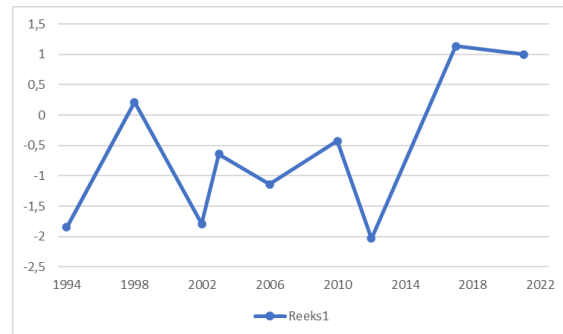Figure 5.1; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010) & Own calculations.

Figure 5.2; Source: Oosterwaal & Torenvlied (2010) & Own calculations.

In figure 5.1, the distance to the mean partisan is shown, meaning that the closer the value of this variable falls around 0, the smaller the difference between the party's attitude on ethnic integration policy to their voters. When this shows a negative value, it means that a party's voters have a more xenophobic attitude than the party they vote for. On the other hand, when the score on this variable is positive, it means that voters of a specific political party have a more tolerant attitude than the party they voted for that election year.

This is the same for figure 5.2, where the weighed average distance to the mean partisan is shown in a trend line since 1994. Instead of per party, here we see the mean value for all the parties with seats in the Second Chamber and to what extent they represent the electorate.

Remarkably, in figure 5.1 it can be seen that the values of mostly right-wing parties that scored relatively high on the ethnic integration scale now again score quite high on this variable with scores between +1 and even +2 sometimes. The opposite is also visible, with parties that scored relatively low on the ethnic integration scale also scoring lower on the distance to the mean partisan. Outliers of -3 and even -4 are visible for parties like the PvdA or the SP, but mainly for the CDA in 1994. Since this outlier, the CDA did score increasingly xenophobic on the ethnic integration scale until 2010, after which

the party starts to fluctuate more and thus the distance to the mean partisan alternates between positive and negative scores. The Christian Union also experiences a similar rise in their scores on the party programme, causing the values regarding distance to the mean partisan to also change from negative to positive. Apart from this, the other parties seem to score fairly stable positive or stable negative on this variable.

What the scores on this variable, distance to the mean partisan, reflect is the extent to which the elected parties in the Second Chamber represent their voters. As the variables societal and political polarisation indicated earlier, citizens have become increasingly moderate on ethnic integration policies. Political parties, on the other hand, tend to represent more extreme positions on the ethnic integration policy scale. Besides this, it is also interesting to see that apart from a small positive value in 1998, the value for the average distance to the mean partisan is consistently negative until 2017. Thus, from 1994 until 2012 (again, with the exception of 1998) the electorate held a more xenophobic view on ethnic integration policy than the political parties in the Second Chamber. After 2012 this changed, with scores of around a +1 in both 2017 and 2021 meaning that either the electorate became more tolerant of ethnic integration policy, or political parties became more xenophobic on this issue. Certainly in 2017, political parties can be seen adopting a rather xenophobic stance towards ethnic integration policies, which could possibly be a reaction to the migration crisis that reached Europe just before. So, comparatively speaking, voters have indeed become more tolerant which increases the score on this variable tremendously. The fact remains that currently there is a discrepancy of an entire point on the ethnic integration policy scale between the political parties in the Second Chamber and the weighed average partisan position of the voters that are being represented by these political parties.

7. Conclusion

This article discussed the issue of polarization in present and future society, both in the political and societal contexts. It highlighted the influence of polarization on democratic processes, policy formations, societal fragmentation, and public discourse, with a focus on Dutch elections and the impact of immigration as a salient policy issue. The research examined trends in political and societal polarization from 2010 to 2021 and explored variables such as responsiveness to political elites, representation of the mean partisan, issue salience, and dissatisfaction with the democratic system.

To answer the main question "Can trends in political and societal polarisation be explained by trends in elite polarisation, mean partisan polarisation, issue salience, and anti-systemness?" this article looks at two sub-questions.
The first sub-question is "How have trends in political and societal polarisation developed since 2010?". Trend lines between 2010 and 2021 show that both political and societal polarisation stay fairly stable from 2010 to 2017. Between 2017 and 2021 however a decrease is visible in both political and societal polarisation.

The second sub-question is "What do trends in elite polarisation, mean partisan polarisation, issue salience, and anti-systemness look like since 2010?". This sub-question was divided into four hypotheses, with the first one stating that more polarisation of the political elites leads to more political and societal polarisation. In the relatively short term, i.e. between 2010 and 2021, the two trend lines seem to be somewhat similar as they both remain fairly stable, then show a small decrease between 2017 and 2021 which might be caused by the Covid-19 crisis that occurred from 2020 onwards. In the slightly longer term, i.e. between 1994 and 2021, it is noticeable that the two lines are very similar.

The second hypothesis states that more polarisation of the mean partisan leads to more political and societal polarisation. Initially, this seems to hold true when looking at the data between 1994 and 2006, showing an increase in both mean partisan polarisation and political polarisation. However, between 2010 and 2021, this similarity seems to be missing because of the increase in mean partisan polarisation in 2012 which occurred not because of social developments, but because the third party, PVV, lost a lot of votes and thus the composition of the Second Chamber changed.

The third hypothesis states that the more salient an issue is, the more polarised politics and society will be. For this variable too, there seems to be a similarity with political polarisation when looking at the period between 1994 and 2006. However, it also appears to be the case that since 2010 this relationship no longer holds. There is some similarity in the peak in both variables seen in 2017 which might hold a relation to the migration crisis that happened two years prior, but the drop thereafter in 2021 is of sharply different proportion.

The last hypothesis concerns anti-systemness, and states that more dissatisfaction with the democratic system leads to more political and societal polarisation. For this last variable, it also does not seem that a correspondence can be found with political and societal polarisation, this mainly due to the fact that anti-systemness decreases between 2010 and 2017, but in contrast to both political and societal polarisation, it actually increases between 2017 and 2021 which corresponds with the degree of fragementation that is visible in the Second Chamber and links to the degree of dissatisfaction with the democratic system.

Besides this, the variable distance to the mean partisan shows the extent to which voters are represented by the political parties they vote for in the Second Chamber. It is striking to see that between 1994 and 2012 (with the exception of 1998) the value on

this variable stays below 0, yet in 2017 and 2021 the value increases to +1, for which a possible explanation could also be the migration crisis and the fact that in 2017 political parties held a more xenophobic stance on ethnic integration policy than the years prior, which in relation makes the voters seem more tolerant on this issue.

Thus, looking back at our main question "Can trends in political and societal polarisation be explained by trends in elite polarisation, mean partisan polarisation, issue salience, and anti-systemness?", we can conclude that there is a relation between responsiveness to political elites and societal polarisation. For both representation to the mean partisan and issue salience a relationship with political polarisation seemed to have been found between 1994 and 2006 but looking at all the data between 1994 and 2021 this relationship does not last. Anti-systemness does not seem to resemble political or societal polarisation at all.

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