
Policy agendas and births and deaths of political parties

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Abstract

The standard model of political party density emphasizing the interaction of social cleavages and district magnitude (M) is incomplete in accounting for number of parties in cases of high values of M in an arbitrary way. We explore an alternative model for such cases emphasizing the slack in the issue agenda available to parties with which to construct viable identities or niches they can employ to mobilize cognitively-limited voters. The model is tested with time series data and event history analysis on the sizes of the public policy agenda and the political

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party system in the Netherlands, an extreme case of large district magnitude given its single national district. Change in the slack of the issue agenda influences the births and deaths of political parties, a result that may also have implications for cases of lower district magnitude.

Keywords

party density, policy agendas, the Netherlands

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The now standard model of the density or number of parties found in political party systems combines the insights of political sociologists such as Grumm (1958) and Lipset and Rokkan (1967), who emphasized the role of social cleavages, and those following Duverger (1954; Lijphart, 1990; Riker, 1982) highlighting the role of electoral institutions, especially district magnitude (M) or the number of legislators elected from a district (Cox, 1997; Neto and Cox, 1997; Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 1994; Powell, 1982; Taagepera and Grofman, 1985; Taagepera and Shugart, 1993). Despite this very real success, there are several reasons to be less than fully satisfied with the standard model. It does not, for example, account for the numbers of political parties found in political systems with high district magnitudes or values of M . The standard model hides away these troublesome cases under the blanket of an arbitrary logged specification. When the logged measures of district magnitude are unpacked using a polynomial specification, number of parties does not respond to changes in the value of district magnitude after M values of 15 or so (Lowery et al., 2010), a value considerably lower than the extreme values of M found in Israel (120) and the Netherlands (150) and, indeed, to about a fifth of the cases used in the usual cross-sectional tests of the standard model (Cox, 1997; Neto and Cox, 1997; Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 1994). This suggests that the model is at least incomplete in terms of the party systems it can account for and that something other than electoral institutions and/or cleavages may matter.

After first describing the standard model and its difficulties with high values of district magnitude, we develop an alternative explanation for these cases emphasizing slack in the issue agenda available to political parties with which to construct viable electoral identities or niches with which to mobilize myopic, inattentive, and cognitively limited voters. We then test this alternative using time series data on the size of the public policy agenda and the political party system in the Netherlands, the most extreme case of a large M given its single national district. We also assess the comparative importance of the variables cited in the standard model of party density: social cleavages and electoral institutions. We conclude by discussing how our model contributes to the broader understanding of party system density and how these findings may even have implications for cases with low district magnitude.

The standard model and its limits

The standard model of the density of party systems combining the insights of work by political sociologists emphasizing long-standing social cleavages and those of

institutionalists emphasizing the role of political institutions, especially district magnitude, is perhaps best represented by the powerful analysis of Cox (1997). But his model clearly emphasizes the role of district magnitude. Indeed, he argues that strategic voting on the part of individual citizens *largely* accounts for the strong relationship between M and number of effective parties, noting that ‘instrumentally rational voters eschew wasting their votes on hopeless candidacies, preferring instead to transfer their support to some candidate with a serious chance of winning’ (Cox, 1997: 30). Still, his specification – building on Powell (1982), Neto and Cox (1997), Taagepera and Grofman (1985), and Ordeshook and Shvetsova (1994) – also includes number of social cleavages in the model in interaction with district magnitude (Cox, 1997; Neto and Cox, 1997; Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 1994) based on the expectation – at least as old as Key’s work on party factions in *Southern Politics* (Canon, 1978) – that ‘political entrepreneurs’ have strong incentives ‘to base separate parties on these cleavages’.

So, what is wrong about the standard model? One problem concerns the functional form of the core district magnitude variable routinely used in cross-national tests of the standard model. The district magnitude term is included in the model in either a decimal or natural logged form suggesting that the relationship is curvilinear. Unfortunately, this specification is treated as a measurement convenience and is virtually undefended theoretically. The closest one can find to a theoretical argument is Ordeshook and Shvetsova’s (1994: 106–7) summary of Sartori’s observation that:

although we might predict that single member districts imply two-party systems, and that, say, 15-member districts might imply four or five parties, it is unreasonable to suppose that 120- or 150-member districts (Israel and the Netherlands) will generate 30 or 40 parties, *ceteris paribus*. (1986: 67, n. 15)

We have no trouble with this observation *per se*. Any number of models *might* suggest that the relationship between M and number of parties is curvilinear. But none of the several extant versions of the standard model actually provides such an explanation. Instead, these exceptions are buried deep in the logged values, where their theoretically interesting, if exceptional, character is effectively hidden.

To better explore these issues, Lowery and colleagues (2010) re-estimated the standard model using a polynomial specification to unpack the logged values of M.¹ By unpacking the LogM term of the standard model, they determined that the relationship between party density and district magnitude traces an S-shaped response function that is initially flat, then convex, rising through a period of linear growth, then concave as the growth of party density slows, and finally flat as there is no further growth in number of parties as M increases. Such sigmoid functions are the hallmark of the growth of many different kinds of populations of organizations discussed in the organizational ecology literature. Organizational ecology examines the evolution of populations of organizations through processes of selection (Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Hannan et al., 2007). The approach, as noted by Baum and Oliver (1996: 1378–9), emphasizes ‘how competition for scarce common resources and mutualism based on complementary functional differences’ affects organizational founding and failure rates. More to the point,

this suggests that the theory of party system density might be viewed as one part of a more general theory of the evolution of populations of organizations.

More substantively, Lowery et al. (2010) found not one world of party system density, but several. The first is Duverger's (1954) world of single-member districts where an M of 1 and elite calculations produce only two parties, unless regional or ethnic enclaves otherwise provide a niche for specialists. The second is Cox's (1997) twilight world of low M in which party numbers are suppressed below what M alone might allow because of strategic voting, the impact of which ebbs quickly. The third world – from M 5 to M 15 or so – is the exclusive province of the Lijphart's (1990) generalized $M+1$ rule in which only M matters. And, finally, there is the world of cases with M greater than 15 in which, given the flat response function, or terminal density dependence in the language of organization ecology, neither district magnitude nor its interaction with social cleavages seems to play a role in determining party system density.²

Although quite different, Lowery et al. (2010) note that these four worlds can be subsumed under an organization ecology model in which different kinds of constraints operate under different environmental conditions. For low- and mid-range values of M , those constraints certainly include the kinds of variables highlighted by the standard model: district magnitude and its interaction with social cleavages. Attention to these variables is fully consistent with organization ecology's focus on the role of vital environmental resources that set limits on the carrying capacities of political systems for political parties. But it is some other resource yet to be identified – and not M – that produces density dependence or the flat response function observed for the 20 percent or so of cases of M greater than 15 examined in cross-national tests of the standard model. For an organization ecology interpretation to be complete, then, it must do more than simply subsume the standard model by accounting for what it explains since there would then be little to distinguish the two models. Instead it must also explain what the standard model cannot: party density in systems with M greater than 15. We address this problem by using two key theoretical tools of organization ecology. The first is niche theory (Hannan et al., 2007; Péli and Nooteboom, 1999), which provides us the tools needed to explain niche formation in the presence of agenda slack. And, second, we use density dependence theory to theoretically account for how intensifying competition for an issue identity attenuates party density growth as issue agenda slack disappears when the system's carrying capacity for political parties is approximated (Hannan and Carroll, 1992; Lowery et al., 2010).

Issue agendas and party vital rates

Why, then, does the density of party systems become unresponsive to changes in social cleavages and/or district magnitude above M values of 15 or so? In organization ecology, the key resources that organizations depend on are associated with demand for organizational services. Our intuition is that, at high values of M , these critical resources are related to the issues that allow parties to differentiate themselves before their consumers: voters. Are issues not able to be subsumed under social cleavages as highlighted in the standard model? While some scholars claim that the nature and role of both cleavages and issues within political systems are multi-faceted and dynamic, changing over time

as a function of the strategic position of parties and political entrepreneurs as well as more exogenous changes in the environment (Daalder, 1984; Powell, 1986; Rohrschneider, 1993), most scholars have emphasized the stability of social cleavages as distinctive from more transient issues (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Indeed, in the extensive cross-sectional analyses of party system density, cleavages are typically measured by counting the number of ethnic, language, and/or religious groups in a nation, not more transient issues such as those associated with housing, environmental, or tax policy. Still, as Cox (1997) notes by citing Meisel (1974) and Jaensch (1983), with respect to even long-standing ethnic, language, and/or religious cleavages:

not all social cleavages become politicized, and . . . even fewer become *particized* (i.e., made into important lines of partisan division). Both processes – politicization and particization – typically do not just happen; they require someone to push them along, someone with resources who can compete against other politicians who may be attempting to prevent the politicization of that particular cleavage, or to activate others instead. (Cox, 1997: 26)

Given this, we see issues as distinct from social cleavages and of more proximate or immediate political import, although we will explore this issue empirically later.³

Our intuition that issues matter is, of course, not without precedent. There is a long tradition within the discipline of examining the role of issues in determining and constraining the behaviour of political parties, including extensive research on the Dutch party system on the role issues have played in the structuring of competition among parties (Aarts et al., 1999) and the rise of new parties (Belanger and Aarts, 2006; Krouwel and Lucardie, 2008). However, we wish to highlight here not the role of specific issues for specific parties, as has been done, but the role of the entire issue agenda in determining how many parties can survive within a political system. Our model of party system density in high M systems rests on five assumptions that, while not uncontroversial, are well established in the discipline.

First we assume, far from the strategic voting interpretation of voters as clairvoyant calculators of electoral odds, that they are poorly informed and generally inattentive to politics (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Macdonald et al., 1998). In summarizing this research domain, Luskin (2002: 282) noted that ‘at long last, and despite some flickering dissent . . . there now seems to be a near-standard that by anything approaching elite standards most citizens think and know jaw-droppingly little about politics.’ In a world of myopic, inattentive, and cognitively-limited voters, it is not easy to attract voters’ attention (Tavits, 2008). This will be especially true for new parties and new issues, which explains why office seekers rely on established parties rather than striking out on their own. Established parties offer a well-trying issue repertoire, a known brand, and/or a reputation that helps to overcome the problem of inattentive voters in a noisy environment (Aldrich, 1995: 49–56).

Second we assume that parties attract voters with issues (Schlesinger, 1984: 383). Or as Downs (1957: 28) asserted ‘parties formulate policies in order to win elections rather than win elections to formulate policies’. With this assumption, we hope to bring parties as organizations into our explanation of the density of party systems, something that is again consistent with an organization ecology approach to political phenomena, and also

something that reflects Schlesinger's (1984: 374) objective of linking 'together the theory of party competition with that of party organization' to construct a broader theory of party politics.⁴ In Schlesinger's view political parties are, first of all, organizations that seek to survive by winning elections with voters doing the winnowing. More to the point, they develop issues and the policies that address them as crucial products offered in exchange for voters' support (Schlesinger, 1984: 383). Finding attractive or at least electorally-reliable issues is difficult if voters are paying limited or sporadic attention to, and are poorly informed about, politics. And this problem is likely to be especially severe in systems with electoral rules favouring many parties, each clamoring for attention *against* the competing messages of, potentially, quite similar rivals in their common efforts to establish viable brands or issue reputations. Thus the numbers of parties actually competing for and winning office in such systems will likely lag behind the number that could potentially survive on the basis of the mathematical opportunities provided by electoral rules alone.

Third we assume that parties – or entrepreneurs of potential parties – operate in a retrospective manner when calculating their chances of being successful in the future. That is, they look to the prior election to see if there are issues or issue configurations that are available upon which to develop an independent party identity. Such a retrospective orientation is consistent with Aldrich's (1995) analysis of the evolution of party systems via emphasis on their role in solving problems, especially the problem of a lack of success in prior elections. But prior elections also provide the best concrete evidence available to politicians about the opportunities and constraints they face in addressing their electoral problems or ambitions. Among these is the volume of available issue space upon which to build a viable party identity.

And, fourth, in what is perhaps the most unique addition of our consideration of the role of issues, we assume that the volume of issue space available to political parties with which to mobilize voters is restricted, even if it is dynamic. That is, while the cardinality of the issue set facing a nation may ebb and flow over time (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005), there are very real limits to the absolute size of the issue agenda available to politicians in any one time and place to differentiate themselves in the eyes of inattentive voters. Parties cannot just make issues up. Indeed, while party entrepreneurs will look for new issues with which to mobilize voters (Belanger and Aarts, 2006; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989), the agenda space available for issues is itself to a considerable degree exogenously determined, temporally sticky, and likely limited in scope (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Indeed, it can be difficult for newcomers to displace older parties even when new issues appear (Krouwel and Lucardie, 2008; Meguid, 2005; Rohrschneider, 1993) if the older parties also are compelled to address an exogenously-driven issue agenda.

Given voter inattention and a limited supply of issues available to parties with which to distinguish themselves, the density of the party system itself should act as an increasingly powerful drag on further party formation even as the *potential* number of survivable parties given electoral rules increases. As the number of parties increases, the issue space needed to establish a viable electoral identity is more likely to be already occupied. Importantly, however, changes in the issue agenda can either relax or enhance this constraint. That is, while we assume that the issue agenda is limited, it is not fixed

(Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). It is this variation – our fifth assumption – that we can use to determine whether issue agenda change limits the resource space available to politicians and parties, thereby imposing a flat response function or negative density dependence on the relation between M and numbers of political parties. If the size of the issue agenda contracts, then new parties may find it even tougher to form, and older parties may no longer be able to sustain an electorally-viable profile with inattentive voters. There will not be sufficient distinctive issue sets upon which to build a discernibly-unique issue identity. In contrast, if the issue agenda expands to address a wider range of issues in an electorally-meaningful manner, then new parties should find it easier to establish distinctive identities and older parties will be less threatened by the competition. A broader, deeper policy agenda should allow a greater number of parties to construct a distinctive issue set or configuration that might be attractive to a sufficient set of voters to secure election.

These five assumptions provide a straightforward test implication. In the language of the event history analysis that we use in the ultimate tests of the model, we hypothesize that having fewer than expected political parties given the issue agenda space available in one election will increase the hazard of new party births in the following election. We also hypothesize that observing more parties in a political system than expected in a prior election given the available issue space will increase the hazard rate of party deaths in the following election.

Testing the expectation

We test these expectations below with time series data on the Dutch case with its extreme district magnitude of 150. One important advantage of focusing on a single national party system over time is that we can largely side step at least some of the conceptual issues associated with distinguishing between long-standing ethnic, language, and/or religious cleavages and the more short-term impacts of issues. That is, if cleavages represent more lasting divisions within a polity, focusing on a single polity will effectively control for them, thereby allowing us to focus more squarely on the influence of issues. However, we will later consider some additional empirical controls for one possible cleavage in the Dutch political system (religion) that might have undergone some meaningful change over the time period we examine.

We proceed in the following way in the subsequent sections. We first describe the party system in the Netherlands over the post-war period to highlight our two dependent variables: the number of parties standing in parliamentary elections for the second chamber (Tweede Kamer), which we use in the first analysis, and party births and deaths, used in the second set of analyses. We then describe the niche model, the theoretical foundation for our model, and how changes in the issue agenda can create space for a new party. We describe the way in which we estimate issue agenda space. In the two following empirical sections we first use time series analysis to generate the critical independent variable for the final analysis, the amount of slack in the party system given the size of the issue agenda, using historic data on the Dutch policy agenda; and last, we employ event history analysis (EHA) to assess whether slack in the issue agenda-party system does indeed influence political party births and deaths.

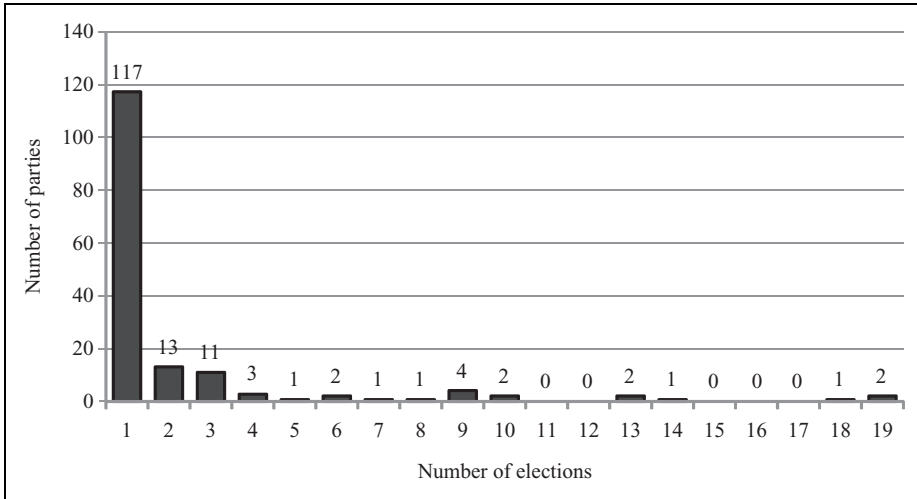


Figure 1. Number of elections in which 161 parties have competed, 1946–2006.

The Dutch party system

Although the Dutch are rarely viewed as an extreme people (although see Blokker et al., 2008), their electoral system certainly qualifies for that label. With a single national district for the 150 members of the Tweede Kamer, the Netherlands has a district magnitude of 150. Among the countries typically included in analyses of party density, only Israel, with a district magnitude of 120, competes. We focus on the Dutch case for several reasons, but one of them is that it is the case that the standard model has the most difficulty explaining. It is a hard case. With proportional representation, a low threshold for participation in the Tweede Kamer, and plausibly retaining two distinct ideological dimensions (i.e., left–right and religious–non-religious), the Dutch party system is well populated (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005; Koole, 1996), although it is clearly not as crowded as would be predicted by the generalized Duverger rule alone (Cox, 2006). Still, as seen in Figure 1, fully 161 different political parties competed in Dutch parliamentary elections from 1946 through 2006. And with 72.67 percent (117) of these parties only competing in one election, there have been a lot of party births and deaths. In fact, only two of the 161 parties have competed and won seats in parliament over the entire period: the social-democratic PvdA and the conservative protestant SGP.

All of the remaining parties were born, died, and/or merged since 1946 (Krouwel and Lucardie, 2008; Mair, 1999). The latter group includes some notable cases, such as the Christian-democratic CDA (Christian-Democratic Appeal), which was formed by the merger of the three major Christian-democratic parties (KVP [Catholic People’s Party], ARP [Anti-Revolutionary Party] and CHU [Christian-Historical Union]) in 1977 after the near-collapse of traditional religious cleavages in the Netherlands provided less issue space for separate denominational parties. While the CDA merger was a significant one, given that the party or its component parties have been part of the government through most of the post-war period, mergers are generally rather uncommon, involving only

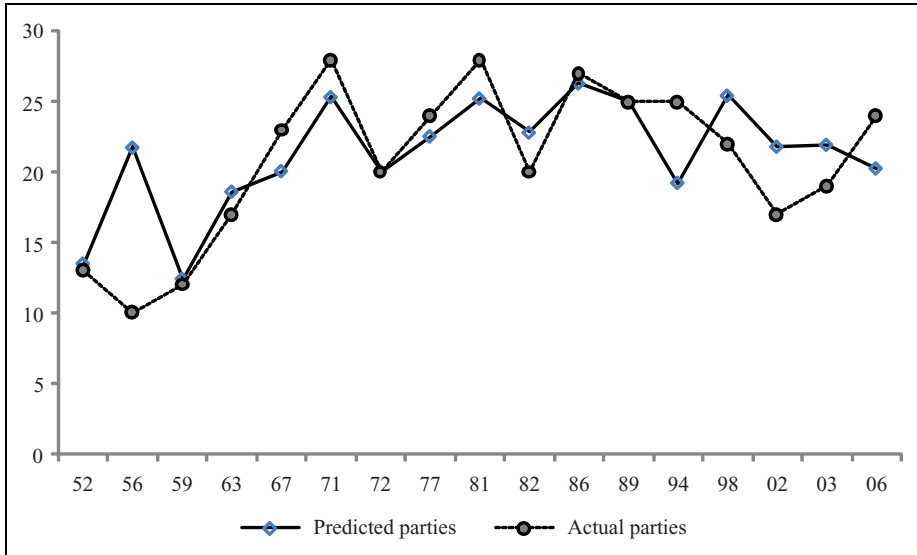


Figure 2. Predicted and actual number of parties competing by election, 1952–2006.

5 percent or so of all of the parties. Somewhat more common is the founding of new parties by splitting off from older ones, such as the somewhat more rightwing social-democratic DS'70 (Democratic Socialists 1970) from the PvdA (Labour Party) in 1970. Most new parties, however, did not arise via direct splits from existing parties, but from entrepreneurial activity around new issues (Krouwel and Lucardie, 2008). Most of these new parties, as might be expected, failed after one election. There are very few parties that repeatedly tried and failed to secure representation in parliament or ultimately succeeded only after repeated election campaigns. For example, the fundamentalist protestant Reformed Political League (GPV) and the socialist SP (Socialist Party) gained seats in parliament only after many attempts: only after four election attempts for the former and six for the latter.

Many of the successful parties are, of course, still quite small in terms of electoral support and the numbers of seats they claim in the Tweede Kamer. But in the Dutch context, they can still have considerable import. One or the other of two small parties – D66, a party emphasizing democratic reform, and ChristenUnie, an economic left-leaning, fundamentalist Christian party – have been part of the governing coalition for the last quarter of a century. And, while never part of a governing coalition, it often seems that Geert Wilders' anti-immigrant PVV (Party for Freedom) is having a profound impact on the Dutch policy agenda. More generally, several scholars have noted that the unusual openness of the Netherlands to new parties has allowed them to bring new issues onto the policy agenda, especially so when older, more established parties have faced electoral difficulties (Krouwel and Lucardie, 2008; Mair, 1997, 1999).

In examining the pattern of party competition over time, it is also clear that the largely cross-sectional analyses typical of work on the standard model may give a very false sense of the stability of party systems in terms of the number of parties that compete. As seen in the darker line of Figure 2, there has been plenty of variation in the numbers

of parties contesting elections in the post-war period, ranging from a low of 10 in 1956 to a high of 28 in 1971, which provides us another reason for focusing on the Dutch case. That is, there is considerable variation in the numbers of parties competing in each election, the dependent variable in the next step of this analysis. In contrast, Dutch electoral rules and social cleavages, the explanatory variables of the standard model, are rather stable over most of this period. Thus, to explain variation in the number of Dutch parties competing over time, we will likely have to look elsewhere.

Niche model

We argue that it is issue agenda slack that facilitates niche formation and maintenance for new parties. Before estimating this slack, we make more explicit the conceptual framework underlying our operationalization. Analytically speaking, the realized niche of an organization is the multidimensional resource space domain where the organization sustains itself in the presence of competitors (Hannan and Freeman, 1977). The resource space can be the political space spun by issue-axes along which electoral preferences distribute (Downs, 1957; Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989). The focal scarce resource for organizations is their audience's demand for services. In our context, this is electoral demand for political representation on issues of concern to voters. Potential voters are thus *resource carriers* in this representation; their distribution in the issue space tells us where parties may locate electorally viable niches.

Agenda slack refers to the presence of unoccupied, but potentially accessible, spatial positions in electoral demand space. When spanning their niches, organizations address the audience members with their offering (Hannan et al., 2007; Péli and van Witteloostuijn, 2009). Normally, niches heavily overlap at mainstream positions, oftentimes leaving the less lucrative peripheries to be occupied by specialized players. Moreover, the presence of agenda slack also depends on the structural changes of the issue space. The space can expand or contract along existing dimensions. For example, small parties may find niches by extending issue-axes towards radical positions. But the space can also expand as the result of the emergence of new issues (Péli and Nooteboom, 1999). Issue dimension proliferation is strongly hindered, however, by institutional constraints and electoral perception limits, as we mentioned earlier. The opposite process, space contraction by dimension removal, may well happen if issues are successfully addressed or, for example, in times of severe political stress, such as wars, terrorist attacks, or economic crises, the issue-focus narrows. Then, the issue space may collapse even to a single dimension ('are you with us or against us?'), causing severe niche crowding. Below, we will apply this resource-based niche conceptualization to the context of the Dutch political system and provide an empirical operationalization of agenda slack.

Before that, however, we must note that we would not expect that there is always a simple one-to-one correspondence to between the issue slack generated by the emergence of a new issue and the birth of a new party. Older parties might incorporate a new issue or governments might try to preempt the formation of new parties by addressing it. But parties can be highly constrained in addressing new issues, given their support for positions on older issues and their existing constituencies. For example, the Democratic Party in Michigan was historically closely tied to labour unions associated with the auto

industry in Detroit. As a result, the emergence of the ‘Democratic’ issue of the environment in the 1970s posed real difficulties for the Democratic Party in Michigan. Thus, parties may annex new issues, but they may also be highly constrained in addressing new issues and new issue configurations by their existing positions on other issues, something that provides an opportunity, but by no means a certainty, for new parties to emerge.

Even more broadly, there may not be a one-to-one correspondence to a new issue and the emergence or death of parties because what surely matters most is the overall dimensionality of the issue agenda (Albright, 2010). As dimensionality increases with the addition of a new issue, there are many more possible configurations of party positions across all issue arrays. Thus the emergence of the immigration issue in the Netherlands potentially created the space for both an anti-immigrant, economically right wing party and an anti-immigrant, economically left wing party as well as pro-immigrant version of both. Add then conservative and liberal social positions to these potential party configurations and we now have many more possibilities. Indeed, there is a further complication in that parties can vary in their *emphases* of the issues they address. Thus if parties are more than single-issue causes, more issues simply provide for more combinations and permutations across *all* of the issue space, thereby creating more opportunities for parties. Conversely, contracting the agenda space reduces the opportunities for parties to maintain a distinctive identity across *all* of the issues that they must address.

Estimating issue agenda slack

The next step is to develop a measure of the amount of issue agenda-party slack in the Dutch political system. We do so by examining the residuals generated from regressing an election year measure of the density of Dutch party system on an election year measure of the heterogeneity of the Dutch political agenda, controlling for other explanations of the number of parties competing in a given election. The dependent variable is the number of parties competing in each election, as observed in Figure 2. We also examined as alternatives two fractionalization measures – both party vote and party seat share – as is more common in the literature on party system density. But both alternatives were essentially constants over the post-war period while number of parties, we have seen, is highly variable.

Turning to the critical independent variable, we employ Breeman and colleagues’ (2009) Herfindahl index of the density of the Dutch policy agenda based on coding of the government’s statements each year, as proclaimed on *Prinsjesdag* in the *Troonrede* (Queen’s speech), constructed using a Dutch variant of the Baumgartner and Jones (1993) policy agendas coding scheme using 19 major topics. The Queen’s speech – written by the coalition government – reports the government’s achievements and major events of the previous year as well as the government’s goals and policy decisions for the year to come. These annual speeches can involve symbolic language as they address hopes and concerns about the well-being of the country, but are also surprisingly substantive and specific in terms of attention to a variety of policy topics.⁵

In assessing the validity of this measure, two critical issues must be considered. The first is the distinction between long-standing cleavages of the type considered in extant

cross-national analyses of party system density and the kinds of short-term issues that are relevant for our theory of party systems. First, again, by focusing on a single national case over time, we are plausibly controlling for many of the long-standing ethnic, linguistic, and religious divisions that are the focus of the cross-national literature. And the kinds of issues examined in the coding of the Queen's speech – and in the policy agendas literature more generally – do not speak to the kinds of long-standing ethnic, language, and religious divisions found in work on cleavages. The coding categories included issues associated with planning, public administration, foreign policy, foreign trade, science and technology, defence, commerce, housing, social security, justice and crime, transport, energy, environment, education, labour, agriculture and fisheries, health, immigration, and macro-economy. One can imagine, we suppose, that some long-standing cleavage might be reflected in a few of these issues in some places at some times, such as ethnic divisions in Iraq being reflected in foreign policy issues with respect to Iran. But it is difficult to see how changes in attention to commerce or transport issues would consistently reflect long-standing ethnic, language, or religious cleavages in a manner that would confound our attention to issues, again, especially so since we examine a single polity over time.

Furthermore, attention to these several issues changes markedly over time, sometimes dramatically so, something that would not be expected if they largely reflected long-standing ethnic, linguistic, and religious cleavages. As is fully evident in the analysis of the Queen speech measure by Breeman et al. (2009), labour, defence, and macro-economic statements in Queen speech rise in the 1950s peak in the 1960s, and then steadily decline thereafter. Statements on the environment and social security rose in the 1970s and 1980s and have since levelled off. And attention to several issue areas – commerce, science and technology, transportation, and planning – is extremely erratic, rising and falling as specific policy problems emerge and disappear. Given this volatility and variation therein across issues, it just does not seem plausible to view these issues as representing cleavages in the sense of persistent divisions in society, a conceptualization that is typical of the cross-national literature on party system density. In short, we believe that our measures tap more short-term issues rather than reflecting long-term social cleavages.

Turning to the second major issue with respect to the validity of our measure, we must ask whether attention to issues is truly exogenous. That is, might the party composition of the government itself determine what issues are discussed in the Queen's speeches? Consistent with the larger literature on policy agendas (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005), we believe that the structure of the policy agendas in terms of the kinds and numbers of issues that are addressed is largely exogenously determined. That is, agendas seem to be influenced neither by which specific parties are members of the governing coalition nor the demands of election year timing (Breeman et al., 2009; see also Walgrave et al., 2006). While both variables almost certainly influence *how* governments respond to issues, *which* issues governments must address seems determined by the hard reality of real events. Furthermore, the numerous topics in the Queen's speeches normally – in most years and on most issues – do not constitute radical departures from patterns of past attention to issues; rather, they cohere into positions along the extant policy or issue dimensions that must be addressed by any party in

government. Thus the themes mentioned in the quite condensed *Troonrede* of about 2,000 to 3,000 words are normally those that require party policy positioning by the government of some sort even if the issue set is itself exogenously determined by events in the real world.

This strong claim is supported by two prior analyses of the Dutch Queen's speech data. Breeman et al. (2009) examined the similarities between the number of statements on each of the issue areas in year-by-year pairs over the whole time series. In a few paired years, relatively low levels of correlation were observed. But these were clearly externally driven, such as the greater attention given to foreign affairs issues when Indonesia gained independence and in 1992 when the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the Maastricht treaty dominated the attention of the government. Overall, however, the average correlation in the numbers of statements given to the several issues between two years *within a period during which a single government was in power* ($n = 38, r = 0.824$) hardly differed – substantively and statistically – from the comparable average correlation for pairs of years *in which the government and the coalition partners therein changed* ($n = 13, r = 0.809$). Attention to issues – if not how governments in the Netherlands address those issues – does not change as the parties in control of the government changed.⁶

This last point is especially evident in Breeman et al.'s (2008) statement-by-statement analysis of all of the Queen's speech sentences on one of the issues in our measure of attention that might be thought to be the most ideological and thus more closely related to the party composition of government – public administration. They found that the number of such statements increased linearly with the expansion of the welfare state. During this linear increase, there are clear differences over time in *how* governments speak about public administration, with a shift from attention to structuring government services to providing more oversight. But both are largely responses to exogenous forces associated with the growth and then aging of the Dutch welfare state. More to the point, with only one exception (a few more sentences addressing the openness and transparency of government when D66 was in the government), they found that the numbers of statements addressing public administration year-to-year seemed unrelated to the party composition of the government. This does not mean, of course, that parties do not matter. What did change with patterns of party control was the tone or *how* governments talked about these issues. Centre-right governments were, as would be expected, far more critical in how they talked about public services than were center-left governments. But both were compelled to address the issue of an expanding and then aging welfare state whether they cared to or not. Thus we are confident that our measure of the issue agenda facing Dutch governments over the post-war period is valid and is not confounded by the party composition of those governments.

Dutch policy agendas vary over time. For our purpose, the most important characteristic of the agenda is how crowded it is. The trend towards more crowding is evident in Figure 3, which reports election year values by averaging the values over the prior three years and the year of election of a Herfindahl index of policy attention, calculated by summing the squared proportions of an item – in this case, the proportions of statements in each speech addressing one of the 19 major policy topics. Thus a value of 1 would indicate that attention was given to only one of the 19 policy topics and a value near

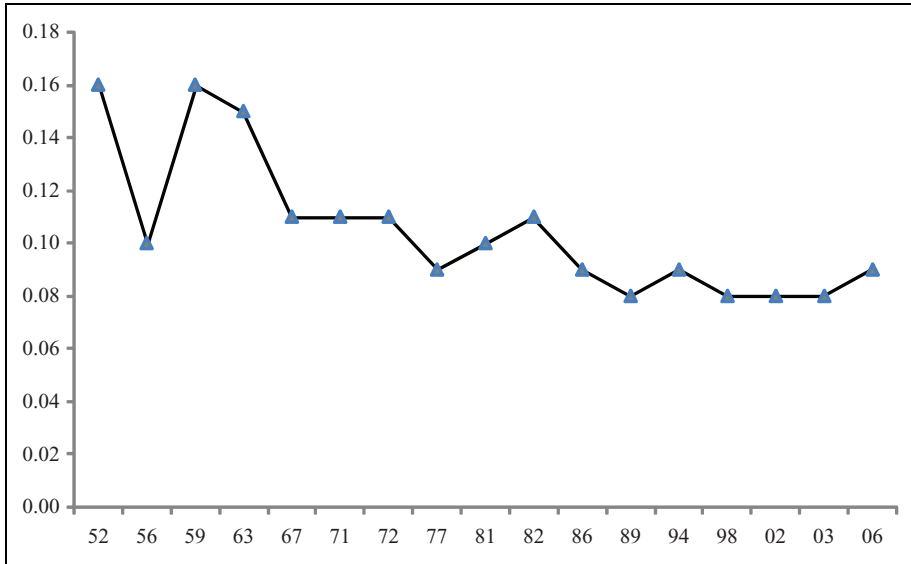


Figure 3. Herfindahl index of policy concentration in annual Queen speeches, 1952–2006.

0 would indicate that attention was spread evenly across all of the issues. There is a rather marked linear decline in the annual Herfindahl values reported in the figure. More recent governments gave more even-handed attention to a wider array of policy issues. This suggests that the policy agenda in the Netherlands has become much more crowded in recent decades. For our purposes, we expect that this more crowded issue agenda has created opportunities for parties to develop viable issue niches within the minds of otherwise inattentive voters. Thus a decreasing concentration of topics in the speeches indicates increasing issue space size, and so potential agenda slack. However, the dominant pattern of a growing issue agenda crowding is not monotonic. When issue concentration increases, there should be less issue slack for parties to employ in building distinctive identities in the minds of voters. More importantly for our purpose, the tightening or relaxing of the issue agenda constraint should enable us to see if it is the nature of the issue agenda itself that imposes density dependence on the responsiveness of party system density to the usual suspects of district magnitude and social cleavages included in cross-sectional tests of the standard model.

Our model also includes several control variables to address rival explanations, especially those associated with the standard model, of the variation in number of parties that have competed in Dutch elections. The first two control variables address the electoral institutions that lie at the heart of the standard model – changes in electoral institutions. There have been only two significant changes in the electoral structure over this period. In 1956, the electoral threshold for participating in parliament was in effect lowered. The Dutch election law has no explicit threshold per se. Thus all a party needs to do to win a seat in parliament is to secure enough votes for a single seat. Therefore, the expansion of the Tweede Kamer from 100 to 150 seats, which was part of the 1956 constitutional

revision, represented in practice a change in the electoral threshold. Since 1956, a party only needs 0.67 percent instead of 1.00 percent of the vote to obtain a single seat. A dummy variable scored 1 after 1956 was added to the model to account for this change in electoral legislation. Second, the *Kieswet* – or election law – was changed in 1994, making it considerably more difficult for new parties to register for elections, something that has been found in cross-national analysis to influence party entrance (Tavits, 2006). A dummy variable scored 1 after 1994 was added to account for this change.

The second set of variables in the standard model address social cleavages, usually measured by religious, ethnic, or language fractionalization. We have already discussed one way in which we distinguish these from issues, highlighting our focus on a single case over time as a means to control for persistent cleavages, the nature of the issues in our measure in distinction to the kinds of divisions addressed in the literature on cleavages, and the volatility of attention to these issues in distinction to the presumed persistence of long-standing cleavages. Further, it is not clear that such cleavages should still matter in the Netherlands, even if we could draw a clear link between them and the kinds of issues in our measure of issue crowding. While the religious cleavage between Catholics and Protestants, along with the less clearly defined secular pillar, once unarguably structured much of Dutch politics, the political relevance of that cleavage has diminished to a very considerable degree since the 1960s (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005). More recently, however, the divide between Muslims and others has been of political import. Still, this cleavage was arguably placed on the agenda by Pim Fortuyn only during the 2002 election⁷ (Belanger and Aarts, 2006; Pellikaan et al., 2007), which is near the end of our time series. We believe that, through case selection and the nature of our issue measure, it taps issue agenda diversity, not changes in long-standing cleavages. Still, with a cautious philosophy that wearing suspenders and a belt is always safer than relying on only one or the other, we also included in the estimating models additional controls for the religious based cleavages. Indeed, we measured election year social fractionalization with several measures of religious-based cleavages.⁸ All produce essentially the same (null) results. In the empirical results reported here, we opted for the simplest fractionalization measure with the longest temporal consistency across the post-war period.⁹

A third set of control variables address government and coalition stability. We expect that periods of government or coalition instability will encourage new parties to join the electoral fray. Simply put, governments and coalitions that are stable for long periods may discourage entrepreneurs from taking a chance on new parties. In contrast, instability offers opportunities (Tavits, 2007). Government stability is operationalized as the number of new cabinets that were formed during the last five years preceding an election. The higher the value, the more frequently new cabinets have been installed by the Queen due to an election or a cabinet crisis. Coalition stability is similarly measured, but assesses the frequency of changes in the party composition of the governing coalition over the last five years. Thus it does not count those cases in which the same coalition was re-installed after an election or a cabinet crisis.

With 17 election observations, the time series model was estimated using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression after determining that there was little evidence of serial correlation.¹⁰ In terms of collinearity, there was some evidence that the Queen's speech

Table 1. OLS analysis of number of parties competing in elections, 1952–2006.

Independent variable	Dependent variable: no. of parties competing in election			
Size of policy agenda	Queen speech	–168.303 **	—	–118.824 **
	Herfindahl index	(–2.267)		(–2.514)
Social cleavages	Religion	–88.764	82.244	—
	fractionalization	(–0.471)	(0.406)	
Electoral institutions	Electoral threshold	–7.239	3.487	—
		(–0.884)	(0.445)	
	Party application rules	–4.055	1.886	—
Political stability		(–1.024)	(0.542)	
	Government stability	–5.716	–2.688	—
		(–1.560)	(0.672)	
Coalition stability		4.517	3.641	—
		(1.572)	(1.090)	
Constant		114.859	–40.843	32.646
R-square		0.516	0.368	0.283
N		17	17	17

Note: Figures in parentheses are t-values.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < .001$, two tailed tests.

agenda variable was modestly related to the party application rules dummy ($r = -0.535$). Successive exclusion of variables, however, did not alter the results. And as might be expected, there is a correlation of 0.670 between government and coalition stability. Again, the coefficients generated by the model did not change in any substantive manner when only one or the other was included in the specification.

The results reported in the first column of Table 1 indicate that issue density, as measured by the Herfindahl index of the proportions of attention paid to 19 broad issues, is strongly related to the number of political parties competing in the 17 post-war elections we examine. Given the inverse coding of the Herfindahl index, the negative sign of the estimate indicates that, as expected, numbers of parties increase with issue agenda size. Further, none of the control variables generated estimates that were discernibly different from zero. Neither the changes in the electoral rules undertaken over this period nor religious fractionalization, the variables cited in the standard model, influenced the number of parties competing during the post-war election. Nor does government/cabinet stability seem to matter. We were not surprised by these null results given that, with an M of 150 and little sustained change in the values of the control variables, it seemed unlikely that the control variables would matter.

Nevertheless, we should not over-interpret their lack of significance. As seen in column two of Table 1, while none of the control variables produced statistically-discernible estimates when the agenda variable was excluded from the model, the R-square value of 0.268 is not close to zero. Further, as seen in column three, inclusion of *only* the agenda variable in the model, while still producing a significant and negative estimate, produces an R-square value (0.368) that is more than half of that reported for the full model (0.516). So it seems likely that the control variables are

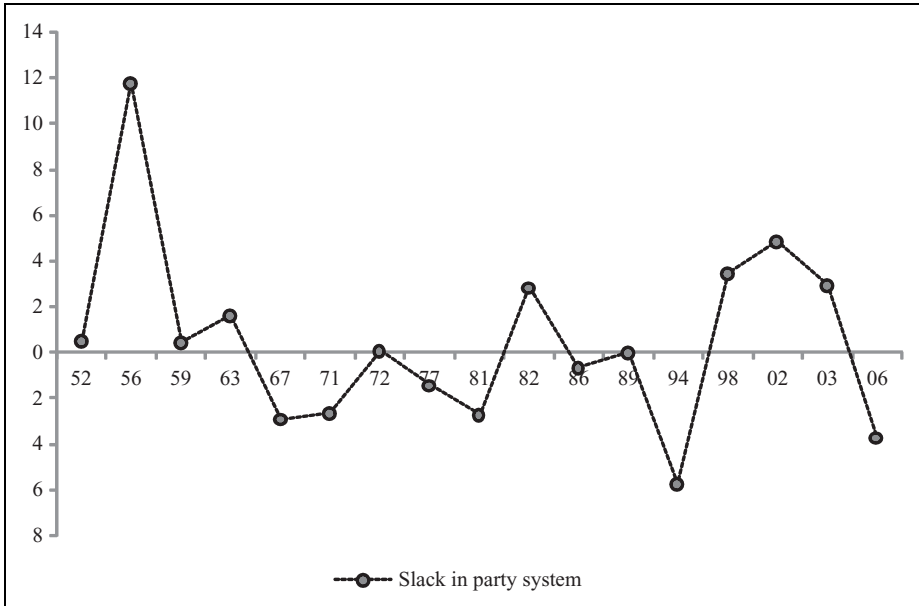


Figure 4. Estimated issue party slack, 1952–2004.

adding something to the model even if we cannot identify precisely which is playing a meaningful role. Simply put, with only 17 cases, even modest levels of collinearity are likely precluding us disentangling the effects of the control variables. For this reason, we use the results from the full model reported in column one of Table 1 to estimate how policy agenda size influences the density of the party system. But whatever else is unclear in these results, we have strong support for our expectation that issues and the way parties use them are important. Or rather, we think that it is *slack* in the issue agenda space that either restrains or provides the niche space needed to sustain the formation of new parties, making it more or less difficult for established parties to maintain a viable identity in the face of voter inattention and indifference. Our final test, then, must examine how issue agenda slack influences the birth and deaths of parties. Our key independent variable is policy agenda slack, the values of which are simply the residuals from the model reported in Table 1. That is, Figure 2, in which we earlier reported (the darker line) the actual number parties competing in each of the post-war elections, also reports using a lighter line the predicted number of parties competing in these elections based on the estimates of the first model reported in Table 1. The residuals or differences between the actual and predicted values are reported in Figure 4, where positive values indicate that there were fewer political parties competing than would be expected given the volume of the issue agenda alone or that there was slack in the system available to sustain more parties. Negative values indicate that, given the size of the policy agenda, there remains little room for more parties and that existing parties may face difficulties sustaining a viable electoral niche.

Event history analysis of party births and deaths

We now have all of the elements needed to test our hypotheses that political party births and deaths are associated with changes in the slack available in the issue agenda-party space using event history analysis (EHA). Our dependent variables are party birth or formation and party death or disbanding.¹¹ For each political party the election in which it first competed provides our indicator of party birth. The election after the last election in which it competed serves as our marker of party death. Importantly, although there are relatively few mergers in our data, they require special attention. We treat mergers as births of new organizations and the disbanding of their independent predecessors as party deaths. This should pose no problem for party deaths. As noted earlier, the best example of a merger is provided by the CDA. Given the fact that the new party formed largely under the constraint of a rapid dissolution of the traditional denominational structure of Dutch political and social life in the 1960s, the process that led to the disappearance of the component parties is consistent with our emphasis on insufficient policy agenda slack with which to sustain a viable electoral identity. Treating the merged CDA as a party birth is more problematic, however, since the model suggests that births result from slack in the policy agenda space, not through forced marriages among weakened party organizations. Still, there are few such mergers, and their inclusion – given the underlying logic of the hypothesis – should militate against our finding support for it rather than making it easier.

The key independent variable of interest in the EHA models of party births and deaths is the residual for the predicted number of parties in the prior election, as estimated with the model presented in Table 1 and reported in Figure 4. We hypothesize that, when the number of parties in the preceding election is less than we have predicted, other parties will have more issue agenda space in which to form and, therefore, will have an *increased* hazard of formation. When the number of parties in the prior election is fewer than predicted given the issue space available, parties will not have to struggle so hard to compete in a crowded issue environment and will have, therefore, a *decreased* hazard of disbanding.

The issue slack residual variable is lagged from the prior election. In addition, the specifications of both the birth and death models include several control variables. The first is the re-centred square of the lagged residual variable which is included to test for non-linear effects of the slack variable. The second is the lagged value of the actual number of political parties competing in an election which is included to test whether simply having more (or fewer) parties competing in the last election, irrespective of the issue space available, may lead political entrepreneurs to suspend (or accelerate) efforts to form a new party or leaders of older parties to consider (or put off the table) disbanding it. A third control included in the model of political party deaths is the prior success of the party as measured by the proportion of seats in the Tweede Kamer it won in the last election. Parties with greater numbers of seats should have some protection from disbanding due to loss of all seats arising from simple random fluctuations in support (Pimm et al., 1988; Raup, 1991).

We employ a simple Cox proportional hazards model with results presented as hazard ratios. We begin observation in 1952, the first year for which we have residual values

Table 2. Hazard of party births and deaths predicted by lagged residual values.

Independent variable	Party births		Party deaths	
	Hazard ratio	Coefficients	Hazard ratio	Coefficients
Lagged residuals for predicted Number of parties	1.830***	0.606	0.910**	-0.092
Lagged residuals for predicted Number of parties squared	0.24	0.131	0.02	0.990**
Lagged number of parties	0.910***	-0.096	0.032	-0.015
Lagged number of parties squared	0.02	0.025	0.01	0.006
Lagged number of parties squared	0.830***	-0.19	1.01	0.009
Lagged number of parties squared	0.04	0.045	0.02	0.021
Lagged seats won in last election	—	—	0.5	-0.695
			0.28	0.56
Wald χ^2	$\chi^2 (df3) = 24.86, p = 0.000$		$\chi^2 (df4) = 22.13, p = 0.000$	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

from our earlier model. Parties are at risk of birth from that date until 2006, the last date of our predicted values of the residual from the model reported in Table 1. Parties are at risk of death beginning with the date of the election in which they first competed.

As seen in Table 2, our hypotheses about the influence of the lagged density of the party system relative to available issue agenda space on party births and deaths are confirmed. The first two columns report the results for party births. The positive and highly significant value (1.830, $p < 0.001$) for the lagged residual of the predicted number of parties indicates that, when the number of political parties competing in the last election is fewer than expected given available agenda space, the hazard of party births increases. The corresponding basic coefficient is 0.606, which indicates that a one unit increase in the residual increases the hazard of party births by 83 percent. The hazard ratio for the squared version of the lagged value of the predicted number of parties relative to available agenda space is less than 1.00 (0.910), which indicates that the powerfully positive nominal effect diminishes somewhat – 0.09 percent (1.00 – 0.910) – for each one unit change in the standardized value of the residual or slack variable. Thus, while apparent agenda space encourages party births, it does not do so in a simple linear manner. It seems that a little breathing room in the policy agenda space quickly encourages new parties to form. But as the pool is drained of new party aspirants, the rate of new party formation then weakens somewhat. And last in terms of political party births, the simple number of parties competing in the last election matters. The hazard ratio of 0.830 indicates that simply having more parties competing in the prior election, irrespective of the relationship between their numbers and available issue space, tends to suppress party formation.¹²

Conversely, as seen in the last two columns of the table, when the number of parties in a prior election is greater than predicted, and the party system is dense relative to the issue agenda, parties have a greater hazard of disbanding. With a hazard ratio of 0.910 ($p < 0.01$) or less than 1.000, having fewer parties than is predicted by the size of the issue agenda leads to a reduced risk, or less likelihood, of party death or

disbanding. The chance of a party failing declines by 0.09 percent ($1.000 - 0.910$) for each one unit change in the standardized value of the residual variable. The hazard ratio for the squared value of the issue residual variable (0.990) indicates that this effect, too, is curvilinear, if only modestly so. In this case, however, both hazard ratios are less than 1, suggesting that the risk of party failure increases at an even more rapid rate – an additional 0.01 percent ($1.00 - 0.990$) for each standardized unit change in the squared slack variable – as slack disappears in the issue space. Thus it seems that, while party births are rather readily encouraged, the new parties then become hard to kill off. Neither of the control variables in the party deaths model generated discernible estimates. Simply having more (or fewer) parties competing in the last election did not influence the risk of party death, nor did having won more seats in Parliament in the last election seem to provide any special protection against failure.

Conclusion

In their re-analysis of the data supporting the standard model of party system density using a polynomial model, Lowery et al. (2010) found not one party system, but four. These sketched a sigmoid response function of party density to district magnitude, the hallmark of an organizational ecology process. Their organization ecology model subsumes – albeit linking them in a more plausible manner and sharply bounding the operation of strategic voting – the first three of those systems: Duverger's (1954) world of single-member districts, Cox's (1997) world of low M where party numbers are suppressed below what district magnitude alone would suggest, and Lijphart's (1990) world of the generalized $M+1$ rule in which only M matters for systems with M levels of 5 to 15. But neither model could account for the density dependence or lack of responsiveness to M of cases with an M of 15 or more. In this analysis, we developed a model based upon five plausible assumptions about voters, parties, and the issue agenda to explain such cases. We tested the model with data from the hard case of the Netherlands, finding strong support for it. Changes in the slack in the issue agenda-party system have a significant impact on the vital rates – births and deaths – of political parties in the Netherlands.

This suggests that it is the issue agenda itself, and the space it provides parties to build independent identities, that limits the density of the party system when district magnitude rises above 15 or so. In short, we have found strong support for a theoretically-grounded account of the fourth world of party systems noted by Lowery et al. (2010). In combination with prior results re-examining cross-sectional tests of the standard model bearing on the other party system worlds (Lowery et al., 2010), we believe that the organizational ecology interpretation can unite them into a single, coherent account of the density of party systems. Importantly, this interpretation does not so much replace the standard model as subsuming it. The population ecology model allows us to both better interpret earlier results and to now go beyond them to account for cases it could not except by the measurement slight-of-hand of logging.

Still, while the findings presented here contribute to a better understanding of how the density of party systems is determined more generally, does agenda size matter for less extreme cases than those with a single national district? We examined the extreme case

of the Netherlands, after all, because it is a hard case for the standard model, not because it was in any sense typical. But our results are relevant for more than only the extreme cases of Israel and the Netherlands. Lowery et al. (2010) found that density dependence in the responsiveness of party density to changes in district magnitude sets in when M rises to 15 or so, including about 20 percent of the cases examined in prior cross-sectional tests of the standard model. But do our findings have implications for the other 80 percent of cases?

We believe that they do in two ways. The first is another set of cases that the standard model has trouble accounting for (Cox, 1997: 159): new political systems, such as those found in eastern and central Europe. In such systems, the issue agenda was typically extraordinarily complex and party identities are typically weak (Tavits, 2006, 2007, 2008). Accordingly, such systems might be expected to support larger numbers of parties than they might otherwise do given the $M+1$ rule. The second and broader set of cases are the stable democracies in which the constraint of M suppresses the number of parties below the level that might survive based on available issue agenda space alone. That useful issue agenda space does not disappear, however, and will surely attract the attention of party entrepreneurs as they seek the attention of inattentive voters. Thus we think it likely that the slack in the policy or issue agenda will still have a considerable impact on politics even in party systems in which M more clearly determines how many parties can survive, but most likely by engendering multiple factions *within* parties.

As a final thought experiment, then, we can reconsider the opposite extreme of party density – the one party systems of the Solid South studied by V. O. Key in *Southern Politics* (1949). In accounting for variations in party factionalism found in the southern states, Key highlighted their differences in economic and social heterogeneity. Arkansas produced no discernible factions and a quiet, limited policy agenda because of few policy disagreements among its homogeneous white voters. The more heterogeneous Florida, in contrast, produced both a more active policy agenda and a complex form of friends-and-neighbours factionalism. In Key's view, social heterogeneity raises new issues, which in turn provides a rich foundation for competing factions. While Canon (1978) has attempted to reinterpret Key's analysis using the kinds of election rule variables cited in the standard model, we think that Key's original analysis based on social and economic heterogeneity and issue agenda complexity is far more plausible. It is certainly consistent with the results presented here. It could well be that changes in levels of policy-issue slack in party systems with low and moderate levels of M are expressed not via influencing party births and deaths, but by influencing party faction births and deaths.

Notes

1. They employed the simple version of the standard model presented by Ordeshook and Shvetsova (1994: 11) – including district magnitude, ethnic heterogeneity, and their interaction – because it is a bit simpler than Cox's, yet produces quite similar results (Cox, 1997: 221). However, they employed Cox's data – 54 national cases (circa 1985) – because they provide us many more observations.

2. Lowery et al. (2010) report that, even with extreme values of 120 and 150, the effective number of parties found in the Netherlands and Israel are estimated with the polynomial model to be about the same as those found in countries with M values greater than 15: Austria, Bolivia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Luxemburg and Portugal.
3. Indeed, we address the issue of cleavages versus issues in the empirical analysis to follow both through case selection and the use of control variables in the models we estimate. As we will see with respect to case selection, we examine a single national system over time rather than cross-sectional analysis of multiple nations at one point in time. If ethnic, language, and/or religious cleavages are of a long-standing nature we will, therefore, effectively control for their influence in our empirical analysis in favour of more short-term issue dynamics. However, as will be seen, we will include controls in the estimating model for the religious cleavage in Dutch politics, the one source of long-standing cleavage that plausibly pertains to Dutch politics.
4. Indeed, we find it rather odd that, as a theory designed to explain the numbers of parties found in political systems parties, organizations play almost no role in the standard model (Schlesinger, 1984: 378). Rather, the standard model provides a theory about the interaction of voter behaviour and electoral institutions with parties being all too often a mere ghostly presence somewhere in the background.
5. They coded all Queen's speeches between 1945 and 2007 at the level of the individual sentence and quasi-sentence. If sentences made reference to more than one topic – enumerative statements – they were coded at the quasi-sentence level. Purely ceremonial statements spoken at the beginning and end of a Queen's speech were not coded by content. They counted these sentences as part of the calculation of the total length of the Queen's speeches. The full dataset consists of 8,772 coded sentences and quasi-sentences, allocated to one of the 19 main topic categories and into a more specific sub-topic category when applicable. Coding proved to be highly reliable, with intercoder reliability scores above 0.90 in all cases and well above that in most cases.
6. For the most part, we believe that there is a direct relationship between issues developing in the real world and government attention to them. However, the relationship could be indirect as well. That is, a new party or even an older opposition party might be emphasizing a new issue because they view it as important. The parties in the government may have no intrinsic interest in the issue, but may still address it as a means of politically pre-empting the competition. In this alternative format, the exogenous influence of reality is a step removed from the endogenous behaviour of the parties in government, but the effect would be the same as we describe here.
7. The precise timing of the injection of this issue is debatable but, in any case, quite late in our time series. For instance, Kriesi and colleagues (2008) and Bale (2003) suggest that the issue was already salient as early as 1994, although there is little evidence that it influenced the party agendas or manifestos until much later.
8. These are all based on Dutch statistical office data, differing only in the way they approach the other religion category. In one measure, the other category is treated similar to the other religious groups as a distinct category. In the second, we removed the other category from our tally, assuming that the other religious groups are very small and inconsequential for major electoral trends. The third uses data for Muslims and Hindus (available since 1972) as a distinct category, and treats the remaining other religious groups as in the first operationalization. The last operationalization is the same as the previous one except that we excluded the

- remaining other religions. The time series of these four fractionalizations measures are extremely highly correlated.
9. We did not examine the interaction of the electoral law changes and social cleavages given the limited degrees of freedom and the fact that neither set of controls produced any evidence of having an independent impact on number of parties when considered nominally.
 10. Given the frequency of party deaths and the typically short life-spans of the involved parties, it seems likely that only first order serial correlation would be a potential problem. But regressing the residuals on their lagged values produced a *t*-value of only 0.03 ($p = 0.974$) and an *R*-square value below 0.01.
 11. Some might argue that number of party births and deaths is not all that interesting. What matters is how large they are and whether they are in government. Clearly, both sets of variables are important, if for different reasons. For purposes of understanding party electoral competition, the first matters a great deal, while the second is important when considering the policy produced by government. For this reason, the extensive literature on party system density (see Cox, 1997) typically looks at both the effective number of parties competing and the effective number of parties in government. At the same time, the two are closely related empirically. Indeed, Lowery et al. (2010) generated essentially identical results when using the two different measures to test their polynomial version of the standard model. Despite this, we would suggest that both of these standard measures based on party fractionalization scores miss the point to some degree by confounding the size of the party – either competing for seats or winning seats – with the number of parties – either competing for or winning seats – when the theories guiding this research are squarely focused on the later. The theories speak to number of parties competing or in parliament, not number adjusted for size. Thus we think that our attention to numbers in the prior section of this paper provides a more direct reflection of the theories underlying this kind of research. And with respect to births and deaths, a party cannot be represented in government if is not yet born or has died. These are critical demographic events in the life of a political party that shape its opportunities to be in government.
 12. Interestingly, this last finding indicates a density effect as yet undetected in the standard organization ecology literature. This standard density dependence interpretation claims that resource competition blocks entry at high densities (Hannan and Carroll, 1992). By softening competition, agenda slack should facilitate entry independently from incumbent party density. The fact that high density combined with agenda slack still attenuates entry indicates an extra density effect. In our context, limited electoral perception might work against density growth: people are attentive to a limited number of party offerings, as they are attentive only to a limited issue agenda.

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