

Integrative and divisive roles of political parties: Party attachment, Ideology and satisfaction with democracy in the Netherlands¹

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ABSTRACT

Political parties can be seen as agents of both integration and division. Attachment to political parties may function as an integrating mechanism by channeling political and ideological polarization away from system-challenging activities towards the regime support and acceptance of the prevailing political (democratic) order. At the same time, parties might also foster extremism and dissatisfaction with democratic performance. This paper examines these possibilities using Dutch Election Studies data. The empirical examination of the relationships between the triangle of ideological extremism, partisanship, and satisfaction with democracy provides mixed support for both interpretations, and emphasizes the double role of partisanship.

KEY WORDS: *Partisanship, ideological extremism, satisfaction with democracy, the Netherlands*

Introduction

The role of political parties in legitimizing regimes and integrating citizens into the democratic political order is often praised (e.g., Schattschneider, 1942, Sartori 1976, Katz & Crotty, 2006) but less often demonstrated.³ If parties have indeed such a role, they must exercise it, among other ways, through the emotional links that exist between parties and citizens (Enyedi & Todosijević, 2009).

Citizens equipped with civic virtues such as political interest, knowledge, participation, sense of efficacy, should, therefore, be more likely to view political parties as legitimate political actors, and feel attached to (some of) them. Positive emotions binding citizens to parties, together with the mentioned civic virtues, should make citizens feel integrated into the political system, and result in the stronger acceptance of and satisfaction with the democratic political order.

Yet, parties are often seen as reflecting the insurmountable social divisions, and accused of promoting or even creating conflict and competition for their own

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³ According to Schattschneider's memorable assertion, "political parties created democracy and ... modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties" (1942, 1).

purpose (cf. Maggiotto and Piereson 1977; Layman and Carsey 2002, Brewer, 2005, Ishiyama, 2009). From this perspective, according to Daalder “Mass parties are accused of being heavily ideologized ‘fighting machines’, seeking to subject both voters and the state to a combination of dogma and elitist self-interest.” (2002, p. 43). Hence, partisanship may equally be expressive of the antagonistic view of the politics, of fundamental ideological disagreements and visceral abhorrence towards one’s political opponents. Provided the right kind of motivation, political parties could easily appear as irreconcilable enemies, rather than representatives of alternative visions in the civic project of advancing the common good. When seen in this perspective, strong partisanship should be accompanied by ideological extremism, and possibly with the skepticism toward democratic order.

In light of the two visions of the role of party attachment, it becomes particularly important to identify the conditions under which partisan attachments develop and to assess their attitudinal consequences. The present paper examines the hypothesis about the mediating role of partisan attachments.²⁵ According to this hypothesis, strong attachment to political parties has a double function concerning the citizens’ relationship to the political system: the integrative and the divisive. On the one side, political parties may help the integration of citizens into the political system. Attachment to political parties channels political and ideological polarization away from system-challenging activities towards the regime support and acceptance of the prevailing political (democratic) order. This view has a considerable history in the literature on party identification, such as Mainwaring and Scully (1994), Huntington (1968), Rose and Mishler (1998), Morlino and Montero (1995), Yanai (1999), Schattschneider (1942).

On the other side, parties could equally be seen as agents of political division and antagonism. In this view (e.g., Budge et al., 1976), parties may also foster ideological extremism, and thereby contribute to the dissatisfaction with democratic performance or even the rejection of the democratic system (Enyedi and Todosijević, 2009).⁴

The present paper presents a detailed study of the relationships between civic virtues, (perceived) political polarization, party attachments, ideological extremism, and satisfaction with democracy, based on the Dutch Parliamentary Elections Study (DPES) series. Data from the 2006 DPES study are used as the model-building data. Data from 2002 and 1998 served to construct the verification models, since these data-sets contain equivalent variables needed to replicate the basic features of the model. Additional DPES studies are used to partially replicate the models, since they contain only subsets of variables from the initial model.

In general, the results indicate that it is possible to detect both the integrative or ‘civic’ dispositions, such as political efficacy and knowledge, and the divisive sentiments, like extreme views on various political issues, highly differentiated feelings towards parties (that is, both love and hate) and the perception of parties as standing far apart, behind the feelings of attachment to political parties.

⁴ The key concept in this paper is party attachment, used interchangeably with partisanship. The use of ‘party identification’ is avoided given the presumed deep socializational roots and immutability of these identifications, which are anyway impossible to determine by the standard party identification survey questions.

Furthermore, the integrative effects of partisanship were visible in its association with the satisfaction with democracy, while the divisive role was revealed by its prediction of ideological extremism.

Theoretical framework and general hypotheses

Most empirical studies, whichever framework formed their basis, come up with similar social profiles of committed party supporters. The accumulated findings suggest that party attachment is related to social integration. Typical partisans tend to be male, old, married, urban dwellers, higher status citizens (e.g., Campbell 1960, Miller and Shanks 1996, Norris 2004, Schmitt and Holmberg 1995). From this perspective, the attachment to a particular party appears as part of the more general phenomenon of integration into the mainstream of the society.

For the present purpose, a different meaning of integration is relevant. From the civic culture perspective (Almond and Verba, 1963), a sense of political integration should be at least as important as the objective indicators of social integration. Citizens who are integrated into the (partisan) liberal democratic regimes, who internalize democratic norms, who follow politics attentively and see a benefit in participating in the political process, are more likely to develop partisan attachments. Belief in the importance of politics and elections, and accurate knowledge of the political process are part of the civic virtues that are supposed to characterize ideal citizens. Hence, regardless of whether party identification/attachment has roots in early socialization, or the need for information short-cuts, it is clear that indicators of civic orientation, or attitudinal predisposition for democratic politics should be predictive of the attachment to political parties.

On the other side, the lack of party attachment can be conceived as a specific form of political alienation. Thus, it could be hypothesized that attitudes such as political interest, knowledge, participation, political efficacy compose a more general, latent dimension that can be termed as the 'civic disposition'. This dimension is, then, expected to be positively associated both with the increased likelihood of the attachment to a political party, and the satisfaction with political regime (in this case democracy). This triangle is here defined as the civic, or 'bright', or integrative aspects of partisanship.

But partisan attachments can also be products of less civic and more divisive attitudes (Budge et al., 1976). Engagement in politics is often rooted in dissatisfaction and in the rejection of certain ideological-political alternatives. Not only that political parties could be seen as being 'invented' in order to manage real or potential social and political conflict, they are often accused of creating conflict for their own power-seeking purposes. Therefore one could expect a polarized view of politics ('subjective polarization') behind partisanship as well. People who see large ideological differences between parties and who give discriminating emotional responses to them (that is, they like some and hate others) are likely to have stronger partisan attachments. Thus, the cognitive aspect of the polarized view of politics could be represented by the perception of large differences between parties in their stands on specific political issues, as well as on more general ideological dimensions (e.g., left-right). The affective aspects can be represented by differences in the affects that parties elicit. Affective polarization

would be low for respondents whose degree of liking or disliking is uniform across different parties, but high for those who intensively like some parties, and dislike others.

This argument clearly follows from the social identity perspective. According to the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981, Tajfel and Turner 1986, Greene, 2002), perception of intergroup differences and differential affective relationship to them should be followed by stronger identification with the in-group (in this case party attachment), and further, with the stronger rejection of the out-group (ideological extremism).⁵

Identification with the in-group (and parties are certainly central foci of group identification in the political sphere), is on the one side based on the perception of group differences and boundaries. On the other side, group identification itself has certain perceptual consequences, such as perception of in-group homogeneity, differentiation from the out-group, and emphasis on group boundaries. Most importantly, group identification is accompanied by differential treatment of the in- and out-group, i.e., more favorable treatment if in-group, and discriminatory attitude towards out-groups. In the political field, this means increased rejection of the competing parties, and possibly political extremism.

From this approach, one could also derive an implication of recursive relationships. In this case, it could mean a reversed causal direction – from identification to perception of group differences. In fact, such recursive relationship may be responsible for the stability of both party identifications and political perceptions. The present model, however, remains focused on unidirectional relationships for two main reasons. First, statistical estimates of recursive models are still unreliable (Kline, 2011). Second, the paper's focus is on the double role of party attachments, which implies unidirectional relationships. The existence of a recursive relationship between identification and perceptions of group differences would not contradict the current model - the path from perceptions to identifications would remain unchallenged.

In sum, somewhat disparate social science traditions suggest that partisanship can have not only integrative (civic) and divisive (adversarial) *sources*, but also the corresponding *consequences*. Partisanship, motivated by both civic mindedness and perception of political polarization, may lead to the regime support and acceptance of the democratic order, but may also foster ideological extremism. Therefore, party attachment appears to be as much a force of division as of integration.

The goal of the present analyses is to test the integrative and divisive hypotheses about the function of partisanship on the basis of Dutch Parliamentary Election Study data. Exploratory research on the hypothesis about the double role of partisanship, conducted in a comparative context (Enyedi & Todosijević, 2009), showed that identification with parties indeed performs both the integrative and divisive functions. The integrative role, however, proved stronger in the established

⁵ Psychological experiments showed that group identification, and consequent differential treatment of out-groups, can develop almost instantaneously. No extended socialization experiences are necessary and strong emotional attachments could develop also for new political parties.

democracies compared to the East European countries, where the adversarial effects of party identification appeared stronger.

Despite the merits of the comparative approach, detailed studies of specific cases are needed for several reasons. First, comparative data rarely contain sufficient variables for specifying various aspects of theoretical models. Second, the role of a specific political context often remains in the background in the analyses of aggregated comparative data. The DPES data set contains variables sufficient for adequate and reliable operationalization of various aspects of the model. For instance, the civic disposition is based on 6 manifest variables, which ensures comprehensive and reliable measurement. In addition, equivalent or comparable sets of variables appear in connection with more than a single election. Thus, while the initial model is developed on the basis of the 2006 DPES data, the model is verified using the election studies from 2002, and 1998. This is important in order to examine which elements of the model represent more stable tendencies, and which may be specific for a particular time or political context.

Notes on the Dutch political context

Taking a longitudinal perspective is important because of varying degrees of political polarization over time. The contrast between the 1998 and 2002/3 elections is particularly sharp. The 1998 elections secured another term for the so-called 'purple coalition'. This coalition, first established in 1994, included the left-wing PvdA and right-liberal VVD (plus D66), but for the first time circumventing the Christian democrats (CDA), who were part of the ruling coalition ever since the introduction of general suffrage in 1918 (Irwin, 1999). The political climate around the 1998 election was generally described as de-politicized, de-polarized, without major political problems and tensions (Irwin, 1999). Although the 1994 election has been described as "the most dramatic election of the century" (Irwin, 1995, p. 72), the all-time title in terms of volatility and general dramatic effect, goes to the 2002 election (Irwin and Holsteyn, 2004). This election was characterized by an extreme level of volatility, but also by a general dissatisfaction with the political system (despite the voters being "reasonably satisfied with government's performance in economic affairs", Irwin and Holsteyn, 2004, p. 553). The 2006 election was less dramatic than the 2002-3 elections, but also far from the tranquility of 1998 (Bélanger and Aarts, 2006). Amidst the good economy, political confrontations revolved around personal rivalries, and immigration and crime issues. However, "the 2006 election revealed increasing polarization over the post-World War II period" (Bélanger and Aarts, 2006, p. 836), meaning the increasing support for parties at the extremes of the left-right dimension. These variations in the intensity of polarization and competitiveness of the elections provide a strong test of the robustness of the model to the changes in political context while keeping the institutional and cultural features constant.

It has been argued that party identification is a problematic concept for multi-party systems, because identifications were found to be unstable and hardly discernible from the vote (Thomassen 1976), and that identifications are often multiple (van der Eijk and Niemöller 1986). However, recent evidence suggests that partisanship is strong among the Dutch public, though not necessarily conceptualized and measured according to the Michigan school (Thomassen and Rosema, 2009), and

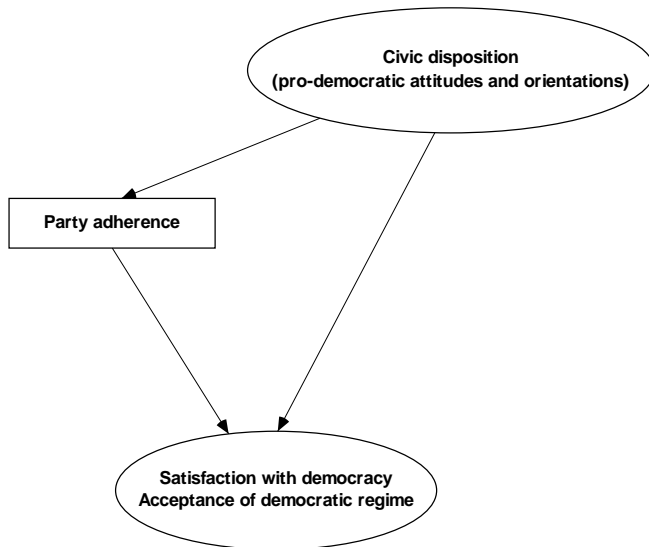
that multiple identifications are not that prevalent in the Netherlands as initially believed (Schmitt, 2009). More than being merely suitable for the present research, I would argue that the Dutch political system itself actually represents a particularly appropriate background for the study of the interplay between ideological extremism, partisanship, and satisfaction. Although party identifications may be stronger and easier to study in two-party systems, studying the effects of partisanship on political extremism in such systems would be problematic, given the limited possibility to form and express preferences for political extremes. A fragmented system, with a mixture of stable and volatile elements (e.g., old and new political parties) that covers a broad political spectrum, provides ideal ground for the analysis of the integrative and divisive roles of partisanship. In any case, in order to avoid the controversies about the existence of party identification (in the Michigan school sense) in the Netherlands, I use 'party attachment' to label the key variable. The advantage of it is also that it can be used as a quasi-continuous variable, representing different degrees of attachment. The classical party identification operationalization (artificially) separates direction (which party) and strength of identification.

The basic elements of the models

The integrative and divisive models are first presented separately. In the next step they are brought together in the combined model, which allows the examination of the consequences of different roots of partisanship.

The integrative model specifies basically a triangular relationship between the civic disposition, which influences partisanship directly, and satisfaction with democracy both directly and indirectly via partisanship. This model operationalizes the theoretical argument which states that civic disposition, or integration into the political system increases the likelihood of finding a political party that represents one's views, and in turn, it encourages further acceptance and approval of the political regime (democracy). The integrative model is schematically presented in Figure 1.

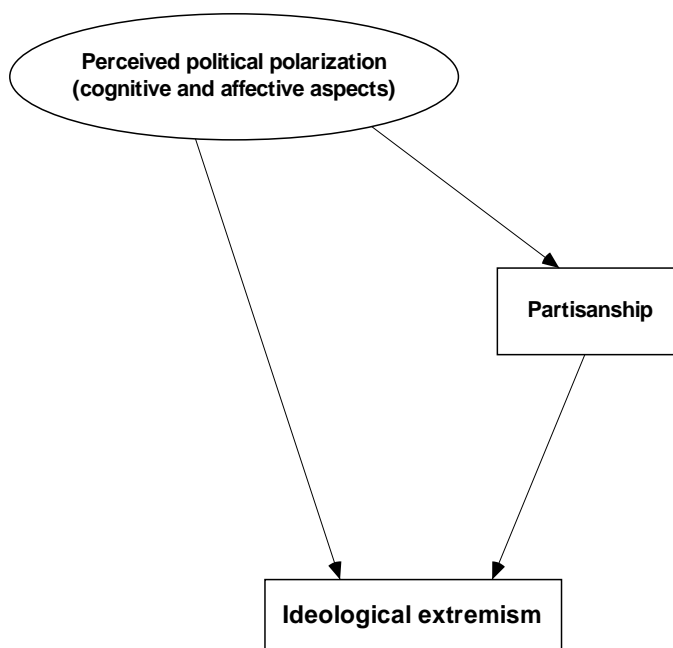
Figure 1 The integrative model of political partisanship



Source: Author's calculations based on DPES data (DANS Dataset number: P1816; see Aarts & Todosijević 2009; Todosijević et al. 2010).

The divisive model specifies that perceived political polarization, in the first step, leads to stronger attachment to political parties. Perception of no difference between parties would make the attachments irrelevant. Perceived polarization, in this model, leads to taking more extreme political positions (behavioral aspect) directly, but also indirectly via partisanship would, which in turn, leads to the increased ideological extremism, but also to satisfaction with regime. The divisive model is schematically presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2 The divisive model of political partisanship



Source: Author's calculations based on DPES data (DANS Dataset number: P1816; see Aarts & Todosijević 2009; Todosijević et al. 2010).

Implications of the divisive model for the satisfaction with democratic regime are complex. First, party attachment should work the same way as in the case of the integrative model: the inability to find a party representative of one's views should lead to dissatisfaction. In this case, however, partisanship reveals its special function of converting (some of) the negative aspects of the perceived polarization into the democratic satisfaction. On the other side, extremism, which is itself influenced by partisanship, is likely to reduce the satisfaction for several reasons. The political system may be seen as representing the status quo, and one of the main reasons for being ideologically extreme is to change the status quo. Furthermore, the ideologically strongly opined may be dissatisfied with the system because it treats their ideological opponents as legitimate political actors.

In any case, it is clear that the relationship between partisanship and democratic satisfaction is not necessarily simple and uncontroversial as the integrative model would imply. In order to fully understand the involved relationships, it is necessary to examine the combined model of partisanship.

Finally, a note on methodological caution is in order. The language of 'causal modeling' and 'path analysis', used throughout the article, suggests claims of establishing the 'true' causal relationships. However, establishing causal relationship in cross-sectional survey research is still a complex and controversial issue (e.g., Holland, 1986, Pearl, 2003, 2000). In the present case, 'causality' and 'paths' are treated in technical sense, as is the usual standard when the methods of structural equation modeling are applied. In such cases, claims of causality rest on theoretical grounds which more or less support the operationalization and structural ordering of the included concepts and variables (e.g., Marcoulides and Schumacker, 2013).

Method

Data

The analysis is based on the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES)⁶ data. DPES studies are based on face to face interviews using probability samples of Dutch population, typically conducted in at least two waves – before and after parliamentary elections. The newly created cumulative data set, with studies from 1971 to 2006, is freely accessible through the DANS archive.⁷

Data from the 2006 DPES study are used for the model-building. Data from 2002 and 1998 served to construct the verification models, since these data-sets contain equivalent variables needed to replicate the basic features of the model.

⁶ For more details, see <http://dpes.nl/>.

⁷ Data Archiving and Networked Services - <http://www.dans.knaw.nl/>. For more details about the data-set and variables used, see Todosijević, Aarts and Kaap, 2010.

Measures

Civic disposition, or attitudes that express a favorable orientation towards participation in democratic politics, is operationalized as a latent variable based on the following indicators: a) Political cynicism; b) Political interest; c) External political efficacy; d) Internal political efficacy; e) Political knowledge f) Political participation.

Each of the measures is itself based on multi-item operationalizations of the relevant constructs. The *Appendix* shows the details about the involved items.

Political polarization is a latent variable based on three measures of perception of the political world, which includes both cognitive and affective aspects:

a) *Affective polarization* - Standard deviation of 'sympathy' scores for different political parties. A higher score indicates larger differences in affective reactions to political parties.

b) *Issue extremism* - Average of squared deviation of respondent's self-placement from the neutral point on various issues, such as crime policy, euthanasia, reduction of income differences. A higher score indicates more pronounced views on different political matters.

c) *Perceived ideological polarization* - Standard deviation of respondent's placements of different parties on the Left-Right scale. A higher score means that parties are perceived as being ideologically diverse. Low scores mean that most parties are seen as similar to each other.

It is important to note that this is an individual-level variable, which reflects the degree to which an individual perceives the political world as ideologically polarized and reacts to it in emotionally engaged way. This is different from polarization as a political system variable.

Ideological extremism is defined as the squared distance from the neutral point on the Left-Right self-placement scale.

Partisanship or party attachment is a pre-defined variable in the DPES data which combines answers to a set of questions about partisanship. First, a respondent is asked if she is an adherent to a party. Those who answer 'yes' are asked about the degree of adherence (three levels). Those who answered 'no' to the first question are asked if there is a party they are more attracted to any party than to others. Respondents can answer 'I don't know' to these questions as well. The combination of these questions gives the composite variable with 8 degrees of partisanship, as shown in Table 1.⁸

⁸ Due to the coding rules, the variable is unevenly distributed across different categories. However, no substantive differences occur if the variable is recoded to fewer points with a more even distribution.

Table 1 Distribution of the partisanship variable in the DPES studies

Response category	Percent of respondents		
	1998 data	2002 data	2006 data
0 'Neither adherent nor attracted'	28.14	18.13	30.52
1 'No adherent, DK attracted'	.05	.95	.27
2 'No adherent, attracted'	43.77	41.20	38.53
3 'DK adherent, attracted'			.23
4 'Adherent, not convinced'	7.94	8.70	7.86
5 'Adherent, DK convinced'		.05	.23
6 'Convinced adherent'	16.55	25.29	18.58
7 'Very convinced adherent'	3.56	5.67	3.78
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on DPES data (DANS Dataset number: P1816; see Aarts & Todosijević 2009; Todosijević et al. 2010).

Satisfaction with democracy, or acceptance of the democratic regime, is a latent variable defined by two manifest variables:

- d) Government policy satisfaction score. This is a multi-item measure, indicating a more specific attitude towards the functioning of government in the country.
- e) Satisfaction with democracy in the Netherlands. This item is supposed to capture a more general orientation towards the democratic system in the Netherlands.

Results

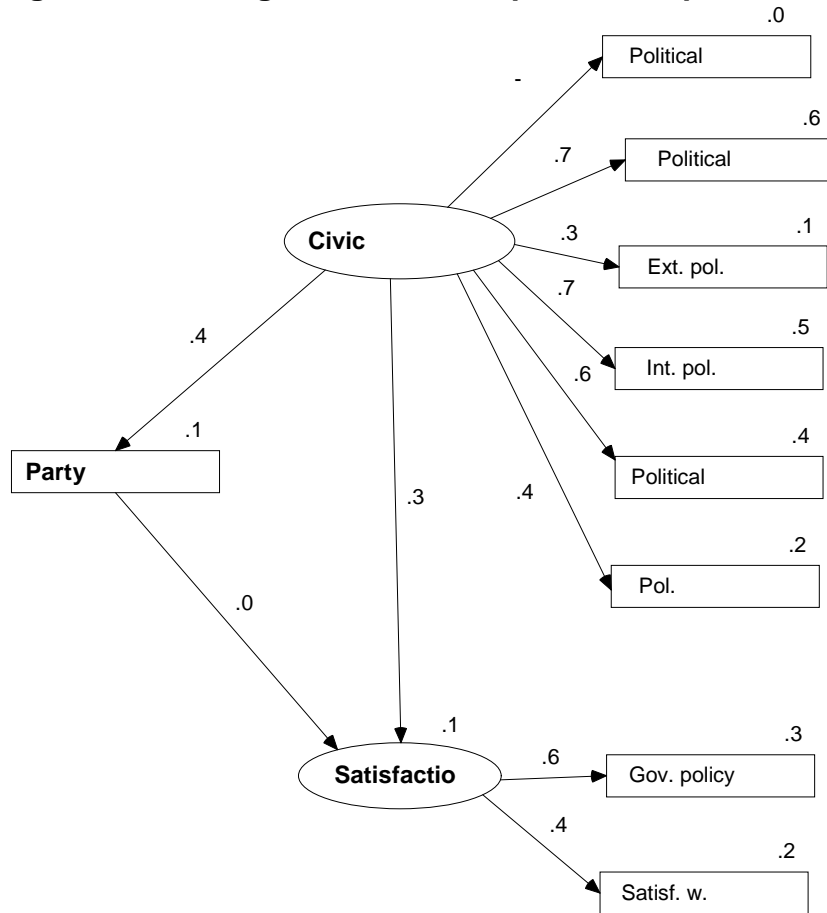
Structural equation analyses were performed using the AMOS software. First, all possible causal paths were included in these non-recursive models, and then the statistically insignificant paths were eliminated. Although the overall fit of the model, as indicated by the chi-square, is generally less than perfect, RMSEA indicators are quite satisfactory for most of the presented models.⁹

Beneficial aspects of partisanship, 2006

Findings from the 2006 DPES study confirm the basic elements of the integrative model. The civic disposition shows positive effects on satisfaction with democratic regime, both directly, and indirectly, via party attachment. The connection between the civic disposition and partisanship is rather strong (.39), while the influence of partisanship onto satisfaction is weaker (.09), though highly statistically significant.

⁹ RMSEA values below .08 indicate acceptable fit and below .05 indicate close fit (Kline, 2005). The fit of the models could be improved by including some additional covariance and path coefficients, but these would be lacking substantive rationale. All statistics presented here were estimated with the maximum likelihood method based on the covariance matrix.

Figure 3 The integrative model of partisanship, 2006



Chi-square = 5831.171 (104p=.00)

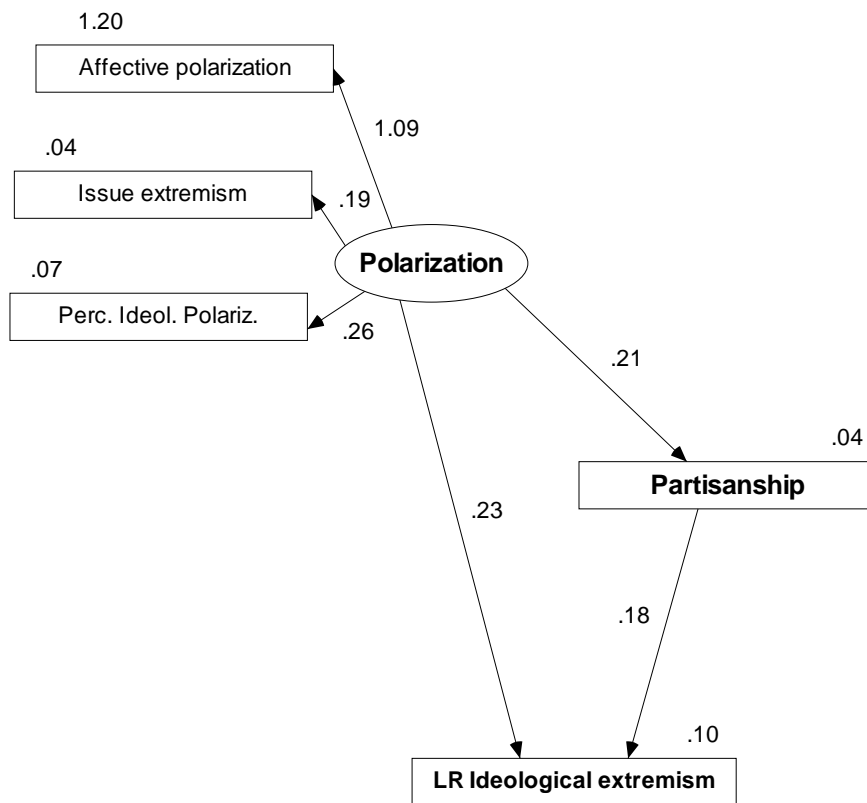
RMSEA=.06
Standardized

Source: Author's calculations based on DPES data (DANS Dataset number: P1816; see Aarts & Todosijević 2009; Todosijević et al. 2010).

The divisive aspects of partisanship, 2006

The basic specification of the divisive model is represented by the polarization-partisanship-extremism triangle, as in Figure 4. The results show that, indeed, perceived political polarization leads to stronger party attachment, and to taking more extreme ideological positions. Partisanship, furthermore, completes the indirect path by the positive association with extremism. The data, therefore, support the basic version of the divisive model as well.

Figure 4 The divisive model of partisanship, 2006

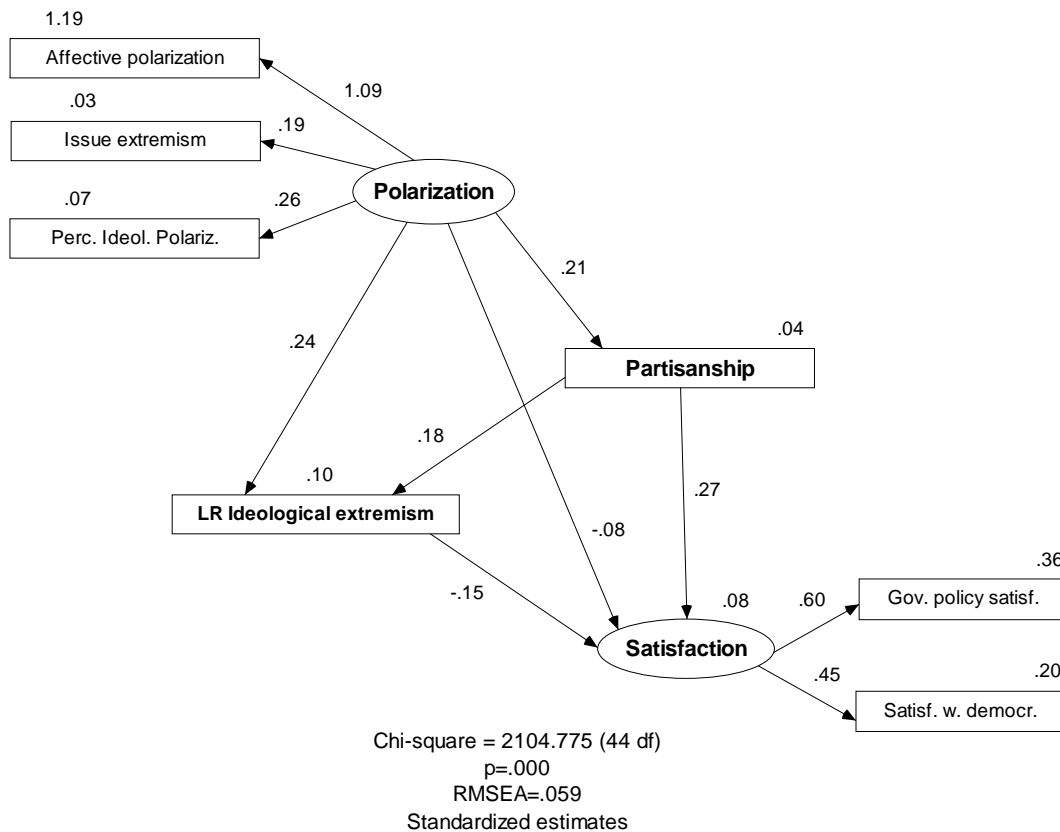


Chi-square = 1329.661 (20 df)
 p=.000
 RMSEA=.070
 Standardized estimates

Source: Author's calculations based on DPES data (DANS Dataset number: P1816; see Aarts & Todosijević 2009; Todosijević et al. 2010).

Figure 5 presents a more complex view of the divisive model. This model looks also at the way the initial model relates to the satisfaction with the democratic regime. The findings accentuate the complexity of the role of partisanship. On the one side, it increases ideological extremism, which then decreases satisfaction. But, on the other side, party attachment increases satisfaction directly. Thus, it appears that potentially negative implications of the strongly polarized views of politics are ameliorated if citizens are able to find parties that they could associate with. However, partisanship can also make one's views more extreme and therefore result in the increased dissatisfaction. Perceived polarization also shows a direct negative effect onto satisfaction (.08).

Figure 5 Expanded version of the divisive model of partisanship, 2006

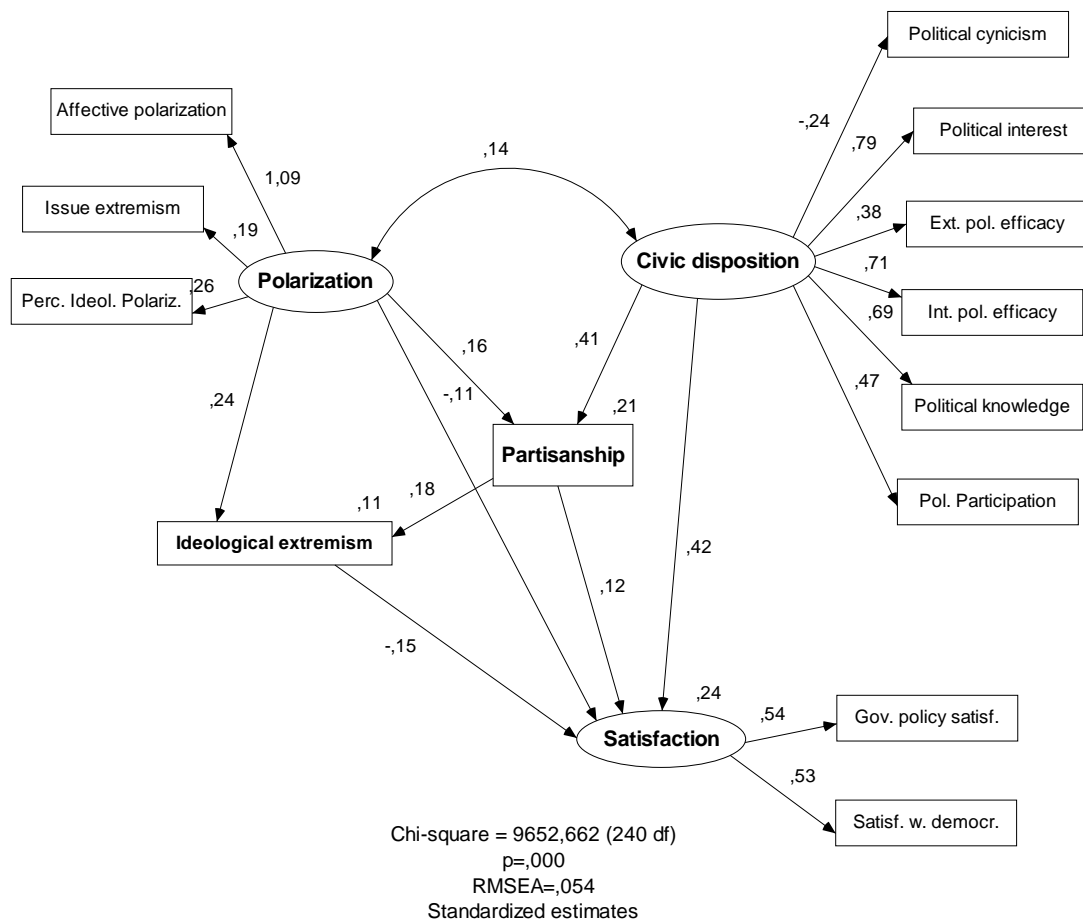


Source: Author's calculations based on DPES data (DANS Dataset number: P1816; see Aarts & Todosijević 2009; Todosijević et al. 2010).

The combined model of partisanship, 2006

The combined model of partisanship outlines the complex relationships between the analyzed constructs. Party attachment appears rooted both in civic dispositions, and in the polarized view of politics. Its effects seem to be equally divided. On the one side, partisanship increases satisfaction, but on the other, it increases taking more extreme ideological positions, which in turn increases dissatisfaction. Thus, the combined model underlines the complexity of the involved relationships, in particular the double role of partisanship.

Figure 6 The combined model of partisanship, 2006



Source: Author's calculations based on DPES data (DANS Dataset number: P1816; see Aarts & Todosijević 2009; Todosijević et al. 2010).

The results for the combined model confirm the initial theoretical expectations about the different roots and consequences of partisanship. First, partisanship is strongly influenced by the civic disposition, and it mediates part of this dispositional influence onto the satisfaction with democracy. The integrative aspect of partisanship is completed by the ability of partisanship to convert some of the potentially negative influence of the perceived polarization into satisfaction. On the other side, partisanship is also instrumental in fostering ideological extremism. Strong party attachments lead to more extreme ideological positions, which in turn are followed by dissatisfaction. Thus, party attachment cannot be seen simply as integrative or divisive, neither normatively nor empirically. It obviously has a double function, with roots both in perceived division and in civic culture, and consequences in feelings of political integration and satisfaction, and extremism and dissatisfaction.

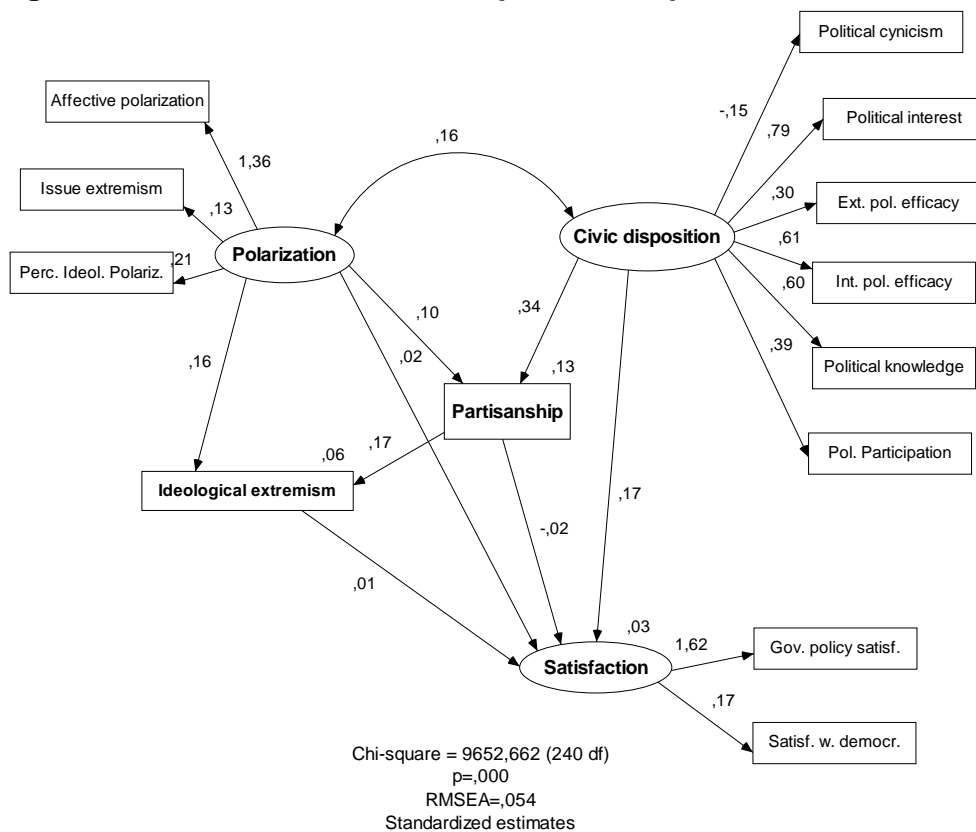
Verification samples

In order to examine to what extent the obtained relationships represent more general tendencies, rather than specific features of the 2006 DPES data-set, the same structural analysis is performed using the 2002 and 1998 data. These two data-sets contain basically identical sets of variables needed for the present analyses. The next section presents the combined models.

The combined model of partisanship, 2002

Results from 2002 data only partly replicate the findings from the model-building sample. The major difference is in the difficulty to explain satisfaction with democratic regime in 2002. Most of the influences are close to zero, except for the direct link between the civic disposition and satisfaction. Even this link is considerably weaker compared to the 2006 findings (.17 compared to .42 in 2006). The remaining features of the initial model are more faithfully reproduced. Partisanship is associated both with the civic orientation, and the perceived polarization. Both relationships are somewhat weaker in 2002, but the difference is small. Furthermore, the perceived polarization and partisanship contribute to ideological extremism just as in 2006. Thus, the 2002 data reproduce the initial findings about different roots of partisanship, but the consequences are less faithfully reproduced, since it proved difficult to explain satisfaction with democratic regime.

Figure 7 The combined model of partisanship, 2002



Source: Author's calculations based on DPES data (DANS Dataset number: P1816; see Aarts & Todosijević 2009; Todosijević et al. 2010).

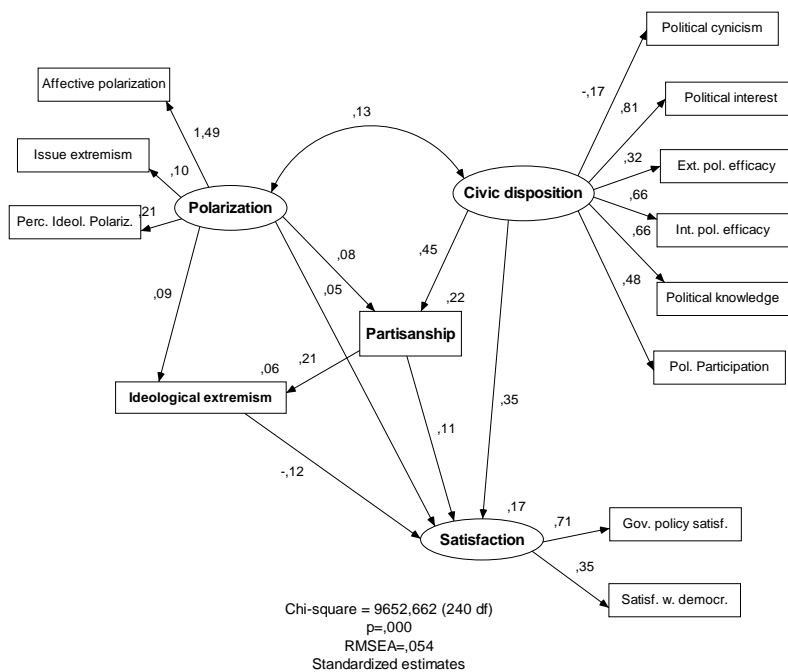
It is possible that it has something to do with the specific features of the 2002 election, especially the events associated with Pim Fortuyn (see the debate about the role of dissatisfaction in connection with 2002 election: van der Brug, 2003, van der Zwan, 2004, Bélanger and Aarts, 2006). The “extreme volatility” of the 2002 and 2003 elections has been associated with “the instability on the leadership of political parties” (Irwin and Holsteyn, 2004, p. 551), but also specific issues (immigration) and general dissatisfaction (e.g., Bélanger and Aarts, 2006).

Since the included composite measure of the satisfaction with democracy conflates the more normative and general evaluation of the Dutch democratic system with more specific government performance evaluation, it is not surprising that it is partly dependent on specific political context. In the context of the 2002 election, generally high levels of dissatisfaction probably led to the decrease of its association with both partisanship and ideological extremism.

The combined model of partisanship, 1998

The initial model received stronger support in the 1998 data. Here, the results reproduce not only the initial findings about the roots of partisanship, but also about the consequences. Thus, partisanship mediates both the effects of perceived polarization (.08) and especially civic orientation (.45), and increases both the satisfaction with democracy (.11), and ideological extremism (.21). Extremism, in turn, reduces the satisfaction (-.12). The only deviation from the 2006 model concerns the direct effect of polarization onto satisfaction. In 2006, the results indicated a relatively modest negative association (-.11), while in 1998 the results show a weak positive association (.05). Nonetheless, the deviation is a minor one, and does not affect the overall impression of the equivalence between the 2006 and 1998 findings.

Figure 8 The combined model of partisanship, 1998



Source: Author’s calculations based on DPES data (DANS Dataset number: P1816; see Aarts & Todosijević 2009; Todosijević et al. 2010).

The 1998 elections are known as one of the most de-politicized and de-polarized in the recent Dutch history (Irwin, 1999). The period preceding the election was characterized by booming economy and absence of any major political conflicts and tensions. The election resulted in the so-called 'purple coalition' initialized in 1994 (including left-wing PvdA and right-wing VVD, but circumventing CDA). Thus, it seems that the model is better in explaining democratic satisfaction in periods of political tranquility (1998 and 2006), rather than in times of political turmoil (2002).¹⁰

Discussion and conclusions

The academic literature has discussed different aspects of the attachment to political parties, but often in isolation from one another. There is a literature that suggests that party identification is an important building block of the general pro-democratic and civic orientation. Partisanship is seen as one of the best indicators of the rootedness of party systems and, indeed, of liberal democracy itself (Mainwaring and Scully 1994, Huntington 1968, Rose and Mishler 1998, Morlino and Montero 1995, etc.). Correspondingly, the absence of long-term emotional attachments to parties is seen as a worrying sign of the fragility of representative democracy.

However, the argument about the beneficial aspects of partisanship often rests on a number of implicit assumptions, and the exact mechanism through which partisanship produces the presumed positive consequences often remains unspecified in empirical models. If we look at partisanship from the perspective of social-psychological research on intergroup relations, it is clear that identification with political parties may equally be a consequence of political division, competition, and conflict. Political scientists, of course, have not missed to observe that engagement in politics is often rooted in conflict and dissatisfaction (Budge et al., 1976, Maggiotto and Piereson 1977). From this perspective, a polarized view of politics is also likely to characterize strong party attachment, which is increasingly a trait of a minority group that considers politics as very important. Actually, not so much politics in general, but rather the differences between parties. Only people in whose minds and hearts parties occupy very different positions are likely to have strong partisan attachments. The implication is that those should be identifiers who see large ideological differences between parties and who give very discriminating emotional responses to them.

The presented research integrated the two general perspectives on partisanship, and developed a more complex but more realistic and complete model. The combined model integrates different research traditions and disciplines as well.

¹⁰ I performed additional validations of the theoretical model using DPES data sets from other election years, but with incomplete sets of variables. The results for 1994, for instance, are in most respects similar to those from 2006. Both the civic disposition, and to a smaller degree perceived polarization increase PID. The consequences of identification are also reproduced - PID predicts both extremism, and satisfaction with democracy. The negative association between extremism and satisfaction is also reproduced. Similarly to the other case of extremely polarized election (2002 study), satisfaction is not explained well by the model (though the significant association is the one between PID and satisfaction). Findings based on the remaining studies (1989, 1986, and 1981) by and large confirm the main features of the combined model. One of the differences concerns the positive association between the ideological extremism and satisfaction with democracy (although in all these cases satisfaction was defined by government policy satisfaction measure). Details of these analyses (graphs and brief outlines of the findings) can be obtained from the author upon request.

The results based on the model-building sample from 2006, as well as the verification samples, provide a strong support for the 'integrative' model of partisanship. In line with what was predicted on the basis of the civic culture perspective, the endorsement of civic values and norms of political behavior, leads both to stronger identification with political parties, and to the acceptance of the democratic regime. It seems that civic disposition makes individuals more likely to see parties as legitimate and positive agents in the social and political sphere. Those who manage to find a party they could feel close to, in turn, tend to be more satisfied with the democratic regime.

The 'darker' or divisive model of partisanship, based on the perception of polarization, conflict, and intergroup cognitive and affective differentiation, also received support. The influence of the perceived polarization onto ideological extremism, both directly, and through increased partisanship, received support throughout the analyzed Dutch election studies. Thus, in addition to the civic orientation, the perception of politics as a polarized field of adversarial competitors also increases partisanship. Citizens to whom all parties look alike, i.e., when they do not perceive much difference in their stands both on specific issues and on more ideological level, nor they differentiate them on affective grounds, are less likely to feel attached to any political party. This kind of political apathy can lead one to adopt a more moderate political position, but also to feel alienated from the regime. Without parties that seem affectively and cognitively acceptable, it seems difficult to establish a positive link with the democratic order. In the more complex version of the 'divisive' partisanship model, ideological extremism reduces democratic orientation, although this link proved statistically insignificant in the 2002 sample.

The analysis of the combined model emphasized the main features of the two aspects of partisanship. The main message is that polarization influences democratic orientation via three paths: directly reducing the satisfaction with democracy, and indirectly - it reduces satisfaction via ideological extremism (though this link is unstable), but it also increases the satisfaction via partisanship. Testing the model in samples other than the 2006 DPES sample provided overall support for the initial model. The main deviation concerns the 2002 data, where partisanship had a very small influence onto satisfaction with democracy. As far as the explanation of democratic satisfaction is concerned, the model seems more appropriate for the periods of political stability (2006 and especially 1998) than to the times of political turmoil (2002).

Therefore, it can be concluded that partisanship plays the integrating role, not only with respect to the initially pro-democratic attitudes that constitute the civic disposition, but also concerning the initially negative, or adversarial and conflicting, attitudes. The other side of the coin is that partisanship also transforms part of the initially pro-democratic orientation into ideological extremism, which is potentially threatening for the principled support for democracy.

From the normative point of view, it follows that a positive, favorable attitude towards political parties should be cultivated because it is beneficial for democratic support. At the same time, a critical attitude towards parties also seems necessary, because uncritical identification may lead to extremism and dissatisfaction with

democratic regime. There is a danger for democracy, to use Weber's words, to turn into "a dictatorship resting on the exploitation of mass emotionality" (Weber, 1946 [1918]: 107).

One may further speculate about different conditions that could influence the balance between integrative and divisive aspects of partisanship. Various factors may contribute to increased political polarization, such as actions of political elites, negative campaigns, or competitive and adversarial political culture. These factors, especially if combined with and facilitated by social-structural factors, such as typically in Eastern Europe (Enyedi and Todosijević, 2009), may make strong partisanship a destabilizing, rather than a stabilizing factor. Likewise, the decline of partisanship, lamented by some (e.g., Dalton and Weldon, 2007), should be seen as a mixed blessing. On the one side, it may reflect political alienation, and contribute to dissatisfaction with democracy. On the other side, it can reduce political extremism, and enable citizens to form their political choices based on interests and issue positions, rather than on (possibly irrational) affective attachments to political parties.

The model also has implications for macro features of political systems. For instance, systems that encourage parties to become similar to each other, such as in the Downsian two-party model with twin catch-all ideologically indistinguishable parties, may also lead to alienation and dissatisfaction. In such conditions it may be difficult for citizens to establish psychological links with parties. In any case, further research is needed in order to substantiate such speculations.

Overall, it can be concluded that party attachment plays a double role. On the one side, it has beneficial consequences for democracy by increasing the satisfaction with democracy directly. It also has negative consequences, by increasing one's ideological extremism, and so indirectly reducing the satisfaction with democracy.

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Appendix (referred to on page 82)

Operational definitions

Variable names correspond to those in the newly released 1971-2006 Cumulative DPES data-file, and the corresponding codebook (*Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies Data Source Book 1971-2006*, DANS, 2009).

Civic disposition

Political cynicism

V47_4 Political cynicism score

This is a composite variable (range from “0 Low” to “3 High”) based on summarizing the affirmative answers to the following three items:

Item	Label	Codes of ‘positive’ responses
V47_1	Politicians promise more than they can deliver	1,2
V47_2	Ministers primarily self-interested	1,2
V47_3	Friends more important than abilities to become MP	1,2

Political interest

V1_5 Political Interest Score

This is a composite variable (range from “0 Low” to “4 High”) based on summarizing the ‘positive’ answers to the following four items:

Item	Label	Codes of ‘positive’ responses
V1_1	Reads about national news	1
V1_2	Talks national news	1,2
V1_3	Reads foreign news	1,2
V1_4	Interested in politics	1

External political efficacy

V48_6 V48_6 External political efficacy score

This is a composite variable (range from “0 Low” to “5 High”) based on summarizing the ‘positive’ answers (in this case, disagreements) to the following items:

Item	Label	Codes of ‘positive’ responses
V48_1	MPs do (not) care about opinions of people like me	2
V48_	Parties only interested in my vote, not in my	2

2	opinion	
V48_	People like me have no influence on politics	2
3		
V48_	So many people vote, my vote does not matter	2
4		
V48_	MPs quickly lose contact with citizens	2
5		

Note that the number of items varies between election studies, from the first three items (DPES 2006), to 4 (1981, 1986, 1989, 1994), to 5 (1998, 2002).

Internal political efficacy

V49_4 Internal political efficacy score

This is a composite variable (range from “0 Low” to “3 High”) based on summarizing the ‘positive’ answers to the following three items:

Item	Label	Codes of ‘positive’ responses
V49_1	Consider myself qualified for politics	1,2
V49_2	Good understanding of political problems	1,2
V49_3	Politics sometimes too complicated	3,4

Political knowledge

V53b_2 Political knowledge score (12 items)

This scale is constructed by counting positive responses to the questions about name, party and function of four politicians whose photograph was shown.

Political participation

In 2006 and 2002:

V58_24 Civic participation score - 8 item measure

The remaining years;

V58_23 Civic participation score - 13 item measure

This is a cumulative scale, computed by counting the number of affirmative responses to a set of civic participation questions. Note that the total number of items varies from 8 in 2002 and 2006, to 13 in the remaining surveys. The following table shows a portion of the relevant items:

Item	Label
V58_1	Did (not) contact cabinet minister
V58_2	Did (not) contact member of parliament

V58_3	Did (not) sign a petition
V58_4	Did (not) try to activate interest group
V58_5	Did (not) try to activate radio or TV
V58_6	Did (not) try to activate political party
V58_21	Did (not) use the Internet, email or SMS

Political polarization

Affective polarization

Standard deviation of 'sympathy' scores for different political parties. Higher score indicates larger differences in affective reactions to political parties.

Question text for 'sympathy score' items:

And now I would like to know from you how sympathetic you find the political parties. You can give each party a score between 0 and 10. With this 0 means that you find this party not sympathetic and 10 means that you find this party very sympathetic. What score would you give the PvdA?

Issue extremism

Average of squared deviation of respondent's self-placement from the neutral point on various issues, such as crime policy, euthanasia, reduction of income differences. The following table shows the involved issues. Note that not all issues are asked in each year. For more details see the relevant data Codebook.

Item	Label
V37_10	Euthanasia - respondent's preference
V38_10	Income differences - respondent's preference
V39_8	Crime – respondent's preference
V40_10	Nuclear plants - position of respondent
V41_10	Ethnic minorities -position of respondent
V42_11	European unification -position of respondent
V43_10	Asylum seekers - position of respondent
V44_5	Abortion - respondent's preference

Perceived ideological polarization

Based on items V46_3 to V46_25

Standard deviation of respondent's placements of different parties on the Left-Right scale.

Question text for Left-Right party placement items:

In politics people sometimes talk about left and right. Would you please indicate the degree to which you think that a party is left or right?
Where would you place [the PvdA]?

Satisfaction with democracy

V34_5 Policy satisfaction score

This is a composite variable (range from “0 Low” to “3 High”) based on summarizing the ‘positive’ answers to the following three items:

Item	Label	Codes of ‘positive’ responses
V34_1	Effect government policy on economic situation	1
V34_2	Effect government policy on employment	1
V34_4	General satisfaction with government	1,2

V35_1 Satisfaction with democracy in the Netherlands

Question text:

On the whole, are you very satisfied; fairly satisfied; not very satisfied; or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in the Netherlands?

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