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Split Ticket Voting in Mixed Member Proportional Systems: The Hypothetical Case of The Netherlands

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In Mixed Member Proportional systems, voters are able to split their vote. To what extent do voters use this opportunity, which voters seem to use this opportunity most and what are the potential consequences of split ticket voting? These questions are answered by comparatively analyzing motives for split ticket voting and factors that facilitate such behavior and apply them to the Dutch situation. Moreover, we employ various simulations based on the last three parliamentary elections in order to assess the potential consequences of split ticket voting under different electoral system proposals. In general, these results indicate that split ticket voting will not have substantial effects on the distribution of seats in parliament.

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Introduction

In Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) systems, voters are able to split their vote.¹ To what extent do voters use this opportunity, which voters seem to use this opportunity most and what are the potential consequences of split ticket voting? These questions are answered in general and more specifically for the hypothetical introduction of an MMP system in The Netherlands. The questions are answered using studies carried out in authorities having used MMP systems like Scotland, Wales, New Zealand, the Greater London Area, Italy and Germany.

The general, evaluation of split ticket voting seems to be somewhat problematic. On the one hand, it seems to be a kind of flaw in the system, since it may at least potentially produce distortions of proportionality. Therefore, from this perspective ‘too much’ ticket splitting is undesirable. On the other



hand, the opportunity to vote for a party *and* to vote for a candidate of another party is introduced to be used by voters. It is expected to create more responsive representatives. From this perspective, the level of split ticket voting cannot be too high. In this paper, we will not discuss the desirability of the level of split ticket voting, but just focus on the background and the potential consequences with respect to the distribution of seats.

In the next section, we provide an overview of split ticket voting in MMP systems. Some basic motives for split ticket voting are distinguished and individual and contextual factors affecting these motives are identified. Then these insights are ‘applied’ to the Dutch situation in various simulations in order to assess the potential consequences of split ticket voting.

Split Ticket Voting in MMP Systems

What are the reasons to split the ticket?

How many people split their ticket? So far there is no systematic comparison across mixed electoral systems. Johnston and Pattie (2002, 586–587) report approximately 20% in Scotland and Wales at their first election under the mixed system in 1999. In 2003 the percentages were 28% for Scotland and 17% for Wales. About 37% of the voters split their ticket in New Zealand’s first national election in 1996 (Johnston and Pattie, 2002, 586–587), 35% in 1999, 39% in 2002 (Aimer and Vowles, 2004, 23). In Germany the number of ticket-splitters rose from about 6% in the sixties and seventies to an all-time high (about 23%) in the *Bundestag* election of 2002 (Jesse, 1988, 114–115; Klingemann and Wessels, 2001; Pappi and Gschwend, 2005).²

In order to understand why some voters split their ticket and why the percentages differ across nations, we need to identify relevant individual and contextual factors affecting split ticket voting. Based on those factors, we could counterfactually infer how many ticket-splitters we should expect under particular conditions, more specifically after the introduction of a mixed system in The Netherlands. In this paper, we distinguish between two sets of factors. The first set is related to the ‘supply side’ of politics (i.e., political parties and candidates). The second set is related to the ‘demand side’ of politics (i.e., voters).

Supply side: political parties and candidates

Political parties have to decide whether they will present candidates in a particular constituency. If a party does not compete in all constituencies, its supporters will be unable to cast a straight-ticket for their most preferred party.



Sometimes political parties are not willing or unable to run on both the lists and the constituencies. In the 2004 Greater London elections, for example, the British National Party did not present a candidate in any of the constituencies. In the fifties, the FDP in Germany agreed with CDU/CSU and the DP not to nominate candidates in some constituencies in exchange for nomination in other districts (Jesse, 1988, 111). The phenomenon is also observed in New Zealand (Johnston and Pattie, 2002, 595–596). Since voters supporting political parties that do not present a constituency candidate are forced to split their vote (or to desert their most preferred party to cast a ‘straight ticket’ for a less preferred party) this vote-choice behavior is called ‘necessary split-ticket voting’ (Johnston and Pattie, 2002, 596).

After being nominated, party candidates (and, if allowed, independents) have the option to run either a person-centered campaign where they personally try to win as many votes as possible *or* to run a purely party-centered campaign. As we will argue below, the first strategy might stimulate (‘sincere’) split ticket voting, whereas the second will not.

Demand side: voters

Even if all political parties compete in all constituencies and all candidates run a party-centered constituency campaign, voters may still have good reasons to split their ticket. These motives can be subsumed under four different headings: sincere, strategic, coalitional and other motives (Jesse, 1988; Cox, 1997; Bawn, 1999; Schoen, 1999; Karp *et al.*, 2002; Pappi and Thurner, 2002; Gschwend *et al.*, 2003; Moser and Scheiner, 2005; Gschwend, 2006).

The first motive has to do with a sincere expression of the voters’ preferences. We will call this type of vote-choice behavior ‘sincere split ticket voting’. If a voter supports a political party but sincerely prefers the constituency candidate of another party (either for personal or for policy reasons), she might end up splitting her ballot.

The second motive is strategic. Assuming that her constituency candidate preference order is identical to her party preference order, a *strategic voter* is someone who votes for another party (on the list vote) or for another party candidate (on the constituency vote) than her most preferred party or candidate if she thus expects to be more likely to influence the outcome of the election than by casting a *sincere* straight-ticket. There may be various incentives to split a ticket strategically. The main incentive to vote strategically on the constituency ballot (assuming a sincere vote on the list vote) is because the most preferred candidate is unlikely to win a constituency seat. In order to avoid wasting the constituency vote, some voters cast their constituency vote strategically for the most preferred *viable* candidate. Furthermore, for the list



vote, if a party is expected to win *too many* district seats, it will not win one of the ‘top up seats’ (Dunleavy *et al.*, 1998, 49). In such situations, an additional list vote for the most preferred party does not change the outcome.³ Some voters may thus vote strategically for a somewhat lesser preferred party on the list vote and (assuming a sincere constituency vote) consequentially split their ticket.

A third motive is to express multiple-party preferences or to signal support for the voters’ most preferred coalition (Roberts, 1988; Pappi and Thurner, 2002) simultaneously. Although this seems to be strategic, it is not. The important difference is that such voters do not form expectations as to whether they are more likely to influence the outcome of the election by deserting their most preferred option.

One can expect that the three aforementioned motives for ticket-splitting (sincere, strategic and coalitional) have a systematic impact on the behavior of voters. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the fourth possibility that split-ticket voting may arise just from voter ‘confusion’ or, rather, from other (still unidentified) ‘causes’ (Schoen, 1999, 474).

The relative contribution of the aforementioned motives

It is rather difficult to be precise about the relative impact of the four sets of aforementioned motives. Differences with respect to the supply side that define the opportunity structure, for example, are hardly studied. Sometimes (Johnston and Pattie, 2002) the *consequences* of the fact that some political parties are not presenting candidates are taken into account, but most of the time they are not. With respect to the demand side, many studies do not distinguish between those four motives, making it difficult to assess their relative impact. Most researchers are trying to show that ‘strategic voting’ occurs in MMP systems. Others argue that strategic voting in these studies is over-estimated, because the literature fails to disentangle sincere split ticket voting from strategic ticket splitting (Moser and Scheiner, 2005, 272–274). What is more, explanatory models of split ticket voting show that the first three sets of motives explain split ticket voting to a limited degree only, leaving much open for additional but yet unknown causal mechanisms.

Factors Explaining Split Ticket Voting

The general goal of this study is to make an informed guess about the level of split ticket voting that has to be expected after the introduction of a MMP system. Thus, we need to find factors that are able to explain the aforementioned motives of political parties (entry decisions), candidates (campaign strategies) and voters (sincere, strategic, coalitional and other



Table 1 Factors explaining the entry decisions of political parties, candidate campaign styles and voter motives to split their ticket

Entry decisions of political parties

- (1) Perceived contamination effect (do constituency candidates improve the list vote?)
- (2) Costs of participation (fee)^a
- (3) Availability of candidates^a
- (4) Availability of pre-electoral coalitions

Candidates campaign styles

- (5) Candidate names on the constituency ballot (not just party names)
- (6) Open list systems together with large district magnitudes^b
- (7) More personalistic electoral rules used in previous elections
- (8) Nomination process for constituency candidates is decentralized
- (9) Dual-candidacies (both list and constituency) are not permitted^a
- (10) Independent candidacies are possible^b

Voters' proclivity to split tickets and factors facilitating voters' ability to split tickets

- (11) Strength of partisanship
- (12) Political knowledge and political sophistication^a
- (13) Amount of information available about the constituency contest
 1. Incumbency
 2. Reliable campaign information to form expectations (campaign expenditures)
 3. Pre-electoral Identifiability of stable coalition patterns
- (14) Size of the 'menu'

^aFactors without variance across the various MMP systems including the ones discussed in The Netherlands.

^bFactors without variance across the various MMP systems, but with variance across the proposals discussed in The Netherlands.

motives). These factors, to which we elaborate in turn, are summarized in Table 1.

In the first part of this section, we focus on the opportunity structure of voters, that is, on entry decisions of political parties as well as candidates campaign styles that facilitate sincere ticket-splitting. Then we introduce the proclivity to split the ticket that presumably conditions all other effects on the probability of splitting ones ticket. Particular factors that facilitate ticket-splitting are discussed too.

Entry decisions of political parties

Why do so many parties' present candidates in the constituency contest of mixed systems although they are clearly doomed to loose? Scholars argue that parties improve their vote shares in the *list* contest if they present a candidate, viable or not, at the constituency contest. This is called a contamination effect



(Herron and Nishikawa, 2001; Cox and Schoppa, 2002; Gschwend *et al.*, 2003, 119; Ferrara and Herron, 2005). If the contamination effect is big, parties will have an incentive to nominate candidates in as many constituencies as possible to exploit this effect. The number of contested constituencies will only depend on the parties' resources, the costs of participating in the constituency contest (e.g., legal fees) and the availability of candidates. Thus, while we expect larger parties to present candidates in all districts, minor parties will not necessarily be able to do that. Minor parties also have an incentive to coordinate their entry into the electoral market through forming a pre-electoral coalition (support of coalition candidates, strategically withdrawals). So far there is no research, however, as to whether voters respond favourably to such strategic coordination efforts of party elites.

Candidates campaign styles

A candidate's success in the constituency contest depends foremost on the popularity of his political party. Instead of running merely a party centered campaign, though, a candidate might decide to go personal in order to gain a seat. By running candidate centered campaigns, voters are likely to have the opportunity to form independent candidate preferences. As a consequence, they are more likely to split their ticket sincerely.

In general, we particularly expect personalized campaign efforts in systems where not only party labels are on the ballot but also candidate names. Other institutional arrangements stimulate candidates to go personal as well. Open list systems together with large district magnitudes (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Shugart *et al.*, 2005), systems where prior electoral rules have been more personalistic (SNTV in Japan or SMD in New Zealand) in the past (Moser and Scheiner, 2005), third, systems in which the nomination process for constituency candidates is decentralized (see Hazan and Voerman, 2006), fourth, if dual-candidacies are not permitted (as was shortly debated in the context of the Dutch system) and fifth, independent candidacies are encouraged.

Voters' proclivity to split tickets and factors facilitating voters' ability to split tickets

Voters typically cast a straight ticket despite opportunities and motivations to split their ticket. It seems cognitively easier for voters to make just one decision instead of two independent decisions that might lead to a split decision (Gschwend, 2004, 2006, 28). More effortful information processing is required to split one's ticket. From research in social and political psychology, we know that voters need to be particularly *motivated* and *able* to make elaborate



decisions. For strong partisans, for instance, an efficient information processing strategy is to just follow the low-elaboration route and simply cast a straight-ticket for their party. Consequently, one of the most robust findings in the literature is that the motivation to split one's ticket increases the weaker a voter's partisanship is (Campbell and Miller, 1957; Nie *et al.*, 1976; Beck *et al.*, 1992; Karp *et al.*, 2002). Besides motivation voters need to possess the cognitive ability to refrain from employing easier-to-process short-cuts, which is a function of voters' political knowledge or level of sophistication (Luskin, 1987; Zaller, 1992). Thus, facing the same decision context, we expect voters with a high proclivity to split their ticket, that is sophisticated voters with weak partisan anchors, to be more likely to split their ticket than voters with a low proclivity.

Some factors also facilitate ticket-splitting. In general, ticket-splitting is more likely if the information received during the campaign enables voters to do so. Sincere ticket splitters are interested in differentiating candidates above and beyond their party affiliations. Candidates vary in their appeal to voters whether they will perform as a good constituency representative (Shugart *et al.*, 2005). Incumbency is the most obvious factor relating to candidates overall appeals, given their familiarity as well as their record of service, and, therefore, is consequently often used in comparative studies (Moser and Scheiner, 2005).

Strategic ticket splitting is possible only if voters can form expectations whether their most preferred party is expected to win a seat. Since polls are typically not representative of one's particular constituency, voters have to refrain to other sources to form their expectations. Voters could infer from the electoral landscape of previous elections to the upcoming election. Given that candidates of small parties are less likely to win constituency seats, small party supporters will be generally more likely to cast a strategic constituency vote — particularly when the race is expected to be close. Generally, strategic ticket-splitting will be more relevant the clearer the expectations in the electorate of who will be the viable candidates. Furthermore, intense campaigns facilitate voters with information to form expectations, too. Campaign expenditures are taken in that regard as a proxy for the volume or the intensity of the local campaign (Johnston and Pattie, 1999, 2002; Karp *et al.*, 2002).

Coalitional ticket splitters need to form multiple-party or coalition preferences. The general idea is that party preference orders — particular the information one can infer from party preferences beyond the most preferred party — does systematically explain vote decisions in multi-party systems (Pappi, 1996). Thus, although respondents prefer the same party, if their second most-preferred parties differ, one would expect consequently their voting behavior to differ, too. Voters party preference rankings imply an implicit coalition preference, that is called 'coalition-leaning' (Pappi and Eckstein, 1998). The pre-electoral public discourse about potential



governmental coalitions might lead voters to activate their implicit attitude about coalitions and develop, potentially by rehearsing, an explicit coalition preference that can be measured directly by asking respondents in surveys. Such instruments are quite rare in comparative perspective, unfortunately.

In general, the more parties and party candidates are running on both ballots, the more potential combinations of ticket splitting are *a priori* possible, thus enabling voters to split their ticket (for whatever reason). Since the ideological distance between parties or candidates on the menu and, therefore, their distinctiveness are likely to diminish, one would expect an increase in ticket splitting since voters are more likely to split their votes among similar parties, that is, parties that are close in an ideological space (Elklit and Kjær, 2005, 129).

How Much Ticket Splitting After Introducing an MMP System?

So far we have identified motives of parties and candidates that give rise to ticket-splitting behavior of voters but also motifs of voters themselves to split their ticket. Subsequently, we identified a number of factors affecting either the decision of parties to participate in the constituency contest, or the decision of voters to split the ticket. These factors are summarized in Table 1. In Table 1, factors that do *not* seem to vary across the various MMP systems including the ones discussed in The Netherlands are marked with an 'a'. Since these factors cannot account for the actual differences in the level of split ticket voting across the various systems, we can ignore them when predicting the level of split ticket voting. To our knowledge, for example, all existing MMP systems and the one eventually proposed for the Netherlands, allow candidates to compete both in one of the constituencies and on the list. So this factor cannot account for the country differences in candidates going personal and the level of split ticket voting this produces. In addition, some factors do not differ between existing systems, but are different in the various Dutch proposals. This means we cannot say anything about the potential effect of this factor, using information about other systems. The two factors falling into this category are the use of open list systems (instead of SMDs) in the constituencies (probably increasing split ticket voting) and the fact that independent candidates are not allowed to compete in constituencies (reducing split ticket voting). These factors are marked with a 'b'.

The factors summarized in Table 1 represent independent variables of an informal model to predict the level of split ticket voting under various mixed systems. These factors explain why political parties choose candidates to compete in districts (thus reducing the level of necessary split tickets), explain



why candidates go personal (thus stimulating sincere split ticket voting) and why voters in the end split their ticket. If we knew the appropriate functional form and the effect sizes of the aforementioned independent variables, we could just plug-in the numbers for the Netherlands. But as we indicated earlier, the data are simply not available to make the model more precise and to estimate the parameters.

Despite the lack of a formal model we, nevertheless, generate some rough estimates of the expected level of ticket splitting based on comparisons of these factors for the Netherlands with the effect they have in other studies. We thereby distinguish whether the MMP employs a single member or a multi-member district tier in addition to a common PR tier.

An educated guess about the impact of the introduction of a mixed system with single member districts suggests that the expected level of split ticket voting will be at least 23 percent, the current level of split ticket voting in Germany. Like the Netherlands, and unlike the other countries that can be used in comparison, Germany does not have a truly personalistic electoral system, although its MMP system is definitely more personalistic than the system currently used in The Netherlands (which might be a reason to expect a lower level of split ticket voting in the Netherlands). In addition, unlike the German system, independent candidates will not be allowed to compete at the nominal tier. This in effect means that political parties monopolize the recruitment of candidates. As a consequence, constituency candidates will be less willing to go personal.

Some factors, however, seem to suggest that the level of split ticket voting will be somewhat larger than in Germany. The main reason is the larger fragmentation of the Dutch party system as compared to the German system. The party landscape in The Netherlands is a bit more like the party landscape in New Zealand, which has a larger number of effective parties than in Germany. New Zealand has a level of split ticket voting between 35 and 39 percent. But since New Zealand was using a more candidate centered system before the introduction of its MMP system, it is likely that many constituency candidates are still well known and that voters are used to vote for candidates irrespective of their party preferences. Therefore, given a SMD-tier the expected level of split ticket voting in the Netherlands will be somewhere between 23 and 39 percent.

The introduction of a mixed system with multimember districts (the De Graaf proposal) will generally induce a *lower* ticket-splitting level, since the strategic incentive for split ticket voting will be substantially lower. Consequently, we expect the level of split ticket voting to be even smaller. On the other hand, the 'menu' of viable constituency candidates will be larger and coalitional motives may be more important. Assuming that these factors are similarly important, the expected level of split ticket voting will



be only slightly smaller than under a given MMP system with a single member district tier.

These numbers (say between 23 and 35%) might have an enormous impact on the distribution of seats, especially with a nominal tier of single member districts. However, the *gross* level of split ticket voting (the percentage of voters splitting their ticket) is much bigger than the *net* level of split ticket voting. The effect of a voter voting for party A on the list and for candidate of party B in the district will be canceled out by another voter in the same constituency voting for party B on the list and for candidate of party A in the district. Moreover, many split tickets cannot be accounted for by the informal model, however, and appear to be ‘random’. Thus, the potential consequences, which are represented by net level of split ticket voting, will be limited.

The Potential Consequences of Split Ticket Voting⁴

How does split ticket voting influence the distribution of seats in both single member and multi-member constituencies? We conduct two simulations in order to answer this question. The first simulation is based on the (strong) assumption that all districts have the same distribution of party-votes (i.e., the national level distribution of votes). The second simulation is based on the actual voting results but employing *ex post* constructed constituencies. In order to get a reasonable baseline we begin by assuming that every voter casts a straight-ticket. Consequently, both simulations will yield a distribution of constituency votes for party candidates. These votes can then be translated into legislative seats using two different electoral institutions: single member and multi-member rules systems.

In a final step, we discuss the potential effect of split ticket voting on the distribution of seats. In order to assess the potential consequences of ‘split ticket voting’, we need to simplify the explanatory factors (see Table 1) even further. We do not know, for example, which parties will be able to present candidates that induce sincere ticket splitting, the extent to which particular candidates will ‘go personal’ or which coalitional motives will play a role (which will stimulate coalitional ticket splitting). Therefore, we will merely focus on the strategic ticket splitting under this system. We will assume that some voters casting a list vote for smaller parties will cast a constituency vote for candidates of one of the larger, ‘viable’ parties. This is not as restrictive as it seems. Some split ticket voting, for example, will be ‘random’ and therefore inconsequential with regard to the distribution of seats. In addition, part of the entry decisions of parties (as affected by the ‘availability of pre-election coalitions’) can be ‘modeled’ as strategic behavior by voters, because the



non-entry of small parties (in order to stimulate voting for a larger ‘ideologically close’ party) has the same effect as strategic behavior of voters.

Single member districts

Suppose the nominal tier is organized in, say, 50 single member districts with an FPTP system.⁵ According to simulation 1 (equal distribution of vote shares), the largest political party (PvdA in 1998 and CDA in 2002 and 2003) wins most votes in all districts and, consequently, wins *all* constituency seats. The ‘viable candidates’ belong to either PvdA, CDA or VVD in 1998, PvdA, CDA or LPF in 2002 or to CDA and PvdA in 2003.

What is the ‘second best choice’ for voters, given that the candidate of their most preferred party candidate is not viable? In the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies of 1998, 2002 and 2003, voters were asked to rank-order all parties, starting with the most preferred one.⁶ Using these data, we can show, first, that many voters of SP, GreenLeft and D66 prefer PvdA to CDA and VVD; second, that LPF voters generally prefer the VVD and the CDA to the PvdA and third, that CU and SGP voters generally prefer the CDA to the VVD. This is more or less common knowledge. The most problematic group of voters in this respect is the VVD. Normally, it is assumed that the VVD voters prefer CDA to the PvdA, thus building a ‘right wing block’ and a ‘left wing block’. But in 1998, after 4 years of VVD and PvdA collaboration, a majority of the VVD voters preferred the PvdA to CDA, which shows that strategic incentives might be different across elections. In addition, further analysis shows that many Dutch voters have preference orderings that are quite distinct from the one we have presented here.

However, if we assume all voters order the Dutch political parties on the same left-right scale, we can infer that strategic behavior of political parties and voters will help the *median* viable party to win all districts seats. In 1998 the median viable party is not clear, since both the left (left wing parties including D66) won exactly 75 seats, but since in that year VVD voters might have supported the PvdA, it would probably have been the PvdA to gain from strategic voting.⁷ In 2002 and 2003, CDA was the median party, implying that strategic behavior would not have affected the distribution of seats.

Based on the first simulation, we do not expect strategic split ticket voting to affect the outcome of the election. In 1998, the already largest party would have won even more because of strategic voting. In 2002, the gap between the largest and the second largest party was 20 seats (13% of the votes). This means the gap between the first and the second candidate can only be bridged if the net level of strategic voting in one direction only is over 13% and this is too much given the actual (net) level of split ticket voting in countries already using an MMP system. In 2003, split ticket voting might have had consequences.



Especially the close race between CDA and PvdA in 2003 may have reversed the electoral fortunes of the CDA. But since in that year, VVD voters were no longer preferring PvdA to CDA, the 'right wing block' would have been able to 'block' strategic choices of both left wing parties (selective entry) and strategic behavior of voters (strategic split ticket voting).

Applying simulation 2 (heterogeneous constituencies, based on actual voting results) yields similar results, but of course the political party winning most votes nationally, does not win in all constituencies. In our simulation, the largest party (PvdA) in 1998 wins in 33 out of the 50 constituencies (VVD 14, CDA only 3), in 2002 the largest party (CDA) wins in 40 out of 50 districts (PvdA and LPF both 5) and in 2003 (with the close race between CDA and PvdA, ending in small majority (2 seats) for CDA) the largest party wins 31 seats (PvdA 18, VVD 1). This means the actual heterogeneity of vote share distributions across constituencies substantially attenuates the aforementioned findings. The largest party nationally wins substantially more seats than the second largest party, but does not win a seat in *all* constituencies.

Strategic voting may somewhat affect the outcome, favoring the median party, but this effect is expected to be very small. In 1998 it might have given a few seats to CDA (mainly because of small Christian party voters voting for the CDA candidate in the constituencies) and to the PvdA (mainly because of left wing voters voting for the PvdA candidate), and will have caused losses for the VVD. In 2002, strategic voting would have been virtually inconsequential. The gap between the largest (CDA) and the second largest party (LPF) was simply too big to be bridged by strategic voting (or strategic entry of parties). In 2003, however, the close race between CDA and PvdA might have made strategic ticket-splitting very consequential.

Since we are discussing the introduction of an MMP system, the fact that strategic voting might affect the election outcome in constituencies does not mean that the introduction of a mixed system (mechanical effect) and the occurrence of strategic voting (psychological effect) do affect the overall outcome of the elections (the distribution of seats across parties). If the number of single member constituencies is smaller than the number of seats won under the current PR system by the largest party, the introduction of MMP with SMDs will not affect the number of seats for this party compared to the current PR system. This means that as long as the number of single member constituencies is lower than 43 (if we restrict our attention to the elections of 1998, 2002 and 2003), only the list vote will determine the distribution of seats across parties while not even strategic voting by *all* supporters of non-viable candidates in the districts will affect the distribution of seats at the aggregate level. The heterogeneity of vote share distributions across constituencies and the fact that at least some minor candidate supporters will vote a straight ticket does further reduce the chance that this will ever occur. We therefore predict



that the introduction of an MMP system with a nominal tier consisting of 50 single member districts will not substantially affect the distribution of seats compared to a single tiered PR system. Even unprecedented levels of split ticket voting will be unable to change this distribution.

Multi-member districts

The mechanical impact of the introduction of an MMP system with 20 multimember districts using SNTV (De Graaf proposal) for the nominal tier will be even smaller than the impact of the introduction of a system with single member districts. Taking simulation 1 (equal distribution of vote shares) and assuming that only one candidate for each party will be viable to win a constituency seat in a multi-member district (under SNTV candidates of one political party will have difficulties coordinating the efforts of their party supporters), we predict that all major parties will win a seat in every district and the maximum number of seats won by a party will be 20 (which is the number of constituencies). Only if, for example, the third largest party wins *less* than 20 seats, the mechanical effect of the introduction of this system might affect the distribution of seats as compared to the current system⁸ (Van der Kolk, 2004b). Under De Graafs system, 75 district seats would have been distributed across 20 multi-member districts, having 2 to 5 seats. If we assume all districts to have an identical vote share distribution, the two largest parties would have won 20 seats (In 1998, PvdA and VVD; in 2002 CDA and LPF; in 2003 CDA and PvdA). Depending on the exact number of seats in each of the districts the third party would have obtained a bit less than 20 seats etceteras.

In the second step, strategic ticket splitting is allowed. We assume some or even all minor party supporters to cast their vote for the most preferred viable party candidate instead. The expectation that a constituency vote for a minor party is wasted is less clear than in single member districts since even candidates of medium sized parties may win a constituency seat. Therefore, neither political parties, nor their voters will have an incentive to behave strategically. Thus, the level of strategic split ticket voting will be relatively low.

But even if voters vote strategically, it will be virtually inconsequential. Voting for a candidate of the two largest parties, for example, will not add one constituency seat to the totals of the two largest parties. Only if the smallest parties (or their supporters) could form a coalition against one of the medium sized parties, extreme levels of strategic voting may affect the distribution of constituency seats. This, however, is merely a theoretical possibility.

The results of simulation 2 (heterogeneous constituencies, based on actual voting results) are in many respects similar to the results of simulation 1 (Van der Kolk, 2004b). As long as we assume parties to nominate only one candidate



in each district, the results of simulation 1 and simulation 2 are virtually identical. Strategic voting is thus equally inconsequential.

Things change a bit once we assume political parties are able to solve the ‘within party coordination’ problem, for example, by presenting a male and a female candidate in one constituency and demanding female voters to vote for the female candidate and male voters to vote for the male candidate. In that case, political parties may be able to win two seats in a constituency. Simulations (simulation 2) based on this assumption show, for example, that in 2002, the PvdA might have doubled its number of constituency seats if SP, GL and D66 voters would have voted strategically.⁹ Because CDA and VVD will be supported strategically only by the (very) small Christian orthodox parties, it is mainly the PvdA, which might win additional constituency seats because of (massive) strategic voting.

But since we are discussing the introduction of an MMP system, the fact that strategic voting might affect the outcome of the elections in the constituencies does not imply the distribution of seats across parties is equally affected. All our simulations show that with a system of 75 constituency seats the overall distribution of seats across parties will be determined completely by the list vote. This implies that strategic voting will be inconsequential with respect to the distribution of seats across parties.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have addressed three questions: (1) to what extent do voters split their vote under mixed systems; (2) which voters seem to use this opportunity most, and (3) what are the potential consequences of split ticket voting? These questions were answered in general and more specifically for the (hypothetical) introduction of an MMP system in The Netherlands. Given the state of the comparative literature on this topic quantifying hypothetical scenarios for The Netherlands is a rather challenging task.

The first question was answered by describing levels of split ticket voting. These levels seem to be between 17% (Wales) and 39% (New Zealand). Based on a review on existing research of split ticket voting, we then described many factors that are hypothesized to affect the level of split ticket voting. These factors are related to the behavior of political parties, candidates and voters. Based on these factors (summarized in Table 1) and the actual levels of split ticket voting, we subsequently estimated the gross level of split ticket voting in The Netherlands to be around 30%. We expect the net level of split ticket voting, however, to be lower, since much of this split ticket voting will be ‘random’ or constituency specific. If a multi-member district system is used (as was proposed by the Government), the levels will be even lower.



Using two different simulations, we finally predict that the consequences of split ticket voting under an MMP system with single member districts are likely to be rather small. These consequences will be even smaller with multi-member instead of single member districts. With respect to the distribution of seats over political parties, we have argued that split ticket voting will be essentially without consequences.

The argument in this paper is based on a rather informal model developed by comparing various studies of split ticket voting. Further research is needed in order to specify and quantify the various parameters. Whether this will eventually lead to a formalized model, which can be used to predict the level of split ticket voting in a country remains to be seen.

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Notes

- 1 Other types of split-ticket voting occur between elections of different levels of governance, for example, local and national elections. Given the proposals about electoral reform that are considered in The Netherlands we focus solely on incentives to split a ticket for the same level of governance, particularly in compensatory mixed-member systems.
- 2 The level of split ticket voting in Italy is more problematic to determine, because parties form broader pre-electoral coalitions than in other countries (Ferrara, 2004; Benoit *et al.*, 2006).
- 3 It is possible that voters voting strategically do *not* split their ticket. We shall ignore the general causes of strategic voting on the list vote here. Introducing an MMP system in the Netherlands will probably not change the strategic incentives with respect to this vote. For strategic voting in PR systems see Irwin and Van Holsteyn (2003), Cox (1997, 197) and Gschwend (2004, 29–34). In addition, strategic voting might occur on the list vote, if voters want to ensure that a smaller coalition party will pass the threshold (Cox, 1997, Gschwend, 2006).
- 4 The arguments and computations presented in this section are discussed more extensively in Van der Kolk (2004a, b).
- 5 One of the serious alternatives discussed in the preparation of the final system.
- 6 We used the 'voting probability questions'; how big is the probability you will ever vote for one of the following political parties. The majority of the GreenLeft voters, for example, gave the highest probability to the GreenLeft and the second highest probability to the PvdA.
- 7 To be precise, D66 might have been the winner if all voters voted strategically. But D66 is a very weak 'focal point'. We therefore predict the PvdA to be the winner of every FPTP election.
- 8 To be more general, we should note that as long as the number of constituencies having at least n seats exceeds the number of seats for the n th largest party, no party will be able to win 'too many' seats (as compared to the number of seats won under the current system).
- 9 The simulation was carried out before the final proposal was made public. The simulations are based on 80 (and not 75 as in the actual proposal) constituency seats distributed across 20 constituencies (6 with 3 seats, 13 with 4 seats and 1 with 5 seats).