Government Formations in the Netherlands: A historical perspective

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Abstract

This study investigates the relation between the length of government formation and electoral volatility, party fractionalisation and party polarisation. In order to investigate this, the legislative elections in Netherlands between 1948 and 2017 are used. The study utilises two complementary empirical strategies. Firstly, a quantitative research is executed, by employing a general least squares regression. In this regression, the 21 national parliamentary elections between 1948 and 2017 are investigated. In order to discover the, partial, impact of electoral volatility, party fractionalisation and party polarisation on the length of government formation.

Secondly, complementing the approach, a most similar system design is applied to research the causal mechanism. This is executed by doing case studies on the 2010 and 2017 elections, and on the 2006 and 2012 elections. By performing this research, a more in depth analysis is made into the government formation processes of that time.

The study discovers that both electoral volatility and fractionalisation have a substantial impact on the length of government formations. However, the study also discovers that despite the effect of these variables, it cannot be conclusively justified that solely these variables are accountable for the changes in the length of the government formations.

Keywords: Government formation, electoral volatility, fractionalisation, polarisation

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Introduction

After the national election in March 2017, the longest government formation period in Dutch parliamentary history followed. After 225 days of government formation, the new government was installed, and 'Rutte III' could commence its term (Parlement & Politiek, 2018a). The trend of longer lasting government formation periods has been on the rise for the last decades. Moreover, for the last decades, the Netherlands has seen a more unpredictable party system. Just as in many countries, the polls have seemed to be unable to accurately predict the outcomes of the elections. For example, in the American Presidential elections, and the Brexit referendum.

This thesis will attempt to discover what factors are causes of these changes, in the Netherlands. From preliminary research, it has become clear that multiple factors can be the cause of the increase of the duration of government formation; however, for this research, the focus will be on three variables. These variables are electoral volatility, fractionalisation of the party system, and polarisation of the party system. These variables are chosen because in the last decades there are more seats that 'change colour', the electoral volatility increases (Mair, 2008). Additionally, the number of parties that manage to be represented in parliament fluctuates, thus the fractionalisation of the parties alters greatly (Taylor & Herman, 1971). For example, in the 2017 election, 13 parties obtained seats in parliament, and therefore the number of seats per party decreased (Parlement & Politiek, 2018a) (Parlement & Politiek, 2018b). This phenomenon causes a more fractionalised political landscape. Furthermore, due to the higher number of parties, the political spectrum becomes more polarised because there needs to be more space in between the parties, for party competition to be present. This causes the emergence of more extreme parties with far-right and far-left ideologies. (Schmitt, 2016)

The following thesis examines if these changes in the variables correlate, and if they influence the duration of the government formation. From these questions, the research question for this study is composed: *What factors affect the length of the government formation of a national government?*

This question is important to research because it could give insight in the electoral system, voting behaviour, and could assist in the creation of recommendations on alteration of the electoral process, or the government formation. These findings would be specific to the

Netherlands; however, the results could be used to investigate in different countries, with similar electoral systems.

Theoretical Framework

From the period after the second World War, the Netherlands has always been perceived as a stable democracy. Especially during the prime time of the pillarization, which lasted until the end of the 1960s, the governments that were formed were inclusive and "relatively depoliticised" (Andeweg, 2008, p. 254). The pillarization ensured that the people voted according to their faith because the pillars were categorised by religion ("Roman Catholic, orthodox Calvinist or secular" (Bryant, 1981, p. 56)). Moreover, these pillars contained not only parties, but also schools, unions, and media outlets (Bryant, 1981). This strong structure ensured a relatively high predictability of the election outcomes because people had a high party loyalty. When, in the 1960s, the depillarisation commenced, this structure disappeared, and the party system changed rapidly with more consequences. Among others, three factors have increased over the following decades, as a result of the depillarisation: the number of seats that change after an election *(electoral volatility)*, the number of parties that are represented in parliament *(fractionalisation)*, and the range in ideology of the parties in parliament *(polarisation)*. The point of this research is to investigate if the change in these factors had an effect on the duration of a government formation. The choice for the Netherlands is due to the uniqueness of the case. Maybe the phenomena occur in different countries as well, but it will be too difficult to compare the Netherlands to other cases because of the difference in electoral system and party system, which makes it too complicated to control for these alternative explanations.

Dependent variable: length of government formation.

As discussed above, the concept of *government formation* is the process of establishing a group of parties that will form the government, through negotiations between party leaders (Andeweg, 2008). However, this is not the only form of government formation. American scholar Lawrence Lowell argued that parliaments need to have two conditions to have a stable government. First, the government should consist of one party, in order to not have the concessions and friction of a multiparty coalition. Second, the opposition should consist of one party, this to have a proper execution of the monitoring of the government,

and when they become the majority and form the government, the first condition should be met again (Taylor & Herman, 1971). This is different in the Netherlands, as well as in other countries with coalition governments. In coalition government formations, there are two possibilities for coalitions, pre-election coalitions and post-election coalitions. Pre-election coalitions could potentially assist small parties to gain a broader electorate. This could be useful for parties to manage to be elected into Parliament, as "in general, all electoral systems disadvantage small parties" (Gschwend & Hooghe, 2008, p. 557). According to Sona Golder (2006), pre-election coalitions are more likely to form between parties that are of relatively similar ideology and size; additionally, they are more likely to form when the party system is highly polarised (Golder, 2006). The issue with pre-electoral coalitions can be that voters chose not to vote for their desired party because they dislike the coalition party. Therefore, forming a pre-electoral coalition is a gamble for all the parties engaging in the coalition (Gschwend & Hooghe, 2008). Post-election coalitions are formed when it is clear how many seats every party has, and which parties have similar plans for the future. Post-election coalition government formations are often a long process, with different stages, it is important that the process as a whole is considered in the Dependent Variable (DV).

For the last century, in the Netherlands, and many Western European countries, coalition governments have been the norm. In a coalition government, the election is merely the first step in the way towards a new government (Laver & Schofield, 2004). In the Netherlands, the government formation procedure is as follows. After the election, a 'scout' investigates, by order of the parliament, among the parties what type of coalition would be a possibility to form a government. This is reported back to the parliament. After this first step, a new person is installed by parliament[1], the "informateur" (Parlement & Politiek, 2018c) (Parlement & Politiek, 2018e). This informateur then attempts to create the most viable coalition of parties. In the Netherlands, it is common that the biggest party is part of the first government formation attempt. In some cases, this attempt fails, after which often the informateur resigns, and a new one is appointed. An example of this is the government formation of 2017, in which one of the parties, GroenLinks, did not want to continue the negotiations (Hoedeman, 2017). When a fruitful coalition is established, a new informateur is

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[1] Until 2012, the informateur and the formateur were appointed by the King. From 2012, the Parliament appoints these positions (Parlement & Politiek, 2018c).

installed to help draft a concept coalition agreement. This is a document in which the main issues and future plans are presented. After the completion of this document the "formateur" is installed, this is usually the next Prime Minister (Martin & Vanberg, 2003). The formateur then consults intended ministers and deputy ministers to form a cabinet. Lastly, the formateur proposes the new government to the king, whom installs the new government (Parlement & Politiek, 2018c). After this whole process, a coalition government can commence its governing period. The coalition government can have two different forms, a minority government, or a majority government. The Netherlands has a tradition in searching for a majority government; however, not only in the Parliament, but it is considered important that the parties that form the government also have a majority in the Senate (Andeweg, 2008). This additional difficulty makes the Netherlands, on average, one of the most time costly government formations in Western Europe (Martin & Vanberg, 2003). This lengthy process brings a problem to the ability to govern the country (Martin & Vanberg, 2003). For example, during the formation period the former government remains functional, as 'outgoing cabinet', because the country cannot be without a government; however, this government does not take, or initiate, big policies decisions because it feels that this is the responsibility of the new government. Nevertheless, the new parliament is already installed, and wants to continue governing the country. An example is the 2017 government formation, it took 225 days before the new government was installed, which means that the country was for 2/3 of a year without an active government.

As mentioned before, this paper intends to analyse the impact of three variables on the length of the government formation. The three variables are *electoral volatility, fractionalisation in parliament,* and *polarisation of the party system.*

Independent variable: electoral volatility.

The first factor, which was mentioned above, is investigated is *electoral volatility*. Electoral volatility is "the net change within the electoral party system resulting from individual vote transfers" (Mair, 2008, p. 238). This increased, according to Peter Mair, because of the very small number of citizens that are member of a political party. In the 1990s this was among the lowest in western Europe, with 2.5% of the population that was member of a party (Mair, 2008). This phenomenon is related to the pillars that existed until the 1960s, where people did not have to be member of a party because they were in such a social

structure that it was clear to what parties they were affiliated. In other words, the increase in utility of becoming member of a party was too small, people benefitted from the party structures regardless of if they were member of the party or not (Bryant, 1981). For example, from elementary school people were already introduced into the pillar. However, when this was abolished, the electoral volatility increased, as people did not feel loyalty to vote for the same party anymore (Mair, 2008). Another factor that has increased the electoral volatility, according to Mair, is the party system itself. Because of the openness of the Dutch party system, people do not have to vote strategically to a great extent, such as in a two-party system (Abramson & Et al., 2009). Mair's argument comes from the notion that, because of the vast number of parties, people do not have to vote for a party that is not their preferred party. The Dutch party system allows alternative and new parties to excel in elections, due to the lack of a threshold; therefore, providing the electorate with a wide variety of parties to choose from (Mair, 2008). When there is a consecutive trend of the entering of new parties, and with that a high electoral volatility, it can lead to party system de-institutionalisation (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2017). However, Carina Bischoff disagrees with this notion. She argues that there are two forms of strategic voting that can increase the electoral volatility, seat maximizing and government maximizing strategic voting. As the Netherlands always has coalition governments, it is possible that people vote for a party that has an expected influence in the government formation (Bischoff, 2013). Even if this is not their preferred party to vote for, but close to their convictions that they have confidence that this party has a positive influence on the government formation process. This does relate to the earlier point by Mair, that because of the many parties in the Netherlands, people do not have to vote strategically. There is a high chance that there are multiple parties that are fairly well in representing a person's ideology, thus people can easier switch between parties, if they think this will be better for the government formation process (Bischoff, 2013). An increase in electoral volatility is also likely to cause a flow of new members of Parliament (Tavits, 2008). When these new members need to participate in the government formation, these could take longer because of the lack of experience of the negotiators.

Independent variable: fractionalisation.

The second factor that will be researched is, the *fractionalisation in parliament*. Fractionalisation is "the number-of-parties with seats in parliament" (Taylor & Herman, 1971,

p. 30). This definition does not take into account the number of seats each party possesses, the weight of the party, which is attempted by multiple scholars to define. As Sartori (1976) argued, when looking at fractionalisation of a parliament, it is only meaningful to investigate the parties that have the size to be of importance in coalition formations, or to distort these formations (Sartori, 1976). By looking at the important parties, it could be determined if the parliament was effectively a two-party, or multi-party parliament was (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979). This concept is important in the process of government formation because depending on how many seats each party has, and the number of parties in parliament there are, the government formation needs more parties to form a majority government. The more parties that are involved, the more difficult they negotiations become (Dalton, 2008), especially when the parties are ideological further apart. This ties into another aspect, cleavages. Cleavages are the structural differences in deeply felt believes, for example, in religion, class, or origin. As in the Netherlands there is no threshold for parties to get into parliament, any party with enough supporters can enter after an election[2]. When there are more cleavages felt, parties that want to defend the group arise (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Thus, by having more clashes between the cleavages, fractionalisation can increase.

Independent variable: polarisation.

Lastly, the *polarisation of the party system*. With the increase of parties that have seats in parliament, the polarisation between the parties often increases because they have to set themselves apart from the other parties. Without party competition, there would be no reason to vote for one party or the other, determined by ideology (Dalton, 2008). Anthony Downs argued that parties set themselves apart on the left and right continuum. He used a spatial model for this to display where each party's ideology was positioned to compare them amongst each other. His premise was that voters vote for the party that is the closed to the voter's ideology because this would provide them with the most utility for their effort. According to Downs, in a multiparty system, parties would have to move to the side to ensure the cleavage between the parties, which would cause voters to vote for them in elections. The more parties would enter the election, the more they are obliged to move away from each other, and likely to the extreme ends of the spectrum. When this occurs the polarisation

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[2] Any party that obtains more votes than the complete number of votes divided by 150 seats, obtains a seat in parliament.

increases, which therefore Downs measured by counting the number of parties (Downs, 1957). Giovanni Sartori continued with this idea, but he looked at the effects on the ideology of parties, when the number of parties increased. He measured the degree of polarisation that was created when more parties entered the spectrum. Sartori discovered that there were centripetal and centrifugal powers that made the parties move on the left and right scale; moreover, he discovered, just as Downs, that parties move more to the extremes, when more parties enter the spectrum (Sartori, 1976). As both conclude that when more parties arise, the parties will move more towards the extremes of the spectrum, chances are that it becomes more difficult to form coalitions. This is because of the more complex consensus that needs to be created between the potential coalition partners. Another option is that the same parties always form the coalitions (Armstrong & Duch, 2010). Depending on the election results, these coalition parties are likely to be centre parties that are not too far away from each other; however, they could also be a block on the left or the right side of the spectrum, in which extreme parties could have a chance of governing. Deriving from the operationalisation of Downs and Sartori, party polarisation and fractionalisation are very similar; however, they do not represent the same phenomenon.

Deriving from these variables, three hypotheses are created:

- H1: the higher the electoral volatility is, the longer the government formation period will be.

- H2: the lower the number of seats every party obtains, the longer the government formation period will be.

- H3: the more increase of the level of party polarisation, the longer the government formation period will be.

Methods and Data

The following part will display the operationalisation of the concepts that are described in the previous section; furthermore, the sources of the information will be presented. Deriving from this, the choices, considerations, limitations, and consequences will be discussed. The variables that will be employed during the answering of the research question are: government formation, electoral volatility, fractionalisation, and polarisation. Additionally, the research methods will be presented that are chosen to answer the research question.

Operationalization of the variables.

The DV issue length of government formation. The DV will be operationalised as the number of days it takes from the day of the election, until the day that the new government is presented to the King, by whom the government is installed. The data for the date of the election, and of the date of the start of the government come from parlgov.org[3].

The first Independent Variable (IV) electoral volatility, is the number of seats that has changed colour (Mair, 2008). This is possible to calculate after the elections by counting of all the votes. Because the number of seats changed in 1956, from 100 seats in parliament to 150 seats, the variable will be expressed in percentages. The data for this variable comes from Vincenzo Emanuele[4]. In this dataset, Emanuele calculated the electoral volatility in three ways. Firstly, he calculated the percentage of votes that changed party because of parties entering or leaving the parliament (RegV). Secondly, the percentage of seats changing between parties that are in the parliament (AltV). Lastly, the percentage of votes that switch between parties that have, in the previous, and the current election obtained less than 1% of the votes (OthV) (Emanuele, 2017). From these three a total is taken (TV), which will serve as the electoral volatility variable value.

$$RegV + AltV + OthV = Tv$$

$$\frac{|\sum_{0=1}^{n} Pot + \sum_{w=1}^{n} Pw(t+1)|}{2} + \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} |Pit - Pi(t+1)|}{2} + \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} |Pit - Pi(t+1)|}{2} = \text{Tv (Emanuele, 2017)}$$

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[3] ParlGov is a data infrastructure for political science and contains information for all EU and most OECD democracies (37 countries) (Parlgov, 2018)

[4] https://cise.luiss.it/cise/dataset-of-electoral-volatility-and-its-internal-components-in-western-europe-1945-2015/

The second IV is fractionalisation. This IV will be calculated following the model by Laakso and Taagepera (1979), the effective number of parties (ENP). This is a calculation of the weighted strength of the parties, and how many parties would be in parliament, if they would all have the same size (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979). Table 1 shows examples of how these results can vary, when the number of parties change, or their share of the votes. The result will be the indicator for the level of fragmentation. The measurement provides an insight in the changes over time, to not only show the fractionalisation of the parliament, but also the distribution of the seats among the parties (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979). The data is derived from the website parlgov.org.

$$N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} P_i^2}$$

Number of parties	Party 1	Party 2	Party 3	Party 4	Party 5	ENP
2	.5	.5				2
2	.75	.25				1.60
3	.25	.35	.40			2.90
4	.10	.03	.32	.55		2.41
5	.15	.05	.25	.30	.25	4.17

Table 1 Examples of ENP results with different number of parties, and varying shares of votes.

The third IV is party system polarisation. Every party can be given a value on this left to right scale. It is common that the value 0 is extreme left-wing, and the value 10 is extreme right-wing. The website parlgov.org has provided most of the parties in Europe with an ideological value. By calculating a weighted[5] average party polarisation, for all the parties that have gained seats in parliament after an election, it is possible to compare the level of polarisation election after election.

$$\sqrt{\sum_{a+1}^{n} Si(a - Pi)^2}$$

s = share of seats
a = number of parties
p = position in left-right scale

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[5] Weighted means that the share of seats is taking into account per party. Thus, the ideology of the party is multiplied by the percentage of the seats that the party has.

Research methods.

For the first part of the thesis' research, data from 1948 until 2017 will be investigated. This will amount to 21 elections for the Dutch national parliament. The year 1948 is chosen because this is the first election after the second World War, of the national parliament, that has all the data complete. Furthermore, the election was vital because of the intended constitutional change (Parlement & Politiek, 2018g)[6]. In order to be able to compare the different years, the seats will have to be presented in percentages because from 1956 onwards the national parliament went from 100 seats to 150 seats. (Parlement & Politiek, 2018d). The study will employ at two-pronged methodology. Firstly, the quantitative method will be a generalised least squares (GLS) regression. Because it is a time-series regression, the Prais-Winsten and Cochrane-Orcutt regressions is used; moreover, a rhotype tsscorr is added. Prais uses the generalized least-squares method to estimate the parameters in a linear regression model in which the errors are serially correlated. Specifically, the errors are assumed to follow a first-order autoregressive process (Stata13, 2018). A limitation of the model might be the low statistical significance of the correlation coefficients, due to the small-N. This result will cause a smaller certainty that the relation that is observed because of random chance. This could be unfortunate, but will be supplemented by the following research method.

To discover the specific causal mechanism accounting for differences in the length of government formation, secondly, a qualitative research method is used. The method that will be employed is a most similar system design (MSSD). The research will, firstly, go into two cases that have a big variation in the IV fractionalisation, as well as a variation in the DV. By holding the variables electoral volatility and polarisation constant, it is possible to investigate if the variation in the DV is due to the change in fractionalisation. The cases that are selected are the elections of 2010 and 2017. The second research will be on two cases where the values for the electoral volatility have a big difference, as well as the DV. In these two cases the variables fractionalisation and polarisation are held constant. By investigating these two

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[6] A constitutional change was necessary for the transition of sovereignty to the government of Indonesia (Parlement & Politiek, 2018g).

cases, it can be investigated if the causal mechanism for the variation in the DV is due to the change in electoral volatility. These cases will be the elections of 2006 and 2012[7].

Year	Government Formation (days)	Electoral Volatility (%)	Fractionalisation	Party System Polarisation
2006	92	20,20	5,5	2,33
2010	127	23,60	6,7	2,48
2012	54	15,85	5,7	2,35
2017	225	23,25	8,1	2,45

Table 2 The four selected cases for the MSSD research, with the values for the variables.

Results

The next section of the thesis will display, and analyse, the data and results of the two research methods that are described above. The first research method is the regression analysis of the 21 moments in time, in order to find the association between the variables. The second research method is a MSSD research to two cases, in order to research the causal mechanism between the variables.

Before going into the regression models, it is important to look at the distribution of the three different IVs compared to the DV. As is visible in figure 1 below, the three IVs are quite similarly correlated to the DV. All three IVs are more distributed in the lower half of the scatterplots, with a few outliers to the upper half of the scatterplots. From this can be concluded that the regression lines are likely to be this high in the scatter plots, due to the high value of the outliers, and with that the value of the positive residuals. Furthermore, the regression lines of all three IVs are positive, thus when X (Volatility, Fractionalisation, or Polarisation) increases, Y (Government Formation Length) increases as well. Additionally, the regression lines of all three IVs have relatively similar slopes.

To determine if there is multicollinearity among the IVs, a correlation calculation has been executed, visible in appendix B. This table displays that it is difficult to determine the partial effect of the IVs on the DV, as appendix B demonstrates that the IVs are highly correlated with each other. If this occurs, there is a risk of multicollinearity. Multicollinearity

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[7] Unfortunately, there is no good case to investigate two elections where the polarisation variable is constant, and has enough variation in the DV and other IVs. This would case to go back in time to much, which would jeopardise the comparability to the other cases, because of too many alternative explanations.

happens when the correlation is higher than 0.8 (Pollock, 2015). As is visible in appendix B, there is a strong correlation between electoral volatility and polarisation is (r=.79), as well as between fractionalisation and polarisation is (r=.71). These results are confirming multicollinearity among the IVs. Despite the fact that the variables are theoretically looking at three different causal mechanisms, from this can be concluded that it is difficult to determine the partial effects of the IVs on the causal mechanism.
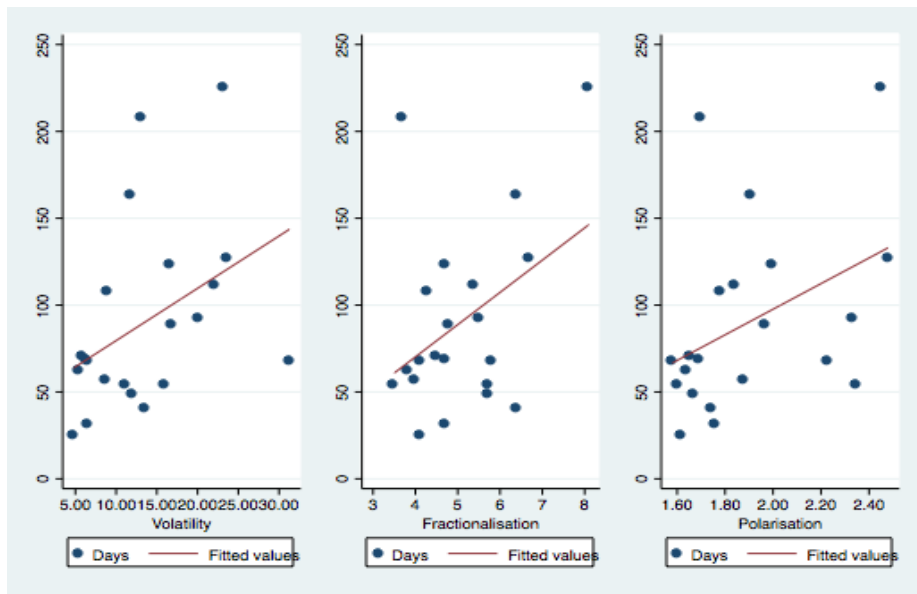

Figure 1 Scatterplots of the three independent variables, with the dependent variable.

When moving to the regression model (table 3) model 1 shows that the effect of electoral volatility has, as expected, a positive effect on the length of the government formation. Changing one point in the percentage of electoral volatility (the variable originally ranges from 4.8% to 31.3%) increases the length of government formation in 3 days. The evidence is statistically significant at the 10% level. Model 2 shows that, as expected, the effect of fractionalisation is positive on the length of government formation, and is statistically significant on the 10% level. Changing one point in the degree of fractionalisation (the variable originally ranges from 3.5 to 8.1) increases the length of government formation in 18 days. The evidence is statistically significant at the 10% level. Model 3 depicts that the effect of polarisation is positive on the length of government formation. When there is a one-point increase in the degree of polarisation (the variable originally ranges from 1.58 to 2.48) the length of government formation increases with 73 days. This effect is significant at the 10% level. In Model 4, the level of electoral volatility and the degree of fractionalisation are grouped together. Despite the two coefficients show, as expected, a positive relationship with

the length of government formation, the two variables fall short of statistical signification. The high correlation between the two variables (r=.64), together with the low number of observations in the model, may well be explaining this lack of statistical signification. In model 5, the level of electoral volatility and the degree polarisation are pooled together. As anticipated, the two coefficients show a positive relationship with the DV. However, the variables fail to be statistically significant. It is probable that this is due to the high correlation between the two variables (r=.79), and the low number of observations. For model 6, the degree of fractionalisation and the degree of polarisation are entered. Both of the variables are, as expected, positively related to the length of government formation. Nevertheless, both variables are not statistically significant. This is likely due to the high correlation between the two variables (r=.71), and the low number of observations. In model 7, all three IVs are grouped together. All three IVs remain positively correlated with the length of the government formation; however, all variables still fall short of statistical signification.

	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5	Model6	Model7
volatility	3.014+			1.913	1.828		1.533
	(1.517)			(1.954)	(2.521)		(2.590)
fractionalisation		18.465+		10.946		10.928	9.559
		(9.539)		(12.195)		(13.530)	(13.898)
polarisation			73.402+		37.424	42.730	16.383
			(38.090)		(62.707)	(53.932)	(70.394)
_cons	49.303*	-3.606	-49.179	8.611	-5.665	-46.461	-10.289
	(23.244)	(49.677)	(73.155)	(50.998)	(95.080)	(73.774)	(96.661)
N	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
+ p < .1, * p < .05, ** p < .01							

Table 3 Summary of the regression models 1-7

The second part of the research will depth into some specific case-studies in order to better understand the dynamic of government formation and the causes for the variation in the length. All the cases that are investigated are in the, what is called, era of instability (2002-present) (Parlement & Politiek, 2018i).

Case 1: Assessing the impact of fractionalisation with the 2010 and the 2017 elections.

The first instance will investigate the elections of 2010 and 2017, by having the IVs electoral volatility and polarisation constant. In 2010 the electoral volatility was, as is visible in appendix C, 23.6%, and in 2017 it was 23.35%. Moreover, the polarisation is also almost of the same value, in 2010 at 2.48 and in 2017 this is at 2.45. In 2010 the government formation

took 127 days. The government of 2010-2012 is categorised as a minority government in the Senate, with support of an extra party for a majority in parliament (Parlement & Politiek, 2018h). In 2017 the government formation took 225 days, the longest government formation since the second World War (Parlement & Politiek, 2018a). The government of 2017-present is categorised as a majority government in both Parliament and the Senate (Parlement & Politiek, 2018h). The variable that varies is fractionalisation, the ENP. In 2010 the ENP was 6.7, and in 2017 at 8.1.

As explained in the theoretical framework, a higher ENP is likely to require more parties to form a majority coalition government, as the parties will all be rather small. In 2010, 10 parties were elected into parliament. The VVD and the CDA formed the government, with support of the PVV in Parliament (Parlement & Politiek, 2018j). All these parties were right-wing parties; moreover, because the PVV only supported the government, they had a smaller seat at the negotiation table. Therefore, the negotiations went rather quick, as the parties had similar plans for the coming for years. In 2017, 13 parties were elected into government. This increase in parties, of which many were of about the same size, required the government formation to take place with four parties. Initially, the negotiations started with VVD, CDA, D66, and GroenLinks; however, after 100 days GroenLinks ceased to be part of the negotiations because of fundamental ideological differences. The negotiations continued with the VVD, CDA, D66, and the CU and managed to complete the government formation (Parlement & Politiek, 2018b). Another complicating factor was that prior to the elections most of the parties[8] already declared that, regardless of the outcome, they would not want to get into a coalition with the PVV. This caused some unrest, especially among the supporters of the PVV because they deemed it undemocratic, and confirmed their believes about the political establishment (NOS, 2017). The PVV ended up being the second biggest party of the elections, with 20 seats (Parlement & Politiek, 2018b). By excluding this many seats, it became much more difficult to find a formation that had a majority in both the Senate and the Parliament (NOS, 2017). By excluding the possibility of forming a coalition with the PVV before the elections, most parties formed some form of pre-election coalition. Not in the actual

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[8] Every party, except for 50Plus, VNL, and Forum voor Democratie, have excluded the PVV (Telegraaf, 2017).

definition of the concept[9], but an adaptation of it, in which the parties collectively stated that they will not govern with this one party.

Judging from these two government formations, it can be concluded that the causal mechanism is that when there are more parties that need to partake in the government formation to form a majority, the government formation will take longer. Moreover, the necessity for more parties in a government is likely to create a situation where parties that are ideologically further apart will get into a government formation together. As the 2017 government formation has illustrated, this is not easily accomplished. Another difference is that in 2017 they wanted to create a majority government, where in 2010 they sufficed with a minority government (Parlement & Politiek, 2018j) (Parlement & Politiek, 2018b). It clearly requires more parties to participate in the negotiations to form a majority government, when many parties are of relative same size. Thus, the causal mechanism of a higher ENP that will lead to a longer government formation, is in place; nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that it is a complicating factor to form majority government coalitions, when a big party is expelled from forming a government with the other big parties. This is likely to affect the length of the government formation negatively.

Case 2: Assessing the impact of electoral volatility with the 2006 and the 2012 elections.

The second instance investigates the elections of 2006 and 2012, where the impact of the variable electoral volatility on the length of government formation is researched. The other two IVs, fractionalisation and polarisation are kept constant. The degree of fractionalisation was, in 2006, at 5.5, and in 2012, at 5.7. Additionally, the degree of polarisation was very similar in both cases. In 2006, the degree of polarisation was 2.33, and in 2012 at 2.35. While these values are very similar, the variation in the DV is very big. In 2006, the government formation took 92 days. In 2012, the government formation took 54 days. The government of 2006 is categorised as a majority government; however, from 2010 it lost its majority due to the revoked support of the PVDA. The government of 2012 is categorised as a majority government; nevertheless, they did not have a majority in the Senate (Parlement

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[9] "A pre-electoral coalition exists when multiple parties choose to co-ordinate their electoral strategies rather than run for office alone" (Golder, 2006, p. 195).

& Politiek, 2018h). The difference in these two cases is the electoral volatility. In 2006, 20.2% electoral volatility was recorded, where in 2012 only 15.85% was recorded.

As is described in the theoretical framework, when there is an increase in the electoral volatility, it is likely to have an effect on the length of the government formation, as there are many new people to politics. In 2006, the electoral volatility was at 20.2%. After the 2006 elections, two new parties entered the parliament. Firstly, the anti-immigration party, the PVV, entered the parliament with nine seats. This is a high entry for a new party. Secondly, the animal rights party, the PvdD, entered with two seats in parliament (Parlement & Politiek, 2018k). The electoral volatility, after the elections of 2012, was substantially lower, 15.85%. After the elections, only one new party entered parliament. This was the 50plus party, the senior party, which entered with two seats. After the 2006 elections, there was not only a higher entry of new parties, but as well a much higher succession of Parliament members, compared to 2012. In 2006, 70 people of the previous term did not return, compared to 46 after the 2012 election (Parlement & Politiek, 2018l). This means that it is likely that the negotiations have been held by less experienced Parliament members in 2006 than in 2012, which would likely prolong the government formation period.

The government formation attempt in 2006 was initially started with CDA, PVDA, and SP because these parties were the three biggest, after the election. SP had gained 16 seats in the elections, thus many new parliament members. Rather quick, after 25 days, it became clear that the SP could not cooperate in a government, due to too different ideologies (Parlement & Politiek, 2018m). This forced the CDA and PVDA to search for another party, to form a majority government. They found this support in the CU. The CU had doubled in size after the elections. This combination of parties proved to be fruitful as a government coalition, and after a total of 89 days the new government was installed. The government formation of 2012 was one of the quickest formations, after the Second World War. The government formation only took 47 days (Parlement & Politiek, 2018p). After the elections, the two biggest parties, the VVD and PVDA, were perceived as the most viable option for a coalition. Both parties had gained seats[10]; however, both parties are well established in the Parliament, thus lack of experience would not be as big of a problem for them.

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[10] The VVD gained 10 seats, the PVDA gained 8 seats (Parlement & Politiek, 2018o).

Concluding from both government formations, it can be concluded that especially the inexperience of the participants in the government formation, in 2006 the SP[11], has been a contributing factor to the extension of the government formation. Despite the fact that both of the government formations were still under the average of government formations[12]. This means that the causal mechanism was not only that the increase in electoral volatility lead to a longer government formation, but a related feature of too many new members of Parliament. Moreover, as official reason why the SP ceased the government formation, was that the SP could not continue because of incompatible ideas for the coalition (Parlement & Politiek, 2018m). This means that the ideologies of the parties were too far apart, which was probably easier to overcome in 2012 between just two parties.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at finding the causal mechanism that determines the length of government formations in the Netherlands. This has been attempted by looking at three variables that have been on the rise, since the de-pillarization of the end of the 1960s. The three variables are electoral volatility, fractionalisation, and polarisation. By using a quantitative approach, it has been demonstrated that all three variables have a positive correlation with the length of government formations. Furthermore, all three variables had statistical signification at the 10% level. With a sample of 21 observations, the hypotheses can be accepted. As is stated above, the following four models stop to be statistically significant. Moreover, from the first three models, it does not become undisputedly clear what factor is affecting the length of the government formation the most. One of the main issues is that the three variables are on different measurement scales, which makes it difficult to compare them.

In order to complement the findings from the quantitative analysis, a qualitative research has been executed. For this qualitative research a MSSD design was selected. In both of the instances, the DV of one of the elections was almost twice as big as the other election. This means that the variation in the IV had, possible, a large effect on the length of the

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[11] The 2006 government formation was the SP's first government formation, their negotiators were new to the procedure (Parlement & Politiek , 2018q).
[12] The average length of government formations, after the Second World War, is 90 days.

government formation. The first instance, researching the impact fractionalisation on the length of government formation, showed that with a higher number of effective parties it becomes more challenging to find enough parties to form a coalition. However, this was not only due to actual increase in number of parties that were necessary to for a majority coalition, but also because of the bigger ideological gap between the parties. Thus, the second remark points towards the impact that polarisation can have on the length of government formation as well. Even though, polarisation remained constant for the whole parliament, this can still be a disrupting feature for the government formations. In the second instance, researching the impact of electoral volatility on the length of government formation, the example showed that when there are more new members of parliament after an election, it becomes more difficult for the negotiating parties to make quick decisions in the negotiations. Nevertheless, electoral volatility does seem to have a smaller impact prolonging effect on the length of government formation, than in the first instance, when the degree of fractionalisation and polarisation is smaller.

To answers the research question: *What factors affect the length of the government formation of a national government?* These case studies have not conclusively proven what factor affects the length of government formation the most. However, they have proven that when there is a less stable parliament, with many parties and many new members, the government formation does take substantially longer. It is therefore possible to conclude that for all three factors, when increasing, do contribute to a longer government formation. Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot completely justify that the alteration in the length of government formation is solely due to these three factors, other factors can play part in the events and creation of the government.

This thesis has researched the connection between the length of government formation in the Netherlands, and the factors electoral volatility, fractionalisation, and polarisation. As research method for the quantitative part, a time series regression was chosen to investigate the correlations between the DV and the IVs. A limitation of this time series design, is that there is a low external validity because the correlations that are discovered are very specific to, in this case, the Netherlands. This is not necessarily a bad thing. As explained before, it would be difficult to compare this research to other countries, as there would be many alternative explanations, such as the electoral system and the party systems. Furthermore, if there would have been more observations that had all the data, the

p-value probably would have been higher. This has made it difficult to prove the partial effect of the three variables on the DV without needing to consider the effect of the other variables, as well as the fact that the three IVs were highly correlated, which made it difficult to determine the partial effect of the IVs.

Despite the evidence found, the present research may raise some concerns that further research should address. For example, further research could go more in depth in the exclusion of coalition possibilities, prior to the elections. By investigating the 'actual' ENP that are eligible for coalition government formation, it can be researched if alteration to the electoral, or parliamentary system, should be made. From this research recommendations can be made to more actively make pre-election coalitions. As Golder has discovered, when party systems become more polarised, pre-election coalitions occur more often (Golder, 2006). Another possibility that could be researched, is whether minority governments are as effective as majority governments because if that is the case, the coalition government formation can take more formations after an election. Lastly, the same research can be conducted on a different country, with a different institutional design, but without immediately comparing it to this research on the Netherlands. This new research could discover how these variables are correlated, and what causal mechanisms would be in place in, for example, a majoritarian system such as the United Kingdom.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Abbreviations

Christen Democratisch Appel	CDA
ChristenUnie	CU
Dependent Variable	DV
Democraten '66	D66
Effective Number of Parties	ENP
European Union	EU
Independent Variable	IV
The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD
Partij van de Arbeid	PVDA
Partij voor de Dieren	PvdD
Partij voor de Vrijheid	PVV
VoorNederland	VNL
Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	VVD

Appendix B

Obs=21	Volatility	Fractionalisation	Polarisation
Volatility	1.0000		
Fractionalisation	0.6402	1.0000	
Polarisation	0.7879	0.7140	1.0000

Table 4 Correlation between the three IVs.

Appendix C

Year	Government formation (days)	Electoral Volatility %	Fractionalisation	Party System Polarisation
1948	31	6,55	4,7	1,76
1952	69	6,30	4,7	1,69
1956	25	4,80	4,1	1,62
1959	68	6,45	4,1	1,58
1963	70	5,80	4,5	1,65
1967	49	12,00	5,7	1,67
1971	40	13,50	6,4	1,74
1972	163	11,80	6,4	1,91
1977	208	13,00	3,7	1,70
1981	108	8,90	4,3	1,78
1982	57	8,60	4,0	1,88
1986	54	11,05	3,5	1,60
1989	62	5,45	3,8	1,64
1994	111	22,20	5,4	1,84
1998	89	16,90	4,8	1,97
2002	68	31,30	5,8	2,23
2003	123	16,55	4,7	2,00
2006	92	20,20	5,5	2,33
2010	127	23,60	6,7	2,48
2012	54	15,85	5,7	2,35
2017	225	23,25	8,1	2,45

Table 5 Data for the quantitative research.