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The Netherlands

The role of cultural conservatism among voters and party elites

Nan Dirk De Graaf and Giedo Jansen

The Netherlands is one of the countries in Europe experiencing a strong trend towards secularization. Each successive cohort appears to be less religious (De Graaf and te Grotenhuis 2008) and has relatively fewer people with a denomination (Need and De Graaf 1996; De Graaf, Need, and Ultee 2004). One implication for confessional political parties is that the relative size of implicitly potential voters is declining. What about this shrinking group of people belonging to a Church? Are they still to the same extent inclined to vote for a confessional political party? Research has shown that religious-based voting has declined considerably.[1] Furthermore, Kees Aarts and Jacques Thomassen (2008) showed that, for Dutch voters, religious ideological issues have become relatively less important for identifying differences between political parties. Despite all these findings, religion is still a dominant political divide within the Netherlands, and religious people are still much more likely to cast a vote for a confessional political party than for any other political party (De Graaf, Jansen, and Need 2013).

Traditionally, religious people are assumed to have a culturally conservative ideology, and this is closely linked to the political manifestos of confessional political parties. Depending on the denominational background of parties, the manifestos vary to some degree in what we label as *cultural conservatism*. Will these parties adjust their manifestos to maximize their party size? And what will the consequences be if they do? Besides answering these questions, the main aim of this chapter is to explain why there has been a decline in religious-based vote choice. This is a complex task, because a decline in the relative number of religious people in society does not logically imply that those who do have a denomination will be less likely to prefer a confessional party. One possible relevant social change is that those having a denomination secularize as well, and will therefore have a weaker culturally conservative ideology over time. Our objective is to explore whether this

[1] See for instance De Graaf (1996); Eisinga, Felling, and Franses (1997); Evans and De Graaf (2013a); Jansen, De Graaf, and Need (2012); Need (1997); De Graaf, Heath, and Need (2001); Van der Kolk (2000), Van Holsteyn and Irwin (2000), and Irwin and Van Holsteyn (2008).

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is indeed a plausible explanation. However, in line with earlier work by Nan Dirk De Graaf, Anthony Heath, and Ariana Need (2001) and Giedo Jansen, De Graaf, and Need (2012), we consider not only the role of such *bottom-up* social changes, but also the role of *top-down* political changes (i.e. the merging of parties and changes in party manifestos) as a potential interpretation of the decline in religious voting. These two studies have shown that apart from social changes, the supply of party alternatives is important in the processes of religious de-alignment. The mergers in 1977 of the main Catholic, Protestant, and Calvinist political parties resulted in a sharp and sudden decrease in the religiosity–vote relationship. Jansen, De Graaf, and Need (2012) found that the religion–vote association also dropped after the 2002 elections, coinciding with the merger of two minor Protestant parties. Moreover, the latter study also showed that alternatives in party positions matter: as parties take more traditionalist party positions, this increases the effect of church membership on vote choice. Especially, non-affiliated voters become less likely to vote for parties that focus more on traditional moral positions. Jansen, De Graaf, and Need (2012) also show that parties with more traditional moral positions deter secular voters rather than attract religious voters.

The studies by De Graaf et al. and Jansen et al. both employ data of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES). Although these data allow for an investigation of all general elections in the Netherlands from the 1970s onwards, the role of ideology remains somewhat under-studied due to a lack of measures that are consistently comparable over time. In this chapter, we make use of excellent comparable data for measuring cultural conservatism. Using these data, we will especially focus on the evolution of religious ideology in Dutch politics. The bottom-up perspective is related to the composition of electorates and the relevance of specific divisions in society. From this perspective, we will examine changes in the cultural conservative value orientations of Dutch voters belonging to various religious groups, including non-church members. By showing how religious affiliation, church attendance, and ideological values of the Dutch population have been changing, we provide detailed information about the secularization process in the Netherlands. The top-down perspective is related to the extent to which parties appeal to voters (Evans 2000; Evans and Whitefield 2006; Jansen, De Graaf, and Need 2011). From this perspective, patterns in the religion–vote relationship reflect characteristics of the party system or of individual parties. In this study, we examine how changes in cultural conservatism among voters and party elites produce changes in the religiosity–vote relationship.

In sum, we aim to answer the following question: to what extent can bottom-up and top-down changes in cultural conservatism account for changes in the effect of religiosity on party choice in the Netherlands between 1979 and 2010? We will use data from the Social and Cultural Developments in the Netherlands (SOCON) surveys. This is a set of seven cross-sectional surveys that were conducted between 1979 and 2010. First, we shall begin with a description of the

social changes that are relevant for understanding the possible changes in the religious structure of Dutch society since the late 1970s. After that, we will introduce the hypotheses derived from both the bottom-up approach and those hypotheses derived from the top-down, or the so-called *political choice*, approach (Evans and De Graaf 2013b).

Changes in the religious and political landscapes

Secularization

The religious landscape of the Netherlands has changed considerably in the past four decades. We will not provide a detailed theoretical exposé as to whether the trends can best be explained by the secularization paradigm or by a more economic paradigm (for an overview see De Graaf 2013). What is important is that there has been a strong decline in the relative number of people with a denomination, and that a cohort-effect interpretation of this change is the most plausible one (Need and De Graaf 1996; te Grotenhuis 1998). Grace Davie (2002) claims that there might be fewer people with a denomination, but that people still believe. This 'believing without belonging' is likely to be less traditional and more individualized. De Graaf and Manfred te Grotenhuis (2008), however, demonstrated that this does not apply to the Netherlands.[2] When distinguishing between traditional Christian belief and belief in the supernatural, both show a decline over the 1979–2005 period, although the decline in belief in God is somewhat stronger than the decline in belief in the supernatural. Since the number of Church members is declining as well, these results imply that there is not much believing without belonging, although the somewhat slower decline in believing in the supernatural suggests somewhat diverging trends.

Life-course studies using event history data clearly show that life-cycle effects are small (i.e. people become more religious when they grow older) and that non-members and former members in the Netherlands remain non-members during their whole lifecycle (Need and De Graaf 1996; te Grotenhuis 1998). Taking these and their own results into account, De Graaf and te Grotenhuis (2008: 596) concluded that 'in the Netherlands for the years to come, a continuing "silent secularization revolution" in which both religious belief and religious affiliation decline is the most likely longitudinal trend, and not a large-scale religious revival.'

Figure 16.1a shows that the proportion of the religious electorate has fallen considerably. Total Church membership dropped from 58 per cent in 1979 to 34 per cent in 2010. This decline is most apparent for Catholics and Protestants, dropping from 30 and 17 per cent to 16 and 8 per cent, respectively. The Calvinists

[2] Aarts et al. (2008) showed that the Davie's claim does not apply to other countries as well.

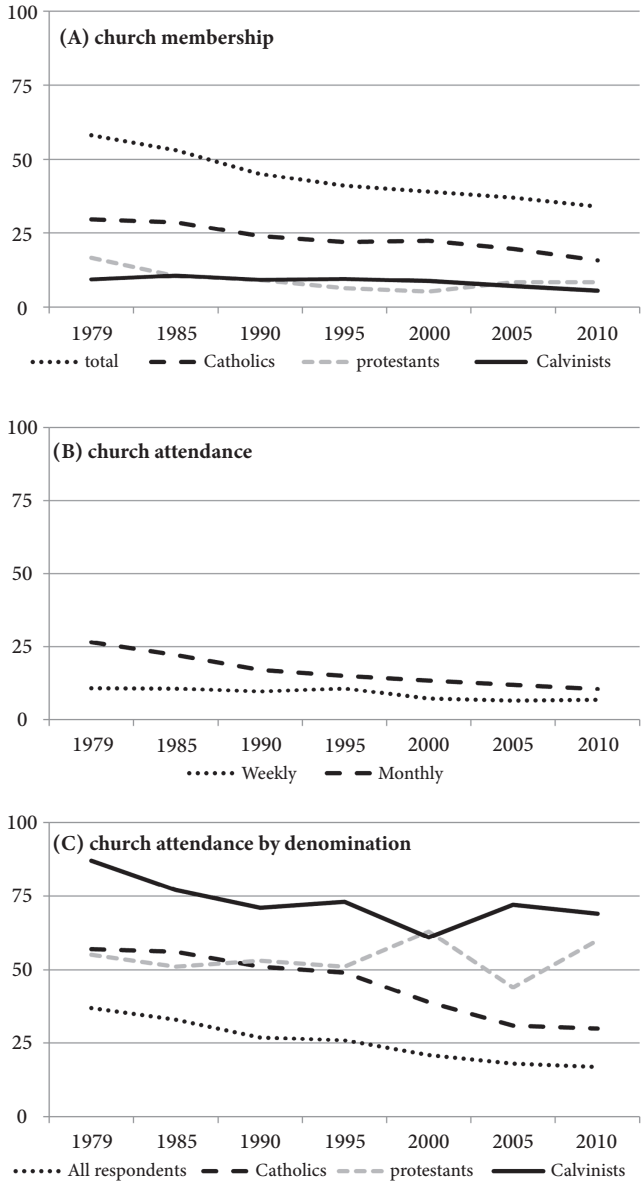

Figure 16.1 Trends in Church membership and church attendance by denomination in the Netherlands, 1979–2010

Source: Social and Cultural Developments in the Netherlands (SOCON) surveys, 1979–2010.

remained more or less stable at 9 per cent till 1995, and then dropped to 6 per cent of the population in 2010. With regard to church attendance, we first focus on the percentage of the population that attends religious services each week or month. Figure 16.1b shows a strong decline especially for weekly attendance, but monthly attendance has also become slightly weaker in the new millennium.

Figure 16.1c, which distinguishes between denominations, reveals a more or less linear downward trend of regular church attendance (i.e. at least once a month) among all respondents over a period of thirty-one years. When broken down by religious groups, the decline is most evident for Catholics (from 57 to 30 per cent) and Calvinists (from 87 to 70 per cent). Among Liberal Protestants, the rate of regular church attendance appears to be somewhat more stable over time, or, to phrase it more exactly, it would seem that there is a trendless fluctuation from 1995 onwards.

It is important to note that there has been an increase in the number of Muslims. There are approximately 900,000 Muslims (about 6 per cent of the population, and mostly of Moroccan and Turkish descent) who live in the Netherlands. There is not much knowledge about the secularization process among Muslims, but the first indications suggest that Muslims are influenced by 'rationalization' (Phalet and Haker 2004). Although relevant data cover a shorter time period than in this study, Karen Phalet and Frea Haker (2004) concluded that Muslim identity is still very strong, although young Muslims are on average clearly less strict concerning their religious duties than older ones. While they also found that it is difficult to disentangle life-cycle and cohort-effects properly in their data, they claim that the most plausible interpretation is that cohort effects are present.[3] Fransje Smits and Wout Ultee (2013) find that mosque attendance among people of Turkish and Moroccan descent increased slightly between 1997 and 2009. If only Muslims are studied, however, a slight decline in mosque attendance can be observed over this period, although for other countries it is difficult to come to any clear conclusion (Voas and Fleischmann 2012). Unfortunately, the survey used for this chapter pre-dates the establishment of DENK in 2015, a political party with its roots in the Dutch Turkish and Moroccan communities.

Changing religious institutions

In the past fifty years, religion as an institution has also been in decline. This applies especially to the Catholic Church. For example, the authority of the bishop weakened substantially. Young religious cohorts are guided less by the moral authority and spiritual guidance of religious leaders than older cohorts

[3] Other studies on secularization among Muslims in the Netherlands include those by Phalet, Gijsberts, and Hagendoorn (2008) and Smits and Ultee (2013).

(Dobbelaere 1999). The increasing number of closed or demolished churches dramatically illustrates the decline of the Catholic Church. In 2011, it was estimated that in the years to come about 1,100 church buildings, 25 per cent of the current total, will be closed (Bisseling, De Roest, and Valstar 2011).

In addition, Protestant denominations experienced important institutional changes. After suffering many splits since the nineteenth century (Janse 1985; Knippenberg 1992), a reunification process started in the 1960s. In 2004, the process culminated in the formation of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN, Protestantse Kerk in Nederland), a merger between the Dutch Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Re-reformed Churches. However, this merger also resulted in new Church fissions because several conservative branches of the Reformed Church and some re-reformed communities decided not to join the new PKN.

Religious parties

Historically, there had been three main religious parties: the Catholic People's Party (KVP, Katholieke Volkspartij), which drew its support mainly from Catholics; the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP, Anti-Revolutionaire Partij), mainly supported by members of the Calvinist Churches and from other orthodox Protestants, and the Christian Historical Union (CHU, Christelijk-Historische Unie), mostly voted from members of the Liberal Protestant churches.[4] As Cees van der Eijk and Kees B. Niemoller (1983: 6) have argued, 'in terms of policy and in the eyes of the electorate these parties are very similar and are considered to occupy a centre-right position in Dutch parliamentary politics … Internal Christian-democratic differences have always been minimal in relation to the differences of these parties vis-à-vis the other parties.' These three religious parties fought the 1977 election on a common slate and in 1980 formally merged into the single party of the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA, Christen-Democratisch Appèl). Ever since the introduction of universal suffrage at least one of these Christian-democratic parties has been part of the governing coalitions, although this sequence was first broken in 1994, and again in the period 2012–17.

After the formation of the CDA, other confessional parties, mainly appealing to orthodox Protestants, remained extant in the Dutch party system. Although these minor 'Re-reformed' (*Gereformeerde*) parties (i.e. Political Reformed Party [SGP, Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij], Reformed Political Alliance [GPV, Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond], or Reformed Political Federation [RPF, Reformatorische Polieteke Federatie]) did not join the CDA, two of these (GPV and RPF)

[4] This discussion of religious parties in the Netherlands is based on De Graaf, Heath, and Need (2001) and Jansen, De Graaf, and Need (2012).

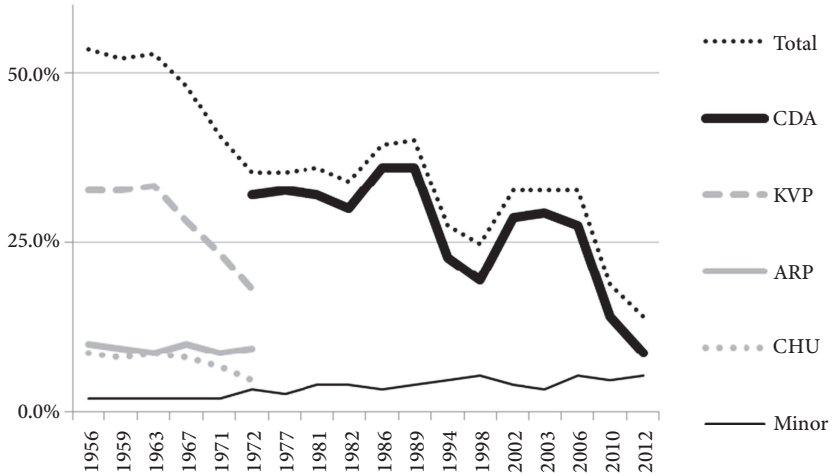

Figure 16.2 Parliamentary seats held by religious parties in the Dutch Tweede Kamer, 1956–2012[a]

[a] Minor religious parties include GPV, RPF, CU, and SGP.

Source: SOCON surveys, 1979–2010.

merged into the Christian Union (CU, ChristenUnie) in 2002. Both the SGP and the CU are much more conservative than the CDA regarding moral issues. On economic issues, the CU takes a more leftist position than the CDA, and the label *klein rechts* (or *minor right*), which was used to summarize the CU-predecessors, suffices no longer (Pellikaan 2002). Figure 16.2 shows the share of parliamentary seats held by religious parties in the Tweede Kamer (or parliamentary lower House) in the period 1956–2012. Although together religious parties once held the majority of seats in the Dutch parliament, this position has dramatically weakened during recent decades. Despite periods of recovery, the CDA especially lost electoral support over time. The number of seats held since the 2012 elections has been particularly low, and after some slight recovery fell down again to similarly low levels in later elections.

Religious issues

As in other European countries, historical State-Church conflicts in the Netherlands can be traced back to issues surrounding religious freedom, above all with respect to the control over mass education (Lipset and Rokkan 1967b). The first political party in the Netherlands, the Calvinist ARP, emerged out of the so-called *Schoolstrijd* (or *School Struggle)*, a conflict over the equalization of financial rights for public and denominational schools (Knippenberg 2006). Also in the period under study, religious freedom has remained an issue. Since the adoption of the

law allowing same-sex marriages in 2001, there has been an ongoing discussion in Dutch politics as to whether civil servants with religious objections to homosexuality are allowed to refuse to marry same-sex couples. Moreover, the growth of the Muslim population in the Netherlands and the rise of right-wing populist parties, such as the Pim Fortuyn List (LPF, Lijst Pim Fortuyn) and the Party for Freedom (PVV, Partij voor de Vrijheid), have once again put religious freedom back on the political agenda—e.g. issues surrounding the establishment of mosques, the financing of Islamic schools, and the *burqa ban* (Knippenberg 2006).

As well as issues directly involving the interests of religious groups, religious differences have also surfaced in the Netherlands with respect to policies related to moral dilemmas. Despite opposition from parts of its electorate and also from smaller Christian parties, the CDA compromised on legalizing abortion in 1981 (Meijering 2012; Sluiter 2012). Later on, in the period 1994–2002, the 'purple coalition' of the Labour Party (PvdA, Partij van de Arbeid), the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD, Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie), and Democrats 66 (D66, Democraten 66), the first coalition without the CDA, was able to settle the opening of marriage to same-sex couples and the ethical issue of legalizing euthanasia. Interestingly, this happened without much opposition from the CDA (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). Although ethical and moral issues are not very salient, differences still exist today between religious and non-religious groups with respect to moral values and policies. Church members, for example, still strongly oppose adoption rights for same-sex couples or Sunday opening hours for shops (CBS 2009).

Bottom-up changes: compositional changes and the blurring of religious group boundaries

In general, processes of blurring will result in less distinctive religious groups, both culturally and socially. This will ultimately lead to a convergence of political preferences of religious and non-religious groups, and could be an explanation for the decline in traditional religiously based voting. If we want to investigate the trend in the association between the religious and non-religious properly, we also have to consider the fact that the non-religious groups became less homogeneous over time due to an increasing number of people leaving the Church who are still influenced by their religious background.

The decline of traditional divisions can either be caused by compositional effects or by the blurring of the boundaries of religious and non-religious groups (De Graaf, Heath, and Need 2001). Compositional effects are defined as changes in the sizes of the different religious categories. For example, the trends reported in previous Figure 16.1b imply that the decline in the relative number of Church members will cause the compositional effect of religiosity, because fewer religious

people (assuming that the association between religiosity and vote remains stable) are politically relevant. In other words, these changes may affect the total vote shares of the various religious parties, but they will not necessarily affect the strength of the association between religiosity and vote, as measured by odds ratios—which are invariant with respect to the marginal totals. As we will argue later, these compositional changes are very likely to affect the party manifestos if, according to a Downsian model, parties change their position to maximize their number of voters.

We need to distinguish these compositional changes from changes in group solidarity and the blurring of group boundaries. As De Graaf, Heath, and Need (2001: 3) have stated, 'the boundaries between the religious and the irreligious have, it is often assumed, become more blurred, and the social distinctiveness and cultural distinctiveness of religious groups as well as their normative force as reference groups has in consequence declined.' Concerning religious groups, we would also expect an effect of outflow mobility. As argued above, those who leave the Church are socialized religiously. Hence, they are more likely to cast a religious vote than second-generation, non-Church members. A study focusing on the Netherlands showed that former members are indeed more likely to vote for a confessional party than second-generation non-members are (Need 1997). This will affect the impact of religious boundaries, since non-Church members will more likely vote for religious political parties than in the past. Furthermore, due to secularization and individualization, religious affiliation becomes a less important guide for political choices and, more generally, religion's impact on politics and many other aspects of society has considerably declined in Western societies (Dobbelaere 1981). We therefore expect that secularization will weaken the relationship between denomination and ideology, partly explaining the declining relationship between religiosity and voting. However, as our first hypothesis, we expect that

H1: *The decline of the religiosity–vote relationship is less strong if we distinguish between first- and second-generation non-members.*

We will also investigate the ideology of members of these groups over time. For this, we have more accurate measures of religious belief than those used by Jansen (2011) and Jansen, De Graaf, and Need (2012). We are not only able to examine associations between group membership and voting behaviour, but also the intervening effect of ideology. This is of theoretical importance since it might help us to understand the association between the classical cleavages and vote changes. The finding that religious divisions are reflected by differences in value orientations is well established in the political science literature (for instance, Nelsen, Guth, and Fraser 2001; Knutsen 2004b; Aarts and Thomassen 2008, and Raymond 2011). Religiosity and religious membership is often associated with traditional views on moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality,

and gender relations, sometimes more broadly labelled, as we mentioned before, as *cultural conservatism* (Middendorp 1991). The decline of religious divisions in politics may be attributed to a decrease in traditional moral values. Growing homogeneity between religious and non-religious groups may have reduced a sense of shared identity and common interest among members of religious denominations. Our hypothesis then reads that

H2: *The decline of the association between religiosity and party preference will be less strong when we take the relevant ideology, i.e. cultural conservatism, into account.*

With respect to religiosity, we could also formulate an integration hypothesis that might explain the process of blurring. We know that church attendance is an important indicator which denotes a sense of integration in a Church. Hence, the higher the level of church attendance, the more likely one will cast a vote in accordance with said religious ideology. The cultural and normative boundaries between religious and irreligious voters may blur not only because Church members attend church less often (compositional explanation), but also because the moral authority and spiritual guidance provided by religious leaders declines in a secularizing society, which in its turn causes a declining impact of church attendance. Compared to earlier decades, religious leaders today may not only be less successful in enforcing religious norms, but may also emphasize different values during religious services. We therefore hypothesize that

H3: *The decline of the association between religiosity and party preference will be less strong when we take church attendance into account.*

Top-down changes: the impact of political elites

So far we have been discussing political changes that were based on the idea that political cleavages are shaped bottom-up. The *political choice* model has more of a top-down perspective, since it focuses on how political parties take different positions along ideological dimensions. In this case, the agent of change is political rather than sociological, though strategic movements in party positions are themselves assumed to be conditioned by changes in the social structural composition, such as the decline in the size of the levels of religious participation.

Jansen, De Graaf, and Need (2012) and De Graaf, Jansen, and Need (2013) distinguished between two types of top-down political changes: first, changes in the ideological positions of parties; second, the evolution of the Dutch party system with regard to the availability of confessional parties. As already said, the CDA was formed in 1977 after the merger of three denominational parties, all

with a distinguished previous history. The merging of religious parties into the CDA reduced the level of religious voting. Also, the political merger of two minor Protestant parties into the CU reduced the level of religious voting from the 2002 elections onwards. Their analyses additionally show that traditionalist party positions increase religious voting despite the weakening of religious integration and the restructuring of the party system. More particularly, non-affiliated voters are generally less likely to vote for parties that hold traditional moral positions. They therefore concluded that parties with more traditional moral positions deter secular voters rather than attract religious voters. What Jansen, De Graaf, and Need (2012) could not investigate though is whether cultural conservatism (measured as a validated political ideology) interacts with the level of conservatism of political parties and to what extent cultural conservatism could interpret changes in the religiosity–vote association. We can do this now by using the SOCON surveys, which will be discussed later. However, the use of these surveys comes at a cost, since given the time span we cannot test against the impact of the party mergers.

The top-down or political choice model assumes that the relationship between individual ideology and voting depends on the ideological positions of parties. A citizen with a culturally conservative ideology is more likely to vote for a confessional party that makes it clear its culturally conservative statements. Based on a Downsian model—assuming that parties change their position in order to maximize the number of voters—we expect that parties will move towards the centre. Consequently, if a religious party wants to maximize its vote share in a secularizing society, it should de-emphasize traditional moral values. Hans Keman and Paul Pennings (2006) have indeed shown a convergence of political choices. Many Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe, including those in the Netherlands, moved to the centre during the 1990s. Religious political parties did so because of the relative shrinking religious group size. Hence, political elites, when writing party manifestos, will deliberately adjust the party programmes accordingly. But, in pursuing this strategy, they are confronted with a classic dilemma: by seeking support from secular voters to secure the long-term survival of their party, they run the risk of eroding the linkage between religiosity and politics (Kalyvas 1996). Overall, we expect that in the case where religious parties focus more on traditional morality issues, it is likely that the association between denomination and religious voting will be strengthened. We therefore hypothesize that

H4a: *Changes in the association between denomination and party choice become less strong when we take the ideological position of parties into account.*

Given our focus on ideologies, we expect that less stress on traditional morality issues by religious parties will weaken the relevance of ideologies. We may expect that not only the cultural conservative ideology of citizens in general, but also that

of the religious political elites, have been in decline. However, the simple assumption of a move towards the centre is less straightforward in a country such as the Netherlands, with both a fragmented party system and a highly proportional electoral system (Evans and De Graaf 2013b). When the CDA moves towards the middle, political elites of small flanking parties might increasingly stress the culturally conservative ideology of their parties to attract traditional CDA voters. Therefore, also for the CDA, a move towards the middle might come at a higher cost than initially anticipated. It is a delicate equilibrium process. Hence, it is not unlikely that the CDA as a large confessional party will move away from the middle again to keep their most traditional voters. We therefore expect that

H4b: *Changes in the association between cultural conservatism and party choice become less strong when we take the ideological positions of political parties into account.*

We can conclude that social change and political choice perspectives come to rather different predictions about both the patterning of change in relationships between social structure and vote and the forms taken by the relations between social structure and political attitudes. These can be seen in Figure 16.3, which provides a schematic overview of the impact of social change on the relation between religion and conservative ideology, on the one hand, and the impact of political change on the relation between conservative ideology and party choice, on the other. The bottom-up interpretation is provided by arrow *A*, showing the blurring effect on the association between denomination and cultural conservatism. In arrow *B*, the political choice (i.e. top-down perspective) is indicated by changes in the party manifestos (these are of course conditioned by social changes) that will affect the strength of the relation between ideology and party choice The more confessional political parties move towards the centre, the less likely people with a conservative ideology will cast a vote for confessional parties.

Data and variables

We will use, as already mentioned, the SOCON cross-sectional surveys, conducted in 1979, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010—a period of thirty-one years.[5] All surveys are representative of the Dutch population (excluding those with a

[5] To compare our results with previous publications, the Dutch National Election Surveys over the period 1971–2006 seems the obvious choice. However, these data do not offer the possibility of measuring over time in detail and comparably both economic and cultural conservatism. In addition, these data do not contain for all years detailed occupational codings to construct a suitable class division. We therefore also choose to use the SOCON surveys, which include as well a question on vote intention. Their samples were 1,003 for the 1979 survey, 3,003 for 1985, 2,384 for 1990, 2,019 for 1995, 1,008 for 2000, 1,375 for 2005, and 994 for 2010. For details about design, non-response, and the like, see Eisinga et al. (1992, 1999, 2002, 2012, and 2013).

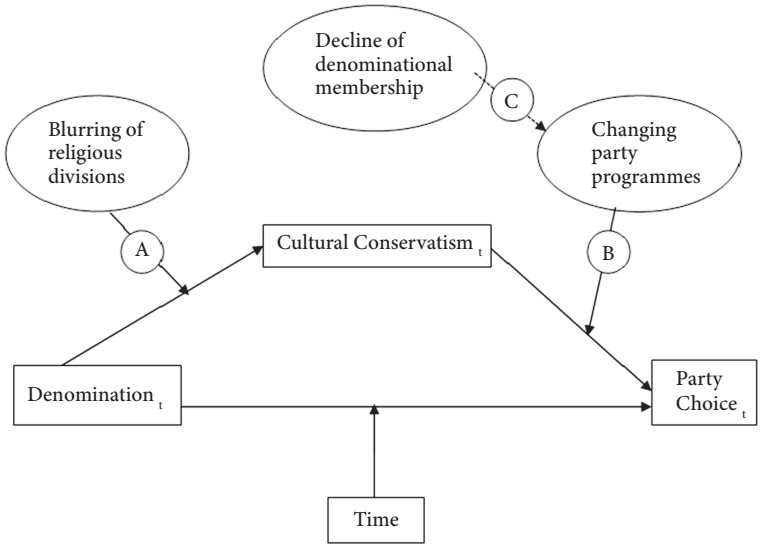

Figure 16.3 The impact of having a denomination or being religious on party choice via cultural conservatism in the Netherlands, showing the impact of secularization through either (*i*) the impact of shifts in party positions on the link from cultural conservatism to party choice or (*ii*) its direct impact on the links between denomination and cultural conservatism

Source: Evans and Der Graaf (2013b: 18).

non-Christian affiliation) aged 18–70 regarding age, marital status, and gender. From this longitudinal dataset, we selected the following six variables, all based on identical questions in every survey.

Denomination: The denominational group of respondents is measured using two questions. First, it was asked whether or not they are a member of a Christian Church, or if they had been a member before. If respondents indicated that they are a member of a Christian Church, they were then asked which Church they were a member of. The response categories sometimes differ by wave. We grouped the categories into the following denominational groups: second-generation non-members, first-generation non-members, Catholics, Liberal Protestants, orthodox Protestants (Calvinists), and those who are a member of another Christian Church. Unfortunately, it is not possible to distinguish a separate category for members of non-Christian churches because the required information is not available in the pre-1995 surveys. It is therefore not feasible to separate non-Christian Church members from non-Church members. The post-1995 surveys, however, indicate

that the group of non-Christian Church members in the sample is small, and it may be expected that this group was even smaller in the pre-1995 period.

Church attendance: Church attendance is measured in the following categories: (0) (almost) never, (1) a few times a year, (2) at least once a month, at least once a week.

Ideology: To construct a scale measuring culturally conservative ideology, we employed three batteries of items from the SOCON surveys. First, we use five items on *civil liberty* (everybody should be free versus freedom should be restricted). Respondents were asked whether people should be free to (1a) say whatever they want to in public, (1b) write whatever they want to in public, (1c) demonstrate in favour of or against a cause, (1d) criticize the Royal House in public, and (1e) occupy buildings to enforce justified demands. Second, we use three items on *life and death* (permitted or not); respondents were asked whether they would permit (2a) euthanasia, (2b) abortion, and (2c) suicide. Third, we use four items on *gender equality* (agree or not, five-point scale). Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements: (3a) 'A woman is better suited to raise children than a man', (3b) 'It is not really as important for a girl to get a good education as for a boy', (3c) 'In general boys can be brought up freer than girls', and (3d) 'It is unnatural if women give guidance to men in a company.' We also employed for cultural conservatism a confirmatory second-order factor analysis. We started with factor solutions for the civil liberty items (1a–1e), the issues on death (2a–2c), and the differences between men and women (3a–3d). These three factors form one dimension, and the reliability coefficient is 0.78.

Groups of political parties: In the SOCON surveys, respondents were asked 'Which national party would you vote for if parliamentary elections were held today?' The number of parties that appear on the ballot each election is large. To provide a parsimonious study that allows an over-time comparison, we distinguish between four major party groups in the Netherlands based on the De Graaf et al. (2001) classification. Next to a category for *religious parties* (Christian Democratic Appeal [CDA], Political Reformed Party [SGP], and Christian Union [CU]), we combine parties of the *Old Left* (as the Labour Party [PvdA] or the Socialist Party [SP]), the *New Left* (as Democrats '66 [D66] or the Green Left [GL]), and the *Liberal Right* (as People's Party for Freedom and Democracy [VVD]). For readability purposes, we will occasionally apply the label 'voting' when it actually concerns 'vote intention'.

Political party positions: To determine the position of religious parties, we use data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). The CMP datasets are based on content analyses of the election programmes of parties contesting in national elections (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006).

The quantity and direction of statements by parties, measured in sentences in a programme, are classified into fifty-six policy categories. With regard to the traditionalist positions of parties, we use the emphasis in the manifestos placed on positive statements about 'traditional morality'. This item was measured as the percentage of sentences of the total text dedicated to 'favourable mention of traditional moral values; prohibition, censorship and suppression of immorality and unseemly behaviour; maintenance and stability of family, and religion'. Because our dependent variable consists of party groups instead of individual parties, we constructed a weighted mean of this scale by party group for each election year. The weight of a party within this group is determined by its vote share in percentages. Because the CMP data only includes 'significant' parties, not all Dutch parties are covered, i.e. positions of minor religious parties (RPF, GVP, SGP) are not included in calculating the position of the religious party group.

Control variables: In all multivariate analyses we use a set of controls, i.e. age, age-squared, education in seven categories (elementary at most, lower vocational [LBO], lower secondary [MULO, ULO, MAVO], secondary vocational [MBO], higher secondary [HAVO, MMS, VWO], higher vocational [HBO], and university [WO, WO+]), marital status, employment status, social class in three categories (non-labourers, labourers, self-employed), and gender.

Analyses

Religiosity: levels of cultural conservatism over time

We have learnt in Figure 16.1 that the relative number of people with a denomination and the level of church attendance declined considerably, suggesting strong secularization effects in the Netherlands. However, religiosity or cultural conservatism might still be viewed as a strong and especially stable political anchor of voting preferences. In order to assess whether this indeed is the case, we report cultural conservatism for each survey and denomination in Figure 16.4. The scores on the cultural conservative scale exhibit diverging trends. For Catholics, we notice a clear decline in cultural conservatism till 2005 and a flat line afterwards, confirming the secularization process. Not surprisingly, the Calvinists have on average the highest score, but they show a remarkable trend; we observe more or less a *U*-shape which has its lowest level of cultural conservatism in 2000. Remarkably, there is hardly any difference between 1979 and 2010, which in this case comes as a contrast to an assumed secularization process. On average, Protestants show a decline in cultural conservatism, although it is not a uniform pattern. Not unsurprisingly, first- and second-generation non-Church members show the

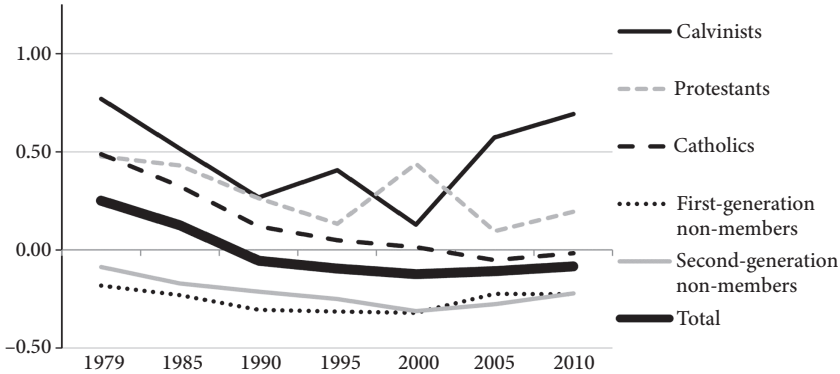

Figure 16.4 Average scores on the cultural conservatism scale, by denomination and generation, in the Netherlands, 1979–2010
Source: SOCON surveys, 1979–2010.

lowest scores on the scale. Both groups show a decline till 2000 and no differences between the two groups since then. Interestingly, the average level of cultural conservatism for the whole population also declines till 2000 and since then there has hardly been any change.

To get a more detailed grasp of the changes in the culturally conservative values of Dutch voters of various religious groups, we report the trends of cultural conservatism for frequent and infrequent church attendees. One might expect that the decline be less or even non-existing among those who frequently attend religious services. Figure 16.5 shows that both for Protestants and Catholics there is also a decline in cultural conservatism among infrequent church attendees, although from 1990 onwards Protestants remain more or less stable. For Calvinists, there is no *U*-shape for the infrequent church attendees: it is more or less a pattern of trendless fluctuation. Also, with respect to frequent attendees among Catholics, we observe a decline in cultural conservatism. For Protestants who attend church frequently, there is a small decline, although 2000 is an anomaly. For Calvinists who attend frequently, we find the earlier mentioned *U*-shape, but now the increase in cultural conservatism from 2000 onwards is quite strong; for this group, it surpasses in 2010 the score of 1979.

Bottom-up interpretation: religious divides and vote intention over time

We start by showing the over-time results of the relation between denomination and vote intention. Is there a clear decline in religiously based voting? In Figure 16.6a we report the difference in predicted probabilities of voting for a

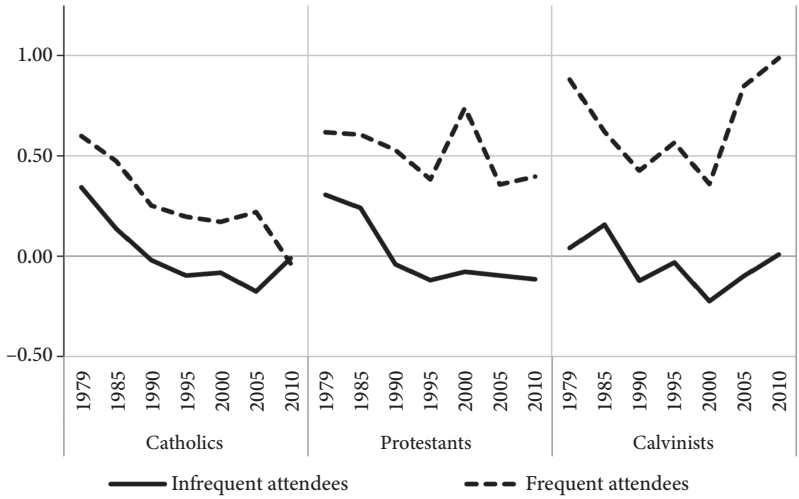

Figure 16.5 Average scores on the cultural conservatism scale, by denomination and church attendance, in the Netherlands, 1979–2010
Source: SOCON surveys, 1979–2010.

religious party (versus any other party) relative to non-Church members (based on the average marginal effects of a logistic regression model).[6] Calvinists show no linear decline in religious vote intention; rather, this is a *U*-shape. For Catholics, we notice a decline on average, whereas Protestants demonstrate a trendless fluctuation from 1979 onwards. Although Catholics are by size the biggest group of the three denominations, we cannot conclude that there is a general decline in denominational-based voting preference. In a next step, we will try to explain the variation in vote intention by controlling for church attendance in a logistic regression model. In Figure 16.6a we can see that, taking into account church attendance in the model, the likelihood of casting a religious vote considerably decreases. For Catholics, only a small decline in denominational vote intention remains. This implies that the decline in church attendance explains most of the decline in the religious vote, which confirms Hypothesis 3. However, not unexpectedly, church attendance cannot explain the *U*-shape of the odds ratios for Calvinists.

Next, we investigate whether a change in the ideology can explain the differences over time. In Figure 16.6a we plot the probability for religious vote intention after taking into account cultural conservatism as well, and using again a logistic regression model. The results show first of all that cultural conservatism explains part of the denomination-vote intention variation, since for most years

[6] To estimate the trends in the effect of denomination, we included dummy-indicators for each year (with 1979 as the reference category), as well as interactions between the year-dummies and the dummy-indicators for the major religious groups (with non-members as the reference category).

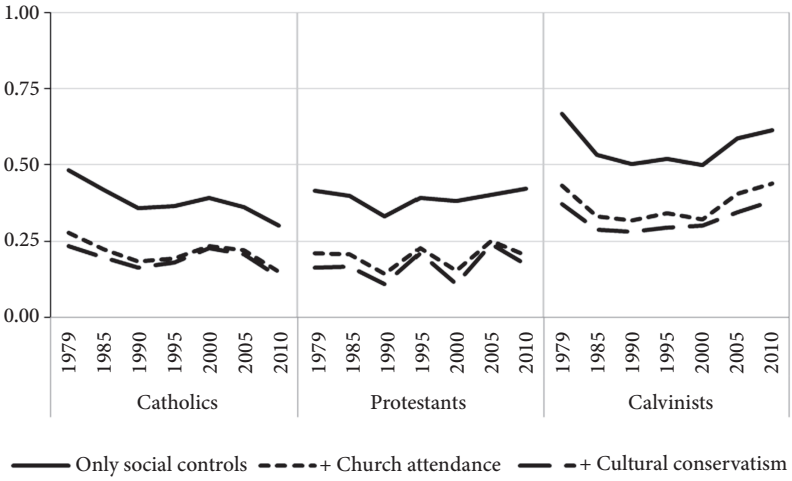

Figure 16.6a Differences in predicted probabilities to vote for a religious party relative to non-Church members in the Netherlands, 1979–2010
Source: SOCON surveys, 1979–2010.

the probabilities are lower for the Calvinists and the *U*-shape is less prominent, although still extant. For Catholics, the trend becomes even flatter, suggesting support for Hypothesis 2. For Protestants, not much difference can be seen in the trend after adding cultural conservatism. On average, the probability is only a bit lower for each year. The logistic regression analyses included in Table A16.1, in the Appendix, estimating religious voting separately for each year, show that for each year cultural conservatism has had a substantial effect on the religious vote intention.

In our first hypothesis, we suggested that the decline of the religion–vote relationship is less strong when differentiating between first- and second-generation non-members. Figure 16.6b shows that the overall probability for a religious vote is slightly higher if the reference category becomes the second-generation non-members. However, there is hardly any different trend as compared to Figure 16.6a. In other words, we do not find support for this hypothesis.

In the Dutch political system, religious voters have more of a choice than the simple denominational/non-denominational divide. For example, we could distinguish the CDA from CU and the SGP, but this is not realistic since these are very small parties and we simply run out of sufficient cases as to make any claim at all. However, we can distinguish several non-denominational party blocs. Similar to Jansen et al. (2012), we will distribute parties among the *Old Left* (including parties as the Labour Party [PvdA], the Socialist Party [PS, Socialistische Partij], the Social Democratic Party [DS'70, Democratisch Socialisten '70], and the Communist Party [CPN, Communistische Partij Nederland]); the *New Left* (D66, the Greens, the Party of Radicals [PPR, Politieke Partij Radicalen], the Pacifist Socialist Party [PSP, Pacifistisch Socialistische Partij], and the Evangelical Popular Party

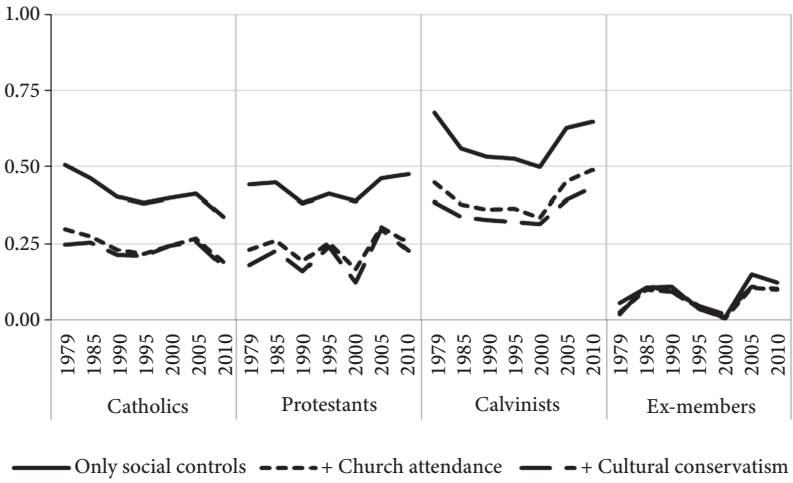

Figure 16.6b Differences in predicted probabilities to vote for a religious party relative to non-Church members, taking second generations as the reference category, in the Netherlands, 1979–2010
Source: SOCON surveys, 1979–2010.

[EPV, Evangelische Volkspartij), and the *Liberal Right* (the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy [VVD], the Farmers' Party [BP, Boerenpartij], and the New Middle Party [NMP, Nieuwe Midden Partij]). We therefore will examine whether the preference for a denominational party varies if one ponders this choice as compared to the option of voting for a party either included in the Old Left, New Left, or Liberal Right. For this purpose, we will plot the probabilities using a multinomial logistic regression. The results are reported in Figure 16.7. Concerning the religious vote intention, it reveals a similar but slightly different pattern than the one reported in previous Figure 16.6. The differences are due to the exclusion of some minor and new parties, such as the Pim Fortuyn (LPF) or the Party for Freedom (PVV), that do not fit into the categorization of the party blocs.

First of all, we report the results for Catholics in Figure 16.7. There is a decline in the probability Catholics have such a preference for religious parties. And their probability of having preferences for the Old Left and New Left seem to follow a trendless fluctuation. Catholics became slightly more likely to have some leanings toward parties included in the Liberal-Right bloc. Furthermore, adding church attendance in the model slightly reduced both the overall probabilities and the declining trends for having instead a religious vote intention. Adding cultural conservatism hardly changed the results.

For Protestants, Figure 16.7 shows changes for 2010. They became more likely to have preferences for the Old Left, and less likely for the New Left. Controlling for church attendance and cultural conservatism reduced the probabilities overall. And for Calvinists, the resulting pattern offers an interesting insight into the earlier *U*-shape denominational vote intention. Apparently, since 2005 both the Old

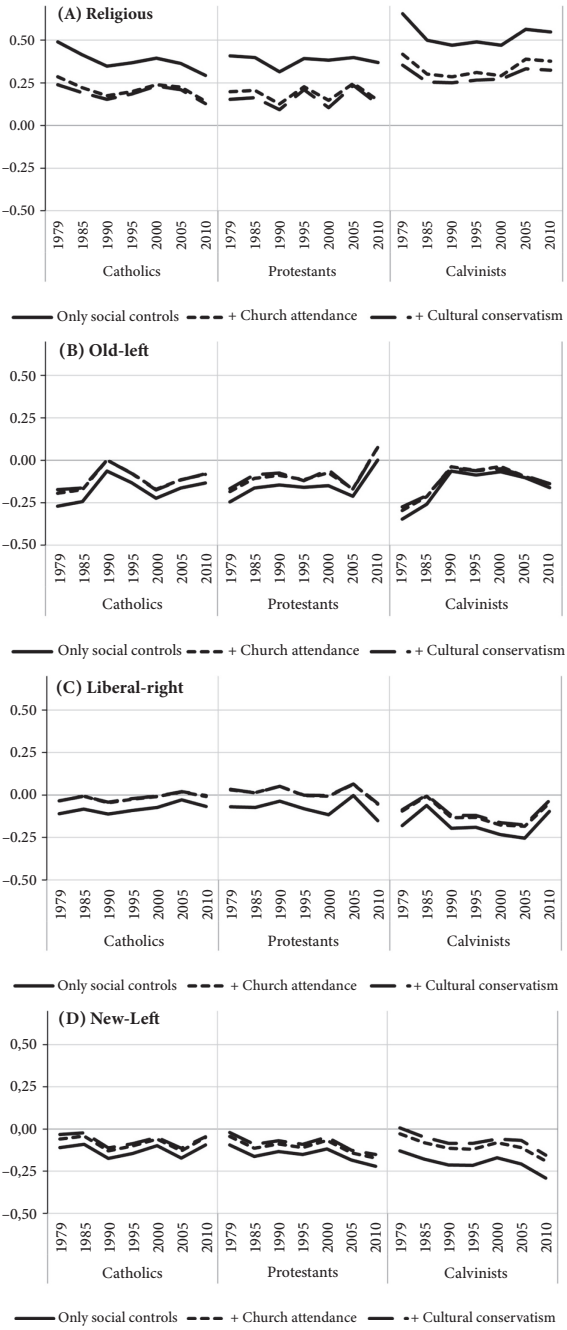

Figure 16.7 Differences in predicted probabilities based on a multinomial logistic regression analysis to vote for Religious, Old-Left, Liberal-Right, or New-Left parties relative to non-Church members in the Netherlands, 1979–2010[a]

[a] *Religious* parties include CDA, KVP, ARP, CHU, GPV, RPF, CU, and SGP; *Old Left* parties, PvdA, SP, DS'70, and CPN; *Liberal Right* parties, VVD, BP, and NMD; and *New Left* parties, D66, Greens, PPR, PSP, and EPV.
Source: SOCON surveys, 1979–2010.

Left and the New Left became an even less attractive option for the Calvinists. This matches with their increased probability to prefer a religious party; the aversion against Liberal Right became less strong as well. Figure 16.7 reveals furthermore that controlling for church attendance and cultural conservatism interprets a large part of the Calvinist affiliation. Church attendance and cultural conservatism hardly explain anything regarding the preference for any party belonging to the Old-Left bloc.

Top-down interpretation: religious divides and vote intention over time

So far, we have tried to explain the changes in the denomination-vote association using the bottom-up interpretation. But political parties are not static in their appeals; they change their party programmes to improve their attraction to voters. Due to the shrinking size of the religious electorate, confessional parties face a dilemma if they want to maximize the support of voters. It might be tempting to adjust their party programmes in such a way that it also becomes more appealing to non-religious voters. This might result, however, in the possibility that religious voters will recognize themselves less in those parties. In order to know what impact party programmes have, we make use of data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006). In Figure 16.8, the emphasis on traditional morality issues of the CDA, the most relevant Christian Democratic party in the Netherlands, is reported by election year. It would be optimal to employ a conditional logistic regression design to formally model the effect of party positions on vote choice (Jansen et al. 2012). However, given that the CMP dataset is gathered during elections, the years of measurement do not match with the SOCON survey years. The most feasible and rather restricted approach we can therefore take is to look at general changes in the manifesto scores and to investigate whether the predicted probabilities of voting for a religious party follow the same pattern.

What Figure 16.8 shows is that, for the CDA, the focus on traditional morality issues declines till 1982 and stays low till 1986. This is exactly the period where the probabilities of having religious versus any other party preference declined most strongly for Calvinists, both when we take their church attendance and cultural conservatism into account as well when we do not (i.e. uncontrolled). For Catholics, there is also a decline in religious voting during this period. This suggests an adjustment of the religious voters to the declining focus on morality issues of the CDA, although the decline in religious voting among Catholics continues till about 1990, when traditional morality issues get more attention at the CDA. Between 1990 and 2000, the probabilities of Catholics having confessional party preference increased slightly (see Figure 16.7), a development that follows to some

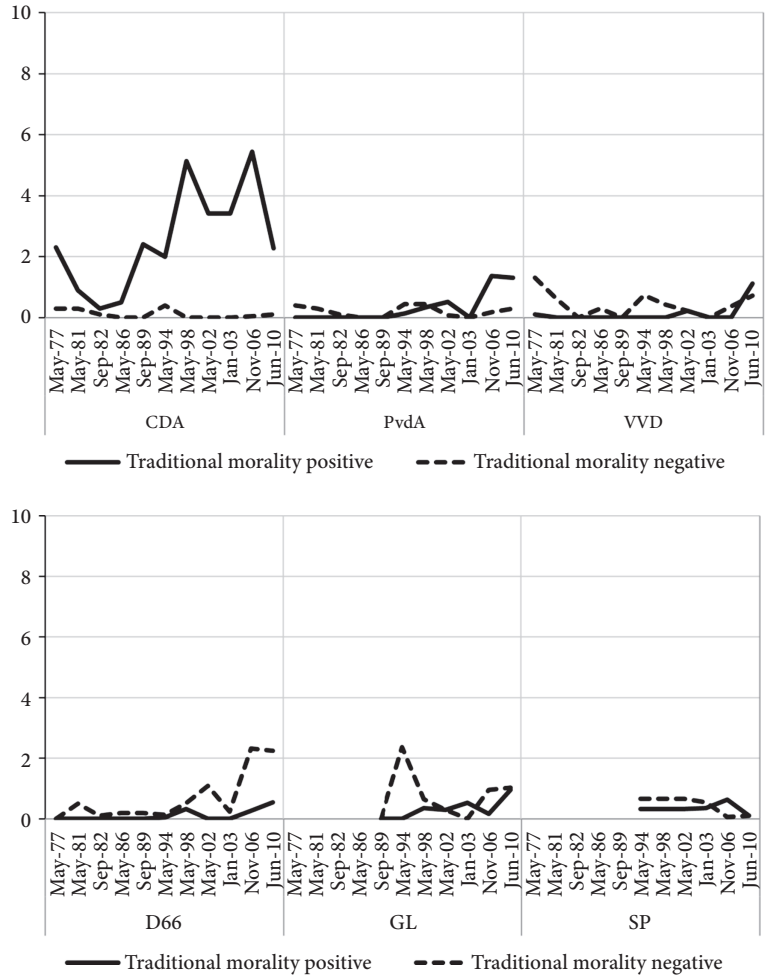

Figure 16.8 Emphasis on traditional morality in the manifestos of some selected political parties, broken down by party, in the Netherlands, 1977–2010[a]

[a] The emphasis is calculated subtracting the negative from the positive mentions.

Source: Manifesto Project Database, from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP).

extent the increasing focus on morality issues of the CDA in Figure 16.8 during that period. In contrast, the declining scores of the CDA manifestos from 2006 onwards match the decline in the difference in predicted probabilities for Catholics relative to non-members in 2010. In Figure 16.8, the extrapolated manifesto scores are more or less the same in 2000 and 2005, departing from the decrease in predicted voting probabilities between 2000 and 2005 for Catholics. Hence, although we see some support for the top-down interpretation (Hypothesis 4a), this does not hold

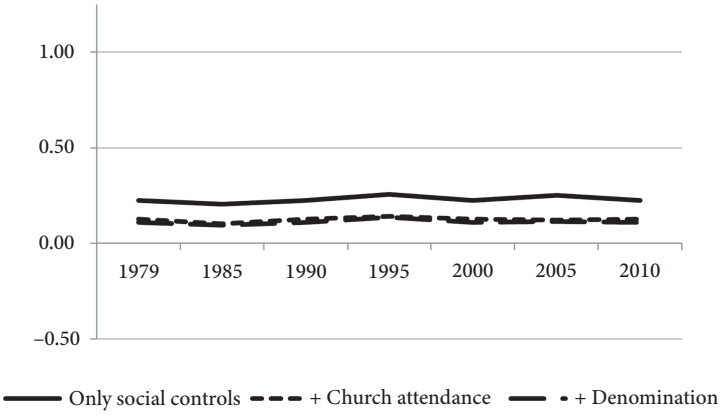

Figure 16.9 Average marginal effect of cultural conservatism on voting for a religious party in the Netherlands, 1979–2010
Source: SOCON surveys, 1979–2010.

for all periods. Of course, we have to be careful with our interpretations. As stated earlier, Catholics are by numbers the biggest group, and we can only elaborate on this group. We do not have the specific manifesto scores for other confessional parties such as CU and SGP over this period. For other parties, there is not much variation, although we notice that for D66 there is more of a negative focus on morality issues since the 2003 elections.

Finally, in Figure 16.9 we report the trend in the association between cultural conservatism and the intention of casting a religious vote in order to test Hypothesis 4b. It is clear that either after controlling for social background indicators, or additionally controlling for church attendance and denominational membership, there is hardly any change in that association. This suggests that, apparently, party's manifestos do not have any effect on this association.

Conclusions

The secularization process in the Netherlands during the last five decades has been particularly strong. The relative number of religious people declined considerably, and cohort replacement became the most important driver of this process. We noticed also that the level of church attendance declined not only because of a relative increase in the non-affiliated population, but also because church attendance diminished among the affiliated. Likewise, religious ideology in Dutch society is in decline. Cultural conservatism is becoming less important among all groups, except for Calvinists, who showed a decline from 1979 till 2000, followed by an increase to about a level in 2010 as it was in 1979. Regarding the Catholic Church,

recent events do not provide many clues about a possible end in the declining number of Catholics in the near future. In his assessments of various theories, De Graaf (2013) argued that the signalling approach might offer a potential tool for explaining the strength of Churches in societies. Signals of confidence in the Church are important, and recent scandals of the cover-up of sexual abuses by Catholic cardinals and bishops do not provide much hope in this respect. Pope Francis I, in our view, seems to understand this very well, and appears to be actively involved in trying to rebuild confidence in the Catholic Church.

The last decades also saw a decline in the power and prominence of religious institutions in the Netherlands. The large amount of church buildings that were closed or demolished is a physical indication of this process. The process of secularization has also had a strong impact on the political landscape. The declining electoral support in recent elections for the CDA, the biggest confessional party, also illustrates these trends. Despite all this evidence, religion as a divide is still an important predictor of religious voting. However, Catholics, still the largest denominational group in the Netherlands, reduced their support for Christian parties. This declining support is best explained by the lower levels in church attendance and to some extent also by the decline in cultural conservatism within this group. For Protestants, not much has been changing since 1979, whereas for Calvinists we noticed an interesting revival of religiously based voting. Initially, in 1979 the Calvinists had a probability of about 70 per cent of having a religious party preference, but this dropped to about 50 per cent and stayed constant till about 2000. After 2000, it increased again to more than 60 per cent. This is more or less the same pattern, i.e. a *U*-curve, as the trend of cultural conservatism for the Calvinists. Controlling for cultural conservatism, the *U*-curve in the probability of voting for a religious party flattened to some extent, indicating that cultural conservatism interprets part of the fluctuation in Calvinists' religiously based voting.

Overall, we noticed that church attendance explains a lot of the association between denomination and religious voting. Although cultural conservatism has a strong independent effect, it only marginally adds to the explanation of that association. Furthermore, the distinction between first- and second-generation non-members adds little to the explanation of trends as well.

Due to a decrease in the relative size of the Christian population and a decline in its religious orthodoxy, Christian political parties have to adjust their political party programmes in order not to lose too many votes. A telling case of this strategy is the merging of three religious political parties into the CDA in 1977 and the subsequent adjustment of their party programmes. We also investigated to what extent the association between being a member of a Christian Church and voting for a Christian party is mediated by the ideological position of such a party. Because of data limitations, we could only examine the ideological position of the CDA over time; we were unable, however, to investigate whether the leaders of

small Christian flanking parties increasingly stressed their cultural conservative ideology in order to attract traditional CDA voters. In any case, data suggest that a declining focus on morality issues by the CDA seems to run parallel with a decline of support among Catholics; contrariwise, increasing the relevance of morality issues seems to increase the likelihood of attracting Catholic voters. But this is far from a perfect relationship. In some periods we notice a less parallel process. Furthermore, while the party manifesto scores are only available for election years, our surveys were held in other years. Based on Dutch election surveys and party manifesto data, Jansen (2011) could analyse similar years and also found support for the claim that parties may increase their support among religious voters by stressing traditional issues. In other words, it seems that *political choice matters* (Evans and De Graaf 2013b). On the other hand, and rather unexpectedly, variations in party manifesto scores over time seem not to affect the association between cultural conservatism and casting a religious vote.

In our theoretical section, we focused on possible explanations for declining trends in the association between denomination and religious voting. Those trends indeed apply to the largest religious group, i.e. Catholics. However, for smaller groups we noticed different patterns. For Protestants, there is a trendless fluctuation, and for Calvinists, an initial weakening of religious voting was followed by its strengthening. In other words, even in a secularizing country these trends are not always what one initially would expect.

Given that the CDA has been a member of a coalition government for decades, their loss in support among the voting population, first in 2010 and again in 2012 and 2017, suggests a blow to potential chances of becoming a major player in future government coalitions. This decline of political power is also an indication of secularization. During their first period outside government, between 1994 and 2002, the CDA reorientated itself on its core values, actively debating its religious roots. Also, the more recent losses have provoked a process of strategic reorientation, with the installation of a Strategic Council after the 2010 election. At the 2012 Congress, the party, again in opposition, switched its course towards a large set of centrist policies. In the 2017 general elections, the CDA became the third party in a very much fragmented parliament, but its increase in both votes (from 8.5 to 12.4 per cent) and seats (from 13 to 19) were rather disappointing. At this point, however, it is perhaps too early to assess the long-term outcomes of those processes.

Table A16.1 Logistic regression analyses of voting for a religious party in the Netherlands, 1979–2010[a]

Variables	1979	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Constant	**−4.39*****	**−3.74*****	**−2.62*****	**−2.46*****	**−2.64*****	**−3.29*****	**−3.33*****
Denomination (r. c., non-member)							
Ex-member	0.26	**0.87*****	**0.67*****	**0.70*****	**0.19*****	**1.02*****	**0.64*****
Catholic	**1.91*****	**1.93*****	**1.43*****	**1.71*****	**1.81*****	**2.22*****	**1.06*****
Protestant	**1.32*****	**1.75*****	**1.08*****	**2.09*****	**0.71**	**2.59*****	**1.56*****
Calvinist	**2.56*****	**2.25*****	**1.99*****	**2.26*****	**2.04*****	**3.04*****	**2.76*****
Other	0.69	0.75*	0.03	1.01**	0.60	1.46**	0.06
Church attendance	**0.75*****	**0.66*****	**0.69*****	**0.76*****	**0.73*****	**0.44*****	**0.70*****
Cultural conservatism	**0.90*****	**0.77*****	**0.96*****	**1.05*****	**1.07*****	**1.03*****	**0.86*****
Age	0.02	0.01	−0.01	**−0.09*****	−0.06	−0.04	−0.03
Age^2	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	**0.002*****	0.001	0.001	0.001
Education (r. c., elementary at most)							
Lower vocational (LBO)	**1.14*****	0.15	**0.51****	0.22	0.07	0.69	0.10
Lower secondary (MULO, ULO, MAVO)	0.55	0.18	**0.71*****	0.38	0.70	0.57	0.78
Secondary vocational (MBO)	**0.66***	0.31	**0.78*****	0.23	0.13	0.62	0.38
Higher secondary (HAVO, MMS, VWO)	0.00	−0.25	**0.59****	−0.11	−0.11	0.16	0.44
Higher vocational (HBO)	0.57	0.01	0.30	−0.20	0.22	0.14	0.70

University (WO, WO+)	−0.35	−0.56	−0.02	**−0.83***	−0.42	−0.56	−0.03
Marital status (r. c., married)							
Not Married	0.48	0.12	−0.09	−0.21	−0.41	−0.32	−0.12
Divorced	0.57	−0.32	−0.43	**−0.82***	−0.88	**−1.33*****	−0.49
Widowed	−0.17	−0.36	**−1.05****	−0.27	0.73	−0.51	−0.10
Employment status (r. c., non-employed)							
Employed	0.15	**0.26***	0.20	0.29	0.25	**0.49***	0.38
Social class (r. c., non-labourer)							
Labourer	**−0.62****	**−0.43*****	−0.18	−0.32	0.27	−0.29	−0.45
Self-employed	−0.14	0.21	−0.34	−0.01	−0.33	−0.06	0.09
Gender (r. c., male)							
Female	0.15	0.01	−0.09	−0.17	0.12	−0.05	−0.36
N	876	2,301	1,973	1,611	782	929	964

[a] In bold, significant coefficients. Levels of statistical significance: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; *** p<0.01 (two-tailed test).
Source: Social and Cultural Developments in the Netherlands (SOCON) surveys, 1979–2010.