

Membership change in the Dutch Tweede Kamer 1946-2012ⁱ

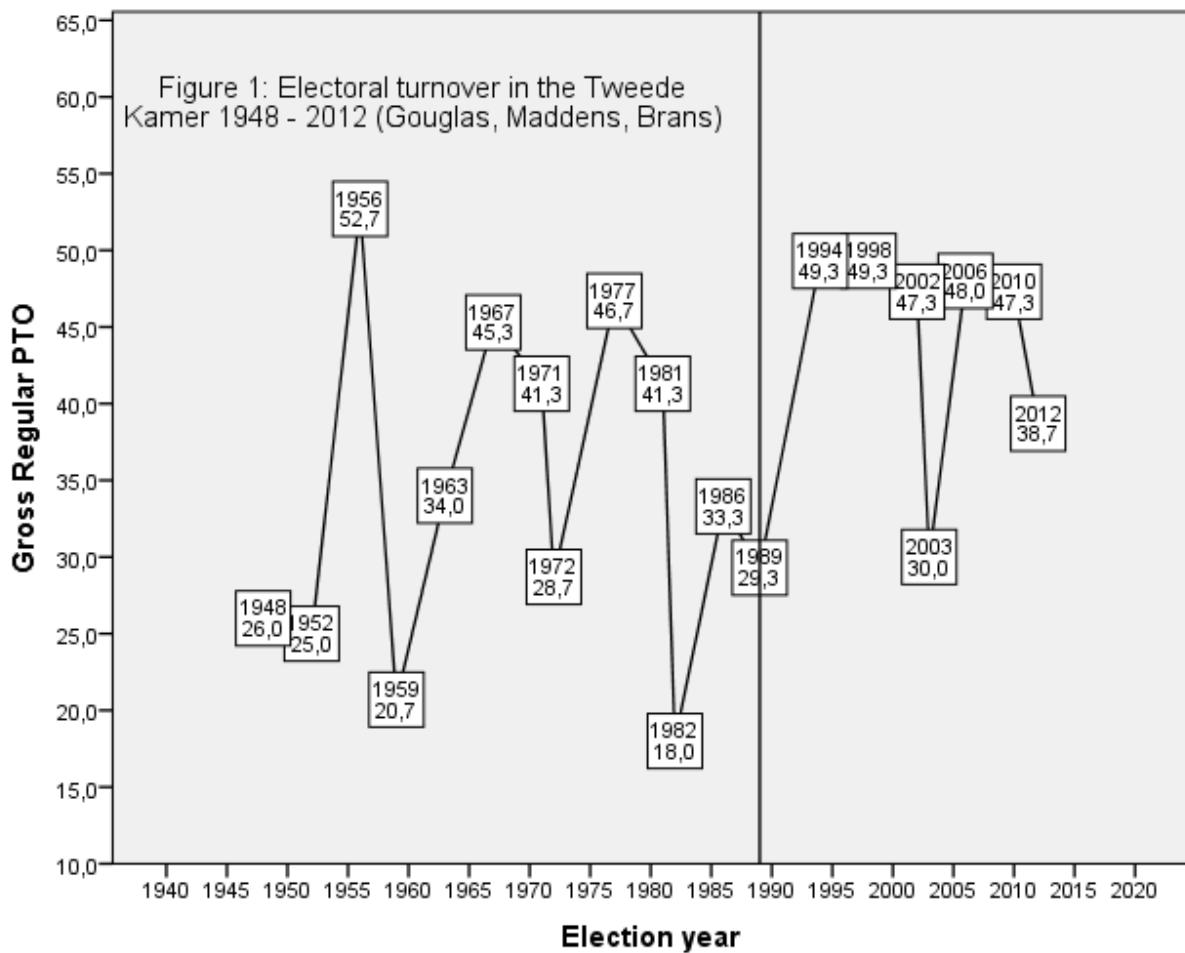
By Athanassios Gouglas and Bart Maddens,

KU Leuven Public Governance Institute

The proportion of parliamentary membership change from election to election, as well as mid-term, is central to democracy. A low turnover rate influences the renewal of parliaments both in terms of sociodemographic representation, as well as in relation to the flow of ideas and new policies. A high turnover too may result to weak and instable legislatures, staffed by inexperienced and transient legislators. While there is no common yardstick as to what constitutes an optimal rate of turnover, there is agreement that a ‘usual’ rate of renewal after elections stands anywhere between 20% and 40%. Using the *Parlement & Politiek* historical data on members of the Dutch Tweede Kamer for the period 1946 - 2012, two types of turnover have been calculated. *Gross regular parliamentary turnover* (electoral turnover), which reflects the proportion of new MPs entering the Tweede Kamer after elections, and *gross non-regular turnover* (mid-term turnover), which reflects the proportion of substitutes entering the lower house during the legislative term.

I. Tweede Kamer electoral turnover trends 1948-2012

On average, a newly elected Tweede Kamer post War has 37,6% new MP’s. Like in most West European democracies, two broad historical periods in the development of membership renewal in the Netherlands can be discerned (Figure 1). The first, between 1948 and 1989 is associated with what Heinrich Best in his “New Challenges, New Elites” termed the “consensus challenge for West European Democracies, namely the establishment of consensually unified polities and societies. In the case of the Netherlands, this takes place in the context of a highly segmented and pillarised along religion and class lines society. As the challenge is met through consociational politics and exercised by a new political class of political professionals, membership renewal is stabilised at lower rates. Electoral turnover in this historical phase averages 34%. The second period, between 1994 and today, is associated with what Best termed the ‘legitimacy challenge’. As in most West European countries, during that period turnover in the Netherlands spikes too, averaging 44,3%. The challenge, a first taste of which is given in the 1967 – 1981 interlude, targets political personnel quality, defined as the ability of democracy to produce efficient and accountable representatives. It goes hand in hand with broader societal developments: the growth of the middle class, depillarisation, the emergence of new social cleavages and a new post-bipolar world political environment. Voter behaviour becomes more open and the frozen party system of the previous era is de-structured. Parties respond to the challenge by pluralising candidate recruitment and reducing incumbency.



1948-1963: the consensus challenge meets consociational politics, electoral turnover at its lowest

During that period turnover is significantly lower, averaging 31,6%. If it was not for the 1956 election, when the size of the Tweede Kamer increased from 100 to 150 seats, turnover would average 21%. The period is associated with social segmentation along religion and class, pillarization, a structured model of voting along the pillar lines (in 1956, 72% of the electorate voted according to this model), a centralised candidate selection process based on the almost automatic reselection of incumbents and the reservation of ‘quality seats’ for representatives of the affiliated interests of the pillar. This period of typical consociational democracy led to the consolidation of the new post War professional political class.

1967-1989: the consensus challenge in transition, electoral turnover on the rise

1967 marks the beginning of a transition to a new historical phase. Turnover is significantly higher till 1989, averaging 35,5%. Yet, it is the sub-period between 1967 and 1981, which is rather turbulent, averaging a turnover of 40,6%. This is the period of declining religious and class affiliation, followed by a tremendous growth of the secular middle class. Along with it, voting patterns start to depart from a structured model along pillar lines to a more open model, meaning

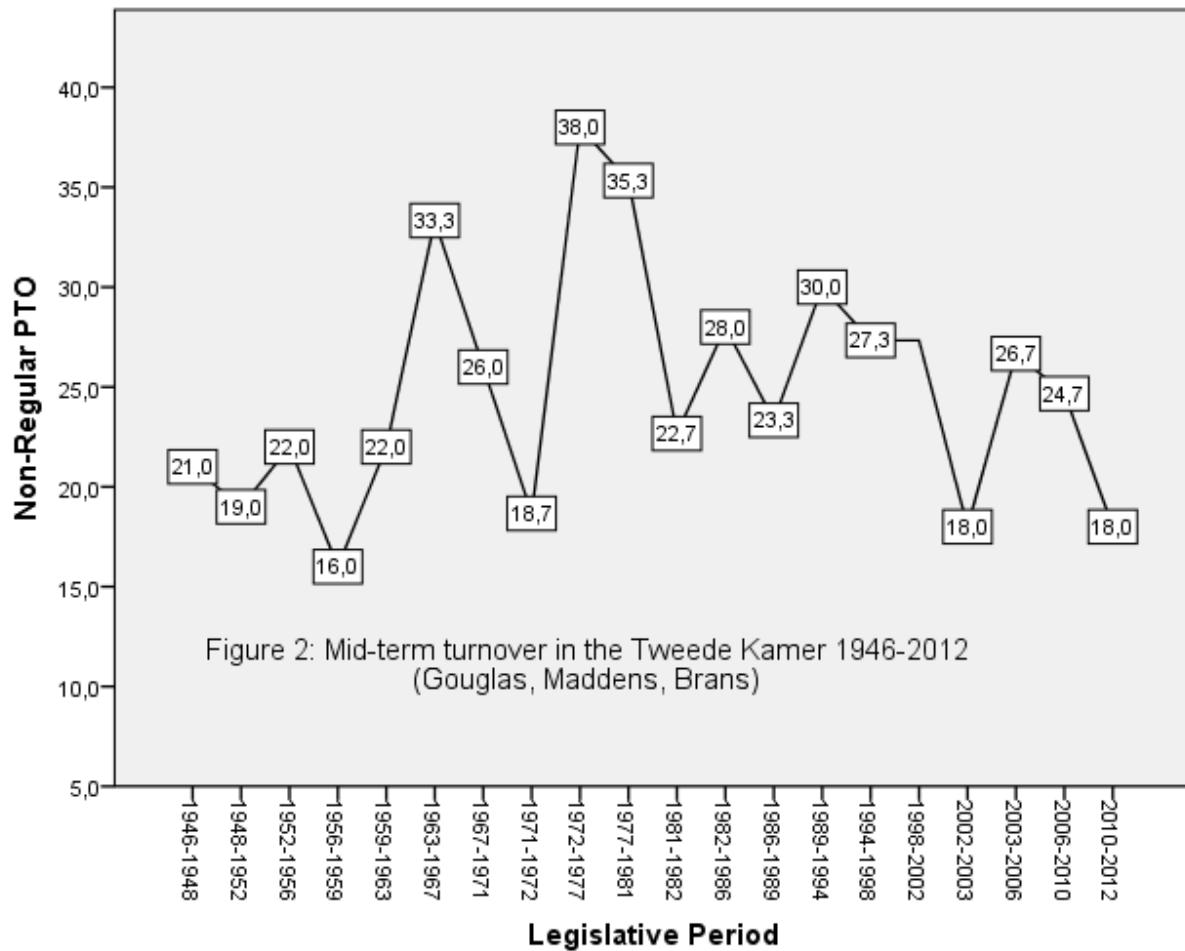
that both religious and secular parties starting to lose their traditional voter base. Yet, despite turbulence, the two dynamics still coexist, as the low turnover period of the eighties suggest.

1994 – 2012: the legitimacy challenge and the electoral turnover spike

The 1994 election marks the beginning of a period characterised by extremely high turnover rates. Average electoral turnover stands at 44,3%, which is above the ‘usual’ limit and almost 10 pct higher than turnover in the previous period. In the post-bipolar era and a de-pillarised Dutch society, the political class is challenged. The average electoral volatility more than doubles showing a citizen body in turmoil. As Andeweg and Irwin in their Governance and the Politics of the Netherlands highlight structured voting along pillar lines gives its place to a more open model. In 1956 72% of the electorate voted a party representative of one of their pillar, associated with their religion and class, but by the 2006 election this has dropped to 28%. With more votes and consequently more seats up for grabs parties respond to the challenge by making changes in the way they balance their candidates lists, trying to reflect more the composition and the changing needs of the electorate. This pluralisation of candidate selection drives the increase in political personnel renewal.

II. Tweede Kamer mid-term turnover 1946-2012

The turnover story during the legislative term is rather different (figure 2). Non-regular turnover averages 24,8%, which means that on average 36 MPs enter every legislature as substitutes in mid-term. Yet there are no clear historical patterns. The two distinct historical periods used for electoral turnover are here deplete, as mid-term turnover averages 25% and 24,5% in every period respectively. Two comments. First, due to the incompatibility between members executive and legislative positions, the average mid-term turnover in the Dutch Tweede Kamer is historically high and we may hypothesize much higher than in other lower chambers across Europe. On the basis of the scarce data that are available, we might hypothesises that the only exception are chambers with similar incompatibility rules, for instance the Belgian De Kamer since 1995 and the Austrian Nationalrat since 1983. The high mid-term turnover is also impacted by the possibility of leaving the parliament and being able to return later. In some cases this return is planned, as is the case with pregnancy leave, fixed at 16 months since 2006. Second, when the legislative period is short (1 to 2 years max) turnover during the legislative term is also significantly lower. This arguably reflects the fact that there has not been significant time for either members of parliament to consider exiting the assembly voluntary or for party selectorates to deselect or re-rank incumbents in order to promote new candidates. The only exception to the rule is again the 1956-1959 legislature. The effect of a low mid-term turnover is technical rather than real. If the size of the assembly had remained the same, non-regular turnover would be 24%, which is exactly at its normal historical level.



What next?

In relation to mid-term turnover it is fairly easy to predict that the average substitution rate will remain stable around its historical average, unless there is a major policy change regarding either the incompatibility between executive and legislative positions, or the right to return to one's position after an interval. In relation to electoral turnover it is much harder to make predictions. Despite a significant drop of electoral turnover below the 40% 'usual' threshold in the 2012 election, the 'legitimacy challenge' is still in place. To a certain extent the global economic crisis and its aftershocks have provided fertile soil for its prolongation. This in turn means that voter swings may still remain high. In the meantime, political parties will try to adapt, among others by further pluralising candidate recruitment, selecting candidates that are more closely reflecting the electorate and its perceived needs. Should we be worried? The political profession has become riskier, yet democracy has become more competitive.

ⁱ The data in the present report was collected by Dr (c) Athanassios Gouglas of the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute (Belgium) during his visiting doctoral fellowship at the University of Leiden under the guidance of prof. Rudy Andeweg whose help is greatly acknowledged. The data forms part of a developing database on parliamentary turnover in Western Europe in the framework of the doctoral research project "Determinants of Parliamentary

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