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Uncovering the Liberal Party in Western Europe: A Comparative Perspective

Master's thesis Political Science

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Abstract

The argument this thesis proposes is that contemporary liberal parties in Western Europe strongly adhere to core principles of traditional liberalism. The argument continues with demonstrating that within the liberal party family in Western Europe two types of liberal parties can be found. This argument gains relevance, through the lack of contemporary research on the liberal party family, which causes the problem that within political science it is not clear what exactly defines contemporary so-called 'liberal' parties. In other words, definitions of the liberal party are outdated and in order to understand contemporary developments within the liberal party family, we should first know what exactly defines a liberal party in the 21st century. The research continues with a case study, which consists of analyzing the party platforms of the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. This case study provides an insight into the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe.

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1. Introduction

Lipset and Rokkan's infamous introduction to their volume *'Party Systems and Voter Alignments'* came out in 1967. In this piece, they argued that party systems were frozen. In order to understand the nature of party systems, it was necessary to return to the 1920s. This was the origins of contemporary European party systems. However, as soon as their chapter appeared, it also appeared that European party systems were experiencing dramatic changes, such as higher levels of volatility, the rise of new parties and ideological changes to existing parties (Bale, 2010; Mair, 2008; Pedersen, 1979).

These dynamics continued well into the 1970s, 1980s and the 1990s. It is during these years that volatility increased (Pedersen, 1979), that Keynesian social democracy became Third Way politics, that conservative parties became neo-conservative parties and that we saw the rise of Green parties and populist parties (Green-Pedersen et al., 2001; Mudde, 2004; Mair, 2008b; Arzheimer, 2009; Bale, 2010). Thus, party systems in the last decades have experienced considerable change. It could be argued that some of the most dramatic changes have been spurred on by the rise of populist radical right parties. Writing in the later part of 2015, populist parties have enjoyed some of their biggest success; this is in part on the back of the current European refugee crisis (The Washington Post, 2015).

In the wake of these changes, one change has gone relatively unnoticed by academics and party scholars. That is, a rise of liberal parties. In the United Kingdom (UK) the Liberal Democrats governed with Conservatives between 2010 and 2015. In the Netherlands the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) has been the largest party since the general elections of 2010. Therefore, the VVD is at the moment one of the most successful liberal parties in Western Europe. This is at the very least noteworthy, since they were a relatively minor party in the Dutch political system (Lucardie, 2008), but still have been able to hugely increase their amount of votes since the 2010 elections. Another Dutch liberal party, Democrats '66 (D66), polls also relatively high, confirming the popularity of liberal parties in the Netherlands (Kiesraad, 2007, 2010, 2012). In Sweden, a centre-right coalition (consisting of the Liberal People's Party among others), 'the Alliance', was able to oust the Social Democrats out of government

after they had been twelve years in power. They continued their government position in the 2010 general election. In short, other examples aside, a rise of liberal parties in Western Europe can be observed.

These developments are rather puzzling on the surface. It appears that in several European countries we see two contradictory developments. On the one hand the rise of populist and populist radical right parties; which are often nationalist, they oppose immigration and they often are critical of globalization. And on the other hand, parties that are in favor of pluralism, individual rights, cosmopolitanism and in many cases an open market economy; principles that one would associate with liberal parties. What explains this phenomenon?

Two scenarios are possible: on the one hand, perhaps European societies are polarizing; those who support the principles of liberalism and liberal parties versus those who are fearful of what liberals would refer to as an open and even tolerant society. Or, on the other hand, perhaps these liberal parties are just liberal parties in name only. An extreme example of this latter scenario is the Austrian Freedom Party. This party was a liberal party in the post World War II era and even a member of the Liberal International (the world federation of liberal political parties). This all changed as Joerg Haider took over the party in 1986 and turned it into a populist and subsequently, in a populist radical right party (Kitschelt & McGann, 2005).

To be honest, this is an extreme example, but it brings up the research question of this thesis: Who are the current liberal parties in Western Europe? Can they still be considered liberal parties in the classical sense, i.e. parties that support less state, pluralism, the individual, the rule of law, and a market economy? Answering this question is difficult, in part since the last comprehensive scholarly work on liberal parties was carried out in 1988.

1.1 Scientific relevance and the literature gap

The author of this last comprehensive scholarly work is Emil J. Kirchner and he edited the book titled '*Liberal Parties in Western Europe*' (1988). This book compared for the first time liberal parties through a systematic framework. This was needed, despite the fact that Morgan and Silvestri researched liberal parties in four West European

countries in 1982. The problem was that their analysis also contained conservative parties and more importantly, they did not employ a systematic framework for comparing either type of liberal party. Similarly, through describing general features of liberal parties in terms of ideology, history and organizational features, the books by Stammen (1978) and von Beyme (1985) do not attempt a systematic comparison between liberal parties. Therefore, the edited book of Kirchner made a significant contribution. After this work there has not been done anything like this, which leaves us with a gap in the literature on liberal parties, at least in a comparative perspective.

Considering all this, the research question also has scientific relevance, besides the relevance of studying liberal parties in the described context of developments in European party systems. The scientific relevance then lies in the absence of an updated comprehensive study on liberal parties in Western Europe which can function as a starting point in trying to explain the developments liberal parties have experienced in the last thirty years or so. In order to say something about contemporary liberal parties in a systematic comparative way we have to fall back on the work of Kirchner which at least could need an update. This confirms once more the need for a study that tries to uncover the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe. What then is the precise aim of the research that will be conducted in this thesis?

1.2 The aim of the thesis

The above shows that, although we know in general terms who or what liberal parties are, there is a lack of an updated comprehensive study on the liberal party in Western Europe and accordingly a lack of knowledge about who the current liberal parties are. Obviously, there is available scientific literature on liberal parties and this should be a good starting point in getting to a definition of the liberal party family. However, in light of the described developments at the beginning of the introduction, it is a problem to build on literature that originates from before the 90s. This could possibly give a skewed understanding of current liberal parties. Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to uncover the identity of contemporary liberal parties. There is need for research that identifies the contemporary liberal parties in Western Europe or at least generates an updated insight.

In order to answer the research question it is necessary to uncover the identity of contemporary liberal parties: Who are they? What do they stand for? In other words, we cannot just assume that they are liberal parties just because they were liberal parties in the past, because they may belong to an international liberal organization or because their name implies that they are a liberal party. To clarify this it is necessary to discuss what a party family is. Mair and Mudde (1998) note that there are significant disadvantages when identifying a political party on the basis of its name. It touches only the surface of a political party. For example, the authors use the example noted above: the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). Therefore, the authors suggest using the approach that looks at what parties are based on the ideological profile (Mair & Mudde, 1998). What does this mean in the context of this thesis? What exactly will this thesis investigate in order to get to an answer?

1.3 The scope and focus of the thesis

How is this thesis going to proceed in uncovering the identity of liberal parties in Western Europe? Logically extending the contribution of Mair & Mudde (1998), this thesis will focus on getting an understanding of the ideological profile of liberal parties in Western Europe. More specifically, this means that the party platforms of two so-called liberal parties will be analyzed, i.e. the Dutch People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the British Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems). The exact reasoning behind the choice for these two parties will be further elaborated in the methodology chapter. For now it suffices to say that these two parties will be at the center of a comparative case study in order to eventually generalize to the larger population of liberal parties. What is important to mention, is that the two cases are in historical perspective considered to be liberal parties, since the point of studying them is that it is not clear within the scientific literature if they still are. The study of their party platforms should provide a clue about whether this is still the case.

The argument that will be developed throughout this thesis is that in following the existing literature that has been written on liberal parties, although outdated, contemporary liberal parties should still be identified by a strong adherence to core liberal principles, originating from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Furthermore, two different streams of liberalism should be present in contemporary liberal parties,

i.e. classical-liberalism and social-liberalism. The specifics of these two streams and why they exactly differ and in what way, will be elaborated in the next chapter. The interesting part will be whether, after analyzing the party platforms of the VVD and the Liberal Democrats, this is really the case or that we see a vastly changed liberal party when considering their ideological core.

1.4 Contribution of this thesis

First of all, it should be stressed that this thesis has an exploratory nature. In other words, the thesis adopts a descriptive approach towards the topic of liberal parties and has not the intention to explain any outcome or whatsoever. The contribution of the research that is conducted in this thesis lies mainly in partially closing the gap in the existing literature on liberal parties. More concretely, this means that this thesis will contribute to an updated definition of the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe. This is an essential first step in getting a better understanding of the rise of the liberal party in Western Europe.

1.5 The outline of the thesis

In the theoretical chapter I will start with introducing some ideas on concept formation. This will be inspired on Sartori and his 'ladder of abstraction'. This will be necessary in order to understand the discussion in the conceptual framework about how to define the main concepts of this thesis. I argue that out of the discussed literature a general definition of liberalism can be found and two definitions that define two types of liberal parties within the liberal party family in Western Europe. This relates to the 'ladder of abstraction', because the general definition can be applied to the liberal party in Western Europe, while when we zoom in on specific liberal parties, for example the Netherlands, we can see a type of liberal party that is more detailed. It is like when you zoom in on earth, you get to see more details, but it is still the earth.

The methodological chapter will deal with the case selection and the method I have adopted in order to analyze the party platforms of both the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. In other words, I will justify my selection for the VVD and the Liberal Democrats and the specific time period of the party platforms that I analyze of both

parties. Subsequently, I will elaborate how I have analyzed those party platforms and why this is a good approach towards studying party platforms of political parties.

The data chapter will then be a description of the main findings that came out of the analysis of the party platforms of both parties. I will structurally elaborate on the main findings, starting with the VVD and then the Liberal Democrats. The chapter will be concluded by adopting a comparative discussion of the main similarities and differences between both parties.

In the conclusion chapter I will get to an answer on the main research question based on the main findings in the data chapter. I will also elaborate on the potential generalizations that can be made and possible areas for future research will be discussed.

2. Theoretical chapter

2.1 Introduction

Before we assess whether contemporary parties are liberal parties, it is necessary to be clear on what a liberal party is. Although not much has been written on liberal parties in recent times, prior literature does contain some significant works that should provide a good starting point. The chapter begins with a review of some of the most essential works on liberal parties over the last thirty years. The goal is to clearly identify and understand what a liberal party is: what are its core characteristics? The purpose is to develop a clear definition of liberalism, one that will guide my expectations and my empirical analysis.

Before we begin, it is necessary to say something about concept formation. Liberalism is an ideology and a party family, but it is also a concept. This is especially the case if we turn to liberal parties. Thus, we must be clear in how we are going to define the concept of liberalism. What do we include in this definition? What do we exclude? In other words, what are the core characteristics of a liberal party?

2.2 Concept formation

Most research on political parties, whether explicitly or implicitly, is comparative research. This will also be the case in this thesis, because the VVD and the Liberal Democrats will be compared. The first, and in many ways most important, lesson in developing and understanding comparisons is to know whether the objects being compared are similar to one another, i.e. is an apple compared to another apple. Or are the objects so different that any comparison between them is likely to prove meaningless? In order to determine whether objects are the same, these objects have to be defined, because only then it becomes clear whether the objects that are being compared are similar to one another. Therefore, defining concepts is a crucial first step in a comparative research design. In this thesis I will use Giovanni Sartori's notion of concept formation, because this will provide a framework for getting to a definition of liberalism and the two types of liberal parties. Most importantly, his rules for assessing concepts and his notion of the ladder of abstraction will be discussed, which will prove

to be an essential mechanism in assessing the liberal party in a comparative perspective further on in this chapter.

2.2.1 Sartori's rules of concept formation

The first rule of Sartori is very clear: you have to start your research with the 'what-is' question. In other words, we should always begin with specifying and defining our concepts. The logic is simple; you first need to know what you are going to measure and compare before you are actually going to do it. A concept can be defined as 'the basic unit of thinking'. This helps to understand which properties do actually belong to a concept and which do not, so that we end up with measuring what we want to measure (Sartori, 1984: 74, Mair, 2008a: 179). When comparing multiple cases it is particularly important to know whether the object of study – say nationalism – is the same or functionally equivalent across different cases (Mair, 2008a: 181). This brings us to the second rule of concept formation.

The second rule Sartori emphasizes, is that 'more and less' comparisons should only be conducted within the same classes or categories (Sartori, 1970: 1038). This means that the concept is defined and classified qualitatively, by language and theory, and measurement takes place within the terms of reference or class specified by the concept. Mair says (2008a, 182):

This is the principle of per genus et differentiam, whereby each object can be defined by its genus – the class of objects to which it belongs – and by its differentiam – the particular attributes that make it different from all the other objects in the same class.

In practice this means that liberalism needs to be defined before accounting for its development. Otherwise it would not be clear whether what I am talking about is also truly about liberalism.

Classifications have two important characteristics. Each classification should be exclusive and exhaustive. When two or more classifications are combined, whereby the categories move from being uni-dimensional to being two- or multidimensional, the result is a typology and again, the same rules apply: the types must be both exclusive and exhaustive. Moreover, with typologies, as with classifications, it is essential to know

the answer to the 'what-is' question; that is, it is necessary in any typology or classification to know to what the particular types and classes refer. Classes and types need labels. This is exactly what I want to achieve at the end of this chapter in getting to an understanding to what liberalism refers to (Mair, 2008a: 183). How to compare with Sartori's argument that one must only compare within classes? This is the point where we get to Sartori's notion of the 'ladder of abstraction'.

Understanding the 'ladder of abstraction' means that I should elaborate on the problem that Sartori identifies as *concept stretching*. This is the broadening of the meaning – and thereby the range of application – of the conceptualizations at hand. It appears that we can cover more – in travelling terms – only by saying less, and by saying less in a far less precise manner. This has led to unbounded and largely undefined conceptualizations. Categories are becoming ultimately 'universal', concepts which are applicable to any time or any place. This being a very short elaboration on *concept stretching*, the relevance will be visible in relationship to the 'ladder of abstraction'.

The 'ladder of abstraction' deals in important ways with the essence of *concept stretching*. As long as concepts point to differences of kind, i.e. as long as we pursue the either-or mode of analysis, we are in trouble, because *conceptual stretching* is easy; but if concepts are understood as a matter of more-or-less, i.e., as pointing to differences in degree, then our difficulties can be solved by measurement, and the real problem is precisely how to measure (Sartori, 1970: 64). However, I have already showed that it is essential to define the concepts before measuring; before measurement, it is essential to have an understanding of what we are actually measuring. How can the 'ladder of abstraction' help in this process of concept formation?

The third key point of Sartori is 'the ladder of abstraction'. To understand the mechanism, you really have to visualize a ladder. Concepts that are defined by a large number of properties, and which thereby have a more limited range of applications, are located towards the bottom of the ladder. Concepts that are defined by just one or two properties, and hence which are very abstract and have a very wide range of applications, are located at the top of the ladder (Mair, 2008a: 186; Sartori, 1970: 1041). Key to this is that when you move in a comparative analysis from, for example, two cases to ten cases, the concepts should be made more abstract. In this way the concept avoids 'concept stretching', because you do not stretch the original concept beyond sensible

limits to fit a new range of cases. Therefore, it is of the essence in concept formation and making comparisons between cases that you learn where you are standing on the ladder of abstraction. One way of conceiving the differences between the upper and lower levels of the ladder of abstraction is the following example:

You have to imagine yourself in space, looking down on the earth. You see the oceans and the continents, some essential core characteristics of the earth, a concept defined by just a couple of properties. Now imagine that you slowly descent out of space and get closer to the earth. You descent through the clouds and in the process of descending you get to see increasingly more details of specific countries. These countries have a large number of properties. However, in the end you still see the earth, be it more detailed, thus this being the vertical hierarchy of concepts, because those countries are the same at a higher level of abstraction like the earth. This process captures exactly the idea behind the 'ladder of abstraction'.

Having captured the main elements of concept formation, what does it mean for the remaining theoretical chapter? I argue that, in following the existing literature on liberal parties, two classifications of liberal parties can be identified within the liberal party family in Western Europe. Thus, liberalism has two sub-types of liberalism which are represented in the two classifications of liberal parties. The goal being to define these concepts, the mechanisms that have been presented in this section will form the backbone of defining the concepts at the end of the theoretical chapter.

2.3 Conceptual framework

What do these implications of concept formation have to do with liberal parties? Before applying the logic of concept formation to liberal parties, it is first necessary to understand how political scientists have understood the historical development of liberal parties. The guiding story will be the development through history of liberal parties and how this has affected the existing perspectives on the liberal party family in Western Europe. This historical section will be followed by a section which outlines various perspectives from key authors on how this historical development has led to definitional problems. These perspectives will then be taken into account when I come to the section that deals with creating definitions. How does this fit in the area of

research of this thesis? In other words, what is then the argument throughout this section?

The argument in a nutshell is that the liberal party family in Western Europe can be separated into two different types (not mutually exclusive, meaning there is some overlap) of liberal parties in the Western hemisphere. They are liberal parties, in so far as they have something in common, something that allows us to place them in a single party family. But internally within this larger liberal party family we see two different types of this liberal party in Western Europe, namely classical-liberal and social-liberal.

2.3.1 History of liberalism in Western Europe

Already in the 18th century several elements of liberal philosophy can be found in the works of several philosophers. These early liberal elements all merged into the political liberalism that gained common ground in various European countries in the nineteenth century. The first political movement that called themselves liberal, were the *liberals* in Spain. They were insurgents who in 1809 in the city of Cádiz gathered and fought against Napoleon, who shortly before had invaded their country. The term 'liberalism' first came into use in English in 1815 and it only acquired real significance through the attitude taken by different political groupings to the French Revolution (Beaufort & Schie, 2014: 15; Kirchner, 1988: 2; Beyme, 1985: 31-32).

Liberalism enjoyed its hey-day during the nineteenth century, and the strong influence of once-dominant liberal parties persisted for the first few decades of the twentieth century. Their successes were for the most part bound up with the interests of the rising bourgeoisie, the middle classes, who sought personal liberties and freedom for economic enterprise. Liberalism was in the vanguard of movements for constitutional reform and for the enlargement of civil liberties (Smith, 1988: 17).

This early liberalism was strongly influenced by the 'Enlightenment' period in Europe and the ideas of the individual and freedom at that time. The individual should get a more central position as opposed to being part of a larger group, like a family. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant, stated that humans should never be used as a means to a goal, but are themselves the goal (Beaufort & Schie, 2014: 18). Freedom was another element that was important for early liberalism. In challenging both absolutism and obscurantism, political liberalism, focused on four main themes: religious tolerance,

free inquiry, self-government and the market economy (Salvadori, 1977). In short, a battle for spiritual freedom, political freedom and economic freedom (Beaufort & Schie, 2014: 19). Liberals in the nineteenth century were united by the ideas they had towards the individual and the freedom of the individual.

However, the conflicts with regards to the church and the state varied from one country to another, so that individual liberal parties differed in their emphasis – economic freedom, constitutional reform, or the secularization of the state – although the issues were also linked. There was also the force of nationalism, depending to the extent to which national aspirations still had to be satisfied. For those countries where the nation-building process was incomplete when the modern party system was still in its formative state, liberalism became the natural mobilizing force to forge the new nation state. These battles eventually came to an end and goals were being realized, like confronting aristocratic and church powers and success in nation-building (Kirchner, 1988: 7; Smith, 1988: 17; Beaufort & Schie, 2014). Being a dominant force in the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, this was followed by another era.

Liberal parties went into a steep decline, a process of party decay that appeared irreversible. A number of reasons can be put forward. Once primary demands of constitutional advance had been met, some of impetus of the radical stance of liberalism towards authoritarianism waned. Liberal parties became identified with liberal democracies; their aims were realized. From the liberal preference of a government legitimized by the people, the choice of a democratic form of governance is obvious. This relates of course to the view of the intrinsic value of the individual and its individual freedom (Smith, 1988: 18; Beaufort & Schie, 2014: 21). Another important reason is the changing social composition of European electorates. The electorate was widened and universal adult suffrage became the norm. Where liberal parties failed to win over these newly enfranchised social groups, social democracy was the principal beneficiary with its focus on class politics. Liberalism had a hard time in making a contribution in the new dimension of party competition.

Liberal parties had to reinterpret liberalism in the context of changing political developments during the twentieth century. This was certainly the case when the role of the state became increasingly important within society. The state had the responsibility

to take care for national economic performance and the level of employment, which led to permanent state intervention. Another responsibility is the obligation of meeting minimum standards and of improving the life chances of the mass of the population through the network of social provisions – health, education, social security – as well by the means of transfer payments and redistributive taxation. In other words, the state was responsible for the ‘Welfare State’.

How did liberal parties cope with this increased role for the state? The accommodation to this has been uneven between liberal parties in different countries in Western Europe. Liberal parties had to find a way, and this eventually led to two types of liberal parties who can be linked to two types of liberalism, namely classical-liberalism and social-liberalism. Where the former is still strongly related to the original ideas of liberalism, like minimal state intervention, the latter is more open to the influence external factors have on the development of the individual, while still taking the individual as starting point, and see much more justifications for the intervention of the state in guaranteeing individual liberties.

The period after World War II has thus been the period where liberal parties differed in approach to coping with the changed role of the state. Since then these two types have been still present to contemporary times, varying across countries in Western Europe, for example the two cases that are central in this thesis where the VVD is generally seen as a party who is closely affiliated with classical-liberalism, and the Liberal Democrats strongly related to social-liberalism. The point is here that going from the nineteenth to the twentieth century the core principles of liberalism still are present, but in the period after the World War II until recent times there is the issue of state intervention and how liberal parties deal with this. To further elaborate on this I want to discuss the similarities and differences between important authors who each have certain views on the contemporary liberal party and how to properly get to an understanding of what liberalism is and what this implies for liberal parties, which is the main focus of this thesis.

2.3.2 Defining liberalism: is it possible?

If liberalism has a rich and long history, it is still necessary to have a clearer understanding of what liberalism is. Is it possible to clearly define the core characteristics of liberalism? In this section I will discuss several authors who have tried to come to an understanding of the core characteristics of liberalism in the context of the historical development from the nineteenth century onwards. These authors will form the base for my own definitions, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter. To be clear, the discussion of the authors is aimed on providing an overview of what has to be considered when coming to a definition of liberalism and subsequently liberal parties.

The consensus within the literature is that the history of liberalism and its development towards contemporary times has led to some ambiguities within liberalism and makes it in turn rather difficult to properly understand liberalism, most certainly when getting to a definition which is universal for Western Europe (Margulies, 2015: 242). In other words, even liberal parties themselves having different views on the core principles of liberalism (the presence of ambivalence), it has been even more difficult for political scientists to pinpoint the essential characteristics of the liberal party in Western Europe. How have the authors that are central here dealt with this? The three key authors in this debate are: Kirchner, Salvadori and Smith. Each author has their own perspective on the historical development of liberalism and its implications for getting to a definition of liberal parties in Western Europe. This will be the central focus of the discussion that follows, starting with Kirchner (1988).

Kirchner's perspective

What is the perspective of Kirchner on the relationship between the historical development of liberalism and defining liberal parties in Western Europe? To get to an answer, first his edited book has to be taken into consideration. This book, called *Liberal parties in Western Europe*, was published in 1988 and is a comprehensive systematic analysis of liberal parties in Western Europe.

In his introduction of the book he asks the question 'what is liberalism?' He shows that there is an absence of a widely accepted working definition, which is the result of the different national traditions under which liberalism has developed. He then goes on with discussing several authors who have described liberalism. Besides the variation

between liberal parties in Western Europe, there is also the difference in time. This is the difference as described in the previous section about liberalism in the nineteenth century and liberalism that had to deal with the creation of the Welfare State after World War II, hence the twentieth century (Kirchner, 1988: 2-4).

The main point is then that the history of liberalism and how it developed and accordingly created different traditions of liberal parties, has led to definitional problems. He concludes that it is very difficult to arrive at a definition of liberalism which can be expected to have validity in several different countries at the same time. In order to make a comparison of liberal parties, he therefore avoids coming to an 'objective' definition of liberalism. Instead, he adopts common guidelines for every country contributor to select the relevant parties by country.

What is of the essence for the discussion that is developed in this section, is that he sees no way of properly defining liberal parties in a comparative perspective, because of the variation between liberal parties across Western Europe. However, despite these doubts, in this thesis I contend that, if we use the Sartorian notion of the ladder of abstraction, an 'objective' definition is possible. This brings me to the next author, Salvadori.

Salvadori's perspective

In analyzing the history of liberalism in Western Europe, Salvadori identifies two historical roots (1977). These are the English-speaking version and the continental version. Where the former mainly focused on the expansion of democratic values, free trade and internationalism, the latter rejected any form of authoritarianism (economic and political nature) and it focused on nation building, if it had not already been accomplished. In the continental version developed a new split between the so-called moderates and progressives. Moderates can mostly be identified with liberalism or liberal-conservatism, whereas progressivism appeared under the label of liberalism as well as under that of radicalism, republicanism and social democracy.

This division between moderates and progressives is often reflected in the two wings of modern liberal parties in Western Europe. Two examples are the German FDP with its 'national liberal' and 'social liberal' factions and Norway where the division is between 'conservative liberals' and 'moderately social democratic liberals'. Kirchner uses this

perspective of Salvadori in illustrating the variation of liberal parties in Western Europe. As an additional note, it is interesting to see that labels vary, while they all belong to the same party family. This shows that a clear choice has to be made in what labels to use, and more importantly what this means in ideological terms. Basically, this is what will be done at the end of this chapter, when defining liberalism as a general concept.

Salvadori does contribute to the view of Kirchner; the two historical roots Salvadori identifies, do illustrate the issues Kirchner notes in defining liberalism and accordingly liberal parties in Western Europe. The two historical roots led to different traditions of liberalism. These manifest themselves in the form of different political parties, each bearing the name of liberalism or related labels with more than one such party in a number of countries.

However, in the context of the Sartorian notion of the ladder of abstraction, there emerges an opportunity to come to an 'objective' definition of liberalism. Clearly, there is a lot of variation in between countries in Western Europe with regards to liberalism. Still, following Salvadori there is some structure to be found in Western Europe liberalism, illustrated by the two historic trees of liberalism and the split between moderates and progressives in Western Europe. Interestingly, these historic roots continue into contemporary times, illustrated by the variation in liberal parties. It seems that there can be two types of liberal parties be distinguished, when we continue the split between moderates and progressives. In short, using the 'ladder of abstraction', it is possible to come to a general definition of liberalism and more detailed definitions of liberal parties when we look at the specific cases, which in this thesis are the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. In this context, how can the next author contribute to get to the understanding of the definitional issues that are apparent with liberal parties?

Smith's perspective

Clearly individual countries' political history and culture has contributed substantially to liberal parties developing often sharply differing attitudes. Furthermore, liberalism, as conceived and developed in nineteenth century, differs from its counterpart in the twentieth century. This difference has its roots in the creation of the Welfare State in the period immediately after World War II. How does Smith add to the understanding of the

relationship between the historical development of liberalism and the definitional issues of liberal parties?

First of all, Smith sees the legacy of historical liberalism as a crucial aspect in understanding contemporary liberalism, i.e. liberalism in the 21st century. This is interesting, because apparently there is a constant that connects liberalism through history, starting in the nineteenth century. Smith argues that the constant is the ambivalence about what the role of freedom exactly is in society (Smith, 1988: 16). Where this ambivalence initially presented itself in the split between moderates and progressives on the continent of Europe, this ambivalence continued to divide liberal parties in the context of how to deal with the creation of the Welfare State in the second half of the twentieth century.

Smith explicitly makes a distinction between a liberal-conservative type of liberal party and a liberal-radical type of liberal party (Smith, 1988: 21). In this thesis liberal-conservative is dubbed as classical-liberal and liberal-radical as social-liberal. These two types provide the tools to come to an 'objective' definition of liberalism, since now it is possible to move on the 'ladder of abstraction' from the general concept of liberalism to the sub-types, classical-liberal and social-liberal. It is worth mentioning that these two types apply only to the contemporary family. This is problematic, since this neglects the origins of liberalism in the nineteenth century. However, Smith solves this with the common element of ambivalence in European liberalism. Let me shortly elaborate on this.

In order to understand these two types he emphasizes the choice of perspective which is historical liberalism versus contemporary liberalism. The point here is that in order to properly analyze liberal parties of today, he argues that it is best to use both perspectives. Historical liberalism is still relevant for its contemporary counterpart, because liberal parties of today still look back to their roots and their original ideas. For example, the way early liberalism looked at the intrinsic value of the individual, is still very relevant for contemporary liberal parties (Smith, 1988: 19). The point being here, is that in getting to a definition of liberalism, you have to take in account the roots of liberalism and how this still affects contemporary liberal parties.

In doing this, he shows that the two types of liberalism came to existence when they had to cope with a more important role for the state. However, they still strongly relate to core liberal principles, like the individual and freedom. They only interpret them in a slightly different way, especially how they should deal with the degree of state intervention towards individual freedom. He argues that the classical-liberal type still strongly affiliates to interpretations of original liberalism, which consisted of minimal state intervention, and economic freedom, which mainly focused on equal opportunity between individuals and equivalence, which did not mean that every individual is equal. The important thing is that in dealing with an increased role for the state, this should be still tried to be limited in reasonable terms. The social-liberal type of liberal party has a much more interventionist approach with regards to the state. They are not necessarily opposed to some help from the state in guaranteeing for example individual freedom or fighting unfair inequality between individuals. They have much more embraced the norms of state intervention and collectivism. The important thing here is that Smith provides a way of categorizing contemporary liberal parties in a comparative perspective.

Concluding the discussion

What does this all mean for the next step in this chapter, defining liberalism? First of all, there is a consensus on the presence of two types of liberal parties within the liberal party family in Western Europe. Of course, political history and culture has influenced liberal parties developing often sharply differing attitudes, but in the end the split is mainly classical-liberalism and social-liberalism. Secondly, liberalism can be defined based on core liberal principles that already emerged in the nineteenth century. This is justified, because according to the literature, besides the obvious reinterpretations in the context of political and societal changes, the core of liberal principles are still strongly rooted in West European liberalism and in analyzing contemporary liberal parties it will lead to one-sidedness when not looking at the historical legacy of liberalism for contemporary liberal parties. Mainly Smith makes this argument, although Kirchner sees a difference between nineteenth and twentieth century, he also observes the still existing historical roots in contemporary liberal parties, in his case the end of the twentieth century. The third point is then that the variations within European liberalism and this so-called ambivalence that is present, also means that the authors do

not even really try to get to a definition or when they try it is not that clear as it could be. In the concluding section of this chapter I am trying to redefine liberalism and the two sub-types, classical-liberalism and social-liberalism.

In this thesis I argue that there are two types of liberal parties within the liberal party family in Western Europe. I also follow that these two types both adhere to the core principles of liberalism. Clearly, I move away from Kirchner, since he avoids defining explicitly liberalism and I follow Smith in the two types of liberal parties he identifies and how he shows the relevance of the historical legacy of liberalism for the analysis of contemporary liberal parties. Thus, having elaborated on the historical development of liberalism and the perspectives of some important contributors in understanding this historical development, I now do have a basis in getting to answer the question 'what is liberalism'?

2.3.3 Defining concepts

Having discussed the historical development of liberalism and specific views out of the literature on liberal parties, it is at least clear that getting to a definition of liberalism and its sub-types is not particularly straightforward. Still, despite the identified issues it is still worth trying to come to a definition. In this section I will argue that the concept of liberalism exists out of six areas of focus, namely 'the individual', 'freedom', 'the economy', 'the state', 'rule of law' and 'responsibility'. How did I come to these six areas of focus?

The literature shows that liberalism has always been about a strong focus on the individual and the importance of freedom. What do I mean with this? The individual is always the starting point of liberal ideology. The individual has an intrinsic value. Thus the individual is the point of reference. Subsequently, the most important goal for liberals is then the individual freedom. This is what I described in the historical development about battles for freedom, and relates to religious tolerance, political freedom and economic freedom. From this it is not hard to get to 'the economy', 'the state', 'rule of law', and 'responsibility'.

With regards to 'the state', the point is that it can be understood with regards to political freedom and the battle against authoritarianism. From the perspective from the individual, the state is to serve the individual and not the other way around. The state is

legitimized by the people, logically preference for democracy. In extension of this aspect of the relationship between the state and the individual, there is the issue of minimal state intervention for the purpose of individual freedom. This is where we arrive at the rule of law. The problem is that there is a certain tension between freedom and democracy, where there is a risk that a specific group gets a majority of power, therefore not too much power should be with one group, and this is known as *checks-and-balances*. The idea is that the principles of rule of law are leading for the decisions of the state. Important principles within the rule of law are that the law is equivalent for everyone and that the decisions of the state should be based on the law.

Besides the importance of the state and the rule of law there is the domain of the economy. The idea here is that the individual self knows best what is good for him, especially in the economical sphere. This serves the general interest. Thus large as possible space where societal forces are free to do. Related to this and the individual and its freedom is the role of responsibility. The point is that the rights of the individual, most of all its freedom require also certain obligations. This is where responsibility is important. To deal with freedom, requires also responsibility, since the individual is responsible for its actions. Responsibility is strongly related to the core principles of liberalism, since a liberal society can only exist when every individual takes responsibility for their actions.

The above sums up the core of liberalism in Western Europe. Obviously, as I build up to this section, there is the discussion within liberalism about the precise meaning of individual freedom and the amount space that should be granted to the state. This is the point where we arrive at the two types of liberalism, classical-liberalism and social-liberalism.

Two things are important before I continue. First, there is the issue that these two types are based on the period since the creation of the Welfare State, so basically after the World War II. However, I have argued that core principles from liberalism in the nineteenth century are still relevant for these two types. Secondly, these two sub-types have to be understood in the context of the ladder of abstraction, in which liberalism is the container in which these two sub-types can be found. Thus, depending on which level I am standing on the ladder of abstraction, comparative issues can be countered through being honest about the position on the ladder. Thus, liberalism captures both

types of parties in Western Europe, while when I am talking about each specific type, be it classical-liberal or social-liberal, this applies to a much more specific range of cases in Western Europe.

In the context of this thesis, I am talking about a classical-liberal type party VVD and social-liberal Liberal Democrats. The choice for these two liberal parties will be further explained in the methodology chapter when I discuss case selection, but for now it suffices to say that on the basis of the literature, these two parties are generally affiliated with each their specific type of liberal party. This is then also the link between this chapter and the empirical chapter, in that the distinction between the two types of liberal parties within Western Europe is represented by the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. Of course, the question in this thesis whether this assumed categorization of the VVD and the Liberal Democrats still stands in the contemporary political environment in Western Europe. Having established this, what are then the exact specifics of each type of liberal party based on the existing literature?

What is it that exactly divides classical-liberalism and social-liberalism? Basically, it is the difference between positive and negative freedom, and thus the exact meaning of individual freedom and how this relates to the power of the state. Negative freedom is the domain in which the individual has control and is not intervened. The only limitation is the harm principle, meaning that every individual has the same amount of freedom. An individual's freedom is limited when it harms other individual's freedom. Looking at the historical development of liberalism, this negative freedom can be perceived as the basis freedom for all liberals. Positive freedom is about the degree to which an individual is really able to form its own life. This means that active support and help with creating certain preconditions for independence. For example, the security of a social safety net. The two types of liberalism I identify both have their own view on the negative and positive freedoms and their specific emphasis. Thus, in coming to an understanding of both types, what does each type exactly emphasize in this context of negative and positive freedom?

Classical-liberalism and social-liberalism

Where both types of liberalism adhere to the areas of focus of liberalism in Western Europe, they thus differ in how they perceive the degree of individual freedom and the

space of the state. In short, they have different perspectives on negative and positive freedoms. What does this mean concretely? Starting with the classical type, it is obvious that this type stays close to the original ideas of liberalism. However, this does not mean they dismiss the developments with regards to the role of the state, like more responsibilities with regards to the Welfare State. What it does mean that they see the state important in protecting individual freedoms and rule of law. They are very suspicious in too much state power. The focus is on negative freedom, and while accepting positive freedoms, they are really cautious towards them. There is trust in the individual in design its life as he sees fit. The state should also be very reluctant towards the domain of the economy, since it is the optimal social market for individuals. With regards to the state itself, the state does have core tasks, like certain public services should be realized by the state. However, this range of duties should be as small as possible. The common ground is that in every area of focus I have identified with regards to liberalism, the state should be reluctant in its behavior and the negative freedom is emphasized (Hall, 1987).

What about social-liberalism? Social-liberalism is much more sympathetic towards positive freedom. This is from the presumption that the environment has a certain influence on the development of individuals, which has effects outside of their own doing. State intervention should be focused on battling inequality which came out of legislation. This did not mean that they abandoned the idea of a society that exists out of free and responsible individuals. It is just the acknowledgement that there are other causes outside the individual which requires support from the state, however keeping the degree of state intervention reasonable. Individual is perceived in a slightly different way in this type of liberalism. The individual is very closely to society, while still acknowledging the central role of the individual; it has to be seen in the role it fulfills in society. The society is equal to a human organism which separate organs only able to function as a part of the human in which it is situated. In other words, the role of the individual is framed in the interest of the whole society, neither taking a primary position over the other.

To conclude this section, where I have illustrated the characteristics of liberalism and its two sub-types classical-liberalism and social-liberalism, I have to say that the views I have illustrated are a simplification of all the philosophical views that are out there on

this topic. However, the point of this chapter is that there is a common ground with regards to what characterizes each concept and this is for the purposes of this thesis more than sufficient. The purpose is to have a demarcation between the two types of liberalism, and realizing that there is even more to it than in the way I have illustrated the differences, I am able with these definitions to proceed in empirically analyzing the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. I will finish this chapter with a table (Table 1) which gives an overview of the core characteristics that I have identified during the course of this theoretical chapter.

	Liberalism:	
	Liberalism focuses on the individual, freedom, the economy, the state, rule of law and responsibility	
	Classical - liberal	Social-liberal
Individual	Minimal intervention in the private space of the individual.	The individual has to be seen in relationship to society.
Freedom	Emphasis on negative freedom.	Emphasis on positive freedom.
The economy	The free market is essential, but the state should overview some necessary rules	Unwanted outcomes of free market require state intervention.
The state	The state should focus on its core tasks.	State should intervene to actively defend the rights of the individual and battle inequality.
Rule of law	Everyone is equal for the law and state should guarantee individual freedom.	Everyone is equal for the law and state should guarantee individual freedom.
Responsibility	Every individual is responsible for its actions.	Responsibility to develop and social interest.

Table 1: An overview of liberalism and the two sub-types

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In order to gain insight about the liberal party family in Western Europe this thesis adopts a comparative perspective on the liberal party in Western Europe. This perspective has effect on the method of research, especially when considering case selection. In the previous chapter I elaborated on the theory of liberal parties. In the next chapter the actual status of liberal parties in relationship to liberalism will be investigated; specifically the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. Accordingly, the central question in this chapter is how to research the liberal party family in a comparative perspective?

This chapter will deal with the issues of case selection and how this is related to making valid comparisons between cases. Another aspect is the selection of the time frame this thesis investigates. Having elaborated on this, I outline the exact process of how I have conducted the empirical analysis that will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.2 Case selection

The process of case selection is arguably one of the trickiest parts of conducting research. This is for the simple reason that, in making a selection of cases out of a larger group of possible cases, you are limiting yourself as a researcher to a specific part of a larger picture which can easily lead to skewed observations. Inherently, it is quite problematic to generalize the findings in this specific part of the picture to the larger population. Still, more often than would be ideal there is no time to properly examine the larger picture, and you have to come to terms with this specific part of the picture. Being aware of this problem, how to deal with it?

As already mentioned, this thesis will investigate the party platforms of the two aforementioned cases. This thesis researches these two cases more intensively, as opposed to a large number of liberal parties. The idea is that we can better understand the larger picture by focusing on a key part of it (Gerring, 2007). In other words, the VVD and the Liberal Democrats are a representation of a larger group of cases. By researching more intensively these two liberal parties, we can come to a better

understanding of the larger group of liberal parties. Still, this leaves us with the question why these two cases out of the larger group of liberal parties? What is the scientific justification for only researching these two cases and using this to make generalizations?

To justify this selection of cases, I have to elaborate on the important work of Gerring that he did with regards to case study research. In his book *'Case Study Research: principles and practices'* (2007) he goes in great detail about how to properly conduct case study research. In the words of Gerring, 'the product of a good case study is insight' (2007: 7). The purpose of this thesis being to reassess the liberal parties in Western Europe, and logically gaining insight, the choice for a case study is justified. The precise method that then is adopted is a small n cross-case method. I am investigating two cases more intensively, and at the same time comparing them to gain additional insight. In order to understand correctly the liberal party in Western Europe I need to go in depth, instead of selecting a lot of cases and missing depth in the analysis. Still, in the context of the theoretical part of this thesis, it is interesting to compare one case to another, since this will lead to additional insight by comparison (Gerring, 2007: 49). In short, the specific aim of the research conducted, which is an understanding of the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe, fits with case study research, in that an in-depth analysis is needed.

Gerring identifies several case selection techniques in order to isolate a sample of cases that represents the larger population. The two cases that I have selected are a typical case. The function of the two cases is namely to provide insight into a broader phenomenon (Gerring, 2009: 649). The typical case can serve an exploratory role, and this is exactly what the role is of the two cases in this thesis. The two cases are selected to be as representative as possible of the contemporary liberal party family in Western Europe. The VVD and the Liberal Democrats qualify as a typical case in that I am looking for a classical-liberal and social-liberal type of liberal party (Gerring, 2009: 650). What is important to mention here is that Gerring assumes the presence of a causal relationship within the context of selecting cases. However, in this thesis the approach is, initially at least, of a descriptive nature. This means that I have to slightly use a different reasoning in selecting the two cases. In short, the two cases that are selected are both a typical case of the larger population of liberal parties.

3.3 Justification of the timeframe

In order to get an understanding of the two selected liberal parties and how they relate to the liberal party family in general and the two derived main types of a liberal party, being 'liberal-conservative' and 'liberal-radical', I have chosen to analyze the three most recent party platforms for national elections of both parties. Why the three most recent party platforms? This has several reasons.

First, the three most recent party platforms of the VVD and the Liberal-Democrats cover both the period from 2005 until 2015. More concretely, this means that the party platforms of the years 2005, 2010 and 2015 are analyzed for the Liberal-Democrats and the party platforms of the year 2006, 2010 and 2012 for the VVD. Secondly, and this is related to this time period, the three party platforms of each party incorporate multiple situations. For both parties this means that the 2005 and 2006 party platform was before the global financial crisis and the rest of the party platforms after the financial crisis. Even more important, both parties have been in government, since 2010. This means that the 2005 and 2006 party platform for both parties was not followed by a government period, while this was the case with both 2010 party platforms. The 2012 VVD party platform and the 2015 Liberal-Democrats party platform are then both after being in government, which gives an extra dynamic. Third, and last, there is the simple reason that I want to explore the contemporary liberal party and this period covers mostly the main events in the last decade and maybe even more important, more party platforms would just be impossible with regards to the available resources, like time.

Having explained the chosen time frame, it is now time for going step-by-step through the method I have adopted in researching the data, the party platforms of both parties.

3.4 Step-by-step report of coding the party platforms

Having established the two cases and the specific party platforms I wanted to start analyzing, the next question is: 'how should I analyze these party platforms'? There are several aspects that need to be discussed in this section. First, I explain the choice for party platforms as the unit of analysis. Secondly, I will outline how I have analyzed these party platforms and how this gives me valid and reliable information in order to answer the research question.

Why analyze party platforms? The reason is that party platforms give a good insight in how a political party expresses its ideas about how society should be and how it sees realized in practice. It gives insight in their ideology, since the party platform is the primary medium to express the ideas of the party in a clear and elaborated way. Therefore, the analysis of party platforms should generate insight in the ideas of contemporary liberal parties and to what extent liberal ideology is represented in these party platforms. This begs the question: how to extract these pieces of information in a comprehensive and effective way?

In order to extract the necessary information from the party platforms, I opted for coding the party platforms. Before I elaborate on the process of coding the party platforms, I should explain the different approaches that can be used when coding data, which are in this case the party platforms. There are two approaches to be identified: a concept-driven and a data-driven. The concept-driven approach is a deductive strategy for building your coding frame; you are making use of things that you already know. The data-driven approach is an inductive strategy for building a coding frame, creating categories and sub categories based on your data. This is especially appropriate if the research goal is to describe the material in detail, which is the case in this thesis (Schreier, 2012).

In this thesis, the emphasis is on the data-driven approach. This means that through the data I will come up with a code sheet that can be categorized in main categories and sub categories. However, the concept-driven approach will also be relevant in a certain way. The point is that it makes sense to first knowing what you are going to research. But in the process of answering the what-is question you can combine a concept driven with a data driven approach. A typical 'mix' would be to come up with important topics based on what you already know and to turn these into main categories; concept-driven part. Second step then to specify what is said about these topics by creating sub categories based on data; data-driven part of strategy (Schreier, 2012; Sartori, 1970).

In the context of this thesis it means that the focus will be on the inductive part, namely trying to create concepts based on the data (and in the same manner a coding sheet in analyzing the data), in that way trying to answer the 'what-is' question, but also setting up guide lines before diving into the data (based on what we know till now). This will be

the concept-driven part of the research. How does this translate to the actual coding of the party platforms? How did I proceed in analyzing the party platforms?

There are various ways to code sources of information, but in this case I opted for so-called 'open coding'. This means that you start with certain guidelines, which are based on common knowledge with regards to what to expect that is going to be relevant information. The topic being liberal parties, I created the following guidelines:

- Individualism
- Mistrust of the power of the state
- Market economy
- Freedom
- Responsibility
- Equal opportunity
- Universalism
- Rule of law
- Self government

These guidelines are based on the theory of liberalism and liberal parties, as outlined in the theoretical section of this thesis. The relevance of these guidelines should not be exaggerated, since it gives merely guidance while reading the party platforms in which chunks of text could possibly be relevant in the context of exploring the liberal party in Western Europe. In other words, this is the concept-driven part of the coding, while the emphasis is really on the data-driven part of the coding.

How did I proceed with coding the party platforms? Having established guidelines and after that having gone through the six party platforms and created codes, I had six code sheets. However, I had only codes and they still needed to be categorized. Taking the guidelines and the gathered codes into consideration, I came to six main categories:

- Individualism
- Freedom
- The economy
- The state
- Rule of law
- Responsibility

Each of these main categories contained a part of the total codes for each party platform. In other words, all the codes that I identified while going through the party platforms could be categorized in one of the six main categories. This was the last step of how I

analyzed the six party platforms. These six code sheets give an overview of the relevant information these party platforms contain. Having finished this process this enables me to structurally analyze and compare the party platforms of the VVD and the Liberal Democrats in the next chapter.

3.5 Summarizing the implications

In this chapter I discussed the case selection and how I have executed my research in this thesis. The case selection part in this chapter is important, because it has an influence on the results that come out of this research and it has an influence to what extent I can generalize the results to the larger group of cases. In this chapter, it has been explained what reasons were behind the selection of the VVD and the Liberal Democrats as the cases that are going to be investigated in the next chapter.

The second part of this chapter outlined the specifics of the conducted analysis of the two cases, concretely meaning the party platforms of both parties. This is important; I show here in what way I am going to get the results that are relevant for the main research focus of this thesis, namely the research to what extent the VVD and the Liberal Democrats can still be called a 'liberal' party in the context of contemporary party systems. Thus, this chapter is the build up to the next chapter where I am going to outline the results of the research I have conducted towards the party platforms of both the VVD and the Liberal Democrats.

4. Analysis of the party platforms

4.1 Introduction

Is it possible to classify so-called contemporary liberal parties as liberal after having analyzed their recent party platforms? This will be the leading question in this chapter. This question logically follows out of the theoretical chapter. In the theoretical chapter I elaborated on the historical development of liberalism and the implications this has for getting to a definition of liberalism and the political parties who adhere to liberalism. The chapter concluded with definitions of liberalism and the two identified sub-types of liberal parties. Having established classifications, it is now time to turn to the coded data of the party platforms of the two liberal parties in order to determine whether those two so-called contemporary liberal parties can be classified as liberal parties. I will now shortly elaborate on the contents and the structure in this chapter.

As I described in the previous chapter, I coded the party platforms of both the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. In this chapter I will describe the outcomes and discuss the implications of the coding I have conducted of the six party platforms of both the VVD (party platform of the year 2006, 2010 and 2012) and the Liberal Democrats (2005, 2010, and 2015). How is this descriptive analysis structured?

The structure exists of a part focusing on the VVD and a part focusing on the Liberal Democrats. First, the party itself will be shortly introduced and the context of the party platforms for each individual election will be outlined. Each party platform has its own political and societal context. The actual descriptive analysis of the party platforms of the VVD and the Liberal Democrats will be structured along the six main categories which emerged out of the coding process, being respectively 'individualism', 'freedom', 'the economy', 'the state', 'rule of law', and 'responsibility'. The six party platforms will then be systematically discussed along the main categories. For example, when I discuss 'individualism' and how this relates to the VVD party platforms, all three party platforms (2006, 2010 and 2012) will then be discussed and compared within the category 'individualism'. This is to be repeated, until the main categories within the context of both parties have been discussed. Concluding this chapter, I will write a comparative section, which will be focused on the similarities and differences between the VVD and

the Liberal Democrats, which can be distracted from the analysis before. This outline will provide a first step in exploring the contemporary liberal party family and hopefully interesting comparisons can be made towards the two political parties that are at the centre of this thesis. Before I really move on to the descriptive analysis, I want to emphasize that the approach of this descriptive analysis is most of all exploratory. We will now proceed with the actual discussion of the party platforms of both parties, starting with the VVD.

4.2 The case of the VVD

4.2.1 The VVD in the Dutch party system

The VVD is the oldest liberal party in the Netherlands. The 1948 party grew from the *Partij van de Vrijheid* (Freedom Party), which was established in 1946, as a new incarnation of the pre-World War II *Liberale Staatspartij De Vrijheidsbond* (Daalder & Koole, 1988: 151).

Compared to other liberal parties in Europe the VVD wins a relatively high number of votes, has a lot of members and participates more than often in government. This is not at all obvious, since ideologically speaking the VVD is a strong right-wing party and not at the center of the party system. Despite the distance towards the political centre, the VVD is not often sidelined in Dutch politics. Between 1948 and 2008 it was 21 years in opposition and 39 years in government (Lucardie, 2008: 18). More recently, the VVD has won elections quite dominantly in 2010 & 2012, and they have the first liberal prime minister in the history of Dutch politics since the World War II. The VVD seems secured with an influential position in the Dutch political system, even though there are for the past 15 years some cracks in the influential position with the emergence of competitors on the right side, concretely the '*Lijst Pim Fortuyn*' (LPF) and currently the Party For Freedom (PVV). Despite these challenges, the VVD has increasingly become more powerful, i.e. it was until recent times often a junior coalition member of governments and has now become the biggest party of the Netherlands, thereby taking over from the Dutch Christian Democratic party (CDA).

This begs the question: does this liberal party relates itself still to liberalism, taking into consideration the changes they have experienced? In other words, what is the

contemporary VVD in ideological terms all about and how strongly relates this to liberalism? After analyzing the three most recent party platforms of national elections in the Netherlands (2006-2012), I should find some answers.

4.2.2 Electoral context of the party platforms

The party platforms that are being discussed cover three different Dutch general elections. The three elections were respectively held on the following three dates: 22nd November 2006, 9th June 2010 and 12th September 2012. Let me shortly give an overview of the context of the three elections.

The elections in 2006 were held after the fall of the second 'Balkenende cabinet'. The general elections were not that successful for the VVD, they went from 28 to 22 seats (Kiesraad, 2003; 2007). An important element of this loss in seats was the fierce competition within the VVD for leadership before the elections. This competition was eventually won by Mark Rutte. The VVD party platform of the year 2006 was the first party platform under the leadership of Mark Rutte (Volkskrant, 2006; De Groene Amsterdammer, 2006; VVD, 2006). Another interesting element is that this party platform is still before the financial crises.

The next party platform for the elections in 2010 was the first one after the global financial crisis of 2008 (VVD, 2010; The Economist, 2013). The elections in 2010 were triggered by the fall of Balkenende's fourth cabinet on 20 February (NRC, 2010). The VVD, led by Mark Rutte, won the largest number of seats in the House of Representatives, with a total of 31 seats which is an increase of 9 seats compared to the previous election in 2006 (Kiesraad, 2010). The VVD got a stunning total of almost two million votes, which is quite remarkable in the age of floating voters and a quickly changing Dutch political system (Mair, 2008). After the election the VVD formed a right-wing coalition together with the Christian Democratic Party (CDA) and with the Party For Freedom (PVV) formally making an agreement (*gedoogakkoord*) to support the government but without holding any cabinet seats. It was the first coalition government to be led by the VVD. Rutte was sworn in as Prime Minister on the 14th of October, becoming the first liberal prime minister after World War II (EenVandaag, 2010; Elsevier, 2010).

The elections of 2012 were held after Prime Minister Mark Rutte handed in his government's resignation to Queen Beatrix on the 23th of April (Rijksoverheid, 2012). The result of the elections were once again that the VVD and got the most votes, resulting in an impressive number (in the context of the Dutch political system) of 41 seats, which is an increase of 10 votes compared to the 2010 election result (Kiesraad, 2012). Thus, the VVD continued their success. The VVD and the Dutch Social Democratic Party, the PvdA formed a coalition together (NRC, 2012). Currently they are still forming the Dutch government with Rutte as Prime Minister.

Before I really start discussing the three party platforms of the VVD, I want to shortly mention certain expectations towards the VVD and its party platforms. I do expect some differences between the party platforms with regards to how they relate to the main categories. This has two reasons, namely the 2008 financial global crises, which splits the 2006 party platform from the 2010 and 2012 party platform, and the participation in government since 2010, which makes that the 2012 party platform is potentially influenced by the government participation.

Further expectations are related to the discussion of the party platforms and the main categories. The following categories will be evaluated: 'individualism', 'freedom', 'the economy', 'the state', 'rule of law', 'responsibility'. Of course, the point of this chapter is to exactly getting an understanding of these main categories. However, taking the theoretical chapter into consideration, certain expectations can be noted in the context of discussing the party platforms of the VVD. The argument I make is that the VVD is more likely to relate to the classical-liberal type, meaning certain attitudes towards those six main categories, which differ in important ways from the social-liberal type of liberal party.

Individualism will be used to discuss the role of the individual within the party platform. Freedom will be used to discuss the way freedom is interpreted by the VVD and how it plays a role across domains like the economy. The economy will then be used to discuss the specific views on the economy. The state will discuss the view on the role of the state within society. Rule of law will discuss the role of justice and rights. Responsibility will then mainly discuss the other side of freedom, because freedom is having rights, but also obligations. This should give an initial view on what to expect in these categories. The actual descriptive analysis will show how this in reality works out.

4.2.3 Individualism

In this section, I will discuss the concept of individualism and how this is represented in the three party platforms of the VVD. I will try to identify similarities and differences across the three party platforms and how this relates to liberalism.

Starting with the party platform of the year 2006, I came to the finding that individualism is a core concept within the party platform of the VVD. The focus on individualism is illustrated in multiple ways. Some dimensions will be discussed in the other concepts, since the individual is also central in the context of the economy, freedom, the state, responsibility and rule of law. Looking at the title of the party platform, 'for a society with ambition', the approach towards the individual is already set. This is further illustrated by these quotes:

"We opt for lifelong learning and developing yourself, for the pleasure of working for everyone who can." (VVD, 2006: 1)

"Sport promotes the spirit of an entrepreneur, rewards initiative and contributes to a healthy lifestyle." (Ibid.: 2)

"Hospitals and healthcare facilities focus their method more on the rhythm and the wishes of the patient." (Ibid.: 4)

These quotes underline the role of the individual and in what way the VVD interprets this role. Whether it is education or healthcare, the individual is the starting point on which policies should be made. Important here is also that the individual should have the freedom to follow their own path and the individual should be facilitated. This is something that will be discussed in more detail in the next section about freedom.

The way the VVD thinks about the individual is also applied to current, pressing issues, like immigration. This is interesting, because this shows the flexibility liberal parties have in adapting themselves to new issues, without needing to take distance from liberalism. Immigrants are individuals, just as native Dutch, however they should seize their own opportunities. Besides the equivalence between every individual, there is a strict policy towards immigrants.

“People, who want to settle in the Netherlands, have to be able to participate in our society.” (Ibid.: 3)

How does the 2010 party platform relate to the 2006 party platform and the concept of the individual? It seems that the concept of individualism is still as relevant as in the 2006 party platform. However, where the title of the 2006 party platform was ‘For a society with ambition’, the title of the 2010 party platform is ‘Affairs in order’, which puts the focus more on taking responsibility and less on maximum effort in realizing ambitions. It will become clear that this change is best understood in the context of the aftermath of the financial crisis.

That the concept of individualism is as present as in the 2006 party platform, is illustrated by the following quotes:

“The Netherlands is a beautiful and rich country that is bursting with talent. The VVD sees many opportunities for the Netherlands and is optimistic about the future of our country and its people.” (VVD, 2010: 5)

“What connects us is the will to move forward and not to give up in despair. Not by making people dependent on the government, but by helping them to be self-reliant.” (Ibid.)

“Every child deserves the best opportunities to develop his or her talents.” (Ibid.: 15)

“Good education helps children to develop themselves to people with a sense of responsibility and respect for every individual.” (Ibid.)

The focus is again on the individual and on the degree to which they have rights and obligations. The state should intervene as little as possible, so that the individual has the capacity and freedom to contribute in a meaningful way to the economy and the society.

This brings me to the party platform of 2012. Only separated by two years between the previous party platform, it is not much of a surprise that we do not find any meaningful differences with regards to the relevance of the concept of individualism. Furthermore, the VVD had been in government since 2010, which could maybe influence this party platform. However, apparently they continued in the same direction, at least in this

category. The self-reliance of the individual and its positive effects is emphasized once more:

“Good education ensures that our children develop themselves and learn for a job that suits them. Good education creates opportunities for success in life and is also the foundation for a strong economy.” (VVD, 2012: 22)

Again, personal training and seizing opportunities that are created through education is important. The VVD also believe in the capabilities of every individual. This is clearly illustrated by how they think about patients that need healthcare. The VVD believes that the state should take as much distance as needed initially and first trust in the capabilities of the individual. This will also be discussed in the section that covers the state. For now the following quote is interesting:

“Healthcare revolves around the interests of the patient. The VVD wants thereby that people try to be self-reliant as long as possible. It is important that a patient can choose from multiple healthcare providers.” (Ibid.: 29)

This illustrates how the VVD perceives the role of the individual in relationship to the state in the larger context of the Welfare State. They accept the necessity of the Welfare State, but are cautious and want to use it only when necessary. This links to the observation by Smith (1988) that liberal parties had to cope with a more important role for the state with regards to public services.

Taken the three party platforms together, the question arises how this relates to liberalism? Like liberalism, the individual has a special place. Interesting is how the VVD sees the individual in relation to other domains, like the economy. Following the findings of the party platforms with regards to individualism, it is fair to say that the self-reliance of the individual is very important, and education being an important means to that end. The perspective on the individual that is presented here relates strongly to general liberal principles. The individual should not be seen as a means to an end, but is a goal in itself. Policies should be centered on the individual. An important factor is the role of the state and how much it should intervene, but this will be discussed in more detail in the section about the state. For now it should be clear that the interpretation of the individual by the VVD aligns with liberal ideology.

Taking the sub-types of liberal parties into consideration, it seems that the findings of the coded data about the category 'individualism' indicate a perspective that is closely related to classical-liberalism. This becomes clear through how the VVD stresses the responsibility of the individual in directing its own life and that this should not be hindered. Every individual should have equal opportunity and from there on an individual should form its own life.

4.2.4 Freedom

In this section, I will discuss the concept of freedom and how this is represented in the three party platforms of the VVD. I will identify similarities and differences across the three party platforms and how this eventually relates to liberal ideology. A crucial issue with regards to freedom is that of taxes. This is where the 2006 party platform begins.

"Reduce taxes for everyone." (VVD, 2006: 1)

Taxes are a hurdle to the freedom of the individual. This relates to the title, 'for a society with ambition', since individuals should be as free as possible to realize ambitions.

"We Liberals have enormous confidence in the power of every human. How you do develop, what you think is important, with whom you choose to start new adventures, how you want to make money: people themselves know best. Politics must create the preconditions. It is precisely the respect for each individual's freedom that makes our society multi-faceted, committed and resilient." (Ibid.: 2)

What the above quote shows is that the individual is closely intertwined with freedom and how the state should behave *vis à vis* the individual. Besides the issue of taxes, the above is applied to how every individual should have the freedom and the opportunity to use their own talents. This should be central in education.

"Every young person can do something good. One is handy, another one is creative, one third can learn well. Schools and universities should provide every student the chances of a successful future by variation in approach." (Ibid.: 3)

It is clear that the VVD emphasizes freedom in their party platform of 2006. Then the question arises how they exactly interpret freedom in the larger context of society. It seems that the VVD is emphasizing negative freedom, meaning that the individual is

perfectly capable in determining for themselves how to use freedom. Still, there are limits to freedom. The following quote gives a good illustration of freedom in the context of society:

“Of course, rules are needed to live properly with sixteen million people. In their private domain, people should have maximal freedom. This requires utmost restraint of the government in personal matters such as sex, parenting, lifestyle, life fulfillment, dealing with illness and death. The government must intervene when private misconduct takes place, such as child abuse or domestic violence. They should not, however well intended, impose humans how to live and how to die. Self-determination is an important right for liberals. Freedom in a democracy is the highest good. In ever-new ways, she is threatened, even now. Therefore, the VVD fights, like any other party, for a country and a life of freedom”. (Ibid.: 2)

Turning the focus towards the 2010 party platform, taxes play again a central role.

“The VVD wants that people who work and earn money have a larger part of that money to spent for themselves instead on taxes.” (VVD, 2010: 9)

“Freedom and a free exchange of knowledge, thoughts and feelings are the basis of our modern market economy and our prosperity. The VVD stands for the freedom of all Dutch people who have good intentions.” (Ibid.: 5)

This quote shows in an interesting way that freedom is related to the individual, the economy and responsibility. A balanced economy needs freedom, but at the same time, this brings responsibilities. In the responsibility section, I will go in more detail. At least this quote shows that the core principles of classical-liberalism are central to the VVD, meaning that freedom of the individual should be a high priority. The following quotes also underline this:

“The patient takes a central place in the healthcare. Indeed, healthcare is meant for the patient, not the other way around. Therefore freedom of choice for patients is extremely important.” (Ibid.: 19)

“The VVD believes that people should determine themselves where they live and how they live. The VVD wants to stimulate private property.” (Ibid.: 25)

What is the situation in the 2012 party platform? Freedom stays a main focus.

“This is how we want to transfer the Netherlands to our children: as a free country with a strong economy without unnecessary rules and with low taxes for people who want to make something of their lives – like entrepreneurs, police officers and healthcare workers.” (VVD, 2012: 6)

The concept of freedom is present in the ‘individual’ section, about education and healthcare. This is only a representation, since the idea of freedom is also extended to the economy and other sub domains like culture, sports, housing. A classic example of freedom is taxes, which I already mentioned in earlier discussions about freedom. However, it seems that taxes have become just another part and not the focus of the party platform. On the other hand, freedom is something that can be found through the entire party platform and it is difficult to point to one or two highlights. If I have to name one, I would say that freedom needs a safe society. This is being emphasized in the introduction of the party platform and I will go in more detail in rule of law section, since it is more related to that.

Clearly, the three platforms relate strongly to liberalism in the context of freedom. Freedom being a core principle within liberalism, the main message within these three party platforms is that freedom is also a core principle for the VVD. For example, the necessary evil of taxes is dealt with in every platform and it illustrates how this affects the individual and economic freedom and how this should be taken to a minimum according to the VVD.

The above discussion of freedom in the context of the three party platforms also provides an indication of the type of liberal party the VVD can be associated with, namely classical-liberal. The way the VVD frames freedom in the context of society, emphasizes that they prefer negative freedom instead of positive freedom. The individual should be bothered as less as possible. The individual knows best for himself how to deal with freedom. The state should be cautious in intervening in the life of individuals. This all points to an understanding of freedom that can be associated with classical-liberalism as opposed to social-liberalism.

4.2.5 Economy

In this section, I will discuss the concept of the economy and how this is represented in the three party platforms of the VVD. I will identify similarities and differences across the three party platforms and how this relates to liberalism.

Having analyzed the 2006 party platform, the economy plays a central and connecting role. This has to do with the free market, which relates freedom, individualism and the state. More concretely, The VVD believes that entrepreneurs are the driving force behind the economy, which is illustrated by the quotes below:

“The risk of entrepreneurship should be rewarded significantly, for all those starting young entrepreneurs are the driving force behind job creation.” (VVD, 2006: 2)

“In our country are too few start-ups. We want to double the number of start-ups in four years. Give people with guts the opportunity. Nothing works better for the sphere of the economy.” (Ibid.)

Entrepreneurship leads to more jobs and this in turn leads to a mentality of want to move forward and creating your own success and realizing your own ambitions. The idea is that hard work should be rewarded. It does not matter if your highly educated or not, because craftsmen matter as much as highly educated labor to the economy.

“Our economy cannot do without craftsmen. Schools must restore craftsmanship in honor. Vocational education may radiate pride again.” (Ibid.: 1)

High employment is essential in the context of realizing ambitions and freedom for the individual and a properly functioning economy that creates welfare.

“The VVD wants that as many people as possible are active on the labor market and also stay active. The society really needs the energy and experience of newcomers, women and older generations.” (Ibid.: 2)

Related to this is the issue of immigrants, since immigrants should be an added value to the economy. Immigrants can contribute in a positive way to the economy according to the VVD. The economy can play an important role with regards to immigration and integration.

"We must be smart in dealing with immigration. Smart by focusing on educated people." (Ibid.)

"Employment is the best way to integration." (Ibid.)

Once again, this illustrates how the VVD tries to incorporate pressing and trending issues in the Dutch political landscape within the liberal ideology. A last element that stands out in the party platform with regards to the economy is the role of innovation. This is linked to the idea of moving forward and an ambitious society with ambitious individuals and entrepreneurs. Innovation is an essential requirement for a growing economy.

"To invent and innovate are essential for the Dutch economy. We become more competitive, and acquire for example cleaner transportation, improved health and more sustainable housing. Innovation is not only to be found in technology, but also in work by real humans by finding new ways of organizing and applying." (Ibid.: 3)

Turning the focus towards the 2010 party platform, it is interesting to see to what degree the financial crisis of 2008 has influenced the view of the VVD on the economy. First thing that is interesting is the focus on certain main pillars within the party platform. For this section the focus on the economy and government finances is especially interesting. This indicates an increased emphasis on the economy in comparison to the 2006 party platform. It seems that there is an emphasis on the consequences of the financial crisis within this party platform. This is illustrated by the title of the economy chapter '*Affairs in order within the economy*' and by the following quote:

"Since 2008 there is a severe economic crisis. Also in the coming years people will lose their jobs and entrepreneurs will get in trouble. Our economy has had a big crash and is now at a lower level than before the crisis. If we do not act now, that means fewer opportunities for businesses and fewer jobs." (VVD, 2010: 7)

Besides the incorporation of how to deal with the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the perspective of the VVD is quite identical to the 2006 party platform, i.e. entrepreneurship and the importance of a state who tries to minimize intervention. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

“A strong economy creates jobs, offers opportunities to entrepreneurs and generates prosperity for citizens.” (Ibid.)

“The state should create the right preconditions in which our economy can grow. Because well educated people are our main source of wealth.” (Ibid.)

“The VVD has a lot of appreciation for craftsmen. In the Netherlands there’s a lot of demand for craftsmen. We should not only create new ideas, but also really create something out of those ideas.” (Ibid.: 15)

The last quote shows that the economy is really centered onto the individual and getting the most out of society and the economy. Besides the role of the individual within the economy, there is also the role of innovation to get the economy to a higher level. Another important aspect is the role of responsibility in the economy which is illustrated by the following quote:

“Innovation is the development and use of new products, technologies and work methods. Innovation provides greater prosperity and therefore more jobs. Our economy really needs the coming years more innovation to survive in the increasingly more competitive world.” (Ibid.: 13)

“Work does not mean only earning enough money for your family or yourself, it is also contributing to the Dutch economy. Moreover, a job helps in making social contacts.” (Ibid.: 10)

The 2012 party platform strongly builds on the 2010 party platform, having two years of governing experience for the VVD. Responsibility plays at least the same role with regards to the economy as compared to 2010. In the introduction of the party platform it is mentioned that the Rutte I government has made already important steps to reinforce the economy and get the government finances in order. That the economy is important for the VVD is shown by this quote:

“A strong economy creates jobs, offers prosperity for citizens and opportunities for entrepreneurs.” (VVD, 2012: 10)

This illustrates the same picture as in the 2006, and especially the 2010 party platform. The economy is the key to a society based on liberal values, thereby focusing on ‘hard

working people' and entrepreneurs. The economy is in this way related to the individual, freedom and the state and even responsibility. Within the economy there should be freedom for the individual to seize opportunities. The state cannot create economic growth, but can facilitate society in creating the right conditions for economic growth, for example through low taxes and less regulation.

Taken together, what stands out? Clearly, the economy is a central element in all three party platforms. The economy functions as an enabler, who for examples enables entrepreneurs to have economic freedom and creates jobs, high employment.

Furthermore, education of all levels is important with regards to well educated individuals who are active in the labor force, being self-reliant. This extends to the role of immigrants in the economy, which should add value. Innovation is also important in the way of creating new opportunities, and moving the economy growth forward. An important difference is visible between the 2006 party platform and the 2010/2012 party platform, where the focus in the latter party platforms is more on responsibility within the economy and government finances. This is an effect of the aftermath of the financial crisis. With regards to the economy, the state has then the responsibility to have the government finances in order. The state is there to create proper preconditions, like infrastructure. Responsibility is thus increasingly important, to the individual and the state in the domain of the economy, which is illustrated by the increased emphasis on energy policy and durability. Still, the role of the state within the economy should be minimized, besides the implications of a more active role for the state within the economy.

Generally, there is a strong presence of liberal ideology in this section, in the way how the VVD deals with the role of the economy. This relates to the idea of 'more market, less government'. It all focuses on the freedom of the entrepreneur within the free market. The individual and freedom are strongly connected. Extending this link to liberalism and the economy, it also means that the VVD inclines to classical-liberalism, because they clearly are not an advocate of state intervention. This is illustrated by the belief that the state should merely facilitate and that the entrepreneur should be let loose as much as possible, like no unnecessary rules.

4.2.6 State

Thus far, I have discussed the concepts of the individual, freedom and the economy. In this section the focus is on the state and how the VVD exactly sees the state positioned in relationship to other domains. This section will be especially interesting, since it is very closely related to one of the main issues which separates classical-liberalism from social-liberalism. The state is necessary for law & order within a society and thereby guaranteeing freedom. However, a big issue is the degree of state intervention in society, which can negatively affect freedom within a society. It will be interesting to see how this is represented in the recent party platforms of the VVD. Extending the previous discussions, the focus will be especially on how the degree of intervention by the state is discussed by the VVD.

“The government is there for citizens and must serve them. Ultimately the civilian is the one with power. Administrative responsibility is insufficient visible.” (VVD, 2006: 4)

“The expediency and service of the execution by the national government, the provincial government and municipalities must be raised.” (Ibid.)

Related to the facilitating role of the state within society, is that the state should only focus on its core tasks. This can be understood in the context of the freedom of the individual and economic freedom. With the state focusing on its core tasks, it does not interfere with certain domains which need to be as free as possible from the state. What it does, should do it effective. This relates to the idea of liberalism of a certain degree of mistrust in the power of the state.

The 2010 party platform continues with giving a high priority to the conservative role of the state. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the financial crisis it is time for the state to get their affairs in order. The focus is now even more on a government who acts efficient, specifically with regards to the government finances.

“A responsible government tackles the problems right now and does not shy away from tough choices. We must realize that the current spending pattern of the government is based on a level of prosperity that does not exist anymore after the economic crisis. That is a tough, but honest and necessary message. This means that

the growth of government expenditure should be reduced considerably, but in a responsible way.” (VVD, 2010: 8)

“The VVD wants a powerful, small government. Public administration is there for citizens, not vice versa. (...)Decisive action and act in time determines to a significant extent the effectiveness of a small government that serves its citizens.” (Ibid.: 30)

“The VVD stands for fewer administrators, fewer politicians, and fewer civil servants.” (Ibid.)

The VVD clearly tries to say that the state is there for its core tasks, and nothing more. All overhead should be removed. This clearly relates to liberal ideology, where the state is around for the necessary public services. Areas where the state is needed are law & order and the defense department, but this will be discussed in more detail in the ‘rule of law’ section (Hall, 1987: 103).

The 2012 party platform continues with the above presented picture of the perspective of the VVD in the context of this category. It seems that the issue of responsible behavior by the state is at least as important and maybe even more. This will be discussed in more detail in the responsibility section and the same can be said for the task of security, which will be discussed in rule of law section.

The idea that the state should be small and powerful is continuously represented in the party platform. The authorities are there to serve the citizen and not the other way around. The VVD believes that the distance between the citizen and the state is too big. People have little trust in the rule of law and the performance of the government. The VVD believes that a compact and structured government gains trust of the citizens.

Taken the three party platforms together, how does the VVD in the context of the state relate to liberalism? The VVD seems to strongly adhere to liberal ideology in their party platforms, looking at the view that is presented on the state. Liberalism has mistrust against the power of the state and the state, being necessary, should serve the citizens, and not the other way around. In this way, again the incline towards ‘liberal-conservatism’ is illustrated by the VVD in their party platform, because the state is effective and small. There is a clear preference for a state that takes the necessary

distance from society, however facilitates and should take its core tasks seriously and really focus on them. This is an indication of some kind of mistrust of power of the state, however at the same time realizing that certain tasks belong to the state and should be executed effectively and with responsibility. To conclude and compare over time, the role of the government plays a more present role in the 2012 party platform compared to 2006 and 2010. The VVD really emphasizes the changes that are needed in context of the state. This comes really close to the liberal-conservative approach.

4.2.7 Rule of law

In this section, I will discuss the concept of rule of law and how this is represented in the three party platforms of the VVD. I will try to identify similarities and differences across the three party platforms and how it relates to liberalism.

The previous section I mentioned that the state has a core task in providing security. Following liberalism, the idea is that the state should guarantee safety within society, so that individuals can be really free. Rule of law is there to secure the rights of the individual. What does this concretely mean when looking at the 2006 party platform of the VVD? It seems after analyzing the party platform that the focus is on clear and strict regulations for people who break the rules. For example:

*“If you hit a random person, you hit a citizen – and then you should be punished.”
(VVD, 2006: 1)*

Within the party platform there are two sections that explain properly what the vision of the VVD is with regards to rule of law. The first section is titled ‘Respect for authority officials’. The message is that officials that are serving the nation should be treated with respect while doing their duty for guaranteeing a safe society. There should be mutual respect. The second section is titled ‘Safe on the streets’. This next quote underlines once again that rule of law is very important:

“Safety is the oldest and most important task of the government. Crystal clear rules are crucial. People need to know what they can expect. Consistent enforcement is also needed. Otherwise, no one takes the rules seriously.” (Ibid.: 3)

The point is that the victim should be central with regards to crime, which relates nicely to the focus on the individual and freedom. Rights should be respected. This does not

mean this is only applicable to the Netherlands. The ideas of rule of law should also be applied globally. This fits also with the 'state' section, but in my view the focus is in this party platform more on international law & order.

"Maintaining and strengthening of the international rule of law has continued priority." (Ibid.: 4)

"Our country should vigorously defend its interests in a turbulent world. Moreover, we want to actively pursue a decent life for all citizens of the world." (Ibid.: 4)

In the 2010 party platform it is made very clear that security is a classic task of the government and that this is related to the concept of freedom:

"Offering security is a classic task of the government. (...) People who through their behavior undermine (the sense of) security, need a powerful and energetic acting government to oppose them. There must be respect to persons who act on behalf of the government: of course the policeman, but also all the others who work in the public interest and for us, such as ambulance personnel, teachers, bus and train staff and civil servants." (VVD, 2010: 31)

"Netherland needs to be safer, because without security there's no freedom." (Ibid.: 31)

Guaranteeing security can also mean a breach in the privacy of individuals, which is an increasing issue, for example internet. With regarding to privacy of individuals following can be found:

"The protection of privacy of citizens is of great importance. After all, freedom is a right worth preserving. Internet and contemporary technologies enable authorities to gather large amounts of personal data, whether it is about patient records or counterterrorism practices. Too often we just have to rely on the good intentions of the government without sufficient guarantees and safeguards against abuse." (Ibid.: 33)

Besides domestic security and maintaining rule of law, the VVD still sees international rule of law as one of their priorities, like in 2006 party platform. As in the 2006 and 2010 party platforms, the concept of rule of law is focused on a secure environment for

every individual in society. This is potentially the most important precondition for a free society. What are the concrete ideas within the 2012 party platform?

The state should try to justly punish criminals. Where freedom is an important right for individuals, this is less so for people who break the rules. They should be confronted by a powerful state. This needs a lot of extra police officers on the streets. Once again the role of the individual is emphasized, because victims should be prioritized over criminals. This shows how the state sometimes has to strongly interfere with regards to their core tasks. However, this is in the context of guaranteeing freedom by providing a secure environment for individuals, this is the leading principle. This brings us to the topic of privacy, because with catching criminals often there is the discussion of privacy. This means that private information should be properly secured. Besides domestic rule of law, VVD sees also important role on international level.

“The VVD wants that the Netherlands defends the international legal system, human rights and responsible government in other countries.” (VVD, 2012: 56)

Taken all three party platforms together, quite a clear picture emerges about the views of the VVD with regards to the concept of rule of law. It means mainly that the core task of the state of providing safety in society is very important, especially for the degree of freedom. This connects with classical-liberalism as in that the state should create a secure environment for people to have freedom. It also shows the role of the individual and how its rights are guaranteed, while people who break the rules have to, at least temporarily, lose some rights, apart from that they have the right on a fair trial in court. It seems that the strict tone towards offending the rules continues throughout the three party platforms, without changing priority of the theme.

4.2.8 Responsibility

In this section, I will discuss the concept of responsibility and how this is represented in the three party platforms of the VVD. I will try to identify similarities and differences across the three party platforms and how this relates to liberalism.

The concept of responsibility is to be understood in the context of rights and obligations. Every individual in society has certain rights, but this also means certain obligations. In the 2006 party platform this is for example illustrated with the topic of environment.

The VVD portrays the issue of the environment as a concern as well as an opportunity. Individuals and the state have the responsibility to take care of environmental problems and make sure that children do not have to pay for the problems that have been created by earlier generations. However, there are also opportunities.

“Good environmental policy can be a source of innovation and a driver of economic growth. Consider the development and export of knowledge in energy and water management. As we succeed to connect economy and ecology, care for the environment can evolve into an opportunity.” (VVD, 2006: 4)

In my view, the above illustrates an interesting trade-off, with regards to the degree of state intervention and freedom. Yes, it is responsible to act on behalf of the environment, but the way it is presented in the party platform is more about state intervention than a bottom-up approach where the individual has the freedom. It is also that responsibility means that there is not unlimited freedom. It is an interesting approach taking into context that the individual and its freedom are quite important traditionally in ideology of VVD.

Responsibility is also a central element with regards to integration and immigration. New immigrants have the responsibility to do their utmost best to integrate properly. At the same time the state has the responsibility to provide a safe haven for refugees and provide real opportunities for accepted refugees (Ibid.).

How does the 2010 party platform relate to the concept of ‘responsibility’? For starters, what is the approach towards the environment, which took a rather important role in 2006 party platform. It seems that it is still important in 2010 party platform, looking at the following quotes:

“The VVD wants to pursue a responsible energy and climate policy.” (VVD, 2010: 26)

“The VVD is working towards clean en renewable sources of energy. This offers opportunities for the environment and our economy.” (Ibid.)

As I have mentioned before, responsibility is related to the idea that rights and obligations are two sides of the same coin. Freedom needs responsibility, to guarantee a proper functioning society. The VVD sees it as the responsibility of the state and individuals to make sure that children have a good future ahead.

Responsibility is also represented by the ideas the VVD has about government finances in order. This is more emphasized after the financial crises, since the idea is that governments should cut in expenses, because it is irresponsible to spend more than you get in.

Does this trend continue in the 2012 party platform? That responsibility is important becomes already clear with the title of the party platform: 'Do not pass on, but address'. The idea behind the title is that you should take responsibility for your actions. This is applicable towards the individual among others, because individual should take responsibility for their own lives and should not lean too much on the state, but also to the state itself that has to take responsibility for their core tasks, which I discussed in the state section. A good example within the party platform that illustrates the essence of the concept of responsibility is the focus on government finances. The following two quotes from the platform grasp the essence:

"A responsible government tackles the problems now and does not slide it on to next generations. The VVD wants to move swiftly towards a structural balance between revenues and government expenditure." (VVD, 2012: 11)

"The VVD is in addition in favor of a government that focuses on its core tasks. When every tier of government is limited to its core tasks, there is less administrative burden and – more importantly - more freedom and responsibility for people." (Ibid.: 42)

The second quote also shows how responsibility is intertwined between different domains. When the state focuses on its core tasks, this has effect for responsibility also on individual level. Furthermore, the above quotes show that it also means to take responsibility to the future, and this is also to be found in the party platform with regards to environmental issues. However, this is mostly economy related, which I already mentioned in the economy section, it is mostly about survival. However, the VVD feels the responsibility to strive for more sustainable economy (Ibid.: 19).

Taken the three party platforms together, the concept of responsibility seems to have a really important role, especially the 2010 and 2012 party platforms. There is an increasing focus on the responsibility of the state for the government finances, but also on the individual with regards to contributing to society through jobs and more

generally the issue of the environment and more renewable energy sources. At the same time this gives more responsibilities for individuals and it is aligned with liberalism that the individual should have these responsibilities. It is also a concept that can be quite easily adapted to new emerging issues, which gives liberals flexibility. For example, the aftermath of the financial crisis and the issue of climate change. I think it is really interesting to see how they put more and more emphasis on the environment, which is not naturally one of their core topics in elections. There seems to be again a strong connection to liberalism in the sense that responsibility is very closely related to freedom and that responsibility is one of the most important duties of an individual in society. Responsibility also describes the attitude of the state towards society. Taken all this in account, it is difficult to indicate the type of liberal party with regards to this category, since there seems to be some proactive elements with regards to the environment, which is not really a liberal approach. Still, considering the general tone towards responsibility and its implications, it is fair to stay that the VVD ones more strongly is inclined to 'liberal-conservative' type.

4.2.9 Concluding remarks

Before moving on to the Liberal Democrats, I want to take a quick look at the six categories that have been discussed. Each category discussed a part of the codes that came out of the coding of the three party platforms of the VVD in the period 2006-2012. Taken these categories together, a picture emerges of the VVD in relation to the concepts that have been defined in the theoretical chapter. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis above also potentially provides an overview of the similarities and differences between the different party platforms.

The discussion of the six categories does show that the core principles of liberalism are still clearly present in all three party platforms. Moreover, the six categories do illustrate a picture of a liberal party that tends to classical-liberalism. However, there are indications of social liberalism, but these are not being emphasized by the VVD. This is easily explained, since the VVD has to deal with the Welfare State and the role the state plays. However, what eventually becomes clear, that classical- liberalism is at the core of the VVD in matters such as individual freedom and entrepreneurship in the domain of the economy.

In analyzing these party platforms, it is interesting to see how the VVD deals with contemporary issues. First of all, the aftermath of the global financial crisis is definitely present in the 2010 and 2012 party platforms of the VVD compared to the 2006 party platform. Secondly, the three party platforms do show a strikingly resemblance in how they all focus in important lines on the same main themes. These are just some observations that should be kept in mind while continuing this thesis with the analysis of the party platforms of the Liberal Democrats.

4.3 The case of the Liberal Democrats

4.3.1 The Liberal Democrats in the British party system

The Liberal Democrats are a product of an electoral alliance between the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party. This electoral alliance was established in 1981 and eventually changed their name to Liberal Democrats in 1988 (Evans & Sanderson-Nash, 2011: 459; Curtice, 1988; Jones, 2011).

The Liberal Democrats are from a historical perspective a liberal party that can be seen as a social-liberal type of liberal party. Since the formation of the electoral alliance, this party has consolidated their third-party status within UK-electoral politics. Where they have been relatively successful, especially in comparison to other liberal parties in Western Europe, they were never really able to make a breakthrough. However, in 2010 they were able to join a coalition government with the Conservatives (Evans & Sanderson-Nash, 2011; Curtice, 1988; Cutts, 2012: 96; Jones, 2011). This suggests that the Liberal Democrats have become an important player in the British party system. However, the last major work on liberal parties being written in 1988 (Kirchner, 1988), it begs the question to what extent this traditional liberal party still really is a liberal party and whether social-liberalism can still be found in their recent party platforms.

Thus, Liberal Democrats are heavily influenced through their history, containing several splits and eventually an electoral alliance between the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party. Since this electoral alliance the Liberal Democrats have seen an increase in their votes generally and has consolidated their third-party status within UK-electoral politics (Cutts, 2012: 97; Jones, 2011: 221). In the last decade they have even had more success, leading to participation in a coalition with the Conservatives. Then

the question arises, are the Liberal Democrats still a liberal party and do they still associate themselves with social-liberalism? This is also relevant, because it is not clear in the contemporary literature on political parties what liberal parties today are. Therefore, I will systematically describe the findings of the party platforms, on basis of the coded data, of the Liberal Democrats to come to what extent Liberal Democrats in contemporary times still adhere to liberalism and whether they still can be classified as social-liberal. After analyzing their three most recent party platforms of national elections in the UK (2005-2015), I hope to get an insight into this so-called liberal party.

4.3.2 Electoral context of the party platforms

The party platforms that are being discussed in the following sections cover three different British general elections in the period 2005-2015. The three elections were respectively held on the following three dates: 5th May 2005, 6th May 2010 and 7th May 2015 (The Electoral Commission, 2005; 2010; 2015). Let me shortly give an overview of the context of the three elections.

The United Kingdom (UK) general elections of 2005 were won by the Labour Party, and under the leadership of Tony Blair they won their third consecutive victory.

Interestingly, it remains the last Labour victory in the UK. The result of these elections were impressive for the Liberal Democrats, gaining their highest share of the vote since they were in a SDP-Liberal Alliance and won 62 seats (22%), becoming the third largest party under the leadership of Charles Kennedy. The 2005 election figures revealed a trend of the Liberal Democrats replacing the Conservatives as Labour's main opponents in urban areas. This party platform was the last party platform under the leadership of Charles Kennedy (The Electoral Commission, 2005; Liberal Democrats, 2005; 2010).

This will be interesting to take into account when comparing this party platform to the party platforms of 2010 and 2015, which are under leadership of Nick Clegg.

The next party platform for the elections in 2010 was the first one after the global financial crisis of 2008. Furthermore, the Liberal Democrats were for the first time under the leadership of Nick Clegg. Although the Liberal Democrats got a smaller share of the seats in parliament than in the 2005 elections, this time the Liberal Democrats were able to join a coalition with the Conservatives, thereby entering the government (The Electoral Commission, 2010; Liberal Democrats, 2010).

The elections of 2015 saw the party platform of the Liberal Democrats focusing on the five years in government together with the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats were not able to continue their rather high percentage of the votes in the exit polls of these elections, suffering probably from their participation in government that had to deal with the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The Liberal Democrats were still under the leadership of Nick Clegg (The Electoral Commission, 2015; Liberal Democrats, 2015).

Before I really start to discuss the three party platforms of the Liberal Democrats, I want to shortly mention certain expectations towards the Liberal Democrats and its party platforms. I do expect some differences between the party platforms with regards to how they relate to the main categories, as proved to be the case with discussing the findings of the VVD. This has two reasons, namely the 2008 financial crisis, which splits the 2005 party platform from the 2010 and 2015 party platforms, and the participation in government in the 2010-2015 period, which makes that the 2015 party platform is potentially influenced by the government participation of the Liberal Democrats.

Further expectations are related to the discussion of the party platforms and the main categories. These expectations are about the relationship between the main categories and the analyzed content of the party platforms. In other words, what do I expect to find within the categories individualism, freedom, the economy, the state, rule of law and responsibility. In short, the expectation is that the Liberal Democrats are inclined to social-liberalism, instead of inclined towards classical-liberalism. Evidently, I expect them to have a strong adherence to liberalism in general. What does this mean for the categories generally speaking?

Looking at the categories, I expect quite opposite results than from the VVD. Each category will still have the same focus, for example, individualism will put the individual central. However, I expect a difference in the approach.

Individualism will be used to discuss the role of the individual within the party platform. Freedom will be used to discuss the way freedom is interpreted by the Liberal Democrats and how it plays a role across domains like the economy. The economy will then be used to discuss the specific views on the economy. The state will discuss the view on the role of the state within society. Rule of law will discuss the role of justice and

rights. Responsibility will then mainly discuss the other side of freedom, because freedom is having rights, but also obligations. This should give an initial view on what to expect in these categories. The actual descriptive analysis will show how this in reality works out.

4.3.3 Individualism

In this section, I will discuss the concept of individualism and how this is represented in the three party platforms. I will try to identify similarities and differences across the three party platforms and how this relates to liberalism.

In the 2005 party platform the defense of fundamental civil liberties is an important focus. This has for example to do with the increase in taxes for citizens, which goes against the core principles of liberalism. In this party platform of 2005, the Liberal Democrats want to be the real alternative to Labour and the Conservatives. They do this with regard to individual to achieve a fairer and more straightforward tax system. This is already a deviation from the VVD, because they distance themselves from the two main parties in the party system.

As is the case with the VVD, the individual is the starting point for the Liberal Democrats. The emphasis is for the Liberal Democrats on defending the rights of the individual, i.e. civic liberties. Interestingly, the Liberal Democrats focus in the context of the individual more on inequality within society. Where the VVD was more about equivalence between individual and accepting that not every individual is equal, the Liberal Democrats have a different view on inequality. This obviously relates to social-liberalism, because there is a more active role for the state here to fight inequality. The following quote indicates the preference for social- liberalism’:

“It is a privilege at this election to be leading the most socially progressive party in British politics.” (Liberal Democrats, 2005: 2)

That the individual is central, but in a more social way, is illustrated by the first chapter of the party platform. This chapter is about the National Healthcare Service (NHS) and the emphasis is on the priority of patients. Professional decisions based on patient need, speedier diagnosis and effective treatment. Reduce red tape and private subsidies.

The coded data of the 2010 party platform do show that the focus on individualism is as present as in the 2005 party platform. That the focus is on individuals, becomes clear through the slogans of 'a fair chance' and 'a fair future'. A fair chance mostly relates to that every child should have a fair chance in live to get the most out of it. Education should be available to every child. A fair future is more related to how every individual should get the opportunity to get on with life and that there is no difference between individuals. Equivalence is very important.

Education is an important focus of the Liberal Democrats and it should be designed for the student (the individual). Thus, the development of the individual is central. Another important aspect related to the individual is that the power should be with the individual. This once again shows the essence of the individual for Liberal Democrats and is well expressed by the following quotes:

"At the root of Britain's problems today is the failure to distribute power fairly between people. Political power has been hoarded by politicians and civil servants; economic power has been hoarded by big business. Both kinds of power have been stripped from ordinary citizens, leaving us with a fragile society marked by inequality, environmental degradation and boom-bust economics." (Liberal Democrats, 2010: 9)

"The Liberal Democrat philosophy is built on a simple ambition: to distribute power fairly among people. From that goal of fairness spring the four priorities which form the backbone of this manifesto. Each will redistribute power of a different kind, be it economic, social, political or financial. Each will change Britain for the better." (Ibid.)

Following the 2005 and 2010 party platforms, the 2015 party platform is also focused on concept of individualism. Examples are that children should have opportunities. Everyone should have opportunities to get on in life. This is applicable to the domains of work, private, online and in the local communities. The idea is to have an opportunity society with world-class education for all to support this idea. Another aspect of individualism is that their environment should feel comfortable in society by proper housing policy. People should have a place of their own, own private property.

Individuals also have equal rights. True security for individuals and for our nation must be built on a platform of equal rights and civil liberties. Discrimination and inequality can hold people back, and should not be the case. Opportunities are not equally distributed in modern Britain. A fair society should treat its citizens equally and with dignity. Liberal Democrats have in government key advances in fight for equality. They want to continue work to fight prejudice and discrimination based on race, age, religion or belief, gender, sexuality, and disability.

Power should be with the people, Liberal Democrats believe. People need the power not just to make decisions about their own lives, but about the way their country, their community, their workplace and more are run. Local is better and people should have self-determination.

Taken all three party platforms together, how do the Liberal Democrats perceive the role of the individual in their party platforms? Apparently, they combine equal opportunity for every individual with giving people a fair chance by fighting inequality. Therefore equivalence between individuals is less important than the increase in inequality between individuals. This is especially the case in 2005, but is also strongly present in the 2010 and 2015 party platforms, which therefore is a perspective that has been present in the past decade. In general, it is clear that the individual and its rights have priority. The exact emphasis on the individual seems to slightly change in the party platforms of 2010 and 2015 under the leadership of Nick Clegg. The emphasis is more on self-reliance of the individual and less about how the individual is affected by external factors and how the state should play an active role in battling inequality.

How does this relate to liberalism? I have already mentioned that the individual is central in liberal ideology. This returns clearly in the party platforms of the Liberal Democrats. However, it is essential to point out that emphasis on the individual is more on its rights than its obligations. In other words, the self-reliance aspect is less present than you would expect with regards to a liberal party. In this manner, they seem to incline more towards the social-liberal wing of liberal parties.

4.3.4 Freedom

That the concept of freedom is at the core of liberal ideology, should be clear by now. Far more interesting is to see how the Liberal Democrats interpret freedom in their party platform, which will be the focus of this section.

An important element for the Liberal Democrats is fair taxes. This seems to confirm the picture that I just illustrated about the individual, that it is more about inequality than equivalence. They see a more proactive function for taxes, in the sense that with taxes they want to redistribute money. However, there is also the aspect of fewer burdens on individuals with regards to taxes, thus still emphasizing the need for freedom of the individual. Liberal Democrats emphasize fairer taxes, because ordinary hard-working families pay more as a share of their incomes in tax than the very rich (Liberal Democrats, 2005: 10). Liberal Democrats will make the tax system fairer and simpler.

Liberal Democrats strongly emphasize the civil rights of individuals; freedom being the most important one. The idea is that a secure society is definitely important, but basic freedoms of individuals should not have to suffer by the states' actions of guaranteeing a safe society. The focus of the government should be on defending the liberties of individuals, on which I further expand in the 'rule of law' section. Education is seen as an important means for individuals to be able to enjoy their freedom. This shows that there is a mix of positive and negative freedom, because on the one hand the state should make sure that there is education, and on the other hand the individual has the freedom to unlock their own potential in their own way.

"The finest investment our generation can make is to give a high-quality education to the next generation. Nothing sets a child free more than this. If we are successful, each and every child is given the opportunity to unlock their potential. If we fail then we put their whole future at risk." (Ibid.: 6)

The way freedom is perceived in the 2010 party platform is similar to the 2005 party platform. Again fair taxes are an area of focus for this party. The tax system should distribute wealth and power to alleviate the worst excesses of inequality. The tax and benefits system should be made fair, so that everyone, be they young or old, can afford to get by. Liberal Democrats will cut taxes for millions of working people and pensioners.

Freedom is also provided by a focus on the economy that is about innovation and sustainability, where the infrastructure the country needs is in place for individuals and business to thrive (Liberal Democrats, 2010: 20). The goal is opportunities for all in a fair, green economy. This is in more areas visible, like education and that everyone has the opportunity to get help from the NHS when needed.

How relates the 2015 party platform to the concept of freedom? How is the concept of freedom represented in the party platform after five years of governing experience? The findings of the coded data indicate that freedom is still having the same meaning for the Liberal Democrats. They still focus on fair taxes. Every single individual should have the means to be free. The Liberal Democrats believe that the tax system is an important means to that end.

“We will continue to make taxes fairer and simpler, help those on low and middle incomes, and ensure those on the highest incomes make a fair contribution.”

(Liberal Democrats, 2015: 41)

This quote shows an interesting deviation from the approach of the VVD. Where the VVD sees taxes mainly as a necessary evil that should minimal affect individual freedom, the Liberal Democrats see taxes also as a means to distribute wealth across individuals, making a difference between low/middle income and highest incomes. That is their interpretation of fair taxes. In the party platform, freedom is also an important element with regards to education and healthcare.

Taken all three party platforms together with regards to the concept of freedom, a quite similar image presents itself across the party platforms of the Liberal Democrats. The main focus is that there should be individual and economic freedom. However, this also means that through taxes they want to battle inequality as main aim. In short, the state should play a more active role in guaranteeing freedom and opportunities to enjoy that freedom.

The findings in the context of freedom within the three party platforms indicate a strong presence of core liberal principles. Furthermore, there are indications that a social-liberal approach is present. Concluding, the interpretation of freedom has an interesting angle, which is that there is an element of redistribution of wealth through taxes, which

definitely cannot be identified with classical-liberalism, while strongly inclines towards social-liberalism.

4.3.5 Economy

In this section, I will discuss the concept of the economy and how this is represented in the three party platforms of the Liberal Democrats. I will try to identify similarities and differences across the three party platforms and how it relates to liberalism. How is the economy represented in the party platforms and what does it say about the presence of liberalism within the Liberal Democrats? Furthermore, are there indications that the Liberal Democrats incline to either classical-liberalism or social-liberalism?

Starting with the 2005 party platform, the coded data show a rather fuzzy image. On the one hand there seems to be a presence of classical-liberalism and on the other there seems to be a presence of social-liberalism. This mixed approach is illustrated by the label 'fair economy'. The focus is on building prosperity for Britain, and the idea is that the government should see it as one of their core tasks to manage the economy well. Therefore, the state should set clear priorities in public spending. The economy should also be fairer, which is also the case with the tax system. For example, they want to tackle irresponsible credit expansion in mortgages and personal loans by curbing misleading advertising and anti-competitive practices by promoters of insurance for mortgages and loans, and of credit cards. They oppose also the increasing complexity of business taxes and want a simpler and fairer system that is giving priority to helping small business. Finally, they want to slash the red tape, bureaucracy and over-regulation that are holding British business – especially small business – back (Liberal Democrats, 2005: 10-11). In short, they do stand for the entrepreneur, but again in a way that is reminiscent with how they perceive the individual; the state should be proactive in battling inequality.

More than the VVD, they link the state to the economy. The above shows the complicated picture, because there can be elements found like a preference for entrepreneurs and justness for the individual, but also a more important role for the state. This is something that should be taken into account in the final comparative part of this data chapter.

Liberal Democrats support a liberal economic approach to trade, investment and migration in the national interest. They want Britain to be at the centre of a liberalized reformed European Union (EU). Liberal Democrats believe that Britain should work to create the right economic conditions to join the euro in order to safeguard investment in the UK and reduce the cost and risk of trade with the rest of Europe.

In the party platform of 2010 fair economy is continued by the Liberal Democrats. They want to create jobs by making Britain greener:

“Our vision is of a very different economy, balanced and sustainable both financially and environmentally. We will reduce the deficit, break up the banks, and ensure that Britain leads in developing the new green economy that the world needs.”
(Liberal Democrats, 2010: 10)

The health of the economy depends on the health of the country's finances. Public borrowing needs to be brought under control to protect the country's economic future, while at the same time not undermining the much-needed recovery so that jobs do not suffer. The economy should be based on innovation and sustainability, infrastructure country needs is in place for individuals and business to thrive. Aim is to deliver growth that lasts and is environmentally sustainable. Accordingly, sustainable finance is also a priority, because an economy cannot be build on financial gambling as became clear after the recession in 2008. Furthermore, making the economy green will create 100,000 jobs and creates hundreds of thousands of opportunities for young people affected by recession.

Liberal Democrats believe in the value of entrepreneurship and enterprise, vital to create wealth the UK needs. This needs a proper functioning free market. The economy also needs a dynamic environment for science and innovation. This creates opportunities for the future. Science has an importance for the recovery and reshaping of the economy, thereby making it less reliant on the banking sector.

In the 2015 party platform a fair economy is once more emphasized and one of the main pillars. The idea is to have prosperity for all through the economy. The economy needs to be stronger. This can be achieved mainly through balancing the budget fairly and invest to build a high-skill, low-carbon economy. Responsible finances are essential because it underpins everything else Liberal Democrats want to achieve. High debt and

deficits are a risk to economic stability and it is simply not right to borrow too much money and expect our children to pay it back. Britain needs a strong economy not just to help fund public services, but because growth and enterprise create jobs and opportunities for all. The aim is an economy that is strong, green, open and fair; an economy that builds prosperity and wellbeing that lasts, for everyone (Liberal Democrats, 2015: 23).

Britain should, as a major global economy, promote open markets and free trade, both within EU and beyond. Liberal Democrats believe we should welcome talented people from abroad and give sanctuary to refugees fleeing persecution. Immigration procedures must be robust and fair (Ibid.: 33).

In this party platform the participation in government is taken into consideration. The Liberal Democrats emphasize that when they were in government they have significantly increased jobs in the UK. High employment is important for prosperity for all and linked to the central role of the individual.

Taken all party platforms together, a clear focus on a fairer and greener economy is visible. Although the specific focus in this category stays the same across the three party platforms, the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008 is visible in the two party platforms of 2010 and 2015. This is especially represented by how they emphasize the responsibility of the state with regards to public debt and how the banking sector has to be tamed.

In the perception of this category emerges an ideological profile that is closely to liberalism. The individual is the starting point and economic freedom is a frequently mentioned theme by the Liberal Democrats. Interestingly, the role of the economy is more related to how the state could play a role in it. Still, the importance of entrepreneurs is being emphasized and they should have the freedom to take initiative for new ideas that help the economy grow. These two dimensions make it difficult to identify whether the Liberal Democrats can be classified as either classical-liberal or social-liberal.

4.3.6 State

In this section, I will discuss the concept of the state and how this is represented in the three party platforms of the Liberal Democrats. I will try to identify similarities and differences across the three party platforms. The focus will be on to what extent the view of the Liberal Democrats on the state can be related to liberalism and whether it can be classified as classical- liberalism or social-liberalism. As is theorized, the state is a crucial concept in the distinction between the two types of liberalism, but also liberalism in general. It will be interesting to discover the exact findings that follow out of the coded data of the three party platforms.

Starting with the 2005 party platform, the view of the Liberal Democrats on the state is quite clear. To begin with, the state should focus on its core tasks. Only, the Liberal Democrats emphasize a broader range of areas than the VVD does, namely the National Healthcare System (NHS), education, besides the usual core tasks (in the view of liberalism) like defense, law & order and providing proper infrastructure for citizens. The idea is that the state should provide opportunities and facilitate society, but should also more actively defend social injustice and inequality outside of the doings of the individual. With regards to the classic tasks of the state, i.e. law & order, the approach is that the security of citizens should not compromise the civil rights of individuals. Thus, safety is important, but freedom should not suffer from a state that intervenes in the name of securing society.

Another element is the decentralization of the state. Liberal Democrats want strong local communities who do not want to be bothered by the central government (Liberal Democrats, 2005: 13). Local services, like health and education, have to work better for people and that's best achieved at the local level. This shows once again the important role of the individual. Moreover, this also shows the priority of a small and effective state (Ibid.: 18), because local government can cope more effectively with the needs of citizens. This also means that power should not be abused in the eyes of the Liberal Democrats (Ibid.).

The view on the state in the 2005 party platform is to be found almost unchanged in the party platforms of 2010 and 2015, despite the new leadership, i.e. Nick Clegg. The notion

of a fair society continues and it influences how the state should act towards the individual and society.

What is interesting to mention, is the belief in investing and improving the quality of the public services in the UK. In the eyes of the Liberal Democrats they are the cornerstone of a fair society, opening up opportunities and providing support and help when needed (Liberal Democrats, 2010: 32). Specifically, the NHS should work better and there is an important role for the state to make sure that this happens. Extending this idea, the Liberal Democrats also want to change that chances in life are more determined by your parents' income than anywhere else in the developed world in 2010 (Ibid.: 33). Thus, Liberal Democrats want to provide a fair start for all children, by cutting class sizes, setting schools free to give all children the best possible education. Scrap unfair university tuition fees everyone has chance to get a of parents' income. Liberal Democrats also believe every family should get the support it needs to thrive, help with childcare through to better support caretakers and elderly parents.

Another important element within this section is that of local communities and how this relates to central government and the other way around. Liberal Democrats believe in strong communities, where local people can come together to meet local needs. Every community should be safe and fair, and offer opportunities to people of every background. This also means that immigration is an important factor. It would be wrong to try and end immigration completely but we have to manage migration so that it benefits Britain and is fair for everyone. State responsible for proper immigration management, immigration system is in chaos after decades of incompetent management.

The state should create preconditions and does this by better and more affordable homes, public transport you can rely on, a green and pleasant land, a fair deal for the countryside, fair trade for British farmers and also education and NHS mentioned before.

Taken all three party platforms together, there seems to be a lot of continuity throughout the party platforms with regards to the concept of the state. In general, the way the Liberal Democrats deal with the state fits in important ways with liberalism. The state has the responsibility for certain core tasks, which guarantee the rights of the

individual. This also means that the state should be effective and cautious with regards to interfering in society.

Still, in the context of the sub-types of liberalism, a clear social-liberal approach is presented in this category. The Liberal Democrats have a more active role for the state in mind, looking at all the tasks the state should try to fulfill. Interestingly, there is some indication that this decreases in the 2015 party platform when compared to the 2005 and 2010 party platforms. However, the focus on a fair society remains, which does mean that the state needs to be relatively more proactive in guaranteeing the rights of the individual.

4.3.7 Rule of law

In this section the focus is on the 'rule of law'. As I have just mentioned Liberal Democrats see the area of rule of law as one of the core tasks of the state. This is in line with the idea that a necessary requirement for freedom is a safe and secure society. This is underlined by the following quote:

"Governments keep talking tough, but everyone knows it is not working. It is time to concentrate on the basics: more police on the beat, more effort to stop prisoners re-offending, more help for victims of crime." (Liberal Democrats, 2005: 8)

This quote clearly proves that the Liberal Democrats have a strong belief in the rule of law. They see the individual as a priority in their policy, since the state has to take care of guaranteeing proper preconditions that makes sure that the freedom of the individual is guaranteed. Besides domestic rule of law and the role of the state, there is also the international aspect of rule of law.

The Liberal Democrats believe that Britain has a leading role to play in Europe and the world. In the aftermath of 9/11 and the Iraq war this role is more important than ever. It is in the interest of Britain to maintain the international rule of law and actively try to build on security at home and abroad. This is a logical extension of the core tasks of the state and this also means that defense is an important aspect of it. The state has sovereignty and needs an army to defend its people. This focus on the army and the state goes way back to the early liberalism where nation building was an important issue.

The importance of the rule of law is also present in the party platforms of 2010 and 2015. The rule of law also extends to the political arena. This should be a fair and open political system, with power devolved to all the nations, communities, neighborhoods and peoples of Britain. Rule of law is also about fairness and people that are empowered, knowing the chance to change things in their neighborhood or in the country as a whole is in their hands. In short, for the Liberal Democrats the rule of law equals protecting the civil rights of individuals, either on a national or an international level.

“Liberal Democrats believe it is an individual’s right to live their lives as they see fit, without discrimination, with personal privacy, and with equal rights before the law.” (Liberal Democrats, 2010: 93)

“We believe in freedom, justice, prosperity and human rights for all and will do all we can to work towards a world where these hopes become reality.” (Ibid.: 57)

What is present in all three party platforms is the essence of law enforcement. It is about setting boundaries to citizens who misbehave, and thereby guaranteeing a secure environment for citizens to live in. More police on the streets should improve the security and they have to work more effectively to cut crime. Besides chasing criminals, an important factor is preventing of crime (Ibid.: 71).

In the party platforms the Liberal Democrats show that they put priority on rights of the individual above the guarantee of security in society. Liberal Democrats believe that true security for individuals and for the UK must be built on a platform of equal rights and civil liberties. Discrimination and inequality can hold people back just as much as a lack of legal freedoms. Freedom of expression and free press are therefore more important than the necessity of a secure society. Liberal Democrats believe British foreign policy and international aid should seek to advance human rights and democracy throughout the world. All people – regardless of ethnicity, disability, age, belief, gender or sexual orientation – deserve a freer, fairer and more prosperous world (Liberal Democrats, 2015: 153).

Concluding this section, it is clear that the Liberal Democrats, in the context of this section, have a strong belief in the rule of law. The findings of the three party platforms indicate a strong presence of liberalism. A good example is the importance of individual rights and respecting these rights under all circumstances. Still, individuals who

misbehave themselves should get their punishment. Every individual will be treated the same for the law. This section also shows that throughout the three party platforms, from 2005-2015, the focus stays the same. Most importantly, there is a strong indication of social-liberalism in relationship to the rule of law. This is illustrated by the priority on individual rights. Social-liberalism inclines more to the defense of individual rights, although a secure society is important. Still, the freedom of the individual should not be compromised by the state's actions in providing a safe society. This picture clearly emerges in the analysis of the party platforms of the Liberal Democrats in the period 2005-2015.

4.3.8 Responsibility

To what extent is responsibility an important category in the three party platforms of the Liberal Democrats? In other words, does this category give an indication of the presence of liberalism in the party platforms of the Liberal Democrats and can a certain type of liberal party be identified in the context of this category, either classical-liberal or social-liberal?

The coded data of the three party platforms do indicate the presence of 'responsibility'. The most important dimension is the focus on the issue of climate change and the need for responsible policies to guarantee the future of our world. Liberal Democrats stand for a strong green thread through everything they do and promise.

"Throughout this manifesto, we recognize our responsibility to future generations, to protect the precious environment that sustains all life on the planet. Policies for environmental sustainability are therefore set out in every area – because for us, environmental policy is not an optional extra but an integral part of the way in which we will govern". (Liberal Democrats, 2005: 2)

This green thread is present in all three party platforms and seems to become increasingly important towards the 2015 party platform. This is probably explained by the increasing salience of climate change on a global level. What is interesting here is that responsibility gets framed in the context of society and how the individual and the state need to take their responsibility. The successful economies of the future will be 'circular' – where waste and the use of non-renewable resources are minimized and recovery, reuse and recycling are maximized. Britain has a real opportunity to lead the

way, generating sustainable prosperity and jobs. Thus, green also extends to economy, meaning minimal waste and a responsibility to be effective (Liberal Democrats, 2015: 82). This seems to fit with the social-liberal perspective on responsibility and how the individual is eventually a part of a larger society.

“Liberal Democrats will put the environment at the heart of government policy. We will pass five green laws to establish a permanent legal framework for a prosperous, sustainable economy.” (Ibid.: 91)

Besides the importance of environmental issues in the context of responsibility, there are also other areas where responsibility is emphasized. Liberal Democrats believe that they should take responsibility to offer place to stay for refugees. On the other hand, those refugees should also take responsibility for a successful stay in the UK. Individuals in general are responsible for their own actions, which is illustrated by the focus on more self-reliant local communities. This is approached from a positive evaluation of the capabilities of the individual. This all seems classic liberal, but it is interesting to see how everywhere there is a really strong focus on the ‘green’ topic, for example local communities should aim for zero municipal waste. These issues are present in all three party platforms.

Liberal Democrats also see responsibility in an international perspective. Issues like the environment and developmental aid are also prioritized in international relations. For example, they want to press the EU to undertake initiative with regards to climate change. They also want to meet Britain’s obligations to the developing world. Liberal Democrats are committed to a world free from poverty, inequality and injustice and meeting the Millennium Development Goals is a vital first step. Taking responsibility also means that Britain’s armed forces should be properly equipped for the 21st century. Responsibility should also be taken at governmental level, especially with regards to putting the power back where it belongs and finances. Finances have to be credible and responsible.

“Britain must work together with our partners abroad if we are to have the best hope of meeting the challenges the world faces. We believe in freedom, justice, prosperity and human rights for all and will do all we can to work towards a world

where these hopes become reality. Above all, climate change is the greatest challenge facing this generation.” (Liberal Democrats, 2010: 56)

Another element of responsibility is the state versus individuals. The state should create preconditions for individuals to seize opportunities and provide in affordable homes for all. For people to live fulfilled lives, they need a decent home at a cost they can afford. Individuals and how they are related to responsibilities seems to be absent in this party platform. More ‘victim’ approach towards individuals in context of bad policies previous governments.

The picture that then emerges after having described the findings of the party platforms is one where responsibility most definitely is a relevant topic, but at the same time is quite ambivalent in how it is framed. In other words, it is not clear cut liberal. Obviously, the way Liberal Democrats perceive responsibility seems to generally relate to liberalism. Responsibility is seen as an important concept in a free society. Still, and this is where I believe their social-liberal identity emerges, it seems that mainly the state should take the responsibility in making sure that the society persists. This is most clearly illustrated by the focus on the environment. This does not mean that the individual should not behave responsible. What it does mean is that the state should play a more proactive role in doing what is best for the long-term future. It is the realization that the individual faces situations which sometimes needs the intervention of collective action, without compromising the individual rights. In short, in this section emerges a picture of a political party that acknowledges its liberal roots by connecting to core liberal principles, while at the same time they tend to social-liberalism.

4.3.9 Concluding remarks

How to conclude this discussion? What does this analysis of the party platforms of the Liberal Democrats tell us about this party in the last decade? Although I am going to take a comparative perspective on the VVD and the Liberal Democrats in the next section, I want to shortly recapitulate on the Liberal Democrats and their party platforms. The above analysis should help in uncovering the identity of this political party.

First of all, what the analysis does indicate is that the Liberal Democrats do strongly adhere to liberalism. This is something what comes forward out of the categories that have been discussed and is something what in all three party platforms is present. This

being said, it also appears that a social-liberal profile can be identified when looking at their party platforms. However, there seems to be a light shift away from social-liberalism and slightly moving towards classical-liberalism. This is really subtle, so they are still social-liberal.

Secondly, it seems that the party platforms of 2010 and 2015 slightly differ from the 2005 party platform. This can be understood in the change of leadership. Nick Clegg became the new leader of the Liberal Democrats in between the 2005 and 2010 general elections. However, there was also the global financial crisis in 2008 which seems to have some influence on the party platforms of 2010 and 2015. Furthermore, the 2015 party platform shows a lot of references to their government participation. In short, there are some important differences in between the party platforms.

4.4 CONCLUDING COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In this section, I outline the main differences and similarities between the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. Comparing the two will provide an additional insight into the contemporary liberal party family across Western Europe, because only by comparison insight can be gained about the variation between liberal parties in Western Europe. Without comparing, certain interesting aspects may seem irrelevant at first sight, while in a comparative perspective these aspects may prove to be quite interesting in the way that they differ or are similar. In short, comparing contributes to gaining additional knowledge about the liberal party in Western Europe. The comparison that is central in this section is an addition to the intra-party comparison over time, offered by discussing the party platforms, which covers the period 2005-2015.

Until this section I analysed in a systematic way the findings that came out of the coded data of the party platforms of the two parties that are being researched. In other words, an analysis has been conducted across six main categories, based on the party platforms of each party, that generates an insight on the issue to what extent each party can be identified as a liberal party and whether each party can be classified as either classical-liberal or social-liberal. In the terms of the 'ladder of abstraction', the question is whether the analysis of the party platforms gives an insight into what liberalism nowadays means. Moreover, when descending this ladder the question arises whether

looking specifically at the VVD or the Liberal Democrats either an adherence to classical-liberalism or social-liberalism can be found.

Where to start when comparing the VVD and the Liberal Democrats on the basis of their party platforms? To get an answer to this, I should first make clear what I expect to find by comparing these two parties and the results that I have described in the previous sections in this chapter. The expectation is that the VVD will represent an ideological profile that is closely related to classical-liberalism, while the Liberal Democrats represent an ideological profile that is closely related to social-liberalism. Both parties have a clear liberal profile, when positioning on the level of the concept of liberalism on 'the ladder of abstraction'. These expectations are mostly based on the previous analysis of the party platforms, and for a part based on the definitions that were created and which led to guidelines that supported the coding of the data. Furthermore, following the literature that is available on liberal parties, unfortunately outdated, the VVD and the Liberal Democrats can be perceived as political parties that belong to the liberal party family in Western Europe. According to the literature the VVD is a classical-liberal party, while the Liberal Democrats are a social-liberal party (Smith, 1988; Jones, 2011). The answer to the question at the beginning of this paragraph is then that we should start with determining what the main similarities and differences are, which should give an indication to what extent both parties are still a liberal party, and looking specifically either the VVD or the Liberal Democrats, to what extent they are still a classical-liberal or social-liberal party. Let's take a look at both parties in a comparative perspective.

What similarities can be identified within the analysis between the VVD and the Liberal Democrats?

The first important similarity has to do with how the coded data of both parties could eventually be categorized into the same six main categories. Without even going into the content of the party platforms, this similarity already gives certain important indications about the current state of the liberal party in Western Europe. Most importantly, this similarity indicates that both parties' party platforms had the same areas of focus in this period. For example, both the VVD and the Liberal Democrats had a main focus throughout their party platforms on the individual. This indicates that both parties had the same focus on the themes throughout the party platforms. Furthermore, it shows that both parties showcase a still present liberal identity through their party platforms,

since these six main categories originate out of the guidelines that were created on the basis of the definitions that were setup in the theoretical chapter.

When digging a bit deeper in the analysis of the coded data, a picture emerges of two political parties who not only are labelled traditionally as a liberal party, but also still strongly relate to core liberal principles, at least in their party platforms. What proves to be a second similar element is that both parties show a strong affinity with the core principles of liberalism. This is supported by the repeated observation that for both parties core principles make their appearance. The most appealing is the individual as a starting point. Another strong indicator is the role freedom plays within the domains of the individual and the economy, which is observed within the party platforms of both parties. Thus besides the common knowledge that both parties are a liberal party, which originates from the available literature, there is a strong indication that these two parties still strongly present themselves as a party which adheres a liberal ideological profile in contemporary times. In short, the party platforms of both parties in the period 2005-2015 illustrate a clear liberal ideological profile.

Putting everything in the right context, it is important to take Sartori's 'ladder of abstraction' into consideration. Having established that the main similarity between the two parties is the adherence to liberalism, this means that on the where the concept of liberalism is positioned on the ladder both parties are captured by this concept. What is really important to realize, is that this is on a certain level on the ladder of abstraction; when moving down or up on this ladder this will have an impact on the argument that is made. Now it is clear that the similarities are to be found on this certain level of abstraction, i.e. the concept of liberalism, we can move to the two other concepts, namely classical-liberalism and social-liberalism. In other words, concretely we move from liberal parties in Western Europe to the alleged liberal parties that are the VVD and the Liberal Democrats.

Descending on the 'ladder of abstraction'

This thesis operates at multiple levels on the ladder of abstraction. The higher level is the concept of liberalism, while the lower level exists of the two sub-types, classical-liberalism and social-liberalism. At the level of the concept of liberalism they were united under the same concept. When descending on the ladder and arriving at the level

of the two sub-types, a more detailed level with the specific focus on each case is presented. This allows talking about liberal parties in general, while discussing these two specific parties. Actually, this is in fact an abstract way of summarizing what is the essence of what has been written in this chapter up to this point. In other words, the analysis of the party platforms of both parties and the findings that came out of it is in a more concrete way the representation of the abstract approach of the ladder of abstraction. Indeed, both parties do embrace the same themes in their party platforms, but the precise tone differs in various ways. What do we find when comparing the VVD and the Liberal Democrats and looking at the details of each specific case?

During the description of the findings in the party platforms, I already noted at some points the discrepancies between both parties with regards to the tone towards specific liberal themes, like individual freedom. I should already mention that the differences are subtle; still they are significant enough to indicate the differences in how they perceive liberalism.

The main difference is found with regards to the role of the state and the emphasis on either negative or positive freedom. The VVD can be clearly typed as a party that prioritizes negative freedoms with regards to the individual, and thereby the state should be cautious in its actions. This is closely related to classical-liberalism.

Interestingly, the Liberal Democrats adopt an approach that is closer related to social-liberalism. For example, the individual and society are much stronger related to each other. This is for example illustrated by how they present fair taxes and how this helps society and the individual. It is more about positive freedoms, which means that the context of society and its effects on individuals should also be taken into consideration, resulting in a distribution of wealth through taxes.

Another clear difference is the strong emphasis on the environmental issues by the Liberal Democrats. This is in stark contrast with how the VVD deals with this issue. This shows in an interesting way the differences between the two political parties and how they adhere to liberalism. The VVD frames the issue of environmentalism in a more economical perspective and how this can contribute to new chances and increased employment. The Liberal Democrats on the other hand focus much more on the importance of environment for whole society and how this is a responsibility for

everyone to do something about it. Both still adopt a liberal approach in the sense of responsibility and that individual is important, but the tone is different.

In line with this, the VVD also strongly emphasizes the economy in their party platform. This is to a lesser degree the case with the Liberal Democrats, who have a quite broad approach to themes in their party platforms. It is interesting to see this difference and can be explained in several ways. First, the VVD can distinguish itself with this focus on the economy within the Dutch party system. In the same way, the Liberal Democrats try to take a broader approach, since they have to compete with the Labour party and the Conservatives in the British party system. Secondly, it could also be linked to the distinction between classical-liberalism and social-liberalism. The former focuses more on the role of the economy in relationship towards the individual and the state, where the latter sees the economy in a broader perspective of society, i.e. social-liberalism. Furthermore, the global financial crisis forces the VVD and the Liberal Democrats to increasingly emphasize the economy. However, the Liberal Democrats do focus to a lesser extent on the economy than the VVD.

An interesting external development, besides climate change, is the global financial crisis in 2008, which seems to quite strongly affect the party platforms in the period afterwards. Both parties have in their party platforms a stronger emphasis on economical responsibility, especially the role the state plays in this context taking into account the public debt and how this should be minimized. Once again, there is a difference which illustrates the preference for classical-liberalism with the VVD and social-liberalism with the Liberal Democrats. The VVD sees an important role for the state in taking responsibility over government finances, thus acknowledging a relative strong role for the state in the economy. The Liberal Democrats go further with more state intervention in the economy, like reform the banking sector. In other words, they look at the effects on the whole society, but also what is best for individual. Thus it is more about intervening, and this is not the case with the VVD.

The point in this comparison is that a picture emerges of two political parties, that indeed can be called a liberal party based on their party platforms, but by comparing they take different forms of a liberal party when considering their detailed interpretations of liberalism, namely classical-liberalism and social-liberalism.

5. Conclusion

This chapter will conclude the research that has been conducted, by reintroducing the main research question of this thesis and discussing the possible answer in the context of the gathered information in the previous chapters. Furthermore, an important element in this chapter is what the findings in this thesis do implicate for the liberal parties in Western Europe and even political parties and political systems in general. In other words, what generalizations can be made and what are the implications of the results for future research?

This thesis started out with the argument that two types of liberal parties can be distinguished when focusing on the liberal party family in Western Europe. These are the classical-liberals and the social-liberals. This distinction is based on a difference in ideological perspective between the two types towards liberalism. The argument is derived from the existing literature on liberal parties. This brings me to the puzzle.

The rise of liberal parties is a development that has largely been neglected by political scientists. This is confirmed by the absence of a systematic comparative analysis on liberal parties for quite some time now. Still, apparently we do generally know which parties can be called a liberal party and which not. The question then arises why there is so little research on liberal parties, since there is enough reason to investigate them? The real problem here is that we assume certain political parties to be a liberal party, but this is largely based on outdated scientific literature. It is puzzling that it is not clear whether current so-called liberal parties are still justified to be called a liberal party. What does it even mean to be a liberal party in this rapidly changing political climate in Western Europe, i.e. the rise of populist parties? In short, before we can even try to explain the rise of liberal parties, we should first know what it means to be a liberal party in the 21st century.

A theoretical discussion followed on liberalism and the liberal party, accumulating in a conclusion which provided definitions of liberalism and the two different types of liberal parties coming out of the literature. This led to the expectations that both the VVD and the Liberal Democrats are a political party that embrace liberalism (which is not really ever been disputed, but it is not either confirmed for the contemporary parties in the

21st century), but more importantly that the VVD represented the classical-liberal type of party and the Liberal Democrats the social-liberal type of party. However, this is largely based on scientific literature pre-1990. Thus I continued with the empirical analysis of the three most recent party platforms of both the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. I wanted to investigate whether in the party platforms of these two political parties still traces could be found of the expected type of liberal party. I concluded with a comparative analysis of the results that came out of the party platform analysis of both the VVD and the Liberal Democrats. What is there to conclude? This brings me to the main research question, which I wish to answer in this overall conclusion: Who are the current liberal parties in Western Europe?

Asking this question implies a multidimensional answer, because several answers can be extracted from the comparative analysis of the VVD and the Liberal Democrats in order to say something about the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe. What does the comparative analysis of the party platforms of the VVD and the Liberal Democrats in the period 2005-2015 tell about the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe?

5.1 Getting to an answer

The analysis that is provided in the empirical chapter of the party platforms of both the VVD and the Liberal Democrats contains several findings that help to get to an answer. First of all, both parties do present themselves as a liberal party when taking a look at their party platforms. In other words, the findings that are provided by the coded data of the party platforms do indicate that both parties strongly relate themselves to core liberal principles as defined in the theoretical section. This means that an argument can be made that the VVD and the Liberal Democrats still prioritize liberal ideology in their identity as a political party. Therefore, liberalism is not only in their name, but also in their ideas they have about contemporary issues in 21st century representative democracies.

Secondly, comparing the VVD and the Liberal Democrats shows that differences in interpretation are to be observed. Although they relate on the level of the concept of liberalism to the same areas of focus (themes), when looking more specifically at each party and their party platforms, differences do appear. This is something that became especially clear when comparing the VVD directly to the Liberal Democrats in the final

section of the previous chapter. These differences in interpretation seem to relate closely to either classical-liberalism or social-liberalism. What becomes clear in the analysis of the party platforms is that the Liberal Democrats incline more to social-liberalism, while the VVD inclines more to classical-liberalism. However, this is based on conclusions per category. In other words, although both parties do clearly incline to either classical-liberalism or social-liberalism, there are also indications that they on certain issues adopt a view that does not fit with their classification of either classical-liberal or social-liberal. Still, while acknowledging these details, in general the categories do illustrate that the VVD tends to classical-liberalism and the Liberal Democrats to social-liberalism. In short, both parties do relate themselves in clear ways to the core principles of liberalism, but when comparing both parties the emphasis quite often differs within certain categories, like individualism and freedom.

It is important to realize that the approach adopted in this research has an exploratory nature. Therefore, the goal is to gain insight into the contemporary liberal party, which in this thesis specifically is done by analyzing the party platforms of two liberal parties. The relevance of this approach lies then in the contribution to better understanding the ideological profile of two traditional liberal parties in the last decade. Although I would like to indefinitely label the VVD to be a classical-liberal party and the Liberal Democrats a social-liberal party, the real contribution is the insight that was acquired by analyzing their party platforms of the past decade and what this means for the contemporary liberal party. What then can be said about the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe when we put the findings of this thesis in a broader perspective?

5.2 Generalizing the findings

As discussed in the methodology section, this thesis researches two liberal parties, specifically their party platforms, more intensively, as opposed to a study of a large number of liberal parties. The idea is that we can better understand the larger picture by focusing on a key part of it (Gerring, 2007). In other words, the VVD and the Liberal Democrats are a representation of a larger group of cases. We arrive now at the most interesting aspect in terms of what the study of the two cases and its comparison can contribute, namely what does this intensive study of the party platforms of these two

parties tell us about the larger picture, being the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe?

I would argue that on the basis of the research of the party platforms of both parties, the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe can still be identified on the basis of classic liberal themes, like individual freedom and economical freedom. This argument is then based on that these two liberal parties do represent a larger population, in that they both cover a specific subtype of liberal party, namely a liberal party that can be labeled classical-liberal or social-liberal. Moreover, these two liberal parties show that the presence of these two sub-types is still present. In other words, there is still a difference of emphasis present within the contemporary liberal party family, but these two labels become one when going higher on the ladder of abstraction, arriving at liberalism.

Then the question arises: is this surprising? If this is really surprising, why so? Or maybe the surprise lies in that there are no surprises to be found. Starting this thesis with the observation of the rise of liberal parties and how this has been neglected, when other developments in party systems, i.e. the rise of populist parties, have been thoroughly researched, I would argue that it is, if not surprising, at least worth noting, how the VVD and the Liberal Democrats do express a strong liberal identity through their party platforms. What it does show is that their expression of their ideological profile does not get influenced by the developments party systems in Western Europe have experienced in the 21st century. However, the argument could also be put the other way around. Their ideological profile has become even more relevant in the context of the developments of party systems in the 21st century.

In the context of the discussion about the difficulties in defining liberalism, the findings in this thesis do show that the historical legacy of liberalism is indeed still relevant in understanding the party platforms of the contemporary liberal party. Classic liberal themes prove to be still relevant in contemporary party platforms of the two parties. Furthermore, these two parties show that different perspectives on liberal ideology are still present within contemporary liberal parties. In the context of generalizations, it seems that on the intensive study of these two parties an expectation can be made that liberal parties in Western Europe are still close to the core principles of liberalism in their party platforms. Then again, a difference should be expected in how they exactly

deal with core themes of liberalism, in the context of classical- liberalism and social-liberalism.

What also could be argued, is that the study of these party platforms do show the presence of a liberal party family, since these two parties have a lot in common on the main themes, but that in order to compare larger groups of liberal parties it is important to realize that liberal parties by country do differ in how they emphasize and frame certain themes, most importantly the degree of intervention by the state.

5.3 Future research

This thesis has aimed to make a contribution in developing insight on the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe. The nature of the research conducted in this thesis is exploratory. This leaves open a lot of options for future research, since this research positions itself in the exploratory stage which should generate ideas for future research. I do want to keep the potential areas for future research close to the main focus of this thesis, since I could otherwise make an almost endless list.

First of all, the study of the two parties in this thesis is based on party platforms. Although this is a source which provides important information about the ideas of a political party and the actual implementation, there is more than a party platform to a political party. Obviously, considering the resources in the context of this thesis the studying of the party platforms takes a lot of time and effort. What I am saying here is that party platforms are a part of a larger whole. Therefore, further research on liberal parties could also take into consideration how the party platforms are implemented when those parties govern, which is the case at the moment with the VVD. Governing together with another party, tests to what extent this seemingly strong adherence to liberalism still stands in the day-by-day politics of a society.

Secondly, and quite obvious, having made a first step in identifying the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe, it would be interesting to see to what extent the findings of the party platforms of these two parties are also present in other cases.

Thirdly, when considering the puzzle that is described in the introduction, an important area for future research can be mentioned. Having made a first step in understanding the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe, we see that the most successful

liberal party in Western Europe profiles itself clearly as a classical-liberal party. We also see that the Liberal Democrats can be identified as a social-liberal party. Therefore, we can say that there are indeed political parties in the contemporary party systems that can be labeled as a liberal party. In the context of the puzzle, there seems to be a division between liberal parties and populist parties. There is then a rise of liberal parties and a rise of populist parties. How can this happen at the same time? What explains the rise of liberal parties? This would then be an interesting area of future research.

This thesis has tried to make a first step in gaining insight into the liberal party family in Western Europe and what can be considered a contemporary liberal party on the basis of their party platforms. The areas for future research do confirm that a better understanding of the contemporary liberal party in Western Europe is highly needed, especially in the context of contemporary developments in West European party systems.

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