

To reform or not to reform?

Parties' differing interest in institutional reforms in established
democracies



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Abstract: Today we find ourselves in a perceived legitimacy crisis of representative democracy. A possible solution can be to institutionally reform democracy. This thesis research whether political parties express an interest in institutionally reforming representative democracy and if proposals for institutional reform differ in sort and direction among various party groups. Research on political parties and institutional reform is outdated, often merely focused either on the actual implementation of the institutional reform, on just electoral reform, or just on one party group's interest in institutional reforms. By examining the mention of institutional reform in party manifestos from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in 2017, this thesis analyses different types of institutional reform, across different institutional contexts and between parties. This thesis concludes that institutional context is the greatest determinant of parties' interest in reforming democracy. Parties in the UK are mainly interested in inclusive representative reforms, while parties in the Netherlands are more interested in direct democracy reforms.

Keywords: institutional reforms, representative democracy, direct democracy, participatory deliberative democracy, majoritarian democracy, consensual democracy, populism, green parties

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

CDA	<i>Christen-Democratisch Appèl</i>
CU	<i>Christen Unie</i>
D66	<i>Democraten '66</i>
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
FPTP	First Past the Post
FvD	<i>Forum voor Democratie</i>
NL	The Netherlands
PRRP	Populist Radical Right Party
PvdA	<i>Partij van de Arbeid</i>
PvdD	<i>Partij voor de Dieren</i>
PVV	<i>Partij voor de Vrijheid</i>
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
SGP	<i>Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij</i>
SNP	Scottish National Party
SP	Socialistische Partij
UK	The United Kingdom
UKIP	The United Kingdom Independence Party
VVD	<i>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</i>

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1. Introduction

An ongoing debate in political science and society is the debate about the decline, and even the crisis, of representative democracy. This narrative about democracy runs deep within political science and society and is ongoing for as long as democracy is an established regime type, with another theory explaining or predicting the decline of democracy each decade (van Ham et al. 2017). Today we speak of a legitimacy crisis of representative democracy, referring to citizens' dissatisfaction with the institutions and processes of representative democracy, which makes it harder to sustain the legitimacy and effectiveness of the democratic institutions and processes (Cain et al. 2003).

There are many reasons why people believe that there is an ongoing legitimacy crisis of representative democracy. The memberships of political parties are falling back, the turnout in elections is declining, party elites are increasingly mistrusted, citizens are disengaging from politics, and there is a rise of radicalism and populism (de Wilde 2020: 272; Bedock 2017: 11-12). While theories about the decline are omnipresent, the empirical evidence for this decline is not. Scholars find no universal decline in citizen's support for democracy and representative democracy is still the norm in Western Democracies (van Ham et al. 2017; Hendriks and Michels 2011).

Despite the lack of a consensus on empirical evidence, the idea that democracy faces a legitimacy crisis exists in society. For example, in 2019 39 percent of American citizens believes that there is a crisis of democracy, and another 42 percent believes that democracy faces "serious challenges" (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2020: 6). The idea of a legitimacy crisis is central in society, and it is a problem that people believe needs to be solved, or else democracy might be subject to instability and chaos or illiberal democracy and authoritarian leadership (van Ham et al. 2017).

This thesis will not deal with the question of whether there is an ongoing crisis of representative democracy but deal with the way that political parties potentially react to this crisis. Political parties need to respond to citizens' preferences, so if among citizens the feeling exists that democracy is in crisis, it is expected that political parties respond to these feelings. Van Ham et al. (2017: VI) state that there are some low levels of citizen support that political leaders need to respond to, to keep up with social and economic changes. This thesis focuses on one specific way that political parties can respond: with institutional reforms. Institutional reforms are changes made to the rules of the democratic game.

Jacques Thomassen (2011: 214) notes that “the cure of democracy is often more democracy”, arguing that this “more democracy” often has the form of direct democracy. The solution to the crisis of representative democracy can thus be introducing elements of other democratic theories such as direct democracy and participatory democracy. These are ways that representative democracy can be institutionally reformed. However, reforming the institutions of elections itself might also be a way to react.

Müller, Mair and Plasser (2004) see institutional reform as something that governing parties can adopt to react to democratic challenges. They distinguish seven ways in which these parties might react to democratic challenges, one of them being institutional responses. This is nonetheless the costliest response in times of democratic stability because the political actors with the power to modify the political systems are the ones in power. Bedock (2017: 17) argues that the current erosion of political support poses a serious challenge to political systems so that we can in fact consider these current times as a period of democratic instability, where institutional reform might be fitting.

She moreover states that the issue of democratic reform is taking over the everyday political agenda, and institutional reforming is debated in Western European polities (ibid.). If this were to be true, we can expect every party to formulate opinions on institutionally reforming democracy, to give citizens an idea of where they stand in the debate on institutional reform. In times of a perceived crisis of democracy, this might be a theme that citizens are interested in. The political science literature on parties’ interests in reforming democracy is however not very dense.

The most influential research stems from a study by Kittilson and Scarrow in 2003. They regard parties as the intermediaries between citizens’ preferences and state structures and research if parties express an interest in democratizing reforms (Kittilson and Scarrow 2003: 59-60). They examine data on democratic rhetoric from the Comparative Manifestos Project, across twenty-five nations between 1945 and 1998. The variable they use is, as they call themselves a ‘catch-all theme’ and says nothing more than if there were any mentions of democracy as a goal, a generalized support for democracy or the involvement of citizens. Kittilson and Scarrow (2003: 62-64) find only modest changes in democratic rhetoric, but they find a great variety amongst nations, parties, and time. They find that New left parties emphasize democratic themes. Moreover, they noted that when one party in a system intensifies its focus on democracy other parties follow (ibid.).

This research is very clearly outdated and in need of renewal. It does for example not include populism, an ideology which contributes to the perceived crisis of democracy and the will to change the democratic system, embedded in its ideology. Moreover, it regards democratic rhetoric as one theme, while there can be a wide range of different ways that representative democracies can be changed. It is, however, one of the few studies that focuses on democratic themes in all parties. Other, more recent, research focuses either on the actual implementation of institutional reform – with a small focus on the governing parties, is more focused on one element of institutional reform: electoral reform, or only investigates a particular type of party's support for institutional reform. This thesis strives to renew and expand the research done by Kittilson and Scarrow in 2003.

The question that this thesis answers is:

"Do political parties in representative democracies express an interest in institutional reforms? If so, do these proposals for institutional reform differ in sort and direction among various party groups?"

This thesis is interested in whether we can observe differences between party groups and the claims these party groups make. There are reasons to assume that parties in different institutional systems, parties with different strategic and power positions and parties with different ideological beliefs, differ in their interest in institutionally reforming democracy. Getting an insight into parties' interest in reforming democracy is relevant societally because citizens gain an insight into who, or which party group to vote for if they desire changes made to the democratic system.

This thesis has the following structure. First, in the theoretical framework, I will examine representative democracy, its institutions, and its' current state. I will then focus on alternative models of democracy. Continuously, I will move on to define institutional reform and the different sorts and directions institutional reforms can take. Following I will discuss why I expect that different groups of political parties are interested in reforming representative democracy differently. The theoretical section will produce hypotheses that will guide the analysis of the data. In the method section, I will discuss the cases of this study, the British and Dutch party manifestos of the general election of 2017 and elaborate on the chosen methods and discuss the used data. In the analysis and results, the hypothesis will be tested.

This thesis will conclude that parties do express an interest in reforming democracy, but that the sorts of reforms vary between different contexts. In the Netherlands, a consensual

democracy, the focus is on reforming democracy with direct democracy or participatory deliberative democracy, while in the UK, a majoritarian democracy, the focus is on making the electoral system more representative.

2. Theoretical framework

This section of the thesis aims to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework to address the main research questions: "Do political parties in representative democracies express an interest in institutional reforms? If so, do these proposals for institutional reform differ in sort, scope, and direction, among various party groups?" Firstly, I will discuss representative democracy as we know it today and the differences between representative democracies. This is followed by a discussion of different models of democracy that might enhance representative democracy. After which I will set out ways in which we can distinguish different types of institutional reforms. Lastly, I will focus on parties as the intermediaries between citizen's preferences and the last part of this section discusses which parties would be theoretically more likely to make claims that refer to institutional reform followed by hypotheses.

2.1. Defining democracy

Democracy is a highly discussed concept, with different definitions and various models of democracy existing in theory and in practice (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012: 10). The thesis will not theoretically add to this debate, but it is important to clarify which definition and model of democracy will be used and for what reasons. The focus of this thesis will be representative democracy. In the base, I adopt the definition that representative democracy is a regime that centres on the elections of elites who act as trustees (or delegates) of the larger population and make decisions on their behalf (Landmore 2017: 54). Fundamentally, representative democracy is about representation, however in practice, elections have become one with representative democracy, and representative democracy is now often equated with electoral democracy (Landmore 2017: 54). I will follow my discussion on representative democracy by discussing both elections and representation. Elections are a type of political institution, and since political institutions are core to this thesis I will start by defining political institutions.

2.1.1. Institutions

Political institutions are the rules of the game that govern the process by which collective decisions are made (Stoll 2005: 1). Political institutions together make the democratic system (Bedock 2017: 9). These institutions are interacting, interrelated and interdependent elements of a whole. Without these institutions, a democracy could not exist, since there is no way the distribution of power is structured. There is however no blueprint of how the institutions of a

democracy should look like. Meaning that institutions can differ between countries. All democratic systems of institutions have an underlying logic of distributions of power and conceptions of democratic legitimacy (idem 9-10). For a representative democracy, this underlying power is representation.

While I will come back to different forms of institutional reforms, later I will provide here already a definition of institutional reform. In line with Camille Bedock (2017), I define institutional reform as changes made to the core rules of the democratic system. Through institutional reform, the way the polity is organized is being changed, and these changes have an impact on the political game. It is important to highlight here the linguistic nuance in the English language between polity, politics, and policy (Caiani and Graziano 2022: 570). Roughly, polity refers to the political institutions that form a democracy, politics to the competition between actors and policy to the content of the political decision-making. The difference between these terms is important because it shows the different aspects of the political sphere.

An important distinction for this thesis is the different functions that institutions fulfil in a democracy. The distinction that this thesis will adopt is that between the representative function and the participation function (Bedock 2017: 26). *The representative function* relates to the traditional form of representative democracy, to this belong the rules of the repartition of power, the selection process of political elites and the modes of decision-making and policy implementation (ibid.). *The participative function* moves beyond the traditional form of representative democracy and entails alternative ways of democratic involvement in decision-making or alternative tools for participation in the traditional political process (ibid.). In a democracy, there is tension between these two functions, and institutional designers need to balance both elements when they create political structures (Scarrow 2001: 652). In a representative democracy, institutions with a representative function do fulfil a bigger role than those institutions with a participative role.

Electoral system

The electoral system is an institution that one of the most important institutions of representative democracy, the electoral system, in more detail. An electoral system translates the votes won into seats (Reynolds et al. 2008: 5). An electoral system is a system of institutions. Institutions within the electoral system are the electoral formula, the ballot structure, and the district magnitude. The electoral formula is the choice of the electoral

system and what mathematical formula is used to calculate the seat allocation, the ballot structure is whether a voter can choose a candidate or a party and if they cast a single vote or list a series of preferences, and the district magnitude is how many representatives a district elects (ibid.). Electoral systems can be divided into categories: plurality/majority systems, proportional representation, and mixed systems. Different electoral systems yield different results. For example, proportional systems are more likely to result in a multiparty system with a coalition or minority government, whereas plurality/majority electoral systems are more likely to result in a two-party system with a single party having majority control (ibid.). This is a mechanical effect of electoral systems.

Besides a mechanical effect, different party systems may also have psychological effects which enhance the mechanical effects (idem: 6). If only one candidate can be elected from a single-member district, voters may not vote for their sincere preference, but vote strategically to avoid their vote being wasted (ibid.). This strengthens larger parties and disadvantages smaller parties. In proportional systems, this strategic voting is reduced, which facilitates smaller parties (idem: 6-7).

Electoral systems need not be seen in isolation. How electoral systems are designed and what their effects are, is contingent upon other structures in the system of political institutions (ibid.). Changing one part of the political system is likely to cause changes in the way that other political institutions work. Electoral systems are thus not the only thing in a system of political institutions that can be changed.

2.1.2. Representation

A discussion on representative democracy is not complete without discussing representation and the work of the late Hanna Pitkin, one of the most influential writers on political representation. Pitkin (1967) conceptualizes representation as “the making present in *some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact” (Pitkin 1967: 8-9, italics in original). Citizens’ preferences that are otherwise not present, are made present through the representatives in the legislative area, and that is representation.

To understand the concept of political representation however fully, the different ways in which the concept is used need to be considered. Pitkin argues that there are four different views of political representation, formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive (Dovi 2018). The first view, formalistic representation, is especially relevant to this thesis and relates to the previous section on institutions. Pitkin describes formalistic representation as

something that actually lies outside of the activity of representation itself (Pitkin 1967).

Formalistic representation refers to the institutional arrangements before and after the activity of representation (Dovi 2018).

Formalistic representation has two dimensions: authorization and accountability.

Authorization refers to how representatives gain their standing, status, position, or office.

Accountability, on the other hand, involves the ability of voters to hold their representatives responsible for their actions, either by rewarding or punishing them based on their responsiveness to the citizens' wishes. (Dovi 2018). This thesis focuses primarily on the authorization dimension of formalistic representation. Thus, on the institutional arrangement *before* the act of representation and the question of parties' desire to change these institutional arrangements.

To continue, symbolic representation and descriptive representation are views on representation that look more at what a representative is, rather than what a representative does. They are both views in which representation means “standing for” something (Pitkin 1967). These forms of representation are of lesser importance for this thesis and will only be discussed briefly. Descriptive representation refers to the resemblance between the representative and those being represented. It is important for descriptive representation that representatives and represented share a descriptive likeness (idem: 61). Gender quotas, for example, are an example of increasing the descriptive representation of women.

Symbolic representation refers to the role of symbols, that can represent something, by symbolizing something that is otherwise not present (Pitkin 1967: 92). A symbol might be a flag or a piece of clothing, but can also be a human being, like the king. Symbolic representation is not necessarily a source of information but is more a recipient or object of feelings or an expression of feelings (idem: 99). The symbols have value because they are “standing for” something, which invokes feelings.

The fourth view on representation is substantive representation and deals with the actual activity of the representatives. In the forms described above, representation is a noun. Representation, however, does not equal representing. Representing is a verb, it is an act. Representing means “acting in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them” (Pitkin 1967: 209). It is expected of representatives that they act independently of the represented while trying to avoid conflicts in the interests of them and the ones they represent.

People are substantively represented when representatives act in their best interests (ibid.). This view of representation is thus concerned with what the representative does, and how she does it. In this view, questions can be asked like do the representatives advance the policy preferences that serve the interests of the represented? (Dovi 2018).

Representative democracy is built on substantive representation. The premise of representative democracy is that there is a close match between the preference of citizens and the actions of representatives (Kurella and Rosset 2017: 1). Elections are the political institutions that are in place to ensure that match since this mechanism allows citizens to select representatives that advocate policies that advocate their wishes (ibid.). The representation of citizens is organized in representative democracies through political parties (Dalton 1985: 270). Political scientists even state that effective political parties are essential for a healthy working democracy (Renwick 2011: 41). When there are different parties present, citizens have the choice to vote for the party that they are the most congruent with, in terms of ideas, attitudes and preferences.

Parties are the intermediaries between citizens' preferences and state structures, so it is likely that if citizens have preferences regarding the institutional arrangements of representative democracy, they want to see them reflected in parties. Parties, on the other hand, need to react to this preference, and will, to win votes, cater to the citizens' interest.

I will conclude this part on representative democracy by highlighting the four main features that Nadia Urbinati (2010: 1) argues that are part of a representative democracy.

“(a) the sovereignty of the people expressed in the electoral appointment of the representatives; (b) representation as a free mandate relation; (c) electoral mechanisms to ensure some measure of responsiveness to the people by representatives who speak and act in their name; and (d) the universal franchise, which grounds representation on an important element of political equality.”

While this theoretical framework up until this point has not discussed the importance of inclusion, it agrees with the last feature of Urbinati, that a representative democracy requires a universal franchise and thus the inclusion of all adults. These features are however still very broad and allow for variations between representative democracies. The next part will cover these varieties. It is important to discuss these varieties because the institutional structure can shape the behaviour of political parties, and with that the way that they might be interested in

institutional reform. Understanding different types of representative democracies is thus crucial for examining parties' interest in institutional reforms.

2.1.3. Patterns of democracies

Many scholars have proposed ways to classify democratic regimes, the distinction that Lijphart (1999) makes is, however, the most influential. I, therefore, adopt his distinction. Lijphart (1999) distinguishes between two patterns in which democratic institutions can be structured: Majoritarian Westminster Democracy and the non-majoritarian consensus democracy (Hendriks and Michels 2011: 308). For Lijphart, the difference between these, is based upon the answers to the question "who will do the governing and to whose interests should the government be responsive when the people are in disagreement and have divergent preferences?" (Lijphart 1999). For the majoritarian model, the answer is the majority of the people, for the consensus model this is only the bare minimum and its answer to the question is: "As many people as possible". Here we can see the fundamental difference between the two patterns of democracy: in the majoritarian model power is concentrated and in the consensus model power is shared.

The power concentration in a majoritarian democracy is produced by a winner-takes-all electoral system, an adversarial political culture, a competitive party system based largely around a two-party system, a single-party majority cabinet and (Flinders 2005: 67; Hendriks and Michels 2011: 308). The United Kingdom is a typical example of a majoritarian democracy, and that is why this pattern of democracy is also called the majoritarian Westminster democracy. Lijphart (1999: 2) state that overall, the majoritarian democracy can be viewed as exclusive, competitive, and adversarial.

In a consensus democracy, on the other hand, power is shared, dispersed, and limited in a variety of ways (Hendriks and Michels 2011: 308). The system is commonly based around a proportional electoral system, multi-party systems, multi-party coalitions, a more consensual political culture, two equally strong but differently constituted houses and a federal and decentralized government (Flinders 2005: 67; Hendriks and Michels 2011: 308). The country that comes most close to being a perfect consensual democracy is Belgium, but the Netherlands is also close. For Lijphart (1999: 2), consensual democracy is characterized by inclusivity, bargaining, and compromising.

Important is that the majoritarian and the consensus model are two ideal types. Every democracy is placed at either end of the continuum or somewhere in between. Although this

division of Lijphart is criticized widely, it has also become the standard to differentiate between democratic models and the division between power-concentrating and power-sharing institutions of democracy will be used throughout this thesis (Bedock 2017).

2.1.4. Liberal democracy

A point needs to be made for the use of representative democracy against the use of liberal democracy in this thesis. Liberal democracy is defined by Bollen (1993: 1208) as “the extent to which a political system allows political liberties and democratic rule”. Liberal democracy adds an ‘extra’ layer to the concept of representative democracy. First, political liberties are added. Political liberties are the freedoms that people have in a country, like the freedom of speech, or the freedom to form or participate in any political group (idem: 1209). Second, democratic rule is extended beyond representation. Bollen (1993: 1209) refers to democratic rule as the extent that the national government is accountable to the general population, and everyone is entitled to participate in the government directly or through representatives (ibid.). Within the definition of liberal democracy, there is thus also room for citizens to directly rule beyond representation.

Representative democracies and liberal democracies are often used interchangeably, although there are fundamental differences between the two definitions. Representative democracy is focused on elections, and representation, whereas liberal democracy takes a wider approach and includes political freedoms and more ways of democratic participation. While the concept of liberal democracy is more encompassing, I am focusing on the concept of representative democracies because the institutions that are believed to be under pressure today, are the institutions that are primarily part of the representation aspect of representative democracies. Besides that, liberal democracy adds the layer of political liberties, and while these are highly relevant and necessary for a good functioning democracy. This thesis will not focus on these elements and therefore the term representative democracy will be adopted.

2.1.5. Crisis of representative democracy

As stated in the introduction the last decades scholars write about the decline or crisis of *representative* democracy. In 2003, Cain et al. (2003: 1) write that there are signs of a spreading dissatisfaction with the institutions and processes of representative democracy. They argue that turnout in elections is declining, which would mean that the main institution that facilitates representation is getting less popular, and people are becoming less committed to either holding representatives accountable or trying to authorize a party of their liking. Next

to that, numbers of political party memberships are dropping, which means that the main actor through which representation is happening in representative democracies, is getting lower support. So, the two most important factors of representative democracy, elections and political parties seem to be under pressure. In addition to this, it is argued that scepticism regarding politicians, political parties and political institutions is growing (ibid.).

The claim that representative democracy is in crisis is, however, not uncontested. Several scholars have tried to find empirical evidence for this claim and failed. Ham et al. (2017: VI) researched if representative democracy faced a legitimacy crisis by looking at the political support of citizens, but they did not find a universal decline of political support, which would be the expected outcome of a legitimacy decline. They conclude that lower levels of political support are often temporary and differ greatly between countries.

While they did not find a general decline in citizen support, they did find low levels of citizen support since the 2008 economic crisis. This citizen's support is especially low for political institutions and political authorities (idem: 31). The authors state that the way this citizen's dissatisfaction continues, depends on the reaction of political systems and leaders. According to them, "democracy is a 'moving target' which needs to be continuously reshaped and reformed to keep up with social and economic changes to continue to match citizens' expectations" (Ham et al. 2017: VI). The crisis of representative democracy might thus not be as extreme as some scholars pronounce it, but there are low levels of support, especially to the political institutions to which political leaders need to react.

A way that political leaders and political parties can react to these challenges is thus with institutional reforms offering "more democracy". As stated, there is a tendency to counter crises of democracy with more democracy (Thomassen 2011: 214). Cain et al. (2003: 1) write in 2003 that trends of a decline of representative democracy declining are accompanied by increasing demands for reforms that expand citizen and interest group access to politics in other ways, while also requesting a restructuring of the process of democratic decision-making. They argue that citizen participation is expanding and that more people are signing petitions, joining interest groups (ibid.). So, people are requesting and exploiting institutions that have a more participative function in a democracy. Do parties, however, cater to this interest? Before I move on to discuss institutional reforms and political parties, I will first elaborate on other types of democracy that lay the theoretical foundation for these participatory democratic innovations.

An important remark here is that research shows that institutionally reforming democracy does not necessarily enhance people's support for democracy (Andeweg and Aarts 2017: 200). Scholars argue that to increase people's support for democracy, bureaucratic impartiality and procedural fairness need to be increased (ibid.). However, the aim of this thesis is not to prove that there is or is not a crisis of democracy, and if this potential crisis can be solved through institutional reform.

This thesis aims to discover if parties have an interest in reforming democracy since there seem to be signs that citizens want to participate in democracy in other ways, and that is it argued that the democratic issue is a part of the everyday political agenda (Bedock 2017).

2.2. Alternative models of decision-making

This part of the theoretical framework focuses on alternative models of decision-making, which institutions can potentially enhance representative democracy. Linda Maduz (2010) differentiates between two normative models of democracy. The first model I already discussed and is the liberal or representative democracy. The first broad normative model is participatory or direct democracy. Maduz (2010: 1) states that this type of democracy describes a situation where citizens are directly included in political decision-making.

2.2.1. Direct Democracy

Direct democracy is an umbrella term that includes a variety of political processes (Matsusaka 2005: 187). The common denominator is that citizens have a direct influence on policies and laws, rather than selecting a candidate for office (ibid.). There are different forms of direct democracy, this thesis focuses on referendums, initiatives, and the direct election of public officials.

More traditional forms of institutions of direct democracy are referendums and initiatives. A referendum is a process where citizens are allowed to approve or reject laws or constitutional amendments by the government (Lupia and Matsusaka 2003: 465). There are different forms of referendums. With initiatives, ordinary citizens can propose new laws or constitutional amendments by petition (ibid.).

Susan Scarrow (2001) argues that the direct election of public officials, like the mayor or the prime minister, is also a form of direct democracy. Scarrow argues that the direct election of public officials alters the structures of representative systems to maximize opportunities for citizens to directly affect political decisions and should therefore be considered a form of

direct democracy (Scarrow 2001: 655). In this thesis, the direct election of public officials will be viewed as a form of direct democracy. Since citizens can directly exercise influence with their decision.

Practices of direct democracy often have a binding and direct influence on political decisions. Political innovations following direct democracy are thus referendums, citizens' initiatives, and the direct election of officials. Through these institutions, citizens have a more direct say in decision-making. I will now continue with innovations through which citizens have a less direct say in decision-making.

2.2.2. Participatory deliberative democracy

I will discuss two more alternative ways of democratic involvement, participatory democracy and deliberative democracy and while are often used interchangeably; it is wrong to equate the two. Both theories are normative critiques of Western liberal democracy, but both theories have a different focus. They can however be mutually supportive, and recently scholars have combined them in the so-called: *Participatory deliberative democracy* (Elstub 2018). In this section, I will discuss them both and argue for the use of the term participatory deliberative democracy throughout the rest of this thesis.

Participatory democrats desire the “direct participation of citizens in the regulation of key institutions of society, including the spheres of work and the community” (Elstub 2018: 189). The participatory idea is that citizens, who live in a democracy, engage with law and policy, and not just delegate responsibility to representatives (ibid.). They strive for avenues for citizen participation to represent genuine opportunities to *determine* collective decisions. Participatory democrats see the principle of popular sovereignty as a commitment to broaden citizens' political participation (Cini and Felicett 2018: 152). Democratic legitimacy is based on the active and enduring participation of citizens (ibid.).

On the other hand, the focus of deliberative democrats is on enhancing the democratic space with deliberation (ibid.). The idea is that through public discussion, citizens' opinions are not just aggregated, but transformed. Citizens collectively address collective problems and deliberate how to best solve them. Democratic legitimacy is then achieved when decision-making is preceded by reasoned discussion among all individuals (ibid.). Deliberative democrats aim to free the democratic space from inegalitarian power relations, and irrational attitudes (ibid.).

Originally participatory democracy and deliberative democracy had distinct political goals and normative expectations (idem: 156). In the past, it was theorized that participation and deliberation could not coincide. Full participation would get in the way of proper deliberation and the other way around. However, contemporary deliberative democrats believe that the two can be converged. “Deliberation is a kind of participation or somehow essential to it (idem: 157).” They are connected normative projects, that complement each other. On the one hand, participation assures the inclusion of all citizens and their opinions, which is needed for deliberation (Elstub 2018). And on the other hand, deliberative practices make participatory democracy less vague, enhance educative effects, and reduce inequalities through public reasoning (ibid.). Because they complement each other and are often used interchangeably, I will use participatory deliberative democracy throughout this thesis.

For now, discussing the normative ideas on this level will suffice. Only the political institutions in which empirical participatory deliberative practices take place need further discussion. Cini and Felicetti (2018: 162-163) argue that the centrality of these institutions in the policy-making processes determines the level of power of ordinary citizens. The degree of citizen empowerment depends on the political weight of participatory deliberative arenas (ibid.). Two different types of political institutions can be distinguished in this case. Formal institutions and informal places of deliberation.

Formal institutions are characterized by high-quality deliberative participation and a more direct impact on power (idem: 161). In this formal arrangement, ordinary citizens deliberate together and their deliberation can affect the outcome of decisions. Some forms of these institutions are citizen juries, (electronic) town meetings, citizen assemblies and participatory budgeting (ibid.). Informal places of deliberations are places where citizens who do not have direct access to representative institutions can rework their ideas and attempt to influence decision-making from the outside. Examples are self-organized committees of citizens, grassroots workplace assemblies, non-institutional social forums, and social movement organisations (ibid.).

Since the 1990s democracies have increasingly adopted ways to expand participatory citizen involvement (Geissel and Michels 2018: 129). However, participatory developments are not consistent throughout democracies (ibid.). Some countries lean more towards direct democratic options, while others seek more avenues for political deliberation among citizens.

2.3. Institutional reforms

Research on the reform of political institutions is a niche field within political science research. Up until 1992, there was little research on institutions, their formation and change according to Steinmo and Thelen (1992). They state that the formation of institutions and their change is arguably one of the most important issues in comparative politics, but that it has received little attention in the literature (Bedock 2017: 40). In the last decades research on the determinants and mechanics of institutional change has increased.

A book that nicely structures the research on institutional change over the last decades is the book by Camille Bedock: *Reforming Democracy: Institutional Engineering in Western Europe* (2017). In this book, Bedock answers the question: “What has the scope of institutional engineering in Western Europe been in the last two decades? What types of reforms have been adopted, in what circumstances, and at what time?” While Bedock focuses more on the actual implementation of institutional reforms in Western Europe, she also discusses the processes of institutional reform. Bedock’s book is therefore a helpful starting point for researching parties and institutional reform.

2.3.1. Different sorts of institutional reform

According to Bedock (2017), there are two categories of reforms. *Representative reforms*, relate to the representative function of political institutions and thus change something about representative democracy in its traditional form and *participative reforms*, reforms that provide alternative modes to democratic decision-making. To these belong the participative innovations discussed in the previous section. From this categorization, Bedock identifies six dimensions of institutional reform.

Representative reforms are changes made at the national level of (1) elections, (2) parliamentary reforms, and (3) the regulation of the representative function between the national and subnational levels. The regulation of the participative function: (4) reforms of the direct election of the head executive, (5) direct democracy and (6) access to suffrage. (Bedock 2017: 26-27). While it is useful that Bedock distinguishes participative and representative reforms, I would argue, based on the previous sections, that the categorization of participative reforms is missing some participative innovations. I would therefore argue to add a dimension on participatory and deliberative democracy to the participative reforms.

Moreover, Bedock (2017) argues that these dimensions of reforms can be classified in three ways: Based on their scope, the direction of the reform and the format of the reform. For this

thesis mainly the direction of the reform is relevant, and the scope of the reform to some extent as well, but the format in the way that Bedock discusses it will be left out. She discusses bundles of reforms, and the format refers to how these bundles are constituted.

Moreover, excluded in this analysis are institutional changes that are part of the democratic consolidation process. Of interest in this thesis are changes within consolidated democracies and political parties' participation participate in these changes. This thesis will therefore not deal with regime changes and will solely focus on consolidated democracies in Western Europe.

The direction of reforms

Here Bedock (2017: 68) classifies reforms based on whether the reform disperses power or concentrates it. She here makes the distinction between inclusive vs. exclusive reforms. Inclusive reforms open the decision-making process to new political actors or citizens, thus dispersing the power (ibid.). Exclusive reforms close the decision-making process off to some political actors or citizens, they thus concentrate power. On the representative level, a connection can be drawn here to the earlier-mentioned patterns of democracy. A majoritarian democracy concentrates power more, while a consensus democracy is more power-sharing. Inclusive representative reforms might thus move a democracy more into a consensus democracy, and exclusive representative reforms move a democracy more into the ideal type of majoritarian democracy.

The scope of institutional reforms

Bedock (2017: 67) differentiates between substantial vs. minor reforms. Substantial reforms are "a reform that substantially alters the balance of power and the relationship between parties, the executive and the legislative powers, or between citizens and the political system". However, some subjectivity is attached to classifying a reform as 'substantial'. A risk is that the reform is being evaluated on its impact, while this impact might vary highly between contexts, thus saying nothing about the actual content of the reform (ibid.). Bedock (2017: 68) makes the argument that reform is classified as substantial when they affect the national level and has a direct impact on the relationship between the citizenry and the political system and between the actors within the political system.

2.4. Parties and institutional reform

Up until now, I have discussed democracy, institutions, and institutional reform, but not to a greater extent political parties and their potential interest in institutional reforms. In this section, I will elaborate on the reasons why I expect that certain parties will have a (specific) interest in institutionally reforming democracy. This section will provide the hypothesis that will guide the analysis. I will first set out the motivations of actors, which form the basis for my categorization between party groups.

2.4.1. Motivations to reform

Now that it is clear what institutional reforms are, and what kind of reforms exist. We move on to the question of what incentivizes parties to undertake reforms to the institutions. Here the literature on institutional reform is relatively limited. Within the field of institutional reform, researchers focused on the subfield of electoral reform. That is why reasons on what motivates actors to undertake reforms are mainly based on the research on electoral reforms. This section starts with discussing Alan Renwick who gives in his book *The Politics of Electoral Reform* (2010) a nice overview of things that motivates actors to reform.

Renwick (2010: 27) describes two main categories of motivations of actors for electoral reform: Power interests and values. He notes that these are broad categories, and that power should not automatically be equated with self-interest and values with altruism. Power interest and values are useful categorizations to distinguish between different party groups that will be adopted throughout this thesis.

Power interests

For power interests, Renwick assumes that actors want to maximize their power (ibid.). Political actors will think of electoral systems and electoral reforms in redistributive terms (idem: 37). He differentiates here between office-seekers and policy-seekers. Pure office-seekers strive to win or retain office as an end in itself, and pure policy seekers want to have “maximum leverage over public policy outcomes” (idem: 28). Either way, both want to have power. Renwick (2010: 30) states five reasons why parties might want to reform or abstain from reforming: Voter preferences, votes, seats, office, and influence.

A voter preferences motivation to reform can be when there is a desire among voters for electoral reform, and politicians fear that they will lose votes in the next election if they fail to respond to this demand (idem: 31). Or on the other hand, when they fear that changing the

electoral rules will cost them votes, they may abstain from pushing for electoral reform. Votes and seats are straightforward. Parties want to gain many votes and/or seats. Office motivations apply to parties in a coalition, who might be reluctant to push an electoral reform that would boost their seat shares if that would appear hostile to other coalition partners (idem: 33). An influence motivation might be when parties agree to electoral reform, to get other policy objectives that matter more to them. An influence motivation is also when reforms might be needed to maintain democratic legitimacy. As argued people are pushing for more citizen participation, and party memberships are falling. If political elites want to continue to be legitimate actors, they need to undertake institutional reforms that expand the excess of citizens to the political process (Bedock 2017: 20).

Values

However, winning seats and obtaining power does not explain everything there is to know about parties' motivations to reform. Parties might make choices based on what they think is good, just, or efficient (Renwick 2011: 37). "Politicians sometimes want to do the right, or democratic thing" (ibid.). Renwick names seven values that can inspire motivations of reforms for parties: Democracy, stability, governance, policy outcomes, constituency service, identity, and practicability.

Democratic motivations might be the fair distribution of seats, avoidance of anomalous results, fair distribution of power, representation of society, having a choice as a voter, checks and balances, encouraging effective political parties and simplicity (idem: 39). Parties might push for reforms to obtain these democratic goals, and not so much to ensure their political power.

Here it is noticeable that Renwick writes on electoral reform, and he did not consider that the ideology of parties might also be an incentive for reform. The need to change the electoral system might not be a part of parties' ideology to reform, since this is mainly concerned with power-sharing or power-concentrating incentives which are not part of ideologies. However, introducing more participative reforms can be a part of an ideology since the underlying idea can be more inclusive for example, which does fit ideologies.

2.4.2. Overall trends of political parties and institutional reforms

As mentioned earlier the main study that researches the connection between political parties, citizens and institutional reforms is the 2003 study of Miki Kittilson and Susan Scarrow. Kittilson and Scarrow research the extent to which parties express an interest in democratizing reforms (Kittilson and Scarrow 2003: 59). They use the Comparative Manifestos Project

(CMP) to assess the extent to which parties emphasize democratic themes from 1960 to 1990. They conclude that over the years there are only modest changes in democratic rhetoric. They do not see a great deal of variation across nations, parties, and time (idem: 62). However, this research is (1) outdated, new phenomena like the rise of populism, are not included in this research and (2) the CMP only says something about the times democratic rhetoric is used and says nothing about its content. Therefore, new research into parties' interest in institutional reforming is needed.

Furthermore, when focusing on the actual implementation of reforms, Bedock (2017: 86) finds that representative reforms have dominated the Western European institutional agenda, more than participative reforms. This is an interesting finding, because of the context of the crisis of democracy and the popular pressure for more citizens' participation, we would expect an increase in participative reforms. However, Western European elites do apparently not take up participative reforms (ibid.). Alternative models of democracy have complemented rather than challenged representative democracy (ibid.). It is interesting to see if we also see this trend in the parties' interest in institutional reform. We would therefore expect that if the actual implementation of representative reforms is bigger than the implementation of participative reforms, party interests should copy this trend. Otherwise, there would be a big gap between what parties want and what is actually being implemented..

2.4.3. Institutional context

I expect parties in different institutional contexts to differ in their interest in institutionally reforming democracy. The institutional context is here the difference between a more power-concentrating system, the majoritarian democracy and a power-sharing system, the consensus democracy. Systematically, I will discuss how I expect parties in these systems to react differently to representative reforms and participative reforms.

Scholars have investigated the difference between patterns of democracy regarding the actual implementation of reforms. Bedock (2017) finds no difference in the implementation of institutional reform between a country with a lot of veto players (consensual democracy) and a country with one (or two) veto players (majoritarian democracy). Arguing thus that institutional differences do not matter for the implementation of institutional reform.

However, Bedock only researches the actual implementation of reforms, and that is not what I am interested in, I research whether parties express an interest in reform. In this case, it is thus

extra relevant to see if there is a difference noticeable between interests among parties. Because in this case, parties wish to not translate to policy.

For the representative part of the institutions, I expect parties to have an interest in representative reforms that have the opposite characteristic of the system that they are in. So, I expect that parties have an interest in representative reforms that change the status quo. As stated in the introduction, institutionally reforming is a costly response in times of democratic stability, but current times of erosion of political support can be considered as a period of democratic instability (Bedock 2017: 17). I, therefore, expect that when parties express an interest to reform the representative institutions of their democracy, they do this in the ‘opposite’ direction and change the status quo, because they feel that something needs to be ‘radically’ changed.

Hypothesis 1a: Parties in a majoritarian democracy are interested in inclusive representative reforms.

Hypothesis 1b: Parties in a consensual democracy are interested in exclusive representative reforms.

Since the different patterns of democracy arise from the democracies differing representative institutions, I expect the main difference between parties to be present here. It could however also be theorized why different patterns of democracy would favour different types of participative reforms. The system of majoritarian democracy is designed to make decisions as a majority. Referendums are essentially decisions made by a majority. Consensual democracies favour inclusion, bargaining and compromising, these are characteristics that fit more deliberative practices.

Hendriks and Michels (2011) researched the different types of institutions in the UK and the Netherlands, coming most close to the ideal types of majoritarian democracy and consensual democracy. They concluded that while both countries often state (in different wordings) that they are a representative democracy and that this does not allow for forms of direct democracy, they do move towards more direct and participatory forms of democracy (idem: 314). Hendriks and Michels do find a slight difference between both countries. In the Netherlands, they find a somewhat stronger tendency for participatory deliberative democracy. They adhere to the Dutch tradition of cooperation and consensus building (idem: 315). They do however also find this on a more local level in the UK. And they find examples of direct democracy in both countries.

This research aligns with the theory, and I, therefore, expect that.

Hypothesis 1c: Both parties in a majoritarian democracy and consensual democracy are interested in participative reforms, but parties in a consensual democracy are especially interested in deliberative participative reforms.

2.4.4. Power-interested actors.

I will now differentiate between parties based on the categorization of Renwick: Power interest and values. First I will look at parties and see if power interest motivations can explain why they will or will not appeal to the voters with ideas about institutional reform. I am distinguishing two sets party groups: governing/opposition parties and established/challenger parties.

Governing and opposition parties

Parties that are currently in power, the governing parties, are there because of institutions that are in place. They thus will be less incentivized to change the rules of the game, because changing the rules might mean losses to their power. Moreover, empirical research shows that time in government decreases the likelihood of parties supporting reform (Bedock 2017: 52-53). Governing parties are less willingly to take risks than parties in opposition because they might lose power. However, reforming might also mean gaining more power, if governing parties decide to take on exclusive reforms. These reforms concentrate power, which means that governing parties would get more powerful. Based on this theory and research I formulate the hypothesis that

Hypothesis 2a: Parties in government will be generally less interested in reforms but will be more interested than other parties in exclusive reforms.

I expect this hypothesis is especially relevant for representative reforms, but I expect the same on the side of participative reforms.

However, an argument can be made that governing parties can have an interest in more inclusive reforms because they might want to spread blame for decisions they have made. Spreading blame is a strategy which tries to decrease personal responsibility for parties by institutional reforming which makes it eventually more difficult for citizens to sanction parties because not one party is deemed responsible for the policy outcome (Bedock 2017: 19). This responsibility might be shared between different political actors, but citizens too might become more involved in the process for parties to be able to shift blame. This reasoning

would thus point to more power-sharing, inclusive reforms. While I find these arguments convincing, I expect that this is exceptional rather than a general explanation for parties' interest in reforms. I will however be attentive to this possible dynamic in the analysis.

Opposition parties on the other hand are not in power and will likely want to be in power. With proposing reforms, they have less to lose than governing parties. I therefore expect opposition parties to show an interest in reforming the system, and especially with reforms that open the institutional system.

Hypothesis 2b: Parties in opposition will be more interested in institutional reforms and will navigate towards inclusive reforms.

Dominant and challenger parties

While the previous distinction between governing and opposition parties made sense, there is another dimension that needs to be considered. Dominant and challenger parties. In a system where dynamics change often, the current parties in opposition, might be well-established parties that have benefitted from the institutional system, that is in place, before. A dominant party, or established party, is a party that has had an opportunity to control policy or government (De Vries and Hobolt 2020: 21). Parties thus with government experience. Having benefitted from the system, might lower their incentive to change the system when they are in opposition.

Challenger parties on the other hand, are parties that do not have government experience. De Vries and Hobolt (2020) state that because challenger parties have not been part of government, they have the incentive to challenge the dominance of existing players through political innovation. This political innovation can be institutional reforms. Just like with governing and opposition parties it is to be expected that dominant parties are more interested in exclusive reforms, and challenger parties more in inclusive reforms. This is again more applicable to representative reforms but might also apply to participative reforms.

From this follows the hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: Dominant parties are less likely to be interested in institutional reforms, and especially exclusive reforms.

Hypothesis 3b: Challenger parties are more likely to be interested in institutional reforms, and especially inclusive reforms.

2.4.5. Parties and values

As Renwick points out, getting in power might not be the only thing that motivates political parties. Driven by their ideology, parties might also be interested in institutionally reforming democracy. The expectations above focused mainly on the representative side of democracy since this is where the most power is to be gained or lost in the current representative democracy. The next part however will focus more on participative reforms. I expect that the ideologies that would be most interested in reforming the institutions of democracy are new left/green parties and populist parties. I will discuss them both.

New left and green parties.

In the current party system, new left parties can be considered challenger parties. Green parties and other new left parties were established in the 1970s and are part of the so-called “New politics ideology”. One belief of this ideology is that all of society should have a greater say in the making of decisions which affect society as a whole (Price-Thomas 2016: 12). This part of the ideology points us thus in the direction of more participatory forms of democracy as direct democracy and deliberative democracy.

In their 2003 study, Killitson and Scarrow also expected social democratic and Green/New Left parties to be more likely to stress democratic themes. They argued that this was because of the ideological commitment of these groups to under-represented groups and participatory norms. Moreover, Price-Thomas (2016: 12) stated that ever since their origin green parties have advocated for more citizen participation and decentralization (Price-Thomas 2016: 12). Green parties were the first to make their internal organizational structures more inclusive (Biard et al. 2020: 2).

There has been empirical research on especially green parties and institutional reform. Price-Thomas (2016: 12-14) finds that Green parties in France, the UK and Germany adopt democratic themes in their party manifestos. They argue for decentralization and stress the importance of localism. Moreover, they find a focus on citizen-initiated referendums and other democratic experiments.

Biard et al. (2020) conduct a qualitative content analysis on the democratic themes of green parties in Belgium. They state that traditionally green parties have been the issue owners of democratic innovation in Belgium. The authors find that complementary to green proposals for improving the quality of representative democracy, green parties also plead for other models of democracy in their party manifestos (idem: 15). These proposals are however never

at the expense of the representative model. More specifically, they find that within new models of democracy, the greens mainly opt for referendums and other participatory instruments. To a lesser extent do they find mentions of deliberative democracy in these models. Hence, following empirical research and theory I expect that:

Hypothesis 4: New Left and Green parties are interested reforming institutions especially with participative, inclusive reforms.

Populism

Another type of challenger party is the populist party. As stated before, populism is on the rise in Europe. This can be seen in the Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, the strong position of Marie Le Pen in the French elections, and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the German elections (Algan et al. 2017: 309-310). I will first discuss the concept of populism, before I move on to populist parties' possible interest in reforming democracy.

In the literature on populism there is no consensus on whether populism can be considered an ideology or whether it is a discourse and a political style or strategy. I take on the definition of Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012), who do see populism as an ideology, although it is a thin-centred one. According to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012: 8), populism is:

“a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people and ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people”.

They argue that populism is in essence a form of *moral* politics, in the sense that there is a moral judgment in a distinction between the corrupt elite and ‘the people’. Populists themselves construct meaning to the two categories and decide who counts as the elite and the people (idem: 9). The ideology can be considered thin-centred because populism can be attached to other ideologies, like liberalism, socialism, or nationalism (ibid.). However, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) state that it must not be forgotten that populism has a core itself.

To discuss this core more thoroughly I further adopt the conceptualization of Daniele Caramani (2017) which formulates populism from the perspective of political representation. He defines populism as a form of representation which claims that political action should be guided by the unconstrained will of the people. Constraining factors to the will of the people

are checks and balances, procedures, and the constitutional protection of minorities (and of the opposition) (Caramani 2017: 55). Populist parties critique the party representation of representative democracy because they perceive parties to be less responsive to the public (idem: 58). Populists consider themselves antiparty and claim to be external to party politics (idem: 60). They argue that the main goals of parties are related to electoral competition and the occupation of government positions and not achieving the common good. It is argued that populists would rather have a model of government that increases the power of the people, while reducing the role of elected elites (Gherghina and Pilet 2021: 1). Therefore, it is expected that populist parties are interested in institutionally reforming democracy, and especially in direct democracy and referendums, since these institutions give more power to the people (ibid.).

Gherghina and Pilet (2021) analyse the mention of a referendum in party manifestos and find that in 45 percent of all the manifestos, populist parties expressed a favourable opinion of referendums. 9 percent were neutral, and another 46 percent did not refer to this topic. Best (2020) looks at a more specific type of populist party, the populist radical right party (PRRP) and finds that democratic reforms are often a key chapter in party manifestos. Furthermore, Bedock et al. (2023: 665) find that the PRRPs they study all strongly support referendums and find that direct democracy, in general, has become a greater part of these parties' rhetoric and manifestos. An interesting finding of the study of Bedock et al. is that when PRRPs increased their focus on democratic reform, mainstream parties became more sceptical of reforming. This is in contrast with the finding of Kittilson and Scarrow (2003) who state that parties follow national patterns, when one party increases its focus on reforming other parties follow. I will not control for this dynamic in my analysis, but it is important to be aware of it.

After discussing theory and empirical research I come to the hypothesis that

Hypothesis 5: Populist parties have an interest in participative reforms, and especially in direct democracy reforms.

3. Methods

The research questions of this thesis “Do political parties in representative democracies express an interest in institutional reforms? If so, do these proposals for institutional reform differ in sort and direction among various party groups?” are descriptive questions and will be researched with Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). For this analysis, the party manifestos of the Netherlands and the UK from the 2017 national election will be analysed. I will first explain why I focus on party manifestos and explain the rationale for selecting the UK and the Netherlands.

Party manifestos

I am interested in if parties express an interest in institutional reform. A way that parties express their interest systematically is through party manifestos. At the same time point they release a statement about their policy (and polity) preferences. Party manifestos are a substantive focal point for political communication during election time (Elfrinkhof et al. 2014). It is expected that if a party has an interest in reforming institutions, and formed opinions about institutional reform, they are going to communicate that in their party manifestos. Party manifestos are thus a place where the interest of parties in institutional reform is most likely to appear. That is why the unit of analysis is this study, although I am not mainly interested in elections. Furthermore, a more practical reason is that election manifestos are an appropriate document for a cross-national study (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011).

Case selection

As stated before, this thesis is interested in researching institutional change in already established democracies and will therefore only be researching established democracies. This will impact the generalizability of this research. Because of time and capacity constraints, it was not possible to conduct a QCA on a high number of countries and a sample needed to be selected. To make this selection, the Comparative Manifesto project was used (cite CMP project). Based on the indication per 202 Democracy, which includes mentions of democracy as a method or goal, the need for citizens’ involvement in political decision-making, support for direct or representative democracy and support for parts of the democratic regime (codebook CMP project 2023), countries got a score. I assume that countries with high scores will likely have more parties making claims about institutional reform.

Established democracies that score high on this variable in recent years are the United Kingdom, Austria, Czech Republic, Spain, France, and the Netherlands. Eventually, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands were selected as cases for a couple of reasons. The countries have different electoral systems, the United Kingdom has a plurality system (on the national level) and the Netherlands has a highly proportional representation system. Both countries are typical cases for the two democratic models: majoritarian democracy, and consensual democracies (Gerring 2017: 56-58). Selecting them both as cases, results in a diverse case selection, where the two cases capture the diversity of the electoral system (ibid.).

Secondly, the UK and the Netherlands are often compared, so there is a vast literature tradition to build upon. Thirdly, in both countries, we find green and populist parties, the type of parties that are of interest for this study. That makes them eligible for this research. And lastly, because of time and language constraints, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands were the most feasible options.

This thesis will focus on the 2017 elections of both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (UK). This year has been chosen for different reasons. Firstly, because in this year both countries held national elections, which reduces the chances that any difference between the countries can be explained because of other time-relevant external factors. This was the reason for not using the most recent elections of both countries. The latest election of the Netherlands was in 2021 during Covid, while the latest elections of the UK were in 2019, before Covid. Covid had a severe impact on different parts of society, so comparing the latest elections has a higher risk of other factors intervening.

Secondly, the elections were held after Brexit, which had an impact on all countries in the European Union. These times of changes could have inspired other changes within institutions, that could increase the chances of mentions of institutional reform in the party manifestos. Since this thesis aims to describe differences between parties, and not explain the role of major events on the willingness to institutionally reform. The choice has been made to only research one timepoint. I will now shortly describe the context for both cases.

Political institutions in the United Kingdom & The 2017 general election

The United Kingdom is known for its first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system on the national level. A system with simple plurality rule and single-member districts (Colomer 2011). Whereas most European democracies have moved from majoritarian systems to more

proportional representation systems throughout time, the UK did not. While historically there have been efforts to change this system, eventually the key political players benefitted from the majoritarian system and kept the first-past-the-post system (Colomer 2011). A plurality system tends to produce a single absolute winner that is only supported by a minority of the popular votes (ibid.). In these systems, it is more beneficial to have strong support in several districts than national support but spread more evenly.

In the UK it has become a standard practice that to electorally reform the system, a referendum needs to be held to gain citizens' support for the reform (Qvortrup 2012). In this tradition, in 2011 there has been a referendum in the UK to substitute the FPTP system with the Alternative Vote system. The Alternative Vote system gives the voter more options than the FPTP system. In the latter voters simply indicate their favoured candidate, whereas in the former they rank the candidates in the order of their choice (Reynolds et al. 2008: 47-48). On the 5th of May, 67,9 percent of the people voted "No" to changing the electoral system (Qvotrup 2012). After this, there has only been an electoral register reform in 2013.

The 2017 general election, held on the 8th of June, follows the 2016 Brexit referendum, a referendum that is regarded as one of the most divisive political issues of recent times (Vaccari et al. 2020). It has been stated that this election showed a return to conflictual politics and that while Brexit played a role, it did not form a positional issue (ibid.). In the two decades before the 2017 election, parties have become more ideologically similar, and therefore the dominant conflict within elections has been on valence issues, such as the handling of the economy (idem: 602-603). In this election, however, the Labour Party moved towards the left and the Conservative Party adopted a more conservative position. The Conservative Party won the election with 317 seats of the 650, losing thirteen seats. Labour gained 267 seats, which is thirty more than they had. The Conservative Party formed the government together with the Democratic Unionist Party. (DUP). The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), a new party and advocator for Brexit, won one seat in 2015 but lost it in the general election of 2017.

The Netherlands and the general election of 2017

The Netherlands has a highly proportional representational system. It only has one district. So, everyone who gets enough votes is elected to the House of Representatives. Preference votes make it possible for candidates lower on the list, to still make it into the House of Representatives if they gain enough votes. The Netherlands does not formally have a

threshold, the only threshold is the number of votes it takes to win one seat. The Dutch parliament consist of 150 members.

The Netherlands has had its proportional representation electoral system since 1917. This system favours small parties, which can result in longer coalition forming time. That is why in the Netherlands there is a debate around adopting an electoral threshold. In the Netherlands referendums occur from time to time but are not standard practice (Werner 2020). In 2006 The Netherlands organized a citizen's assembly around the question: "What is the best electoral system for the Netherlands?". Citizens' assemblies are becoming more popular, and there is a national discussion on the use of referendums (source).

The 2017 general election of the Netherlands took place on the 15th of March. Particularly for this election is that it was not until October 26, 2017, that a government was installed. The election saw a high turnout (81,9%), the breakthrough of new Parties (Forum voor Democratie and DENK), and the absence of genuinely large parties (van Holsteyn 2018: 1364). The central theme of this election seemed to be the "Dutch identity", and questions of how the established political order could survive seeing the surge of right-wing populism, an ideology the PVV and the FvD adhered to (idem: 1365-1366). VVD became the largest party with 33 seats out of the 150. Former government party PvdA saw its seats dramatically drop from 38 to 9. The government was a coalition of VVD, CDA, D66 and ChristenUnie.

Qualitative Content Analysis

To describe parties' interest in institutional reforms in these two elections a qualitative content analysis is conducted. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is a method that describes the meaning of qualitative material systematically (Schreier 2012: 1). Meaning is constructed and not always obvious (idem: 2) Within QCA you deal with data in which the meaning is not immediately obvious, it requires interpretation, and QCA can help you interpret it (ibid.). QCA is relevant for this thesis because the goal is to gain insight into parties appeals to citizens in a systematic way. It is not only relevant how much these parties make claims to institutional reforms, but also what claims are being made. That is why QCA is a suitable method for this thesis.

The method from QCA always follows the same steps, and these are the steps that will also be followed in this thesis. The steps are:

“Selecting a research question, selecting your material, building a coding frame that will usually comprise several main categories, each with their own set of subcategories, dividing your material into units of coding, trying out your coding frame through double-coding, followed by a discussion of units that were coded differently; evaluating your coding frame in terms of the consistency of coding and in terms of validity and revising it accordingly; coding all your material, using the revised version of your coding frame, and transforming the information to the case level; interpreting and presenting your findings.” (Schreier 2012: 5-6).

The research question has been elaborated upon in the theoretical framework, so we can move on to the selection of the material. The unit of analysis of this research is as already discussed party manifestos. I will now discuss how the manifestos are selected.

Comparative Manifesto Project

The biggest dataset on election manifestos is the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), earlier research on parties and institutional reforms relied on the data of the CMP (Kittilson and Scarrow 2003). This thesis will not extensively use the CMP, it will only be used in an explorative way, to select relevant cases, as has already been described. This choice has been made because the CMP does not necessarily code institutional change. Within the variable *per202*, they code everything that has to do with representative democracy, and that is not necessarily of interest to this thesis. They did recently start with coding direct democracy but mentions of participatory or deliberative democracy are missing. Since this thesis aims to make substantive claims about the content of election manifestos, and this is not possible with CMP, the choice has been made to conduct a QCA.

Data collection

The sampling unit of this thesis is the party manifestos from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom of 2017 which are available in the Comparative Manifesto Project. This database includes all the party manifestos of the parties that gained seats in that election, and for the UK additionally the party manifesto of the UKIP. The UKIP party manifesto is also included in the analysis since it is a populist party that performed well in the 2015 election. For a diverse selection of party ideologies, it is relevant to also include UKIP. With including UKIP, the N for this study is 22. Nine party manifestos will be investigated for the UK and twelve party manifestos for NL. Table 1 provides an overview of the selected parties and some defining characteristics that are relevant to answer the hypotheses.

Table 1*Overview of parties and their characteristics*

Party Name	Country	Established	Seats won	Left/right scale	Left/right category	Populist	Green	Gov. before elect. 2017	Gov. exp. in years 1945-2017
Conservative	UK	1834	317	7,64	Right			Yes	42
Labour	UK	1900	262	2,64	Left				24
SNP	UK	1934	35	3,36	Left				
Liberal democrats	UK	1988	12	4,5	Centre				6
DUP	UK	1974	10	8,67	Right				
Sinn Féin	UK	1905	7	2,91	Left	Yes			
Plaid Cymru	UK	1925	4	3,25	Left				
Green Party	UK	1990	1	2	Left		Yes		
UKIP	UK	1993	0	8,62	Right	Yes			
VVD	NL	1948	33	7,87	Right			Yes	47
PVV	NL	2006	20	9,27	Right	Yes			
CDA	NL	1980	19	7	Right				28
D66	NL	1966	19	5,47	Centre				17
GroenLinks	NL	1989	14	2,6	Left		Yes		
SP	NL	1971	14	1,27	Left	Yes			
PvdA	NL	1946	9	3,87	Left			Yes	40
ChristenUnie	NL	2000	5	5	Centre				3
PvdD	NL	2002	5	2,79	Left		Yes		
50Plus	NL	2009	4	5,23	Centre				
SGP	NL	1918	3	7,92	Right				
DENK	NL	2017	3	3,83	Left				
FvD	NL	2017	2	9,53	Right	Yes			

For Populist? The database PopuList was used. (Rooduijn et al. 2019). For the Left/right classification the CHES data (2017) was used and operationalized as score 0-4 = left. 4-6 = centre 6-10 = right

The coding frame

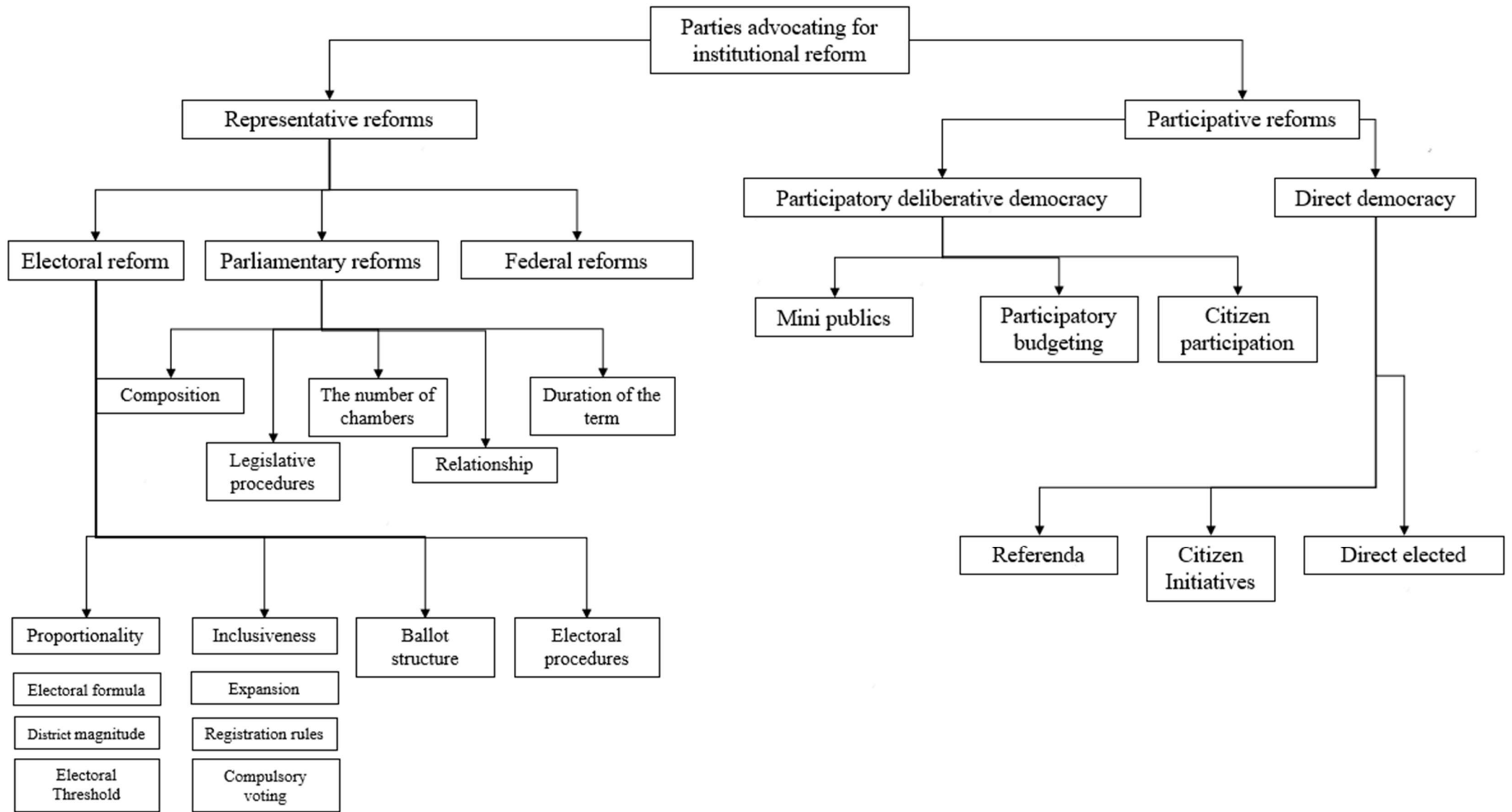
This thesis will use a high-complexity coding frame with two dimensions and more hierarchical levels. To build this coding frame a mixed-method approach is used. First deductively, a coding frame has been developed, and then during rounds of coding, concepts have been added to this framework. The coding frame is a combination of Bedock's six dimensions of institutional reform (Bedock 2017) and the categorization of electoral reform from Jacobs and Leyenaar (2011). The framework distinguishes between the two functions of political institutions, The representative function, and the participative function, although the two functions overlap at times, this distinction is kept to systematically assess the manifestos. The main difference between this model of Bedock and the coding frame that I adopt is that access to suffrage is moved from the participative function to the representative function. Following the classification of Jacobs and Leyenaar (2011) I group (the expansion of) the

electorate under electoral reform as inclusiveness. I also adopt three of the five other dimensions of electoral reform that they identify, to structure mentions to electoral reform. Namely: Proportionality, Ballot structure and electoral procedures. The only dimension that I leave out of electoral reform is “the election levels” which refers mainly to the direct election of public figures, I leave direct democracy out of electoral reform and include this in direct democracy.

Moreover, as I already mention Bedock’s dimensions do not cover practices of participatory deliberative democracy, so I adopt participatory deliberative democracy as a subcategory of participative reform next to the subcategory of direct democracy, which includes referendums, citizens’ initiatives, and the direct election of officials. The coding frame is visualized in Figure 1. See the codebook in Appendix I.

Furthermore, for a complete overview of parties’ interest in reforms I code the direction for each category. For representative reforms is code if the proposed reform is inclusive, thus power-sharing, exclusive, thus power-concentrating or advocating to maintain the status quo. Electoral procedures are here not assigned a direction since they are mostly technical of origin. For parliamentary reforms, I also coded the duration of the term, to be a procedural reform. The actual category of legislative procedures here, is however, divided into inclusive, exclusive or status quo. Moreover, for the participative reforms, I did not code inclusive or exclusive, but positive or negative. Final note is that for the Netherlands, I leave the regional water authorities (*waterschappen*) out of this research, because there is no British equivalent and it would complicate the research too much.

Figure 1: Coding frame



4. Analysis and results

This section will systematically discuss the results of all the formulated hypotheses.

As discussed in the theoretical section, Bedock (2017) found that overall, more representative reforms were implemented than participative reforms. It would therefore be logical if we also saw this pattern reflected in the interest that parties express for these reforms. The data shows that that is the case, in total there were one hundred unique mentions of representative reforms and 44 mentions of participative reforms.

4.1. Institutional differences

Moving on to the differences between NL and the UK, one typical consensual democracy and the other a majoritarian democracy. As shown in Table 2, there is not a big difference observable in the number of mentions of representative reforms in total. Looking at the subcategories, however, a few things stand out.

Table 2

Numbers of different types of institutional reforms per country

	The Netherlands	The United Kingdom
Representative reforms	52	48
<i>Electoral reform</i>	26	29
Inclusive reform	11	20
Exclusive reform	5	1
Status quo	3	3
Procedural reforms	7	5
<i>Parliamentary reforms</i>	18	9
Inclusive reform	8	2
Exclusive reform	6	5
Status quo	1	1
Procedural reforms	3	1
<i>Federal reforms</i>	8	10
Inclusive reform	5	9
Exclusive reform	2	0
Status quo	1	1

Electoral reform

For the category of electoral reform, parties in the UK express a great interest in reforming the electoral system in a more inclusively. All parties, except for the right-wing parties: The conservatives and DUP and the Ireland nationalist party Sinn Fein, express favourable opinions to a more inclusive electoral system. The mentions of inclusive electoral reform are focused on making the electoral system more proportional and expanding the electorate to 16- and 17-year-olds and citizens overseas or EU citizens within the UK, as can be seen in Table 3. The governing Conservative Party does not show an interest in making the electoral system more inclusive; however, they do include these two topics in their manifestos and take a status quo stance on these two points, stating that they want to retain the FPTP system and keep the franchise at eighteen. It thus becomes clear that in the United Kingdom, institutionally reforming the electoral system is part of the political agenda, and that a substantial number of parties want to change the electoral system in a more inclusively.

Parties in the Netherlands do show a greater interest in exclusively reforming the electoral system than parties in the United Kingdom. Three parties want to introduce an electoral threshold in the Netherlands or want to investigate the introduction of an electoral threshold. Larger parties benefit from the electoral system having an electoral threshold and its introduction would thus concentrate the power. It is therefore surprising that 50PLUS is interested in introducing an electoral threshold since they won only two seats in the 2012 election. Only CU takes a status quo position on electoral thresholds and argues that it is not in favour of introducing an electoral threshold. While there is a greater interest in exclusive reforms in NL than in the UK, the interest in inclusive electoral reforms is still bigger in NL.

Other than in the UK, where the inclusive electoral reforms were clearly structured around two issues and where, almost, all parties took a position on the issues of the electoral system and the composition of the franchise. The proposed electoral reforms vary in topics in NL as can be seen in Table 4. Here, for example, only the parties DENK and *GroenLinks*, mention lowering the age of the franchise to sixteen years old, and no party is advocating for keeping it at eighteen. CDA, is proposing a new electoral system, DENK is interested in changing the way the remainder seat in elections is distributed and PvdD and *GroenLinks* suggest that it would be more democratic if mayors were elected by elected bodies. Not one issue of the electoral system seems to be that politicized that all parties are interested in mentioning it.

Table 3*Parties in the UK on electoral reform*

	Mention of reform	Party
Parties in the UK on inclusive electoral reform	“Replacement of the first-past-the-post system with proportional representation” (p. 41)	SNP
	“Extending the franchise to citizens of other EU countries, resident in the UK, for the elections to the UK Parliament” (p. 41)	SNP
	“More proportional voting system that makes seats match votes” (p.58)	UKIP
	“Introduce the Single Transferable Vote for local government elections in England and for electing MPs across the UK” (p.93)	Liberal Democrats
	“Introduce votes at 16 for all elections and referendums across the UK” (p.93)	Liberal Democrats
	“The second chamber should be democratically elected” (p.104)	Labour party
	“Reduce the voting age to 16” (p.23)	Labour Party
	“Introduce proportional representation (PR) for parliamentary and local elections” (p.23)	Green Party
	“We want to grant 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote” (p.15)	Plaid Cymru
	“Reform the voting system so that it is more representative” (p.15)	Plaid Cymru
Parties in the UK taking a status quo position on electoral reform	“We will retain the first past the post system of voting for parliamentary elections” (p.45)	The Conservative Party
	“We will retain the current franchise to vote in parliamentary elections at eighteen” (p.45)	The Conservative Party

Table 4*Parties in NL on electoral reform*

	Mention of reform (translated)	Party
Parties in NL on exclusive electoral reform	“There will be an electoral threshold of 3%” (p.12)	50PLUS
	“In the new electoral system that we propose, we introduce an electoral threshold of 2%” (p.22)	CDA
	“We want to look into the introduction of an electoral threshold” (p.96)	VVD
	“Voting rights in the Netherlands need to be directly attached again to Dutch citizenship, non-Dutch cannot vote in local elections” (p.33)	SGP
Parties in the Netherlands on inclusive electoral reform	“We are in favour for the distribution of the remainder seat in a way that does not favour big parties” (p.61)	DENK
	“The local council elects the mayor” (p.67)	GroenLinks
	“The age of the active voting right lowered to sixteen” (p.67)	GroenLinks

Parliamentary reforms

Parties in the Netherlands, however, do express an interest in parliamentary reforms. Looking at Table 2, the number of mentions of inclusive and exclusive reforms is the same. The inclusive parliamentary reforms all fall in the category of legislative procedures. These are suggestions that make the legislative procedures of the workings of the parliaments, fairer or improve the position of parliament towards government, or strengthen split-off fractions within the parliament. Exclusive parliamentary reforms suggest a weakening of the position of split-off fractions and express an interest in abolishing the upper house, *de Eerste Kamer*. One party, 50PLUS is interested in reducing the members of parliament from 150 to 100 members.

The parties, SNP, and UKIP, in the UK also advocate for the abolishment of the upper house, the House of Lords. Besides that, like 50PLUS in the Netherlands, the Conservative Party and UKIP want to reduce the number of parliament members. There is thus some overlap in the parliamentary reforms that both parties are interested in here. The reforms are however not

widely advocate for, nor is it at this point possible to distinguish patterns in the interest of party groups in parliamentary reforms.

Federal reforms

The interest in federal reforms is omnipresent in British parties. For Sinn Fein and DUP, it is even the only type of institutional reform that they mention. Almost all parties in the UK are in favour of changing the system in a way that power becomes more shared between the different countries of the United Kingdom. Only the two biggest parties are not in favour. Labour takes a status quo stance, and the Conservative Party does not mention the possibility of changing the system at all.

For the Netherlands almost all the proposed federal reforms are minor. Only 50PLUS is interested in a major reform and advocates for abolishing the provinces as an administrative layer. Other minor reforms focus on the role of the kingdom of the Netherlands as a whole, including the Caribbean countries.

Representative reforms

Looking at all the aspects of representative reforms and looking back at the hypothesis, I can confirm that a great share of parties in the UK, a majoritarian democracy, is interested in inclusive reforms, and mainly in electoral and federal reforms. However, the biggest party in 2017, the Conservative Party was not part of this trend and often took a status quo stance, but this will be discussed later in the analysis. What became especially clear is in the UK there is a political debate on changing the electoral system - and making it more representative- and expanding the electorate. Parties take on positions on both sides of the debate. I can thus confirm hypothesis 1a: “Parties in a majoritarian democracy are interested in inclusive representative reforms”.

For the Netherlands, a consensual democracy, parties that are interested in exclusive representative reforms are not in the majority, although there are more parties in the Netherlands arguing in favour of exclusive representative reforms, than in the UK. Different representative institutional reforms are being discussed, but not one democratic issue stands out. Hypothesis 1b can thus not fully be confirmed, while parties in a consensual democracy are interested in exclusive representative reforms, this is not a general trend.

Table 5*Numbers of different types of participative institutional reforms per country*

	The Netherlands	The United Kingdom
Participative reforms	41	6
<i>Direct democracy</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>6</i>
Referendums: Positive	10	3
Referendums: Negative	4	-
Citizens' initiative: Positive	10	1
Directly elected: Positive	5	1
Directly elected: Negative	1	-
General positive direct democracy	1	1
<i>Participatory deliberative</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>-</i>
Deliberative practices: Positive	3	-
Citizens' participation: Positive	3	-
New forms of democracy	4	-

Participative reforms

I will now move on to the greatest difference between both institutional contexts. As can be in Table 5, parties in the UK are remarkably less interested in participative reforms than parties in NL. There are only six mentions throughout all manifestos of participative reforms, more than six times less than the mentions of participative reforms in NL. Most interesting is that there is not one party in the UK which expresses an interest in participatory deliberative reforms. There is some attention to reforms regarding direct democracy, but participatory deliberative practices are totally missing.

In the Netherlands however, all parties express an interest in reforming some part of the participative institutions of democracy. The main focus is on institutions of direct democracy, but also participatory deliberative practices are mentioned. A few examples of Dutch parties' interest in participative reforms are selected and displayed in Table 6. Noticeable is that not all parties are in favour of referendums. SGP is not in favour, because they feel that it undermines the role of elected representatives. *GroenLinks* does not want referendums, but more deliberative practices instead, arguing that this is more fitting for solving complex societal problems than the binary choice that referendums offer. The VVD is also not in favour of the simplification that a referendum requires and is thus against the use of a referendum. The parties that are in favour of referenda, propose different forms of referendums: advisory, corrective, and binding referendums. For now, this difference is not

Table 6*Parties in the Netherlands on participative reforms*

	Mention of reform	Party
Parties in NL on direct democracy reforms	“We want to investigate how different forms of citizen engagement and direct democracy can be inserted”	PvdA
	“ <i>Forum van Democratie</i> wants the introduction of binding referendums and people initiatives” (p. 6)	FvD
	“Forms of direct democracy, like referendums get a more prominent place” (p.32)	PvdD
	“The introduction of a binding referendum” (p.1)	PVV
	“Instead of an advisory referendum, we want a corrective referendum as soon as possible” (p.9)	SP
	“We do not want an advisory referendum” (p.21)	CDA
	“Referenda do not fit in a system of elected representatives” (p.32)	SGP
	“We are not in favour of any form of a referendum on any level” (p.96)	VVD
	“The citizen initiative is simulated with campaigns and made easier” (p.32)	PvdD
	“With the right to challenge, citizens get the right to propose an alternative proposal in their municipalities” (p.23)	CDA
Parties in NL on deliberative democracy reforms	“Participatory and deliberative democracy are emerging and deserve attention” (p.159)	D66
	“ <i>GroenLinks</i> is in favour of new forms of deliberative democracy” (p.67)	GL

important and will not be developed further. It becomes clear that the introduction of referendums is part of the democratic agenda, and parties are interested in reforming this participative institution of democracy.

Unlike referendums, there is no disagreement on the introduction of citizens’ initiatives in the Netherlands. All the mentions of citizen’s initiatives are positive and argue in favour of them. There is however some disagreement on the direct election of some leaders in society. This was also already noticeable when discussing inclusive electoral reforms, Dutch parties do not agree on who should elect leaders as mayors, or provincial leaders (*Commissaris van de Koning*). But there is definitely a push to make their election more democratic.

Lastly, participatory deliberative reforms. In the Netherlands, two parties, D66 and *GroenLinks* advocate directly in favour of the introduction of more deliberation. Some other parties keep it vaguer and mention that “new forms of democracy” should be considered.

Because of the context in which these statements were made, I decided to classify these mentions of “new forms of democracy” with participatory deliberative democracy.

This analysis shows that in the Netherlands there is a greater interest of parties to move beyond the traditional representative functions and investigate more participative institutions of democracy. In the UK on the other hand, there is only a casual mention of direct democracy. It must be noted here that referendums in the United Kingdom are already used more widely than in the Netherlands. Coming back to hypothesis 1c, I can state that parties in both institutional contexts are indeed, to some extent, interested in participative reforms. There is however a great difference in this interest. Moreover, while parties in the Netherlands are more interested in participatory deliberative practices than parties in the UK, overall, they are still more interested in direct democracy reforms.

4.2 Parties as power-interested actors

Up until now, I have not given attention to the within differences between parties in the same institutional context. So, it is now time to see if there are any patterns observable between party groups and their interest for reforming democracy. I start with the group parties that is currently in government.

Governing parties

The governing group of parties is not very big, and contains only three parties, looking at the total number of mentions of reforms to compare the groups is therefore useless. I will instead investigate the proposals they make. The parties in government before the election of 2017 were the Conservative Party in the UK and the VVD and the PvdA in the Netherlands. I expected that they would be less interested in reforms in general, and more interested in exclusive reforms.

As stated before, in the UK, the Conservative Party took a status quo stance regarding electoral reform. They expressed their preference for an FPTP system and wanted to keep the franchise at eighteen. They are thus not interested in reforming the electoral system. Moreover, they did not comment on federal reform. In these areas, they are thus not interested in reforms, as expected, but also not in exclusive reforms. This is different for the area of parliamentary reform, here they make a few suggestions that would concentrate the power in the system. First, they state that they want to reduce the number of parliamentary members from 650 to 600 (The Conservative Party 2017: 44). Second, they make a comment about the duration of the term of parliament. I had originally coded this as the “procedural reforms” of parliamentary reforms. However, it is questionable if it is really a neutral procedural reform if we take a closer look at who suggests it. The Conservative Party argues in favour of repealing

the fixed-term parliament act. This act made it more difficult for the prime minister to call an early election (Grant 2021). By repealing this act, the prime minister would get more power again, and since the Conservative Party is governing at this time and providing the prime minister, that would mean more power for the Conservative Party. For parliamentary reforms, the governing party in the UK is thus interested in exclusive institutional reforms.

In the Netherlands, the VVD also expresses an interest in the term, they do this however on a more national level. They state it needs to be made possible that when a local government is not functioning properly, ministers need to be able to call for a new election. So that citizens “can restore the peace, when the local government made a mess”. Since the VVD has been a government party for a long time, it always has had a lot of ministers. Granting this power to the ministers, would therefore also give them more power.

Furthermore, the VVD is interested in abolishing electoral alliances, which made it possible for smaller parties to count as one party when the remaining seat is distributed, increasing their chances for an extra seat. The VVD is already a large party, so these electoral alliances would reduce their chance of an extra seat, and suggesting their abolishment would thus concentrate their power more. Besides that, as already stated they are in favour of the possibility of introducing an electoral threshold which would increase their power. The VVD is thus more interested in exclusive reforms than it is in not reforming at all.

Interesting, however, is that both the VVD and the Conservative Party are right-wing parties. When looking at a governing left-wing party, the PvdA another pattern is observable. The PvdA made no comment about changing the representative side of democracy. The only reforms they seem interested in, are inclusive reforms regarding the participative side of democracy. They argue for more room for citizens’ initiatives, want to include forms of direct democracy and want to experiment with new forms of democratic engagement. So, while the hypothesis is true that they are not interested in (representative) reforms at all, they are not more interested in exclusive reforms as expected. This differs from the Conservative Party and the VVD. It cannot be confirmed that this difference is caused by their different ideologies (left and right-wing), but it is an interesting finding.

The Conservative Party and the VVD are not especially interested in participative reforms. The Conservative Party makes one mention of participative reforms stating that residents need the power to veto high tax increases with a referendum, and the VVD argues against the use of referendums. So here there can be no pattern observable.

Overall hypothesis 2a is not as clear cut, the hypothesis seems true for the Conservative Party in the UK, here the Conservative Party is more interested in keeping the status quo, and otherwise in exclusive reforms. For the Netherlands, however, the pattern differs. The VVD is more interested in exclusive reforms, than it is in keeping the status quo, and the PvdA does not mention reforms, and if it does it is to argue for participative reforms. As mentioned this can be due to a difference in ideology. Hypothesis 2a can thus not fully be accepted.

Opposition parties

Again, for opposition parties, it is not fair to compare the numbers of opposition parties with that of governing parties. I thus highlight the most relevant observations here. As already noted, regarding the electoral system in the UK, the Conservative Party was the only one taking a status quo stance. Almost all other parties, opposition parties thus, were interested in inclusive electoral reforms, thus opening the electoral system.

In the Netherlands results are more diverse, not only current governing parties opt for exclusive reforms. Parties like 50PLUS or the CDA do to, with advocating for an electoral threshold. This thus shows us that at least in the Netherlands, having an interest in electoral reform is not directly tied to governing.

I can therefore again not confirm hypothesis 2b, at least not for the Netherlands. The opposition is too diverse and thus have different institutional preferences. It can be useful to broaden the categories of governing and opposition, to distinguish other patterns.

Dominant and challenger parties

Moving on to dominant and challenger parties, the number of parties in the dominant category expands. Dominant parties in the UK are the Conservative Party, the Labour Party and more recently, the Liberal Democrats. Dominant parties in the Netherlands are VVD, PvdA, CDA, CU and D66. When taking a first look at the differences between dominant and challenger parties as two categories, there are not many differences observable. Challenger parties are more interested in direct democracy reforms, and parliamentary reforms. I however expected that dominant parties were less interested in institutional reform than challenger parties. While challenger parties do mention institutional reform more often, this difference is not especially large. I, therefore, decided to add institutional context to Table 7 and see if the strategic position in a different institutional context made any difference in the parties' interest in institutional reforms. Now, some interesting differences become more clearly observable.

Table 7*Parties on institutional reforms divided by dominant and challenger parties*

	Dominant parties	Challenger parties	Dominant parties NL	Challenger parties NL	Dominant parties UK	Challenger parties UK
Representative reforms	41	59	20	32	21	27
<i>Electoral reform</i>	25	30	10	16	15	14
Inclusive reform	13	18	4	7	9	11
Exclusive reform	3	3	3	2	-	1
Status quo	4	2	1	2	3	-
Procedural reform	5	7	2	5	3	2
<i>Parliamentary reforms</i>	9	18	5	13	4	5
Inclusive reform	1	9	1	7	-	2
Exclusive reform	4	7	2	4	2	3
Status quo	1	1	-	1	1	-
Procedural reform	3	1	2	1	1	-
<i>Federal reforms</i>	7	11	5	3	2	8
Inclusive reform	5	9	4	1	1	8
Exclusive reform	1	1	1	1	-	-
Status quo	1	1	-	1	1	-
Participative reforms	19	28	17	24	2	4
<i>Direct democracy reforms</i>	12	25	10	21	2	4
Referendums: Positive	3	10	2	8	1	2
Referendums: Negative	2	2	2	2	-	-
Citizens' initiative: Positive	4	7	4	6	-	1
Directly elected: Positive	2	4	1	4	1	-
Directly elected: Negative	-	1	-	1	-	-
General positive direct. Dem	1	1	1	-	-	1
<i>Participatory deliberative</i>	7	3	7	3	-	-
Deliberative democracy: Positive	2	1	2	1	-	-
Citizens' participation: Positive	2	1	2	1	-	-
New forms of democracy	3	1	3	1	-	-

In the United Kingdom, the mentions of institutional reform between challenger parties and dominant parties are very close. As I already discussed, electoral reform is clearly politicized in the United Kingdom and the numbers of mentions of challenger parties and dominant parties are therefore nearly the same. A noticeable difference between the two groups is regarding the federal reforms. Challenger parties are especially interested in inclusive federal reforms. This is not very surprising since the national parties, Scottish, Irish and Welsh, advocate for a bigger say in their countries and are challenger parties.

The first noted difference between the differing interest of dominant and challenger parties for their interest in parliamentary reforms and direct democracy reforms is primarily caused by the difference between parties in the Netherlands. Challenger parties in the Netherlands, are substantially more interested in inclusive parliamentary reforms than dominant parties. They argue for more power-sharing and more power for the parliament towards the government. They are also more interested in exclusive parliamentary reforms, arguing for the abolishment of the upper house.

Furthermore, challenger parties in the Netherlands are also more interested in introducing forms of direct democracy. For the dominant parties, only D66, one of the parties with less government experience than the others, expresses a favourable opinion of referendums. The other proponents of introducing direct democracy, are all challenger parties. This is a substantial difference between challenger and dominant parties in the Netherlands.

Overall, there is no big difference between the dominant and challenger parties' interest in institutional reforms. However, in a few instances, challenger parties are more interested in inclusive reforms than dominant parties. This is the case for federal reforms in the UK and parliamentary and direct democracy reforms in NL. A perhaps more important finding is that the main differences all became evident once I differentiated between different institutional contexts. This shows us that while the difference between challenger and dominant parties is important, it is especially relevant within a certain institutional context. Institutional context determines thus in this case, parties' interest in institutional reform.

4.3. Parties and values

The question is however if parties with the same ideology, act the same across different contexts. I will now focus on parties who I believe have the intrinsic motivation to change the system, instead of a strategic motivation. Starting with green parties.

Table 8*Green parties mentions of institutional reforms*

	The Green Party	GroenLinks	PvdD
Representative reforms	4	3	1
Inclusive electoral reforms	3	1	1
Inclusive parliamentary reforms	1	-	-
Exclusive parliamentary reforms	-	1	-
Electoral procedures	-	1	-
Participative reforms	2	4	6
<i>Direct democracy</i>	2	2	5
Referendums: Positive	1	-	3
Referendums: Negative	-	1	-
Citizens' initiative: Positive	-	1	2
Directly elected: Positive	-	-	-
Directly elected: Negative	-	-	-
General positive direct democracy	1	-	-
<i>Participatory deliberative</i>	-	2	1
Deliberative practices: Positive	-	1	-
Citizens' participation: Positive	-	-	1
New forms of democracy	-	1	-

Green parties

There are three green/new left parties in my database. The green party in the United Kingdom and *GroenLinks* and PvdD in the Netherlands. As can be seen in Table 8, all parties are interested in institutionally reforming democracy, and mostly in inclusive reforms. Only the Dutch Green party *GroenLinks* proposes two excluding reforms. It wants to abolish the upper house and is against the introduction of referenda. They however state, that while they do not want direct democracy in the form of referenda, they do want to experiment with “new forms of (direct) democracy, especially in local governments” (*GroenLinks* 2017: 67). Moreover, they state specifically that they are in favour of new forms of deliberative democracy (ibid.).

The Green Party in the UK wants to lower the electoral franchise to sixteen and introduce proportional representation for the parliament and local elections. Furthermore, they want to replace the House of Lords, with an elected second chamber. This fits within the “New politics ideology” that all of society should have a greater say in the making of decisions (Price-Thomas 2016: 12). They also mention a greater role for direct democracy by stating “Give power to local communities by allowing for 40% of the local electorate to secure a

referendum on local government decisions or to recall their MP “ (Green Party 2017: 21). They do not mention deliberative practices.

The PvdD is mostly focused on introducing forms of direct democracy. They argue that forms of direct democracy need to get a more prominent place and want to introduce a corrective binding referendum (Partij voor de Dieren 2017: 32). Moreover, they want to make citizens’ initiatives more accessible and push citizen participation. They only make one mention about changing the representative institutions: The PvdD wants a more democratic way of electing mayors.

So, considering all the green parties together, they are mostly interested in inclusive institutional reforms. They are especially interested in forms of direct democracy, only in the Netherlands are green parties also interested in participatory deliberative reforms. Here a small influence of the institutional context might again be observed, because of the inherent characteristic of a consensual democracy to be more open for cooperation and consensus-building.

Populist parties

The group of populist parties is slightly bigger than the group of green parties. The project PopuList (Rooduijn et al. 2019) categorizes five parties in the UK and the NL as populist. Sinn Féin and UKIP for the UK, and PVV, FvD and SP in the Netherlands. These are both populist-right (UKIP, PVV, FvD) and populist-left parties (Sinn Féin, SP). Two things are necessary to mention before I continue with the analysis. First, is that Sinn Féin is a Northern-Ireland nationalistic party, mainly interested in Ireland's unity. When they receive seats in Westminster, they abstain from participating in the parliament of the UK (Bowcott 2017). Therefore, while they are classified as populist, they might not behave the same way as other populist parties regarding institutional reform, besides federal reforms. Second, is that the PVV is known for their short manifestos. It is only one page and has therefore naturally not much room to dive deep into issues.

Table 9 shows the mentions of reforms for the populist parties, I only included the categories that were mentioned in the party manifestos. As immediately becomes clear, as expected Sinn Féin only mentions inclusive federal reforms, advocating for more power sharing and more power for (Northern) Ireland. Also, as expected PVV only has one mention of institutional reform. They argue for “the introduction of the binding referendum” (PVV 2017: 1). Even though it is only one mention it is in line with the populist thinking of more power to the

people and thus fits the hypothesis.

Table 9

Populist parties mentions of institutional reforms

	Sinn Féin	UKIP	PVV	FvD	SP
Representative reforms	2	6	-	3	1
Inclusive electoral reforms	-	2	-	1	-
Inclusive parliamentary reforms	-	-	-	2	-
Exclusive parliamentary reforms	-	2	-	-	-
Inclusive federal reforms	2	1	-	-	1
Electoral procedures	-	1	-	-	-
Participative reforms	-	2	1	5	2
<i>Direct democracy</i>	-	2	1	5	2
Referendums: Positive	-	1	1	2	1
Citizens' initiative: Positive	-	1	-	1	1
Directly elected: Positive	-	-	-	2	-

Table 9 shows that the British party UKIP is interested in both representative reforms and participative reforms. UKIP proposes to institute a whole new English Parliament, that will be elected through proportional representation. This new parliament will act as an oversight body, and all four nations of the UK will get their own parliament with similar devolved power (UKIP 2017: 59-60). This is a major proposed reform. For participative reforms, UKIP advocates for the possibility for citizens to initiate binding referenda and proposes to have a national referendum every year on the issues that gained the highest numbers of signatures on petitions (idem: 60). This is again a major reform and gives more power to the people. UKIP thus proposes major reforms, that will give more power to the people through proportional representation and referenda and citizens' initiatives.

FvD also proposes some major reforms. They want to introduce binding referendums and citizens' initiatives. Moreover, they want to both directly elect the mayor as the prime minister (Forum voor Democratie 2017: 6-7). Directly electing the prime minister is a major reform, since the minister-president is now traditionally the leader of the biggest party in parliament. Introducing a completely new election on a national level is a major reform. The representative reforms that they propose are aimed at the "party cartel", advocating for digital individual voting in the House of Representatives, so that each parliament member can personally be held accountable. Next to that, they want open applications for minister positions, that are not connected to party membership. This would also drastically change how power-sharing in the Netherlands works and is therefore a major reform.

Lastly, the SP does mention participative reforms, they advocate for the introduction of participative reform and more citizens' initiatives (SP 2017: 9). The federal reform they mention, is aimed at bettering the relationship with the Caribbean municipalities of the Dutch Kingdom and is thus not aimed at making the electoral system more representative.

Overall, almost all populist parties propose participative reforms like referenda and citizen initiatives to give more power to the people. Interestingly, only UKIP emphasizes changing the representative institutions of democracy. This points out that also for populist parties, the institutional context in which they operate may influence their emphasis on different issues. Besides that, it is noticeable that populist parties seem to propose major reforms..

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This thesis started with the perceived crisis of representative democracy and the notion that a crisis of democracy is often countered with more democracy. Furthermore, it started with the claim that today in Western-European polities, institutionally reforming democracy is part of the everyday political agenda. However, there was no systematic and recent research on parties' interest in reforming democracy, something that needs to be established if we are to argue, institutional reform is part of the political agenda. Besides that, if other forms of democracy are being introduced into the system, some actor needs to do this, but who is and with what reforms? This thesis aimed to offer an insight into parties' interest in institutionally reforming democracy.

The first question of this thesis "Do political parties in representative democracies express an interest in institutional reforms?" I think can safely be answered with a "yes". Throughout party manifestos from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, I have found parties mentioning institutions and a desire to reform them or keep them as they are. This yes, however, does not tell us enough. Parties vary widely and might differ in the reforms they propose if they even propose reforms at all. To examine this possible difference, I investigated different party groups. Parties in majoritarian democracies and consensual democracies, parties in government and opposition, dominant parties and challenger parties, green parties and populist parties.

Looking first at the institutional context, I expected that due to times of democratic instability, caused by the perceived crisis of representative democracy, parties would move in a different direction than the system they are in. That would mean that parties in a majoritarian democracy would be interested in inclusive reforms, and parties in a consensual democracy would be interested in exclusive reforms. As became clear from the analysis, parties in the UK, a majoritarian democracy are indeed interested in inclusive representative reforms. Reforming the electoral system, and making it more representative, is an issue that is politicized in the UK. Furthermore, federally reforming the system and giving more powers to the countries within the UK is a topic that also almost all parties take a stance on. While in the Netherlands some parties were indeed interested in exclusive representative reforms, more parties still expressed an interest in inclusive representative reforms.

What became however clear was Dutch parties' interest in reforming democracy with reforms that go beyond representative democracy. Compared to the UK, they expressed a great

interest in participative reforms and especially in direct democracy reforms. A lot of parties took on a position on the topic of referendums and expressed a favourable opinion on citizens' initiatives. In the UK, there were only casual mentions of direct democracy and nothing of participatory deliberative democracy.

To generalize this, in times of a perceived crisis of representative democracy, parties in a majoritarian democracy tend to have an interest in making the electoral system more representative and decentralising power, while parties in a consensual democracy rather reform democracy by introducing forms of direct or participatory deliberative democracy. This difference between institutional contexts seems to be persistent also when classifying other parties together.

For parties in government, it is hard to distinguish a pattern. Governing parties tend to abstain from wanting reform, but in the Netherlands, this also depends on the party. The right-wing party VVD is interested in exclusive reforms, while the left-wing PvdA is not and wants to open the system more with participative reforms. It cannot be concluded that this difference stems from their ideological difference, but this is a possible direction for future research.

The institutional context is of great importance when looking at the groups of dominant and challenger parties. The real differences between dominant and challenger parties only become apparent when they are classified by the institutional system. There is no general pattern of dominant parties or challenger parties expressing an interest in institutional reform, it depends on the institutional setting.

The institutional setting is also of importance when discussing ideological groups, green parties in the Netherlands do advocate for participatory deliberative practices, while the green party in the UK does not. This might be due to the characteristic of the consensual system being more cooperative and consensus-building. Besides that, the populist party, UKIP in the UK devotes more attention to changing the electoral system than populist parties in the Netherlands which focus more on direct democracy.

All in all, I can conclude that party groups differ in their interest for institutional reform and that the party groups who differ most, are parties in a majoritarian democracy versus parties in a consensual democracy. The institutional setting is a great determinator of a party's interest in reforming democracy. The solution of parties in a majoritarian democracy for the crisis of representative democracy is to make the electoral system more representative, while in a consensual democracy, it is to introduce other forms of democracy.

There is reason for some caution when generalizing this finding. While I did research some of the most typical cases of a majoritarian system and a consensual democracy, I only researched one case for each system. One or both cases might be outliers from the actual pattern.

Moreover, I did not do a time comparison, and therefore I cannot confirm whether I did observe a general trend or only a short deviation from another trend. Next to this, there are some other limitations to my study.

Firstly, I did not research how important institutional reform is to parties. I did not consider the size of the party manifestos when interpreting my results. Mentioning a statement about institutional reform in a hundred pages document does not immediately show commitment to the issue while mentioning it in a one-page document does. I also did not investigate other ways parties can express their interest in institutional reforms. I could have, for example, observed mentions of institutional reforms in parliamentary debates, in proposed bills or in speeches of party leaders. Making a statement in a party manifesto does not take a lot of time and effort, while other ways do. Researching how important the issue of institutional reform is for different parties, might lead to different results and trends and is therefore an interesting direction for future research. This is also the only way that it can be confirmed that institutional reform is actually a ‘big’ part of the political agenda.

Secondly, I am a Dutch person, and I coded the party manifestos all by myself. While I tried to be as consistent and transparent with the coding as possible, qualitative research requires interpretation and someone else might interpret the party manifestos differently. For future research, it is thus important to have at least two coders, from preferably different backgrounds.

Lastly, due to the cases and time constraints, I left out some other ways representative democracy can be reformed that might be relevant for other countries. Parties in the Netherlands and the UK did not show an interest in technocratic reforms, but other countries might do. Furthermore, I did not focus on e-democracy reforms, another type of institutional reform that might become more relevant with time. These are types of reforms that future research can focus on to broaden the concept of institutional reform even more.

6. Literature

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7. Appendix I

Coding book:

1. Project description

The aim of this thesis is to offer a description of political parties' interest in institutional reform. This thesis researches if there are differences between party groups and the interest for different reforms (identifying political parties both ideologically and on their position in the political field), what sort of reforms are proposed and if there is an observable difference between institutional systems. To test this, the party manifestos of political parties in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom from the 2017 general elections are being researched.

2. Sampling unit

The textual basis of the of the project are the Party Manifestos of 2017 from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in the Comparative Manifesto Database.

3. Coding unit

A coding unit in this thesis is:

- Whole sentences in paragraphs
- Whole and partial sentences in bullet points
- Whole and partial sentences which are part of enumeration with line breaks

Not a coding unit is:

- Images
- Headings and subheadings

4. Coding procedure

Not every part of the document needs to be coded only the parts that are relevant for this thesis, which will be specified later.

The steps:

- (1) A first round of coding is applied where the encoder reads the whole manifesto and codes every mention of one of the codes.
- (2) When in doubt a memo is added to the coding unit.
- (3) When done, the encoder revises the codes and might add a subcategory, if the coding frame turned out not to be encompassing enough.
- (4) Then another round of coding follows, until there is nothing to add to the coding frame.

- (5) After this the encoder looks at the total list of codes per document and removes all the ones where the coding unit means exactly the same.

Important notes:

- There can only be one code assigned per unit, but main categories or subcategories can be assigned.
- Same ideas are often articulated in the introduction of the manifesto and in introduction of chapters. These repetitions of ideas need to be removed from the final dataset.

Main category 1: Representative reforms

Reforms that relate to the traditional form of representative democracy, to the repartition of power, the selection process of political elites and the models of decision-making and policy implementation (Bedock 2017).

Subcategory 1.1: Electoral reform

This regulates the translation of votes into seats. The dimensions follow the dimensions set out by Kristoff and Leyenaar (2011).

Code category: Proportionality

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- An electoral formula
 - o Majoritarian
 - o Semi-proportional
 - o Proportional
- A district magnitude
- An effective electoral threshold

Code category: Inclusiveness

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- Any *expansion* of the electorate by law
 - Examples:
 - o Lowering of the voting age
 - o Enfranchising foreigners
 - o Enfranchising citizens living abroad

- Voter registration requirements
 - Example:
 - o Change the system to the government automatically registering citizens
- Compulsory voting

Code category: The ballot structure

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- Ballot choice
- Candidate choice
 - o Quota
- Party choice
 - o Requirements for parties to take part in elections
 - o Government funds

Code category: Electoral procedures

All legislation on how and when elections are organised (Kristoff and Leyenaar 2011).

- Electoral management bodies
- The way of voting

Subcategory 1.2. Parliamentary reforms

Code category: Reforms altering the composition of the parliament

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- A certain number of seats in parliament

Code category: The main legislative procedures

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- The way that the legislative procedure in both chambers work

Code category: The number of lower and upper chambers

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- The abolishment of the upper chamber

Code category: The relationship between the executive and the parliament

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- A changing power dynamic

Code category: The duration of the term at the national level

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- A set term for the parliament, that cannot be abolished earlier.

Subcategory 1.3. Federal reform or decentralization reforms

Code all that mentions modifying the balance of powers between the national level and the regions or federal entities in terms of

- Competences
- Fiscal autonomy
- Instruments of control

Main category: Participative reforms

Moves beyond the traditional form of representative democracy and consists of the alternative ways citizens can be democratic involved in the decision-making.

Subcategory 2.1 Direct democracy

Code category: Referendum

Code all that mentions (A preference for)

- The introduction or abolishment of referendums
- The level of referendums
 - o National
 - o Regional
 - o Local
- The impact of referendums
 - o Binding
 - o Advisory
 - o Other

Code category: Citizens' initiative

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- Citizens' initiative
 - o Local
 - o National
- Petitions
- Other initiatives

Code category: Direct election

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- Directly elected public figures

2.2. Participatory deliberative democracy

Code category: Mini-public

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- Citizens assemblies of any kind

Code category: Participatory budgeting

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- Citizens assemblies with a focus on assigning (a part of) the budget

Code category: Citizens' participation

Code all that mentions (a preference for)

- Citizens' participation in general, when it does not fit another category