Is the economy better off than before?

The impact of economic evaluations on electoral outcomes in the Netherlands.

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1. Introduction

"Next Tuesday is Election Day. Next Tuesday all of you will go to the polls, will stand there in the polling place and make a decision. I think when you make that decision, it might be well if you would ask yourself, are you better off than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the stores than it was four years ago? Is there more or less unemployment in the country than there was four years ago?"

Prior to the elections of 1980 for the United States Presidency the candidate of the Republicans, Ronald Reagan, pointed at the audience in a television debate and advised voters to ask themselves in the polling place: are you better of than you were four years ago? Ronald Reagan assumed that voters would make a retrospective judgment and that this retrospective judgment would have an impact on the likelihood of a vote for himself, in the case that the judgment was negative, or the incumbent president Jimmy Carter, in the case that the judgment was positive. Although Ronald Reagan spoke about the effects of Carters policies on the individual life of the voter (after all he advises to ask the question are *you* better off, in stead of are *we,* as in nation, better off) he also pointed at macro-level, by referring to the (un)employment. As will be shown in this thesis a more appropriate question would have been *Are we better off than we were four years ago?* Or more specific *Is the economy better off than before?* For the purpose of this thesis Reagans quote is adapted in order to cover the purpose of this study and used as title.

The government of Prime Minister Mark Rutte resigned in april 2012 after the conclusion that the coalition parties could not agree on the measures to cut the budget deficit. New elections will follow in September 2012. The Netherlands Bureau for

Economic Policy Analysis (in Dutch: Centraal Plan Bureau) concluded in December of 2011 that the Dutch Economy got in a recession again and that the budget deficit increased.[1] It is clear for every voter that the Netherlands is facing, just as most other European countries, profound economic problems. The Rutte cabinet was in charge to solve these economic problems, but has the government policies been successful? This question and the question Reagan posed will probably be posed as well by party leaders prior to the elections for the Dutch parliament in September 2012. Are you better off now than before the Rutte cabinet came in office? Are we as nation better off than before the Rutte cabinet came in office? Is the economy better off than before the Rutte cabinet came in office? It seems crucial to the electoral outcomes, but is that really true?

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of the economy on electoral outcomes. The central research question is *What is the impact of the economy on electoral outcomes in the Netherlands?* In order to answer this research question first the existing literature and theories will be reviewed to attain a complete understanding of the relationship between the economy and electoral outcomes. Subsequently the research question will be modified into a workable question and a research design to answer this question will be made. Finally the research design will be executed to provide an answer on the central question.

1.1 Scientific and societal relevance

The available studies on the relationship between the economy and the vote in the Netherlands are limited. The existing studies will be reviewed in the theory party of this thesis, but the conclusion is, as we will see, that an extensive study, that goes beyond

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[1] http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/12/13/cpb-cijfers-nederland-in-recessie-extra-bezuinigingen-nodig/

the simple bivariate analyses, of the impact of economic evaluations on government support at different elections is almost never been done. This study contributes to a better understanding of economic voting in the Netherlands by offering that study. The results can show to what extent economic evaluations increase the likelihood of government support, and how this impact is related to the impact in other elections and contexts. From a societal perspective, this research makes clear how Dutch voters evaluate the government policies and what kind of effect this can have on the electoral outcomes. It can be useful information for politicians and policy makers prior to the elections in September 2012 and after.

2. Literature Review

In order to answer the proposed research question in the introduction of this study, first the existing literature will be reviewed. The starting point will be the literature on how voters derive at their party choice, to understand how the relationship between the economy and electoral outcomes fits into the model of party choice. Subsequently the literature on economic voting will be reviewed, by discussing the most prominent debates in the field of economic voting. Finally the results of studies on economic voting in the Netherlands will be discussed. Based on this literature review a statistical model will be build to assess the impact of the economy on electoral outcomes in the Netherlands.

2.1 The explanation of Party Choice

Electoral choices are in democratic systems at the center of the political process. The editors of The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior, Dalton and Klingemann (2007),

provide a short overview of the developments in electoral research. According to them early electoral research made the assumption that most citizens are unable to deal with the complexity of politics and that they, therefore, have to rely on shortcuts, such as group cues, heuristics or affective partisan loyalties. The classic work from Lipset and Rokkan (1967) took this approach and focused on social cleavages and stable party-voter alignments. Their idea was that political decisions are guided by enduring social cleavages, which has led to stable party-voter alignments. Back in these years scholars had the supposition that people's electoral behavior was determined by their social background, such as their religion or social class. However, nowadays the alignment between voter and parties is not that solid anymore, so social positions are not a good predictor any more for political positions as they were decades ago. Thomassen (2005) claims that this is caused by changes in the composition of the electorate and the relationship between social position and electoral behavior. He observes a modernization process in the model of party choice.

For a complete understanding of how voters derive at a party choice and what Thomassen means with the modernization process, it is wise to fall back on the Michigan framework, of party choice, often referred to as the funnel of causality. The Michigan framework, named after the scholars from the University of Michigan who designed the framework, is a conceptual framework, designed to explain party choice. This framework relies on the principle that diverse factors has an influence on the party choice, and that these factors are in causal relations with each other. Basically the model suggests that demographic characteristics, such as age, religion or social class, lead to psychological affiliations and biases, such as party identification or ideological orientations, and that these long-term predispositions modifies short-term factors such

as the assessment of parties and candidates in relation to political issues and government performance and that finally these short-term factors determine the party choice. (Campbell et al, 1960) According to Thomassen this model is the main theoretical approach in electoral research. It is hardly impossible to think of any other theoretical approach or set of variables that would not fit in this model. Dalton and Klingemann conclude that social position no longer determines political positions. Long-term predispositions based on social position or partisanship declined and made research on electoral behavior shift to short-term factors such as candidate-image and issue-opinions. (2007: 10-11) This conclusion is also endorsed by Thomassen (2005), who argues that short-term factors as issues, retrospective judgments and political leaders gradually became more powerful as explanatory factors of voting behavior. However, it would be a mistake to present the different approaches of explaining party choice as competing models. If you want to examine the explanatory power of short-term factors you still have to control for preceding variables as social structure and long-term predispositions. These developments point in the direction that judgments about the economy can be of increasingly importance in the decision making process of voters.

According to Rose and McAllister, cited by Andeweg and Irwin (2005: 97), the Netherlands were in the mid-1960s a classic example of a structured system of multi-party competition in which the electorate has been determined along the two dimensions religion and class, each sustaining separate political parties. The shift in explaining electoral behavior as described by Dalton and Klingemann and Thomassen is observable in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has shifted to an open system, with some structure provided by ideological differences, but even polarization along this line is decreasing. The importance of short-term factors in influencing and explaining voting

behavior has increased. The influence of every short term factor may vary from election to election, at least the possibility for short term factors to have influence exist. (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005: 109)

2.2 The economy and the vote

Tufte, one of the most cited scholars in the field of Economic Voting, articulated in 1978 a basic principle: *When you think economics, think elections; when you think elections, think economics.* (1978: 65) In the previous decades many scholars devoted attention to the relationship between the economy and electoral outcomes. According to Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier the flow of scholarly papers on economic voting evolved from a trickle to a torrent of over 300 articles and books. (2000: 183) It is therefore hardly impossible to provide an overview of the existing literature about economic voting. In order to distill the most influential literature, the most easy way is to dive into some literature reviews about economic voting that exist, see for example Monroe (1984), Kiewiet & Rivers (1985), Lewis Beck (1988), Nannestad & Paldam (1994), Anderson (1995), Norpoth (1996), Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2000), Anderson (2007) and Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2007). In order to attain a complete understanding of how the relationship between economics and electoral outcomes works different debates in the field of economic voting will be discussed. This review will start with the theoretic roots of the relationship between the economy and electoral outcomes. Subsequently retrospective voting and the reward punishment model will be discussed, and its counterpart prospective voting. Then attention will be devoted on the target of economic evaluations by elaborating on sociotropic and pocketbook voting. The impact

of the institutional context on economic voting will be reviewed and finally what is known about economic voting in the Netherlands will be handled.

2.3 Theoretic roots of relationship economy and electoral outcomes

The relationship between the economy and electoral outcomes is based on the assumption that the electorate holds the government accountable, which, in turn, is rooted in the idea that a representative government is the only practical way to govern nation-states democratically. Because of the size, scope and complexity of the contemporary nation-states it is impossible for most citizens to participate directly in the administration of the state. Therefore they suspend their control in exchange for a minimum of possibilities of political participation. It was Schumpeter in 1942 who described the design of a modern representational democracy as a political system in which the people "have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them" (1942: 269). Schmitter and Karl endorsed this view on the democracy and defined democracy as "a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens acting indirectly through the competition and operation of their elected representatives" (1991: 76). From these perspectives you can consider elections as an institution to grant citizens the power to delegate their authority to people who have to act on their behalf and therefore act responsibly. This institutional design makes sure that citizens hold the politicians accountable for the government's record.

To what extent citizens are able to fulfill this minimal responsibility in the democratic system is subject of debate for over decades. According to Almond and Verba a well functioning democracy demands responsive, well-informed and interested

citizens. (1963) We are far away from the idea of a competent citizen as sketched by Aristoteles. Back in the sixties, Converse showed us that citizens do not possess clear belief systems and do not approach political issues through an ideological lens. Most citizens do have low-quality opinions, if they have opinions at all. High-quality opinions, defined by Converse (1964), but also by Zaller (1992), as being stable, consistent, informed and connected to abstract principles and values are very rare in the mass public. They have the information nor the motivation and capacity to fulfill their, as what some scholars might describe, democratic duty and judge fairly the governance performance. Clawson and Oxley sketch the landscape of the different views on the need for an informed and participative citizenry. On one hand of the spectrum you will find scholars who argue that without informed citizens a citizen cannot make political decisions and therefore the political system is unable to function well. Other scholars argue that citizens can make reasonable decisions without being knowledgeable, interested or attentive to politics, because they use informational shortcuts, such as cues from persons or groups they trust, in order to function in the democratic system. This is in line with more elitist democratic theorists who take the position that the ignorance of citizens will lead to a flourishing democracy, because an attentive citizenry will cause unnecessary interventions in the political process. (Clawson and Oxley, 2008: 183-184)

2.4 Retrospective voting: the reward and punishment model

Although citizens are far away from the ideal, how do we explain that accountability in politics still exist? Are the choices of citizens actually so unclear as we think they are? Fiorina argues that citizens do not need to know the precise policies in order to see or feel the results of those policies. In order to judge whether the government performed

well, citizens only need to calculate the changes in their own welfare (1981: 5) This argument is based on the theory, introduced by Key, that voters play the rational god of vengeance and reward (1964: 568). Key believes that voters judges governance performance retrospectively and build their choice at judgment day on their past experience and Key sees the electorate in a role of appraiser of past events, past performance and past actions. (1966: 61) Anderson elaborates on this argument and underlines the role of the economy in this retrospective judgment of the government performance: Given citizens' limited willingness and capacity to process complex information about politics, reward and punishment should most easily be detectable with regard to the performance of the economy. Judging economic performance is namely more straightforward for average citizens than other areas of government performance. (Anderson, 1995; Anderson, 2007) The standard model suggested by Key assumes a naïve reward-and-punishment calculus. Kramer examined the model suggested by Key and assumed that the following type is operative: "if the performance of the incumbent party is 'satisfactory' according to some simple standard, the voter votes to retain the incumbent governing party in office to enable it to continue its present policies; while if the incumbent's performance is not 'satisfactory', the voter votes against the incumbent, to give the opposition party a chance to govern" (1971: 134). According to the literature reviews of Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2007, and Anderson (2007), the reward-punishment hypothesis is still the most central hypothesis in the existing literature on economic voting.

One shortcoming on the reward and punishment model is that it does not take into account that various aspects of the government will be judged differently by different people or political groups in the electorate. Parties will also have different economic

priorities, for instance more left-oriented parties are in most cases more concerned about the levels of unemployment, where right-wing parties probably would devote more attention to concerns about increasing levels of inflation. This partisan view on economic voting is of obvious relevance for understanding the relationship between the economy and electoral outcomes. (Listhaug, 2005: 216)

2.5 Asymmetry of economic evaluations

The reward punishment model seems to make sense in order to explain government support by looking at the economic evaluations. Some scholars claim that the effects of bad evaluations are not in balance with the effects of good evaluations. According to these scholars, it seems that the effects of a bad economy on the vote choice last longer than the effects of a good economy. In terms of Key, this means that voters are more likely to act as a god of vengeance, than as a god of reward. This point is raised by the study of Campbell and colleagues in their very oft cited publication The American Voter. An explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the idea that the electorate simply expects that the government deliver good economic results and that only in bad economic times voters pay a lot of attention to the status and handling of the economy. In the literature on economic voting this phenomenon is called 'negativity effect' or the 'asymmetry of economic evaluations.

The evidence for this phenomenon is not unambiguous. The study of Lewis-Beck on economic voting in five major countries showed that "the electorates are even-handed, in their economic judgments, voting for governments that are liked, against governments that are disliked". (1988: 79) The study of Kiewiet (1983) showed more or less the same results. Good economic evaluations had almost the same predictive power

of voting for the incumbent, as negative evaluations had on the predictive power of not voting for the incumbent. The debate on negativity effects is yet undecided.

A different approach on the strength of the relationship between negative (or positive) evaluations on voting for the incumbent (or opposition) leads to a similar conclusion. Evans and Anderson (2006) argue, according to Vorselaars (2009), that in disastrous economy "economic evaluations will be less affected by political determinants (such as party identification) as there are very strong cues from the economy itself." This might be an explanation for the small effect of bad evaluations of the Dutch economy on the loyalty of voters in the Netherlands. The saliency of the issue the economy might have an effect on the degree of economic voting in the Netherlands. This fits well in the research done by Powell and Whitten (1993), Wilkin and colleagues (1997), Anderson (2000) and Nadeau and colleagues (2002), who stated that in institution contexts in which the responsibility of the economy is not clarified voters are less likely to blame or praise the government. The institutional context will be discussed later in this literature review. Both approaches hint in the direction that in bad economic times the economic evaluations have more effect on political considerations than in more prosperous times.

2.6 Prospective voting

However the bulk of the empirical research is based on the reward punishment model, there are also some investigations on prospective effects. It is possible to draw a distinction in the literature between prospective models and retrospective models. Do voters look ahead and choose between two hypothetical future paths, or do they look back and evaluate the trend from past to present? The first option, prospective voting,

finds it origins in research done by Downs back in the fifties of the precious century. Downs makes the argument that "when a man votes, he is helping to select the government which will govern him during the coming election period" (1957: 39). This does not mean that these expectations about the future has nothing to do with evaluations of the past. According to Fiorina, knowledge of the past figures importantly in expectations for the future. Downs argues that when a party is in power, you should take the incumbent present policies, rather than promises. Downs assumes that voters extrapolate future actions from past actions and calculate the consequences of those actions in future environments. (1981: 196) This shows that even Downs is not very confident about the abilities of citizens to predict the future, because he argues that citizens take party's current performance as the best bet for future performance. When you consider the voting model as truly prospective, you expect that a rational voter ought to make a decision based on a comparison of future benefits. Voters should ask themselves which party is the most likely to deliver a prosperous time after the election, regardless of their track record so far. (Norpoth, 1996: 315) Fiorina explored the impact of economic expectations of problems around unemployment and inflation by asking respondents whether they thought that these problems would be better handled by the Democrats or the Republicans. He found that the economic expectations outperformed complex retrospective items. Studies from Kuklinksi and West (1981), Chappell and Keech (1985, 1991), Sanders (1991) and Lockerbie (1992), Lanoue (1994) and Clarke and Stewart (1994) point into the same direction. A study done by Lewis-Beck in 1988 led to the conclusion that prospective personal finances were a statistically economic predictor for vote intention, where prospective personal finances were not. Nadeau and Lewisbeck examined in a pooled analysis the impact of an Economic Future Indes

(EFI), equal to the percentage who think business conditions over the next twelve monts will be "good" minus the percentage who think they will be "bad" and found that this index has about the same impact as the National Business Index, equal to the percentage who said the economy was "better" than before minus the percentage who said it was "worse". (2001: 172-175)

2.7 Sociotropic versus pocketbook voting

Another debate in the field of literature on economic voting has evolved around the question what types of economic conditions voter consider. You can consider the economy as a political issue that really touches the citizens, because it has an effect on their personal environment. It is therefore not strange that the conventional wisdom among politicians and citizens is that citizens vote according to their pocketbook. In the end every citizen has the aim for personal prosperity and if you really want to attain this goal the political decision making process should be guided by considerations about the personal economic conditions. In the literature this phenomenon is called pocketbook voting. The opposite, when a vote is based on considerations about the national economic situation, is called sociotropic voting. In contrary to what one might expect, the hypothesis that a voter is guided by his or her personal economic conditions is not very broad supported in the literature. The research done by Kinder and Kiewiet (1979) showed that people reacted to changes in national economic conditions and government competence in stead of changes in their pocketbooks. Kiewiet (1983) offers a more extensive specification and this study shows that the pocketbook variable consistently fails to reach a conventional level of statistical significance. An explanation for these contra-intuitive results is offered in what is called the 'ethic of self-reliance', Americans

feel responsible for their personal economic well-being, not the government, also in bad times. (Norpoth, 1996: 312) Lewis-Beck (1988) expanded the research done by Kinder and Kiewiet into a comparative study of five European countries and found similar results. This points in the direction that we are not speaking about a phenomenon specifically related to the American culture. Citizens attribute responsibility to the government for the shape of the macro economy. The government has the task to take care for low levels of unemployment, avoid recessions and secure stable prices, not to make individual citizens richer. According to Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2007) sociotropic effects on voting behavior are normally larger than pocketbook effects.

However, this does not mean that no evidence for pocketbook voting is available and that sociotropic voting is endorsed by all scholars. The strongest critique is coming from Kramer, who claims that the evidence for sociotropic voting is artifactual. His argument is that individual perceptions on the economy may be flawed, contaminated and biased. He states that the perception of the national economic condition as a parameter is "in general so badly and unpredicatably biased as to be essentially unrelated to the underlying individual-level behavioral relationship we are trying to estimate" (1983: 93). Furthermore he argues that the distinction between pocketbook and sociotropic perceptions is very difficult to make from a conceptual and methodological point of view. Kramer certainly has a point, but opponents argue that no good alternative is available and that excluding individual perceptions from the analysis would be too rigorous.

2.8 Institutional Context

Another shortcoming of the reward punishment model is that we find very mixed results in cross-national comparisons. While generally most of the cross-national studies were positive, the results were not always as consistent as expected. Lewis-Beck (1988) found in a study on the effects of the economy on the electoral outcome in Britain, Spain, Germany, France and Italy differences in the explanatory power of the economy. He attributed these differences to what he called coalitional complexity. The more parties in the government, the more diffusion of government responsibility for managing the economy, what makes it harder for the voter to blame, and therefore the economic vote is diluted. (Lewis-Beck, 1988: 105) Many other studies point in the direction that the institutional context of a country has a big impact on the effects of the economy on electoral outcomes. The relationship between the economy, more specific economic evaluations and electoral outcomes is based on the assumption that citizens hold the incumbent parties responsible for the government performance. From that perspective the citizens need to know who they can hold responsible for the government performance. Powell and Whitten (1993) elaborated on the coalitional complexity hypothesis, suggested by Lewis-Beck, and designed a study to take the 'clarity of responsibility' for economic outcomes and the 'alternatives for dissent' into account. Their conclusion is that the political context matter, since economic voting can only occur when citizens are able to attribute responsibility to the government. This is a support for the claim made by Lewis-Beck. Wilkin and colleagues (1997) did a world-wide test of economic voting and argue that, because of the lack of clarity, citizens focus on the major incumbent party and hold them accountable for the economic performance. Anderson (2000) elaborated on the research of Powell and Whitten and

argued that voters' ability to express discontent is enhanced when mechanisms of accountability are simple. Nadeau and colleagues (2002) expanded the index of responsibility and find a strong relationship between the clarity of responsibility and the level of economic voting. They showed that in high clarity countries economic evaluations are moderately strong force on intended vote and that in other countries economic evaluations make a much smaller contribution. However, even in those countries voters will, under prospitious conditions credit or blame the government for the economic situations." (Nadeau et al, 2002: 414-415) A general conclusion of the existing literature can be that it is arguable that the conclusion that voters in diffused institutional settings do not know who to blame is too rigid, but it makes the decision-process more complex and therefore the explanatory power of the economy on electoral outcomes decreases. According to the literature by Powell and Whitten (1993), Wilkin and colleagues (1997), Anderson (2000) and Nadeau and colleagues (2002), The Netherlands does not score high on the level of clarity of who is responsible, because of their multiparty system.

2.9 Economic Voting in the Netherlands

Although Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier start with the remark that the papers on economic voting did evolve from a trickle to a torrent of over 300 articles in their literature review on economic voting, they also make the remark that most of these articles are carried out in only a few countries. They conclude that for almost every established democracy at least one paper can be cited, but that for most of the nations besides countries like the United States, France or Britain, the literature on economic voting is represented by one investigator, one approach or one article. (2000: 207) This seems the case for the

Netherlands, because there are limited studies done on economic voting in The Netherlands.

Respondents were asked in the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys of 1986 for the first time to assess the government performance on the economy. Therefore hardly any study on economic voting in the Netherlands exist from before 1986. Pellikaan found in his research on the elections of 1986 evidence for the hypothesis that voters who assessed government performance more negatively are more likely to vote for a opposition party. He also found evidence that the level of satisfaction of the government performance is related to party preference. If the political orientation of the respondent is in line with the political orientation of the government, the respondent is more likely to be satisfied with the government performance. (1987: 117-119) Rodenhuis studied the existence of prospective voting at the same elections and concluded that respondents who intended to vote for a government parties had better expectations of the effects of that cabinet. (1987: 130) Aarts and colleagues more or less drew the same conclusions for the elections of 1989 as Pellikaan and Rodenhuis did for the elections of 1986. Although there is one exception: Aarts and colleagues interpreted the relationship between economic evaluations and intention to vote for a government party the other way around, the government performance on the national economic situation, employment and personal economic situation is better evaluated by supporters of the government parties. More intensive research is needed to shed more light on the relationship between economic evaluations and electoral outcomes.

Irwin and Van Holsteyn (1997) did research on the election results of the Dutch elections in 1994, which showed that the stability of Dutch politics did not longer exist. They showed that short-term factors, such as the state of the economy had a

considerable impact on the electoral outcome. A combination of lower loyalty towards the government parties and a increased size of dissatisfied groups contributed to the poor results of the incumbent government parties, the Dutch labour party PvdA and the Christian-Democrats, CDA. They conclude that voters who feel that the policies had an unfavorable effect on the economic conditions only slightly less likely to remain loyal to the party they used to vote for. (1997: 99-103) Kaashoek studied the same elections and drew a similar conclusion. The unfavorable assessment of the performance of the government parties on the economy certainly played a role in the decision making process of voters. The tendency to vote for a opposition party in stead of a government party was high among every group of voters, but by far the highest among voters who assessed the government performance as unfavorable. It seems that there is a relationship between the retrospective judgment of the voters and their change of party choice. (1995: 204) The impact of the economy on the election results for the elections of 1998 and 2002 are quite in contrary to the findings for the elections in 1994. In 1998 almost everyone seemed to pleased and wished to continue the government, because the governmental performance and the economy and employment had been favorable. In 2002, fully two-third of the electorate felt that the government had a favorable impact on the economy. Yet, the three coalition parties responsible for the solid economic performance lost 43 of their 97 seats in the parliament. Van Holsteyn and Irwin conclude therefore that it was certainly not the economy that was uppermost in the minds of Dutch voters when they casted their vote. (2003: 54-55)

Middendorp and Kolkhuis Tanke did an attempt to integrate previous approaches to economic voting and concluded that about 10 to 15% of the Dutch vote can be considered as determined by economic evaluations, mainly of the perception of

government policies' effect on the National Economic Condition, but at the same time conclude that the major determinants of the vote are still religion, social class and various ideological stands. Furthermore they raised the question to what extent economic evaluations were determined by party identification, but are unable to provide a clear answer on that question. (1990: 548-551) Swank and Eisinga found also support for the conventional responsibility hypothesis that voters reward the government for favorable economic outcomes and punish it for unfavorable economic outcomes. They add to this hypothesis the prediction that right-wing political parties benefit from poor economic growth prospects, in contrary to more left-wing parties. (1999: 211) This conclusion is not been found in other studies on economic voting in the Netherlands. Finally, Listhaug did a cross-country analysis on the relationship between economic evaluations and the support for the incumbent parties. Based on a regression analysis for the elections of 1986, 1989, 1994 and 1998 Listhaug concludes that the effect of evaluations of the governments performance on the general economic situation is strong and in line with the incumbency hypothesis, so economic evaluations matter. (2005: 226-228) The studies of Rodenhuis (1987), Van Holsteyn and Irwin (1997), Middendorp and Kolkhuis Tanke (1990) and Listhaug found evidence that evaluations of the national economic situation had a larger impact on the electoral outcomes than evaluations of the personal economic situation. According to Van Holsteyn and Irwin this corresponds with "that found in other countries that sociotropic voting appears to be of greater importance than pocketbook voting" (1997: 103). Vorselaars (2009) argued in her award winning Master Thesis about the attribution of economic responsibility in The Netherlands that voters do not distinguish between the economic responsibilities of individual coalition partners and that, even without an attribution of economic

responsibility, economic voting is still possible as an implicit attribution of economic responsibility is also possible through economic evaluations. These evaluations are more determined by what the government has done than other factors and therefore economic evaluations can be used as independent variables in economic voting research.

Another country that often is used as a contrary case to the cases of United States and Britain is Denmark. Denmark is used in order to examine economic voting in a small, continental, multiparty democracy. In line with the findings of studies on economic voting in the Netherlands cross-sectional survey research has found substantial economic voting in Denmark as well. Nannestad and Paldam found convincing evidence that economic evaluations lead to electoral outcomes. Striking in this study is that they found strong evidence that pocketbook effects dominated the sociotropic effects. (1995: 57) Borre employed a study in the same time period and found, completely in contrary to the results of Nannestad and Paldam, that there were never significant pocketbook effects, but always significant collective effects. (1997: 359) Although the findings intersect with each other, it is evidence that in multiparty systems where the responsibility for voters might be unclear economic voting also occurs.

3. Applied theory

This study is designed to explain electoral outcomes. More specific as discussed in the literature review the Michigan framework is the most used framework by electoral researchers to explain voting behavior. Scholars can deliberate about what factors

actually need to be taken into account when explaining vote choice, but as Thomassen stated it is hardly impossible to think of any alternative theoretical approach that would not fit into this model. Therefore in this study the Michigan framework will be used as starting point for our research design. In short the framework hypothesizes that the social background of a voter has an influence on the long-term predispositions, that these long-term pre-dispositions modifies the positions of the voter on short-term factors, and that these position in the end determines his voting behavior. The impact of every factor in the framework can differ over time, can differ in different contexts and can be different for every voter of course. According to this framework retrospective judgments of the performance of the government is modified by a voters party identification and ideological orientation, which in turn is influenced by someone's social background. This retrospective judgments will determine the vote choice, at least for one part.

Furthermore, in the literature review is discussed that the social structure of the society is changing. This development has put the relationship between social position and electoral behavior under pressure. A shift over time towards more short term factors as the most predictive factors in the Michigan Framework can be expected, as a result of the decreasing influence of the social structure on electoral behavior. This theoretical argument will also be taken in account when building the research design.

This study has the aim to examine the influence of the economy on electoral outcomes. The reward punishment model provides answers on what the relationship between the economy and electoral outcomes looks like. Basically the argument is that voters, when they have to make a vote decision, evaluate economic conditions and compare these conditions with the conditions at the last elections. They hold the

government accountable for the changes in these conditions. When the conditions are better than before, the voter will be more likely to reward the government with their vote. When they evaluate the economic conditions more negatively, the voter will be more likely to punish the government and vote for the opposition.

The reward punishment model fits very well in the Michigan Framework and is therefore chosen as theoretic approach for this study As is discussed in the literature review scholars have debated the target of economic evaluations, national economic conditions or personal economic conditions. In this study the assessments of both the national economic conditions, as the personal economic conditions will be incorporated in order to shed a little bit more light on this question.

Drawing on the theoretical argument in the literature that suggests that bad news drives out good news, it can be expected that bad evaluations have a bigger impact on electoral behavior than good evaluations. In other words voters tend to punish harder than they would reward. This argument will also be a fundament for our research design.

4. Main Concepts

This study is designed in order to examine the influence of the economy on electoral outcomes. The model to study this relationship is based on the theory that the likelihood for a vote on the incumbent government increases when the evaluations of the economic conditions are more positive. The concept that needs to be explained is therefore the support for the incumbent government at the next elections. Deriving from the reward punishment model the other important concept, the economy, has to be translated into

the assessment of the economy by voters. Economic evaluations are therefore conceptualized as the evaluation of the economic conditions, both national economic conditions and personal economic conditions.

According to the Michigan Framework other factors that might explain government support has to be taken into account as well. For the social structure of the voter gender, age, religion, social class and education will be incorporated. For the long-term predispositions the ideological orientation of the voter and party identification will be incorporated. And for short-term factors a voters faith in the incumbent prime-minister and the sympathy scores for the party leaders of the incumbent government parties will be incorporated.

5. Research Question and Hypotheses

In the introduction to this thesis the main research question is formulated: *What is the impact of national and personal economic conditions on voting behavior?* Based on the literature review this research question needs to become a little bit more specified in order to make a well executable research design. The more specified research question that will be addressed in this study is:

What is the impact of a voter's evaluation of national and personal economic conditions on his likelihood for supporting the government at the elections in The Netherlands?

In order to get a full understanding of the impact of the economy on electoral outcomes in The Netherlands the following hypotheses will be tested. Drawing on the literature it can be expected that voters who perceive the national economic conditions more positive, are more likely to vote for the incumbent government. This expectation is

formulated in a way that we can actually test the relationship between the concept of evaluation of economic conditions and government support.

  H1a: Voters with a positive (negative) evaluation of the government's performance on
  the national economic conditions are more (less) likely to support the government.

Subsequently we test the hypothesis that people who perceive their personal economic conditions more positive, are more likely to vote for the incumbent government.

  H1b: Voters with a positive (negative) evaluation of the government's performance on
  their personal economic conditions are more (less) likely to support the government.

The debate on whether voters base their vote on evaluations of the national economic conditions or on evaluations of their personal economic conditions seems to be decided in the advantage of sociotropic voting. Therefore, it can be expected that the impact of evaluations of national economic conditions is greater than the impact of evaluations of personal economic conditions. This expectation is formulated in hypothesis 2:

  H2: The impact of a positive evaluation of the government's performance on national
  economic conditions on the likelihood for government support is greater than the
  impact of a positive evaluation of the government performance on personal economic
  conditions on the likelihood for government support.

According to the literature a shift towards a bigger role for short-term factors in the decision making process for voters should be observable. Thus, it can be expected that over time the impact of the evaluations of economic conditions on the likelihood for government support increases. This expectation is formulated in hypothesis 3:

  H3: The impact of a positive evaluation of the government's performance on national
  (personal) economic conditions on the likelihood for government support increases
  over time.

The theoretical argument that the impact of negative evaluations will be greater on the electoral outcomes than positive evaluations have to lead to an increase in the impact of the evaluations on government support when the economic conditions in general will be assessed as negative. This expectation is formulated in hypothesis 4:

H4: The impact of a positive evaluation of the government's performance on national (personal) economic conditions on the likelihood for government support increases when in general the evaluations of the government's performance are more negative.

6. Data and Case Selection

This research is designed to provide an answer on the question what the impact is of national and personal economic conditions on voting behavior in the Netherlands. To provide an answer on this question a cross-sectional design is made, and the existing data of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys will be used. The pooled data of the elections of 1971 to 2006 provide the opportunity to look behind the dynamics of a single election and therefore overcome the differences that occur when you compare the results of previous studies on economic voting. The research aims to investigate how citizens in the Netherlands make their vote choice, so the units of analysis are individuals and the case selection will be a random selection of Dutch adult citizens.

Under the guidance of an inter-university workgroup in the last four decades every national parliamentary election was followed by a large scale, nationwide electoral research project. These *Dutch National Election Studies* are designed to enable researchers to do an in-depth investigation of the backgrounds of party choice and changes thereof. (Todosijevic et al, 2010) Because the studies were held after every election, electoral behavior and political orientations in the Netherlands can be studied

in a systematic way from the early 1970s up to the national election of 2006. The questions within the studies are divided in three categories based on their origins; administrative and contextual variables, socio-demographical variables such as religion and social class and more specific survey variables, such as long term dispositions as party identification or ideological orientation and more short term factors as political and social issues or the evaluation of government performance.

In this study we will use the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies of 1986, 1989, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2003 and 2006, for one simple reason. In the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies of 1986 respondents were asked for the first time after their perceptions of the national economic situation and their personal economic situation. This variable is crucial for our research, so we will not make use of the DPES prior to 1986. Furthermore, in 2002 the first Balkenende Cabinet resigned after only only 85 days and new elections were announced. Because these elections came so soon after the elections in May 2002 the organizers of the DPES decided to collect only data after the elections of 2003, due to practical problems. All respondents that participated in the post-election wave of 2002 were again approached for the post-election wave of 2003. As we will see, the absence of a pre-election wave in 2003 makes it impossible to do a same analysis of the impact of economic perceptions on voting behavior for the election of 2003 as we will do for the other elections in the time period 1986-2006. The number of respondents for the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys used in this research design are at least 1271 (in the case of the elections of 2003) and up to 2623 (in the case of the elections of 2006)

7. Operationalization and Measurement

7.1 Dependent Variable: Government Support

The aim of this research is to examine the impact of evaluations of national and personal economic conditions on voting behavior of citizens. The dependent variable that will be explained is government support, because we expect that voters with more positive evaluations are more likely to support the government. In line with most existing approaches to economic voting this is operationalized in a dichotomy, the voter supports (in the form of a vote) the government parties (coded as 1) or supports (in the form of a vote) the opposition parties (coded as 0). The focus on the dichotomy seems to make sense because if economic conditions in any way have an impact on voting, according to the literature this must involve an assessment of who is to be praised or blamed for the state of the economy. (Anderson, 1995)

Van der Brug and colleagues (2007) make an important claim that in countries with a multi-party system where multiple parties compete for the vote, the dichotomy government-opposition does not adequately represent the choices voters make (2007: 8-15). Although Van der Brug and colleagues raise a very valid point, three arguments made that is chosen for the ordinary distinction between support (in the form of a vote) for government parties or opposition parties. First, the model that is designed to explain government support is based on the theory that citizens reward the government with a vote or punish them with a vote for an alternative (opposition) party. Although handling the variety of possible choices at the elections as a choice for government parties or opposition parties, might be a simplified representation of the reality, it is the most valid operationalization of the reward punishment theory in to a research design. Furthermore

the reservations of Van der Brug and colleagues to handle the vote choice in a multiparty system as a dichotomy government versus opposition support might be a little bit exaggerated. As is showed in the literature review, the results of studies on the effect of institutional complexity on economic voting showed that, when controlled for many other variables, even in multi party systems economic voting takes place. Vorselaars (2009) contributed to the existing literature with her Master Thesis on attributing responsibility to government parties in the Dutch case and concluded that voters are able to attribute responsibility to government parties and make distinctions between the responsibilities of individual coalition parties. All in all these studies suggest that simplifying the multi party context is valid. And the final argument for sticking to the ordinary dichotomy is that it makes it possible to reflect on the results of this study by comparing the results with previous studies on the impact of economic evaluations on government support. A new, little used way of conceiving the dependent variable would have made this problematic.

In the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys respondents are asked in the post election wave after their vote choice. This variable will be handled in the way that a vote for a party that was in office the previous years to the election will be seen support for the government, and a vote for a party that acted in the opposition will be seen as support for the opposition. Furthermore a part of the electorate decided to not cast their vote at the elections. It is arguable to handle these non-voters as support for the opposition, because these voters did decide to refrain from supporting the government. However, for this study these non-voters will be handled as missing cases, because sufficient understanding of the considerations of these non-voters is unavailable. In

order to conceive the dependent variable the formation of the incumbent governments prior to elections need to take in account:

Table 1. Dutch Cabinets (since 1982)

Elections	Cabinet	Prime Minister	Parties (# seats in Parliament)		
1982	Lubbers I	Ruud Lubbers (CDA)	CDA (45)	VVD (36)	
1986	Lubbers II	Ruud Lubbers (CDA)	CDA (54)	VVD (27)	
1989	Lubbers III	Ruud Lubbers (CDA)	CDA (54)	PvdA (49)	
1994	Kok I (Purple I)	Wim Kok (PvdA)	PvdA (37)	VVD (31)	D66 (24)
1998	Kok II (Purple II)	Wim Kok (PvdA)	PvdA (45)	VVD (38)	D66 (14)
2002	Balkenende I	Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA)	CDA (43)	LPF (26)	VVD (24)
2003	Balkenende II	Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA)	CDA (44)	VVD (28)	D66 (6)
	Balkenende III*	Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA)	CDA (44)	VVD (28)	
2006	Balkenende IV	Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA)	CDA (41)	PvdA (33)	ChristianUnion (6)

Source: Parliamentary Documentation Centre
* = Demisionary Minority Cabinet after the subsequent resignation of Balkenende II, in office until the next elections.

An example: Every respondent in the election survey for 1986 that voted for either the ChristianDemocrats (CDA) or the Liberals (VVD) will be coded as support for the government, because the CDA and the VVD were in a government coalition together from 1982 to 1986, prior to the elections. For the election in 2002 a vote for the PvdA, the VVD or D66 will be handled as government support and any other vote as support for opposition parties. The sample distribution of the recoded variable government support is as followed:

Table 2. Sample distribution vote for government or opposition (1986-2006)

	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006
	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq
Government Parties	613	646	620	1029	567	562	957
	48,9%	46,6%	44,5%	63,1%	37,4%	46,6%	43,1%
Opposition Parties	641	740	773	601	950	1261	794
	51,1%	53,4%	55,5%	36,9%	62,6%	53,4%	56,9%
Missing	375	368	419	471	390	66	405
N (without missing cases)	1254	1386	1393	1630	1517	1205	2218

We can see that, except for the elections in 1998, at every election a majority of the respondents voted for an opposition party over a government party. In 2002 62,6% of the respondents voted for an opposition party. This is reflected in the election result of 2002, where the three parties in the previous government lost together a historically amount of 41 of their 97 seats in the Parliament.

7.2   Independent Variable: Economic Evaluations

The most important independent variable in this study is the economic evaluation of the individual. Target is the object of evaluation, both the evaluation of the government's performance on the personal economic situation of the voter, as the performance of the government on the national economic situation. Respondents in the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys are asked after their national and personal economic conditions, by answering the question *do you think that the economic situation has been influenced favorably, unfavorably or neither by the government policies?* and *do you think your personal financial situation has been influenced favorably, unfavorably or neither by the government policies?* Although not discussed in the literature review, note that the investigators of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys explicitly refer to government policies in the question. Scholars have not agreed yet on the question whether government policies actually matter, or just the outcomes of policies. Drawing on the literature it would be expected that individuals with better evaluations of their personal economic situation and the national economic situation are more likely to support the government. It applies the key argument of Fiorina, who came up with the

retrospective economic voter hypothesis of "an electorate that treats elections … as referenda on the incumbent administration's handling of the economy" (1981: 26). Two other relevant questions are asked in the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys and will be incorporated in this study as well. Next to the evaluation of the respondent on the effect of the government's performance on the national and personal economic situations, respondents are asked on their evaluation of the effect on the employment. The question in the survey is: *do you think that employment in the Netherlands has been influenced favorably, unfavorably, or neither by the government policies?* In the analysis this question will be handled as an indicator for sociotropic voting, because factors as stable prices and employment belong to the macro-economy and therefore to sociotropic voting.

Finally respondents are asked how satisfied they are in general with what the government has done during the period prior to the elections. At first sight, this question seems not to ask respondents about their evaluation of economic policies. However, the fact that this question is asked directly after the three questions on national economic situation, employment and personal economic situation, and the fact that social-economic policy is often the most important part of government policy, it is likely that respondents will think of economic aspects while answering this question. (Pellikaan, 1987: 116)

The questions on the evaluations of the government's performance on the national economic situation, employment and personal economic situation were not asked in the post election wave of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Survey of 2003. In analyzing the elections of 2003 only the general satisfaction can be taken as predictor for government support. However, one of the arguments for treating this question as a

measure for economic evaluations is invalid, because no questions about economic performance were asked prior to this question. This has to be considered when interpreting the analyses of the election of 2003.

Table 3a. Sample Distribution Effect Government on Economic Situation (1986-2006)

	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006
	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq
Unfavorably (1)	246	192	586	162	205		552
	16,7%	11,4%	36,2%	8,0%	11,0%		21,7%
The same (2)	381	568	782	645	674		844
	25,9%	33,6%	48,3%	32,0%	36,2%		33,2%
Favorably (3)	842	929	252	1209	985		1145
	57,3%	55,0%	15,6%	60,0%	52,8%		45,1%
Mean	2,41	2,44	1,79	2,52	2,42		2,23
Standard Deviation	0,76	0,69	0,69	0,64	0,68		0,78
N	1469	1689	1620	2016	1864		2541

Source: DPES 1986 - 2006

Table 3b. Sample Distribution Effect Government on Employment (1986-2006)

	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006
	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq
Unfavorably (1)	350	484	976	241	186		524
	23,0%	28,8%	57,3%	11,8%	10,0%		21,0%
The same (2)	572	623	575	500	422		850
	37,6%	37,1%	33,8%	24,5%	22,6%		34,1%
Favorably (3)	600	572	151	1303	1259		1120
	39,4%	34,1%	8,9%	63,7%	67,4%		44,9%
Mean	2,16	2,05	1,52	2,52	2,57		2,24
Standard Deviation	0,77	0,79	0,65	0,70	0,67		0,78
N	1522	1679	1702	2044	1867		2494

Source: DPES 1986 - 2006

Table 3c. Sample Distribution Effect Government on Respondent's Finances (1986-2006)

	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006
	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq
Unfavorably (1)	623	525	664	479	359		1180
	39,9%	30,5%	38,3%	23,2%	19,1%		46,3%
The same (2)	748	826	832	1031	857		1101
	47,9%	47,9%	48,0%	50,0%	45,7%		43,2%
Favorably (3)	189	372	236	552	660		270
	12,1%	21,6%	13,6%	26,8%	35,2%		10,6%
Mean	1,72	1,91	1,75	2,04	2,16		1,64

Standard Deviation	0,67	0,71	0,68	0,71	0,72	0,66
N	1560	1723	1732	2062	1876	2551

Source: DPES 1986 - 2006

Table 3d. Sample Distribution General Satisfaction with Government (1986-2006)							
	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006
	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq
Very Unsatisfied (1)	99	111	72	29	59	156	156
	6,2%	6,4%	4,1%	1,4%	3,1%	12,6%	6,0%
Dissatisfied (2)	360	285	489	240	366	492	615
	22,6%	16,4%	27,6%	11,6%	19,3%	39,6%	23,7%
Satisfied nor unsatisfied (3)	488	722	883	864	818	424	981
	30,6%	41,6%	49,9%	41,8%	43,1%	34,1%	37,9%
Satisfied (4)	599	566	324	912	637	162	818
	37,6%	32,6%	18,3%	44,1%	33,6%	13,0%	31,6%
Very satisfied (5)	47	53	2	22	16	8	21
	3,0%	3,1%	0,1%	1,1%	0,8%	0,6%	0,8%
Mean	3,08	3,10	2,83	3,32	3,10	2,50	2,97
Standard Deviation	0,98	0,93	0,77	0,74	0,82	0,90	0,91
N	1593	1737	1770	2067	1896	1242	2591

Source: DPES 1986 - 2006

The coding and distribution of the four variables are showed in the above tables. A few observations can be made. The first observation is that at the elections of 1994 the governments performance on all three targets is evaluated the most negative in relation to evaluations at other elections. The second observation is that the respondents are quite positive about the effect of the government on the national economic condition. Except for the elections of 1994, at all other elections a big majority evaluated the effect as favorably or at least the same. A third observation is that the effect on the national economic situation is evaluated more positively than the effect on the personal economic condition. A fourth observation will be that at most elections more respondents evaluated the effect of the government on their personal economic situation as unfavorably than favorably. And a final observation is that for the most elections a

clear trend is observable for every question. The means for the elections of 1994 were all more negative than they were in 1989. In 1998 all aspects were evaluated more positively and in 2006 all aspects were evaluated more negatively than in 2002 or 2003. In 1989 only the effect on employment was evaluated more negative and in 2002 the effects on the national economic situation and general satisfaction were evaluated more negative, while the effect on employment and personal economic situation were evaluated more positive, but the differences are small. All in all it is observable that in relation to the scores of the other elections, the government is judged more negatively at the elections of 1994, 2006 and 1986 and more positively at the elections of 1998 and 2002.

This rises the question to what extent these four variables are correlated with each other, in other words to what extent they measure the same phenomenon.

Table 4. Correlations Economic Evaluations		National Economic Situation	Employment	Personal Economic Situation	General Satisfaction
National Economic Situation	Pearson's R	1	,538	,265	,504
	Significance		,000	,000	,000
	N	11199	10885	11003	11114
Employment	Pearson's R	,538	1	,275	,430
	Significance	,000		,000	,000
	N	10885	11308	11094	11200
Personal Economic Situation	Pearson's R	,265	,275	1	,334
	Significance	,000	,000		,000
	N	11003	11094	11504	11377
General Satisfaction	Pearson's R	,504	,430	,334	1
	Significance	,000	,000	,000	
	N	11114	11200	11377	12896

It is observed that all four variables have a certain degree of coherence. The assumption that the question about general satisfaction with the government would be related to social-economic policies is hereby confirmed, because it is significantly correlated to the three other questions. Moreover, it is observed that the personal economic situation is significantly correlated to the other three questions, but the degree of coherence is

smaller than the coherence of the other three variables together. This can be seen as confirmation of the choice to distinct between national and personal economic situations. The relationships between the different four variables are not that high that multicollinearity exists.

7.3   Control Variables

This study relies on the Michigan Framework to explain vote choice. An important conclusion of Thomassen (2005) is that, although short-term factors gradually become more powerful as explanatory factors of voting behavior, you need to control for the preceding sets of variables. In order to assess the impact of retrospective judgments of the economy on government support it is needed to control for other important factors in the model. In line with the Michigan framework and existing literature on the predictors for vote choice in the Netherlands the next variables will be incorporated in the model to be able to make a valid judgment on the explanatory power of economic evaluations.

7.3.1 Socio-demographic features

According to Campbell and colleagues the social background of voters will affect the voting behavior. The existing studies on explaining government support in the Netherlands do not provide an unambiguous answer how socio-demographic features affect the likelihood for a vote on one of the government parties. Therefore the study done by Listhaug (2005) on government support will be taken as example. Furthermore the socio-demographic features will be coded on the basis of conventional wisdom. The following socio-demographic features will be incorporated:

Age. Based on the study by Listhaug, it can be expected that elderly people are more intended to vote for a government party than young people. All respondents are divided in 13 categories, ranging from 17 to 20 years (codes as 1), 20 to 25 years (coded as 2) to 70 to 75 (codes as 12) and 76 and higher ages (coded as 13).

Sex. Based on the study by Listhaug, it can be expected that if a voter is male he is more likely to vote for a government party. The female gender is codes as 0, the male gender is coded as 1.

Social Class. Based on the study by Listhaug, it can be expected that when voters assign themselves to a higher social class they are more likely to vote for a government party. Respondents could assign themselves to five different categories: working class (coded as 1), upper working class, middle class, upper middle class and upper class (coded as 5).

Religion. Based on the study by Listhaug, it can be expected that people who often attend a religious service are more likely to vote for a government party. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they attend a religious service, ranging from (almost) never (coded as 1) to at least once a week (coded as 5).

Education. It can be expected that a higher educated respondent is more likely to support the government. Respondents were asked to indicate what the highest education level is they completed, ranging from elementary education (coded as 1) to higher vocational, or university level (coded as 5).

7.3.2 Long-term predispositions: Party Identification

In the Michigan framework party identification has the function of ensuring people's lasting attachment to a political party. It is the long-term, affective, psychological

identification with one's preferred party. Problematic with using party identification as an explanatory factor of voting behavior is that it seems that party identification and party choice tend to coincide and change in tandem. In a small study to examine the coincidence of party identification and party choice Berglund and colleagues (2005: 124) found that six in seven people vote for the party that they identify with. This makes party identification very problematic as a predictor for vote choice, because it seems that they are too related to each other. However, adding a strength or intensity component to party identification is not controversial among scholars. "There seems to be a general agreement that a variable measuring degree of party attachment is quite useful, no matter how we interpret party identification." (Holmberg, 1994: 101)

In the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys respondents are asked if they feel adherent to a political party, and if so to which party they feel adherent. Furthermore respondents are asked if they feel attracted to a political party, and if so to which party they feel attracted. These questions can be combined into one scale, ranging from neither adherent nor attracted to a political party (coded as 0), to very convinced adherent to a political party (coded as 7). In order to use party identification as an indicator for government support, in this study this scale is used in combination with the direction of the scale. For respondents that answered that their party adherence is directed at one of the opposition parties, the scale is inverted to a scale ranging from very convinced adherent to a opposition party (coded as -7), to no adherent to a opposition party, but attracted to a opposition party (coded as -2). Respondents who answered that their party adherence is directed at one of the government parties kept their score on the already existing scale. In this way a variable for party identification is

developed ranging from very convinced adherent to a opposition party (coded as -7) to very convinced adherent to a government party (coded as 7).

7.3.3 Long-term predispositions: Ideological Orientation

According Van der Eijk en colleagues "the left-right continuum has traditionally been looked upon in electoral research as one of the most important dimensions to describe voters' substantive political orientations. In combination with their perceptions of where the political parties are located on the same dimension, these orientations allow an instrumental mode of electoral choice." (2005: 167) They describe that left-right orientations of citizens are one of the most important factors that determine vote choice. The left-right orientation also structures other political orientations, such as considerations about political issues, government performance and political leaders. Van der Eijk and colleagues conclude that in the Netherlands a strong association exist between the left-right position and party choice, and that this association remains observable, even though the strength can vary over time.

Therefore, it can be expected that a voters position on the left-right continuum has explanatory power for the vote choice, based on the idea that the position of the party in the same continuum should match. The distance between the self-placement of the voter and the position of the party can be an indicator of how likely it is that a voter will cast his vote for that party. This idea is neglected by Listhaug (2005) in her study on the vote for the incumbent parties. She does not work with left-right distance, but takes only the position of the respondent on the left-right dimension. This does not make sense because it implies that a higher score on the left-right dimension (ergo a more right orientation) would increase the likelihood of voting on an incumbent party.

Problematic in using left-right distance as a predictor for government support is that you need to combine the positions of all government parties in order to measure the distance of the self-placement with the position of the government in the left-right continuum. In this study the average score of the positions of the coalition parties will be used as the position of the government in the left-right continuum, with the side note that this is quite artificial and that it might not be a correct reflection of the true position of the government. It might not be the correct reflection, but a better alternative is unavailable.

The distance between self-placement and the average score of the government parties will be made absolute, because it does not matter in what direction the distance between the positions appear. Furthermore the distance will be inverted, in order to make sure that the variable aligns with direction in which the dependent variable is coded and that a higher score reflects an agreement between the self-placement and the placement of the government.

For example if a respondent at the elections of 1986 placed himself on a scale from 0 to 10 at number 3, and the coalition parties the CDA and VVD respectively at number 6 and 8, the distance will be coded as 6 (average score for government parties is 7, distance between self-placement and average is 4, inverted to number 6). If a respondent at the elections of 2002 placed himself at 8 and the coalition parties the PvdA, VVD and D66 respectively an 3, an 8 and an 5, the distance will be coded as 7,33 (distance between self-placement and government average is -2,67, this will be made absolute to 2,67 and subsequently inverted to 7,33). All in all a scale is developed ranging from 0 (what reflects a very big distance between the self-placement and the

government placement) to 10 (what reflects a total agreement between the self-placement and the government placement).

7.3.3 Short-term factors: Sympathy score Party Leaders

Many scholars who studied the Dutch elections observed a relationship between de popularity of the candidate of a party and its success. The support for the government can therefore possibly be explained by the sympathy an individual has for the party leaders of the government parties. It can be expected that a respondent with a higher level of sympathy is more likely to vote for the government. Every respondent is asked to indicate how sympathetic they find the politicians on a scale of 0 (very unsympathetic) to 10 (very sympathetic). Because the dependent variable in this study is the support for the previous government as a whole the mean of the sympathy scores of the party leaders of the government parties will be taken as measure for the sympathy score for the party leaders. This can be problematic, because it is not obvious that an individual has the same sympathy feelings for every party leader in the government, but no concrete alternative is available.

7.3.5 Short-term factors: Faith in Prime Minister

In the literature there is often referred to the so called Prime Minister bonus, what refers to the benefit of the party of the Prime Minister from the status and achievements of the previous Prime Minister. This can influence the electoral outcomes and can therefore explain the electoral choices of citizens, and therefore needs to be incorporated as short-term factor in the statistical model. Respondents in the Dutch Parliamentary Election

Surveys are asked the question *How much faith do you have in <previous Prime Minister> as Prime Minister?* Respondents can answer this question on a scale from 1 (very much faith) to 7 (no faith at all). For this research design the respondents faith in the Prime Minister or his successor in his own party will be used as variable in explaining voting for the government or opposition. For example in 1989 Ruud Lubbers was the Prime Minister in office and the candidate of the CDA in the elections, so respondents were asked to indicate their faith in Ruud Lubbers as Prime Minister. In 1994 Ruud Lubbers was succeeded by Elco Brinkman as party leader, so respondents were asked to indicate their faith in Elco Brinkman as Prime Minister.

We expect that respondents with more faith in the Prime Minister are more likely to vote for the government, so the variable is recoded in order to align it with the direction of the dependent variable (very much faith is coded as 7, no faith at all is codes as 1).

8. Empirical Results

Before diving into the regression analyes it is advisable to take a look at how the main variables, government support and the economic evaluations, are related to each other.

Table 5a. Effect government policy on National Economic Situation							
		1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2006
Unfavorably	Voted for Opposition	160	128	290	67	134	364
		87,0%	87,1%	67,3%	60,4%	80,7%	82,4%
	Voted for Government	24	19	141	44	32	78
		13,0%	12,9%	32,7%	39,6%	19,3%	17,6%
Favorably nor Unfavorably	Voted for Opposition	213	287	349	207	360	481
		77,5%	68,2%	54,5%	42,9%	68,8%	68,6%
	Voted for Government	62	134	291	276	163	220
		22,5%	31,8%	45,5%	57,1%	31,2%	31,4%
Favorably	Voted for Opposition	204	303	75	305	433	381
		29,5%	38,7%	36,2%	30,7%	54,2%	37,1%
	Voted for Government	487	480	132	688	366	646
		70,5%	61,3%	63,8%	69,3%	45,8%	62,9%

Table 5b. Effect government policy on Employment

		1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2006
Unfavorably	Voted for Opposition	221	302	468	73	117	339
		82,2%	82,5%	63,8%	44,5%	79,1%	81,7%
	Voted for Government	48	64	266	91	31	76
		17,8%	17,5%	36,2%	55,5%	20,9%	18,3%
Favorably nor Unfavorably	Voted for Opposition	277	262	230	169	237	474
		64,9%	52,0%	49,4%	43,7%	73,4%	64,5%
	Voted for Government	150	242	236	218	86	261
		35,1%	48,0%	50,6%	56,3%	26,6%	35,5%
Favorably	Voted for Opposition	105	154	46	339	577	378
		21,7%	33,3%	38,3%	32,3%	56,7%	38,7%
	Voted for Government	379	309	74	709	441	598
		78,3%	66,7%	61,7%	67,7%	43,3%	61,3%

Table 5c. Effect government policy on Respondents Finances

		1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2006
Unfavorably	Voted for Opposition	295	291	317	170	206	681
		63,2%	69,0%	63,3%	45,9%	72,5%	69,1%
	Voted for Government	172	131	184	200	78	304
		36,8%	31,0%	36,7%	54,1%	27,5%	30,9%
Favorably nor Unfavorably	Voted for Opposition	272	333	349	286	452	453
		46,8%	51,9%	52,4%	35,8%	66,3%	47,6%
	Voted for Government	309	309	317	513	230	499
		53,2%	48,1%	47,6%	64,2%	33,7%	52,4%
Favorably	Voted for Opposition	48	108	81	139	281	92
		31,6%	35,8%	46,3%	31,7%	53,2%	40,0%
	Voted for Government	104	194	94	299	247	138
		68,4%	64,2%	53,7%	68,3%	46,8%	60,0%

Table 5d. Effect government policy on General Satisfaction

		1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006
Very unsatisfied	Voted for Opposition	72	78	41	15	44	110	120
		94,7%	92,9%	80,4%	75,0%	91,7%	75,9%	96,8%
	Voted for Government	4	6	10	5	4	35	4
		5,3%	7,1%	19,6%	25,0%	8,3%	24,1%	3,2%
Dissatisfied	Voted for Opposition	246	207	267	99	247	308	438
		90,4%	93,2%	71,2%	56,3%	86,1%	66,5%	82,6%
	Voted for Government	26	15	108	77	40	155	92
		9,6%	6,8%	28,8%	43,8%	13,9%	33,5%	17,4%
Satisfied nor Unsatisfied	Voted for Opposition	214	343	361	285	409	169	476
		60,1%	61,3%	52,8%	43,8%	63,1%	41,6%	58,4%

	Voted for Government	142	217	323	365	239	237	339
		39,9%	38,8%	47,2%	56,2%	36,9%	58,4%	41,6%
Satisfied	Voted for Opposition	97	105	94	195	238	37	216
		19,7%	22,4%	35,9%	25,9%	46,6%	23,6%	30,1%
	Voted for Government	396	364	168	557	273	120	501
		80,3%	77,6%	64,1%	74,1%	53,4%	76,4%	69,9%
Very satisfied	Voted for Opposition	2	3	0	1	6	1	3
		5,0%	6,8%	0,0%	5,9%	40,0%	12,5%	15,0%
	Voted for Government	38	41	1	16	9	7	17
		95,0%	93,2%	100,0%	94,1%	60,0%	87,5%	85,0%

Source: DPES 1986 - 2006

A simple bivariate table points in the direction that the claim that more positive evaluations increases the likelihood for government support makes sense, also in the Dutch case and for election after election. These bivariate tables make it possible to compare the ratio between government supporters and opposition supporters for different evaluations on the four economic variables.

It can be observed that for every variable for every election the ratio between government and opposition supporters shift from a majority of opposition supporters to a majority of government supporters when the evaluations become more positively. For example, 87,0% of the respondents who evaluated the effect of the government on the national economic situation in 1986 as unfavorably voted for the opposition, while only 29,5% of the respondents who evaluated the effect favorably voted for the opposition. The only exception for this observation is the election of 2002, where in almost every group of respondents a majority of opposition supports exist. This can be explained by huge loss of support the government parties faced in these elections. However ratio's for these elections move in the same direction as they do at other elections. Based on these tables you can state that a more positive evaluation on all four variables is related to a higher likelihood of voting for the government.

Although, these bivariate tables does not provide any information about the strength and direction of these relationship. It points to the questions that need to answered: How important are these evaluations for the voting behavior of individuals, once other variables are controlled for? A regression analysis will be performed to answer this question.

8.1 Regression Analyses

For every election a direct logistic regression is performed in on order to assess the impact of economic evaluations on the likelihood that the respondent will support the government. The regression analyses contain two parts. In the first model only the economic evaluations are assessed, in the full model all control variables are incorporated as well. For every election all variables are checked on multicollinearity and none of the variables demonstrated a problematic high correlation with the dependent variable or one of the other independent or control variables. The full tables of the Logistic Regression Analyses can be found in the Appendix to this thesis.

8.1.1 The elections of 1986

Direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of economic evaluations on the likelihood that a respondent would vote for a government party at the elections of 1986. The model containing only the economic evaluations was statistically significant, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who voted for the government and voters who voted for the opposition. The model as a whole explained between the 29,9% and 41,2% of the variance in government support. As shown only the effect of government policies on employment and the general satisfaction with the

government made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model. The strongest predictor of government support was general satisfaction, recording an odds ratio of 3.396, indicating that respondents who reported that they were satisfied with the government were over 3 times more likely to vote for the government.

The full model was statistically significant as well and explained as a whole between 58,3% and 80,5% of the variance. The effect of the government on employment remained making a unique statistically significant contribution, with an odds ratio of 2.030. Furthermore party adherence, left-right distance, sympathy score for party leaders of the government parties and the faith in the prime minister made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, while controlling for other factors that might have influenced the government support.

8.1.2 The elections of 1989

Direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of economic evaluations on the likelihood that a respondent would vote for a government party at the elections of 1989. The model containing only the economic evaluations was statistically significant, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who voted for the government and voters who voted for the opposition. The model as a whole explained between the 25,5% and 34,6% of the variance in government support. As shown the effect of government policies on the national economic situation and the personal economic situation, as well as the general satisfaction with the government made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model. The strongest predictor of government support was general satisfaction, recording an odds ratio of 3.996, indicating that respondents who reported that they were satisfied with the government were almost 4 times more likely to vote for the government.

The full model was statistically significant as well and explained as a whole between 56,0% and 76,0% of the variance. When controlling for other factors that might influence government support, only the general satisfaction with the government remained statistically significant, with an odds ratio of 2.097. Furthermore gender, party adherence, left-right distance and the faith in the prime minister made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, while controlling for other factors that might have influenced the government support.

8.1.3 The elections of 1994

Direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of economic evaluations on the likelihood that a respondent would vote for a government party at the elections of 1994. The model containing only the economic evaluations was statistically significant, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who voted for the government and voters who voted for the opposition. The model as a whole explained between the 9,6% and 12,8% of the variance in government support. As shown the effect of government policies on the national economic situation and the general satisfaction with the government made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model. The strongest predictor of government support was general satisfaction, recording an odds ratio of 1,540, indicating that respondents who reported that they were satisfied with the government were about 1,5 times more likely to vote for the government.

The full model was statistically significant as well and explained as a whole between 44,8% and 59,9% of the variance. When controlling for other factors that might influence government support, none of the economic evaluations remained statistically

significant. This is in contrary to age, gender, party adherence, left-right distance, sympathy for the party leaders of the government parties and the faith in the prime minister, because they all made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, while controlling for other factors that might have influenced the government support. Note that these findings are quite in contrary to the findings of Van Holsteyn and Irwin (1997) and Kaashoek (1995). They found that evidence that a combination of negative evaluations and a decreasing level of party attachment accounted for the big loss of the government parties.

8.1.4 The elections of 1998

Direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of economic evaluations on the likelihood that a respondent would vote for a government party at the elections of 1998. The model containing only the economic evaluations was statistically significant, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who voted for the government and voters who voted for the opposition. The model as a whole explained between the 4,1% and 5,4% of the variance in government support. As shown the effect of government policies on the national economic situation and the general satisfaction with the government made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model. The strongest predictor of government support was the effect of the government policies on the national economic situation, recording an odds ratio of 1,533, indicating that respondents who reported that they evaluated the government policies as favorably to the national economic situation were about 1,5 times more likely to vote for the government.

The full model was statistically significant as well and explained as a whole between 45,8% and 65,9% of the variance. When controlling for other factors that might influence government support, only the general satisfaction remained statistically significant. Furthermore, religion and party adherence made all a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, while controlling for other factors that might have influenced the government support.

8.1.5 The elections of 2002

Direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of economic evaluations on the likelihood that a respondent would vote for a government party at the elections of 2002. The model containing only the economic evaluations was statistically significant, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who voted for the government and voters who voted for the opposition. The model as a whole explained between the 8,7% and 12,4% of the variance in government support. As shown the effect of government policies on employment and the general satisfaction with the government made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model. The strongest predictor of government support was general satisfaction with the government, recording an odds ratio of 2,115, indicating that respondents who are satisfied with the government were over 2 times more likely to vote for the government.

The full model was statistically significant as well and explained as a whole between 45,8% and 65,9% of the variance. When controlling for other factors that might influence government support, only the general satisfaction remained statistically significant. Furthermore, religion and party adherence made all a unique statistically

significant contribution to the model, while controlling for other factors that might have influenced the government support.

8.1.6 The elections of 2003

Direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of economic evaluations on the likelihood that a respondent would vote for a government party at the elections of 2003. In the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys of 2003 the respondents were only asked on their general satisfaction. The model containing only this variable was statistically significant, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who voted for the government and voters who voted for the opposition. The model explained between the 10,7% and 14,4% of the variance in government support. As shown the effect of the general satisfaction with the government made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, recording an odds ratio of 2,292, indicating that respondents who are satisfied with the government were over 2 times more likely to vote for the government.

The full model was statistically significant as well and explained as a whole between 44,2% and 59,5% of the variance. When controlling for other factors that might influence government support the general satisfaction remained statistically significant. Furthermore, age, social class, left-right distance and sympathy for party leaders made all a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, while controlling for other factors that might have influenced the government support. Note that party adherence and faith prime minister are not incorporated in the model, due to the fact that some questions were not asked in the surveys on the election of 2003.

8.1.7 The elections of 2006

Direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of economic evaluations on the likelihood that a respondent would vote for a government party at the elections of 2006. The model containing only the economic evaluations was statistically significant, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who voted for the government and voters who voted for the opposition. The model as a whole explained between the 14,5% and 19,3% of the variance in government support. As shown only the general satisfaction with the government made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, recording an odds ratio of 1,880, indicating that respondents who are satisfied with the government were almost 2 times more likely to vote for the government.

The full model was statistically significant as well and explained as a whole between 44,9% and 59,9% of the variance. When controlling for other factors that might influence government support, the general satisfaction lost its statistically significance. In contrary sex, education, party adherence, left-right distance and faith in the prime minister made all a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, while controlling for other factors that might have influenced the government support, but note that the sympathy scores for party leaders are excluded in this model, because these questions were not asked in the DPES of 2006.

8.1.8 One model for the elections of 1986 to 2002

The pooled data set of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys of 1971 to 2006 enables to build one model in which no distinction will be made for different elections.

It is possible to perform a direct logistic regression for all respondents from 1986 to 2002 in order to assess the impact of economic evaluations and the control variables on government support. The respondents from the elections of 2003 and 2006 are excluded, because not all control variables are available for these respondents. The model containing only the economic evaluations was statistically significant, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who voted for the government and voters who voted for the opposition. The model as a whole explained between the 14,7% and 19,6% of the variance in government support. As shown the effect of the government on the national economic situation and the general satisfaction with the government made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model. The strongest predictor of government support was the general satisfaction with the government, recording an odds ratio of 2,523, indicating that respondents who are satisfied with the government were almost 2,5 times more likely to vote for the government.

The full model was statistically significant as well and explained as a whole between 53,4% and 71,3% of the variance. When controlling for other factors that might influence government support, both the effect of the government on the national economic situation and the general satisfaction of the government remain statistically significant. Furthermore sex, religion, party adherence, left-right distance, sympathy for party leaders and faith in prime ministers made all a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, while controlling for other factors that might have influenced the government support.

8.1.9 Statistically Significant Contributors to Government Support

After the performance of the regression analyses at every election it is possible to make an overview of what factors made an unique statistically significant contribution to the models in order to assess the impact of economic evaluations on government support. Without any other control variables it is observable that the degree of general satisfaction about what the government has done the years prior to the elections at every election made a statistically significant contribution, recording odds ratios ranging from 1,370 at the elections of 1998 to 3,996 at the elections of 1989. Only at the elections of 1998 the general satisfaction was not the most powerful predictor for government support. The evaluation of the effect of government policies on the national economic situation made a statistically significant contribution at the elections of 1989, 1994 and 1998. Evaluations of the effect of the government policies on employment made a statistically significant contribution to the models of the elections of 1986 and 2002. That evaluations about employment played a significant role in the elections of 1986 can be explained by the fact that employment was, according to Aardal and van Wijnen (2005: 208), the most important issue in the elections of 1986. Evaluations on the effect of government policies on the personal finances of the respondents made a statistically significant contribution to the model of 1989, but its odds ratio is rather low (1,254).

All models appeared to be statistically significant, indicating that every model was able to distinguish between respondents who support the government and those who do not. The R square appears to be a measure in order to express the explained variance of a model. The explained variance of all the models vary from 4,1% at the elections of 1998 to 29,9% at the elections of 1986 if the Cox & Snell R square is used as measure, or

5,4% at the elections of 1998 to 41,2% at the elections of 1986. The results vary somewhat and no trend over time is observable.

When controlling for other variables, such as socio-demographic features, long-term predispositions and short-term factors the general satisfaction kept its statistically significant contribution to the model at the elections of 1989, 2002 and 2003. The same holds for employment at the elections of 1986, where it was the most powerful predictor in the model, and the national economic condition at the elections of 1998. All in all we can therefore conclude that at the elections of 1986, 1989, 1998, 2002 and 2003 an economic evaluation made a statistically significant contribution to the model. At the elections of 1994 and 2006 the economic evaluations lost their significance when controlling for other variables.

Table 6. Statistically significant contributors to government support

		C&S R^2	N R^2	Significant contributors (odds ratio)
1986	Only economic evaluations	,299	,412	Employment (2,153); General Satisfaction (3,396)
	All variables	,583	,805	Employment (2,030); Party Adherence (1,956), Left-Right Distance (1,582), Sympathy Party Leaders (1,530), Faith Prime Minister (1,273)
1989	Only economic evaluations	,255	,346	National Economic Situation (1,544); Personal Economic Situation (1,254), General Satisfaction (3,996)
	All variables	,560	,760	General Satisfaction (2,097); Sex (0,346); Party Adherence (1,811); Left-Right Distance (1,814); Faith Prime Minister (1,680)
1994	Only economic evaluations	,096	,128	National Economic Situation (1,400); General Satisfaction (1,540)
	All variables	,448	,599	Age (1,099); Sex (0,580); Party Adherence (1,670); Left-Right Distance (1,243); Sympathy Party Leaders (1,190); Faith Prime Minister (1,231)
1998	Only economic evaluations	,041	,054	National Economic Situation (1,533); General Satisfaction (1,370)
	All variables	,538	,717	National Economic Situation (1,619); Sex (0,468); Religion (0,649); Party Adherence (2,088); Faith Prime Minister (1,334)
2002	Only economic evaluations	,087	,124	Employment (1,429); General Satisfaction (2,115)
	All variables	,458	,659	General Satisfaction (1,654); Religion (0,818); Party Adherence (1,800)
2003*	Only economic evaluations	,107	,144	General Satisfaction (2.292)
	All variables	,442	,595	General Satisfaction (1,434); Social Class (1,510); Left-Right Distance (2,433); Sympathy Party Leaders (1,867)

2006**	Only economic evaluations	,145	,193	General Satisfaction (1,880)
	All variables	,449	,599	Sex (0,384); Education (1,689); Party Adherence (1,871); Left-Right Distance (1,474); Faith Prime Minister (1,481)
1986-2002	Only economic evaluations	,147	,196	National Economic Situation (1,387); General Satisfaction (2,523)
	All variables	,534	,713	National Economic Situation (1,267); General Satisfaction (1,270); Sex (0,646); Religion (0,927); Party Adherence (1,895); Left-Right Distance (1,312); Sympathy Party Leaders (1,244); Faith Prime Minister (1,310)

* = National Economic Situation, Employment, Personal Economic Situation, Party Adherence and Faith Prime Minister not included in model

** = Sympathy Party leaders not included in model

It is not striking to observe that most of the variables derived from the Michigan framework made a statistically significant contribution to the model. Party Adherence is significant in every model, reporting odds ratios ranging from 1,670 to 2,088. It is the most powerful predictor at the elections, except for the elections of 1986 and 1989 where it is outperformed by employment and general satisfaction. Religion made a unique statistically significant contribution at the elections of 1998 and 2002. At hindsight this might be explained by the fact that none of the coalition parties of these cabinets were based on religious grounds. Therefore, it makes sense that voters who are not willing to attend religious services are more likely to vote for the government. Gender seems to be a predictor for government support as well, recording that being a female makes it more likely to vote for a government party. All models were statistically significant and recorded quite high R squares, indicating that the models explained often around 50% of the variance or more.

The factors that played a role in explaining government support vary quite a lot from election to election, which indicates that there need to be dealt with very different contexts. This makes using the pooled model for the elections of 1986 to 2002 as a valid model for explaining government support problematic. The observed significant factors in this model are the product of the significant contribution they made at single

elections. The models per election are therefore more valid and contain more information about the relation between economic evaluations and government support.

8.1.10 Evaluating the hypotheses

The formulated hypotheses, in order to provide a good insight in the relation between the economy and electoral outcomes, can be tested on basis of the analyses that are done.

H1a: Voters with a positive (negative) evaluation of the government's performance on the national economic conditions are more (less) likely to support the government.

According to the logistic regression analyses, evaluations about the national economic situation or the employment made a unique statistically significant contribution at the elections of 1986 and 1998. Furthermore general satisfaction about the governments performance made a unique statistically significant contribution at the elections of 1989, 2002 and 2003. In this thesis it is argued that the general satisfaction will be handled as a measure for economic evaluations. However carefull interpretation is needed, because at the elections of 2003 no economic question were asked prior to the question about the general satisfaction. These results point in the direction that sociotropic voting occurs in the case of the Netherlands, at least at some elections. The results of the regression analyses for 5 out of 7 elections show that voters with a more positive evaluation about the government are more likely to vote for the government. With some reluctance we can consider Hypothesis 1a to be confirmed, at least for the elections of 1986, 1989, 1998, 2002 and 2003.

H1b: Voters with a positive (negative) evaluation of the government's performance on their personal economic conditions are more (less) likely to support the government.

Evaluations about the effect of government policies on the respondents personal finances seem to make no unique statistically significant contribution at any election. In this analysis no indication for pocketbook voting is found and therefore Hypothesis 1b can be rejected.

H2: The impact of a positive evaluation of the government's performance on national economic conditions on the likelihood for government support is greater than the impact of a positive evaluation of the government performance on personal economic conditions on the likelihood for government support.

No indication for pocketbook voting is found in this study in contrary to some findings that points in the direction that sociotropic voting exists. Therefore it can be stated that evaluations of the national economic situation outperformed evaluations of the personal economic situation. Hypothesis 2 can therefore be seen as corroborated.

H3: The impact of a positive evaluation of the government's performance on national (personal) economic conditions on the likelihood for government support increases over time.

It was expected that economic evaluations should be of increasing importance in explaining the government support over time. For the elections in which economic evaluations made a significant contribution we can observe that Employment in 1986 and General Satisfaction in 1989 are stronger predictors for Government Support in these elections than the economic evaluations in the elections of 1998, 2002 and 2003.

This is in contrast to what was expected. No results were found that point in the direction of our formulated expectation, so Hypothesis 3 needs to be rejected.

H4: The impact of a positive evaluation of the government's performance on national (personal) economic conditions on the likelihood for government support increases when in general the evaluations of the government's performance are more negative.

The economic variables for the elections of 1994 and 2006 were evaluated in general the most negative when comparing them to the economic variables at other elections. It is striking that at these elections none of the economic variables made a unique statistically significant contribution to the explanation of government support. Therefore no evidence is found that in times were the economy is evaluated more negative the impact of the economic evaluations on the likelihood for government support increases. Hypothesis 4 needs to be rejected.

9. Conclusion and Discussion

After the analyses it is possible to draw some conclusions and provide a final answer on what the research question was of this thesis: *What is the impact of a voter's evaluation of national and personal economic conditions on his likelihood for supporting the government at the elections in The Netherlands?* In general it can be stated that a more positive evaluation of the national economic conditions increases the likelihood that a voter will support the government at the next elections in the Netherlands. This translation from a positive evaluation of the economic condition to a vote for the government is the effect of the attribution of responsibility for this positive economic

situation to the incumbent government parties. Because the voter believes that these incumbent parties are more or less responsible for the flourishing economic state he or she is more likely to reward the government parties with a vote at the next elections.

The conclusion that a more positive evaluation of the personal economic conditions will increase the likelihood that a voter will vote for the government is untenable. The existing literature on pocketbook voting suggests that voters do not attribute responsibility to the government parties for their personal finances. For the Dutch case no evidence is found that voters translate their evaluation of their financial well-being into a vote for or against the government.

The strength of the impact of the evaluations of the national economic situation on government support is partially explained by other factors that have an impact on voting behavior. This study has shown that the impact of economic evaluations on government support decreases or even disappears for some targets in some elections when traditional voting predictors as party identification, ideological orientation and positions on party leaders are also included in the analysis. According to the Michigan Framework it is not surprisingly that a voters position on economic evaluations is influenced by the level of identification with a government party or his ideological orientation.

However, it is striking to see that the strength of the impact of the economic evaluations on government support is not consistent over time. The strength of the impact of economic evaluations on government support varies per election. Furthermore for every election it differs which economic evaluation made a statistically significant contribution to the government support. This suggests that a differentiation in the target of economic evaluations of the national economic situation can be helpful for further research.

On the basis of the results of this study it is impossible to draw conclusions why economic evaluations matter more in some elections than in other. No evidence is found that the level of economic voting increases, due to changes in the composition of the electorate and the relationship between social structure and electoral behavior, as suggested by Thomassen (2005). In addition, no evidence is found that economic evaluations matter more at elections where the government performance on the economy is evaluated more negatively. A possible explanation for the differences between the elections can be that it matters how important the economy is as issue prior to the election. This could explain why in 1986 the evaluations on the employment made a statistically significant contribution, and why in 1998 and 2002 the economic evaluations had almost no impact on the support for the government. The most important issue in 1986 was employment and in 1998 and 2002 were dominated by issues as minority groups, law and order and the islam.

The final conclusion is therefore that economic evaluations can have an impact on the electoral outcomes in the Netherlands, but it can vary from election to election. It can be expected that the elections in September 2012 are all about the economy. The support for the government can be influenced by the evaluations of voters on the economic situation in the Netherlands. When most voters consider the economic situation as more negative than before this might decrease the support for the government. From that perspective it might be wise for opposition leaders to ask voters: *Is the economy better off than before?*

9.1 Future Research

The biggest question that popped up at this study is: Why do economic evaluations in some elections matter, while in other elections economic evaluations seem to have no impact on the electoral outcomes? Future research needs to address this research question. Furthermore this study has found that it varies per election which economic evaluations have an impact on the electoral outcomes. It might be interesting to see whether it is possible to differentiate between different objects of evaluations, and how these observations contribute to a general economic evaluation. As far as known this question is unanswered yet and need, also according to Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2007), attention.

9.2 Discussion

This study simplified the Dutch multiparty system to a dichotomy of government support versus opposition support. Although the choice for this simplification is substantiated in the research design, it had an effect on almost every control variable. Party identification is related to one specific party and not to the government or opposition as a whole. The same holds for the left-right distance (the position of the government was an artifact) and the sympathy scores for the leaders (the sympathy scores can vary a lot between different coalition party leaders). All in all this can have lead to a model that does not adequately reflect the Dutch case, but a better alternative is unavailable.

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Appendixes

1. Tables Logistic Regression Analyses

1.1 Elections of 1986

Table 7a. Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Voting for Government at Elections in 1986						
	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds Ratio	95,0% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
National Economic Situation	0,311	0,204	2,329	1,365	0,915	2,034
Employment	0,767***	0,181	17,887	2,153	1,509	3,072
Personal Economic Situation	-0,210	0,183	1,323	0,811	0,567	1,159
General Satisfaction	1,223***	0,179	46,726	3,396	2,392	4,822
Constant	-5,736***	0,646	78,802	0,003		
N						506
-2 log likelihood						473,139
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,299
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,412
χ² (d.f.)						179,438 (6)
National Economic Situation	0,111	0,366	0,092	1,117	0,545	2,290
Employment	0,708**	0,291	5,903	2,030	1,147	3,593
Personal Economic Situation	-0,227	0,299	0,574	0,797	0,443	1,433
General Satisfaction	0,053	0,317	0,28	1,055	0,566	1,964
Age	-0,004	0,0598	0,004	0,996	0,888	1,117
Sex	0,007	0,38	0	1,007	0,478	2,119
Social Class	0,202	0,214	0,893	1,224	0,805	1,860
Religion	0,021	0,122	0,028	1,021	0,803	1,297
Education	-0,203	0,17	1,424	0,816	0,585	1,139
Party Adherence	0,671***	0,077	75,451	1,956	1,681	2,276
Left-Right Distance	0,459***	0,124	13,747	1,582	1,241	2,016
Sympathy Party Leaders	0,425**	0,13	10,681	1,530	1,186	1,975
Faith Prime Minister	0,242*	0,138	3,083	1,273	0,972	1,668
Constant	-8,433***	1,585	28,304	0,000		
N						506
-2 log likelihood						209,978
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,583
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,805
χ² (d.f.)						442,600 (13)

* = sig at .05 level; ** = sig at .01 level; *** = sig at .001 level

1.2 Elections of 1989

Table 7b. Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Voting for Government at Elections in 1989

	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds Ratio	95,0% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
National Economic Situation	0,434**	0,176	6,113	1,544	1,094	2,178
Employment	0,144	0,140	1,052	1,155	0,877	1,520
Personal Economic Situation	0,226*	0,136	2,747	1,254	0,960	1,638
General Satisfaction	1,385***	0,165	70,139	3,996	2,889	5,526
Constant	-6,067***	0,618	96,360	0,002		
N						640
-2 log likelihood						667,107
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,255
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,346
χ² (d.f.)						188,351 (4)
National Economic Situation	0,210	0,271	0,596	1,233	0,724	2,099
Employment	0,137	0,219	0,389	1,147	0,746	1,763
Personal Economic Situation	0,169	0,211	0,642	1,184	0,783	1,789
General Satisfaction	0,741**	0,244	9,185	2,097	1,299	3,386
Age	0,034	0,054	0,395	1,035	0,930	1,150
Sex	-1,061**	0,310	11,731	0,346	0,189	0,635
Social Class	-0,069	0,166	0,174	0,933	0,673	1,293
Religion	0,052	0,095	0,302	1,053	0,875	1,268
Education	0,151	0,163	0,864	1,163	0,846	1,601
Party Adherence	0,594***	0,061	93,542	1,811	1,606	2,043
Left-Right Distance	0,596***	0,110	29,577	1,814	1,464	2,249
Sympathy Party Leaders	0,200	0,123	2,648	1,222	0,960	1,555
Faith Prime Minister	0,519***	0,127	16,735	1,680	1,310	2,154
Constant	-12,580***	1,629	59,624	0,000		
N						640
-2 log likelihood						329,49
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,560
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,760
χ² (d.f.)						525,969 (13)

* = sig at .05 level; ** = sig at .01 level; *** = sig at .001 level

1.3 Elections of 1994

Table 7c. Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Voting for Government at Elections in 1994

	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds Ratio	95,0% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
National Economic Situation	0,336*	0,190	3,146	1,400	0,965	2,03
Employment	0,301	0,193	2,431	1,352	0,925	1,974
Personal Economic Situation	0,238	0,163	2,138	1,269	0,922	1,746
General Satisfaction	0,432**	0,159	7,409	1,540	1,128	2,101
Constant	-2,687***	0,500	28,847	0,068		
N						395
-2 log likelihood						506,298
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,096
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,128
χ² (d.f.)						39,948 (4)
National Economic Situation	0,283	0,266	1,131	1,327	0,788	2,233
Employment	-0,091	0,272	0,112	0,913	0,536	1,556
Personal Economic Situation	0,002	0,224	0,000	1,002	0,645	1,556
General Satisfaction	0,046	0,229	0,040	1,047	0,669	1,639
Age	0,095*	0,050	3,631	1,099	0,997	1,211
Sex	-0,545*	0,298	3,352	0,580	0,323	1,039
Social Class	-0,117	0,172	0,460	0,890	0,635	1,247
Religion	-0,014	0,103	0,018	0,986	0,805	1,208
Education	0,098	0,152	0,417	1,103	0,819	1,485
Party Adherence	0,513***	0,058	78,326	1,670	1,491	1,871
Left-Right Distance	0,218**	0,111	3,850	1,243	1,000	1,545
Sympathy Party Leaders	0,174*	0,093	3,464	1,190	0,991	1,428
Faith Prime Minister	0,208**	0,085	5,993	1,231	1,042	1,454
Constant	-4,517**	1,343	11,315	0,011		
N						395
-2 log likelihood						311,2
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,448
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,599
χ² (d.f.)						235,046 (13)

* = sig at .05 level; ** = sig at .01 level; *** = sig at .001 level

1.4 Elections of 1998

Table 7d. Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Voting for Government at Elections in 1998

	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds Ratio	95,0% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
National Economic Situation	0,428**	0,161	7,075	1,533	1,119	2,101
Employment	0,040	0,144	0,079	1,041	0,786	1,380
Personal Economic Situation	0,065	0,125	0,275	1,068	0,836	1,363
General Satisfaction	0,315**	0,126	6,245	1,370	1,070	1,754
Constant	-2,361***	0,526	20,120	0,094		
N						619
-2 log likelihood						832,109
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,041
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,054
χ² (d.f.)						25,734 (4)
National Economic Situation	0,482*	0,259	3,462	1,619	0,975	2,688
Employment	0,181	0,22	0,678	1,198	0,779	1,844
Personal Economic Situation	-0,019	0,189	0,011	0,981	0,677	1,42
General Satisfaction	-0,198	0,208	0,903	0,821	0,546	1,234
Age	0,004	0,046	0,007	1,004	0,917	1,099
Sex	-0,758**	0,272	7,743	0,468	0,275	0,799
Social Class	-0,076	0,164	0,215	0,927	0,672	1,278
Religion	-0,433***	0,096	20,456	0,649	0,538	0,783
Education	0,213	0,116	3,409	1,238	0,987	1,553
Party Adherence	0,736***	0,069	114,026	2,088	1,824	2,39
Left-Right Distance	0,178	0,109	2,66	1,195	0,965	1,479
Sympathy Party Leaders	0,171	0,111	2,385	1,187	0,955	1,475
Faith Prime Minister	0,288*	0,156	3,414	1,334	0,983	1,811
Constant	-3,805**	1,577	5,822	0,022		
N						619
-2 log likelihood						380,198
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,538
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,717
χ² (d.f.)						477,645 (13)

* = sig at .05 level; ** = sig at .01 level; *** = sig at .001 level

1.5 Elections of 2002

Table 7e. Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Voting for Government at Elections in 2002

	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds Ratio	95,0% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
National Economic Situation	-0,044	0,163	0,072	0,957	0,695	1,318
Employment	0,357**	0,182	3,852	1,429	1,000	2,042
Personal Economic Situation	0,028	0,145	0,038	1,028	0,775	1,366
General Satisfaction	0,749***	0,140	28,649	2,115	1,608	2,783
Constant	-4,168***	0,584	50,852	0,015		
N						569
-2 log likelihood						626,416
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,087
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,124
χ² (d.f.)						51,514 (4)
National Economic Situation	0,057	0,256	0,051	1,059	0,642	1,748
Employment	0,094	0,270	0,121	1,098	0,648	1,863
Personal Economic Situation	-0,052	0,212	0,060	0,950	0,627	1,438
General Satisfaction	0,503**	0,228	4,851	1,654	1,057	2,589
Age	0,018	0,051	0,122	1,018	0,921	1,125
Sex	0,038	0,293	0,017	1,038	0,585	1,842
Social Class	0,027	0,174	0,025	1,028	0,731	1,445
Religion	-0,201*	0,109	3,390	0,818	0,661	1,013
Education	0,146	0,129	1,293	1,158	0,899	1,490
Party Adherence	0,588***	0,055	112,873	1,800	1,615	2,007
Left-Right Distance	-0,027	0,123	0,050	0,973	0,765	1,238
Sympathy Party Leaders	0,094	0,114	0,682	1,098	0,879	1,372
Faith Prime Minister	0,108	0,086	1,562	1,114	0,941	1,319
Constant	-3,684**	1,537	5,746	0,025		
N						569
-2 log likelihood						328,901
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,458
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,659
χ² (d.f.)						349,029 (13)

* = sig at .05 level; ** = sig at .01 level; *** = sig at .001 level

1.6 Elections of 2003

Table 7f. Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Voting for Government at Elections in 2003

	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds Ratio	95,0% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
National Economic Situation						
Employment						
Personal Economic Situation						
General Satisfaction	0,829***	0,117	50,185	2,292	1,822	2,883
Constant	-1,892***	0,326	33,672	0,151		
N						510
-2 log likelihood						634,001
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,107
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,144
χ² (d.f.)						57,749 (1)
National Economic Situation						
Employment						
Personal Economic Situation						
General Satisfaction	0,361**	0,163	4,921	1,434	1,043	1,973
Age	0,092**	0,046	3,944	1,096	1,001	1,201
Sex	-0,046	0,265	0,030	0,955	0,568	1,606
Social Class	0,412**	0,170	5,900	1,510	1,083	2,105
Religion	-0,125	0,088	2,031	0,882	0,743	1,048
Education	-0,150	0,108	1,932	0,860	0,696	1,064
Party Adherence						
Left-Right Distance	0,889***	0,105	72,248	2,433	1,982	2,987
Sympathy Party Leaders	0,624***	0,098	40,342	1,867	1,54	2,263
Faith Prime Minister						
Constant	-12,003***	1,318	82,984			
N						510
-2 log likelihood						394,175
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,442
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,595
χ² (d.f.)						297,575 (8)

* = sig at .05 level; ** = sig at .01 level; *** = sig at .001 level

1.7 Elections of 2006

Table 7g. Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Voting for Government at Elections in 2006

	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds Ratio	95,0% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
National Economic Situation	0,249	0,324	0,589	1,282	0,680	2,420
Employment	0,194	0,303	0,408	1,214	0,670	2,199
Personal Economic Situation	0,256	0,279	0,843	1,292	0,748	2,230
General Satisfaction	0,631**	0,265	5,684	1,880	1,119	3,159
Constant	-3,412***	0,830	16,875	0,033		
N						145
-2 log likelihood						178,288
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,145
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,193
χ² (d.f.)						22,663 (4)
National Economic Situation	-0,045	0,417	0,012	0,956	0,423	2,163
Employment	0,329	0,381	0,749	1,390	0,659	2,930
Personal Economic Situation	0,208	0,371	0,314	1,231	0,595	2,545
General Satisfaction	0,473	0,381	1,537	1,605	0,760	3,388
Age	0,085	0,089	0,913	1,089	0,914	1,297
Sex	-0,957*	0,501	3,653	0,384	0,144	1,025
Social Class	-0,053	0,281	0,036	0,948	0,547	1,643
Religion	-0,147	0,194	0,575	0,863	0,590	1,262
Education	0,524**	0,237	4,898	1,689	1,062	2,685
Party Adherence	0,626**	0,192	10,608	1,871	1,283	2,727
Left-Right Distance	0,388**	0,196	3,925	1,474	1,004	2,165
Sympathy Party Leaders						
Faith Prime Minister	0,393**	0,197	3,983	1,481	1,007	2,177
Constant	-9,526***	2,486	14,682	0		
N						145
-2 log likelihood						114,456
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,449
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,599
χ² (d.f.)						86,495 (13)

* = sig at .05 level; ** = sig at .01 level; *** = sig at .001 level

1.8 One model for the elections of 1986 to 2002

Table 7h. Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of Voting for Government at Elections in 1986-2002

	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds Ratio	95,0% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
National Economic Situation	0,327***	0,073	20,026	1,387	1,202	1,600
Employment	0,002	0,064	0,001	1,002	0,884	1,136
Personal Economic Situation	-0,037	0,061	0,366	0,964	0,856	1,086
General Satisfaction	0,925***	0,063	213,809	2,523	2,229	2,856
Constant	-3,690***	0,225	268,502	0,025		
N						2729
-2 log likelihood						3346,471
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,147
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,196
χ² (d.f.)						433,952 (4)
National Economic Situation	0,236**	0,111	4,526	1,267	1,019	1,575
Employment	0,061	0,096	0,410	1,063	0,882	1,282
ItPersonal Economic Situation	-0,030	0,090	0,110	0,971	0,813	1,158
General Satisfaction	0,239**	0,100	5,754	1,270	1,045	1,544
Age	0,008	0,021	0,143	1,008	0,968	1,050
Sex	-0,438**	0,127	11,815	0,646	0,503	0,829
Social Class	0,027	0,073	0,137	1,027	0,890	1,186
Religion	-0,076*	0,043	3,201	0,927	0,852	1,007
Education	0,006	0,056	0,013	1,006	0,902	1,123
Party Adherence	0,639***	0,027	554,707	1,895	1,797	1,998
Left-Right Distance	0,271***	0,047	33,714	1,312	1,197	1,437
Sympathy Party Leaders	0,218***	0,046	22,287	1,244	1,136	1,361
Faith Prime Minister	0,270***	0,036	56,642	1,310	1,221	1,405
Constant	-5,950***	0,581	104,755	0,003		
N						2729
-2 log likelihood						1694,861
Cox and Snell pseudo R²						0,534
Nagelkerke pseudo R²						0,713
χ² (d.f.)						2085,742 (13)

* = sig at .05 level; ** = sig at .01 level; *** = sig at .001 level