
Original Article

Political death and survival in the Netherlands: Explaining resignations of individual cabinet members 1946–2010

Mark Bovens, Gijs Jan Brandsma* and Dick Thesingh

School of Governance, Utrecht University, Bijlhouwerstraat 6, 3511 ZC Utrecht, The Netherlands.

E-mail: g.j.brandsma@uu.nl

*Corresponding author.

Abstract Resignation by individual cabinet ministers is a major political event. Little is known, however, about the incidence, the patterns and the causes of ministerial resignations. This article works towards a political survival model of individual (junior and senior) ministers in the Netherlands, a country characterized by proportional representation and coalition governments. It does so on the basis of data for all 719 cabinet members serving between 1946 and 2010. It first establishes the turnover rate of individual cabinet members. On average, 15.0 per cent of all ministers step down individually before the end of their term. A total of 5.3 per cent resigns for political reasons, such as an internal conflict within the cabinet or losing the confidence of the party or parliament. With regard to political resignations, the Balkenende era was the most turbulent of Dutch post-war political history. We then tried to explain the resignation hazard for individual ministers on the basis of recent comparative research. The analysis shows that previous experience in parliament makes the largest difference. Ministers lacking such experience are currently 51 per cent less likely to survive in office.

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Ministerial Resignation and Survival

Resignations by cabinet members are major political events. Invariably, a ministerial resignation is covered on the front page of newspapers and is prime time footage for the television networks. It is a source of speculation and a hotly debated topic. In the Netherlands, these debates are highly normative in nature. Many political commentators argue that cabinet members should step down more often. Resignation is seen as the ultimate, and in fact, mandatory sanction in the system of ministerial responsibility and political accountability to parliament. However, in the Netherlands the system of coalition government arguably stands in the way of politically motivated resignations.



A cabinet member, almost by definition, is a prominent party member whose resignation could jeopardize the position of his or her party and even bring down the coalition, should the coalition party demand ‘an eye for an eye’, or threaten to leave the coalition (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005, p. 141). Hence coalition dynamics prevent political resignations and hamper the functioning of the system of ministerial accountability to parliament. Van Thijn (1998) coined the term ‘sorry democracy’ in this context: ministers apologize to parliament in case of serious executive failures, but subsequently remain in office. Often during these debates, much rhetoric is heard that hearkens back to a purported Gilded Age, in which cabinet ministers did the honourable thing and resigned in the face of serious parliamentary criticism.

First of all, these debates raise empirical questions about the incidence and reasons for political resignations by individual cabinet members in the Netherlands. Were political office holders indeed more chivalrous in earlier decades? Or are there signs that ‘sorry democracy’ is on the wane, heralding a revival of parliamentary dominance (Andeweg, 2008, p. 272)? The answers to these questions are highly relevant, given the widely held conviction in the Netherlands that coalition dynamics are causing the system of ministerial responsibility to parliament to fail.

Resignations by individual cabinet members are also interesting for descriptive reasons. How often do Dutch cabinet members resign and for what reasons? Who survives in office and who does not? What explains the likelihood of their resignation and what can account for the duration of their survival in office? There is a fairly large body of literature about the background of individual cabinet members when they enter office (Bakema and Secker, 1990; Secker, 1991), but less is known about the circumstances under which they leave office.

Third, resignations by Dutch cabinet members are interesting for comparative reasons. Much of the literature on ministerial resignations deals with Anglo-Saxon countries that have a Westminster-type parliamentary system, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland or New Zealand (Dewan and Dowding, 2005; Kam and Indridason, 2005; Berlinski *et al*, 2007; Indridason and Kam, 2008). In Westminster systems, the prime minister has ample possibilities to hire and fire ministers and to reshuffle his or her cabinet. Because of the majoritarian character of this system, coalition dynamics are absent or of a limited nature. In the Dutch coalition system, by contrast, the prime minister does not hire or fire individual ministers. This is the prerogative of the leaders of the coalition parties. As a result, resignation rates vary greatly between countries, and constitutional factors very likely account for these differences. In general, far fewer ministerial resignations occur from coalition governments than from single-party governments, mainly because prime ministers in coalition governments are unable, or much more reluctant to replace weak ministers, as this may upset one of the coalition parties. This is less of an issue in single-party governments, as there is no risk that the party may leave government (Dowding and Dumont, 2009). This is why the British prime minister can afford to reshuffle government regularly, and quietly shoo out weaker colleagues,



instead of waiting for them to be subjected to fierce public criticism at a later stage. In Germany, by contrast, it is very uncommon for individual ministers to resign from office before the end of their term (Fischer and Kaiser, 2009).

But there are additional constitutional factors at play here. Ireland's resignation rate is very low, but its cabinets are relatively small and government composition alternates between single-party governments and coalitions, minority and bare-majority governments (Coakley and Gallagher, 1993, p. 19; O'Malley, 2009). France has a tradition of frequent government resignations as opposed to the resignation of individual ministers (Kam and Indridason, 2009), and the same is true for Italy, where governments only stabilized after Berlusconi first took office in 1996 (Verzichelli, 2009). The only counter-intuitive example would be Belgium, which is characterized by federal coalition governments that consist of many parties, but that nonetheless exhibit very high resignation rates. This is because Belgian ministers are keener to accept positions at the international, the regional or even local level than their colleagues in other countries are (Dumont *et al*, 2009).

To date, little research has been carried out on the reasons why ministers actually decide to step down. While the motivations for ministerial resignations have been catalogued various times in the past, no explanations of why some ministers actually step down, while others remain in the cabinet (Dowding and Kang, 1998; Fischer *et al*, 2006), are provided. Fischer *et al* (2006) counted 111 cases in Germany between 1969 and 2005 where the possibility of ministerial resignation was seriously considered in the media, but only 14 of these eventually led to a resignation. Similarly, in Britain 273 calls for resignation were made between 1945 and 2007, of which just under half actually led to resignation (Berlinski *et al*, 2009, p. 72). Only Berlinski *et al* (2007) have proposed an explanatory model for ministerial tenure in the United Kingdom, a country that is characterized by a majoritarian political system and also a relatively high turnover rate of individual ministers.

This article works towards a political survival model of individual ministers in the Netherlands, a country typified by proportional representation and coalition governments. We first attempt to establish the turnover rate of individual cabinet members. In other words, how many actually step down from office before the end of their term, and to what extent were they forced to do so for political reasons? What is the resignation hazard for individual ministers? Next we will try to explain individual political resignations. Do ministerial resignation chances have structural determinants, such as personal or party-political attributes? This article seeks to answer these questions for all Dutch cabinet members holding office between 1946 and 2010.

Types of Resignation

In this article, we focus on *individual* resignations only. Ministers will often resign collectively, for example, when the entire cabinet resigns on reaching the end of its



term, or because it feels it has lost the confidence of a majority of parliament. Furthermore, in political systems with coalition governments, political disagreements within the cabinet may cause coalition partners to withdraw their support, resulting in the resignation of a complete faction. These collective resignations are beyond the scope of this article – this is not an article about coalition dynamics and cabinet survival. Those phenomena require a different theoretical framework. Our focus is on the political death and survival of individual cabinet members. These individual resignations come in different guises. The main distinction we make in this article, following Andeweg (2008), is between resignations that are political and resignations that are non-political.

Non-political resignations can occur for a variety of reasons. As in the case of Belgium, briefly mentioned in the introduction, a cabinet member can be pulled to a more prestigious function outside the cabinet (Dumont *et al*, 2009). Often, another minister or a junior minister will then be appointed in his or her place (who, in turn, will resign from his or her previous post). Sometimes, ministers choose to step down because of health reasons, and regrettably, some die in office. All these forms have in common that the resignation of the minister is not the explicit or implicit outcome of a negative judgment by parliament, the coalition or the minister's own party, of the performance of the minister.

Political resignations can take place as a result of an internal conflict within the cabinet because parliament adopts a motion of no-confidence in an individual minister, or when a cabinet member is personally discredited because of alleged financial or other misconduct. 'Casualties' of cabinet reshuffles would also fall under this category, but the Netherlands, not having a Westminster-type of government, does not have a tradition of reshuffling. The Dutch prime minister has very limited formal powers in this respect; he cannot dismiss ministers or reshuffle his cabinet. Nevertheless, it does happen on occasion that ministers are asked to step down by their party leader. These 'forced' resignations are politically much more significant than the non-political ones, as they are at the apex of the political accountability of ministers.

We must admit that in some cases, the line between political and non-political resignations is hard to draw. In Dutch parliamentary history, a small number of cases have been documented in which poorly performing ministers have been granted the face-saving opportunity to resign officially for health reasons, or in which it might be argued that they were 'promoted' to a position outside the cabinet as a form of political damage control.

Data Collection and Operationalization

In order to investigate the determinants of individual ministerial resignation, we constructed a data set containing all members of all Dutch cabinets between 1946 and



2010. This was done on the basis of the biographical archives of the Parliamentary Documentation Centre at Leiden University, which has recorded extensive biographies of all cabinet members.¹ This data set included both senior and junior ministers (*staatssecretaris*). Within this data set, we identified a subset of all individual cabinet members tendering their resignation before the end of their term, or before the collective resignation of the cabinet. For each of these individual cabinet members, we recorded the date of the formal appointment by the Queen² and the date of the formal acceptance by the Queen of his or her resignation, and calculated the number of days he or she spent in office.³

As was explained earlier, collective resignations were not taken into consideration. However, we did include individual resignations of members of so-called ‘demissionary’ cabinets. In the Netherlands, when a cabinet has offered its resignation to the Crown, it is asked by the Queen to remain in office and to act as a caretaker cabinet until a new cabinet is installed. This usually takes many weeks, if not months. For the purpose of this article, if an individual member of such a demissionary cabinet steps down, this is regarded as an individual resignation. These can be highly politicized events, such as the forced resignation of the then demissionary ministers Hirsch Ballin and Van Thijn in the wake of the IRT-policing affair (serious professional misconduct by members of the Dutch police force) in 1994, or of the ministers Donner and Dekker in 2006 after the publication of a highly critical report on the deadly fire in 2005 in a Schiphol Airport detention centre that took the life of 11 illegal immigrants who were being held in custody there.

We listed the reason for each individual resignation where applicable,⁴ recorded a number of personal data, such as age on assuming office, gender, parliamentary experience, previous cabinet experience, and added political data, such as party background (including the number of seats in parliament), established party or new to parliament and government – for example, DS’70, an offshoot of the Dutch Labour Party or the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF). We also recorded how many votes of no-confidence were tabled against the individual minister in question. These data were obtained from the database of the lower house of the Dutch Parliament.⁵ The latter records, however, only date back as far as the second Van Agt cabinet, which came into power in 1981. In addition, we analysed per party whether its votes were essential in order for the cabinet to achieve a parliamentary majority or whether they made no difference to the outcome.

Political Death and Survival 1946–2010

The number of resignations

Since the end of the Second World War until 2010, the Netherlands has had 26 governments, starting with the first Beel cabinet in 1946 through Balkenende’s



fourth cabinet, which took office in 2007. These 26 cabinets comprised a total of 719 senior and junior ministers. Of these, 108 stepped down individually. About one-third (38) of these individual resignations may be considered political resignations, while about two-thirds (70) were non-political.

Table 1 shows that only a small portion of cabinet members actually resign before the end of their tenure (or rather: before the cabinet is dissolved), and that most resignations that do occur are non-political. Eighty-five per cent of all cabinet members survived to reach the end of their term, while 9.7 per cent left for non-political reasons. The political resignations account for 5.3 per cent of the total.

Of the 38 cabinet members leaving the Dutch government since 1946 for political reasons, 16 resigned after losing a confidence vote. The actors casting these votes differed from case to case. In some cases, parliament adopted a no-confidence motion, while in others it was the ministers' own party. The dismissal of minister

Table 1: Individual resignations by cabinet, 1946–2010

		<i>No resignation</i>		<i>Non-political resignations</i>		<i>Political resignations</i>		<i>N</i>
1946–1948	Beel 1	14	73.7%	3	15.8%	2	10.5%	19
1948–1951	Drees 1	22	84.6%	2	7.7%	2	7.7%	26
1951–1952	Drees 2	21	91.3%	2	8.7%	0	0.0%	23
1952–1956	Drees 3	20	83.3%	3	12.5%	1	4.2%	24
1956–1958	Drees 4	21	84.0%	3	12.0%	1	4.0%	25
1958–1959	Beel 2	14	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	14
1959–1963	De Quay	24	85.7%	2	7.1%	2	7.1%	28
1963–1965	Marijnen	25	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	25
1965–1966	Cals	27	93.1%	1	3.4%	1	3.4%	29
1966–1967	Zijlstra	21	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	21
1967–1971	De Jong	26	96.3%	0	0.0%	1	3.7%	27
1971–1972	Biesheuvel 1	28	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	28
1972–1973	Biesheuvel 2	18	72.0%	6	24.0%	1	4.0%	25
1973–1977	Den Uyl	23	59.0%	15	38.5%	1	2.6%	39
1977–1981	Van Agt 1	27	71.1%	8	21.1%	3	7.9%	38
1981–1982	Van Agt 2	32	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	32
1982	Van Agt 3	22	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	22
1982–1986	Lubbers 1	30	93.8%	1	3.1%	1	3.1%	32
1986–1989	Lubbers 2	23	71.9%	5	15.6%	4	12.5%	32
1989–1994	Lubbers 3	19	54.3%	11	31.4%	5	14.3%	35
1994–1998	Kok 1	26	96.3%	0	0.0%	1	3.7%	27
1998–2002	Kok 2	29	85.3%	3	8.8%	2	5.9%	34
2002–2003	Balkenende 1	25	86.2%	0	0.0%	4	13.8%	29
2003–2006	Balkenende 2	25	83.3%	3	10.0%	2	6.7%	30
2006–2007	Balkenende 3	23	92.0%	0	0.0%	2	8.0%	25
2007–2010	Balkenende 4	26	86.7%	2	6.7%	2	6.7%	30
Total		611	85.0%	70	9.7%	38	5.3%	719



Vogelaar (PvdA) by her party leader Bos in 2008 is a case in point. Since 1946, 14 ministers left because of an internal conflict within the cabinet; in several cases, junior ministers had to leave after a conflict with their senior minister. Another eight had to resign because they were discredited personally, for example, because they had provided inaccurate or false information about their professional past, or because of alleged financial misconduct.

The resignations are not equally divided over the 26 cabinets. Table 1 shows that the number of early resignations fluctuates between governments with high resignation rates and governments with more stability in this respect. The early post-war cabinets, which struggled with the decolonization of Indonesia, had relatively high numbers of ministers who resigned from their post. From the late fifties until the early seventies, very few individual cabinet members resigned – which may also have had to do with the fact that a number of these cabinets were short-lived. Only three ministers departed in the period from the Marijnen cabinet up until the first Biesheuvel cabinet. In the seventies, the number of resignations once again climbed. The majority of these resignations were for non-political reasons and regarded members of demissionary cabinets who resigned in order to take a seat in parliament after the elections.⁶ The number of resignations showed another peak during the second and third Lubbers cabinets in the late eighties and early nineties. This turbulent period was followed by the relative tranquility of the Kok cabinets, which lost only two members to political resignations. The final four cabinets showed in Table 1, the Balkenende I–IV cabinets, were probably the most turbulent in post-war history. Not one of these cabinets completed its tenure; moreover, in view of their relatively short periods in office, the number of members stepping down for political reasons was high.

These figures cannot easily be compared with findings from other countries. Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2008) made a similar inventory for 18 democracies between 1945 and 1999, but included only 9 portfolios per government without a breakdown per country. Berlinski *et al* (2009) counted 591 resignations in the United Kingdom between 1945 and 2007 and 273 calls for resignation that did not result in one, but do not mention how many ministers assumed office during that same period. The same is true for Fischer and Kaiser (2009) who found 57 premature resignations in Germany between 1949 and 2007, of which 17 were political. They, too, do not state the total number of ministers in office in that period. Therefore, we have no indication of whether the ratio of ministerial resignation in the Netherlands that we found is high or low compared with other countries.

The length of tenure

When cabinet members resign, how long have they been in office? On average, Dutch ministers stay in office for 820 days, which is a good 2 years. Junior minister

Bijlhout of the LPF holds the record for the shortest career of all: she assumed office in the first Balkenende cabinet in the afternoon of 22 July 2002 and was forced to step down only 9 hours later (her official resignation was accepted 2 days later). In the days before her appointment, she had vehemently denied allegations that she had been a member of the Bouterse militia in her former homeland of Suriname after the military coup in the early eighties. However, on the day of her inauguration, a television station broadcast pictures of her dressed in the militia uniform.

At the other extreme, CDA minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin was forced to leave in May 1994 after having been in office for four and a half years. A majority of the newly elected parliament, more or less by accident (because of the new balance of parties and the absence of a substantial number of members of his own party who were at the recording of a TV show), accepted a motion tabled by the opposition to the effect that he was not to supervise the reorganization of a part of the police force in the wake of the IRT-affair mentioned earlier.

Hence, the length of time that a minister stays in office can vary widely. Furthermore, not all cabinets last equally long; in fact, most governments do not manage to complete their full term of 4 years. This naturally also affects individual resignation patterns. If, for example, a cabinet survives for only 2 years, there is no way of knowing how long an individual minister would have lasted had the entire cabinet not collapsed. A measurement of how long an individual minister can maintain his position, therefore, is constrained by the lifespan of the full cabinet. In other words: had some governments not have fallen before the end of their term, the number of individual resignations might also have been higher. Therefore, timing of both individual resignation and the longevity of a cabinet are essential factors to take into account when explaining the odds of individual resignations.

Hence, when investigating the determinants of the survival of individual cabinet members, this time-dependency needs to be taken into account. A method that is generally applied in such situations is Cox regression analysis. This technique estimates a 'hazard rate' from the data, which is effectively the likelihood that at any given point in time the event of interest will occur given that it has not yet occurred (Golub, 2008, p. 531). Figure 1 shows the 'cumulative survivor function', which is calculated on the basis of the hazard rate, and it shows the probability of a minister remaining in office over time. The horizontal axis in Figure 1 represents time, while the vertical axis represents the probability of a minister remaining in office.

The line in Figure 1 is thus indicative of the probability of a minister remaining in office. It refers both to ministers who were forced to resign and to those who stepped down voluntarily. The cumulative survivor function is fairly stable during the first 50 months, which corresponds to a 'normal' cabinet lifespan of 4 years. The odds of survival gradually go down from 100 per cent at day 1 to just under 80 per cent at the end of a normal term of government. In other words, there is approximately

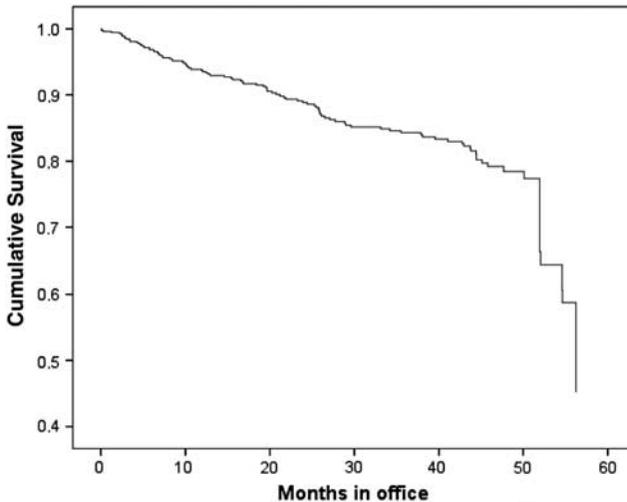


Figure 1: Survivor function for all resignations, 1946–2010.

a 20 per cent chance that a minister will step down prematurely. Many ministers depart after the ‘normal’ 4-year term, as the incumbent government continues to govern until a new government is ready to take its place.

As the figure above shows, the chance that a minister will resign before his 4 years are up is about 20 per cent, while in reality the proportion of ministers who actually resign early is only 15 per cent. The difference is caused by the fact that many cabinets fall before the end of their normal term. The hazard rate contains information on all ministers, but only individual resignations are coded as the event of interest. Hence, the beginning of the line in Figure 1 contains information on all ministers ever appointed, whereas as the line progresses fewer and fewer ministers are included. The sharp drop at the end of the line is, in fact, caused by a single minister who was forced to leave only just before a new government took over.

The above cumulative survivor function in Figure 1 is based on all types of resignations, both political and non-political. Figure 2, however, shows the cumulative survivor function for political resignations only, revealing that political resignation chances have quite a distinctive pattern.

In comparison with the previous figure, the cumulative survivor function is less smooth, which is caused by the fact that only 38 political resignations occurred over the full period of 1946–2010. We can, however, observe that the general shape of the curve is different. First of all, the line ends at a survival chance of about 92 per cent after 4 years. This means that the chances of a minister being *forced* to leave within 4 years are about 8 per cent. Second, the resignation pattern itself also looks different.

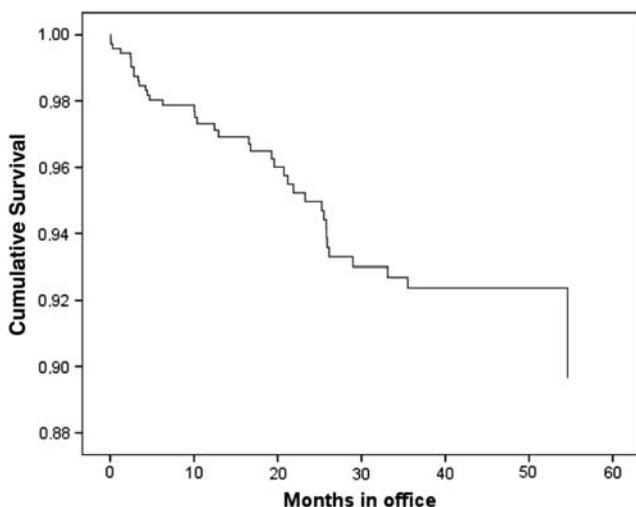


Figure 2: Survivor function for political resignations only, 1946–2010.

Whereas the line for all resignations (Figure 1) decreases smoothly until the full formal term of a government is over, the line for the political resignations falls smoothly only until the first 2 years of a government have passed. There is a slight drop in the survival chances at mid-term (24 months), but after that the chances of a political resignation are much lower, and even disappear entirely after 3 years. The apparent drop at 55 months is caused by a single minister: only one cabinet managed to remain in office for that long (the Lubbers III cabinet), and, as briefly mentioned above, its minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin resigned shortly before the new government took office.⁷

Again, it is difficult to compare the survivor functions for the Netherlands with those for other countries. Without exception, survivor functions in other studies present separate figures per cabinet within countries in order to account for fixed government effects (Berlinski *et al*, 2007; Dowding and Dumont, 2009), which makes it quite hard to see the general trend in those countries. Dutch cabinets are relatively small – especially compared with the United Kingdom – so that any individual event would be displayed as a massive drop in the survival functions when displayed per cabinet.

So far, we have shown that there are different forms of ministerial resignation. The proportion of ministers resigning early is 15.0 per cent, of whom 5.3 per cent left for political reasons. But as the above survivor functions have shown, these figures are time-dependent. The longer a government lasts, the higher the chances of individual ministerial resignations. Furthermore, while the cumulative survivor plot shows that the survival chances for all ministers decrease smoothly, the survival



function for political resignations follows a more erratic course, with survival chances declining smoothly until mid-term, after which these drop significantly and then remain at approximately the same level.

Explaining Resignation and Survival

The proportions and survival chances plotted above represent the entire population of Dutch ministers from 1946 to 2010. But can we also pick out which cabinet members are more likely to resign for political reasons? These are the most salient cases because these are the political casualties that may threaten the stability of the coalition. Why is it that some ministers are forced to step down while others can remain in office? Obviously, this has to do with the specific issues that were at stake, but can we identify personal or party-political attributes?

The analysis will now turn to exclusively explaining the likelihood of a *political* resignation. There are several arguments why the resignation and survival chances of ministers may vary. Every case obviously has unique attributes, but there is a small body of literature that identifies patterns in this. Context-specific as previous research may have been (see, for example, Dowding and Dumont, 2009 for a collection of initial findings from European countries), it does contain several starting points for addressing the Dutch case, as well. We have analysed a number of factors in order to assess their impact on resignation chances, and turned these into testable hypotheses.

Argument 1: Personal background

One of the most relevant papers explaining individual ministerial resignation is that of Berlinski *et al* (2007), who explored explanations for survival rates in the United Kingdom for all ministers from 1945 to 1997. They concluded that five personal attributes affect their survival chances. They found that in Britain, men are more likely to resign than women. Similarly, older ministers are more likely to be coerced to step down than younger ones. The same is true of junior ministers; they, too, are more likely to resign. Perhaps counter-intuitively, they also found that ministers serving in previous cabinets have lower survival rates. Finally, educational background was also shown to affect a minister's capacity to survive. Ministers graduating from public school or from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge have higher survival rates. This latter factor, however, does not apply to the same extent in the Netherlands because of the lack of similar elite educational institutions.

There is another difference between British and Dutch ministers that may be relevant in this regard. Because of the separation of powers between the executive and the legislative, members of the incumbent cabinet in the Netherlands are not

members of parliament. Furthermore, the Netherlands has a long tradition of recruiting ministers from outside parliament. As a result, a substantial number of cabinet members enter office with little or no parliamentary experience, although the number of ministers with experience would appear to be on the rise (Bakema and Secker, 1990; Andeweg, 2008, p. 263). Parliamentary experience may contribute to higher survival rates because these ministers have a network in parliament and have a better grasp of the formal and informal rules of engagement in parliament. We therefore hypothesize that previous parliamentary experience will contribute to individual ministerial survival.

Regarding personal background factors, we formulated five hypotheses, mostly along the lines of the findings of Berlinski *et al* (2007) in the British case:

- Hypothesis 1:** Male ministers are more likely to be coerced to step down than their female colleagues.
- Hypothesis 2:** Older ministers are more likely to be coerced to step down than younger ministers.
- Hypothesis 3:** Ministers who have served in past governments are more likely to be coerced to resign than ‘first-time’ ministers.
- Hypothesis 4:** Junior ministers are more likely to be forced to resign than regular cabinet ministers.
- Hypothesis 5:** Ministers who have no previous experience as members of Parliament are more likely to be forced to step down than ministers who do have such experience.

Argument 2: Depillarization

The sixth hypothesis can be considered a variant to the fifth, in that the relative importance of political experience has increased over time. In the first decades after the war, Dutch society was characterized by deep social and political cleavages between Catholics, orthodox Protestants, socialists and liberal-conservatives. Large parts of civil society were organized and interconnected on the basis of religious affiliation or social stratification: the so-called ‘pillars’. Each pillar had its own unions, interest groups and political party. During the course of the twentieth century, a consociational style of politics was developed in order to accommodate these cleavages and the centrifugal forces that resulted from them. These politics of accommodation (Lijphart, 1968) involved a tendency to depoliticize conflicts and to run cabinets in a business-like or technocratic fashion. Ministers, particularly in the more technical departments, were often recruited from outside politics, even to the extent that they had no political affiliation.



From the late sixties, the pillars started to crumble and Dutch society, as elsewhere, became much more politicized. Ministers were increasingly recruited from parliament and political parties, also because of increasing competition between political parties and, consequently, less secure career prospects for MPs (Bakema and Secker, 1990). We have therefore formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: Previous political experience as a minister or in parliament became more important over time, and such experience increasingly reduces the chance of a political resignation.

Argument 3: Coalition dynamics

In multi-party systems like that of the Netherlands, it would seem plausible to assume that coalition dynamics within a government matter. As findings from other European countries show, whether a weak minister has to leave or not depends on the goodwill of the coalition partners. The team of ministers consists of prominent members of several different parties, and if one party feels antagonized, it may decide to bring down the entire cabinet so as to avoid damage to individual ministers. But in cases where the support of a particular party is not strictly necessary to secure a majority in parliament, that is, when a government is oversized, there are fewer incentives to keep weak ministers on the team (Lijphart, 1999, p. 136; Dowding and Dumont, 2009, p. 13). Oversized governments were something of a tradition in the Netherlands in the decades immediately after the war, but their occurrence has decreased considerably since the early 1970s (Andeweg, 2008, p. 258). The last oversized coalition to date governed from 1998 through 2002.

Thus viewed, ministers who serve in minority governments or in minimal-winning coalitions are quite safe. On the other hand, ministers who hold office in an oversized coalition can easily be disposed of, that is, as long as their party can be done without. The same is true for those ministers who are not acting for a political party but have been appointed on individual merit only, a common feature of Dutch government in the first years after the war.⁸

On two occasions in the past, a newly established party managed to win seats in the election and to enter government instantly. The first party to do so was DS70 (an offshoot of the Labour party) in the 1970s, the second was LPF (Pim Fortuyn's list) in 2002. It may be hypothesized that ministers of new parties run a higher risk of resignation than members of established parties, because their parties may lack strong networks in parliament, a smoothly running party organization or general experience on how to play the political ball game.

Hypothesis 7: Ministers acting for parties that are not needed for securing a bare parliamentary majority have higher resignation probabilities than other ministers.



Hypothesis 8: Ministers of new parliamentary parties have higher resignation probabilities than ministers of established parliamentary parties.

Argument 4: Calls for resignation

An argument that has been reiterated a number of times in the existing literature on resignations is that ministers enjoy a given amount of credibility once they assume office, but that every little incident will subsequently eat away at this. Even if ministers survive a first resignation call, the next may be harder to survive. The result is that ministers accumulate resignation events up to a threshold, after which a minister has no other choice but to resign (Fischer *et al*, 2006, p. 710; Bovens and Wever, 2008; Berlinski *et al*, 2009, p. 69).⁹ Evidence from Germany, for example, shows that most ministers resign after the first or second resignation call, although in one case a minister survived no less than six calls for resignation before falling over the seventh (Fischer *et al*, 2006, p. 721).

Hypothesis 9: The more resignation calls ministers accumulate in Parliament, the higher the chance that they will eventually be forced to leave.

Operationalization and Method of Analysis

The empirical analysis is split into two parts. The first part considers a set of factors derived from the literature that may affect political resignations: the personal background of ministers, depillarization and coalition dynamics. Our method of analysis is different from that of other researchers, who took the number of possible resignation events or calls for resignation as a starting point, coded these for whether or not the ministers actually resigned and then tried to explain the reasons behind survival or resignation following a resignation call (for example, Dowding and Kang, 1998; Fischer *et al*, 2006). While this approach indeed restricts the population to those ministers who are in acute danger of dismissal, it is not possible to infer their findings to the full population of ministers because the ministers who never faced any resignation calls were excluded from the analysis.

Furthermore, it does not fully consider the time-dependent nature of ministerial resignation chances. Because it is not known how long an individual minister would have survived in office had his cabinet not crashed, or his term of office come to an end, effective political survival time is always an incomplete measurement; it is 'censored'. In our case, measurement is right-censored: survival time starts for all ministers equally at the day they assume office, and ends when the cabinet leaves office, be it prematurely or at the end of a normal term.



We have therefore decided to use Cox regression. This technique is specifically tailored to duration models with censored observations, and is designed to handle events that occur relatively rarely, such as is the case for resignations in the population that we study. As briefly outlined above, Cox regression models the 'hazard rate', which is the likelihood that at any given point in time the event of interest will occur given that it has not yet occurred. The event of interest is individual political resignation; non-political resignations are therefore not coded as events of interest in the remainder of this article. The 'baseline hazard rate', in turn, shows the time effect on the hazard rate, that is, when the independent variables are all set to 0 (Golub, 2008, p. 531). The independent variables indicate the percentage change in the risk of the event occurring, with values over 1.00 reflecting higher chances and values under 1.00 lower chances (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 1997, pp. 1433–1434). This way, the effect of all the independent variables can be interpreted as higher or lower resignation chances than the average resignation chances of ministers, which are absorbed in the baseline hazard. As we specified only *political* individual resignations as the event of interest, all ministers who were not forced to resign (regardless of whether they actually did resign or not) were coded similarly for the purposes of this analysis.

The independent variables listed in Table 2 refer to the arguments mentioned in our hypotheses. For each independent variable, the result of the Cox regression analysis shows the effect on political resignation chances.

The second part of the analysis focuses on the calls for resignation. This particular argument cannot be tested in conjunction with the other three arguments because of an endogeneity problem. Calls for resignation are no independent determinants of ministerial resignation since in the Dutch system, they are events that are not from the resignation itself. A call for resignation can be caused by the same variables that cause the resignation itself, or as argued before, serious calls for resignation can be avoided by personal skills. But despite this, there is a compelling argument that political damage in the end may lead to a resignation. Therefore, this argument will be tested in the form of a simple cross-tabulation. Furthermore, because of limited data availability for this variable the analysis of this argument does not go back to before 1981.

Results

Determinants of early resignations

Table 3 shows the results of the Cox regression analysis. The Exp(B) coefficients in the table show the effect of the independent variables. In short, the figures show the degree to which particular attributes add to individual ministers' resignation chances. A figure of 1.00 indicates that a variable makes no difference, 0.50 means

Table 2: Composition of the independent variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Composition</i>
<i>Personal background</i>	
Gender	Dummy variable; 1 = female
Age	Age when assuming office
Rank	Dummy variable; 1 = junior minister
Ministerial experience	Dummy variable; 1 = previous experience in government
Parliamentary experience	Categorical variable; 0 = no previous experience in parliament and acting on behalf of a party that is newly elected to Parliament (DS'70 and LPF), 1 = no previous experience in Parliament but acting on behalf of an established party, 2 = previous experience in parliament
<i>Coalition dynamics</i>	
Surplus party	Dummy variable; 1 = party is not necessary for achieving a parliamentary majority (or minister is not member of any party, or cabinet as a whole is an interim cabinet ^a)
<i>Depillarization</i>	
	Not coded; the results are presented in time windows with an almost perfectly equal number of observations (1946–1967; 1967–1986; 1986–2010)

^aInterim cabinets are sometimes formed when a fallen government is not capable of staying in office preparing an election. Either way, no party in parliament has an (electoral) interest in keeping these ministers in government.

Table 3: Hazard ratios from Cox regression models

<i>Period</i>	<i>1946–2010</i>		
	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
<i>Personal background</i>			
Gender (female)	0.958	−0.043	0.491
Age	1.027	0.027	0.021
Rank (junior minister)	0.863	−0.148	0.341
Ministerial experience	0.766	−0.266	0.360
<i>Parliamentary experience</i>			
Has parliamentary experience (ref. cat.)	—	—	—
No such experience, established party	1.708	0.535	0.359
No such experience, new party	18.876	2.938	0.709
<i>Coalition dynamics</i>			
Surplus party	1.425	0.354	0.394
<i>N</i>		719	

Note: Event coding: (1) political resignation; (0) non-political or no resignation. As a robustness check, we ran the same analysis leaving out the caretaker governments (Balkenende 3 and Van Agt 3). This yielded no significantly different results.



that the chances of an early individual resignation are half and 2.00 refers to a double resignation hazard. Since our data cover the full population of Dutch ministers, significance is irrelevant and thus not reported (cf. Gill, 2001, pp. 318–319, 327–330). Nevertheless, we did report standard errors for information, as well as β -values.

The results in Table 3 show that several of the personal attributes that were found to be strong predictors of ministerial duration in the United Kingdom (Berlinski *et al.*, 2007) play little to no role in the Netherlands. Age and gender hardly produce any effect, while both junior and experienced ministers have a lower risk of political resignation. However, senior and junior ministers without prior experience in parliament are much more likely to be forced to resign prematurely, especially when their respective parties are new. The same is true for ministers of surplus parties in oversized coalitions.

Table 3 covers the full time span of post-war Dutch government, and hence does not show the effect of depillarization on each of the independent variables. We therefore repeated the analysis on subsets of our data, enabling us to show how the determinants of political resignations have changed over time.

The results in Table 4 again show marginal effects for age. Junior ministers were more likely to be forced to resign during the heydays of depillarization, even though

Table 4: Hazard ratios from Cox regression models

Period	1946–1967			1967–1986			1986–2010		
	Exp (B)	B	Standard error	Exp (B)	B	Standard error	Exp (B)	B	Standard error
<i>Personal background</i>									
Gender (female)	0.00	-11.86	759.14	0.00	-13.04	914.08	0.80	-0.23	0.55
Age	1.03	0.03	0.04	1.09	0.09	0.05	0.99	-0.01	0.03
Rank (junior minister)	0.46	-0.78	0.82	1.48	0.39	0.77	0.78	-0.25	0.47
Ministerial experience	0.50	-0.69	0.71	0.84	-0.18	0.87	0.81	-0.22	0.50
<i>Parliamentary experience</i>									
Has parliamentary experience (ref. cat.)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
No such experience, established party	3.61	1.28	1.08	2.97	1.09	0.86	1.51	0.41	0.47
No such experience, new party	—	—	—	0.00	-12.39	5315.1	14.57	2.68	0.79
<i>Coalition dynamics</i>									
Surplus party	1.42	0.35	0.73	2.26	0.82	1.31	3.20	1.16	0.68
N	234			243			242		

Note: Event coding: (1) political resignation; (0) non-political or no resignation. As a robustness check, we ran the same analysis leaving out the caretaker governments (Van Agt 3 and Balkenende 3). This yielded no significantly different results.

generally speaking they enjoy a lower political resignation risk. The extreme effect of gender before 1986 is due to the fact that only a few women served in government in those years, and none of them was forced to resign. Hypotheses 2 and 4 are thus rejected, Hypothesis 1 can be upheld.

Political factors, however, have a much greater impact. Previous experience in government pays off: on the whole, ministers who served in earlier governments are 17 per cent less likely to be forced to resign. This is a markedly different situation than in the United Kingdom, where previous experience appears to be a risk rather than an asset. Hypothesis 3 is therefore rejected. Ministers belonging to parties that are not necessary for a parliamentary majority, however, are increasingly more likely to depart than their colleagues from other coalition parties. The analysis also shows that previous experience in parliament makes a big difference. Ministers lacking such experience are currently 51 per cent less likely to survive in office. Furthermore, joining the cabinet on behalf of a new political party is a major risk factor; in that case, the odds of a political resignation are well over 13 times higher. This effect, however, may be entirely attributed to the resignations of many LPP ministers in 2002, whose political leader Pim Fortuyn was assassinated during the election campaign. Hypotheses 5, 7 and 8 can thus be upheld.

No substantial proof was found for Hypothesis 6. While previous political experience, either in government or in parliament, indeed substantially reduces political resignation chances, the effect weakens considerably over time.

The effect of calls for resignation

For assessing the final hypothesis, we counted the number of votes of no-confidence tabled against all individual ministers since 1981. Table 5 shows a cross-tabulation of the number of those resignation calls and political resignations.

Table 5 shows that there are only seven ministers who were forced to leave after receiving resignation calls. The data do not show, however, if those seven ministers were ultimately forced to leave as a result of the political damage that was inflicted upon them by means of the respective resignation calls. Nonetheless, most of the ministers who were forced to leave did so without any no-confidence vote tabled against them, while most ministers facing a call for their resignation tend to survive. There is, at best, only a weak correlation between the number of resignation calls and resignation events.¹⁰ The figures in the table also show that ministers are not 'out' after two strikes. Instead, they are safe after that; a minister who has survived his second vote of no-confidence, rarely receives novel calls for resignation, and even if he does, he is also likely to survive those. Hypothesis 9, thus, is rejected.

As a resignation call in many cases is a precondition for an actual resignation, we have analysed to what degree they are caused by the same personal and

**Table 5:** Resignation calls and political resignations

	<i>Number of resignation calls since 1981 (per minister)</i>						<i>Total</i>
	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	
Not forced to leave	264	27	7	5	1	1	305
Forced to leave	16	4	3	0	0	0	23
Total	280	31	10	5	1	1	328

Note: Cramér's *V* and Eta (dependent: political resignations): 0.183.

Table 6: No-confidence votes tabled against ministers

<i>Period</i>	<i>1981–2010</i>		
	<i>Exp (B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
<i>Personal background</i>			
Gender (female)	1.550	0.438	0.379
Age	1.006	0.006	0.024
Rank (junior minister)	0.301	-1.202	0.392
Ministerial experience	0.954	-0.047	0.367
<i>Parliamentary experience</i>			
Has parliamentary experience (ref. cat.)	—	—	—
No such experience, established party	1.694	0.527	0.347
No such experience, new party	0.795	-0.230	1.114
<i>Coalition dynamics</i>			
Surplus party	0.220	-1.514	0.637
Constant	0.178	-1.725	1.209
<i>N</i>		328	
Nagelkerke's <i>R</i> ²		0.118	

Note: Dependent variable: No-confidence votes tabled against ministers. Event coding: (0) no no-confidence votes tabled; (1) one or more no-confidence votes tabled.

party-political determinants as examined above. For that matter, we have performed a logistic regression analysis, with a binary dependent variable indicating whether any no-confidence votes were tabled against an individual minister or junior minister (1), or not (0).

Table 6 shows the results of this exercise. Again, we do not report significance because we have investigated the entire population from 1981, and we do not wish to generalize beyond the period that we researched. One result resembles those of the model of actual resignations: junior ministers, are relatively safe, as they are

Table 7: Overview of hypotheses and findings

Hypothesis 1: Male ministers are more likely to be coerced to step down than their female colleagues	Maintained
Hypothesis 2: Older ministers are more likely to be coerced to step down than younger ministers	Rejected
Hypothesis 3: Ministers who have served in past governments are more likely to be coerced to resign than 'first-time' ministers	Rejected
Hypothesis 4: Junior ministers are more likely to be forced to resign than regular cabinet ministers	Rejected
Hypothesis 5: Ministers who have no previous experience as members of Parliament are more likely to be forced to step down than ministers who do have such experience	Maintained
Hypothesis 6: Previous political experience as a minister or in parliament became more important over time, and such experience increasingly reduces the chance of a political resignation	Rejected
Hypothesis 7: Ministers acting for parties that are not needed for securing a bare parliamentary majority have higher resignation probabilities than other ministers	Maintained
Hypothesis 8: Ministers of new parliamentary parties have higher resignation probabilities than ministers of established parliamentary parties	Maintained
Hypothesis 9: The more resignation calls ministers accumulate in Parliament, the higher the chance that they will eventually be forced to leave	Rejected

70 per cent less likely to face a call for resignation. But there are also important differences. Women are more likely to face a no-confidence vote, although the Cox regression model has shown that they are more likely to survive in office than their male colleagues. Similarly, we find that ministers from oversized coalitions are less likely to face a no-confidence vote even though they are much more likely to resign for political reasons. It must be remembered here that from 1981, there has been only one oversized coalition, and therefore this result has to be treated with caution.

The same applies to the effect of being a political novice acting for a new party, or rather the lack thereof in this model. This only applies to LPF which governed for a very short while in the year 2002. Its ministers resigned because of scandals and conflicts within the party, and parliament did not need to put pressure on individual ministers to make them leave office (Table 7).

Conclusion and Discussion

This article investigated the turnover rate of individual cabinet members in the Netherlands from 1946 to 2010. On average, 15.0 per cent of all ministers step down individually before the end of the cabinet. A total of 5.3 per cent step down for political reasons – because of an internal conflict within the cabinet, because of losing confidence of the party or parliament, or because he or she is



politically discredited. The timing of non-political and political resignations differs. In practice, ministers who choose to leave office for non-political reasons do so at any time, whereas the political resignations are more concentrated in the first 2 years of a government in office. Cabinet members do not often resign because of a breach of confidence. In the past 60 years, this happened only 16 times. It is rare in the Netherlands for the rascals to be voted out by Parliament. The impact of calls for resignation appears to be relatively small, with members of the cabinet being more likely to step down because of an internal conflict within cabinet or because of a scandal, than because of losing a no-confidence vote in parliament.

‘Sending ministers home’ is obviously the ultimate sanction in a parliamentary accountability process in which other measures are taken, as well. For instance, the past decades have shown a massive increase in the number of written questions addressed to ministers, and in the number of times ministers are called to parliament for debate (Andeweg, 2008; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2009). Against this background of parliamentary activism, the discovery that previous experience in parliament enhances a minister’s survival chances hardly comes as a surprise. Those lacking previous parliamentary experience have a much higher chance of resignation. Moreover, entering office on behalf of a new party is also a hazardous undertaking. Prime ministers striving to make it to the finish line with their original cabinet intact are well advised to choose ministers with extensive political experience and to avoid new parties. Moreover, they would be wise to steer clear of oversized coalitions, as well. Even though the literature on the length of ministerial tenure is scarce, the results presented in this article show that patterns of ministerial survival are to a high degree institutionally determined. Most factors that significantly affect the resignation chances of British ministers (Berlinksi *et al*, 2007) prove to be irrelevant to the Dutch case. The number of calls for resignation, as proposed elsewhere (Fischer *et al*, 2006; Berlinksi *et al*, 2009), indeed relates to actual resignation, but only to a limited degree. After a minister has survived two votes of no-confidence, history shows that he will then also survive all the following ones.

The idea that ministers nowadays are more tenacious in holding on to their seats than in the past has been shown to be untrue; a Gilded Age, in which cabinet members chivalrously stepped down from office in case of serious allegations of government failure never existed, or at least not after WWII. In fact, the number of political resignations hovered at a mere four per decade in the fifties, sixties and seventies, rising only in the course of time to the record high of the past decade, which was, it should be noted, wholly due to the 10 political resignations occurring during the Balkenende era, from 2002 to 2010.

Hence, since the turn of the century, political turbulence in the Netherlands has been steadily on the rise. Not one of Balkenende’s four successive governments



lasted for the full 4 years, and a considerable number of ministers stepped down because of internal conflicts and breaches of confidence. Compared with the number of days that his governments were in office, the number of ministerial departures from Balkenende's cabinets broke all records in Dutch post-war political history. Never before had so many cabinet members been known to leave office prematurely.

About the Authors

Mark Bovens is Professor of Public Administration at the School of Governance, Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

Gijs Jan Brandsma is Assistant Professor of Public Administration at the School of Governance, Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

Dick Thesingh obtained his MA degree from the School of Governance, Utrecht University, the Netherlands, and worked as a research assistant on this project.

Notes

- 1 These can be found at www.parlement.com.
- 2 As listed in the Royal Decree (*Koninklijk Besluit*) that carried the *contraseign* of the prime minister.
- 3 In the case of sudden, politically motivated resignations, the official date of the resignation often will be a few days after the factual resignation. According to Dutch constitutional practice, the resignation is not accepted by the Queen until a successor is appointed, in order to prevent a vacuum in the system of ministerial responsibility. Therefore, in most cases the formal moment of resignation coincides with the appointment of a successor. In some cases, for example, when it takes more time to find a successor, one of the other cabinet members is appointed as minister *ad interim*. These *ad interim* appointments were not listed as appointments and resignations.
- 4 This too was based on the information provided by the PDC. In some cases, when the information was ambiguous, we consulted additional sources, such as newspaper articles in *NRC Handelsblad*.
- 5 Also available online via www.parlando.sdu.nl and www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl.
- 6 Between 1972 and 1983, the Dutch constitution did not allow members of demissionary cabinets to also take a seat in parliament.
- 7 Ed van Thijn, minister of the Interior, who also had been involved in the IRT-affair, was forced to resign on the same day as Hirsch Ballin. However, he had been in office for a few months only.
- 8 Several cabinets were formed as interim-cabinets after the fall of a previous government, in preparation of new elections. For those cabinets, none of the factions in parliament has an electoral interest in keeping ministers in office *per se*. All such cases were coded as 'not necessary for a parliamentary majority'.
- 9 See Dewan and Myatt (2007) for a theoretical justification of 'two strikes and out'.
- 10 Again, we did not consider significance because our data cover the full population of Dutch ministers.



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