



# Parliament as a steppingstone? Patterns of post-parliamentary careers in The Netherlands between 1967 and 2017

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Accepted: 15 February 2023 / Published online: 3 March 2023  
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## Abstract

Not much is known about Members of Parliament (MPs) after they leave parliament. This study addresses this empirical gap by analysing post-parliamentary employment in The Netherlands between 1967 and 2017. With 970 post-parliamentary careers included, it ranks among the most extensive studies into post-parliamentary career attractiveness up to date and a first inquiry into the development over time. By employing two different measures of attractiveness, this study provides two main findings: first, MPs are increasingly transferring towards a more attractive post-parliamentary career in the 50 years under study, indicating changing patterns in post-parliamentary employment opportunities. Second, by comparing the development in patterns between private and political sector post-parliamentary careers, this study finds that the increase can mainly be attributed to an increase in private sector post-parliamentary careers. Not only are MPs increasingly moving towards the private sector, but they are also increasingly able to gain a more or similar attractive private sector function as of an MP. As a result, the findings indicate substantially different career opportunities, which, in turn, could have significant implications for parliamentary democracy.

**Keywords** Post-parliamentary careers · Political exit · Parliament · Political careers · Revolving door

Individual politicians are the craftsmen who are required for democracy to work. As a result, they are studied intensively; studies of political representation focus on their connection to the voters, parliamentary studies concentrate on their behaviour within parliament, whereas electoral studies specifically pay attention to their

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behaviour during elections. Nonetheless, as soon as politicians leave the political arena, our knowledge about them almost ceases to exist. Few studies have been conducted following the transition out of parliament (Donohue 2016), and the field of political exit remains “under-theorized, under-researched and under-appreciated” (Keane 2011, pp. 282–283). This is surprising considering the number of notorious anecdotal examples; multiple former politicians moved towards lucrative private sector appointments, while critiques of anti-establishment parties have paid attention to the revolving door between political and government appointments.

The careers of politicians are important as their choices also reveal the relevance of the institutions they move in or out of. As the average age of Members of Parliament (MPs) in multiple established democracies is lowering (Fraser and Weller 1987; Byrne and Theakston 2016), this raises questions on the position parliament in their respective careers and thereby the role of parliament as an institution. In fact, MPs are not only increasingly having a career after parliament (Baturu and Mikhaylov 2016), but studies show that significant shares of MPs successfully manage to move towards a more attractive career in either the private or the public sector (Würfel 2018; Claessen et al. 2021). As this is the case, the question emerges if parliament can be seen as steppingstone for a further and more attractive career and if this is increasingly so?

This article examines the post-parliamentary careers of MPs in The Netherlands over a period of 50 years. The Netherlands is selected because the Dutch parliament is without any cool-off period<sup>1</sup>—i.e., MPs are able to take on any job right after parliament—and with a high level of professionalisation (Fish and Kroenig 2009). Additionally, the compositions of Dutch parliament show a declining average age from approximately 55 years old in 1963 towards almost 45 years old in 2013 (Remkes et al. 2018). Lastly, the Dutch party system also offers a highly diverse set of parties—both in ideology as in size—in combination with a comparatively low degree of party patronage (Kopecky et al. 2012). This makes, all combined, The Netherlands an excellent case to compare patterns of post-parliamentary careers in continental Europe; which offers a valuable contribution to the literature on post-political careers which is mainly situated in the Anglo-Saxon domain.

The article contributes to the literature in two ways. First, by providing the first analysis of the attractiveness—using multiple measures for career attractiveness—of post-parliamentary employment over such an extensive period of time, the study is able to show that MPs who leave parliament are increasingly able to secure a more attractive careers afterwards. This longitudinal approach to the research theme of post-parliamentary careers has, to the best my of knowledge, not been applied yet and therefore offers a first insight into the developments over time. Second, this study shows that this development can mainly be attributed in increased private

<sup>1</sup> Besides the lack of a cool-off period, the Dutch Parliament has an extensive benefits package for MPs after they leave parliament. However, the influence of such benefits on post-parliamentary careers is unclear. It could provide MPs with a solid safety net in their search for post-parliamentary employment, but such benefits are not used by all MPs and are even (ideologically) contested by some. This information is not easily available and as a consequence, the effect of such benefits cannot be further taken into account in this study.



sector employment. It longitudinally documents this development and sheds light on the different patterns between the private and political sectors in past 50 years of post-parliamentary careers. By showing how this balance has shifted, it can offer valuable insights into how parliament can be a steppingstone and how it cannot. Moreover, the findings put the relatively recent studies of political exit, and post-parliamentary employment in particular, in perspective and provide further evidence of the changes in political careers. Although this study can offer no insights in the direct implications for parliamentary democracy, this documentation provides a starting point for further research into the consequences.

## Development of the MP position

The position of MP has seen drastic changes throughout parliamentary history. The very first MPs were of good heritage, representing aristocratic backgrounds and/or the wealthier families (Mulé 1998). The position of MP was unpaid, part-time, and most importantly, not a career choice. As a result, being an MP was a secondary occupation, and parliament as a whole was less professionalized and institutionalized (Rush 2001). However, after the widespread application of universal suffrage the position of MP increased in importance. The professionalization of parliament resulted in the commonly held belief that it is impossible—even undesirable—to simultaneously have another professional position. Following Weber's observation, politicians transformed from living "for" politics towards living "from" politics (Weber 2004). As a consequence, the professionalisation gave birth to the phenomenon of "career politicians" (King 1981). These career politicians are disentanglement from society, and show narrow occupational backgrounds situated within the political sector (Allen et al. 2020). They are no longer disbanding their societal positions to fulfil a limited political tenure, because politics is considered a full career path. This career path usually includes training and positions within the political party, moving up the ladder solely by working inside the political domain. Ever since, career politicians established themselves as a strong and enduring presence within democracies across the world (Henn 2018).

The common denominator in these studies of career politicians is the central role the institution of parliament plays in the goals and ambitions of a career politician. Traditionally, acquiring the position of MP is central to the ambitions of lower-ranking career politicians as it not only provides a national profile, influence, and good financial compensation, but also functions as a sustainable basis to grow into the highest echelons of political careerism: the positions within the political executive. Additionally, MPs are perceived vulnerable as they lack the skills to pursue a career of similar attractiveness within different sectors after losing their seat (McAllister 1997; Roberts 2019; Allen et al. 2020). This vulnerability is argued to further strengthen the relative dependence on the position of a MP for a career politician.

This assumed centrality of parliament for a career politician should, however, be questioned. Multiple studies show the existence of relative large movement between different political layers (Scarrow 1997; Borchert 2011), which indicate the presence of alternative paths for a career politician. Moreover, politicians do seem to



possess relevant skills for other sectors; former politicians bring additional value to private sector companies as their presence tends to lead to increasing stock value (Luechinger and Moser 2014) and an increase in government contracts (Schoenherr 2019). This added value can be explained by two arguments. On the one hand, politicians bring invaluable relationship capital which provides access to decision-makers (Freund and Bendel 2016). On the other hand, former politicians bring substantive expertise acquired during their legislative and executive duties (Salisbury et al. 1989). Either way, MPs are able to acquire the network or expertise valuable for non-political sector employment. In turn, these capabilities tend to show significant possibility to move towards other career trajectories, and thus other career motivations and choices. Mattozzi and Merlo (2008) capture such a diversification with the concept of the “political careerist” as companions to the career politicians. In contrast to career politicians, these careerists acquire political experience to move to the private sector afterwards rather than to build a longstanding political career.

Empirically, the differentiation in politician’s career wishes, wants and desires is almost impossible to discover, and information is scarce and, if present, difficult to trust. Alternatively, scholars have brought their attention to the patterns of observable career choices rather than these wishes, wants or desires. These patterns highlight the post-political careers and thus signal the made choices, but are limited insofar they do not provide the reasoning behind them. Nevertheless, the research based on this research provides support for the distinction as conceived by Mattozzi and Merlo (2008). For instance, former ministers are able to find post-political employment in both the private and public sector (Stolz and Fischer 2014; Baturu and Mikhaylov 2016; Dörrenbächer 2016) and MPs similarly so (Baturu and Arlow 2018). In fact, almost a third of former MPs are even able to transfer into more attractive positions in either political, public, or private sectors after their tenure (Würfel 2018; Claessen et al. 2021). Politicians are thus in the position to continue their post-parliamentary career politically or non-politically, providing opportunities for both the political careerists as the career politicians. Moreover, the position of MP is thus not necessarily the definite career ending, nor for career politicians or for political careerists.

## Political ambition: MP as the first career

Career decisions are driven by a multitude of factors, but the one usually proclaimed as a strong influence is personal ambition. Politicians tend to be an ambitious crowd and individual ambition considered as a driving force for career choices. Schlessinger (1966), for instance, argues that politicians have particular ambitions which, together with institutional factors, shape political behaviour. This leads to a structure of static, discrete, and progressive ambitions which are shaped by available patterns of opportunity and their prospective rewards. In an expansion of this framework, Borchert (2011) theorises political career choices to be dependent on three main conditions: the attractiveness, availability, and accessibility of a particular position. Following Borchert’s (2011) framework, there are multiple reasons to suspect that the relative position of an MP within a career is changing.



Firstly, in almost all established democracies, parties are still the institutions that are in control of candidate selection (Hazan and Rahat 2010). However, parties are not as strong as they once were. Membership of parties all across Europe has plummeted (Van Biezen et al. 2012), which could result in less internal competition for political positions. Moreover, the party landscape has been scattered as fragmentation has been on the rise all across developed democracies (Best 2013). In effect, there is no longer a concentration of larger parties that control the candidate selection process as the field has become increasingly diverse and open for competition. This contributes to an increased accessibility of the position of MP. The accessibility of such a relatively attractive position could be higher compared to functions in other sectors, which in turn makes it more interesting to use as a steppingstone for a further career.

Secondly, there is reason to suspect that the availability of the position of MP has increased. In recent decades, all across Europe electoral volatility has been on the rise, and especially so for the Netherlands (see Mair 2008). Simultaneously, and possibly connected, has tenure been decreasing and becoming shorter (for The Netherlands see Remkes et al. 2018). This causes the overall constellation of MPs in a parliament to change shapes more often and faster than ever before. Each election cycle there are thus more places up for grasp for aspiring MPs. In effect, this could indicate an increased accessibility and availability of the MP position compared to more previous periods.

Thirdly, despite the increases in accessibility and availability of the position of MP, the position could have become less attractive in terms of importance. On the one hand, governmental structures have increasingly become multi-level (Hooghe and Marks 2003). New layers, such as the EU, are widely acknowledged to harm the overall strength of the national parliaments (O'Brennan and Raunio 2007). Similarly, all across Europe, countries have recently decentralized powers to subnational layers of government (Ladner et al. 2016), further weakening the relative power of the national institution. Within the national institutions themselves, issues and crisis have replaced powers more towards the executive vis-à-vis the parliament. The Covid-19 crisis, for example, provides a telling case in which parliaments all across Europe were effectively side-lined by their executives. Lastly, the increased job-insecurity due to the increased volatility might increase the incentives for any MP to accept more stable careers at similar levels of attractiveness. All combined, a picture emerges of a weakening parliament and thus less attractive parliament as an institution which MPs might be increasingly more willing to leave.

These three developments combined make that the position of MP is expected to be increasingly exchanged for a more attractive position. Already in 1987, Weller and Fraser noted that for the case of Australia, the perspective of being an MP shifted from a "final career" towards a "first career" (Fraser and Weller 1987). These factors combined result in a process in which the position of MP can be used as a steppingstone in which the parliament was used to move towards a more attractive position. As a result, similarly to the described processes, patterns are expected to emerge in which parliament is increasingly left for more attractive positions.



**Hypothesis 1** MPs are increasingly able to acquire more attractive post-parliamentary careers after leaving parliament.

## Who gains?

The hypothesis—and connected argument—of parliament as a steppingstone inherently has an additional question to it; if parliament can indeed be used as a steppingstone for a further career, which MPs can profit from this? Following the distinction made by Mattozzi and Merlo (2008), it can be questioned whether one group profits more vis-à-vis the other. Both have ambitions to move up the ladder, both, however, have these ambitions in rather different sectors.

Empirically, the literature indicates the existence of opportunities for both the political as private sector. For instance, Claessen et al. (2021, p. 34) find that the public sector, rather than the private sector, has most MP with a ‘more attractive’ post-parliamentary career. Others, highlighting the differences between multiple political layers (Stolz and Fischer 2014; Scarrow 1997), indicate the presence of movement between political layers and thus opportunities for the career politicians. Additionally, the ‘revolving door’ between the political realm and the private sector has been given ample academic attention. Most studies agree that the private sector harbours significant numbers of former politicians (e.g., Baturu and Mikhaylov 2016). The current research, however, mainly discusses the extent of this phenomenon or the differences between which MPs are able to make it and which do not (Baturu and Arlow 2018; Claessen et al. 2021; Theakston et al. 2007; Würfel 2018). For both sectors, however, little is known about longitudinal patterns. Most research on such post-political careers has been conducted in the most recent decades, providing little room to compare the differences over time.

Theoretically, both can be, although via different mechanisms, expected to secure a more attractive career. In the political realm, the parties are still the organisations that are in control of the distribution of offices and allocation of positions. As described above, there are several developments such as increased volatility and diversification of the nomination, which could make the position of MP comparatively easier to acquire as a career politician. At the same time, it can increasingly be a position that is preferred to move out of if the opportunity presents itself. Insecurity due to high volatility in combination with the multi-layered nature of contemporary democracies, might provide MPs with sufficient opportunities and desire to secure legislative or executive functions in such layers (Scarrow 1997; Borchert 2011). For example, sub-national layers have increasingly gained more power in the past decades, in which executive functions such as mayors, regional presidents or members of the executive might be perceived as very attractive positions. Similarly, the relative low boundaries provide the political careerists an relatively easy way in, once they are assumed to be willing to leave as soon as an opportunity presents itself—something that might even be reinforced by the increased volatility. Either way, there is no reason to assume that either sector is better suited to transition into. Consequently, both sectors would be expected to have a increasing pattern of more attractive post-parliamentary careers.



**Hypothesis 2** MPs are increasingly able to acquire a more attractive post-parliamentary career in both the political as the private sector after leaving parliament.

## Research design

This study analyses two different patterns: the changes in attractive post-parliamentary careers over time as well as sectoral differences during this period between the private and political sectors. Career attractiveness can be defined in two components; it is both subjective as it is objective. Subjective attractiveness refers to the personal satisfaction a career gives, whereas objective attractiveness is considered a combination of salary, status, and responsibility. The primary questions of this research concern longitudinal changes in career choices, rather than the direct differences in satisfaction. As a result, the study focuses on objective attractiveness to discuss the larger structural developments in post-parliamentary employment. Two different measures of objective career attractiveness are used to improve robustness: The *Top Positions* measurement which is based on occupational status and level of responsibility, and the *Salary* measurement.

Post-parliamentary careers of all MPs who have left parliament between 1967 and 2017 in the Netherlands have been coded for both sets of measures. Only members from the Tweede Kamer, i.e., the lower house, are selected as this is the main political arena. The upper house has a different political role and the members are part-time employed, which brings the additional problem of distinguishing post-parliamentary careers. The comparison over time compares the averages per parliamentary period of MPs who are successfully able to make the step towards more attractive careers. This period of 50 years is selected as it is long enough to look for real changes, while it simultaneously overlaps with the changes that are hypothesized to be the driving forces of changes in post-parliamentary employment. The second part of the analysis studies the sectoral differences by focusing on career attractiveness per political and private sector. The political sector considers all public offices that are up for election, directly appointed by the political actors such as mayors, or are funded by political entities (political parties). The private sector includes all commercial forms of corporations and organisations. However, employment in non-profit organisations such as foundations, associations, or religious organisations are not included as private sector careers. Finally, to provide a final test of the robustness of the objective career attractiveness measures, electoral data are gathered to conduct a logistic regression in which the relation between leaving voluntarily and the measurements of attractiveness is investigated. All regressions are run in combination with decade fixed effects to control for potential temporal differences.

## Career attractiveness as a variable

The database of biographic information of the Dutch Parliamentary Information Centre is used as a starting point to gather the data on political careers. The database contains high-quality data on MPs before, during, and after their tenure. This data



are further complemented using three sources of internet-based information: general sources of information as personal websites, websites of companies they work for, and Wikipedia (1), social media accounts such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook (2), and newspaper archives (3). Based on this information, the most attractive position within the first 5 years after leaving parliament is selected and coded. Within the length of this period, parliamentary experience is expected to still affect the career (see Würfel 2018; Claessen et al. 2021).

As mentioned, two different measurements are used as dependent variable: Top Positions and Salary.<sup>2</sup> The variable of Top positions is an adapted version of Berkhout (2017). Based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) four different categories are distinguished: manual professions, middle management professions, sub-top positions, and absolute top positions. Based on this, further distinctions are made in which Top Functions would include board membership of one of the 50 biggest companies in the Netherlands, mayor of one of the four biggest cities, or as Secretary-General at NATO. Sub-top functions include the positions of a mayor, full professor, and partner at an (inter)national consultancy firm. Only a very small percentage of people manage to gain such a position. These four categories are further recoded into three different categories. The Top Positions are considered as more attractive positions compared to the position of MP, the sub-top positions are similarly attractive and all other functions are coded as less attractive compared to the position of MP.

The second variable is based on the perceived salary of the highest position. For all public sector and political positions, this information is publicly available in the Netherlands. Moreover, based on earlier research into private sector rewards and earnings, a good estimation can be made of the perceived salary. This study builds and adapts the earlier codework from Claessen et al (2021) as they partly built their framework based on salary. There are 3 categories of perceived salary, 0 which means that the perceived salary is lower than that of an MP, 1 which means the salary would be similar, and 2 in which the salary is higher. In terms of attractiveness it follows the similar structure in which a higher salary is a more attractive position, a similar salary is similarly attractive and finally, a lower salary is less attractive compared to the position of MP.

## Robustness check of attractiveness

While the career choices of MPs are the central point of our research, determining whether they are indeed perceived more attractive is a difficult thing. Two measures of attractiveness are used to create a more solid spread of ambitions, but the question remains if these criteria are indeed perceived to be more attractive compared to a position of MP. To further substantiate the claim of attractiveness and to test the robustness of the measures, data on the matter of leaving parliament is included. A dummy variable is constructed: *leaving voluntarily*. This variable is based on official

<sup>2</sup> The exact coding instructions can be found in the appendix.





election records and codes whether an MP is leaving before the end of his or her tenure or does not accept a seat in the parliament while meeting the requirements of re-election. In other words, this variable indicates whether or not a MP—formally—had the opportunity to stay in parliament at the moment of leaving. In this way, we can track the direct career choices of MPs as it is a direct comparison between the MP position and the post-parliamentary career. As a result, this choice provides a further check the robustness of the attractiveness measure.

Lastly, the analysis includes information from their background careers. If someone entered parliament from a more attractive position, this would make him or her more likely to have an attractive career after parliament. The background career of the MP is coded similarly to how attractiveness is coded of the post-parliamentary tenure. As a result, it is based on data from Dutch Parliamentary Information Centre and additional collected online information for the 5 years prior to joining parliament. Moreover, there are two different variables indicating the background career. Namely, based on top functions and based on salary, both with the categories of more, less or similar levels of attractiveness to the position of MP. This variable also provides the opportunity to check changes over time and thus provides a way to compare the relative experience of MPs when entering parliament.

## Results

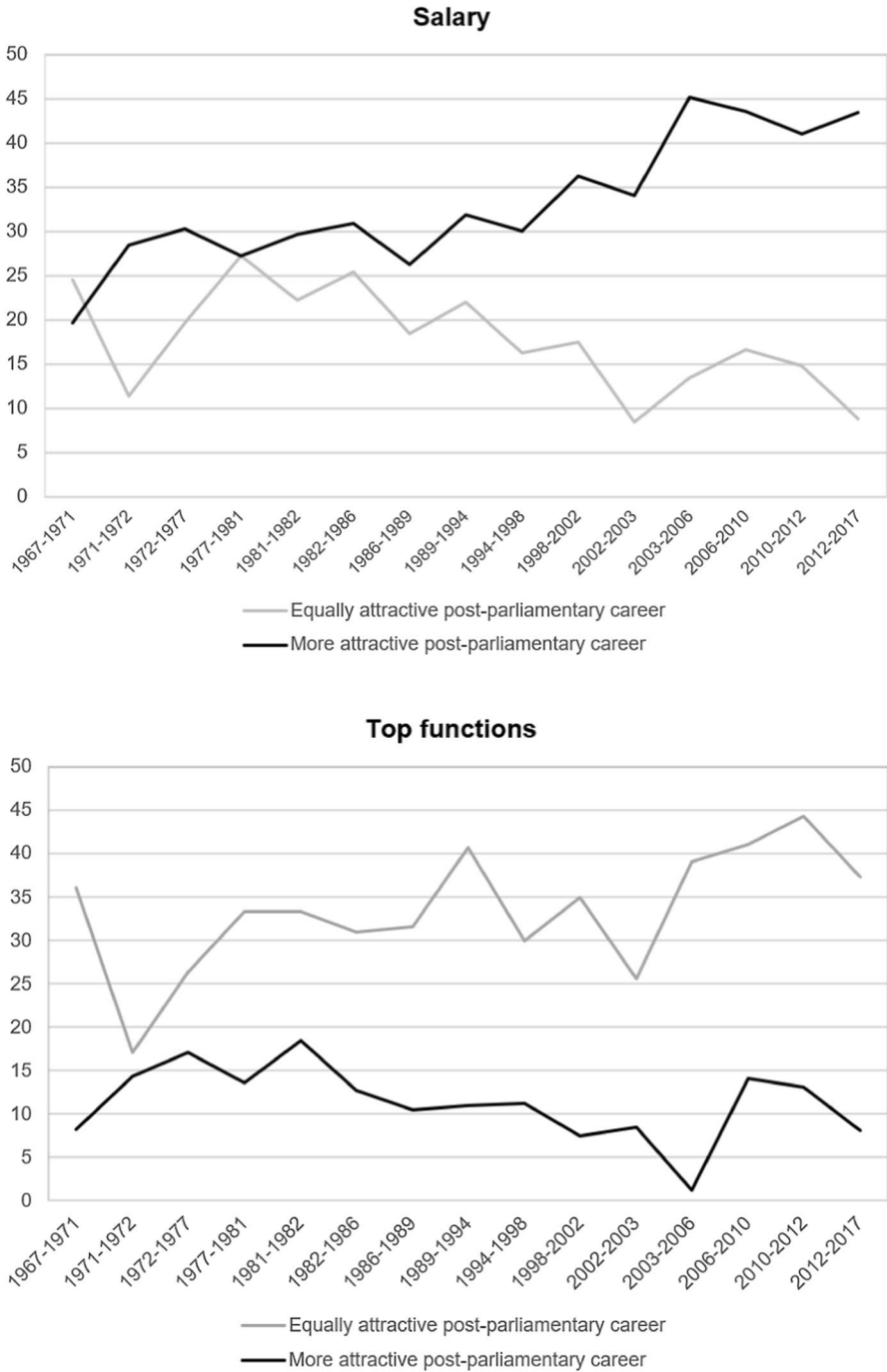
The first results show that a substantial group of the 970 MPs in the analysis is able to transfer into a more or equally attractive position after parliament.<sup>3</sup> Between 1967 and 2017, 34.32% of MPs successfully managed to get a more attractive position based on salary and 10.76% of the MPs were able to move into the more attractive Top Functions. These numbers are significantly higher compared to the average levels of more attractive background careers which at 1.82% of MPs the Top Functions and 9.31% for Salary. Moreover, 17.52% of MPs is able to get a similarly attractive function based on salary and 34.53% based on the Top Functions measure. Combined, 51.84% of MPs based on salary and 45.29% based on the Top Functions remain at least at a similar level of attractiveness. However, one thing comes abundantly clear as well: this possibility is not for all as a large part of MPs is not able to make this step.

## Development of post-parliamentary careers

The results of post-parliamentary career attractiveness over time are visible in Fig. 1. The figure shows the percentage of MPs per parliamentary period—for both Top Functions as for Salary—who are moving into a more attractive or

<sup>3</sup> There is a difference in the number of MPs in background career and post-parliamentary careers: 20 MPs died while in office or shortly after and for a total of 16 cases their post-parliamentary career cannot be determined. Those cases are removed from the analysis.





**Fig. 1** Percentage of MPs that acquires a more attractive post-parliamentary career or an equally attractive post-parliamentary career based on the measures of salary and top functions

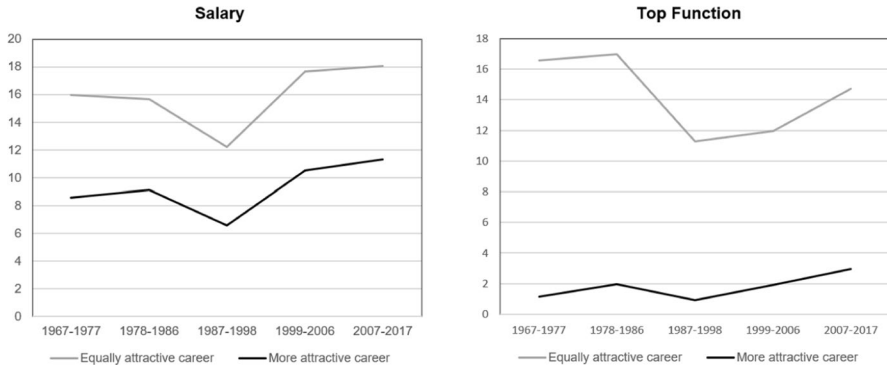


equally attractive post-parliamentary career per parliamentary period. The hypothesis expected an increase in more attractive post-parliamentary careers. The measurement of Salary indicates support for the hypothesis as MPs are increasingly able to secure a more attractive post-parliamentary career. Initially, a mere 19.68% of MPs who left during or after the 1967–1971 parliamentary period were able to secure a more attractive career. Although this already increased to 30.25% for the period of 1972–1977, it remained relatively stable at approximately 30% for the two decades after. The new millennium, however, showed—again—a substantial increase, which peaked during the parliamentary period of 2003–2006. In comparison, the first—between 1967 and 1977—and final decade—between 2006 and 2017—shows a 16.7% points increase from 26.16% in the first decade towards 42.86% in the final decade. Interestingly, a large part of this increase seems to be the result of MP who previously were able to gain a similarly attractive career. In other words, MPs who could only settle for a similarly attractive position previously, might now secure a more attractive position. Nevertheless, if both groups would be combined, there is still a decrease in the number of MPs who transfer from parliament with a less attractive career. Although less strong, the trend is thus universally moving towards a higher degree of attractive post-parliamentary employment.

The measure of Top Functions follows a rather different path. More attractive post-parliamentary careers peak in the first decades and is at its lowest point during the parliamentary period of 2003–2006. While this pattern is clearly downward, the curve is not as sharp compared to the one of Salary, set aside the lowest point during the 2003–2006 period. If the very first decade of the dataset, from 1967 until 1977, is compared with the final decade ranging from 2007 until 2017, the first decade shows 13.37% of MPs being able to transition into a more attractive career whereas this is 11.34% for the final decade. In contrast, the group that is able to move towards similar levels of attractiveness, has grown over the decades. That group shows a moderate growth during the 50 year period, and if we compare between the first and final decade, increases from 27.91% for the first to 40.34% of MPs in the final decade. Moreover, if both are combined into one central measure of more at least equally attractive, a small increase is visible for the 50 year period.

But what explains the divergence between both measures in attractiveness? The answer lies in the differences between the two measurements. Most importantly, some functions characterised as similarly attractive based on Top functions are more attractive in terms of salary. For instance, the position of Mayor is coded as similarly attractive based on top functions unless the MP becomes mayor of one of the four largest cities, whereas mayors of at least the 50 largest municipalities earn a higher salary compared to that of a MP. Likewise, the top functions for the private sector require leadership positions within the country's most prominent companies, whereas a higher salary might already be achieved lower down in the hierarchy. Following this hierarchy, it therefore seems that a more attractive salary is a lower barrier to enter compared to one of the more attractive top functions. As a result, these MPs have not been able to move into the even harder category of more attractive Top Functions, while they were able to transition into positions of more attractive salary.





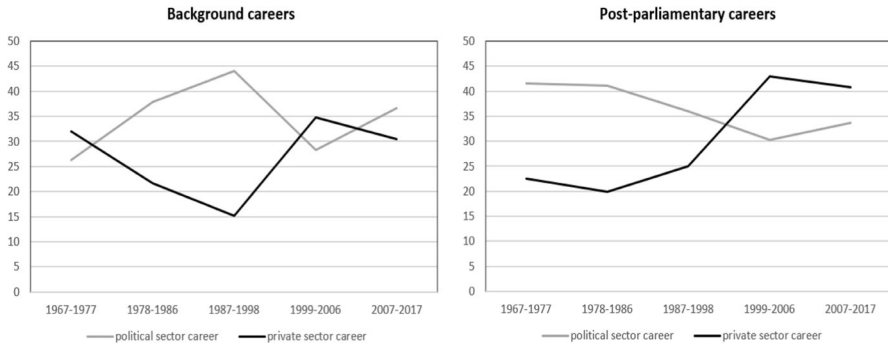
**Fig. 2** Percentage of MPs that leave parliament coming from a more attractive background career or an equally attractive background career based on the measures of salary and top functions

Finally, the period of 2003–2006 is a particular anomaly. One of the explanations for this period can be found in the remarkable period before this parliamentary period. The LPF shook the Dutch Party system on its grounds in 2002 by entering parliament with 26 seats. A first glance at the candidates who entered parliament reveals that many came from high-earning backgrounds; it included multiple doctors, entrepreneurs, and high-ranking people from the private sector. While they were usually able to transition back into these high-paying positions in the years after, these positions are not necessarily considered to be more attractive in terms of status—only equally attractive to be precise. Moreover, the career planning of more traditional MPs seems to have been shaken up by this particular shock in time.

A final check to these patterns is the background careers of these MPs. Entering parliament with a more attractive career is expected to also increase the chances of leaving parliament with a more attractive career. Figure 2 shows the degree of changes in background careers for both measures of attractiveness.<sup>4</sup> The first decade shows that—from the MPs who left during that period—1.14% of MPs had a more attractive background career based on Top Functions and 8.38% had such a career based on salary. Moreover, 16.57% of MPs entered parliament with a similarly attractive career based on Top Functions and 16% based on salary. In comparison, the final decade shows a small increase for Top Functions to 2.94% of MPs who left between 2006 and 2017 coming into the parliament with a more attractive career and 14.71 on similarly attractive careers. For the measure of salary, there is a somewhat bigger increase of 11.34% of MPs coming from more attractive and 18.07% on similar attractive careers. Nonetheless, these relatively small increases are not able to fully explain the larger increase visible for attractive post-parliamentary careers nor are they a story of change over the 50 year period. What it does show, however,

<sup>4</sup> Be aware of the fact that the scale has changed into decades instead of individual parliamentary periods.





**Fig. 3** Percentage of background and post-parliamentary careers in the political and private sector of the total percentage of careers

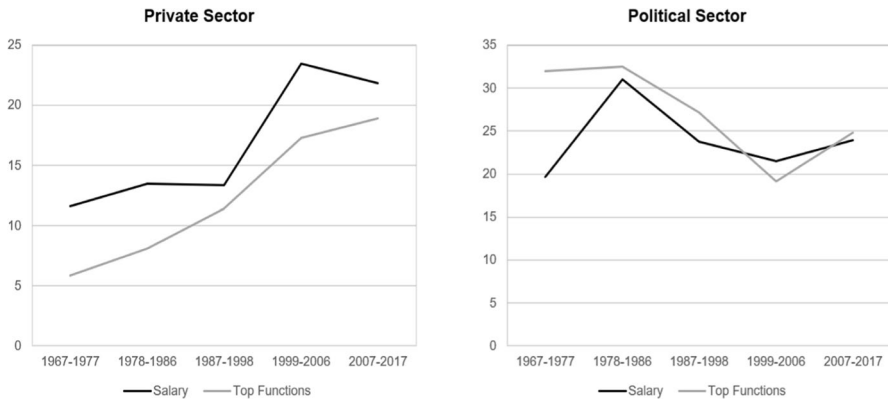
is the fact that MPs from 50 years ago did not necessarily come to the parliament from more attractive careers compared to now.

### Sectoral differences: who gains?

Interestingly, if we subdivide the group into political and private sector, there are significant differences between the two sectors. Figure 3 shows the first overview of the sectoral spread of background and post-parliamentary careers. Two observations are to be made here: while political sector background careers are dominant in the earlier period of the 50 year cycle, the two final decades shows a more mixed background that includes a relative equal division between private and political sector. Moreover, in terms of post-parliamentary careers the two final decades shows relatively more MPs leaving and transitioning into private sector careers—independently of the attractiveness of the function. As a result, the private surpasses the political sector as the most prominent post-parliamentary career and the difference between the two sectors is approximately 12% for MPs that leave in the parliamentary periods between 1998 and 2006, and 6% points for the final parliamentary periods between 2006 and 2017. In contrast, the very first decade of the analysis, between 1967 and 1977, shows 43% of MPs moving into the political sector whereas only 22% of MPs secures a private sector post-parliamentary employment. In other words, in this 50 year period, the scales have tilted in the advantage of private sector post-parliamentary careers compared to political sector post-parliamentary careers.

Furthermore, there are also strong sectoral differences in the trends of degree of post-parliamentary employment. Figure 4 shows per sector, the percentage of MPs within that sector that are able to make the transition towards a similarly or more attractive post-parliamentary career. Hypothesis 2 argued for no specific sectoral differences in the increasing opportunities to secure a more attractive post-parliamentary career. Figure 4 shows the existence of a downward trend—both for salary and for Top Functions—of MPs who acquire a more attractive or similarly attractive career in the political sector. There is no indication of any upward pattern in





**Fig. 4** Percentage, for both the measure of salary as top functions, of similarly and more attractive post-parliamentary career per sector

terms of attractiveness for the political sector, in fact, it peaks for both measurements in the second decade of the analysis. In contrast, the data for the private sector is very different. While there is still a smaller section of MPs who move into the private sector able to gain a similarly attractive or more attractive post-parliamentary career compared to in the political sector, this gap seems to be closing fast. Both for the measure of Salary and the Top Functions measure, there is a substantial and clear positive trend in MPs being able to acquire such attractive post-parliamentary careers. In the first decade of the analysis, only 11.63% of leaving MPs based on salary and 5.88% of MPs based on Top Functions did make that successful transition. In comparison, the final decade of the analysis shows 21.85% based on salary and 18.9% based on Top Functions. This data shows that MPs are not only moving more and more into private sector post-parliamentary careers, they are also more and more able to gain a career that is similarly or more attractive compared to the career of MP. It can therefore be argued that the upward trend in attractiveness can be attributed to this increase in private sector attractive post-parliamentary careers. Consequently, hypothesis 2 can be rejected.

## Career attractiveness measurements

Table 1 provides the results of the further robustness checks on the patterns found in the analysis above. The table indicates the results of the logistic regression analyses, which include the decade fixed effects, the control variable of background career as well as the ‘leaving voluntarily’ variable. Importantly, there is a strong and positive statistically significant relationship between leaving parliament voluntarily for each measure in the categories more attractive and similarly attractive careers. This provides valuable feedback on the measures of attractiveness; the attractive positions are deemed attractive compared to the position of MP as MPs are willing—either in between tenure or by not accepting a seat—to directly transition into this



**Table 1** Logistic regression analysis of leaving voluntarily and more or equally attractive post-parliamentary careers

	Top functions		Salary	
	More attractive	Equally attractive	More attractive	Equally attractive
(Constant)	- 2.928*** (0.288)	- 1.303*** (0.188)	- 1.788*** (0.205)	- 1.395*** (0.205)
Leaving voluntarily	1.454*** (0.244)	0.630*** (0.147)	1.341*** (0.156)	0.014 (0.184)
Background career (Top Function/salary)	1.133** (0.237)	0.455* (0.181)	1.351*** (0.245)	- 0.146 (0.230)
Decade fixed effects				
- 2LL	580,546	1218,302	1115,460	889,645
Cox and Snell's $R^2$	0.083	0.035	0.130	0.014
Nagelkerke's $R^2$	0.168	0.048	0.179	0.390
<i>N</i>	970	970	970	970

Binary logistic regression analysis with decade fixed effects and standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

other career. In other words, in the case of a somewhat direct choice between being an MP and the post-parliamentary career, they significantly more likely to secure a more attractive career compared to non-voluntarily leaving. The one category that provides weaker results is the category of similarly attractive for salary. While this does not create direct problems for the analysis, it could indicate that in terms of salary, leaving voluntarily for a similar salary is not deemed attractive enough to leave parliament—further corroborating the relative positioning of salary vis-à-vis the top function measurement.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study shows the increasing existence of more attractive post-parliamentary careers. Despite the substantial differences between the two measurements, the data suggests a conformation of the hypothesized increasing opportunities for attractive post-parliamentary careers. This already offers an interesting contribution to the earlier studies on post-parliamentary careers and the broader debate on representative democracy as leaving parliament might not be as unfortunate as usually perceived (e.g., Roberts 2019). In fact, it has become increasingly less unfortunate in the past 50 years.

Nevertheless, some things require a more detailed discussion. Firstly, not all factors of availability, attractiveness, and accessibility seem to be affected similarly. The relative number of MPs coming from more attractive backgrounds has remained relatively stable over the 50 years and indicates no decrease. On the contrary, if a development can be identified, it is an increasing one. The position of MP has thus not become a “first career” (Fraser and Weller 1987), but it cannot be considered a “last career” either. Whether it is the accessibility or



the attractiveness of the position that explains the stability cannot be determined based on this particular study and requires further conceptual and empirical disentanglement. This finding, however, also contributes to the literature on a more positive note. It provides no evidence of a declining quality of its members for The Netherlands based on their background experience. Whereas questions of the quality of parliamentary oversight and representation are usually answered by researching the behaviour of members within parliament,—and rightfully so—this finding can offer some additional insight using the background experience as the focus.

Secondly, despite the increasing possibilities to secure a more attractive post-parliamentary career, there are significant differences between the political and private sector. As a result, hypothesis 2, which expected an increase in attractive post-parliamentary careers for both the political sector as the private sector is rejected as the percentage of MPs leaving for the political sector with attractive post-parliamentary careers is decreasing. The MPs that leave for political sector positions are increasingly unable to move into similarly attractive or more attractive post-parliamentary careers. While it does not provide insight why this is the case, the relative position of MP does seem to have been decreasing within the political sector. In other words, securing a more attractive post-parliamentary career has only become harder. This seems to suggest that either the selection of those positions has changed or parliament as an institution has been valued as less valuable compared to these other positions. In any case, it creates questions about whether or not parliament is still the most preferred route towards the higher echelons of political careerism. Further research should take on the careers of those positions and more clearly distinguish between the different layers of the political career to further distinguish between the different categories.

The image of post-parliamentary careers in the private sector shows a very different image: not only are more members leaving for the private sector, but they are also increasingly able to do so for a more or similarly attractive post-parliamentary career. This further strengthens the case of political careerists as advocated by Mattozini and Merlo (2008) and has some larger implications for parliamentary democracy as a whole. Most importantly, the increasing existence of such patterns in private sector post-parliamentary attractiveness can create incentives that should not be preferable in a democracy. One of the most important features of competitive democracy is the fact that politicians are held accountable by the voter. As a result, political goals align with larger goals from the population as the ambitious politician will conform, to a certain extent, to the preferences of the citizens. The private sector on the other hand is characterized by private and commercial goals which are inherently different from such democratic goals. Patterns of large movement towards more attractive private sector post-parliamentary careers can call into question the motivations and channelling of ambitions of individual politicians. If a successful other option is to opt for an attractive private sector career, a politician can be tempted to further align his or her goals with private sector goals instead of the more political goals. This study does not argue that this is automatically the case, but the presence of such patterns does show a vulnerability for democracy. Further research would require a study of the behaviour in parliament and the sequenced





post-parliamentary career to see if this is something that influences the functioning of the parliament.

To end, Schlessinger (1966, p. 1) argued that “ambition is at the heart of politics”. When looking at the patterns of post-parliamentary careers in the past 50 years in The Netherlands, parliament has become increasingly a place for post-parliamentary ambitions. This does not mean parliament can be a steppingstone for everyone, but as it becomes possible for more and more MPs, parliament can increasingly be seen as not a definite career position. Whether or not these patterns influence parliament is a question that remains to be answered, but the mere presence of such patterns could indicate a possible driver of political behaviour that should be taken seriously.

**Supplementary Information** The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-023-00291-w>.

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