

# **Mirror, Mirror on the Wall Government Self-Reflection in Annual Queen's Speeches, 1947-2006**

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Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual NIG Werkconferentie, Tilburg, Nederland, 8 November, 2008. The authors would like to thank Marcel Hanegraaff, Nanette Kistemaker and Judith van Krieken for their accurate coding of the Queen's speeches, and Josta de Hoog for research assistance during this project.

## **Abstract**

As part of a large study of the macro-level structure of the Dutch policy agenda from 1947 to 2006, we examine how the issues associated with public administration have evolved over the post-War era. We use sentence-by-sentence coding of annual Queen's Speeches from 1947 to 2006 using the Baumgartner-Jones Policy Agenda Project coding scheme as our measure of the issues drawing government attention. One of the major codes in this scheme concerns public administration or how the government views issues of government structure and performance in a generic sense independent of specific policy domains. We use time series and content analyses to examine how attention to public administration has changed over 60 years. At the broadest level, we find strong secular growth in the attention to internal issues of public administration with variations in several specific themes in recent decades.

## **Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Government Self-Reflection in Annual Queen's Speech, 1947-2006**

A substantial body of recent research has examined how government attention to issues changes in systematic ways. Based on a model of punctuated equilibrium that views shifts in political attention as appearing between relatively stable periods with only small adaptations and changes, scholars in the U.S. (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005) and Europe have now (John and Margetts, 2003; Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen and Jones, 2006; John, 2006a; John, 2006b; John and Liu, 2006; Walgrave, Varone, and Dumont, 2006; Baumgartner, Foucault, and François, 2006; Timmermans and Scholten, 2006; Princen and Rhinard, 2006) examined how attention to specific policies has changed over time. Far less frequently examined, however, is government attention to *how* it does its job in carrying out the policies it adopts. This is an issue of general public administration that goes beyond the content of specific policies. In short, how much attention does government pay to how it works, how it is organized, and how it parts work together and with citizens. This issue is important on its own terms as the world of public administration has undergone rather extraordinary change in the post-War period, moving from a period of strong era of growth in the welfare state and its attendant Weberian bureaucracies, through efforts to open the doors of government to citizens, to the current ascendancy of New Public Management (NPM) (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Lynn, 2006) and participatory policy-making (Stoker, 2006). How are these changes, which are so evident in public administration textbooks, reflected in government attention to general structures of providing public goods and services?

As part of a large study of the macro-level structure of the Dutch policy agenda from 1947 to 2006, we examine how the issues associated with public administration have evolved over the post-War era. We use sentence-by-sentence coding of annual Queen's speeches from 1947 to 2006 using the Baumgartner-Jones Policy Agenda Project coding scheme as our measure of the issues drawing government attention. One of the major codes in these scheme concerns public administration or how the government views issues of government structure and performance in a generic sense independent of specific policy domains. In the first

section of the paper, we examine the utility of data on the Queen's speeches as a source of data on government agendas in general. We then explore how attention to issues of public administration in general has changed relative to other issues. In the third section, we use time series analysis of statements and content analyses of those statements to assess the evolution of major issues concerning how government does its job. Finally, we conclude by discussing the general nature of attention by government to issues of administration.

### **Approach and Method**

Within the agenda-setting literature, venues are considered to be vital elements as they constitute of 'institutional locations where authoritative decisions are made concerning a given issue' (Baumgartner and Jones, 1999: 32). An especially interesting venue to study executive agenda-setting in the Netherlands, are the Dutch Queen's speeches. It is, of course, not the Queen who writes this speech, but the coalition government. Given on *Prinsjesdag* (Prince's Day), the Queen addresses both Chambers of Parliament and normally gives this speech at the third Tuesday in September. Queen's speeches both looks back to major events of the last year and looks forward to what Government wishes to achieve in the year to come while at the same time addressing Government's hopes and concerns about the wellbeing of the country. While inevitably has symbolic, the speech also contains announcements of new legislative projects and presents the Government's budget. It thus concerns real politics and real public policy, and it tells a story of governmental policy priorities. One part of that story concerns how the government does its work. Thus, Queen's speeches provide a good opportunity to see how the government thinks about how it does its job, how it provides public goods and services, and how it responds to its citizens.

Our coding of the Dutch Queen's speeches follows agenda-setting research conducted in Northern America and Europe (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993, 2002; John and Margetts, 2003; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen and Jones, 2006). A key feature of these projects is the use of a similar codebook containing 19 main topic categories and over 200 subtopics to code agendas in various countries. The Dutch version of the

codebook was created in close collaboration with the policy agendas research teams in the US and Denmark. If necessary, subcodes were adjusted to account for idiosyncrasies related to the Dutch political system (Breeman et al, 2007).

We coded all annual Queen's speeches between 1947 and 2006 at the level of the individual sentence and quasi-sentence.<sup>1</sup> For each sentence or quasi-sentence in the speech, we determined whether the sentence was a real policy intention mentioning some kind of action in the coming year, was a more general statement about a policy problem, or was just ceremonial in character. If sentences made reference to more than one policy topic – enumerative statements, for example, occurred in all Queen's speeches – then we coded at the quasi-sentence level. Purely ceremonial statements spoken at the beginning and end of a Queen's speech were not coded by content because these sentences do not have any policy

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<sup>1</sup> In the Queen speeches, we distinguish four different types of statements. These are the symbolic, general, specific, and exceptional statements. Symbolic statements are the general words of introduction and the final words of the Queen speech. In 1947, the speech started as follows: *Hoewel in de ruim twee jaren, die ons scheiden van de dag der bevrijding, het beeld van ons land, dank zij de toenemende krachtsinspanning van ons volk, alom zichtbare, gelukkige veranderingen heeft ondergaan, moeten wij iedere stap op de weg vooruit nog steeds bevechten tegen een stroom van nationale en internationale moeilijkheden, die nauwelijks in kracht vermindert. It ended with *Op deze inspanning moge de meer dan ooit voor het slagen van ons mensenwerk noodzakelijke zegen Gods rusten*. These statements cannot be coded by policy content, as can neither the Queen's private statements, such as when Beatrix celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her reign (2005): *Mijn grote dank gaat uit naar allen die mij dit jaar overal met enthousiasme verwelkomen*. There are also general statements to relate to some overall observation, such as "*Ons land wordt deze jaren zwaar op de proef gesteld* (1983) or *In Nederland is veel goeds tot stand gebracht. (1999) that are not codable*.*

Second, we distinguish between statements that have a policy content and those that have not. Note, however, that those statements without a clear policy content may be coded by a general, specific or exceptional code. Take, for instance, the following statement from the 2001 queen speech: *Een vitale democratie is gebaat bij actieve participatie van burgers*. This is a general statement about the role of citizens in our democratic system. But it does not contain any policy intention and is those coded as a general statement in the policy area, in our case *Functioneren democratie en openbaar bestuur*. In the same way, we also distinguish a general code, but then with policy content. The 2002 Queen speech, for example, says something general about the corporate culture and indicates that the government wants to change this: *In reactie op de problemen in ons land wil de regering inhoud geven aan een nieuwe bestuurscultuur*. This is also coded under the general code, but is additionally coded as a clear policy intention, albeit what precisely intended remains unclear.

We also distinguish specific codes with and without policy content. An example of the latter is, *Het voorstel tot algehele herziening van de Kieswet zal u in de tweede helft van 1987 worden aangeboden* (1986). In contrast, *De teruglopende opkomst bij verkiezingen baart zorgen was assigned a specific codes with policy content*.

Finally, there are a few statements that are so peculiar or unusual that we did not create a specific code for them, although some could again be coded as having specific policy content. For example, in 2006, the Queen observed that parliament meets in a newly decorated room: *Dit jaar vindt uw Verenigde Vergadering plaats in een nieuw ingerichte Ridderzaal* This has something to do with the parliamentary ceremonies, but has no policy content whatsoever. In contrast, when the government announced a plan to establish a committee to review the quality of the bills (1987), it was assigned to the exception code, but also coded as specific policy content.

content. Still, we counted them merely as part of our calculation of the total length of Queen's speeches. The dataset thereby created consists of some 8,300 coded sentences and quasi-sentences that were allocated into one of the 19 main topic categories and into a more specific subtopic category when applicable. Intercoder reliability checks were made at different stages in the coding process and instances of deviance were discussed and recoded. Coding proved to be highly reliable, with inter-coder reliability scores above 0.90 in all cases and well above 0.90 in most cases. The dataset constructed in this way is used to determine which issues are addressed by governments in their annual address before the joint Chambers of Parliament. Thereby, we hope to determine how the politics of executive attention has evolved over time.

In this analysis, we are interested in only one of the 19 major substantive topic codes: *functioneren democratie en openbaar bestuur* (functioning of democracy and government). Clearly, all of the major topic codes have something to do with public administration. When governments talk of expanding health care, promoting integration, or almost anything else, public administration is involved in some manner. Still, there are a number of topics that governments attend to that do not readily fit into substantive policy topics. But while these 'public administration' topics address many different issues, they have in common attention to government itself, especially in terms of *how* it is conducting its on-going business. That is, they address general questions of government structure in providing goods and services, questions about public employees, and questions of process, either political or administrative.

Most of the codable statements in the *functioneren democratie en openbaar bestuur* major topic code, however, were not readily assigned to a specific subcode. Indeed, more than half – 348 of the 606 codable statements – within this major subject code could only be included in a residual *algemeen en combinaties van subtopics* category (general and combined subcodes). Many other subcodes attracted little or no attention throughout the period. Indeed, subcodes addressing *postdiensten (postal office)*(4 statements), *benoemingen (appointments/nominations/commissions)* (0), *koninklijke onderscheidingen (Royal distinction)* (0), *rijksinkoop contracten en uitbesteding (government contracts and contracting out/outsourcing)* (0), *overheidsgebouwen (government buildings)* (0), *belastingdienst (tax*

*office*) (0), *strafrechtelijke vervolging ministers (judicial prosecution of ministers)* (0), *relatie regering-parlement (relation Cabinet-Parliament)* (12), *verkiezingen en verkiezingscampagnes (elections and election campaigns)* (14), *claims tegen overheid (claim for damages against government)* (0), *rampenbestrijding (disaster management)* (7), *nationale feestdagen (national holidays)* (0), *zaken rond het koninklijk huis (royal family)* (12), *en overige (other)* (4) were assigned no coded statements or were assigned only a few. For the latter, there would be a spike or two over the 50 year period, often associated with quite narrow issues. But there was no sustained attention to the issue. Beyond the general statements not assignable to a specific code, however, there were five subcodes that did attract sustained attention at some point in the post-War period: *interbestuurlijke betrekkingen* (90 statements), *regeling en toezicht gemeentetaken* (30), *personeel in overheidsdienst en ambtenaren* (36), *overheidsefficiëntie en toezicht op bureaucratie* (33), and *staatkundige vernieuwing* (16). Together with the *algemene* statements, these subcodes account for 91.25 percent of the statements in the *functioneren democratie en openbaar bestuur* major topic code. Most of our attention will be addressed to these five sub-codes.

### **Attention to Public Administration**

We begin with analyzing the macro-structure of these political documents in the period 1947-2006 and especially how the public administration topics were addressed within the Queen's speeches. The first step is determining how many total and public administration statements the Queen's speeches contained over the period investigated and how many of these were policy intentions for the new parliamentary year.<sup>2</sup> The total number of statements in the Queen's speeches increased markedly from approximately 100 through the 1960s to around

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<sup>2</sup> As noted, the proportion of policy intentions is a subset of all codable statements in terms of the topics scheme we used. Queen's speeches are not entirely policy programmes containing clear future commitments but also have a broader and in part symbolic function of directing political attention to points of hope and concern. We also counted purely ceremonial sentences, but did not include these in the content analysis where sentences were given substantive codes. On average, the proportion of purely ceremonial statements was 8.57 percent of all sentences. Some years show more ceremony; in 2005, for example, the 25 year anniversary in office of Queen Beatrix was mentioned.

200 in the mid-1980s and 1990s (Breeman et al, 2007). There was no steady increase, however. Indeed, the earlier part of the time series and the later part are rather different with a discontinuous period of rapid growth during the 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed, this period of overall growth conforms well to a third order polynomial regression of the number of statements in the length of the speeches was stable, grew sharply, and then stabilized over the last 20 years. This pattern of rapid growth and then stabilization or even some decline was evident in the time series of several of the major topics. Although precise periods of increase and stabilization or even decline varied to a considerable degree, the policy topics associated with macroeconomics, the environment, immigration and integration, social security, foreign affairs, national defense, and labor all reflect this pattern. A few others – crime and justice policy and health policy – evidenced patterns growth in attention in terms of number and proportion of statements in Troonredes over the last 25 years.

Against this backdrop of change, the one major topic code that stood out in terms of its temporal pattern was *functioneren democratie en openbaar bestuur*. As seen in figure 1, the nominally staid policy area of public administration produces a simple linear pattern of increase – albeit heteroskedastic – as governments have used more time in the Queen’s speeches to discuss their own structures for providing goods and services. On average, each Queen’s speech included just over 10 statements that were codable in some manner as addressing general issues of public administration. But prior to the 1960s, there were far fewer than 10 statements associated with public administration in any of the Queen’s speeches. The number of statements grew, albeit with some marked drop-off in the mid-1990s, to over 30 statements in 2004. This pattern of steady growth holds up well when we shift our attention from the absolute number of statements to their relative proportion. As seen in figure 2, the proportion of statements on public administration has increased even as the total number of statements in the Queen’s speeches has grown. On average, public administration statements accounted for 6.66 percent of the total number of statements. But that proportion has often been over 10 percent since the late 1970s. To put this level of attention into perspective, this proportion now exceeds that observed for all of the other 19

substantive topic codes except macroeconomic policy, foreign policy, and labor policy. Thus, attention to how government does its job in general terms now exceeds most other policy topics, and attention to public administration, broadly defined, is still a growing area of public attention.

(figures 1 and 2 about here)

What is perhaps most interesting about this steady pattern of growth is that government did not seem to say much about *how* it did its business through much of the build-up of the modern welfare state during the 1950s and 1960s. Instead, government spoke then of specific policies, specific programs in substantive terms. It was only after the stabilization of the welfare state that explicit attention turned to the mechanics of how government goods and services were provided and how the public sector made decisions. Thus, attention to public administration is a concern of an established state.

Just as importantly, this recent attention often seems to be more than purely symbolic. As noted earlier, part of the statements in the Queen's speeches are ceremonial (8.57 percent on average). And among those statements that could be coded by policy content, not all reflected strong policy intentions. The latter is certainly true for the general topic code of public administration, as seen in the first bar in figure 3. Only 65.35 percent of all of the public administration statements reflected relatively concrete policy proposals. This was especially true for the 348 general public administration statements of the total of 606 statements in this major topic code. Only 58.05 percent of these general statements were codable in terms of strong or specific policy intentions. A sample of non-codable or general statements is presented in the appendix. Statements not codable in terms of specific policy content include, are, for example: "government will not and cannot do anything but to choose for the future"(1991), or "public administration exists for the citizens"(1994). But the five subtopic codes about which we are specifically interested and which attracted sustained attention show much higher levels of codable policy intentions, ranging from 78.70 percent

for *overheidefficiëntie and toezicht op bureaucratie* to 96.76 percent for *regeling en toezicht gemeentetaken*. Recent governments, at least in terms of intentions states in their annual speeches, seem to do more than merely talk about public administration.

(figure 3 about here)

### **Variation Over Time: Five Subtopics**

There is considerable variation in attention to the specific subcodes over time, as is evident in figure 4. Perhaps the broadest thing to note about the figure is the varied emphasis on the most general coding scheme, which we have noted encompasses the majority of statements on public administration. In particular, the governments of the late-1970s and early 1980s tended to say much less specific things about public administration than either the governments that preceded them or those that followed. This is consistent with the findings on all policy topics more generally (Breeman et al, 2007). That is, governments in these periods made relatively few statements, and those statements they made tended to have less policy content.

(figure 4 about here)

We can look more specifically at the five substantive subcodes that merit special attention. The first two – *interbestuurlijke betrekkingen* and *regeling en toezicht gemeentetaken* – address mostly institutional relationships among levels of government. As seen in figures 5 and 6, they attracted quite different patterns of attention over time. Figure 5 indicates that the former was accorded little attention over most of the post-War period. But from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, *interbestuurlijke betrekkingen* (intergovernmental relations) statements increased markedly as it did also in 2004. In contrast, as seen in figure 6, *regeling en toezicht gemeentetaken* (regulation and control of municipality's tasks) statements rose and declined in no obvious pattern.

(figure 5 and 6 about here)

We can explore these divergent patterns more closely by examining the actual statements. Starting with *interbestuurlijke betrekkingen* (intergovernmental relations), we see four interesting patterns. The first pattern is attention for decentralization – reaching a peak in the 1980s and 1990s. Initially, statements regarding decentralization remained vague. A mere mentioning of the need to strengthen regions to further the development of the country (e.g. Queen’s speech of 1968) was all that was being said. In contrast, from the late 1970s onward, statements became more specific. The way in which decentralization was dealt with was described in some detail. Decentralization entailed the delegation of tasks, increasing municipalities’ discretionary powers, and financial agreements – all to be covered in covenants (*bestuursakkoorden*) made between municipalities and national government.

The second pattern – related to the ever increasing level of decentralization – is the introduction of participatory policy-making. First mentioned in 1976, participatory policy-making is seen as a means to further decentralization. It takes, however, 14 years, before participatory policy-making is mentioned again. As part of social and governmental renewal (*sociale en bestuurlijke vernieuwing*), local governments have to consult citizens and societal organizations to collectively make decisions and create policy. In almost all references, participatory policy-making is specifically linked to the concept of decentralization.

The third pattern is the second peak in attention which occurred in 2004; a peak caused by government’s intention to decrease the number of laws and rules while in the process of or through modernizing government. One way to modernize government is the use of internet. Thus, it was noted that municipalities were expected to publish at least half of their information on internet by the end of 2004.

The last pattern is actually the *lack* of a pattern. Decentralization included the transfer of tasks to municipalities. Small municipalities, however, were unable to execute all these tasks. As a consequence, smaller municipalities were reorganized into a large municipality

which could cope with the workload or a small municipality was added to an already existing larger municipality (Neelen, Rutgers, en Tuurenhout, 2003: 112). This municipal restructuring (*gemeentelijke herindeling*) is rarely mentioned in Queen's speeches. The only frequent reference to restructuring is made to the creation of city provinces as a means to empower important cities (e.g. Rotterdam, The Hague, and Amsterdam) so that they could deal with their specific problems (Queen's speech, 1990). It is interesting to see how a phenomenon which never came into being – city provinces – is mentioned frequently in the Queen's speeches, whereas a phenomenon which occurred frequently – municipal restructuring – is only mentioned twice (explicitly in 1986 (*gemeentelijke herindeling*) and implicitly in 1993 (*ordening van de gebiedsindeling*). Apparently, one was a matter of 'high politics', the other more 'low politics'.

The subtopic *Regeling en toezicht gemeentetaken* consists of 30 statements or substatements dealing primarily with issues of budget allocation systems of Dutch municipalities, such as the establishment and revisions of the *Gemeentefonds*, discussion financial problems of mainly the larger cities, and announcements of new revisions bearing on local tax programs and local social services. With one partial exception, the pattern of discussion of over time reflects a pendulum, continuously swinging between periods of centralization and decentralization as one decades problems are at least in part generated from the prior decades policy solutions to its own problems.

As figure 6 shows, this subtopic was not mentioned between 1977 and 1990. Before and after this period, statements on the subtopic occurred, on average, once every two years. It is striking that none of the Van Agt Cabinets (1977-1982) found it important to pay attention to the (financial) supervision of central government over municipalities. And the Lubbers cabinets (1982-1994) scored only once (in 1990) on this subtopic. However, if we combine this topic with our subtopic about *Interbestuurlijke betrekkingen*, it becomes clear that these cabinets were in fact heavily involved in reforming the institutional relations between central and local government in terms of decentralization of various public services

and responsibilities (such as the *Algemene Bijstandswet*). The general idea during this period was that efficiency would increase if local governments should gain more leeway to make their own policies and arrange for their own revenues. Therefore, the few number of statements during this period is not all that surprising given that this topic focuses on the supervision of central government. The countervailing idea about decreasing the central supervision is reflected elsewhere in our dataset.

During the period after the Second World War until the late-1950s, everyone, including municipalities, were short on cash. They had to borrow a lot of money especially to finance new housing projects, which resulted in huge debts. These financial burdens determined the relation between central and local government. Finally the government agreed to establish a special bank to deal with these debts and to better finance new housing, saying in 1957: “*Teneinde een begin te maken met de consolidatie van de te hoog opgelopen vlottende schuld der gemeenten en van de schulden, die moeten worden aangeaan, in het bijzonder voor de nog dit jaar ondernomen woningbouw, zal de regering haar medewerking verlenen aan een binnenkort door de Bank voor Nederlandsche Gemeenten tegen marktvoorwaarden uit te geven woningbouwlening*”.

Throughout the 1960s the central government organized its financial supervision by rearranging the budget allocation through the general budget system, *het Gemeentefonds*. In addition to the general lump-sum provision from this fund, the central government gave the municipalities also increasingly more rights to introduce specific taxes. In contrast to the fund, these taxes were much more labeled to specified costs. The balancing between these local taxes and the money from the fund characterized the relation between central and local government. Various Queen speeches relate the introduction of new local taxes and the re-organization of the *Gemeentefonds*. In 1969, however, the relation between the two sources of income had become rather obscure and the Queen called in that year for a significant cleansing and reorganization of the fund: “*Teneinde onder meer de noodzakelijke sanering van het Gemeentefonds te verwezenlijken zijn enkele fiscale maatregelen nodig*”.

The left-wing Den Uyl cabinet (1973-1977) took a rather more detailed approach to the problem of municipal housing especially when it came to the buy out of properties and real estate. Local government also got the first right to purchase ground and real estate. This made it easier to push spatial plans through. Furthermore, the central government mandated the local governments to execute various new social security services. In short, the local government received more responsibilities, but these were initiated and supervised by public bodies reflecting the interests of central government.

Just as in the period of the Van Agt and Lubbers cabinets, and in contrast to periods of strict supervision of local government by central government, we observe in the period from 1995 onwards a rise in government attention to more freedom for local governments. In contrast to the previous period, however, the primary reason for increasing policy freedom for municipalities in this period is not efficiency but the strengthening of local democracy and the visibility of local politics. In 2000, for example, the government stated: *“De regering zal nog dit jaar voorstellen doen die moeten leiden tot een betere taakverdeling en een grotere herkenbaarheid van het lokaal bestuur”*. These plans resulted in a number of institutional reforms on the local level, including the introduction of a dualistic system, which means, among other things, that members of a city government could no longer serve as members of the city council. The idea was that this reform would act to increase or promote political polemics, resulting in more citizens' interest for local politics.

Our last observation is that government in its Queen speeches from 2002 onwards has emphasized the responsibilities of the municipalities. It seems to suggest that not all issues that are on the public agenda or in the media should be the responsibility of central government. In 2002, for example, it said: *“Voor het handhaven van vergunningen en voor preventie en bestrijding zijn gemeenten en provincies de eerstverantwoordelijken”* In other words, central government is delimiting the responsibilities between central and local government, which indeed fits with the conception underlying the institutional structure of the decentralized union-state (*gedecentraliseerde eenheidsstaat*).

We can conclude that there is a strong cyclical character to discussion of the relations between central and decentral government in the Queen's speeches. The Dutch central government initially steered local government by adjusting the financial budget systems in general terms, but increased its supervision during the seventies by intervening more and more in specific policy domains, such as housing and social security. Then, from the late seventies onwards the central government started diminishing its control by decentralization policies and giving more financial leeway. The latest trend is that central government is increasingly stipulating the various responsibilities between local and central government. We expect that it will continue do so because, in our "hype sensitive society", central government is held responsible by the national media for everything that goes wrong in society, even though local government may be legally or in actual practice responsible.

As seen in figure 7, the third substantive subtopic – *personeel in overheidsdienst en ambtenaren* – has a strong spike in attention in the 1980s. This topic is almost entirely about labor conditions in the public sector, with salary and pension issues being the ones mentioned most frequently. Also, public sector employment policy is included in this subtopic category, as well as civil servants' right to strike, an issue that was not often on the agenda.

(figure 7 about here)

While these issues were mentioned from time to time in the 1940s through the 1970s, attention rose sharply in the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, most of the attention to this subtopic emerged in the 1980s, when in many ways the public sector itself became a quite prominent point of government concern (see also figure 8 and the discussion of efficiency and bureaucratic oversight). The center-right Lubbers I and II governments in office between 1982 and 1989 declared that freezing public sector wage was a hard precondition for maintaining public

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<sup>3</sup> In 1976, the incumbent Den Uyl government seeking a 'fair distribution of knowledge, income and power' announced a cap on top public sector wages for the next year. This was a dedicated redistributive policy, whereas later public sector wage policies were more generally about overall cuts.

sector employment levels: “Civil servants will have to make sacrifices in income in order to maintain public sector employment as much as possible.” (*Inkomensoffers van ambtenaren en van hen die werkzaam zijn bij door de overheid gefinancierde instellingen, zijn mede noodzakelijk om de daar aanwezige werkgelegenheid zo goed mogelijk in stand te houden*, 1983). Given the relatively concentrated costs of these measures, since they apply to a clearly denoted group with a large mobilization potential intentions mostly were framed in a positive tone, as in the 1986 statement: “Despite a proposed income freeze, next year the vast majority of those working in the public sector will see an increase in purchasing power.” (*Om dezelfde reden wordt in het komende jaar voor het overgrote deel van de inkomens in de collectieve sector, ondanks de voorgestelde bevrozing, koopkrachtverbetering verwacht*, 1986). And: “The continued efforts for labor distribution (...) mean that replacement and expansion of job positions will in part compensate effects of cutbacks in government personnel” (*Bovendien betekent de voortgezette inspanning met betrekking tot de verdeling van het werk (...) dat herbezetting en uitbreiding het effect van de afslanking ten dele zullen compenseren*, 1986). This policy talk became even more positive in the late 1990s and the first years of the new millennium, when the continued emphasis on efficiency and supervision of the public sector (see table and figure on *overheidsefficiëntie en toezicht op bureaucratie*) had diminished the image of the public sector as an employer. Hence public sector labor associations obtained more collective bargaining power (1990) and wage increases were announced (1991).

Party political forces may not be the sole drivers of this pattern of attention and tone, but the shift in 1989 from a center-right to a center-left coalition with the Labor party PvdA in office may have made a difference. In 2001, the PvdA was the prime minister’s party, and in that year it was stated that “employment in the public sector will be made more attractive” (*Het werken in de publieke sector wordt aantrekkelijker gemaakt*, 2001). In 2002 and 2003, however, when the CDA and the VVD were in office together, public sector wage developments again became a point of concern in a broader austerity policy program (*Zij zal ook in haar eigen rol als werkgever matiging van loonkosten betrachten*, 2002; *De overheid zal hieraan actief bijdragen door de ontwikkeling van de ambtenarensalarissen en de*

*uitkeringen te beperken*, 2003). Thus, party seems to have mattered in terms of emphasis on a positive or negative perspective on government employment.

The last two substantive subtopics of interest address two quite different categories of public sector reforms. The first, *overheidsefficiëntie en toezicht op bureaucratie*, reflects the kinds of issues associated with the new public management. The second, *staatkundige vernieuwing*, is focused more on reforms associated with openness of the public sector and citizen influence upon it. As seen in figure 9, attention to the themes of efficiency and bureaucratic oversight appear since the 1970s and have been a recurring element of the governments presentation of its program since the 1980s. Somewhat surprisingly, as seen in figure 9, institutional and democratic reforms which often are associated with the 1970s and the establishment of D66 as a coalition partner, are almost exclusively found in Troonredes after 1990.

(figures 8 and 9 about here)

The topic *overheidsefficiëntie en toezicht op bureaucratie* clearly shows the occurrence of the new public management concepts in public administration. The theme “Reducing The Bureaucracy” seems to be an ongoing, perennial concern, with the government expressing a desire to reduce the size of government as early as the 1947 speech. Paradoxically, recent research, as well as public perceptions, shows a growing, and lately a more stable, bureaucracy in terms of personnel numbers, despite serious attempts to decrease the public bureaucracy (Van der Meer, in press). At a first glance, then, the statements concerning the sub-topic *overheidsefficiëntie en toezicht op bureaucratie* seem to indicate only a *desire* to reduce the bureaucracy.

When given a closer look, however, we can observe some important nuances in the ways in which governments approached this issue. The relatively few statements made in the late 1940s express a concern for a too large bureaucracy, yet this concern is not so much based on more modern efficiency arguments as on something else. On first face, they argue

instead against a government that is too involved in daily life, almost as if they were arguing against the growing welfare state that was clearly on the horizon. This was quite typical even for those coalition governments that included the Labor Party as a partner. But an even closer examination suggests that these statements were directed less prospectively at a growing welfare state, then retrospectively at the need of ‘getting back to normal’ after the difficult reconstruction period following World War II: “Domestically, detailed interventions that resulted from an economy characterized by scarcity and which would nowadays have a paralyzing effect will be ended.” (*Binnenlands wordt een einde gemaakt aan detailbemoeienissen, die zijn voortgevloeid uit de schaarste-economie, maar die thans verstarrend zouden kunnen werken en gemist kunnen worden*, 1949).

From 1983 onwards, we can observe four dominant themes within the subtopic *overheidsefficientie en toezicht op de bureaucratie* that reflect more modern conceptions of these issues, albeit not evenly and consistently spread over time. These four topics include: quality of public service, deregulation, privatization and efficiency; issues all tied to the NPM-literature. When we take together the categories of privatization and efficiency, we see something of a pattern emerging throughout the statements. In the 1980s, the focus is predominantly on issues of efficiency and privatization. In the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the focus seems to have shifted. Better regulation, in particular deregulation, and improving the quality of public services are more often mentioned than are pure efficiency and privatization motives. The 1989 speech, for instance, included a sentence stressing the reduction of bureaucracy both in size and costs: “*de naderende voltooiing van de zogenaamde ‘afslankingsoperatie’ kan als een belangrijke fase in het proces van sanering van de overheidsorganisatie worden beschouwd*”. In 2004 and 2005, however, we observe an emphasis on the improvement of public services and deregulation: “*Om structurele hervormingen [...] tot stand te brengen zijn [o.a, eds] een duidelijke verbetering van de publieke dienstverlening nodig*” and “*minder regels en meer kwaliteit van publieke dienstverlening*”. This tendency towards to cite ‘good governance’ arguments in statements about reform has its theoretical counterpart in the vast literature on New Public Management.

Here, we observe a shift from mapping and assessing public government in predominantly efficiency terms, with its heyday in the 1980s (see Hood, 1995; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), through the explanation of unintended consequences of a rigid implementation of NPM (Hood and Peters, 2004), towards assessing the differences throughout various administrative systems, indicating a trend toward what is often dubbed the Neo-Weberian State (Pollit and Bouckaert, 2004). Whether this tendency can be linked to a particular political colour of different administrations is difficult to say. There are only a few statements concerning this subtopic, which, in addition follow an irregular pattern throughout the Queens speeches. Moreover, this tendency to shift attention toward good governance seems to run through several governments, ranging from Christian Red to Pragmatic Purple, and ultimately to 'Blue Christian Conservatism' (see Breeman et. al, 2007). Moreover, statements calling for simply reducing the size of the bureaucracy are as popular as ever, especially during elections.

Compared to concerns and intentions on government control and efficiency, democratic reform was less salient and appeared later in annual government plans, as figure 9 shows. Most of the statements on institutional and democratic reform appeared after the 1990s. Occasional attention existed in the 1950s, when the number of seats in the Tweede Kamer was raised from 100 to 150. In the mid-1970s, the ambitious Den Uyl government launched a large reform agenda. But in 1976, the government acknowledged only in general terms that efforts toward democratization were meeting with objections and resistance, understating the political trouble between coalition partners, among which the reform oriented party D66, which was in its first term in office.

After almost two decades of silence on institutional reform in Queen's speeches, however, attention to democratic reform recurred in the 1990s. Still, this attention was limited to relatively few topics: the institutional rules governing the appointment of mayors were considered insufficiently democratically responsive, and the referendum was placed on the political menu. In 1994, the first year of the Purple coalition led by PvdA leader Wim Kok, a ministerial committee for institutional reform was announced. These points were restated in

1998 and 1999. In 2003, when the second Balkenende government took office, new proposals for the electoral system of proportional representation with one a single district and for direct election of mayors were announced. The very same statements were literally repeated the next year, 2004. This happened even with legislative projects announced during the same year, in which there remained only three months following the mid-September speech: “In 2004, the government will submit bills for a new electoral district system and for direct mayor elections beginning in 2006”. (*In 2004 zal de regering wetsvoorstellen indienen voor een nieuw kiesstelsel met districten en met ingang van 2006 voor de directe verkiezingen van burgemeesters*, 2003 and 2004). The repetitive nature of political claims may illustrate the difficulty of making political commitments on institutional reform in the Netherlands or, more likely, the very real difficulty of carrying them out..

This pattern of recycling attention to a set of democratic reform issues occurred over relatively short time periods, and always when D66 was a coalition member. Indeed, when this party had resigned *en route* from the Balkenende II government in 2006, attention for changing political system arrangements almost instantly dropped to zero. Thus, while statements on democratic reform are perhaps not especially frequent given widespread public attention to them, our empirical findings in analyzing Queen’s speeches suggest that D66 was an important, perhaps even the most important, agenda setter on issues of democratic reform in the past four decades. The difficultly negotiated coalition agreements associated with every episode of government formation were the sources of political commitment of this annual agenda setting in Queen’s speeches. But the pattern of attention also reveals that statements on institutional reform were made mostly in the first one or two years of the governments in which D66 participated, and died out in subsequent years. Renewed attention to reform occurred when the party rejoined a next government. Institutional reforms came to be labeled as the party’s political ‘crown jewels’, the value of which, however, was not generally shared by its coalition partners. As a result, tangible policy effects were very few. Hence, D66 was seen to suffer from a ‘Calimero-effect’.

## Conclusion

When, how, and why does government reflect on itself and how it is doing its job? Our analysis suggests that there are no simple or comprehensive answers to these questions. In the most general terms, it is clear that government has given steadily more attention to issues of public administration over time. This is in marked contrast to the trends observed previously in other policy domains (Breeman et al, 2007), where there are strong patterns of growth and decline in issue attention. Both in terms of numbers of statements and their proportion as part of all of the statements in Queen's speeches, public administration statements have increased in a nearly linear pattern over time. This reflects, we believe, the end of the growth period of the welfare state. When government is growing, it speaks about specific programs and policies, not about procedures and government functioning. When government growth stalls, it talks about how it carries out its tasks and whether it should continue doing them as it has in the past.

It must also be noted, however, that this general pattern of increase in attention masks variation in attention over time to specific issues or topics associated with public administration. With but one possible exception, *regeling en toezicht gemeentetaken* as seen in figure 6, the five specific topics we have examined evidence a marked increase in attention in recent decades. That is, much of the general increase in attention to public administration over the last two or three decades consisted of attention to institutional relations among the levels of government in The Netherlands and issues concerning the civil service, government reform, and bureaucratic control.

When we turn our attention to the five major sub-policies we have examined, this variation in attention cannot be easily explained by reference to a single cause. Politics clearly matters in two cases, if in different manners. The frequency of statements associated with public sector reform to increase openness and democracy (*staatkundige vernieuwing*) is associated with the presence of D66 in government coalitions. In contrast, numbers of

statements addressing civil service and government employment issues (*personeel in overheidsdienst en ambtenaren*) do not seem to be associated with government composition per se. The sharp increase in the number of such statements during and after the 1980s seems unrelated to the ideological flavor of the coalitions during this period. What does change, however, is the *tone* of the statements, with center-right governments being far more critical of public employees and asking them for more sacrifice than other types of governments. Thus, politics can matter in either the level and/or the tone of attention.

There is much less evidence of a direct political influence on attention to the institutional issues associated with *interbestuurlijke betrekkingen* and *regeling en toezicht gemeentetaken*. In these cases, it seems that there is something of a cycle in emphases on centralization and decentralization of government. This cycle does not seem to be a simple one, however, in that there is no evidence of a return after a period of centralization to the same kinds of decentralization themes observed prior to the period of centralization. This was especially evident in the local government case, where the specific issues concerning finances changed to some degree from one decade to another. Rather, attention to themes of centralization and decentralization on institutional issues seem to cycle because one set of solutions to a given problem generates new problems that then require again new solutions. However, these newer problems and their solutions inevitably seem to be framed in terms of a need for greater centralization (decentralization) arising from an unsatisfactory episode of decentralization (centralization). This is policy attention as corrective incrementalism.

The final subtopic we analysed addresses issues associated with the new public management: *overheidsefficientie en toezicht op bureaucratie*. Here, we see a pattern of non-cyclical issue evolution that also seems to have occurred irrespective of the party political composition of successive governments, or indeed, the neoliberal principles of the new public management seem to have internalized within both center-right and center-left governments. In the 1980s, the focus was largely on efficiency and privatization. But by the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the focus shifted to marketability, better regulation and smarter deregulation, and improving the quality of public services using the language of good governance. In some

respects, we might conclude that sustained attention to the themes of the New Public Management over almost 25 years now has civilized to some degree its harsher aspects, and made the New Public Management safe for women, children, and politicians of all stripes. At the same time, this orientation to responsiveness in the political and administrative system appeared a much stronger theme in Queen's speeches than more fundamentally altering the democratic rules of the game.

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Figure 1: Number of Statements on Public Administration, 1947-2006

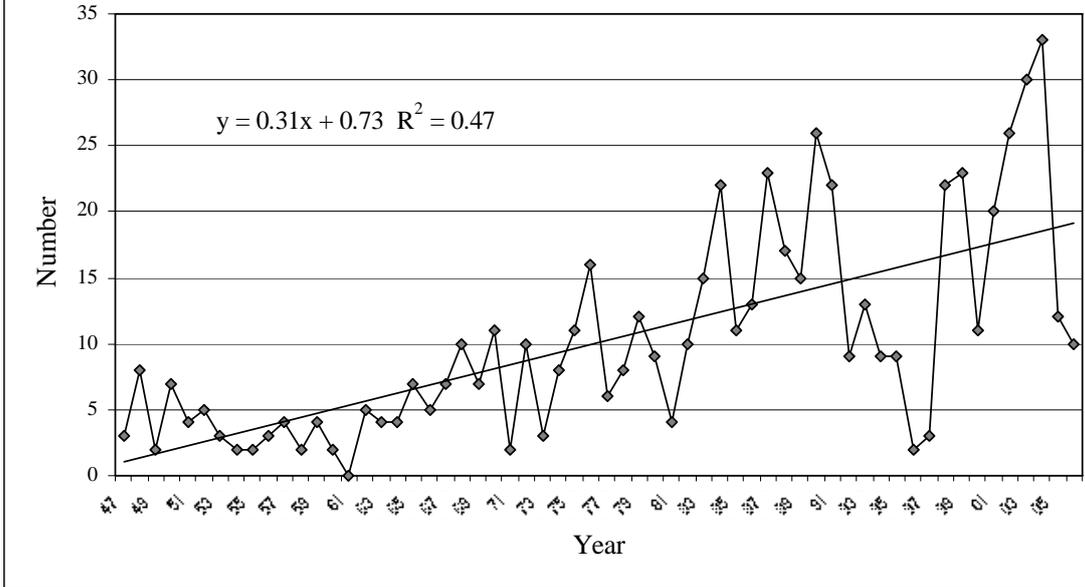


Figure 2: Proportion of Statements on Public Administration, 1947-2006

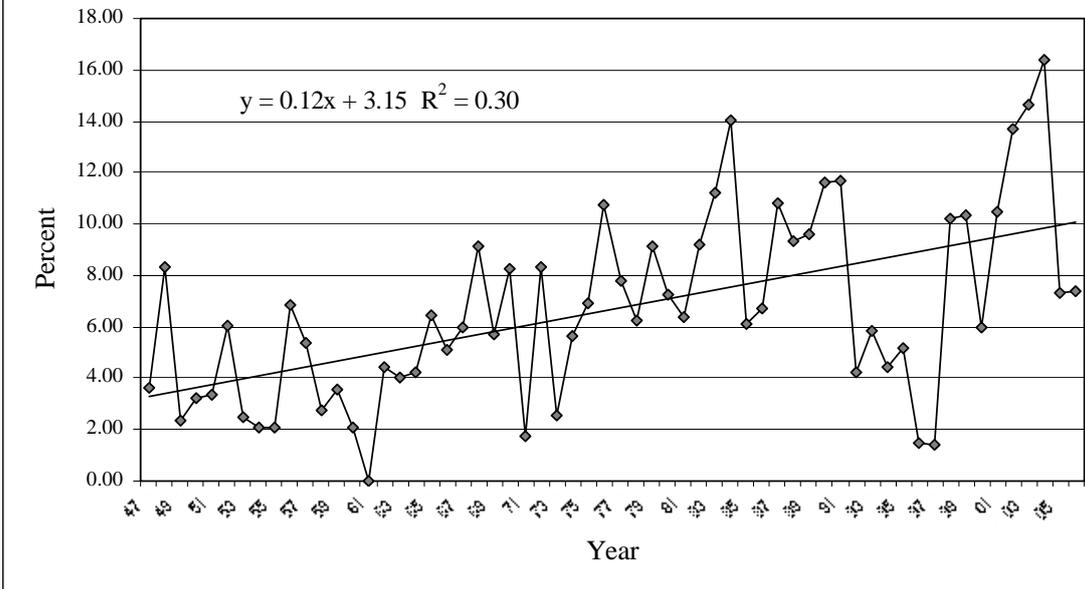


Figure 3: Percent of Statements with Policy Content, 1947-2006

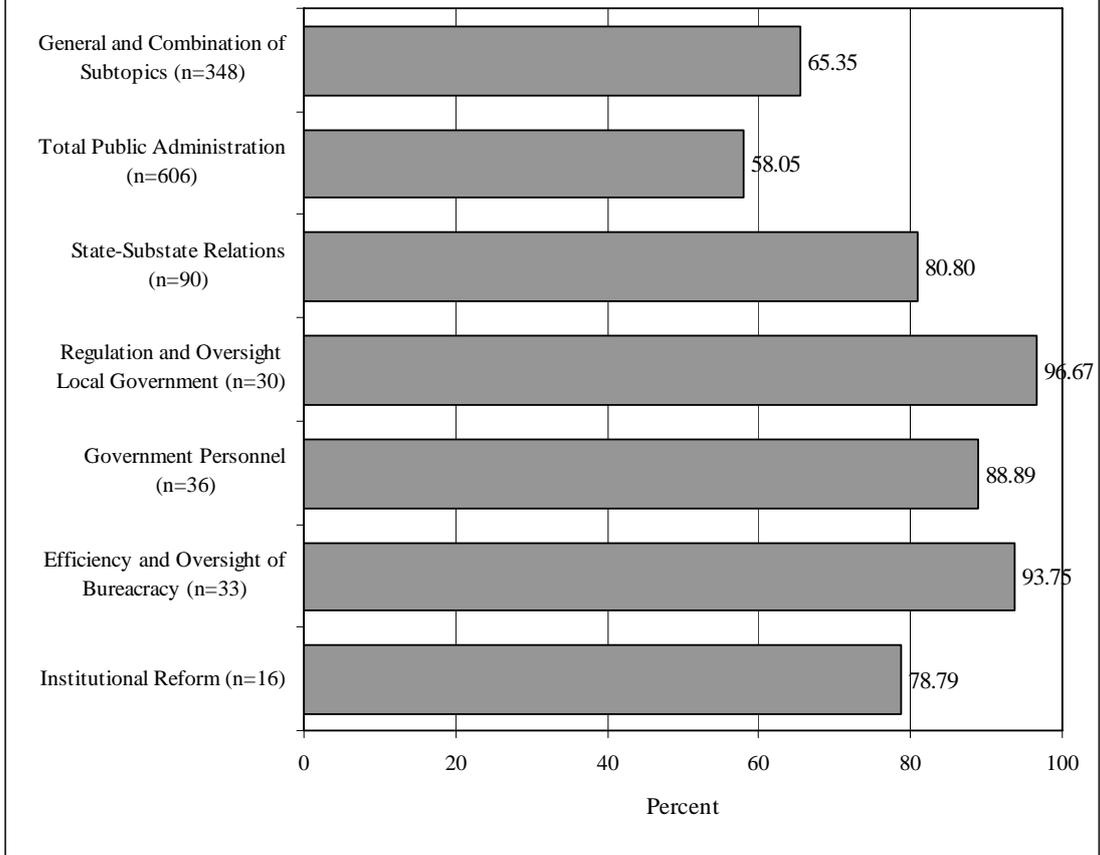


Figure 4: Relative Distribution of Public Administration Subcodes by Topic

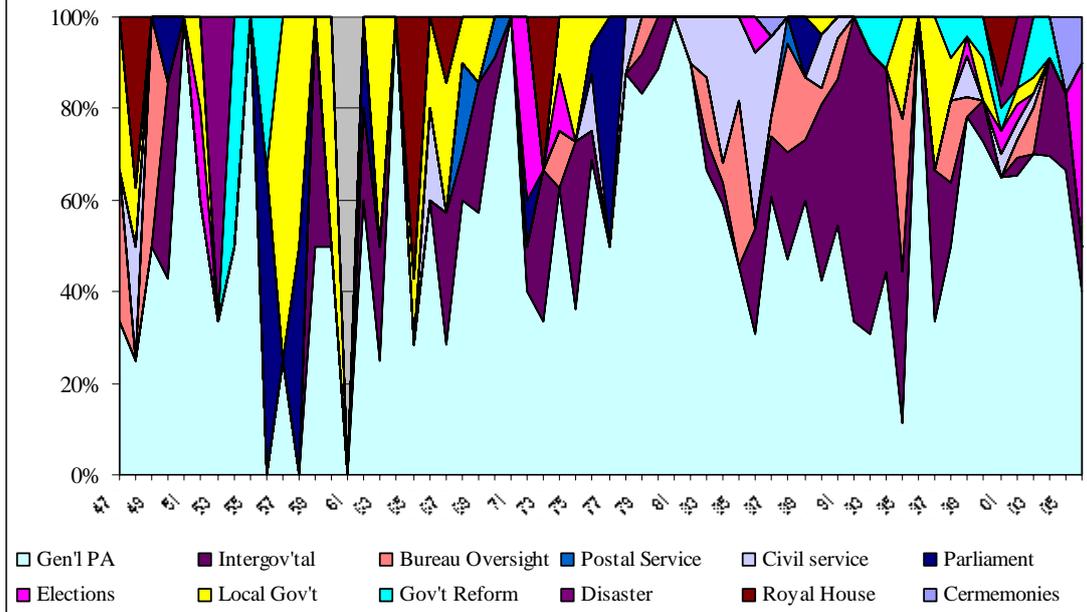


Figure 5: Number of Statements on Intergovernmental Relations, 1947-2006

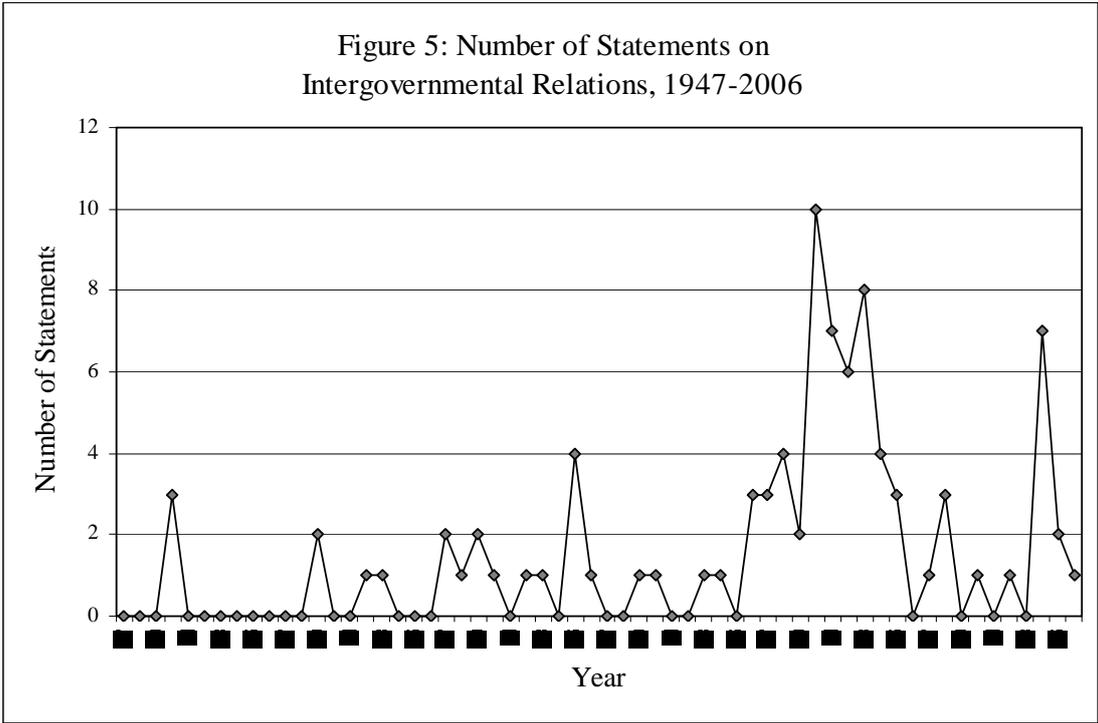


Figure 6: Number of Statements on Local Government, 1947-2006

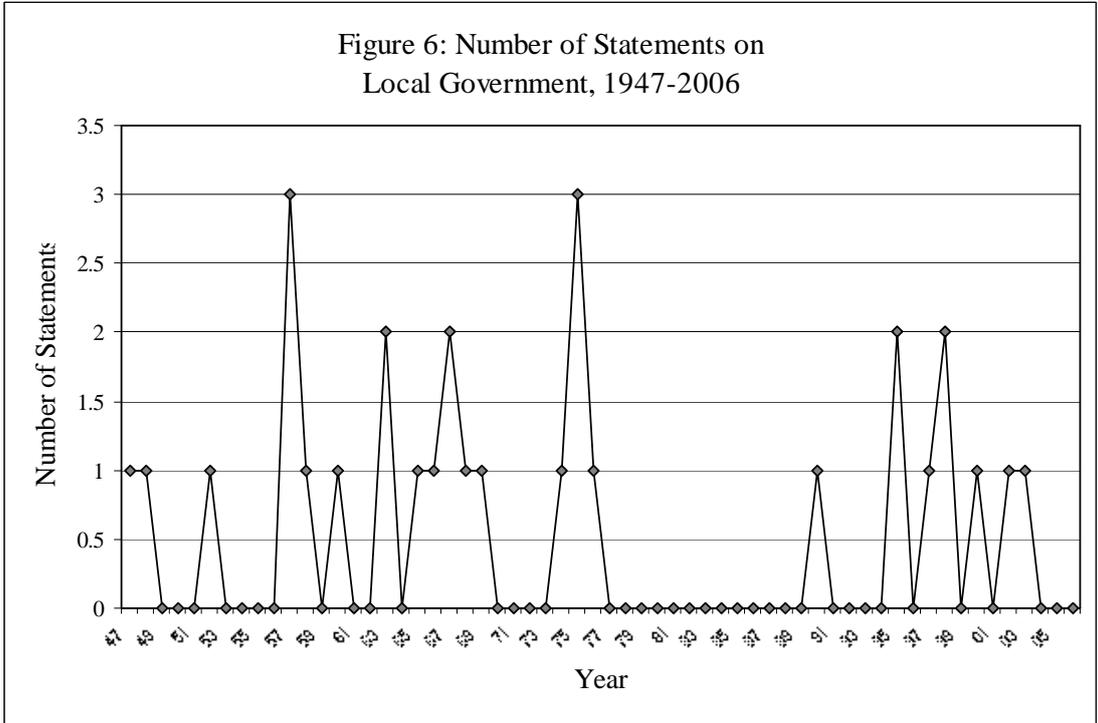


Figure 7: Number of Statements on Government Personnel, 1947-2006

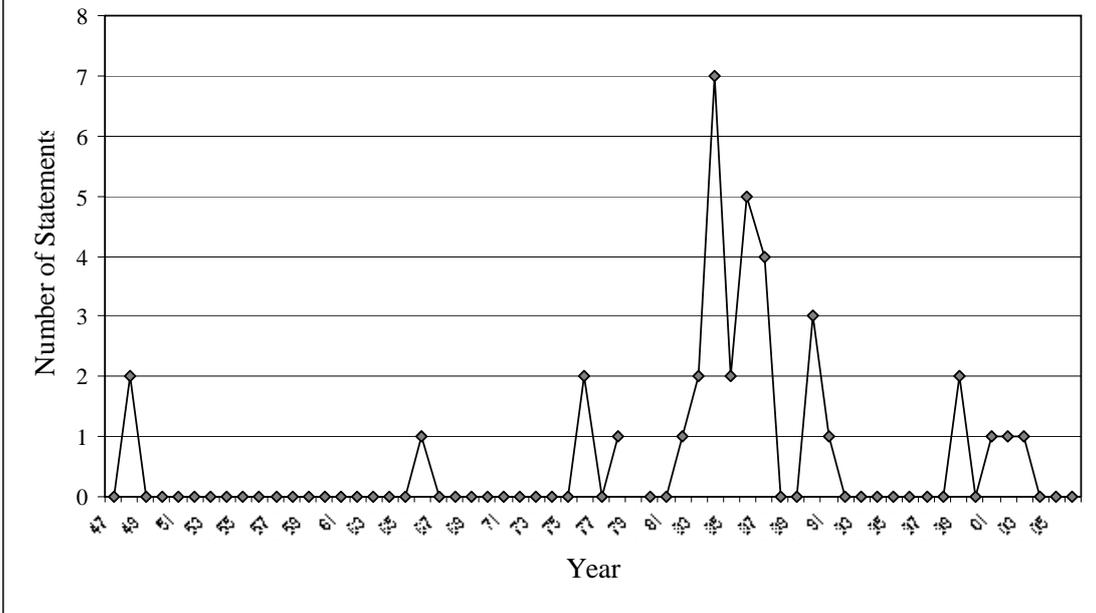


Figure 8: Number of Statements on Efficiency & Bureaucratic Oversight, 1947-2006

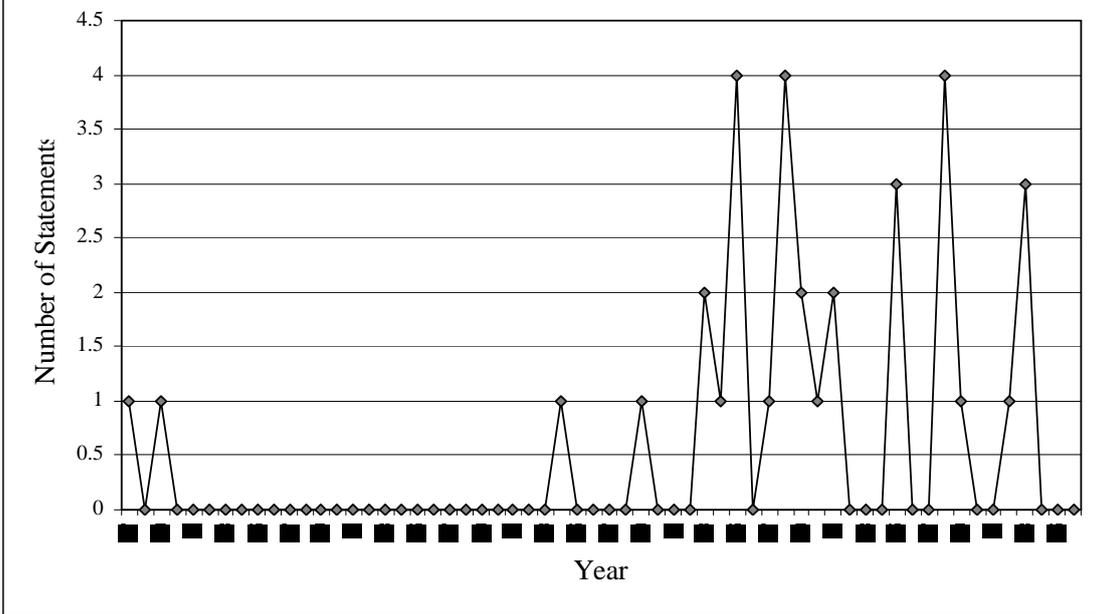
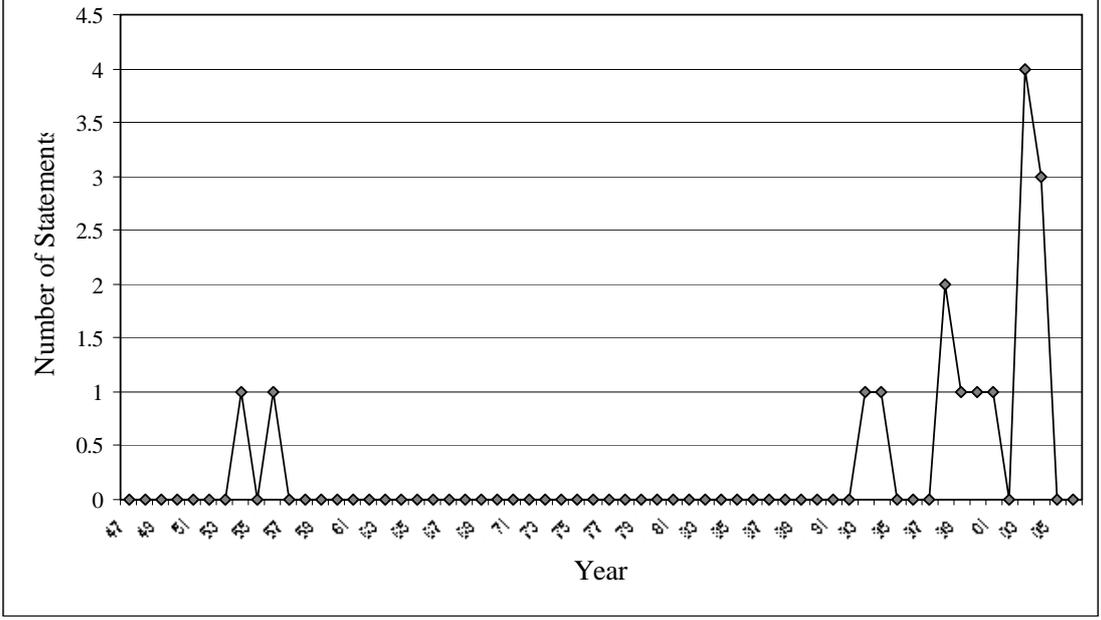


Figure 9: Number of Statements on Institutional Reform, 1947-2006



## **Appendix 1: Sample of general and combined statements on public administration**

- 1947 Het verlangen naar vernieuwing doet ook zijn invloed gelden op het rechtsleven.
- 1949 Ook andere onderwerpen in verband met de ideële en materiële belangen van ons volk dan toen werden genoemd, zijn op verschillende departementen ter hand genomen.
- 1950 De verdere uitwerking van het door het Kabinet bij zijn optreden ontwikkelde program van wetgeving en bestuur, waarvan reeds verscheidene punten werden verwezenlijkt, zal voortgang hebben.
- 1951 Bevordering van hetgeen kan strekken tot bescherming van liet hoge goed der rechtshandhaving heeft de bijzondere aandacht der regering.
- 1952 Ook overigens wacht op het gebied van de wetgeving Regering en Staten-Generaal een omvangrijke taak.
- 1953 Alle krachten worden ingespannen voor het herstel der getroffen gebieden, ook op het gebied van landbouw en wederopbouw.
- 1954 Een voorstel tot verhoging van het ledental der Tweede Kamer van de Staten-Generaal, alsmede enkele andere voorstellen tot wijziging van de Grondwet, waarvan afdoening in eerste lezing nog in de lopende parlementaire periode eveneens wenselijk is, zullen U mede in dit zittingsjaar bereiken.
- 1955 Op korte termijn zullen U voorstellen bereiken tot herziening van de Grondwet, betreffende haar aanpassing aan de rechtsorde voor het Koninkrijk en de bepalingen nopens de buitenlandse betrekkingen.
- 1957 Nauwere Europese samenwerking maakt het ons te meer tot plicht in eigen land verhoudingen te scheppen, die Nederland in internationaal verband een goede en sterke partner doen zijn.
- 1959 Reeds in het algemeen vereist de snelle aanwas van de bevolking en haar spreiding over het grondgebied van ons land het treffen van planologische en bestuurlijke maatregelen, welke van het hoogste belang zijn.
- 1960 Het gehele beleid van de regering blijft daarom gericht op een maatschappelijke en bestuurlijke orde die de mens in staat stelt zich zo goed mogelijk te ontplooiën.
- 1962 Daarnaast zullen u nog enkele nieuwe wetsontwerpen bereiken, waaronder die ter herziening der Grondwet, de goedkeuring van twee internationale conventies inzake ruimte-onderzoek, de algernene premie-spaarwet en de vreemdelingenwet.
- 1963 De handhaving en de vernieuwing van het recht nemen een belangrijke plaats in het regeringsbeleid in.
- 1964 De regering acht een gedachtenwisseling in brede kring over een herziening van de Grondwet van belang.
- 1965 Met deze voorzieningen, gericht op het welzijn van heel ons volk, en met haar plannen tot hervorming en modernisering van ons recht wil de regering voor iedere Nederlander de mogelijkheden vergroten om zowel in materieel als geestelijk opzicht tot volle ontplooiing te komen.
- 1966 Harerzijds wil de Regering, gesteund door een toegewijd ambtenarencorps, in het zittingsjaar dat heden aanvangt, trachten de zojuist aangekondigde plannen te verwerkelijken.
- 1967 Ook op andere terreinen ziet de regering erop toe, dat de rechtsontwikkeling niet ten achter blijft bij de snelle maatschappelijke veranderingen.
- 1968 Een onderzoek naar de mogelijkheden van een grotere openbaarheid van het centrale bestuur acht de regering gewenst.
- 1969 Haar beleid is dan ook gericht op meer openheid en medeverantwoordelijkheid.
- 1970 Zij zal dan ook voortgaan met de moeilijke opgave om de wetgeving aan te passen aan de zich wijzigende levensopvattingen, zoals het verlangen naar meer vrijheid en meer democratische beïnvloeding.
- 1971 Daarnaast zal zij op korte termijn voorstellen doen om de mogelijkheden tot inspraak

- voor de burgers op dit terrein te verruimen.
- 1972 In staatkundig opzicht belemmeren verdeeldheid en onzekerheid de vorming van stabiele meerderheden.
- 1973 In het uitgavenbeleid zijn andere prioriteiten gesteld en is ruimte gemaakt voor nieuwe activiteiten.
- 1974 Op de weg naar spreiding van macht en meer actieve deelneming aan het bestuur wil de regering in het komende jaar concrete resultaten bereiken.
- 1975 De beleidsvoorstellen die de regering u heden voorlegt zijn in velerlei opzicht gericht op een duurzame verbetering van onze economie en daarmee op het veilig stellen van de basis van onze collectieve voorzieningen.
- 1976 De regering onderkent de problemen, die inspraak oproept voor de besluitvorming.
- 1977 Onverschillig of het nieuwe kabinet getrokken beleidslijnen doortrekt, zullen op een breed terrein van onderwijs en welzijn, van volksgezondheid en milieubeheer, van bestuur en rechtsbedeling ingrijpende beslissingen genomen moeten worden.
- 1978 De regering hoopt op een goed overleg met de Staten-Generaal over de ontwerp-Kaderwet specifiek welzijn, waarin het streven naar decentralisatie gestalte krijgt.
- 1978 De regering vertrouwt dat met de parlementaire behandeling van wetsontwerpen tot grondwetsherziening, in deze zittingsperiode goede voortgang kan worden gemaakt.
- 1979 Onze welvaart bestaat niet alleen uit de particuliere inkomens, maar ook uit de talrijke voorzieningen die de burgers van ons land van gemeenschapswege ten dienste staan.
- 1980 Onze democratische rechtsstaat kan een stootje velen.
- 1981 De regering vertrouwt erop dat deze herziening spoedig haar beslag zal krijgen.
- 1982 Dat betekent dat de bestuurders en de burgers zich hebben te schikken naar de rechtsregels die onze democratie heeft voortgebracht.
- 1983 Daarom heeft het kabinet ook een begin gemaakt met de vereenvoudiging van de regelgeving in ons land.
- 1984 De ware vrijheid luistert naar wetten.
- 1985 Het onderwerp verdient in een democratie grondige discussie met respect voor ieders diepgevoelde overtuiging; respect ook voor de verschillende verantwoordelijkheden, waarvoor ieder is gesteld; respect tenslotte voor democratische besluitvorming.
- 1986 Het spiegelbeeld van de gunstiger ontwikkeling voor burgers zoals zich die nu aftekent zien we bij de overheid.
- 1987 De basis voor een doeltreffend overheidsoptreden moet in een rechtstaat als de onze gelegen zijn in de wet.
- 1988 De eenwording van Europa vergt ook op het terrein van rechtshandhaving en bestuur steeds meer aandacht
- 1989 Met betrekking tot het veiligheidsvraagstuk zal de voortschrijdende eenwording West-Europa beter in staat stellen meer verantwoordelijkheden te dragen voor politieke en economische stabiliteit, zowel in de eigen regio als elders in de wereld.
- 1990 Wetgeving, bestuur en rechtspraak zijn nodig voor een evenwichtige behartiging van algemene belangen en voor een eerlijke beslechting van geschillen.
- 1991 Bestuurlijke vernieuwing en structurele verbeteringen in het maatschappelijk bestel, dat is wat de regering bij U, volksvertegenwoordigers, wil bepleiten.
- 1993 Voor alle burgers staat tegenover het recht op voorzieningen de plicht zich voor werk te scholen
- 1994 Naast werkgelegenheid in de marktsector is er behoefte aan betere dienstverlening in de publieke sector.
- 1994 Het openbaar bestuur is er voor de bevolking.
- 1995 Aan initiatieven van gemeenten en instellingen zal ruim baan worden gegeven.
- 1996 Consistentie van beleid en voldoende afstemming op veranderingen in de samenleving zijn beide nodig, alsmede verantwoorde inpassing binnen de financiële mogelijkheden.
- 1997 Voortgaande groei van de werkgelegenheid en bevordering van maatschappelijke en economische participatie door alle burgers staan hierbij voorop.
- 1998 Een evenwichtige, weerbare samenleving kenmerkt zich door goede verhoudingen

	tussen burgers en overheid, door verdraagzaamheid tussen burgers onderling en tussen bevolkingsgroepen.
1999	Wederkerigheid en vertrouwen versterken het fundament van een rechtsstaat die ook in de volgende eeuw weerbaar zal zijn.
2000	Ook de overheid zal nog beter gebruikmaken van de nieuwe technologische mogelijkheden.
2001	Voor een goede balans tussen vrijheid en verantwoordelijkheid is een overheid nodig die richting geeft en ruimte biedt, die resultaten verlangt en rekenschap aflegt; een overheid die normen stelt en handhaaft, daadkracht toont en daarmee gezag heeft.
2002	De regering ziet zich nu voor de zware taak geplaatst om het goede daarvan te behouden, en de onvolkomenheden die er zijn in alle duidelijkheid en met daadkracht aan te pakken.
2003	De regering beoogt daarmee eveneens een cultuuromslag tot stand te brengen.
2004	Zij wil bijdragen aan een sterke en duurzame economie, een slagvaardige overheid, een levende democratie en een veiliger samenleving
2005	Het vertrouwen in de overheid is gedaald
2006	De regering heeft met het oog op de toekomst ingrijpende maatregelen moeten nemen en tijdig noodzakelijke vernieuwingen doorgevoerd.