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SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN THE NETHERLANDS

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A few words from the Editors

The Next Left Country Case Studies (NL CCS) is a relatively new publication series from FEPS and the Karl Renner Institut Research Programme, which is an initiative that is celebrating its 15th year this year. This particular NL CSS collection is designed to provide readers with a set of answers to reoccurring questions, such as *how are the other (sister) parties doing? What are the best examples that could be shared from their respective practices? Is their current situation the result of a long-term process or just an electoral blip?* These and many other queries are covered in the volumes, which are intentionally kept short and remain focused on social democratic parties and the specificities of the respective national contexts in which they operate. Although they are crafted with a mission to zoom in, they also provide incredibly valuable material that can enable comparative studies – in this sense, they are an innovative assemblage that fills an obvious void, not only within the world of think tanks, but also when it comes to contemporary academic writings.

This particular book is an academic masterpiece by Hans Keman, who accepted the challenge of explaining the full and complex story of the Dutch Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA). He does so incredibly skilfully, building on an impressive record of his research and publications, among which *Social Democracy. A Comparative Account of the Left-Wing Party Family* today belongs to the list of absolute classics. In the volume at hand, Keman anchors his deliberation about

the PvdA in the context of contemporary political challenges of the so-called *crisis of traditional parties* and the tectonic shifts that one can observe across so many European member states. Consequently, while he briefly touches on the more legendary beginnings of the 19th century, which saw the *Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij* (SDAP) emerging on the same wave as its sister parties of the workers' movement, he uses this genesis only to point to certain *Dutch specificity* or even *exceptionalism.* The acknowledgment of spatial and religious divides within the country, alongside an understanding of the unique structure of the Dutch economy and labour market, are key to grasping the Dutch *culture of political accommodation* and famous directness in negotiating compromises. These are the lenses without which the political choices of the PvdA in the defining moments post-1989 may appear blurred and incomprehensible.

Consequently, Keman's way of showing the contemporary history of the PvdA and of the PvdA-*GroenLinks* alliance irresistibly reminds one of paintings by Anton Pieck. Keman, just like that artist, offers the big picture, which is filled in with many smaller stories and depths – only together and observed diligently is the entire portrait complete. Page after page, Keman offers perspectives enabling one to focus on details of the PvdA's entrapment between its office-seeking and policy-seeking roles. And that is particularly instructive, as Keman exposes the diverse disproportions that, in the past, led to situations where the size of the PvdA's parliamentary representation was not at all an indication of the profound role they almost perpetually played in subsequent governments from the second half of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. To make the paradox even greater, in 1977, the party recorded the largest-ever electoral victory but was ousted out from the government. These are facts that allow one to understand the position of PvdA-*GroenLinks* today and the slow pace

of government formation after the recent win by *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) in the national elections.

To that end, Keman asks in how far the PvdA has been the party capable of setting an agenda. On one hand, there is evidently a legacy of giants such as Joop den Uyl or Wim Kok – who both led the party without greater contestation and who endowed the centre-left with ideas in regard to the expansion of the welfare state and the so-called "Polder model". On the other hand, there was also the longer chapter of the PvdA embracing the Third Way under Wouter Bos and attempting to embrace this *politics of a new era* in exchange for "*losing its ideological feathers*". This turned out to be a very rocky road, especially since Dutch politics was changing. As in many other places, there was a growing volatility among what used to be "the core electorates" and increasing individualist tendencies, mostly erosive to societies. But perhaps even more than elsewhere, there was also a clear surge in Euroscepticism and anti-immigration sentiments. According to the assessment of Keman, these developments, as well as the impact of the murder of Pim Fortuyn on the Dutch political culture, remained underestimated and underaddressed, especially with proposals such as the move from a welfare state towards a caring state. The PvdA kept suffering, feeling the effects of the general disenchantment with politics and a particular proclivity to be carrying the blame for the childcare benefits scandal around racial profiling, for example, even if it happened under a coalition government with *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD) and others. It would seem that, while the liberal idea of a Dutch state which could guarantee freedoms and opportunities was fading away, so was the memory of the PvdA as a powerhouse. Against this backdrop, the result achieved by Frans Timmermans in the 2019 European elections was evidently a clear breakthrough.

The book ends with a diligent diagnosis of the state that the party finds itself in, along with the challenges it is facing when it comes to mobilising larger groups of the electorate, bridging between the diverse constituencies and setting a tone that would make it stand out in the multi-partisan, fragmented landscape of today. While recognising the PvdA-*GroenLinks* alliance, Keman still insists that there is an alternative which would see the PvdA *realign its original support from blue- and white-collar workers in society.* On either of the trajectories, he argues, the party will need to become more observant and understanding when it comes to the meta processes taking place globally and nationally, and affecting the fabric of society and the intrapersonal relations within it. This will require the PvdA to become bolder and push back against contestation politics (especially with regard to the welfare society, immigration, welfare statism and other aspects). It will also have to do better, when it comes to internal democratisation and offering a competitive setup to the ones observed in recently created movements (the Farmers-Citizens Movement (BBB) or New Social Contract, for example). Now, whichever route the PvdA chooses to pursue more permanently – Hans Keman believes it will continue to be rocky, and staying on track will require the power of conviction. A prospect that is far too familiar for other sister parties across the EU. Hence, the question of the hour that this book spells out really is *Quo vadis, beste PvdA?*

Brussels / Vienna, 1 June 2024

Executive summary

Social democratic parties in Europe are under pressure. The Dutch party the *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA) is an example. Its vote-seeking capacity is below par and its policy performance, if and when in (coalition) government, has not been prolific. Although after the latest elections the recent fusion with Green Left resulted in it becoming the second-largest party in parliament, it can be questioned in what way and to what extent the "left-wing" party family is able to regain both popular trust and confidence in general.

This study presents a "systemic" overview of the vicissitudes of the PvdA over the last 35 years by delineating the political process. Firstly, the focus is on the party's electoral performance, which has been volatile, including an all-time low in 2017. Secondly, party system changes and government participation are elaborated. Finally, the actual policy performance is examined in view of the "mission" of the PvdA from 1994 onwards.

This development appears to be the result of, on one hand, the move to the "radical centre" embracing the thrust of "Third Way" ideas and, on the other hand, retaining "welfare statism" as its mission but ignoring other sociocultural issues. The "Purple Coalition" under the leadership of the PvdA appears to have been a "Pyrrhic victory", ending in electoral defeat in 2002 due to the emergence of populism.

In the 21st century, the Dutch party system has changed profoundly. To comprehend this, a two-dimensional map of party competition is

required. This shows a shift towards progressive versus conservative issues, rather than to left versus right contestation. This development is neglected by "mainstream" parties, including the PvdA, and has resulted in a stealthy but certain erosion of the "centre", inducing adversarial party politics and unstable government coalitions.

Government formation in the Netherlands is an arduous and time-consuming process and impairs the relationship between office-seeking and policy-seeking in government. In effect, it implies a watering down of own policy priorities but also signifies accepting policy priorities of other partners in a coalition. Obviously, this complicates eventual policy formation by the PvdA, especially if certain policy sectors, like social welfare and economic affairs, are not or only partially controlled.

An important factor to comprehend the demise of the "left" in general (across Europe) are the neo-liberal tendencies that have been widely accepted. The "Third Ways" of social democratic parties can be seen as a crucial feature allowing the active role and central position of the "state" to be transformed. Instead of providing safety, welfare and prosperity by means of public regulation and spending, public-private partnerships became prominent.

In fact, this evolution has increased the "micro-macro paradox": macro-political policy performance appears not to match, or poorly matches, the outcomes on the micro-level: citizens. This particularly concerns the "middle" and "lower" income segments of the population, the "traditional" constituency of a social democratic party. In addition, over the last 15 years, several "scandals" have only aggravated the dissatisfaction among "blue- and white-collar" workers, harming their trust in party politics and confidence in the state.

Altogether, it must be concluded that the PvdA (but not alone) has severely underrated changes in Dutch society toward conservatism and sociocultural cleavages reinforced by populist rhetoric conducive

to a retreat of democratic “stateness”. The issue at hand for social democracy and the left in the Netherlands is, therefore, to make a hard choice: either developing a broad green and left front; or realigning its original support from the blue- and white-collar workers in Dutch society.

1
Prologue: Dutch politics and the role of labour

1.1 Social democracy amidst a party system in turmoil

In November 2023, early elections took place in the Netherlands after the (unexpected) fall of the Rutte IV coalition. In the summer of 2023, the Dutch labour party, *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA), decided to cooperate closely with the *Groen Links* (Green Left, GL) to restore its position as the leading force of the "left" in the Netherlands. In the preceding elections of 2017 and 2021, together, these parties gained 14.8% and 10.9% of the vote, respectively. Several issues were on the agenda in Dutch politics, but the main topic of debate concerned the dominant role of the conservative-liberal party (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD), People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), with its popular prime minister, Mark Rutte. In the eyes of different publics, he had increasingly mismanaged several policy issues, such as the "climate transition", the deteriorating standards of living, handling the influx of refugees and the growing levels of immigration, as well as several bureaucratic-political scandals (see Box 2). Altogether, citizens across the country had plenty to worry and complain about, which

expressed itself in low levels of trust in politics and less confidence in public authorities.

Paradoxically, poor policy performances of the previous governments of Rutte did not affect the electoral performance. On the contrary, the VVD remained, by far, the strongest party, whereas its coalition partners were electorally victimised. The PvdA is a prime example. After being in government with the conservative liberals between 2012 and 2017, the party recorded its biggest defeat ever: a loss of 15.7% of the vote. The 2021 election did not bring relief for other left-wing parties. Hence, the idea of the conjunction between GL and Labour (further GL-PvdA) is an understandable move. The early national elections, however, forced the new party combination to develop a fresh "programme commune" overnight and to find a political leader suitable for both parties. Frans Timmermans (PvdA) gracefully returned from Brussels, resigning as EU commissioner. He gained a reputation with his "Green Deal" at the EU level and appeared to be an ideal and experienced leader of the left-wing family to compete with the VVD and other right-wing parties.

Yet, things turned out completely differently, and the election result has led to an *upheaval*. Although the GL-PvdA combination became the second-largest party, with 25 seats (15.6% of the vote) in parliament, the radical right-wing populist party of Geert Wilders (*Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV), Party for Freedom) won no fewer than 37 (23.7% of the vote) of the 150 seats in parliament. In addition, two "new" parties, representing distressed citizens (New Social Covenant (NSC)) gained 20 seats (12.9% of the vote) and the Farmers-Citizens Movement (BBB) seven seats (4.7%).

Altogether, this electoral revolt implies not only a landslide victory for Wilders' PVV and the two new parties, but also demonstrated that a *peat fire* has surfaced in society after simmering for 20 years (when

the Fortuyn movement upset the party system in 2002[1]). This enduring and growing discontent across society has negatively affected the left-wing party family and the Labour party. *Time to reflect*!

1.2 Structure of the story

In this study, I examine the role of Dutch social democracy within the context of the political system of the Netherlands from 1989 onwards. The storyline focuses on the PvdA, which is the post-war party representing social democracy. The analysis is structured around the conception that *any* political party features four different but interdependent elements with regard to the democratic cycle: vote-seeking; office-seeking; policy-seeking; and mission-seeking. This cyclical process is reiterated by *feedback* that represents democratic politics.

Firstly, without seeking and maximizing votes, there is no political influence. Secondly, without keeping political office (in parliament and government), there is no policy-seeking capacity. Thirdly, without a distinctive political programme, there is no societal mission to gain support and policy direction. This approach provides a "systemic" tool[2] that aims to explain the position of the PvdA in the *past*, *present* and *future*.

In Section 2, a concise history of the social democratic movement in the Netherlands is provided to familiarise the reader with the party's trajectory over time, from a centre-left force in parliament and government to a mainstream partner of coalitions with the centre-right. Section 3 provides the contemporary history of the PvdA in terms of vote- and office-seeking to illuminate the electoral ups and downs of the party, focussing on the period 1989-2023. The erosion of the "centre" is discussed together with the fragmentation of the party system in view

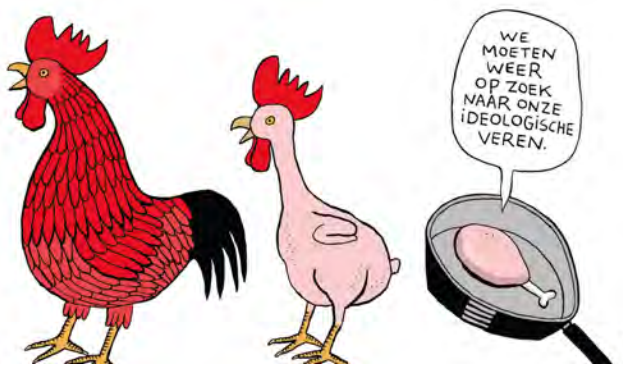
of the policy-seeking behaviour of the party. In the 1990s, the PvdA moved its political mission towards the Third Way, but this was not rewarded after 2002. On the contrary, to understand this development, Section 4 focuses on the dynamics and change of the Dutch party system in relation to the complexities of government formation in the Netherlands. Section 5 wraps up the story by reflecting on the course of events and pondering the contemporary state of affairs.

Up to the 1990s, the system was more or less predictable along two dimensions: *left versus right* and *progressive versus conservative*. However, in part due to the Fortuyn revolt (2002-2003), the party system complexity evolved dramatically in the 21st century and has affected the office- and policy-seeking capacities of the PvdA. During this era, the domination of the conservative-liberal party, the VVD, was apparent. Although the PvdA participated in government (in 2006-2010 and 2012-2017), the policy performance and several infamous scandals of "statism"[3] (elaborated in Box 2) were not recognised by the voter. On the contrary, in effect, office-keeping did not bring a rewarding policy-seeking effort. In Section 6, the decline of PvdA, which has lost its position as the main party of the "left", is diagnosed in view of its prospects for the near future, asking *quo vadis* (where are you going)?

Throughout the story, it is regularly stressed that an important factor, if not a watershed moment, appears to have been the embracing (or entanglement) of "Third Way" ideas, on one hand, and ignoring sociocultural issues that were considered as relevant for citizens, on the other hand. Therefore, the "mission-seeking" or programmatic evolution of the PvdA is relevant when discussing internal debates within the party. There were several ideas across the party (elite), which basically took two directions: universalist principles with green accents, on one hand; and traditional ideas, emphasising a mission to cater for the

lower and middle classes, on the other hand. Additionally, "contextual" explanations in relation to "behavioural" factors are scrutinised.

For example, de-industrialisation and globalisation have indeed changed the labour market supply and demand. At the same time, socioeconomic inequalities have remained: the health care and pension systems are increasingly under pressure; the environmental issue is prominent; whereas policy-seeking efforts appear to induce the "micro-macro paradox".[4] Together with further individualisation (expressed in multi-culturalism and, for example, LGBTQ+ rights), this has implications for the potential constituency of the "left-wing" party family. Section 6 pulls together these factors in view of the history of the PvdA and contemplates the present situation, seeking arguments to consider for the future of the "left" in the Netherlands.



Translation: We ought to find our ideological feathers again.

2
A short history of Dutch labour: The road to power sharing

2.1 From working class politics to reformism: Post-war social democracy

As in most Western European countries, organised socialism in the Netherlands dates back to the late 19th Century. Obviously, the emergence of a socialist movement went hand in hand with the relatively late and limited industrialisation of the Netherlands.[5] Although part of the roots of organised labour lay in the urbanised west of the country due to the efforts of well-organised trailblazers (like diamond cutters), the origins of organised socialism developed in the rural-agrarian areas in the north and east.[6]

In fact, organising the "workers" as an active and united movement in the Netherlands has always been complex. There was strong rivalry from the emerging religious trade unions and (Catholic and Protestant) parties across the country. Hence, social democracy as a "mass" movement remained comparatively small. One reason is that there were only a few loci of heavy or large-scale industries, the traditional birthplace of a working class. In the south of the country,

coal mining was introduced in the late 19th century; in the east, textiles manufacturing was the main industry; and in the north, farming and shipping were the main economic activities. Overall, heavy and geographically concentrated industry barely existed.

Unlike elsewhere, the Dutch economy was structured around the *triangle* of domestic processing (of colonial and agricultural commodities) – trading and shipping (e.g., transit and transport) – with retail and services (like banking and commercial intermediaries) mostly in the west. In short: the structure of the Dutch economy is not only different from its neighbours, in view of the composition of the labour market, but it is also politically idiosyncratic due to its cleavage-based politics, frozen as it was in closed communities, the "pillarisation" of society.[7]

In 1894, the SDAP (*Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij*) was founded as the social democratic party in the Netherlands (and a member of the Second International Socialist Movement). The party was typically a social democratic reformist party like in the UK and Scandinavia at the time: working-class oriented; striving to improve labour conditions, health care, housing and education; and fighting for universal suffrage. The party worked together with existing trade unions and in 1906 a federation of trade unions was founded (*Nederlands Vak Verbond*, NVV). This "marriage" lasted until the 1980s, when the decline in membership compelled the NVV to merge with the Catholic trade union, severing its formal ties with the PvdA.

During the Great War, the existing parliamentary gridlock between the three main cleavage-based alignments and conflict-driven politics (based on religion, liberalism and socialism) was eventually resolved by means of a complex compromise and led to a system of *political accommodation*.[8] In 1919, the Netherlands begot universal suffrage and – at the same time – the majoritarian first-past-the-post electoral system was transformed into proportional representation. Although this

led to electoral growth of the SDAP, it was constrained due to the *pillarisation* of Dutch society. Despite gaining the electoral weight of the social democrats, the three Christian parties remained dominant in government (with the help of the small but essential assistance of the liberals). It lasted until 1939 before the SDAP entered national government, when a coalition between all political parties was formed (except for the National-Socialist party, NSB) in the wake of the Second World War.[9]

After the war, the party transformed itself and changed its name to attract a wider following *beyond* the working-class constituency: the PvdA (Box 1). This initiative aimed at a "breakthrough" of the closed system of the pillarised party system, attempting to attract voters of the (lower) middle strata of Christian democrats and (progressive) liberals. Yet, this *vote-seeking* endeavour faltered more or less because the Catholic and Protestant pillars remained socially stable up to the 1960s. In fact, Christian democratic parties were in government and dominated all coalitions between 1917 and 1994.

Box 1. PvdA: principles; membership; organisation; and leadership.

The party was founded in 1946 as a political association, and it closely cooperated with the GL party in 2023. This signified that the new party was acting together in unity in the various representative bodies. Hence, they formed a political party, GL-PvdA, representing the party in the upper and lower houses, provincial and local councils, and water authorities. The campaign for the EU elections in 2024 is, for instance, conducted by a combined list of candidates, a shared programme and a leader who hails from the GL. The PvdA is an active member of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the international secretary is member of

the PvdA party board. The secretary is responsible for communicating with other PES member parties, as well as informing the party members on European matters.

Apart from a manifesto prepared for the recent election, there is not yet a joint programme of principles. In 2005, the PvdA renewed its manifest of core principles:

The PvdA vouches to stand for:

- freedom, democracy and justice for all;
- solidarity, fair treatment and against discrimination;
- proper living standards, secure livelihood and preventing poverty; and
- improving the environment and international cooperation.

Membership and organisation

In 2023, the membership was 39,500 (GL: 33,800). Together, this would make the new party the largest membership party in the country. Note, however, that the membership rate declined steadily over time: from 96,600 in 1989 to 60,000 in 2002 and down to 39,500 in 2023. The steady decline in membership of the PvdA is illustrated from 1945 to the present in the graph.

Source: https://www.rug.nl/research/dnpp/themas/ledentallen/ledentallen-per-partij/pvda

Relationship between PvdA and the trade unions

Until the 1970s, there was a close relationship between NVV and the PvdA. In the era of de-pillarisation, formal ties were severed but informal relations remained strong (Wim Kok, prime minister between 1994 and 2002, was president of NVV from 1975 to 1986). However, after 2002, relations with the FNV (merger of the social democratic and Catholic trade union federations) were mainly personal and not institutionally organised.

Internal democracy of the PvdA

Although the party has intensified its internal democratisation, the basic structure tends to be top/bottom. The difference is that, since the late 1990s, the countervailing powers have been reinforced and most offices within the party and the party leadership are open for election.

The party has a *party board* that oversees the overall coordination and direction of its activities. In addition, there is a *presidium*, which is responsible for the internal process of deliberative democracy, such as organising party gatherings; members' congresses; and elections of officials, local leadership and the party leadership.

Furthermore, there is a *members' council* that has an advisory function. Its advises and its recommendations (requested or not) can only be ignored by means of a pen-and-ink rejection, including motivation. Finally, there is digital *members' chamber*, allowing members or (local) branches to raise questions, issue complaints and to submit motions, albeit within the "rules of order". This internet-driven participation is valued by the younger and educated members, but – according to the traditional rank-and-file membership – these procedures have taken away the influence of regional branches.

Altogether, the party has several layers of institutions to enhance internal democratic processes. However, there are continuous

signs inside the PvdA that these procedures are considered to be insufficient and that the relationship between the "parliamentary" party and the party board is often strained.[10]

Political leadership

The political leader is elected at the general congress by delegates representing the local branches. The election is open to all members to nominate themselves as candidate. The contest for the leadership is controversial because it has caused uneasiness among the reputed politicians. In particular, in 2012, the contest ended in an ugly manner and according to party members damaged the reputation of both the party and the candidates.

Up to 2002, the leadership was practically uncontested. Joop den Uyl was leader until his death (1986) and his successor, Wim Kok, led the party until 2002. After that, the political leadership changed hands regularly. Ad Melkert was his successor for only a year (2002/2003). Jeltje van Nieuwenhoven, speaker of the lower house, was the interim leader and followed up by Wouter Bos, who led the party until 2010. In subsequent years, Job Cohen (2010-2012), Diederik Samson (2012-2016), Lodewijk Asscher (2016-2021), Lillianne Ploumen (2021-2022) and Atje Kuiken (till 2023) have been political leaders. Kuiken was succeeded in the same year by former EU Commissioner Frans Timmermans, who was the first political leader of the GL-PvdA combination.

Altogether, since the resignation of Wim Kok in 2002, there have been eight different leaders, more than most political parties in the Netherlands have experienced. It signifies unstable leadership of a party in troubled waters. The recent cooperation with GL is supported by the members of both parties but is not uncontested, especially not by traditional social democrats.

2.2 Vote-seeking by catch-allism and office-seeking by policy concertation

The transformation towards a "catch-all" party turned out to be effective in terms of its *vote and office-seeking* capacity because the party participated in all governments from 1945 to 1959. The era of recovery from the damages of the Nazi occupation, the painful decolonisation of Indonesia, reconstructing the economy (among other things, by participating in the European Coal and Steel Community and co-founding the European Economic Community (EEC)) and developing the foundations of the "welfare state". The leader of the PvdA, Willem Drees, was prime minister from 1948 to 1959. Hence, the paradox of Dutch politics throughout the post-war period until 2002 is that the relationship between its vote-seeking capacity and office-seeking performance has been, to some extent, disproportional: its parliamentary strength did not predict such a strong presence in the coalitions up to 1959.[11] In contrast to other countries, for instance, those in Scandinavia, the PvdA not only participated continually but also held the premiership (Willem Drees), as well as portfolios in line with the mission of the party: developing a sound economy and social welfare state. This result is the outcome of the notorious "consociational democracy", promoting governance from the "centre" primarily with the Catholics.[12]

The foundations of a welfare state were developed in concert with a pillarised system of industrial relations, providing the conditions for economic growth and prosperity.[13] In fact, in addition to the *social* welfare state, a strict *economic* regime was signposted by the state regarding price levels, wage determination and domestic investments.[14] In addition, the social democratic-Christian democratic coalitions

supported the foundation of the EEC, catering for agrarian interests and benefitting the economic openness of the country. Overall, the social and economic policies signified a growth in public expenditure from the 1960s onwards (around 40% of GDP). This development mirrors the developments across Scandinavia.[15] Yet, in contrast, these policy-seeking results in the Netherlands were a *shared* achievement of *both* Christian democracy and social democracy.[16] Hence, a better term is perhaps policy *concertation*: a political compromise supported by the pillarised employers' associations and trade unions. This mode of tri-partite policy making was called "neo-corporatism".[17]

Joop den Uyl (1919-1987), political leader of the PvdA and prime minister of the Netherlands (1973-1977)

For most Dutch people, however, the pinnacle of "democratic socialism" took place in 1973, when a "progressive" coalition under the leadership of the popular Joop den Uyl (pictured) as prime

minister not only attempted to extend the welfare state, but also to transform the economy toward more equality and equity.[18] Another bold initiative was, like those by Willy Brand in Germany and Olaf Palme in Sweden, to seriously enhance democratisation beyond the political system (like lowering the voting age and creating consultation and participation within companies, schools, university and other organisations).[19]

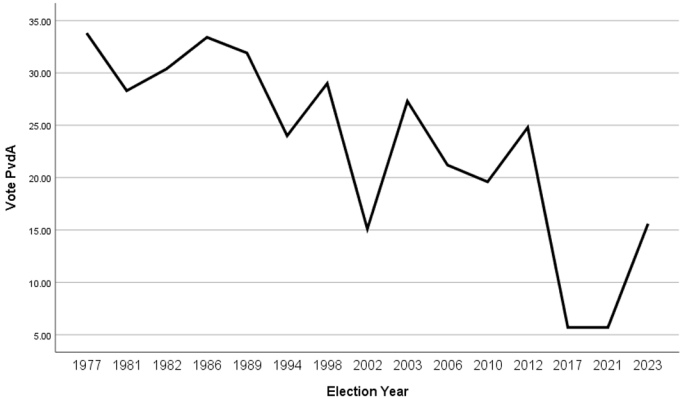
Altogether the agenda was ambitious, but the eventual performance was disappointing. The reasons for this were that the status of this coalition government was extra-parliamentary (i.e., not supported by a majority in parliament but only tolerance by lukewarm Christian democratic parties[20]). Further incidents like the oil boycott (1973) and several hijacking incidents overtook proper policy execution. The coalition fell in 1977 due to internal conflicts, and elections followed suit.[21]

Paradoxically, after the largest electoral victory of the PvdA ever in 1977 (Table 1) the party was ousted from government. Instead, the (conservative) liberal VVD entered government. In part, this outcome signifies that Christian democracy only colluded with the PvdA if no other coalition was viable: adversarial politics slowly replaced collusive practices.

Up to 1989 (apart from short-lived participation in 1981), the PvdA was in opposition, when a recession occurred and austerity policies to reduce welfare benefits were introduced. The social democratic trade union (NVV) merged with the Catholic one to form FNV and severed its relations with the party. At the same time, the (conservative) liberals (VVD) gained more electoral influence, the three Christian parties merged to form the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) in 1980 and there were "new" parties on the left: the Socialist Party (SP) and the GL ascended at the time (see Table 1).

In other words, the era of the politics of "accommodation" and "concertation" faded, as the political dominance of social democracy and Christian democracy evaporated slowly, and due to the growth of the liberal-conservative VVD, the relationship between vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking became not only complex but also implied a stronger shift of the party system towards the centre-right[22] and towards a change in party competition: instead of a centre-left median voter making the difference, it meant governing from the centre by means of varying coalitions of the so-called mainstream parties.

Figure 1. The electoral performance of the PvdA between 1977 and 2023.



Notes: vote represents percentage of the total vote. The upswing of 2023 represents the combined party list of the GL and the PvdA.
Source: Kiesraad Nederland.

2.3 From “mainstream” partisan governance towards adversarial party politics

The first electoral upheaval in Dutch party politics occurred after the coalition formed between Christian democracy and social democracy in 1989 expired. After the elections of 1994, a coalition was formed *without* Christian democracy for the first time since 1917. The so-called “Purple Coalition” of the conservative (VVD) and progressive (D66) liberal parties with the social democrats – Wim Kok (PvdA) serving as prime minister – steered the country into the 21st century under favourable social and economic conditions.[23] In the meantime, the party, according to party leader Wim Kok, was better off "losing its ideological feathers".[24] In fact, it meant a turn to the "Third Way", as adopted by the UK Labour Party under Blair.[25]

However, the shift of 1994 signified more. Firstly, the expanding secularisation and individualisation of society in the 1980s implied a slow but definitive *de*-pillarisation of the Dutch political system. This gradually affected electoral support from its traditional constituencies, like social democracy and Christian democracy. Secondly, the legacy of the “purple” period resulted in the growth of political polarisation in terms of party competition and an increase of party fragmentation in parliament.[26]

These tendencies expressed themselves in higher levels of electoral volatility, more parties in parliament and eventually less trust in party politics. For example, electoral volatility was below 10% but has averaged 20% since 1994, the number of parties in parliament has almost doubled since the 1990s and "trust in parties" hovers at around 40% or less.[27] Thirdly, the evolution – in terms of shifting party system dynamics – into new forms of political contestation (like populism by

the radical right and left) and the concomitant emergence of "political entrepreneurs", such as Pim Fortuyn and Gerard Wilders, implied a different political style.[28]

This development accelerated after 2002, when the murder of Pim Fortuyn by a "green" activist took place,[29] which was followed by the murder of a journalist in 2004.[30] Both incidents signified a different attitude regarding ideas of a multicultural society. The offshoot has been that issues *other* than those originally "owned" by the social democrats – like the "welfare state", socioeconomic viability and caring for the precariat – were seen in politics and society as being more important.[31] In addition to the apparent inequality of opportunities, "identity politics" in the broadest sense of the word gained weight; the "environment" and "climate" concerns are another example, but immigration-cum-refugees as well as *Euroscepticism* gained prominence as well and were captured by parties other than the PvdA.[32]

The EU has always been a special issue in Dutch politics – although a founding member and having played a considerable role in it – but parties were also concerned about the actual regulative influence of the EU on domestic policy formation. Nevertheless, the mainstream parties have always been supportive and were represented in the European Commission with important portfolios. The PvdA delegated three of them – Sicco Mansholt, Henk Vredeling and Frans Timmermans – whereas the CDA delegated five and the VVD had three commissioners to date. Despite this positive attitude, the position and role of the EU was regularly disputed in Dutch politics, also by the PvdA (see also Table 3).

The Eurosceptic attitude in Dutch politics was particularly visible around the two referenda held: in 2005, regarding the EU constitution; and in 2016, concerning the Association Treaty with Ukraine. Both referenda were lost, with 60% of voters against (but the turnouts

differed considerably: 61% in 2005 and only 32% in 2016[33]). The voter turnout for the regular European parliamentary elections reflects the relative disinterest of the Dutch electorate: between 1999 and 2019 it hovered around 37%, and the PvdA gained around five seats on average. All in all, the attitude in Dutch politics to the EU has been lukewarm, if not critical, including the PvdA, but remaining a member of the EU was never in doubt.

The party appeared, however, to have ignored shifts in public opinion on the diverse issue formation, like Euroscepticism and its links to immigration. It was not close to the left-right distinction, but rather to the progressive-conservative distinction. At the same time, the party identified itself as a "radical centre" party (as Giddens called the development of a Third Way party[34]). After 2002, the PvdA entered into a short-lived coalition in 2006 with the CDA, which did not enhance its public profile. Between 2012 and 2017, a *LibLab* coalition government kept office under dire socioeconomic circumstances.

This led to welfare retrenchment, sobering the "caring state", which led to a retreat from public services.[35] The 2017 elections turned out to be disastrous; the PvdA was downgraded from 38 seats to a small party with only nine seats in parliament. In fact, as Figure 2 shows, the era of 1989-2021 can be seen as the fading away of social democracy as a mainstream *left-wing* political power in the Netherlands[36] (Table 1). However, the *turning point* in terms of vote- and office-seeking appears to have been the first successful inroad of the popular party led by the populist Pim Fortuyn in 2002. The promising trajectory of the "purple" coalitions appeared to have become a cul-de-sac.

As this concise overview illustrates, the social democratic PvdA represented the secular lower and middle classes until the coalition under the leadership of Joop den Uyl in the 1970. Electoral support remained more or less stable until the 1994 election (31.6% on

Table 1. Electoral results in the Netherlands 1977-2023.

Election year	Voter turnout	Electoral volatility	Vote share (%)					
			PvdA	CDA	VVD	Mainstream	New parties	Populist parties
1977	88.10	12.80	33.80	31.90	17.90	83.60	3.10	1.20
1981	87.00	8.90	28.30	30.80	17.30	71.40	0.10	2.00
1982	81.00	8.60	30.40	29.40	23.10	82.90	0.60	0.80
1986	85.80	11.10	33.40	34.60	17.40	85.40	0.20	0.40
1989	80.30	5.50	31.90	35.30	22.50	89.70	4.50	0.90
1994	78.80	22.20	24.00	22.20	35.50	81.70	10.60	2.50
1998	75.40	16.00	29.00	18.40	27.50	74.90	11.70	0.60
Average	82.30	12.2	30.1	28.9	23.0	81.4	4.4	1.2
2002	79.10	31.30	15.10	27.90	20.50	63.50	21.20	18.60
2003	80.10	16.60	27.30	28.60	22.00	77.90	8.30	5.70
2006	80.40	20.20	21.20	26.50	16.70	64.40	7.70	5.90
2010	75.40	23.60	19.60	13.60	27.50	60.70	15.50	16.10
2012	75.60	15.60	24.80	11.10	34.60	70.50	1.90	10.10
2017	81.60	23.30	5.70	12.40	33.50	51.60	7.00	14.90
2021	78.70	18.10	5.70	9.50	36.90	52.10	12.80	18.20
2023	78.20	34.60	15.60	3.30	15.20	34.10	16.60	25.90
Average	78.60	22.9	16.9	16.6	25.7	59.4	11.4	14.4

Notes: *electoral volatility* signifies the part of the electorate that switched party in relation to the preceding election. CDA = Christian democracy; VVD = (conservative) liberal party; Mainstream concerns the combined vote share of PvdA-CDA-VVD. New parties = those parties that participate for the first time; Populist = Centre Democrats (CD), List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), Freedom Party (PVV) and Democratic Forum (FvD).

Sources: Kiesraad (Electoral Board); DNPP (*Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen*); electoral volatility: own computation.

average), whereas since that time the average levels have dwindled (18.8% until 2021). The *policy-seeking mission* continued to be the further development of a welfare *society*, enhancing the quality of life for all (e.g., education, health and income security). However, the tension between pledges and reality meant that the policy performance degraded in the 1990s, and the gap between politics and society widened due to the micro-macro paradox.

The slow decline in electoral support of the PvdA in the 21st century is, however, not only due to this paradox or lack of appeal, but also considered by researchers as affected by demographic and geographic shifts in its electorate,[37] a growing gap between the educated "universalists" (the meritocracy) and the traditional core of blue- and white-collar voters.[38] According to these researchers, new cleavages have developed between the "winners" and "losers" of the neo-liberal wave in combination with – as discussed below – the tacit move toward Third Way politics.

This argument bears some credibility: a toxic effect appears to have emerged within the PvdA due to the growing impact of the party's ideological discourse, representing the universal ideals of what I label as the "modernisers" in relation to the "traditionalist". On one hand, the mission of the "left" remained the same (caring for people, including the future of the world); on the other hand, there are the "losers" in globalisation.[39] This latter category, often blue- and white-collar workers, experiences a party that does not respond to their day-to-day safety and securities (like housing, health care, work and income). They do not feel represented nor recognised.

A post-electoral survey in 2023 demonstrates, to a large extent, the mentioned trends within the electorate as a whole, as well as within the GL-PvdA: across the whole electorate, the voter turnout is lower among young people (–10%) and within urbanised areas (–5%). For

the highly educated, this is different. They outnumber the others in turnout by 15%. In addition, the lower educated and rural voters tend to choose parties on the basis of specific issues, rather than based on party programmes as a whole. Hence, it appears that issues like health care, cost of living, immigration and trust in politics motivates the lower-educated citizens to turn out and vote for a party close to their issues. Many of them are living in smaller communities and rural areas outside the "*Randstad*".[40]

This patterned variation also applies to the GL-PvdA electorate in 2023: 53% of their voters are highly educated; two thirds of them live in highly urbanised areas; but more than 50% are over 50 years of age (and 28% are old-age pensioners). If one combines this information, then it signifies a split electorate between blue- and white-collar workers that live outside the big cities and university towns, whereas the young and educated represent "universal" ideas and rate issues such as "climate" higher than "immigration".[41] Altogether, the PvdA constituency has changed drastically since the 1990s as has the political mission of the PvdA in the 21st century.

The era of "purple power" ended dramatically with the murder of Pim Fortuyn and resulted in a mere 15.1% of the vote for the PvdA in 2002. The *vote-seeking* capacity of the "left" parties has faded altogether since then. Although the *office-seeking* capacity remained apparent, together with the main parties in the centre of gravity, it did not change their (responsive and responsible) behaviour nor their *policy-seeking* attitude in terms of seeking solutions that would restore trust in politics and the belief of effective policy implementation through public authority (i.e., "statism") and confidence in *stateness*.[42]

In retrospect, one may conclude that in 2002 the strong *nexus* between *vote-seeking and office-seeking* was interrupted. Without noticing it, the relationship between the party's "issue ownership" and

its electoral followship evaporated. For the PvdA, the era of electoral viability, successful policy concertation and governing from the "centre" was over. This evolution appears to have been driven by the party's move to the "radical centre" and seems to have increasingly affected the overall composition of its electorate.

3
Party system change and office-seeking: Moving to the "radical centre"

3.1 Social democratic vote- and office-seeking: Mission completed?

Although in 1977 the Dutch social-democratic party PvdA, under Prime Minister Joop Den Uyl, achieved its best electoral result ever, nevertheless, in the process of government formation it lost its electoral bonus: it was not converted into "office-seeking" rewards. Instead of leading the next coalition, the party was condemned to the opposition benches. Only in 1989 did it regain governmental status when Wim Kok became Minister of Finance and in 1994 prime minister of the first-ever "Purple" coalition[43] in the Netherlands, together with the liberal parties VVD and D66. The strategy of relating vote-seeking and office-seeking appeared optimal again, albeit by coalescing with progressive and conservative liberal parties instead of with the Christian Democratic Party.

In 2002, the PvdA went into opposition after the electoral upheaval caused by the populist Pim Fortuyn. In 2006, when the country (and the EU) was in a recession due to the global banking

crisis severely hurting the housing market, the PvdA – under new leadership of Wouter Bos – governed with the CDA and others to restore the market economy. However, economic stagnation was prolonged under a right-wing coalition (supported by the populist PVV), and the PvdA electorally became the second-largest party in 2012. The PvdA formed a coalition with the (conservative) liberal VVD. The policy agenda concerned austerity policies. These were the key, at the time, to recovery from the economic misery in combination with a slimmed-down welfare state.[44]

Yet, in 2017 – despite the economic redress – the party was abandoned by the electorate, causing its worst electoral performance ever: dropping from 30 seats in parliament to nine (or 5.7% of the vote). Although the party leadership changed hands twice, recovery did not occur at all in the parliamentary elections of 2021. The PvdA not only remained on nine seats, but all three left-wing parties lost electoral support (–8.0%). In the 21st century, the Dutch party system has clearly moved towards the moderate right, and simultaneously, a shift towards populism and right-wing radicalism became visible.[45] In summary, social democratic *vote-seeking* strategies did not yield votes at all nor did government participation with the conservative-liberals pay off. On the contrary, policy-seeking efforts merely led to social welfare retrenchment, little economic prosperity for the "modal" citizen and a tighter fiscal state prior to the 2017 elections.[46]

The loss in 2017 was unprecedented in Dutch politics and certainly for the social democratic PvdA. As Table 1 reports, between 1945 and 1990, the social democrats received around 28% of the vote and was always in contention for participating in any coalition government. In fact, the post-war political strategy of the PvdA was – unlike the pre-war situation – to govern society by means of cooperation with Christian democracy. This *policy-seeking* strategy was considered to

be the road to carry out its agenda as a party representing a wider segment of society, not only the "working class".[47] The mission of the PvdA became *subsistence security, economic prosperity and social welfare* for all.[48]

In other words, Dutch social democracy had transformed itself during and after the Second World War from a *working-class* party to a "*catch-all*" party actively seeking governmental responsibility to change society by means of collaboration.[49] The result after several post-war governments is that the party provided three prime ministers (Drees, Den Uyl and Kok) and spent 38 years in office. And, as a *policy strategy*, it paid off in terms of social welfare development and economic prosperity until the turn of the century.[50] However, in the 21st century, the situation changed dramatically with a few *ups* and several *downs*. To understand this alteration, it is essential to examine the architecture of the party system of the Netherlands in more detail.

3.2 The changing Dutch party system: From consociational to adversarial interaction

A party system denotes the patterns of interaction between political parties. Such interaction is characterised by the extent of *party differences*, as manifested in their electoral pledges and principled backgrounds, like the social democratic ideology, the Christian belief system or liberal convictions. The more the party positions remain distant, or are volatile, the more complex the interactions and interparty rivalry and the fewer options for coalescence and cooperation between parties. In fact, and in any case in the Netherlands, the main political currents represented were "closed" shops shaped by pillarisation into the 1980s.[51] Since then, the three main parties together dwindled from

83.6% in 1977 to 65.5% in 2002, and in 2023 the combined level of VVD, CDA and PvdA was only 34.2% (see also Figure 2).

According to the American political scientist Robert Dahl (1971), the Dutch party system "could not exist" because the pillars excluded each other and were a stumbling block to genuine pluralistic decision-making. Yet, this appeared not to be the case, and certainly not after the war: the main parties did collaborate and participated in stable and enduring coalitions. Arend Lijphart, a Dutch-born American political scientist, explained this enigma: precisely because of closed pillar systems, the respective leaders were allowed to coalesce and cooperate in government, whilst followers remained socially and culturally separated. In a sense, the Dutch party democracy featured an elitist element.[52] It also signified that the party system was more or less "frozen": the relationship between party competition and electoral outcomes barely changed.[53] In other words, the parties representing the cleavage-related pillars consistently registered the same level of voting support in elections right up to the 1980s.[54]

In large part, this frozen party system has been reinforced by the extant electoral system in combination with compulsory voting (abolished in 1970). The Dutch electoral system is amongst the most proportional (Table 2).[55] The advantage is that every vote is relevant (no wasted vote as, for example, in the UK). The disadvantage is that it more or less drives fragmentation of the party system. Comparing the Netherlands with neighbouring electoral systems shows that, for instance, in Belgium, Germany, the UK or Scandinavia, the rate of disproportionality is higher, resulting in less party fragmentation.

Apart from the Danish electoral system, most other electoral systems produce higher levels of disproportionality: the UK, with its first-past-the-post system, had a score of 15.0 in its latest election; whereas the Belgian and German levels are 3.5; and Denmark is indeed close to

Table 2. Electoral disproportionality and party system fragmentation in the Netherlands.

Election year	Electoral system disproportionality	Fragmentation	
		Electoral	Legislative
1971	1.13	7.17	4.57
1981	1.12	4.57	4.30
1994	0.98	5.75	5.43
2002	1.00	6.07	5.80
2010	0.91	6.99	6.75
2021	1.16	9.28	8.55

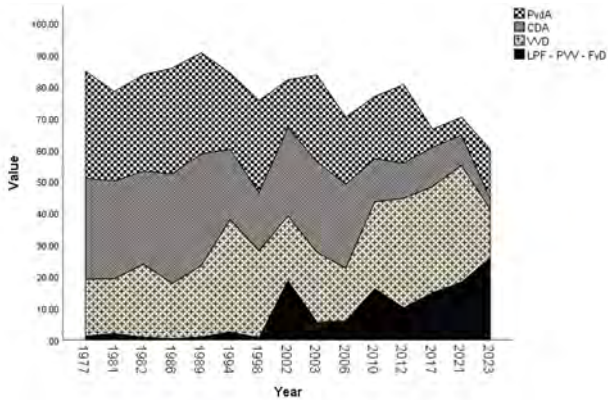
Note: if the disproportionality score is close to 0.00, it signifies a perfect rate of proportionality; the difference between electoral and legislative fragmentation concerns how many parties participate in the elections and those that secure at least a seat in parliament.

Source: Armingeon. K., V. Wenger, F. Wiedemeier, C. Isler, L. Knöpfel, D. Weisstanner and S. Engler (2023) *Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2022*. Zurich: Institute of Political Science, University of Zurich, http://www.cpds-data.org/.

the Netherlands, 1.13. In the Netherlands, a candidate MP only needs to get above the divisor, which is the electoral threshold[56] to enter parliament. And this has been the case since the 1990s. In 2021, an extremely high number of parties were present in the lower house: 21 (10 parties with less than 3% of the vote, i.e., four parliamentary seats maximum).

The high level of proportionality results has led to an overcrowded party system and, over time, an electoral shrinking of the so-called *main parties*, among which is the PvdA. In effect, this development transformed the Dutch party system, which looked complex (but was not, due to the vote- and office-seeking strengths of the main parties), into a complex system of party interactions. The age of “consociationalism” had vanished and adversarial politics became

Figure 2. Main parties' electoral share in relation to radical right-wing parties (1977-2023).



a dominant feature of the Dutch party system. This led to the demise of the mainstream parties that had been occupying the "centre". This powerful pivotal position of relating votes to offices, which could be translated into governing powers, slowly but surely eroded in the 21st century. New forms of party competition emerged, due to the rise of populist right-wing parties, in particular.[57]

3.3 Shifting issues and party competition after 2002: The demise of the "centre"

The changing format of interaction in the Dutch party system and the related "thaw" of the "frozen" party system is, among other reasons, the result of a fast-changing society due to, for instance, de-industrialisation (changing patterns of employability and flexible

work), altered patterns of communication (e.g., digitalisation and social media) and a shifting pattern of contested issues (towards sociocultural issues, such as LGBTQ+ rights) driving an altered type of party competition: from consociational governance to adversarial partisan politics.[58] After the purple coalition governments, when vote-seeking and office-keeping seemed a perfect combination, came the upheaval of the 2002 election. The Pim Fortuyn campaign demonstrated not only that a "new" party could overhaul the extant party system but, foremost, that traditional socioeconomic issues were not dominating party competition by exclusion.[59] On the contrary.

Three additional reasons can be mentioned for why the Dutch party system and interparty competition changed in the 21st century: (1) *modernisation* of society gradually drives secularisation, resulting in a drift away from Chistian democratic parties in particular; (2) extant issues like *welfare statism* and *economic prosperity*, mainly representing the left versus right dimension in party competition, are no longer strongly contested across most parties, but they are harming the “left” in particular; and (3) *sociocultural* issues like Islam, immigration, the recurring urban (or the Randstad, i.e., the west of the country) versus rural cleavage (e.g., climate versus farmers and those living in the countryside feeling underrepresented) and finally the longing for Dutch *traditions*[60] have increasingly become prominent among several electoral "publics" that cannot be structured simply along the existing left versus right dimension (see also Section 2.3).[61]

Figure 2 demonstrates how the populist right-wing parties have grown over time, whereas the traditional parties of government (CDA, PvdA and VVD) together lost support from 1989 onwards. The conservative liberals appeared to be an exception under the leadership of Mark Rutte. However, the leader of the VVD and popular personality recently left Dutch politics. Nevertheless, the landslide victory of Pim

Fortuyn in 2002 and the electoral rise of the PVV (founded in 2006) marked the beginning of the erosion of the centre of the party system.

The exceptional victory of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and the unexpected landslide win of Geert Wilders' PVV in 2023 were shock election results that upset the party system. In 2010, the PVV already scored more than 16% and the PvdA in 2012 nearly 25%. This explains the relative high level of electoral volatility since 2002 (on average 23%, almost one in four voters, switch parties between elections; in the latest election, it was even one in three!). Yet, this has not been the only sign of volatile electorate behaviour: in the provincial elections,[62] the radical Forum for Democracy (FvD) gained a lot of dissatisfied voters in 2019, primarily in the western part of the country, and in 2023 the BBB gained the majority in all but one of the 12 provinces and is now the largest party in the Senate.

The conclusion is that the Dutch party system has been in turmoil for two decades now. In terms of vote-seeking and office-seeking, electoral volatility and fragmentation of parliament have increased. This is making partisan governance by means of coalition formation increasingly cumbersome. Finding a consensus and cooperation between parties is increasingly intricate, especially so between government and the parties in opposition. One of the effects has been that the left-wing family appeared less able to cope with the changing conditions. Not only the SP and GL, but also the PvdA could not cope successfully.

4
Office-seeking behaviour and coalition formation: The role of the PvdA

4.1 The erosion of the political centre: Party competition and issue ownership

The political power relations between parties are not only precarious in terms of vote- and office-seeking, but also conducive to unstable interparty relations in an increasingly fragmented upper and lower house. The rise of new parties and the growth of parties outside the "centre" of the Dutch party system compete with the mainstream parties on issues that were not yet relevant and in due time gained prominence. In Table 3, the party differences on several issues before and after 2002 are shown for the major parties. On one hand, the parties' position regarding left versus right differences and progressive versus conservative attitudes are presented. On the other hand, the party positions with respect to issues such as "welfare statism", "traditional society" and those concerning the EU are reported. Whereas the first two variables in Table 3 depict the usual spatial organisation of the

Dutch party system, the other variables focus on what appear to be the "new" dimensions of party competition in the Netherlands. The data are presented for the mainstream parties before and after 2002.

Table 3. Policy positions of the main parties between 1989 and 2021.

	Left-right	Progres-sive-con-servative	Welfare statism	Traditional society	EU
All parties 1989-1998	4.68	14.95	21.79	0.33	6.78
2002-2021	3.36	–1.62	20.80	–5.00	3.53
PvdA 1989-1998	9.41	19.73	24.53	0.20	4.12
2002-2021	13.88	14.68	27.70	–086	4.85
CDA 1989-1998	6.19	15.28	22.67	1.64	7.67
2002-2021	3.53	–2.07	12.90	–1.25	4.41
VVD 1989-1998	–4.46	4.50	16.76	–0.92	4.12
2002-2021	–5.00	–5.76	16.33	–4.39	2.26

Notes: the left-right scale is a socioeconomic-driven index; positive and higher scores indicate a tendency toward the left side of the spectrum, whereas negative scores imply a right-wing position; progressive-conservative indicates partisan differences on issues relating to cosmopolitan values versus traditional values in relation to society signifying stressing the primacy of national culture and the adherence to the traditional Dutch way of life; EU is the issue centred on how much the EU is considered to be desired and useful. See the Appendix for operationalisation and calculation of the variables.

Reading example: between 1989 and 1998, the PvdA scores on 9.41 on the left-right scale, whereas the benchmark (all parties average score) is 4.68, which means that the PvdA is more to the left than most other parties. Between 2002 and 2021, it rises to 13.88, whereas, for instance, the VVD shows a figure of –5.00. Hence, the distance between these parties is 18.88, and the PvdA scores more than 10 points from the benchmark. The other variables are likewise measured and show, for example, that Christian democracy (CDA) becomes more conservative after 2002.

Source: Manifesto Project Main Dataset, made available by Wissenschaftzentrum Berlin.

What can be discerned is that the party distances across all parties over time are indeed shifting from the left towards the right and dramatically from progressive towards conservativism. Whereas the welfare state, as such, appears not to be an issue among the mainstream parties, several elements of "conservatism" gain more weight after 2002. Traditional society, reflecting Dutch culture, indigenous norms and values like national identity and social interactions, and antipathy towards multiculturalism have become more prominent within the Dutch party system, but Europeanisation is downsized (except for the PvdA and parties like D66, GL and Volt).

Altogether, the conclusion is that the mainstream parties have moved from a "centrist" position to a "centre-right" position. It should be understood, however, that this trend also seems to be due to the programmatic change to the right-hand side of the parties in the centre of the party system, such as the VVD and CDA. In large part, this movement seems to be due to growing competition with the emerging populist parties, particularly the PVV. In its programme, the PvdA appears to have ignored the changing sociocultural climate in society at large, on one hand, as well as having neglected the precarious developments *within* its original constituency: the blue- and white-collar workers, on the other hand.[63]

Several analysts have argued that the PvdA did not have a clear position on the "new" issues and have ignored that its socioeconomic policy position defined as the "welfare state" was likewise valued by other parties (see Table 3). Nevertheless, inside the PvdA, it was assumed that the party still "owned" the "welfare state" issue. Yet, what is suggested by the leadership of the party and internal critics (considering the vote-seeking capacity) is that during electoral campaigning and its role as opposition party, it has insufficiently explained to the public *why* the "welfare state" is an essential asset for society for all, but foremost

how it benefits its own constituency, namely, *both* the "middle" strata and the "working" class and "losers" to societal modernisation and globalisation.[64]

In other words, social democratic politics and related policy making (if and when in government) should instead serve the community pre-eminently by organising public provisions for a large group of people who have in common that they are either salary workers or those who are not (the unemployed and pensioners). This segment of society earns a modal income or less and is often dependent on the welfare state to provide social security, health care and housing, as a backup for a proper and affordable standard of living.

Perhaps, the PvdA has paid insufficient attention to its "natural" or "core" constituency, who feel ignored in their daily concerns and worries, such as dealing with immigration, inflation, health and elderly care, and the potential impact of Europeanisation. In short, social democratic voters no longer feel represented,[65] whereas the party leadership has suffered from the *micro-macro* paradox: what appears rational and effective policy making in The Hague (also called the "Cheese Dome") is often experienced and perceived differently at the ground level by individual citizens. Georg Menz observed, for instance, that "[...] the Dutch Labor party is a mere shadow of its former self an object study of struggling to define its mission. With such pronounced problems of self-definition comes a limited appeal to voters and members".[66]

The missing link appears to be that the *mission* of the PvdA has been missing (or at least has not been communicated loud and clear to voters). Secondly, as far as there has been government participation, the potential electoral "bonus" could not be harvested. Thirdly, due to shifting issues across the party system, the PvdA appeared unable to maintain its policy-seeking agenda, whether in opposition or in government. Hence, in addition to the shrinking of the mainstream

parties (see Figure 2), the capacity to convert electoral pledges into policy making has been reduced. Whereas the "purple" coalitions seemingly fared well (under favourable economic circumstances), the government-formation involvement of the PvdA and subsequent participation in 2006-2010 and 2012-2017 did not pay off electorally nor in terms of policy performances. It can be argued that the party may well have been too eager to participate in government, without sensing what impact it would have on its traditional following.

4.2 Policy-seeking opportunities and office-seeking: Forming a coalition government

The policy-seeking activities of parties have become increasingly intricate since 2002. A necessary, albeit not always sufficient, condition is to convert its parliamentary position into *co*-governance. Forming a coalition government in the Netherlands has always been complex and cumbersome.[67] The main problem is that the respective policy positions of parties, emphasised during election campaigns, are subject to lengthy negotiations between parties that have shown intentions to form a majority coalition. Electoral pledges must be transformed into a shared policy-seeking programme between those parties that together have a parliamentary majority (preferably in both chambers). Minority governments with external support in parliament or extra-parliamentary governments rarely occur in the Netherlands. The exceptions to this (informal) rule point to a stalemate between parties and makes party governance rather vulnerable with regard to policy making.[68]

The basic choice for any party in the process of government formation is to develop a consensus by means of compromise. Such

a process involves either a "tit-for-tat" strategy or aims at consensus by watering down differences in relation to policy pledges. The former strategy was used by the PvdA when the second Rutte government was formed in 2012. The other strategy employed by progressive and conservative liberals in coalition with the PvdA created a platform for cooperation and eventual coalescence of the "purple" coalitions under the leadership of Wim Kok between 1994 and 2002.[69]

Hence, forming a party government in the Netherlands is a delicate game to play and can last for months: on average, the formation of a new coalition takes 120 days (i.e., 4 months). The formation of the last government in 2021 was a (negative) record: 299 days! Secondly, the eventual outcome is often surprising. In 1977, the PvdA experienced its largest electoral victory but after a lengthy formation period other parties formed a government instead. This resulted in trauma for the party. Why? Firstly, because becoming the biggest party in the lower house does not automatically mean becoming a party in government or holding the premiership. Secondly, the PvdA overstated its policy-seeking capacity at the time and claimed to be able to veto individuals from other participating parties being included as ministers. This only shows how delicate and vulnerable the formation process is for any party involved.

Altogether, the process of government formation implies always building a (majority) coalition between parties. Apart from which parties will be cooperating, the crucial element is the *content and coherence* of the policy-seeking agreement between these parties. In other words, how and to what extent is the “game” played in view of the original electoral manifestos? To what extent are the party distances relevant for government formation? What has been gained at the end of the day, what has been lost and what is the commonly agreed *policy-seeking* effort of the “new” coalition?[70] Hence, the relative distance between

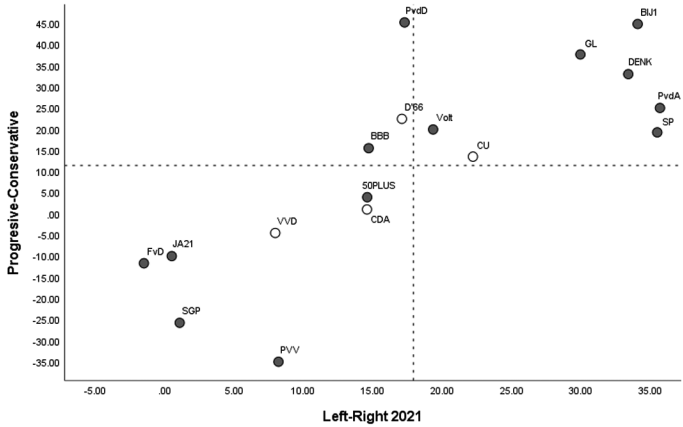
parties is an important element for finding a suitable coalition.

Figure 3 is an example of finding a viable combination of parties that are relatively close to each other. This two-dimensional map also clearly illustrates the distances of the coalition parties from either right-wing and conservative parties (towards the left lower corner) or left-wing and progressive parties (towards the right upper corner) within the party system. The map depicts the party system after the 2021 elections (see the Appendix for the method used).

The parties in government are, by and large, close to the "centre" of the distribution. The three other parties within the same space have only a few seats and are not needed to gain a majority in the lower house. The parties in opposition are clearly either to the left and progressive or alternatively right-wing and conservative. Hence, the formation is typically a centrist combination, and the opposition is on either side of the political spectrum. As can be observed, the PvdA is clearly in the left-cum-progressive camp. However, this was not the case earlier. Figure A1 in the Appendix illustrates this: apart from the 1989 programme, the party did not score as highly on both dimensions. Apart from the low number of seats in the lower house, it is obvious that the social democrats were not able to participate in government.

An additional element of forming a government is the *distribution of the ministries* between the parties. It is expected that a social democratic party will endeavour to occupy those sectors that are close to its core business, like socioeconomic affairs, health care and education. Obviously, this is a useful condition to direct policy efforts through the departments. Finally, a margin of majority for the coalition in *both* chambers is preferred. In the era that mainstream parties were dominant, support for the government was, on average, at least 60% in both chambers. However, after 2002, this was just over 50% in the lower house. However, since 2012, there have been situations

Figure 3. Two-dimensional map of the Dutch party system in 2021.



Note: parties in black are in opposition; those featuring a white dot formed the government coalition in 2021. The dotted line indicates the average score of all parties on each dimension.

Party labels: BBB = Farmer-Citizen Movement; BIJ1 = Together; CDA = Christian Democratic Appeal; CU = Christian Union; D66 = Democrats66; DENK = Think; FvD = Forum of Democracy; GL = Green Left; JA21 = Yes21; PvdA = Labour; PvdD = Animal Party; PVV = Freedom Party; SGP = Statist Reformed Party; SP = Socialist Party; Volt = European Party.

Source: see Appendix.

of "divided governance" (i.e., the majority in the lower house is not present in the upper house). This situation further complicates the life and times of a coalition.

All in all, the formation of a more or less stable partisan majority government is a demanding assignment for all parties involved, quite time-consuming and delicate to perform. This is illustrated in Table 4, which shows the duration of the formation process, the duration of the

ensuing coalition government, the support in parliament for the coalition and the proportional participation of the PvdA in government (i.e., the number of portfolios held by the PvdA).

Table 4. Basic features of coalition government formation (1989-2021).

Period	Formation days	Government duration (days)	Parliamentary support (%)	Participation by the PvdA (%)
1989-2021	119.6	886	55.0	18.3
1989-1998	98.4	1,162	59.4	25.0
2002-2021	140.7	611	50.6	11.6

Source: Kabinetsformatie. Averages are own computations.

The difference between the two periods is striking in all respects. Over the whole period, it can be surmised that, if stability is an indication of duration, then from 2002 onwards, governments have tended to become less enduring and more unstable. The only exception is the VVD-PvdA coalition between 2012 and 2017: formation took only 54 days and the coalition lasted 4.5 years. This observation is reinforced by the statistical relationships between the strength of the mainstream parties and the duration of a coalition: Pearsons $r = 0.64$ before 2002. The same is true for the relationship between government support and duration ($r = 0.47$). Hence, if governmental stability is considered to be dependent on support in parliament, it appears that in the period before 2002 this was the case: on average, the duration of government was 1,161 days, whereas after 2002 it has almost halved, 610 days (i.e., less than 2 years).

Altogether the formation process in the Netherlands is mostly a long and winding road dominated by the mainstream parties, in the last 20 years, the complex and arduous negotiations have severely

increased since the power platform of the "centre" parties is reduced, and the party system is strongly fragmented. In addition, the effects of higher levels of electoral volatility also meant that "divided" governance occurred regularly. Finally, the programmatic party differences between parties moved gradually from socioeconomic contestation towards sociocultural issues like immigration, traditional values and concerning the influence of Europeanisation on national policy formation. It appears, as Table 4 demonstrates, that the role of the PvdA in the process has become weaker after the "purple" era. Let us have a closer inspection of how the social democrats fared.

4.3 The PvdA and government formation: Performance and participation

How did the PvdA fare in the complex and delicate process of coalition formation? As explained in the previous section, the mainstream parties dominate this process, although all parties in parliament are involved in the first stages. Generally, the party with the highest number of seats in parliament after the election has the honour to start negotiations. More often than not, this implied a leading role for the Christian democratic party after the war.

However, this changed during the 1990s, when both the CDA and the PvdA lost seats in parliament but remained the two strongest parties. Nevertheless, the PvdA took over, together with the VVD and D66, forming the purple governments. In 2007, the PvdA entered negotiations and these resulted in the formation of the fourth government led by Balkenende (CDA) between 2007 and 2010. After 2010, the VVD became the dominant party of government when Rutte led the first of four consecutive governments. His first government

was extra-parliamentary (supported by Wilders' PVV in parliament) but short-lived and followed up in 2012 by a coalition with the PvdA after their successful vote-seeking campaign. The policy agreement reached was basically the result of trading off each other's preferences (tit-for-tat) within the context of restoring the fiscal state of affairs. This was the last coalition in which social democracy participated. In Table 5, the outcomes of the five formations of the coalitions since 1989 are presented.

Table 5. Outcomes of the coalition negotiations resulting in PvdA government participation.

Year	Proportional size in coalition	Premiership or Deputy PM	Economic welfare sector	Social welfare sector
1989	50.0	0.5	0.33	0.67
1994	35.7	1.0	0.33	0.67
1998	42.9	1.0	0.33	0.33
2007	35.3	0.5	0.33	0.67
2012	46.2	0.5	0.67	0.33
Average	42.0	0.7	0.40	0.54

Notes: proportional size = number of ministers relative to the total; premiership = 1.0, if it is 0.5, it indicates that the PvdA holds the deputy premiership; economic and social welfare sector = relative number of PvdA ministers in each policy sector: 1.0 is equal to holding three ministries.

If and when the PvdA participates in a coalition, its size is around 40%, but it is hardly ever dominant. Only during the "purple" period was the premiership held by the PvdA; the first time since the Den Uyl government (1973-1977). However, perhaps equally relevant is to what extent the party occupies those policy-making sectors that are close to its policy-seeking efforts: steering the economy, on one hand, and the provision of social welfare, on the other hand. Whereas the latter sector is well served by PvdA ministers (but as Table 5 shows

never completely), in the economic sector, the PvdA only held two out of the three ministries in 2012. Only in 1989 and 2012 did the party have a minister of finance, which is seen as a key position next to the prime minister. All in all, the PvdA *co*-governed for 18 years between 1989 and 2023.

Serving the people in government for about half the time after 1989 appears a suitable track record in terms of converting vote-seeking capacity into government office-seeking. This conversion is crucial for making policies that are more or less close to the party's *mission*.[71] Yet, the question that is crying out for an answer is twofold: what did participation bring in terms of adequate policy formation, and how did it affect the party in terms of its social democratic mission? In the view of commentators, inside and outside the party, the collaboration in government with the liberal-conservative VVD has caused more damage than goodwill. The damage concerns the watering down of the PvdA's own mission and electoral pledges, thereby disconnecting from its original constituency as well as by drifting away from "stateness" (effective conversion of policy direction). It is one of the vulnerabilities of governing: the performance remains below par or is not perceived in society as such, thereby alienating the citizen. In other words:

> *[…] the politics of government formation, have bewildered many Dutch voters. The various combinations of parties in government only have led to confusion of the 'men in the street' as what do parties stand for and what can they deliver at the end of the day.*[72]

This seems to have been the case for the PvdA when they were in government. Hence, it can be argued that in Dutch politics the process of government building, and subsequent policymaking, has been *more or less* conducive to a changing mission of the party. Firstly, by forming the "purple coalition" by tacitly moving toward the Third Way, and

secondly, in 2012, by embracing the VVD mission to take responsibility to "save" the economy and to reorganise the welfare state for the sake of Dutch society following neo-liberal ideas.[73] Both governments that were formed at the time can be considered as watershed moments that have injured the PvdA in terms of its "mission" as being a principled party of "labour". In Section 5, these two government formations and policy performances whilst in government are discussed in more detail.

5
Policy-seeking in government: Watershed moments and performances

5.1 The origins of "purple" collaboration: The shift towards a Dutch "Third Way"

The concept of the *Third Way*, as popularised by Giddens,[74] seeks to renew social democracy by addressing contemporary challenges associated with globalisation, individualism, political polarity, ecology, and the transformation of traditional values and lifestyles. Furthermore, these issue areas, and those relating to "welfare statism", are conducive to a change in policy agenda of the "new" social democracy. For example, macro-*economic policy* should be directed at sound public finances, that is, no deficit spending or rising public debts but rather allowing for tax cuts. Likewise, welfare state programmes ought to aim to transform the existing safety net of entitlements into a springboard to individual development and taking personal responsibility instead of remaining dependent on the state.[75]

In other words, labour market policymaking aims to promote individual responsibility, mobility and flexibility of the labour force (i.e., "*éducation permanente*" and lifelong employability). Furthermore, the relationship between the state and market was revised: instead of direct regulation, the public authority should remain at "arm's length" and it should be monitored by independent agencies. Hence, the intervention state retreats, the market coordinates socioeconomic development, and communities are thought to be responsible for sociocultural integration and coherence. It was the way to shape "modern" society.[76] Becker and Cuperus have put this argument forward succinctly:

> *One of the effects was the dismantling of the state and public sector. The introduction of New Public Management (the state should steer, not row) in the 1990s, promoting market forces and competition in the public domain, undermining the public ethic and the role of public professionals, considering citizens as customers of public services – but treating them with distrust and growing surveillance – all added up to policy disasters, catastrophic failures of essential public services, and state interventions with damaging effects. The decentralisation of essential public functions to the local level under condition of later budget cuts made matters worse. No wonder that trust in political institutions has suffered severely in the Netherlands – bad news for social democrats for whom the state and the collective sector used to be an essential part of their political project.*[77]

It is this platform of Third Way ideas and the associated proposals for social democratic policy formation that have impacted on the programmatic changes in many social democratic parties across Europe. Particularly so in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, where Tony Blair, Gerhard Schroeder and Wim Kok were prime ministers representing social democracy during the 1990s. It signified a movement within European social democracy away from its original

mission towards Third Way ideas, labelled as "The Radical Centre".[78] In Table 6, this is illustrated by inspecting the programmatic changes in Northwestern Europe taking place during the 1990s.

Table 6. Change in social democratic programme positions before and after 1990 by country.

Country	Moving from left to right	Prioritising welfare statism	Third Way emphasis	Working-class appeal
Denmark	4.30	–1.70	0.10	6.70
Germany	–14.50	–2.70	0.80	0.50
Netherlands	*–19.90*	*–5.90*	*5.70*	*0.90*
Norway	–3.10	1.20	2.20	9.20
Sweden	–17.00	–9.10	–0.50	7.50
UK	–20.80	–6.30	5.10	–1.70
Social democratic parties	–6.10	–1.40	1.70	2.50

Notes: minus = overall programmatic movement from left to right; likewise, less emphasis on welfare statism. Third Way emphasis represents elements in the party's programme present. Working-class appeal concerns more than less emphasis on blue and white collar workers. Plus = more to the left and more emphasis on the other indicators of programmatic elements mentioned. Change is between the average positions for 1975-1990 and 1991-2015. *Social democratic parties* concern 21 parties in the OECD world.

Source: Manifesto Project. See Klingemann et al. (2006) and Keman (2017): 174-178.

It is immediately clear that most social democratic parties (except Denmark at the time) have changed their programmatic approach since 1990. Yet, it is also clear that many of the social democratic parties have not altered their ideological compass in the direction of the "radical centre" as drastically as in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. It can also be noted that there is a considerable difference emerging

between the Scandinavian countries and the UK, Germany and the Netherlands with regard to their movement to the centre of gravity of their party systems. Norway and Denmark remain different.

More specifically, apart from Norway, all parties have diminished their attachment to "welfare statism" as a prime policy priority.[79] Furthermore, it appears that the focus on working class appeal (blue- and white-collar workers), except for in Norway and Sweden, is no longer a prominent feature of social democracy. The long and short of it is that the Dutch PvdA became a prototypical Third Way party *avant la lettre*. In fact, the PvdA can be considered a "forerunner". Although the PvdA leadership – personified by Wim Kok – never explicitly identified with the label "Third Way", it is obvious that it adopted full-blown Third Way policies. As Bill Clinton remarked: "Prime Minister Wim Kok, from the Netherlands, actually was all doing this before we were".[80]

Apparently social democracy, by moving to the centre of gravity of its party system, is to be understood as an attempt to broaden its constituency *beyond* blue- and white-collar workers.[81] This strategy was attempted earlier by the PvdA: the change from a class-based party toward "catch-allism" took place *directly after* the Second World War. This is understandable since the Dutch party system was mainly organised along a dual cleavage system. In this "pillarised" system, the blue- and white-collar segments were divided across religious parties and secular parties. Secondly, the blue-collar population, as such, has never been large because heavy industry in the Netherlands is relatively small (and de-industrialisation reduced its size further), whereas craftsmanship and jobs in retail, trading and in the service sector, as well as small-scale farming, have always predominated. For example, the service sector grew by 240% between 1980 and 2020, whereas the industrial sector was reduced to 20% of the employed and the agrarian sector lost more than 40% of its jobs.[82]

Another factor at play has been that the trade unions were pillarised and not really unified nor having a large membership. Their interests were reasonably represented within the institutions of consociationalism and corporatism, that is, the celebrated method of Dutch negotiating: the "Polder model".[83] In summary, the Dutch "blue-collar" class has always been relatively small and organised through the religious and secular pillars in different trade union federations. Since the 1980s, this de-alignment occurred (as within Christian democracy) and re-alignment did not occur. In 1980, the NVV had one million members and, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the combined trade union federation had 880,000 members (including retired persons) in 2022.

An additional effect seems to be that it relaxed its position regarding the generous welfare state, which became noticeable in the wave of welfare retrenchment.[84] Obviously, these reasons may help to explain the declining performance across Europe in its vote-seeking capacities, on one hand, and less confidence in policy performance if in government by the lower income segments of the social democratic constituency, on the other hand. Recent electoral results in Scandinavia support this observation. In brief: the shift towards the Third Way can be seen as a *rupture* with the past. The "purple" coalition is the point of departure for the change in direction of the PvdA.

Although there was opposition, the majority of MPs and the party board supported the Third Way line of action. Only after 2002, when the party lost almost half of its electoral support, did former MPs and members of government think in retrospect that the party had moved too much to the centre of the party system, embraced deregulation too often (such as banking and the labour market), allowed for too much privatisation of public amenities (like the railways) and had too little regard for where a social democratic party stood in the name of its "natural" constituency: "Regret after the fact!".[85]

In conclusion, what happened during the 1990s was that the mission of the PvdA slowly but certainly shifted from a typical reformist social democratic party towards an office-driven party colluding with the party system's "centre" of gravity. In addition, the implicit move to the "Third Way" implied a (tacit) acceptance of the neo-liberal creed. These ideas were originally purported by Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek – both Noble Prize winners. The idea of the "big spending state" was born: intervention and regulation of society would distort the working and thus curative effects of the market forces.[86] Many politicians of different political parties embraced the ideas of the Chicago School and these were used to reorganise and reduce "statism", which only stood in the way of a sound economy and self-sustaining society. After 1990, the gospel of marketisation spread across Europe by most political currents. As Joseph Stiglitz commented:[87]

> *The neoliberal reforms of the 1980s were based on the idea that unfettered markets would bring shared prosperity through a mystical trickle-down process. We were told that lowering tax rates on the rich, financialization, and globalization would result in higher standards of living for everybody. […] Instead of the promised prosperity, we got deindustrialization, polarization, and a shrinking middle class.*

In short: in the view of many antagonists and supporters, social democracy appeared to be insufficiently organised and not capable of delivering adequate social and economic welfare to society. In contrast to the market mechanism, the politicised state and party government would impede the economy from running smoothly and stand in the way of a self-serving society. Bureaucratic procedures would only cause incrementalism, inertia and inequality. Hence, electoral support of left-wing parties is not met by adequate policies but is causing

dissatisfaction and distrust. It is this type of "framing" of the office-seeking efforts of the PvdA to empower its policy-making capacity appear to have caused collateral damage to its policy performance.

5.2 Policy performance in dire times: Saving the nation from despair?

The five governments between 1981 and 2017 in which the PvdA participated (see Table 5) experienced different circumstances in terms of the economic situation, maintenance of the welfare state, and events and incidents influencing steady policy making and thereby the conduct of government. Some affairs were, however, hard to control and in fact "external" (like the Srebrenica catastrophe[88]). Yet, a few incidents, eventually turning into "scandals", affected trust in politics and government in particular (see Box 2 for an overview).

The PvdA, as a "mainstream" party, was also responsible for the conduct of government, and its role has hurt the party frequently in terms of its "principles" and setting policy priorities. The policy performance (or outcomes) of government can be split into two categories: public policy formation to maintain, if not enhance, the fiscal state concerning the economy and related issues (like unemployment, inflation and income inequality); and producing social goods in an appropriate way (such as social security, housing and health care). Although political decision-making in parliament is important and government proposals are crucial, the actual execution takes place by means of an efficient and trustworthy bureaucracy exerting public authority impartially.[89] Hence, policy performance is an interplay between parties in government, parliamentary deliberation and approval, as well as ministers directing their ministries. In Table 7, several socioeconomic

parameters and some fiscal indicators are listed. In addition, income-related expenditures and related outcomes are presented, covering four periods (1981-2022).

Table 7. Socioeconomic state of affairs between 1981 and 2022.

Indicator	Period			
	1981-1993	1994-2002	2003-2012	2013-2022
Economic growth rate (GDP)	2.1	3.4	1.3	1.5
Inflation (change in consumer price index)	2.6	2.5	1.8	2.7
Unemployment (% total labour force)	9.6	5.6	5.7	5.4
Total government outlays (% GDP)	53.9	45.9	44.8	46.8
Budget deficit (% GDP)	–4.1	–2.0	–2.4	–3.4
Transfer payments (% of outlays)	18.5	12.3	10.6	10.5
Health care (% of outlays)	5.0	5.4	7.6	8.4
Income inequality (pre-taxation)	42.6	36.8	40.8	41.0
Income inequality (post-taxation)	25.0	23.1	26.5	28.4

Notes: government outlays include interest payments of public debt; transfer payments include all social security benefits to eligible citizens; income inequality is measured by the GINI index before and after taxation.

Source: Armingeon. K., V. Wenger, F. Wiedemeier, C. Isler, L. Knöpfel, D. Weisstanner and S. Engler (2023) *Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2022*. Zurich: Institute of Political Science, University of Zurich, http://www.cpds-data.org/.

These macro-parameters not only underscore that the Netherlands is a relatively prosperous, if not wealthy, country, but also that governments (including those in which the PvdA participated) are well

equipped to “mind the shop”. Yet, it is also observed that government spending decreased after 1994 and the level of social security benefits appeared to have been cut back. Secondly, also note that after 2003 the income post-taxation inequality goes up, and this is even stronger after 2013. In summary, the role of the PvdA in terms of macro-policy outcomes do not seem to make a difference.

On the contrary, retrenchment measures affected the generosity of the existing welfare state. This was not only an effect of lower levels of welfare-state-related expenditures, but also due to changing allowances from being universalistic to “means-tested”.[90] At the same time, an austerity regime was gradually put in place and led to, for example, the "childcare scandal" (see Box 2). Other examples can be mentioned, but the message is that the PvdA, whilst in government, was *co*-responsible for these “national” policy performances. In part, this has to do with economic circumstances, but coalition politics also played a role, for example between 2012 and 2017. The PvdA always shows itself to be a reliable partner in government and has always been loyal to affairs of the state (and the monarchy[91]). This may be a commendable feat, but the question arises as to what extent the conducted policy formation was in line with its own principled mission.

This is an important question to understand the electoral demise of the party since the disastrous elections of 2017. On one hand, adequate socioeconomic policy performances are a condition for successful vote-seeking, but, on the other hand, electoral pledges result in debt for the less well-off in society. The information in Table 7 is not hopeful in this respect. The reduced expenditures on transfer payments to households show that, in addition to income inequality, the poverty rate has not lowered in the last 20 years; housing also remains on the agenda as being an urgent concern for the lower income segment and younger people.

The same can be seen in relation to pensioners and the elderly, whose income and living standards are under pressure (especially if they rely on only a state pension[92]). The Dutch Bureau of Statistics (CBS[1], 2023) has calculated that the "poverty line" is if the income of a couple is below €2,000 a month; a retired couple receives €2,250 a month (without an additional pension). Both groups are growing, and pensioners make up a large share of the PvdA electorate.[93] Of course, the PvdA alone is not to blame for the underperformance, but what is essential is that the party is not able to demonstrate, in or out of government, that it makes a difference for its "own" constituency – the lower income groups, if not the precariat, young, old or in between.

Altogether, the policy performance of the PvdA – if and when in government – is of a variable quality. Surely, the macro-parameters are satisfactory: the Netherlands is a prosperous and wealthy country with comparatively low levels of unemployment, according to comparative indicators like the Human Development Index (HDI, in 2023, was 0.941, or ranked tenth globally), and a high level of well-being (i.e., quality of life, occupying eighth place for OECD members[94]) with a standard of living that is comfortable for many Dutch people. Hence, one could expect that most people would be satisfied with the policy performance of different governments and with the role of the PvdA as a *policymaker*. Yet, this does not appear to be the case at the *micro*-level. Why? The answer may be complex, but, at the same time, there are certain elements to ponder that may shed light on the arduous trajectory of social democracy and other "left-wing" parties in the Netherlands.

1 https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/arbeid-en-inkomen/inkomen-en-bestedingen

5.3 Disenchantment, disillusion or mission accomplished?

Reports by the CBS show a puzzling picture of what the Dutch citizen thinks and expects of politicians, parties and government. The paradox is that the relationship between politics and society is at an historical low. Trust in politicians was only 24% in 2023, which was 10% lower than ten years before. The same applies to confidence in government, which was 40% in 2012 and – after a short upsurge during the Covid-19 crisis – only 30% in 2022. At the same time, the average citizen is quite satisfied with their life and the socioeconomic conditions in general.[95] The paradox is that people are generally satisfied with the lives they live but are disappointed regarding the way the government and public services operate (see Box 2). Foremost is that the self-indulgence of politicians who live in The Hague is criticised:[96] there is a widening gap between politics and the citizen.

Whereas confidence in institutions like the judiciary and police remains strong (77% in 2012 and 2022), confidence in public services and the regulating capacity of the state to solve urgent problems is waning over time (in 2022: 42.5%). Perhaps surprisingly, support for the Dutch membership of the EU is relatively strong and above the overall EU averages: in 2015, this was 70% and in 2023 rose to 79%. For the European Commission (governing body), this was 50% in 2015 and is now 60%.[97] In brief: trust and confidence in domestic politics and stateness is fading, whereas the EU appears to have become an accepted part of politics and stateness. One reason may well be that several domestic "scandals" and geo-political issues are not addressed or inadequately dealt with (like during the Covid-19 pandemic and the present war in Ukraine). This signifies the dependence of the national state on supranational collaboration. Yet, as Box 2 demonstrates,

the operating quality of the state and its bureaucracy appear to be below par. The three examples concern "affairs" through which political trust has been severely harmed in the eyes of the public, as they demonstrate misconduct by government and show an apparent incapacity for "statism" to solve societal problems.

Box 2. Affairs harming political trust: childcare benefits; earthquakes; and asylum seekers.

1) Childcare benefits scandal: institutional biased behaviour and failings of the rule of law[98]

This scandal concerns false allegations of fraud made by the Tax Office while attempting to prevent abuse of childcare. After several enquiries, including by members of parliament, a final report blamed various governments for bureaucratic mismanagement and a rigid judiciary for discrimination and unfair treatment of citizens (in particular, those with dual nationality). The report led to the collective resignation of the government in early 2021.

Between 2005 and 2019, authorities wrongly persecuted around 26,000 parents for making wrongful benefit claims, requiring them to pay back all the allowances they had received. In many cases, this sum amounted to tens of thousands of euros, driving families into severe financial and social hardship. The scandal was brought to public attention in September 2018. Investigators have subsequently described the working procedure of the Tax Office as "discriminatory" against parents with foreign backgrounds, as well as being carried out with an "institutional bias". On 15 January 2021, two months before the 2021 general election, the third government led by Rutte resigned over the scandal, following a parliamentary inquiry into the matter, which concluded that "fundamental principles of the rule of law" had been violated.

Childcare benefits were included in the Dutch social welfare system in 2004, when parliament accepted the Childcare Act. The programme is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, but the Tax Office (part of the Ministry of Finance) is responsible for its implementation, including payment and fraud prevention. In 2005, the General Act on Means-Tested Benefits was introduced, which reorganised the existing welfare system. This law did not allow for "fair treatment", that is, to make individual exceptions if considered unreasonable. This decision was made by a majority in parliament.

This political "scandal" should be understood in the context of other fraud cases, including the Bulgarian migrant fraud discovered in 2013. Both chambers in parliament urged for a stricter fraud prevention policy. The coalition agreement of the first Rutte cabinet (in which the populist right-wing PVV was a supporting partner) also promised to intensify anti-fraud enforcement. Although a few MPs (from CDA, SP and Denk) continued to question this matter and related procedures up to 2018, there was little or no response from the government apart from denial. This included the Rutte government in which the PvdA participated.

In December 2020, after a report by the parliamentary interrogation committee had been published, the former PvdA Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, Lodewijk Asscher, personally apologised for his role in the childcare benefits scandal. His role led to a discussion within the party about his position as party leader for the 2021 election. Initially, he wanted to continue as party leader, but, on 14 January 2021, Asscher resigned as party leader and candidate MP. In short: the PvdA was seen as a "partner in crime".

2) Earthquakes in Groningen: natural gas extraction and damage compensation[99]

The Netherlands has a history of extracting gas from natural gas fields without experiencing natural earthquakes (according to the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute). Nevertheless, the extraction of natural gas from the Groningen gas field (which is in the north of the country) has caused regular man-made earthquakes (about 1,600), which have damaged people's properties. This damage to local buildings and concerns around climate change have been ongoing and led to a parliamentary audit of the government's decisions surrounding the Groningen gas field, the largest natural gas field in Western Europe.

Earthquakes caused by gas extraction have been noted elsewhere in the Netherlands since 1986 but grew rather severe after 2000. Gas extraction in Groningen has been scaled down since 2018 and was halted in October 2023. Although it was a point of contention in parliament given the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent European ban on gas imports from Russia, production has been aborted.

During the Rutte IV cabinet, compensation was awarded to homeowners whose houses were damaged by gas extraction, but this process has not gone smoothly, to say the least. In February 2023, a parliamentary inquiry commission determined that the government owed a "debt of honour" to residents of Groningen and proposed several remedies to alleviate this. Although the government offered excuses and promised to speed up the reconstruction of houses and compensation for damage, the actual handling has been slow, arduous and incomplete.

Noteworthy is that parliament did take extraordinarily long to allow an official inquiry to examine the relationship between gas extraction and the occurrence of earthquakes and who was responsible for indemnification and reconstruction. The motion was proposed in

2016 by the PvdA and GL in the Second Chamber, but was only passed in 2019.

3) Asylum policy: the undying issue dividing the party system in the 21st century[100]

Governments have always been reluctant to create permanent shelter capacity for asylum seekers, choosing to instead to scale capacity up or down, thereby creating issues for municipalities to establish shelter through laborious deliberations with their inhabitants.

Since the 1990s, the Netherlands has increasingly received asylum seekers from many regions. More recently, the influx grew strongly, in particular those from Syria fleeing from the civil war and from Ukraine after the Russian invasion. Asylum applications have therefore increased by 33% since 2022 to over 47,000, and, according to government estimates, were expected to reach 70,000 by the end of 2023 (in reality, the number was 50,000). This has exceeded the number of refugees the country was prepared for and was conducive to political polarisation.

In 2022, the government chose to devolve responsibility for the founding of asylum seeker housing centres (AZCs) to municipalities. This move created another problem, as many of these municipalities were reluctant or openly unwilling to comply with the demand to accommodate recognised refugees. In part, this was due to concerns from locals, such as "there are too many asylum seekers" or "why can't it be somewhere else?". This so-called "NIMBY" (not in my backyard) phenomenon was supported by several parties, including the VVD and PVV, in parliament.

A second problem concerned the scaling down of suitable housing for those asylum seekers who were granted *permanent* status.

This situation was deepened by the general housing shortage for younger or modal income people. The inability to create more housing has resulted in bottlenecks in the two registration centres in the Netherlands, *Ter Apel*, a small town in the province Groningen, and *Budel*, an equally small municipality in Noord-Brabant.

These circumstances led the international Red Cross and other non-governmental organisations deeming it necessary to lend aid to these registration centres, as conditions were considered "inhuman and unsustainable". In addition, the *Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur* (council for public governance) and the *Adviesraad Migratie* (advice council immigration) judged the situation to be "a crisis created and maintained by the government itself".

In February 2023, the CDA, a party in coalition, proposed to institute a *dual-status* system. This proposal was backed by the VVD but opposed by the Christian Union and D66, the other members of the coalition. The proposal would have classified war refugees under a different status than other (so-called economic) refugees. In addition, the total number of relatives who could be reunited with refugees would be limited.

Disagreement within the coalition about this proposal led to the government's resignation three months later, as both the Christian Union and D66 could not abide by the terms demanded by the VVD. This was a premeditated strategy, rather than chance, according to the Christian Union and opposition parties. However, during the election campaign, this asylum crisis not only became a prominent issue, but was "owned" almost exclusively by right-wing parties, such as the PVV of Geert Wilders. The VVD did not gain from this vote-seeking strategy.

The "asylum" and "refugee" problematic has been high on the political agenda since 2002 and has driven societal polarisation. Remarkably, although it is obviously an issue that is prolific in terms

of progressive versus conservative party positions, the left-wing party family has not succeeded in developing alternative and viable policy proposals to solve the situation, and therefore, is unable to convince its electoral followers that it would be trustworthy to handle this issue.

The basic feeling among the citizenry is that there are many other pressing problems (like the climate transition, housing shortage and the health care system) that are not being solved nor under control by the state or are being wrongly managed. Moreover, as stated above, politicians, parties and the government appear unwilling to address them or create stalemates when making decisions. Politics as a trustworthy representative and problem solver is increasingly under public and media scrutiny. Lower levels of trust and confidence in politics, and parties in particular, undermine citizens' belief in the integrity of their representatives and government (and its members) to do what is good for society.

Such a belief grows if the policy performance is close to their preferences or popular demands that can reduce the *micro-macro paradox*. In short: the better responsiveness achieved by the government and responsibility of the party they voted for, the more favourable the citizen-cum-elector is. However, voters in the Netherlands are increasingly lacking trust in parties and in government. This is illustrated by the level of electoral volatility (see Table 1) and the rate of government turnover since 2002.

Trust and confidence are crucial for ensuring the performance of a wide range of public policies that depend on positive attitudes and compliance from the public. For instance, the Covid-19 stringency measures worked best if "stateness" was widely considered by the

public to be reliable. However, as the United Nations (UN) recently reported, there is a decrease in public support:

> *Governments will need to count on, or in cases where government responses were largely found to be ineffective, to regain public trust as they plan and implement an inclusive recovery. However, there is growing concern about a crisis in public trust that is contributing to, among other things, support for extreme political views, increasing public discontent, protests and in some cases violent conflict.*[101]

Exactly this was not only apparent in the Netherlands during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also in a few other instances, as described in Box 2. Equally clear is that opposition parties in parliament, including the PvdA, have been unable to conduct veritable and effective opposition. Apart from the problematic issues mentioned, there have been more protests from different interest groups in society: farmers protesting against the "green" policy proposals; climate activists against the slow enactment of the same policy measures; demonstrations in Groningen around the earthquakes; and the widespread upheaval concerning the refugee crisis.

What is understandable in relation to these "affairs" and public consternation is that *new* parties emerged. Remarkable is their success and ability to organise electoral support, such as the BBB, in essence a rural party supporting farmers, and the NSC led by Pieter Omtzigt (formerly MP for the CDA). Omtzigt, who impressed the public as the main mouthpiece tenaciously seeking justice for the victims of the childcare scandal (assisted by the SP). In other words: established parties, the PvdA included, were not taking the lead nor visible in parliament or on location (except for Atje Kuiken of the PvdA). Mainstream parties, in or out of government, seemingly remain detached from society, or as Peter Mair observed:[102] "Parties have reduced their presence in the

wider society and have become part of the state. They have become agencies that govern […] rather than that they represent".

This appears to apply to the PvdA as well and signifies its lost connection to its constituency and perhaps loss of its role as the "trusted" agent of the "person on the street" who had confidence in the PvdA as a keeper of their interests. Altogether, the conclusion is that, like other parties, social democrats have shown a policy performance track record that is positive at the macro-societal level but is perceived to be insufficiently operating, be it in a coalition or in opposition, at the micro-individual level. In brief: there appears to be a feeling of *disenchantment* with the PvdA in representing the problems and issues of (working) people, on one hand, and a feeling of *disillusion* regarding the problem-solving capacity of party government, on the other hand. The question is therefore to what extent the social democratic *mission* is still congruent with its constituency and still considered as a party capable of representing its electorate effectively in terms of an adequate policy performance.

6
Epilogue

6.1 Anamneses

From a comparative viewpoint, one cannot deny that the social democratic family in Western Europe has given in in terms of its vote- and office-seeking capacities. In part, this may have to do to with the policy-seeking (and eventually policy-making) direction and related policy performances. Alternatively, the 21st century is changing rapidly, and new issues and societal problems require new political responses and perspectives.

One observation is that the emergence of the progressive-conservative dimension in party competition, in addition to the loss of issue ownership regarding welfare statism, has shown the lack of party cohesion in terms of the party's principal mission. On one hand, the party seems to be split between the younger, urban, often higher educated members and, on the other hand, traditional social democrats, who are often aged 50 and older in favour of a "caring" state. This intra-party tension, in terms of representing members and setting priorities, should not be overlooked if one ponders the future.[103] For instance, there appears to be a lack of connecting with blue- and white-collar workers, in view of the rise of populism and even "illiberalism", which is devoid of "universalism" and deference for the contemporary trends (like

"climate", social justice and "wokism"). Instead, intolerance and societal conservatism are promoted by populist parties in terms of "traditional society" and Eurosceptic issues, in combination with nationalism, anti-multiculturalism and concerns about immigration.[104]

Although this may explain the continuing reduction of the vote share of established parties after 2002 and of the Dutch PvdA in particular,[105] these explanations ignore the more structural reasons underlying the diminution of all mainstream parties in the Netherlands: deindustrialisation; globalism; flexible working; demographic developments; and secularisation have all played a role.[106]

Both the growth of electoral volatility and votes for new parties (see Table 1) – albeit quite variable over time and noticeable across Western Europe – demonstrate that the original social democratic strategy of office-seeking by means of the ownership of the "welfare statism" issue or by means of a Third Way strategy, by moving to the radical centre, can no longer be considered as a viable route to electoral success nor that government participation is an effective way to maintain the support of its "natural" constituency[107] in view of material subsistence uncertainties for the lower and middle classes in society. Other parties, including centre and (radical) right ones, have made this their issue as well.

The contemporary political history of the Netherlands only displays such a conjecture: the post-consociational and post-corporatist era of accommodation politics inhibits previous powerhouses (PvdA and Christion democracy) from maintaining their electoral support and consequently making policy that furthers consensus and cooperation to cope with the problematic issues of today, including post-material demands like the environment, inclusion, equality (of opportunity) and equity (collective provisions for all individual citizens).

The history of welfare retrenchment under Prime Minister Kok, in coalition with conservative and progressive liberals – and the populist

backlash of 2002 – only reinforces the loss of a social democratic identity for its followers and impairs visions from its leadership. This process was strengthened by the austerity regime and introducing strict immigration measures (see Box 2), among other things, executed under the responsibility of a LibLab coalition between 2012 and 2017, resulting in the historic electoral demise of the PvdA. The promise of "democratic socialism" under the leadership of Joop den Uyl, seemingly "modernised" by means of the "Third Way" during Wim Kok's leadership, does not fit present times anymore: it is *not* the economy *nor* the welfare state *only*.[108] So, what are the prospects?

6.2 Diagnosis

What if the PvdA had *not* chosen a course towards the "radical centre" or to embrace the "green" issue? To answer this counterfactual[109] question, we employ a "benchmark": the apparent success of Danish social democracy in contrast to other members of the social democratic party family, particularly the PvdA.[110] Six themes are addressed to diagnose the "ailments" of the PvdA:

1) In Denmark, the decline of the blue- and white-collar vote for labour remains limited due to highly organised trade unions, a regulated labour market and a monitored pensioner system. Obviously, this is not the case in the Netherlands: the relationship between the two main trade union federations and the PvdA is extremely weak, since the 1990s the labour market has only been indirectly regulated and the famous Dutch pension system is to be overhauled soon. This last step, supported by the PvdA and the trade union federations, is contested by specialists and the rank-and-file. The overhaul may well have consequences for the (still) working population and pensioners. A large part of the PvdA electorate is over 50 years of

age and many of them are willing to change their vote of late. Are they still being represented?

2) The opaque position of the Dutch party regarding neo-liberalism, globalism and "universal" values (however important they are) leaves behind many of its "natural" constituency. Although these topics have been discussed vehemently between parties and inside Danish social democracy, the party still finds sufficient support from other parties to develop socioeconomic policies that remain viable and acceptable to its electorate. Clearly, this has not been the case in the Netherlands, and the party remains vague on its contemporary mission.
3) The relationship between the party leadership and rank-and-file members is vulnerable. According to *Nedergaard*, the Danish party has been able to (re)connect with blue- and white-collar workers. Perhaps the (not uncontroversial) strict policy stance on immigration and refugees is clarifying. Whatever one may think of these policies, it demonstrates that *vertical* integration within the party appears to be reinforced. In Box 1, the party organisation was described, and we found that the bottom-up perspective was atomised in the PvdA. We also noticed that the leadership tended to represent the younger, higher educated segments of the membership, not lower educated and salaried people. Hence, it is expedient to reflect on the party's mission and policy-seeking behaviour.
4) Danish social democracy is shown to be able to maintain its ownership of welfare statism in relation to other parties. The universalistic element has even been expanded concurrent with its asylum policy. In this way, discussions on eligibility and provision, a hot topic elsewhere, for both groups has been avoided. However, in times of economic decline, this approach is under pressure. In the Netherlands, the turn to neo-liberalism and Third Way ideas

has, amongst other things, been conducive to retrenchment and austerity measures. Populist parties argue that the lower levels of social security, the shortage of suitable housing and "big city" impoverishment is the result of policies enacted by the established political centre.

5) Danish governments, in which social democrats regularly participate, support EU integration, but also recognise the controversial effects it has or can have domestically. For this reason, they maintain extant opt-outs. This attitude is positively acknowledged by trade unions and the working class. Euroscepticism certainly exists, but, unlike the PvdA, it is not an issue captured by other, right-wing parties. Transparent but conditional support of EU integration appears to be a direction that pays off within the party and in electoral competition.
6) Altogether, it appears that the Danish social democratic party has shirked from the "Third Way" (see Table 6) to modernise its mission and to maintain its relationship with its "natural" constituency. It should be added that this position has not happened overnight nor was it uncontested. On the contrary, also, in Denmark, the highly educated promoted universal values as the party's mission and policy direction. Yet, the leadership of the party was renewed and recovering the close relationship with trade unions seems to have made the difference.

Of course, one ought to take into account that the Danish political and socioeconomic context is different from the Dutch circumstances and socioeconomic structure: Danish social democracy has long been the dominant party in terms of vote- and office-seeking. Secondly, the levels of trust in politics and confidence in stateness are consistently higher than in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the main message of the above counterfactual analysis is that there are alternative options

available to redress the dire situation in which the Dutch social democratic party appears to find itself. So, what does the future bring? What might be a viable therapy?

6.3 Therapy

The diagnosis appears to be that another vote- and policy-seeking strategy is called for. In addition, alternative *ideational* coalitions, as with the GL, may well be a potential and viable route to take. At the same time, the diagnosis also shows that *reconnecting* with its multifarious constituencies – the less privileged, lower income segments in society, as well as the blue- and white-collar people – will be complex but ought to be pursued as well. Yet, so it seems, the PvdA momentarily lacks appealing and stable leadership, ideological transparency and the political determination to successfully contest other parties in elections and to combat negative and conservative tendencies in parliament, if not (radical) right-wing politics and governance.[111]

The approach in this study focussed on the *interdependent* relationships between vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking capacities that determine the actions and behaviour of any party. Like other social democratic parties, Dutch social democracy stressed vote- and office-seeking as the hallmarks of its political strategy. Yet, the crucial element remains the *mission* of social democracy in this era.

Back in 1997, there was a debate between the leaders of the British Labour Party, Tony Blair, and the French *Parti Socialiste*, Lionel Jospin. Tony Blair advised a meeting of European social democratic leaders to "modernise or die". Blair challenged his colleagues to discard policies that led to more regulation and more spending and instead take a "third way", a way of marrying together an open, competitive and successful

economy with a just, decent and humane society. Yet, Jospin argued in favour of a vast expansion of state-run social services because the market could not provide these alone. He added, "market forces – if there is no attempt to control them – will threaten our very idea of civilization".[112] Obviously, each leader had a mission when defining the political strategy of social democracy.

Such a mission of the Dutch social democratic party is opaque and seems to embrace progressive and universal topics based on socioeconomic fairness: fair redistribution of work and income; a viable infrastructure; fair treatment of minorities and refugees; and a feasible and sustainable "green revolution".[113] A critical observer could judge this European programme as making no clear choice and not addressing a constituency. It is neither fish nor fowl. In terms of vote- and policy-seeking, it is casting a wide net, but hardly addressing the topics that are close to the Danish approach or the French way.

What can be taken away from this overview is that vote- and office-seeking through the traditional "left versus right" battles only are insufficient at this day and age. Secondly, that government participation, as such, appears to be hazardous for two reasons: (1) policy-seeking through coalition formation is hampered by the erosion of the party system's "centre"; and (2) infamous instances of "stateness" produce low levels of policy performances (see Box 2). Without trust in politics and acting as a reliable agent in or out government in the eyes of the electorate, the PvdA will not easily regain the confidence of its original constituency nor extend its appeal to the middle classes. Hence, no easy answer nor "silver lining" can be expected soon.

Altogether, it can be concluded that the PvdA (although not alone) has underrated the changing society, the shift to conservatist issues and populist rhetoric, and the retreat of "stateness". The issue at hand for a resilient social democracy and the left wing in the Netherlands

is therefore to make a choice: either develop a broad green and left following; or realign its original support from the blue- and white-collar workers in society.

Given the fragmentation and complexity of the Dutch party system nowadays (see Figure 3), the first requirement would be to develop party coalitions prior to elections and sustainable cooperation in parliament. There are now five "greenish-cum-universalistic" parties since the last elections for parliament. This fragmentation impairs their vote-seeking performance in relation to the centre and right-wing parties promoting contesting issues around immigration, the EU, welfare statism and "traditional society". The foreseen merger of GL and PvdA is therefore a risk, unless a shared and solid alternative perspective is developed.

Another condition for the future of social democracy is to protect its mission in view of its historical traditions and to maintain its connection with the blue- and white-collar population (or middle and lower salaried workers and pensioners). This implies taking up "hot" issues like immigration (and concerning the refugee problem) and taking a clear policy stance regarding "welfare statism" and the provision of approachable public services (see Box 2). Such conditions need not stand in the way of closer cooperation with other parties but should serve as an essential ingredient.

Finally, the internal procedures within the PvdA ought to be focussed upon. On one hand, there is the matter of leadership and the relationship between the party (board) and the parliamentary party. On the other hand, there is room for improving the vertical integration of members and the relevant publics. Originally, a social democratic party developed as a "movement" combining political activism with institutional representation. In this context, leadership is an important feature of a *party-cum-movement*.[114] Integrating followers and voters is equally important. In the Netherlands, so it seems, this feature is

recognisable in the – albeit somewhat divided – greenish parties and in the "new" parties like the BBB (and to some extent) and the NSC party led by Pieter Omzigt. However, neither the PvdA nor the (more radical) SP appear able to produce veritable leadership of late that is capable of conveying a convincing message to its members and potential electorate.

In summary: the PvdA itself is the result of a merger (see Section 2.1), but it remained a social democratic party. Nevertheless, Dutch social democracy needs to ponder whether or not the future lies within a broad progressive movement, containing diverse leftish and greenish parties, or if it should continue its path packed with a well-known but not worn out nor outdated mission: the social democratisation of society for the sake of ordinary people by providing security, welfare and safety. Where to now? Whatever route is chosen, it will be long and winding, as well as requiring considerable efforts and commitment!

Appendix

Partisan differences making up the Dutch party system: A two-dimensional approach

Rationale

Most journalists and researchers of party systems use the left-right dimension to discuss the interactions between parties. However, since the 1990s, political scientists have argued to employ a *two-dimensional* perspective to do justice to the complexities of measuring party distances. From a technical point of view, it is preferred to develop a *spatial* map of a party system. Another reason is that this is necessary from a substantial viewpoint: recent developments in many party systems illustrate this.[115]

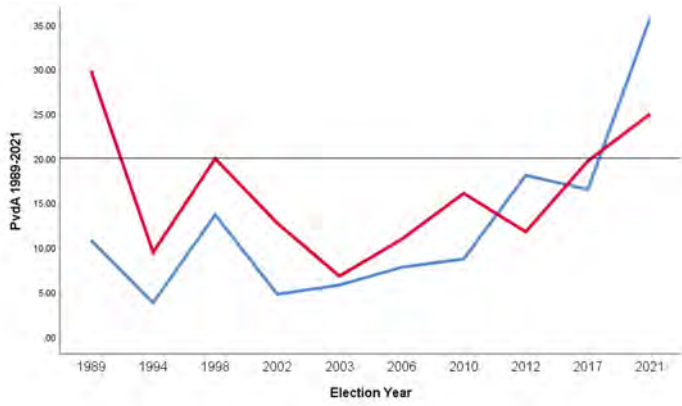
On one hand, there is growing overlap between other elements of party differences within the left-right dimension, which are contested (like the "environment" or "welfare statism"). On the other hand, the operationalisation of the concept of left-right remains too "thin" and does not capture certain relevant issues, or it is too "thick", resulting in a container concept. In brief: a two-dimensional or spatial perspective is used to illustrate the partisan positions of the Dutch party system.[116]

Method

The left versus right dimension is conceptualised to indicate the *socioeconomic* emphasis of parties and is derived from their electoral programmes. The other dimension concerns the *sociocultural* party differences in terms of progressive versus conservative attitudes expressed by parties revealing emphases, for instance, on national identity, traditional society, immigration and views on Europeanisation.

The information is derived from data produced by the Manifesto Research Group. In addition, other more specific scales are used that are useful to detect the programmatic changes within the PvdA and other parties making up the Dutch party system. The exact

Figure A1. The movements of the PvdA in both left-right and conservative-progressive dimensions over time.



Notes: red line = left-right score; blue line = progressive-conservative score. The higher the score, the stronger the leftish and progressive tendency. The black line represents the average score. Note the gradual shift from left-right to progressive-conservative and the U-shaped development.

operationalisation for each variable-cum-scale is described in detail at the end of this Appendix. Table 3 in the text shows the actual scores of the different scales for the mainstream parties over time. Figure A1 shows the movements of the PvdA on both dimensions over time.

Operationalisation parties' programmatic positions

Source: Manifesto Project Website.

Codebook Version May 2023. The codebook contains all variables (labelled *PER* + *number*) mentioned and elaborates the coding of each variable used to develop the different scales.

The method applied involves adding up the separate values (i.e., content analytical scores): the higher the score, the more a party emphasises underlying information as variables. For example: *left-wing complexion* and *right-wing complexion* for the PvdA in 2021 are, respectively, 41.25 and 5.75. Summed, this implies a left-right score on this scale of 35.50. The same procedure repeated for the conservative liberal VVD gives a value of 8.00, signifying the difference between these parties in term of the PvdA being more left wing than the right-wing VVD. The same method is employed for the distinction between progressive and conservative.

Left-wing complexion =
per403 + per404 + per407 + per409 + per412 + per503 + per701 + per705.

Right-wing complexion =
per401 + per402 + per406 + per410 + per414 + per505 + per702 + per704.

Scale: *left-right*: summing left minus right; high = towards left; low= towards right.

Progressive complexion =
per106 + per107 + per201 + per501 + per502 + per503 + per604 + per607.
Conservative complexion =
per104 + per109 + per110 + per505 + per601 + per603 + per605 + per608.
Scale: *progressive-conservative*; summing progressive minus conservative; high = progressive; low = conservative.

The additional scales employed concern specific elements that are summed and considered to be positively rated by a party and reflect contested issues within Dutch politics:

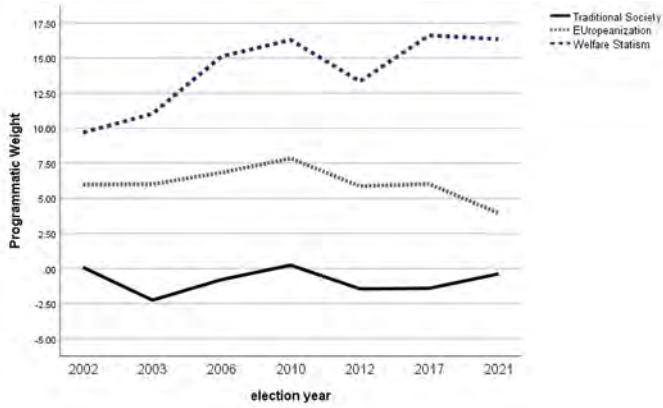
Welfare state = per405 + per409 + per503 + per504 + per506 + per501.

Traditional society = per110 + per204 + per601 + per 603 + per605 + per608.

EU = per101 + per107 + per108.

Figure A2 shows the relative distribution of specific issues in the programmatic stance of the PvdA.

Figure A2. Relative distribution of welfare statism, traditionalism and Europe in the programmatic stance of the PvdA.



Note: Zero values concern a neutral position; Below Zero implies a negative attitude, whereas a positive score means more programmatic emphases mentioned.

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Endnotes

1 Dr Pim Fortuyn (1948-2002), a sociologist and professor, was a flamboyant personality, an eloquent debater and openly homosexual. He stormed onto the political scene, stressing the issue that the purple coalition (1994-2002) was a sham and had ruined the country. He held strong opinions on the Islamic influences in Europe and related perils of immigration. He was the first successful right-wing populist in Dutch politics, appealing to many disappointed voters across the middle classes. Two days before the general elections of 2002, he was murdered by a Green activist, which led to vehement riots against the political establishment and government in particular. See P. Pennings and H. Keman (2003) "The Dutch parliamentary elections in 2002 and 2003: The rise and decline of the Fortuyn movement". *Acta Politica*, 1(38): 51-68.

2 The research underlying this study follows these four elements. In terms of systems theory, the four elements are not only interrelated but also reiterated over time. Hence, in democratic politics, this sequence is mainly defined by the electoral cycle. See H. Keman (2010) "Strategy development and variations of party government", in J. Raschke and R. Tils (eds) *Strategie in der Politikwissenschaft* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag), pp. 183-184; and H. Keman (2017) *Social Democracy: A Comparative Account of the Left-Wing Party Family* (London: Routledge), 2017: pp. 19-20.

3 *Statism* is short for the intervention in societal and economic relations by public authorities. It concerns various modes of public policy formation *directed* by means of democratic decision-making.

4 The micro-macro paradox implies that public regulation and concomitant measures are generic and often hurt certain groups or individual citizens more than others – one shoe (or public measure) does not fit all (the citizens), causing discontent. Secondly, the actual implementation of public policies strongly depends on the degree of effective and efficient "stateness" based on compliance from private contractors and public servants. In Box 2, certain "affairs" are reported, serving as an illustration of this paradox.

5 Luiten van Zanden, J. and A. van Riel (2000) *Nederland 1780-1914: Staat, Instituties en Economische Ontwikkeling* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans).

6 Lichtheim, G. (1970) *A Short History of Socialism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson), pp. 70-72.

7 Pillarisation implies a *vertical* division and organisation of society based on secularity versus religion and rich versus poor. These divisions are called "pillars" and shaped politics during most of the 20th century. The SDAP (after the war, the PvdA) and NVV (the trade union) represented the "socialist" pillar alongside the Catholic, Protestant and liberal-secular pillars. The dynamics and stability of the Dutch political system have been analysed by A. Lijphart (2002) "The evolution of consociational and corporatist practices 1965-2000". *Acta Politica*, Spring-Summer(37): 23-43; H. Daalder and R. Koole (2002) "The consociational democracy model and the Netherlands: Ambivalent allies?" *Acta Politica*, Spring-Summer(37): 23-43; and P. Pennings and H. Keman (2008) "The changing landscape of Dutch politics since the 1970s: A comparative exploration". *Acta Politica*, 2-3(43): 154-179.

8 Lijphart, A. (1968) *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: J. H. de Busy); R. B. Andeweg (1999) "Parties, pillars and the politics of accommodation: Weak or weakening linkages? The case of Dutch consociationalism", in K. R. Luther and F. Müller-Rommel (eds) *Political Parties in the New Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 108-133.

9 It should be noted that before 1939 the SDAP was often represented in local government, mainly in the larger cities. Examples include Willem Drees, later prime minister, and Floor Wibaut, who were councillors in The Hague and Amsterdam, respectively. Both were active in housing, health and social affairs. This type of socialism is called "sewer socialism" in the USA.

10 Boom, W. (2017) *De Neergang van de PvdA: Prominente Sociaal-Democraten over de Crisis en de Weg Omhoog* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam), pp. 198-206 and 224-238.

11 Keman, H. (2022) "The continued decline of Dutch social democracy", in G. Menz (ed.) *The Resistible Corrosion of Europe's Center-Left after 2008* (London: Routledge), p. 150.

12 Andeweg, R. B. (1999) "Parties, pillars and the politics of accommodation: Weak or weakening linkages? The case of Dutch consociationalism"; H. Keman and P. Pennings (2006) "Competition and coalescence: Social

democracy and Christian democracy moving into the 21st century". *Swiss Political Science Review*, 2(12): 95-126. DOI: 10.1002/j.1662-6370.2006.tb00390.x

13 van Waarden, F. (2002) "Dutch consociationalism and corporatism: A case of persistence". *Acta Politica*, Spring-Summer(37): 44-68; J. Woldendorp (2005) *The Polder Model: From Disease to Miracle? Dutch Neo-corporatism 1965-2000* (Amsterdam: Thela Thesis).

14 Messing, F. (1981) *De Nederlandse Economie 1945-1980. Herstel-Groei-Stagnatie* (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck), 57ff.

15 Castles, F. G. (2004) *The Future of the Welfare State: Crisis Myths and Crisis Realities*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

16 Kersbergen, K. van (1995) *Social Capitalism: A Study of Christian Democracy and the Welfare State* (London: Routledge).

17 Woldendorp, J. (2005) *The Polder Model: From Disease to Miracle? Dutch Neo-corporatism 1965-2000*.

18 Equity is used here to mean reasonable righteousness in providing services by the state for those in need, like health, housing, education and progressive taxation. Its rationale in view of distribution is that (1) those in need must receive assistance first; (2) some benefits are means tested, while others are not; (3) education and health care, for example, are open for all; and (4) progressive tax is meant to redistribute according to levels of income and property. See H. Keman (2017) *Social Democracy: A Comparative Account of the Left-Wing Party Family*, pp. 61-65.

19 Dryzek, J. S. (2012) *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

20 Andeweg, R. B. and G. Irwin (2014) *Governance and Politics of the Netherlands, 5th edition* (London: MacMillan), pp. 134-136.

21 van Merriënboer, J. (2016) "De moeder van alle formaties", in C. van Baalen and A. van Kessel (eds) *Kabinetsformaties 1977-2012* (Amsterdam: Boom), pp. 11-80.

22 Keman, H. and P. Pennings (2006) "Competition and coalescence: Social democracy and Christian democracy moving into the 21st century".

23 Merkel, W., C. Egle, C. Henkes et al. (2006) *Die Reformfähigkeit der Sozialdemokratie. Herausforderungen und Bilanz der Regierungspolitik in Westeuropa* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag).

24 In Dutch, "*Verloor haar ideologische veren*", or in English, "lost its original social democratic compass", that is, its programmatic profile. In fact, it criticised a turn to the "Third Way", as adopted by the UK Labour Party

under Blair, and let "neo-liberal" ideas slip in. This programmatic shift allowed, in part, the creation of the "Purple Coalition". See Becker, F. H. (1994) "De jaren 1970-1994", in M. Brinkman (ed.) *Honderd Jaar Sociaal-Democratie in Nederland 1894-1994* (Amsterdam: B. Bakker), pp. 238-295.

25 Keman, H. (2017) *Social Democracy: A Comparative Account of the Left-Wing Party Family*, pp. 171-177.

26 Tillie, J., J. van Holsteyn, H. van der Kolk et al. (2016) *Rumoer: Nederlandse kiezers en Politiek 1998-2012* (*Uproar: Dutch Voters and Politics 1998-2012*) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), pp. 12-13.

27 Mair, P. (2013) *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (London: Verso), pp. 245-248.

28 Aarts, K. and J. Thomassen (2008) "Dutch voters and the changing party space 1989-2006". *Acta Politica* 2-3(43): 203-234. DOI: 10.1057/ap.2008.6; H. Keman (2019) "Indirect democracy in EUrope: The challenge of new political parties", in R. Careja, P. Emmenegger and N. Giger (eds) *The European Social Model under Pressure* (Wiesbaden: Springer), pp. 425-446.

29 Margry, P. J. (2003) "The murder of Pim Fortuyn and collective emotions: Hype, hysteria and holiness in the Netherlands?" *Etnofoor*, 2(16): 106-131.

30 In November 2004, a Dutch television journalist, Theo van Gogh, was murdered by a radical Muslim, belonging to a terrorist group. This incident has led to political obduration, to the present day, on immigration, refugees in particular and to xenophobia in general; to hatred of the Islam; and consequently, discrimination of (Dutch) Muslims.

31 van der Brug, W., C. de Vries and J. van Spanje (2011) "Nieuwe strijdpunten, nieuwe scheidslijnen? Politieke vertegenwoordiging in Nederland", in R. B. Andeweg and J. J. Thomassen (eds) (2011) *Democratie Doorgelicht. Het functioneren van de Nederlands democratie* (Leiden: Leiden University Press), pp. 288-289.

32 Tillie, J., J. van Holsteyn, H. van der Kolk et al. (2016) *Rumoer: Nederlandse kiezers en Politiek 1998-2012*, 131ff.

33 Research shows that the majority of the PvdA electorate voted in favour. Another aspect is that, in general, the support came from the older generations as well as from the highly educated voters (see "Nederlands referendum over de Associatieovereenkomst tussen de Europese Unie en Oekraïne". Wikipedia.org; "Analyse van uitslag Nederlands referendum". Europese grondwet.nl). Given the low turnout in 2016, the treaty with

Ukraine was ratified by parliament in the end, albeit with a few restrictions.

34 Giddens, A. (1994) *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (London: Polity Press).

35 van Holsteyn, J. (2018) "The Dutch parliamentary elections of March 2017". *West European Politics*, 6(41): 1364-1377.

36 For example, the left-wing competitor, SP, has not progressed in the same period. The Dutch communist party (CPN) was never a challenger, only in the first post-war election in 1945 did the party score 10% of the national vote. Other leftish parties, except GL, never gained more than 3% of the vote on average.

37 Voogd de, J. and R. Cuperus (2021) *Atlas van Afgehaakt Nederland: Over buitenstaanders en gevestigden*, Den Haag: ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties.

38 Bovens, M. and A. Wille (2017) *Diploma Democracy: The Rise of Political Meritocracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); M. J. Sandel (2021) *The Tyranny of Merit: Can We Find the Common Good?* (New York: Picador).

39 Häusermann, S. and H. P. Kriesi (2015) "What do voters want? Dimensions and configurations in individual-level preferences and party choice", in P. Beramendi, S. Häusermann, H. Kitschelt et al. (eds) *The Politics of Advanced Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 202-230.

40 See "Tweede Kamerverkiezingen 2023; Ipsos Kiezersonderzoek". Ipsos, 4 December 2023.

41 Holsteyn, van J. and G.A. Irwin (2022) The Dutch Parliamentary elections of March 2021, in: *West European Politics*, 45/7: 1493-1505.

42 *Stateness* is seen as a *mutual* interaction between *state and society*, whereby both are subservient to democratic norms such as the consultation of stakeholders and citizens' deliberation to find a balanced outcome in view of the "common good". See J. P. Nettl (1968) "The state as a conceptual variable". *World Politics*, 4(20): 559-592 and Dryzek, J. S. (2012) *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance*.

43 Purple because it was a coalition between the "red" social democrats, the "blue" conservative liberals (VVD) and the "green" progressive liberals (D66).

44 van Holsteyn, J. (2018) "The Dutch parliamentary elections of March 2017"; K. van Kersbergen, B. Vis and A. Hemerijck (2014) "The Great Recession and welfare state reform: Is retrenchment really the only game left in town?" *Social Policy & Administration*, 7(48): 883-904. DOI: https://

doi.org/10.1111/spol.12063

45 Keman, H. (2022) "The continued decline of Dutch social democracy".

46 Becker, F. H. and R. Cuperus (2023) "van Kersbergen's law? The magical disappearance of Dutch social democracy", in C. Green-Pedersen, C. Jensen and B. Vis (eds) *No Normal Science: Festschrift for Kees van Kersbergen* (Aarhus: Politica), pp. 71-87.

47 van den Berg, J. T. J. (2019) "Een gebroken alliantie maar niet onherstelbaar". Symposium: *Afscheid van de sociaaldemocratie* (Farewell to Social Democracy). University of Leiden.

48 Subsistence security is nowadays the "buzz word" across the *whole* party system from left to right. Yet, it had been introduced earlier by the SP to mean enhancing the standard of living conditions of lower earners and the "underprivileged" in particular. Although many parties employ this idea, the actual meaning differs. Social democracy sees it as the bottom line for *all* citizens to enable a liveable life without poverty, want and insecurity. See J. T. J. van den Berg, (2019) "Een gebroken alliantie maar niet onherstelbaar".

49 van Praag, P. (2016) "Van kiezers en campagnes: De electorale ontwikkeling van de PvdA", in F. H. Becker and G. Voerman (eds) *Zeventig Jaar Partij van de Arbeid* (Amsterdam: Boom), pp. 99-125.

50 Merkel, W., C. Egle, C. Henkes et al. (2006) *Die Reformfähigkeit der Sozialdemokratie. Herausforderungen und Bilanz der Regierungspolitik in Westeuropa*; H. Keman (2017) *Social Democracy: A Comparative Account of the Left-Wing Party Family*, Chapter 6.

51 Daalder, H. (1995) *Van oude en nieuwe regenten. Politiek in Nederland*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.

52 Dahl, Robert A. (1971) *Polyarchy. Participation and Opposition*, New Haven – London: Yale University Press.

53 Lijphart, A. (1968) *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*, Chapter 13.

54 Lipset, S. M. and S. Rokkan (1967) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York & London: The Free Press & Collier-MacMillan); K. Aarts and J. Thomassen (2008) "Dutch voters and the changing party space 1989-2006"; W. van der Brug, C. de Vries and J. van Spanje (2011) "Nieuwe strijdpunten. nieuwe scheidslijnen? Politieke vertegenwoordiging in Nederland".

55 A keen-witted description among electoral specialists was to ask a random Dutch voter two questions to know how they would vote: (1) what is your

income; and (2) are you religious? Depending on the answers, the voter could be positioned: lower & higher income + religious = one of the Christian democratic parties; higher income + secular = liberal party; and lower income + secular = social democracy. Until the 1960s, it explained about 75% of the vote!

56 Farrell, D. (2001) *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).

57 The divisor is the number of total valid votes cast divided by the number of seats in the lower house (*N* = 150). Roughly speaking, a (new) party or a single citizen needed around 60,000 votes at the beginning of this century to gain a seat. Depending on the voter turnout, nowadays it is close to 70,000.

58 De Lange, S. and M. Rooduijn (2011) "Een populistische tijdgeest in Nederland? Een inhoudsanalyse van de verkiezingsprogramma's van politieke partijen", in R. Andeweg and J. Thomassen (eds) *Democratie Doorgelicht: Het Functioneren van de Nederlandse Democratie* (Leiden: Leiden University Press), pp. 319-334.

59 Menz, G. Ed. (2022) *The resistible corrosion of Europe's Center-Left after 2008*, London: Routledge.

60 de Vries, C. E. (2017) "The cosmopolitan-parochial divide: Changing patterns of party and electoral competition in the Netherlands and beyond". *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11(25): 1541-1565.

61 A typical Dutch example of a sociocultural issue is the role of "*Zwarte Piet*" (Black Peter, the assistant of Santa Claus). This children's festive feature has a long tradition, but Black Peter is nowadays seen as a racial issue, showing the subservience of non-white people. Protesters organised themselves under the banner "Kick Out Zwarte Piet" and have attracted significant support, as well as rejection, across the population and political parties.

62 Tillie, J., J. van Holsteyn, H. van der Kolk et al. (2016) *Rumoer: Nederlandse kiezers en Politiek 1998-2012*; J. van Holsteyn (2018) "The Dutch parliamentary elections of March 2017".

63 Provincial elections are relevant for national politics: the provincial parliaments elect the members of the upper house (or Senate). Coalitions need a majority in both houses; otherwise, there is "divided governance". This has increased the political role of the Senate (*Chambre de Reflection*) of late.

64 Schumacher, G. (2011) *'Modernize or Die'? Social Democrats, Welfare State Retrenchment and the Choice between Office and Policy* (Amsterdam: VU Press).

65 Hellema, D. and M. van Lith (2020) *Dat Hadden We Nooit Moeten Doen. De PvdA en de Neoliberale Revolutie van de Jaren Negentig* (Amsterdam: Prometheus); W. Boom (2017) *De Neergang van de PvdA: Prominente Sociaal-Democraten over de Crisis en de Weg Omhoog*.

66 This is confirmed in the latest election (November 2023). The first post-election analyses show that many GL-PvdA voters came from D66 and other progressive parties. Instead, many low-income, less educated and often older voters voted for the new parties (NSC and BBB) or the right-wing PVV. See:"Cijfers en trends van het EenVandaag opiniepanel". *EenVandaag*, and "Jong of oud, man of vrouw; wie stemde op welke partij?" *NOS Nieuws*, 16 March 2017.

67 Menz, G. Ed. (2022) *The resistible corrosion of Europe's Center-Left after 2008*, London: Routledge.

68 Andeweg, R. B. and G. Irwin (2014) *Governance and Politics of the Netherlands, 5th edition*; H. Keman (2010) "Strategy development and variations of party government", pp. 183-210.

69 It concerns the Den Uyl government (1973-1977), the second Balkenende government (2006-2007), and the first Rutte government (2010-2012). Note that two of the three cases occur *after* 2002.

70 van Baalen, C. and A. van Kessel (eds) (2016) *Kabinetsformaties 1977-2012* (Amsterdam: Boom).

71 Keman, H. (2010) "Strategy development and variations of party government".

72 Zohlnhöfer, R. and F. Bandau (2019) "Policy or office? The determinants of programmatic change in West European political parties", in R. Careja, P. Emmenegger and N. Giger (eds) *The European Social Model under Pressure* (Wiesbaden: Springer), pp. 501-520.

73 Keman, H. (2022) "The continued decline of Dutch social democracy", p. 162.

74 Boom, W. (2017) *De Neergang van de PvdA: Prominente Sociaal-Democraten over de Crisis en de Weg Omhoog* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam). This book, a collection of interviews of the PvdA leadership, is a fascinating read. On one hand, there are staunch defenders of the coalition with the VVD, arguing that, otherwise, we would have been worse off. Whilst, on the other hand, critics claim that the collaboration has made the PvdA only responsible for retrenchment policies without sufficient protection for those in (dire) need: the modal and lower salaried working people and pensioners.

75 Giddens, A. (1998) *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (London: Polity Press).

76 Keman, H., K. van Kersbergen and B. Vis (2006) "Political parties and new social risks: The double backlash against social democracy and Christian democracy", in K. Armingeon and G. Bonoli (eds) *The Politics of Post-Industrial Welfare States: Adapting Post-War Social Policies to New Social Risks* (London: Routledge), pp. 27-51; H. Keman (2011) "Third Ways and social democracy: The right way to go?" *British Journal of Political Science*, 3(41): 671-680. DOI: 10.1017/S0007123410000475; W. Merkel (2001) "The Third Ways of social democracy", in R. Cuperus, K. A. Duffek and J. Kandel (2001) *Multiple Third Ways: European Social Democracy facing the Twin Revolution and the Knowledge Society* (Amsterdam/Berlin/Vienna: Wiardi Beckman Stichting/Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung/Renner Institut), pp. 27-62.

77 Schumacher, G. (2011) *'Modernize or Die'? Social Democrats, Welfare State Retrenchment and the Choice between Office and Policy*.

78 Becker, F. H. and R. Cuperus (2023) "van Kersbergen's law? The magical disappearance of Dutch social democracy", p. 78.

79 Giddens, A. (1998) *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*, pp. 44-46.

80 Armingeon, K. and G. Bonoli (eds) (2006) *The Politics of Post-Industrial Welfare States: Adapting Post-War Social Policies to New Social Risks* (London: Routledge).

81 Becker, F. H. and R. Cuperus (2023) "van Kersbergen's law? The magical disappearance of Dutch social democracy", p. 77.

82 van den Berg, J. T. J. (2019) "Een gebroken alliantie maar niet onherstelbaar". Symposium: *Afscheid van de sociaaldemocratie*.

83 OECD (2023) *How is Life* (Paris: OECD Publishers).

84 Lijphart, A. (2002) "The evolution of consociational and corporatist practices 1965-2000".; R. B. Andeweg and G. Irwin (2014) *Governance and Politics of the Netherlands, 5th edition*, pp. 33-38; Woldendorp, J. (2005) *The Polder Model: From Disease to Miracle? Dutch Neo-corporatism 1965-2000*.

85 Pierson, P. (2001) *Hard Choices: Social Democracy in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press); H. Keman, K. van Kersbergen and B. Vis (2006) "Political parties and new social risks: The double backlash against social democracy and Christian democracy".

86 Hellema, D. and M. van Lith (2020) *Dat Hadden We Nooit Moeten Doen. De PvdA en de Neoliberale Revolutie van de Jaren Negentig*, Chapter 7.

87 Castles, F. G. Ed. (2007) *The Disappearing State: Retrenchment Realities in an Age of Globalism*, Cheltenham/Northampton (MA): Edward Elgar.

88 Stiglitz, J. (2019) Three decades of neoliberal policies have decimated the middle class, our economy, and our democracy, in: Market Watch (online 14 March), see: https://www.marketwatch.com/author/joseph-e-stiglitz

89 The Srebrenica disaster concerned the Dutch army protecting the Islamist population under the aegis of the UN Forces in Bosnia. Without proper weaponry and support from UN air forces, the Dutch were overrun by Serbian troops (led by general Mladic). This was followed by the massacre of around 8,000 men. A detailed enquiry conducted by Dutch experts revealed that the catastrophe had been due to inadequate preparation and insufficient arrangements with the UN command structure. In 2002, the second "purple" coalition resigned, taking responsibility for the Dutch involvement. See also: "Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/35: The fall of Srebrenica". United Nations General Assembly A/54/549, 15 November 1999.

90 Keman, H. (2002) "Policy-making capacities of European party government", in K. R. Luther and F. Müller-Rommel (eds) *Political Parties in the New Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 207-245.

91 Keman, H., K. van Kersbergen and B. Vis (2006) "Political parties and new social risks: The double backlash against social democracy and Christian democracy".

92 Remarkably, the PvdA has not only served the country but also the monarchy in times of crisis. The first PvdA prime minister, Willem Drees, solved problems around the Queen's marriage in 1956; Joop Den Uyl saved the Prince Consort from an indictment for fraud in 1973; and Wim Kok smoothed the way in 2001 for the present King to marry his Argentine fiancé, whose father had been a member of the Argentine government during the Videla dictatorship.

93 In 2023, the modal income in the Netherlands was around €40,000 annually, whereas the state pension, namely, AOW (for a couple), was €25,000. Most retired people have an additional pension, but often the lower income segments have no or only a relatively low additional pension.

94 Jensen, C. and K. van Kersbergen (2017) *The Politics of Inequality* (London: Palgrave MacMillan).

95 Source: OECD (2023) *How is Life*.

96 Ridder, Den J., Kunst, S., Hartman, C. and Miltenburg, E. (2023) *Burgersperspectieven* 2, Den Haag: Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau. file:///C:/Users/Keman/Downloads/Burgerperspectieven+2023+bericht+2.pdf

97 After the assassination of Pim Fortuyn and the ensuing (spontaneous) riots aimed at the "Cheese Dome" (meaning the closed shop of self-indulgent parliamentary politics), and blaming Wim Kok, the prime minister, for his "cold" reaction, the PvdA issued a report to analyse the situation. The report mentioned many faults and offered remedies. However, it merely led to an internal debate and did not go much further. See E. Lammers (2002) "Interview with Margreeth de Boer, Chairperson of the PvdA inquiry". *Trouw*, 26 September 2002.

98 see: www.montesquieu-instituut.nl

99 Parliamentary Inquiry Committee (2020) "Parlementaire ondervragingscommissie Kinderopvangtoeslag. Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal" (in Dutch). SDU: Tweede Kamer.

100 "Schade door gaswinning". Rijksoverheid.nl.

101 "Aanpak opvangcrisis". Rijksoverheid.nl.

102 United Nations (2021) "Trust in public institutions: Trends and implications for economic security". UN Policy Brief 108, New York.

103 Mair, P. (2013) *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy*, p. 20.

104 Giger, N. and G. Schumacher (2020) "Bringing party organization back in: A comparative analysis of party representation in Europe". *Political Science Research and Methods* 4(8): 692-706. DOI: 10.1017/psrm.2019.54

105 van der Brug, W., C. de Vries and J. van Spanje (2011) "Nieuwe strijdpunten. nieuwe scheidslijnen? Politieke vertegenwoordiging in Nederland"; C. E. de Vries (2017) "The cosmopolitan-parochial divide: Changing patterns of party and electoral competition in the Netherlands and beyond".

106 De Lange, S. and M. Rooduijn (2011) "Een populistische tijdgeest in Nederland? Een inhoudsanalyse van de verkiezingsprogramma's van politieke partijen".

107 Häusermann, S. and H. P. Kriesi (2015) "What do voters want? Dimensions and configurations in individual-level preferences and party choice".

108 Kouwe, E. van der, H. Keman and P. Pennings (2011) Tussen Mandaat en Resultaat: Problemen in de Nederlandse democratie? in: R.B. Andeweg en J. Thomassen (eds) *Democratie doorgelicht. Het functioneren van de Nederlandse democratie*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.

109 Keman, H. (2017) *Social Democracy: A Comparative Account of the Left-Wing Party Family*, p. 215.

110 Counterfactual analysis is an historical approach asking what if. For example, *what* would have occurred *if* the PvdA would have followed the course of the Danish *Socialdemokriet*? It is conjecture of course.
111 Nedergaard, P. (2022) "Bucking the trend: The extraordinarily bounce back of the Danish centre-left", in G. Menz (ed.) *The Resistible Corrosion of Europe's Center-Left after 2008* (London: Routledge), pp. 170-190.
112 Keman, H. (2022) "The continued decline of Dutch social democracy"; F.H. Becker and R. Cuperus (2023) "van Kersbergen's law? The magical disappearance of Dutch social democracy".
113 Marqusee, M. (1997) "New Labour and its discontents". *New Left Review*, July/August(224).
114 "Standpunten". PvDA website.
115 Keman, H. (2019) "Indirect democracy in EUrope: The challenge of new political parties".
116 Hooghe, L. and G. Marks (2009) "A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus". *British Journal of Political Science*, 1(39): 1-23. DOI: 10.1017/S0007123408000409
117 Keman, H. (2007) Experts and manifestos: Different sources: Same results for comparative research? In: *Electoral Studies*, 26: 76-89.

Biography

Hans Keman (1948) is emeritus professor of Comparative Political Science at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VUA). He lives in Friesland, the northern part of the Netherlands.

He read Political Science and Contemporary History at the VUA. After being lecturer at the University of Amsterdam (1975-1982) he went to the European University Institute. 1n 1985 he became associate professor of Comparative Politics at Leiden University. In 1990 Keman was appointed Full Professor at the VU Amsterdam.

Keman has been visiting fellow in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, China, Kenia, as well as across Europe. He has been Co-Editor of the *European Journal of Political Research* (1997-2003) and of *Acta Politica* (2003-2007). He has also been involved in the Dutch cricketing world as a player and administrator.

Hans Keman is a comparative political scientist in substance and method. His main field in publications is on democracy in general, party behaviour, the role of party governments in conducting public policy formation. He is considered as an expert on research methods and the relationship between history and social science. Keman has published 20 books (alone or in cooperation) and more than 200 peer reviewed

journal articles and contributions to textbooks and research volumes. Recently he published the following books:

- *Social Democracy: A Comparative Account of the Left-Wing Party Family*, Routledge, 2017.
- *Transportation and the State: Governing the Public Domain*, Edward Elgar, 2020.
- *Democracies in Peril? Waves of Democratization*, London: Routledge, 2023.

Social democratic parties in Europe are under pressure. The Dutch party the *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA) is an example. Its vote-seeking capacity is below par and its policy performance, if and when in (coalition) government, has not been prolific. Although after the latest elections the recent fusion with Green Left resulted in it becoming the second-largest party in parliament, it can be questioned in what way and to what extent the "left-wing" party family is able to regain both popular trust and confidence in general.

Social Democracy in the Netherlands

Hans Keman

The Dutch Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA) is one of the oldest parties within the European Progressive Family. Since its establishment in the 19th century, it has evolved—incorporating elements typical of other sister parties, but always remaining rather exceptional. The reasons behind this were the existence of unusual social divisions compared to other countries and the specific shape of the Dutch economy and industrial relations. These influenced the space and ways of organizing the movement. In the 20th century, the PvdA played a pivotal role, being, however, trapped between vote-seeking through catch-allism and office-seeking through policy concertation. This meant that it did lead governments and work towards the extension of the welfare state, but it then found itself exposed to the same dilemma—eventually embracing the Third Way. With tectonic shifts and voter volatility, it struggled through the second decade of the 21st century, with some breakthrough moments being the 2019 European Elections. In recent months, it decided to form common lists with GroenLinks, which resulted in that bloc being considered the counterbalance to the victor of the recent general elections, PVV. This prompts the important question: Quo vadis, further PvdA?

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