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Lobbying in Company: Mechanisms of political decision-making and economic interests in the history of Dutch Brazil, 1621-1656

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1. LOBBYING FOR THE CREATION OF THE WIC

The Dutch Republic originated from a civil war, masked as a war for independence from the King of Spain, between 1568 and 1648. This Eighty Years' War united the seven provinces in the northern Low Countries, but the young republic was divided on several issues: Was war better than peace for the Republic? Was a republic the best form of government, or should a prince be the head of state? And, what should be the true Protestant form of religion? All these issues came together in struggles for power. Who held power in the Republic, and who had the power to force which decisions? In order to answer these questions, this chapter investigates the governance structure of the Dutch Republic and answers the question what the circumstances were in which the WIC came into being. This is important to understand the rest of this dissertation as it showcases the political context where lobbying occurred. The chapter is complemented by an introduction of the governance structure of the West India Company (WIC) and a brief introduction to the Dutch presence in Brazil.

1.1. *THE DUTCH REPUBLIC*

1.1.1. **The cities**

Cities were historically important in the Low Countries. Most had acquired city rights as the result of a bargaining process with an overlord. As bellicose rulers had required funds for the ever-expanding scale of warfare, local authorities had demanded rights and privileges in exchange for their financial support generated by city taxes.⁸⁶ These rights and privileges that generally originated in the Middle Ages were inherited and cherished by future generations and (mostly) respected by subsequent rulers. As the cities in the Low Countries over time became part of Burgundian and subsequently the Habsburg empires, every city had a unique charter.⁸⁷ The alleged violation of privileges by the Habsburg King Philip II

⁸⁶ C. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992); C. Tilly and W. Blockmans, eds., *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe, A.D. 1000 to 1800* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

⁸⁷ W. Blockmans and W. Prevenier, *In de ban van Bourgondië* (Houten: Fibula, 1988), 10-12, 118-124.

(1527-1598) was one of the causes of the Dutch Revolt, as this infringement was deemed tyrannical.

Most inhabitants primarily identified as inhabitants of a city, as they hardly came outside the city walls.⁸⁸ Therefore, the city government had an important role in the lives of most inhabitants and were relatively approachable for city burghers. The tasks of the city government, which was a collegiate board, included appointing individuals for an array of jobs such as the administrators of the city's orphanage.⁸⁹ From a central council (*raad*, *vroedschap* or *gezworen gemeente*), two to four Burgomasters (*burgemeesters*) were selected who were in charge of the day-to-day administration. The magistracy was comprised of lay judges (*schepenen*) forming a court of justice and a sheriff (*schout*) in charge of criminal prosecution and the execution of sentences.⁹⁰ In contemporary texts, the government as well as the judicial bodies are referred to as magistrates. In most cities, the ruler confirmed the Burgomasters from a list of candidates suggested by the central council. Amsterdam is one of the few exceptions of a city that had the privilege of appointing Burgomasters itself. In theory, all men within a certain age range who were burghers of the city (*poorter*) and did not have a close family member on the council, could hold any of the city's public offices. In reality, membership was confined to a few wealthy families.⁹¹ This practice often led to the formation of factions that fought each other for local power.⁹² These struggles for power on a city level were predominantly aligned along clientelism networks. The urban elite did not only wield power over the city council. Important positions in other influential bodies of significant stature, such as a church consistory, a large trading company, or the city's orphanage, combined particularly well with membership of the city council in the years that one was not a Burgomaster or when a close family member was already filling a seat.

⁸⁸ S. Groenveld, "'Natie' en 'Patria' bij zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanders," in *Vaderland: een geschiedenis van de vijftiende eeuw tot 1940*, ed. N.C.F. van Sas (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).

⁸⁹ M.A. Ebben, "Twee wegen naar Munster: De besluitvorming over de Vrede van Munster in de Republiek en Spanje," in *Harmonie in Holland: Het poldermodel van 1500 tot nu.*, ed. D. Bos, H. te Velde, and M.A. Ebben (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007), 52-53.

⁹⁰ Nierop, "Popular Participation," 273-276.

⁹¹ A. Th. van Deursen, *Een dorp in de polder: Graft in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013), 165; J. Adams, *The Familial State: Ruling families and merchant capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁹² D.J. Roorda, *Partij en factie: de oproeren van 1672 in de steden van Holland en Zeeland, een krachtmeting tussen partijen en facties* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1978).

One important form of contact between the rulers and the ruled was the petition. City archives regularly contain petitions to the local governments.⁹³ This mostly involved soft lobbying such as requests for financial aid or petitions by certain religious factions for their own church.⁹⁴ The vast majority of petitions submitted to the city councils thus involved local issues that were part of the urban jurisdiction. There was however good reason to petition the Burgomasters for issues that transcended local interests and that involved the supraregional 'commonwealth' (*gemeene best*), since Burgomasters doubled as representatives to provincial or state-wide political bodies.

The Burgomaster's outside role also had consequences for petitioning. For example in 1653, when the Dutch Republic was in the middle of the First Anglo-Dutch War, the WIC directors complained that in Amsterdam at least 'one of the Burgomasters has always been absent as a commissioner here or there', while another was plagued by illness.⁹⁵ Considering 'the weakness of the honorable collegiate board', the directors deemed it ill-advised to submit their petition at this time.⁹⁶ Weakness, in this case, referred to the limited political clout of these particular Burgomasters. After all, they could, as representatives of the city government, recommend favorably in provincial or state-wide political arenas on issues that belonged to these respective jurisdictions. In 1653, as Cornelis Witsen was bedridden and Frans Banning Cocq was pre-occupied with the war with England, the other two Burgomasters were not considered powerful enough in WIC affairs to recommend these favorably.⁹⁷

In order to understand why the Amsterdam Burgomasters could potentially achieve a favorable decision on a higher political level, it is important to explain how authority was divided on a provincial and state-wide level.

⁹³ Vermeesch, "Miserabele personen."

⁹⁴ F. Deen, *Publiek debat en propaganda in Amsterdam tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand: Amsterdam 'Moorddam' (1566-1578)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 71-74.

⁹⁵ 'altijt ijmandt van derselver regerende burgemeesteren hier ofte daer gecommitteert ende absent sijn geweest', US-nar, A1810, *Correspondence 1647-1653*, 11:90 (1) [4 November 1653].

⁹⁶ 'het collegie geheel swack sijnde', US-nar, A1810, *Correspondence 1647-1653*, 11:90 (1).

⁹⁷ In November 1653 the Burgomasters were: Frans Banning Cocq, Nicolaes Corver, Joan van de Poll, Cornelis Witsen. Jan Bicker Gerritsz of the influential Bicker family had started the year as Burgomaster, but had died in May 1653; see: G.W. Kernkamp, *De regeeringe van Amsterdam (1653-1672) - ontworpen door Hans Bontemantel* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1897), 155; J.E. Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam 1578-1795* (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1963).

1.1.2. Provincial States

The Dutch Republic was officially called the Republic of the Seven United Provinces, a name suggesting the autonomy of the provinces. The base for the institutional framework can be found in the Union of Utrecht (1579). This Union envisioned the provinces as individual entities with their own rights and privileges, but required collectiveness on some issues. For example, alliances and war and peace with foreign powers required unanimity. Taxes and coinage were made uniform. From 1595, when Groningen was added to the collective, the provinces totaled seven. The theoretical starting point was that sovereignty belonged to the people, who transferred this highest authority to a collegiate board of representatives: the provincial states.⁹⁸ The states effectively inherited this from the previous rulers, but the Revolt had drastically changed the details of the provincial states.⁹⁹

The seven provinces were Guelders, Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Overijssel, Friesland, and Groningen. As can be seen in Figure 1-1, each province had its own unique composition for representation, but as a general rule, they represented localities and the nobility. The provincial assemblies met every couple of months, and day to day administration was in the hands of authorized councils (*Gecommitteerde Raden* or *Gedeputeerde Staten*).¹⁰⁰ The States of Holland were an exception and met, especially later in the seventeenth century, more than 200 days per year.¹⁰¹ Even though the provincial states could impose taxes, most taxes were generated in the cities. Therefore, the cities had a strong negotiation position within the provincial assemblies.

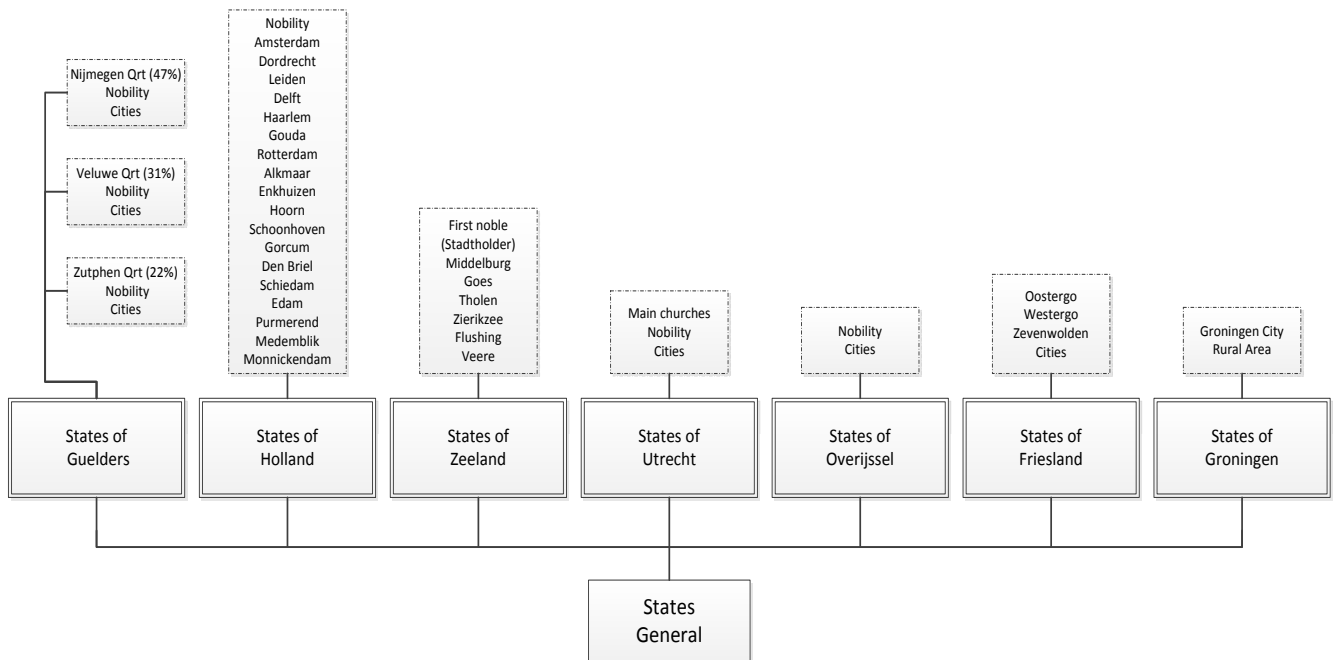
⁹⁸ S. Groenveld, *Unie-Bestand-Vrede: Drie fundamentele wetten van de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009), 16-18.

⁹⁹ J.I. Israel, *De Republiek, 1477-1806* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2008), 321.

¹⁰⁰ S. Groenveld, "De institutionele en politieke context," in *Van tresorier tot thesaurier-generaal*, ed. J.Th. Smidt, et al. (Hilversum: Verloren, 1996), 57.

¹⁰¹ Th. Thomassen, "Instrumenten van de macht: De Staten-Generaal en hun archieven 1576-1796" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2009), 87-90.

Figure 1-1: The institutional basis of the Republic after 1595



The influence of the Amsterdam Burgomasters within the provincial States of Holland was based on two pillars. The first was the city's financial wealth. As Burgomasters of the largest city in Holland and as a major port city in the world, they generated much income through taxes, and thus contributed a considerable share of the provincial budget. This gave Amsterdam a strong negotiation position, and made it an attractive partner for city-alliances. The second pillar for the Amsterdam Burgomaster's influence resulted from the unique position of the Holland nobility (*Ridderschap*). The nobility together had one vote (just like eighteen cities each had one vote) and claimed the right to represent the interests of the rural parts of Holland.¹⁰² As the urban elite of Amsterdam became wealthier, they came in the financial position to acquire seigneuries in the rural areas around their city, or alternatively became financially attractive spouses for impoverished noble families. The aforementioned Frans Banning Cocq was lord of Purmerland and Ilpendam for example.¹⁰³ This provided the Amsterdam urban elite with more influence through the vote of the nobility. Moreover, despite their single vote, the nobility had the possibility of steering the vote in the provincial

¹⁰² When Voorne petitioned to send a delegation to the States of Holland in 1579 this was denied because the nobility already represented the countryside. See: H.F.K. van Nierop, *Van ridders tot regenten: de Hollandse adel in de zestiende en de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1990), 178.

¹⁰³ Elias, *De vroedschap*, 406.

assembly because they were the first to cast it.¹⁰⁴ This first vote was considered an 'advice' for the cities, and the vote was subsequently 'concluded' by the Grand Pensionary (*Raadspensionaris*). The Grand Pensionary, who provided legal advice for resolutions, was also the Pensionary of the nobility, and the secretary of the provincial assembly and thus had large influence on what was on the agenda for the meetings and what ended up in the minutes.

Within the provincial States of Zeeland, power was predominantly in the hands of cities. Just like in Holland, the Burgomasters from the cities doubled as delegates to the provincial assembly. The seventh vote in the States of Zeeland was in the hands of the first noble, which was the Marquis of Veere. In theory this was the Stadtholder (see below), but since he was often not able to attend the meetings he appointed a representative.¹⁰⁵ The Stadtholder further yielded power through his task of appointing the City Council in Veere and Flushing; this effectively earned him three of the seven votes.¹⁰⁶ As it was possible to combine offices it was further possible that a considerable share of decision-making power was in the hands of one individual. A good example is Johan de Moor (1576-1644). This WIC director was not only one of the largest investors, but also a member of the city council of Flushing and its representative in the provincial assembly, as well as a member of the Admiralty (see below).¹⁰⁷

In the other provinces cities had less influence as cities had one joint vote against the nobility or rural quarters in that province. These provincial assemblies met only two or three times yearly and are also referred to as Diets. These were characterized as social events where overlords and farmers met.¹⁰⁸ A Diet (*landdag*, literally land-day) was in fact the prominent form of organization in the Dutch Republic. Guelders, Friesland, Groningen, Overijssel and Drenthe all had a Diet. It is no coincidence that these rural provinces had a

¹⁰⁴ Nierop, *Van ridders tot regenten*, 179-180.

¹⁰⁵ M.C. 't Hart, "Autonoom maar kwetsbaar. De Middelburgse regenten en de opstand van 1651," *De zeventiende eeuw* 9, no. 1 (1993).

¹⁰⁶ A.C. Meijer, *Liefhebbers des vaderlands en de beminders van de commercie* (Middelburg: Zeeuws genootschap der Wetenschappen, [1982]), 25.

¹⁰⁷ I.J.A. Nijenhuis et al., *Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal 1626-1630* (<http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/besluitenstatengeneraal1576-1630/BesluitenStaten-generaal1626-165105/09/2015>), [Johan de Moor]; J.I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585-1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 150-151.

¹⁰⁸ A. Th. van Deursen, "Staatsinstellingen in de noordelijke Nederlanden 1579-1780," in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden, Vol. V*, ed. P.J. Blok (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1980), 383.

governmental structure where the 'lands' came together in their Provincial assemblies with little to no influence for the cities. The power of cities was not a given in Dutch rural provinces. For example, it was only after the Act of Abjuration (1581), in which the Dutch provinces declared themselves independent from the King of Spain, that eleven Frisian cities received one vote – as opposed to three votes for the different rural quarters.¹⁰⁹

1.1.3. States General

The States General were a collegiate board for provincial delegates. They were an intergovernmental body for deliberation between the different provinces rather than a centralized government (see Figure 1-1). Each provincial delegation was led by the highest-ranking individual, the *premier*, who spoke on behalf of the deputies. The States General officially formed the venue where the provincial delegates deliberated on issues of defense, finances and alliances, and war and peace. However, in practice substantially more issues gravitated towards these High-Mightinesses. The seven provinces all held one vote in the States General, but could send as many delegates as they wished. The number of allocated seats was limited however.¹¹⁰ It was not uncommon for one or two provinces to be entirely absent when no delegates were sent.¹¹¹

Because the States General could not handle all the affairs in a general session they delegated a significant number of affairs to special commissions or *besognes*. The number of members in a commission was set at eight (one for each province plus the Grand Pensionary of Holland), but on average consisted of about five or six. Some of the commissions were secret and did not have to consult the provincial principals. Sometimes they even had the authority to make a decision on behalf of the States General. Larger commissions with more members and representatives of more provinces handled more important issues than smaller commissions. Most of the commissioners were drawn from a pool of fifteen to twenty individuals that held an important share of power in the Dutch Republic.¹¹² Committees

¹⁰⁹ R. Fruin, *Geschiedenis der Staatsinstellingen in Nederland tot den val der Republiek* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1901), 247-252.

¹¹⁰ Guelders and Holland had 6 six seats, Zealand and Friesland 3, Utrecht, Overijssel, and Groningen two, see: Thomassen, "Instrumenten van de macht," 94-95.

¹¹¹ Israel, *De Republiek*, 321.

¹¹² Groenveld, "De institutionele en politieke context," 61, 64-65.

were always chaired by the highest-ranking member, who in practice was almost without exception a representative from Guelders, the only duchy within the United Provinces.¹¹³

Holland paid roughly 58 per cent of the finances of the generality, but that was not its only base of power in the States General. Most of the resolutions of the States General were prepared as concepts in the meetings of the States of Holland.¹¹⁴ For the most part, Holland tried to convince the other provinces to agree with its policy, but if that would not succeed Holland would often act independently. Holland had no problem promoting its own interests in international affairs such as in the Baltic trade.¹¹⁵ Because inhabitants from this province were regularly the States General's diplomatic representatives in important European trading locations, they could advance the province's merchant interests as well.

There are two issues that are left out to make Figure 1-1 more comprehensible: the status of the province of Drenthe and the Generality Lands. Drenthe was not a full province. It did have autonomy and a provincial assembly like the other provinces, but it did not have a vote in the States General. The Generality Lands were areas under direct rule of the States General. Because these areas were captured from the Spanish during the Eighty Year's War and cut off from their original governments, sovereignty was claimed by the States General based on the 'right of conquest'. Staats-Brabant and Staats-Vlaanderen (see Figure 1-2) are an example of Generality Lands. The Generality Lands were administered by the Council of State (*Raad van State*). The Council of State was the highest advice council – not an executive council – of the States General. Officially, it also administered financial affairs, treaties with foreign powers, the fortified towns, and the army. However, in practice, diplomacy and foreign affairs were in the hands of the States General.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Thomassen, "Instrumenten van de macht," 99-101.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 87-90.

¹¹⁵ G. de Bruin, "De soevereiniteit in de republiek: een machtsprobleem," *BMGN* 94, no. 1 (1979): 30.

¹¹⁶ Fruin, *Geschiedenis der Staatsinstellingen*, 193-195.

Figure 1-2: The provinces, voting cities, and Generality Lands of the Republic of the United Provinces in 1621.



Source: Erik Odegard

Because each province could send as many delegates as they wished and change who represented them, it was not always clear whom individuals petitioning the States General were to address. There were selected individuals who, in exchange for a fee, could function as brokers.¹¹⁷ Other interests had their own (semi-)permanent representation in The Hague. For example, merchants trading on the rivers Rhine, Meuse, Waal, and IJssel, were

¹¹⁷ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02 Staten Generaal, inv. nr. 7482, 23-Jul-1652 Request by some merchants, inhabitants of Amsterdam.

represented by Gijsbert Huijssen.¹¹⁸ It could also happen that what a petitioner wanted to discuss in the meeting was not possible, because something else was already being discussed. An example of this can be found in 1650 when a member of the Lampsins family from Zeeland intended to sway the High-Mightinesses to convey the island of St. Martin to this family. Upon learning that the matters of New Netherland were discussed at that moment the member of the family left without taking any further action.¹¹⁹

1.1.4. The Stadtholders

At least since the Burgundian and Habsburg periods, rulers appointed individuals to represent them locally. These place holders (*lieu tenant* in French) were known as Stadtholders, literally holding a city on behalf of a ruler. After the Act of Abjuration (1581) each of the provinces kept the function of Stadtholder, but he was no longer a placeholder for a lord, but became a servant of the provinces. The Stadtholder, as a prince, brought international prestige, and functioned as a mediator between the provinces.¹²⁰ As Captain- and Admiral-General the Stadtholder had substantial military power.

Table 1-1: Stadtholders in the Dutch Republic, 1580-1696

Period	Holland	Zeeland	Utrecht	Overijssel	Guelders	Groningen	Friesland
1584-1589	Maurits van Oranje		Adolf van Nieuwenaar			Willem Lodewijk van Nassau-Dillenburg	
1590-1620							
1620-1625							
1625-1632	Frederik-Hendrik van Oranje					Ernst-Casimir van Nassau-Dietz	
1632-1640						Hendrik-Casimir I van Nassau-Dietz	
1640-1647							
1647-1650	Willem II van Oranje					Willem-Frederik van Nassau-Dietz	
1650-1664	First Stadtholderless Period						
1664-1672						Hendrik-Casimir II van Nassau-Dietz	
1672-1675	Willem III van Oranje (until 1702)						
1675-1696							

¹¹⁸ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 7482, 09-Oct-1652 Memo by the common merchants trading on the river in these lands.

¹¹⁹ US-nar, A1810, Correspondence 1647-1653, 11:18 [16 February 1650].

¹²⁰ Groenveld, *Unie-Bestand-Vrede*, 21.

If a Stadtholder¹²¹ was very ambitious and had the necessary personal talents, he could acquire the leadership of the state, on the basis of his leadership of the army and the hereditary prestige that came with the name Nassau. The Stadtholder was not a member of the provincial states (exception made for Zeeland), but he could choose to speak in their meetings whenever he deemed it necessary.¹²² Frederik Hendrik was a member of the nobility in Holland after 1637.¹²³ Through patronage the Stadtholder could stretch his influence well beyond the official paths.¹²⁴ However, he always needed the support of the regents, while they did not necessarily need his to govern the Republic, as is well illustrated by the First Stadtholderless Period (1650-1672). The Stadtholder had the power to appoint Burgomasters in certain cities. The local council would suggest a double list of candidates from which the Stadtholder would select who he deemed most capable or loyal. In a society where patron-client relations functioned like money, the Stadtholder could later ask for favors in return.¹²⁵

These favors could also be on behalf of someone else, as can be seen in a recommendation (*voorschrijven*) in 1633. Since the WIC felt they had been waiting for too long for financial subsidies from Utrecht, the Stadtholder Frederik Hendrik sent a request to the States of Utrecht on behalf of the WIC, first on 28 June 1633, and again on 17 December 1634.¹²⁶ The most important reason to pay, according to the requests, was that the WIC was beneficial to 'the affairs of the country'. It was not always necessary for a Stadtholder to know details about the request he was recommending.

1.1.5. Conflicting powers

Considering how the Republic came into being it was at no point a foregone conclusion that it would end up as a Republic. There were strong voices that advocated a princely lord as sovereign. These voices did not go quiet after failed experiments of offering the sovereignty to foreign lords such as Francis, Duke of Anjou, in 1582 and Robert Dudley, Count of

¹²¹ If I mention Stadtholder I mean the Stadtholder of Holland etc, the other Stadtholder will be referred to as the Frisian Stadtholder.

¹²² Israel, *De Republiek*, 334; L. Kooijmans, *Liefde in opdracht: het hofleven van Willem Frederik van Nassau* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2000), 17-19.

¹²³ Nierop, *Van ridders tot regenten*, 178.

¹²⁴ Janssen, *Creaturen van de Macht*.

¹²⁵ Israel, *De Republiek*, 334; Janssen, *Creaturen van de Macht*; Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*.

¹²⁶ NL-UtHUA 233, inv. 278-4, fol. 337, 348.

Leicester in 1585.¹²⁷ Other individuals, opposed to a princely lord, also contested Stadtholders' hereditary office. The advocates of a true Republic where no-one inherited a position would succeed in suspending the position of Stadtholder in the majority of the provinces in 1650. The debates between Republicans (*Staatsgezinden*) and Orangists (*Prinsgezinden*) went on continuously throughout the seventeenth century.

The command of military forces, both naval and land army, was closely related to this issue. The navy was led by an Admiral-General (the Stadtholder) and was organized through several Admiralties. These reported to the States General, making it a Generality body, despite its decentralized operations.¹²⁸ There were five admiralty councils: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Noorderkwartier (Hoorn and Enkhuizen), Zeeland (Middelburg), and Friesland (Dokkum – Harlingen after 1644). The fleet, led by these five semi-independently operating councils, was not only in charge of protecting the coast, merchant fleets, and fisheries, but also responsible for collecting its own revenue through customs (*convooi en licenten*).¹²⁹ The army was led by the Captain-General. In every province the Stadtholder was the Captain-General. From Maurits onwards the Stadtholder of Holland and Zeeland was also the Captain-General of the Generality, with the Stadtholder of Friesland as his local substitute.¹³⁰ The way the command of military forces was structured in the Republic illustrates part of the basis of the Stadtholder's power. This meant that individuals in favor of less influence of the Stadtholders, the republican party, were generally more likely to be in favor of peace than were the supporters of the prince.

The issue of war and peace was ongoing in the northern Netherlands, but debates on this issue were particularly strong in the years around truce or peace negotiations. In the years preceding the signing of the Twelve Year's Truce in 1609 a majority of Dutch language pamphlets dealt with the issue (52,6 per cent in 1608, see Figure 1-3). The anti-peace propaganda was generally published anonymously, but there is a striking resemblance between the arguments in letters written by Stadtholder Maurits and anonymous pamphlets.

¹²⁷ Israel, *De Republiek*, 235-237; F.G. Oosterhoff, *Leicester and the Netherlands, 1586-1587* (Utrecht: HES, 1988).

¹²⁸ Fruin, *Geschiedenis der Staatsinstellingen*, 199.

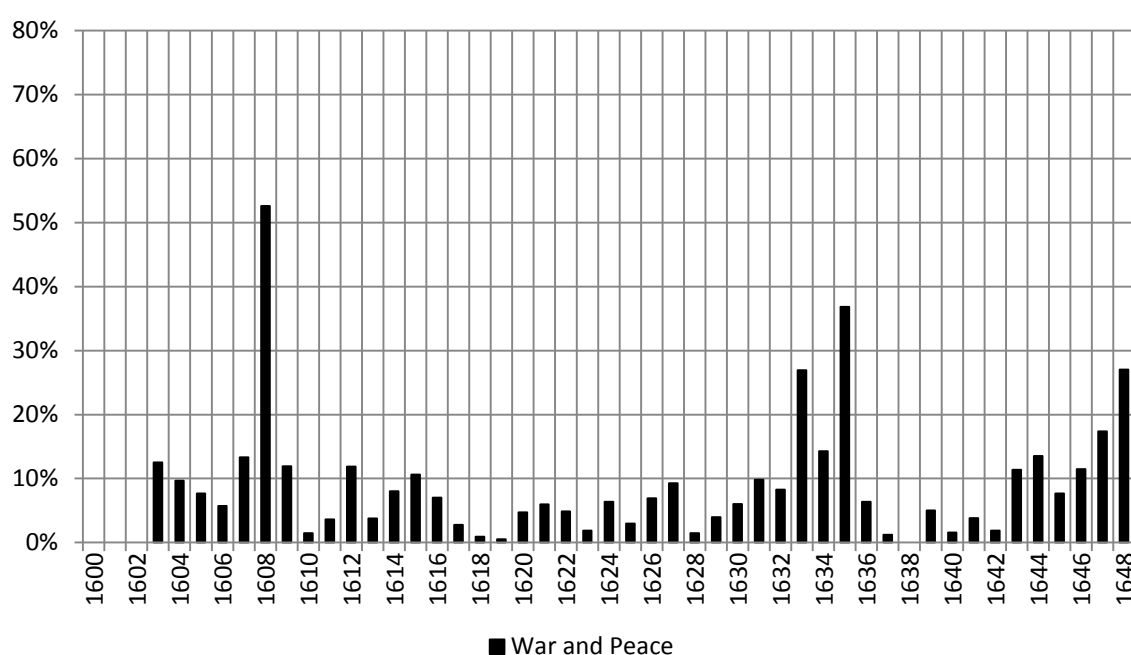
¹²⁹ Israel, *De Republiek*, 323-325.

¹³⁰ Thomassen, "Instrumenten van de macht," 148-150; Israel, *De Republiek*, 334.

This of course does not mean that it was Maurits himself who penned and spread the pamphlets, but it does indicate that the pro-war campaign had a similar view as the Prince.¹³¹

In these years there was also a wide selection of pamphlets and petitions to the States of Holland and Zealand from the VOC (the States General's East India Company chartered in 1602), arguing that this company was not only founded for East Indian trade, but also to attack the revenue and possessions of the Habsburg Crown in Asia.¹³² Because of this and the income generating through prized ships, VOC directors also did not support a treaty with the Spanish King and the VOC presented itself as a vital asset in the war against Spain. Surprisingly absent in the discourse were arguments related to the European bulk trade – a type of trade that one would expect to be supportive of the peace because it would open up the trade to the Mediterranean, and lift the trade embargo to the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, financial arguments were not used to support the peace propaganda.¹³³

Figure 1-3: Percentage of survived Dutch language pamphlets dealing with war and peace



Source: TEMPO database. These data were compiled by me and Wilko van Dijk, MA.

¹³¹ Stensland, "Peace or no peace?," 234-235.

¹³² Israel, *Dutch Primacy*, 70-71.

¹³³ Stensland, "Peace or no peace?," 235-238.

After the Truce was signed in 1609, the Dutch army decreased from 60,000 men in 1606 to around 30,000.¹³⁴ The decrease in army size effectively diminished the relevance of the Stadtholder. Maurits was well aware of this in the years leading up to the Truce, but the provincial gentry did not support Maurits' plans to continue the war. Therefore, most of the nobility in Utrecht, Guelders and Overijssel supported Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, at the time Grand Pensionary of Holland¹³⁵, plans for a Truce.¹³⁶ Even though Maurits initially had some support from Amsterdam and Delft, the Truce was eventually signed in 1609.

The debate regarding war or peace in the Republic did not have to do with pacifist ideals or economic interests. Rather, it had to do with the recurrent issue of power within the Republic. It seems likely that the other provinces supported the Stadtholders out of self-interest rather than Orangist ideology. Seeing as Holland's policies threatened their provincial sovereignty, the Stadtholder and the other provinces were driven into each other's arms.¹³⁷

The second time the Stadtholder, still Maurits, took up an issue with Holland, still led by van Oldenbarnevelt, the issue revolved around religion. Without going into the details of the religious differences between the Remonstrants¹³⁸ and the Contraremonstrants, it suffices to say that religious differences formed the ground for the battle between Holland and Maurits, which nearly led to a civil war.¹³⁹ The issue between Remonstrants and Contraremonstrants had been a-political for a long time, but it provided popular support for both Maurits and van Oldenbarnevelt. It culminated in a victory for Maurits in 1619 in two ways. Firstly, the Synod of Dordrecht (1619) established the Calvinist religion as the public religion, meaning that the religious doctrine of Arminianism, supported by van Oldenbarnevelt, was considered heresy. Secondly, van Oldenbarnevelt was, for his intentional disruption of the

¹³⁴ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic and the Hispanic World, 1606-1661* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 42-43.

¹³⁵ Technically van Oldenbarnevelt was the Land's Advocate as the title of Land's Advocate changed to Grand Pensionary after 1619, but it is the same role within the system, so for the sake of clarity I chose to call him Grand Pensionary here.

¹³⁶ Israel, *The Dutch Republic and the Hispanic World*, 30.

¹³⁷ Bruin, "Soevereiniteit in de republiek." 33.

¹³⁸ An interesting detail related to petitions is that the Remonstrant movement received its name through a petition, or remonstrance, to the States of Holland in June 1610. Even though this petition was not signed, the original draft dated 14 January was signed by forty-four supplicants, see: M. de Vries, "Vierenveertig handtekeningen," in *De remonstrantie 400 jaar*, ed. K. Holtzapffel and M. van Leeuwen (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2010), 35-36.

¹³⁹ J. den Tex, "Maurits en Oldenbarnevelt vóór en na Nieuwpoort," *BMGN* 85, no. 1 (1970).

religious and political relations in the Republic, sentenced for treason and publically beheaded.¹⁴⁰ Now that Maurits had defeated Holland in the internal power struggle of the Republic it was not unthinkable that the Stadtholder could be elevated to the Duke of Guelders, and the Count of Holland etcetera. And the possibility of offering sovereignty to a prince of the Nassau house remained up in the air at least until the 1640s. However, the bourgeois regents in Holland held on to enough clout to create a stalemate over this issue of power and sovereignty.¹⁴¹

Nevertheless, the struggle over power surfaced clearly once more after the peace with Spain was signed in the Treaty of Munster in 1648. Just like during the Truce in 1609, Holland wanted to roughly half the size of the army which would again limit the Stadtholder's power. Dutch Brazil got dragged into the subsequent struggle for power between Holland and the Stadtholder, William II. He accused Holland of neglecting the WIC's colony in an attempt to increase support in the other provinces. Admiral Witte de With (who had led the rescue fleet, was paid for by the Admiralty of Rotterdam, and had Republican sympathies) was arrested by the Admiralty of Amsterdam on order of the Stadtholder. The Amsterdam magistracy opposed the notion that anyone other than themselves could make arrests within their city walls and released the Admiral. When the prince and the States General tried to bring Witte de With in front of a court-martial, the States of Holland, led by Amsterdam, advocated that it was their jurisdiction, and not the Generality's.¹⁴²

While this event played out, the Stadtholder had six prominent Republicans arrested in The Hague in July 1650 while the Frisian Stadtholder marched to Amsterdam in an attempt to seize the city. This attempt failed because the soldiers became scattered all over the heathlands as a result of a heavy summer storm and were subsequently overtaken by a mail courier from Hamburg who warned the Amsterdam magistracy. These refused to let the Frisian Stadtholder in, but the results of negotiations during the siege included the removal of two of the Stadtholder's main opponents (Cornelis and Andries Bicker) from the city

¹⁴⁰ Israel, *De Republiek*, 479-496.

¹⁴¹ Bruin, "Soevereiniteit in de republiek," 37-40.

¹⁴² Israel, *De Republiek*, 670.670; C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil, 1624-1654* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 221-225.

leadership.¹⁴³ Moreover, the Stadtholder could now force the trial of Witte de With in a special court of two judges from every Admiralty. De With was charged with neglect of duty on 259 accounts for which the prosecutor demanded decapitation by sword.¹⁴⁴ In the months that followed, the Stadtholder succeeded in blocking further downsizing of the army, but before William II could unfold the totality of his ambition, he died on 6 November 1650. His son, William III, was born eight days later. Without an heir fit to take the office of Stadtholder, the Republicans seized the opportunity to declare 'The True Freedom' of the Stadtholderless Period that lasted until 1672. Witte de With was released from imprisonment on 16 December 1650, and evaded death in February when he was sentenced to loss of wages.¹⁴⁵

This example shows how affairs in the Dutch Republic were often, if not always, connected to issues of power and authority. These battles should therefore be taken into account when considering the creation process of the West India Company.

1.2. THE WEST INDIA COMPANY

Long before the establishment of the WIC, merchants from the Low Countries had been trading to Brazil and in the Atlantic.¹⁴⁶ In 1621, before the WIC had started thinking about trading to Brazil, ships from the United Provinces carried one-third to half of the trade between Brazil and Europe.¹⁴⁷ The principal proponent of the establishment of the WIC was, at least according to himself, Willem Usselinx. Born in Flanders in 1567, he spent some of his early merchant training on the Azores and possibly Brazil, before moving to Middelburg at the age of 24.¹⁴⁸ He was one of many individuals who fled the southern Low Countries for the protestant northern provinces to escape religious prosecution. According to a memory of

¹⁴³ Israel, *De Republiek*, 659-676.

¹⁴⁴ W.J. van Hoboken, *Witte de With in Brazilië, 1648-1649* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1955), 268-301.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ C. Ebert, "Dutch Trade with Brazil before the Dutch West India Company, 1587-1621," in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, ed. J. Postma and V. Enthoven (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

¹⁴⁷ S.B. Schwartz, *Sovereignty and society in colonial Brazil: The High Court of Bahia and its judges, 1609-1751* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 99.

¹⁴⁸ C.K. Kesler, "Willem Usselinx en de oprichting van de Westindische Compagnie," *De West-Indische Gids* 3, no. 1 (1921/1922): 66.

his own hand, he had started advocating for a chartered Company for the trade in the Americas as early as 1592.¹⁴⁹ Usselincx had a strong vision for the way the Company should operate. He wanted to colonize the parts of South America that had not yet been colonized and the colonies should be settlement colonies that could function as a market for Dutch manufactured goods, and could produce colonial commodities in return. It was a misconception, he argued, to think that riches from the Atlantic only came in the form of silver and gold. Instead, goods such as tobacco, sugar, or cochineal, would provide all the wealth. These goods should not be produced with slave labor, but with paid laborers from Europe – not because there were large moral objections to slavery, but principally because it made more economic sense. The settlement colonies, moreover, should be a Calvinist safe haven in a largely Catholic New World.¹⁵⁰

Usselincx' profitable slave free Calvinist utopia in the Americas does not exactly anticipate the reality of Dutch presence in the Atlantic. Nevertheless, this 'vision' of Usselincx is generally well-described in the existing literature on the Dutch in the Atlantic.¹⁵¹ In his 2012 dissertation, Alexander Bick points out that the historiography on the role of Usselincx seems to be in a paradox as it simultaneously ascribes him as a driving force, while also assuming that he had very little influence.¹⁵² In an attempt to solve this, Bick argues that Usselincx' vision of the governance structure of the Company was very influential, while at the same time acknowledging that his vision did not keep up with the later outcome. Bick's approach of looking at the governance structure of the WIC in an attempt to investigate the influence of Usselincx is convincing. What Bick overlooks, however, is the role of parties and factions in the Republic that determined the outcome of the WIC charter. Instead, I posit that Usselincx' actions were dictated by the bandwidth provided by the political circumstances and ongoing power struggles in the Republic.

¹⁴⁹ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 5758, 3-Oct-1644 Memo by Willem Usselincx [scan 008].

¹⁵⁰ W. Klooster, *The Dutch moment: war, trade, and settlement in the seventeenth-century Atlantic world* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 209, 242.

¹⁵¹ B. Schmidt, *Innocence abroad: the Dutch imagination and the New World, 1570-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 178-184; H. den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen: Walburg Press, 2002).

¹⁵² A. Bick, "Governing the Free Sea: The Dutch West India Company and Commercial Politics, 1618-1645" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Princeton, 2012), 32.

1.2.1. Willem Usselinx

When Usselinx started advocating for a WIC in the late sixteenth century, most merchants thought it was too costly and risky to start such a large endeavor. However, as more merchants ventured into the Atlantic Ocean and local companies for the trade to the West Indies and the Guinea coast emerged, the audience for his plans grew around the year 1600. The VOC was established in the meantime in 1602, demonstrating that large chartered companies were a possibility. While interests for a WIC initially rested predominantly within the province of Zeeland, the States of Holland established a special committee that included Jan Huygen van Linschoten and François Vranck, combining legal and state experience of Vranck with the exploratory expertise of van Linschoten. The committee concluded that there certainly was interest for an Atlantic Company, but that investors wanted to know details before committing large sums of money. Usselinx tried to mobilize interest in Zeeland meanwhile and was selected as a special envoy for the province to negotiate the details of a charter with the Holland representatives.¹⁵³

When considering this charter, it becomes apparent that it was modelled after the VOC charter with a board of seventeen directors from four chambers: Amsterdam, Zeeland, Noorderkwartier, and Meuse. An important change in comparison to the VOC charter was to combat the often-heard complaint that (chief) investors did not have enough influence in the business decisions of the VOC. Therefore, new provisions in the charter safeguarded the interests of the investors by allowing them to inspect the books and more power in company management.¹⁵⁴ While Usselinx maintained his vision of a settlement company supported through state-financed military, the Holland delegation advocated for a company of war financed through trade. The truce negotiations between the northern provinces and the King of Spain pushed back the issue of a company for the Americas as it meant that it was no longer necessary to privatize the war effort in the Atlantic. During the Truce negotiations, Usselinx reached out to Stadtholder Maurits, advocating in favor of a continuation of the war with Spain and open trade to the Americas.¹⁵⁵ The Truce with Spain in 1609 shelved the

¹⁵³ O. van Rees, *Geschiedenis der Staathuishoudkunde in Nederland tot het einde der achttiende eeuw*, Vol. II (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1868), 76-78.

¹⁵⁴ Bick, "Governing the Free Sea," 99-100.

¹⁵⁵ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 5758, 3-Oct-1644 Memo by Willem Usselinx [scan 008].

plans for the WIC for a while, and Usselincx decided to invest in the impoldering of the Beemster.

With support from the Stadtholder, who thought that renewed hostilities with the Spanish could rekindle his military ambitions, Usselincx succeeded in starting a discussion on a WIC again in 1614 despite the general contentment about the Truce. According to his own memorial, Usselincx knew that van Oldenbarnevelt was against the plans and that the Grand Pensionary was convinced that without his approval there would never be a company. Van Oldenbarnevelt thus decided to obstruct the process and to send Usselincx on a Perseusian mission to include the trade to Guinea in the charter. Van Oldenbarnevelt himself, as well as Maurits, had previously attempted to no avail to bring all the Guinea trade into one company. However, after many and long solicitations Usselincx succeeded in convincing the Amsterdam magistracy to include the Guinea trade. Maurits warned Usselincx that this would not be enough for van Oldenbarnevelt, who indeed was not yet convinced.¹⁵⁶ The Grand Pensionary wished to appoint one of the seventeen directors of the Company Board from the ranks of the States General. The city magistrates, moreover, should appoint the directors. Van Oldenbarnevelt, thus, advocated for a strong regent control over Company policy.

For Usselincx, this idea was unacceptable.¹⁵⁷ His draft charter included a Council of the Indies (*Raet van Indien*) modeled after the Spanish Supreme Council for the Indies to govern a WIC. The proposed council would consist of eight to ten 'qualified persons, both nobility and others' balancing expertise in trade and government. Anyone who had invested more than 800,000 guilders would automatically obtain a seat and any remaining seats would be elected by the principal investors. The Prince of Orange (the Stadtholder) should preside over the meetings of the Council of the Indies 'to give it more authority and prestige'.¹⁵⁸ The Company should be in charge of trade while the States General should remain responsible for the administration and governance, and for matters of religion, war, and peace. The state's income of taxes and duties (*convooyen* and *licenten*) should rise from increased trading to the colonies, thus allowing to pay for the added naval expenses. Allowing magistrates to

¹⁵⁶ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 5758, 3-Oct-1644 Memo by Willem Usselincx [scan 008].

¹⁵⁷ C. Ligtenberg, *Willem Usselincx* (Utrecht: Oosthoek, 1915), 82-83.

¹⁵⁸ 'van welcken Raet Syn Princelycke Excellentie behoorde 'thooft te wesen, om dien meer autoriteyts ende aensiens te geven', O. van Rees, "Willem Usselincx," *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* 107, no. 1 (1867): 424.

interfere in trade and business would deter investors, while merchants were incompetent 'to govern, and to make laws and ordinances'. Usselincx' often repeated quoted that 'merchants have profit as their North Star, and desire as their compass' clearly positions him with the Orangists who believed that it was the nobility, or at least studied individuals, that should be in charge of government.¹⁵⁹ Similar sentiments can be found with the Frisian Stadtholder Willem Frederik for example. He remarked that 'one cannot expect anything else than quarrels, affairs, and affronts from merchants, as they do not know to deal with decent people', and that 'merchants only think about benefiting trade, and they do not consider the rest of the country and the nobility', 'republicans and merchants only remember that they need men of quality in times of war'.¹⁶⁰ Alexander van der Capellen, the nobleman from Guelders who in the 1640s and 1650s would have a pivotal position in the States General's committee on West Indian affairs, further published a treatise called 'The ambition of the plebeians over the nobility'.¹⁶¹ The *ambitione peblejorum* was feared by many nobles, according to van der Capellen, who saw that the power of non-nobles was increasing almost daily. Moreover, when he was considered to succeed Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen (1604-1679, see also following chapters) as Governor-General in Brazil, van der Capellen refused as he knew better than 'to travel so wide in the service of merchants'.¹⁶² Matters of war in particular were an 'affair for people in high regard', Usselincx continued his proposition, as soldiers claimed 'that they would rather die, than serve under merchants'.¹⁶³ The party lines between the republicans and Orangists thus clearly come to the fore in their different proposed charters. While van Oldenbarnevelt proposed more influence for the

¹⁵⁹ 'Cooplieden die de winste tot Noortsterre ende de begeerlickheyt voor compas hebben', *ibid.*; see also: NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 9409: 'Remarques op het Octroy van de West-Indische Compagnie aan Haar Ho: Mo: door Willem Usselincx anno 1620 gemaect'.

¹⁶⁰ 'want van de coopluyden heeft hij niet te verwachten als querelen, questiën, affronten, want de coopluyden mit luyden van fatsoen niet om kunnen gaen', J. Visser and G.N. van der Plaat, eds., *Gloria parendi. Dagboeken van Willem Frederik, stadhouder van Friesland, Groningen en Drenthe, 1643-1649, 1651-1654* (Den Haag: Nederlands Historisch Genootschap, 1995), I/79. 'omdat de republiken en coopluyden noit heeren van qualiteit estimeren als in tijt van noot ende oorloch', *ibid.*, I/96. 'De coopluyden dencken nievers op als op de trafijc en die te beneficiëren; voor de rest van het landt en den adel daer sijn [zien] se niet naer om', *ibid.*, VI/228.

¹⁶¹ J. Jacobs, "Act with the Cunning of a Fox: The Political Dimensions of the Struggle for Hegemony over New Netherland, 1647-1653," (Unpublished Paper). See also C. Gietman, *Republiek van Adel: eer in de Oost-Nederlandse adelscultuur (1555-1702)* (Utrecht: Van Gruting, 2010), 99.

¹⁶² 'soo wijdt over see te gaen in dienst van cooplude', quoted in Gietman, *Republiek van Adel*, 27.

¹⁶³ 'dat sy haer liever wilden laten hangen als onder 'tgebiet van de cooplieden na Indien te gaen', Rees, *Geschiedenis der Staathuishoudkunde, Vol. II*, 425.

States General and local magistrates in the appointment of directors, Usselincx chose the side of Maurits and proposed far-reaching influence for the nobility and shareholder advocacy.

Usselincx advocated for more control for shareholders in the company's trading business. The VOC, whose shareholders had repeatedly complained about not having enough influence on company business and no instruments to check the directors' financial claims, served as an example for Usselincx on what should be avoided.¹⁶⁴ Every city or province that invested at least one million guilders could obtain a trading chamber in the charter that Usselincx proposed, and every town that raised 200,000 guilders would be entitled to delegate one or two directors. However, these directors should be elected by investors that had invested at least 1,200 guilders. To become a director, one only needed a minimum investment of 300 guilders. The proposal of the States of Holland stipulated that far higher sums were required for similar influence. A collegiate body elected from the investors would furthermore function as an audit office for imported and exported goods.¹⁶⁵ This demonstrates how important Usselincx deemed to allow merchants to control trade, rather than regents, and how much influence he envisioned for shareholders in the Company as opposed to the vision of van Oldenbarnevelt.

It took Usselincx four months of pleading, and 'extraordinary means', to have his petitions heard by the States of Holland.¹⁶⁶ Van Oldenbarnevelt and the others in the opposition acknowledged that Usselincx was right, according to Usselincx, who further added that this did not mean that van Oldenbarnevelt stopped to delay the creation of such a company. These delaying tactics urged Usselincx to turn to the States General, who were willing to hear him, but then suggested he would turn again to the States of Holland. Usselincx did just that, but despite 'all his labor and ingenuity', he could not get these provincial delegates to discuss his requests. This forced him to travel to Zeeland from where he started writing lengthy letters to the Holland nobility, van Oldenbarnevelt, and each of the cities in Holland. When realizing that he would not be able to sway the States of Holland, Usselincx decided then to erect a provincial company in Zeeland for which he quickly received 800,000 guilders of subscriptions from local investors. With this success, the States

¹⁶⁴ Rees, "Willem Usselincx," 300.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 302.

¹⁶⁶ 'Dese requeste kreeg ik met een vervolch van omtrent 4 maanden door eene extraordinaris middel eijndelijck gelesen', NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 5758, 3-Oct-1644 Memory by Willem Usselincx [scan 009].

of Zeeland had sufficient reasons to start laboring for Usselincx' Company at the States General and further instructed an extraordinary deputy at the States of Holland to labor for the same thing.¹⁶⁷ The States General subsequently established a committee to begin working on a WIC in 1617. Despite this committee's warm reception of Usselincx' ideas, Holland remained of the position that a peace with Spain was more favorable than a WIC.¹⁶⁸ Usselincx' financial position was bad due to disappointing results of his Beemster investment and he owed 153,000 guilders to several Amsterdam creditors. One of these creditors, Govaert van Schoonhoven, who was a slave trader on the African coast, offered Usselincx to lower the interest payments if he would stop his efforts to erect a WIC.¹⁶⁹

Van Oldenbarnevelt thus continued his objection to Usselincx' plans, while Maurits supported his ideas for a chartered company in the Atlantic. After van Oldenbarnevelt's arrest in 1618, his beheading in 1619, and the purge of several Holland City Councils in favor of Arminians, the pro-war faction got more traction in the States General and the States of Holland. Leader of the contra-remonstrant pro-war faction in Holland was the Amsterdammer Reynier Pauw (1564-1636) who had trading experience to Guyana and Brazil.¹⁷⁰ At his initiative, the States of Holland resolved to appoint a committee with representatives of the major trading cities to review the different charter drafts since 1606 and to unite them into one new draft charter for a WIC. The committee completed their task by December 1619 and reported to the States of Holland that Usselincx' proposition was 'not well suited' for the provincial interests, but anyone who was interested could consult it at the registry's office (*griffie*).¹⁷¹ By January 1620 the States of Holland sent their proposal to the States General for further discussion and it was their draft that would function as the basis of further discussion. Holland's draft charter is significant as even though it is similar to the final charter, there are some crucial differences, as demonstrated by Alexander Bick. First of all, this draft envisioned that the delegate of the States General would preside the meeting of the Board of Directors, providing them with substantial power over agenda setting and control over debates. Furthermore, the States General would, 'instead of a Council of the

¹⁶⁷ NL-HaNA, 1.01.02, inv. nr. 5758, 3-Oct-1644 Memory by Willem Usselincx [scan 009].

¹⁶⁸ Bick, "Governing the Free Sea," 105-106.

¹⁶⁹ Rees, "Willem Usselincx," 294-295; Rees, *Geschiedenis der Staathuishoudkunde*, Vol. II, 470.

¹⁷⁰ Elias, *De vroedschap*, 191.

¹⁷¹ Rees, "Willem Usselincx," 298.

Indies', have veto power over issues of war within the Company.¹⁷² After a round of discussion by all the provinces the charter was more or less finalized allowing the possibility of an extra director's chamber for polities that could find sufficient investment to establish an independent chamber, and instead of presiding the meetings of the Board of Directors, the States General would help to direct the affairs of the Company at the Board of Directors. There were some political quarrels from Amsterdam delegates who wished to keep the Guinea trade out of the charter and from Noorderkwartier delegates who preferred to keep the salt trade from Punta de Araya (in present-day Venezuela) out.¹⁷³ They were under the impression that they did not need the Company's involvement in this trade. After all, they had successfully traded on the other side of the Atlantic before the Truce.¹⁷⁴ The Noorderkwartier initially succeeded, but when investments in the WIC turned out disappointing, the States General decided to include the salt trade in the charter. Moreover, when the Spanish built a stronghold to detect (and prevent) illicit trade in Punta de Araya, it became harder for the merchants from Hoorn and Enkhuizen to continue their trade.¹⁷⁵ On 3 June 1621, the charter for the West India Company was unanimously approved by the States General.¹⁷⁶

Despite Holland's, and in particular van Oldenbarnevelt's, opposition, Usselinx received more favorable audiences at the States General than at the States of Holland. This can easily be explained through party lines. Usselinx formally aligned himself with Maurits which made reconciliation with van Oldenbarnevelt impossible. However, through Maurits' network Usselinx received more favorable responses in provinces where the nobility had a stronger position power such as Zeeland, Guelders, but also Friesland. The republicans though, were never going to agree to a charter that granted substantial power in the Atlantic to the Prince of Orange through a Council of the Indies. The proposal of the republicans for a WIC charter included the States General as a president instead of the Stadtholder, which

¹⁷² 'In Staete van desen Raet [van Indien] & datter expendeert wort int' 18 artyckel gesyt dat in saeken van oorlogs op de genoomen resolutie vorsocht sal worden haer ho: mo: approbatye', quoted in Bick, "Governing the Free Sea," 108.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 106-109.

¹⁷⁴ E. Sluiter, "Dutch-Spanish Rivalry in the Caribbean Area, 1594-1609," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 28, no. 2 (1948): 180-181, 191.

¹⁷⁵ Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 30; J.G. van Dillen, *Van Rijkdom en Regenten. Handboek tot de Economische en Sociale Geschiedenis van Nederland tijdens de Republiek* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 145-146.

¹⁷⁶ Bick, "Governing the Free Sea," 111.

indicates how they viewed their position vis-à-vis the Prince of Orange in the Republic. Common ground was found to provide neither the Stadtholder, nor the States General, with presiding power in a WIC institution. Usselincx antagonized other interests and possible allies through his emphasis on shareholder advocacy. Many holders of public offices in the Republic rejoiced the prospect of a new state-chartered organization that provided them with opportunities to extend their personal clientele networks through new job appointments.¹⁷⁷ It surely was no coincidence that all the fresh WIC directors that the Amsterdam city council appointed came from the intimate social circles of the Amsterdam elite such as Reynier Pauw.¹⁷⁸ Other adversaries of Usselincx' plans included Orangists in rural provinces that loathed the idea of leaving appointments to shareholder democracy. Moreover, the directors of the VOC, who were intimately intertwined with the leadership in the Republic, saw a shareholder advocacy as a dangerous precedent for their own company with its charter due for renegotiation in 1623.¹⁷⁹ This provided another considerable share of the political mandarines with a reason to object to Usselincx plans. Finally, the nail in the coffin of his charter was the plan to establish peaceful settlement colonies in 'unclaimed' territories. The primary common ground between Maurits' Orangists and the 'merchant class' was the war against the Spanish.¹⁸⁰ For the Orangists, the WIC would facilitate opening a new front against the Spanish in the Atlantic that Maurits hoped could alleviate his territorial war effort, while for the merchants it promised riches through the possibility of privateering the illustrious Spanish silver fleet. Usselincx did not (want to) see the limited maneuverability that the Republic offered for the creation of his Company and left the country disappointed in an attempt to find more fertile soil for his ideas with the Swedish King. The common ground between Maurits and the merchant class for the creation of a WIC made it a Company of War, rather than a Company of Trade.

¹⁷⁷ Ligtenberg, *Willem Usselincx*, 82-86.

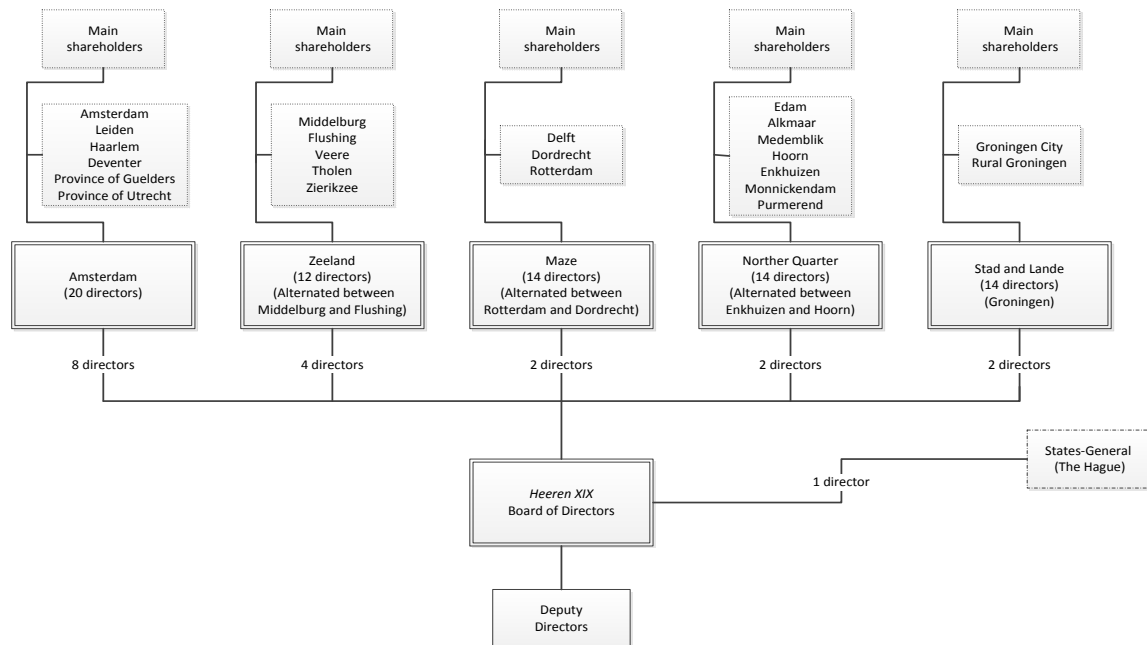
¹⁷⁸ C. Lesger, *The rise of the Amsterdam market and information exchange: merchants, commercial expansion and change in the spatial economy of the Low Countries, c. 1550-1630* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 179.

¹⁷⁹ S. van Brakel, *De Hollandsche handelscompagnieën der zeventiende eeuw* ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1908), 133-150.

¹⁸⁰ Rees, "Willem Usselincx," 304-305.

1.2.2. The lay-out of the WIC

Figure 1-4: The governance structure of the West India Company



The position of Friesland and Groningen is of particular interest for the history of the WIC. The provincial honor of Groningen had been slightly tarnished in 1614 when it had been left out of the *Noordsche Compagnie*, a Holland company chartered for whaling.¹⁸¹ So when the plans for a WIC were discussed, the provincial States of Groningen sent a delegation to The Hague to negotiate. The States of Holland allowed cooperation from the Groningen delegates, but after they had jointly put something on paper, Holland's provincial assembly brushed aside the proposal of Groningen, and returned to their original draft. The repeated requests of Groningen, joined by Friesland, led the Hollanders to give in: if these northern provinces succeeded in providing half a million in capital, they could have their own director's chamber.¹⁸² Groningen succeeded in bringing up the necessary capital, but Friesland never did. That Friesland failed was largely due to *hubris*, but it formed the basis for a long period of Frisian resentment towards the Company that would resurface in the

¹⁸¹ Zealand chambers were added in 1616, Friesland chambers only in 1636.

¹⁸² P.J. van Winter, *De Westindische Compagnie ter kamer Stad en Lande* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 4-6.

1630s, the early 1650s, and 1701.¹⁸³ Every time the Frisians felt like they could use the WIC as a bargaining chip to gain influence, they did.¹⁸⁴

The offices of the Company were divided over five chambers: Amsterdam, Zealand, Maze, Noorderkwartier, and Stad en Lande.¹⁸⁵ Cities or provinces that had not managed to acquire a chamber in the Company were allowed to appoint a director (*bewindhebber*) to every chamber in which they invested 100,000 guilders. The provinces of Utrecht and Gelderland could appoint a director in Amsterdam for example, and the city of Edam could appoint a director in the chamber of Noorderkwartier. The other directors of the chambers were selected by the chamber's city's magistrates from the pool of main investors (*hoofdparticipanten*). In order to qualify as a main investor, one needed to invest 6,000 guilders in Amsterdam or 4,000 guilders in the other chambers. However, there were also a few investor-directors elected by the main investors to control the chamber's policies.¹⁸⁶ Each chamber sent directors to the general board of directors. That board was composed of nineteen people called the *Heeren XIX*. These gentlemen were selected by and from Amsterdam (8), Zealand (4), Maze (2), Noorderkwartier (2) and Stad en Lande (2). The nineteen gentlemen were completed by a representative from the States General (see Figure 1-4).¹⁸⁷ One director did not necessarily mean one individual, but equaled one vote. Every chamber could send as many directors to the meeting of the board of directors (*Heeren XIX*) as they wished, but they were limited to the allocated number of votes.¹⁸⁸ The Board of Directors convened two to three times a year for several days, and had deputy directors (*gecommiteerde bewindhebbers*) who formed a constant delegation in The Hague to secure the interest of the Company at the *Binnenhof*.

Thus, by 1623 Dutch merchants possessed two companies for the Indies; the VOC for Asia and the WIC for the Americas and Africa. They were of course not the only competitors for overseas riches, but they would prove to be a force to be reckoned with, both in the fields of

¹⁸³ See for example Knuttel 7002: Anonymous, *Vertoogh, over den toestant der West-indische Compagnie* (Rotterdam: Johannes Roon, 1651).

¹⁸⁴ Winter, *WIC ter kamer Stad en Lande*, 10-11.

¹⁸⁵ Maze is Rotterdam and Dordrecht, Noorderkwartier is Enkhuizen and Hoorn, Stad & Lande is Groningen. Amsterdam had initially 20 *bewindhebbers*, Zealand 12, and the other each had 14, but these numbers would change over time.

¹⁸⁶ Winter, *WIC ter kamer Stad en Lande*, 15-16.

¹⁸⁷ Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 31.

¹⁸⁸ Bick, "Governing the Free Sea," 123-125.

trade and war. The plan for the WIC to establish itself in the Atlantic, was laid down in the Grand Design (*Groot Desseyn*). This design consisted of a grand scheme to take over the Southern Atlantic possessions of the Portuguese because since 1580 the Portuguese were included in the Spanish domains through the Union of the Crowns (1580-1640). This meant that Portuguese possessions were, in the rationale of the Republic, a legitimate target in the war with the Habsburg King. The center of these Portuguese possessions was Brazil.¹⁸⁹

1.3. BRAZIL

The colonial commodities that Brazil produced were mainly sugar and a dyewood that produces a deep red dye for the cloth industry. In fact, the name of the country Brazil comes from the words *Terra do Brasil*, or land of Brazil (wood) – even though the initial name of those lands was *Ilha de Vera Cruz*. Sugar and brazilwood had been known in Europe since the Middle Ages, but Brazil provided an option that could produce more of both for a lower price. The sugar plantations and brazilwood logging in the Northeastern part of Brazil for the European market started during the Portuguese colonization.

The Portuguese initially allowed trade by non-subjects. As long as duties were paid, they did not even have to be Catholics to transport the goods from Brazil to Europe. That is, as long as the carriers brought the goods to Lisbon. When Hanseatic traders started bringing goods directly to their own ports non-Iberian involvement became more of an issue. Ten merchants from Hamburg sailed their ships directly to their homeport in 1590.¹⁹⁰ One of these ships and its cargo was collectively owned by three Hamburgers, two Hollanders, and a Portuguese though, so it was not only Hanseatic merchants avoiding the Portuguese ports.¹⁹¹ The number of ships going directly to cities in northern Germany increased in 1602 to twenty-three.¹⁹² This eventually led to a ban on foreign trade in 1605. Nevertheless, it is

¹⁸⁹ Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 35-38.

¹⁹⁰ P. Dollinger, *De Hanze: opkomst, bloei en ondergang van een handelsverbond* (Utrecht/Antwerpen: Het Spectrum, 1967), 430.

¹⁹¹ C.A.P. Antunes, R. Post, and J.P. Salvado, "Het omzeilen van monopoliehandel. Smokkel en belastingontduiking bij de handel in brazielhout, 1500-1674," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 13, no. 1 (2016); Dollinger, *De Hanze*, 437.

¹⁹² C. Ebert, *Between Empires: Brazilian Sugar in the Early Atlantic Economy, 1550-1630* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 134.

estimated that after 1609 – that is, during the Truce – Dutch merchants imported more than half of the Brazilian sugar, both directly and via Portuguese ports.¹⁹³

A ship destined for Brazil and coming from Europe would have to pass east of the Cape Verde Islands and continue in a southwards direction, potentially even passing the equator until the wind direction would change to east. On that wind, the ships could sail westwards in the direction of Brazil. Depending on the season the current would be northwards, southwards, or still. A ship thus would have to aim either more north or south than its actual destination.¹⁹⁴ This was especially important in the more northern captaincies such as Rio Grande from March to May. Due to a northwards current and a SSE to SE wind it would be impossible to correct a course that was too far to the north. There would be no way back.

In order to capture Brazil from the Portuguese, the WIC sent out an expedition for the conquest of Bahia, the capital of Portuguese Brazil, in the beginning of 1624. The fleet of twenty-six sails commanded by Jacob Willekens arrived at Bahia on 8 May and conquered the city two days later.¹⁹⁵ The news of the conquest of Bahia caused great rejoice in the Republic.¹⁹⁶ The second part of the Grand Design was to also conquer Luanda, the important fortress on the Angolan coast. Piet Heyn, who had been vice-Admiral on the fleet of Willekens, was sent with seven ships to the African coast on 5 August. Willekens himself had left for the Republic to bring the spoils of war, leaving only eleven ships to defend Bahia from a possible Luso-Spanish counter-attack.¹⁹⁷ A Spanish fleet did arrive. It was led by Don Fadrique de Toledo and consisted of fifty-two sails, the largest and strongest fleet to cross the equator until then. After a siege of a month, the WIC soldiers, led by the often-drunk officer Willem Schouten, gave up and were allowed to return to the Republic. A second Dutch fleet, destined to relieve the pressure of the siege in Bahia, was kept in Dutch harbors due to bad winter weather and arrived too late to be of any help. Meanwhile, Piet Heyn had failed in Angola too, only being able to plunder some ships of the coast. Heyn returned to Brazil, but

¹⁹³ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹⁴ B.N. Teensma, *Suiker, verfhout en tabak: Het Braziliaanse handboek van Johannes de Laet, 1637. Bezorgd en ingeleid door B.N. Teensma*, vol. 108, Werken uitgegeven door de Linschoten-Vereeniging (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2009), 55-56.

¹⁹⁵ Boxer, *Dutch in Brazil*, 21-23.

¹⁹⁶ M. van Groesen, "Lessons learned: The Second Dutch Conquest of Brazil and the Memory of the First," *Colonial Latin American Review* 20, no. 2 (2011).

¹⁹⁷ Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 38-39.

when confronted with the enormous fleet of Don Fadrique, he was forced to continue his voyage northwards, arriving in Holland at the end of July.¹⁹⁸

The WIC's endeavor in the southern Atlantic had not only failed, it also depleted the Company's funds. The Company had to bury its ambition as it was laid down in the Grand Design, and changed course. With their last funds, they raised a privateering fleet commanded by Piet Heyn. Cruising off the Brazilian coast he was able to capture twenty-six ships, loaded with more than 2,500 chests of sugar, and tobacco and hides. Through the income the WIC made from Piet Heyn's booty, it was able to equip a fleet of thirty-one sails in the spring of 1628. This fleet with 4,000 men and 689 guns was commanded by Piet Heyn himself, who was now promoted to General, and aimed at capturing one of the Spanish silver-fleets in the Caribbean. On the night of 7 September 1628, Piet Heyn famously succeeded in the Cuban harbor of Matanzas, pouring 8 million guilders worth of silver, and an additional 4 million worth of other goods into the WIC chest.¹⁹⁹

The WIC now had money to spend again and decided to make another expensive attempt for Brazil. The directors felt they had to move quickly though, as Spanish delegates and the States General attempted to negotiate a peace. Thus, as the VOC had done in the years before 1609, the WIC petitioned to the States General and printed a pamphlet with arguments contributing to the anti-peace lobby in 1629.²⁰⁰ A peace with Spain and Portugal would greatly limit the execution of the Grand Design. Fortunately for the WIC, the peace negotiations failed. This was largely because of continuing animosity between Holland city councils dating back to the religious dispute between van Oldenbarnevelt and Maurits.²⁰¹ The WIC's second attempt for Brazil did not aim for Bahia, but targeted the poorly defended captaincy of Pernambuco.²⁰² From letters seized in previous campaigns the WIC learned that the fortifications in Olinda and Recife were in a state of disrepair, so a fleet of sixty-seven sails under the command of Hendrick Cornelisz Loncq crossed the Atlantic.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Boxer, *Dutch in Brazil*, 23-26.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 28-31.

²⁰⁰ Knuttel 3909: Bewindhebbers, *Consideratien ende redenen der E, heeren bewind-hebberen, vande geotrojeerde West-Indische Compagnie inde vergaedinghe vande [...] Staten Generael [...] overgelevert, nopende de teghenwoordige deliberatie over den treves met den coning van Hispanjen* (Haarlem: Adriaen Romaan, 1629).

²⁰¹ Israel, *De Republiek*, 563-573.

²⁰² Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 39.

²⁰³ Boxer, *Dutch in Brazil*, 37.

Within two weeks the WIC forces captured Recife and Olinda. They burned down Olinda in 1631 because they deemed it too difficult to defend and they were severely besieged in Recife by guerillas formerly known as Portuguese settlers. Nevertheless, the WIC eventually succeeded in establishing a more permanent bridgehead in Brazil. After successfully breaking through the siege in 1632, the WIC could slowly but steadily expand its territory in Brazil, and the directors could start to think about how to govern the newly acquired colony.²⁰⁴

1.4. CONCLUSION

The Dutch Republic was built on traditions and customs originating in the Middle Ages which led to a political structure that was decentralized in nature. As a result, lobbyists in the Republic were required to approach political mandataries on multiple levels. At the same time, the system of representation allowed for 'efficient' lobbying for convincing one individual could resort to effects of multiple political levels. Examples of lobbying strategies in this chapter included petitions, personal relations, and pamphlets. The Companies used comparable tactics to people.

Within the political system of the Republic there were several issues that limited the formation of lobbying alliances. The most important divider was the ideological party line between republicans and Orangists.²⁰⁵ This division overlapped to some extent on other issues such as the vision on the role of religion or the nobility in government. However, in case of the latter, the support for Orangists far exceeded the number of members of the nobility in the country. Although some individuals may have supported the societal role of the nobility from a pragmatic or conservative standpoint, an additional explanation are the faction lines that ran through local polities based on clientelism networks. The combination of factions and parties limited the options for alliances of people that tried to lobby.

An example of the difficulties of creating lobbying alliances can be seen in the case of Willem Usselinx' attempts to create a company for the West Indies since the 1590s. After aligning himself with the Stadtholder and thus positioning himself firmly with the Orangists,

²⁰⁴ Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, 39-41.

²⁰⁵ Roorda, *Partij en factie*.

he almost by default created opposition from the republicans; in particular van Oldenbarnevelt. Usselincx' vision further failed to expand his alliance by propagating more shareholder advocacy as opposed to clientelist appointments, the Stadtholder as the head of the 'Council of the Indies' as opposed to the States General, and peaceful colonies in 'unclaimed' territories as opposed to conquests at the expense of the Habsburgs. These existing conditions, factions, and party lines provided the bandwidth in which Usselincx, or any other lobbyist, operated as it simultaneously limited and facilitated the maneuverability. That being said, the alliance that led to the creation of the WIC was ultimately forged between supporters of the Orangist party and interests that supported a continued war effort. This example has demonstrated that it was thus important to be knowledgeable on the (im)possibilities of lobbying.

