Changing Party Systems in Western Europe

Edited by

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PINTER

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The Netherlands: Resilience Amidst Change

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Introduction

Almost fifteen years ago, the Dutch-American political scientist Arend Lijphart published a book entitled *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (1984). Lijphart argued that there are two main models of democracy: Westminster or majoritarian democracy and consensus democracy. The majoritarian elements of the Westminster model include: the concentration of executive power in single-party and bare-majority cabinets; executive domination of the legislature; a two-party system; a one-dimensional party system and a plurality system of elections. On the other hand, the elements of the consensus model which act to restrain the majority include: executive power-sharing in grand coalitions; a balanced executive–legislative relationship; a multi-party system; a multi-dimensional party system and proportional representation.

According to Lijphart, majoritarian democracy works best in relatively homogeneous societies like the United Kingdom. The consensus model, in contrast, is especially appropriate for plural societies. Since the single most important characteristic of Dutch politics is without doubt that the Netherlands is a plural society, a country of political and religious minorities (Daalder, 1966; Andeweg and Irwin, 1993: 23), it is hardly surprising that, at least as far as the five variables mentioned above are concerned, the Netherlands can be considered to be the prototype of a consensus democracy.

The Netherlands has not only had a multi-party system but also a *multi-dimensional* party system ever since the first attempt at a 'breakthrough' of the existing party system finally became successful in the 1870s. Both before and after the Second World War, moreover, at least five political parties have been 'relevant' (Sartori, 1976). Although at first sight therefore the model of extreme, or polarized, pluralism seems to apply, Sartori himself has more than once indicated that the Netherlands belonged in the category of moderate pluralism (Sartori, 1976; Sani and Sartori, 1983; see also Daalder,

1987: 266). As will be argued below, the Netherlands has retained its multi-party and multi-dimensional character. However, the partial success of the second major attempt at a 'breakthrough' of the party system, launched by the Socialists immediately after the Second World War, has led to recent speculation about a possible 're-dichotomization' of Dutch politics. The comparison between a first and a second attempt at a 'breakthrough' in the party system was made by Bruins Slot (1952: 154–79) among others.

This chapter will deal with the historical development of the Dutch party system before 1945, the contextual variables of most relevance, the post-1945 party system and then the processes of change and adaptation up until the present day.

Historical background before 1945

As was noted above, the single most important characteristic of Dutch politics is, and has always been, that the Netherlands is a plural society. Two cleavages have traditionally been of particular importance: religion and social class. The oldest, and in many respects the most important, of the two is religion. As a result of this cleavage, Dutch society has, since the origins of the Dutch state in the sixteenth century, consisted of three main religious groups: Roman Catholics (the oldest group), orthodox Protestants and a secular or humanist minority.

Although the size of the different groups, as well as the relations between them, has naturally varied over the centuries, these three groups, with their distinctive identities and histories, have always been important. The existence of these three distinct groups has contributed to the fact that it has proven extremely difficult, if not impossible, to write a truly comprehensive political and social history of the Netherlands. Each of the three groups has brought forth its own gifted, sometimes excellent, historians (Puchinger, 1979). However, the first real 'synthesis' of Dutch social and political history has yet to be written, despite occasional claims to the contrary (see, however, Israel, 1995).

Industrialization in the Netherlands took place later than in other Western European countries. Therefore, the second cleavage mentioned above – social class – did not become important until around 1880. Moreover, because of the binding force that religion constituted within both the Catholic and the orthodox Protestant segments of the population, only the secular or humanist group was actually divided into two parts as a result of this cleavage. Thus, from about the end of the nineteenth century, it has been possible to speak of four minorities in Dutch society: the Catholics, the orthodox Protestants, the secular working class or the socialists and the secular middle class or the liberals.

What makes the Dutch case interesting from a comparative point of view is that for most of the twentieth century, the first three groups (Catholics, Protestants and secular working class) have in effect been tightly organized subcultures that structured most, if not all, aspects of political, social and personal life in the Netherlands. In Dutch, these subcultures are usually known as *zuilen* or pillars. The segmentation of Dutch society into these different subcultures is called *verzuiling* or pillarization. The idea behind this metaphor is that the four separate pillars were – like those of a Greek temple – kept apart, only being joined at the top by the political elites, thus supporting the 'roof' of the Dutch state (Lijphart, 1975; Van Schendelen, 1984). A caveat is needed here, however.

For at least some social scientists and historians, the term 'pillarization' has a largely negative meaning. The period of pillarization between 1870–1960 is, possibly partly as a result of personal experiences and frustrations, regarded by them as a culturally 'dark' period of Dutch history, in which the political and religious elites of the day succeeded in controlling their rank and file adherents on an unprecedented scale. Others, however, are more positive about the same period in Dutch history, and they are even inclined to regard it as a kind of second 'Golden Age' in which religious and political life flourished once more (see, for example, Puchinger, 1993b). The same caveat applies to the 1960s and 1970s. As a result of processes of secularization and individualization and a number of other factors like the impact of television and the effects of generational change, the pillars started to crumble in the 1960s. Pillarization has become de-pillarization.

To many social scientists and historians, this marks a kind of liberation from a 'medieval' past, and the dawning of a new era of 'enlightenment'. Others, however, are increasingly worried about the effects that the secularization and individualization processes may have on the cohesion of Dutch society. They regard the present situation as being a culturally 'dark' era because relatively few people and organizations are still trying to maintain an explicit relation between their religious and other beliefs and social and political action. This might even be an explanation for the widening 'confidence gap' between Dutch citizens and the Dutch political system about which a number of Dutch politicians and political commentators have become increasingly concerned over the last few years (Van Gunsteren and Andeweg, 1994). Because of the de-pillarization process, Dutch people are finding it increasingly difficult to relate to parties and politicians that in their eyes have become too technocratic.

No matter to which 'school' one belongs in this respect, however, there can be no doubt that, despite the organizational and quantitative changes that have taken place during the last twenty years, the Netherlands remains a country of religious and political minorities. Roman Catholicism, the

Reformation, and Humanism still constitute the three main foundation stones on which Dutch society and civilization are built, although – like most of its neighbours – the Netherlands has gradually become more multicultural in the post-1945 period because of immigration.

Since the subcultures structured almost every aspect of social and political life, it is only natural that the birth of Dutch political parties was very much tied to the development of the pillars. Yet, it is not possible to fully comprehend the process of party formation, without first paying attention to the fact that in the first half of the nineteenth century one could already speak of a conservative–liberal dichotomy in parliament. The liberals were clearly the dominant group. Among other things they were, with J.R. Thorbecke as their renowned leader, the driving force behind the amendments to the Dutch constitution of 1840 and 1848 by which modern parliamentary government was introduced. In the latter stages of the nineteenth century, however, liberalism gradually became dominant in many other sectors of society as well, including the economy and the churches. Despite, or maybe partly because of, their dominant position, the Liberals have traditionally remained less organized than the three other groups in Dutch society (Taal, 1980; Daalder and Koole, 1988).

Thus, the first liberal party was formed only in 1885, and that was mainly in reaction to the formation of the religious parties. In addition, until the Second World War, and again after 1966, there have been at least two separate liberal parties because of differences of opinion with regard to universal suffrage and the role of the state in social and economic life among other things. The most important of these were the conservative–liberal Liberal Union (LU, since 1921 called Liberal State Party or LSP) and the progressive–liberal Radical Democratic League (VDB, founded in 1901).

Meanwhile, around 1850 an orthodox Protestant historian and statesman named G. Groen van Prinsterer began to free himself ideologically and politically from the rival political group, the conservatives. In this process, that had already started in the 1830s and that can only be explained against the background of the complex religious and theological climate of those years, the lectures he gave for friends during the winter of 1845–46 on the topic of 'Unbelief and Revolution' played an important role (Groen van Prinsterer, 1922 [1847]). Although Groen van Prinsterer would sit practically alone in parliament for another two decades, he indirectly laid the foundations for what, in 1879, became the first national party organization in Holland, the orthodox Protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) (De Wilde and Smeenk, 1949). By then, the conservative group in parliament had virtually disappeared (Lucardie, 1988).

The name Anti-Revolutionary Party referred to the French Revolution, which because of the principle of *ni Dieu, ni maître*, was interpreted as a revolt

against God. Its first leader was the charismatic A. Kuyper, who had also authored the party's first programme.

By 1894, De Savornin Lohman, the parliamentary leader, and several other more conservative members had left the Anti-Revolutionary Party, with universal suffrage, as in the case of the liberals, being one of the main divisive issues. In 1908, this group joined with two other small religious parties to form a second orthodox Protestant party: the more theocratic Christian-Historical Union (CHU) (Van Spanning, 1988). While most adherents of the Christian-Historical Union belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church, the Anti-Revolutionary Party drew its support largely from the Calvinist churches that had been founded by Kuyper in 1892.

Although a Roman Catholic State Party (RKSP) was not formally established until 1926, the Catholics were the second group within the Dutch population to begin to organize itself politically (Rogier and De Rooy, 1953). Originally, the Catholic members of parliament had worked closely with the liberals. The main reason for this was that the Catholics had been discriminated against in the time of the Republic (1579–1795), when the orthodox Protestants had, despite their minority status culturally and economically, been the dominant group and had acted very much as if the Netherlands was a Protestant country. The Catholics expected, not without reason, to benefit from their political co-operation with the liberals as the latter were preparing the constitutional amendments of 1840 and 1848 which not only paved the way for modern parliamentary government but also included the introduction of a bill of religious and other rights.

As a result, despite an emotional appeal from a number of orthodox Protestants to the king, the episcopal hierarchy was reintroduced in the Netherlands in 1853. During the 1860s, however, Catholics and liberals gradually grew apart. One reason for this was that the Vatican, as well as the Dutch bishops, began to seek the establishment of Catholic schools, something which the liberals opposed. Another reason was that the liberals successfully tried to end the official diplomatic ties that existed between the Netherlands and the Vatican. Also more generally, the liberals became increasingly anti-clerical. Following the example of Kuyper, in 1883 a poet and priest by the name of H.J.A.M. Schaepman devised the first Catholic political programme. Yet, as mentioned above, it would take until 1926 before the first Catholic party was formally founded.

One explanation for this was that the Catholics long remained hesitant about involving themselves directly in politics after they had been discriminated against for centuries. A second reason is that, for the Catholics, political action was and has always remained, less central than activities in other sectors of society. In this, they differed from the orthodox Protestants and, to a lesser extent, the socialists.

Not only did the orthodox Protestants and Catholics start to organize themselves politically in the second half of the nineteenth century but they also began to co-operate closely in parliament and the cabinet in the so-called Coalition. This was a remarkable development because it occurred in a country in which orthodox Protestants and Catholics had gone their separate ways for centuries and in a period when no ecumenical contacts whatsoever between their respective churches existed. The fact that the Coalition was formed can to a large extent be attributed to the common goal of the provision of public subsidies for religious schools that the two groups shared, but as so often the good personal relations between Kuyper and De Savornin Lohman, on the one hand, and Schaepman, on the other hand, were instrumental as well.

The Coalition of orthodox Protestants and Catholics resulted in a number of cabinets especially those after the First World War, and it did not break up definitively until 1939. Before that, during the 1930s, the Anti-Revolutionary Prime Minister, H. Colijn, had occasionally broadened the Coalition by including the liberals, something he had been in favour of since at least 1913 (Puchinger, 1969; 1980; 1993a).

The secular working class finally organized itself in the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP, founded in 1894), with P.J. Troelstra as its first leader (Perry *et al.*, 1994). A socialist party had already existed before 1894 (the SDB, founded in 1882) but under the leadership of F. Domela Nieuwenhuis, however, this party had developed more and more in an anarchist direction. Until the Second World War, the socialists remained in opposition at the national level because they were generally considered to be too radical and too anti-monarchist to participate in government. Immediately after the First World War, in 1918, they were even accused, wrongly, of staging a revolutionary uprising.

This situation changed in the 1930s, when the Social Democratic Workers' Party officially abandoned Marxism and turned more towards personalism and socialist planning. In 1937, it adopted a reformist programme of basic principles that finally made the party acceptable as a coalition partner for the Roman Catholic State Party in particular as well as the Christian-Historical Union whose relationship with the Anti-Revolutionary Party had deteriorated during the 1930s.

The Anti-Revolutionary Party had developed in a more conservative direction, whereas the Roman Catholic State Party as well as the Christian-Historical Union had gradually advocated more progressive policies in order to combat the international economic recession. There had, however, been a growing number of differences of opinion between the religious parties already since 1917, when the common goal of public subsidies for religious schools had been achieved. In 1939, a cabinet of Christian Historicals and

Roman Catholics was formed, a cabinet that also contained two socialists for the first time. In addition, there was one minister with an Anti-Revolutionary background in this cabinet against the will of the leadership of the ARP.

On the basis of the above, then, we can conclude that between 1879 and 1940 the Netherlands had a multi-party system and a multi-dimensional party system. This is particularly the case since only the major political parties have been mentioned above. *Within* all three pillars, in addition, there were also several smaller parties (Lucardie, 1991). The most important of these within the orthodox Protestant pillar were the Political Reformed Party (SGP, founded in 1918 and currently the oldest political party in the Netherlands), and after 1945, the Reformed Political League (GPV) and the Reformed Political Federation (RPF).

Within the socialist pillar, there were the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPH, later CPN) and, after 1945, the Pacifist Socialist Party (PSP). Although from time to time there have also been smaller parties within both the Catholic and the liberal pillars, these parties have generally been more short-lived. At the parliamentary elections of 1933, a record number of 54 party lists was submitted, 14 of which eventually proved successful.

If we count the liberal parties as being one, however, only five parties were strictly 'relevant'. Of the two traditional cleavages in Dutch society until 1940, religion was politically the most important although, especially during the economic recession of the 1930s, it became increasingly clear that important changes were under way (Koole and ten Napel, 1991).

Contextual variables

As is clear from the above section on history, the multi-party system and the multi-dimensional party system that the Netherlands has known since the second half of the nineteenth century, were mainly the result of the plural character of Dutch society. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that between 1848 and 1917 the Netherlands had a single member district system. Of course, the introduction of a system of proportional representation in which the country was treated as a single electoral district and universal suffrage in the latter year (universal suffrage for men was introduced in 1917 and for women in 1919) made it easier for new political parties to gain seats, especially since the Dutch electoral system is one of the most proportional systems in the world (Daalder, 1975). Yet, it should nevertheless be emphasized that around eight different political groups were already represented in the Dutch parliament at the turn of the century.

The introduction of proportional representation and universal suffrage had a noticeable impact on the relative strengths of the parties. More

specifically, the liberals were reduced in size after 1917, whereas the three major religious parties together acquired an absolute majority of the seats in the second chamber which they did not relinquish again until 1967. Just as the nineteenth century can be characterized as the liberal century in Dutch politics in many ways, the twentieth century was to become the century in which the Christian parties played a pivotal role.

Before 1917, cabinets had comprised either the liberal parties (which together with the socialists constituted the Left in Dutch politics) or the religious parties that represented the Right. Between 1917 and 1994 in particular, the Catholics participated in every cabinet, except in the short-lived Colijn V cabinet in 1939, initially together with the two major orthodox Protestant parties but increasingly also with either the liberals, or the socialists, or both.

It is interesting to note that, despite repeated attempts at political and administrative reform, the electoral system as well as other contextual variables (Müller, 1993) have remained largely unchanged since 1917. Compared with several other Western European countries, the Netherlands can therefore said to be characterized by a relatively high degree of institutional conservatism (Andeweg, 1989). Only very recently, after the formation of the first coalition without the Christian Democrats since 1917 (see later), modest proposals have been put forward by the present Kok cabinet for a reform of the electoral system (with the German electoral system acting as the main source for inspiration) and, more importantly, the introduction of a corrective referendum at national level. According to some authors, it is likely that in the near future elements of direct democracy such as referendums and initiatives but also new techniques like 'deliberative' polling will either be introduced or gain in importance (see, for example, Beedham, 1993). One of the interesting things about such a development would be that, as Lijphart himself has argued (1984), referendums and other elements of direct democracy are not specifically related to the characteristics of either model of democracy that we set out at the start of this chapter.

Therefore, the distinction between majoritarian and consensus democracies in Western Europe might well become more and more diffuse if this were to happen. Such convergence is, of course, also likely to occur as a result of the continuing process of European integration. For the time being, however, it remains to be seen whether there will in fact be a parliamentary majority even for the modest proposals for institutional reform of the Kok cabinet. There is a general feeling that, in order to achieve such support, any proposals will have to be limited. Therefore, even if adopted, the reforms are not likely to have a significant impact on the political system in general and the party system in particular.

As far as the individual political parties are concerned, over the past decades, there has been a significant drop in the membership figures for almost all parties. At present, only about 3 per cent of the Dutch population is a member of a political party, compared to approximately 10 per cent in the early 1960s. It should be emphasized, however, that this apparent 'decline' of parties does not necessarily imply 'the end of party'.

Given the fact that some form of representation will remain necessary in the future, it is more likely that what we are really witnessing is a transformation from the traditional 'mass bureaucratic party' to what Ruud Koole has called the 'modern cadre party' (1992; 1994). At present, nobody seems to long for the 'electoral-professional party' (Panebianco, 1988). On the contrary, a sharper, instead of a more diffuse ideological profile for the traditional political parties, might be one of the potential remedies when it comes to closing the widely perceived confidence gap between Dutch citizens and the political system.

The post-war party system

Following the Second World War, a second major attempt at a 'breakthrough' in the Dutch party system was launched by the Social Democrats. The main reason for this was that, as a result of pillarization, they could only appeal to non-religious voters. Therefore, unlike in neighbouring countries, they were not able to attract more than 20 to 25 per cent of the national vote. More specifically, the Social Democrats tried to reintroduce the two party system and the one-dimensional party system that the Netherlands had known in the first part of the nineteenth century. Like the earlier attempt undertaken by Groen van Prinsterer around 1850, however, this second 'breakthrough' initially remained unsuccessful.

Before long, after the possibility of forming a unified, Protestant People's Party had briefly been discussed, the two major orthodox Protestant parties re-emerged as separate parties, whereas the Roman Catholic State Party merely changed its name to the Catholic People's Party (KVP). As a result, although an ideologically somewhat broader formation, the Labour Party (PvdA) which was founded in 1946 closely resembled its immediate predecessor, the Social Democratic Workers' Party.

This was even more the case, after P.J. Oud together with a small group of other progressive Liberals, who had formerly belonged to the Radical Democratic League but had joined the Labour Party after 1945, became disenchanted and left the party again in 1947. A year later, this group of progressive Liberals joined with the conservative Party of Freedom (PvdV, founded in 1945 as the successor to the Liberal State Party) to form the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD).

Thus, after 1945, the Netherlands retained its multi-party system as well as its multi-dimensionality. At this point, the major parties of the Catholic, the orthodox Protestant, the socialist, and the liberal pillars were, respectively, the Catholic People's Party; the Anti-Revolutionary Party and the Christian-Historical Union; the Labour Party and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy. Together, these five system parties used to win between 86 and 92 per cent of the national vote during the first two decades after 1945 (see Table 9.1).

As far as the importance of the two traditional cleavages in Dutch society are concerned, however, there was a change in that after the Second World War social class became the most important cleavage for a while as the central issues of this period included the reconstruction of the country after the war and the establishment of the welfare state. That social class had become the most important cleavage was illustrated by the fact that the terms 'right' and 'left' that had earlier stood for, respectively, the 'religious' and the 'non-religious' parties, now came to mean 'conservative' and 'progressive' in socio-economic terms.

Partly as a result, there was once again, as in 1917, a significant change as far as the composition of the cabinets was concerned (see Table 9.2). The Social Democrats, who had entered government for the first time in 1939, continued to take part in a series of broad 'Roman-Red' coalitions in the years immediately following the war. From 1948 to 1958, these cabinets were headed by a socialist prime minister, W. Drees. Between 1959 and 1989, however, the three religious parties mostly worked together (24 out of 30 years) with the liberals.

Some have argued that this was only natural since the Catholic Party in particular was not so much a centre party but a party of the right (in the socio-economic meaning of the term) and they were thus ideologically closer to the liberals than to the socialists (Daudt, 1980). Others, however, have correctly pointed out that this relatively long period of isolation between 1959 and 1989 was at least partly the socialists' own fault. More specifically, the relationship between the religious parties and the Labour Party inevitably suffered from the polarization strategy adopted by the latter party in the 1960s and 1970s. This will be dealt with in more detail later on.

Because of the importance of the socio-economic cleavage, the Labour Party and (conservative) liberals worked together in only two cabinets, Drees I (1948–51) and Drees II (1951–52). From 1959 onwards, they more or less explicitly excluded the possibility of their co-operating within the cabinet, thus making it much easier for the Catholic People's Party to play its pivotal role in Dutch politics than would otherwise have been the case.

With the advantage of hindsight, it is possible to argue that a first indication of the changes that were to come in the 1960s and 1970s was the

Table 9.1 Dutch election results, 1946–98

Party	1946	1948	1952	1956	1959	1963	1967	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
KVP	30.8	31.0	28.7	31.7	31.6	31.9	26.5	21.8	17.7							
ARP	12.9	13.2	11.3	9.9	9.4	8.7	9.9	8.6	8.8							
CHU	7.8	9.2	8.9	8.4	8.1	8.6	8.1	6.3	4.8							
CDA										31.9	30.8	29.4	34.6	35.3	22.2	
SGP	2.1	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.7	1.9	1.7	1.8
PvdA	28.3	25.6	29.0	32.7	30.4	28.0	23.6	24.6	27.3	33.8	28.3	30.4	33.3	31.9	24.0	29.0
CPN	10.6	7.7	6.2	4.7	2.4	2.8	3.6	3.9	4.7	1.7	2.1	1.8	0.6	–	–	–
PvdV	6.4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–							
VVD	–	7.9	8.8	8.8	12.2	10.3	10.7	10.3	14.4	17.9	17.3	23.1	17.4	14.6	20.0	24.7
KNP	–	1.3	2.7	–	–	–	–	–	–							
GPV	–	–	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.9	1.6	1.8	1.0	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.3
PSP	–	–	–	–	1.8	3.0	2.9	1.4	1.5	0.9	2.1	2.3	1.2	–	–	–
BP	–	–	–	–	0.7	2.1	4.8	1.1	1.9	0.8	–	–	–	–	–	–
D66							4.5	6.8	4.2	5.4	11.1	4.3	6.1	7.9	15.5	9.0
PPR										1.7	2.0	1.7	1.3	–	–	–
DS'70										0.7	–	–	–	–	–	–
RKPN										0.4	–	–	–	–	–	–
RPF										–	1.2	1.5	0.9	1.0	1.8	2.0
EVP										–	0.5	0.7	0.2	–	–	–
Centre										–	0.1	0.8	0.4	0.9	2.5	0.6
GL										–	–	–	–	4.1	3.5	7.3
AOV										–	–	–	–	–	3.6	0.5
Unie 55+										–	–	–		–	0.9	0.5
SP										–	–	0.5	0.4	0.4	1.3	3.5

Table 9.1 *contd.*

Source: Andeweg and Irwin, 1993: 105; Daalder and Schuyt, 1986: A1300-27 (supplemented for 1998).

Key to party abbreviations

AOV	Aged League
ARP	Anti-Revolutionary Party
BP	Farmer's Party
CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal
Centre	Centre Party/Centre Democrats
CHU	Christian-Historical Union
CPN	Communist Party
D'66	Democrats '66
DS'70	Democratic Socialists '70
EVP	Evangelical People's Party
GL	Green Left
GPV	Reformed Political League
KNP	Catholic National Party
KVP	Catholic People's Party
NMP	Dutch Middle Class Party
PPR	Radical Party
PSP	Pacifist Socialist Party
PvdA	Labour Party
PvdV	Party of Freedom
RKPN	Roman Catholic Party of the Netherlands
RPF	Reformed Political Federation
SGP	Political Reformed Party
SP	Socialist Party
Unie 55+	Union of those 55 or older
VVD	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy

Table 9.2 Government composition in the Netherlands, 1945–94

Date installed	Prime Minister	Composition[1]
24 June 1945	Schermerhorn	*PvdA*/KVP/ARP/np
3 July 1946	Beel I	PvdA/*KVP*/np
7 August 1948	Drees I	*PvdA*/KVP/CHU/VVD/np
15 March 1951	Drees II	*PvdA*/KVP/CHU/VVD/np
2 September 1952	Drees III	*PvdA*/KVP/ARP/CHU/np
13 October 1956	Drees IV	*PvdA*/KVP/ARP/CHU
22 December 1958	Beel II	*KVP*/ARP/CHU
19 May 1959	De Quay	*KVP*/ARP/CHU/VVD
24 July 1963	Marijnen	*KVP*/ARP/CHU/VVD
14 April 1965	Cals	PvdA/*KVP*/ARP
22 November 1966	Zijlstra	KVP/*ARP*
5 April 1967	De Jong	*KVP*/ARP/CHU/VVD
6 July 1971	Biesheuvel I	KVP/*ARP*/CHU/VVD/DS70
20 July 1972	Biesheuvel II	KVP/*ARP*/CHU/VVD
11 May 1973	Den Uyl	PPR/*PvdA*/D66/KVP/ARP
19 December 1977	Van Agt I	*CDA*/VVD
11 September 1981	Van Agt II	PvdA/D66/*CDA*
29 May 1982	Van Agt III	D66/*CDA*
4 November 1982	Lubbers I	*CDA*/VVD
14 July 1986	Lubbers II	*CDA*/VVD
7 November 1989	Lubbers III	PvdA/*CDA*
22 August 1994	Kok	*PvdA*/D66/VVD

[1] Party of the Prime Minister in *italics*; np = non-partisan.

Source: Andeweg and Irwin, 1993: 119 (supplemented for 1994)

formation of the Farmers' Party (BP), a rightist protest party in the late 1950s. More importantly, in 1966 a party called Democrats '66 (D'66) was founded. Over the years, this party has developed into a progressive–liberal system party not unlike the pre-War Radical Democratic League, as opposed to the conservative–liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy. The original purpose of D'66, however, was to 'explode' the pillarized party system.

Apart from the Farmers' Party and Democrats '66, several other 'new' parties were to enter the Dutch parliament during the 1960s and the 1970s such as the Pacifist Socialist Party (PSP), which had gained two seats in 1959 already, the Radical Party (PPR) and the Democratic Socialists '70 (DS'70).

As in other Western European countries and the United States, new 'post-materialist' issues such as the environment, peace, and the need for individual self-expression suddenly appeared on the political agenda. As will become clear later on, however, in the end, these issues would not replace religion and social class as the two most important cleavages in Dutch politics.

Change and adaptation

By the time Democrats '66 was founded, the traditional pillars in Dutch society had already started to crumble (Blom and Van der Plaat, 1986; Irwin and Van Holsteyn, 1989a; 1989b). As far as political life is concerned, the parliamentary election of 1967 marked a turning point. Until 1994, the election of 1967 was the only really 'historic' national election the Netherlands had experienced since the introduction of the system of proportional representation and universal suffrage in 1917.

The election of 1967 was important for a number of reasons, particularly because the three religious parties lost their combined parliamentary majority which they had enjoyed continuously for 50 years. Second, the Catholic People's Party especially lost votes dramatically. In just nine years, between 1963 and 1972, the party lost almost half its seats in parliament. Third, the Labour Party also reached a historic low point of 23.6 per cent of the vote. Fourth, the liberals, who had always opposed the principle of pillarization because of their conviction that religion was and had to remain essentially a private matter, gained one seat. Fifth, both the new Farmers' Party and Democrats '66 were highly successful in 1967.

Partly because of the heavy vote losses of the religious parties, in particular the progressive parties, but to a certain extent also the liberals, adopted the so-called 'polarization strategy' (Daalder, 1986; Tromp, 1989). By doing away with the 'accommodationist' political style of the 1940s and 1950s, it was hoped by the progressive parties that the electorate would be forced into two opposing camps. The religious parties would then either have to choose co-operation with the left-wing parties or with the right-wing parties. In either case, they would split and, as a result, disappear. The main purpose of this strategy was therefore to achieve the 'breakthrough' in the party system which had ultimately failed immediately after the Second World War.

Once again, these efforts turned out to be in vain, however, and eventually even counter-productive. They were counter-productive because the relatively hostile political environment proved to be an extra stimulus for the merger of the two major orthodox Protestant parties and the Catholic People's Party into the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) in 1980. Other incentives for co-operation between the three parties that had formerly belonged to two different pillars included the clearly decreasing hold which the Anti-Revolutionary Party, the Christian-Historical Union and the Catholic People's Party had upon their respective Protestant and Catholic electorates and the wish of important portions of the Catholic and orthodox Protestant subcultures to nevertheless maintain an explicit relation between the Christian faith and political action.

In addition, the fact that the leaders of the three parties had come to know each other in the *Nouvelles Equipes Internationales* (the European Christian Democratic Movement) and the strong desire within all three parties for co-operation at the municipal and provincial levels were significant (ten Napel, 1992; see also Lucardie and ten Napel, 1994). This merger of the three religious parties into the Christian Democratic Appeal can be regarded as the single most important party political renewal in the Netherlands since the Second World War.

Although the Christian Democrats have no longer occupied a majority position in parliament but only about one third of the seats since 1967, they have been able to maintain their strong position in the centre of Dutch politics and even strengthen their crucial role during cabinet formations by merging. As a result, until 1994, it proved to be impossible to form a national coalition without the Christian Democrats. A similar attempt by Democrats '66, the Labour Party and the Radical Party to form a progressive people's party failed in the early 1970s.

After a brief *intermezzo*, the Den Uyl cabinet of 1973–77 in which the Socialists worked together with representatives from the Catholic People's Party and the Anti-Revolutionary Party, the Christian Democrats between 1977 and 1989 largely maintained their co-operation with the liberals that had started in 1959, with the main issue now being the crisis of the welfare state.

In 1986, the Christian Democrats even openly announced before the elections that they wanted to continue the prevailing coalition for the first time in Dutch parliamentary history. Paradoxically, this polarization strategy of the right, as it has been called, did not lead to a split within the Christian Democratic party, but instead to a 'landslide' victory of nine seats. Moreover, for the first time, the Christian Democratic Appeal proved able to attract a substantial number of non-religious voters. At least in part, this was made possible by the popularity of the then prime minister and leader of the CDA, Ruud Lubbers (ten Napel, 1995).

In 1989, however, the parliamentary caucus of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) withdrew its support from the second Lubbers cabinet. After the liberals had been defeated in the elections that were subsequently held, a third Lubbers cabinet was formed which consisted of Christian Democrats and Labour. By that time, the Labour Party had distanced itself through a series of programmatic and organizational reviews from the style and postures adopted in the late 1960s and the 1970s, notably and in particular the polarization strategy (Wolinetz, 1993). In a sense, this coalition of Christian Democrats and Labour therefore appeared to mark the end of a period of relative turmoil in Dutch politics and the return to the system of consociational or consensus democracy that had existed until the

1960s. Particularly at the start, this cabinet was sometimes compared to the series of broad 'Roman-Red' coalitions headed by Drees between 1948 and 1958.

In 1994, however, the Christian Democratic and Labour system parties performed especially poorly in the second chamber elections. The Christian Democratic Appeal suffered an unprecedented loss of 13 per cent of the national vote, whereas the Labour Party was back at its historic low point of 1967 with a mere 24 per cent of the vote (a loss of 8 per cent). The post-materialist Democrats '66, on the other hand, performed so well that it actually doubled in size. The conservative–liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) also gained 5.4 per cent of the vote. It had now become clear that the conservative liberals were the main party to gain from the process of de-pillarization.

Although, as we saw above, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy suffered electoral losses during the second half of the 1980s as a result of leadership problems (after having polled 23.1 per cent in 1982), it won 20 per cent of the vote in the national elections in 1994 as against barely 8 per cent in 1948 (see Table 9.1). In the provincial elections of 1995, which cannot of course be directly compared to second chamber elections, this percentage had rocketed to an astonishing 27.2 per cent. Given these figures, it is hardly surprising that the charismatic leader of the parliamentary party of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, Bolkestein, was widely considered to be a serious candidate to succeed Kok as prime minister, if the former's party were to become the largest party at the 1998 election. This turned out not to be the case, however.

For Labour, the corresponding figures are 24 per cent in 1994 as against 28.3 per cent in 1946 and for the Christian Democrats, 22.2 per cent in 1994 as against 51.5 per cent in 1946. One further remarkable development was, that, in 1994, two new 'single issue' parties entered parliament, the Aged League (AOV) and the Union of those 55 or older (Unie 55+).

It is still difficult to interpret what really happened in 1994. It is certain, however, that specific events played a significant role, particularly in the loss that the Christian Democratic Appeal suffered. Several of these incidents were a direct result of the rapidly deteriorating personal and political relationship between the Christian Democratic Prime Minister Lubbers, who had already indicated in 1990 that he did not want to continue his job after the next election, and his successor, Brinkman, whom Lubbers had himself appointed. This led to increasing tensions between the parliamentary party of the CDA in the Second Chamber, under the leadership of Brinkman, and the Christian Democratic ministers in the Lubbers III cabinet.

In the end, it was unclear for many Christian Democratic voters whether, by voting for the Christian Democratic Appeal, they would be supporting the

Centre–Left policies of the Lubbers III cabinet or the more conservative policies advocated by the parliamentary party. In the case of the Labour Party, their heavy electoral loss can at least in part be attributed to the manner in which they handled the revision of the disability law in 1993.

Structural factors, however, are also likely to have played a role. In particular, it can be argued that, once again, there was a change with regard to the relative importance of the two traditional cleavages in Dutch society, in that social class lost some of the prominence it had as a cleavage during most of the post-war period. As in other Western European countries, the Dutch Labour Party has been so successful in achieving their original political goals that they have, in a sense, become a party without a 'heartland'. The old working class has virtually disappeared, although it can be argued that because of technological developments (with the advent of 'the information age'), new forms of inequality are already emerging.

Religion, on the other hand, still plays a crucial role in Dutch politics and society and it may once again become the most important cleavage as the Netherlands enters the twenty-first century, even though quantitatively speaking the Catholics and orthodox Protestants are significantly smaller in number than in the nineteenth century. Moreover, while at present, still half of the Dutch population regards itself as 'Christian', according to some researchers, this percentage will have dropped to about 20 per cent in the year 2020 (Becker and Vink, 1994).

Consequently, one of the most hotly debated issues in Dutch politics today is whether, as a result of processes of secularization and individualization, the Netherlands is gradually disintegrating as a society. As was argued in a report by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), there used to be four social groups or pillars. Now there appear to be about 15 million individuals (*Eigentijds burgerschap*, 1992).

As a result, a new cultural dichotomy has gradually developed between the liberal parties, who regard the development of society since the 1960s as predominantly positive and the Christian Democrats who tend to emphasize the potential risks and are therefore more pessimistic in their outlook. In this sense, the Christian Democratic Appeal is a communitarian party, although the ideological differences between communitarians like Amitai Etzioni and Alasdair MacIntyre, on the one hand, and Christian Democratic political philosophies, on the other, should not be underestimated.

The intriguing question is which position Labour will eventually choose in this controversy. At present, the party seems to be paralysed by the tensions between its liberal and communitarian wings. The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy also has a communitarian wing which is currently relatively weak, however.

The renewed importance of the religious or cultural cleavage is demonstrated by the fact that after the elections of 1994 a so-called 'purple' (PvdA red and VVD blue mixed together) coalition of conservative and progressive Liberals and Labour was formed. Apparently, the traditional socio-economic differences between in particular the Labour Party and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy have become so small that the possibility of them working together in cabinet no longer needs to be definitively excluded.

Consequently, if the national election of 1967 was the first 'historic' election after the introduction of a system of proportional representation and universal suffrage in 1917 because the religious parties lost their combined parliamentary majority, the election of 1994 might well be called the second 'historic' election because the Christian Democrats lost their pivotal position in the process of government formation. One could indeed argue, that the attempt at a 'breakthrough' of the existing party system launched by Labour after the Second World War has finally been successful, even though the liberals are the main party to gain.

It is tempting to draw a comparison between the present political and religious climate and that of the first half of the nineteenth century. Once again, liberalism is dominant. Once again, the Christian Democrats are in opposition to liberalism and the spirit of the French Revolution, the latter in a sense being represented by the coalition of Labour, and conservative (VVD) and progressive (D'66) liberals.

Yet, if one looks carefully, there are already signs that the policies advocated by more or less communitarian parties like the Christian Democratic Appeal and (depending on the outcome of the internal power struggle between its liberal and communitarian wings) the Labour Party might gain popularity once more.

In addition, social class is not likely to completely disappear as a cleavage, and the liberals have an important role to play in the battle against post-modernism, in particular the idea that western political systems are entering a kind of post-institutional era (Guéhenno 1993). This, in combination with the fact that the three traditional groups in Dutch society are still in evidence, reinforces the expectation that the four major Dutch parties will all have important roles to play in the years ahead.

Conclusion: resilience amidst change

The concept of the 'core' of a party system as developed by Gordon Smith seems to be particularly useful as a means of describing the developments which have taken place in the Dutch party system since the Second World War. In an article published in the *Journal of Theoretical Politics* in 1989, Smith concluded that:

> What emerges from a review of a cross-section of recent West European experience is that, whatever else may be changing, the essential core of party systems is remarkably unscathed. Typically, we can observe a three-stage process:
>
> 1. an initial *reverse* suffered by some or all of the core parties as new parties gain support and electoral volatility rises;
> 2. a period of *flux* with the core parties in disarray and adopting strategies of adaptation;
> 3. finally a *restabilization*, the core parties recovering at least a substantial part of their electorate and able to reassert their governing position.
>
> (1989a: 361–2)

As far as the Netherlands is concerned, it can indeed be argued that there have been reverses suffered by several core parties – in particular the Christian Democrats and Labour (in the late 1960s), then a period of flux (the 1970s) and a restabilization of the party system (in the 1980s). Clearly, there has been no complete reversion to the *status quo ante*, if only because the Christian Democrats have recently lost their pivotal position in Dutch politics and the Labour Party was back at a historic low point as well in 1994. In this sense, Wolinetz was certainly correct when he wrote that '[t]he Dutch party system provides fertile ground for exploring party system change' (1988: 130).

There has indeed been party system change in the sense that 'as a result of ideological, strategic, or electoral shifts, there is a transformation of the direction of competition or the governing formula' (Mair, 1989: 257). What is even more striking, however, is the resilience of the party system. Without doubt, the core of the Dutch party system as defined in this chapter has been preserved (Smith, 1989a: 358–9; 1989b). In this sense, the subtitle of a volume on Dutch politics that was published in 1989, *Politics in the Netherlands: How Much Change?* (Daalder and Irwin, 1989), still applies, suggesting as it does both that there have been changes, and that doubts are legitimately possible as to whether there is not also a high degree of continuity.

One of the contributors to that volume, Arend Lijphart, concluded that even without all the measuring that he had performed:

> the adoption of a broad comparative perspective readily shows that the changes in the operation of Dutch democracy should not be exaggerated. The overall pattern of the new Dutch politics in the 1967–88 period still looks a great deal more like the old 1946–67 Dutch politics than like British or New Zealand politics. The Netherlands has merely moved from the politics of accommodation to the politics of relatively less accommodation and relatively more adversarial relations – and it clearly does not qualify yet to be a member of the family of adversarial and majoritarian democracies.
>
> (1989: 151)

Although more recent evidence suggests that the Netherlands is no longer one of the most consensual European democracies, this is largely a result of

developments in other countries. According to Mair (1994b: 99, 121), the character of Dutch politics itself has not changed dramatically in the past twenty years, and in any case continues to be consensual. More specifically, the Netherlands appears to have retained its century-old multi-party system as well as its multi-dimensionality. Because of the merger of the three religious parties, on the one hand, and the success of Democrats '66, on the other, there are now four instead of five major parties. Together, however, these traditional parties provided further evidence of long-term stability (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Mair, 1993), attracting a remarkable 81.7 per cent of the vote in 1994.

One relatively small change to note is that, in 1989, the Communist Party of the Netherlands joined with three other small Leftist parties (the Pacifist Socialist Party, the Radical Party and the Evangelical People's Party that was formed in the 1970s as a protest against the merger of the three confessional parties in the Christian Democratic Appeal) to form the Green Left (GL). In the 1998 parliamentary elections, this combination polled 7.3 per cent. The extreme left-wing Socialist Party (SP) polled 3.5 per cent whereas the extreme right-wing Centre Democrats are not represented any longer in parliament. The Aged League and the Union of Those 55 or Older started to disintegrate almost immediately after the 1994 election had taken place, whereas the three smaller religious parties are more or less stable.

It remains to be seen therefore whether the outcome of the parliamentary election of 1994 and the formation of the first cabinet without Christian Democrats since 1917, has marked the beginning of an era of more or less radical change in the Dutch political and party system. After the substantial gains by the Labour Party and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy of 5 and 4.7 per cent respectively, and the renewed loss of the Christian Democrats of 3.8 per cent in 1998, there is increasing speculation about the latter being reduced to the status of a 'non-relevant' party. It has been one of the underlying theses of this chapter, however, that what we have experienced thus far is merely another change in the relative importance of the two traditional cleavages in Dutch politics, namely, religion and social class. The overall conclusion must be that, although there has been party system change in the Netherlands, the party system has also demonstrated a high degree of resilience in terms of the parties that comprise its stable and enduring core.