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Dutch politics: insights from the outside – introduction

Rudy B. Andeweg, Cees van der Eijk, Wil Hout

It is an undeniable, yet puzzling characteristic of comparative political science that views from the outside often have provided the most penetrating insights into political systems. Whenever one finds a truly good country-study, chances are that it was written by a scholar exogenous to that particular country: Eckstein on Norway, Hoffmann on France, La-Palombara on Italy, Rose on England, Rustow on Sweden, to name just a randomly chosen few.¹ What advantage did they have over local scholars? Cynics may wish to attribute the fame of these authors not so much to their insights, but rather to the fact that English was their mother tongue. Without denying the importance of English as the lingua franca of political science, this can be a partial explanation at most. After all, the most illustrious and best-known scholar who had provided us with 'insights from the outside' is the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *De la Démocratie en Amérique* (1835, 1840) became a classic about politics and society in the nineteenth-century United States.² A more recent example outside the Anglo-American linguistic community is Alfred Grosser, who has lived in France from his teens onward, and is now a leading authority on German politics.³

De Tocqueville wrote his study of American politics on the basis of a mere nine-month visit to the United States. Often, however, these scholars gave their insights from the outside, but not as complete outsiders: they returned to the country of their childhood or family origins, or they lived and worked inside the object of their study for a considerable time, sometimes as a result of what has become known as Verba's Law.⁴ Nevertheless, they brought something to their study that indigenous scholars could not: coming from another political culture and system they were saved from the myopia that often results from proximity to current political events. Moreover, even when writing single-country studies, they could not escape adopting, sometimes explicitly, more often implicitly, a comparative perspective.

The study of Dutch politics has also profited from this combination of distance and comparative perspective provided primarily by American, and to a lesser extent British and German, political scientists: Herman Bakvis, Dietmar Braun Samuel Eldersveld, Georg Geismann, Joseph Houska, Galen Irwin, M. Kent Jennings, Norbert Lepszy, Robert Morlan, Amy VandenBosch, John P. Windmuller, and the list is far from complete.⁵ However, the best-known example of 'insight from the outside' in the context of Dutch Politics, is without doubt Arend Lijphart, who was born in The Netherlands and spent his formative years here. After high school he left for the United States, and it is there that he received his training as a political scientist. Both his *The Trauma of Decolonization: the Dutch and West New Guinea* (New Haven 1966), and his famous *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley 1968, 1975) were written in the United States. *The Politics of Accommodation* was first published there before a Dutch translation appeared in the Netherlands. Lijphart's work has stimulated the study of Dutch politics by political scientists from other countries as not other work before or after *The Politics of Accommodation* had been able to do. Indeed, many of the authors mentioned above came to the Netherlands out of curiosity about consociational democracy.

This issue of *Acta Politica* is the final one of the twenty-fifth volume. Over the past twenty-five years *Acta Politica*, the Journal of the Dutch Political Science Association, has served as a forum for various opinions about Dutch politics, comparative politics, political theory, and general political science. Given the importance of 'insights from the outside' for the study of comparative politics in general, and Dutch politics in particular, the editors have judged this twenty-fifth anniversary an appropriate occasion to invite several renowned non-Dutch political scientists, who have done research and have published on aspects of Dutch politics, to write an essay on politics in the Netherlands. It is with considerable pride that the editors present the resulting essays in this issue. Each essay provides, in its own way, and with respect to different aspects of Dutch politics, 'insights from the outside'. K.R. Gladdish deals with government formation in the Netherlands. He investigates which patterns, norms and difficulties are characteristic of the formation of governments in the non-majoritarian Dutch political system. S.B. Wolinetz addresses himself to the problem of change in Dutch politics. He considers the characteristics of political socialization and communication, interest articulation and aggregation, and policy-making in the pre- and post-1967 phases in the Dutch political system. H. Kriesi adopts a more explicit comparative perspective on Dutch politics. In his article, he compares Dutch pillar-

ization and Swiss federalism as mechanisms of integration of culturally heterogeneous populations. B.C. Cohen compares the making of foreign policy in the United States and the Netherlands. He focuses on the role of political parties and investigates how the characteristics of the general political system affect and shape the behaviour of political parties with respect to foreign policy.

Notes

1. H. Eckstein, *Division and Cohesion in Democracy: a study of Norway*, Princeton 1966;
S. Hoffmann et al., *In Search of France*, Cambridge Mass. 1963, and S. Hoffmann, *Decline or Renewal: France since the 1930s*, New York 1974;
J. LaPalombara, *Interest Groups in Italian Politics*, Princeton 1964;
R. Rose, *Politics in England; Change and Persistence*, fifth ed., London 1989;
D.A. Rustow, *The Politics of Compromise: a study of Parties and Cabinet Governments in Sweden*, Princeton 1955.
2. A. de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1951.
3. A. Grosser, *Geschichte Deutschlands seit 1945: Eine Bilanz*, München 1974.
4. According to Sidney Verba, if you cannot figure out why a colleague is interested in a particular country, *cherchez la femme!*
5. In the space of a single footnote it is impossible to provide a comprehensive list of these authors' works on Dutch politics. A few examples have to suffice:
H. Bakvis, *Catholic Power in the Netherlands*, Kingston and Montreal 1981;
D. Braun, *Der Niederländische Weg in die Massenarbeitslosigkeit (1973-1981); eine politisch-institutionelle Analyse*, diss. Universiteit van Amsterdam 1988;
S.J. Eldersveld, J. Kooiman and Th. van der Tak, *Elite Images of Dutch Politics*, Ann Arbor, 1981 (see also VandenBosch);
G. Geismann, *Politische Struktur und Regierungssystem in den Niederlanden*, Frankfurt 1964;
J.J. Houska, *Influencing Mass Political Behavior: elites and political subcultures in The Netherlands and Austria*, Berkeley 1985;
G.A. Irwin, *The Dutch Party System*, in P. Merkl (ed.), *Western European Party Systems*, New York 1980, p. 161-84;
M.K. Jennings, *Partisan Commitment and Electoral Behavior in The Netherlands*, *Acta Politica* 7 (1972), p. 445-70;
N. Lepszy, *Regierung, Parteien und Gewerkschaften in den Niederlanden*, Düsseldorf 1979;
R.L. Morlan, *Local Government in the Netherlands*, *American Political Science Review* 52 (1958), p. 835-37;
Th. R. Rochon, *Mobilizers and Challengers: towards a theory of new party success*, *International Political Science Review* 6 (1985), p. 419-39;
A. VandenBosch and S.J. Eldersveld, *Government of the Netherlands*, Lexington 1947;
A. VandenBosch, *Dutch Foreign Policy since 1813: a study in small power politics*, The Hague 1959;
J.P. Windmuller, *Labor Relations in the Netherlands*, Ithaca 1969.