Stability and change in Dutch politics: introduction to the handbook

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CHAPTER 1

STABILITY AND CHANGE IN DUTCH POLITICS

Introduction to the Handbook

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Vale, the Dutch Politics of Accommodation?

Once upon a time, the Netherlands held a special position in the study of politics on the wings of Arend Lijphart's (1968) classic portrayal of its distinctive formula of elite accommodation, which helped turn a country with a social structure that might leave it bitterly divided and politically paralysed into a stable and well-functioning consensus democracy. Its way of making democracy work in a divided society made it an intriguing case within the empire of mainstream comparative politics, posing an implausible yet vigorous challenge to the then conventional understanding that (a) a majoritarian electoral system delivering two-party competition provided the most robust and effective form of 'polyarchy' (Dahl, 1971); (b) democracy/polyarchy stood little chance of survival in any country with deeply entrenched and mutually reinforcing social cleavages (Almond & Verba, 1963; Kriesi, 1998).

Though not without its critics (e.g. Daalder, 1974; Lijphart, 1984; Van Schendelen, 1983, 1984), Lijphart's gripping case study of the 1917 'grand bargain' between the key political groupings in the Netherlands, and his analysis of the subsequent decades of institutionalization of elite concertation as a political safety valve on top of entrenched pillarization of society along religious, class, and regional lines, which survived the Second World War and delivered prosperity in the first few post-war decades, became

a kind of bedrock political-science narrative about Dutch politics in the twentieth century. And although the sociodemographic and sociocultural basis underpinning the pillar system crumbled during its later decades, the system of centripetal elite bargaining and consensus seeking, buffeted by mechanisms and arenas for depoliticizing tricky issues, and intricate juggling of front-stage political posturing and back-stage pragmatist deal making, was largely maintained until well into the first decade of the twenty-first century (Timmermans & Andeweg, 2000).

Meanwhile, deep and rapid technological, ecosystemic, geopolitical, economic, and sociocultural changes have come to the fore, and have challenged the narratives, institutions, and practices of the Dutch political system. Voter behaviour has become more volatile than in the heyday of pillarization as voters have 'begun to choose' (Mair, 2008; Thomassen & Van Ham, 2014). Likewise, political trust in elites and institutions, traditionally very high by comparative standards, has moved up and (recently mostly) down (Bovens & Wille, 2008; De Blok & Brummel, 2022; Den Ridder et al., 2023; Snel et al., 2022). The Dutch party system has been in a state of flux, with numerous newcomers and breakaways, and a clearly discernible hollowing out of what was once its centrist core (Kessenich & Van der Brug, 2022; Pellikaan et al., 2018). These developments have led to unprecedented levels of political fragmentation, which have created renewed challenges to keeping the country governed.

Under the record-length prime ministership of Mark Rutte (2010–2024) these challenges have been managed by shifting the political composition of governing coalitions and by extremely tight coalition management practices (Louwerse & Timmermans, 2021). Critics allege the latter have undermined the dualist structure of the Dutch political system, in which there is an institutional separation between the legislature and the executive (Voermans, 2021). Under Dutch dualism, cabinet members are not members of parliament and are overwhelmingly recruited from outside parliamentary ranks. It presupposes that governments govern and that parliaments deliberate about the executive branch's legislative proposals, put forward proposals of their own, and hold governments to account—and also that parliamentarians form their views without fear or favour. In practice, monist pragmatism and coping mechanisms have always muddied the waters, though to different extents and in different ways at different points in time (Andeweg, 1992).

With parliamentary majorities in both houses of parliament having become elusive as of the 2010s, monism has made a comeback. Party discipline among MPs of governing parties has been high for several decades, and their political leaders in cabinet and parliament have been increasingly pre-cooking deals on every controversial item on the agenda. Moreover, they have also been reaching out to leaders of parties in opposition that are needed for upper house majorities. With its co-legislative and co-steering activities largely pre-empted by these practices, critics argue that the Dutch parliament has largely become a venue for vacuous political posturing and ever more exacting accountability rituals (Andeweg, 2008; Voermans, 2021). The traditionally subdued and business-like tone of parliamentary deliberations has been challenged by a higher incidence of straight-talking among MPs and members of government.

Polarizing figures have rattled the political establishment and challenged the implicit consensus about the bandwidth of what is considered acceptable political discourse. In the 2000s alone, these have included Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated by an animal rights activist in 2002 on the eve of what looked like an electoral triumph that could have seen him become prime minister; Thierry Baudet, who characterized the European Union (EU) as a 'cultural-Marxist' project and who has been accused of a range of political sins including anti-Semitism, misogyny, and taking money from Putin; and above all, anti-Islam, anti-immigration nationalist crusader Geert Wilders, who has lived under permanent police protection for two decades, has been convicted up to the Supreme Court for 'the insulting of social groups', and yet managed to score a resounding shock victory in the November 2023 parliamentary elections that set his party up for forming a rightist government coalition which took office in mid-2024.

In addition to these populist radical-right leaders, other new parties also entered parliament, such as an animal rights party, a farmers' party, a minority rights party, a pan-European party, and a social justice party. These parties reflect and politicize fault lines between the centre and periphery, urban and rural areas, lower- and higher-educated citizens, younger and older generations of citizens, and citizens with and without a migration background, and thereby also change parliamentary dynamics.

Clearly there are pressures upon and within the Dutch polity to move away from its tried-and-tested twentieth-century formula, but it is as yet unclear what it is gravitating towards. Are we witnessing the end of Dutch politics of accommodation, and a change towards a more politicized/competitive form of Dutch politics? It is hard to answer these questions in a simple and straightforward manner.

This Handbook is born out of the recognition that the cocktail of contextual and endemic changes may impinge differently on various Dutch political institutions, actors, arenas, and processes. It seeks to provide a comprehensive collection of thematic reviews investigating the trajectory of the many building blocks that make up the Dutch political system. For the overwhelming majority of the nearly 50 chapters in the Handbook, the big question in the background is whether, when, and where the system has faced critical junctures at which the once path-dependent 'way we do things around here' could be challenged, ditched, adapted, or reinvented.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, we set the stage for this venture. We begin by offering two 'snapshots' of Dutch society and its political system—one from the heyday of the politics of accommodation and one from the present moment, 60 years on. This provides the reader with a first and admittedly broad-brush picture of what might be the combination of stability and change in the key features of Dutch political life. We then survey how the study of Dutch politics—conducted mainly but certainly not exclusively by political scientists—has evolved over this same period. In the final part of this opening chapter, we present the design of this volume, the considerations that have gone into it, and the strengths and limitations of the exercise that flow from it. We shall also briefly showcase what is to come in each of the book's six constituent thematic parts.

Stories of Stability and Change

To paint a picture of the trajectory that Dutch society, its political system, and the process of governing the Netherlands has been on, we take two moments in time as markers: May 1963, when the first televised parliamentary election took place; and November 2023, when a campaign that was fought in both traditional and online social media landed the populist radical-right Freedom Party (PVV) an unprecedented quarter of the votes. At these two points in time, what mindsets and 'rules of engagement' shaped the political process? Comparing the two, what has endured, what has fallen away, what has been transformed, and what has evolved incrementally? We will begin by juxtaposing the two snapshots as stories, and then we will get on the balcony and take a more systematic look at the broader patterns that can be discerned.

May 1963: Still the Politics of Pillarization and Accommodation

In May 1963, the overwhelming proportion of the population had grown up in a small country that as a colonial power had been generating part of its wealth from exploiting its overseas 'assets'. They had live memories of the Second World War, though these experiences were preferably not talked about either in private or in the public realm. They had seen their country shrink on the world stage and suffer an ignominious loss of its colonial 'jewels in the crown' (Indonesia, in 1949, and Papua New Guinea, in 1962). They had had to come to terms with the post-war reality of American hegemony: the game of holding on to those colonial possessions was essentially up when the Americans withdrew their support for doing so.

With the advent of a bipolar international system dominated by the so-called Cold War between the superpowers, the Dutch along with the other states of western Europe had chosen to live under the American nuclear umbrella and had collided in dressing it up as a multilateral collective defence effort, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. They had gasped for breath in October 1961 when the Soviets tested the American resolve to defend West Berlin and then again in October 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis. Meanwhile, the Dutch had embraced American hegemony as a fact of life in other ways, too. Economically, the country had benefited immensely from Marshall Plan financial aid for its post-war reconstruction and from the rapid economic growth and prosperity that had ensued. Culturally, it had started to take to Hollywood, jeans, and rock and roll—an influence that was strengthened further as television had just begun to find its way into Dutch living rooms (television viewers had access to two channels that broadcast from 6.45 p.m. to midnight, in black and white only). Uncle Sam felt unblemished and strong: Vietnam, Watergate, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert F. Kennedy, the big race riots, and other indications of American fallibility had not yet happened.

At the same time, the Dutch government had been an enthusiastic supporter of western European cooperation, and among the six signatories to the 1957 Treaty of Rome that founded the European Economic Community (EEC), the precursor to the EU. Integrating post-war (West) Germany into a free-market and liberal-democratic order rooted in Franco-German collaboration was a major objective of Dutch foreign policy. The EEC was seen as a principal gateway to continued peace and sustained economic growth on the continent. It reflected a widespread belief in the possibility of progress—through international collaboration, state-directed welfare capitalism, and modernist planning.

The national calamity of the flood disaster of 1953—as a result of which 1,835 people and nearly 50,000 cattle lost their lives, and 1,500 km^2 of agricultural land was laid to waste—was still etched in public memory. By 1963, the country was in the midst of an all-out effort to finally win the battle against the low-lying country's historical nemesis: the North Sea. An ambitious 'Delta Plan' was being executed, which envisaged a system of dams and dikes that should prevent recurrence of flooding forever. A sustained effort across more than four decades, finally completed in the mid-1990s, it would become an iconic achievement of robust government commitment and innovative civil engineering.

In May 1963, the Dutch population was ethnically highly homogenous, of the northern European variety. There were small groups of repatriated Indo-European, Moluccan, Papuan, and Chinese people as part of the decolonization process of the Dutch East Indies, while 90% of the Jewish citizens had been led away and exterminated by the Nazis during the German occupation of 1940–1945. The much bigger inflows of so-called 'guest workers' from the Mediterranean and from the western part of the Dutch colonial empire, which would sow the seeds of demographic and sociocultural upheaval, had not yet arrived. It was also a relatively uneducated society. Though illiteracy had fallen off sharply, only about 3% of the adult population had enjoyed tertiary education. Less than one-third of women of working age held jobs. The contraceptive pill became widely available that year, which heralded the sexual revolution and changed the position of women in society.

If not from long formal educational journeys, where did the Dutch acquire their beliefs, values, and identities? The year 1963 lies at the tail end of a period in which Dutch people grew up to be socialized into a community still shaped by the four so-called 'pillars': the Catholic, Protestant, socialist, and liberal communities. For those born into the 'red pillar' in that year, for example, this meant that their parents subscribed to a social-democratic newspaper and preferred to listen to and watch the programmes of the Society of Worker Radio Amateurs (VARA) public broadcasting association. They would send their children to a secular public primary school (*algemeen openbaar onderwijs*), making sure to pick a school that lay within their lower-middle-class suburban neighbourhood, so as not to have to mingle with the teachers and parents of a public primary school in a neighbourhood of high socio-economic status (SES), which was thus overwhelmingly 'liberal'. In the run-up to the parliamentary election of 15 May 1963, they would proudly display the campaign poster of the Dutch Labour

Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*) on their street-facing sitting-room window. Most of their neighbours would do the same, though not necessarily for the same party. These unmistakeable displays of political partisanship would influence their choices of whom to befriend and whom to be more reserved with in their apartment building. For those born into Catholic, Protestant, or liberal 'pillars', their lives equally would unfold in specific schools, media, and civil society organizations where they were most likely to meet citizens sharing their political views.

During the 1963 campaign, for the first time Dutch voters were able to see the contending party leaders locked in debate on their television sets. The main issue during the campaign was who would go into coalition with whom. Over the previous four years, the Labour Party had waged hard opposition to the Christian-Liberal coalition. It maintained its oppositional stance during the campaign, speculating that discontent with some of the governing coalition's policies would see voters shift their allegiances towards them. This turned out to be a miscalculation. The fact that in a 2.25% vote change, the Labour Party lost five of its 48 seats at that election was seen as a major upset by the commentariat in the days and weeks following the election. Apparently, standing outside the centrist consensus of the era was an electoral liability.

What was deemed unremarkable then, but looked at from a late 2023 vantage point seems otherworldly, was the fact that the political parties associated with the four pillars obtained 135 out of 150 seats. Though entirely in keeping with the pattern of the preceding elections, to the twenty-first-century observer of Dutch politics it nevertheless evidences a staggering display of electoral loyalty to the pillars and to the particular form of political stability their well-rehearsed interplay provided. What the voters and commentators of 1963 did not realize at the time was that this pillarized world, and the political system that was built around it, was about to be exposed to manifold forces of change, whose political impact would begin to be felt at the next election in 1967 and would continue to resonate in the decades to come.

November 2023: A Realignment Election?

Sixty years later, the Netherlands prepared for another, but unplanned, general election. By then, the country and its politics had changed in profound ways. The population had increased to almost 18 million, and around a quarter of these inhabitants were born outside the Netherlands (15%) or had at least one parent born abroad (12%) (Statistics Netherlands, 2023). The largest groups of those with a migration background had roots in Europe (outside of the Netherlands), Morocco, Turkey, Indonesia, Surinam, and the Dutch Caribbean, reflecting the influx of migrant workers and their families, as well as migration related to the Dutch colonial past. That colonial heritage continued to play a role in politics and society, now mostly centring on questions of continued racism and discrimination in society, the government's apology for slavery, and the not-yet-completely abolished tradition of Black Pete (*Zwarte Piet*) during Saint Nicolas celebrations.

Education levels had increased substantially, with 35% of the population over 15 years of age having completed tertiary education. Almost two thirds of women between 15 and 75 years of age were working outside of the home, less than 10 percentage points lower than men—compared to a gender gap of about 50% in the late 1960s. Still, many more women than men were working part time, especially when they had (young) children. At the same time, fertility rates had been declining for decades until well below replacement levels, and the Dutch population was ageing rapidly, with on average 20% of the population over 65 years old, and this figure is expected to rise still further as the baby-boom generation is retiring (Statistics Netherlands, 2023).

Growing up in the Netherlands in 2023 no longer means living within your pillar. Though Protestant and Catholic schools still exist, and other religious schools are now also available, many schools are defined by their educational approach (e.g. Dalton, Montessori) rather than their religious affiliation. Likewise, while public media still provide space for the media organizations that originated from the pillars, many of these have since merged, and many new public and commercial channels have become available. Civil society organizations and unions are largely detached from their pillars too: soccer, tennis, and hockey clubs are no longer Catholic or socialist, but just sports clubs. All in all, there appears to be more choice to live one's life according to personal values and preferences.

But segmentation remains present in daily life. While income inequality has been kept relatively in check in the Netherlands, wealth inequality has risen sharply since the 1980s. People living in high-SES neighbourhoods rarely interact with people living in low-SES neighbourhoods, and social networks are structured on the basis of individual characteristics (e.g. education, profession, social class) and characteristics of the environment (e.g. region, urbanization level). This segmentation is also correlated to political preferences. Neighbourhoods can be classified on the basis distinct voter profiles, and geographical divides increasingly structure social and political attitudes and behaviours. Moreover, citizens experience feelings of hostility towards social and political groups, a phenomenon also known as affective polarization.

These profound societal changes are combined with numerous successive external challenges. While the threat of flooding from the North Sea was substantially reduced years before, many new crises present themselves: the climate crisis, the Covid crisis, the cost of living crisis, the migration crisis, the housing crisis—almost all major policy areas seem to suffer some kind of crisis. At least, that is how those concerned about the various issues like to present them, but also in objective terms most of these provide a continued challenge to society and government.

These challenges are further compounded by administrative and political changes in recent decades that have undercut the capacity of government and local, provincial, and national bureaucracies to adequately respond to these challenges. Extensive decentralization of public services to local governments, combined with substantial budget cuts, has undermined the quality of public service delivery; shifting policy implementation outside of ministries to implementing agencies has limited the degree of oversight and the 'steering' capacity of national governments when things go wrong; and

the emergence of a de facto fourth layer of regional governance in the form of regional partnerships without any formal democratic legitimation has created vast uncertainty about who is to be held accountable for decisions made.

Politically, increasing fragmentation of the Dutch party system has made coalitions larger and more ideologically heterogeneous, and shifting majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate mean more extensive bargaining needs to take place to pass government plans. Governments are increasingly also bound by European and international commitments that, while in part shaped and influenced by those governments, are often presented as having descended from heaven as undisputed facts, rather than as decisions that are the product of extensive intergovernmental negotiations. In this context of governments with limited policy discretion and administration with limited capacity, the 2023 elections were held.

At the start of 2023, the House of Representatives—the primary parliamentary arena—counted no fewer than 21 political groupings. Nearly one third (44 out of 150) of its seats were held by challenger parties, all but two of which had been in existence for less than five years. Meanwhile, the 75-seat Senate contained 16 political groupings. The four-party governing coalition that was formed after a tortuous, record-breaking nine-month formation process following the 2021 parliamentary election combined secular and Christian, conservative and progressive, as well as socio-economically centre-left and centre-right parties. It had a meagre two-seat majority in the House of Representatives and lacked a Senate majority, in common with most governments in the previous decade.

The four-party governing coalition, also known as the fourth Rutte government (Rutte IV), which had taken office in January 2022, was to deliver hitherto elusive progress on big-ticket reforms, such as speeding up measures designed to meet its climate policy targets in areas including sustainable energy and land use practices. But even more, it was to forge a path towards a new 'governance culture'—more transparent, more citizen-centric, more mindful of propriety in executive–legislative relations. This had become a top priority after Rutte's previous government had resigned amidst widespread media and public indignation following a damning inquiry report about sustained callous and allegedly discriminatory hounding of tens of thousands of citizens by the Dutch tax office in an effort to reclaim allegedly fraudulently obtained childcare benefits.

The uneasiness of the Rutte IV formation process continued into its day-to-day governance. Large problems remained unresolved, such as the shortage of shelters for asylum seekers and a reduction in nitrogen emissions. In June 2023 the coalition parties tried to resolve some of their policy differences on migration, but ultimately came up short, which led to the government's resignation. To the surprise of many, shortly afterwards, Rutte announced that he would not lead his party into the early elections that were scheduled for November. At the end of the summer, another shock to the Dutch party system occurred when Pieter Omtzigt, a well-known member of parliament (MP) who had left the Christian Democrats in 2021, finally founded his own political party that became one of the electoral frontrunners overnight.

The biggest surprise had yet to happen, though. While the populist radical-right PVV had been slowly recovering from some polling losses since the summer, only in the last week before the election did Wilders' party skyrocket in the opinion polls. Final polls before the election suggested that the PVV, the conservative-liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), and the newly formed alliance between the Greens and Labour were virtually tied for the top spot, but on election night the PVV came out clearly on top with 37 seats, compared to 25 and 24 for the other two parties. While some observers had pointed out that a campaign that focused on migration and in which the VVD no longer excluded the possibility of forming a coalition with the PVV would be beneficial to the latter, only in the last week of the campaign was this reflected in the polls—and the PVV did even better on election day than the polls indicated. Explaining these developments and exploring their consequences—the first PVV-led four-party coalition government took office in July 2024—will consume scholars of Dutch politics in the upcoming years.

A Polity in Flux?

Table 1.1 juxtaposes and expands the two snapshots presented above. It tells a story of a country experiencing deep changes that have found their way into its political system, and that have challenged key tenets of the politics of accommodation. These changes have partly been the product of political choices about the content of public policies, the role of the state in society, and the organization of public policymaking and service delivery. Path-forging examples of the former include choices about increasing access to secondary and tertiary education, labour market policies, infrastructure and economic development, and migration policies. Choices about the organization of public governance with similarly profound societal and political impacts have included the commitment to deepening European integration and expanding EU membership, the embracing of neo-liberal economic thought about rolling back the state and harnessing the power of markets through deregulation and privatization, and moves in the mid-2010s to decentralize large swathes of social policy execution to the municipalities.

At the same time, pivotal underlying drivers of change in Dutch society, politics, and government originated outside the country. There were technological breakthroughs such as television, personal computing, mobile phones, the internet, and most recently biotechnology and artificial intelligence that transformed the economy and the communication environment. A number of fateful global shifts occurred, such as the end of the Cold War and its impacts on Germany and the former Soviet-dominated central and eastern European states, '9/11' and its aftermath, the rise of China, and the formidable growth and power of a handful of tech companies.

Furthermore, the so-called 'new despotism' (Keane, 2020), a political formula pioneered in countries like Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, and Jiang Zemin's China, had gained traction. It offered an alternative social contract to citizens: 'we will deliver prosperity and shopping malls; you will do as you are told and ask no questions'.

Its increasing appeal challenged the naïve post-1989 presumption that liberal democracy would become the only game in town. It created significant tensions within the EU and presented foreign policy dilemmas for countries like the Netherlands, as fellow member states such as Hungary and Poland began to veer towards new despotism. Compounding these challenges, in the early 2010s Putin's Russia undertook a form of revanchist expansionism culminating in the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine that rocked all of Europe both militarily and, through the use of its 'gas weapon', economically. Soaring energy prices pushed inflation up to levels not seen since the 1970s and raised the spectre of stagflation.

Like many of its northern European counterparts, the Dutch government, already reeling from unprecedented emergency outlays of dozens of billions in response to the 2020–2021 Covid-19 pandemic, responded by forking out similar amounts to offer short-term energy price compensations and fund consumer price ceilings. Meanwhile, eco-systemic changes such as accelerating human-made climate change and biodiversity loss were having increasingly visible and profound impacts, including projected sea-level rises and extreme weather events. These confronted the 'Low Country' that is the Netherlands with existential questions and an urgent need to contemplate climate adaptation measures that would potentially entail further astronomic expenditures and intense conflicts between different interests, values, groups, and regions within Dutch society. All in all, from the vantage point of the changes and challenges confronting the Dutch polity in 2023, the predicaments of 1963 feel, by comparison, less 'wicked'.

Table 1.1 contains rough-and-ready characterizations of how the populace, the organization of political life, and the manner in which citizens bestow legitimacy on political elites and institutions have evolved. With its emphasis on stark contrasts, the table tells only a part of the story. As readers will discover when delving into the chapters of this Handbook, the full story is not one of wholesale change and renewal. On the contrary, it is more about how societal changes and adaptive pressures in some ways *did* and in other respects *did not* affect the mindsets and routines of the politics of accommodation with which this chapter began (cf. Andeweg et al., 2020).

Though the societal foundations upon which it was built have changed, the institutional architecture of governing and the political playbook of the Netherlands have only partially been redrawn. For example, its electoral system of extreme proportional representation keeps on throwing up complex coalition-formation puzzles that have continued to be solved in the tried-and-tested manner: behind closed doors, taking plenty of time, facilitated by 'wise persons'. Likewise, although on the surface the 2010–2024 Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte presented as a thoroughly modern, communication-savvy, and ruthlessly pragmatic politician, he still operated in a largely unaltered constitutional context that bestows little or no 'hard power' on the Dutch prime minister, and therefore had to rely on more or less the same set of soft-power repertoires and relational work that his 1963 predecessors Piet de Quay and, following the May election, Victor Marijnen deployed.

Furthermore, though since the early 1980s an alleged 'chasm' between what Dutch citizens like to see from their politicians and how the Dutch political system operates

Table 1.1 Changes in Dutch society and politics

	1963	2023
Population, size	11.97 million	17.94 million
Population, median age	32	42.5
Population, ethnicity	Homogenous (< 8% migrant)	Diverse (26.4% migrant)
High-profile social cleavages	Religion and class	Education and geography
Sociopolitical organization	Stable party system: 'pillars'	Volatile party system: 'ideological blocks' and 'newcomers'
Party affiliation	Medium levels of membership and long-term loyalties	Low levels of membership and fleeting 'likes'
Political style	Pacification of inter-pillar tensions Accommodation Technocracy	Politicization of social differences Polarization Contested expertise
Political transparency	Opaque: backroom deals and government secrecy	Legible: mediatized politics and 'open government'
Political legitimacy	Promises-based: elections and representative democracy; institutional authority	Performance-based: watchdogs and monitory democracy; transactional authority
Policy style	Proactive: long-term orientation and planning Government: state-centric hierarchies	Reactive: issue management and improvisation Governance: de-centred networks
Governing structure	Three-tier 'Huis van Thorbecke', driven by national government	Multilevel 'spaghetti', driven by Europeanization and decentralization
Political risk: main causes of ministerial turnover and cabinet crises	Inter- and intraparty conflicts, breakdown of elite concertation	Implementation failures and critical inquiry reports

Source: authors.

has been repeatedly signalled, and disputed (Andeweg, 2018; see also Van Ham et al., 2017), no major institutional reform has been undertaken since to build new bridges between the electorate and its representatives. This has not been for want of ideas. In fact, many proposals to adapt Dutch political institutions and processes have been launched by various committees and think tanks across the decades (Hout & Andeweg, 1993; Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur, 2010). The 2018 report of a blue-ribbon 'state commission' for the parliamentary system offered a smorgasbord of pathways to reinvigorate Dutch democracy (Staatscommissie Parlementair Stelsel, 2018). Like many of its predecessors, it was received with a warm glow of verbal appreciation by the government of the day but has since met the same fate: limited momentum in a political system seemingly unwilling to make up its mind about itself.

Therefore, many of the contributions to this Handbook face the task of shedding light on what seem to be dramatic changes at surface level, but upon closer inspection are often subtler and sometimes ambiguous patterns of stability and change. They will demonstrate that in some instances, political change was not straightforward, unidirectional, and linear albeit incremental, but rather involved pendulum swings, policy reversals, and crisis-driven improvisations that became path-dependent more by accident than by design.

Ebbs and Flows in the Study of Dutch Politics

In 1963 the study of Dutch politics was a small enterprise within the academy, comprising just four professorial chairs all held by White males (H. Daalder at Leiden University; H. Daudt at the University of Amsterdam; G. Kuypers at the Free University in Amsterdam; and G. Schichtling at the Catholic University in Nijmegen) (Hoogerwerf, 1981). Political historians and constitutional lawyers outnumbered 'empirical' political scientists by a considerable margin. Intellectually, classic institutionalism and the modernist 'policy sciences' reigned, while the behavioural, rational choice, and (neo-)Marxist perspectives that would gain prominence in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. De Swaan, 1973; Stuurman, 1983; Van Putten, 1981) were still in their infancy.

Since then, Dutch political science has expanded numerically and geographically, the outlook and composition of research staff has diversified, and technological advances have made new approaches possible. This has led to a considerable expansion of the range of questions political scientists have asked about Dutch politics, the research methods they bring to bear on investigating these questions, and the insights they are able to produce. The field has been transformed since then. Rather than studying Dutch politics as a case *sui generis*, subsequent generations of scholars have followed Lijphart's and his contemporary Hans Daalder's lead and have increasingly studied 'the Dutch case' as part of thematically driven cross-national comparative research designs that were primarily aimed at contributing to middle-range theories and general political science models (Andeweg & Vis, 2015). To some degree, therefore, Dutch political scientists have left part of the work to contemporary political historians, who however rely on their own periodizations and diachronic comparisons and make limited use of and do not contribute to the stock of theories, typologies, and cross-national comparisons of their political science colleagues (e.g. Bosmans & Van Kessel, 2011; De Rooy, 2014; Te Velde, 2002).

The traditional lenses used to study Dutch politics and government have been complemented by perspectives such as intersectionality (Celis et al., 2012; Leyenaar, 2013; Mügge, 2016; Mügge et al., 2019), postcolonialism (Jones, 2012; Oostindie, 2011; Sharpe, 2022), political leadership (Karsten & Hendriks, 2017; Swinkels et al., 2017; 't Hart & Schelfhout, 2016; 't Hart & Ten Hooven, 2004), policymaking and policy

networks (Hufen & Ringeling, 1990; Kickert & Van Vught, 1995; Kickert et al., 1997; 't Hart et al., 1995); and multilevel governance (Geuijen et al., 2008; Groenleer & Hendriks, 2020; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2014; Scholten, 2012; Witteveen et al., 1995). Moreover, Dutch political scientists have not just focused their energies on penetrating the columns of leading international academic journals but have breached new ground in contributing to public debates about Dutch politics through a variety of channels: online magazines (e.g. stukroodvlees.nl), custom-made voting assistance tools (e.g. kieskompas.nl), op-ed articles in leading newspapers, and election commentator roles with prime news channels.

Design and Core Themes of the Handbook: A Preview

The Handbook provides comprehensive coverage of the state of the art in research on Dutch politics. It is composed in five parts.

Part I presents four chapters discussing the *historical trajectories of key elements of the Dutch political system*. Chapter 2, written by historian Beatrice de Graaf, covers the formation and institutionalization of the Dutch state as a provider of internal and external security. In Chapter 3, fellow historian Henk te Velde provides a periodization of Dutch political history by analysing evolving political styles—that is, how Dutch politicians discussed the problems they were faced with and how they tried to solve them. In Chapter 4, the doyen of the study of Dutch politics, Rudy Andeweg, continues the main thread of this introductory section by probing deeply into the characteristics, emergence, consolidation, and decline of Dutch consociationalism. Part I is closed out by Franca van Hooren and Barbara Vis, who in Chapter 5 trace the political lineage, distinctive features, and reform pathways of the Dutch welfare state.

Part II tracks four *core institutions making up the Dutch trias politica*. The characteristics, functions, and contemporary challenges of the Dutch monarchy are discussed by Paul Bovend'Eert in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, Tom Louwerse and Cynthia van Vonno discuss the key organizational features of parliamentary politics and zoom in on three areas of parliamentary research: executive–legislative relations; the organization of parliament and the behaviour of parliamentary party groups; and the roles of individual MPs. Stavros Zouridis in Chapter 8 follows suit with an analysis of the Dutch judiciary. It begins by describing the enablers of the longstanding peaceful coexistence of politics and the judiciary in the Netherlands: its constitutional design and the prevailing political and legal cultures. The second part of the chapter describes how this coexistence gave way to increased unease in the relationship, and documents the rise of 'judicial politics'. Closing out Part II, in Chapter 9 Erik-Jan van Dorp and Rod Rhodes present the institutional landscape of the executive branch of Dutch government, particularly cabinet government and the senior civil service. After placing the

Dutch executive in a historical context, they review research on its inner workings by discerning five forms of 'executive politics' in the Netherlands: budgetary politics, turf politics, silo politics, court politics (i.e. inner circles around prime ministers), and accountability politics.

Part III takes a *territorial perspective on the Dutch political system*, looking in particular at five tiers other than the national where politics takes place. Starting at the 'coalface', in Chapter 10 Lisanne de Blok, Giedo Jansen, and Hans Vollaard discuss municipal politics, focusing on three key clusters of relationships: (1) between municipal governments and citizens, local civil society, and the private sector; (2) within municipal governments between legislative, executive, and administrative actors, and (3) between municipal governments and other levels of governance. In Chapter 11, Marcel Boogers and Klaartje Peters discuss regional politics as both politics *about* the region and politics *in* the region. They examine the recurrent and as yet unresolved debates about whether and how there should be a regional tier of government 'in between' the local and provincial tiers. Notwithstanding the absence of a formalized regional tier, the chapter documents the rich array of regional-level political processes, often constituted by institutionalized forms of intermunicipal cooperation. Chapter 12 by Harmen Binnema and Hans Vollaard covers two other 'intermediate' tiers: the provinces and the uniquely Dutch system of regional water authorities, one of the oldest continuous institutions of government worldwide. The chapter discusses the historical development and institutional organization of both, with a particular focus on their scale, tasks, and finances. It furthermore analyses their institutional resilience, their effectiveness in polycentric multilevel networks, and their democratic quality.

Moving beyond the national level, in Chapter 13 Reinout van der Veer and Femke van Esch discuss the body of research on the relationship between Dutch politics and the EU that has evolved along with the growing importance of the EU itself. The profound importance of European integration for Dutch politics has inspired political scientists to examine a flurry of questions. The authors group the state of the art along two overarching themes. One relates to the role of the Netherlands in the EU, studying for example how, as a 'small' state, the Netherlands wields influence in European politics. The other concerns the role of the EU in the Netherlands, looking at how EU-related issues have permeated Dutch elections and political debates, and how EU outputs (policies, regulations) have affected Dutch political realities. Finally, Chapter 14 by Gert Oostindie and Wouter Veenendaal covers research on the Kingdom of the Netherlands as a transatlantic entity located both in Europe and in the Caribbean. The chapter discusses the historical origins of the present Kingdom relations; the legal architecture of the Kingdom; the significance of the Caribbean and the transatlantic Kingdom relations in contemporary Dutch politics; evaluations of the current postcolonial arrangement in the Dutch Caribbean islands; and Dutch Kingdom relations in a broader international perspective.

Part IV explores *key social cleavages and prominent political issues in which social fault lines become apparent*. The 'classic' cleavages of religion, class, and place have long been the key shapers of voter attitudes and behaviour in Dutch politics. In Chapter 15, Galen Irwin and Joop van Holsteyn race their historical roots and the evolution of their prominence

in Dutch politics. Chapter 16, by Eelco Harteveld and Daphne van der Pas, juxtaposes and examines the evidence for key emergent cleavages that have supplemented and, to a considerable extent, supplanted these classic cleavages: age, gender, urbanity, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment. The authors show how these new social divisions have contributed to a realignment in Dutch politics. Wouter van der Brug and Erika van Elsas continue the analysis in Chapter 17 by examining the development of Dutch public opinion on key political issues and the extent to which citizens' opinions are structured by a limited number of ideological dimensions. They show how the left–right ideological spectrum remains an important structuring element in voter attitudes.

In Chapter 18, Carolien van Ham and Jacques Thomassen study citizens' legitimacy beliefs and political support for the political system and its institutions. They map the development of political support in the Netherlands over time and comparatively, and signal growing gaps in political support between citizens from different social groups, as well as increasing politicization of political support. In Chapter 19, Josje den Ridder and Julien van Ostaaijen document and interpret the evolution of political participation in the Netherlands. Voting in elections remains by far the most common form of participation, and turnout rates in national elections in particular remain high. While there is no decline in overall levels of participation, inequality in who participates remains high, with important consequences for the quality of representation in the Netherlands.

Then follow three chapters in which authors examine three key issues that continue to dog Dutch politics. Firstly, in Chapter 20, Margo Trappenburg documents the evolution of 'morality politics'—questions concerning the governance of the beginning and end of human lives (specifically the regulation of abortion and euthanasia) and people's gender and identity. She shows how for a long time the consociational formula of Dutch political problem solving was applied to forge regulatory compromises, but since the 1990s there has been a rise in the active politicization of morality issues at both ends of the political spectrum. In Chapter 21, Lauren Lauret and Karwan Fatah-Black discuss the chequered history of how Dutch political parties and governments have dealt with the country's colonial past. Focusing on the issue of inequality in citizenship status within the Dutch empire, they show how Dutch policymakers sought to emancipate their colonial subjects according to European norms of political participation and yet not grant them full citizenship. This course of action, the authors show, sowed the seeds of current, ongoing frictions between Dutch governments and citizens with ties to the former colonies. Finally, in Chapter 22 Léonie de Jonge, Matthijs Rooduijn, and Andrej Zaslove trace and interpret the emergence of populism as an issue in Dutch politics, arguing that it followed a unique trajectory of a comparatively late rise and yet a relatively quick firm integration of populist parties into the partisan arena.

Part V contains reviews of a wide range of *pivotal political structures and processes that make the Dutch political system work*. In Chapter 23, Henk van der Kolk discusses the origins and remarkable endurance of the Dutch electoral system, which is one of the most purely proportional systems worldwide. Allowing maximum access to parliamentary seats for new parties, the system has had a profound effect on the composition and functioning of parliament and on the felt legitimacy of elements of the political system.

In Chapter 24, Annemarie Walter and Philip van Praag discuss the evolution of political campaigning. Long a comparatively placid and low-key affair, this has changed considerably in recent decades. Adoption of modern techniques such as use of voter data for microtargeting has led to parties' growing need for money. Parties' lack of financial transparency, acceptance of foreign donations, aggressive campaign practices (e.g. uncivil negative campaigning, demonization, and the spread of disinformation), and the lack of transparency in advertising strategies challenge the integrity of the electoral process and have triggered new legislation curtailing some of the most problematic practices. In Chapter 25, Tom van der Meer and Wouter van der Brug discuss voting patterns. Long a bulwark of stability, at the dawn of the 2000s the Netherlands moved towards levels of electoral volatility and electoral fragmentation that are among the highest in western and central Europe. Over time, the most stable and structural predictors of party choice have become less important, while short-term factors such as political issues and party leadership have become more important. Yet, ongoing stability underlies the high levels of volatility. Fragmentation has largely taken place within rather than between distinct clusters of parties.

In Chapter 26, Simon Otjes and Sarah de Lange explore what these changes mean for the Dutch party system. They observe continuity, most notably in the absence of wholesale alternation in the Dutch party system, and change, in the form of new and successful political party families, such as the populist radical right, the prominence of the cultural dimension in Dutch politics, and increased fragmentation. In Chapter 27, Simon Otjes and Leonie de Jonge discuss how political scientists have changed their toolkits for understanding historical, current, and potential future organizational aspects of political parties in the Netherlands. In the past, scholars employed thick and holistic typologies such as the cadre party and the mass party to characterize and describe what parties are. These typologies covered various aspects, including the parties' electorate, organizational structure, programmatic positioning, and campaign strategies. This has shifted towards the use of more focused typologies concentrating on what parties actually do—specifically, the niche versus the mainstream party, and the challenger versus the dominant party.

In Chapter 28 the focus shifts towards a central feature of Dutch politics: the formation, management, and termination of governing coalitions. Tom Louwerse and Arco Timmermans discuss how the electoral system's indirect link to government formation complicates the translation of election outcomes into coalitions. It necessitates often lengthy post-election negotiations and intricate management of coalition dynamics once governments have been formed. With political fragmentation on the rise, the number of coalition parties has increased compared to the 1980s, increasing the political complexity of the work.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding its proportional representation system, Dutch politics historically has been dominated by White, heterosexual men. Liza Mügge, Zahra Runderkamp, and Niels Spierings demonstrate in Chapter 29 that groups that do not fit this norm—women, citizens with a 'migration background', lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans citizens, and disabled citizens—are still systematically underrepresented (in

descriptive terms) in political institutions, but some more so than others. Continuing on the theme of representation, in Chapter 30 Wouter Schakel and Armèn Hakhverdian examine research on the link between public preferences and political outcomes—that is, substantive representation. They find that in terms of ideological congruence there are relatively high levels of overlap between mass- and elite-level attitudes, although representatives tend to be more economically right wing and culturally left wing than the general electorate. In terms of political responsiveness, public policy choices do respond to public opinion, albeit considerably more so to the preferences of richer and highly educated citizens.

Chapter 31 by Rens Vliegenthart, Sanne Kruikemeier, and Loes Aaldering focuses on how Dutch politicians make strategic use of the opportunities that mainstream and social media offer. They demonstrate how media coverage deeply affects politicians' communication efforts and behaviour, and show how Dutch politicians have begun to make more deliberate use of strategies to exploit the opportunities that social media offer them. In Chapter 32, Gerard Breeman and Arco Timmermans explore the evolution of Dutch research on agenda setting—that is, the process of selecting and prioritizing policy problems and the impact of stakeholders on these processes. They document the waxing and waning (and reframing) of attention to issues such as safety and security, democratic reform, and EU affairs. In Chapter 33, Ellis Aizenberg and Caelesta Braun review the evolving nature of Dutch interest representation, applying a conceptual framework that segments the process of interest representation into interest mobilization, the impact of interest communities and organizational environment, lobby strategies, and political and policy influence. After discussing the strengths and limitations of the iconic Dutch 'Polder model', they highlight three core characteristics of contemporary interest representation: a close bond between government and a few selected interest organizations; closed networks of societal and political elites; and the disruptive and innovative potential of new modes of interest mobilization.

In Chapter 34, Thomas Schillemans examines patterns of accountability in Dutch politics and public administration, where accountability is understood as a relational mechanism linking power holders as account givers to power controllers as account holders. He discerns three overarching trends: a rising number of account holders and account givers, following various sidewards and downwards shifts in the structures of Dutch governance; an increase and tightening of accountability standards in terms of legal requirements and financial management; and greater activism and a more critical stance on the part of account-holding entities ranging from the European Parliament to local councils to voters. In Chapter 35, which concludes Part V of the Handbook, Arjen Boin, Sanneke Kuipers, and Jeroen Wolbers discuss the evolution of crises and crisis management in the Netherlands. Exploring the recent history of various types of crises and patterns of political responses to them, they conclude that there is little to support the notion of a country that is now 'ridden by crises' (as some commentators would have it). What is clear, however, is that the crises that do occur tend to be more prone to politicization in both the acute and post-acute response phases.

Finally, Part VI of the Handbook considers the political dynamics of public policymaking across a wide range of policy domains. Each chapter discusses key policy challenges, the actors and arenas involved in policymaking, pivotal policy commitments, and emerging pressures to adapt and reform them. By way of introduction to this section, Chapter 36 by Paul 't Hart takes a helicopter view, mapping the cross-cutting institutions and mechanisms that provide rules of the game and structure interactions, and assessing key recurrent characteristics of Dutch policymaking processes. He observes that although it has become progressively more difficult during the last decade, forging compromises on contentious issues across political divides and with regard for minority viewpoints has continued to be the oil that lubricates the fractured and potentially fractious arenas of Dutch policymaking.

That introductory overview chapter is followed by 11 contributions zooming in on the distinctive challenges, arenas, actors, and pathways of particular policy domains. Each of these at times has been politically complex and contentious, and some still are to date. These chapters cover: economic policy (Chapter 37, by Olaf van Vliet, Koen Caminada, and Kees Goudswaard); labour market policy (Chapter 38, by Paul de Beer); education policy (Chapter 39, by Marlies Honingh and Lars Stevenson); health care policy (Chapter 40, by Hans Maarse and Patrick Jeurissen); agriculture policy (Chapter 41, by Jouke de Vries and Teun Havinga); climate mitigation policy (Chapter 42, by Lisanne Groen and Dave Huitema); internal and external security policy (Chapter 43, by Joachim Koops, Erwin Muller, and Edwin Bakker); migration policy (Chapter 44, by Peter Scholten); foreign policy (Chapter 45, by Bertjan Verbeek); innovation and technology policy (Chapter 46, by Rinie van Est and Jasper Deuten); and finally Chapter 47 on democratic reform policy, by Frank Hendriks, Kristof Jacobs, and Ank Michels.

All in all, the Handbook offers a comprehensive and longitudinal examination of Dutch political institutions, processes, and practices, and of the ways in which researchers have documented and interpreted both stability and change in Dutch political life. It is important to note that the chapters of this Handbook have been finalized in the summer of 2023, thus stopping short of covering the 2023 parliamentary election and its political impacts. The Dutch polity remains in flux, as that election has once again demonstrated. As editors, we hope therefore that a decade from now, a fresh team of editors and authors will once again take stock of what may well have been a significantly changed lie of the political land.

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