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The evolution of party organizations in the Netherlands

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CHAPTER

27 The Evolution of Party Organizations in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Over recent decades, the study of political parties in the Netherlands has undergone a significant transformation. 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 party's electorate, organizational structure, programmatic positioning, and campaign strategies. In recent years, however, there has been a shift in the approach of political scientists towards the use of more focused and analytical typologies to study what parties actually do. Specifically, the niche and mainstream party, as well as the challenger and dominant party, have become prominent typologies. These new typologies concentrate on specific aspects of parties and use them to explain parties' behaviour. This chapter examines and elucidates this shift, using it as a lens to investigate the historical, current, and potential future organizational aspects of political parties in the Netherlands.

Keywords: party organization, mass party, cadre party, niche party, mainstream party, party membership, party finance

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Introduction

Political parties are commonly defined as organizations that compete in elections (Ware, 1996). While the societal role of parties has changed considerably over recent decades (Mair, 2013), they still serve as key vehicles for organizing political representation in Western democracies. They help translate popular

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demands into legislation, mobilize citizens for elections, and recruit and select political elites (Scarrow & Webb, 2017). In the Dutch political system, parties propose a list of candidates who run under a common programme. Following the elections, the parties that are elected to parliament form parliamentary party groups (PPGs), which play a key role in the coalition formation process. Thus, political parties act as key intermediaries between citizens and the state. In this chapter, we examine party organizations in their full breadth, including the relationship between the party in public office, central office, and on the ground, as well as the role of ancillary organizations, such as political youth organizations.

Despite their central role in Dutch politics, parties are not explicitly mentioned in the constitution, the Electoral Law, or even the standing orders of parliament. In fact, they are only mentioned in the Financing Political Parties and Media Act.[1] Yet, parties play a crucial role in the political system: the Dutch electoral system gives voters little control over who enters parliament, as more than 99% of members of parliament
p. 458 (MPs) are ↳ elected on the basis of their list position (Nagtzaam, 2019). In parliament, meanwhile, PPG voting unity is extremely high, with MPs voting as a block along partisan lines on more than 99% of the votes (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011). Parties also play a major role in coalition governance, as political leaders bargain along partisan lines to formulate a coalition agreement.

At the same time, their importance as intermediaries between the state and society is challenged by the importance of corporatist bargaining, the weakening of the societal roots of parties (Mair, 2013), and low levels of trust in parties (Van Ham & Thomassen, 2017). Moreover, within Dutch parties, the position of extra-parliamentary organizations vis-à-vis the party in public office (PPG and government ministers) is relatively weak. For instance, the power of the party chair, who in countries like Belgium serves as the political leader directing PPGs at different levels, is relatively limited in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, the party leader, who typically either serves as chair of the *Tweede Kamer* PPG or (deputy) prime minister, is considered much more powerful. Therefore, unlike Belgium or Austria, the Netherlands cannot be characterized as a *partitocracy* or *Parteienstaat* (e.g. Pelinka & Plasser, 2019; Van Haute et al., 2013).

Political parties have been a focal point for both Dutch political scientists (Aarts & Van Biezen, 2016) and international scholars of party politics (Janda, 2015). This chapter discusses (the study of) Dutch political parties, with a focus on their internal organization. Over recent decades, the study of political parties has undergone a number of changes. Like most subfields of political science, the study of party politics has internationalized, and large-*N* studies have become increasingly common. This shift is exemplified by the move from Koole's (1992) book-length analysis of typologies of party organizations in the Netherlands to subsequent works that take a comparative approach (e.g. De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). At the same time, as we argue here, the field has evolved from thick, descriptive studies that focus on what parties *are*, to more analytical studies that focus on what parties actually *do*. Within this realm, scholars have sought to understand what choices parties make under specific circumstances.

Parties operate in different areas of competition, including the electoral, parliamentary, and governmental arenas (Bardi & Mair, 2008). The aforementioned transition towards a more analytical approach means that studies now tend to examine how parties campaign for votes, how they interact in parliament, and how they cooperate in coalition governments. Yet, even in these more analytical studies, there is generally less attention for parties as organizations. Because of the change in geographical scope and analytical lens, the number of articles that examine only one or more Dutch political parties (as distinct from those studying their voters, campaign strategies, or parliamentary behaviour) has remained limited.

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In this chapter, we revisit the study of political parties in the Netherlands, as well as the research conducted by Dutch political scientists in this field. As the discipline adopts an increasingly comparative outlook, the topics that Dutch political scientists study (in particular, the relationship between challenger/niche parties and dominant/mainstream parties) reflect developments in the Netherlands that also hold relevance on an
p. 459 international scale. These developments include trends such as individualization, ↳ professionalization, and regulation. Prior to discussing how these trends have affected (the study of) Dutch political parties, we revisit the literature to explore the organization of political parties in the Netherlands and its evolution over time.

Political Parties as Organizations

The organizational structure of parties in the Netherlands has undergone significant changes over time. To understand this development, we need to go back to 1879, when the first national Dutch political party was founded: the Anti-Revolutionary Party (*Anti-Revolutionaire Partij*, ARP).[2] The ARP took its name from the French Revolution, which it believed had disrupted the social fabric of the Netherlands. The main aim of the party was the emancipation of orthodox Calvinists, also known as the *kleine luyden* ('little people'), from liberal dominance. The ARP was the first mass party in the Netherlands (Koole, 1996). In the concept 'mass party', a number of characteristics coincide, including a party's internal organization, its ideology, and its electoral strategy (Duverger, 1959; Panebianco, 1988). Specifically, mass parties are characterized by strong vertical organizational ties, a central role for the organized party cadre—what Katz and Mair (1993) call the party on the ground—in internal decision making, and a reliance on an activist membership for party funding and volunteer labour. The collective identity of the members is preserved through ideology, while the party in central office (i.e. the national board and its staff in the party headquarters) serves as an important link between different parts of the party. A mass party's representatives in parliament and the cabinet (also known as the party in public office) operate on the basis of strict party unity. The members and voters of mass parties traditionally come from a *classe gardée*, a specific social segment defined by a common religion or class, and the labour-intensive election campaigns are focused on mobilizing this group. Accordingly, they tend to foster strong ties with other societal organizations, such as trade unions and employers' organizations—particularly in a pillarized society like the Netherlands.[3]

From a comparative perspective, it is exceptional that the ARP introduced the mass party model to the Netherlands, a model that was typically associated with socialist parties elsewhere in Europe (Koole, 1996). The Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij*, SDAP), a predecessor of the current Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA), which was founded in 1894, shared the mass party model
p. 460 with the ARP (Van Veldhuizen, 2015). Table 27.1 lists all Dutch parties in the period 1989–2023. ↳

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Table 27.1 Overview of political parties (in parliament between 1989 and 2023)

Name Abb.				Formed		
	Dutch	**English**	**Ideology**	**In**	**As**	**Government**
Current parties						
PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid	Labour Party	Social democratic	1946	Merger	1989–2002 2007–2010 2012–2017
CDA	Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Christian-Democratic Appeal	Christian democratic	1977	Merger	1989–1994 2002–2012 2017–now
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	Conservative liberal	1948	Merger	1994–2007 2010–now
D66	Democraten 66	Democrats 66	Social liberal	1966	New	1994–2002 2003–2006 2012–now
SP	Socialistische Partij	Socialist Party	Left populist	1972	Split	–
GL	GroenLinks	GreenLeft	Postmaterialist	1989	Merger	–
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Freedom Party	Radical right-wing populist	2006	Split	2010–2012[a]
CU	ChristenUnie	Christian Union	Christian social	2000	Merger	2007–2010 2017–now
SGP	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	Political Reformed Party	Christian conservative	1918	New	–
PvdD	Partij voor de Dieren	Party for the Animals	Deep green	2002	New	–
50PLUS	Pensioners' interest			2009	New[b]	–
FVD	Forum voor Democratie	Forum for Democracy	Radical right-wing populist	2016	New	–
Denk	Think/Equal[c]		Multiculturalist	2015	Split	–
Volt			Social liberal	2017	Branch	–
JA21		Yes21	Radical right-wing populist	2020	Split	–
BIJ1		AsOne	Intersectional feminist	2016	Split	–
BBB	BoerBurgerBeweging	Farmer–Citizen Movement	Rural interest	2019	New	–
Defunct parties						

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LPF	Lijst Pim Fortuyn	Pim Fortuyn List	Radical right-wing populist	2002	Split	2002–2003
RPF	Reformatorische Politieke Federatie	Reformed Political Federation	Christian conservative	1975	Split	–
GPV	Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond	Reformed Political League	Christian conservative	1948	Split	–
AOV	Algemeen Ouderenverbond	General Seniors' League	Pensioners' interest	1993	New	–
CD	Centrum Democraten	Centre Democrats	Radical right-wing populist	1984	Split	–
U55+	Politieke Unie 55+	Political Union 55+	Pensioners' interest	1992	Merger	–
LN	Leefbaar Nederland	Liveable Netherlands	Centrist populist	1999	New	–

Source: authors.

[a] Support party.

[b] Transformation of PRDV.

[c] Think in Dutch, Equal in Turkish.

p. 461 In the same period, four other parties formed: the Liberal Union (*Liberale Unie*, LU), the Freethinking-Democratic League (*Vrijzinnig-Democratische Bond*, VDB), the Christian-Historical Union (*Christelijk-Historische Unie*, CHU), and the General League of Roman-Catholic Caucuses (*Algemeene Bond der Rooms-Katholieke Kiesverenigingen*, ABRK). They resisted the mass party model and stayed close to the ideal type of the 'cadre party'. Cadre parties are different from mass parties in the sense that the party on the ground and in public office are not strongly linked together. Accordingly, they do not have strong membership organizations. Instead, MPs rely on independent and weak local caucuses for re-election in their own district.[4]

The cadre parties that existed before the Second World War were characterized not only by the absence of vertical integration, but also by a lack of party discipline. As an example, CHU MPs were expected to vote according to their conscience on every matter. In fact, the issue of party discipline played a pivotal role in the formation of the CHU, as it emerged from factions that had broken away from the ARP due to their opposition to the party's strict enforcement of party discipline. Unlike mass parties, neither the LU nor the CHU represented a specific class that sought to emancipate itself through self-organization.

The Catholic party lacked vertical integration: the Catholic Parliamentary Group and the *Algemeene Bond* (i.e. the federation of district-level caucuses that supported Catholic candidates) were separate organizations. In 1926, the two merged to form the Roman Catholic State Party (*Rooms-Katholieke*
p. 462 *Staatspartij*, RKSP). The RKSP, as well ↳ as its successor, the Catholic People's Party (*Katholieke Volkspartij*, KVP), however, were conceived as mass parties.[5]

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After the introduction of mass suffrage, the mass party model became the dominant form of party organization. By the 1950s, approximately one in ten voters was a member of a political party. The KVP in particular attracted a large membership base, while the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD)—the successor of the LU—and the CHU continued to resist this party model. For instance, in 1959, 16% of KVP voters were also members of the party, compared to 9% of the CHU voters and 5% of the VVD voters.

With the depillarization of the 1960s and 1970s, the mass party model became less sustainable. The structured voting model declined, and membership figures dwindled. In the 1970s, only 4% of Dutch voters were members of a political party. This also meant that parties had to adapt their election campaigns, party organization, and financing strategy. Partly as a result of these changes, political scientists developed new typologies to understand these new formations, such as the catch-all party (Kirchheimer, 1954), the electoral-professional party (Panebianco, 1988), and the business firm party (Hopkin & Paolucci, 1999). These models all considered the changing electoral context, and how parties positioned themselves strategically within it, while observing the diminishing influence of ideology and a shift in power away from the party on the ground to the party leadership. The most prominent of these models was arguably the cartel party (Katz & Mair, 1995). The so-called 'cartel party thesis' suggests that the role of political parties has shifted from being representatives of civil society to being instruments of the state. A key element of a cartel party is its greater reliance on public funding. According to Katz and Mair (1995), cartel parties operate in concert to prevent new parties from getting access to the spoils that they have (e.g. party finance and access to office). The Dutch political scientist Koole (1996) argued that cartelization is a property of the party system as a whole, and therefore the model should not be used to characterize individual parties. He therefore proposed an alternative model: the 'modern cadre party' (Koole, 1992), which captured a number of organizational trends, such as a decline in internal democracy, the centralization of power, a shift to a broader electoral strategy, and an increased reliance on state resources.

While the introduction of the concept of the cartel party sparked a lively debate about its empirical accuracy and analytical usefulness, as well as its alternatives (Koole, 1996; Krouwel, 2003), it eventually petered out in the early 2000s. Although some political scientists in the Netherlands continue to use the concept of 'the cartel party' as an analytical tool (e.g. Van Biezen & Kopecký, 2014), the shifting focus in political science from what parties *are* to what parties *do* has left the debate about this party type unresolved.

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The Current State of Party Research

After the debate about party typologies had died down in the early 2000s, two new lines of research developed: one examined specific organizational features of political parties, including membership, finance, and internal democracy; the other involved a renewed focus on party typologies.

Party Organization

In comparison to other European countries, political parties in the Netherlands organize only a small proportion of the electorate, which has translated into low membership levels (Van Biezen et al., 2012). Over the last 30 years, the Documentation Centre for Dutch Political Parties (DNPP) at the University of Groningen has collected data on party membership. Figure 27.1 show the membership–electorate ratio between 1989 and 2022, and Figure 27.2 compares the membership of the three core parties with other parties over the same period.

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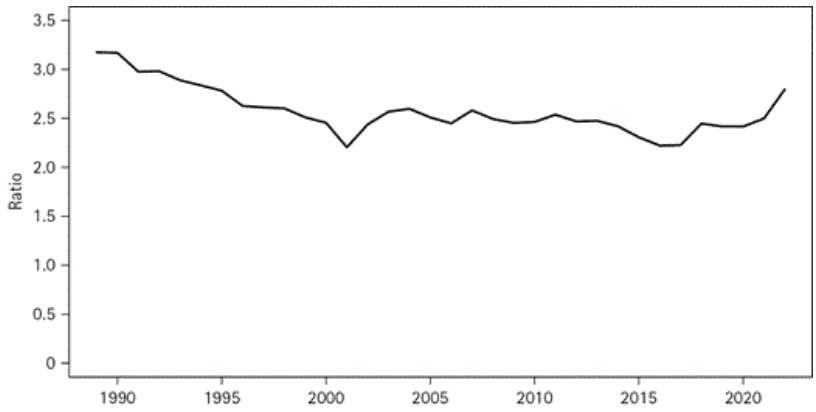

Figure 27.1 Membership–electorate ratio, 1989–2022

Source: author created. Membership data from DNPP www.rug.nl/research/dnpp/themas/ledentallen/ and electorate data from www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl

Taken together, these figures show that since the 1990s, the total party membership as a proportion of the electorate appears to have stabilized at around 2.5%. However, a closer look reveals that there are remarkable differences between parties. The three party families that grew out of the main societal 'pillars' that long made up Dutch society, namely the Christian-Democratic Appeal (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*,
p. 464 CDA), the VVD, and the PvdA, lost two thirds of their membership between 1989 and 2022 ↳ (Van Schie & Voerman, 2008; Voerman, 2010; Voerman & Becker, 2016). Dwindling membership numbers have made it increasingly difficult for established parties to fill their electoral lists, particularly at the local and regional levels (Otjes et al., 2020). At the same time, the two orthodox Protestant parties, namely the Christian Union (*ChristenUnie*, CU) and the Reformed Political Party (*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*, SGP), have maintained their membership.

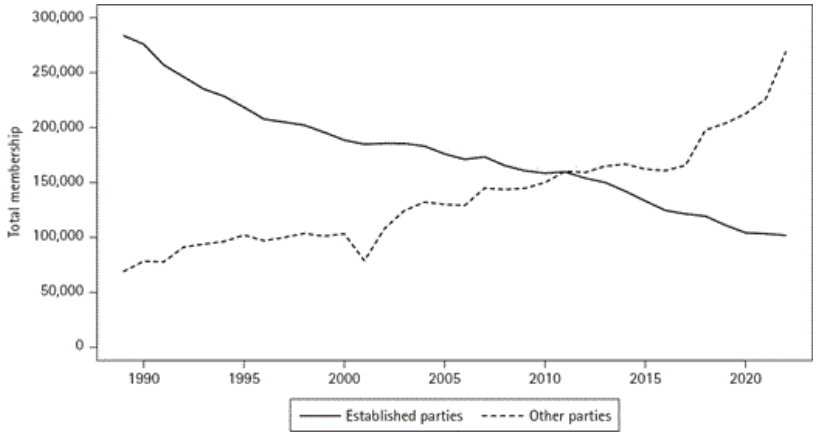

Figure 27.2 Membership of the three core parties and other parties, 1989–2022

Solid line: Membership of CDA, PvdA and VVD; Dashed line: Other parties. *Source*: author calculations; author created. Membership data from DNPP, www.rug.nl/research/dnpp/themas/ledentallen/

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Some newcomers have been successful at attracting new members, most notably the left-wing Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*, SP) and the far-right Forum for Democracy (*Forum voor Democratie*, FVD). The SP built a large and active membership base before its entry into parliament in 1994 and saw its membership rise every year between 1992 and 2007 (Lucardie & Voerman, 2019). The growth of the FVD was even more spectacular. Founded as a Eurosceptic think tank in 2015, it entered parliament for the first time in the 2017, and by 2020, it had become the biggest party in the Netherlands by membership (De Jonge, 2021). While the SP and FVD managed to attract a large membership, other parties made do with much smaller membership bases. The populist radical-right Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) is an extreme case in point, as the leader and founder, Geert Wilders, is its sole member (Mazzoleni & Voerman, 2017).

Members are important for political parties; they provide activists to run election campaigns, they enable the recruitment of candidates, and they are a key source of income. In contrast to membership numbers, party finance figures have remained relatively stable in the Netherlands in the last 30 years. Despite decreasing membership figures, the share of party budgets that come from state subsidies has not increased
p. 465 ↳ significantly. In 2018, the average party received 32% of its income from subsidies and 40% from membership dues. In 1989, the figures were 27% and 43% respectively (see Table 27.2). For the remaining funding, parties rely on donations. The most prominent of these consists of the 'taxes' that many parties levy on their representatives and members of executives: they pay part of their income to the party that they represent. More generally, the Dutch system of party finance does not meet the narrative of cartel parties that keep their resources to themselves (as argued by Katz & Mair, 1995). If anything, after entering parliament, new parties get access to state funding, and since most new parties do not have a lot of members, state subsidies make up a large share of their income. The ethnic-minority interest party Denk
p. 466 and the pensioners' party 50PLUS get ↳ the highest share of their income from subsidies. Thus, instead of helping established parties maintain their position, subsidies play an important role in creating a level playing field (Koole, 1996). The only exception here is the PVV, which is excluded from state subsidies because it does not meet the 1,000-member minimum requirement outlined in the party finance law.

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Table 27.2 Party organization

	Party finance (%)				Internal democracy			
	Dues		Subsidies		Party leader		Candidate list	
	1989	2018	1989	2018	2002	2018	2002	2018
PvdA	62	53	14	32	DC	Ref.	DC	MC
CDA	64	64	17	27	DC	Ref.	PB	PB
VVD	61	35	25	31	DC	Ref.	DC	Ref.
D66	48	50	31	21	MC	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
SP	5[a]	8	10[a]	11	DC	DC	DC	DC
GL	35[a]	41	25[a]	27	MC	Ref.	MC	Ref.
CU	45[b]	57	45[b]	25	DC	HC	DC	HC
SGP	26[c]	30	35[c]	32	DC	DC	PE	PE
PVV	–	n/a	–	0	–	–	–	PL
PvdD	–	28	–	39	–	MC	–	MC
50PLUS	–	28	–	70	–	MC	–	MC
Denk	–	n/a	–	76	–	MC	–	PE
FVD	–	49	–	25	–	MC	–	PEC

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JA21	–	–	–	–	–	MC	–	MC
Volt	–	–	–	–	–	Ref.	–	Ref.
BIJ1	–	–	–	–	–	MC	–	MC
BBB	–	–	–	–	–	MC	–	MC

Sources: Koole (2011); Poguntke et al. (2016); Voerman (2014).

a 1994.

b average GPV and RPF.

c 2008.

Ref.: Referendum; MC: Member congress; HC: Hybrid Congress; DC: Delegate congress; PB: Party Branches; PE: Party Executive; PL: Party Leader.

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Besides membership and finances, party structure has also received ample attention in the academic literature (Hazan & Voerman, 2006; Schumacher & Giger, 2017). For this discussion, it is useful to focus on the party central office, the party in public office, and the party on the ground (Katz & Mair, 2013). These three different faces of the party have different interests and resources, but more fundamentally, they also operate at different speeds (Meijer, 2014). For instance, the party in public office seeks to manage the electoral brand of the party in a media and political landscape. Along with its close advisers (often including a campaign manager), the PPG chair makes strategic decisions about the positioning of the party, and can swiftly change course—even at the speed of a single tweet.

In comparison, the party on the ground operates at a much slower pace. For instance, members may meet once a year at a party congress, which is often the highest organ within a political party. Here, the members can vote on electoral manifestos and candidate lists. In some parties, only the party congress can approve participation in government coalitions. However, to a certain extent, the term 'party on the ground' reflects an outdated reality. While some parties still engage in door-to-door campaigning, the importance of volunteer labour in election campaigns has waned in favour of investing in purchased social media exposure.

The party central office sits between the party in central office and the membership base. The board is elected by and accountable to the annual party congress, which can be composed of either delegates or party members. They oversee the formal candidate selection process, draft manifestos, and are responsible for the party's revenue. The party chair is often the only one who is employed full time by the party, whereas the remaining board positions are filled by dedicated volunteers. The chair regularly participates in PPG meetings and maintains a similar work pace to the party in public office. This also holds true for the online and offline campaign staff in the central office, who wield significant influence over a substantial portion of the party's expenditures. Other departments within the central office, further from the campaign, operate at a slower pace. Many parties establish specialized departments geared towards supporting branches and training members. Additionally, most parties maintain entities such as a youth organization, a scientific bureau, and an international bureau, which are partially funded through separate subsidy programmes. One noteworthy exception in terms of party organization is the PVV, which formally operates as a one-man show as it relies almost entirely on its main representative in public office.

Over time, the power relation between the different faces has shifted. We can see this most clearly in candidate selection. Some parties, including the VVD, CDA, PvdA, the social-liberal Democrats 66 (*Democraten 66*, D66), and GreenLeft (*GroenLinks*, GL), have opened up the process of candidate selection to
p. 467 internal referendums (Voerman, ↳ 2014). Koole (1996) and Katz and Mair (1995) have observed that individual party members formally getting a greater say over candidate selection is a plebiscitarian move: it undermines the influence of party's middle cadres and disperses power among atomized party members. This allows the party in public office to operate more independently from the party on the ground. The extent to which this is problematic is up for debate, given that in these parties, the opinions of party members and party elites overlap considerably (Van Holsteyn et al., 2017). Meanwhile, in the SP and CU, the party congress has the final say over the list of candidates, and in the SGP, this is the responsibility of the party board. With the exception of Volt, new parties have followed this more hierarchical model. The PVV and FVD are the most hierarchical, with the party leaders completely controlling candidate selection (De Jonge, 2021).

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Party Typologies

While the discussion about what party type succeeded the mass party petered out in the early 2000s, the debate about typologies resurfaced a few years later. However, this time, the discussion on typologies was not so much to conceptualize different periods in the development of parties. Instead, it aimed to facilitate comparative analysis in order to compare and contrast parties operating in the same period. Where Koole (1996) and Katz and Mair (1995) believed that different types of parties succeed each other chronologically, Meguid (2005) and De Vries and Hobolt (2020) propose that different types of parties compete with each other at the same time. Accordingly, they use party typologies to analyse how parties operate within a given time period. Scholars working within this tradition typically distinguish between newcomer parties and established parties. The most prominent Dutch scholar here is De Vries, who, together with Hobolt, theorized the concept of 'challenger parties' (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). In a similar vein, Meguid (2005) conceptualized 'niche parties', a concept that has also been applied to the Netherlands (see Van Ditmars & De Lange, 2019). These newer typologies tend to be more precise and less comprehensive than those used in the 1990s.

Challenger parties are simply defined by their lack of government experience (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). They are contrasted with what De Vries and Hobolt (2020) call 'dominant parties' that have government experience. De Vries and Hobolt (2020) argue that challenger parties operate as political entrepreneurs that introduce new issues and employ anti-establishment rhetoric. A significant drawback of the analytical simplicity of De Vries and Hobolt's model is that it assumes that every party without government experience behaves in the same way. In the Netherlands, this would apply to the SGP, which often supports the government, the populist radical-right PVV, which except for a brief period between 2010 and 2012 challenged the government, and GL, which has increasingly positioned itself as a party that is willing and able to assume governmental responsibilities. Moreover, given the fragmentation of the Dutch party system, it would not be accurate to consider every party with government experience (including the PvdA,
p. 468 CDA, and CU) as 'dominant' parties. First, none of these parties is dominant in a ↳ numerical sense; in the last election, none received more than 25% of the vote. Second, the Dutch party system is relatively open compared to other systems, with new parties quickly entering novel coalitions (Mair, 1997).

By contrast, Meguid (2005) defines niche parties by their electoral strategy: they tend to focus on one novel issue that falls outside of the economic line of conflict, and they reject the traditional class-based orientation of politics. This sets them apart from mainstream parties, which primarily campaign based on their centrist economic policy position and their ability to serve in government. Wagner (2012) has further refined the concept of niche parties, suggesting that the thematic focus on non-economic issues is what ultimately characterizes them. However, applying Meguid's (2005) typology to the Netherlands also reveals its limitations. For instance, the CDA rejects the class-based orientation of politics and wants to govern, while acknowledging that 'a man does not live on bread alone' (thereby emphasizing the importance of non-economic issues), yet it is also the epitome of a mainstream party. The typology also encounters challenges when dealing with the radical-left SP, which challenges the establishment while being highly committed to class-based politics.[6]

Taken together, these new typologies have provided valuable insights by offering a more nuanced perspective on the party-political landscape, especially when compared to the mass and cadre party models, which implied a dominant model at a specific point in time. At the same time, these new conceptualizations are narrower in scope than earlier party typologies as they concentrate primarily on campaign strategies.

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Certain elements that in the past were considered integral aspects of a concept have now become distinct and separate elements in party research. For example, Koole (1996) viewed the centrism of certain parties and their inclination towards centralized forms of organization as constituent elements of the cadre party. In contrast, Schumacher et al. (2013) examine how party organization influences strategic decisions concerning party positioning. In this approach, party positions are no longer treated as mere components of a predefined party type, but rather as outcomes that are, to some extent, the result of party organizational structures and strategies.

While these newer typologies offer some analytical value, it is evident that there is an overlap between the observed trends (i.e. declining party membership, internal democratization) and the dichotomies of new/old, challenger/dominant, and niche/mainstream. Since these are ideal types, not all parties align perfectly with these categorizations. In the Netherlands, there are three traditional 'mainstream' or 'dominant' parties: the CDA, VVD, and PvdA. From the cabinet Drees I (in 1946) until the cabinet Rutte IV (in 2022), no (non-caretaker) government was formed that did not include at least two of these parties (or their predecessors). Their manifestos tend to focus on economic issues, and their campaigns on the competence of their leaders as potential prime ministers. While these parties can still undeniably be categorized as
p. 469 'mainstream' ↳ parties, they have experienced a steady decline in their membership (see Figure 27.2) and electoral support. In 1989, these parties held 125 out of 150 seats in parliament, compared to 58 seats in 2021 (see Otjes & De Lange, *this volume*).

The decline of mainstream parties in the Netherlands went hand in hand with the rise of new parties. This prominently includes far-right parties, such as the Pim Fortuyn List (*Lijst Pim Fortuyn*, LPF), PVV, JA21 and FVD, but also pensioners' parties (e.g. 50PLUS; see Boerboom, 2021) and parties focusing on environmental issues, such as the animal rights party (*Partij van de Dieren*, PvdD) and GL (Lucardie & Voerman, 2010). Other examples of new parties in the Dutch political landscape have focused on multiculturalism (e.g. Denk and BIJ1), European integration (Volt), or rural interests (notably the Farmer–Citizen Movement, BBB). These newcomers generally lack government experience, campaign on newer issues, and seek to mobilize voters on cross-cutting cleavages. While some of them have hierarchical party structures and lack an extensive membership base, others have bucked these trends. For instance, the FVD is the largest party in terms of membership but is very hierarchically organized, while GL has undergone democratization processes to include broader participation of its members and democratized its internal organizations. Notwithstanding these different characteristics, they can still be categorized as 'niche' parties.

Some parties do not easily fit into these categories. As Brummer and Otjes (2021) have observed, D66 has undergone a radical shift. While the party was formed as a challenger/niche party with the promise to disrupt the system and kept this orientation for the first decades of its existence, it now often participates in government. In fact during the Rutte period, no viable coalition was formed without the support of D66 either as a coalition party or as a supportive opposition party. Although its emphasis on democratic reform has diminished, D66 has consistently maintained a distinct identity by focusing on issues that have remained quintessentially 'D66' over time, even if the specific content of those issues has evolved.

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The CU, SGP, and SP also do not easily fit into the categories 'challenger/niche party' and 'dominant/mainstream party'. The focus that the CU and SGP have on moral issues might make them niche parties, but they do not necessarily seek to introduce new cleavages in the political landscape, but rather seek to protect their own electorate from secularization. These parties have stable support bases in clearly delineated Protestant communities (the so-called 'Bible belt'), and foster ties with like-minded Protestant organizations. While De Vries and Hobolt (2020) may qualify the CU as a 'dominant' party because of its by now frequent government participation, it does not dominate the system numerically (by garnering only 3% of the vote). The SGP and SP can be seen as 'permanent opposition parties'. Yet, they operate very differently: the SGP is constructive, while the SP is focused much more on challenging the government (Louwerse & Otjes, 2019). The SP's focus on economic issues, however, does not square with the notion that it is a niche party. Moreover, in the organizations of each of these parties, strong local branches still play an important role. All in all, these parties fit poorly with the niche/challenger party vs. mainstream/dominant party distinction. Perhaps it is better to think of them as relics of the age of mass parties.

Questions for Future Research

The societal role of political parties has changed over recent decades. In the context of dwindling membership figures and perceived elite disengagement from grassroots politics, scholars have observed the decline of traditional mass parties. Scholars have come up with wildly different models to understand the emergence of a new type of party, such as cartel parties (Katz & Mair, 1995), or mainstream parties and dominant parties (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). At the same time, we have seen the rise of niche, challenger, and populist parties (see De Jonge, Rooduijn, & Zaslove, *this volume*) that criticize their mainstream opponents for being out of touch with voters. In our view, this indicates a new phase in party politics in the Netherlands, with increased competition between mainstream/dominant parties and niche/challenger parties being the key dynamic.

While parties still play a key role in the functioning of the democratic system, it is undeniable that they have come under increasing pressure, which has affected campaign strategies as well as party organizations. The exact nature and implications of these effects remain underexplored. In the remainder of this chapter, we discuss three major trends that merit further consideration: individualization, professionalization, and regulation. First, the process of individualization is evident in the depillarization of the 1960s and the ensuing decline of established parties. This generated a large number of free-floating voters: since they were 'liberated' from traditional party loyalties, they became 'available' to vote for new parties. This poses a clear threat to the electoral, financial, and organizational stability of political parties. After all, votes determine not only the number of seats that parties have in parliament (and with that, their power over policy), but also their income. Losing elections means less income through subsidies and party 'taxes'. This blow can, to some extent, be softened with high membership bases, but lower levels of loyalty also result in lower membership figures. How parties operate in a world of increasing electoral and financial uncertainty requires further investigation.

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A second trend that political parties are experiencing pertains to professionalization: as Koole (1992) had already observed, parties are no longer purely volunteer-driven organizations. As the role of party cadres diminished, the influence of professionals in campaigning and recruitment increased. For instance, parties rely increasingly on in-house professionals and external consultants from polling, marketing, and communication to determine their tactics, strategies and programmes. Moreover, for recruitment purposes, parties rely less on broad networks of like-minded societal groups and more on their own organizational efforts. Parliamentary candidates are often recruited by PPG staff and the political advisers of ministers. How the professionalization of Dutch politics has affected the gap between citizens and their representatives ought to be examined. On the one hand, it is a clear sign that parties no longer have the deep societal rootedness that mass parties once had. On the other hand, parties are relying more and more on professional social media experts to bridge this gap (Spierings & Jacobs, 2019; ↳ Vliegenthart, 2012). Further research into digital campaigning is certainly warranted (see Vliegenthart, Kruikemeijer, & Aaldering, *this volume*).

A final trend we observe is regulation. This is a relatively novel phenomenon in the Netherlands: at the time of writing (2023), the Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations is preparing a Law on Political Parties (*Wet op de Politieke Partijen*, WPP). The aim of the WPP is to update and strengthen the legal frameworks within which Dutch political parties operate. Among others things, this law promises to make local party branches and independent local parties eligible for subsidies, widen the legal basis to ban parties if they go against the democratic order, and require greater transparency about party organization and online campaigning. The implementation of this new law could lead to more insight into how party finance rules, transparency requirements, and the threat of a legal ban affect party behaviour.

In addition to studying the effects of these three trends on parties as organizations that mobilize voters and recruit political elites, two areas also require further attention: the daily functioning of the extra-parliamentary organization, and party politics at the local level. First, we know surprisingly little about the work that happens in party headquarters, and how that shapes the strategic, programmatic, and recruitment choices that parties make. In line with this observation, the role of party chairs and the functioning of ancillary organizations, such as youth organizations and scientific bureaus, merit further research (see De Roon, 2022; Timmermans et al., 2014; Van de Velde, 1994).

Second, party politics at the local level has been sorely overlooked. To date, we know little about how parties are organized at the local level. Yet, we see an immense diversity at this level, which is largely linked to the existence of independent local parties. These are parties that run in a single municipality in local elections without any organizational ties to one or more parties that run for elections in other municipalities or at the other levels of government (Otjes & Van Ostaaijen, 2021). In 2022, these independent local parties received 31% of the vote, which was more than the three largest national parties combined. Thus, independent local parties can be seen as the largest ‘political family’ in municipal politics. What they share is their organizational independence. While local parties have assumed a more prominent role in Dutch politics, we still know relatively little about them (but see Otjes & Van Ostaaijen, 2021). These parties show a high degree of organizational diversity: some operate without members or manifesto, while others have membership organizations. In light of their growing popularity, future studies should pay more attention to the subnational level.

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Notes

1 Dutch party law stipulates that in order to be eligible for state funding for the extra-parliamentary party organization, a party needs to be an association with a legal personality, be represented in either house of the *Staten-Generaal*, and have at least 1,000 paying members. The Media Act gives all parties represented in the *Staten-Generaal* the right to limited radio and television airtime.

2 Technically, the conservative *Algeemene Kiesvereeniging in Nederland* predates the ARP as the first national party by 11 years (De Jong, 2000).

3 In the Netherlands, political cleavages were solidified into ‘pillars’ that structured not just the political landscape, but nearly every aspect of life. Every pillar produced its own political party, and members of a pillar voted for this party.

4 At this time, the electoral system was still based on electoral districts.

5 It is peculiar that the *Algemeene Bond* operated as a cadre party, considering that it originated as an emancipation movement. Up until 1926, they did not need a strong party organization because the Roman Catholic Church fulfilled this role.

6 Adams et al. (2006) count radical-left parties as niche parties because of their ‘non-centrist’ ideology, but they do not explain what makes an ideology non-centrist.

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