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Dutch parliamentary elections of October 2025

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ABSTRACT

The election followed the fall of an experimental four-party coalition under nonpartisan prime minister Dick Schoof and without the leaders of the four coalition partners in the cabinet. The campaign followed the standard Dutch pattern: low costs and an emphasis on televised debates. The election ended in a close race between D66 and Geert Wilders' PVV. D66 gained spectacularly (from 9 to 26 seats) while PVV lost considerably (from 37 to 26 seats). The NSC lost all of its twenty seats in Parliament and the Christian Democratic Appeal made a comeback (up from 5 to 18 seats). The government formation process, led by D66, was difficult, as at least two relevant parties refused to cooperate in coalitions including some other parties. In the end, D66, VVD, and CDA formed the first true – without support agreement – minority cabinet in Dutch history. The Netherlands have entered a new experiment.

KEYWORDS Elections; Netherlands; cabinet formation; minority government

After the 2023 parliamentary election, an experiment was begun in which the leaders of the four coalition partners would remain in the Parliament and a nonpartisan prime minister, Dick Schoof, was installed.¹ This experiment failed. The parties often acted independently rather than as a group. In the end, Geert Wilders withdrew the PVV ministers from the Cabinet, which then fell on 3 June 2025, after serving only 337 days. New elections were called for 29 October 2025. The campaign followed the standard Dutch pattern: low costs and an emphasis on televised debates. The election did produce some interesting results: 1) D66 gained substantially while PVV suffered considerable losses, returning both parties with 26 seats each to parliament (it took several days to determine whether D66 or the PVV had become the largest party); 2) the NSC lost all of its 20 seats in Parliament; and 3) the Christian Democratic Appeal bounced back from 5 to 18 seats. As the largest party, D66 took the lead in the formation process. This proved difficult, as the VVD refused to enter a cabinet with the left-wing GreenLeft/PvdA and D66 refused to join with

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right-wing JA21. In the end, D66, VVD, and CDA decided to form a minority cabinet. Thus, once again, an experiment was tried. Time will tell if this one is more successful than the last.

This report provides some more information on the background to the election, the electoral campaign, the election result, and the government formation process.

Background to the election

The experiment failed. After the elections of November 2023 and long negotiations, four parties took the audacious step of introducing a Cabinet with two important experimental elements. Rather than follow a decades long tradition that the prime minister ‘customarily comes from the largest governing party’ (Andeweg *et al.* 2020: 125), they agreed that Geert Wilders, leader of the Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV), the largest party in the Second Chamber, would not become prime minister. Moreover, none of the leaders of the coalition parties would accept ministerial posts in the new Cabinet. Instead, they would all remain in the Second Chamber as leaders of their respective parliamentary caucuses.

Since the prime minister would not come from the largest party, a second experimental element was introduced. They chose Dick Schoof, who had never held a political position, to lead the Cabinet. Schoof was not a member of any party at the time. Although he had been a member of the social-democratic Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA) for thirty years until January 2021, first and foremost he had had a long and distinguished career in the civil service (Aharouay and De Koning 2025). Perhaps unintentionally, no minister in the new Cabinet had ever served as minister in a previous Cabinet. This had not happened since 1905.

From the start, the right-wing coalition was like a runaway stagecoach with four horses harnessed together, often not pulling in the same direction: nobody held the reins. Parties made proposals that their coalition partners were not aware of. For example, the Farmer-Citizen Movement (*BoerBurgerBeweging*, BBB) made a proposal in the First Chamber to take 5 billion euros out of the climate fund and give it to the farmers. New Social Contract (*Nieuw Sociaal Contract*, NSC) produced its own pension plan, after the recent introduction of a fundamentally new pension system that had taken many years to develop and introduce. The Liberal Party (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD) introduced a legislative proposal to protect first responders from violence. And last but not least the PVV, in particular its leader Wilders, never felt any need to consult any party, or even the MPs of his own party caucus (e.g. NRC, 14 February 2025).

An additional bump in the road concerned the position of Pieter Omtzigt, the leader of NSC (see e.g. Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2025: 466).

Omtzigt was suffering health issues. His first burn-out had occurred in 2021. After resting for four months, returning to Parliament and leaving the Christian Democratic Appeal (*Christen Democratisch Appèl*, CDA), two months before the November 2023 elections he announced the founding of the NSC. The NSC gained an impressive 20 seats at the election and became one of the four horses pulling the stagecoach. However, in September 2024, Omtzigt was forced to step back from his work and take a period of rest again; in November 2024 he returned to Parliament, but not yet full-time. On 18 April 2025, he announced his retirement from Parliament and from politics, greatly hobbling his party.² His successor Nicolien van Vroonhoven, also a former MP of the CDA and Omtzigt's right-hand, faced a major challenge leading a party that was 'built entirely on one man's reputation, without that man being around. And that in a, to put it mildly, challenging governing coalition' (*de Volkskrant*, 1 April 2025).³

In the end it was Wilders who abruptly halted the runaway stagecoach. Frustrated and feeling that the main goals of his party on immigration were being thwarted, on 25 May, he introduced ten major changes to the coalition accord that he demanded that his coalition partners accept. These included that all Dutch borders immediately be closed to new asylum seekers and that all Syrian refugees be returned to Syria. After some days of internal consultations, Wilders concluded that his coalition partners were unwilling to take immediate action and he withdrew his party's members from the Cabinet. Characteristic of Wilders, he announced this decision on X, prior to informing prime minister Schoof (Aharouay and De Koning 2025: 25). On 3 June, the cabinet officially fell. The Schoof experiment had lasted 337 days, making it the third shortest cabinet in the Dutch post-war period.⁴ Taking the summer vacation into account and the need for parties to have sufficient time to prepare a new list of candidates and a party manifesto and for municipalities and other actors to organise the election process, new elections were set for 29 October 2025.⁵

The election campaign

All 15 political parties already represented in the Second Chamber of Parliament and 12 additional parties or party lists participated in the election.⁶ Most of the parties retained their number 1 on the candidate list (i.e. the list-puller) from the previous (2023) election. The exceptions were: 1) the NSC (Omtzigt had retired from politics; Van Vroonhoven declared herself unavailable; and Eddy van Hijum became the NSC list-puller); 2) the Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*, SP; Lillian Marijnissen had resigned in December 2023 after poor election results and was replaced by Jimmy Dijk); 3) Forum for Democracy (*Forum voor Democratie*, FvD; Thierry Baudet decided that his role as party leader was

played out and in August 2025 he was replaced by Lidewij de Vos, while Baudet opted for the number 2 position on the list of candidates); and 4) 50PLUS (a party for the interests of the elderly; Jan Struijs succeeded Gerard van Hooft, under whose leadership the party had lost its single seat in 2023). [Table 1](#) lists the names of the list-pullers – 10 men, 5 women, as in 2023 – for all 15 parties that were electorally successful in October 2025, together with the title of their party manifesto.

The election campaign began in earnest at the beginning of October. Debates between list-pullers are crucial: ‘Televised election debates and the media coverage of them are certainly an important part of Dutch election campaigns’ (Walter and Van Praag [2024](#): 409). The public and commercial media organisations organise debates and determine who will participate. They often base their choices on the standing of the parties in the polls (Louwerse and Van Dijk [2022](#): 549).

Table 1. Party leadership at general elections 2023 and 2025 (for parties elected in Parliament in 2025).

List Number, Party	Party leader (gender)		Title party platform 2025
	2023	2025	
1) PVV	Geert Wilders (M)	Geert Wilders (M)	This is your country!/Dit is uw land!
2) GL/PvdA	Frans Timmermans (M)	Frans Timmermans (M)	A new start for the Netherlands/Een nieuwe start voor Nederland
3) VVD	Dilan Yesilgöz (F)	Dilan Yesilgöz (F)	Stronger from the storm/Sterker uit de storm
5) D66	Rob Jetten (M)	Rob Jetten (M)	It can be done/Het kan wél
6) BBB	Caroline van der Plas (F)	Caroline van der Plas (F)	BBB delivers/BBB levert
7) CDA	Henri Bontenbal (M)	Henri Bontenbal (M)	Building on trust/Bouwen op vertrouwen
8) SP	Lilian Marijnissen (F)	Jimmy Dijk (M)	Super social/Super sociaal
9) DENK	Stephan van Baarle (M)	Stephan van Baarle (M)	Now is the moment, more than ever!/Nu is het moment meer dan ooit!
10) PvdD	Esther Ouwehand (F)	Esther Ouwehand (F)	Naturally/Natuurlijk
11) FvD	Thierry Baudet (M)	Lidewij de Vos (F)	A new opportunity for the Netherlands/Een nieuwe kans voor Nederland
12) SGP	Chris Stoffer (M)	Chris Stoffer (M)	Vote Christian for the Netherlands/Stem christelijk voor Nederland
13) CU	Mirjam Bikker (F)	Mirjam Bikker (F)	Standing up for the good/Opstaan voor het goede
14) Volt	Laurens Dassen (M)	Laurens Dassen (M)	Do something new/Doe iets nieuws
15) JA21	Joost Eerdmans (M)	Joost Eerdmans (M)	The right approach for the Netherlands/De juiste aanpak voor Nederland
20) 50PLUS	Gerard van Hooft (M)	Jan Struijs (M)	We participate/Wij doen mee

The first major debate, however, is traditionally a radio debate on the public station Radio 1.⁷ This debate was held on 10 October. The first televised debate was organised two days later by the commercial broadcaster RTL. Plans were altered when Wilders, who already had skipped the radio debate, withdrew following reports that suggested that he may have been the object of a planned attack on his life by three persons who had been arrested in Belgium. Four other list-pullers of major parties participated: Timmermans, Yeşilgöz, Bontenbal, and Jetten, who took the place of Wilders and, with Bontenbal, with his positive and constructive tone made a surprisingly strong impression during the debate.⁸ Wilders stayed away: even though the authorities declared that there were no further threats, he said that he had a 'bad feeling' about matters, and would cancel all campaign activities, including the major second RTL debate to be held on 19 October. With Wilders again absent, that debate included the four aforementioned list-pullers, supplemented by the leaders of JA21 and SP. The main topics discussed were housing, immigration, and health policy; there was no clear winner or loser of this debate.⁹

Wilders, however, changed his position after about a week and announced on X that he would re-enter the campaign, taking the place of Jetten in a televised debate with Bontenbal, Timmermans, and Yeşilgöz on 23 October, just six days before the election. This was the first time that these main political competitors had an opportunity to challenge Wilders, and they made one point absolutely clear: they were not willing to participate in a new coalition with him. The main topics were again housing, immigration and health care. There were some other less relevant debates, and the campaign traditionally closed with a two-stage debate on the eve of the election by the public broadcaster NOS.¹⁰ A debate was held between the leaders of six smaller parties at 7pm and a second debate between nine other parties between 8.30 and 10pm. This was the first opportunity for a number of parties to participate in a national televised debate: Christian Union (*ChristenUnie*, CU), the ethnic party Denk, the orthodox protestant Dutch Reformed Party (*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*, SGP), the pan-European party Volt, FvD en the PvdD in the early debate and NSC and BBB in the later one.

Since the debates are initiated and organised by the media outlets, they involve relatively small expenditure for the parties. Parties organise meetings around the country in which candidates are presented and organise various other campaign activities, but the major expense for the parties has become 'paid publicity and external consultants' (Walter and Van Praag 2024: 412). Since 1994, parties have increasingly paid for advertisements on radio, television, and the internet, although as of 10 October 2025 EU regulations 'on the transparency and targeting of political advertising' (2024/900) severely restricted Dutch parties placing ads on social media sites.¹¹

Accurate figures on the exact amount spent on campaign activities are virtually impossible to obtain, but some estimates provide insight into which parties are the most active in this respect (see for the period 1994–2021 Walter and Van Praag 2024: 411). On 26 October 2025, *de Volkskrant* reported that up to that point, D66 had the most advertising of any party, 67 per cent more than made by the VVD, which was second.¹² The party was estimated to have spent 1.8 million euros on television ads and billboards along the highways. Two other large spenders were the VVD with 1.1 million euros and the GreenLeft/PvdA (*GroenLinks/Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA) combination with 928,000 euros. The numbers then dropped off to CDA (294,000), PvdD (279,000), SGP (197,000), 50Plus (131,000), CU (108,000), Volt (83,000), JA21 (44,000), SP (34,000) and FvD (33,000). No figures were reported for other parties. It is interesting to note that also no figure was reported for Wilders' PVV; prior to the successful 2023 elections, the estimation was that the PVV had spent less than 5,000 euros (see Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2025: 469).

Political parties in the Netherlands receive funds from membership dues, governmental subsidies, and gifts and donations, including for some parties mandatory or voluntary contributions of representatives (Walter and Van Praag 2024: 410). Gifts and donations are especially important for carrying out election campaigns. Dutch law requires that all gifts of greater than 1,000 euros must be reported up to a maximum of 100,000 euros.¹³ The amounts are, however, relatively small by international standards. In 2025, it was reported that 13 parties received a total of only 5.12 million euros in donations. A comparatively low number, 264 individuals, contributed more than 1,000 euros to a party. The GreenLeft (*GroenLinks*, GL) received the largest amount in donations (1.1 million), with 97 donations greater than 1,000 euros; most of these would have come from officeholders of the party. The second largest amount received by a party was D66 with just under one million. Five parties, including D66, received a donation of the maximum amount of 100,000 euros. Interestingly, a small number of individuals made this maximum donation to more than one party.¹⁴ Note, however, that these figures may only show the tip of the iceberg: a major concern of Dutch election campaigns is 'the lack of transparency about the origins of parties' campaign money' (Walter and Van Praag 2024: 416).

The election result

The results show that short-term factors and by implication the election campaign matters more than ever; important and hard to predict changes can be seen in the volatile voting behaviour of the electorate. These may be indications of a process of 'Dutchification' of party and electoral politics. 'The term 'Dutchification' refers to a combination of processes: an

increase in electoral volatility, an ongoing fragmentation of the party system, the electoral surge of niche parties at the expense of established party families, and an overall increased level of competition between political parties' (Van der Meer and Van der Brug 2024: 420).

On 22 August, the rump cabinet 'fell' again, when NSC withdrew, leaving only the VVD and BBB as the rump Schoof cabinet. Tom Louwerse of the aggregate poll *Peilingwijzer* (see Louwerse and Van Dijk 2022) issued his first report on 27 August 2025, i.e. the first report after the second fall (see note 5). He noted that the PVV remained the largest party. Although this party was down from its peak at the elections of 2023 when it gained 23.5 per cent of the vote, with between 18 and 22 per cent in the *Peilingwijzer*, it remained the largest party. It was followed by GreenLeft/PvdA with a margin of 16 to 18 per cent. D66 stood in fifth place with a margin of 6 to 8 per cent. On 8 October came the first mention of some electoral gains by D66, which had climbed to tie in fourth place with 8 to 9 per cent. The PVV remained in first place with 20 to 22 per cent. In the final report on 28 October, published the day before the election, Louwerse noted that it was not possible to reach a conclusion concerning which party was the largest. The PVV had fallen to 15 to 18 per cent; GreenLeft/PvdA sat at between 15 to 16 per cent, and D66 had steadily risen to between 14 to 16 per cent (see Table 2).

The actual results indicate that there continued to be substantial electoral movement in the last days of the campaign, with at that moment about 55 per cent of the voters with a clear and final party preference and about 45 per cent still in doubt (Van der Schelde *et al.* 2025: 9). Results from the 2025 Dutch Election Study showed that 13 per cent made their vote decision on election day and 27 per cent in the last days before the election. This concurs with the previous elections of 2023, when 15 per cent of the voters made their vote decision on election day and 30 per cent only a day or a few days earlier (Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2024: 35).

On the day after the election, it could not yet be determined which party was the largest. D66 had a lead of a few thousand votes over the PVV, but there were still votes to be counted. Wilders shared social media messages that insinuated that containers of votes had disappeared in one municipality, and that other irregularities had been observed.¹⁵ He stated that he did not know whether these insinuations were correct but considered them important enough for further investigation. After a few days of some uncertainty, on 7 November, the Electoral Council (*Kiesraad*) announced the final and official results and added an unusual and unambiguous statement that the results were reliable and the result of a fair and transparent election process.¹⁶ Although both the PVV and D66 had won 26 seats in Parliament, D66 had received 29,668 more votes and was officially the largest party (see Table 2).

Table 2. Election to the Second Chamber of Dutch Parliament 29 October 2025.

Party	Elections 29 October 2025			Peilingwijzer/Poll-of-Polls 28 October 2025			Elections 2023		Elections 2021		Elections 2017		Elections 2012	
	Seats	Votes	% Votes	% Votes	% Votes	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats	Seats
PVV	26	1,760,966	16,66%	15–18%	24–28	37	17	20	15	15	15	15	15	15
GL/PvdA	20	1,352,163	12,79%	15–16%	22–26	25	8	14	4	4	14	4	4	4
– GL														
– PvdA														
VVD	22	1,505,829	14,24%	10–12%	15–19	24	34	33	41	41	33	33	41	41
NSC	0	39,408	0,37%	0–1%	0–1	20	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
D66	26	1,790,634	16,94%	14–16%	21–25	9	24	19	12	12	19	19	12	12
BBB	4	279,916	2,65%	2–3%	3–5	7	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CDA	18	1,246,874	11,79%	12–14%	18–22	5	15	19	13	13	19	19	13	13
SP	3	199,585	1,89%	3–3%	3–5	5	9	14	15	15	14	14	15	15
DENK	3	250,368	2,37%	2–3%	2–4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	–	–
PvdD	3	219,371	2,08%	2–3%	2–4	3	6	5	2	2	5	5	2	2
FvD	7	480,393	4,54%	3–4%	4–6	3	8	2	–	–	2	2	–	–
SGP	3	238,093	2,25%	2–3%	2–4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
CU	3	201,361	1,90%	2–2%	2–4	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Volt	1	116,468	1,10%	1–2%	1–3	2	3	3	–	–	–	–	–	–
JA21	9	628,517	5,95%	6–8%	9–12	1	3	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
50PLUS	2	151,053	1,43%	1–2%	1–3	0	1	4	2	2	4	4	2	2
Other parties	0	110,991	1,05%	–	0	0	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Turnout						77,75%	78,71%	81,57%	74,57%	74,57%	81,57%	81,57%	74,57%	74,57%
Total	150	78,30%	100%		0	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150

Source: Electoral Council (*Kiesraad*) for election results; *Peilingwijzer* for poll results (https://peilingwijzer.tomlouwense.nl/posts/20251028_update_peilingwijzer.html).
Note: Only results for parties with at least 1 seat after the 2025 elections, plus the NSC; parties are ordered according to their size in 2023, that is also the order of parties on the ballot in 2025.

There were other interesting results. Perhaps the most ‘impressive’ was the disappearance of NSC from Parliament. With its problematic participation in the right-wing Cabinet Schoof and the departure from politics of its founder and leader Omtzigt, the party was rudderless and failed to gain a single seat in 2025. No party had ever gone from 0 to 20 and back to 0 in such a short period of time. Other interesting developments in 2025 concerned the CDA and JA21. The once powerful CDA had fallen to only 5 seats in 2023, but under the leadership of Henri Bontenbal, jumped to 18 in 2025. JA21 had received only a single seat in 2023 and rose to 9 seats. The most plausible hypotheses are that the CDA profited from the fall of NSC and that JA21 gained votes from the PVV, as also may have been the case for the successful FvD (see Van der Schelde *et al.* 2025: 12).

The new government

‘Important as they are, elections seldom have a determining impact on the formation of a government’ (Andeweg *et al.* 2020: 120). Once it had been officially determined that D66 was the largest party in the Second Chamber, the process of forming a new government could begin. Even a cursory analysis of the elections results showed that this would be difficult. Although D66 was the largest party, it was the smallest largest party in the modern history of the country. With ten small and five middle-sized parties and the PVV in advance excluded from the new coalition – in the Netherlands, pre-election exclusions are more common than pre-election coalitions (Louwerse and Timmermans 2024: 476) – forging a majority coalition was a daunting proposition.

Since 2012, not the monarch but the Second Chamber has initiated the cabinet formation process (e.g. Louwers and Timmermans 2024). To fulfil the former role of the monarch, a ‘scout’ (*verkenner*) is appointed. On 4 November, Wouter Koolmees, former MP and Minister of Social Affairs and Employment in the Rutte Cabinet from 2017 to 2022 for D66, was appointed as scout to explore the possibilities of forming a majority coalition. He met with all the parties – and it was immediately clear how complicated the process would be. Rob Jetten, leader of D66, preferred a centre cabinet GL/PvdA-D66-CDA-VVD. However, the leader of the VVD, Dilan Yeşilgöz, reiterated her campaign pledge that the VVD would in no scenario enter a cabinet with GL/PvdA; the fact that party leader Frans Timmermans had immediately stepped down as a result of the disappointing election result (minus 5 seats) and was succeeded by Jesse Klaver made no difference to her (e.g. NRC, 4 November 2025). Yeşilgöz preferred a cabinet of D66-CDA-VVD and the right wing JA21, but this combination was rejected by D66 (e.g. Trouw, 5 November 2025). On 11

November, Koolmees presented his conclusions to the Second Chamber. He proposed that D66 and CDA form what he called the ‘engine block’ of a new coalition and suggested that they should first agree on the central problems or policy issues of housing, nitrogen emissions, the economic position of the Netherlands, asylum and migration, and international security. When this had been accomplished, they could seek support among other parties (*Trouw*, 11 November 2025).

Two *informateurs* were appointed to guide this next phase of the process. D66 nominated former minister of Economic Affairs, Hans Wijers; the CDA nominated its former leader Sybrand van Haersma Buma. A deadline of three weeks was set for them to come to an agreement. However, this phase got off to a false start: in a private app message that was revealed by the media Wijers had referred to Yeşilgöz as ‘the witch of the VVD’. Wijers concluded that this had damaged his open-minded image and withdrew, and Buma continued as the single *informateur* (e.g. *NRC*, 15 November 2025; *Trouw*, 15 November 2025).

After three weeks, the pragmatic duo Jetten and Bontenbal had completed their writing assignment and ‘the true formation process could now begin’ (*Trouw*, 3 December 2025). The same newspaper described the document as ‘something for everybody’ and it had ‘reached out a helping hand’ to other parties (*de Volkskrant*, 3 December 2025). The plan included sections on nitrogen emissions, housing, defense, climate, asylum and migration, the economy, and finances. Although proposals were included for the major political problems of the day, they remained sufficiently centrist that other parties could be found to lend support.

The next step was for all parties in Parliament to meet with Buma to indicate whether they saw possibilities for joining in support of this document. The following day, it was reported that the VVD was enthusiastic concerning participation in a new cabinet, whereas GL/PvdA saw the door closing (e.g. *de Volkskrant*, 4 December 2025). Yet, otherwise, the parties remained entrenched in their positions: the VVD refused to enter a cabinet with GL/PvdA and D66 was opposed to a rightist coalition with VVD and JA21. Buma concluded that it was not clear that a majority cabinet could be formed, but that he was not yet ready to accept a minority cabinet (*NRC*, 5 December 2025; *de Volkskrant*, 5 December 2025).

In his final report, Buma recommended D66, CDA and the VVD prepare an agreement as the basis of a ‘stable cabinet’.¹⁷ For this phase, a new *informateur* was appointed: Rianne Letschert, the chairman of the board of the Maastricht University and party member of D66. She would lead the discussions among these parties in formulating a coalition agreement. On 10 December, the Second Chamber agreed to allow these three parties to investigate the formation of a minority cabinet (e.g. *de Volkskrant*, 10 December 2025).

Under Letchert, the parties continued to search for additional coalition partners, but without success. In the end, on 9 January 2026, Jetten announced that the three parties had decided to go it alone and form a minority cabinet. This was an historic decision and the beginning of a new experiment, as the country had never had a minority cabinet under normal circumstances; no Cabinet had *not* held a majority in *either* the First or Second Chamber. Traditionally ‘minority governments are not regarded a serious option by Dutch politicians’ (Andeweg 2011: 147). The exception might be the Cabinet Rutte I (2010–2012), which consisted of a minority of CDA and VVD but was ‘supported’ by the PVV; this might be called ‘a majority Cabinet in disguise’ (Otjes and Louwerse 2014).

Once D66, CDA and VVD had declared their desire to join together in a minority Cabinet, they were faced with two immediate challenges. One was one that they will face for the entire tenure as Cabinet: they need support from other parties to pass legislation in both houses of Parliament. Jetten referred to this as the ‘outstretched hand’ strategy, as part of his ambition to create a new, cooperative and constructive political culture. However, they failed to gain any immediate commitments from other parties but were given a small boost by Jesse Klaver (GL/PvdA), who was willing to help the minority coalition under three conditions: 1) ‘common people’ would be protected; 2) the nitrate crisis be solved; and 3) respect be shown to the rule of law and democracy (e.g. *de Volkskrant*, 24 January 2026).¹⁸

The second immediate challenge for the three partners was to write a coalition accord that would outline what they hoped to accomplish in the coming years. After 33 days of internal negotiation and 93 days after the elections, they presented their agreement titled *Aan de slag: Bouwen aan een beter Nederland* (Getting Started: Building a Better Netherlands). Some of the major elements of the accord, that according to a preliminary analysis showed D66 as the loser and CDA and VVD as the winners of the negotiations (Otjes 2026), were: 1) increase the expenditures for defense by 19.3 billion euro over the years until 2035; 2) maintain support for Ukraine for three years; 3) major investments for education (the previous government had proposed substantial cuts); 4) slight increase in development aid; 5) resurrection of a 20 billion euro fund to fight nitrate emissions, assist agriculture, and protect the environment; 6) allocate an additional one billion euros for housing for the years 2029 through to 2035; and 7) no decrease in the tax regulation through which home owners are allowed to deduct their mortgage interest from their income tax. To finance these expenditures, some drastic measures would be taken: 1) shorten the period of unemployment payments from two to one year; 2) raise the age of retirement; 3) raise the co-pay threshold for health insurance from 385 euros per year to 460 euros; 4) reduce long-term expenditure for care of elderly,

handicapped, and mental patients; 5) increase tax on incomes to finance the defense expenditures, referred to as the 'freedom contribution'; and 6) reorganise the civil service.

Obviously, this agreement was 'written in pencil' (NRC, 30 January 2026), since all proposals would have to be discussed with opposition parties. On Tuesday, 3 February, the Second Chamber debated the agreement. The open discussion ended with the opposition parties bringing a long list of demands for additions or changes to the coalition document. Raising the age for a government pension was the most controversial aspect of the agreement, but a resolution that stated that the Second Chamber would not support this proposal failed to get a majority.¹⁹ At the end of the debate, Jetten was chosen as *formateur* to complete the formation of the new cabinet.

The coalition partners moved quickly, and the following day announced the distribution of positions in the new cabinet. Then only four days later, all the names were announced of the people to fulfil these posts.²⁰ Rob Jetten (D66) – 38 years old, openly gay, and the first Prime Minister from D66 – would be the Head of the Department of General Affairs and Prime Minister, and he and his relatively young team would consist of a total of 18 ministers (7 D66, 6 VVD, 5 CDA; 11 men, 7 women) and 10 junior ministers (3 D66, 3 VVD, 3 CDA, plus the party-less Sandra Palmen who continued to work on repairing the damage of the childhood benefits scandal; 3 men, 7 women). The 2023 experiment that the candidates appear before a delegation of MPs and present themselves (see Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2025: 475) was not repeated, so the new Cabinet Jetten I could be sworn in and present itself to the Dutch people on 23 February 2026.²¹

Conclusion

Following the election of 2023, four parties (BBB, NSC, PVV and VVD) embarked on an experiment. The leaders of the parties would remain in Parliament rather than taking a position in the new cabinet; the leader of the largest party PVV, Geert Wilders, was denied the function of Prime Minister. The leader of that cabinet, Dick Schoof, was an experienced civil servant drawn from outside the coalition parties. The experiment was a failure. As noted above, it was like a group of four horses trying to pull a stagecoach, each in a different direction. This new coalition (D66, CDA and VVD) is also an experiment, this time by becoming a genuine minority cabinet with only 66 seats in the Second Chamber of Parliament, and minority support on the First Chamber or Senate, and with Rob Jetten as the first member of D66 to become Prime Minister. To pass legislation one or more additional parties will be

needed to form a majority. It is as if this time three horses attempt to pull the stagecoach, but at each stop an additional horse must be added. The question for the future is whether these horses can pull together and form a team to pull the stagecoach to its destination. Only time will tell.

Notes

1. For other recent articles in the 'Elections in Context' series, see Camatarri *et al.* (2025), Prosser (2025), Rori (2025) and Scharrer *et al.* (2026).
2. See e.g. <https://nos.nl/artikel/2564120-vertrekkende-omtzig-was-pitbull-en-dossievreter-wel-ten-koste-van-gezondheid>.
3. All translations from Dutch to English by the authors.
4. See <https://www.parlement.com/kabinet-schoof-2024-heden>.
5. Although the Schoof Cabinet was now a so-called rump Cabinet, serving as a caretaker until the new elections, its troubles were not over. On 22 August, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Casper Veldkamp (NSC), resigned, complaining that he did not have sufficient possibilities or discretion to take measures against the state of Israel for the situation in Gaza. In solidarity, the other Cabinet members from NSC also resigned, creating a new word in the Dutch language, *dubbel-demissionair*, or double-rump Cabinet. After this unique second fall of the Cabinet, only the ministers from the BBB and the VVD – totaling 32 out of 150 seats represented in the Second Chamber – remained until a new Cabinet could be formed after the October 2025 elections.
6. Eighteen parties participated in all (20) electoral districts and 9 parties in less, ranging from 19 to 2 districts, that primarily have an administrative function: 'for the determination of the distribution of seats in the Second Chamber of Parliament, the country is treated as a single electoral district' (Andeweg *et al.* 2020: 86; see also Van der Kolk 2024).
7. For an overview of the 2025 debates, see <https://www.ewmagazine.nl/politiek/achtergrond/2025/08/alle-verkiezingsdebatten-tweede-kamerverkiezingen-2025-1497079/>.
8. See <https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/politiek/artikel/5533389/debat-bontenbal-jetten-verrassing-nieuwspanel>.
9. See <https://www.ewmagazine.nl/politiek/achtergrond/2025/10/rtl-debat-tweede-voor-bode-voor-moeizame-kabinetsformatie-1508719/>.
10. See <https://over.nos.nl/nieuws/het-nos-slotdebat-vijftien-partijen-twee-debatten-tien-rondes/>.
11. See <https://nos.nl/collectie/14002/artikel/2586030-politieke-partijen-gaven-vlak-voor-verbod-nog-tienduizenden-euro-s-uit-op-sociale-media>.
12. See <https://www.volkskrant.nl/politiek/d66-stoot-de-vvd-van-troon-als-grootste-adverteerder-tijdens-verkiezingscampagne~b1defb4a/>.
13. For the 2025 official overview, see <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/democratie/documenten/jaarverslagen/2025/01/31/overzicht-substantiele-giften-aan-politieke-partijen-2025>.
14. See <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/ministerie-vordert-enige-gift-aan-pvv-groenlinks-en-pvda-kregen-samen-3-2-miljoen-aan-donaties-binnen~add90eff/?cb=9a7c3515-4a2d-4593-8965-7>.

15. See <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/wilders-insinueert-dat-containers-vol-stemmen-zijn-verdwenen-gemeente-gelooft-oren-niet-dit-is-trumpiaans~a74f35a5/>.
16. One of the authors (Van Holsteyn) is a member of the *Kiesraad*.
17. See <https://www.kabinetsformatie2025.nl/documenten/2025/12/08/eindverslag-informateur-buma>.
18. A surprise development might eventually prove to be another boost. On 20 January 2026, seven members of the parliamentary caucus of the PVV withdrew to continue further as the Group Markuszower, named after the most prominent MP and leader of this group. They objected to the stranglehold that Geert Wilders held on the members of his caucus, complained about the character of the PVV as a party without party members and the way that Wilders had operated during the campaign (and was not willing to evaluate this campaign) but, more importantly, they expressed greater willingness than Wilders to at least meet with the new coalition.
19. On 10 February all opposition parties, i.e. a majority of 84 seats, voted in favour of a resolution not to allocate money to explore the introduction of an electoral threshold in the Netherlands (<https://nos.nl/artikel/2601776-oppositie-stemt-kiesdrempelvoorstel-minderheidscoalitie-weg>).
20. On Monday, 16 February, the intended State Secretary for Finance, Nathalie van Berkel (D66), withdrew due to media reports about inaccuracies in her CV, in particular the diplomas she claimed to have obtained (e.g. *de Volkskrant*, 17 February 2026).
21. On the day following the installation of the new cabinet, Caroline van der Plas, announced she was resigning her leadership of the BBB and would be replaced by Henk Vermeer. The number two on the list of candidates, Mona Keijzer, felt so aggrieved that she left the party but would remain in Parliament as a one-person caucus.

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