Parliamentary Politics in the Netherlands

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INTRODUCTION

PARLIAMENT is one of the most visible arenas in Dutch politics. Key debates in the House of Representatives are televised, livestreamed, and covered extensively in news media reports. The results of parliamentary votes are shared on social media by parties and politicians to demonstrate their stance and to criticize other parties' voting behaviour. In addition to functioning as the nation's debating chamber, parliament has an important role as one of the High Councils of State in representing, as stipulated in the constitution, 'the entire Dutch people', making laws, and overseeing the government.

The Netherlands is a parliamentary democracy, which means that the executive is not directly elected, as in presidential systems, but derives its democratic legitimacy from the confidence bestowed on it by parliament. While on paper parliament is the government's principal, in practice the relationship seems reversed: members of parliament (MPs) who belong to one of the coalition parties are expected to loyally support the government. In essence, this means that coalition MPs are dependent on the very people they are tasked to monitor. This is in part explained by the central role of political parties, whose top politicians often sit in government.

The complicated executive–legislative relationship gives rise to debates on the relations between government and parliament, coalition and opposition, and party and individual MP. An often-heard call is for more 'dualism' between government and parliament—as opposed to 'monism', in which the two are fused (Andeweg et al., 2020, p. 141). In the Netherlands there is a desire to combine a confidence relationship between parliament and government with clearly separate responsibilities and autonomy for both institutions, which creates an inherent tension. This ambiguity is reflected in attempts to classify the Dutch parliament: Polsby (1975, pp. 292, 296) described the Dutch parliament as a 'moderately transformative institution'. It is not truly a

transformative institution (or 'working parliament') like the US Congress, but also not purely an arena (or 'talking parliament') like the British House of Commons.

In international-comparative terms, the Dutch parliament has been classified as relatively powerful: with a score of 0.78 on a scale from 0 to 1 it is only a few points behind the highest-scoring parliaments, such as Germany (0.84) (Fish & Kroenig, 2009). Still, there are concerns about the *use* of these powers and the performance of parliament. These stem not only from the ambiguity in terms of executive–legislative relations, but also from changes in the party-political context and changes in MPs' backgrounds and careers. During the last two decades, an increase in electoral volatility and the ensuing fragmentation of party politics have resulted in larger numbers of on average smaller parliamentary party groups, which makes it more difficult for parties to attend to all parliamentary tasks. Moreover, on the flanks of the political spectrum, particularly on the right, parties prioritize ideological polarization and have introduced confrontational debating styles into the hitherto relatively muted Dutch parliamentary repertoire. Many parties campaign permanently and cultivate their public image, which also contributes to a focus on representing voters, and less attention paid to the scrutiny of legislation and monitoring of the implementation of regulations. In addition, MP turnover has increased over time, resulting in a decrease in institutional memory, which could also diminish the strength of parliament when it comes to its legislative and monitoring functions. Moreover, MPs are hardly descriptively representative of the general population, particularly in terms of their education levels (Bovens & Wille, 2011; see also Mügge, Runderkamp, & Spierings, *this volume*).

While there are many challenges to how parliament functions, some sociopolitical changes have presented MPs with opportunities to wield *more* influence. Since 2010 most governments have lacked a majority in the Senate, which makes them dependent on opposition parties to pass legislation. This is an opportunity for opposition parties to break through the stranglehold of coalition parties, but it could also contribute to a 'blurring' of opposition and government (Andeweg, 2013). As we will discuss in this chapter, the sum of these developments changes the way in which the two chambers of parliament operate and challenges the quality of parliamentary work.

This chapter provides an overview of the key organizational features of parliamentary politics in the Netherlands. It subsequently surveys academic research on parliamentary politics in three key areas: (1) executive–legislative relations, (2) the organization of parliament and the behaviour of parliamentary party groups, and (3) the role of the individual MP. The chapter ends by highlighting the challenges for parliamentary research in the Netherlands and suggesting an agenda for further research.

Stable Institutions, Changing Practices

The Dutch parliament is called States-General (*Staten-Generaal*), a name taken from the body that brought together representatives from the provinces during

the Dutch Republic (1579–1795). At the start of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, a two-chamber parliament was set up: the Senate (literally: 'First Chamber', *Eerste Kamer*) to which aristocrats were appointed by the king, and a House of Representatives (literally: 'Second Chamber', *Tweede Kamer*) that was indirectly elected by members of the provincial councils (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling, 2017; Van den Braak, 2023). After the major constitutional review of 1848, the House of Representatives was reformed into a directly elected chamber, albeit with a limited electorate, while the Senate was elected by members of the provincial councils. In 1917 a majoritarian electoral system with electoral districts was replaced by proportional representation with a single nationwide district and, a few years later, a minimal electoral threshold of one seat (see Van der Kolk, *this volume*). This has resulted in many parties winning representation, and MPs being elected mostly due to their position on the electoral list. No major institutional reforms of parliament have taken place in recent decades, but as we will see the practice of parliamentary politics has changed in important ways.

Bicameralism

The Dutch parliament consists of two chambers: the House of Representatives with 150 full-time members, and the Senate seating 75 part-time members. Although named the *Tweede Kamer* (Second Chamber), the directly elected House of Representatives is the most politically relevant chamber. Still, the *Eerste Kamer* (Senate) is strong in comparison to some other European upper houses, holding veto powers over all legislation including the budget (but not the right to propose amendments) (Lijphart, 2012). Since 1983, all Senate seats are in play in four-yearly (indirect) elections, replacing a system in which half of the seats were up for election every three years (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling, 2017). Because elections for the two chambers are held at varying moments in time, the party composition of the Senate is usually different from that of the House of Representatives.

The relatively strong powers of the Senate and its lack of true geographical representation invite concerns that the Senate merely replicates the role of the House of Representatives (Staatscommissie Parlementair Stelsel, 2018, pp. 292–293). Indeed, while the Senate is tasked with assessing the quality of legislation and upholding the rule of law (Van den Braak, 2023, p. 83), its party groups usually echo the votes of their counterparts in the House of Representatives. Proposals to alter the Senate's powers— there have been recurrent efforts to diminish the Senate's powers or even to abolish the upper house altogether—need to meet the high threshold of a two-thirds majority in the Senate itself, and so reform proposals are unlikely to pass. At the time of writing, the government is preparing a proposal to make it possible for the Senate to refer a bill back to the House of Representatives rather than rejecting it outright, which is argued to be a way to perform better its core functions regarding legislative quality and the rule of law (Staatscommissie Parlementair Stelsel, 2018, pp. 301–307).

Since 2010 almost all governments have lacked a Senate majority, which has further complicated governance in the fragmented Dutch political landscape. The government has to find opposition support for its legislation to be approved in the Senate, which has led to various backroom deals between the government and several opposition parties.

House of Representatives

Day-to-day parliamentary business mostly takes place in the House of Representatives. With 150 seats, the House of Representatives is the smallest in Europe when comparing the number of seats to the size of the country's population. The empirical 'cube law', which holds the number of members of the lower house to be about the cube root of the population, predicts 259 seats for the *Tweede Kamer* (Otjes, 2020). There are non-political staff members who facilitate MPs' work, including an analysis and research department and three committee assistance departments. The allocation of political support staff is relatively modest in comparison to other European parliaments, however, and recently there have been calls to expand the staff of party groups (Otjes, 2023).

Due to the proportional electoral system as well as an increase in electoral fragmentation, the effective number of party groups in the *Tweede Kamer* has increased from around four in the 1980s to over eight in recent years (Louwerse & Timmermans, 2021, pp. 453–454). In the 2021 elections, 17 parties won at least one seat. Most party groups are thus relatively small and depend on a strict division of labour to deal with the high parliamentary workload (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011). At the start of each parliamentary term, the party leadership assigns a spokesperson for each policy area and MPs are expected to keep to their policy issues. MPs are assumed to act on behalf of their party group and coordinate their actions with the party group leadership and within the party group meetings. As long as MPs operate within the boundaries of the party manifesto—and, in the case of coalition parties, the coalition agreement—individual members have considerable room to determine their parties' exact policies on specific bills or issues (Van Schendelen, 1976).

Strong specialization within party groups is thus an important feature of the House of Representatives, and increasingly we also see stronger specialization between party groups. Several new parties cater to a specific constituency or focus on specific policy domains, such as 50PLUS (elderly), the Party for the Animals (animal rights, agriculture, environment), and the Farmer–Citizen Movement (farmers and the countryside). And given an average party size of only nine seats at the start of the 2021 term, many other parties are also increasingly unable to be comprehensive in their coverage of issues and bills.

In addition to party groups, parliamentary committees are an important organizational feature of the *Tweede Kamer*. Normally, each government department is 'shadowed' by a permanent parliamentary committee. The membership of committees reflects the composition of parliament as a whole, thus resulting in coalition parties controlling the committee agendas. Committee chairs are awarded proportionally to

parties, but the role of committee chair is comparatively weak (Sieberer & Höhman, 2017, p. 313). Committees play a role in scrutinizing legislation, but also organize meetings to discuss policy and oversee the government. Moreover, they can convene technical briefings, round tables, and hearings (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling, 2017). Dutch committees offer an arena for exchange between party specialists and the relevant minister, but no decisions are made in them. Moreover, they are not very strong compared to, for example, committees in the Scandinavian countries (André et al., 2016; Zubek, 2021, p. 1026; but see also Martin & Vanberg, 2011). Committees cannot accept amendments to a bill and cannot split or merge bills (Mickler, 2022).

The *Tweede Kamer* is chaired by the Speaker of the House, who is elected by the chamber by secret ballot. Before 2002, the Speaker was always a nominated by the largest party group. Since then, Speaker elections have become more competitive and only one out of five Speakers was a member of the largest party group between 2002 and 2023. Together with several other designated members, the chair forms the Presidency (*presidium*), which is the highest political authority in the *Tweede Kamer*. The House of Representatives' non-political staff, headed by the clerk (*griffier*), serves at its discretion.

Parliament's Toolkit

The constitutional powers of the House of Representatives include the right to initiate, vote on, and amend legislation, the budget right, the right of parliamentary investigation, the right to ask the government questions, and the right to initiate motions (including confidence motions). While formally parliament is co-legislator together with the government, in practice most legislation is introduced by the government. Following receipt of compulsory but non-binding legal advice from the Council of State (*Raad van State*), bills are presented to the House of Representatives. Bills go through a preparatory stage in the designated parliamentary committee. This is often a written procedure, especially for technical legislation. Subsequently, bills are tabled for plenary debate, but if no member wishes to speak, they are rubber-stamped. Most bills are subsequently voted on by a show of hands of MPs present in the plenary, who are assumed to vote on behalf of all the members of their party group. This practice evidences the high party group unity, as the procedure by default assumes that party group members vote in unison. However, any MP can request that roll-call voting take place on any vote (with the exception of mandatory secret written voting concerning people, such as the selection of the Speaker of the House), at which point the Speaker usually suspends the meeting and rings the division bell to allow for more MPs to make their way to the plenary to vote (Van Vonno, 2016, p. 167). The bill then moves to the Senate, and once the Senate also approves the bill, it receives Royal Assent. The parliament's budget right is exercised in a similar fashion: budget proposals are bills and, therefore, require approval in both houses of parliament.

As noted, unlike the Senate, the House of Representatives has the right to amend legislation, including budget bills. If an amendment is accepted by the government, it

becomes part of the bill (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling, 2017, p. 251). Amendments that are not accepted by the government are voted on by the House of Representatives, with the most far-reaching amendments voted on first. The number of amendments put to a vote has been just over 400 per year since the 1980s, with no clear trend in its usage (Louwerse et al., 2023). While amendments have direct consequences, writing amendments requires more skill and effort than the use of other parliamentary instruments. Written amendments are also not very visible to the public, which may explain their relatively modest use.

Staging and performing in parliamentary *debates* is an important instrument for MPs. The *Tweede Kamer* controls its own agenda, which in practice mostly amounts to control by the coalition parties (Döring, 1995, p. 223; Otjes, 2019). Most types of debates in the plenary require a majority to support their scheduling, but there is also the option to propose a *Dertigledendebat*, which requires the support of only thirty members. As other types of debates have priority, there is usually a long waiting list for this type of debate to be scheduled, but the option does provide opposition parties with the opportunity to debate in the House of Representatives issues that the coalition parties would rather not discuss. In recent years, the use of this type of debate has fluctuated over time, averaging around 26 times per year between 2011 and 2020 (Parlement.com 2022).

In parliamentary debates, spokespersons for each party group speak on behalf of their party group (Otjes & Louwerse, 2021). Like other aspects of parliamentary work, speech making is thus highly specialized, and it is exceptional for MPs to speak against their party line. Politically pivotal and high-profile debates are usually handled by the party group leader. Speaking time is not limited for debates on legislation, while for budget debates parties receive a total 'budget' of speaking time for all budget debates combined and can decide which specific debates to prioritize. For many other types of debates, speaking time is equal for every speaker. Attempts to filibuster have been effectively neutralized by scheduling additional time for debate and, on rare occasions, by use of the 'guillotine' rule that allows a majority vote to end a debate.

Parliamentary *motions* are another important tool for MPs. They can be introduced during any plenary debate by one or more members. Most of these motions call for some kind of action by the government on a specific policy issue. Unless accepted by the government, motions are normally voted on by show of hands. When adopted, motions are not binding on the government, except for motions of no confidence, which would require the government or an individual minister to resign. The use of motions in the *Tweede Kamer* has increased from a few hundred per year in the 1970s to over 5,000 per year in the early 2020s (Louwerse et al., 2018; Louwerse et al., 2023). This has led to concerns about the instrument being overused and becoming less effective in soliciting policy change from the government. Motions require, however, quite little effort and are a relatively visible instrument that forces other parties to take a stance, and they are therefore an attractive instrument in the toolbox.

Written parliamentary *questions* are another instrument whose use has exploded over recent decades. There are hardly any (enforced) limits on the use of the instrument; MPs can ask any question they want. While government officials and coalition party MPs sometimes complain about the large number of written questions, opposition MPs lament the lack of concrete and substantive answers from ministers. Oral questions are restricted to the televised *vragenuur* (question time) in the *Tweede Kamer* on Tuesdays, which features different ministers each week, depending on the issue. Given that question time is only one hour per week, there are limits on the number of oral questions. MPs submit their questions to the Speaker, who decides which questions are selected. Parliament has reformed the set-up of question time several times in attempts to make it more attractive for citizens to watch, but given the large number of party groups in parliament, each wanting to get a question in, the number of interactions between the minister and each questioner is limited. Therefore, it hardly reminds observers of the heated exchanges of Prime Minister's Questions in the United Kingdom, a model that some aspire to.

Parliamentary *inquiries* are yet another set of instruments that allow parliament to investigate an issue, using documentary research and hearing of witnesses under oath. Although both chambers have the right to inquire, the Senate has never exercised its right. The instrument was also hardly used by the House of Representatives in the first eight decades of the twentieth century—except for a major inquiry into government policy during the Second World War. From 1983 onwards, the House has used the instrument more frequently (12 times between 1983 and 2022) and in 2016 a slimmed-down 'parliamentary interrogation' was introduced and was held three times (until 2022). Since 2023, the House has had three instruments: the traditional parliamentary inquiry, the brief inquiry (which replaced the short-lived parliamentary interrogation), and the parliamentary investigation. The brief inquiry differs from the regular parliamentary inquiry in requiring less preparatory document analysis. The parliamentary investigation is the lightest form; the witnesses summoned by the committee are not required to appear under oath.

The parliamentary inquiry is an important and powerful instrument for the *Tweede Kamer*. Responsibilities for fact finding and drawing conclusions are shared by the entire inquiry committee, which is always composed of members from across the political spectrum (Bovend'Eert & Kummeling, 2017, p. 403). On more than one occasion, inquiry reports have triggered ministerial resignations (Bovens et al., 2015). In 2021, for example, the entire cabinet resigned after the publication of the report of a parliamentary 'interrogation committee' investigating callous conduct of the Dutch tax office in relation to its hounding of recipients of childcare benefits whom it suspected of having made fraudulent claims. However, even with the introduction of interrogation and later brief inquiry, the fragmentation of parliament has led to problems when it comes to the initiation and composition of time-consuming parliamentary inquiry committees. Inquiries take resources away from MPs' ability to do their other parliamentary tasks.

STUDYING THE DUTCH PARLIAMENT: METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM

The study of the Dutch parliament has been conducted from various disciplinary perspectives: (parliamentary) historians, constitutional lawyers, and political scientists have contributed to this diverse literature. We will survey the literature by first focusing on 'macro perspectives' that concentrate on parliamentary history and executive-legislative relations, then discuss meso-level research that looks at what happens in the plenary and parliamentary committees, and finally look at the micro level of the individual MP (i.e. their role orientations, careers, and commitment to party unity). As we will see, in almost all research on parliament, political parties are a central actor. Therefore, we will not discuss research on parliamentary party groups separately but highlight their importance throughout.

Parliamentary History

Parliamentary historians have contributed to in-depth knowledge regarding the practice of parliamentary politics and significant events in parliamentary history. Early work by Oud (1946) was later extended and updated by Bosmans and Van Kessel (2011). Even more recently, two extensive overviews of parliamentary history covering the period between 1796 and 2016 were written by Van den Berg and Vis (2013) and Van den Braak and Van den Berg (2017). A series on *Parliamentary History of the Netherlands* has been published by the Centre of Parliamentary History of the Radboud University. The Yearbooks of Parliamentary History (*Jaarboeken Parlementaire Geschiedenis*) provide another important resource on parliamentary history, with a thematic focus, and using a variety of sources, including interviews, memoirs, and document analysis.

These works provide a detailed, often chronologic description of parliamentary history in the Netherlands and as such provide a very important resource for parliamentary researchers. In most of these books, parliamentary politics is discussed in close connection to executive politics (coalition formation, major debates in the coalition, coalition breakdown). It is interesting that this research tradition is known as 'parliamentary history', despite paying at least equal attention to governmental and coalition politics.

Executive–Legislative Relations

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, in the Dutch public debate the relationship between parliament and government is often framed in terms of monism versus dualism (Daalder, 1990; Jurgens, 1991; Louwerse & Van Vonno, 2017; Rijperda

Wierdsma, 1961). While in terms of membership such 'dualism' does indeed exist—members of the government (normally) cannot be an MP as well—in practice, coalition MPs and government ministers 'play for the same team', which comes close to the defining characteristic of a parliamentary or 'fused-power' system (Kreppel, 2014, p. 84).

The empirical study of the relationship between the executive and the legislative branch has been led by Andeweg (1992, 1997, 2006; Andeweg & Nijzink, 1995), who amended King's (1976) typology of modes of executive–legislative relations for the *Tweede Kamer*. Each mode, or pattern of interactions, is associated with both a particular characterization of parliament and a specific role conception for MPs. In the non-party mode, the main line of conflict lies between members of 'the' government versus members of 'the' parliament. This mode matches the classic dualist image of executive–legislative relations. In the non-party mode, MPs conceive of their role as parliamentarian, and their main task as being to check and balance the government. In the interparty mode, ministers and MPs from one party interact with other parties' ministers and MPs. Parliament is viewed as an arena in which an ideological struggle takes place between political parties, especially between ministers and party groups belonging to government parties versus the party groups in opposition. MPs take on the role of partisan party members. Finally, in the cross-party mode, the minister and MPs focusing on one specific policy area interact with those concerned with other policy arenas. Parliament is viewed as a marketplace, and MPs take on the role of advocate of sectorial interests.

The modes of executive–legislative relations usually coexist (although one can be dominant), and MPs can switch between associated roles depending on the circumstances and/or issues at hand. Andeweg (1997) argues that for Dutch executive–legislative relations, the non-party mode dominated between 1870 and 1920, although Van der Heiden and Pekelder (2000) argue that the *Tweede Kamer* was never as 'dualistic' as is sometimes suggested. The period of pillarization (1920–1965) consisted of a transitional phase in executive–legislative relations, in which the cross-party mode developed in conjuncture with the institutionalization of the committee system.

As of 1965, the interparty mode became dominant (Andeweg, 1992, 1997; Andeweg & Nijzink, 1995; Andeweg et al., 2020, p. 153). In line with this, Van Vonno (2012) finds, using the Dutch Parliamentary Studies 1990, 2001, and 2006, an increase over time in the number of MPs who indicate specializing in the partisan party member role, and a decrease in the number of MPs who switch between the parliamentarian, advocate, and partisan roles vis-à-vis the executive. The central role of political parties likely contributes to the dominance of the interparty mode. Indeed, decision making increasingly occurs in the top echelons of the governing parties—parliamentary party leaders and (deputy) prime ministers—(Louwerse & Timmermans, 2021), a process that Koole (2018) calls 'governmentalization'.

While most of the literature focuses on the role of governing parties, there is a growing body of research on opposition parties. This literature notes the consensual nature of opposition politics in the Netherlands and the fact that opposition parties generally make more use of parliamentary instruments than governing parties (Andeweg et al., 2008).

Otjes et al. (2018) find that opposition parties very frequently support government legislation (93% on average), but that there is diversity among opposition parties. Some opposition parties are mostly active in amending legislation and providing alternatives to government policies, while other parties, including populist parties, focus on oversight and rejecting government bills (Louwerse & Otjes, 2019).

Institutional Organization and Behaviour: Politics in the Plenary and Committees

The plenary meeting is the most visible part of parliamentary work. Most research on parliament and its organization focuses on the plenary debate and related instruments (voting, bills, parliamentary motions). Early examples include Visscher's (1994) work on parliamentary influence on legislation, which made use of the data collected by the Parliamentary Documentation Centre and found that one in four bills was amended by the House of Representatives and four out of nine by the government itself. The digitization of parliamentary documents has made this type of analysis much easier and more feasible (Louwerse et al., 2018; Marx & Schulth, 2010).

Parliamentary debates have long been used as a source of information on the policy positions of political parties and the conflict lines in the political debate. Traditional methods of analysis, the close reading and manual coding or interpretation of a smaller number of debates, have been complemented by large-N analysis of speech making. Otjes and Louwerse (2021) find that MPs who are male, higher on the electoral list, and leader of their party's parliamentary group speak longer in parliamentary debates. In other research, parliamentary speech is used to derive policy positions of political parties (Louwerse, 2011; Schwalbach, 2023) or to classify the topic of debate (Timmermans & Breeman, 2019). The analysis of the linguistic style of politicians in parliamentary debates shows that politicians use a political style to present themselves as an insider or outsider (Van Leeuwen, 2015). While there has been much public debate on growing political incivility in the House of Representatives, systematic analysis is missing (Walter & Van Praag, 2022). While some argue that 'talk is cheap', Louwerse and Van Vonno (2022) find a positive correlation between speaking in parliament and the chances for reselection of MPs.

The analysis of patterns of parliamentary voting shows that a general ideological left–right dimension as well as a coalition versus opposition dimension (in which the most anti-establishment opposition parties are on the extreme) structure parliamentary voting behaviour (Louwerse et al., 2018; Onderco & Joosen, 2022; Otjes, 2011). The study of parliamentary voting is attractive because voting is highly structured and offers information about the behaviour of all political parties, but it is important to consider *what types* of proposals and topics are voted on. Moreover, parties' voting behaviour is informed not only by their policy stances, but also by their coalition participation as well as strategic motives. Governing parties are, for example, less likely to support parliamentary motions that are in line with their positions in voting advice applications than

opposition parties, in part because they do not want to pin down the minister (Fivaz et al., 2014; Goeree & Popping, 2014; Popping & Wittek, 2015). As governments since 2010 have not usually controlled parliamentary majorities in both chambers, researchers have paid particular attention to government–opposition patterns in voting and found that overall voting patterns remain structured to a large degree by the government–opposition divide (Otjes & Louwerse, 2014).

As in the above research, the use of other parliamentary instruments, such as motions, written and oral questions, and amendments, has been studied mostly from a rational choice institutionalist perspective, in which tool use and co-sponsorship of proposals is explained by electoral incentives for MPs and parties, policy distances, and issue saliency (Louwerse & Otjes, 2015; Otjes & Louwerse, 2018). The impact of the party and committee environment has, however, also been shown to matter for the level of legislative activity of individual MPs (Louwerse & Otjes, 2016). The relationship between media attention and parliamentary instruments (questions, bills) has received quite some scholarly attention. Media reports are a stronger predictor of the topics of oral questions in parliament than the other way around (Van Aelst & Vliegenthart, 2014), law making seems to receive very little media attention at all (Van Aelst et al., 2015), and the impact of media attention on legislative outcomes was found to be negligible (Melenhorst, 2017).

In contrast to the plenary, parliamentary committees in the Dutch parliament are somewhat under-researched. Helboe Pedersen et al. (2015) investigate which actors get invited to provide evidence in parliamentary committees and find that in the Netherlands closed access reduces evidence concentration and the predominance of non-governmental organizations. Mickler (2022) provides the most in-depth empirical analysis of Dutch committee powers and committee assignments. Committee assignments are mostly based on knowledge and experience rather than on a partisan rationale. As to the workings of the committees, Mickler (2022) finds that spokespersons on an issue or bill have the mandate to develop their party line, but there are several intraparty checks (such as working groups or the party group meeting) to check and correct the prepared position. He thus describes committee working procedures as adhering to an 'informational' rationale in which MPs act as representatives of their party in committees but have to report back to the party group and are not autonomous in their decisions (see also Van Schendelen, 1976).

Members of Parliament: Roles and Party Unity

Above, we mentioned the modes of executive–legislative relations, and the associated roles MPs can take on: parliamentarian, partisan party member, policy advocate. Studies focusing on executive–legislative relations rely on data from the Dutch Parliamentary Studies (Andeweg & Van Vonno, 2018). The Netherlands is unique in that MPs have been surveyed repeatedly since the late 1960s (in 1968, 1972, 1979, 1990, 2001, 2006, and

2017), allowing for longitudinal comparisons of MPs' opinions, perceptions, and self-reported behaviour over a wide range of topics.

The Dutch Parliamentary Studies have also allowed for the exploration of other roles, or coherent sets of norms of behaviour, that MPs can take on (Converse & Pierce, 1979, 1986; Eulau et al., 1959; Wahlke et al., 1962). In a typology originally developed for the study of American state legislators, Walke et al. (1962) differentiate between two representational roles: that of constituency voter delegate, entailing that representatives do as their constituencies instruct, and that of Burkean trustee, meaning that representatives use their own knowledge and experience to decide what is in the best interest of their voters. Converse and Pierce (1979) added a third role to this classic typology for the Dutch case: the loyal party delegate, who has their party instead of the voters as their main focus of representation. Andeweg and Thomassen (2005) find that the percentage of MPs who, in the situation of a conflict of opinion between their own and their party voters, would vote according to their own opinion (Burkean trustees) has decreased over time in the Dutch parliament, with the proportion of MPs who would follow the opinion of their party voters (a voter delegate style of representation), or indicate that 'it depends', growing over time. This growth is even stronger when given a choice between their own opinion and that of their political party (a party delegate style of representation).

Indeed, studies of party (voting) unity in the Netherlands reveal that it has always been high, even near complete (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011; Tazelaar, 1974; Van Vonno, 2016; Visscher, 1994; Wolters, 1984). This holds for both parliamentary voting as well as party group membership, although the number of party group defections has increased in recent years. The high levels of party voting unity are mostly due to voluntary mechanisms, starting with cue taking resulting from the division of labour within party groups, followed by simple agreement with the position of the party, and the strengths of norms of party loyalty in the case of disagreement (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011; Van Schendelen, 1976; Van Vonno, 2016). Although often mentioned in the literature and media, party discipline—that is, the (threatened) use of sanctions and promises to elicit MPs' toeing of the party line in the case of disagreement—likely takes place only sporadically (Van Vonno, 2019; Van Vonno & Andeweg, 2014;). Given the high levels of party unity, it is no surprise that in the Dutch parliament, the parliamentary party group is taken as the main representative actor.

(Post-)parliamentary Careers

Throughout Dutch parliamentary history, MPs have overwhelmingly belonged to the most well-educated layers of society (Secker, 1995). Bovens and Wille (2011) characterize the Netherlands as a 'diploma democracy', which results in an increasing educational cleavage. Women are also less likely to be elected to parliament than men (see Mügge, Runderkamp, Spierings, *this volume*).

Political parties are gatekeepers when it comes to parliament. According to Turner-Zwinkels and Mills (2020, p. 227), most Dutch MPs have experience as party representatives at the local or provincial level (which in the Netherlands is a part-time function, apart from in the largest municipalities), or were active as volunteers for or within their political party (e.g. board membership). Increasingly, however, acting as a political aid at the national level has become a means of jumpstarting a parliamentary career.

Public concerns over a 'revolving door' between service as an MP and commercial and semi-public jobs have been addressed by research on post-parliamentary careers. About 40–50% of MPs manage to obtain a post-parliamentary position that confers similar salary or status, whereas not more than 10% held such a position before entering parliament (Van der Vlist, 2023). MPs are increasingly able to find more attractive post-parliamentary positions (compared to their position as MP) in the private sector, but not in the public sector (Van der Vlist, 2023). Those who held cabinet jobs before are more likely to secure an attractive job after their parliamentary career, while those who failed to be renominated or re-elected are less able to (Claessen et al., 2021).

OPEN QUESTIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While parliamentary politics in the Netherlands has been studied from various perspectives, changes in the way parliament operates and advances in research methodology leave considerable room for the study of old and new questions on this topic. In this concluding section, we offer a research agenda for legislative research in the Netherlands, by focusing on three perspectives: (1) linking legislative research with other research topics in political science and other disciplines, (2) speaking to key societal challenges relating to parliamentary democracy, and (3) making use of methodological advances.

First, while research on parliament has traditionally been linked with the study of *descriptive and substantive political representation* (Andeweg, 2011; Hakhverdian & Schakel, 2017; Louwerse, 2011), combining legislative research with other research areas will offer important new insights on this classic question. In the area of political representation itself, many studies simply look at the relationship between citizen priorities and policy outcomes, but as parliament is a key actor in the legislative process, studying the way in which this linkage between preferences and policies is established offers a key contribution to our understanding of democratic decision making. An important question here is the effect of the use of legislative instruments on policymaking and the importance of informational flows for parliamentary work, which have been overlooked since Van Schendelen's pioneering work (1976) and Visscher's (1994) extensive study. Another area concerns the *effects of interest representation and lobbying* in

the parliamentary context, a topic which is studied quite extensively (see Aizenberg & Braun, *this volume*), but where the connection with the legislative studies literature is limited. Lastly, voter perceptions of parliamentary work have been studied mostly in terms of their trust in the institution (see Van Ham & Thomassen, *this volume*). It would be relevant for our study of democratic representation to get a better understanding how voters learn about and evaluate what parliament does.

A second strand of questions stems from societal developments that impact the role and functioning of parliament. The central question is *whether and how parliament will remain politically relevant in a time of governmentalization and fragmentation*. Governmentalization means that parliament seems to lose 'standing', which is reflected in parliamentary careers in which parliament seems to be a stepping stone towards something better (mayor, alderman in a large municipality, a senior public sector role). Is this perception grounded in reality and what are its causes? Fragmentation directly impacts parliamentary work—because there are many more and smaller political parties in parliament—and the way in which this work is perceived by voters. Moreover, how will parties deal with the tension between acting *responsively* to voters and *responsibly* to international partners, future generations, and the rule of law (Mair, 2008)? Due to rising electoral volatility and increased polarization on large societal challenges such as climate change, this tension has arguably increased: what consequences does this have for parliamentary behaviour? Some parties do not merely challenge the policy agenda and positions of mainstream parties, but openly question and violate basic democratic norms. To what degree will this distinction between responsibility and responsiveness shape parliamentary behaviour over the coming decades? Are there ways to reduce this tension, so that political parties are better able to be both responsible and responsive? A final societal concern is the support and resources available for parliamentary work. Researchers should pay closer attention to the role of political and non-political staff in parliamentary work, as they form a largely invisible but key ingredient, which may very well have an impact on the 'political' output.

Lastly, methodological innovation will likely contribute to an extension of legislative studies. While most work on the use of parliamentary instruments now focuses on the number of activities per MP or party, future work could more extensively combine parliamentary and media data to distinguish between more and less important proposals and actions. Moreover, the question of how and why parties use the tools at their disposal in varying ways could take a more prominent place. The rapid development of large language models over the last few years offers opportunities to study at scale the saliency of topics, the positions of political actors, the sentiment of parliamentary debates, and the way in which MPs talk to each other in plenary and committee meetings, both in the Netherlands as well as in international-comparative research. Linking existing behavioural data on the use of parliamentary instruments with other types of data, such as surveys and interviews of MPs, offers another way forward. Finally, the growing availability of data on and increasing interest in local politics means that all these questions can also be studied at the local and regional level.

Despite the challenges faced, parliament remains a key actor in national politics. 'The Hague' and the 'Binnenhof'—the location of the parliament buildings and the prime minister's office—are synonymous for national-level politics. The central question is not whether parliament will remain a central actor in national-level politics, but how it will adapt to the many societal and political challenges ahead.

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