

Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, (VVD), wins the general elections for a fourth consecutive term in office

The liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) of outgoing Prime Minister Mark Rutte has won the Dutch general elections for the fourth time in a row. The party won 34 seats in the House of States General, the lower house of parliament (+1 compared to the previous legislative elections of 15 March 2017). Due to the health situation, the elections were held over three days, between 15 and 17 March, so that vulnerable people could have the time and room necessary to perform their civic duty. People over 70 were invited to vote by post. "Voters in the Netherlands have given my party a massive vote of confidence. I am very proud of this," said Mark Rutte after the results were announced, adding "proud of what we have achieved over the last ten years in the Netherlands."

The Democrats 66 (D66), led by Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Sigrid Kaag, which comprises centre-left reformist liberals, came second with 24 seats (+5). This result, the highest ever achieved by D66, is the surprise of the election. "I see the confidence we received as a confirmation that we are the only progressive party that has been influential in recent years," said Sigrid Kaag after the election.

The D66 attracted voters from the right but especially from the left. The left parties have performed poorly in this election.

The Labour Party (PvdA), led by Lilianne Ploumen, who had to replace Lodewijk Asscher, former Minister of Social Affairs (2012-2017) and who resigned in January, and the Socialist Party (SP), a radical left-wing party led by Lilian Marijnissen, each won 9 seats (i.e. a retention for the PvdA and a drop of 5 seats for the SP). The Green Left (GL), an ecologist party led by Jesse Klaver,

saw its number of elected members almost halved: 8 seats (-6).

As in 2017, the decline of the left is mainly due to the PvdA, which has long been the leader of the left and is not growing. As Cas Mudde, a professor at the University of Georgia in the United States, writes, "the Dutch Labour Party is suffering 'pasokification', whereby the influence of social democratic parties declines with each election as with the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in Greece or the Socialist Party (PS) in France."

Geert Wilders' right-wing populist Party for Freedom (PVV) came third with 17 MPs (-3). "One thing is certain, the stronger we are, the more people will vote for my party, the harder it will be to exclude us," Geert Wilders repeated during the campaign. Chris Aalberts, a political scientist at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, believes that "Geert Wilders' programme, which discriminates against Muslims and people with a second passport, has been written in such a way that Geert Wilders is guaranteed never to be part of the government and that he can remain in the opposition. Because that is what he prefers."

The Forum for Democracy (FvD), another right-wing populist party led by Thierry Baudet, won 8 seats (+6). "The Forum for Democracy managed to stand out: it is the only party to campaign on conspiracy, it explains that the government is trying to kill individual freedoms by using the health crisis. At least half of Thierry Baudet's electorate believes in these conspiracy theories, thinks that the virus was created to muzzle citizens," analyses Sarah de Lange, professor of political science at the University of Amsterdam.

General elections in the Netherlands

17th March 2021

The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), a centre-right party in the outgoing government led by Wopke Hoekstra, won 15 seats (-4). Another member of the outgoing coalition, Gert-Jan Segers' Christian Union (CU), held on with 5 seats.

The Animal Party (PvdD) won 6 seats (+1); the Reformed Political Party (SGP), which brings together the orthodox Protestant electorate (strict Calvinists) and Denk (Think), which advocates multiculturalism and decolonisation, each won 3 seats; 50 Plus, a party that defends the interests of pensioners, won 1 MP (-3).

Finally, 4 new parties entered the lower house: the pro-European party Volt won 3 seats; Juiste Antwoord

2021 (JA21), a right-wing party with former FvD members, won 3 seats; Bij1 (Together), an anti-racist and anti-capitalist party founded by former Denk member Sylvana Simons, won 1 seat, as did the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BoerBurgerBeweging, BBB).

In total, 17 parties will therefore be represented in the new House of States General, a number equal to that of the parliament that was elected in 1918.

The turnout was one of the highest in the Netherlands: 82.6%.

Results of the parliamentary elections of 15-17 March 2021 in the Netherlands

Turnout: 82.6%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	Number of seats
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	2 249 988	21.91	34
Democrats 66 (D66)	1 535 624	14.95	24
Party for freedom(PVV)	1 116 037	10.87	17
Christian Democrat Appeal (CDA)	981 867	9.56	15
Socialist Party (SP)	617 746	6.01	9
Labour Party (PvdA)	585 630	5.70	9
Green Left (GL)	520 994	5.07	8
Forum for Democracy (FvD)	516 723	5.03	8
Animals Party (PvdD)	391 166	3.81	6
Christian Union (CU)	347 898	3.39	5
Volt Nederland	245 632	2.39	3
Juiste Antwoord 2021 (JA21)	243 669	2.37	3
Politcial Reform Party (SGP)	214 830	2.09	3
Denk	204 969	2	3
50 Plus	105 571	1.03	1
Farmers-Citizens' Movement (BoerBurgerBeweging, BBB)	103 526	1.01	1
Bij1	83 601	0.81	1
Others	204 779	12.87	0

Source : <https://www.verkiezingensite.nl>

"The main issue in these elections is who can best lead this country through the coronavirus crisis," said Mark Rutte during the election campaign. "The outgoing Prime Minister is taking advantage of the 'rally around the flag' phenomenon, whereby in a moment of war or crisis, people support the government of the day out of self-preservation and security," said Meindert Fennema, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam. "I think in general people are satisfied with the way the Covid-19 crisis is being handled. Of course, there are critics, but I would say these are minor in nature. People feel that Mark Rutte is handling the crisis well. They want him to stay until the end of this crisis and we will see what happens afterwards," said political scientist Chris Aalberts, adding "Many people expect the coming government to stay for a year, or a year and a half, until the crisis is over. When it is over, then we will have real elections."

Mark Rutte, 54, from The Hague, graduated in history from Leiden University and from the International Institute for Management Development in Lausanne. He started his professional career at Unilever, where he worked in the human resources department before becoming State Secretary for Employment and Social Security in the government led by Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA) in 2002. In 2004, he was appointed State Secretary for Vocational Training and Higher Education. In 2006, he became leader of the VVD, which he led to victory in the general election on 9 June 2010. Four months later, Mark Rutte became the

first liberal head of government in the Netherlands since 1913. He was reappointed to this position after the elections of 12 September 2012. The coalition government he formed with the PvdA was the first since 2002 to last an entire legislature. He again led the VVD to victory in the parliamentary elections of 15 March 2017. He then formed a 4-party government (VVD, CDA, D66 and CU) which will run the country for the entire legislature, although the government has been running the current affairs since January. Mark Rutte, nicknamed *Teflon Mark* for his ability to fend off crises, is expected to be re-elected.

"These parliamentary elections are a victory for the centre parties, they have not brought any change for the radical right parties, which do not exceed 18% of the usual vote, and they are a failure for the radical left parties," analysed Tom-Jan Meeus, political journalist at the daily NRC Handelsblad. There will be no major changes at the end of the election, but Prime Minister Mark Rutte, a liberal who is keen on budgetary rigour, might have to change his European positions under pressure from D 66.

A few days before the vote, he declared that it "seemed obvious" to him to form an alliance with D66 again. However, he needs to find 2 other partners to be able to lead the Netherlands and have an absolute majority (76 seats of the 150 MPs). With the CDA, the coalition would only have 74 seats; with the CDA and CU, 78 seats.

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