

The radical right largely ahead in the Dutch general election

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**RESULTS**

The radical right-wing Freedom Party (PVV), led by Geert Wilders, came out ahead in the Dutch general elections held on 22 November. The PVV won 23.70% of the vote and 37 seats, 20 more than in the previous general election in March 2021.

The most recent pre-election opinion polls showed a rise in the party's share of the vote a few days before the election, but no one had anticipated such a breakthrough. *"Anyone who says they know who will win these elections is lying. Anything can still happen"*, said political scientist Julia Wouters a few days before the vote. On the eve of the election, only four out of ten voters (40%) said they were sure of their choice. The number of parties in the running (27) made it difficult to anticipate how the Dutch would vote. Kristof Jacobs, professor of political science at Radboud University in Nijmegen, pointed out that *"most of the front-runners have been replaced compared with 2021, which opens up the game even more"*.

"The Mark Rutte era is ending with a right-wing populist revolt that is shaking The Hague to its foundations. The PVV's historic election victory has exceeded all expectations", read the daily NRC. *"You could call it an earthquake. Nobody expected this result, not even Geert Wilders"*, said Rene Cuperus of the Clingendael Institute. Exceptionally, the European Commission, which never comments on the results of national elections held within Member States, issued a statement: *"We continue to count on the strong involvement of the Netherlands in the European Union"*.

The PVV came out ahead in the cities of Rotterdam, The Hague and Maastricht. It obtained its highest results in the south and north-east of the country.

The four parties in the outgoing government suffered losses. The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), led by outgoing Prime Minister Mark Rutte, won 15.25% of the vote and 24 seats (down 10). The Democrats 66 (D66), led by Rob Jetten, won 6.23% and 9 seats (down 15). The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), led by Henri Bontenbal, took 3.34% and 5 seats (down 10). The Christian Union (CU), 2.05% and 3 seats (-2).

The Labour Party-Green Left (PvdA-GL) alliance, led by Frans Timmermans, former Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Climate Action (2019-2023), took 2nd place, well behind the PVV, with 15.56% and 25 seats (+8 compared to the result of the two parties in the previous elections). The left-wing coalition won in Amsterdam, Utrecht and Groningen.

According to Menno Hurenkamp, a political scientist at the University of Utrecht, both the Socialist Party (SP), a radical left-wing party led by Lilian Marijnissen, and the Party for the Animals (PvdD), led by Esther Ouwehand, suffered from the strategic vote in support of the coalition led by Frans Timmermans, a choice made by a section of the electorate that became increasingly worried as the threat of a Geert Wilders victory became clearer in the opinion polls. These two parties won 3.15% and 5 MPs (-4) and 2.22% and 3 seats (-3) respectively.

The Labour Party-Green Left alliance came in ahead of the New Social Contract (NSC), a new party founded by Pieter Omtzigt and positioned in the centre of the political spectrum, which won 12.89% and 20 seats. The Citizen Farmer Movement (BBB), a party led by Caroline van der Plas, which for a long time topped the opinion polls, won 4.68% and 7 seats (up 6).

5 other parties will be represented in the Chamber of States General, the lower house of Parliament.

In total, the right-wing parties won two-thirds of the votes in this election.

The turnout was 77.80%, an increase of 2.26 points compared to the turnout for the 2021 general elections.

Results of the general election of 22 November 2023 in the Netherlands

Turnout: 77.80%

Political Parties	Number of votes obtained	% of votes won	Number of seats
Party for Freedom (PVV)	2 435 592	23.70	37
Alliance Labour Party-Green Left (PvdA-GL)	1 598 856	15.56	25
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	1 567 332	15.25	24
New Social Contract (NSC)	1 325 250	12.89	20
Democrats 66 (D66)	640 497	6.23	9
Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB)	480 869	4.68	7
Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)	343 045	3.34	5
Socialist Party (SP)	323 574	3.15	5
Denk (DENK)	241 620	2.35	3
Forum for Democracy (FvD)	230 548	2.24	3
Party for the Animals (PvdD)	228 389	2.22	3
Reformed Political Party (SGP)	216 812	2.11	3
Christian Union (CU)	210 360	2.05	3
Volt	172 670	1.68	2
Juiste Antwoord 2021 (JA 21)	70 356	0.68	1
Others	537 245	1.87	0

source : <https://app.nos.nl/nieuws/tk2023/>

"The PVV can no longer be ignored," said Geert Wilders after the results were announced, adding that "the PVV is the biggest party in the Netherlands! "When I left my former party (the VVD), I said that one day we would become the biggest political force in the Netherlands". Geert Wilders has been active on the Dutch political scene for twenty years, where his fortunes have varied, but he has recently shifted towards a more social agenda. "There are more important problems than fighting the flood of asylum seekers and immigrants", he said, adding that while immigration is an important issue, "the Dutch are even more worried about whether they have any money left in their wallets". The PVV leader promised his fellow citizens to focus on "security and health" as well as better access to housing and retirement homes. Wilders, who for the first time said he was ready to govern, also appeared calm and collected during the pre-election TV debates.

"Geert Wilders has remained the same, but his tone has changed somewhat. What has also changed is that there are now more radical parties and Geert Wilders appears almost as a moderate. Especially since some traditional parties have also moved closer to the PVV on issues such as immigration, which was central to the campaign," points out Kristof Jacobs, a political scientist at the University of Nijmegen. Geert Wilders has therefore modified his discourse and has been able to talk to his compatriots about the housing crisis, the dilapidated state of care services and purchasing power. He also managed to polish up his speech. And all this at a time when the other parties were talking more and more about immigration and he less. Indeed, the populist leader undeniably benefited from the presence of the issue of immigration and asylum which lay central to political debates. It should be remembered that the election was called when Prime Minister Mark Rutte resigned on 7 July after his government was unable to pass a bill to reduce the number of asylum seekers

admitted to the Netherlands. Many criticised Mark Rutte for using the asylum issue as a pretext to force an early return to the polls by setting his government coalition partners conditions that he knew could not be accepted.

"It's a crushing victory and sets in motion a whole new dynamic", said Diederick van Wijk of the Clingendael Institute, adding: *"The other parties made a strategic error by focusing on immigration, thus playing into the PVV's hands"*. More than half of Dutch people (52%) say they are concerned about immigration.

"The tsunami of asylum must be stemmed", the populist leader certainly repeated during the election campaign, but he made it clear that there would be no more talk of *"the Koran and mosques"*. Of course, Geert Wilders still insists on his slogan *"The Netherlands first"*. He is fighting for a sovereign country, responsible for its own currency and borders, and which sets its own rules. Finally, he wants to organise a binding referendum on the Netherlands' exit from the European Union (Nexit). A supporter of Vladimir Putin, Geert Wilders also wants to halt all military aid to Ukraine.

Dilan Yesilgöz-Zegerius, leader of the VVD, took a very firm stance on migration and asylum issues during the election campaign. *"As similar experiences in other countries have already shown, this is a strategy that rarely, if ever, pays off. Voters always prefer the*

original to the copy", said Benjamin Leruth, professor of political science at the University of Groningen. The leader of the VVD also said previously that she did not consider it impossible to govern with Geert Wilders' PVV. This mention of a possible coalition helped to legitimise, normalise and even strengthen the PVV and its leader.

Geert Wilders now hopes to secure a majority and form a government. The Labour Party-Green Left alliance (PvdA-GL) has already declared that it will not cooperate with the PVV. *"The time has come for us to defend democracy"*, said Frans Timmermans.

A priori, the VVD no longer plans to cooperate with Geert Wilders, particularly if he can lay claim to leading the government. Dilan Yesilgöz-Zegerius said he wanted to work towards building a centre-right coalition.

"We are ready to govern. It's a difficult result. We will discuss how we can best contribute," said Pieter Omtzigt.

Geert Wilders has spoken of forming a coalition government comprising the PVV, the New Social Contract (BSC) and the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB). Together, the 3 parties have 64 seats in the House, 12 short of the absolute majority (76). The negotiations are going to be long.

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