

European  
Elections monitor

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## ANALYSIS

# Far-right forces lead the poll in the Netherlands

The Dutch are being called to the polls on 29 October to elect the 150 members of the Second Chamber (*Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*), the lower house of parliament. The general elections are being held two years early, following the departure of Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) from the government on 3 June.

Formed on 2 July 2024 following the previous general elections on 22 November 2023, the coalition government led by senior civil servant Dick Schoof (independent) comprised four parties until last spring: the Party for Freedom, a right-wing populist party created and led by Geert Wilders, who is also its only member; the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), a liberal party led by Dilan Yesilgoz; the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB), representing the rural world, led by Caroline van der Plas; and the New Social Contract (NSC), a centrist party led by Nicolien van Vroonhoven.

Twenty-seven lists are in the running for the general election. The elected members of parliament will meet the following week. 135,424 Dutch citizens living abroad have registered to vote on 29 October, a record for the Netherlands and a quarter more than in the last general election on 22 November 2023.

With three weeks to go before the election, voters cite housing as their top priority. The Netherlands is experiencing a severe housing shortage (400,000 last year, or 5% of the total housing stock). This is followed by health, asylum and immigration. According to the latest opinion poll conducted by Ipsos I&O between 26 and 29 September, the Party for Freedom is expected to win 31 of the 150 seats in the Second Chamber. The man who brought down the coalition government therefore remains popular and his party is expected to come out ahead in the next general elections. It is expected to be followed by the centre-right Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), which is forecast to win 25 seats; the coalition formed by the Green Left and the Labour Party (GL-PvdA), which is expected to win 23 seats; the liberal Democrats 66 (D 66) are due to win 15 seats, the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) would

win 14 seats, Juiste Antwoord 2021 (Correct Answer, JA21) is expected to garner 11 seats, while the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) is projected to win 5 seats. the Socialist Party (PS), Denk, the Party for the Animals (PvdD), Forum for Democracy (FvD) and Volt would each win 4 seats, the Reformed Political Party (SGP) 3 and the Christian Union (CU) 2 seats. The New Social Contract (NSC) may not win any seats and, as a result, disappear from the House of Representatives.

## THE POLITICAL CRISIS

It all began on 28 May when Geert Wilders unexpectedly presented a new plan to further tighten asylum laws in the Netherlands. This ten-point plan included stepping up the fight against immigration by securing the borders with the army. It provided for the deportation of migrants convicted of crimes, as well as dual nationals who had been convicted of crimes. The plan also provided for the repatriation of Syrian refugees whose country is no longer considered a 'country at risk'. Geert Wilders supports closing the borders to asylum seekers. He is also calling for the suspension of the asylum quotas voted by the European Union. He wants to ban family reunification for refugees. Similarly, he wants to close reception centres and remove the obligation to house asylum seekers and, more broadly, any housing assistance granted to refugees.

On 3 June, the parties in the governing coalition refused to endorse his plan to reduce asylum and immigration, which they described as 'unworkable' and 'legally invalid'.

As a result, Geert Wilders withdrew from the governing coalition, blaming his partners for the fall of the government. "Our patience is at an end. The voters who made the

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*Party for Freedom the largest party have the right to a government that manages asylum and immigration (...) I promised voters the strictest policy. I did not get any guarantees, so I had no choice but to withdraw my support for the government,"* said Geert Wilders. Unusually, the five ministers from the Freedom Party resigned, whereas in such cases ministers usually remain in office until a new government is appointed.

Three months after the resignation of the Freedom Party ministers, it was the turn of Foreign Minister Caspar Veldkamp (NSC) to step down on 22 August. After pleading at length, in vain, for an embargo on imports of products from Israeli settlements, he declared that he 'no longer had sufficient confidence in his ability to act as Foreign Affairs Minister in the weeks, months and year ahead' to continue in his role. His resignation led to the resignation of four other ministers from the New Social Contract (Health, Home Affairs, Education and Social Affairs), as well as four secretaries of state.

The governing coalition is now reduced to two parties and has only 32 seats in the Second Chamber.

#### ONE YEAR OF THE GEERT WILDERS GOVERNMENT

Although the PVV came out ahead in the previous general election on 22 November 2023, Geert Wilders did not succeed Mark Rutte (VVD) as Prime Minister of the Netherlands. He has always claimed that Dick Schoof was chosen because Pieter Omtzigt and Dilan Yesilgoz, then leaders of the NSC and VVD respectively, did not want him to head the government. In any case, this allowed Geert Wilders to retain his freedom to criticise the government's actions.

During the first few months, the PVV's government partners appreciated the fact that Geert Wilders was no longer talking about closing mosques, banning the Koran or implementing Nexit (the Netherlands' exit from the European Union), all measures that were included in his party's election manifesto. Marjolein Faber (PVV), who is responsible for asylum and immigration, drafted three bills to reform the asylum system, all of which were criticised by the Council of State. Last May, she had to admit that she would not be able to reduce her ministry's budget by 3.5 billion as planned. Marjolein Faber failed to impose her emergency asylum law, which contravened

the principles of the state and international treaties. It was deemed unenforceable at national, European and even international level (it violated the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees).

In 2024, the Netherlands had a positive net migration balance: 130,000 foreigners arrived on Dutch territory. While limiting what Wilders called the 'asylum industry' was the ruling coalition's number one objective and the core of the PVV's programme, nothing was done in this area; nothing, in fact, could really be done.

Beyond immigration and asylum, none of the government's election promises were fulfilled, neither the increase in purchasing power, nor the rent freeze, nor the increase in the number of healthcare workers, nor the revival of nuclear power, nor the limitation of sheep and cattle herds. It is true that the coalition has only been in power in the Netherlands for 11 months.

*"This coalition government never worked well. Geert Wilders was waiting for the right moment to withdraw. By using immigration policy as a pretext, he hopes to make this issue the focus of the next election campaign,"* said Sam van der Taak, director of the European programme at IDEA, adding, *"Geert Wilders is a veteran of Dutch politics who has a very good sense of timing."*

Thirteen years ago, the PVV leader brought down Mark Rutte's government, which he had supported in exchange for the adoption of several measures from his programme, including a ban on full-face veils and a reduction in development aid, demonstrating their irresponsibility in times of crisis. On 21 April 2012, Geert Wilders walked out of negotiations on the reforms needed to reduce the country's budget deficit, refusing, in his words, to vote for *"measures dictated by Brussels that penalise the purchasing power of the Dutch people too much"*. *"My loyalty lies first and foremost with the Netherlands, not Brussels. We are the masters in our own house, in our own country. This project was not in the interests of the voters of the Party for Freedom. We do not want to subject our pensions to a bloodbath because of the diktat from Brussels,"* Geert Wilders said at the time.

For months, tensions had been mounting between the PVV and the parties in the coalition government, to the point

that many politicians were relieved when the populist-backed government came to an end.

In 2025, Geert Wilders once again proved that he could not be relied upon as an ally, even for right-wing forces. This time, they would be wise to learn their lesson and abandon any alliance with the PVV. *"The Party for Freedom has not followed the same path as other radical right-wing parties in Europe: its populist DNA continues to be an obstacle,"* wrote the daily newspaper NRC.

Although leading in the polls on 29 October, the PVV is not guaranteed to find partners with whom to govern. It has ruled out any alliance with the Christian Democratic Appeal, the Green Left or the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy. Geert Wilders says he wants to lead the government himself in the event of victory.

#### THE OTHER POLITICAL FORCES AT PLAY

On the left of the political spectrum, the Green Left (GL) and Labour Party (PvdA) have joined forces by forming an alliance for the general election. The two parties chose this strategy on 12 June. This coalition will become a new political party in 2026. Some members of the Labour Party have expressed fears that the merger with the Green Left will undermine the social democratic values they defend and transform their party into a 'party of graduates'. The former Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Climate Action (2019-2023), Frans Timmermans, is leading the alliance for the election campaign. Geert Wilders has designated him as his main opponent.

The programme of the Green Left-Labour Party coalition, under the title *A New Start for the Netherlands*, plans to build 100,000 new homes, which, according to Frans Timmermans, will be financed by an increase in taxes on the highest incomes and a wealth tax. The left-wing alliance refuses to make any cuts in the social welfare or health sectors.

It wants to limit the number of foreigners entering the country to around 50,000 per year.

On the right of the political spectrum, Dilan Yesilgoz, leader of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), has ruled out any collaboration with the Green Left-Labour Party coalition. She favours cooperation with the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), Juiste Antwoord 2021 or the Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB). Despite the risks of improvisation, blackmail, etc., which Geert Wilders has repeatedly shown himself capable of, she has not yet completely ruled out cooperation with the PVV.

The VVD's programme is entitled *Stronger in the Storm*. It provides for lower corporate taxes and more benefits for workers. It is proposing numerous cuts in health and social security budgets. It wants to increase defence spending. It is in favour of strict limits on immigration and asylum and supports ending priority housing for refugees.

The VVD has shifted to the right on many issues such as immigration, climate change and the welfare state, but remains strongly pro-European.

*"The Dutch want a return to normal, civilised politics. That is our challenge. This policy is in the DNA of the Christian Democratic Appeal,"* said CDA leader Henri Bontenal. In the previous general election on 22 November 2023, the party recorded its lowest result in history. Henri Bontenal entered politics only four years ago and has the advantage of being considered a newcomer. The Christian Democratic Appeal proposes to reduce the tax break granted to people who have owned their homes for 30 years. It benefits from the space left in the centre of the political spectrum by the VVD and the Farmer-Citizen Movement, both of which have shifted to the right. It also seems to appeal to some supporters of the New Social Contract who regret the departure of Pieter Omtzigt as head of the NSC party.

The Socialist Party (PS) is advocating a very left-wing programme: raising the minimum wage to €18 per hour, creating income-related health insurance, nationalising all public transport and the energy company, and building a million new homes with rents not exceeding €800 per month. The Socialists say they would finance these measures by taxing the highest incomes.

A symbol of the crisis affecting the kingdom but also many European states, the Netherlands has been the

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scene of riots and violence, notably on 20 September in The Hague following a demonstration against immigration and for a tougher asylum policy organised by a 26-year-old influencer who calls herself 'Els de droite' (Els the Right-Winger) and is also a supporter of Geert Wilders. A motorway was blocked, police cars were set on fire and six journalists were attacked. All political leaders condemned the demonstration and the violence that took place.

#### THE DUTCH POLITICAL SYSTEM

The States General is a bicameral parliament. The First Chamber (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal), or Senate, has 75 members, who are elected every four years by indirect suffrage by the members of the assemblies of the 12 provincial states of the kingdom. The Second Chamber (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal) has 150 members who are elected every four years from a single national constituency using a fully proportional list system, which favours the representation of a large number of parties.

The Netherlands does not have an electoral threshold (kiesdrempel). Voters can cast preferential votes. Seats are allocated at national level among the lists that have reached the national quotient (the number of valid votes cast at national level divided by the number of seats to be filled, i.e. 150), i.e. at least 0.67% of the votes cast nationwide. Seats not filled after this initial allocation are assigned according to the d'Hondt system to the highest average (according to the Hare quotient, i.e. the total percentage of votes divided by the number of seats to be filled, i.e. 0.67%).

The seats obtained by a list are first allocated to candidates who, in the preferential votes, have obtained at least 25% of the number of votes required for a seat (0.17% of the total votes). If several candidates on a list exceed this threshold, their ranking is determined according to the number of votes received. The remaining seats are allocated to candidates according to their ranking on the electoral list.

Any political party wishing to field candidates in the general election must obtain at least 500 signatures of support from voters. In addition, if the party is not represented in the Second Chamber, it must deposit a bond of €11,000,

which will be refunded if it obtains at least 75% of the required national quotient.

Sixteen political parties are represented in the current Second Chamber of Parliament:

- The Party for Freedom (PVV), a right-wing populist party founded in 2002 by Geert Wilders, has 37 seats;
- The Labour Party Alliance (PvdA), founded in 1946 and originating from the trade union movement, together with the Green Left (GL), an environmentalist party created in 1989 and led by Frans Timmermans, has 25 MPs;
- The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), a liberal party created in 1948 and led by Dilan Yesilgoz, has 24 seats;
- The centre-right New Social Contract, founded in 2023 and led by Nicolien van Vroonhoven, has 20 elected representatives;
- Democrats 66 (D66) brings together centre-left liberal reformers. Led by Rob Jetten, they hold 10 seats;
- The Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB), founded in 2019 by Caroline van der Plas and representing the rural world, has 7 MPs;
- The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) is a centre-right party formed in 1980 from the merger of three parties: the Catholic People's Party (KVP), the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) and the Historical Christian Union (CHU). Led by Henri Bontenbal, it has five seats.
- The Socialist Party (SP), a radical left-wing party led by Jimmy Dijk, has four elected representatives.
- Denk, a party founded in 2014 by Tunahan Kuzu and Selcuk Öztürk, former members of the Labour Party, advocates multiculturalism and decolonisation. Led by Stephan van Baarle, it has three seats.
- The Forum for Democracy (FvD), a right-wing populist party led by Thierry Baudet, has three MPs.
- The Party for the Animals (PvdD), founded in 2002 and led by Esther Ouwehand, has three seats.
- The Reformed Political Party (SGP), founded in 1918 and led by Chris Stoffer, brings together the orthodox Protestant electorate (strict Calvinists). It won three seats.

- The Christian Union (CU), formed in January 2000 from the merger of the Reformed Political Federation (RPF) and the Reformed Political Alliance (GPV), led by Mirjam Bikker, has three elected representatives;
- Volt (VOLT), a European social-liberal party chaired by Laurens Dassen, has two seats.
- Juiste Antwoord 2021 ('Correct Answer 2021', JA21), the result of a split from the Forum for Democracy, led by Joost Eerdmans, has two MPs.

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

Turnout: 77.60%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	Number of seats
Party for Freedom (PVV)	2 446 338	23.49	37
Labour Party-Green Left Alliance (PvdA-GL)	1 640 865	15.75	25
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	1 588 436	15.25	24
New Social Contract (NSC)	1 338 408	12.85	20
Democrats 66 (D66)	655 389	6.29	10
The farmer-citizen movement (BBB)	483 817	4.65	7
Christian Democrat Appeal (CDA)	344 926	3.31	5
Socialist Party (SP)	327 196	3.14	4
Denk	246 546	2.37	3
Party for the animals (PvdD)	234 721	2.25	3
Forum for Democracy (FvD)	232 312	2.23	3
Reformed political party(SGP)	217 287	2.09	3
Christian Union (CU)	212 455	2.04	3
Volt	178 588	1.71	2
Correct Answer 2021 (JA 21)	71 208	0.68	1
Others	196 627	1.90	0

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

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