



The Dutch Parliamentary elections of March 2021

Joop J. M. van Holsteyn & Galen A. Irwin

To cite this article: Joop J. M. van Holsteyn & Galen A. Irwin (2022) The Dutch Parliamentary elections of March 2021, *West European Politics*, 45:7, 1493-1505, DOI: [10.1080/01402382.2022.2070981](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2070981)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2070981>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 19 May 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2502



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 7 View citing articles [↗](#)

The Dutch Parliamentary elections of March 2021

Joop J. M. van Holsteyn and Galen A. Irwin

Institute of Political Science, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands


ABSTRACT

The Dutch general election of March 2021 can be referred to as the ‘Corona’ election, as the world-wide pandemic influenced all aspects of this election. The government made special provisions to make participation safer for voters. Restrictions on crowd size and social distancing restricted the possibilities for traditional means of election campaigning. Thus the campaign was carried out primarily in the mass and social media. The Corona virus and health care were prominent issues during the campaign. However, Corona had little influence on turnout as the percentage was only slightly lower than for the previous election. Corona seems to have produced ‘rally around the leader’ or ‘don’t change horses’ effects among Dutch voters. The Liberal Party (VVD) gained one seat, D66 five, and the CU held onto its seats. Although the CDA lost four seats, this was the first election since 1981 that a coalition had *not* lost seats at a subsequent election. The total number of parties represented rose to a record 17 (for 150 seats in the Second Chamber or Dutch lower house). Corona also impacted the coalition formation process when an infected ‘explorer’ was photographed with notes from the negotiations when she hurriedly left the building. The ensuing debate created distrust among potential partners that took several months to resolve. In the end, after the longest formation process in Dutch history, the coalition consisted of the same parties as in the previous Cabinet and was led by the same Prime Minister, Mark Rutte.

KEYWORDS Netherlands; elections; COVID-19; government formation; coalition bargaining

Background to the election

After the longest Cabinet formation process since the Second World War, the third Cabinet under the leadership of Mark Rutte was installed on 16 October 2017 (see also Van Holsteyn 2018).¹ The Cabinet consisted of the VVD (People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy), CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal), D66 (Democrats ‘66) and CU (Christian Union).

CONTACT Joop J. M. van Holsteyn  holsteyn@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Under the new Cabinet, the Referendum Law of 2015 was repealed and after many years of political struggle and stalemate, the constitutional provisions for the appointment of mayors and provincial governors were removed. Major new policy initiatives were the announcement of a Pension Accord in 2019 and a Climate Accord to reduce emissions by 50 percent by 2030. The major challenges faced by the Cabinet were: a) how to react to the judicial decision that emissions of nitrogen had to be reduced; b) problems surrounding the evacuation of those who had worked for the Netherlands in Afghanistan; c) reaction to the parliamentary and societal accusations of inadequate reactions by civil servants and politicians to the unfair procedures that had been followed in combatting fraud with child benefits payments – this led to the resignation of the Cabinet on 15 January 2021; and d) most importantly, the Corona pandemic.

On 3 December 2019 the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported a cluster of lung infections arising from a virus that would become known as the SARS-Cov-2 virus, which causes the Covid-19 illness or Corona. The first case in Europe was reported on 24 January 2020. On the same day, the Minister of Health of the Netherlands, Hugo de Jonge (CDA), announced to Parliament that the country was prepared for an outbreak of this disease and an advisory Outbreak Management Team (OMT) became operational. The first cases of Covid-19 in the Netherlands were registered on 27 February. On 9 March 2020, the first in a series of press conferences was televised in which the Prime Minister (PM), Mark Rutte (VVD), warned the country that the disease was spreading and stressed some basic principles of mitigation. The country entered a new era, a year before the parliamentary election scheduled for 17 March 2021.

Organisation of the election

In the autumn of 2020, the Ministry of Internal Affairs began preparations for the task of holding elections during a pandemic. Legislation was passed that included temporary changes to how the election would be organised as safely as possible for the voters.

In order to prevent the polling stations from becoming too crowded, two days of early voting were instituted. Traditionally, Dutch elections are held on Wednesdays, but in 2021 each municipality opened at least one polling station on Monday 15 and Tuesday 16 March. These early voting days were intended for use by the elderly and those who were most vulnerable to Corona, but no one could be forbidden to arrive on these days (for more information on early voting and confidence in the electoral process, see Van Ham 2018).

In order to further protect the elderly, voters over the age of 70 were sent a postal ballot. *All* voters in the Netherlands receive a voting pass at least fourteen days before the election; the materials for mail voting (two envelopes and a ballot) were sent separately. One envelope was labelled the ballot envelope. The voter filled in the ballot and placed it in this envelope, which was then placed in the second envelope together with the voting pass. Approximately 2.4 million ballots were sent out, of which 1.1 million were returned. A number of difficulties with the process emerged. Roughly 33,000 envelopes that the postal service received had no address. In opening the return envelope, in some cases the voting pass was not found. And although the Minister of the Interior ordered a less strict application of the rules, about 65,000 votes – approximately the number of votes needed for one seat in the Second Chamber – were not considered at all or were considered invalid (NOS 2022a).

A third alternative way to vote was by giving power of attorney to someone else to cast the vote. For 2021, the number of persons for whom a voter could receive a power of attorney to cast a vote for someone else was raised from two to three, even though the Electoral Council had advised negatively on this increase. Likely due to the other extra options, this had little impact: the number of such votes cast was fewer than in 2017 (917,698; 8.77% and 964,811; 9.13%, respectively).

In the polling stations voters were required to disinfect their hands upon entering the station, maintain 1.5 m distance from others, and to wear a face mask. An extra official was added to the staff to ensure that these rules were obeyed. All tables and voting booths were disinfected regularly, as were the red pencils which voters used to mark the ballots; some municipalities simply allowed the voters to keep their pencil.

No fewer than 89 political groups registered a party name with the Electoral Council and 41 of these actually submitted a list of candidates, of which 37 were declared valid – a post-war record. This number necessitated a ballot paper of 100×70 centimetres, which presented difficulties for print shops, voters, and poll officials. Counting the votes was also influenced by the large ballot paper. The ballots had to be unfolded and placed in piles, one for each party. Since social distancing required the counters to keep 1.5 metres from each other, the Ministry had ordered that an area of 60 square metres would be necessary to count the votes, forcing some municipalities to rent large halls or indoor stadiums.

Campaigning

Prior to the campaign, the parties select a list of candidates, including, at the top, the so-called list-puller. On 31 October 2020, Rutte announced

that he would lead his party (Liberal Party, VVD) again. The GreenLeft (GL), Socialist Party (SP), Christian Union (CU), Political Reformed Party (SGP), Freedom Party (PVV) and Forum for Democracy (FVD) also retained their leaders from the previous campaign. The Labour Party (PvdA) had intended to retain its leader, Lodewijk Asscher, but on 14 January 2021 he resigned from politics, accepting responsibility for his role as Minister of Social Affairs in a major child benefits payments scandal; Lillian Ploumen was chosen to lead the party at the election.

The choice of a leader for the Christian-democratic CDA was messy. After the resignation of Sybrand Buma in May 2019 many supported the young Minister of Finance, Wopke Hoekstra, as his successor as party leader. However, Hoekstra declined, saying that he was more of an administrator than a politician. In July 2020, the party held an election among the party members, but a run-off election between the top candidates, Hugo de Jonge and Pieter Omtzigt, became necessary. De Jonge eked out a narrow victory and declared Omtzigt his 'running mate'. However, on 10 December, he notified the party that he was unable to combine his position as Minister of Health with the party leadership and resigned the latter position. The party then again turned to Hoekstra, who this time consented to be the list-puller and party leader – to the unpleasant surprise of Omtzigt.

With the departure of Alexander Pechtold at the end of 2018, D66 also needed a new leader. The chair of the parliamentary party, Rob Jetten, stepped aside in favour of Sigrid Kaag, the Minister of Foreign Trade and Developmental Aid. Kaag contributed to the record number of female list-pullers in 2021: of the 17 parties that were elected to the Second Chamber, seven were led by women.

Traditionally, Dutch election campaigns are short, low-key affairs and this was exacerbated under Corona circumstances. Restrictions on the movement of citizens placed by the government had a severe impact on what could be done. Consequently, and more than ever before, the 2021 campaign was a mass and social media campaign, beginning with a radio debate on 8 February. Debates between the list-pullers generally form an important campaign component, but those organised by the major broadcasting networks, both public and commercial, attract the most attention. In 2021, two new elements were introduced in their format. During the television debate on 28 February, each of the six list-pullers was confronted by a voter who was allowed to conduct a short debate with a list-puller, providing for some tough confrontations. On 16 March, i.e. after early voting had already begun, eight debates were held between pairs of eight list-pullers. In each mini-debate, one side was allowed to pose a proposition that was then debated with the other side. Each list-puller participated in two such mini-debates. According to the Dutch

Parliamentary Election Study 2021 (DPES 2021), about 25 percent of all voters watched at least one televised debate, 45 percent parts of at least one, and about 30 percent did not watch any televised debate. These figures indicate slightly less interest in the debates compared to previous years (Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2021a).

In 2021, the parties spent a record 13.7 million euros on traditional media advertising, including 6.6 million on television ads. D66 spent the largest amount of money (3.4 million euros), followed by the VVD (3.2 million), CDA (1.8 million), and FVD (1.7 million). Also, the parties increased their presence on digital media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. The audio app Clubhouse made its entry into the campaign, and the use of podcasts increased. Total figures for expenditures on digital media are not available, but it was reported that in the last week before the election, FVD and the CDA spent approximately 150,000 and 115,000 € respectively for ads on Facebook and Instagram (NOS 2022b; RTL 2022).

One reason that it was possible for the parties to increase their expenditures for advertisements was that they could divert funds that otherwise would have been devoted to traditional means of campaigning. For example, the PvdA had to cancel the distribution of roses at markets because of the restrictions on social distancing and GreenLeft was forced to cancel the meet-ups with Jesse Klaver that had been so successful in 2017. FVD defied governmental regulations and held rallies outdoors.

The 2021 election witnessed a rise in large campaign contributions to parties. A tech billionaire donated one million € to D66 and 350,000 € to the Animal Rights Party (PvdD) in support for their plans to fight climate change. Three months after the election, it emerged that the CDA had received a donation of 1.2 million € from a business millionaire, who had been chairman of the party's fundraising campaign. FVD reported donations in both 2020 and 2021 of 250,000 € from a Dutch resident in Hong Kong. Other parties reported substantial sums as well, although not as large as these (Rijksoverheid 2022; *Volkscrant* 2022). Despite such donations, however, Dutch elections remain inexpensive affairs by international standards. Although the final totals for 2021 may be somewhat higher, in 2017 the total expenditures for the twelve parties (excluding the PVV, for which no information was available) that entered the Second Chamber was just over €13.5 million, i.e. €1.5 per vote (Andeweg *et al.* 2020).

With low levels of resources available, free publicity remains crucial. An analysis of television items and articles about the election by *NRC Handelsblad* and the Free University, found that the coalition partners received the most attention. The VVD – the largest coalition party and party of PM Rutte – appeared in 60 percent of the items; after February

2021 the figure for television rose to 80 percent. Of the junior coalition partners, the CDA and D66 were mentioned more often than the CU. Attention for the parties on the radical right, i.e. the PVV and FVD, increased as the campaign progressed. Among the new parties, JA21, a right-wing spin-off from FVD, gained the most attention, followed by Volt, a pan-European party (Takken 2021). This research also showed that substantively the Corona virus and health care dominated the topics that were discussed, with almost 40 percent, followed by education and the youth (13%), and by the taxes and child payments scandal (9%). Obviously, this was not a year for 'It's the economy, stupid' (< 1%).

The Corona virus dominated the campaign, but it was *not* a matter that presented clear policy alternatives to the voters (Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2021a). The government, in typical Dutch fashion, had attempted to gain broad support for the measures to combat the virus; in the Second Chamber most often almost all parties agreed with the proposals. Thus, opposition parties had no leg to stand on if they attempted to attack the coalition parties on the Corona issue. The exceptions were the PVV and FVD, which was very vocal in its opposition. In the final stages of the campaign D66 also took stands at variance with governmental policy (Broer and Kee 2021).

Rather than focussing on issues, the major parties focussed on political leaders and leadership. The VVD concentrated on Rutte, in an attempt to take advantage of the electoral bonus that comes with his position as PM (Van der Meer 2021). Sigrid Kaag of D66 – in the campaign also referred to as Team Kaag – ran on a slogan of New Leadership.

The result

The effect of Corona on turnout at the election was limited, likely due to the measures taken to make voting easier. The official turnout figure in 2021 was 78.7 percent, compared to 81.9 percent in 2017 (which was the highest figure since 1986).

Considerable research will be needed to understand the effects of the Corona virus on the decision processes of the voters and how this affected the overall results (see Table 1 for an overview of the results).

What seems to stand out is a 'rally-round-the-flag (leader)' effect. The Corona crisis began early in 2020, but by the fall of 2020, polls were showing a commanding lead for the VVD and Rutte. In November pollster Peter Kanne wrote a blog entitled 'Can the VVD lose the election of 2021?' (Stukroodvlees 2022). The VVD held 40 seats in the polls, double the number held by the runner-up, PVV. In the end, the VVD did not receive the 40 seats that had been indicated, but with 34 seats

Table 1. Election to the Second Chamber of Dutch Parliament 17 March 2021.

| | 2021 Seats | 2021 Votes | 2021 Votes (%) | 2017 Seats | 2017 Votes | 2017 Votes (%) |
|---------------|------------|------------|----------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| VVD | 34 | 2,279,130 | 21.9 | 33 | 2,238,351 | 21.3 |
| D66 | 24 | 1,565,861 | 15.0 | 19 | 1,285,819 | 12.2 |
| PVV | 17 | 1,124,482 | 10.8 | 20 | 1,372,941 | 13.1 |
| CDA | 15 | 990,601 | 9.5 | 19 | 1,301,796 | 12.4 |
| SP | 9 | 623,371 | 6.0 | 14 | 955,633 | 9.1 |
| PvdA | 9 | 597,192 | 5.7 | 9 | 599,699 | 5.7 |
| GL | 8 | 537,308 | 5.2 | 14 | 959,600 | 9.1 |
| FvD | 8 | 523,083 | 5.0 | 2 | 187,162 | 1.8 |
| PvdD | 6 | 399,750 | 3.8 | 5 | 335,214 | 3.2 |
| CU | 5 | 351,275 | 3.4 | 5 | 356,271 | 3.4 |
| Volt | 3 | 252,480 | 2.4 | – | – | – |
| Ja21 | 3 | 246,620 | 2.4 | – | – | – |
| SGP | 3 | 215,249 | 2.1 | 3 | 218,950 | 2.1 |
| DENK | 3 | 211,237 | 2.0 | 3 | 216,147 | 2.1 |
| 50+ | 1 | 106,702 | 1.0 | 4 | 327,131 | 3.1 |
| BBB | 1 | 104,319 | 1.0 | – | – | – |
| Bij1 | 1 | 87,238 | 0.8 | – | – | – |
| Other parties | | 206,954 | 2.0 | | 161,327 | |
| Turnout | 150 | 78.71% | | 150 | 81.9% | |

Source: Kiesraad (Electoral Council), www.kiesraad.nl.

remained the largest party in the Second Chamber, partly as a result of a weakened but lasting rally-effect (Van Der Meer 2021).

On the day following the election, *de Volkskrant* published a photo of a jubilant Sigrid Kaag dancing on a tabletop to celebrate the success of D66 in achieving 27 seats, based on the exit poll. Although this figure declined to 24 seats in the final results, it represented a substantial gain from the 19 seats it had held in the previous Second Chamber. This was even more impressive since D66 – as other junior coalition partners – generally has lost seats after having participated in government. The appeal for new leadership may have been effective. Also, the centre position of D66 in the ideological continuum may have helped; the party was the only major party that was considered as an electoral option by voters with a moderate left-wing *and* right-wing orientation (Van Der Meer 2021; Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2021b).

With the VVD gaining one seat, D66 five and the CU holding on to its five seats, the loss of four seats by the CDA meant that coalition had done well: this was only the second election since 1981 in which the government coalition had gained seats at a subsequent election (Andeweg *et al.* 2020; Van Der Meer 2021). Voters had no desire to ‘change horses in the middle of a (Corona) stream’.

A parliamentary election fulfils the definition of a first-order election in determining who will hold power in the coming term, something a second-order election does not (Reif and Schmitt 1980). However, the 2021 election had less than usual impact on the question of who indeed obtained power. From the outset it was clear that the VVD would remain

the largest party and would almost inevitably take the lead in a new coalition. Also, Rutte was the strongest candidate to again become PM. There was no electoral contest between parties concerning who would become the largest or between leading candidates to become PM, as in 2012 between Rutte and Diederik Samsom (PvdA).

Since in 2021 this power question was removed from the equation, the election showed elements of a second-order election. For example, voters were freed from strategic considerations and were free to cast a vote from the heart rather than from their head, with 'brighter prospects for small and new parties' (Reif and Schmitt 1980). The latter was certainly the case: four new parties entered Parliament. JA21 originated from a split within FVD, after the FVD was criticised for racism and anti-Semitism; JA21 gained three seats in the new Parliament. Volt, a branch of Volt Europe, also gained three seats. The party is described as a social-liberal party and is obviously pro-EU. The Farmer-Citizen-Movement (abbreviated BBB in Dutch) was founded in 2019 by Caroline van der Plas, who became the party's first and only MP and aims to provide better representation of citizens in rural and agricultural areas. Finally, BIJ1 squeaked into Parliament with 87,238 votes, barely exceeding the electoral quotient of 69,485. The name of the party refers to Article 1 of the Dutch Constitution that guarantees equal treatment under the law and forbids various forms of discrimination.

Other fairly new parties had varying success. 50PLUS had suffered from dissension and split-offs during the previous parliamentary period (Boerboom 2021) and lost three seats. The ethnic or immigrant party DENK held onto its three seats. Despite the dissension that had led to the founding of JA21, Forum for Democracy (FVD), which was founded in 2016 and entered Parliament in 2017 – and had major electoral success at the Provincial elections of 2019, when it became the largest party – earned eight seats, picking up six seats from the 2017 results. The success of these parties brought the number of parties winning seats after an election to 17, a record since the introduction of universal suffrage.

Party successes are complemented by party failures. The largest loss of six seats was sustained by GreenLeft, which in 2017 had been aided by a Klaver-effect, referring to its list-puller. The SP lost five seats and since the PvdA only held onto its nine seats, the left, i.e. GreenLeft, SP, PvdA, PvdD, and BIJ1, holds a total of 33 (out of 150) seats, a post-war low. The lack of success by the PvdA, combined with the loss of four seats by the CDA, also meant that these once powerful traditional parties held only nine and fifteen seats respectively. The traditional and dominant Big Three (CDA, PvdA and VVD) seems to belong to electoral and political history (Louwerse *et al.* 2019).

Government formation

Although the dominant position of the VVD was clear, the observation that ‘elections seldom have a determining impact on the formation of a government’ holds for 2021 (Andeweg *et al.* 2020). Moreover, the Corona virus had major impact on the inherently complicated process of cabinet formation in the Netherlands. Following procedures established in 2012, which restricted the role of the monarch in the process, on the day following the election, the Second Chamber requested representatives from the two largest parties, Annemarie Jorritsma (VVD) and Kajsia Ollongren (D66) to investigate which parties might form a Cabinet.

On 25 March, Corona struck – with major consequences. After arriving in the morning to continue discussions, Ollongren was informed that she had tested positive for the virus. She gathered up all her documents and rushed to a waiting limousine. A photographer snapped a photo and a blown up image revealed some notes from their meeting: ‘position Omtzigt, appointment elsewhere’. Omtzigt had been instrumental in bringing to attention the child benefits payments scandal that led to the resignation of the Rutte III Cabinet; he was considered by many as an active but also irritating member of Parliament (but highly popular among voters). Jorritsma and Ollongren felt their position as ‘explorers’ had been compromised and resigned; Tamara van Ark (VVD) and Wouter Koolmees (D66) were appointed as their successors. Later in the evening, Rutte and Kaag denied that there had been talks about finding a different job for Omtzigt in order to get him out of Parliament. The uproar that followed led to a debate in Parliament on 2 April. There was a general feeling that Rutte had misled all involved about his role. As a result a motion of no confidence was supported by all the opposition parties, but Rutte survived when the coalition partners refused to support this motion. Instead, D66 and CDA put forward a milder motion of condemnation, which passed with only the VVD opposing it. Kaag said that in such a situation ‘I would draw my conclusions’. Nevertheless, Rutte refused to resign – and the formation process was at an impasse, in a toxic political atmosphere.

Also on 2 April, the Second Chamber voted to appoint a new *informateur*, who was less closely tied to day-to-day politics; this meant the exit of Van Ark and Koolmees. The position fell to a senior statesman with ample experience in cabinet formation, Herman Tjeenk Willink (PvdA). He moved slowly, attempting first to restore trust among the various parties. After three weeks, he concluded that the formation process could continue, focussing on the substantive issues facing the country, especially the restoration of the economy after the Corona crisis, and, only then, on who would govern with whom.

The *informateur* who took over was Mariëtte Hamer (PvdA), the chairman of the Social Economic Council. Her deadline for announcing results was 6 June, but she was forced to request an extension. The major roadblock was the unwillingness of various parties to join in a coalition. The VVD and CDA did not wish to have both the PvdA and GreenLeft together in a Cabinet, but each of the latter refused to participate without the other. Strengthened by its success and in order to have better opportunities to solve medical-ethical issues, D66 was disinclined to again sit in a cabinet with the orthodox protestant CU. The CU was disinclined to join a coalition with Rutte as PM.

On 22 June, Hamer reported to the Second Chamber, only to reiterate the impasse that existed among the six parties that were under consideration for participation in a new cabinet. Her recommendation was that the leaders of the largest parties, Rutte and Kaag, prepare a document outlining what needed to be done during the coming years. Then the search could begin to find parties to form a majority coalition around these proposals. Hamer suggested that after the summer vacation, the deliberations could continue the middle of August; she was again appointed *informateur* to guide and supervise the process.

Rutte and Kaag completed their document on August 16 and discussions were resumed. However, after two weeks of negotiations, the impasse continued. Hamer saw no way out of this impasse and on 2 September submitted her resignation, recommending that a member of the VVD be appointed to attempt to form a *minority* Cabinet of VVD, CDA, and D66. The Second Chamber debated the final report of Hamer on 7 September, and appointed Johan Remkes (VVD) as *informateur* to investigate the possibility of a minority cabinet. On 28 September, he concluded that this was not a viable option and suggested an *extra-parliamentary* cabinet; if this failed, new elections should be called. With this threat of new elections hanging above the negotiations, D66 relented and agreed to participate in a cabinet with the CU. In his final report, Remkes suggested that one or two *informateurs* be appointed to attempt to form a cabinet with these four parties, i.e. the same parties that had comprised the Rutte III Cabinet.

On 5 October, Remkes, together with Koolmees, was appointed by the Second Chamber to conduct these negotiations. After more than two months of secret negotiations, during which very little information was leaked to the media and the public, on 13 December, it was announced that the four parties had reached an agreement. The following day the agreement entitled 'Looking after each other, looking forward to the future' (*Omzien naar elkaar, vooruitkijken naar de toekomst*) was presented to the parliamentary groups, who voted their support for the accord. On 15 December, the agreement was presented to the public and the two

informateurs submitted their resignation. The agreement was debated the following day in Parliament, which then appointed Rutte as *formateur* to lead the coalition parties in the search for new ministers for his fourth cabinet.

On 2 January 2022, the parties completed their task and announced the names of those they were proposing for positions of minister and junior minister. The following day, Rutte began a round of talks with those who had been proposed. The Rutte III Cabinet completed 360 days as a caretaker government, following its resignation on 15 January 2021. This constituted a record; the 299 days since the election also set a new record as the longest Cabinet formation period in the history of the Netherlands.

The new cabinet consists of twenty ministers and nine junior ministers. The VVD holds eight minister posts, D66 six, the CDA four and the CU two. Half of the seats are held by women, a larger percentage than in any previous Cabinet; two new ministers have a non-western background. Although the parties remained the same as in the previous cabinet, only Rutte remained at his post as PM; six names remained but at new posts.

On Monday, 10 January 2022, the new Cabinet Rutte IV was installed by the king and presented to the people with the traditional photograph at the Noordeinde Palace – with the exception of Minister of Finance, Kaag, who was not able to join the meeting: on Sunday 9 January, she announced she had tested positive for the Corona virus – a final indication that the Dutch Parliamentary elections of 17 March 2021 was dominated by the pandemic from start to finish.

Note

1. For other recent articles in the Elections in Context series see Little (2021); Pilet (2021); Prosser (2020); Faas and Klingelhöfer (2022) and Lopes (2022).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Joop J. M. van Holsteyn is Professor in Political Behaviour and Research Methods at the Department of Political Science, Leiden University. His research focuses on electoral behaviour, public opinion and opinion polling, right-wing extremism, and party membership in the Netherlands. He has published articles in English in, e.g., *Acta Politica*, *Electoral Studies*, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *Party Politics*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, and *West European Politics*. [holsteyn@fsw.leidenuniv.nl]

Galen A. Irwin is Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Department of Political Science, Leiden University. His research has focused on political participation, voting behaviour, and public opinion. He has published articles in, e.g., *Acta Politica*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Electoral Studies*, *International Journal of Public Opinion*, and *West European Politics*. [irwin@fsw.leidenuniv.nl]

References

- Andeweg, Rudy B., Galen A. Irwin, and Tom Louwerse (2020). *Governance and Politics of The Netherlands* (5th ed.). London: Red Globe Press.
- Boerboom, Joep (2021). *Ouderenstrijd: De bewogen geschiedenis van 50PLUS*. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Broer, Thijs, and Peter Kee (2021). *Code Rood: Het verhaal achter het corona-beleid*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Pluim.
- Faas, Thorsten, and Tristan Klingelhöfer (2022). 'German Politics at the Traffic Light: New Beginnings in the Election of 2021', *West European Politics*. doi:10.1080/01402382.2022.2045783
- Little, Conor (2021). 'Change Gradually, Then All at Once: The General Election of February 2020 in the Republic of Ireland', *West European Politics*, 44:3, 714–23.
- Lopes, Hugo Ferrinho (2022). 'An Unexpected Socialist Majority: The 2022 Portuguese General Elections', *West European Politics*, doi:10.1080/01402382.2022.2070983.
- Louwerse, Tom, Rudy Andeweg, Joop van Holsteyn, and Josje den Ridder, eds. (2019). *Van driestromenland tot Delta? Beschouwingen over ontwikkelingen in de Nederlandse politiek*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.
- NOS (2022a). 65.000 stemmen 70+ers niet meegeteld door fouten bij briefstemmen. <https://nos.nl/artikel/2375960-65-000-stemmen-70-ers-niet-meegeteld-door-fouten-bij-briefstemmen> (accessed April 10, 2022).
- NOS (2022b). Sociale media waren onmisbaar in campagne, maar lijken niet doorslaggevend. <https://nos.nl/artikel/2373554-sociale-media-waaren-onmisbaar-in-campagne-maar-lijken-niet-doorslag> (accessed April 10, 2022).
- Pilet, Jean-Benoit (2021). 'Hard Times for Governing Parties: The 2019 Federal Elections in Belgium', *West European Politics*, 44:2, 439–49.
- Prosser, Christopher (2020). 'The End of the EU Affair: The UK General Election of 2019', *West European Politics*, 44:2, 450–61.
- Reif, Karlheinz, and Hermann Schmitt (1980). 'Nine Second-Order National Elections – A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results', *European Journal of Political Research*, 8:1, 3–44.
- Rijksoverheid (2022). <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/publicaties/2021/03/10/overzicht-giften-en-schulden-politieke-partijen-tweede-kamerverkiezing-en-2021-van-2019-tot-en-met-24-februari-2021> (accessed April 10, 2022).
- RTL (2022). Alles voor de aandacht: politici smijten met geld om online gezien te worden. <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/politiek/artikel/5218807/artijen-smijten-met-geld-en-doen-online-de-gekte-dingen-ze-willen> (accessed April 10, 2022).
- Stukroodvles (2022). Kan de VVD de verkiezingen van 2021 verliezen? <https://stukroodvles.nl/kan-de-vvd-de-verkiezingen-van-2021-verliezen> (accessed April 10, 2022). The blog is in Dutch, translation of the title by the authors.
- Takken, Wilfried (2021). 'Welke partijen waren het meest in beeld?', *NRC Handelsblad*, March 15.

- Van der Meer, Tom (2021). 'De verkiezingen van 2021 in longitudinaal perspectief', in Take Sipma, *et al.* (eds.), *Versplinterde vertegenwoordiging. Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek 2021*. SKON, 15–27.
- Van Ham, Carolien (2018). 'Vertrouwen in eerlijke verkiezingen', in Take Sipma, *et al.* (eds.), *Versplinterde vertegenwoordiging. Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek 2021*. SKON, 37–47.
- Van Holsteyn, Joop (2018). 'The Dutch Parliamentary Elections of March 2017', *West European Politics*, 41:6, 1364–77.
- Van Holsteyn, Joop, and Galen Irwin (2021a). 'Aandacht voor politiek in de aanloop van de Tweede Kamerverkiezingen van 2021', in Take Sipma, *et al.* (eds.), *Versplinterde vertegenwoordiging. Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek 2021*. SKON, 48–57.
- Van Holsteyn, Joop, and Galen Irwin (2021b). 'Wie zijn die mensen?' over de kiezersaanhang van D66, 1967–2021', in Coen Brummer and Simon Otjes (eds.), *Tussen bestormen en besturen. 55 jaar D66 in de Nederlandse politiek (1966–2021)*. Amsterdam: Boom, 161–80.
- Volkskrant* (2022). De 'suikeroom van het CDA', die 1,2 miljoen aan zijn partij gaf, heeft nog een aantal vragen te beantwoorden. <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/de-suikeroom-van-het-cda-die-1-2-miljoen-aan-zijn-partij-gaf-heeft-nog-een-aantal-vragen-te-beantwoorden-b37b4955/> (accessed April 10, 2022).