

The Netherlands

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Introduction

The Treaty of Westphalia recognized the End of the Eighty Years War in 1648 and with it the independence of the Netherlands from Habsburg Spain. At that time the Dutch Republic was a federal republic governed by a decentralized system with a strong emphasis on local autonomy. The United Kingdom of the Netherlands was formed at the Congress of Vienna in 1813 as a monarchy with a bicameral parliament (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1379). The Dutch constitution of 1815 recognized the departure from the previous republican form of government to a constitutional monarchy that limited the monarch's power. The constitution from 1848 was a reaction to revolutionary movements in Europe and established direct suffrage. A series of liberal reforms towards democratization followed (McLaren, 1980: 60).

Elections

In the period from 1919 to 1939 five elections were held.

The electoral system in the Netherlands from 1919 to 1939 was based on the principle of proportional representation. The legislative authority of the country resided in the bicameral parliament known as the "Staten Generaal." The upper chamber (Senate), "*Eerste Kamer*", consisted of 75 members who were indirectly elected by provincial legislatures for six-year terms, with half of the deputies up for reelection every three years. The lower chamber (House of Representatives), "*Tweede Kamer*", comprised 100 members directly elected for four-year terms. Before 1918, members of the Dutch parliament were elected from single districts. However, this changed with the introduction of a new electoral law in 1918. Technically, the country is divided into 18 electoral districts, but by allowing the pooling of votes won in different districts, the electoral law effectively creates one national constituency (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 642). In 1917, active and passive voting rights for all men were established, while passive voting rights for women were granted in 1919 and enshrined in the constitution in 1922. Simultaneously, proportional representation was introduced. Voting in the Netherlands was compulsory until 1971.

To win a seat after 1933, a party had to achieve the "electoral divisor" (average number of votes per seat) or 1.0 percent of the national vote. Seats were allocated according to the d'Hondt or highest-average formula. In contrast to electoral laws in effect elsewhere in Europe, the versions of proportional representation used between 1918 and 1933 were extremely favorable to smaller parties (McLaren, 1980: 65).

05 July 1922

The election held on July 5, 1922 was the first election held under universal suffrage. 48 Parties contested, ten of which obtained at least one seat. The Catholic and Protestant parties achieved significant gains: the "*Algemeene Bond van RK-kiesverenigingen*" - the forerunner of the **Roman Catholic Party (RKSP)**¹ being the strongest party with 32 seats while the **Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP)** secured 16 seats. The election primary focused on the issue of school funding. While the RKSP and ARP supported state financing for schools, the **Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP)** (20 seats, -2) opposed it. The RKSP formed a centre-right government with the ARP and the **Christian Historical Union (CHU)**.

01 July 1925

The austerity policies of the previous Finance Minister Colijn shaped the discourse in the run-up to this election. The former coalition parties (RKSP, ARP and CHU) also formed a government in 1925. Even though their result decreased compared to the previous election, the **RKSP** remained the strongest party with 30 seats (-2) and the **ARP** the third strongest with 13 (-3). The **SDAP** won four additional seats and continued to be the second largest party with 24 seats. A total of 31 parties contested the election, ten of which entered parliament. In 1926, with the coalition parties remaining the same, the government changed its prime minister from Hendrikus Colijn (ARP) to Dirk Jan de Geer (CHU) due to disagreements over the country's relationship with the Vatican.

¹The RKSP was formally established on 1926-06-03. Before that, Catholics were organized in the "Algemeene Bond van RK-kiesverenigingen", which was also informally called the RKSP.

03 July 1929

Eleven of the 35 parties running for election in 1929 were able to win a seat. The majority (**Roman Catholic Party (RKSP)** 30 seats, **SDAP** 24 seats, **ARP** twelve seats) and coalition parties (RKSP, ARP and CHU) hardly changed. However, as the parties could not agree on a common programme, an extra-parliamentary cabinet ² was formed without direct links to the ruling parties. Due to the world economic crisis and the associated economic policy measures, there was growing unrest among the population and the rise of extreme parties.

26 April 1933

For the 1933 election, the number of contesting parties rose to 54, of which 14 won at least one seat in the Lower House. In the course of this, the **RKSP** (28 seats) as well as the **SDAP** (22 seats) lost two seats each, while the **ARP** (14 seats) won two additional seats. After this election, an extra-parliamentary centre-right cabinet consisting of the RKSP, ARP and CHU was formed. The legislative period was significantly influenced by the preceding economic crisis, which caused an unemployment rate of 30% in 1935. The government reduced public spending but invested in employment programmes.

26 May 1937

According to the ABEL database, the number of parties standing for election was reduced to 20, 10 of which received enough votes to win at least one seat. As a result, the three largest parties were able to slightly increase their number of seats again: the **RKSP** won 31 (+3), the **SDAP** 23 (+1) and the **ARP** 17 seats (+3). The majority situation did not change significantly and the RKSP, ARP and CHU were able to form a cabinet that was again parliamentary in character. The cabinet's policy continued to be shaped by the economic problems and additionally by the growing number of (mainly Jewish) refugees as well as the growing threat of war.

²An extra-parliamentary cabinet differs from a parliamentary cabinet in its attachment to parties and its formation. Extra-parliamentary cabinets are based on government programmes not coalition agreements.

Parties

The party system in the Netherlands during the late 19th and early 20th centuries reflected the deep social and religious cleavages present in society at that time. As suffrage gradually extended, political parties emerged to address the most salient issues of the era, such as the introduction of universal suffrage and state financing of religious schools. The party system transformation was influenced by the emergence of Calvinist, Catholic, and socialist movements. The Calvinist and Catholic groups organized to demand state support for religious schools, while socialists viewed universal suffrage as a crucial step towards addressing their grievances. The Pacification Settlement of 1916 and 1917 resolved the school and suffrage questions by implementing universal manhood suffrage, proportional representation, and state support for denominational schools. However, both the religious parties and the pillarized social structure, i.e. the division of society into ethno-religious blocs, continued to persist (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 643). The religious cleavage in society gave rise to the Christian Democratic group of parties, while the social cleavage resulted in two such groups of parties: a socialist group of parties representing the secular working class and a liberal group of parties representing the secular middle class. These parties mobilized followers and built networks, leading to a segmented social structure in the 1920s. None of these societal segments comprised a majority of the population, and no single political party was able to capture a majority of the seats in Parliament. Thus, national policy-making required a process of consensus-seeking through careful negotiations among party leaders, known as consociational democracy (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1381).

During this period, five major parties or tendencies were usually represented: the Liberals (sometimes grouped into several parties), the Social Democratic Party, Catholics, and two Protestant parties (the Anti-Revolutionary Party and the Christian Historical Union). Additionally, the permissive version of proportional representation facilitated the organization of numerous minor parties expressing differences within or among subcultures. Prior to World War I, the power of the Liberals declined considerably. In the six elections between 1918 and 1937, the average share of the five main parties (Catholics,

Labour, Calvinist, Christians, and Liberals) ranged from 81% to 84% (McLaren, 1980: 63). The interwar period witnessed a large number of parties competing in parliamentary elections, ranging from 20 to 54, with varying degrees of success in winning seats. This multitude of parties complicated the politics of cabinet formation (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 643).

Roman Catholic Party

Dutch Catholics were organized in election societies since the 1860s, as they sought to protect their religious and political interests. However, it was not until 1926 that the **Rooms-Katholieke Staatspartij** (RKSP) was formed, marking the establishment of a centralized political party with a dedicated secretariat. The impetus behind the formation of the RKSP stemmed from the growing demands for separate denominational representation in the Dutch political landscape. As the primary political party representing Dutch Catholics, the RKSP consistently garnered a substantial share of the votes from the Catholic community. Their influence was particularly pronounced in predominantly Catholic regions of the country. This not only contributed to the RKSP being the largest parliamentary party at the time, but also made them a relevant part of the coalition-building process. During this period, the RKSP's electoral strategy revolved around promoting the interests of Catholics and safeguarding the position of the Catholic Church in Dutch society. (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 648)

Original Name	Rooms-Katholieke Staatspartij
Other Names	
Abbreviation	RKSP
Factions	

Social Democratic Worker's Party

The **Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij** (Social Democratic Labour Party), commonly known as the SDAP, was established in 1894 through a split within the Social Democratic League. As a reformist party, the SDAP focused on achieving its goals

through parliamentary means, emphasizing the class struggle and advocating for social democratic policies. After 1918, the RKSP (Rooms-Katholieke Staatspartij) refused to form an alliance with the SDAP. This refusal had significant consequences for the SDAP's participation in government. The RKSP's stance effectively kept the SDAP out of cabinets until 1939, preventing the SDAP from playing a direct role in government and shaping policies during that period. This strained relationship between the two parties further highlighted the political divisions and challenges faced by the SDAP in its pursuit of social democratic reforms. (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 669)

Original Name	Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij
Other Names	
Abbreviation	SDAP
Factions	

Anti-Revolutionary Party

The **Anti-Revolutionaire Partij** (Anti-Revolutionary Party), abbreviated as ARP, was the first mass party in the Netherlands, established in 1879. The party emerged in response to the widening gulf between the Enlightenment ideals and Orthodox Calvinism. The ARP explicitly rejected the secular doctrines of the French Revolution and aimed to establish conditions under which orthodox Calvinism could thrive, free from the pressures of secularization.

Rather than advocating for reaction or conservatism, the ARP sought to recognize its minority position and protect the rights of orthodox Calvinists. The party pursued policies such as state financing for religious schools, advocating for a day of Sunday rest, and pushing for universal household suffrage. These measures were aimed at both preserving the influence of Christianity in society and enfranchising and mobilizing its supporters. (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 646)

Original Name	Anti-Revolutionaire Partij
Other Names	
Abbreviation	ARP
Factions	

Copy and paste list of parties from party notes (example to be shown).

References

McHale, Vincent E and Sharon Skowronski. 1983. *Political Parties of Europe*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

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