The Netherlands: Old Solutions to New Problems

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Article details
Louwerse, Tom, and Timmermans, Arco. 2021. 'The Netherlands: Old Solutions to New Problems'. In Coalition Governance in Western Europe, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 448–81. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198868484.003.0013

Chapter 13
The Netherlands: Old Solutions to New Problems

Tom Louwerse and Arco Timmermans

New lines of conflict, political parties, and the fragmentation of the political landscape have contributed to cabinet volatility in the Netherlands. Politicians have tried to deal with those problems using mainly 'old' consensus-politics solutions. When the second Rutte cabinet faced a minority in the Senate in 2012, it chose to strike deals with opposition parties to ensure passage of major legislation. The prime minister did not like this, however: 'I have such a [big, red] ear from calling [the opposition leaders].' For his next cabinet, he preferred to go back to a coalition with a stable majority, as has been the norm in Dutch politics since the Second World War.

Coalition politics in the Netherlands is rooted in a system of consociational democracy that allowed for a great deal of inclusiveness in governance (Lijphart 1968). While the old system of 'pillarized' political parties catering to a specific socio-economic or religious constituency has faded, the way governance is conducted still largely follows the same unwritten rules (Andeweg and Irwin 2014). This has resulted in long government formation processes in which policy is negotiated in great detail. The increasing complexity of the political landscape has made this formation process even more difficult in recent years and it has also required extensive efforts to deal with conflicts within the coalition.

This chapter deals with the way in which politicians have tried to fit these old solutions to new problems. We first describe the institutional setting with a specific emphasis on changes since the turn of the century. We then describe the party system and political parties: how immigration and integration have become an important line of conflict and have given rise to several new political parties. We subsequently assess how these developments have affected the formation, functioning, duration, and termination of Dutch governments.[1]

[1] This chapter is based on various sources, including the (detailed) reports from *(in)formateurs* that are available online for all government formation processes since 2002 (via https://www.kabinetsformatie2017.nl/documenten). For the 2017 formation all documents related to the cabinet formation are available; for previous government formations all reports by *(in)formateurs* are available. The recent Dutch-language volume by Van Baalen and Van Kessel (2016) on Dutch cabinet formations also provides background information from interviews with key players. Moreover, newspaper sources

Tom Louwerse and Arco Timmermans, *The Netherlands: Old Solutions to New Problems* In: *Coalition Governance in Western Europe*. Edited by: Torbjörn Bergman, Hanna Bäck, and Johan Hellström, Oxford University Press.
© Oxford University Press 2021. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198868484.003.0013

The institutional setting

Government coalitions have been the norm in Dutch politics since its inception. Even before the introduction of a system of proportional representation (1917), no political party normally commanded a parliamentary majority. From a purely institutional perspective, coalition formation was not too complex. While there were and still are two chambers in parliament, the second chamber (*Eerste Kamer*) is clearly less important when it comes to questions of government inauguration or survival. Government formation is the remit of the party leaders in the lower house and the question of confidence is (almost) never made explicit in the Senate. Moreover, the government until recently usually commanded a majority in both chambers. Still, when the Rutte II government did not command a Senate majority, it believed that the Senate would vote for bills based on their merits. That did not quite work out as expected: opposition parties in the Senate demanded concessions when supporting government bills, which lead to a practice of ensuring opposition support for major bills. Thus, while the Dutch Senate does not play a big role in government formation, its veto power on bills results in the need for government parties to take the party political composition of the Senate into account. This worked out relatively well during the Rutte II government, which was the first to complete its full term since 1998.

While majority coalitions have been the norm in Dutch politics, until 2012 there was no requirement that this majority support be demonstrated through an investiture vote. This has recently changed, however, when parliament decided it wanted to coordinate government formation itself instead of this process being led by the head of state (the king). In implementing this change, the lower house (*Tweede Kamer*) included in its Standing Orders the provision that *(in)formateurs* be appointed by the lower house of parliament. This can be regarded as a form of proactive investiture (Rasch et al. 2015). One should, however, note that the entire basis for the procedure is the Tweede Kamer's own Standing Orders. There is no constitutional or legal requirement that the *formateur* ought to be appointed by parliament. In practice, the appointment of *(in)formateurs* has been supported by a broad coalition of parties. Thus while strictly a positive investment requirement, it seems not to have led to a much more contested or politicized inauguration process than in the past. After all, the main reason for the change in procedure was to take this power away from the head of state, not to create a positive investiture rule. Still, the effects of this procedural change have yet to be grasped in full.

An even more recent, and temporary, institutional change was the introduction of an advisory corrective referendum in 2015 (Jacobs et al. 2016). While this institution does not directly affect government formation, it might impact on

offer detailed contemporary accounts of these cabinet formation processes. Therefore, we have not conducted our own interviews for this chapter.

how governments function, their stability, and eventually the type of government formed. The 2015 legislation opened up the possibility to request a non-binding referendum on a bill that has passed parliament. This requires 10,000 signatures for the initial request and another 300,000 signatures (in a six-week period) once this initial threshold has been met. Since the availability of this instrument, two referendums have been held: one on the EU Association Treaty with Ukraine (2016) and the Law on Intelligence and Security Services (2018). Both referendums led to a defeat of the government's legislation. The need for the government to deal with negative referendum outcomes might have impacted future governance. Every successful bill could be subject to a referendum and once it has been held the result would at least have been 'politically binding'. Due to the unease with particularly the 2016 referendum, the Rutte III coalition parties abolished the advisory corrective referendum in 2018.

The government itself is characterized by a relative equality among ministers. The prime minister is characterized as *primus inter pares* (the first under equals). The prime minister's position was strengthened somewhat in 2007 when a change in the Standing Order of the Council of Ministers was implemented, which (somewhat) strengthens the agenda-setting power of the prime minister. Otherwise, the formal position of the prime minister has hardly changed since 1945. Fiers and Krouwel (2005) have argued that his authority has increased particularly in terms of policy coordination. As party leader of (usually) the largest party, the prime minister has gained a stronger position within his own party but not towards ministers from other parties (Andeweg and Irwin 2014: 160). Dutch coalitions are a balancing act of the parties involved; if a serious political or policy conflict arises, all parties have to be involved in finding some sort of compromise.

The party system and the actors

Party system change

Before 1967, Dutch elections were essentially censuses. Voting behaviour followed the patterns of pillarization along religious and class lines (Andeweg and Irwin 2014). Only few seats changed party hands between elections: after the 1948 elections only 4 out of 100 parliamentary seats were occupied by a different party than before the voters had their say.[2] While volatility did increase somewhat in the 1970s and 1980s to around 10 per cent of parliamentary seats changing hands, the watershed election was in 1994 when 22.7 per cent of parliamentary seats changed party hands. Electoral volatility has remained high ever since, with a

[2] As the electoral system is very proportional, electoral volatility in terms of votes essentially follows the same pattern. We focus on seats here, as coalition government is our main objective.

minimum of 15.3 per cent of seats changing hands. The most volatile election was in 2002 when 30.7 per cent of the parliamentary seats was won by a different party. These levels are not only high compared to the 1950s and 1960s but also in international comparative terms (Mair 2008).

The increased levels of volatility go hand in hand with an increase of the effective number of parliamentary parties (EPP). The pattern is, however, not identical due to the position of the Christian democrats. Before 1977 there were three separate Christian democratic parties, which resulted in a relatively high EPP of about 4.5 in the 1950s and 1960s. This increased to around 6.4 in the 1970s because of the rise of several new parties. After the 1977 merger of the Christian democrats, the EPP declined substantially to 3.7. It remained low throughout the 1980s. The volatile 1994 election increased the EPP to 5.4. Ever since, the level has remained between about 4.7 and a high of 8.1 in the 2017 elections.

Another source of fragmentation has been the relatively high number of split-off parties that have formed in parliament during a parliamentary term. In the 2012 parliament the number of parliamentary parties increased from 11 in 2012 to 17 just before the 2017 elections, due to members of parliament (MPs) leaving their parliamentary party. This resulted in the Rutte II government losing its parliamentary majority at the end of its term.

The increase of the number of parties mirrors the decline of the 'big three': Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), Labour Party (PvdA), and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). In the 1986 election, these three parties won 133 out of 150 seats (89 per cent), which had declined to only 82 seats (55 per cent) in 2010. New parties have emerged right, left, and centre on the political spectrum. The very low electoral threshold of one seat (0.67 per cent) means that it is not too difficult for new parties to gain parliamentary representation and since 2002 seven parties have done so: the populist parties Liveable Netherlands (LN), List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), Party for Freedom (PVV), and Forum for Democracy (FvD) as well as the special interest parties the Party for the Animals (PvdD), 50PLUS (elderly), and Denk (migrants). While LN and LPF turned out to be short-lived, the others look likely to be around for at least some time. These completely new parties are not the only ones to challenge the 'big three'. On the left, the Socialist Party (SP) and Green Left (GL), in the centre Democrats 66 (D66) and the Christian Union (CU), and on the right the Reformed Political Party (SGP) have been alternatives to the incumbent parties. D66 and SP in particular have done so successfully at times, winning more than 20 seats at least once since 1994.

The electoral success of new parties is related to the restructuring of the political competition. Pellikaan et al. (2003) argue that the 2002 elections brought about a change in the second dimension of political conflict. For many years, Dutch politics had arguably been structured by a socio-economic left–right dimension as well as a religious dimension. The latter was replaced by a cultural dimension in

2002, according to Pellikaan et al. (2003). The cultural dimension relates to issues of immigration and the integration of migrants. Initially the LPF was the main owner of this new issue, a position that was later taken over by the PVV.

The exact meaning of the second dimension can be discussed. Whereas Pellikaan et al. (2003) call it a cultural dimension, Kriesi et al. (2006) talk about the winners and losers of globalization. Parties like LPF and PVV represent those who do not stand to gain from open borders and supranational institutions and therefore generally oppose immigration and European integration. It should be stressed that the cultural dimension deviates somewhat from the GAL–TAN dimension that is often used in the literature. Parties like the PVV are by far the most extreme on the cultural dimension, but they are more moderate in terms of GAL–TAN because of their support for social liberal values, such as gay marriage (and vice versa for the Orthodox Protestant SGP party).[3]

Issues relating to the cultural dimension have remained relatively important since 2002. The LPF disappeared quickly as a result of internal conflict after its leader was assassinated just before the 2002 elections. Its position in the electoral landscape was filled by the PVV, which takes a somewhat ambiguous position on the economic left–right dimension but unambiguously opposes immigration and European integration. The party has become more radical over time in this respect. Initially Wilders argued that he wanted to combat the 'excesses of Islam'; more recently the party opposes Islam altogether because it regards it as an extremist political ideology, not a religion. Whereas in 2006 the PVV argued that European cooperation should be 'mainly economic', it currently advocates a Dutch withdrawal from the Union. More recently, the Forum for Democracy (FvD) has presented itself as a new radical right-wing populist challenger, gaining two seats in the 2017 elections. Partly in response to these right-wing nativist parties, migrants have organized themselves into a new political party as well (Denk), which entered parliament for the first time in 2017 with three seats.

The entry of new political parties was not limited to the cultural dimension. In 2006, the Party for the Animals (PvdD) entered parliament for the first time and has seen continued representation since. The 50PLUS party, which is aimed mostly towards elderly voters, won its first parliamentary seats in 2012. Both parties managed to gain seats in the elections of 2017, signalling that their success is not short term. Within the volatile and fragmented Dutch political landscape, these 'single issue' parties seem to be able to attract a small but sufficiently large electorate.

Table 13.1a introduces the resulting historical cabinet record. It shows that after two cabinets led by a PvdA prime minister (1994–2002), the following eight years witnessed five CDA-led cabinets. First with the new right-wing LPF and VVD,

[3] The correlation between Dutch party positions on GAL–TAN and immigration policy is 0.72 in the CHES 2010 data, while social lifestyle and GAL–TAN correlate more strongly ($r = 0.96$).

Table 13.1a Dutch cabinets since 1946

Cabinet number	Cabinet	Year in	Election date	Party composition of cabinet	Type of cabinet	Cabinet strength in seats (%)	Number of seats in parliament	Number of parties in parliament	ENP, parliament	Median party in first policy dimension	Formal support parties
1	Beel I	1946-07-03	1946-05-17	KVP, PvdA	mwc	61	100	7	4.47	ARP	
2	Drees I	1948-08-07	1948-07-07	PvdA, KVP, CHU, VVD	sur	76	100	8	4.68	KVP	
3	Drees II	1951-03-15		PvdA, KVP, CHU, VVD	sur	76	100	8	4.68	KVP	
4	Drees III	1952-09-02	1952-06-25	PvdA, KVP, CHU, ARP	sur	81	100	8	4.65	KVP	
5	Drees IV	1956-10-13	1956-06-13	PvdA, KVP, CHU, ARP	sur	84.7	150	7	4.07	KVP	
6	Beel II[a]	1958-12-22		KVP, CHU, ARP	mwc	51.3	150	7	4.07	KVP	
7	De Quay	1959-05-19	1959-03-12	KVP, CHU, ARP, VVD	sur	62.7	150	8	4.15	KVP	
8	Marijnen	1963-07-24	1963-05-15	KVP, CHU, ARP, VVD	sur	61.3	150	10	4.51	KVP	
9	Cals	1965-04-14		KVP, PvdA, ARP	sur	70.7	150	10	4.51	KVP	
10	Zijlstra[a]	1966-11-22		ARP, KVP	min	42	150	10	4.51	KVP	
11	De Jong	1967-04-05	1967-02-15	KVP, ARP, CHU, VVD	mwc	57.3	150	11	5.71	KVP	
12	Biesheuvel I	1971-07-06	1971-04-28	ARP, KVP, CHU, VVD, DS70	mwc	54.7	150	14	6.4	KVP	
13	Biesheuvel II[a]	1972-08-09		ARP, KVP, CHU, VVD	min	49.3	150	14	6.4	KVP	
14	Den Uyl	1973-05-11	1972-11-29	PvdA, PPR, D66, KVP, ARP	sur	64.7	150	14	6.42	CDA	
15	Van Agt I	1977-12-19	1977-05-25	CDA, VVD	mwc	51.3	150	11	3.7	CDA	
16	Van Agt II	1981-09-11	1981-05-26	CDA, PvdA, D66	sur	72.7	150	10	4.29	CDA	

Continued

Table 13.1a *Continued*

Cabinet number	Cabinet	Year in	Election date	Party composition of cabinet	Type of cabinet	Cabinet strength in seats (%)	Number of seats in parliament	Number of parties in parliament	ENP, parliament	Median party in first policy dimension	Formal support parties
17	Van Agt III[a]	1982-05-29		CDA, D66	min	43.3	150	10	4.29	CDA	
18	Lubbers I	1982-11-04	1982-09-08	CDA, VVD	mwc	54	150	12	4.01	CDA	
19	Lubbers II	1986-07-14	1986-05-21	CDA, VVD	mwc	54	150	9	3.49	CDA	
20	Lubbers III	1989-11-07	1989-09-06	CDA, PvdA	mwc	68.7	150	9	3.75	CDA	
21	Kok I	1994-08-22	1994-05-03	PvdA, D66, VVD	mwc	61.3	150	12	5.42	CDA	
22	Kok II	1998-08-03	1998-05-06	PvdA, D66, VVD	sur	64.7	150	9	4.81	D66, CDA	
23	Balkenende I	2002-07-22	2002-05-15	CDA, LPF, VVD	mwc	62	150	10	5.79	CDA	
24	Balkenende II	2003-05-27	2003-01-22	CDA, VVD, D66	mwc	52	150	9	4.74	CDA	
25	Balkenende III[a]	2006-07-07		CDA, VVD	min	47.3	150	9	4.74	CDA	
26	Balkenende IV	2007-02-22	2006-11-22	CDA, PvdA, CU	mwc	53.3	150	10	5.54	D66	
27	Balkenende V[a]	2010-02-23		CDA, CU	min	31.3	150	10	5.54	PVV	
28	Rutte I	2010-10-14	2010-06-09	VVD, CDA	min	34.7	150	10	6.74	PVV	PVV
29	Rutte II	2012-11-05	2012-09-12	VVD, PvdA	mwc	52.7	150	11	5.69	PVV	
30	Rutte III	2017-10-26	2017-03-15	VVD, CDA, D66, CU	mwc	50.7	150	13	8.12	D66	

Notes:
For a list of parties, consult the chapter appendix.
a = Limited policy remit
Median parties are retrieved from the Comparative Parliamentary Democracy Data Archive (http://www.erdda.se), gathered for Müller and Strøm (2000) and Strøm et al. (2003), for the 1946–1998 period. The subsequent period is based on Polk et al. (2017) and Bakker et al. (2015).
The first policy dimension is economic left–right.
The number of parties only includes parties that have held more than two seats in parliament when a cabinet is formed during the period of observation.
Cabinet types: min = Minority cabinet (both single-party and coalition cabinets); mwc = Minimal winning coalition; sur = Surplus majority coalition
Table legends and variables are further defined in the Appendix, this volume.

later with VVD and D66 (followed by a short CDA–VVD caretaker) and finally with PvdA and CU (which ended in a CDA–CU caretaker situation). From 2010 onwards, the VVD won most seats in national elections, which resulted in a number of Rutte cabinets. The first was a minority cabinet with CDA, formally supported by the radical right PVV, followed by a majority cabinet with PvdA, and finally, since 2017, a four-party coalition of VVD, CDA, D66, and CU.

Despite the increasing importance of cultural issues in Dutch politics, socio-economic issues have remained of central importance to electoral and parliamentary politics. Before the financial crisis of 2008, CDA and PvdA failed to overcome their socio-economic differences to form a government in 2003 and succeeded only after a lengthy formation process in 2006–2007. During and after the economic crisis that started in 2008, socio-economic issues took centre stage in electoral and parliamentary politics. An attempt to form a 'purple-plus' coalition of VVD, PvdA, D66, and Green Left failed in 2010 for similar reasons. There is an argument to be made that the left–right dimension is changing in nature. While the classical 'state versus market' distinction remains one aspect of the socio-economic divide, the willingness to reform seems to be a new dimension related to these questions, especially since the financial crisis (Louwerse 2010; Otjes 2015). On the left, we can distinguish between those parties (and voters) that generally favour reforms, such as increasing the pension age and labour market reforms (PvdA, Green Left), and those that do not (SP). Similarly, on the right there are parties that are more willing to reform (VVD, CDA) than others (PVV). The 'reform' dimension to socio-economic policy is correlated with pro- and anti-European policy positions. As a result of this partial redefinition of socio-economic divide, the median position on the socio-economic divide is now occupied by the PVV, which takes left-wing positions on some issues (notably health care) and right-wing positions on other issues (taxation).

Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions

Despite the large degree of fragmentation, coalition formation before elections through electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions has not happened on a regular scale. Only in 1971 and 1972 did left-wing parties (PvdA, D66, PPR) form a pre-electoral coalition with a common manifesto and a joint candidate for prime minister. Table 13.1b records the event.

In 1972 this coalition did form the core of the new government, but as it failed to win an absolute majority it resulted in very complicated coalition negotiations and, eventually, a coalition of the left with two Christian democratic parties. More recently, there has been discussion about cooperation (particularly) on the left, but this never materialized. There have been so-called 'connected lists' (*lijstverbindingen*) between parties, particularly CU and SGP, as well as between left-wing

Table 13.1b Electoral alliances and pre-electoral coalitions in the Netherlands, 1946–2018

Election date	Constituent parties	Type	Types of pre-electoral commitment
1971-04-28	PvdA, D66, PPR	PEC	Joint press conference, Other
1972-11-29	PvdA, D66, PPR	PEC	Joint press conference, Other

Notes:
Type: Electoral alliance (EA) and/or Pre-electoral coalition (PEC)
Types of pre-electoral commitment: Written contract, Joint press conference, Separate declarations, and/or Other.

parties. This now-abolished mechanism does not amount to an electoral alliance or pre-electoral coalition, however, and mainly serves to increase the chances of winning a 'remainder seat' under the D'Hondt electoral formula.

Government formation

The bargaining process

Coalition formation in the Netherlands is a slow process. In comparative terms, Dutch formations are among the longest in Europe, particularly for post-election cabinets (De Winter and Dumont 2008). After elections, parties take their time, to find the right combination of parties and subsequently agree on a government programme. The procedure is only very lightly regulated (the Standing Orders of the lower house of parliament include some regulations) and therefore changes somewhat from year to year. In the most recent years, however, the general pattern is as follows. On the day after the election, the leaders of the newly elected parties are invited by the Speaker of the lower house of parliament for an informal consultation. Before 2012, the head of state (king) consulted with party leaders and advisors. Usually this results in the appointment of a scout (*verkenner*) or *informateur*. Customarily, this person belongs to the largest party but is somewhat removed from party politics to gain the trust of other parties. (S)he is tasked with consulting with individual party leaders to explore which parties might be part of a new government coalition. The scouts usually advise on the coalition composition that should be explored first. Their report is debated by the lower house, which then appoints one or more *informateurs* to lead these negotiations. When negotiations fail a new *informateur* is appointed to re-explore options or to start negotiations on a new cabinet. If successful, these negotiations would result in a coalition agreement. The lower house of parliament would then appoint a *formateur*, usually the prospective prime minister, who is tasked with staffing the cabinet. The division of work between the *informateur* and *formateur* that has

arisen is thus roughly between gathering information and leading negotiations on the coalition agreement, while the *formateur* speaks with prospective (junior) ministers. Finally, the head of state appoints the new ministers. Table 13.2 presents the empirical record since the late 1980s.

There is significant variation in the duration of the bargaining process. Since the Cals cabinet (1966–1967) there has been an informal rule that government resignations have to be followed by new elections. Therefore, bargaining on governments that are not formed immediately after an election only concerns 'caretaker governments' that can be formed relatively quickly. When the PvdA withdrew from the fourth Balkenende cabinet, the formation of Balkenende V (CDA and CU) was even instantaneous. There was no official process of government formation: the remaining ministers just continued in office and a few junior ministers were promoted.

As for regular cabinets formed immediately after elections, the procedure takes much more time. In the last 40 years, even when there was only one (successful) bargaining round, bargaining has taken between 53 and 90 days. When there were multiple (failing) bargaining rounds, the whole procedure has taken more than 200 days in two instances (Van Agt I and Rutte III). The average total bargaining duration for non-caretaker cabinets formed since the Second World War was 87 days; this increases to 104 if we limit ourselves to the last 40 years.

Most of this time is taken up by negotiations on the coalition agreement. The exploration phase usually does not take more than one to two weeks and the formation phase also is concluded within a matter of weeks at most. Reflecting the importance (and length) of the coalition agreements, parties take their time to iron out many details. While coalition agreements are not set in stone (Timmermans 2006), inclusion of electoral commitments in the agreement is one of the best ways to ensure their fulfilment (Thomson 1999: 206). In order to speed up the detailed negotiations, most recent coalition formation processes have relied on 'side tables' in which specific areas of policy were discussed by experts from each parliamentary party group. The leaders (and recently, the *secondants* they bring along) at the main table refer specific or technical issues to their specialists, who can iron out details and compromises that are then finalized at the main table. An additional advantage is that the parliamentary party group is more involved in the negotiation, which the leaders hope increases party unity down the line.

When multiple bargaining rounds are necessary, there are often changes of *informateur* and/or the parties involved in the negotiations. The formation of the Rutte I cabinet in 2010, for example, saw no less than seven failed bargaining rounds. The last four bargaining rounds, including the successful one, all concerned the same parties (VVD, PVV, and CDA). First, *informateur* Lubbers explored the option of a minority cabinet with PVV support, then *informateur* Opstelten started negotiations on a government programme. These talks collapsed after internal turmoil within the CDA. This was resolved a few days later, but the

Table 13.2 Cabinet formation in the Netherlands, 1989–2018

Cabinet	Year in	Number of inconclusive bargaining rounds	Parties involved in the previous bargaining rounds	Bargaining duration of individual formation attempt (in days)	Number of days required in government formation	Total bargaining duration	Result of investiture vote		
							Pro	Abstention	Contra
Lubbers III	1989	1	CDA, PvdA	48	189	61			
			(1) CDA, PvdA, D66	14					
Kok I	1994	2	PvdA, D66, VVD	48	111	109			
			(1) PvdA, VVD, D66	52					
			(2) PvdA, CDA, VVD, D66	9					
Kok II	1998	0	PvdA, D66, VVD	88	90	88			
Balkenende I	2002	0	CDA, LPF, VVD	67	68	67			
Balkenende II	2003	1	CDA, VVD, D66	43	223	124			
			(1) CDA, PvdA	79					
Balkenende III	2006	0	CDA, VVD	7	8	7			
Balkenende IV	2007	0	CDA, PvdA, CU	90	92	90			
Balkenende V	2010	0	CDA, CU	1	0	1			
Rutte I	2010	7	VVD, CDA	32	127	125			
			(1) VVD, PVV, CDA	6					
			(2) VVD, PvdA, CDA, D66, GL	9					
			(3) VVD, PvdA, D66, GL	11					
			(4) VVD, PvdA, D66, GL	17					
			(5) VVD, CDA	14					
			(6) VVD, CDA	32					
			(7) VVD, CDA	7					
Rutte II	2012	0	VVD, PvdA	54	196	54	118	-	32
Rutte III	2017	2	VVD, CDA, D66, CU	121	226	213	111	-	39
			(1) VVD, CDA, D66, GL	49					
			(2) VVD, CDA, D66, GL	14					

queen appointed a third *informateur* (notably former vice-president of the Council of State Tjeenk Willink, a member of the PvdA[4]) to assess the constitutional situation first ('a constitutional penalty round'), before *informateur* Opstelten was allowed to finalize negotiations and hand over to *formateur* Rutte. Therefore, in the more complex bargaining situations there are usually more (sets of) *informateurs* than there are viable bargaining options. There is a lot of backward and forward before everything is finalized.

The composition and size of cabinets

The first section of this chapter alludes to the norm of majority coalition governance in the Netherlands. All governments since 1945 have been coalitions and, save for one recent exception, all (non-caretaker) cabinets since 1945 consisted of ministers from parties that together commanded a majority in the lower house of parliament. Moreover, in the years of 'pillarization' (before 1967, roughly speaking) many government coalitions were surplus majority governments, which contained parties that were not strictly necessary in order to obtain a parliamentary majority. This conforms to the patterns of consensus democracy: broad power-sharing coalitions. Since the 1970s, however, the number of surplus majority cabinets has declined considerably and most governments are minimal winning coalitions. This change can be partly attributed to the merger of three Christian democratic parties into the CDA in 1980. Beforehand, these three parties (increasingly) worked together, even though regularly one of these parties was outside of the government coalition. Another reason to find an increase in minimal wining coalitions is the growing fragmentation of the party landscape. This has made it numerically impossible to form two-party (or in some cases even three-party) coalitions. Because four- or five-party coalitions are considered overly complex, especially after the CDA merger, the only realistic option is often to form a minimal winning coalition. In recent years the only exception is the Kok II cabinet, which was a continuation of Kok I in terms of the three parties involved. While D66 was not needed anymore to win a majority, because of its ideological position in between the other two parties involved (PvdA and VVD) as well as the feeling that 'D66 belonged in the coalition', the party was included in Kok II anyway. A third reason for an increase in minimal winning coalitions is the electoral cost of ruling, which seems to have increased in the last decades (Müller and Louwerse 2020). As a result parties, especially smaller, potential 'surplus'

[4] The Council of State is one of the High Councils of State and has two functions. One is an advisory function, carried out by the Advisory Division, while the other is a judicial function as the highest administrative court, carried out by the Administrative Jurisdiction Division. The two divisions are separate (Council of State n.d.). Before 2012, as one of the advisors of the head of state, the vice-president of the Council of State would present his views on the government formation to the queen.

parties, will think twice before entering a coalition in which their votes are not required. If their votes are not necessary, this limits their bargaining position and therefore potential policy payoffs that may offset future electoral losses.

An alternative to the minimal winning coalition that has been considered more seriously in recent years is the option of a minority government (Strøm 1990). In 2010, VVD and CDA agreed to support and provide ministers for the Rutte I cabinet. These parties jointly controlled only 52 out of 150 parliamentary seats. The radical right-wing populist party PVV agreed to provide support from parliament; it committed to parts of the coalition agreement as well as 'confidence and supply'. Earlier attempts to include the PVV in a regular majority coalition had been met with scepticism from the other two parties involved, but this arrangement, which had worked successfully in countries like Denmark, was acceptable to all three parties. While this government may thus be considered a minority government, it operated as a majority coalition, which was also apparent in terms of parliamentary behaviour of government and opposition parties (Otjes and Louwerse 2014). Despite its nominal status as a minimal winning coalition, the subsequent Rutte II cabinet came closer to substantive minority cabinet status due to its lack of majority support in the Senate. While it would have been unlikely for the Senate to support a motion of no confidence, opposition parties were reluctant to support major government legislation. Eventually, the government chose to strike (ad hoc) deals with opposition parties. In exchange for policy concessions on the bill concerned, opposition parties pledged to support the bill in parliament. The deals were made with the party leaders in the lower house, but the real target was obtaining support in the Senate. Therefore, in many ways Rutte II behaved as a substantive minority cabinet by looking for opposition support on an ad hoc basis.

In terms of the party composition of government the traditional parties continue to dominate the field: CDA, PvdA, VVD, and D66. At least two out of these four have been a part of every (non-caretaker) coalition since the CDA was formed. Two new parties have joined coalitions since 1990: LPF and the CU. After coming second in the 2002 elections the LPF was included in the formation of the first Balkenende cabinet. Due to internal conflicts, however, it also contributed greatly to its (very) early demise and the party soon disintegrated. The CU seems to have been more successful and has participated in two cabinets (Balkenende IV and Rutte III). As a moderate party on most major issues, it can find common ground with parties on the left and right of the political spectrum.

The allocation of ministerial portfolios

The allocation of ministerial portfolios occurs in the final stages of the government formation process when the *formateur* is in charge. The end result with regard to five cross-nationally important ministries is presented in Table 13.3.

Table 13.3 Distribution of cabinet ministerships in Dutch coalitions, 1989–2018

Cabinet	Year in	Number of ministers per party (in descending order)	Total number of ministers	Number of watchdog junior ministers per party	Number of ministries	1 Prime minister	2 Finance	3 Foreign affairs	4 Social affairs	5 Justice
Lubbers III	1989	7 CDA, 7 PvdA	14	3 CDA, 2 PvdA	13	CDA	PvdA	CDA	CDA	CDA
Kok I	1994	5 PvdA, 5 VVD, 4 D66	14	4 PvdA, 3 D66, 3 VVD	13	PvdA	VVD	D66	PvdA	D66
Kok II	1998	6 PvdA, 6 VVD, 3 D66	15	6 PvdA, 4 VVD, 2 D66	13	PvdA	VVD	VVD	PvdA	VVD
Balkenende I	2002	6 CDA, 4 LPF, 4 VVD	14	5 LPF, 4 CDA, 4 VVD	13	CDA	VVD	CDA	CDA	CDA
Balkenende II	2003	8 CDA, 6 VVD, 2 D66	16	5 CDA, 4 VVD, 1 D66	13	CDA	VVD	CDA	CDA	CDA
Balkenende III	2006	9 CDA, 7 VVD	16	3 CDA, 3 VVD	13	CDA	VVD	CDA	CDA	CDA
Balkenende IV	2007	8 CDA, 6 PvdA, 2 CU	16	5 PvdA, 4 CDA	13	CDA	PvdA	CDA	CDA	CDA
Balkenende V	2010	9 CDA, 3 CU	12	2 CDA	13	CDA	CDA	CDA	CDA	CDA
Rutte I	2010	6 CDA, 6 VVD	12	4 CDA, 2 VVD	11	VVD	CDA	VVD	VVD	VVD
Rutte II	2012	7 VVD, 6 PvdA	13	3 PvdA, 2 VVD	11	VVD	PvdA	PvdA	PvdA	VVD
Rutte III	2017	6 VVD, 4 CDA, 4 D66, 2 CU	16	2 CDA, 2 D66, 2 VVD, 1 CU	12	VVD	CDA	VVD	D66	CDA

Informally, before the end stage, parties will have already discussed the total number of ministers, including both departmental and non-departmental ministers, as well as the division of portfolios. This will, however, only be finalized when parties agree on everything and are convinced that they have suitable candidates for the posts allocated to them. The number of ministers for each party is roughly proportional to seat share, with the division of portfolios approximated relatively well by a sequential logic of portfolio allocation (Ecker et al. 2015). Some posts are valued relatively highly by all parties, especially the finance ministry, which since 1990 has almost always been held by the second largest party. Party issue saliency is also important for the allocation of ministerial posts, although arguably less so than in other countries due to the existence of elaborate coalition agreements (Bäck 2011).

Perhaps the most prominent example of catering to party ownership of issues is the creation of so-called 'non-departmental' ministers. For example, the anti-immigrant LPF got a non-departmental minister on immigration and integration (2002), the CU was given a minister for 'youth and family' (2007), and the pro-political reform D66 party obtained a ministerial post on 'political-administrative reform' (2003). The use of this instrument has increased in recent years; expanding beyond the usual non-departmental minister for development cooperation, the Rutte III government has no less than 4 non-departmental ministers out of a total of 16 cabinet ministers.

Coalition agreements

Since the early 1960s, coalition agreements are almost always made when a new government is formed after parliamentary elections. There is no habit of pre-announcing or committing to any policy intentions between parties prior to the start of the government formation process. Mostly, parties keep their positions on major topics quite open; party leaders or spokespersons usually reveal very little until the negotiations have already advanced and it is possible for the new partners to share common viewpoints.

Table 13.4 shows that coalition agreements vary more in size, the number of words, than in the composition of these documents when considering the proportions of policy relative to other kinds of statements, such as on policy specific procedures, ministerial competencies, and offices. The longest agreement to date is the one produced by a four-party coalition in October 2017, with a length of some 40,500 words. There is no clear pattern when relating the party composition of coalitions to the size of agreements. Governments including CDA and VVD (1982, 1986, 2002, 2003, 2010, 2017) and governments with the PvdA on board (1981, 1989, 1994, 1998, 2007, 2012) produced agreements of similar length.

Table 13.4 Size and content of coalition agreements in the Netherlands, 1946–2018

Coalition	Year in	Size	General rules (in %)	Policy-specific procedural rules (in %)	Distribution of offices (in %)	Distribution of competences (in %)	Policies (in %)
Marijnen	1963	3,350	16	29	3	0	52
Cals	1965	3,600	5	0	0	0	95
De Jong	1967	3,100	7	0	0	0	93
Biesheuvel I	1971	6,100	2	5	0	0	93
Van Agt I	1977	7,900	0	2	0	0	98
Van Agt II	1981	15,900	1	1	0	4	94
Lubbers I	1982	20,300	1	2	0	9	88
Lubbers II	1986	15,500	0	2	0	9	89
Lubbers III	1989	28,450	0	2	0	1	97
Kok I	1994	16,250	0	1	0	2	97
Kok II	1998	36,000	0	1	0	1	98
Balkenende I	2002	16,500	0	1	0	1	98
Balkenende II	2003	8,600	0	2	0	1	97
Balkenende IV	2007	16,000	0	2	0	1	97
Rutte I	2010	16,600	0	2	0	1	97
Rutte II	2012	27,000	0	1	0	1	98
Rutte III	2017	40,500	0	1	0	1	98

With size, the agenda capacity for expressed intentions also varies from one cabinet to the next, so coalition agreements can have a narrow or wider scope. While the electoral programmes of participating parties are a basis, there is no straightforward mechanism or rule according to which statements in coalition agreements mirror them. Sometimes pledges are visible, at other times a deal is included that cannot be traced back to any electoral programme. In this sense, government formation is a venue not only for prospective coalition parties to set the agenda but also for all kinds of interest organizations and groups to try and influence what is included in the coalition agreement. Compared to other types of policy agenda, coalition agreements made in the 'institutionalized extra-institutional arena' of government formation (Peterson et al. 1983) are unbounded by formal limits. One practice peculiar to making coalition agreements in the Netherlands is that since the 1980s the policy intentions contained in it are assessed by the national Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (*Centraal Planbureau*, CPB), the public organization that also assesses the electoral programmes of political parties. These assessments are meant to rationalize intentions on economic effects and in this way set boundaries to the plans that new governments can put on the agenda. In reality, parties involved in this process make their expenditure choices to a large extent on the basis of political rationality and estimated electoral effect (Bolhuis 2018).

Coalition agreements may contain many items, often more than what is central to the formation of governments, and also more than what the aforementioned Bureau of Economic Policy Analysis considers for economic effect assessment. Statements in coalition agreements can be symbolic or substantive, opaque or detailed, draw up a shiny future or be written in terms of realizable output. Table 13.4 shows that the proportions of components of coalition agreements are quite stable in the past 30 years. The text is almost entirely about policy statements, part of which are clear-cut intentions and other parts indications of direction for the course of action. But agreements never are completely unambiguous; sometimes formulas are included that are meant to reduce the inflammation risk of controversial issues, but the subsequent interpretation of them gives rise to confusion (Timmermans 1996).

With the size the policy scope of the agreement also varies. While main fields of public policy such as the economy, social security, health, education, and international affairs are always present, coalitions may include different ranges of policy topics. A systematic content analysis of coalition agreements done within the Comparative Agendas Project shows that these documents vary in scope between some 60 and 120 different policy topics (Timmermans and Breeman 2017).[5] This

[5] The maximum scope is some 240 policy topics, clustered in 20 main topic categories. This is a standardized international coding scheme used in the Comparative Agendas Project. See www.comparativeagendas.net where data from the Netherlands Policy Agendas Project are available.

scope correlates with the length of agreements. Apart from habitual elements that make coalition agreements look like quasi-official government programmes, including some mission statement ('building bridges' in 2012, 'confidence in the future' in 2017), it is the scope that expresses both the ambitions of the coalition and the alleged functions of the coalition agreement, to set the agenda and keep manifest or potential controversy under control. The long-term trend in the policy scope is curvilinear: after a rise in the 1960s to the 1990s, it went down in the 2000s and started to rise again in the 2010s. This trend deviates from the development of governmental policy agendas more generally, which after a 'great issue expansion' until the 1980s started to narrow down (Baumgartner and Jones 2015; Timmermans and Breeman 2017).

Within the scope of the agenda, not all issues are equal. The top five priority themes usually take some 50 per cent of the total agenda space in the coalition agreement. These are typically 'guns and butter' topics (Jennings et al. 2011): the economy, international affairs and domestic security, the structure and organization of government, and domains of ongoing policy reform, such as labour market, social security, and health care.

A final observation about the content of coalition agreements is that they seem to have become more open to signals from other policy agendas in the parliamentary system. While agreements emerge from a relatively closed environment meant to cement the coalition internally, the parties taking office show more sensitivity to the parliamentary arena and the public arena. Reasons for this are that majority support is more conditional and even uncertain to obtain in both legislative chambers and that electoral volatility requires parties to constantly monitor the public environment where attention to issues may cascade to problems that must be addressed even if not initially acknowledged. Oral questions in the Second Chamber, for example, long followed the major themes in the coalition agreement as opposition parties tried to find vulnerable parts of the coalition. But since the turn of the century, oral questions have also become a predictor of what themes rise and fall in prominence in the next coalition agreement (Timmermans and Breeman 2010).

Coalition governance

The political transaction costs that coalition parties make in producing joint policy agreements are expected to facilitate consensus and stability. The challenge for coalition governments is to guard the priorities set in the joint policy agreement and also react to pressures for updating the policy agenda as conditions change and focus events may make a previously lower key topic into a matter of urgency. The more turbulent public environment requires constant monitoring by a coalition government in order not to put its legitimacy at stake. But with two to four parties in office, this is a difficult balancing act.

In this sense, cabinet governance in the Netherlands closely follows the coalition compromise model (see Chapter 2, this volume). Coalition agreements are important documents that individual ministers have to adhere to. While deviations are possible (and not infrequent), these always have to be coordinated with all government parties. One (very) partial exception, at least at the coalition formation stage, was the Rutte II cabinet. During the government formation, the parties explicitly chose to 'logroll' on some issues rather than to compromise. Still, the agreed position was included in the coalition agreement, but it potentially provided the party that initiated the policy somewhat more leeway in terms of its implementation. In practice, coordination between the government parties was still the norm. While coalition agreements are never exhaustive and events or developments can require modification and policy adaptation, the compromise model in the Netherlands signifies a wide practice. This becomes more pronounced as the number of coalition partners increases due to declining vote shares of parties that are most 'coalitionable'.

Governments cannot table an infinite number of bills in a legislative year, and even if they might wish to do this for political reasons, they face constraints of administrative preparation and formal legislative calendars. There is no formal maximum in legislative production in the Netherlands, but in practice the number of bills placed on the legislative agenda has a limit of some two hundred per year. With capacity limits, choices must be made. Cabinets also vary in their legislative ambition level. The Rutte II cabinet proposed some 30 per cent more bills in its first year than the following Rutte III cabinet in its first year (Korteweg 2018).

The government formation table is a typical arena of exchange and compromise. But when a specific agreement has to be implemented it usually is disconnected from the other matters that were on the government formation table. It requires patience and loyalty to prevent one coalition partner from undermining the equilibrium of the agenda. For example, shortly after the Rutte II took office in 2012, a PvdA intention in the agreement to make health insurance premiums income-dependent was to be turned into a law by the VVD minister in charge of the health portfolio. But then her party rank and file rebelled, and the plan caused a major problem and put the coalition to an early test of survival.

To reduce the risk of conflict, coalition agreements not only contain new ambitions and joint intentions to initiate new policy but often also mention explicitly whether policies are to continue and stay the same or even mention issues that are not to be addressed, as is indicated in Table 13.5. Maintenance of the status quo in policy is a much more often used explication of agreement to not initiate new policies than the joint declaration that an issue is supposed to be left aside. Policy continuity also is not necessarily an appeasement strategy—the coalition partners can simply prefer a policy programme to remain intact, and this is more likely in case the party holding the portfolio or the whole coalition was the initiator of it during the previous term in office. Explicit negative agenda

Table 13.5 Coalition governance mechanisms in Dutch coalitions, 1946–2018

Coalition	Year in	Coalition agreement	Agreement public	Election rule	Conflict management mechanisms			Personal union	Issues excluded from agenda	Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour	Freedom of appointment	Policy agreement	Junior ministers (watchdogs)	Non-cabinet positions
					All used	Most common	For most serious conflicts							
Beel I	1946	N	N/A	N	Parl	Parl	Parl	N (KVP)	N/A	Most/No	Y	Few	N	N
Drees I	1948	N	N/A	N	Parl	Parl	Parl	N (KVP, VVD, CHU)	N/A	Most/No	Y	Few	N	N
Drees II	1951	N	N/A	N	Parl	Parl	Parl	N (KVP, VVD, CHU)	N/A	Most/No	Y	Few	Y	N
Drees III	1952	N	N/A	N	Parl	Parl	Parl	N (KVP, ARP, CHU)	N/A	Most/No	Y	Few	Y	N
Drees IV	1956	N	N/A	N	Parl	Parl	Parl	N (KVP, ARP, CHU)	N/A	Most/No	Y	Few	Y	N
Beel II	1958	N	N/A	N	Parl	Parl	Parl	N (KVP, CHU)	N/A	Most/No	Y	Few	Y	N
De Quay	1959	N	N/A	N	Parl	Parl	Parl	N (KVP, VVD, CHU, ARP)	N/A	Most/No	Y	Few	Y	N
Marijnen	1963	POST	Y	N	Parl	Parl	Parl	N (KVP, CHU)	No	Most/No	Y	Varied	Y	N
Cals	1965	IE	N	N	Parl, IC	IC	Parl	N (KVP)	No	Most/No	Y	Varied	Y	N
Zijlstra	1966	N	N/A	N	Parl, IC	IC	Parl	N (KVP)	N/A	Most/No	Y		Y	N
De Jong	1967	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC	IC	Parl	N (KVP, CHU, VVD, ARP)	No	Most/No	Y	Varied	Y	N
Biesheuvel I	1971	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (KVP)	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Biesheuvel II	1972	N	N/A	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (KVP, VVD, CHU)	N/A	Most/No	Y		Y	N
Den Uyl	1973	N	N/A	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (KVP, ARP, D66, PPR)	Yes	Most/No	Y		Y	N

Continued

Table 13.5 *Continued*

Coalition	Year in	Coalition agreement	Agreement public	Election rule	Conflict management mechanisms			Personal union	Issues excluded from agenda	Coalition discipline in legislation/ other parl. behaviour	Freedom of appointment	Policy agreement	Junior ministers (watchdogs)	Non-cabinet positions
					All used	Most common	For most serious conflicts							
Van Agt I	1977	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	Y	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Van Agt II	1981	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	Y	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Van Agt III	1982	N	N/A	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	Y	N/A	Most/No	Y		Y	N
Lubbers I	1982	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (VVD)	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Lubbers II	1986	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (VVD)	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Lubbers III	1989	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	Y	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Kok I	1994	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (VVD)	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Kok II	1998	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (VVD, D66)	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Balkenende I	2002	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (LPF, VVD)	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Balkenende II	2003	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (VVD)	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Balkenende III	2006	N	N/A	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (VVD)	N/A	Most/No	Y		Y	N
Balkenende IV	2007	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	Y	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Balkenende V	2010	N	N/A	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	Y	N/A	Most/No	Y		Y	N
Rutte I	2010	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	Y	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Rutte II	2012	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	IC	CoC	N (PvdA)	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N
Rutte III	2017	POST	Y	Y	Parl, IC, CoC	CoC	CoC	N (CDA, D66, CU)	Yes	Most/No	Y	Comp.	Y	N

Notes:
Coalition agreement: POST = post-election; N = no coalition agreement
Conflict management mechanisms: IC = Inner cabinet; CoC = Coalition committee; Parl = Parliamentary leaders
Coalition discipline: Most = Coalition discipline is expected on all matters except those explicitly exempted; No = Coalition discipline not always expected
Policy agreement: Few = Policy agreement on a few selected policies; Varied = Policy agreement on a non-comprehensive variety of policies; Comp. = Comprehensive policy agreement

setting, mentioning issues that shall remain away from the governmental agenda, points to disagreement, and while this may be a procedural arrangement to avoid trouble, the fact that it also is a pointer to underlying disagreement makes coalitions cautious in listing them.

For all these reasons, institutional and political, coalition governance during the term in office means that priorities and payoffs to the partners must be balanced. Carrying out the coalition agreement thus is anything but a routine mechanistic enterprise, and requires very close monitoring of signals from within the coalition and from the wider environment. Looking at successive years a coalition government is in office, we see the political agenda moving in which priorities are reset. Policy agenda change for coalition government need not be a survival risk, as long as such change happens in concert. Thus we see governments addressing different sets of political problems and policy intentions over the course of the term, a display of the way in which attention shifts to different parts of the joint policy agenda set at the beginning. When comparing the legislative agenda of the years in office to the coalition agreement negotiated at the beginning, most of the governments between 1963 and 2012 show some cyclic pattern in which they allocate their attention first to some clear priorities and then in the second and third year in their term in office move back to the wider range of topics included in the coalition agreement. The last year in office then again moves away from the broad agenda and shows concentration of some topics (Timmermans and Breeman 2014).

This apparent sequencing of attention to policy issues suggests that coalition governments begin with the topics considered most important to move into the policy-making pipeline, then address more issues, and finally pay attention to issues that were left somewhat ignored or that play a part in timing towards the elections. This pattern in coalition governments in the Netherlands looks dissimilar from the model of the political business cycle, in which a single party in office strategically times its 'harvest season' for policy success towards the next elections.

The ongoing process of agenda setting is thus not a case of automated government. Furthermore, to secure all this happens as peacefully and productively as possible, there are informal rules and structures for coalition governance.

The role of individual ministers in policy-making

One aspect of this coalition governance is the space given to individual ministers. While individual ministers enjoy leeway in carrying out the tasks related to their portfolio and their role as party prominent in the cabinet, they are in no sense policy 'dictators' (Laver and Shepsle 1996). The principles of collegiality and collective responsibility also underline the importance of the rule of non-intervention into the business of other ministers. Cabinet ministers thus must

stay on their own turf, even though it is sometimes hard to determine where one jurisdiction ends and another begins. Many problems and matters of government policy do not behave according to formal boundaries drawn around a government department. When formal border lines are hard to draw and follow, experiential learning should help preventing that ministers compete openly over who is the first responsible for an issue to address it. Departmental reshuffles made in government formation may also help in this ministerial orientation (Sieberer et al. 2017). In November 2017 for example, the Rutte III government placed the first responsibility for climate policy in the hands of the minister of economics affairs—as was expressed by the new departmental name economic affairs and climate policy. In the cabinet in office between 2012 and 2017, climate policy was the first responsibility of the minister of infrastructure and environment.

Increased media attention and the rapid rise of issues in the public arena make it imperative that ministers carefully balance claiming jurisdiction over an issue and avoidance of blame when the issue is believed to be ill-addressed. This exposure and risk of reputation damage may contribute to the ongoing practice of adherence to the coalition agreement. The prime ministerial position gained importance in representing the country in international arenas, but for domestic coalition governance to be successful, the prime minister must still pay systematic attention to securing the internal harmony and the credibility of the government. Prime minister Mark Rutte, who has run three successive cabinets since 2010, has a gavel when formally presiding meetings of the Council of Ministers, but he never uses it (Niemantsverdriet et al. 2016). The task of preserving internal peace becomes more pressing as government coalitions contain more and smaller parties and have less certainty of stable majority support in parliament. For this reason, the prime minister is also no exception to the rule that policy intentions included in the coalition agreement must be guarded, and in case plans need reconsideration or new issues intrude, the prime minister has special responsibility for establishing agreement about the policy response. This is mostly a matter of personal competence and coalition management skills, and much less of institutional privilege since Dutch prime ministers lack formal equipment for it.

Coalition governance in the executive arena

The external pressures on governments imply that internal governance mechanisms are becoming ever more important. If persuasive communication skills of a prime minister is an advantage, this is not sufficient for managing the major coalition business and even less if matters become tense. The informal cabinet committees that since long are used to streamline and smooth cabinet decision-making are re-operationalized at the beginning of each new government. A variable factor in this is the number of vice-prime ministers, as each coalition

party normally provides one. Thus the Rutte III government taking office in November 2017 counted three vice-prime ministers. If informal cabinet committees deal with policy domains and in this sense have an interdepartmental rationale, the vice-prime ministers act in their role mostly when matters require a more party political nature.

Junior ministers' portfolios are positions for taking a part of the larger ministerial package and specializing on it. They are also created to establish a portfolio balance between the coalition partners and to express priorities in the policy agenda of the new government. Such priorities usually are explicated to allow individual coalition parties to be visible on themes that do not incur real political risk to the coalition as a whole. Thus junior minister positions have been created for promoting women emancipation and for family matters. The most common use of junior ministers however is to reduce the minister's workload; they are usually responsible for a part of the minister's portfolio. It is also common practice to allocate such positions across the coalition; more often than not, junior ministers are from a different party than their minister. Junior ministers are, however, not necessarily 'watchdogs' acting as their own party's agents in the other party's department, but they rather function as bidirectional messengers to fine tune coalition policy between them (Timmermans and Andeweg 2000: 380).

Governance mechanisms in the parliamentary arena

The leaders of parliamentary groups face the double task of keeping up a party profile and harmonize matters important to the continuation and survival of the coalition. Electoral uncertainty and an increasingly harsh culture of accountability in the public arena have pushed the parliamentary face of these members of the party leadership more to the foreground and reduced the tolerance for 'lip service' in unconditionally supporting the government. Party leaders in parliament that move too close towards a position of identification with the government are vulnerable in their role in parliament. During the Rutte III cabinet not only the parliamentary leaders but also area specialists in charge of specific policy themes pushed the leeway for opinionated messages to a maximum (Korteweg 2018). The principle of dualism, a clear separation of responsibilities between government and supporting parties in parliament, is also reinforced by the sometimes very narrow majority or even the absence of a majority for the coalition in the Senate, the other legislative chamber where support parties must be found to secure that legislative proposals actually receive final political endorsement. Party profiling by coalition partners produced more risk of internal controversy. In weekly meetings between the vice-chairs of the coalition parties in the Tweede Kamer, voting on matters on the parliamentary agenda is discussed and coordinated in order to contain the risk of escalation (Korteweg 2018).

The *Torentjesoverleg* (named after the small octagonal tower that houses the prime minister's office) is an essential informal venue where more agenda items are being scheduled for discussion between the top of the cabinet and the top of the parliamentary groups. In the early 2000s the idea came up to refresh Dutch politics (a so-called 'new politics') and abolish such mysterious and non-transparent venues as the *Torentjesoverleg*. But the rejuvenation idea foundered quickly and the prime ministerial tower was unlocked again for coalition summits. What does seem to have changed, however, is the timing of these summits. Parties are more keen to avoid press coverage of parliamentary party leaders entering the prime minister's office as not to create too strong an image of collusion. While the weekly press conference of the prime minister is on Fridays, the consultation of party and cabinet leaders has moved away from the prime minister's office and to Monday mornings—when everyone else also is busy beginning the work week. Interviews with ministers in the Rutte II cabinet (2012–2017) reveal that this weekly summit was crucial to the survival of the two-party coalition that was almost permanently in a process of political negotiation (Niemantsverdriet et al. 2016). Moreover, more specific mechanisms of similar type of composition are used for policy streamlining: the Rutte III cabinet organized 'cockpit talks' involving the cabinet and the parliamentary leaders and area specialists to monitor progress in elaborating a national climate agreement (Meeus 2018). Partly as a result of the fragmentation of parliamentary politics and the fact that the Rutte III government includes no less than four parties, these consultations between parliamentary party leaders and the prime minister and vice- prime ministers have become more central in the last years. Even government ministers sometimes take a back seat, referred to by Koole (2018) as a process of 'governmentalisation'.

Governance mechanisms with different types of actors (mixed)

With a less stable parliamentary majority and the need to secure a majority case by case even on important matters in the Senate, coalition governance also has come to involve a wider politics of agreements with societal stakeholders with major influence on sectors of the economy and society. This extension of the politics of agreements resembles the practice of neo-corporatism but it is more closely connected to the governance of the coalition itself. It not only is a reinvigoration of a policy-making style but also serves the stability of the government itself. In the period since 2010 a housing agreement, a pensions agreement, an energy agreement, a health care agreement, and a climate agreement were negotiated, all meant to provide a wide enough support basis for government policy that it would be possible to move intentions beyond mere plans and set a course of reforms.

Cabinet duration and termination

The duration of cabinets

Dutch governments often end prematurely. In the 2000s, none of the governments formed by Prime Minister Balkenende achieved the maximum possible duration: they ended before the next constitutionally mandated election. Historically, there have been ups and downs in terms of government duration. In the 1940s, both governments ended prematurely, resulting in a relative duration of just under 60 per cent of the maximum possible duration. Table 13.6 displays the relative duration as a share of the maximum possible duration, although it underestimates cabinet duration somewhat because it includes caretaker (transitional) governments, which are almost never intended to last until the next constitutionally mandated elections but rather to organize early elections. Governments in the 1950s were much more stable than the two cabinets in the 1940s, achieving about 75 per cent relative duration, which goes up to almost 90 per cent if we exclude the caretaker cabinet Beel II. In the 1960s this declined to 71 per cent and it remained similarly at 74 per cent in the 1970s (excluding caretakers). While the 1980s started with the short-lived Van Agt II cabinet, the subsequent Lubbers cabinets were much more stable, achieving 70 per cent relative duration (excluding the Van Agt III caretaker government). The 1990s were the most stable decade, with both cabinets of Kok (almost) fulfilling their full term. The break with the 'unstable 2000s' was significant. The average relative duration of the three non-caretaker Balkenende cabinets was 57 per cent, the lowest since the 1940s. More recently, Rutte II's completion of its full term means that relative duration in the 2010s has gone up to 76 per cent.

The fact that Rutte II managed to complete its full term in office is not mere coincidence. Aware of the instability of the Balkenende cabinets and after an early demise of his first cabinet, Prime Minister Rutte was very much focused on a quick government formation and providing stable government. His coalition partner's (PvdA) counterpart agreed with this and the formation of Rutte II was indeed among the quickest in recent times. The Rutte II cabinet was the first since 1998 (Kok I) to complete its full term. The fact that both government parties started to lose support in opinion polls fairly quickly into the government's term will also have contributed to the government's stability: neither party would stand to gain much from early elections. Perhaps Rutte II was the stable exception in unstable times.

The mostly unstable governments that were formed since the '2002 Fortuyn' revolution seem to be connected to the fragmentation of parliament and the subsequent difficulty in forming a government. After the 2017 election, there was only one 'large' party with over 15 per cent of the vote, while five 'mid-sized' parties obtained between 9 per cent and 12 per cent. Coalitions require more

Table 13.6 Cabinet termination in the Netherlands, 1989–2018

Cabinet	Date in	Date out	Relative duration (%)	Mechanisms of cabinet termination	Terminal events	Parties (when conflict between or within)	Policy area(s)	Comments
Lubbers III	1989-11-07	1994-05-03	100	1				
Kok I	1994-08-22	1998-05-05	100	1				
Kok II	1998-08-03	2002-04-16	98.0	9			Foreign policy	The cabinet resigned after a report released by the Dutch Institute for War Documentation, from which Kok drew the conclusion that Dutch UN troops had failed to prevent the fall of Srebrenica in 1995. The government remained in office in a caretaker capacity until the May elections, however.
Balkenende I	2002-07-22	2002-10-16	6.2	8		LPF		The government resigned after infighting in LPF paralysed the ruling coalition.
Balkenende II	2003-05-27	2006-06-30	84.5	7a		VVD, D66	Immigration policy	D66 withdrew from the coalition over controversial statements made by Minister for Immigration and Integration Rita Verdonk of VVD. The government then survived a vote of no confidence initiated by D66, but resigned anyway and called early elections.
Balkenende III	2006-07-07	2006-11-22	69.3	4				Caretaker cabinet to organize early elections.
Balkenende IV	2007-02-22	2010-02-23	80.1	7a		CDA, PvdA	Foreign policy	PvdA left the ruling coalition over policy disagreements on the Dutch troop

					presence in Afghanistan. Early elections were called for 9 June.
Balkenende V	2010-02-23	2010-06-09	39	4	Caretaker cabinet to organize early elections.
Rutte I	2010-10-14	2012-04-23	52.4	4, 9	The government resigned on 23 April 2012 after it lost the external support of PVV, on which it relied for majority status in the lower house. Early elections were called for 12 September 2012.
Rutte II	2012-11-05	2017-03-15	100	1	

Technical terminations

1: Regular parliamentary election; 2: Other constitutional reason; 3: Death of prime minister

Discretionary terminations

4: Early parliamentary election; 5: Voluntary enlargement of coalition; 6: Cabinet defeated by opposition in parliament;
7a/b: Conflict between coalition parties: policy (a) and/or personnel (b); 8: Intra-party conflict in coalition party or parties;
9: Other voluntary reason

Terminal events

10: Elections, non-parliamentary; 11: Popular opinion shocks; 12: International or national security event; 13: Economic event;
14: Personal event

Note: Relative duration: share of constitutionally allowed duration for this cabinet.

parties to win a majority and those majorities are more often than not small. Combining this with a relatively high number of politicians 'crossing the floor', that is leaving their parliamentary party group (usually to start their own party), it means that governing becomes even more of a balancing act than in the past.

The termination of cabinets

Table 13.6 also records the main reasons for termination. The reasons for a premature end to many cabinets are mostly related to political conflict within the coalition. In recent times, all (non-caretaker) Balkenende cabinets resigned due to (policy) conflict between or within coalition parties. Rutte I resigned when the support party PVV left negotiations on financial reforms. This is a continuation of the reasons for cabinet termination over the whole post-Second World War period (see Table 13.6). Some cabinets end due to early parliamentary elections, but these mostly concern caretaker cabinets that were installed to organize those elections. Cabinets in regular elections have become a relatively rare phenomenon in the last 20 years, due to high levels of early terminations. Since the Cals cabinet in the 1960s, the unwritten rule has been that cabinet resignations have to be followed by early elections.

Governments are generally not defeated in parliament. The most recent case of a parliamentary vote leading to a cabinet crisis was in 1999, when the government failed to obtain two-thirds majority support in the Senate for the introduction of a referendum. The government's resignation was, however, revoked after the parties found a compromise that allowed them to continue their coalition. Because the cabinet's resignation was not officially accepted, we do not treat this and similar cases as early terminations (and a new cabinet being formed). The only case where a parliamentary vote directly led to the resignation of a cabinet (that was not later revoked) is the infamous 'Night of Schmelzer' in 1966, when the leader of the KVP introduced a motion that was interpreted by the prime minister as a non-confidence motion. The motion was subsequently adopted, which led to the government's resignation. While individual ministers have lost confidence motions, no cabinets have done so since 1966.

Conclusion

While substantial changes in the party system and electoral context presented new challenges for coalition governance in the Netherlands, Dutch politicians have mainly looked to old solutions to address these new problems. Majority coalition formation is still the norm and the (unintended) introduction of an investiture vote for the *formateur* has further cemented this norm. Electoral volatility and the

effective number of parties have increased over the last 30 years. Immigration and integration have established themselves as a new line of conflict. Despite the rise of new parties on the right, centre, and left, governance is still dominated by the 'traditional' three-plus-one (CDA, VVD, PvdA, and D66). Since 1994, only two new parties have participated in government.

Where something new has been tried, most notably the Rutte I supported minority cabinet, this was not evaluated very positively by the actors involved. While part of the negative assessment was due to the early demise of this cabinet and the policy conflict between PVV on the one hand and VVD and CDA on the other, the dependency on a 'third party' was also seen as something that should be avoided.

Fragmentation and party instability have impacted on cabinet governance. The start of the twenty-first century was an era of cabinet instability. Parties leaders have tried to address this by insisting on party unity so that they could deliver the votes for compromises that were agreed to in the coalition. These demands of loyalty and discipline in some cases had the effect of alienating some government MPs, which led to floor-crossing and thus a further erosion of parliamentary support. Party leaders therefore have to balance between appeasing their MPs and voters as well as avoiding (serious) conflict with other government parties. Coordination within the coalition and conflict resolution mechanisms have therefore become even more important for the survival of cabinets. The Netherlands can clearly be described in terms of the *Coalition Compromise Model*, in which the coalition agreement as well as coordination and conflict management mechanisms are of central importance.

Balance has to be maintained in several arenas. In the parliamentary arena the coalition party leaders regularly meet to avoid unnecessary conflicts. In government, ministers who formally have a relatively strong autonomy have to take into account the views of their parliamentary party group and the sensitivities of coalition partners and those of other ministers. At the very top, the prime minister and leaders of the other parties have to see whether the coalition agreement is upheld or if ad hoc changes are necessary. While the prime minister's formal powers are quite limited, his leadership of the largest party and his central role in policy coordination at home and in Europe strengthen his position.

Whereas electoral politics and political campaigns have become more adversarial in style over the last 20 years, coalition governance still seems to be guided by the politics of accommodation. In that sense, our analysis confirms earlier accounts of Dutch (coalition) politics by Lijphart (1989) and Timmermans and Andeweg (2000). At the same time, the changes in volatility, fragmentation, and the party system are much more extensive now than they were 20 years ago. It needs to be seen whether old solutions keep working in this significantly changed context.

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Appendix. List of political parties

Abbreviation	Name
SP	Socialist Party (Socialistische Partij)
CPN	Communist Party Netherlands (Communistische Partij Nederland)
PSP	Pacifist-Socialist Party (Pacifistisch-Socialistische Partij)
GL	GreenLeft (GroenLinks)
EVP	Evangelical Peoples Party (Evangelische Volkspartij)
PPR	Political Party of Radicals (Politieke Partij Radicalen)
PvdD	Party for the Animals (Partij voor de Dieren)
PvdA	Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid)
DENK	Denk
50PLUS	50PLUS
AOV	General Elderly Alliance (Algemeen Ouderen Verbond)
Unie 55+	Union 55+ (Unie 55+)
CU	ChristianUnion (ChristenUnie)
D66	Democrats 66 (Democraten 66)
ARP	Anti-Revolutionary Party (Anti-Revolutionaire Partij)
KVP	Catholic People's Party (Katholieke Volkspartij)
CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal (Christen Democratisch Appèl)
CHU	Christian-Historical Union (Christelijk-Historische Unie)
DS70	Democratic Socialists '70 (Democratisch Socialisten '70)
NMP	New Middle Party (Nieuwe Midden Partij)
CP-CD	Centre Democrats (Centrum Democraten), 1984–2002 Centre Party (Centrumpartij), 1982–1986
GPV	Reformed Political Union (Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond)
RPF	Reformatory Political Federation (Reformatorische Politieke Federatie)
SGP	Reformed Political Party (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij)
RKPN	Roman Catholic Party of the Netherlands (Rooms Katholieke Partij Nederland)
VVD	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie)
BP-RVP	Right-wing People's Party (Rechtse Volkspartij), 1981 Farmers' Party (Boerenpartij), 1958–1981
LPF	Pim Fortuyn List (Lijst Pim Fortuyn)
PVV	Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid)

Note:
Party names are given in English, followed by the party name in Dutch in parentheses. If several parties have been coded under the same abbreviation (successor parties), or if the party has changed its name, these are listed in reverse chronological order followed by the period during which a specific party or name was in use.