# Fragmentation and coalition formation in the Netherlands

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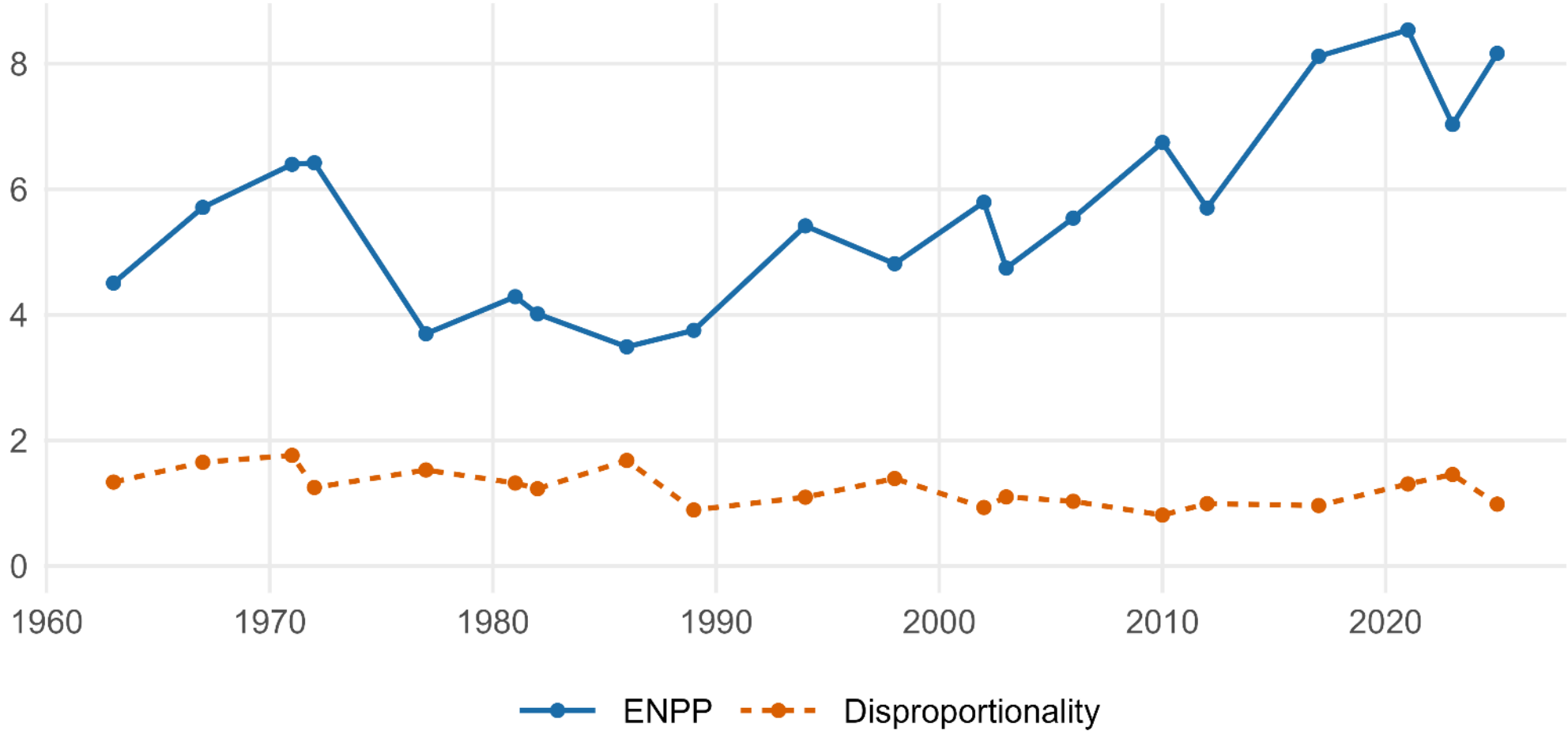
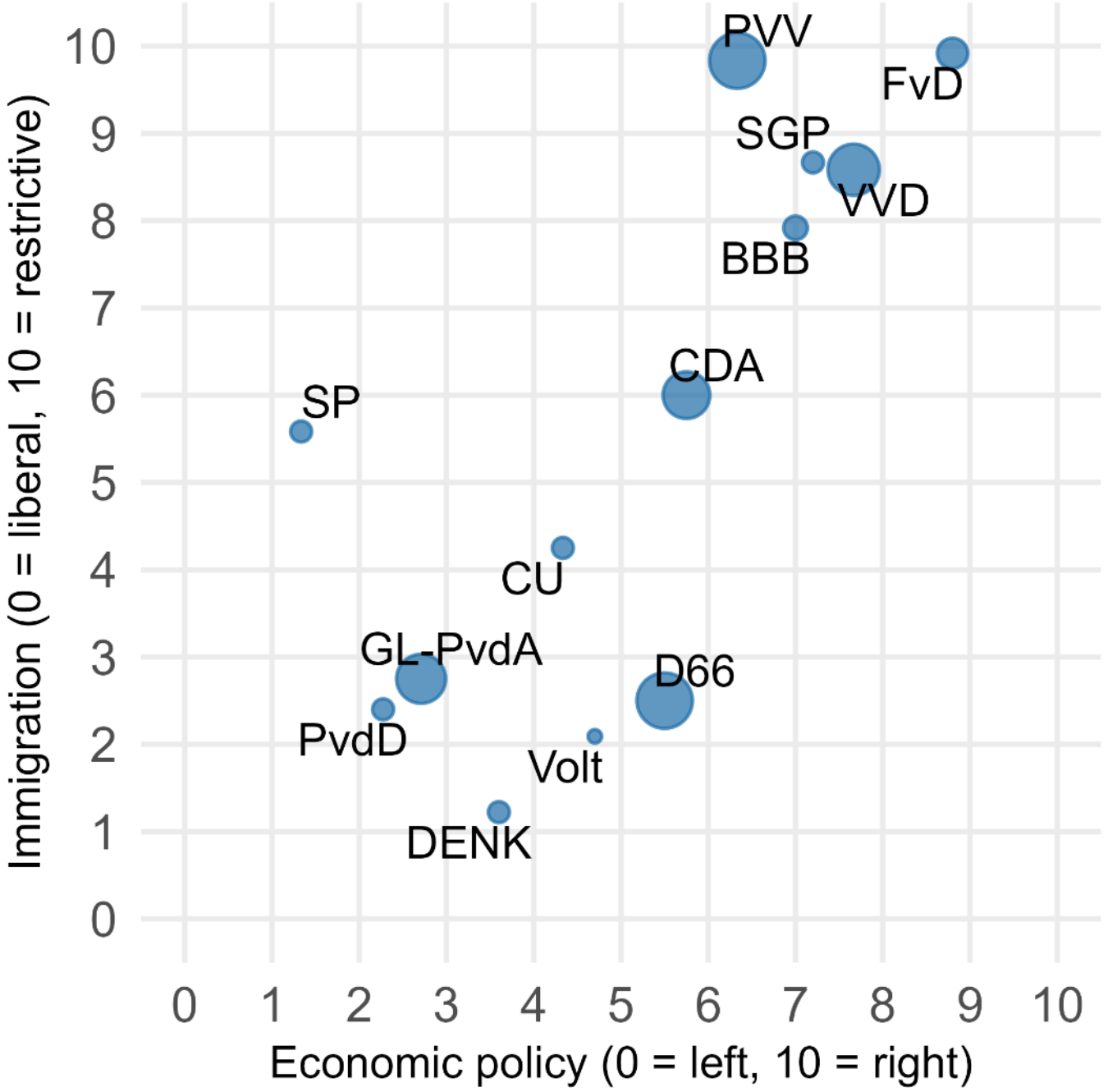
# Low disproportionality and high fragmentation




Source: Electoral Council / own calculations

# A fragmented party system




**Expert estimates of party policy positions**

Point size relative to 2025 election result

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2024)

SAMEN VOORUIT

GROEN LINKS PvdA

"Moving Forward Together"

## Three clusters of parties in voting behaviour

# Left-wing

- Progressive Netherlands (PRO) – 13%
  - Merger of Labour Party (PvdA) and GreenLeft (GL)
  - Centre-left and green politics
- Socialist Party (SP) – 2%
- Animal Rights Party (PvdD) – 2%
- DENK (Think) - 2%
  - Many supporters with a migration abackground
- Volt – 1%

Het kan wél

D66

"It can be done"

## A bridge

# Between left-wing and (centre) right

- Democrats 66 (D66) – 17%
  - Centrist in economic terms, progressive values
  - Attracts both left-wing/progressive and centre-right voters
  - Largest party for the first time in 2025
  - PM Rob Jetten's party

“choose”

## Three clusters of parties in voting behaviour

# Mainstream centre-right and right

- People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) – 14%
  - Economically right wing, increasingly also on migration
  - Party of former PM Mark Rutte
- Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) – 12%
  - One of the ‘traditional big three’, recovering from huge 2023 loss
- Christian Union (CU) – 2%
- Politically Reformed Party (SGP) – 2%

"This is your country!"

## Three clusters of parties in voting behaviour

# Far right

- Freedom Party (PVV) – 17%
  - Radical right. Anti-migration, anti-Islam, 'welfare chauvinism'
  - Geert Wilders party
- JA21 – 6%
  - Radical right, more focus on economic right issues
  - Wants to be the 'responsible right' party, also attracts mainstream right voters
- Forum for Democracy (FvD) – 5%
  - Radical to extreme right
- Farmer-Citizen-Movement (BBB) – 3%
  - Relatively new party. Moved to(wards) the far right bloc.

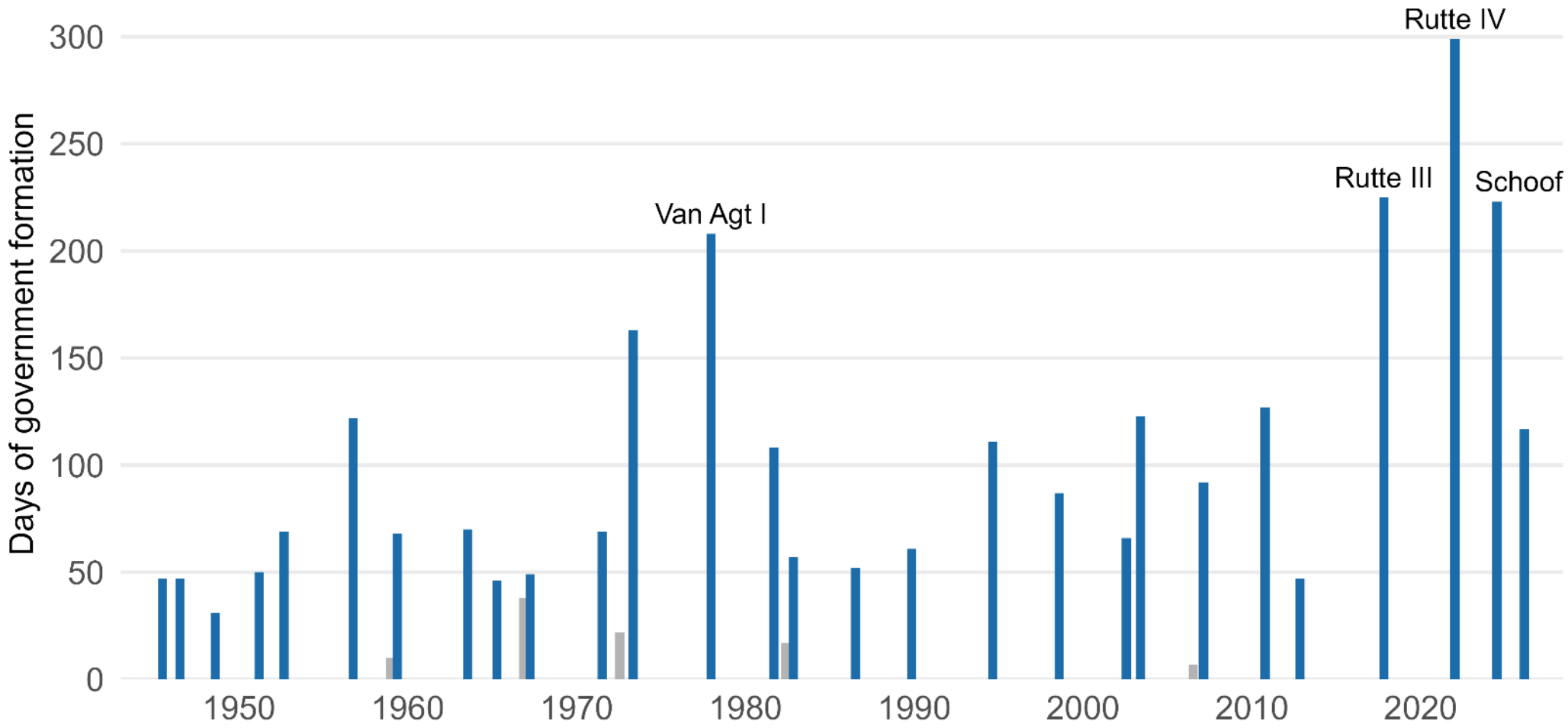
# Government formation challenge

- No pre-electoral agreements or ‘bloc politics’
  - Voters structure in three clusters, rather than two.
  - Centrist parties prefer not to commit to left or mainstream right bloc
- Exclusions
  - PVV and Forum excluded by most other parties
  - Recently the VVD is excluding PRO as coalition partner
- Bicameralism
  - Since 2010, the coalition lacked a Senate majority most of the time

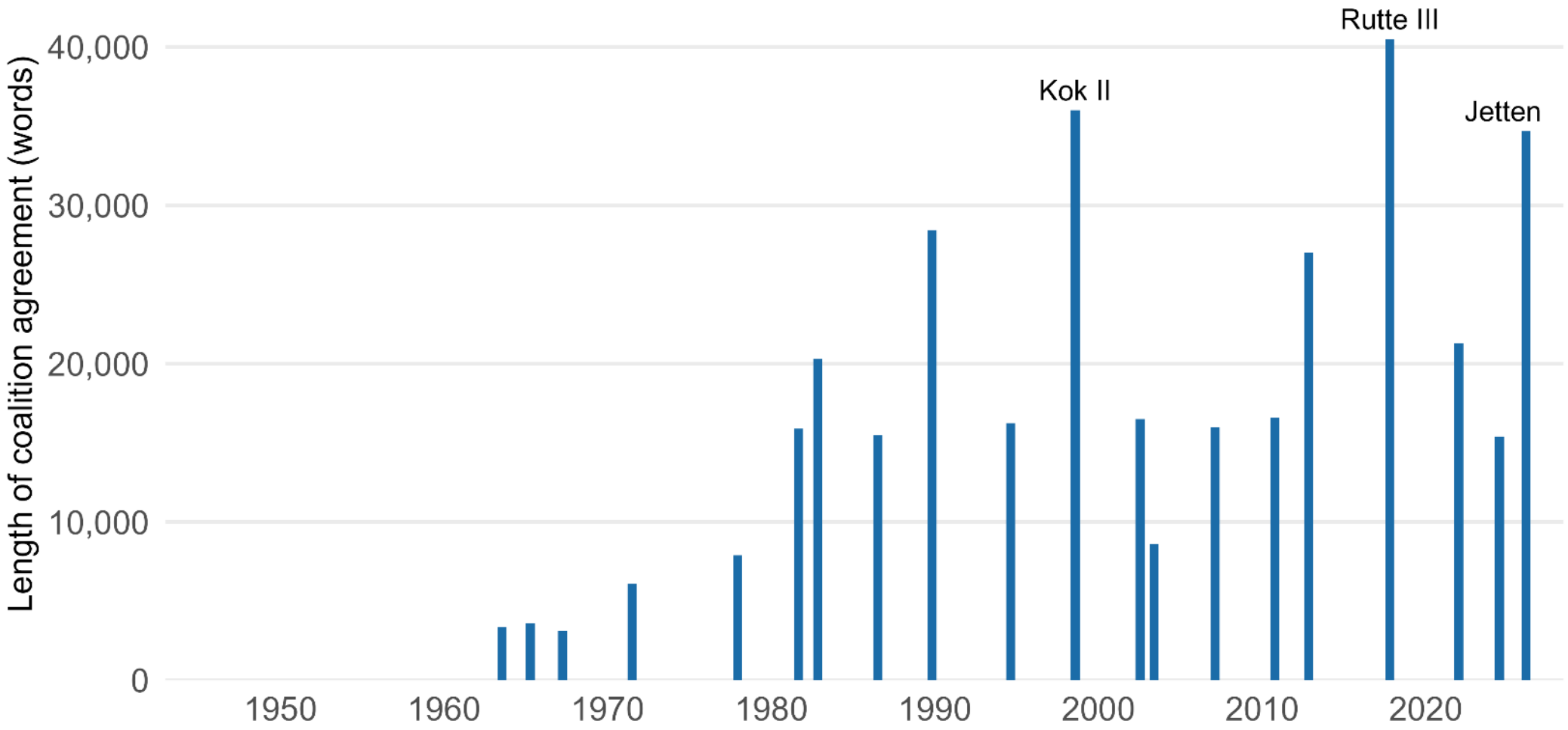
# Historical background

- Pillarization period (up to mid-1960s)
  - Five major parties (socialist, liberal, catholic, and two types of protestants)
  - Dominance of the centre: catholics worked with PvdA *or* VVD.
  - Oversized coalitions, pacification politics.
- After pillarization
  - Fragmentation remained high (except 1980s)
  - Attempts to force two-bloc system failed in the 1970s
  - Focus on governing in minimal winning coalitions

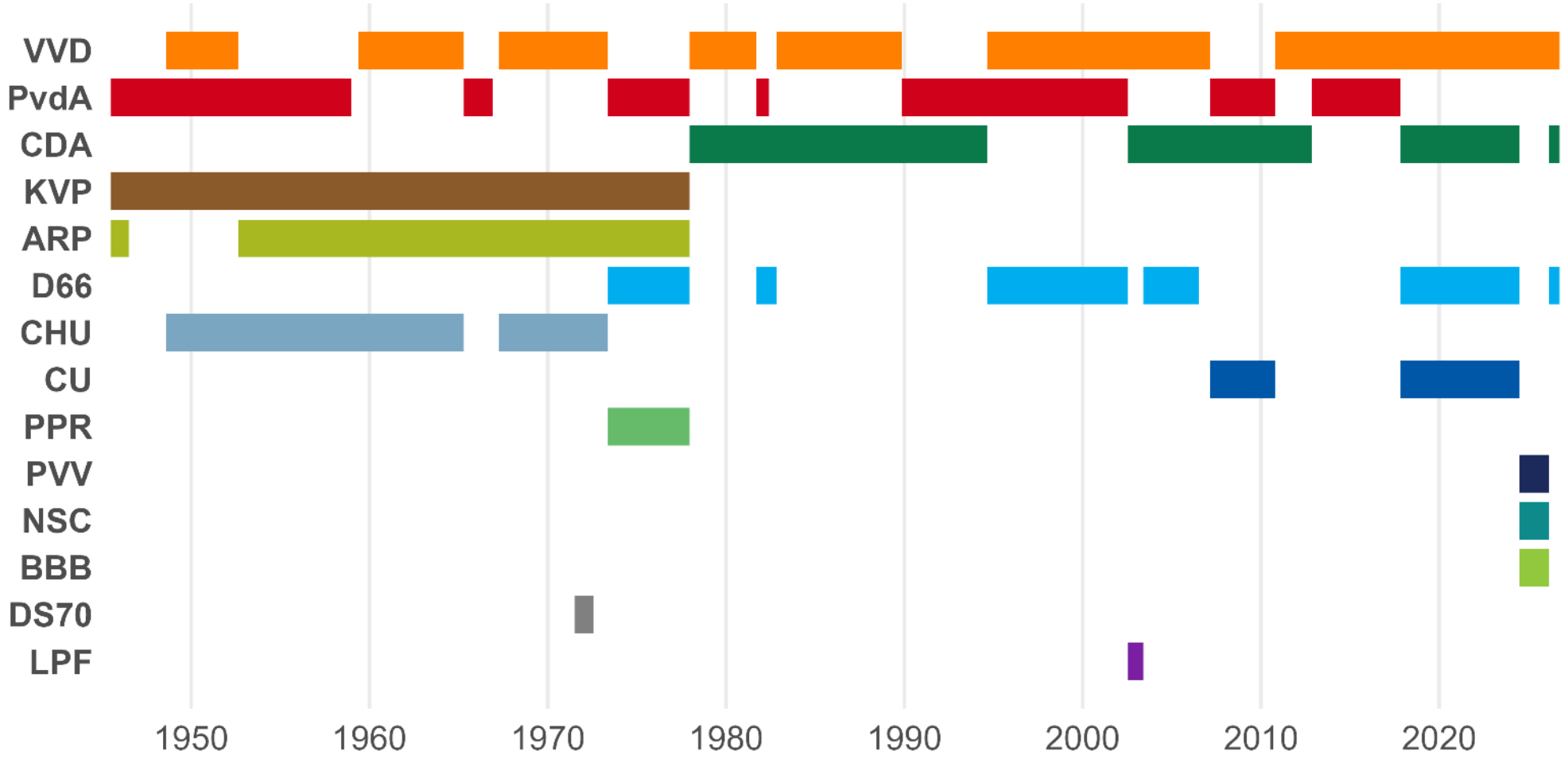
# Consequences: long government formation



# Consequences: long coalition agreements



# Consequences: partial alternation, multiparty cabinets, centre vs. right-wing coalitions



# How about a minority cabinet?

- No formal obstacles. For example no formal investiture vote.
- Traditions of consensus politics should be suitable to deal with challenges

- NL comes from a tradition of broad governments
- Biggest party is small (now 17%)
- No bloc politics with tacit support or support agreements

# But times change

- Cabinet parties have:
  - 66 / 150 House seats (44%)
  - 22 / 75 Senate seats (29%)
- First formal minority cabinet (except caretaker)
  - Rutte I (VVD-CDA) relied on support agreement with PVV, substantive minority cabinet

## Jetten Cabinet sworn in

News item | 2026-02-23 | 10:30

The Jetten cabinet was sworn in this morning at Huis ten Bosch Palace. The new cabinet is formed by D66, VVD and CDA and consists of 18 ministers and 10 state secretaries.

# How new is it?

- Since 2010 no Senate minorities for the coalition (most of the time)
- Negotiations with part of the opposition necessary to pass legislation
- Difference: minority is even smaller, especially in the Senate
- Confidence question is more pronounced in the House

# Mechanisms for collaboration

- Informal backroom negotiations
- Selective invitation and participation
  - Far right less involved
- Current government internally divided on whether they prefer a deal with the left or the right
- Common strategies: depoliticization, putting things on the back burner, ‘creative solutions’ (that cause trouble later)
- But: no tradition like *forlig* in Denmark, relatively weak parliamentary committees

# Conclusion

- Fragmentation makes government formation very complex
- Increasing experience with government-opposition collaboration
- Mainstream parties willing to collaborate, but toolkit actually quite limited
- Risks: standstill, blurring in the centre, only ‘real choice’ at the far ends of the political spectrum.

# Fragmentation and coalition formation in the Netherlands

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