Notes on Recent Elections

The Dutch Parliamentary Election of 1982*

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From a time when electoral shifts in The Netherlands were minor tremors hardly detectable to other than the political seismologists, elections now produce changes of greater force on the political Richter scale, easily noticeable by even the most casual observer. The decline in religious voting since the mid 1960s and the breakdown in socialization whereby younger voters no longer automatically follow the patterns of their parents have greatly increased the 'floating vote'. As many as one-third of the voters now switch their preference between elections, and almost one-fifth of the voters now say that they determine this preference during the last weeks or days before the election. This increase in floating has brought about a less stable balance among the political parties. Because there are now more votes to be won during the campaign and because the formation of the Cabinet is more dependent upon the electoral results, the importance of campaigns and elections has increased greatly. It is against such a background that the election of 1982 must be viewed and interpreted.

Background

The changes which have occurred in patterns of voting have been discussed in far greater detail than is possible here. As one of the most important functions of elections is to provide the basis for the formation of a new Cabinet, the effects of these changes in voting can be understood by examining the balance of parliamentary seats. This shift in relative strength among the parties has in turn influenced the importance of the elections themselves.

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There are two main points which must be made in connection with Table 1. The most important change to be seen is the alteration in the position of the major religious parties. Prior to 1967 these parties held a majority of the seats in the Second Chamber of Parliament and could, at least theoretically, have chosen to form a government themselves without taking a partner from among the other parties. Since then, however, they have dropped to slightly less than a third of the seats. Because of their position at the centre, they have still served in all cabinets, but now are forced to choose a coalition partner. On occasion, the electoral results have limited this choice, since the Christian Democratic Liberal combination failed to achieve a majority of the seats necessary to provide a viable alternative. In such cases, it is either necessary to bring in a smaller party (DS'70 in 1971) or accept the other alternative of a coalition with the Left. The degree of discretion has become limited and the importance of the electoral results increased.

The second important point concerns the changes in voting behaviour which underlie these results. When 'verzuiling' was at its highest in The Netherlands, voters were socialized into one of the parties through group membership and shifts between parties were minimal. With some exceptions, campaigns tended to be defensive. Voters could hardly be won, but might be lost, particularly to splinter parties. As group identification loosened as the basis for vote determination, factors such as issues (including ideological conflicts), images, and party leaders became increasingly important in wooing the new floating vote.

The Left, in particular, attempted a strategy of polarization in order to force wavering religious voters to choose between Right and Left. In Table 1, we see that this strategy has had limited success. The size of the Left vote,
including D’66, has at times increased, and in 1977 the Labour Party actually became larger than the combined list of the major religious parties. Still, it has been the Liberal Party which has grown more in this period. Beginning in 1972 they selected a new leader, Hans Wiegel, who helped change the party’s image and move it in the direction of a mass party.

As the background for the 1982 election, these two changes became of increasing importance. Because it is likely that the Queen will turn to the largest party to initiate negotiations for the formation of a new government, it has become increasingly important to be the largest party in Parliament. In addition to the importance of the largest party, electoral outcomes may now determine which options are available for the formation of a government. Thus, in terms of the selection of a future government, the most pressing questions surrounding the 1982 election were, which party would emerge as largest and what combinations could potentially form a majority cabinet.

Campaign 1982

In some respects, the 1982 campaign was rooted in events of 1977. In that year, the Socialists, under Joop Den Uyl, achieved their greatest post-war success. Yet they failed in the cabinet negotiations, and returned to the opposition. Instead, the Christian Democrats, led by Dries van Agt, turned to the Liberals. The Socialists were, of course, quite disappointed and frustrated with the results of the formation and it served to fire the irritation which existed between the two leaders.

In 1981 the same four men headed the major party tickets as in 1977. The economy had worsened under the van Agt-Wiegel administration, but Den Uyl and the Socialists had been uninspiring in opposition. Voters seemed confused and D’66 was able to capitalize handsomely on its slogan as the ‘Reasonable Alternative’. Although the government coalition eventually lost only three seats, that was sufficient to cost them their majority. This time, Labour proved far less demanding, and in a real breakthrough, Den Uyl agreed to serve as minister in a cabinet led by van Agt.

The coalition of CDA, Labour, and D’66 had hardly begun its work before it fell apart and had to be mended by two outside economists. Nevertheless, problems remained and when no agreement could be reached on the spring budget message, Labour left the Cabinet. They bitterly blamed Dries van Agt for forcing them out.

Leaders and Issues

Although it had long been clear that the coalition was in trouble, the parties were somewhat taken by surprise by the necessity for new elections. The short interval since the previous parliamentary elections, during which provincial and municipal elections had been held, had left the party electoral chests depleted. Little time was available to write or rewrite party manifestos. Basically, they were unprepared, and nowhere was this more obvious than in the questions of selection of an individual to head the electoral ticket. The governmental parties had been too preoccupied with the problems within the Cabinet to consider the important matter of succession.

Within the CDA, the position of van Agt was quite secure. Yet he himself hesitated, and when he finally agreed he reserved the right to leave the Cabinet before the completion of the full four years. Labour hesitated openly before asking Den Uyl to head the list for the sixth
time. There was considerable discussion and pressure for new leadership, but no time to agree upon whom the new leader was to be. Jan Terlouw had virtually saved D'66 from oblivion, but once he became minister of economic affairs was attacked strongly in the press and even within his own party. Only after party leaders prevailed upon him did he consent to head the party ticket.

More by chance than plan, it was the Liberal Party which provided the only new face at the election. Due primarily to personal reasons, Hans Wiegel had resigned to become Queen's Commissioner in the province of Friesland. The party selected the even younger Ed Nijpels (32) to succeed him. As the only new face, media attention centred, perhaps even unwittingly, on Nijpels. He was young, charming, and virtually untouched by the political wars. In debate he needed only to hold his own to come out a winner against the veterans. He did so admirably, making his opponents look old and tired in the process.

The Issues

The issue most in the minds of all at this election was the difficult economic situation. In a country in which a major portion of the GNP passes through the collective sector, economic problems immediately involve major questions concerning the budget. For all of the discussions over the budget and economy, all parties agreed on the basic goals. Unemployment had to be reduced, and the market sector revived. As such, the economy formed what has been called a 'valence issue' in which parties compete to present the best image to the voters. It is not these goals, but the means to achieve them, upon which the disagreement occurs. Yet, even on one of the means, there was basic agreement; wage costs had to decline in order for Dutch industry to become more competitive. Moreover, all parties agreed on the necessity to reduce governmental expenditures, although not on where the cuts should be made or how much they should be. These latter questions, combined with what to do with the amounts saved, were the questions which caused the fall of the Cabinet and carried over into the electoral campaign.

In the Cabinet the Christian Democrats and D'66 had desired greater cuts than had Labour. The Liberal opposition had long maintained that governmental expenditures had got out of hand, and were not sure if even the proposed cuts would be sufficient. Where to cut caused even more difficulties in the Cabinet and among the parties. Disagreements were strong on whether social welfare benefits could or should be lowered and on which income classes should lose the most purchasing power. D'66 proposed a freeze on all salaries for four years. The Socialists wished to minimize the burden falling on those with the lowest incomes and/or on welfare. The Christian Democrats felt only the 'true' minimum wage earners (i.e. those supporting other persons) should be exempted from loss in purchasing power. Whether or not or how much the salaries of governmental employees would be cut formed another area of considerable disagreement.

Finally, the parties argued over what use would be made of the money saved by such budgetary cuts. In the Cabinet, the CDA minister of finance desired to utilize the cuts to reduce the large budget deficit, thus reducing the need for further heavy borrowing. The Socialists argued that salary cuts were only acceptable if it could be shown that new jobs were thereby created.

In the end, the debate on economic issues was probably too complicated and technical to be understood by most voters. What most voters surely did understand, however, were the ideological positions upon which such issue positions were based and the potential class benefits which were implied.

After economic issues, the set of issues uppermost in the minds of Dutch voters in 1982 concerned peace and nuclear weapons. It may have divided the parties even more greatly than the economic issues. In recent years public opinion has become more neutralist and opposed to nuclear weapons, and the parties have been forced to take this fact into account. Of course, peace and even moral opposition to nuclear weapons is likewise a valence issue; everyone is agreed on the necessity of the one and the horror of the other. The disagreement is on the means to achieve peace, i.e. whether participation in NATO and the balance of terror are the proper means. Opposition has centred around the activities of the Inter-denominational Peace Conference (IKV) and their slogan 'Nuclear weapons out of the world, beginning in the Netherlands'.

Of the major parties, the Labour Party has faced the greatest difficulty with regard to the peace issue. On its left are those parties (Communists, Pacifists, Radicals) who would rid The Netherlands of nuclear weapons, and restrict or eliminate participation in NATO. Since there is considerable sympathy for these positions among Labour voters, there is always a potentiality for loss of votes. Yet if it were to adopt such an extremist position it would undoubtedly lose more moderate voters to parties such
as D'66. This dilemma was faced with difficulty in the adoption of the party platform in 1981. Then, Den Uyl had so feared that the party congress would accept the absolutist position of total rejection that he almost uncharacteristically put his own personal prestige on the line. He was willing to agree to dropping some of the Dutch nuclear tasks within NATO, but insisted that one or two must be continued. In the end he prevailed and was chosen to lead the ticket, but not without internal party dissen- sion. Furthermore, he opened the possibility of attack from the Left who sloganed 'A vote for Labour is a vote for Joop Atom'.

Ironically, in 1982, with nothing changed in the party's position, its electoral position was improved. The party congress avoided new dissension by adopting the platform plank of the previous year without discussion. In the campaign the party could avoid the negative (for the Left) image of the retention of nuclear tasks, and concentrate on its unequivocal rejection of the placement of cruise missiles. A defensive position was thus turned into an offensive one.

However, whereas the electoral position of Labour was hereby improved, its possibilities for joining a new coalition were certainly not. Their closest ally among the major parties was D'66 who also would reduce the nuclear tasks and opposed deployment of middle range rocketry, but would reconsider the latter discussion after the negotiations with the USSR were completed. The Christian Democrats partly because of internal disagreement caused by the Interdenominational Peace Conference and its position, wished to postpone any decision until the results of the Geneva talks were known. Clearly there were conditions under which the new weapons would be accepted, and the conference even advised religious voters to cast a vote for one of the parties of the left.

To the Liberals NATO membership remained fundamental. They were opposed to unilateral disarmament and were willing to accept the cruise missiles if the Soviet Union were unwilling to reduce its number of middle range weapons.

The Results

The polls had followed the preferences of voters since the May 1981 elections and through the provincial and municipal elections of 1982. By summer 1982 the contours of rather major shifts had become increasingly obvious. The accuracy of modern polls has taken much of the surprise out of the election results. Nevertheless the race between PvdA and CDA to become the largest party was so close that even the generally extremely accurate TV election night prognosis made the wrong choice. The final results, compared with the results of May 1981, are presented in Table 2.

The shifts were the greatest for D'66 and the Liberals. D'66 had seen great heights and depths in its short history. In 1981 it reached its peak with 11 per cent of the vote and 17 seats in the Second Chamber; in 1982 the party was back to its position of ten years before with only 6 parliamentary seats (4.3 per cent of the vote). It had apparently paid an extremely heavy price for its year in the government. The big winners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percentage of valid votes</th>
<th>Parliamentary seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PvdA</td>
<td>30.4 28.3</td>
<td>47 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>29.3 30.8</td>
<td>45 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVD</td>
<td>23.1 17.3</td>
<td>36 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D'66</td>
<td>4.3 11.1</td>
<td>6 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPN</td>
<td>1.8 2.1</td>
<td>3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSP</td>
<td>2.3 2.1</td>
<td>3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPR</td>
<td>1.6 2.0</td>
<td>2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPF</td>
<td>1.5 1.3</td>
<td>2 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPV</td>
<td>0.8 0.8</td>
<td>1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGP</td>
<td>1.9 2.0</td>
<td>3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVP</td>
<td>0.7 0.5</td>
<td>1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party</td>
<td>0.8 0.2</td>
<td>1 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turnout % 80.6 86.6
were the Liberals, with a gain of 10 seats in Parliament. Now, the three largest parties were more evenly balanced than ever.

The Labour Party recovered dramatically from the disheartening results of the provincial elections, receiving almost a full 10 per cent more of the total vote than in 1981. This result has been exceeded only twice in the party’s history. It won the battle with the CDA, becoming the largest party with two seats more than the Christian Democrats. The latter lost 3 seats in comparison with 1981.

The changes among the smaller parties were minor. Only the Radicals, who lost one seat, were changed from 1981. Two new parties did enter the Chamber. The Evangelical People’s Party, which sees itself to the left of the CDA, managed to obtain one seat. So did the Centre Party, to the distress of most observers. This party is ‘centre’ in name only, as its philosophy relies heavily upon fears of foreign workers and foreign cultural influences and leans in the direction of racism and fascism.

Analysis

The most direct question generally asked when examining election results, especially when the shifts are as great as these just mentioned, is how did they come about? From what parties did the gains come? Where did the votes from the losers go? What effects did new voters have?

Unfortunately, although the first two questions are among the most direct, they are often difficult to analyse. They require an accurate knowledge of voters’ choices at two points in time. Where one is able to ask the same individual voters their preferences at the time of the two elections, the problem is reduced to those difficulties usually encountered in panel survey analysis. More often, however, one is forced to ask a respondent to recall his or her preference at a prior point in time. Research is accumulating to demonstrate that voters, at least in The Netherlands, are not easily able to do this.

Panel data for the 1981/1982 pair of elections will eventually be available, but at this time analysis of voter shifts can only be based upon the results of the election day analysis carried out for the National Broadcasting System. At 40 polling stations, voters are asked upon leaving the booths to indicate their vote just cast, their vote at the previous parliamentary election, and their sex and age. These data thus have the additional disadvantage that non-voters at the current election are not included.

Given these caveats we may examine the figures in Figure 1, which are based upon those voters in 1982 who were able and willing to report their vote in 1981. For ease of presentation, the small parties of the Left and Right have been combined.

All figures in Figure 1 are percentages based upon the total number of voters involved. In each circle is the percentage of votes gained from other parties and lost to other parties. Thus, by subtracting the losses from the gains, one can see that in the overall interchanges between the parties, the Liberals and Labour gained whereas the Christian Democrats and D’66 lost, the latter dramatically. The arrows indicate the percentage of the total number of voters flowing in both directions between each of the pairs of parties.

D’66 suffered a net loss in all directions. Although one might presume from examination of the overall results that D’66 voters had gone over to the Liberals, these figures indicate that the net loss to Labour was actually greater. Evidence is lacking, but one may guess that many of these were Labour voters who had temporarily deserted the party in 1981. Those moving to the Liberals are more likely to be new to that party, having used D’66 as a stopover in the shift between parties.

Aside from the net gain in the interchange with D’66, the Liberals gained substantially from the Christian Democrats. Whereas the net changes for D’66 were all negative, those for the Liberals were almost all positive. Only some loss of votes to the Centre Party may have brought a small net loss in the direction of the splinter right parties.

The other major parties—Labour and CDA—had both net gains and losses. Labour gained from D’66, CDA and the small left, but lost to the Liberals and the Centre Party of the splinter right. The Christian Democrats gained only in the interchanges with D’66, while losing in all other interchanges, of which the loss to the Liberals was the largest.

If we arrange the parties from Left to Right and look at the total shifts, we do not find a massive shift to the Right. The movement from Left to Right is greater than from Right to Left, but the net result is only 1.24 per cent.

Two groups are not included in these interchange figures, but may be examined from the INTOMART survey. Table 3 reports results for those who reported not having voted at the 1981 election and for those who were then too young to vote. These figures add considerably to the understanding of the gains for the Liberals and the recovery of Labour. Labour did extremely well among those who reported not
having voted in 1981. (Could some of these respondents, however, have been referring to the provincial elections at which Labour did so badly?) The Liberals did proportionally better among both groups in comparison with those having voted twice. Pollster Maurice de Hond has also reported that the turnout among 1981 Liberal voters was proportionally higher, so they may also have profited on that account.

Youth Vote

In Table 3 one can see that those voting for the first time differed considerably in their vote preferences from their elders. In fact, among this group, the Liberals form the largest party. Since age is one of the two or three pieces of information which INTOMART has also collected on election day, it is possible to examine the changing preferences of the youngest voters over the past 10 years.

The categorization of age has been changed in the various studies, but in Table 4, it is at least possible to examine the preferences of the youngest voters at each election. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn was already mentioned in the introduction and concerns the lack of continuity in the preferences of the youngest voters and their diversion from their parents’ preferences. Without meaning to sound critical, one might conclude that young voters are ‘fad’ voters. ‘Fad’ voting can be found among all voters, but is particularly strong among young voters who have not yet developed any strong loyalty to a party.

In 1971, D’66 and DS’70 were disproportionately popular with the youngest voters. Only a year later it was the Radical Party (with its attractive leader, Bas de Gaay Fortman) which was strong. In 1977, Labour reached its peak with the help of the youth vote, only to fall back again in 1981 when D’66 was again ‘in’. In 1982, D’66 was ‘out’ and the Liberals were riding high. For the first time in this period, the combined vote for the Left among the youngest voters fell below 50 per cent.

Although young voters show a high level of ‘fad’ voting, one must also note the continuity. In particular, these figures at least partially contradict those who have argued that the
TABLE 3. Vote in 1982 of those too young, non-voters, and those having also voted in 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Too young</th>
<th>Non-voter</th>
<th>Voter in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Left</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PvdA (Labour)</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D'66</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA (Christian Democrats)</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVD (Liberals)</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Right</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100.2</td>
<td>100.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Parliamentary Study, 8 September 1982, INTOMART BV.

TABLE 4. Vote preferences of youngest voters (1971-1982)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election year</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>CPN</th>
<th>PSP</th>
<th>PvdA</th>
<th>PPR</th>
<th>D'66</th>
<th>Major religious parties (CDA)</th>
<th>VVD</th>
<th>DS’70</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>21-22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: INTOMART parliamentary election studies.

Christian Democrats are greying and will eventually die out. It is true that younger voters cast proportionately fewer votes for the CDA than do their elders, but in each of these elections approximately 20 per cent have voted CDA. The balance may be changing, but the three largest parties remain the most popular among these youngest voters.

Cabinet Formation

Although the Labour Party succeeded in its goal of becoming the largest party, it was not able to prevent the combination of CDA and Liberals from obtaining sufficient parliamentary seats to possibly form a majority government. Since the CDA had rather uncharacteristically implied a preference for the Liberals prior to the election, it seemed quite likely that they would combine to form the new government. Yet with the Socialists as the largest party, most agreed that the Queen should first ask someone from that party to inform her of the possibilities of forming a government.

The former minister of education, Jos van Kemenade, was asked by the Queen to investigate the possibilities. He talked with party leaders of the possibilities of a Labour–CDA or a Labour–Liberal combination, in both cases with the possible inclusion of D’66. The Liberals indicated that they were not interested and considered such talks a waste of time. Van Kemenade soon was forced to conclude that no basis was available for a coalition including the Socialists.

These possibilities having failed, the CDA–Liberal combination was investigated. In relatively short time, by Dutch standards, these parties agreed on a governmental programme. In recognition of its loyalty in remaining in the previous cabinet, D’66 was asked if it wished to join. D’66 declined the offer. The biggest surprise of this period of the formation was the announcement of minister president van Agt that he would accept no post in the new Cabinet, but would take a place on the parliamentary back benches. His successor became Ruud Lubbers who quickly completed the process of dividing the ministerial posts and selecting the new Cabinet. On 4 November, the new government of eight Christian Democratic and six Liberal ministers was installed by The Queen. The 1982 electoral process was thereby concluded.
The Spanish General Election of 1982

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The Spanish General Election of 1982 resulted in the third consecutive overwhelming Socialist victory in Southern Europe—not an area hitherto dominated by Socialist governments. The political map of Europe is being drastically redrawn: Socialists are losing in their traditional strongholds of the North and are gaining in the South: of five governments wholly or mainly controlled by Socialist parties, three are now in Southern Europe; and only two of the five Southern European countries are not controlled by Socialist governments.

This development is in itself a change of such a magnitude that it needs to be studied comparatively, accompanied as it seems to be by the decline of Communist parties in their traditional strongholds.1 But the Spanish General Election of 1982 is not only important because it gave the Spanish Socialist Working Party (PSOE) of Felipe Gonzales an absolute majority of seats in the Cortes: it also had the effect—unprecedented in Western Europe—of destroying almost completely a party, the Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD), which had been not merely the largest party, but indeed a near-majority party. The electoral and parliamentary map of Spain has been recast at the same time on both Left and Right. Indeed, if one adds the marked decline of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) as well as some of the smaller nationalist and regionalist parties, the Spanish General Election of 1982 has been characterized by five developments, each of which would probably be sufficient in importance to qualify that election as 'critical'.

