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Peter Noordhoek: Reflections on the Dutch election result

Peter Noordhoek reflects on the Dutch election results (BBC).

In Dutch politics the die has been cast. And the result is truly disturbing. The electoral stalemate I predicted in [my last report](#) has come about.

Personally, I guess I should be pleased. My Christian-democratic party, the CDA, remains the largest party in the Netherlands. In 2003 we won 44 seats out of a 150. After the drastic measures we introduced to change the economy, the electorate was less than grateful and we plummeted in the polls to 30 seats last April. The Labour party polled 60 seats at that time. A lot can happen in half a year. We now have 41 seats. And Labour? 36 seats. So we remain more or less constant, while Labour crashed. They crashed because of our effective campaign and because of the upsurge of the more militant Socialistic Party. This was not an election for parties in the middle.

But neither was it a campaign for parties on the right. The conservative party, the VVD, crashed too, getting just 22 seats. The remains of the party of Pim Fortuyn were wiped out, but there were an equal number of 9 seats for a purely rightwing party led by the Mozart look-alike Geert Wilders. I believe there is a lesson for the British conservative party in both the demise of the VVD and the staying power of the CDA.

The VVD came with an approach that was not unlike the losing campaigns of the Conservative party in the recent past. If I may make a caricature: behind the media imagery, the voter got a mixed bag of messages that were either conflicting or unrealistic. A bit of market ideology, a promise of less taxes, some words about social inclusion – and harsh measures against illegal immigrants. And behind it all the image of bruising leadership contests. Small wonder the Dutch voters did not appreciate such a campaign.

The voters took a different view of the performance of the CDA, even though you could rightly say that CDA and VVD had steered the same course in the Cabinet. Why the difference? In a word: stability. Stability in leadership and stability in message. Using our time in opposition to get back to the sources of Christian-democratic thinking and working consistently to flesh out a number of relevant themes, we were ready for government and have stayed the course ever since. Investing in an authentic message pays off.

Truth be told: it remains to be seen if we can stay on course for the coming parliamentary period. The outcome of the election is impossible. The only combination is a Cabinet that consists of CDA and Labour, the two biggest adversaries, of which one of them is severally wounded. Just before the election only 11% of the electorate thought this to be an attractive combination. I must admit; this is one of those moments I envy the British 'first past the post' system of appointing a winner. Come next March I have another election to run, this time for the provincial authority. The likelihood exists that we will still not have a new cabinet by then. A horrible thought. I hope we can keep our strong showing and that the VVD regains its strength. It is not least



because of this that I am interested in The Great David Cameron Experiment.

By the way, poverty was a real issue in this campaign. And our side did not have new ideas to offer than the old platitude of 'making money before spending it'. The voters were hungry for something more. If only for this I really like the way Greg Clark and Peter Franklin approach the issue. Those who reacted negatively to David Cameron's endorsement of it should think again. The Conservatives need the long tail of a new approach.

November 26, 2006 at 14:55 in [Peter Noordhoek](#) | [Permalink](#)

Comments



Ted zei...

Peter

Thanks for this - looks to an outsider that the issues of immigration helped the extremes more than the centre. Perhaps a large element of previously VVD support was attracted to Wilders? Same seems to have happened on left where Labour lost to Socialists - what was the issue/issues than made left leaning voters more left?

[Antwoorden](#) [November 26, 2006 at 16:29](#)



[Cllr Iain Lindley](#) zei...

I thought the VVD were a liberal party?

[Antwoorden](#) [November 26, 2006 at 17:00](#)



[Maastricht Rebel](#) zei...

Indeed, the CDA sit with the Conservatives in the EPP and the VVD with the Liberal Democrats.

[Antwoorden](#) [November 26, 2006 at 18:11](#)



[Sean Fear](#) zei...

On the Continent, Ian, "Liberal" often means pretty right wing.

The Continental Right is often divided between a Christian (mainly Catholic) Party, and a more secular Liberal Party.

The Liberals are usually more socially liberal than the Christians, but also more committed to free markets, and often take a harder line on immigration, which they feel threatens their secular values.

Holland and Denmark both fit this model. Germany does to an extent.

[Antwoorden](#) [November 26, 2006 at 20:00](#)



[Cllr Iain Lindley](#) zei...

Nevertheless Sean, they are not the Dutch Conservative Party. They are liberals and they sit with the ELDR.

[Antwoorden](#) [November 26, 2006 at 21:07](#)



Peter zei...

I think the most interesting thing about the election has been the growing vote of the people who don't want to vote for the main parties(CDA, Labour and VVD). Even back in 94 you had two pensioners parties(which become a joke as their leader kept on dying) getting 4.5% of the vote, but it does help that the Dutch do have a low threshold of getting a seat in the parliment of 0.67%(should we have that in the UK at about 0.16%). As for a grand coalition I think that will only serve to increase both the Socialists, Wilders(ex fortuyn) and even the CU.

[Antwoorden November 28, 2006 at 12:31](#)

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