

Connecting Parliamentarians

REPORT



PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTION 2021 NETHERLANDS

This report contains the findings of the International Parliamentarians' Congress Election Observation Mission, which visited the Netherlands to observe Parliamentary Elections which were held from March 15-17, 2021.



REPORT

NETHERLANDS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION MARCH-2021

MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is one of the oldest democracies in the world with a very strong parliamentary system. The country has a long-standing tradition of holding elections at all levels of governance. The democracy in the Netherlands is characterized by provision of human rights to all segments of the society, freedom of speech and political participation, and power devolution.

2. From March 15-17, 2021 the Kingdom of Netherlands held elections for 150 seats of the Lower House of the Parliament. The holding of elections during a global pandemic was a huge task that the authorities carried out successfully with the support of its citizens. The safety measures are taken to ensure avoid the spread of COVID-19 were commendable, to say the least. And provides a wonderful case study for other nations around the world on how to hold free and fair elections amidst a global pandemic.
3. On request of the International Parliamentarians' Congress (IPC), the Government of the Netherlands accredited IPC Election Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the Parliamentary Election 2021. To fulfill the task, a three-member team of IPC led by Honorable Mohamed Ali Homoud (Vice President IPC from Djibouti), Senator Honorable Zeeshan Khanzada (Member IPC), and Mr. Ijlal Ali Khan (Assistant Secretary-General IPC) was formed to observe the election process in the Netherlands.
5. The IPC is a transnational network of parliamentarians who have joined hands to play a proactive role in promoting peace and sustainable development through cooperation and dialogue. The IPC aims to make collective efforts for strengthening democracy across the world by creating synergies among parliamentarians. The agenda of IPC is not limited to the strengthening of democracy, the IPC intends to bring together MPs to make collective efforts for human development and prosperity.
6. The IPC Committee on Monitoring and Observation of Elections in the World is among six dynamic committees focusing on specific areas of Parliamentary relevance. This was the third EOM the IPC has conducted since its inception in 2019. Earlier, the IPC delegation observed the parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom and Jordan.
7. It is indeed a matter of great satisfaction that the IPC has been growing as per its founding aims and objectives which included the creation of synergies among the parliamentary community to cope with daunting challenges humanity faces through dialogue and cooperation.
8. I take the opportunity to present this report, which is based on the experiences of the IPC EOM sent to the Netherlands to observe the election held from March 15-17, 2021. This report gives a comprehensive overview of the elections and parliamentary system in the Netherlands as well as provides a detailed analysis of the 2021 elections. The report also presents the findings, that were made by the EOM during their visits and list recommendations that could be taken up to improve the existing system.

Senator Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani
President
International Parliamentarians' Congress (IPC)



INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIANS' CONGRESS (IPC)

The International Parliamentarians' Congress (IPC) is an inter-parliamentary organization that extends its membership to members of parliament (MPs) from across the globe. The Congress envisaged being a unique platform that seeks to bring together parliamentarians from around the world not just as regional or national representatives, but as representatives of the whole humanity.

Chairman Senate of Pakistan, Honorable Mohammad Sadiq Sanjrani is the current President and H.E Mohamed Ali Houmed is the Vice President of IPC. As enshrined in its constitution, the Congress envisions conceptualizing, strategizing, and implementing ideas of peace, prosperity, and progress in the world through cooperation, mutual understanding, and exchange of expertise among MPs. The President IPC conceived it to be a worldwide network of individual members of parliaments who voluntarily intend to work in unison with the single aim to achieve a prosperous and peaceful world through effective independent interaction among parliamentarians.

Headquartered in the capital city of Pakistan, Islamabad, the Congress aims to establish cooperation, synergy, and strategies across international MPs to strengthen democracy and achieve a prosperous and peaceful world. The main organs include General Assembly, the Governing Board, and a Secretariat. Countries around the world are classified into five major geopolitical groups i.e., i) Africa; ii) Americas; iii) Central Asia, South Asia, and southwest Asia; iv) East Asia and South East Asia; and v) Europe and Oceania; and similarly, six thematic standing committees that are represented by all regions.

The six standing committees, includes: i) Standing Committee on Climate Change and Food Security; ii) Standing Committee on Human Rights; iii) Standing Committee on Peace, Security, Conflict Resolution and Interfaith Harmony; iv) Standing Committee on Trade, Investment, and Developmental Cooperation; v) Standing Committee on Health Research, Standardization and Quality Control, and Human Development; and vi) Standing Committee on Monitoring and Observation of Elections in the World.



Connecting Parliamentarians

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The International Parliamentarians' Congress (IPC) is a transcontinental platform of individual members of national Parliaments from across the globe united in purpose to jointly resolve global and regional issues that invariably impact the whole of humanity. Constituted through a resolution adopted by the Senate of Pakistan on August 29, 2019, the IPC crystallizes into reality the vision of Honorable Senator Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani, Chairman Senate of Pakistan, to bring together parliamentarians of different countries to achieve peace, prosperity, and progress through cooperation; mutual understanding; sharing and exchange of ideas as well as experiences.

The H.E Mohamed Ali Homoud, Vice President IPC from Djibouti, Senator Zeeshan Khanzada, and Ijlal Ali Khan, Assistant Secretary-General IPC participated as International accredited observers for the Netherlands Parliamentary elections 2021. We are very thankful to the Vice President IPC for headed the delegation.

The IPC wishes to thank Ms. Sterre van Heemest, MA, Policy Officer, and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (MoIKR) for their co-operation and continuous assistance. We also extend our gratitude to representatives of Netherlands and municipal institutions, election commission, political parties, candidates, media, civil society, the resident diplomatic community, and other interlocutors for support and sharing their views.

ACRONYMS

CDA Christian Democratic Appeal

COVID-19 Corona Virus Disease 2019

EOM Election Observation Mission

IPC International Parliamentarians' Congress

MoIKR Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations

MPs Members of Parliament

PFA Political Finance Act

PvdA The Labour Party

PVV Party for Freedom

SOPs Standard Operating Procedures

VVD People's Party for Freedom and Democracy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government. Universal suffrage for both men and women was established in 1919. The elections in the Netherlands take place based on a list system of proportional representation. The overall population of the Netherlands is 17.28 million of which 13 million are eligible to vote. Currently, Netherlands has 355 municipalities (which includes 3 special municipalities in the Caribbean part of the Netherlands) with no criteria based on which population size of each municipality is determined.

IPC is mandated to monitor and observe the elections held around the world to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections. Besides election observations, IPC missions also utilize these opportunities to broaden their understanding of electoral procedures that states around the world practice.

To fulfill its election observation mandate, IPC approached various countries around the world, which were holding elections in the first quarter of 2021. The Government of the Netherlands accredited IPC to deploy its Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the March 15-17, 2021 Parliamentary elections.

The March'21 elections to the House of Representatives were held during the global pandemic. The Government of Netherlands passed a temporary act, 'The Temporary Act Covid-19' before the elections to ensure that safety measures are followed both outside and inside the polling stations.

The 2021 Parliamentary elections were conducted in a very professional and organized manner. The authorities provided the public with alternative ways of voting like postal voting and proxy voting services to ensure that citizens, who were outside the country as well citizens who were vulnerable to COVID-19 could vote without the risk of exposure. Public confidence in the procedure was reflected by their active participation. The elections were competitive and pluralistic which provided voters with a wide range of choices. The voter turnout stood at 79.3% despite the pandemic.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands, part of the Kingdom of Netherlands, is a country in Western Europe with territories in the Caribbean. The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary form of government. The Chief of the State is the King, and the Head of the Government is the Prime Minister. The King of Netherlands has limited powers, the executive power in the country lies with the council of ministers.



Figure No. 1 – Map of the Netherlands

The Parliament of the Netherlands, known as the States-General, is bicameral with Senate as the upper house or First Chamber and House of Representatives as the lower house or Second Chamber. The Senate has 75 seats while the lower house has 150 seats. The members of the lower house of the States-General are elected directly through general elections for a four-year term while the Senators are indirectly elected by 12 provincial assemblies.

Constitutionally, the House of Representatives has more legislative powers than the Senate which grants it more political importance. But to pass any legislation, a majority in both houses is needed.

1.1. Parliamentary and Electoral History of the Netherlands

The history of Parliament, in the Netherlands, goes back a long time in history but the first elected Parliament is dated back to 1795-1813 period when the Netherlands was dominated by the French. The Parliament, at that time, had one house with limited powers when it came to policy matters, the actual power lied with the King.¹ The bicameral system was introduced in the Netherlands with Houses of Representatives and Senate in 1815 through an amendment in the Constitution. The House of Representatives has prescribed 110 seats which were elected by the provincial councils and the Senate had 40-60 members, who were appointed by the King.²

It was not until 1848 when a new Constitution was passed and the Parliament was given the mandate for accountability of the executive. Under the new Constitution, which forms the base of Dutch parliamentary democracy, the powers of the King were limited but the King remained as the Head of the State. Under the new Constitution, the number of members in the House of Representatives was set at one per 45,000 inhabitants, elected by a resident who paid a certain amount of tax or in other words the elites had the right to vote.³ The elections to 39 members Senate happened through provincial councils. Later in 1887, the number of seats in both Senate and the House of Representatives was increased, 50 and 100 respectively.⁴

It was not until 1917 when the state of the Netherlands granted its male population the right to vote when the electoral system was reformed. And then five years later in 1919, women were granted universal suffrage in the Constitution. The electoral system introduced in 1917 has remained in effect since that time, although some details have been altered.

¹ "Tvhc House of Representatives through the ages", Tweede Kamer, <https://www.houseofrepresentatives.nl/dossiers/house-representatives-through-ages> (accessed April 8, 2021)

² "History of the Staten Generaal", Staten Generaal, https://www.staten-generaal.nl/id/vj8wo4j126z9/document_extern/history_of_the_states_general/f=/vj8wo68pqtwd.pdf (accessed March 8, 2021)

³ "Elections and the election law - Electoral System," Kies Raad, The Hague, 2009.

⁴ History, Staten Generaal

2. POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

Political parties form a very important and essential part of democracy. They are believed to be the ones responsible for inducing the system to be responsive to the needs of its people. In the Netherlands, political parties came into being during the second half of the 19th Century. Their aim was to represent the interests of particular sections of the population politically.

The system of proportional representation, combined with the historical social division between Catholics, Protestants, Socialists, and Liberals has resulted in a multiparty system in the country. As a result of a high degree of political pluralism in the country has no party ever obtained an absolute majority and governments have mostly been formed by the coalition.

Major political parties in the Netherlands are,

2.1. The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)

The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) is a center-right Christian democratic party. It holds to the principle that government activity should supplement but not supplant communal action by citizens. It was originally formed in 1977 from a confederation of the Catholic People's Party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, and the Christian Historical Union.⁵

The party remained very popular from the 1980s onwards till 2006 but over the course of time started losing its general popularity. It was not until the 2017 general elections when CDS regained some of its popularity and won 19 seats which put it third in the race. After the elections, CDA became a junior coalition partner in the cabinet with the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, Democrats 66, and Christian Union.⁵

2.2. The Labour Party (PvdA)

The Labour Party (PvdA) is a social-democratic center-left party. This party moderately progressive and focused on issues such as employment, social security, and healthcare. The party came into being in 1946 as a merger of the Social Democratic Workers' Party, the Free-thinking Democratic League, and the Christian Democratic Union. From 2012 to 2017, the PvdA formed the second-largest party in parliament and was the junior partner in the cabinet with the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy. The party fell to nine seats in the House of Representatives in the 2017 general election, making it the seventh-largest faction in the chamber, recorded as its worst outcome.

2.3. The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)

The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) is a conservative-liberal party that was formed in 1948. Mark Rutte has been the party's leader since 31 May 2006 and on 14 October 2010 became Prime Minister of the Netherlands, marking the first time that the VVD led a government.

⁵ "The Dutch Political System in a Nutshell," Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, Hague, 2008.

The First Rutte cabinet's parliamentary majority was provided by the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and the Party for Freedom, but this majority became unstable when the latter refused to support austerity measures amid the European debt crisis. Therefore, a general election was held in September 2012.⁶ The VVD remained the largest party, with 41 seats.

From November 2012 until March 2017, the VVD was the senior partner in the Second Rutte coalition government. VVD remained the largest party in the March 2017 election (though was reduced to 33 seats); therefore, Rutte was expected to remain as Prime Minister. However, continuing the existing coalition was impossible, as the Labour Party had lost 29 seats: therefore, a center-right coalition was negotiated with the Democrats 66, Christian Union, and CDA, which became the Third Rutte Cabinet.

2.4. Democrats 66

Founded in 1966, calling itself social and liberal, Democrats 66 has been the strongest advocate of state and electoral reform in the Netherlands. It was founded by a group of young intellectuals and journalists. Initially, the party's main objective was to democratize the Dutch political system, but it developed a broader social liberal ideology over time.

In the 1967 general election, the party won 7 out of 150 seats in the House of Representatives. No new party has ever won this many seats in their first-ever election. The party was in government from 1973 to 1977, 1981 to 1982, 1994 to 2002, 2003 to 2006, and 2017 to 2021. It currently holds 19 seats in the House of Representatives, 7 seats in the Senate, and 2 seats in the European Parliament

2.5. Party for Freedom – PVV

Party for Freedom (PVV) was founded in 2001 as a right-wing populist and national-liberal party. It was founded by Geert Wilders, who split from the VVD in 2004. It won 9 seats in the 2006 general election, making it the fifth-largest party in parliament. In the 2010 general election, it won 24 seats, making it the third-largest party. At that time the PVV agreed to support the minority government led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte without having PVV ministers in the cabinet. However, the PVV withdrew its support in April 2012 due to differences. In the following 2012 Dutch general election it won 15 seats losing 9 of its earlier seats but remained the third-largest party in the House of Representative. In the 2017 elections, PVV won 20 seats, making it the second-largest party in Parliament.⁷

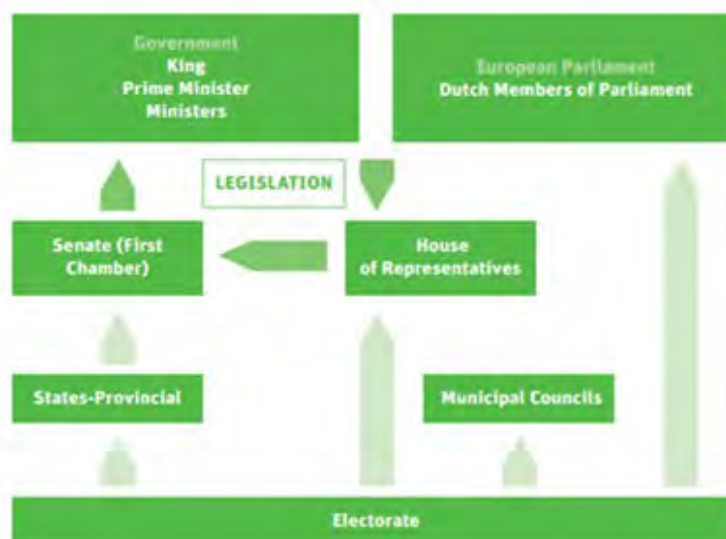
⁶ The Dutch Political System, NIMD

⁷ "Parties," Parlement.com, www.parlement.com/id/vh8lnhrp1wzw/partijen (accessed April 8, 2021)

3. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The Constitution of the Netherlands, which provides for the right to vote and the right to contest elections, is deemed as the primary document in relation to legal aspects of the electoral process as well as form the basis of the Dutch political system. The Constitution also lays out any exceptions and restrictions that are applicable in regards to the electoral process. Besides the Constitution, there are several laws in the Netherlands that regulate parliamentary elections.⁸

In the Netherlands, the Lower House of the Parliament, provincial councils, municipal councils, and Dutch delegation to the European Union are directly elected by people. The elections for the Lower House of the Parliament take place after every four years but in case the Parliament forces the government to resign, elections are held earlier. Elections for provincial and municipal council are also held after every four years. The elections to European Parliament take place after every five years.⁹



3.1. Legal Framework

As mentioned earlier, the Constitution of the Netherlands forms the basis of a legal framework for elections in the country. Besides the Constitution other laws that collectively define the electoral system are the 1954 Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the 1989 Elections Act, the 1989 Elections Decree, the 2013 Political Finance Act (PFA), the 2009 General Administrative Law Act, and the 1994 Criminal Code.

The Elections Act provides for the elections of members to the Lower and Upper House, the European Parliament, the provincial council, and municipal councils. The Elections Decree deals with some implementation issues from the Elections Act, including the naming of candidates on lists of candidates. The Election Act under its injunctions provides for international election observation but overall, all citizens of the Netherlands have the right to observe election processes and file complaints on any part of it.

3.2. Proportional Representation

All direct elections in the Netherlands are organized according to the principle of proportional representation. This system does not make use of separate electoral districts. In the country's parliamentary elections, all the votes cast are combined into one election result – in effect, the

⁸ "OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report," Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Warsaw, June 2017.

⁹ The Dutch Political System, NIMD

whole country is treated as a single electoral district. According to some political scientists, this makes the Dutch voting system one of the most proportional systems in the world.¹⁰

For administrative and party-political reasons, the country is divided into 19 constituencies each covering a province or part of a province. Each constituency has a principal polling station, and each election furthermore has a central electoral committee. For the election of the House of Representatives, this task is handled by the Electoral Council in The Hague. The parties taking part in these parliamentary elections submit their list of candidates to this body.

3.3. Voter Registration

The municipal authorities in the Netherlands are responsible for maintaining voter registers, which are based on information drawn from the population register. The list of eligible voters is automatically extracted and constantly updated. There were 13,187,770 voters registered for the 2021 Parliamentary elections.

All eligible voters can cast their vote on election day. Every Dutch citizen who is 18 or above on the day of the election can vote in the elections. Moreover, the Dutch voters residing in Aruba, Curaçao, or St Maarten, must have been residents of the Netherlands for at least ten years, or they must work in Dutch public service in Aruba, Curaçao or St Maarten (the Dutch spouse, registered partner or life companion and children of these voters are also eligible to vote, in so far as they share a household). On the day of the election, voters can cast their vote in any polling station in their municipality. If they are not able to do so, they can authorize someone else to cast his/her vote.

Dutch nationals who are eligible to vote but reside outside of the country can also vote in the elections to the House of Representatives for which mandatory voter registration can be done online. Pursuant to the Elections Act, the municipality of The Hague is responsible for the registration of Dutch voters abroad. Also, the municipality of The Hague will make the registration options known in a variety of ways. In 2017 the permanent (one-off) registration was introduced. Since its introduction, voters abroad will be automatically sent their ballot documents for each election after they have registered.

Dutch nationals outside of the Netherlands must vote by post. In their registration request, they can state whether they wish to receive their ballot paper by e-mail. Contrary to sending by post, sending by email means that voters outside of the Netherlands will have certainty as to when they will receive the ballot paper. This will give them more time to get their postal vote to the postal electoral committee on time. They will have already received their postal vote certificate (the voting pass for voters outside of the Netherlands) by post. Since 2014, voters outside of the Netherlands have voted with a different, smaller model ballot paper, that can be sent to them by e-mail. They have to print this themselves.

¹⁰ The Dutch Political System, NIMD

3.4. Voting Process

Voting in the Netherlands is not compulsory. In other words, a person is not obliged to cast their vote at the polling station. Before the elections, all eligible voters are sent a voting pass. Voters are free to choose in which polling station they cast their ballot, as long as it is in their municipality. They are, however, required to present proof of identity before casting their vote. The ballot paper and a red pencil are used for casting their votes. The names of the participating parties with the names of their candidates are pre-printed on ballot papers. The voter casts their vote either by marking on the names of the parties or by marking on the box next to the candidate of their choice in red with the provided pencil. This does not necessarily have to be the first candidate on the list. When a voter casts his/her vote for a candidate who is included lower on the list, this is called a 'Voorkeurstem' (preference vote). Many Dutch voters cast such a preference vote because the candidate is a well-known figure in their particular region. Voters can also cast a blank ballot. Although such ballots are invalid, they are included in the tally of the total turnout. Some voters submit such an abstention as a form of a protest vote, or because they do not know which candidate or which party they should vote for. In the latter case, the voter signifies by means of the blank ballot that he/she does however attach importance to the electoral process itself.

In the Netherlands, elections are usually held on a Wednesday. The polling stations are open from 7:30 in the morning to 9 in the evening. The stations are commonly set up in public buildings close to the constituents' homes, such as schools, community centers, and sports centers.

Moreover, if someone is unable to cast its vote due to any personal reason, voters can also authorize another voter to cast a proxy vote on their behalf. This can be done in two ways.

- I. The voter who is unable to visit the polling station fills in a number of fields on the back of his/her voting pass. This authorizes a second voter to cast a proxy vote on his/her behalf. The authorized voter casts this proxy vote at the same time as his/her vote. He/she is also required to present a photocopy of a valid identity document of the absentee voter.
- II. The voter writes to his/her municipal administration at least 14 days before the election formally requesting the municipality to authorize a second voter to cast a proxy vote on his/her behalf. The authorized voter will subsequently be sent a proxy authorization. A voter is allowed to accept a maximum of two authorizations, and may only cast these proxy votes at the same time as he/she casts his/her vote.

Every polling station has a three-member committee that sees to it that everything proceeds according to the regulations. This committee accepts and takes in the voting passes, checks the voters' proof of identity, and issues the ballot papers. The voters then move over to the voting booth to cast their vote in private, to protect the secrecy of the ballot. They then deposit this ballot in a ballot box. Once the polling station closes down, the committee counts the ballot papers. Members of the public are free to attend this event.

⁵ "The Dutch Political System in a Nutshell," Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, Hague, 2008.

4. ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

IPC is mandated to monitor and observe elections held around the world to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections. Besides election observation, IPC missions also utilize these opportunities to broaden their understanding of electoral procedures that states around the world practice. To fulfill its election observation mandate, IPC approached various countries around the world, which were holding elections in the first quarter of 2021, including the Netherlands.



After IPC approached the government of the Netherlands, it received accreditation for its three-member Election Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the Parliamentary elections in the country. The mission was headed by the Vice President of IPC Honorable Mohamad Ali Homoud, who is a President of the National Assembly of Djibouti, along with other core members of the mission, Honorable Senator Zeeshan Khanzada, and Assistant Secretary-General IPC Ijlal Ali Khan. The delegation reached the Netherlands on March 14, 2021, and initiated their observation activities.

The 2021 Elections took place over a period of three days (March 16, 17, and 18) to ensure that polling stations are not crowded and the spread of the virus can be avoided. About 30 international observers participated from four organizations including the IPC.

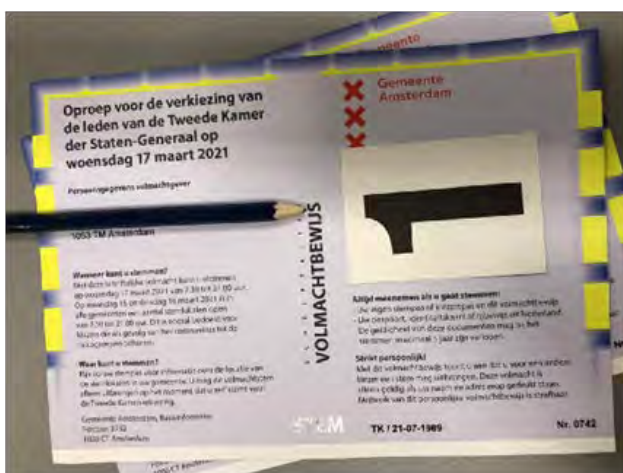
On all three days, the polling stations opened at 0730hrs and closed at 2100hrs, following strict punctuality. The safety measures to avoid the spread of COVID-19 were strictly followed throughout. Hydro-alcoholic gels were available on entry points, face masks were mandatory for polling staff, voters as well as members of the observation mission, the physical distance was respected, and plexiglass windows were used to isolate people from one another. Attendants were specifically appointed to ensure Covid-19



SOPs and health protocol are followed by voters throughout the voting process. One of the notable measures that the Dutch government took was giving the elderly (people above the age of 70) the option to vote through the mail. This step granted that infection in the vulnerable group can be avoided. Besides that, on March 15 and 16, the polling booths were open for the most vulnerable people to cast their vote that includes the old/aged individual, persons with disabilities, and people with underlying health issues.

In the Netherlands, a voter pass is received by all the individuals who are registered to vote, through the mail, one week prior to the election date. All the individuals must bring their voter pass with them to the polling stations. The individual is identified by their voter's pass which has their unique bar codes. Ballot papers are given to voters once they complete a verification process and receive their voter and identity card. Voters' cards are being taken back from the individuals once they cast their vote so they cannot be reused. The whole process is systematic and smooth.

In the Netherlands, the voter does not have to appear on the electoral list or has to be marked with indelible black ink. This simplicity probably explains why a person's voting time is approximately three minutes in the Netherlands according to the observation made by the EOM.

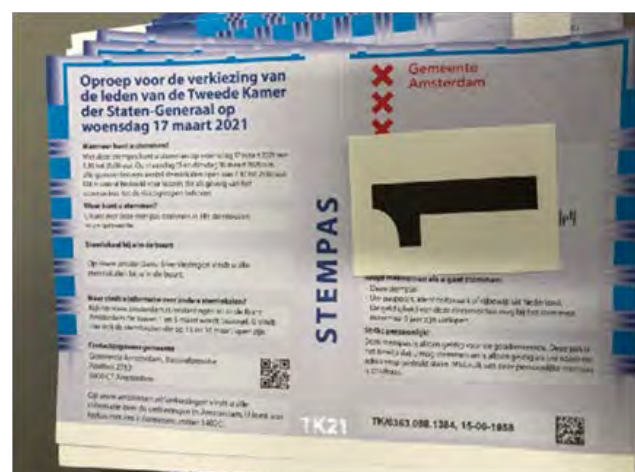


Yellow voter pass is used for Proxy Votes



Green voter pass is used for postal votes

There is no time limit given for completing the ballot paper count. It depends on the number of ballots to be counted, the number of volunteers present, and the number of visitors to the office. The IPC EOM attended the counting process at polling station 245, chaired by Gisele Duetting, and polling station 280 under the supervision of Mohamed El-Mahroun. In polling station 245, 8 volunteers reviewed 484 ballot papers in nearly 4-hours while in 280 polling stations 7-volunteers were assigned to count 687 ballots. It took six hours



Blue voter pass can only be used in polling stations

to complete the count. Each bureau must carry out the counting twice. The first count is considered provisional, it is the second that prevails.

On the initial days, March 15 and 16, the ballot boxes from the polling stations of Amsterdam were collected at 2100hrs. by an impressive logistical device to be stored in a secure room in the Town Hall. These ballot boxes were emptied every evening, and the ballots were counted in the afternoons of March 16, and 17 by volunteers in a huge hall of the municipality. Votes received (several days before) through the mail were also counted on the same day.



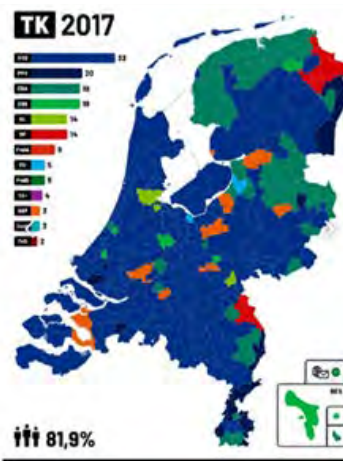
Ballot Box

The civic engagement of the Dutch people is admirable and must be adopted by every developing state. The Netherland government involved the whole community in the process of elections. They mobilized thousands of volunteers to monitor different aspects of the electoral process, to observe the elections, and count votes on each election day. All the members of the polling stations are volunteers whether national, regional, or European and some are volunteering for many years from previous elections. The people of the Netherland respect the vote and oblige his/herself for civic commitment to the country. Since the monitoring and counting are carried out by committed citizens rather than administrative staff, this participatory approach not only reinforces the confidence of the population in the elections but also guarantees transparency and equal opportunities between candidates and their voters.

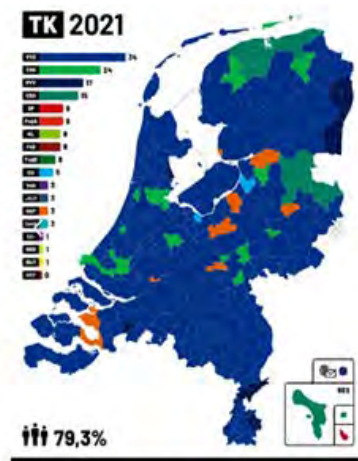
4.1. Assessment of Election Results 2017-2021

The Netherlands despite the ongoing global pandemic held very well-managed elections with a huge voter turnout. If we look towards the last election of the Netherlands, which was

held in 2017 the turnout that was 81.9% marked as higher than any previous Dutch general elections in the twenty-first century. As of 2021 Netherlands parliamentary elections, the turnout has a slight decrease in percentage that is 79.3%, but undoubtedly the greatest surprise for the Netherlands and even the world is that in the current situation the population came out to vote.



Largest Political Party in 2017 Parliamentary Elections with Total voters turn out



Largest Political Party in 2021 Parliamentary Elections with Total voters turn out

COMPARISON BETWEEN 2017 AND 2021 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION RESULTS AND VOTERS TURN OUT

4.2. Official Election Results 2021

PARTY	VOTES	TURNOUT %	SEATS
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy VVD	2,279,130	21.87	34
Democrats 66	1,565,861	15.02	24
Party for Freedom PVV	1,124,482	10.79	17
Christian Democratic Appeal	990,601	9.50	15
Socialist Party	623,371	5.98	9
Labour Party	597,192	5.73	9
GroenLinks	537,308	5.16	8
Forum for Democracy	523,083	5.02	8
Party for the Animals	399,750	3.84	6
Christian Union	351,275	3.37	5
Volt Netherlands	252,480	2.42	3
JA21	246,620	2.37	3
Reformed Political Party	215,249	2.07	3
Denk	211,237	2.03	3
50PLUS	106,702	1.02	1
Farmer–Citizen Movement	104,319	1.00	1
BIJ1	87,238	0.84	1
Code Orange	40,731	0.39	0
NIDA	33,834	0.32	0
Splinter	30,328	0.29	0
Pirate Party	22,816	0.22	0
JONG	15,297	0.15	0

Trots op Nederland	13,198	0.13	0
Henk Krol List	9,264	0.09	0
NLBeter	8,657	0.08	0
List 30	8,277	0.08	0
Libertarian Party	5,546	0.05	0
OpRecht	5,449	0.05	0
Jesus Lives	5,015	0.05	0
The Party Party	3,744	0.04	0
Ubuntu Connected Front	1,880	0.02	0
Free and Social Netherlands	942	0.01	0
Party of Unity	804	0.01	0
We Are the Netherlands	553	0.01	0
Modern Netherlands	245	0.00	0
Party for the Republic	255	0.00	0
The Greens	119	0.00	0
Total	10,422,852	100.00	150

Valid votes	10,422,852	99.62
Invalid/blank votes	39,825	0.38
Total votes	10,462,677	100.00
Registered voters/turnout	13,187,770	79.34 ¹¹

¹¹ Kiesraad. House of Representatives March 17, 2021. <https://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/verkiezingen/detail/TK20210317>

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. In the Netherlands, people with poor vision have the option of using magnifying glass while casting their vote but people with no vision/visually impaired are unable to cast vote on their own. Considering this gap in mind, Netherlands may re-introduce electronic voting at Parliamentary elections that will not only cover the technology used to facilitate the act of casting a vote and to support the electoral process overall but also enables visually impaired voters to complete a ballot paper with the help of an operator or through audio prompts on the phone, or via an electronic voting machine. If re-introducing electronic voting for electoral process is not possible, then they may provide a few braille ballot papers at the polling station to make it possible for visually impaired people to cast vote on their own.
- II. Fraudulent voting is a quite rare aspect in the developed countries but keeping the system and the beliefs of people safeguarded, the ballot box may be made transparent/translucent. It not only ensures that the box is empty before the start of the election process but also keeps a sense of transparency among voters during an election. For example, countries like France, Pakistan use transparent/translucent ballot boxes.
- III. The delegation observed that there was no official media campaign for election candidates and an absence of traditional outreach methods such as billboards, hoardings, and steamer. According to us, limited time can be given to the media campaign for the general public to visualize the candidate's information regarding their attributes, political agendas, and proposed plans.



Inside a polling station during the French presidential election of 2007: election officials and a standard transparent ballot box

Annexure – I

SELECTED PHOTOGRAPHS



City hall, a centralized place for counting votes in Amsterdam. IPC ASG and Vice President IPC with Chief polling Officer



City Hall in Amsterdam, a centralized place where postal and pre-postal votes counts



Honorable Senator Zeeshan Khanzada with Presiding Polling officer at Amsterdam polling Station



Honorable Senator Zeeshan Khanzada, Honorable Vice President IPC Muhammad Ali houmed and Honorable IPC ASG Ijlal Ali Khan at the Polling Station in Hague 2



Honorable Senator Zeeshan Khanzada, Honorable Vice President IPC Muhammad Ali houmed and Honorable IPC ASG Ijlal Ali Khan at the Polling Station in Hague



Polling Station at The Hague near Community Station



Polling Station in The Hague, in Marriot Hotel.
Presiding Polling Officer explaining the procedure of voting



Polling Station Pestana, Amsterdam



Public Voters at the Polling station in the Church, Amsterdam



Reviewing Ballot paper at the polling station in the Hague.



The volunteer staff at the polling station of the Church in Amsterdam.



Volunteer staff at the polling station in Church, Amsterdam after the Polling ends.



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