

Beyond An Election: Rutte vs Wilders

“Anti-Islam and anti-immigration populism got a bloody nose” News agencies have foreshadowed the results in this manner. Everyone who wants to see the defeat of Wilders’ populism has been contented when they read the numbers of seats he takes. Actually, even though the Wilders’ party has ramped the number of seats up, the party could not achieve its goals in this election.

It could not be found exaggerated whether one summarizes the election as *the demise* of PvdA. Their fall reminds us the fall of Liberal Democrats in the UK in 2015 elections. In the Dutch election that has a stunning turnout (82%) Rutte’s VVD gained 33 seats out of 150 (down from 41), while PvdA took only 9 (down from 38). Let’s check out the others: the Christian Democrats and D66 took 19, and Wilders’ PVV had 20.



Mark Rutte and Geert Wilders, during the campaign / AP

One of the significances of the Dutch elections was a chance for testing in what extend pro-European views are sharing among people. When we only think of the numbers, the far-right’s anti-EU populism is not in a position to be nervous about that yet. The parties which support the EU membership compose the majority. Thus, many European leaders were eager to congratulate Rutte as soon as the results came. *“Wilders could not win the election. I am relieved, but we need to continue to fight for an open and Free Europe.”* German socialist leader Martin Schulz tweeted. For Francois Hollande of France, it was *a clear victory against extremism*, while Germany’s Angela Merkel called *a good day for democracy*. The winner of the night, Mark Rutte said: *“It is also an evening in which the Netherlands, after Brexit, after the American elections, said ‘stop’ to the wrong kind of populism.”*

He will be able to create a new coalition but so as to reach the majority, he needs more than 75 seats. It eventually leads to a four-parties coalition. Absolutely, one of the most prominent candidates for the partnership is GreenLeft whose a remarkable charismatic leader Jesse Klaver who quadrupled his number of MP’s from 4 to 16. The chairwoman of Greens, Marjolein Meijer said: *“This is a fantastic result for us.”* She underlines the *“very fertile ground in the Netherlands for change and a positive and hopeful story. For us, this is just the beginning.”* The Dutch political spectrum maintained its fragmented and fragile structure. Thus, we can easily say that small parties have the power to affect Rutte’s route both in negotiations for the coalition and later. However, it seems predictable that the coalition VVD party had with Labor can no longer be

renewed so that Rutte would search for new partners among small junior parties.

Table 1. Seats Won in House of Representative Elections, 2010-17

	2017 (projected)	2012	2010
People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	33	41	31
Party for Freedom (PVV)	20	15	24
Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)	19	13	21
Democrats 66 (D66)	19	12	10
Socialist Party (SP)	14	15	15
GreenLeft (GL)	14	4	10
Labor Party (PvdA)	9	38	30
Christian Union (CU)	5	5	5
Party for the Animals (PvdD)	5	2	2
50PLUS	4	2	-
Reformed Political Party (SGP)	3	3	2
Denk	3	-	-
Forum for Democracy (FVD)	2	-	-

Source: Migration Policy Institute

Wilders Effect on Immigration Policy

Just before the night of voting, it was supposed that the recent diplomatic clash with Turkey may have a substantial effect on the voters. Now, we have not adequate data to check the truth of this argument. If there will be an *after-election poll*, it would shed a light on this. The one-page manifesto of Wilders’ PVV vows *de-Islamization of the Netherlands* accompanied by a strict ban on *Muslim immigrants*. I intentionally write as such because in a few times he expressed that the Netherlands would accept Christian immigrants who face discrimination in the Muslim countries. So they would not pose a challenge to *the Judeo-Christian roots* of the Netherlands, that are often stressed by Wilders’ discourses. Here, the quintessential threat,

according to Wilders’ worldview, is nothing more than the presence of Islam in different spheres of life. His manifesto also includes promises for banning the use of Islamic symbols like the headscarf, hijab, and so on. Prohibiting mosques and Koran is another stunning goal that is explained in the party’s statements. Since 2004, when he started to a political career within VVD, Wilders has been known for being against the membership of Turkey in the EU. In this way, he has resigned from VVD due to its partial support for Turkey’s membership. That’s why anyone could get surprised whether a Wilders government follow a way as Rutter’s has done in the Dutch-Turkish political row. For the election, some analysts remark that a changeover from Wilders’ PVV to Rutte’s VVD. Whatever, the palpable thing is just presence of a populist leader compels the others to defend their authentic positions. It is not realistic to expect a political leader whose the carrier attached to the tendencies of voters, who object to the agitation of demagogues like Wilders. I mean, in a country that has a Wilders, to be a liberal would be imponderably difficult! Perhaps a “liberal” Dutch can give the proper answer.

There are strong indicators to make sense of how the Wilders-effect forces the others to dislocate their positions, especially on immigration. The PM Rutte published an open letter contains a “thinly veiled” warnings to immigrants: *“People who don’t want to adapt, attacking our habits and rejecting our values who attack gay people, who shout at women in short skirts, or call ordinary Dutch people racist.”* “I understand the people who think that if you so fundamentally reject our land, I prefer that you leave” he wrote. Actually, the last sentence was so much obvious as well as striking: *“Act normal or go away”*. Similarly, the leader of Christian Democratic Party, Sybrand Buma

proposed that all students must learn and sing the Dutch national anthem in the schools. On the other hand, the leader of the Social Democrats mentioned *progressive patriotism* includes a criticism against labor migration within the EU.

What Is the Real Problem?

It would not be realistic to expect that individuals can resist against populist discourses. Instead, we should expect that institutions can accomplish it, if they can.



Wilders is known for also his Euro-sceptic stance

The welfare, that can trigger asylum seekers to face up to dangerous long journeys, is just an achievement of “the institutions” of the Netherlands. However, Wilders is like a voice of some people fall apart from the welfare of those institutions. There are rising concerns about the relatively

high rate of young unemployment that exceed 11 percent. Also, the pension system is the tendency of diminishing. That’s why I want to emphasize that neither Wilders nor Trump has a self-appointed legitimation or charisma but they are just aftermaths of the exclusion of a part of the society. Even if one day they will be set aside or defeated, another demagogue would abuse the dissatisfaction of this part of the society. In this context, immigrants in each country have central significance in the struggle with harmful populism.

Featured Photo: Jerry Lapen/ CNP