How Do European Dutch Citizens Feel about the Kingdom?

Parliamentary Elections and an Opinion Survey

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Prof. dr. Wouter Veenendaal
w.p.veenendaal@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

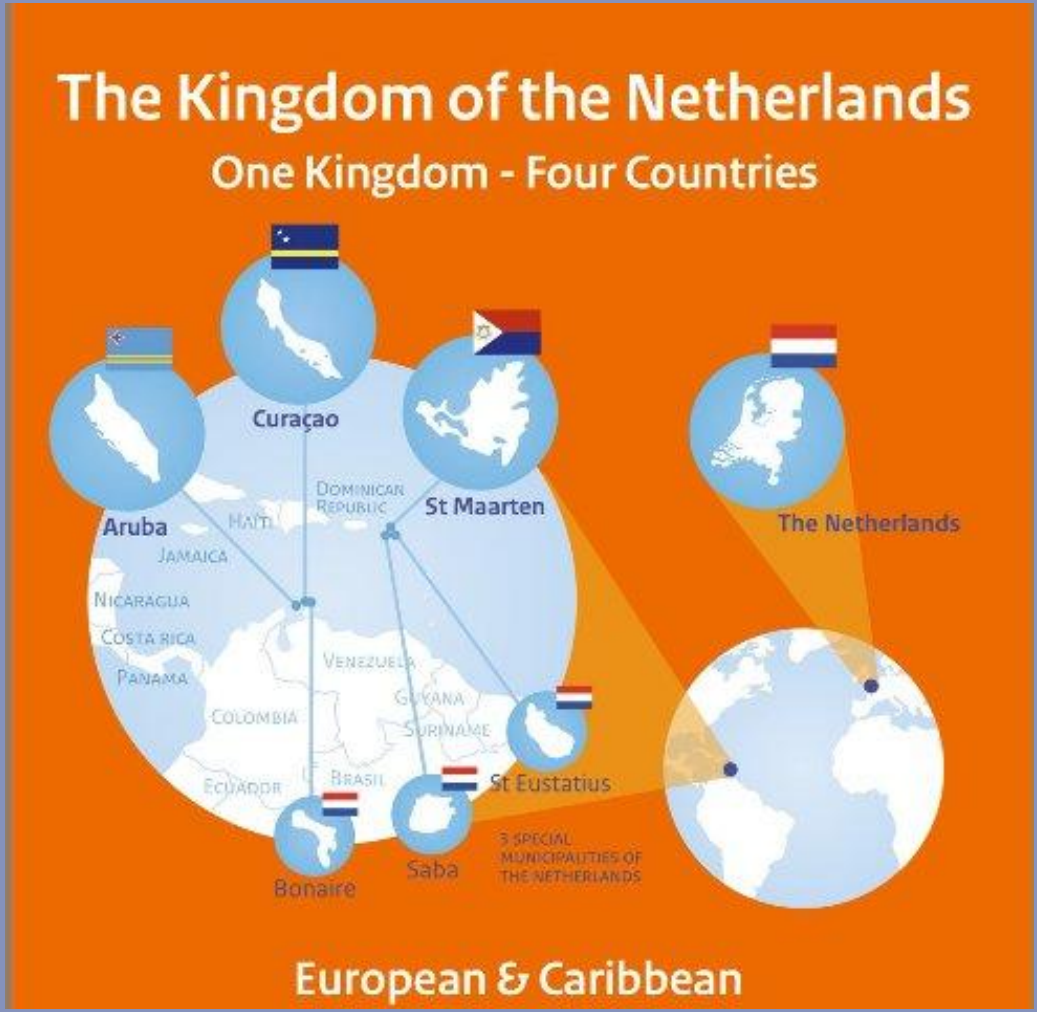
Universiteit Leiden

Instituut Politieke Wetenschap
Universiteit Leiden

Agenda for this Lecture

- Background and structure of the Kingdom
- Social and political context of the European Netherlands
  - Opinion survey results
- The 2025 parliamentary elections
  - Election manifestos
  - Results and potential coalitions
- Consequences for St. Maarten and the Kingdom

Structure of the Kingdom



The Charter for the Kingdom (1954)

- Kingdom with three countries (Netherlands, Netherlands Antilles, Suriname)
- Countries are autonomous; the Kingdom has a limited role
- Countries are equivalent
- The Kingdom exists to achieve common goals and provide mutual assistance
- <u>Kingdom affairs:</u>
  1. Foreign affairs, defence, nationality, monarchy
  2. Protecting democracy, human rights, and good governance

But…

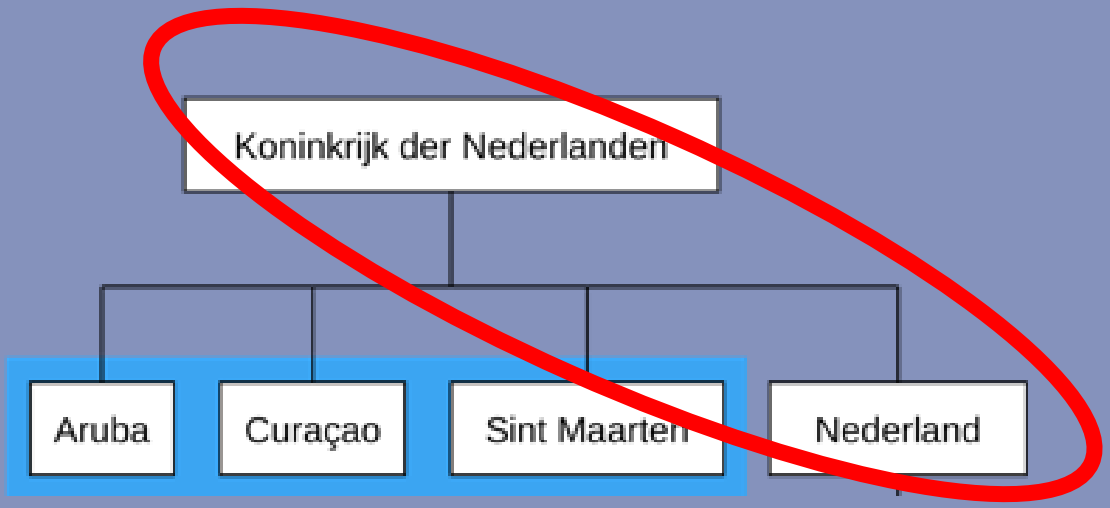
<u>The government of the Kingdom overlaps with that of the Netherlands</u>

- Kingdom government = Dutch government + 3 plenipotentiary ministers
- Chair of the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom = Dutch Prime Minister
- Therefore, in reality, the distinction between the Kingdom government and the Dutch government is difficult to make

<u>There is no Kingdom parliament</u>

- Only the Dutch parliament can scrutinize and hold the Kingdom government accountable
- Citizens of the Caribbean countries do not have the right to vote in this parliament
- The Dutch parliament adopts laws and treaties that apply to the entire Kingdom, including the three Caribbean countries

Structure of the Kingdom



Kingdom Policies of the Netherlands

• 1954 – 1969	abstinence
• 1969 – 1990s	trying to move the islands towards independence
• 1990s – nu	more intensive involvement
• Rutte I - Rutte III (2010 – 2022)	tough stance (Donner, Spies, Plasterk, Knops)
• Rutte IV (2022 – 2024)	somewhat softer stance (v. Huffelen)
• Schoof (2024 – 2025)	tough stance (Szabo, v. Marum)

Kingdom Policies Since 2010

Caribbean Countries (Aruba, Curaçao, St. Maarten):

- Tough on finances and integrity; mostly absent on other issues
- Irma (2017) and Covid-19 (2020-2022): loans in exchange for concessions
- Doubts about the autonomy of the Caribbean countries
  - Knops (2020): autonomy is "fictitious"; countries "cannot carry" it
- 2020-2023: discussion about the Kingdom Act COHO
- Since 2020: Country Packages and Temporary Work Organizations
- Long-standing discussions about the democratic deficit and dispute settlement mechanism

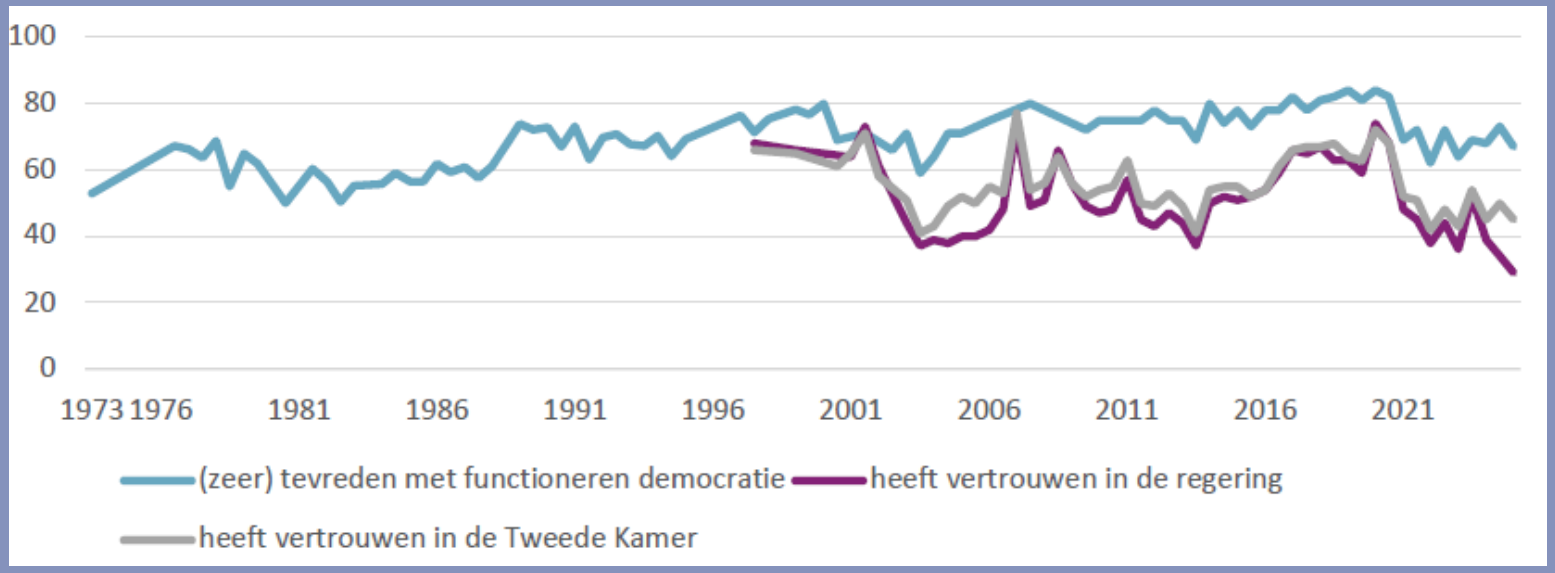
Kingdom Policies Since 2010

Caribbean Netherlands (Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustatius)

- Huge investments in education and healthcare since 2010, but almost all policies are determined from The Hague ("recolonization")
- The starting point is the same laws and regulations as in the European Netherlands, but there is a legal basis for exceptions ("comply or explain")
- The cost of living is 1,5 times higher than in the European Netherlands
  - 35% of the population lives below the poverty line (Thodé Report)
- Social services were only recently or still not aligned with European Netherlands
- Administrative takeover of St. Eustatius (2018-2024)
- Administrative agreements with all three islands

Socio-Political Context European Netherlands

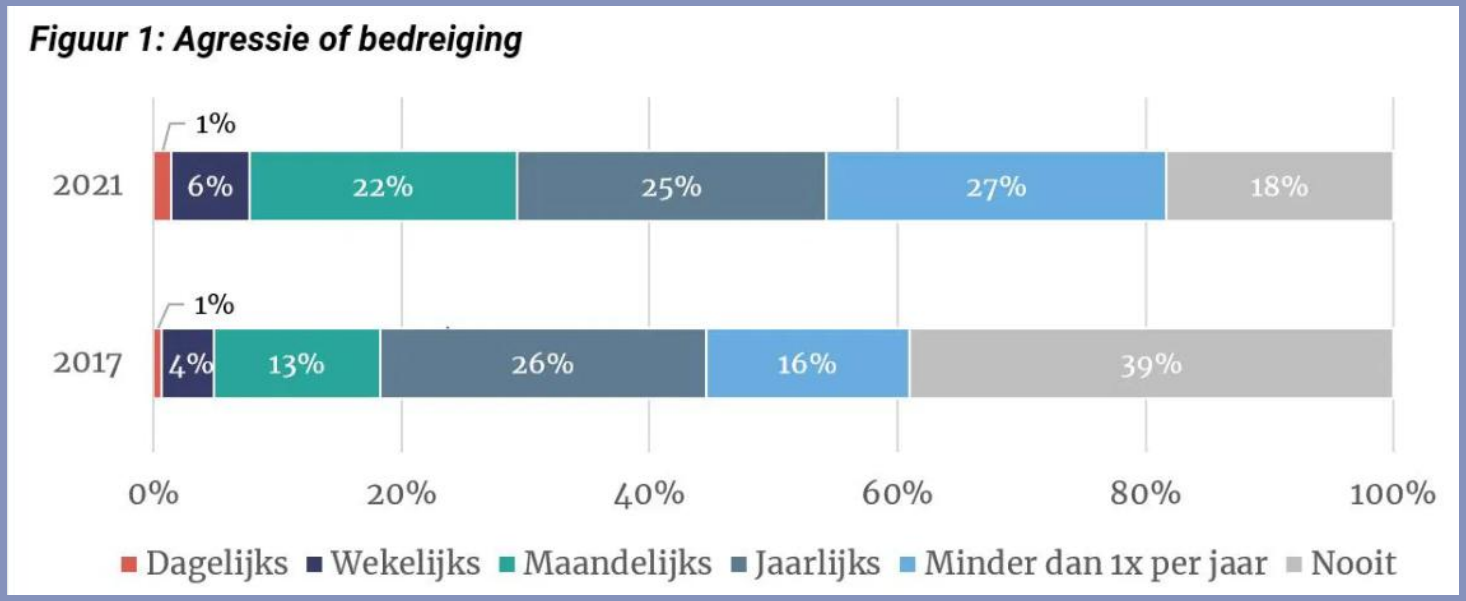
- Growing distrust in politics; cynicism and apathy



- Growth of populist and radical parties (especially PVV)
- Growing political polarization; hostile relations parties

Socio-Political Context European Netherlands

- Last 5 years: political instability and gridlock
- Pressure on the rule of law; risk of democratic erosion
- Increasing agression and intimidation towards politicians and journalists



Friday Last Week…

Leader of Dutch far-right PVV suggests Tuesday election was rigged, but has no evidence

Opinions about the Kingdom

De Hond 2008: "the relationship with the Antilles should end"

- Agree 49% Disagree 37% Don't know / no opinion 14%

De Hond 2015 (instructed by the PVV):

"Financial mismanagement and/or fraud are common in the Netherlands Antilles. Do you think this should lead the Netherlands to completely end all ties with those islands??"

- Yes 61% No 33% Don't know / no opinion 6%

New Opinion Survey conducted by the Chair (2025):

- Carried out by the LISS panel (Tilburg University)
- Extensive online questionnaire; both questions and propositions
- Completed by 2,843 of 3,657 respondents = response rate of 77,7%

Opinion Survey Kingdom Affairs (2025)

Table 2: How familiar or unfamiliar are you with Kingdom relations between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom? (Most common answer in bold)

I am very familiar with that	1,2%
I am somewhat familiar with that	22,5%
I am not very familiar with that	**56,2%**
I am (completely) unfamiliar with that	18,4%
No answer	1,6%

Opinion Survey Kingdom Affairs (2025)

Table 3: Statements about political relations (most common answer in bold)

	Fully agree	Agree	Disagree	Fully disagree	No answer	Don't know / no opinion
The political relationship between the European Netherlands and the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom must remain as is	4,9%	27,7%	15,7%	4,6%	0,9%	**45,8%**
The Caribbean countries in the Kingdom (Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten) should become a province of the Netherlands	3,3%	10,1%	32,7%	13,3%	0,9%	**39,1%**
The Caribbean islands should become completely independent	12,0%	28,1%	16,3%	3,8%	0,8%	**38,5%**

Opinion Survey Kingdom Affairs (2025)

Table 4: Statements on other topics (most common answer in bold)

	Fully agree	Agree	Disagree	Fully disagree	No answer	Don't know / no opinion
The Netherlands should no longer provide financial support to the Caribbean islands within the Kingdom.	6,5%	15,9%	**37,6%**	10,8%	0,8%	27,8%
All Dutch citizens living in Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten should be given the right to vote in elections for the Dutch parliament	4,9%	19,0%	**33,4%**	13,1%	0,8%	28,4%
Residents of the Caribbean islands should no longer be allowed to move freely to the Netherlands.	5,7%	15,6%	**36,6%**	15,4%	0,9%	25,3%

Opinion Survey Kingdom Affairs (2025)

Table 4: Statements on other topics (most common answer in bold)

	Fully agree	Agree	Disagree	Fully disagree	No answer	Don't know / no opinion
The Netherlands must ensure that residents of the Caribbean municipalities (Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius) have the same social benefits as European Dutch citizens	8,9%	**31,8%**	23,0%	6,2%	0,8%	28,8%
The Netherlands has a moral obligation to care for the Caribbean islands	11,5%	**44,6%**	15,2%	4,9%	0,9%	22,4%
In Dutch education, more attention should be paid to Kingdom relations	16,5%	**53,6%**	6,9%	2,4%	0,9%	19,2%

Opinions and Party Preferences

- Relatively few differences between the opinions of supporters of the various parties
- PVV (& FVD): no financial support; no free migration
- Biggest difference is about equal social services for the Caribbean Netherlands
  - Supporters GL-PvdA, D66, CDA, SP and CU are in favor
  - Supporters VVD, PVV, BBB and NSC are against

Elections 29 October 2025

Traditional party positions (1990s – 2020s)

End of Kingdom PVV	**Tough stance (Commonwealth)** VVD SP
Softer stance (keep Charter) CDA GROEN LINKS PvdA D66 Christen Unie	**More equal Kingdom** DENK BIJ1

Election Programmes 2025

BBB:

- Deterring the aggressive socialist dictatorship of Venezuela
- Direct high-quality cable connection between the Netherlands and the Caribbean Netherlands

CDA:

- Close, historic ties with the Caribbean part of the Kingdom
- Poverty reduction and infrastructure improvements in the Caribbean Netherlands
- Special growth fund for Bonaire: investing in the living environment and social services
- Strengthening knowledge exchange and cultural cooperation with Caribbean countries
- Working towards better financial management on the islands

Election Programmes 2025

ChristenUnie:

- Inseparable ties; attention to the wounds of colonial history
- Working together on poverty reduction, housing, climate, and environment
- Investing in security in the Caribbean Netherlands; social services (unemployment benefits, social assistance) must be standardized
- Investing in safety; improving police investigative capacity
- Resolving the democratic deficit in the Kingdom
- Combating human trafficking and the gambling industry
- Recognizing the sins of the slavery past; focusing on its impact on society

DENK:

- Reparations for slavery past
- Keti Koti becomes a national holiday
- Decent social minimum in the Caribbean Netherlands; investing in poverty reduction
- Caribbean students must have easier access to education in the Netherlands

Election Programmes 2025

D66:

- Investing in the green economy, housing, and education on islands
- Social minimum in the Caribbean Netherlands, linked to cost of living
- Developing a climate plan for the Caribbean Netherlands; nature restoration
- Investing in infrastructure on Bonaire
- Lowering the threshold for residents of countries to vote in European elections
- Working on social awareness of the history of slavery

FVD:

- Proud of our shared history; strengthening ties
- Caribbean islands become a springboard for Dutch venture entrepreneurs
- Flying within the Kingdom will become completely tax-free
- Caribbean islands could become "the Florida of the Netherlands"; strengthening the Dutch sphere of influence in the Caribbean and Latin America

Election Programmes 2025

GL-PvdA:

- Protecting coral reefs and biodiversity in the Caribbean Netherlands
- Dutch citizens in the Caribbean countries will gain the right to vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate
- Ending second-class citizenship in the Caribbean Netherlands; introducing a decent social minimum
- More cooperation between the four countries to address problems
- Preserving and promoting Papiamento

JA21:

- The Netherlands should guarantee safety of the Caribbean countries

Partij voor de Dieren:

- Protect nature; combat mass tourism and illegal construction
- Climate budget for the Caribbean Netherlands to facilitate adaptation

Election Programmes 2025

PVV: nothing

SGP:
- Combating drug trafficking and crime
- Dedicated space for medical-ethical issues in the Caribbean Netherlands
- Adequate social minimum for the Caribbean Netherlands
- Opportunities to study in the Netherlands must be expanded

SP:
- Focusing on sustainability and climate adaptation; tackling illegal coastal construction
- Collaborating within the Kingdom based on equality
- Residents of the Caribbean Netherlands have the right to equivalent facilities

Election Programmes 2025

VOLT:

- Strengthen civil society in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom
- Promote access to EU funds for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom
- Guarantee human rights for Venezuelan refugees
- Combat the negative effects of climate change
- Secured seats for the islands of the Caribbean Netherlands
- Social minimum for the Caribbean Netherlands; reduce food costs
- Invest in infrastructure (buses, roads), telephone services, and postal services in the Caribbean Netherlands
- Stop construction of resorts, hotels, and residential areas on Bonaire

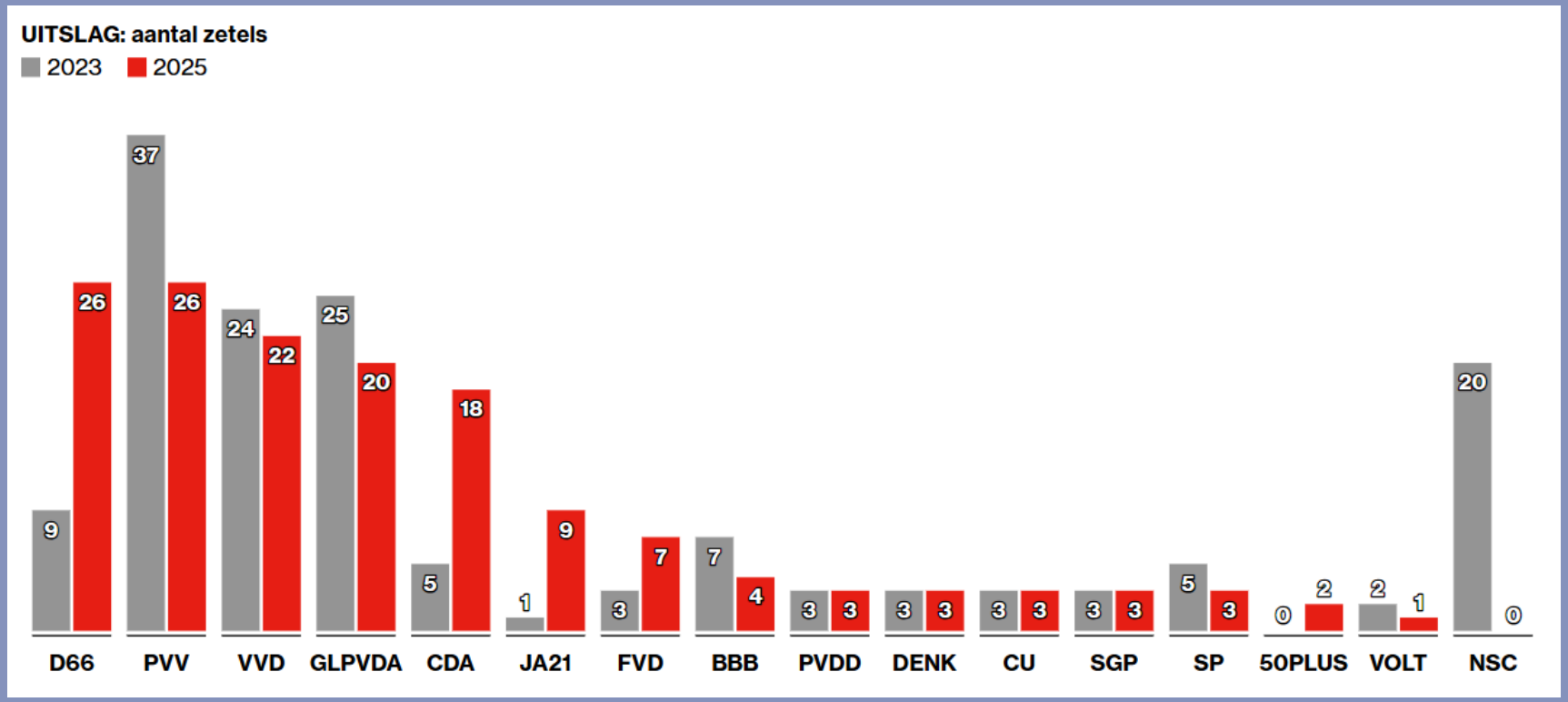
VVD:

- Improve ethical governance, sound finances, and combat corruption
- Caribbean countries must be financially self-sufficient
- Requirements for residence must be similar to the Eur. Netherlands
- All islands must have the opportunity to become independent

Party Positions 2025

End or hard line	Unclear	More equality in Kingdom
PVV VVD	BBB JA21 Forum voor Democratie	CDA GroenLinks PvdA D66 SP ChristenUnie Partij voor de Dieren Volt DENK SGP

Result of the Elections



How Did Caribbean Islands Vote?

Results Caribbean Netherlands:

Turnout:	Bonaire **21,5%**	Saba **29,8%**	St. Eustatius **9,7% (!)**

Bonaire:	D66 **22,6%**	CU **15,7%**	GL-PVDA **12,4%**	PVV **11,8%**
Saba:	D66 **45,2%**	GL-PVDA **25,0%**	PVV **9,2%**	NSC **7,7%**
St. Eustatius:	NSC **34,8%**	D66 **24,1%**	GL-PVDA **16,0%**	CDA **7,0%**

Results Caribbean Countries:

Aruba:	648 votes	D66 (182)	GL-PVDA (125)
Curaçao:	1.195 votes	D66 (286)	VVD (216)
St. Maarten:	176 votes	D66 (48)	GL-PVDA (25)

Possible Coalitions

Centre:	D66-VVD-PVDA/GL-CDA	(**86/150**)
Right-wing:	D66-VVD-CDA-JA21-BBB / CU	(**79-78/150**)
Minority	*D66-VVD-CDA*	*(66/150)*

Consequences for St. Maarten

- Good Governance & Public Finance
- Country Packages, TWO, and Cooperation
- Democratic Deficit & Dispute Resolution Mechanism
- Foreign Affairs & Defence
- Dealing with Slavery Past

But Persons Matter Too!

In Broader Perspective

- 10-10-2025: Fifteen years of autonomy for St. Maarten
- During this period, the role of the Kingdom/the Netherlands has steadily increased
- Positive: The Kingdom's involvement is less one-sided; it also focuses on education, healthcare, and law enforcement
- Risk: The gap between autonomy on paper and autonomy in practice is widening
- Negative: The Kingdom's administrative role is growing, but the influence of St. Maarteners on that governance is lacking
- Therefore: Resolving the democratic deficit is becoming increasingly important

The Democratic Deficit

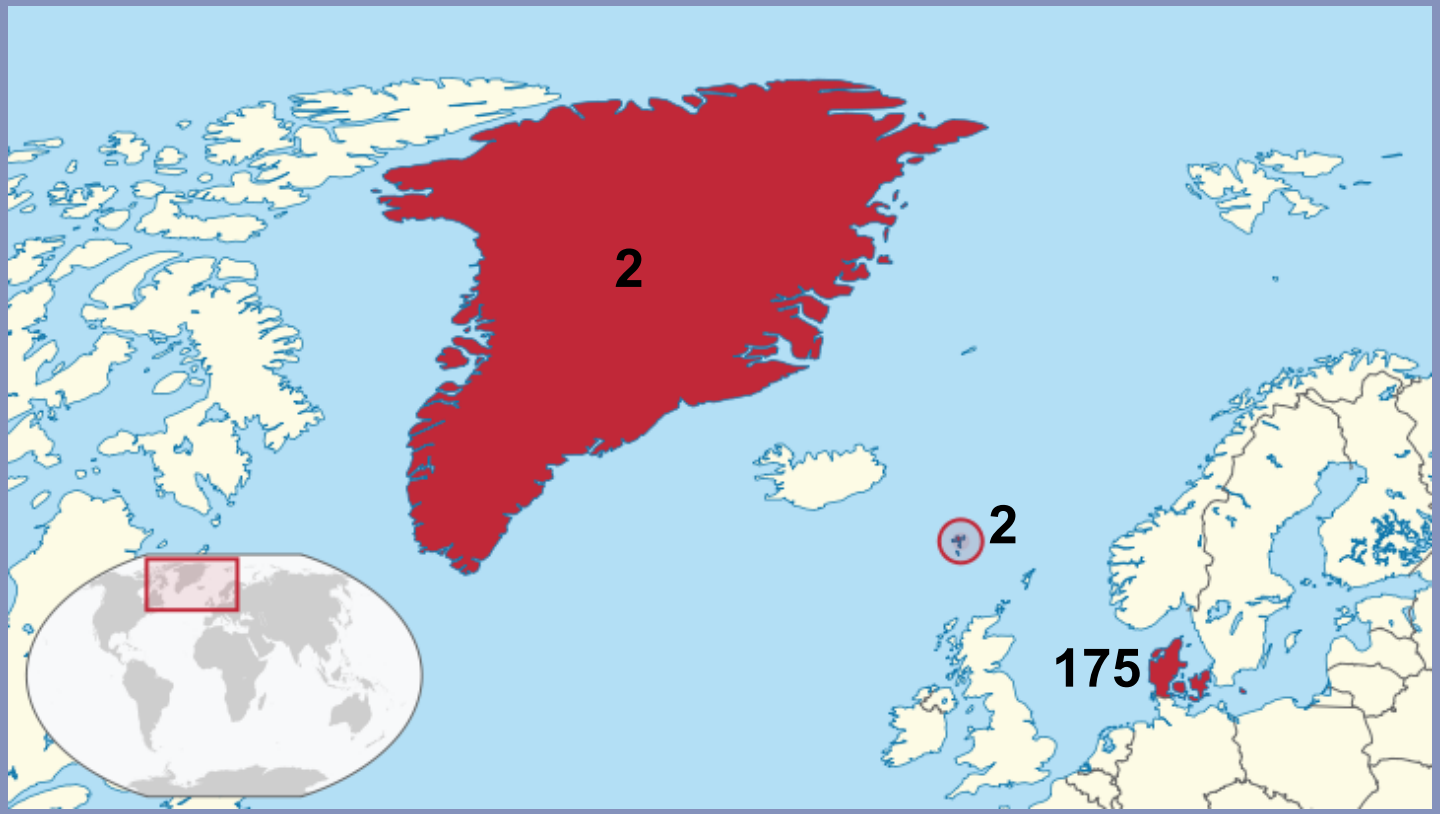
<u>More than just a constitutional issue:</u>

- Contrary to the basic principles of democracy ("*no taxation without representation*") and the principle of equivalence in the Charter
- Reinforces the perception of second-class citizenship among Caribbean Dutch citizens
- Reinforces the lack of interest and knowledge among European Dutch citizens
- Ensures that the Kingdom's actions are determined by Dutch political interests
  - Dutch parties can score points by taking a tough stance toward the islands

Solution 1: Active Voting Rights

- Council of State (2024): grant all Dutch citizens in the Caribbean countries the right to vote for the Dutch parliament
- Advantage: this only requires amending Dutch legislation, so a complex amendment to the Charter is unnecessary
- Disadvantage: it doesn't fit well with the structure of the Kingdom
- Disadvantage: this gives residents of Caribbean countries influence on internal Dutch affairs
- Disadvantage: the electoral quota in the Netherlands is around 70,000; there's a high probability that no Caribbean party will reach that threshold, meaning no representation
  - The likelihood of Dutch parties attracting votes is slim

Solution 2: Danish variant



Folketing (179 seats): 175 seats from Denmark, 2 seats from Faroe Islands & 2 seats from Greenland

Applied to the Kingdom

- 3 of the 150 seats for Caribbean countries, or 3 Caribbean seats added to the existing 150
- Advantage: guaranteed representation from the Caribbean countries
  - Only 3 seats, but their influence should not be underestimated (see Denmark and small parties in the Netherlands)
- Disadvantage: residents of Caribbean countries gain influence on internal Dutch affairs
- Disadvantage: how to distribute them among the three Caribbean countries? Curaçao has three times the population of St. Maarten
- Disadvantage: more complex changes (but combined with a new electoral system?)

Solution 3: Kingdom Parliament

- Establishing a separate Kingdom Parliament (via a Danish variant) alongside a permanent Dutch parliament
  - A Kingdom Parliament focuses solely on Kingdom affairs
- Advantage: Best suited to the Kingdom's structure
- Advantage: No influence on Caribbean residents' internal Dutch affairs
- Disadvantage: Is it possible to clearly distinguish between Dutch and Kingdom affairs?
- Disadvantage: What does this mean for the relationship between parliaments and the government?
  - Senate: Not impossible, but more complex.

Conclusions

- Dutch politics are becoming more polarized and unstable, with a potential for democratic erosion
- This has not affected the Kingdom yet, but that may happen
- Elections 2025: a clear divide between parties that want to improve Kingdom relations and parties with a tougher stance
- The new coalition will include parties of both kinds, so no major changes in Kingdom affairs should be expected
  - But: it also depends on the individual (junior) ministers
- An increasingly assertive Kingdom government and an increasingly polarized Dutch political context means that addressing the democratic deficit becomes ever more important

Questions & Discussion

Be part of the Kingdom Chair network!