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Geert Wilders' Islam-critical party PVV jumped ahead in the final weeks and days of the Dutch general election, enabled by Islamism's return to the front pages in the wake of Hamas' terror attack of October 7. The Gaza War and anti-Israel protests, which also in the Netherlands were frequently hijacked by anti-Semites, Islamists, and Hamas apologists, seem to have reminded Dutch voters of longstanding worries about Islamization and migration from the Middle East. Yet, despite the logical nexus between those worries and Wilders' electoral surge, the extent of this surge only became apparent when the exit polls came out.

Up to election day, PVV had polled on par with three centrist parties. However, shocking the political and journalistic order, PVV won by a landslide, capturing 37 seats out of 150, a quarter of the Dutch lower house. It eclipses GL/PvdA, an alliance between the Social Democrats and the Greens, led by former European Commissioner Frans Timmermans, which came in a distant second with 25 seats. The right-liberal VVD of outgoing Prime Minister Rutte, now led by Dilan Yeşilgöz, won 24 seats. NSC (New Social Contract), a split-off from the Christian Democratic CDA, gained 20 seats, primarily based on the popularity of its frontman, the able parliamentarian Pieter Omtzigt. The rest of the total of 26 competing parties remained small or disappeared from the map.

Wilders' PVV had never ended first in a general election since its inception in 2006. The party is best understood as a post-9/11 party, driven by concerns about Islam's cultural influence and Islamist terrorist violence and focused on stemming mass migration from the Muslim world. Although it was among the major parties in every general election, it had seemed to have run out of steam, lacking any significant policy successes, partly due to the mediocrity of its top echelon and partly because the party was for its entire existence, excluded from executive power by the established centrist parties. Meanwhile, Islamism and Islamic terror seemed to lose their grip on the public imagination, receiving less attention over the years. Even a deadly Islamist terror attack on a streetcar in Utrecht in 2019 disappeared from the Dutch news after a few days.

But the old post-9/11 mood has been brought back by Hamas' terror attack on Israeli civilians and the war between Israel and Hamas that followed, no matter how much the

reporting on this war in the mainstream Dutch and Anglosphere media tilted against the Jewish state and excused the rampant anti-Semitism currently spreading throughout the Western world. While Islamic protesters with black flags and green headbands marched through Dutch streets chanting anti-Semitic slogans and Jewish commemorations and events had to be canceled for security reasons, an endless stream of news articles demonized Israel by suggesting it would randomly kill civilians in Gaza out of bloodlust. Anyone who has been gullibly reading the mainstream Dutch press for the past two months will have thought that the Israeli army has it out for doctors and patients and is, essentially, waging war against unarmed hospitals, like a Don Quixote fighting windmills, but with the human rights violations. So, the interpretations Dutch journalists disseminated were, in terms of content, certainly not favorable to Wilders' PVV, but they worked to the latter's advantage via agenda-setting. The coverage shifted attention to Islam and terrorism, and those are topics on which Wilders tends to do well electorally. Mainstream Dutch journalists, on the whole, tried to direct the Dutch audience away from his political interpretations, but, as is typical, the journalistic media were more effective in guiding people's attention than they were at convincing people to believe X, Y, or Z about what their attention had been directed toward.

Meanwhile, images of Islamist demonstrations spread through social media. The IS-like flags instilled fear; every scary black flag spotted in a Dutch city recruited new voters for Wilders. To many ordinary people, the country seemed out of control. The impression arose that because of the high number of Muslim immigrants, the Netherlands could hardly defend itself against Islamic interference and blackmail and, therefore, moved along with a Middle-Eastern wave of anti-Semitism. Suddenly, many Dutch voters remembered their opposition to mass migration from Muslim countries. Wilders—the Bush-era parliamentary veteran who worked at a moshav farm in the West Bank at age seventeen and has maintained a decidedly hawkish, pro-Israeli stance throughout his adult life—was dusted off.

Still, though this electoral logic seems easy to discern in retrospect, there is great consternation over the election outcome, especially among journalists and public intellectuals. Kaan Özgök, a Dutch commentator who describes himself as a “politically orphaned leftist,” [mocks](#) these “whiners,” tweeting the morning after the election: “What were those prominent whiners thinking? That all those Islamonazist street parties after October 7 would go electorally unpunished?”

However, the fact that Wilders became the biggest in the election does not mean he will automatically become prime minister. A government needs a majority or near-majority in parliament, so the PVV will have to form a coalition with other parties. But the centrist parties have excluded Wilders from executive power for 17 years and may continue to do so despite his spectacular election victory. The electorate is not the only thing that matters in liberal-democratic practice; to the contrary, political and bureaucratic elites are at least as important. The established and centrist parties, let alone the regime of the administrative state, which, in our day and age, is a self-standing ideological force, will not give in so easily.

That is not to say that a governing coalition excluding Wilders can now easily take form, although such a formation is possible theoretically and constitutionally. Timmermans,

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Omtzigt, and Yeşilgöz could form a cabinet and ignore Wilders. Still, the problem is that Timmermans and Yeşilgöz are too big to become junior partners in such a formation. Whichever of those two gives the premiership to the other will lose at the next election. The parties are incentivized to go through the motions ritualistically while blaming each other for failing to form a government, after which new elections may eventually have to be called.

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