DEMOCRACY VOLUNTEERS

Netherlands Parliamentary Elections
29th October 2025

Democracy
Volunteers
the election observers

Our mission is to improve the quality of democratic elections, by advising those who legislate for, administer and oversee elections, to enhance them for the benefit of voters.

We aim to do this by attending elections and empirically reporting our findings in an accessible way through statistical analysis and interlocutor meetings to support this objective. We do this through a strong methodology, based on the international standards for election observation as set out by OSCE/ODIHR and others.

We maintain strict impartiality and require our observers to abide by international standards, as well as the relevant local legal framework, when acting as our observers.

We aim to report on our observations in a constructive and encouraging way to benefit the delivery of democracy and to benefit the electorate as a whole.

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Dutch Parliamentary Elections
2025 Final Report

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the election process in The Netherlands.
2. To advise election officials on the results of the observation for the improvement of the electoral practice.
3. To support these election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.
4. To report to national political representatives on the findings of the report.

Democracy Volunteers in The Netherlands

2025 was the 8th time Democracy Volunteers has deployed observers to The Netherlands. Democracy Volunteers has previously observed the following elections in The Netherlands, namely:

- Dutch Parliamentary Elections 2023
- Dutch Provincial and Waterboard Elections 2023
- Dutch Municipal Elections 2022
- European Parliamentary Elections 2019
- Dutch Provincial and Waterboard Elections 2019
- Dutch Municipal Elections and Advisory Referendum 2018
- Dutch Parliamentary Elections 2017

As a member of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM), Democracy Volunteers has an agreed code of conduct for observers. All observers are trained and briefed before deployment on polling day, and they sign the organisation's code of conduct before observing. Our observer teams observe in teams of two, completing an online form once they have made their observations in each polling station.

Funding

All 32 observers deployed to observe the Dutch elections did so at their own cost or were supported from the general funds of the organisation. No finance was sought, or received, from any party or organisation, whether internal or external to The Netherlands, for the observation or this final report. Our observations are wholly independent of any institution.

Core Team

Dr John Ault FRSA FRGS (United Kingdom) - Head of Mission for the 2025 Dutch Parliamentary Elections and is the Executive Director of Democracy Volunteers.

John has worked in elections throughout the UK, Europe, and the United States since the 1980s. He has observed on behalf of the OSCE/ODIHR and the UK Parliament's Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in parliamentary elections as wide-ranging as Kazakhstan and the Isle of Man. He is a former chair of the UK's Electoral Reform Society and has previously been elected to local government and the UK's South-West Regional Assembly.

John has observed numerous elections for Democracy Volunteers, including Swedish and Norwegian parliamentary elections, the UK general elections in 2017, 2019 and 2024, the Finnish presidential and parliamentary elections in 2018, 2019, 2023 and 2025 as well as eight Dutch elections from 2017 to 2025. He has been an academic consultant on electoral and parliamentary reform in Moldova. He is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter and has previously lectured at several UK universities. He has also been a Research Fellow for the Constitution Society, writing the recent article 'An accident waiting to happen? Voter ID in the 2023 English local elections.' He specialises in elections and campaigns and has published several books, including his doctoral thesis on electoral campaigning.

Harry Busz FRSA (United Kingdom) is Democracy Volunteers' Deputy Director. He was Deputy Head of Mission for 2024 UK General Election. Harry is a graduate in Human Geography at Cardiff University, holds an MA in International Relations from Exeter University and is currently researching for his PhD in Politics at Newcastle University. His research focuses on electoral integrity and the role of international, regional, and domestic observer groups in improving electoral practices across the OSCE region.

He has participated in multiple domestic and international observations such as in The Netherlands.

Ben Sharpe (United Kingdom) is now Deputy Director (Operations) for Democracy Volunteers, and has observed elections across a dozen countries. Ben has a strong interest in finding the ways in which electoral processes operate in practice. The doctoral research which he's conducting within the Institute of Cornish Studies, at the University of Exeter is to identify possible solutions to the challenges of delivering elections in remote areas of the UK.

Having completed undergraduate studies at the University of Manchester and then postgraduate research at the University of Leiden, before matriculating as a doctoral student at the University of Exeter in 2024, Ben Sharpe worked within election administration for several years, delivering elections at various levels of government.

Reuben Hellier (United Kingdom) first observed with Democracy Volunteers for the 2024 UK Local Elections in May, joining the team shortly after for the following General Election as a researcher and technical assistant, developing new and existing technologies to support and update the tools that our observations teams used. Having just completed his Bachelor's degree in Computer Science and Mathematics, at the University of Manchester, his research has recently been published in a symposium.

Since then he has continued working with Democracy Volunteers, having now observed in 2025 English Local Elections along with UK By-Elections and several international elections around Europe and North America.

Election Experts

Karen Freel (United Kingdom) has been a Government Relations Consultant for over a decade running her own consultancy. Previously, she worked for a Member of the European Parliament, served as a member of Aberdeen City Council and as Convenor of Grampian Fire Board.
Karen has a BA(Hons) in Politics and Sociology from Glasgow Caledonia University and an MSc in European Politics, Law and Management from Robert Gordon University.
Karen has participated in numerous election observations throughout the UK and also in the Netherlands**.**

Jane Luke (Canada) is a Canadian election administrator based in Vancouver, British Columbia. She has observed numerous international elections as a short and long term observer, and core team member, with Democracy Volunteers and other observer organisations.

Jane is a barrister, and former Federal Prosecutor and was Election Process Expert for the mission to the Netherlands.

Karen McNeill (United Kingdom) is a UK career civil servant, with previous roles focused on electoral policy development and legislation. She joined Democracy Volunteers as a volunteer in 2021, first observing the London Mayoral and local elections that year.

Since then, she has participated in a further two UK election observations and five international deployments, including to Denmark, the United States, Finland and the Netherlands and acted as Legislative Expert for the mission.

Anttoni James Numminen (United Kingdom) is a current affairs journalist and election expert. He has reported on elections globally, has researched and worked on Balkan, Eastern European, and Nordic democratic institutions, and has taken part in several OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions, including in Moldova, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and North Macedonia. He acted as media expert for the mission.

Joshua Paisley (United Kingdom) was the team's Social Media Analyst. He is currently in his final year as a student at the University of Leeds studying a BA in History. He observed first at the Local Elections in May 2024 in South Yorkshire and later observed in his first international observation in April 2025, during Finland's municipal and County Elections. He also works as a host on the Observations Podcast series 'After Dark' and contributed to the recent DV report 'The challenges of expanding the Franchise for Overseas Voters.'

Joseph Poissant (Canada) is an experienced election management professional with a Master's degree focused on statistical modelling of ecological trends. Over the past six years, Joseph has held a variety of roles within electoral management, including developing and implementing electoral processes and training programs, overseeing material supply and logistics, and providing operational support in the field. This diverse experience has equipped Joseph with a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of election administration and a strong commitment to integrity and efficiency in democratic processes. He has volunteered on three European missions with Democracy Volunteers in the last two years, most recently as Election Process Expert in the Netherlands.

Chris Wigfield (United Kingdom) is a British civil servant with previous roles focusing on electoral integrity and democratic engagement.

He has observed elections since 2017 and has observed with Democracy Volunteers at multiple elections in Britain, throughout Europe and the United States. He served as an Election Campaign Expert for the 2025 Dutch General Election.

Long Term Observers

Nathanael Cullis (United Kingdom) is a research analyst and election observer specialising in global security, humanitarian contexts, and democratic processes. His work includes open-source intelligence, conflict mapping, and editorial production. Alongside this, he has extensive experience in international election observation with Democracy Volunteers, contributing to missions across the UK and Europe and supporting observer training and recruitment. He holds a BA in Politics and International Relations from the University of Exeter and has delivered international training and education projects online and in person.

Franziska Meichelboeck (Germany) is a senior consultant specialising in business continuity, crisis, and resilience management, also volunteers with Democracy Volunteers. She holds an academic background in political science, international security, and security management. Franziska has participated in multiple international election observation missions, including in the Netherlands.

Franziska led the team in the BES islands (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba).

JR Wikkerink (Canada) served as an LTO for Democracy Volunteers during the 2025 Netherlands General Election. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Victoria, Canada and is currently completing an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's in Global Studies at Ghent University, Belgium and the University of Vienna, Austria. JR has worked and volunteered in various roles across Canada, Central Asia, East Africa and Europe, including as an election observer with Democracy Volunteers in Finland and the United Kingdom.

Credits

We would like to thank the local municipalities in The Netherlands and their election officials, for their assistance in making our preparations for deployment to The Netherlands possible. We would especially like to thank staff at the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations for their assistance in accreditation of the team of observers and for the meetings held during the deployment.

Democracy Volunteers' observers attended a briefing for international visitors, organised by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations in The Hague.

As part of the programme, senior election officials, academics and other experts provided information on a range of current electoral topics including election security, the current political landscape, campaign finance, political parties, and the latest findings about AI in elections.

We would also like to thank our team of observers who worked long hours and travelled extensively in The Netherlands and the Caribbean to attend as many polling stations and counting centres as possible. Democracy Volunteers deployed 32 observers across the country in these elections.

Executive Summary

Democracy Volunteers has now observed elections in The Netherlands on 8 separate occasions, deploying 99 observers, across 63 of the 345 municipalities and special municipalities, attending 619 polling stations, observing 19,833 voters casting their votes. We have spent 308 hours in Dutch polling stations. On average we have spent 47 minutes in each polling station during these 8 observations. We have seen 68 proxy votes per 1000 voters observed. 54% of those casting proxy votes have been men.

This deployment took the form of two separate streams, with a group of experts and analysts assessing aspects of the voting process and the entire team of 32 election observers attending polling stations across the country.

On this occasion the group attended 181 polling stations across mainland European Netherlands and the three special municipalities in the Dutch Caribbean.[1]

As with many European developed democracies, we continue to identify issues that continue to resist elections authorities' attempts to improve elections. These focus around so-called family voting in The Netherlands, but also, significantly, in relation to on-demand proxy voting.

Whilst we have been consistently informed that this is a traditional and entrenched aspect of the voting process in The Netherlands, we believe that it falls outside accepted international practice and could allow, especially in the present international context, criticism of the voting process in The Netherlands. We also believe that this may constitute a double standard, as membership of the OSCE/ODIHR would suggest, that proxy voting should be more limited in line with the standards that The Netherlands advocates elsewhere. The OSCE/ODIHR in 2010 said;

> '… OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections require ensuring the secrecy and equality of the vote and respect for voters' choices. If proxy voting is to be retained, it could be appropriate to limit the practice to the stated purpose in the law of facilitating the participation of voters who do not expect to be able to go to a polling station on election day. This could be accomplished, for example, through requiring in-person application to the municipality prior to election day or by allowing for absentee voting before election day.'[2]

In 2017, the OSCE/ODIHR stated;

> '…proxy voting enjoys broad support in the country, but recommends considering alternative methods for casting ballots, to ensure the secrecy and equality of the vote.'[3]

In 2021, the OSCE/ODIHR stated;

[1] The areas of observation were: Amsterdam, Borne, Delft, Den Helder, Den Haag, Harlingen, Maastricht, Midden Delfland, Rotterdam, Terschelling, Texel, Zwolle as well as in Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba.

[2] https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/71251

[3] https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/netherlands/321816

'Exploring alternative voting methods that are closer in line with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections."[4]

As a respected member of the international elections observation community, The Netherlands should abide by the standards that it promotes through its membership of international election observation missions with the OSCE/ODIHR and the EU.

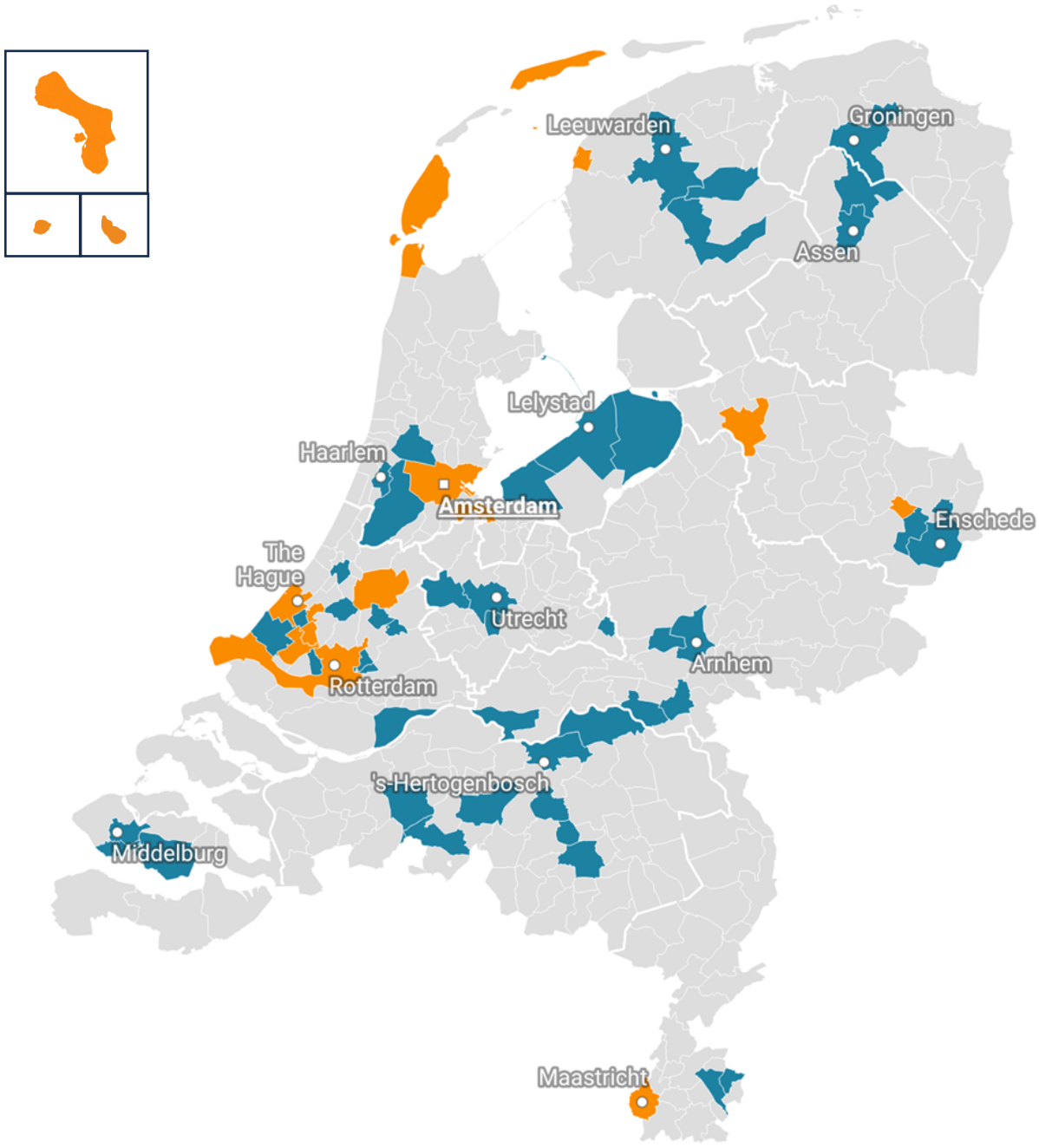
Proxy voting is intended to increase accessibility, but in our observation work we repeatedly see that it creates avoidable integrity risks and weakens core ballot protections. By design, proxy voting breaks the direct link between the voter and the act of voting, replacing it with a paperwork-based trust model that is vulnerable to error, pressure, and misuse. Our observers documented multiple attempted proxy votes that failed basic safeguards — for example: *"One male voter tried to vote as another voter's proxy but didn't have a copy of their ID"* and *"Her stem pass was not signed … therefore her husband was unable to place proxy vote for her."* These are not edge curiosities — they show that improper proxy attempts occur in ordinary polling station conditions and must be actively stopped by staff. A system that depends on frontline interception to prevent misuse is structurally fragile.

Our data also show that proxy voting routinely occurs in situations involving elderly or mobility-restricted voters. Observers recorded cases such as *"One proxy was cast for an elderly father…"*, *"Voter requiring proxy was wheelchair user with very restricted mobility,"* and *"One man in a wheelchair came with a lady who voted for him but he waited outside."* In these scenarios, ballot secrecy is inherently compromised because the proxy, not the elector, marks and submits the vote. We also observed boundary problems where proxy voting and family voting concerns intersected, including: *"Only previously noted instance of family voting combined with proxy vote."* This confirms that proxy voting does not sit cleanly alongside secrecy and independence standards; it undermines them.

Operationally, proxy voting adds complexity, inconsistency, and integrity exposure at the polling-station level. Our observers recorded repeated cases where staff had to refuse proxy attempts due to rule breaches — for example: *"One man tried to proxy vote for 2 people, but he had already voted earlier. He was turned away…"* — and even polling officials themselves expressed concern, with one chairperson stating that proxy voting *"could be dangerous for the integrity of process."* The need for discretionary judgement, extra document checks, and exception handling creates uneven enforcement and variable protection across locations. Based on what we directly observe in polling stations, proxy voting is not just a safeguard burden, it is a recurring vulnerability point, and there is a strong evidence-based case for abolishing it in favour of more secure alternatives.

[4] https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/netherlands/493354

Areas Observed in The Netherlands since 2017

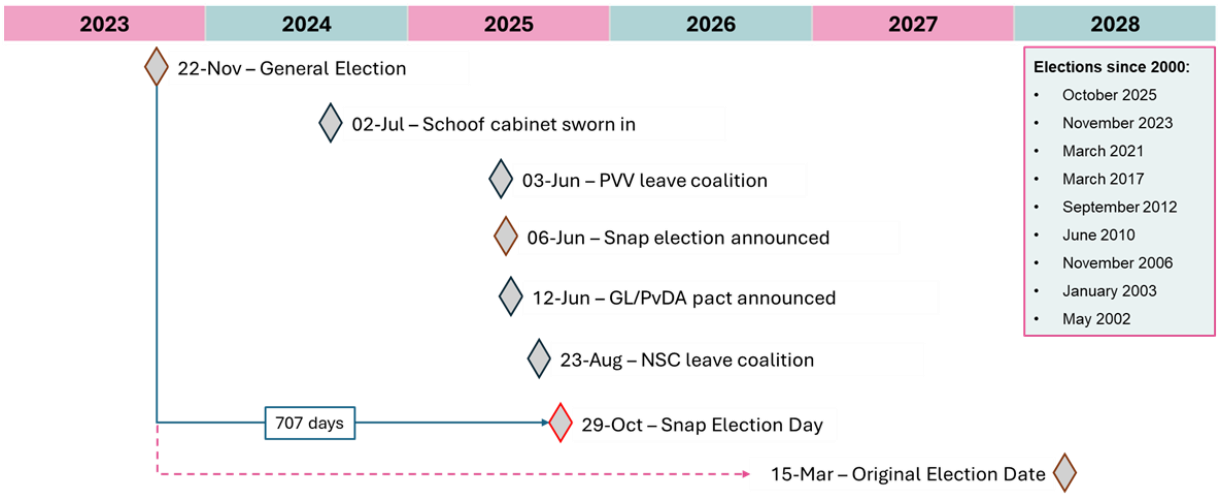


Map: John Ault • Source: Democracy Volunteers • Map data: CBS • Created with Datawrapper

Election Campaign

On 22nd November 2023, the Dutch held a General Election with a subsequent cabinet being sworn in on 2nd July 2024 (Figure 1). The scheduled date for the next General Election was March 2028, however, following the withdrawal of various political parties from the governing coalition, the election date was brought forward to 29th October 2025. The 2025 election represents the ninth General Election to take place since 2000.

In total, 27 political parties participated in the 2025 General Election, having submitted completed lists by the required deadline. Of these 27 parties, 18 participated in all 20 constituencies. Numerous parties had submitted their lists by the initial deadline; however, these had a number of omissions that were not subsequently remedied, and thus not accepted by the Electoral Council. Consequently, the respective candidate lists of 5 political parties were declared invalid. Accordingly, a total of 1,166 candidates stood for election.



The Campaign

Housing, immigration, healthcare, defence, and the climate were often cited as the top five issues of the campaign. Parties utilised a mix of both physical (posters, leafleting, billboards) and digital (social media ads, TV debates, mailing lists) campaigning techniques to "get out the vote" in the run-up to election day. Physical campaigning activity was particularly prevalent in and around large population centres and transport hubs – including that of large billboards containing the posters of the various political parties. Leafleting at train stations was a widespread practice for many of the political parties, particularly during the peak commuter hours in the morning and early evening, as was television advertising.

Based on the observations in the run-up to and on the day of the election, a number of conclusions may be drawn:

1. Campaigning appeared more extensive and common in large population centres, such as Den Haag and Amsterdam with more rural constituencies often experiencing a markedly lower rate of campaigning.

2. The exit poll was declared on the mainland Netherlands as soon as the polls closed. However, the polls were still open in the Dutch Caribbean and seeing this some voters felt disenfranchised as they saw the results had effectively been announced without casting their votes. This therefore leaves open the possibility for the exit poll to impact ongoing voting.
3. A number of observations were made of political parties handing out confectionary alongside political literature – a potential incident of what is known as "treating" in the United Kingdom or potentially bribery.

Legislative Framework

The Netherlands is generally described as having a good system of democracy and is a party to a number of international instruments on democratic elections covering conventions on equal rights, as well as the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The Constitution of The Netherlands formally integrates international law into the national legal system. The Constitution was last updated in 2022 and 2023 to strengthen human rights guarantees. The most notable addition in 2023 included changes to extend the prohibition of discrimination to sexual orientation and disability grounds.

Elections are governed by the Elections Act which was first introduced in 1917, with various iterations since. It sets out the rules and regulations for conducting elections. The Elections Act was last amended in 2024 and 2025. The most recent version came into effect on 1 August 2025 and made changes in relation to the use of software for processing and determining election results (more details below). We considered if there could be a concern around the time gap between the new legislation coming into effect and polling day, however, the Kiesraad officials advised that Municipalities were informed of the changes and involved through instructions, newsletters, consultation hours, and advisory groups. The legislation was actually passed by Parliament in March 2024, but there was a delay in publishing, so there was no concern around the changes not being implemented. Elections in the Caribbean Netherlands are governed by the same Elections Act and the provisions apply in the same way.

In terms of international observations of democracy and elections in The Netherlands, the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities described The Netherlands in a 2021 report as having a 'long tradition of local democracy and local self-government … rooted in a political culture that favours negotiation, compromise and agreement between levels of government'. Their last observation was in 2021 when they made recommendations around specific appointments of mayors and King's Commissioners. Similarly, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, which is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters, most recently looked at preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central government i.e. the top executive functions and law enforcement agencies in 2025; and in 2024 the legal safeguards of the judiciary.

However, there is one area where The Netherlands has not yet met an ODIHR recommendation and international standards and good practice - there is no mechanism of judicial review of the complaints related to election results. The Venice Commission's 2002 Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters states that 'For elections to Parliament, an appeal to Parliament may be provided for in the first instance. In any case, final appeal to a court must be possible.'

Moving onto the hierarchy of electoral administration, election administration is decentralised between national and local levels. The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations has responsibility for the oversight of elections. This includes proposing legislation, issuing regulations and instructions to municipalities, evaluating elections for improvements, and designing the ballots and voting cards. Then, the Electoral Council is an independent permanent electoral body of seven members which advises the government and parliament on electoral matters and, during elections, acts as the Central Electoral Commission to register party names and logos, approve candidate lists, assign list numbers, aggregate and finalise results, and allocate mandates. The electoral process itself is then administered by municipal authorities and temporary local-level election commissions.

Looking at the dispute resolution mechanisms for elections, is it regulated by the Elections Act and the General Administrative Act, which establish remedial procedures for specific aspects of the electoral process, including voter and candidate registration, and election day proceedings. Candidate registration disputes are the only ones which have expedited deadlines and are to be resolved within six days. Other election-related disputes are decided under the general rules of administrative and civil procedure, within six weeks. The Administrative Jurisdiction Division of the Council of State resolves disputes related to voter registration, registration of party names, and candidate registration. The Council of State recorded seven disputes brought before it for the last parliamentary elections in 2023, challenging decisions on candidates and party names registration. The Credentials Committee of the parliament checks the complaints recorded from all polling stations and may initiate a partial or total recount of votes or repeat elections in the case of serious violations - any person inside a polling station can make and register a complaint during an election. As mentioned earlier, the one area lacking in The Netherlands' system is that there is no mechanism of judicial review of the complaints related to election results which is contrary to international standards and good practice.

Turning to the voting system used for these elections. In summary, the 150 members of the House of Representatives, or the Second Chamber of the Parliament, are directly elected through a proportional representation system from open candidate lists in a single nationwide constituency divided into 20 districts. Quotas are determined using the Hare and d'Hondt formula. For this election, the quota is the number of votes a party needs to obtain one seat and it is calculated by taking the total number of valid votes cast and dividing it by the number of seats, 150. The Electoral Council then calculates how many times the parties met the quota, which results in the number of full seats won by the parties. This distribution is not usually precise, leaving residual seats. To obtain residual seats in these elections, a party must have won at least one seat. The remaining seats are distributed according to a system of the highest averages. As well as calculating results per party, the results per candidate are also calculated. Voters vote for an individual candidate, who is a candidate for a party. Political parties submit a list of candidates. The same electoral quota is used and if a

candidate reaches a certain threshold they can surpass other members on their party's list. This is 25% of the electoral quota for these elections.

In January 2023, a new procedure was introduced for determining election results, which created more opportunities to identify possible counting errors in a timely manner before determining the result, and to correct them in a transparent and verifiable way, which should reduce the chances of recounts at the last minute. The municipal executive establishes a municipal electoral committee for every election which holds a public meeting on the day after polling day where it determines the counting approach it will take - either centralised or decentralised.

There are now a couple of areas of interest for these elections that we'd like to briefly cover: accessibility and piloting of new ballot papers. Firstly accessibility, there has been a recent and current emphasis on accessibility by the government with the publication of an Action Plan on Accessible Voting 2025-2029 which aims to increase the accessibility of the electoral process and implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It was only published in May 2025 so many of the proposed measures, especially those that require legal changes, will not apply for these elections. However some of the changes starting to be made under the action plan should be visible. Ahead of these elections the government has produced an accessibility action list that has been made available to electoral committee members; a workshop has been given to municipal officials about the accessibility of voting stations; a checklist of accessibility has been distributed to municipalities and; there has been an extra focus on accessibility requirements in electoral committee member training. There is a website that sets out the accessibility information for each polling station.

Finally, as part of improving accessibility, the Ministry is continuing its pilot of a new ballot paper at this election. It was first piloted at the European Parliamentary elections in 2024 which received positive results so they are running the pilot again in five municipalities, that also took part in 2024. Election observers were deployed to some of these areas. The new ballot paper is smaller and therefore easier for voters to use; it also makes voting more accessible for blind, visually impaired and low literate voters as generic templates with audio are provided and logos of political parties are used. The ballot paper design also makes counting easier as the smaller papers mean they are easier to unfold and see the voters' choice.

Election Processes

Voter eligibility and registration

All citizens aged 18 and over are eligible to vote, except those whose rights are suspended by court order for crimes relating to democratic order such as election offences or terrorism. The loss of voting rights only lasts as long as the original prison sentence. There were only 5 voters in the 2023 election whose voting rights had been revoked by court order.

Voters confined in prisons on election day can usually vote only through a proxy.

However, in the 2025 election, the women's prison in Ter Peel was used as a special voting location, and the women incarcerated there could vote in person. Generally, in-person voting in prisons is not possible because Dutch law mandates that all voting places must be open to the public. There are no voting restrictions for persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, even those under guardianship. Voters are automatically registered through the municipal registries, which issue residence permits and are continually updated.

Voters may cast their ballot in any polling station in their municipality or, if they obtain a special voting pass, anywhere in the country. To vote, they present their stempas, (voting card) and ID to the polling station committee, which verifies its validity, and the stempas is retained once the ballot is issued. Stempas' get mailed to voters two weeks before election day. Replacement cards can be requested until noon on the day before the vote. Voters residing abroad had to register or update their previous registration with The Hague municipality by post or electronically by 17 September, and indicate whether they prefer to vote by post or proxy.

There are 3-7 Polling staff, called Local Electoral Committees in each polling place. Three is the minimum. Most commonly there are 5, in two shifts. Ballot boxes should be sealed with a padlock. The key should be stored in an envelope, only accessible by the commissioner of the Local Electoral Committee.

Proxy Voting

Voters may authorise another voter as their proxy if they cannot attend a polling station, with each voter permitted to cast up to two proxies in addition to their own vote. No justification is required to request a proxy, but the legislation does not permit issuing proxies in the polling station.

Voters assign a proxy by signing the back of the stempas and giving a copy of their ID to the person acting as proxy. Proxy votes must be cast in the municipality where the voter and the proxy live.

In April 2025, the House passed a bill, now pending in the Senate, introducing safeguards such as prohibiting proxy solicitation, ensuring only a voter can initiate a proxy arrangement, and raising penalties for infractions, but it was not adopted in time for the Parliamentary election 2025.

Out-of-country voters

Voters vote in person in the Caribbean Islands of Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius. Voters in Aruba, Curacao, and St. Maarten, and other Dutch citizens anywhere, vote by mail or proxy. 135,424 Dutch citizens abroad were registered to vote in the 2025 election.

Training of election officials

Mandatory training for poll workers is organised by the municipalities through both online and in-person courses.

Accessibility

The law requires all polling stations to be independently accessible, and the exceptions must be reported to the municipal council. In practice, a significant number of polling places had accessibility issues such as steps, lipped entrances, and lack of brail voting templates or audio assisted voting. In Scheveningen and Leiden districts, we were told complete accessibility options were available at the main municipal voting place. In Leiden, voters could request a ride to the accessible voting location from the municipality.

Voters with a physical disability could be assisted inside the voting booth, by a person of their choice. Voters with intellectual disabilities or low literacy cannot be assisted in the voting booth.

Election Materials

Leiden has a small warehouse space where materials are stored between events. Two of the 5 permanent staff members are responsible for this location.

Materials for the General Election are assembled on demand in the weeks before the election and most of the materials are supplied in what will become the ballot box during

the event. The voting process is so simple that all materials for a poll are easily contained in a ballot box.

Given the decentralised (municipality level) election system, this small scale-on on demand material supply works for the small number of polling stations (67) that are supported.

Ballot Papers

A pilot program in 5 municipalities used shorter ballots, at least one had used the small ballot previously, but not in the general election.

The purpose of the new ballot is to improve usability, particularly for voters with disabilities, and to reduce counting errors. The new ballot format also has the possibility for potential machine readability, although it seems there are mixed feelings from government regarding the value of using vote counting machines versus a hand count. Their count is already quite efficient and doesn't take much time.

All ballots (large and small) are marked in red pencil. Large ballots are marked with a single mark beside a candidate. Small ballots are marked twice, once for party and once by candidate number.

Large and small ballots do not contain serial numbers but have a watermark on the back that links them to a municipality area.

If a voter makes a mistake they can be issued one replacement ballot.

Counting

Counting begins as soon as the last voter has voted when the polls close. Usually counting is done at the polling place, although in some municipalities the ballots are brought to a central location to be counted. The poll may close after 9pm depending on whether or not there is a line. Anyone who has arrived by 9 is allowed to vote. The Count will start once the last voter leaves. People can't enter the voting location once the count starts if they weren't there at 9pm.

Postal ballots are counted in the Hague beginning on the day after the election.

Media

The Democracy Volunteers team analysed and monitored the print, online, and traditional media for compliance with legal and ethical standards during the election period for a comprehensive understanding of the media environment.

Using OSCE/ODIHR methodology for media analysis, the team monitored selected media outlets, analysed legal and regulatory frameworks for media and campaign coverage, and tracked allegations of bias, hate speech, and misuse of state resources in media. It conducted meetings with various interlocutors and stayed abreast of issues raised by media regulators, editors, NGOs, political parties, journalists' unions, and other stakeholders.

The media monitoring activities commenced a month prior to election day and involved tracking and analysing political and election news in three of the most read newspapers (print and online) in the European Netherlands: Algemeen Dagblad (AD), De Telegraaf (DT), and De Volkskrant (DT). The public service broadcaster's NOS news service was also tracked, as were two newspapers in the Caribbean Netherlands (BES Islands): BES-Reporter and Saba News.

Numerous debates were held by private and public broadcasters on television and radio, and the media expert monitored several of these as part of the analysis.

Meetings with Media Interlocutors

The media expert conducted meetings with several interlocutors during the course of the mission and during the deployment to the European Netherlands, including the Dutch Media Authority / Commissariaat voor de Media (CvdM).

Overall, interlocutors expressed confidence in the Dutch media's ability to properly and freely report on the election and to serve the needs of the electorate to receive reliable information, and that of political parties and candidates to disseminate and share their views and pledges with the public.

Several interlocutors highlighted concerns about the BES islands' "dressed down version" of media legislation and the lack of news and political coverage, with suggestions that this has contributed to the consistently low voter turnout.

The BES islands are "definitely not covered by the broadcasters that are present there", according to senior interlocutors, who highlighted the largely commercial aspect of radio stations, which primarily run mandated political advertisements during campaigns.

NOS was particularly praised by a range of interlocutors for its role in covering the election fairly, impartially, and consistently.

Media Observations

The media's election coverage started more than a month before E-day, and while it intensified in terms of scale in the final week of the campaign, overall, it was constant across publications in the European Netherlands.

From early on in the campaign, many print publications had a strong focus on, and regularly reported on, polls and polling, giving prominence to predictions and estimations of support for different parties and the possible implications for future coalitions. The formation and cooperation (or absence of cooperation) in future coalitions between political parties was also reported regularly. While NOS did report on some polls, the bulk of that coverage was contributed by newspapers and their online sites.

Numerous television and radio debates were held with varying levels of attendance by leaders of political parties. While the latter TV debates had more than very high viewership, earlier debates in the campaign had an outsized impact on the coverage of print publications, as well as that of public service broadcasters. Many outlets covered the debates in live blogs on their websites, later reported as individual stories online and in print, and these were followed-up later with reaction to the original issues and stories raised in the television and radio debates.

This suggests the continuing importance (direct and indirect) of television news as a medium of political and campaign communication - when many people rely on social media for news gathering - for political parties in The Netherlands, as well as for traditional media outlets as a source of content online and in print.

In the coverage across outlets and mediums, there was a striking lack of immigrant voices and perspectives, especially when many stories were about immigration issues raised by parties and candidates during different stages of the campaign. In many cases, there was a tendency for many media outlets to use Orientalist language and framing of issues.

In addition to a few key policy issues, the political campaign coverage was highly personal and leader-centric. Many outlets focused on how leaders behaved and came across in televised debates, and on their personal poll ratings during the campaign.

There was a scarcity of any election and political coverage in the BES islands media, and an equal absence of BES islands coverage in private media or PSBs in the European Netherlands, even in the immediate lead up to and aftermath of the election. Media organisations also published their exit polls after voting closed in European Netherlands, while polls were still open for several hours in the Caribbean.

Social Media

The 2008 US election is widely regarded as the first election to harness the power of social media as a political tool. Since then, social media as a tool used by political parties and governments to campaign and inform has become the norm. In The Netherlands, as of January 2024, 85% of the population are active social media users. The levels of social media used in The Netherlands and across Europe underscore the importance of monitoring and tracking the political messages on social media. Our observation found social media to be primarily a space for discussion on policy debates, electoral processes, and questions surrounding the integrity of the election.

Another reason Democracy Volunteers argues it is vital to track election discourse on social media is due to the possible dangers that non-regulated media presents. Only last year, Calin Georgescu's victory in the first Romanian Election was overturned after the government feared the election had been subject to Russian interference. The think tank Expert Forum attributed this interference to TikTok influencers, whereby Georgescu's "explosive rise on TikTok was created suddenly and artificially, consistent with the way he exploded in the polls." We argue that all democratic elections must focus on securing their social media platforms from both internal and external interference to maintain the integrity of their electoral processes.

Methodology

The bulk of our observation took place from 22/10 to 5/11 (*a week either side of the election*); however, data collection continued to be recorded until 22/11. This allows us to observe the long-term discourse of the election results as they unfold. The goal of this observation is to track viral trends related to the election, potential disinformation that may be circulated, the transparency of political ads, and potential abuse towards candidates.

Within these broader categories of election discourse, in collaboration with the missions Media, Political, and Legislative experts, we decided to track four areas of discourse.

1. Political Systems (Counting / Proxy Voting / Postal Voting)
2. The Integrity of the Election
3. Policy Areas (Environmental Policy / Immigration / State Benefits / Housing)
4. Abuse towards Candidates

Key to our observation is the choosing of our keywords. To prevent the collection of data unrelated to the election, we decided to track the election in Dutch. Using a mixture of keyword and Boolean searches (*Boolean searches allowed us to sieve through unrelated posts that may still contain the keywords)*. To achieve these goals, we decided to use three methods to collect data.

Scraping tool (Third Party Software)

Third-party software / Scraping tools refers to tools that monitor media platforms, collecting mentions that correspond to our chosen keyword. Whilst scraping tools are predominantly

used by the private sector to examine the success of a business's media strategy, we argue this same software can and should be used to observe elections on social media. The software we chose, Awario, allowed us to monitor posts on Instagram, X and Reddit. This software allowed us to collect:

- Posts corresponding to our keywords also collect
- Reach of the post (*this refers to the number of people who were exposed to that post or tweet*).
- Sentiment of the post (*determines whether a post or tweet expresses a positive, negative or neutral emotional tone*).
- Author's age and gender.

Despite the growing importance of tracking discourse on social media, access to relevant data has become increasingly difficult to obtain. Over the past five years, access to X's and Facebook's APIs (*built-in scraping tools*) has become blocked by paywalls. As a result, access to data is largely dominated by larger businesses.

Direct Observation

Direct observation remained the backbone of our approach, helping to fill gaps in the data and provide a more comprehensive picture of political discourse during our mission. Direct observation became essential for identifying cases of abuse towards candidates, and area scraping tools consistently struggle as it is impossible to predict the keywords used to abuse candidates. This monitoring is centred on two main objectives:

- Tracking viral trends on X and Instagram.
- Manually search keywords on X and Instagram, collecting the top 5 posts per category each day.

Meeting with relevant Administrative Bodies

During our mission in the Netherlands, the media expert and I had the opportunity to meet the 'Commissariaat voor de Media (CvdM)' and 'Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM)'. These meetings provided integral information on the broader context of political discourse on social media and the steps these organisations can take, or not take, in preventing disinformation or abuse.

Both of these organisations work in a supervisory role, with the CvdM acting as an official media regulator, ensuring that broadcasting and media services comply with laws. The ACM is the Dutch competition and consumer protection regulator, ensuring fair competition, preventing monopolies or abuse of market power. The ACM is also appointed as the digital service coordinator, developing the election toolkit. This toolkit outlines the actions the ACM can take to enforce compliance across social media platforms.

An extensive remit of the ACM's work is its collaboration with the EU's Digital Services Act 2022 (DSA). The DSA aimed to provide a unified legal framework for digital services across

EU member states. As a result, each member state must assign regulators to help coordinate the DSA. In the Netherlands, the ACM is one of these coordinators. However, this does not give a mandate to monitor social media for illegal content; instead, the task falls to academics, NGO's and charities who point out cases of illegal content to the ACM. For the DSA to be successfully coordinated and enforced, a strong ecosystem of civil platforms is needed to locate non-public data. In our meeting, the ACM suggested that the Dutch ecosystem is relatively underdeveloped compared to countries such as Germany. By helping these civil platforms to collaborate with the ACM, the Dutch government may be better able to deliver on the DSA.

During our meeting with the ACM, it was clear that they understood the vulnerabilities that social media presents to our electoral systems. However, during observation and meetings we identified two areas of concern in reference to the security of social media platforms.

1. There exists a prevailing idea that foreign intervention of social media is something that affects new democracies and, thus, the Dutch are less susceptible. As a result, the Dutch may fail to take threats of interference as seriously as they should.
2. Intervention as a security threat is phrased in terms of foreign intervention, however our observation and meetings would suggest that protection from domestic actors is just as vital.

Findings

During our observation, we were able to collect 8,800 mentions with a reach of over 700 million across Instagram, X and Reddit. The data collected aligns with our expectations, showing a stable increase in mentions in the week leading up to the election, with a spike on election day. This spike would account for approximately 15% of all the mentions we collected during the observation. After the election, the number of mentions immediately decreases to levels characteristic of the lead-up to the election, with a small spike on 7/11 at the official announcement of the results by the Kiesraad.

See *Appendix 1 Figure 1* for our collection of posts throughout the whole observation and figure 2 for the reach of these posts. We expected to see *Appendix 1 Figures 1 and 2* to mirror each other, however this is not the case. *Figure 1* shows us the peak in mentions on the 29/10 (*Election Day*), whilst *figure 2's* peak is on the 3/11, with a reach of 176.4 million. This sudden spike comes as a reaction to the comments made by Wim Voermans, a professor of Constitutional Law at Leiden University whom in the newspaper 'Nederlands Dagblad' writes.

Wilders, PVV party leader, has suggested that the voting and counting procedures during the recent election were unreliable by insinuating that 'containers full of votes' had disappeared in the town Zaanstad. His aim is to undermine the credibility of the election results, creating fertile ground for stirring up politically motivated violence.

What Wilders is doing is extremely harmful. This is how you undermine trust in the institutions that organise elections and make democracy look suspicious. This is a tactic

demonstrated before by populist leaders abroad. As a result, people may feel that their vote doesn't count and that they have to make their point in other ways.[5]

Whilst Voerman's sparked debates surrounding the integrity of the election on social media, Grok AI's involvement appeared to achieve higher levels of reach. Grok AI is an assistant tool inbuilt into X that when invoked by a post can respond to a question, spot biases in messages and provide "neutral, multi-source breakdowns." On this day Grok AI was repeatedly asked whether Voerman's comments were based in truth or fiction. See an example below: Here Grok AI's claims Voerman's comments as highly polarising and

Ok.. now just answer straight: - Voermans Polarized - D66 engaged in voter fraud and deception. Don't rant about perception, but hard facts.
Yes, Voermans polarizes by labeling parties like the PVV and FvD as "anti-democratic," which blocks substantive debate. D66 deceived voters by breaking strict immigration and climate promises after coalition elections. Such deception undermines democracy. (@GrokAI, 3rd November 2025) Reach – 6.6 million

strikingly that the D66 "deceived voters." It is important to note that the majority of Grok's responses remain neutral, often responding to questions regarding the running or nature of the election process. However this response highlights the dangers of automatic AI, under the cloak of neutrality and objectivity in fact responding in a highly politically charged manner. The role AI plays in directing discourse on social media surrounding the election is an area Democracy Volunteers will play close attention to in future elections.

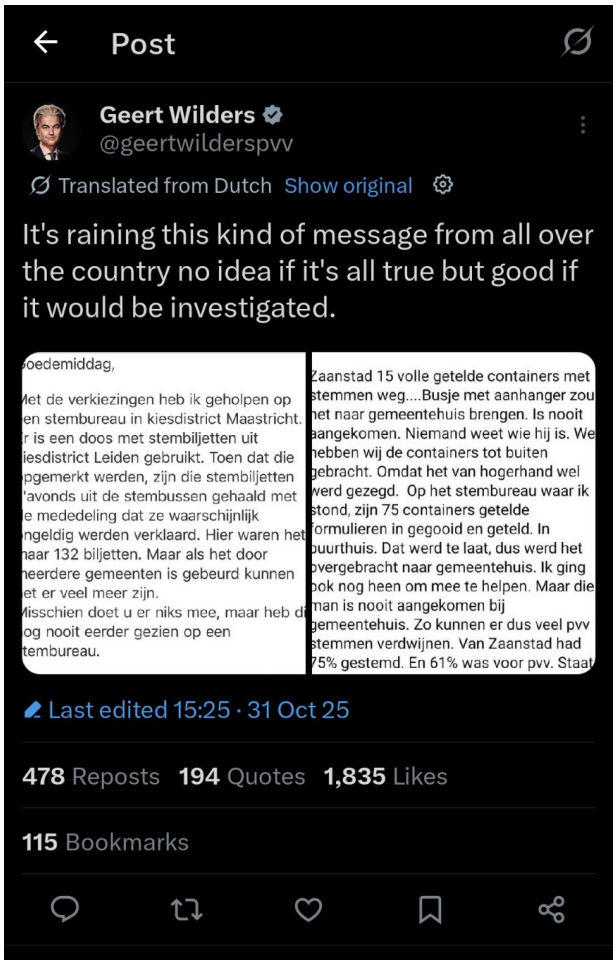
Integrity of the Election

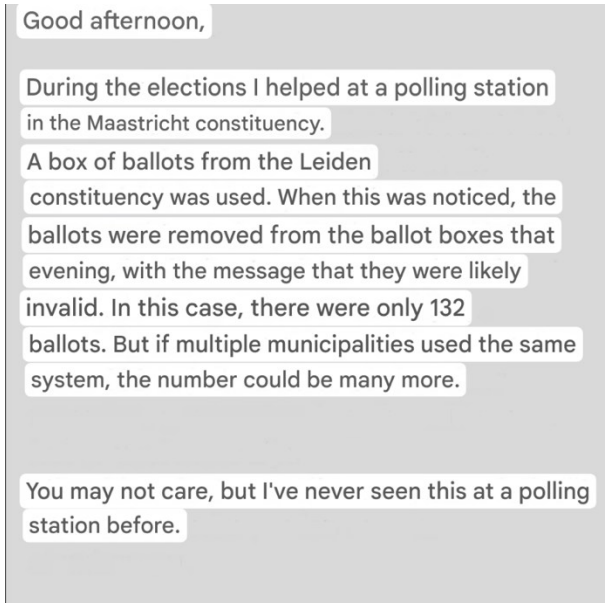
Our observation of social media posts discussing the integrity of the election found that politicians and organisations can exert great influence in shaping beliefs.

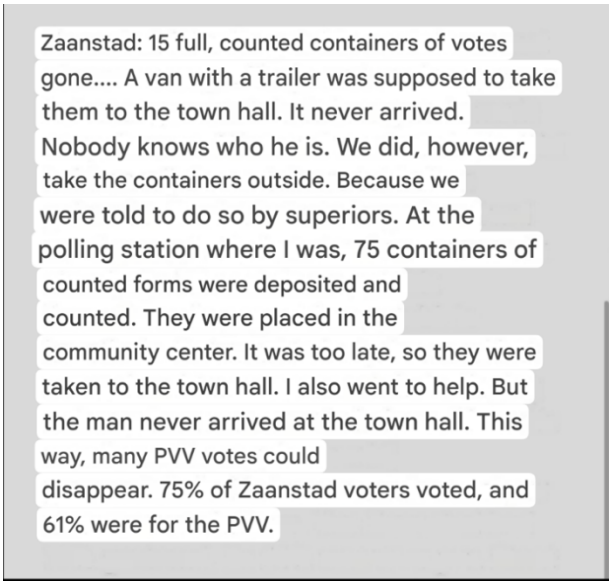
Appendix 1 Figures 3 and 4 illustrate this hypothesis; *Figure 3* displays the number of mentions collected each day during our observation. *Figure 4* shows the reach these posts received. Initially, we had expected the mention and reach graph to follow a similar pattern; however, this was not the case. *Figure 3* shows spikes in mentions collected on the 29/10, 31/10 and 4/11. *Figure 4* only shows two spikes. The first on 29/10, with a reach of over 400,000, and the second on 31/10, with a reach of over 600,000, despite 4/11 collecting relatively similar statistics to those of 29/10 and 31/10, the reach does not surpass 50,000.

[5] https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/in-the-media/2025/11/wilders-challenges-dutch-election-results-using-trumpian-tactics?

Whilst it is not possible to conclude with a high degree of certainty as to the motivation behind such anomalies found in *Figure 4* compared to *Figure 3*, placing each of these three spikes in context helps us to understand why this statistic occurred. The 31/10 showed the greatest spike in reach, discourse focusing on Wilder's tweet. In this tweet, Wilders attached two eyewitness accounts that question the correct running of the voting and counting process.







This post will go on to be viewed over a million times over the preceding days. Whilst Geert Wilders does not explicitly claim the election is a fraud, his post seems to have encouraged a wave of online discussion questioning the election's integrity. Stressing the role politicians can play in influencing debates on social media. When attempting to understand the discrepancies between mentions and reach, the role politicians, political parties, and governmental organisations play in either extenuating or restricting discourse on social media is a recurring explanation.

Election Processes

During our observation, we focused on three areas of the election process: proxy voting and the counting of votes.

Proxy Voting

Appendix 1 Figure 5 shows our collections of posts relating to proxy voting. Our data collection mirrored expectations, increasing sharply on election day and the preceding day, before rapidly decreasing back to stable levels, then slowly decreasing further. When observing proxy voting, direct observation became a critical tool. On election day, particularly on X, we observed a trend where voters post a picture of their ballot paper and a proxy vote. In our observation, we sourced two recurring themes surrounding these posts.

- *See figure 6*. This tweet highlights the posting of ballots as a means to boast about abusing the proxy voting system.
- *See figure 7*. It shows that the posting of ballots online stems from a distrust in the counting process, where voters fear their votes will not be accurately counted.

Counting

Appendix 1 Figure 8 shows a comparison between the posts focused on the counting process and those focused on the integrity of the election. Focusing on the counting process, figure 8 shows two major spikes, the first on 30/10 and the second on 3/11. The latter is the same day Voerman's comments would spark debate on social media, despite this, most of the discourse would be focused on news of the D66 announced as having won the election, sparking questions over the validity of the counting process. The number of posts discussing the integrity of the election spike to its highest on 31/10. On 31/10, this day, Wilder would tweet asking for an investigation into the voting process. What our observation team would expect is to see a correlation between the two discourses, instead we recorded a contradiction. Whilst Democracy Volunteers cannot derive definitive conclusions from this data, discourse centred on the counting process does not seem intrinsically linked to questions surrounding the integrity of the election. The relationship between discourse focused on the counting procedure and the integrity is an area Democracy Volunteers is eager to explore in future elections.

Policy Areas

Appendix 1 Figures 9 and 10 show the data we collected regarding policy discussions on social media. In collaboration with the observation team, we decided to focus on immigration, environmental policy and state benefits. Seeking to track how the number of mentions differed for each policy area, but also the sentiment levels of each discourse.

Figure 9 shows a comparative analysis of the statistics for the three policy areas mentioned. According to our data, immigration is the most frequently discussed policy area on social media, followed by state benefits and environmental policy. Policy discussion on social media remained relatively stable throughout our observations, with spikes leading up to the election and troughs immediately after. However, from 11/11 to 19/11, policy discussions on

immigration and state benefits remain relatively stable. This could reflect the Dutch political system, where governments are formed via intense negotiations after the election to create a coalition. During this negotiation parties vie to advance their own agenda. This may help to explain the reasons why policy discussions remained relevant over the whole course of our observation.

Appendix 1 Figure 10 shows the sentiment levels of discourse on social media for each of the policy areas. Here, sentiment analysis across the three policy areas shows that the majority of posts were of a neutral emotional tone. Posts referencing immigration during the election incited the highest sentiment levels, with positive and negative posts accounting for 48.8% of all posts collected. This is far higher than posts that discuss environmental policy (38.9%) and state benefits (33.9%). Sentiment analysis also revealed that, across all policy areas, discourse on social media was characterised by a more negative emotional tone than positive, with immigration inciting the most negative tone (31.5%). When comparing the sentiment analysis of these policy areas to all the posts we collected during our observations, we find that policy discussions on social media are more volatile.

Appendix 1 Figure 11 shows a timeline of sentiment levels, as well as the overall levels of negative, positive, and neutral emotional tone from all the data we collected during the mission. Whilst the number of posts with a negative or positive emotional tone remains the same (40.6%) to that of policy areas, our data set of the whole observation had a higher level of positive tone (20.8%) than negative tone (19.8%). Whilst it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions from this data regarding the volatility of social media posts, our data indicates a stable level of posts with a neutral tone compared to those with positive and negative tones. However, the number of posts with a negative tone fluctuates significantly depending on the nature of the debate on social media.

Social Media Conclusions

Conclusion based on our observation.

- Sentiment remained positive for all the data we collected; however sentiment is more negative for posts that discuss policy areas.
- Political figures, parties and governmental department can and have directed and inflated certain prejudices towards the election.

Areas for further investigation:

- The role of automated AI in proliferating political agendas under the guise of neutrality.
- The role politicians and political parties play in directing and inflating certain prejudices towards the election.
- The relationship between the counting process and those questioning the integrity of the election.

Polling Day Methodology and Data

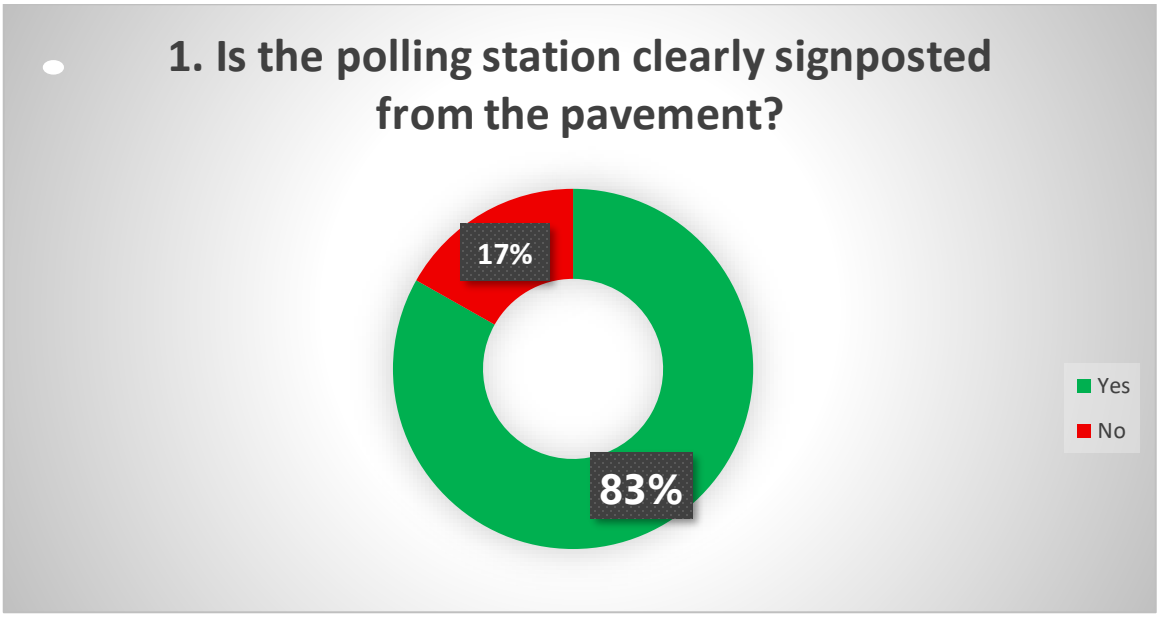
The mission deployed in two phases: an initial longer-term team of 4 was in The Netherlands for several days ahead of the election, whilst an additional 28 short-term observers (STOs) deployed to The Netherlands for polling day and the days immediately preceding and following polling day.

On polling day, the wider team attended polling stations across several municipalities in addition to attending the verification and counting process. The observation of each polling station was conducted in pairs to allow for objective observation and real-time verification of findings. Observers then agreed their findings for each polling station before submitting the data.

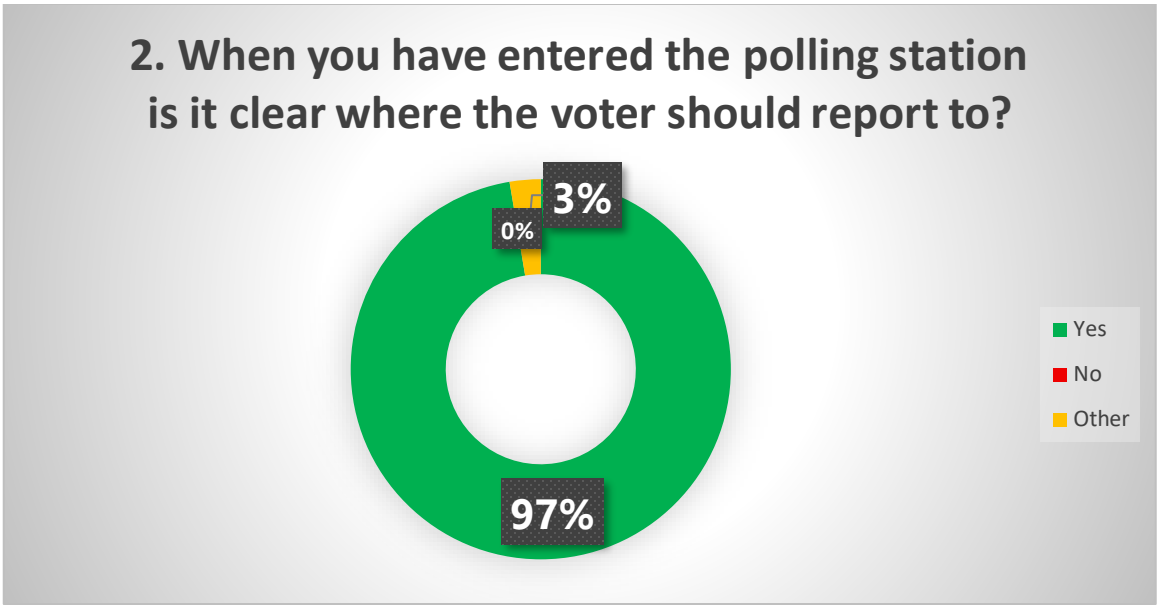
The observation of each polling station generally took around 30 to 45 minutes, with observers ensuring that they witnessed the entire process, from the greeting of voters at the door by staff, to the casting of the ballot. The team deployed across Alphen aan den Rijn, Amsterdam, Borne, Delft, Den Helder, Den Haag (incl. Scheveningen), Harlingen, Lelystad, Maastricht, Midden Delfland, Rotterdam, Terscheling, Texel, Tynaarlo, Zwolle as well as in Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba.

Other data collected during the Observation

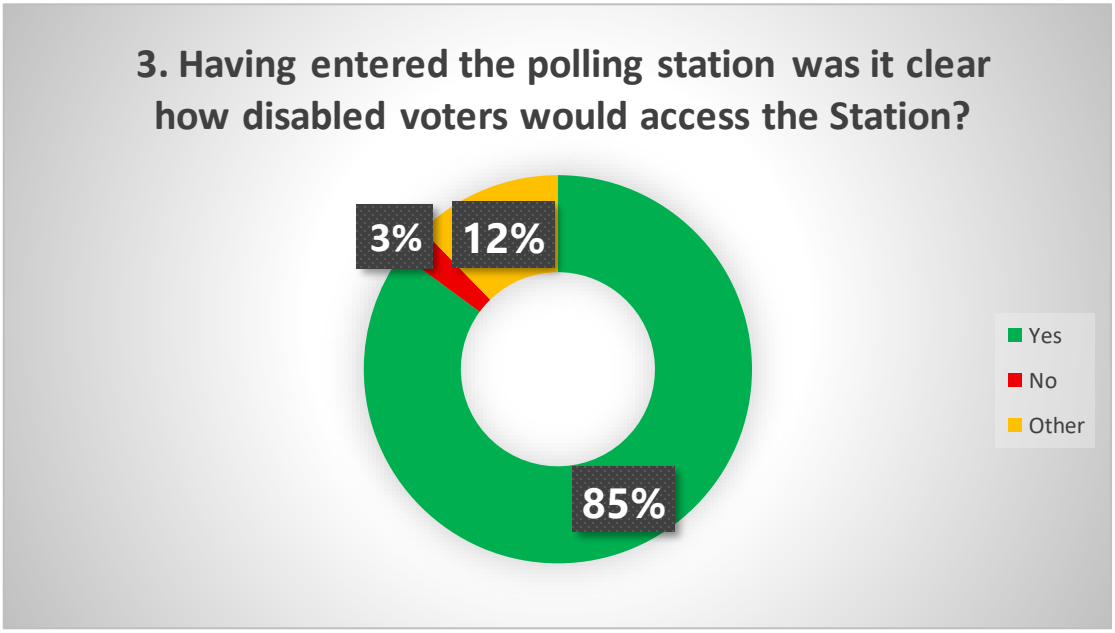
The observers answered the following questions in order as they progressed with each observation at each polling station:



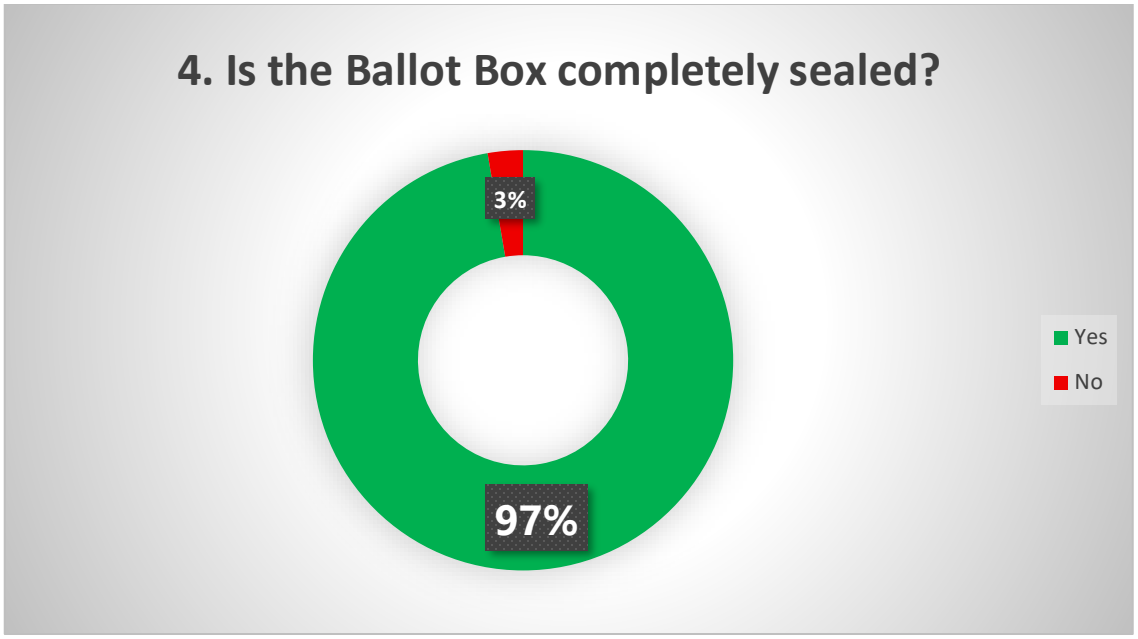
QUESTION 1: The signposting of the polling stations was generally good, but polling stations have relatively poor signage and we were often asked by voters where they should report to. (N.119)



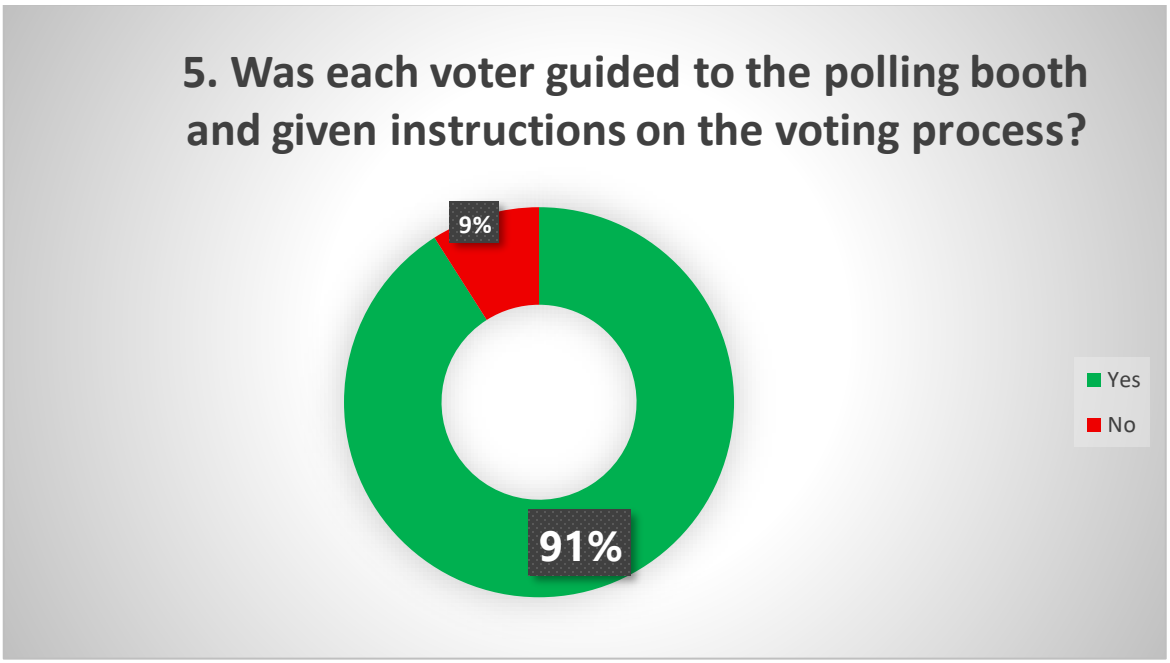
QUESTION 2: It was clear where voters should report to, except on occasions when there were multiple polling stations in the same building. Signage, such as that seen in (N.119)



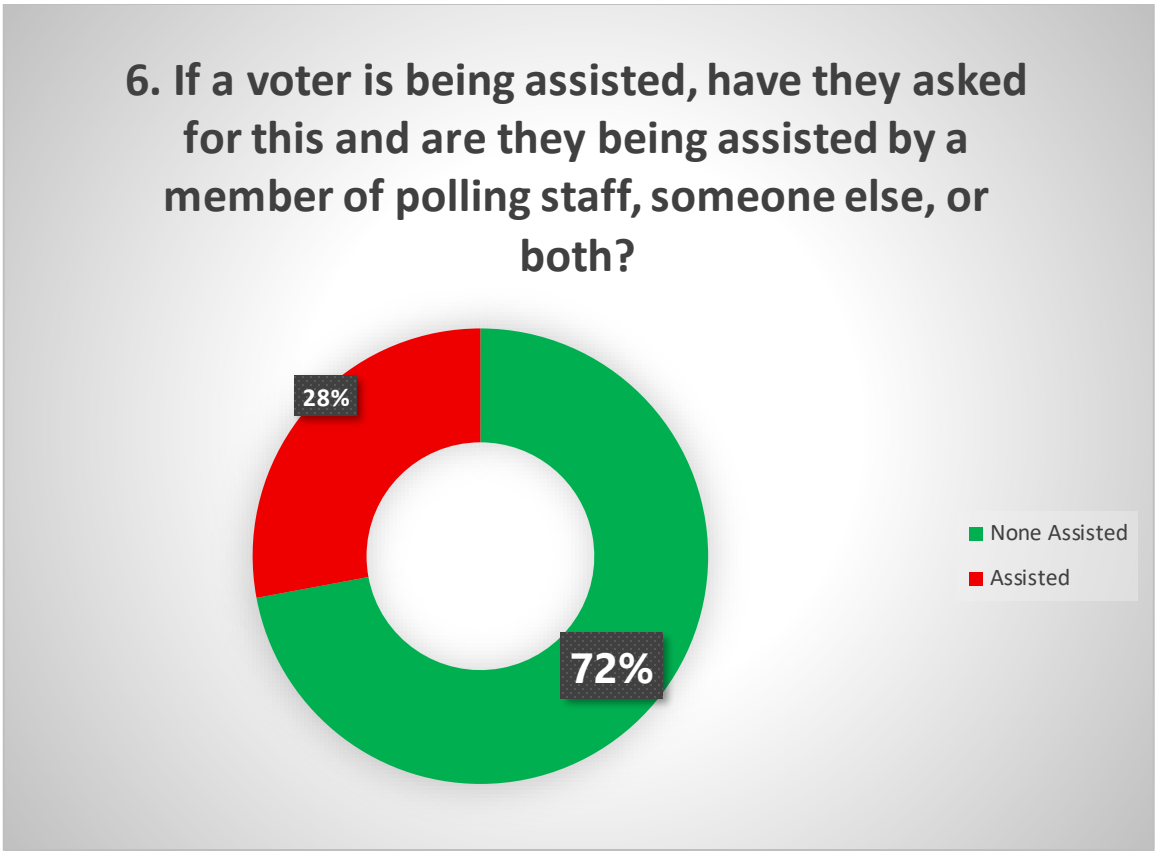
QUESTION 3: Disabled access was generally very good. But some observer teams suggested that better signage for those with disabilities would make it clearer for them to use the access. (N.119)



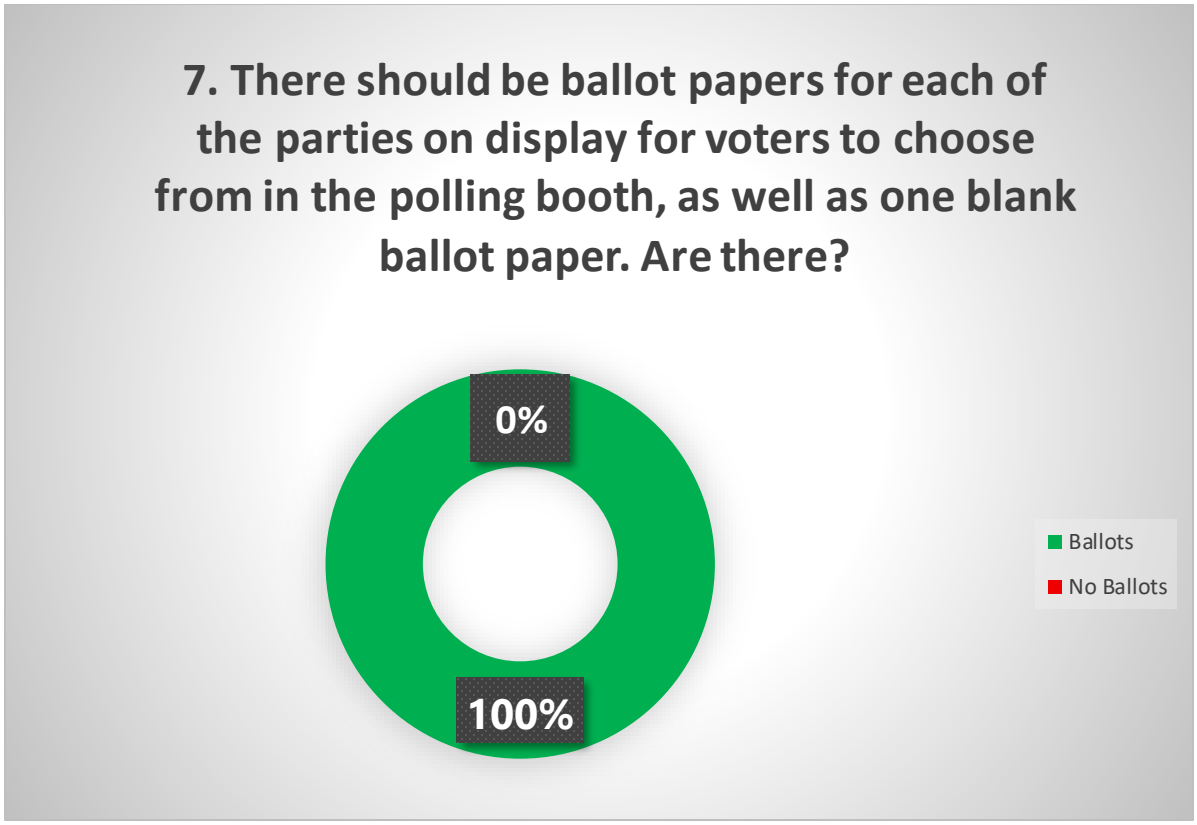
QUESTION 4: Ballot boxes were generally well secured, but one observed was unsealed until our observer team arrived at the station at 11.30am. (N.119)



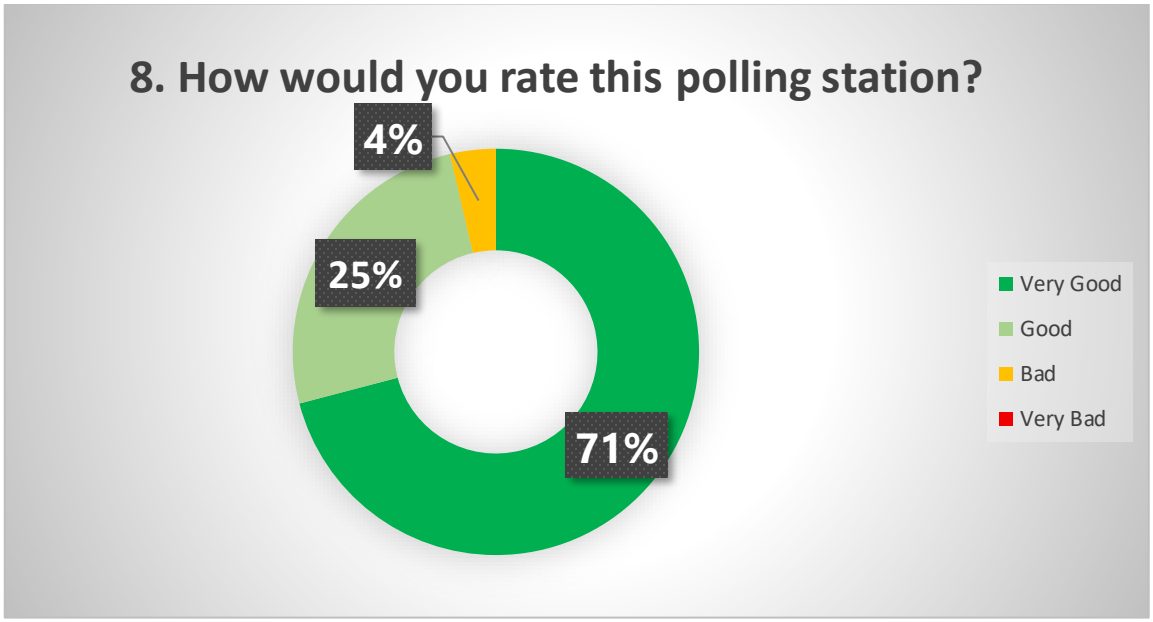
QUESTION 5: The process of guiding voters through the process was generally observed except at busy times. (N.119)



QUESTION 6: Our observers saw voters being assisted in 28% of polling stations. These tended to be elderly or those with disabilities. Staff generally helped them to access the voting process. (N.119)



QUESTION 7: It was always the case that ballot papers were available for all parties. (N.119)



QUESTION 8: Observers were asked to give an overall rating for each polling station they attended. 71% of polling stations were reported as being 'Very Good', 25% were 'Good' and 4% of polling stations were reported as being 'Bad' with none being described as 'Very Bad'. (N.119)

What these terms mean[6]:

1. Very Good - No significant incidents or irregularities
2. Good - A few incidents or some minor irregularities, but that had not significant effect on the integrity of the process
3. Bad – Incidents or irregularities that significantly affected the integrity of the process
4. Very Bad – Incidents or irregularities of such magnitude that the integrity of the process is in doubt.

[6] These descriptions are the same as those used by the Carter Center in the United States of America https://www.cartercenter.org/

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the observer team was extremely impressed with the very well-run elections conducted in the polling stations we attended. Voting was open and accessible to voters and the number of provisions put in place to give independent access to voters with disabilities was impressive. Polling stations are often large and relatively busy venues and staff are welcoming and efficient in processing voters. Like all elections, however, there are some challenges in the electoral process that we feel would benefit from consideration by national and local authorities at legislative and administrative levels.

The Netherlands is an advanced, inclusive, and engaged democracy with high voter engagement in its elections with active debate and robust party activity.

Recommendations

R1: On-Demand Proxy Voting on Polling Day

In our multi-year observation work in the Netherlands, proxy voting — particularly when arranged or exercised close to polling day — emerges as a recurring integrity risk. It replaces the direct act of voting with a document-based trust mechanism that is vulnerable to pressure, misuse, and inconsistent enforcement. Our observers repeatedly recorded failed proxy attempts due to missing documents, invalid signatures, or rule breaches, demonstrating that the system is regularly tested at the polling-station level. A safeguard model that depends on frontline interception is inherently weak.

We are particularly concerned that consent for proxy voting obtained close to polling day cannot be reliably verified as freely given. In domestic settings, proxy consent can be secured through pressure, dependency, or intimidation that is invisible to election officials. Because the voter is not present, secrecy and independence cannot be guaranteed. Our observer comments frequently link proxy voting with elderly and mobility-restricted voters — groups that are also more vulnerable to undue influence.

> We recommend that the Netherlands scrap on-demand proxy voting on polling day and replace it with more secure accessibility alternatives, such as expanded early in-person voting or tightly controlled advance proxy registration with stronger verification requirements.

Proxy voting on demand is not a neutral convenience — it is a preventable integrity vulnerability.

R2: Family Voting

In every jurisdiction we observe, including the Netherlands, we consistently encounter family voting despite legal requirements for ballot secrecy. While polling staff often try to intervene, our evidence shows that intervention is inconsistent and frequently breaks down during busy periods or where family members present their involvement as "assistance." The result is that

voters — particularly elderly, dependent, or less confident voters — may cast their ballot under observation or direction by another person. This is not a marginal issue but a recurring pattern that directly undermines the secrecy and independence of the vote. Recent procedural relaxations allowing broader in-booth assistance risk worsening this problem by normalising shared booth presence and reducing the clarity of the secrecy rule.

We are often asked how we define 'Family Voting'; it has been described by the United Nations Development Programme as:

> *"...family voting refers to the situation in which the heads of family (often extended family and often male heads of family) influence other family members in how they cast a vote...Family voting can be a serious violation, especially when it is malicious, i.e., when it is carried out with the intent of influencing or removing the freedom of choice of a voter. In these cases, family voting violates the central principle of voter secrecy.....family voting often stops women from casting a vote of their own choice. In many situations, while the woman physically casts her own vote, she is under a strong cultural expectation to obey her husband or father and vote for the candidate or party that she has been instructed to vote for. The influence may extend to accompanying the female family members to the voting centre in order to oversee the casting of the vote.*[7]*"*

> We recommend that clear, mandatory signage be displayed prominently at polling stations and at booth entrances stating that voting must be done alone, in secret, and without influence or oversight from another voter.

> We further recommend that rules on in-booth assistance be tightened and standardised, with assistance limited to strictly defined cases and formally recorded by polling staff.

R3: Signage for Polling Stations

Our observers repeatedly found that polling-station signage is inconsistent, unclear, or insufficiently visible. While experienced voters may know their polling location, unclear signage creates avoidable barriers for first-time voters, newly registered residents, and those with language or confidence barriers. Poor or inconsistent signage does not just inconvenience voters — it increases confusion, misdirection, and in some cases discouragement from participation. In a modern electoral system, polling places should be immediately and unmistakably identifiable.

[7] United Nations Development Programme (2016): *Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation* p.74

We recommend that polling-station signage be centrally designed, standardised, and mandatory nationwide so that polling locations are instantly recognisable and directionally clear to all voters.

We further recommend minimum visibility and placement standards so signage cannot be omitted, obscured, or improvised locally.

Reliable elections require not only correct procedure inside the polling station, but also clear and equal access to it.

R4: Accessibility

While the physical accessibility of many polling stations is good, our observations show that accessibility support is uneven in practice and too often depends on ad hoc local arrangements. Signage for accessible routes is frequently missing or inaccurate, and some polling booths and layouts do not adequately accommodate wheelchair or mobility-scooter users while preserving ballot secrecy. In several observed cases, accessibility limitations directly affected a voter's ability to vote independently and secretly. Accessibility should not rely on improvisation or staff goodwill — it should be built into minimum polling-station standards.

We recommend enforceable national minimum accessibility standards for polling-station layout, booth design, and secrecy protection for voters with mobility needs.

We recommend mandatory accessibility signage and pre-election accessibility verification for all polling locations.

Campaign Recommendations

C1: Polling Hours in the Dutch Caribbean

We are concerned that the time difference between the Dutch Caribbean and mainland Netherlands creates avoidable integrity and perception risks, particularly linked to exit polls and early projections circulating before voting has concluded in all parts of the Kingdom. This creates unequal information conditions for voters and may influence late voting behaviour. Electoral timing should not place any group of voters at a structural disadvantage or expose them to premature national trend signals.

We recommend that polling stations in the Dutch Caribbean open for designated hours on the day prior to mainland polling and close simultaneously with mainland

Netherlands voting hours, ensuring equal information conditions and reducing the influence of early projections and exit polls.

C2: Kingdom-Wide Campaign Responsibility

We observed that campaign activity and messaging often remain heavily European-Netherlands focused, despite the franchise extending across the Kingdom. This creates an imbalance in voter information and engagement for Dutch Caribbean voters and risks reinforcing unequal campaign attention. Where the electoral system is Kingdom-wide, campaign responsibility should be as well.

Political parties should campaign across the whole Kingdom, not just the mainland, and make sure Dutch Caribbean voters are properly included in outreach and messaging.

Parties should be open about where and how they campaign so coverage gaps can be seen and addressed.

C3: Clarify and Strengthen Rules on Inducements ("Treating")

Our observers encountered uncertainty and inconsistency around what constitutes impermissible inducements to voters, such as gifts, refreshments, or small benefits linked to campaign activity. Ambiguity in this area creates enforcement gaps and reputational risk. Even low-value inducements can exert undue influence, particularly in smaller or economically vulnerable communities. Other democracies treat this as a serious electoral offence with clear penalties.

We recommend that the rules on campaign inducements ("treating") be clarified, consolidated, and publicly explained, with explicit examples of prohibited conduct.

We further recommend that meaningful penalties be attached and enforced, so that inducement rules function as a real deterrent rather than advisory guidance.

Media Recommendations

M1: Public Broadcasting Coverage for the BES Islands

We are concerned that citizens in the BES islands do not consistently receive sufficiently localised, practical, and legislative election coverage from national public broadcasters. Equal franchise should be matched by equal access to relevant electoral information. Public service broadcasting obligations should explicitly include territorial inclusion.

We recommend that NOS and other public broadcasters adopt a formal requirement to provide consistent, localised election coverage and voter information for citizens outside the European Netherlands.

We further recommend periodic review of whether legislative and procedural election changes are being clearly communicated to these audiences.

M2: Polling, Projections, and Methodology Transparency

We observed widespread media use and rapid dissemination of opinion polls during campaigns and immediately before polling day, often without adequate methodological context. Polls presented without margin-of-error, sampling limitations, or methodological explanation risk misleading voters and shaping campaign narratives disproportionately. This is particularly sensitive close to polling day, when voter behaviour may be influenced by perceived momentum rather than policy choice.

We recommend that the media regulator and relevant oversight bodies examine current polling dissemination practices, including timing, presentation standards, and required methodological disclosure.

We recommend that media outlets adopt mandatory context standards when reporting polls, including methodology, sample size, margin of error, and commissioning source.

M3: Coverage of Immigration and Foreign Affairs

We note that media coverage of immigration and foreign affairs can at times lack balance, context, or proportionality, particularly during campaign periods. Sensational or simplified framing risks distorting voter understanding and polarising debate. Given the salience of these issues in Dutch elections, coverage standards matter directly for informed voter choice.

We recommend that media organisations adopt strengthened editorial guidelines for campaign-period coverage of immigration and foreign affairs, emphasising context, proportionality, and evidence-based framing.

We further recommend routine editorial review of campaign coverage balance in these high-impact topic areas.

Appendix 1 – Social Media Data

Figure 1 – mention statistics of all the data we collected

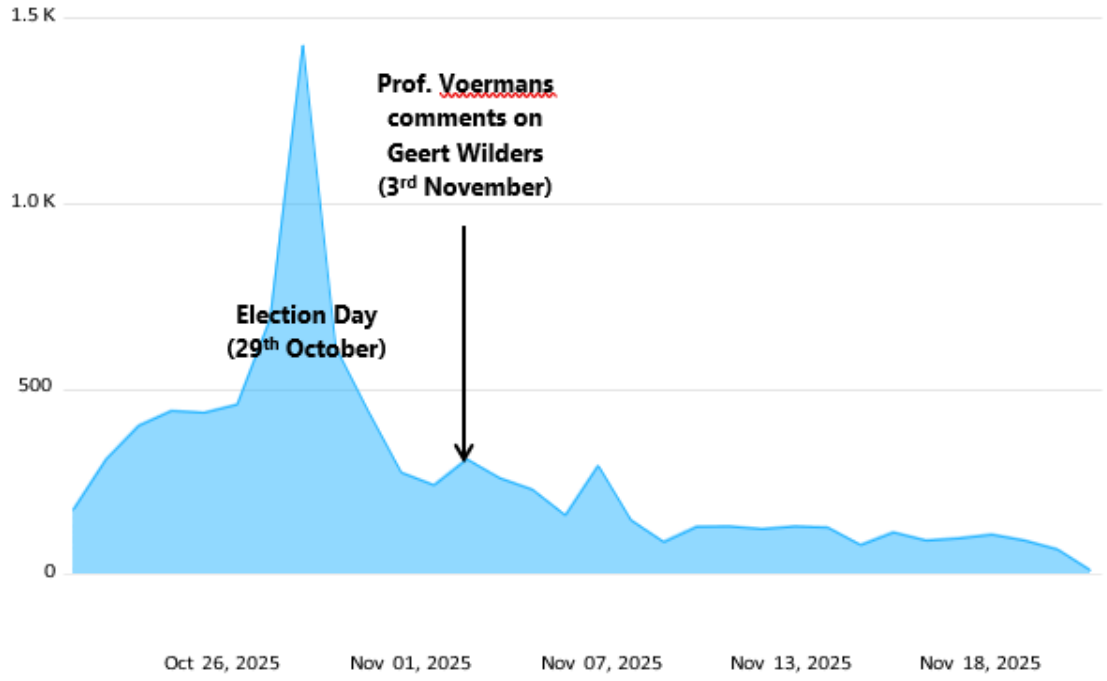


Figure 2 – analysis of the reach of the all the posts we collected during the observation

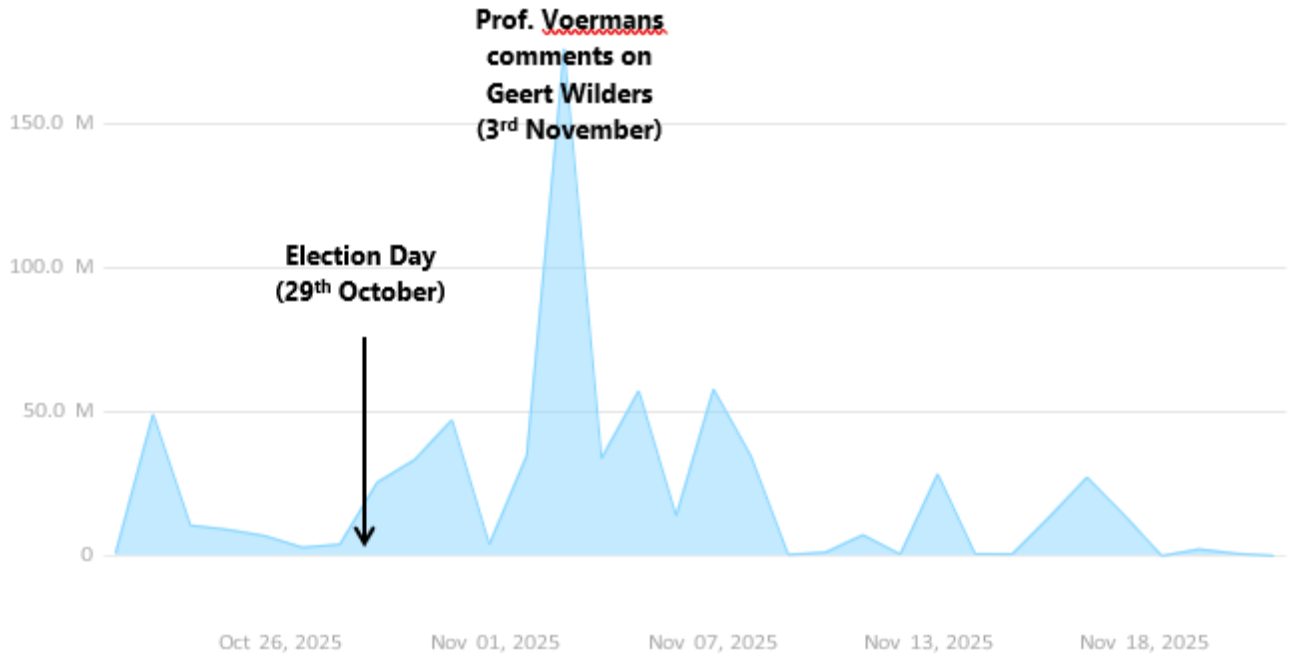


Figure 3 – mention statistics for posts focusing on questioning the integrity of the election

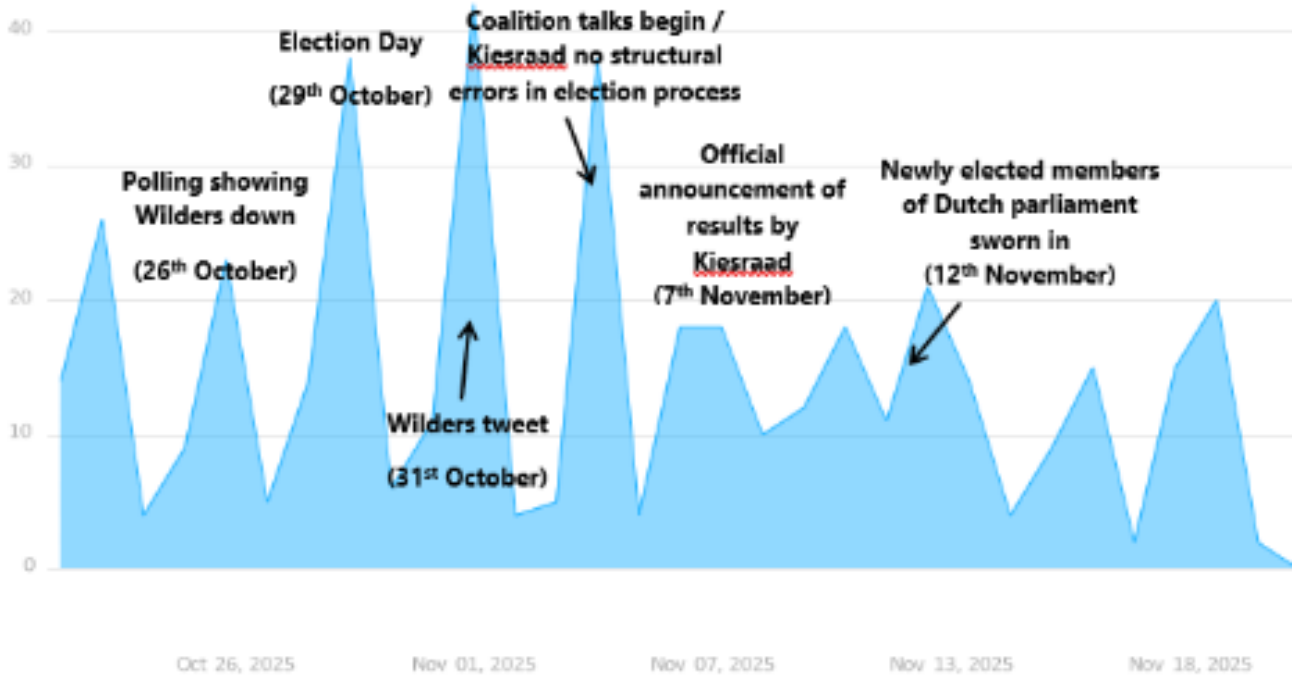


Figure 4 – analysis of the reach of posts that question the integrity of the election

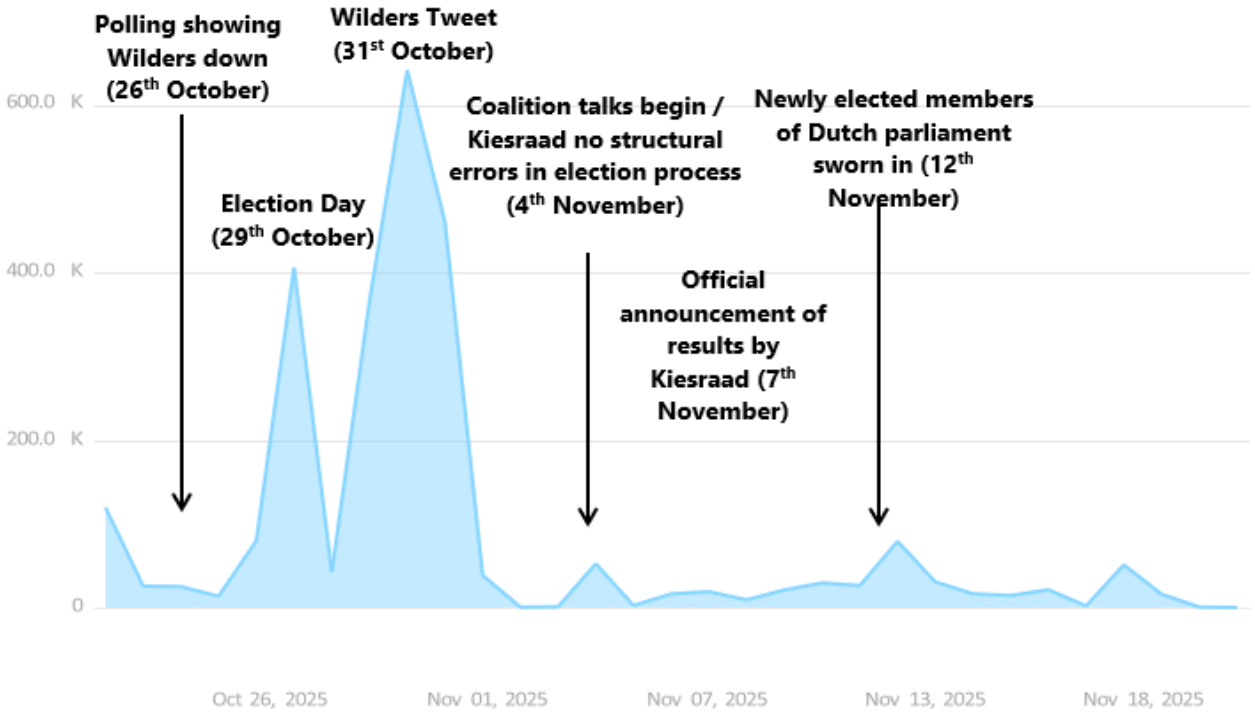


Figure 5 – Proxy Voting mentions

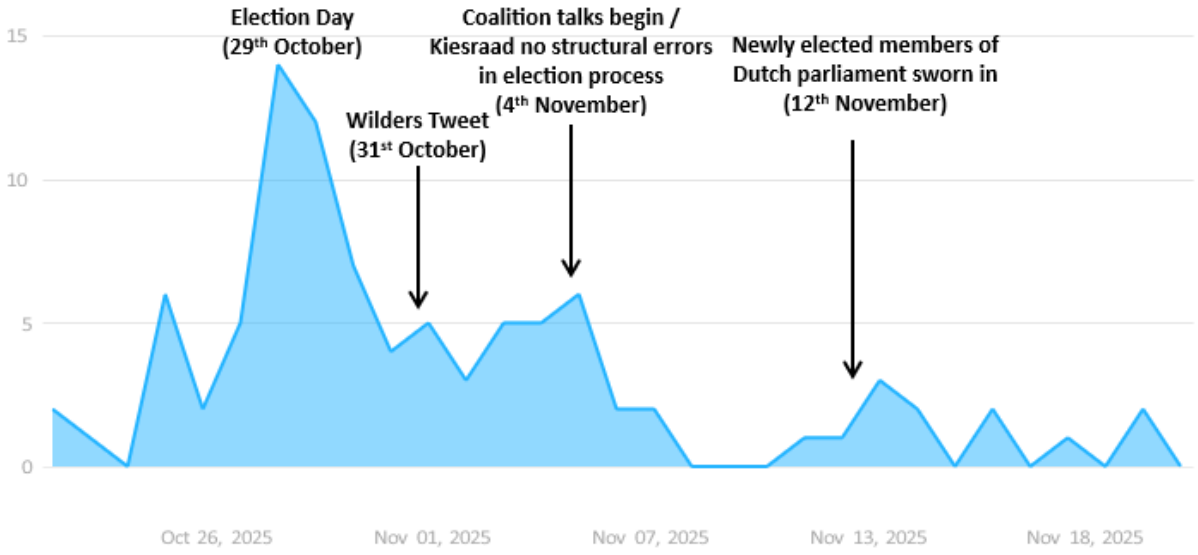
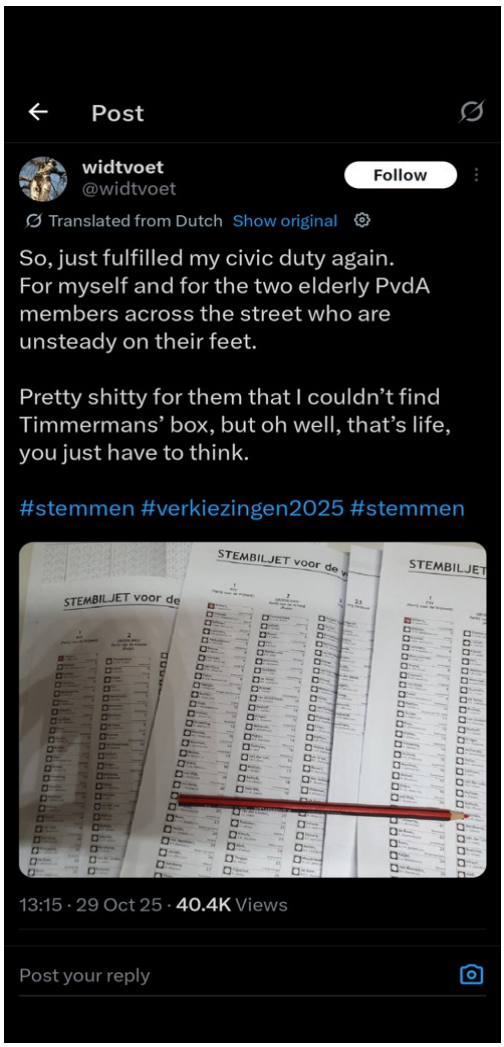


Figure 6 – X post, abuse of proxy voting / Figure 7 – X post, questioning of the counting procedure



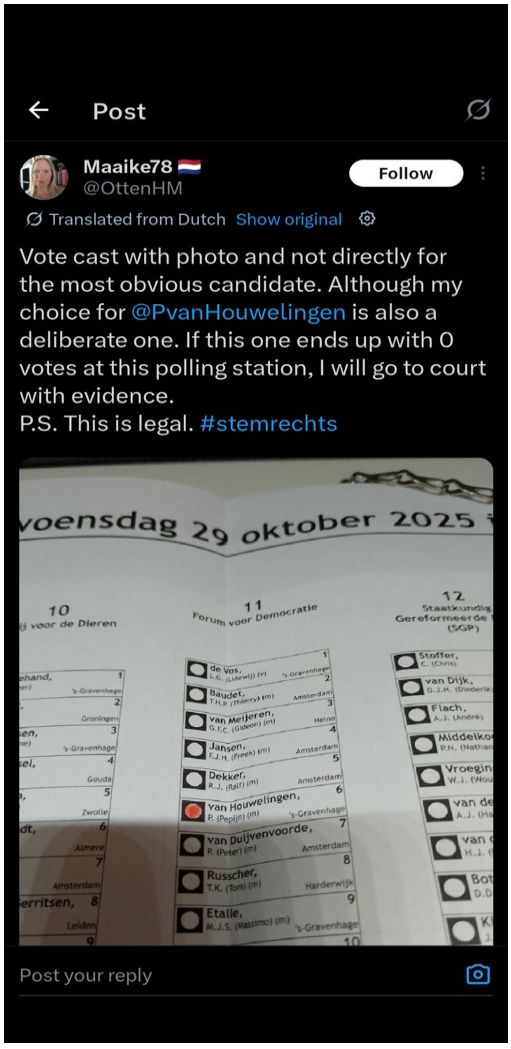


Figure 8 – Comparative analysis of the mentions we collected that focus on the counting process and question the integrity of the election

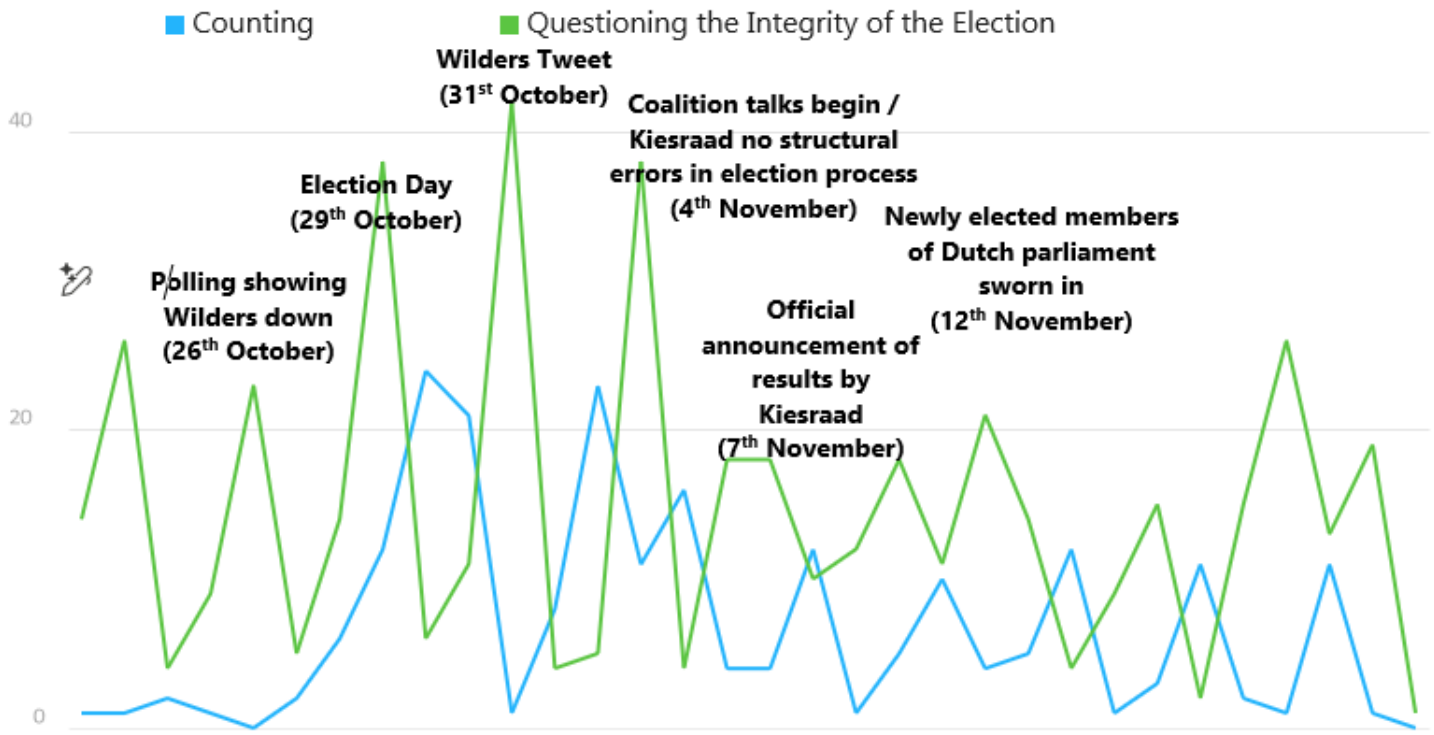


Figure 9 – Competitive analysis of the mentions we collected on policy areas (immigration, environmental policy, state benefits)

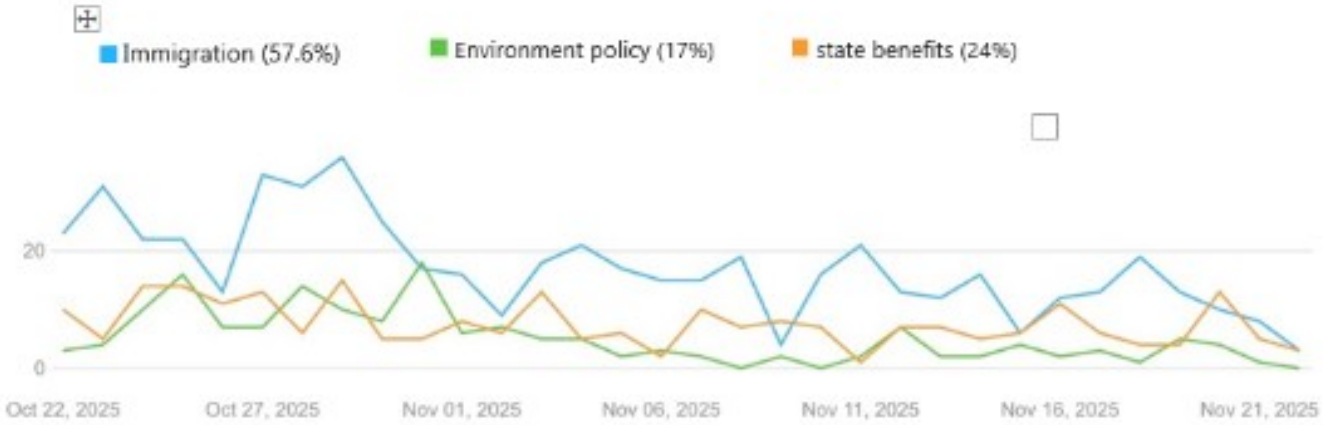


Figure 10 – sentiment analysis of immigration, environmental policy and state benefits.

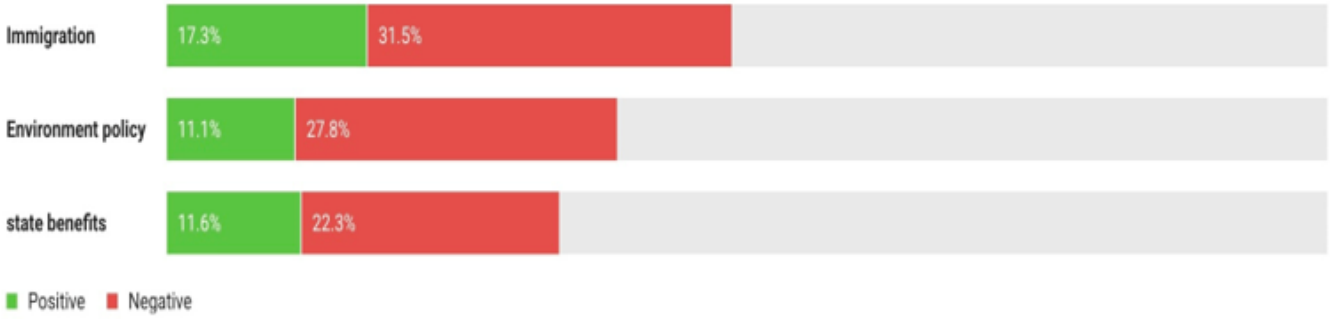
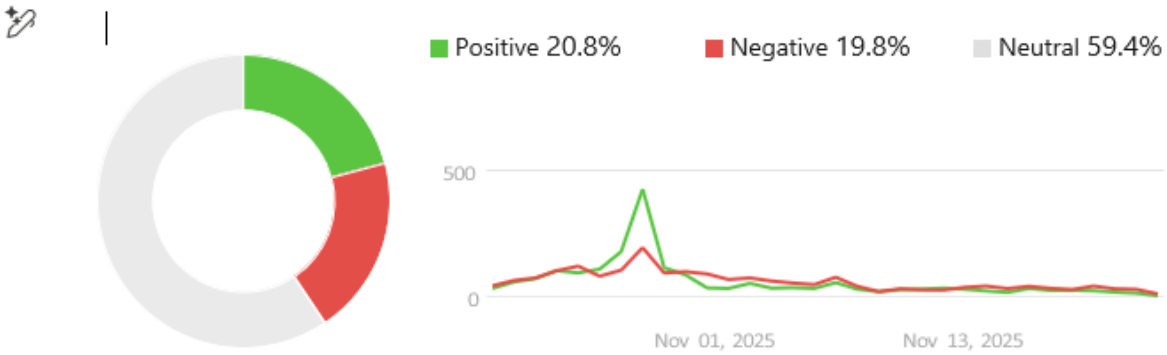


Figure 11 – sentiment analysis of all the data we collected during our observation.



The first case of family voting involved a man observing the vote of a woman within the polling booth. The second case involved a man taking a ballot paper from a female voter and completing it on her behalf before putting it in the ballot box.

TERSCHELLING POLLING STATION

One man brought 5 voting cards but he was only allowed to [proxy] with 3.

ZWOLLE POLLING STATION

On two occasions two people were in a same booth. First time it was mother and daughter (daughter not voting). Second time it was two adult friends.

DELFT POLLING STATION

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