



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Boekbespreking van: Jaarboek Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen 1998

Keman, H.

### Citation

Keman, H. (2000). Boekbespreking van: Jaarboek Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen 1998. *Acta Politica*, 35: 2000(4), 465-467. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450761>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450761>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

of oversimplifying an author's argument for the purpose of offering a brief summary that will be useful to students; in other cases, however, real distortions are introduced into the author's original arguments. For example, I was not satisfied with the summaries of more than a dozen studies of democratization, in which highly nuanced arguments are reduced to only a couple of explanatory variables (see Landman's Table 7.2). Likewise, the summaries of small-*N* studies by scholars such as Moore, Skocpol, and Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens often ignore the role of sequencing and timing. These scholars are interested not only in specifying the values of certain macro variables but also in theorizing the way in which the temporal ordering of variables can have a major effect on outcomes. Landman's summary of static variables does not do justice to these considerations of temporal processes.

Furthermore, because this book focuses on substantive arguments, it necessarily devotes comparatively less attention to analysing the actual research techniques used in large-*N*, small-*N*, and case study research. While students will learn about the different conclusions offered in these research traditions, they will not develop a real feel for what it is like to work with statistical data for large numbers of cases or with detailed historical information for a small number of cases. As a result, some students may have trouble fully appreciating the various checks and balances between the traditions discussed by Landman.

Part III of the book considers the major methodological challenges facing comparative politics in the years to come. I found this part of the book to be the least satisfying from a pedagogical perspective. In the effort to summarize all of the arguments in the book in a single short chapter, Landman ends up covering too much ground for most students. Likewise, the discussion of the past and future of comparative politics is too brief. For example, in a mere two pages Landman describes the evolution of the substantive foci and research methods of comparative politics over the entire last century. Such sweeping generalizations are probably too superficial to engage most students. More intriguing themes are raised at the very end of the book with the discussion of new transnational political influences, human rights, and globalization.

In summary, Landman has written an important if not perfect textbook on methods for comparative political analysis. A major advantage of this book over other similar offerings is its impressive use of detailed and up-to-date examples from real studies of comparative politics. I would highly recommend the book for advanced undergraduate students, even though it sometimes attempts to cover too much material in too little space for this audience. However, I would caution against using the book with graduate students. The problem is not any of the inevitable limitations that arise in Landman's sweeping discussion, but rather that summary versions of methodological ideas and substantive works are less helpful for these students. Professors who teach graduate seminars on comparative politics will be better off assigning selected items from the many excellent works considered in Landman's textbook.

James Mahoney

Gerrit Voerman (ed.) *Jaarboek Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen 1998* [*The 1998 Yearbook of the Centre for the Documentation of Dutch Political Parties*]. Groningen: Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen 1999. ISBN 90-75612-01-x, f 25,-.

In the 25 years of its existence the *Centre for the Documentation of Dutch Political Parties* has proven its value for the study of Dutch politics. One of its features is the publication of a yearbook. Basically, it has two components: historical information on special topics of party history and an annual overview of the main political events, particularly of parties. Furthermore, the yearbook traditionally pairs a few idiosyncratic historical studies with a number of analytical essays on the position of Dutch political parties in the political process within the Netherlands. The 1998 yearbook is no exception in this respect. Despite its emphasis on historical analysis and on the intricacies of the politics of only one political system, the 1998 yearbook offers a few contributions that are of interest to the general comparative political scientist.

The volume contains three history-oriented papers. One deals with affiliated youth organizations. Another discusses the relationship between the Dutch Communist Party and its counterpart in the GDR, the SED, between 1946-1989. The last essay is an intriguing paper on the liberal party and its relationship with the press in the 1950s and 1960s. All three are valuable for those who are interested in these kinds of *petites histoires*, but they are less relevant to political science in general than the 'analytical' papers.

The latter all deal with the main political event of 1998 in Dutch politics: the national parliamentary elections. *Van Praag* and *Penseel* pose the question to what extent have marketing methods professionalized electoral campaigning. *Lucardie* gives an overview of the parties that competed for office, but were not eligible to enter parliament (i.e., they did not even gain 0.67% of the national vote!). *Mamadouh* and *Van der Wusten* provide us with a geographical analysis of the stability of and changes in voting behaviour at the local level in the Netherlands. Lastly, *Andeweg* discusses the pros and cons of the Dutch process of forming a coalition government.

All these essays are relevant for the study of Dutch politics. At the same time, they have a rather parochial flavour about them. They tend to emphasize the peculiarities if not idiosyncrasies of Dutch politics rather than the more general trends that can be observed. This leads to remarks about coalition theories that cannot explain the actual composition of the present government (*Andeweg*, p. 193). Another example is the use of the volatility measure by *Mamadouh* and *Van der Wusten*, who claim that it has not been used before on a disaggregated level (except in the United Kingdom, p. 165). Apart from the fact that this is not true (see, for instance, *Mair & Bartolini, Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability. The Stabilisation of European Electorates 1885-1985*, 1990, as well as *Lane & Ersson, Politics and Society in Western Europe*, 1998), it only shows that these analyses – however sensible they are – lack a broader context. This is also true for the contributions by *Lucardie* and by *Van Praag* and *Penseel*, who

could have profited from the current comparative literature. Nevertheless, these four papers point to some issues that are of interest beyond the Dutch case.

Lucardie's contribution surveys those parties that did not gain (even) one seat. His explanation is that most of these parties lacked a prolific profile that made them, on the one hand, different from the main parties, and, on the other, sufficiently attractive in terms of leadership and issues. Hence, they did not or could not catch the imagination of the electorate. An additional conclusion Lucardie draws is that the traditional Dutch *party families* still dominate the political scene. However, whether this is a sufficient explanation remains to be seen. For one thing, it cannot be corroborated historically (see, for example, the development of the Socialist party [SP], the social-liberal party [Democraten '66], and even the rise and decline of the extreme rightwing party [CD]). Nowadays, more attention is paid to this type of 'new' parties and their origins. On the one hand, in this type of analysis the ideas of Rokkan regarding the importance of (new) cleavages are followed. On the other hand, the relationship between societal 'extremism' and (successful) party-formation is analysed comparatively (see, for instance, Mueller-Rommel [ed.], *New Politics in Western Europe*, 1989). Lucardie's piece would certainly have gained weight if he had used this kind of comparative literature to discuss the electoral failure of many 'newcomers' in the Netherlands.

Van Praag and Penseel offer an interesting view of the growing importance of electoral research that is based on, or is derived from, marketing techniques. This has led to a change in campaign techniques in which the party is not only sold to the voter, but where the consumer may also influence a party's behaviour. Interestingly, the ideas (or strategies) of the campaigns appear to support the 'salience theory' and the 'median voter' (and 'least distance') approach used in electoral studies. If this is true, then electoral campaigns can well be considered as intervening variables producing spurious relationships found in earlier electoral studies. Van Praag and Penseel's essay could thus contribute to the further development of this field in comparative politics (see, for instance, LeDuc, Niemi & Norris [eds.], *Comparing Democracies. Elections and Voting in a Global Perspective*, 1996, especially the chapters by Farrell and Semetko).

Mamadouh and Van der Wusten examine electoral change at the municipal level. Their conclusions are clear: there has been little change compared with 1994 and 1989. Even though some parties win (e.g., VVD) and others lose (e.g., CDA), the geographic distribution of voting patterns remains quite stable. There is still a 'socialist' dominance in the northern Netherlands; there is still a 'bible belt' across the Netherlands (running from the south-west to the north-east), while in urban zones the electorate still does not turn up in the same numbers as elsewhere. The most interesting part of this contribution concerns the 'swing' of the electorate, or rather its volatility. Total volatility was 15.75% in 1998 (Table 3, p. 166), which is less than in 1994. On the municipal level the volatility differs between regions, but is geographically stable. All this is nice to observe, but what does it mean? It does not imply that we know more about the so-called floating voter. The authors think that this is so (p. 172), but they

are mistaken: the volatility measure tells us how many voters swapped party, not how long it took them to decide to swap or not! It would have been much more interesting if Mammadouh and Van der Wusten had used their data to confront it with other available data at the local level (for instance, socio-economic, demographic, and cultural variables; in the way that, for example, Mair and Bertolini have done). This could well have shed light on the causes of electoral stability (and sometimes the lack thereof) that they have observed in the Netherlands over time.

Andeweg's essay discusses the process and outcome of the government formation of the second Dutch government (1998 to date) that excluded the Christian-Democratic Party (CDA), but included the social-liberal party (D66) (even though the latter was not required to form a minimal winning coalition). It is very laudable that Andeweg adopts a comparative perspective that helps him to dispel some myths and superficial criticisms of the stereotypical Dutch way of forming a government. Most interesting are his observations with respect to who actually plays the game and directs the process. More and more, it is the members of the preceding government who are the key players and less and less the parties or their parliamentarians. Hence, its predecessor, including the predecessor's governing pact, has basically formed the present government. Secondly, he notes that the Dutch tradition of appointing 'specialists' as ministers is making way for the practice of appointing 'politicians'. Taken together, the current development implies a certain risk of oligarchic behaviour and thereby creating a democratic deficit: not only regarding the electorate, but also with respect to the ministers' own parties. Given the fact that we know that this shift has already taken place in many European countries, it would have been interesting to know what it means for the role of government elsewhere. Implicitly, Andeweg's analysis is of a comparative nature. It would have strengthened his conclusions if he had taken into account the peculiar institutional context of Dutch government formation and compared this with practices elsewhere (say, Belgium or Denmark). This may have shed more light not only on the peculiarities of the Dutch process, but also on how peculiar it is.

All in all, the annual volume of the *Documentatie Centrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen* has become a valuable and appreciated asset of Dutch Political Science. In part it is a useful reference work, and in part it offers interesting analyses of Dutch parties and politics. Unfortunately, it is directed at a (small) Dutch audience only. It is worthwhile considering whether or not the volume should be translated (in part). If it was decided to do this, the analytical contributions would have to be developed in a more comparative fashion and related more to the present debates in comparative political science.

Hans Keman