

Political Science and Changing Politics

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Foreword

Politics is undergoing significant changes, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere. New trends, movements and ideas are playing an increasingly important role, while traditional centres of power are crumbling, and new powers are on the rise. These changes give rise to new questions. Sometimes we can understand changes with the insights and theories we have, but now and again we need to modify our theories in the light of the latest developments. A lot is changing in politics, and many issues are being debated, though not everything: some practices, beliefs and behaviours also manifest an astonishing continuity.

An important feature of this introductory political science book is that it looks at political developments from a strongly comparative, and sometimes also a historical, perspective. This approach finds support in the saying, 'Knowing just one country means knowing none at all' [in the original Dutch, 'Wie slechts één land kent, kent géén land']. The underlying idea is that you can locate and interpret changes in one country only by comparing them with developments in others. Doing this can make it clear that, while many developments vary from one country to another, they share a common background. Many chapters in this volume take developments in the Netherlands as a starting point, in order then to consider and analyse changes. That said, this book is an introduction not to Dutch politics, but to political science as a scholarly discipline.

It has two parts. The first deals with a number of important current issues. The themes are systematically introduced and linked to social and political changes, and to new scholarly insights. It addresses topics such as power – the core concept in political science; developments in the field of political equality and inequality; the growing importance of collective identity and nationalist sentiment; the future of the welfare state, and consensus democracy.

The second part deals with the role that citizens, groups and organisations, commonly referred to as *actors*, play in contemporary politics. It looks at, among other things, the political behaviour and views of citizens and at their changing party preferences, but also at the ways in which political parties cope with this. It also considers the growing importance of interest groups, as well as the power of the media in politics today.

The formative history of this volume goes back quite a long way. Already in 1991, a collection of essays appeared: *Maatschappij, Macht, Nederlandse*

politiek [Society, Power, and Dutch Politics]. Over the years, there appeared more and more new collections that always played a key role in introducing first-year students to political science. Uwe Becker was the driving force behind these volumes. The last book: *Politicologie, basisthema's en Nederlandse politiek* [Political Science, Basic Themes and Dutch Politics], edited by Uwe Becker and Philip van Praag, appeared in 2006. After more than 10 years, this book was in need of drastic revision. Almost all contributions to this collection are new: only a single chapter is partly based on an earlier version. Unfortunately, Uwe Becker passed away all too soon in 2014. He made a significant and influential contribution to the education of political science at the University of Amsterdam. This introductory book continues the tradition that he started.

Philip van Praag

Amsterdam, June 2017