

Between democracy and citizenship

The political discussion about foreigners' suffrage in the Netherlands 1970-2000



Research master thesis Modern History

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Contents

Introduction	1
1. Democracy, citizenship and suffrage	6
1.1 Between democracy and citizenship	6
1.2 The Democratic citizen paradox	9
1.3 Denizenship and postnational argumentation	10
2. Methodology and sources	13
2.1 Analysing politics	13
2.2 Political reactions	14
2.3 Ideologies as analytical tool	17
2.4 Freeden and Jacobs combined	19
2.5 The implications of language	21
2.6 Left and Right	22
2.7 Interoperating constitutional change	23
2.8 Sources	24
3. 1945-1979: The Dutch minority policy since the Second World War	28
3.1 Temporary migrants	29
3.2 A radical change	33
3.3 Chapter Summary	36
4. 1970-1977: A proposition from the left	38
4.1 Humble beginnings	38
4.2 Plenary debut	43
4.3 A careful proposal to change the constitution	45
4.4 The debate in Rotterdam	49
4.5 Chapter summary	52
5. 1977-1986: The right takes initiative	55
5.1 Moluccans as catalyst for change	55
5.2 Reluctance and doubts	57
5.3 Breaking the political impasse	61

5.4 The regular bill	64
5.5 Illegality and minimal term of residence	66
5.6 Chapter Summary	71
6. 1986-2000: Information campaign, elections and political aftermath	74
6.1 Living together, voting together	74
6.2 Foreigners' suffrage and double nationality	81
6.3 Supralocal Foreigners' suffrage fades away	86
6.4 Chapter Summary	89
Concluding remarks	93
Bibliography	97
Appendix: composition of the Dutch Parliament Since 1945	105

Cover picture: a Turkish woman casts her vote in a ballot box during the local elections in Leerdam held on 27th of November 1985. Taken from: 'Gemeenteraadsverkiezingen in Leerdam', *Buitenlanders Bulletin*, 11th year, no 1 (1986) 9.

Introduction

On the 19th of March 1986 approximately 350.000 extra people gained the opportunity to make their vote count during the Dutch local elections.¹ Turks, Moroccans, Greeks, Italians and a broad range of other foreigners had been given the right to participate if they lived longer than five years in the country. Although the percentage of foreigners that actually cast their vote on this partly clouded Wednesday fell far behind when compared with the turnout of Dutch citizens, the newly acquired possibility to participate in politics was characterised by many politicians as a victory for democracy.² For modern Dutch politics, the grant of suffrage to foreigners meant a unique moment in parliamentary history: the detachment of a mode of formal political participation from the demand of citizenship.

In order to make this detachment possible, two formal political boundaries had to be taken in consideration. Firstly, the constitution had to be changed in order to broaden the scope of active and passive voting rights beyond the boundaries of citizenship.³ Secondly, a regular law had to be implemented in order to actually establish the possibility to vote. This thesis is concerned with the character and development of the political process before and after the actual grant of voting rights to foreigners. The first of two main aims of this dissertation is to establish a better understanding of the relation between the general societal developments surrounding the grant of voting rights to foreigners and the stances and approaches of political parties and the Dutch government when this matter was discussed inside and outside parliament.

In scholarly literature about migrants in the Netherlands, the grant of suffrage to foreigners is generally mentioned briefly.⁴ The new law is in existing literature often

¹ Due to a merger between various municipalities the first time foreigners were able to vote was during the local elections in Leerdam on the 27th of November 1986. See: 'Gemeenteraadsverkiezingen in Leerdam', *Buitenlanders Bulletin*, 11th year, no 1 (1986) 9.

² Frank Buijs, *De stem van migranten en werklozen: de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van 19 maart 1986 te Rotterdam* (Leiden, 1986) 23.

³ As can be expected, changing the constitution is no easy task. After gaining a majority of two thirds in parliament for a proposal to make an alteration in the constitutions, elections are held to gain the approval of the Dutch citizens. After this, the proposed constitutional change must once more be approved by at least two third of the members of parliament. For a more thorough explanation of the procedure to change the Dutch constitution see: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/grondwet-en-statuut/herziening-grondwet>.

⁴ Examples of the most prominent overview studies of migrant and migrant policy in the Netherlands are: Jan Lucassen Rinus Penninx, *Nieuwkomers, Nakomelingen, Nederlanders, Immigranten in Nederland 1550-1993* (Amsterdam, 1994) 154; Leo Lucassen & Jan Lucassen, *Winnaars en Verliezers, Een nuchtere balans van vijfhonderd jaar immigratie* (Amsterdam, 2012); Godfried Engbersen & René Gabriëls (eds.), *Sferen van Integratie, Naar een gedifferentieerd allochtonen beleid* (Amsterdam, 1995); Alfonso Maria Eugenio Fermin, *Nederlandse politieke partijen over minderhedenbeleid 1977-1995*(Amsterdam, 1995) U. Bosma, *Terug uit de kolonien. Zestig jaar postkoloniale migranten en hun organisaties* (Amsterdam, 2009); C. van Eijl; *Al te goed is buurmans gek. Het Nederlandse vreemdelingenbeleid 1840-1940* (Amsterdam, 2005). E. Heijs, *Van Vreemdeling tot Nederlander. De verlening van het Nederlanderschap aan vreemdelingen 1813-1992* (Amsterdam, 1995), P.

overshadowed by the implementation of the first overarching minority policy in the Netherlands which started at the end of 1979. As a result, the grant of suffrage to foreigners is regularly portrayed as an example of the many measures implemented by the government to help incorporate foreigners better in Dutch society. However, the political discussion revealing the many ways this new law can, and was, interpreted is not taken in consideration. The brief mentioning in literature makes it seem that grant of local suffrage to foreigners was a measure accepted by politicians universally. In contrary, as will be made clear in the pages of this thesis, foreigners' suffrage was fuel for considerable discussion in parliament. Perhaps more important, whereas the broadening of voting rights is generally linked in literature concerning migrants to Dutch minority policy, this thesis interprets the grant of voting rights to foreigners from a broader perspective: that of the development of democracy and citizenship. This approach is chosen because it provides the opportunity to map out the political tensions this type of legislation spawns. In modern parliamentary democracy discussion whether foreigners should be allowed to participate during elections automatically raise questions about the nature and development of citizenship. The way politicians approached foreigners' suffrage is thus not only revealing if one wants to understand how ethnic minorities were approached by the various political parties, but also how politicians interpreted matters like the constitution, popular sovereignty, citizenship, equality and their position within the ideological spectrum they act in.

A second, more broad -and theoretical- aim of this dissertation is to criticize an often recurring element in the approach of a great number of historians toward histories of democracy after the Second World War. A great number of scholars who attempt to map out a grand history of western democracy use the widespread appearance of universal suffrage during the first decades of the twentieth century as a pivotal moment of their analysis.⁵ The gaze of historians has a tendency to shift from a broadening of democracy in the form of expanding suffrage towards a deepening of democracy in the form of expanded human rights

Lakeman, *Binnen zonder kloppen. Nederlandse immigratie politiek en de economische gevolgen* (Amsterdam, 1999).

⁵ Of course, the exact moment when universal suffrage was accomplished varies from country to country. Especially woman's suffrage was in some countries achieved much later than in others. The bibliography about democracy is rather extensive. Examples of works that focus more on the deepening rather than the broadening of democracy are: Klaus von Beyne, *Von der Postdemokratie zur Neodemokratie* (Heidelberg, 2013); Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy, from membership to management in American civic life* (Oklahoma, 2003); Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Columbia, 2007); Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Polity Press, 2004); Remieg Aerts & Peter de Goede (eds.), *Omstreden Democratie, over de problemen van een succesverhaal* (Amsterdam, 2013); John Dunn, *Setting the People Free, The Story of Democracy* (London, 2005); John Dunn (ed.), *Democracy, The Unfinished Journey, 508 BC to AD 1993* (Oxford, 1993). Jan Werner Muller, *Contesting Democracy, Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe* (London, 2011); John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (New York, 2009).

and political institutions which culminated at the end of the sixties and then further intensified in the following decades. In most cases, the shift of attention towards the deepening of democracy is a fruitful way to analyse the often complicated matter that is political history and democracy. Since the advent of widespread universal suffrage, the dynamics of the state have changed drastically. One of the most remarkable changes is perhaps the development of the welfare state. This altered the relation between the government and its citizens and the way democracy was perceived. However, these developments do not necessarily exclude changes of aspects of democracy of another order. Few attention has been given to the assumption that the expansion of suffrage was perhaps not completed at the beginning of the twentieth century, but was (and is) still a part of contemporary societal and political debate. The focus of this debate has however shifted from the question which of the original inhabitants of a nation should be eligible to suffrage, towards the question whether those who are classified as foreigners should be able to cast their vote.⁶

These two main aims lead to the following research question: how did the political discussion about foreigners' suffrage in the Netherlands develop between 1970 and 2000? This time period is chosen because the subject appeared for the first time in governmental documents at the beginning of the 1970s and was for the last time comprehensively addressed at the end of the twentieth century. This time period is of course not a strict boundary. Attention will be given to the political situation before and after the first and last emergence of foreigners' suffrage in parliament.

In order to give a convincing answer to the research question, the following sub-questions will be addressed in the core chapters of this thesis: why did foreigners' suffrage become a topic of political discussion? How did the various political parties present in parliament approach foreigners' suffrage in the period under investigation? Why did a majority of parliament agree to amend the constitution in such a way that foreigners' local suffrage could be allowed? What determined the character of the regular law that allowed foreigners' local suffrage? Why have foreigners never been granted suffrage at the provincial and national level? How did international developments influence the discussion about foreigners' suffrage? And finally, why did a further broadening of foreigners' suffrage eventually disappear from the political agenda?

As can be deduced from the above, this research project focuses mainly on the Dutch

⁶ Suffrage for citizens has also developed in the second half of the twentieth century. Especially in the 1970s the required age to be able to vote was lowered in many countries. In the context of this thesis, this is also considered a deepening rather than a broadening of suffrage.

political situation. This does not mean that the Netherlands was the first to extend voting rights to foreigners. Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Ireland and Great-Britain opened the possibility of suffrage to foreigners before the Netherlands did. Each of these countries have decided on different conditions foreigners must meet before they are allowed to be able to elect, or be elected as, local representatives. In all three Scandinavian countries foreigners who are inhabitants for three years are allowed to participate in both the regional and the provincial elections. In Ireland there is in some cases no time limit attached to foreigners' suffrage. A foreigner can participate in the local elections the moment they are considered a legal resident. In Great Britain voting rights are not extended to aliens. However, citizens of Ireland and the Commonwealth are not considered as aliens and therefore have the right to vote during local elections if they reside in Britain.⁷ It would go beyond the scope of this thesis to scrutinize for each of these cases the political discussions in parliament that shaped the preconditions for foreigners to be allowed to vote. However, the variable conditions foreigners must meet in each different country show that every parliamentary discussion about foreigners' suffrage has its own national character. This assumption is strengthened by the way the debate about foreigners' suffrage took place in Belgium. At the end of the 1970's, the country faced similar circumstances as the Netherlands with ethnic minorities. Despite these similar circumstances, a law which would make suffrage possible for foreigners was accepted only as late as 2002. Even more research could be conducted on the parliaments that decided not to grant suffrage to foreigners. The case of the Netherlands has various elements that makes it unique. To name a few: the heritage of its former colonies, the tradition of consensus decision making (the *poldermodel*) and, directly related to this topic, a unique political approach towards ethnic minorities from the end of the Second World War onward.⁸ This emphasis on the Netherlands does of course not mean that international developments are neglected. This methodological issue will be scrutinised in the next chapter.

Just like the above outlaid main aims, the relevance of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, in contemporary times, discussions revolving around the position of foreigners in the Netherlands have not decreased. On the contrary: the attention of politicians towards this topic has been given an extra boost since the emergence of activist populist politicians like Pim Fortuyn, Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders. A better understanding of the reasons behind granting regional political participation to foreigners and the aftermath of this political episode provides a more thorough contextual dimension towards the Dutch political tradition

⁷ *Nederlands Centrum Buitenlanders*, Bijlage bij notitie O/RA/0105/AK/JbM d.d. 12 maart 1984.

⁸ This history will be briefly explained in a separate chapter.

when ethnic minorities are concerned. Secondly, this thesis can be considered as a case study that unveils the complicated relation between the sovereignty of nations, citizenship and democracy. Contrary to popular opinion, the discussion about voting rights did not reach its completion in the interbellum years. Expanding globalisation and the development of the European Union are but two of many contemporary factors that can drastically influence and alter the concept of national citizenship as the foundation of popular sovereignty. Therefore, case studies such as these can shed a light on the various political approaches towards changes in the concept of citizenship within particular national circumstances and traditions.

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter describes the tension and relation between, citizenship, suffrage and democracy in order to give a clear overview of the main issue the members of parliament faced when they had to decide whether foreigners should be allowed to vote. Subsequently, the second chapter takes this issue as a starting point when introducing the used methodology and sources. This chapter also operationalizes important concepts and other elements related to the topic of this thesis. Before continuing to the actual discussion about foreigners' suffrage, chapter three provides an overview of the Dutch government's stance towards immigrants between 1945 and 1979. This in order to familiarise the reader with the particular position of (postcolonial) migrants in the Netherlands at the time foreigners' suffrage was first discussed in parliament. Chapter four, five and six are the core of this thesis. Here, the development of the political discussion about foreigners' suffrage is explained and analysed in chronological order. Chapter four explains the origins and treatment of foreigners' suffrage between 1970 and 1974. Chapter five scrutinizes how and why both the constitutional amendment and the regular law were accepted by a majority of parliament. Finally, chapter six takes a closer look at the governmental and political parties' approach towards foreigners during the electoral campaign before the local elections of 1986 and maps out further developments of the political discussion about foreigners' suffrage after the local elections of 1986.

1. Democracy, citizenship and suffrage

This chapter explores the historical and theoretical relation between democracy, citizenship and suffrage. At the end of this chapter the term democratic citizenship paradox is introduced as a means to signify the central issue political actors in parliament faced when they had to make a decision whether foreigners should be allowed to make their way to the ballot box.

1.1 Between democracy and citizenship

Since the emergence of modern parliamentary democracies, periodical elections determine who are selected as representatives of the people. In the collective memory, it is widely accepted that the act of voting is one of the cornerstones of democracy. Suffrage gives the people of a nation the power to determine whether a certain politician or party can be trusted with the responsibility of deciding what is good for all the people. Parliamentary democracy, with its multi-party system, transparency and constant scrutiny by the electorate is therefore seen by many as the definitive political system which provides the most efficient balance between equality, popular consent and expertise of the representatives.

Especially in the past decade, this assumption has been criticized by many scholars in a vast number of ways. For instance, parliamentary democracy has been called too technocratic⁹, too meritocratic¹⁰, or even a representative aristocracy.¹¹ Also, the by many deeply cherished act of voting has been criticized. Historical research has revealed that the concept of voting was not introduced to serve the people, but rather because a newly emerged aristocracy needed a new form of legitimization for their power after the French Revolution. With the fall of the French nobles the legitimization of power by consent of god or birthright had fallen out of grace. Therefore the right to vote was implemented in order to legitimize the power of the new rulers. At the same time a similar development had taken place in the young new nation of America.¹² Since the end of the eighteenth century, the relation between politicians and voters has changed drastically. At the end of the nineteenth century, political parties emerged and in many countries universal suffrage was realized at the beginning of the

⁹ For a thorough study of this subject see: Frank Vibert, *The Rise of the Unelected, Democracy and the New Separation of Powers* (Cambridge, 2007).

¹⁰ For a specific treatment of this matter in the Dutch context see: M.A.P. Bovens, *De diplomademocratie: Over de spanning tussen meritocratie en democratie* (Amsterdam, 2006).

¹¹ David van Rebroeck, *Tegen Verkiezingen* (Amsterdam, 2013).

¹² For an excellent work on this topic see: Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge, 1997).

twentieth century, for men and usually somewhat later also for women.¹³ Even if the dynamic between representatives and the electorate has definitely changed towards a situation that can be considered radically more social and equal than the situation at the end of the eighteenth century, it can still be claimed that elections can better be interpreted as a form of consent rather than actual rule by the people.¹⁴

From the above, it is clear that theorizing whether a modern parliamentary democracy actually is democratic quickly leads to rather complicated discussions. While it is certainly important to be aware of the many theoretical pitfalls and paradoxes of modern parliamentary democracy, this thesis will not take position in any of these discussions. Whether voting is classified as democratic or not democratic, it cannot be denied that suffrage is still the most important political tool that legitimizes the existence of representative parliaments. Therefore, all political actors will interpret suffrage as the most powerful tool of the people to influence political affairs in a nation. While it can thus be argued whether suffrage actually is one of the cornerstones of democracy, it is certainly a crucial factor in the modern parliamentary system.

While the connection between democracy and suffrage is fuel for considerable debate, the historical link between suffrage and citizenship cannot be denied. For almost two centuries only citizens were allowed to participate during the elections in their own country. In Europe, the origins of modern citizenship can be traced back to France. The above section about democracy already touched upon the enormous change in the way sovereignty was interpreted as result of the revolutionary era at the end of the eighteenth century. Sovereignty, it was argued, belonged to no other than the people itself. Naturally, this made the question who should be considered part of the people more relevant. At first, it was argued that everyone who considered himself a proponent of the revolution could voluntarily make claim on the citizenship of France. Being a citizen was thus first supposed to be an individual political choice.¹⁵ However, this idea of the revolutionaries soon faced the practical objection that it would take a considerable amount of time and paperwork to document everyone's voluntary acceptance of citizenship. It was therefore decided that everyone who was born in

¹³ For a detailed history of the development of democracy see: John Dunn (ed.), *Democracy, The Unfinished Journey, 508 BC to AD 1993* (Oxford 1993). For a more intellectual accented history of democracy see: Jan Werner Muller, *Contesting Democracy, Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe* (London 2011).

¹⁴ For a more elaborated treatment of this argument and other tensions within the concept of democracy see: Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democratie en Tegendemocratie* (Amsterdam, 2012).

¹⁵ Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers in de Politiek*, 24-29. For a more detailed history of citizenship in the Netherlands see: Eric Heijs, *Van vreemdeling tot Nederlander, verlening van het Nederlanderschap aan vreemdelingen 1813-1992* (Nijmegen, 1995).

the territories of France automatically, and thus involuntarily, would be considered *citoyens*.¹⁶

At first, there was not much difference between the status of citizens and non-citizens. This corresponded with the universal ethic of the revolution that there were no differences amongst people. What mattered most was that one should agree with the tendencies of the revolution. (This could of course be contradicted by the fact that political rights were a privilege of the male population). However, this general open-minded opinion towards those who did not have French citizenship would quickly take a drastic turn. Between 1792 and 1795, the France republic faced a series of internal and external turmoil that would drastically change the relation between citizens and non-citizens. Openness towards foreigners was replaced by xenophobia. Every foreigner could in potential be an enemy of the republic. These years of war gave the concept of ‘stranger’ a negative ring and firmly established the notion that citizens should exclusively be the ones who could make a claim on political rights. This meant that ‘the difference between citizens and non-citizens got a juridical meaning.’¹⁷ Political rights were thus bound to citizenship.

After the reign of Napoleon, the idea that political rights should be the privilege of citizens spread throughout Europe. This strengthened the sovereignty of the people and bound the inhabitants of nations firmer together as a ‘single’ entity. During the nineteenth century, the notion of citizenship was used on the continent as the demarcation of the ‘native’ people as a political community that governed itself. This reinforced the position of states at the cost of distancing themselves from others. A gap between those with and without citizenship was created, which would have implications for the way foreigners are treated that prevailed far in the twentieth century and contemporary time.¹⁸

Nowadays, a citizen can be defined as a native or naturalized member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection.¹⁹ Non-citizen is a collective term for all those who live in a nation without having the corresponding nationality. Non-citizens are thus not only poor foreign fortune seekers or refugees but could also be international students or immigrants with a high economic value for the receiving country.²⁰ The most fragile group of non-citizens are what social scientist Matthew Gibney calls the Precarious Residents. They can be defined as ‘non-citizens living in the state that

¹⁶ The constitution of 1791 also granted French citizenship to those who lived outside the territory but were children of French parents. Also worth mentioning is the grant of citizenship to prominent foreigners who had contributed to the success of the revolution.

¹⁷ Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers in de Politiek*, 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁹ Matthew Gibney, *Precarious Residents: Migration Control, Membership and the Rights of Non-Citizens* (Oxford, 2009) 1.

²⁰ Gibney, *Precarious Residents*, 2.

possess few social, political or economic rights, are highly vulnerable to deportation, and have little or no option for making secure their immigration status.’²¹ This group of people in a nation can thus generally be described as those who are considered illegal or those who have limited protection from deportation.

1.2 *The Democratic citizen paradox*

Although the juridical difference between non-citizens and citizens prevailed. In general, scholars agree that the gap between those who have full citizenship and those who do not has greatly diminished during the second half of the twentieth century.²² Those who live in a European nation without having its nationality, granted that their stay is considered legal by the authorities, can make claim on a great number of rights that were once only granted to citizens. Examples of these are the right to reunite with family and access to welfare systems. The grant of local suffrage to non-citizens can also be seen as an action that narrowed the gap between citizens and non-citizens.²³

Despite the narrowing of the gap between citizens and non-citizens there is still an inherent inequality between these two groups. For instance, a great number of theorists argue that especially in countries that call themselves democratic, the still existing situation where citizens naturally have more political rights than non-citizens is morally wrong.²⁴ These scholars are of the opinion that those who live in a nation and are affected by the actions of the same government as their fellow inhabitants who have full citizenship are neglected and treated as second range citizens. The above described general histories of democracy and citizenship show that the power of the state is legitimized by consent of its citizens. However, if the number of inhabitants in a nation without citizenship rises, it could be argued that the legitimacy of the state by consent of its citizens diminishes. This is what social historian Dirk Jacobs calls the *democratic deficit*, which can be defined as: denying political rights to residents who do not have citizenship, but form a notable percentage of the total population of a nation that characterises itself as democratic.²⁵ Since this is (unintentionally²⁶) a rather

²¹ Ibid. 2.

²² Matthew Gibney, *Prekarious Residents: Migration Control, Membership and the Rights of Non-Citizens* (Oxford 2009) 4. Other notable works that express this view are: Yaesmin Soysal, *The limits of Citizenship, Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago, 1994) and Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain* (Oxford, 2000).

²³ An explanation for the narrowing of this gap could have been the world wide grown emphasis on universal human rights. Of course there are also a great number of people who are stateless.

²⁴ For more information about this matter see: Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford, 1983) and David Miller, *National Responsibility and Global Justice* (Oxford, 2007).

²⁵ Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers in de Politiek*, 33-36.

normative term to describe the practical problem of incorporating foreigners further in the political system, I would like to propose the term *democratic citizenship paradox*. This name suits, because parliamentary democracy on the one hand tends to serve the interests of all people in society while at the same time it needs to create boundaries as to who actually belong to ‘the people’. Rather than claiming that there is something wrong with democracy itself, the appointment of the problem as a paradox shows that the difficulty of defining who the people are is always inherently in contradiction with the effort of many parliamentary democracies to create a society that is as equal as possible. Another reason why this new term is proposed is because it underlines that this project is not concerned with moral questions of the rights and wrongs of parliamentary democracy, but rather how the inherent difficulties of democracy come to play, and are approached, by Dutch politicians when issues related to citizenship are discussed.

1.3 Denizenship and postnational argumentation

At this point, it is fruitful to delve a bit deeper in the reasons proposed by scholars why the gap between citizens and non-citizens has diminished in the period under review. In scholarly literature, there are two models that attempt to explain the development of rights for foreigners: the denizenship model and the postnational model. Proponents of the postnational model generally argue that national citizenship has since the second half of the twentieth century been superseded by a transnational assumption of universal personhood. In the words of Yasemin Soysal, who coined the postnational model in her work *Limits of Citizenship, Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*:

Individual rights, expansively redefined as human rights on a universalistic basis and legitimized at the transnational level, undercut the import of national citizenship by disrupting the territorial closure of nations. The same human rights that came to be secured over the centuries in national constitutions as the rights and privileges of a proper citizenry have now attained a new meaning and become globally sanctioned norms and components of a supranational discourse.²⁷

²⁶ Jacobs was aware that this name for the problem had a normative tendency, but decided to use it for strictly analytical purposes. *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷ Yaesmin Soysal, *The limits of Citizenship, Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago, 1994) 164.

Thus, the postnational explanation argues that because human rights have developed in an universalistic sense, those without citizenship have gained more rights which has diminished the strength of the concept of citizenship. In response to this argument, a critic of the postnational explanatory model recently stated that ‘a broad array of scholars has downplayed, criticized, and at times trivialized national citizenship.’²⁸ One of the main points of criticism towards postnationalism is that this explanatory method often neglects the specific development of citizenship rights in individual states.²⁹

Generally, the denizenship model focuses on the development of the social and political position of aliens in particular nation states. Due to the rising number of immigrants in the second half of the twentieth century, many nations have given these new residents political rights despite the fact that they do not possess the relevant nationality. According to users of the denizenship approach, some kind of partial citizenship has emerged in many western nations. The character and development of this partial citizenship is determined by the particular political, cultural and economic circumstances of each nation.³⁰ However, it could be argued that this approach neglects broad international influences that could change or even completely alter the circumstances in particular nations.

Certainly in the context of the subject of this dissertation, where political issues about citizenship and foreigners and equality are very closely related to each other, there is inevitably a certain overlap between the international and the national. Therefore it is important to constantly be aware that both international and national developments can influence each other. Thus rather than interpreting the denizenship model and the postnational model as two competing ways to explain changes in the dynamic of citizenship, they could for the purposes of this thesis better be seen as complementary, influencing each other in a sheer infinite series of events. The denial of the supremacy of both the national and the international is related to the transnational theory of *Histoire Croisée*.³¹ In this thesis, the postnational and denizenship model will not be used as overarching analytical approaches to explain why foreigners were given voting rights. Rather, the terms postnational and denizenship will be used as a means to categorize the argumentation of politicians and other relevant actors about foreigners’ suffrage. Arguments based on international development are thus considered postnational, while arguments grounded on denizenship refer to the particular domestic

²⁸ Randall Hansen, ‘The Poverty of postnationalism: citizenship, immigration, and the new Europe,’ *Theory & Society*, volume 38, (January, 2009) 1-24.

²⁹ Hansen, ‘The Poverty of postnationalism’, 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-20.

³¹ For an introduction of *Histoire Croisée* see: Michael Werner and Benedicte Zimmermann, ‘Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity’, *History and Theory* 45 (February 2006), 30-50.

situation in the Netherlands. For instance, if a political actor states that foreigners' suffrage must be introduced because of the development of globalisation this will be called a postnational argument. On the other hand, a political actor uses a denizenship argument when it is claimed that foreigners' suffrage must be introduced to enhance the integration of migrants in a country.

2. Methodology and sources

Now that the main political issue surrounding foreigners' suffrage has been clarified, this chapter turns to the in this thesis used methodology to analyse the political discussion about the matter. Furthermore, key concepts and elements of the discussion are operationalized. The chapter ends with a description and accountability of the used primary sources.

2.1 Analysing politics

According to historian Ido de Haan the political realm cannot be categorized as strictly separated from the rest of society. Yes, the political realm or atmosphere can be seen as a closed entity with its own behavioural and social rules, but its actions transcend to other atmospheres in society. The actions of the political atmosphere have for instance direct consequences on the behaviour of the corporative and educative atmospheres since politics determine in some sense the boundaries of their actions. The integration of foreigners in the political sphere is therefore certainly not only a tool to give them more influence in the behaviour of government, it is also a way of guaranteeing that foreign minority groups are recognized and taken seriously as participators in society.³² Since their everyday life will inevitably be entangled with the conduct of politics, neglecting foreigners in the political atmosphere is thus at the same time a way of neglecting their (political) existence altogether.

However, the recognition of foreigners as political actors is of course something else than letting them fully participate in the political atmosphere. Parliamentary discussions on the grant of political rights to foreigners generally do not revolve around the question whether non-citizens *could* participate in the political atmosphere, but to what *extent* they are able to participate. For instance, a great number of foreigners are knowingly or unknowingly already participating in the political atmosphere in the Netherlands because they have the right of free speech, the right to work in public jobs and the right to organize themselves in associations. These are examples of what I would like to call the *passive participation* in the political atmosphere. However, the grant of voting rights to foreigners can be considered a strengthening of the *active participation* of this group in the political atmosphere. Active participation in the political atmosphere thus means that an actor has direct influence on the composition and the actions of a government using official organs implemented for this cause. The next section will scrutinize the various reactions politicians could display when faced with a proposal to enhance the active political participation of foreigners.

³² Godfried Enbergsen & René Gabriëls (eds.), *Sferen van integratie, Naar een gedifferentieerd allochtonenbeleid* (Amsterdam, 2005) 159-161.

2.2 Political reactions

How should the political rhetoric revolving around the grant of voting rights to foreigners be approached? A natural starting point of inquiry is the study *Nieuwkomers in de Politiek* (Newcomers in Politics) by the Belgian scholar Dirk Jacobs. This dissertation compared the parliamentary debates about foreigners' suffrage in Belgium and the Netherlands. In the theoretical outlining of his work the scholar criticizes the usage of a critical discourse analysis.³³ According to Jacobs, especially in the case of migration studies, a critical discourse analysis is generally used to unmask 'hidden' racism of the elites in society.³⁴ Behind this notion lies the theoretical assumption that certain dominant ideologies are widespread in particular political situations. Studies that scrutinize the discourse of political parties and the government concerning ethnic minorities are generally constructed around the assumption that even proponents of an 'open' policy towards ethnic minorities are, knowingly or unknowingly, in the grasp of a certain dominant ideology that is inherently racist towards ethnic minorities. I would like to stress that this inherent racism is presumably subtle and of an entire different nature than for instance the stances of extreme right movements towards ethnic minorities. Rather, the racism that is in this case referred to is often a subtle reproduction of generally prevalent racism in a society by political elites.³⁵ According to social scientist Teun A. van Dijk this reproduction of racism can incorporate general egalitarian and humanitarian norms and values, can be subtle and indirect, and is often characterised by an emphasis on the negative aspects of minorities in society.³⁶ In the words of Van Dijk: 'A critical discourse analysis thus enables us to reveal not only the discursive patterns of white elite text and talk about ethnic affairs, but also the socio-cognitive and the sociocultural structures and strategies of their role in the reproduction of racism.'³⁷

According to Jacobs, the methodological problem of an above outlaid critical discourse analysis grounded on the assumption of one dominant ideology is that it is best usable if a scholar approaches his or her research from a normative starting point. It is certainly plausible that certain 'hidden' forms of racism occur when matters like voting rights for foreigners are considered in the formal political sphere. However, methodological problems could easily occur when one uses empirical evidence to prove the existence of

³³ For a good introduction of critical discourse analysis see: Teun A. van Dijk, 'Principles of critical discourse analysis' *Discourse and Society*, 4 (London, 1993) 249-283.

³⁴ Personally, I think that this seems like a rather determinist approach towards the usage of a critical discourse analysis. However, the thought pattern of Jacobs is outlaid here in order to explain how Jacobs came up with his own methodological tool to analyse the discussion about foreigners' suffrage.

³⁵ Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers in de Politiek*, 71-75.

³⁶ Teun A. van Dijk, *Elite Discourse and Racism* (London, 2013), 49-115.

³⁷ Van Dijk, *Elite Discourse and Racism*, 49.

underlying racism of formal political actors. For instance, an absence of a certain form of legislation or political discussion could be interpreted as evidence for racist tendencies. Also, the assumption that a dominant ideology ‘steers’ politicians towards certain conclusions about policy concerning migrants seems like a teleological take on political history closely related to neo-Marxism where ideology is often interpreted as an negative entity that distorts rational thinking.³⁸

In order to avoid the above mentioned pitfalls of a critical discourse analysis, Jacobs decided to use a more broad approach when scrutinizing the language of politicians. He separated the various possible reactions of politicians towards voting rights for immigrants – thus, a broadening of the active participation of foreigners in the political atmosphere- in four broad categories: *assimilationist inclusive discourse*, *assimilationist exclusive discourse*, *pluralistic inclusive discourse* and *segregationist exclusive discourse*. These are what Jacobs calls the four primary discourses used by politicians when immigration policy is discussed.³⁹

The assimilationist exclusive discourse does not accept a detachment of voting rights from citizenship on the grounds that only the ‘prime’ inhabitants of a nation should have the right to make political decisions within their border. The assimilationist inclusive discourse states in contrary that political rights should be given to foreigners in order to make them able to integrate fully in society so they could eventually make a claim for full citizenship. The pluralistic inclusive discourse is also a proponent of granting political rights to foreigners, but not necessarily with the goal of naturalization. Users of this discourse emphasize the inherent differences of cultures and individuals. Instead of arguing from the viewpoint that all citizens of a nation are a homogenous entity that should be ‘mirrored’ by foreigners in order to make claim on full political rights, this line of argumentation focuses rather on the inherent differences that should be cherished instead of criticized. The segregationist exclusive discourse completely rejects the positive effects of immigrants and denies the possibility that foreigners can integrate in society.⁴⁰ Schematically, when combined with the idea of the democratic citizen paradox, this analytical framework looks like this:

³⁸ For an introduction in Marxism political thought and ideology see: Michael Freeden, *Ideology, a very short introduction* (Oxford, 2003).

³⁹ Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers in de Politiek*, 92. Although Jacobs would surely reject this classification, it can definitely be argued that the by him proposed method seems itself a form of critical discourse analysis.

⁴⁰ Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers in de politiek*, 92-98.

		Do foreigners have to adapt in order to participate politically?	
		Yes	No
Can the absence of voting rights for foreigners be considered a democratic citizen paradox?	Yes	<i>assimilationist inclusive discourse</i>	<i>pluralistic inclusive discourse</i>
	No	<i>assimilationist exclusive discourse</i>	<i>segregationist exclusive discourse</i>

Table 1: Broad political discourses about foreigners' suffrage⁴¹

The theoretical framework developed by Jacobs can certainly aid towards a clearer categorization of various political stances when the separation between citizenship and suffrage is scrutinized. However, this clarity could also come at the cost of simplifying political opinions by categorising them in four static categories and perhaps even creating the illusion that the emergence of various political discourses takes places independently from overarching political situations or societal context. Using Jacob's discourses is useful to categorize *how* various political camps approached the proposal of granting voting rights to foreigners, but strays away from the question *why* certain stances towards a political issue are attacked or defended by political actors in parliament.

In this thesis I will use the four categories of political discourse coined by Jacobs, but I will incorporate the importance of underlying ideological thinking in the analysis as well. When Jacob rejected the usage of particular forms of critical discourse analysis he seems to have simultaneously rejected the importance of the concept of ideologies as an *analytical* tool. In his dissertation, Jacobs specifically underlines that he rejects the usefulness of any concept of ideology when performing empirical research. This decision is made by the scholar because he believes that the incorporation of notions of ideology would only push research towards a fruitless hunt after 'ghosts'⁴² in which the scrutinized sources both create and

⁴¹ This is a slightly altered and translated version of the same graph in Jacobs work: see Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers in de Politiek*, 93.

⁴² Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers in de Politiek*, 73.

confirm the metaphysical concept of ideology.⁴³ I agree with Jacobs that one should be cautious when claiming that a particular mode of thought was leading for the action of a political agent, but this is something else than using the notion of ideology as tool to analytically organize various modes of political thought in order to explain political conduct. The next section explains how the concept of ideology can be used as an analytical tool to clarify why certain political parties took particular positions during the debate about foreigners' suffrage.

2.3 Ideologies as analytical tool

Because of its pluralistic usage in literature, it is hard to give a clear definition of the concept of ideology.⁴⁴ For the purpose of this thesis, ideologies will here be defined as general thought patterns that are shared by certain groups in a particular constructed society. In order to grasp and understand the various political opinions regarding this subject better, it is fruitful to scrutinize the 'working' of these ideologies a bit further. The social scientist Michael Freeden states that ideologies are constructed by a morphology that displays core, adjacent, and peripheral political concepts. In the case of contemporary liberalism it can thus be said that liberty is at the core of this ideology, human rights, democracy and equality are adjacent to this core and the value of nationalism can be found at the periphery of this ideology.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the scholar distinguishes between two forms of ideologies: macro-ideologies, like liberalism, socialism and conservatism and micro-ideologies derived from these 'grand narratives' that have their own character because of their own unique context.⁴⁶

How the political concepts that form ideologies are organized depends according to the scholar on four broad factors: proximity, priority, permeability, and proportionality. These are also called 'Freeden's four p's of ideological composition.'⁴⁷ *Proximity* indicates that political concepts have no clear meaning of their own. For example, the value of equality incorporated in an ideology differs in meaning whether it is surrounded with the value of materialism, meaning that everyone should achieve the same amount of material possessions, or the value of basic human rights, where the focus lies less on possessions but on chances of

⁴³ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁴ For a thorough explanation and history of the various 'main' ideologies of the twentieth century see: Andrew Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies, Third Edition* (Oxford, 2010). For a more lively narrative of twentieth century political and intellectual thought see: Jan Werner Muller, *Contesting Democracy, Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe* (London, 2011).

⁴⁵ Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory, A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford, 2006) 75-91.

⁴⁶ Ana Rita Ferreira, Joao Cardoso Rosas (eds.), *Left and Right: The Great Dichotomy Revisited* (Cambridge, 2013) 17.

⁴⁷ For a more elaborated description of these four p's see: Freeden, *Ideology*, 60-66.

individuals to express and develop themselves. *Proportionality* is closely related to politics because it indicates how proponents of ideologies wish to present their arguments. Socialists will for example emphasize their desire for absolute equality even if this desire is in contradiction with other socialist values or the social (and historical) context in which this desire is expressed. On the other hand, political parties could make their rhetoric less radical in order to convince other parties to participate with political matters they would otherwise shy away from. *Priority* is the indicator for shifts of the core, adjacent and periphery concepts of an ideology. The liberal ideology could thus change its priorities over time. An example of this is the shift of private property in liberal political thought from the core of the ideology to the periphery during the 19th and 20th century.

Permeability indicates that ‘ideologies are not mutually exclusive in their ideas, concepts and conceptions.’⁴⁸ In other words: there is an overlap of various political concepts between ideologies. An example of this is the agreement of both liberals and socialists in contemporary western democracies that a certain amount of state intervention is necessary in order to keep a country stable. How this intervention should be arranged is of course part of political choices. A similar example is that both the contemporary liberal and socialist ideology have incorporated the political concept of democracy firmly in their ideological system. Although it could be argued that both ideologies fill in the notion of democracy on their own terms, there are certain characteristics of democracy, like the notion that individuals should have the right to independently vote their representatives, that are not open for interpretation and thus completely shared between (sometimes considered) opposite ideologies. This indicates that ideologies are not operating independently from each other but are influencing one another. In the words of Freeden: ‘Ideologies are not hermetically sealed: they have porous boundaries and will frequently occupy overlapping space. We can refer to them as holding patterns for political ideas, concepts and words.’⁴⁹

The theory of the morphology of ideologies thus suggests that an ideology is an ever changing dynamic cluster of political concepts. Freeden’s morphological analysis is therefore an useful way of making sense of streams of political thought without attaching definitive meanings to ideologies. Its focus on political concepts and the arrangement of these ideological building blocks in relation to each other provides a way to categorise the ideologies of particular political currents without losing the endlessly dynamic, changing and sometimes overlapping character of the realm of political thought. Historians can use this

⁴⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁹ Freeden, *Ideology*, 64.

analytical tool to make sense of complicated modes of political thought.

2.4 Jacobs and Freedon combined

In the specific context of this thesis, the theory of Freedon will be used to make the earlier described theoretical framework of Jacobs less static and more explanatory. In the core chapters of this thesis, the rhetoric of politicians will be scrutinised in order to determine which political concepts were dominant when an opinion about foreigners' suffrage was stated. Subsequently, these concepts and their arrangement in relation to each other determine which of the four categories of discourses are most related to the by the politician used rhetoric. Before this methodology is further clarified, it is first necessary to introduce the most important political concepts that determine a political parties' interpretation of foreigners' suffrage.

Naturally, all political parties relate suffrage to the political concept of democracy. Subsequently, four political concepts dominantly determine how suffrage is interpreted by political actors. These concepts are: basic human rights, political equality, nationalism and citizenship.⁵⁰ Different combinations of these concepts can be related to each of the four by Jacobs proposed discourses: a dominant relation between democracy, basic human rights and political equality results in a pluralistic inclusive discourse, a dominant relation between democracy, citizenship and political equality results in an assimilationist inclusive discourse, a dominant relation between democracy, citizenship, political equality and nationalism results in an assimilationist exclusive discourse, and finally, a dominant relation between democracy, citizenship and nationalism results in a segregationist exclusive discourse. With this in mind, the combination between the discourses of Jacobs and the political concepts of Freedon can be visualised as follows:

⁵⁰ Of course, these particular political concepts can themselves be interpreted in various ways. For the purposes of this dissertation they are confined *within* the broader political concept of democracy. For an introduction on the historical development and most common interpretations of political concepts in a more broad context see: Gerald Gaus, *Political Concepts and Political Theories* (Westview Press, 2006).

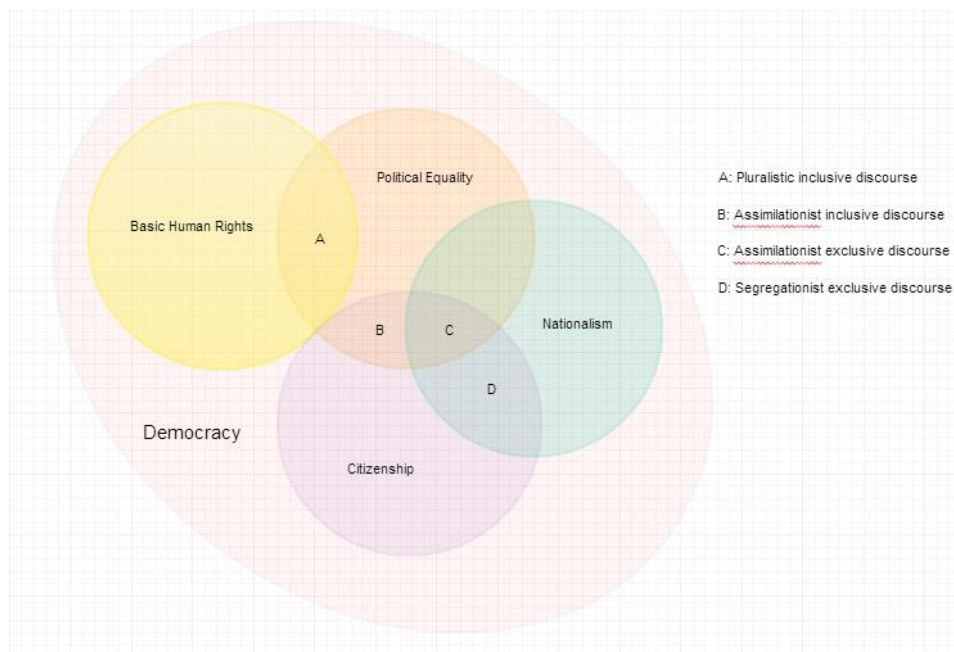


Figure 1: Interpretations of suffrage. This diagram shows the position of the four main discourses in relation with the most prominent political concepts that determine the by political actors used discourse.

What immediately becomes clear when one looks at the above diagram, is that certain political concepts overlap each other, while others are, at least within the context of the discussion about foreigners' suffrage, incompatible with each other. For instance, the political concept of basic human rights is incompatible with the concept of citizenship since any interpretation suffrage that incorporates the concept of citizenship automatically rejects voting rights as a political right that should be given to all residents of a nation. As can be seen, political equality overlaps with all interpretations of suffrage. However, its actual meaning depends on the political concepts it is most closely related with. For instance, a close relation between political equality and nationalism leads to the interpretation that suffrage is foremost a privilege of natives of a specific country.

The above shows that a discussion about foreigners' suffrage can be rather dynamic. Various political parties form their interpretations of suffrage based on similar political concepts, but with different outcomes depending on their relation with other concepts. Also, the above diagram shows that the four discourses of Jacobs are not clear cut categories. Depending on the priority of each of the political concepts that form a political actor's interpretation of suffrage, their rhetoric can be an assimilationist inclusive discourse, but also situated in the area between an assimilationist inclusive discourse and an assimilationist

exclusive discourse. Therefore the combination of the methods of Jacobs and Freedon creates the possibility to use the discourses of Jacobs without reducing the analysis to a division of political opinions amongst four stationary and not dynamic categories

2.5 *The implications of language*⁵¹

An important addition of the above described theory on ideology is an insight formulated in the 1970s by the theoretical historian Reinhart Koselleck. In *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* he expresses his concerns for what he calls the expansion of *ideologisierbarkeit*, the growing extent to which concepts could be incorporated into ideologies. From the eighteenth century, a political term like liberty, which was until then used to depict a singular form of freedom, was replaced by the plural word liberties. The concept of liberty thus became open to multiple interpretations. The growing abstraction of political terms ‘easily fit into open-ended formulae, which could be defined according to the interests of movements and groups competing for the ever-growing number of potential adherents.’⁵² The expanding *ideologisierbarkeit* made it possible for every political group to mould a term so that it would fit in their own thought pattern. This gave politicians, followers of ideologies and theorists of ideology the linguistic means to form oppositional worldviews while using the same terms as their proponents. The growing *ideologisierbarkeit* can therefore perhaps be seen as the breeding ground for thorough political debate. It created the possibility of fundamental different interpretations of political language and, as will now be shortly elaborated, the possibility of giving foreigners and integration a great amount of interpretations.

Foreigners in the Netherlands have been given a great number of names. They were called immigrants, *allochtonen*, or strangers, which emphasized their position as outsiders. Another common group of names for foreigners who live in the nation is one that emphasizes their ‘special’ position. Minorities, *gastarbeiders*⁵³ or the ‘non-Dutch’ are examples of such terms. What all these various terms to depict foreigners have in common is that they construct a distance between the native inhabitants of a state and new arrivals. This phenomenon is in migration theory widely considered as ‘othering’. This concept can be defined as creating a homogenous view of the non-dominant social group in society whilst at the same time

⁵¹ Since the linguistic turn, especially historians have had trouble to find their way out of the ‘subjectivity’ inherent in language. For a clear introduction of the complexity of this matter see: Gabrielle M. Spiegel (editor), *Practicing History, New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn (Rewriting Histories)* (2005).

⁵² Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart, 1972) XVII – XVIII.

⁵³ This term can be defined as foreigners who work temporarily in a nation other than their own.

creating an equally homogenous construct of the dominant group in society.⁵⁴ Generalist as all the above described terms in many cases may be, they can be very useful to reveal the various stances politicians have taken. If one politician repeatedly calls a group in society who has remained here for over a decade *gastarbeiders*, it is rather obvious that he or she is not looking to further integrate or even naturalize these foreigners so that they can become an ‘official’ part of society. For the sake of clarity, and to prevent possible suspicions of normative intentions of yours truly, the term foreigners will here be used in order to depict those who are not born in the Netherlands, or those who are born in the Netherlands but have parents who both not have the Dutch nationality and cannot directly make claim on this nationality without having to go through the formal process in order to achieve the Dutch nationality.

2.6 Left and Right

In this dissertation, the political distinction between left and right will regularly be used to depict various political streams. Therefore a clear definition of what is meant when this dichotomy is used is necessary in order to avoid confusion or misinterpretation of the analysis. With this aim in mind, the work of the Italian social scientist Norberto Bobbio can aid to provide the rather stationary terms left and right with a more dynamic meaning. Bobbio scrutinized the meaning of categorization of ideologies along a horizontal line from left to right. He states that ‘the criterion most frequently used to distinguish between the left and the right is the attitude of real people in society to the ideal of equality.’⁵⁵ In general, a leftist vision can be, according to the scholar, described as being more egalitarian than a right vision. This statement requires some nuance. Bobbio does not support the idea that to be leftwing one requires to believe that everyone is ‘equal in all things irrespective of any discriminating factor.’⁵⁶ The assumption that the left is egalitarian in this context does thus not mean that it is egalitarianist, but that actions from those who are left tend to lean more to a realization of equal standards for all (whenever these are realistically achievable) than from those who are right. This distinction between left and right does not mean that left and right thinkers differ completely in their basic values. Those who are considered right only have a different hierarchy of these values than those who are considered left and vice versa; or to use the above explained theory of Freedon: the political concepts surrounding the value of equality

⁵⁴ Jan Lucassen, Rinus Penninx (eds.), *Nieuwkomers, Nakomelingen, Nederlanders, Immigranten in Nederland 1550-1993* (Amsterdam, 1994) 7-14.

⁵⁵ Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right, The Significance of a Political Distinction* (Cambridge, 1996) 60.

⁵⁶ Bobbio, *Left and Right*, 62.

are arranged differently depending if one is a leftist or a rightist politician.

Bobbio's interpretation of left and right can easily be illustrated using the following seemingly contradictory statements: all humans are equal and all humans are unequal. Both these statements are true. All men share certain characteristics, like the ability to speak and think. On the other hand it could be said that all men are unequal. Every individual is unique and irreplaceable and has his or hers own good and bad characteristics. According to Bobbio, both the left and the right accept that men are both equal and unequal depending on the topic at hand, but those who are classified as leftist consider that what everyone has in common of greater value in the creation of a prosperous society. The right however values the notion of inequality more. They generally believe that the unique characteristics of each individual should be placed above our commonalities when considering (political) policy.⁵⁷

2.7 Interoperating constitutional change

Since the grant of voting rights towards foreigners was legally made possible by a change in the constitution, it is finally necessary to give some attention to the various meanings political actors can attach to a change of the 'foundations' of the Dutch modern parliamentary democracy. In a recent study on the development of the constitution in the Netherlands since the Second World War, historian Karin van Leeuwen argues that scholars should refrain from using the famous reform of the constitution of 1848 by Thorbecke as a definitive starting point of analysis for future attempts to change the constitution. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the constitution can no longer be interpreted as a 'blueprint for the political system and source of political conventions.'⁵⁸ Especially since the beginning of the twentieth century, the main source of political conventions has according to the scholar been surpassed by the ideal of democracy. Other factors, like the emergence of the welfare state and the intensification of scientific reflection on the meaning of the state and its various institutions have changed the way political endeavours were approached by both its actors and those influenced by governmental policy.

The above changes lead Van Leeuwen towards a different approach towards the (attempts to) change the constitution in the period 1945-1983. According to the scholar, more emphasis should lie, without neglecting the complexity of the realm and politics and the clear far reaching influence of the constitutional reform of 1848, on the 'existence of rules, habits or expectations that influence or even define the outcome of certain political processes and

⁵⁷ Ibid., 65-70.

⁵⁸ Karin van Leeuwen, *Uit het spoor van Thorbecke, Grondwetsherziening en staatsvernieuwing in naoorlogs Nederland(1945-1983)* (Amsterdam, 2013) 250.

thus, looking backward, may help explain these processes.⁵⁹ Using this assumption as a starting point, Van Leeuwen concluded that there are three broad ways that constitutional revisions since 1945 were interpreted by their political actors: The *Thorbeckean interpretation* where the constitution is mainly approached as a means to bring about change in the formal and informal rules and structures of state organization; a *pragmatic interpretation* which sees the constitution regularly as a demerit for modernization of state policy and thirdly; a *symbolic interpretation* in which the constitution is interpreted as a summary of common values accepted by a majority of the people. These approaches are obviously not clear cut alternatives, but they can aid in a better comprehension and understanding of the political arguments articulated in parliament when a change of an element of the constitution is considered. According to Van Leeuwen, the various traditions of interpreting the constitution all shaped the character of the negotiations leading to the change of the constitution in 1983. Therefore, without neglecting the societal or historical context surrounding the grant of voting rights to foreigners, these three interpretations should be kept in mind because they could have far reaching consequences for the way politicians approach debates about the constitution

2.8 Sources

Originally, this project started with the intention to provide more insight on the position of various ethnic minorities in the Netherlands towards the grant of regional passive and active voting rights. However, practical and methodological barriers have changed the main aim of this dissertation towards the current focus. There are various reasons why this decision was made. Although governmental reports indicate that there were many different foreigners' organizations active in the Netherlands during the researched period, it is hard to determine whether they would be a reliable source to reveal the general feeling of various ethnic groups. In most cases, these organizations were not necessarily politically active, but rather served as ways for ethnic minorities to meet each other regularly. Archives that remain are mostly scattered over the country. In order to say something fruitful about the general position of various groups of ethnic minorities toward voting rights, a comprehensive survey of these sources is necessary. Since an extensive study of various small foreigners organizations and a reconstruction of their role within Dutch society would be a rather time consuming endeavour, it would not be possible to finish this research on a satisfactory level within the scope of a master's thesis. Another practical problem I encountered was that many sources

⁵⁹ Van Leeuwen, *Uit het spoor van Thorbecke*, 254.

that could provide clues about the foreigners' side of the matter are written in languages I am not able to read.

Besides these practical limitations, research on the stances of foreigners towards voting rights strays perhaps too far away from the main aim of this dissertation. In order to find out why foreigners were given voting rights and how this governmental action should be incorporated in the story of the development of Dutch democracy and migrant policy, the opinion of foreigners themselves towards the grant of voting rights is less relevant. Mostly because it was not the decision of ethnic minorities whether they were allowed to vote or not. Because both a change in the constitution and the implementation of a regular law was necessary to open the possibility of foreigner to go to the ballot box, this responsibility was completely in the hands of those active in the Dutch parliament. This means that every discussion about voting rights that existed outside the political sphere of the parliament was directly or indirectly aimed at the current political situation within the Dutch political institutions.

Therefore, the main body of sources used in this dissertation are the political discussions in the Dutch parliament revolving around the grant of voting rights to foreigners. Using the digitalised database of the *Handelingen*, all references and discussions about voting rights and overarching discussions about the minority policy have been analysed. While these sources provide an illuminating insight in the correspondence between the government and the various political parties, they should be used with caution. Since these documents are, and were, publically accessible, the part of the political game that involves non-public negotiation remains unknown. However, the general statements made in plenary sessions and written preparations can show how political parties approached the matter. The parliamentary discussions thus form the heart of the dissertation because they stand the closest to the pivotal moment of the researched topic, which is the actual implementation of voting rights for citizens. In addition to these documents, the electoral programmes of the various parties in parliament are also used to map out the development of their official statements about foreigners' suffrage.

Of course, the parliamentary discussions are influenced by a wide range of economic, political, cultural, and other factors. In the International Institute of Social History (IISH) I have looked at every copy of the *Buitenlanders Bulletin*. This was a monthly magazine published by the *Nederland Centrum Buitenlanders* (NCB), an organisation founded at the beginning of the 1970s, which would act as an intermediate between the government and minority groups. Other sources of the NCB are letters and minutes of meetings between the

NCB and various minority groups. Both the *Buitenlanders Bulletin* and the more formal sources of the NCB could give indications how the government approached the grant of voting rights and whether the NCB had influence on the parliamentary debate. Despite that many of these sources do not appear in the main body of text, they helped me greatly to find the dates of crucial discussions in parliament. Also, since the NCB closely followed the discussion about foreigners' suffrage in parliament, these sources are used as a safeguard to make sure that none of the most important governmental documents were overlooked. The research in the archives of the NCB took a considerable amount of time because it consisted of approximately sixty meters of mainly unmarked boxes. However, a few boxes were marked as containing: minority negotiations. The letters and minutes in these boxes provided enough clues to trace back the dates of documents that could be found in boxes that were only marked with a year or a month.

Another important set of sources are research reports of the government concerning the topic of migrants in general and voting rights for foreigners in particular. These provide an illuminating insight how ethnic minorities were interpreted and approached on an academic rather than a political level. These reports are not only relevant because of what is actually written, but also by scrutinising that what is not mentioned or highlighted in the reports. Most of these reports could be found online. Others were found in various libraries scattered over the country.

In secondary literature, it is numerously mentioned that foreigners that lived in Rotterdam had been granted voting rights in the small city councils prior to the change of the constitution. It surprised me that the reasons why the city decided to grant these rights are not mentioned in any of the literature. Using an online newspaper database, I found the date when the decision was made in the city council of Rotterdam to let foreigners participate in the election of the small city councils of Rotterdam in 1981. A visit to the Stadsarchief Rotterdam (City Archive of Rotterdam) provided me with the political discussions conducted about this topic at the end of the 1970s. With these sources it became possible to conduct a case study where the arguments of the politicians in parliament and those in the city council of Rotterdam can be compared with the arguments of the political actors in the central government. Although Amsterdam also introduced voting rights to foreigners prior to the central government, I have chosen to single out Rotterdam as case because at the time this city had at the time more foreign inhabitants which made the position of ethnic minorities a more pressing political matter.

A final important source of information consists of the official information campaign

started by the government to encourage foreigners to participate during the municipal elections of 1986. These sources are used to compare the various stances political parties expressed in parliament with the single 'homogeneous' message and rhetoric used on posters, news broadcasts, flyers and brochures. Little remains of the information campaign. The IISG has some posters stored in its archive and a few television broadcasts and a television add produced specifically to inform foreigners can be viewed at the *Beeld en Geluid* archive in Hilversum. Therefore, the main source used to provide a reconstruction and analysis of the information campaign is an extended evaluation report written on request of the government by an independent research agency. This report contains pictures of all the used posters, brochures and other promotional material as well as information about the intended tone of voice and other essential characteristics of the campaign.

3. 1945-1979: The Dutch minority policy since the Second World War

‘In this time of great poverty in the Netherlands, overpopulation should dictate that strangers should only be permitted to reside in the Netherlands after a strict screening is conducted which guarantees that their presence will benefit the general Dutch interest. It will take much effort to cleanse the Netherlands from unwanted and unnecessary strangers who entered our country without permission during the German occupation.’⁶⁰

These are the words of J. Grevelink, the head of the Dutch foreigner service in the first years after the end of the Second World War. Despite this radical stance towards aliens, a great number of foreigners would find their way towards the small country in Western Europe in the next decades. Their nationalities are as variable as their reasons to take the leap towards one of the most densely populated countries in Europe. What they have in common is that they were treated differently on a social, judicial and economic level because they did not have full Dutch citizenship.

For analytical purposes, the development of migration and government policies is separated in two parts. The first part concerns the major migrant streams and its corresponding responses from the Dutch government in roughly the first three decades after the Second World War. The second part starts at the end of the 1970’s because in this time period, as will be made clear, a radical change of the government’s stances towards immigration occurred.

In order to give a contextualisation of the decision of the Dutch government to grant voting rights to foreigners, this chapter provides a broad overview of the governmental stances towards ethnic minorities from the end of the Second World War until 1983. The focus of this chapter lies on the government’s reactions to various streams of immigrants and its corresponding historical circumstances rather than a detailed reconstruction of discussions between various political parties during various episodes of the development of Netherlands’ immigration and ethnic minority policies. This rather broad approach is chosen because a more detailed scrutiny of each loose episode would not be manageable within the limited space given and would stray away too far from the topic of this thesis.

Although the specific political discussions in each time period will not be scrutinized in this chapter, it is necessary to give a brief introduction of the most important political

⁶⁰ Leo Lucassen and Jan Lucassen, *Winnaars en verliezers, een nuchtere balans van vijfhonderd jaar immigratie* (Amsterdam, 2012) 105. It should be noted that Grevelink’s remark was presumably mainly directed towards the many German and other war refugees who fled their native countries during the war.

parties and the composition of the eighteen governments the Netherlands had in the described period.⁶¹ A consistent factor in each of these governments was the Katholieke Volkspartij (KVP), The Dutch Catholic people party. This party participated in every government until it became the Christendemocratisch Appél (CDA) in 1977 as a result of a merger with the Anti-Revolutionair Partij (ARP) and the Christelijk-Historische Unie (CHU). The ARP was the first official political party in the Netherlands. Founded in 1879, most of its followers were members of the Dutch Reformed Church. The CHU was the Dutch protestant Christian party. With some slight variations, these confessional parties were always part of the Dutch government in the researched period. Two other prominent political parties in Dutch parliament since the Second World War were the Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA), the Dutch social democratic party and the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD), the Dutch liberal party. Between 1946 and 1965 the PvdA was consistently part of the government. Between 1948 and 1958 Willem Drees (PvdA) was the prime minister of the country. With the exception of a short lived government in 1965, between 1959 and 1972 the VVD would regularly take the social democrats place amongst the confessional parties in government. In 1977 the PvdA would once again receive governmental responsibility. Together with the KVP, ARP, the Politieke Partij Radikalen (PPR), and the social-liberal party Democraten 66 (D66), the social democrats formed the most progressive government the Netherlands had ever had. The PPR was a progressive Christian oriented party initially composed of former members of the KVP. In 1977 the progressive government was replaced by a conservative coalition of CDA and VVD. From 1977 until 1982 Dries van Agt (CDA) was the prime minister of the country.⁶²

3.1 Temporary migrants

As hinted by the quote of Grevelink, after the Second World War the Dutch government was not keen on allowing foreigners to reside into their country. Rather, because of high numbers of unemployment and a shortage of housing due to the destructions of the war, the government encouraged its citizens to migrate to other parts of the world. As a result, between 1945 and 1972 almost a half million Dutch people immigrated to Australia, Canada, the United States and South Africa.⁶³ An exception within the restrictive immigrant policy was

⁶¹ For an introduction of the political developments in the Netherlands see: J. Bosmans, *Staatkundige Vormgeving in Nederland II, de tijd na 1940* (1999, Assen). For an overview composition of the Dutch parliament since 1945 see the Appendix of this thesis.

⁶² Bosmans, *Staatkundige Vormgeving in Nederland II*, 190-191.

⁶³ Lucassen, *Winnaars en Verliezers*, 108-110.

made for the considerable amount of refugees from former colony Dutch Indonesia when its independence was declared. Within years after the end of the war 125 thousand immigrants came from this region. A second wave of Indonesians arrived in the Netherlands from the beginning of the 1950s. The government started an assimilation policy in order to prevent the significant amount of Dutch Indonesians of becoming a minority group in society. The government refused to call the Indonesians migrants. Rather, the term repatriates was used in order to highlight that this group of people was to be considered Dutch.⁶⁴ In a radio speech Prime Minister Willem Drees underlined specifically that ‘these are Dutch people who live in the most dire circumstances.’⁶⁵

In the same period another group of immigrants from former Dutch-Indonesia arrived in the Netherlands: Moluccan ex-militaries of the *Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger* (The Royal Dutch-Indisch Army) who had participated in the failed attempt of the Dutch government to maintain control over their colony after the end of the war. About 13.000 Moluccans and their families travelled from Indonesia to the Netherlands. The Moluccans were brought to the Netherlands with great reluctance from the government. In a report about this situation, the government argued that it was almost impossible for the Moluccans to adapt to life in the Netherlands because ‘they don’t speak the language, are not used to the climate and will not be able to work.’⁶⁶ The reluctance of the government towards the immigration of thousands of Moluccans was further underlined by attempts to displace them to New-Guinea rather than on Dutch soil.⁶⁷ On the 22nd of January 1951 the supreme court in Den Hague decided, besides complaints of both the Dutch government and the Moluccans themselves, that the former KNIL militaries and their families should move to the Netherlands.⁶⁸ The reason for this was a coup in Indonesia by rebel leader Soekarno. The new regime in Indonesia had strong negative feelings towards the former colonialist and everyone who had aided the Dutch in their attempt to control the colony was seen as an enemy of the new state.⁶⁹

Just as was the case with the Indonesians, the government refused to call the Moluccans immigrants. Rather, the Dutch government classified them in their official documents as ‘displaced persons’⁷⁰ because they expected them to return to their own country within six months. Therefore they were approached radically different than the Indonesians. It

⁶⁴ Alies Struijs, *Minderhedenbeleid en Moraal, Erkenning van Culturele identiteit in het perspectief van de liberale moraal* (Assen, 1998) 7.

⁶⁵ Luccassen, *Winnaars en verliezers*, 113.

⁶⁶ Kamerstukken Tweede Kamer 1950-1951 kamerstuknummer 1900 XIII B ondernummer 9, 10.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 9-10.

⁶⁸ Struijs, *Minderhedenbeleid en Moraal*, 7.

⁶⁹ Lucassen, *Winnaars en Verliezers*, 111-113.

⁷⁰ Kamerstukken Tweede Kamer 1950-1951 kamerstuknummer 1900 XIII B ondernummer 9.

was deemed important that the Moluccans would stay a minority group and they were discouraged from intermingling in society. Not integration but segregation was thus the aim of the government. Therefore, the Moluccans were put in camps in order to refrain them from scattering all over the country. One famous example of these camps is the re usage of *Westerbork*, a German working camp during the Second World War, where thousands of Moluccans were forced to live. This situation was maintained for approximately nine years until many Moluccans were, because the duration of their stay was deemed more permanent than earlier suspected, gradually moved to closed residential districts scattered all over the Netherlands.⁷¹

It is clear that due to the lack of immigration policies and the sudden arrival of thousands of political refugees after the Second World War, the government had to improvise in order to cope with this new situation. Especially in the case of the Moluccas, the starting point of thought seemed to be that they should not be seen as part of society. Rather, they were deemed to be a temporary phenomenon and therefore excluded from society. This approach towards the Moluccas would have, as we shall see later, a significant impact of future governmental policy concerning ethnic minorities.

At the beginning of the sixties, the Dutch economy grew and prosperity strengthened in the small nation. The economy grew so fast that labour forces could not keep up with the growing demand. This led to an active governmental policy enacted to attract temporary workers, generally called *gastarbeiders* from the Mediterranean areas. At first, the government did not intervene with the endeavours of companies to attract these workers. However, because these groups grew larger and were often exposed to unhealthy and dire working circumstances, the government got involved in pursuing recruitment agreements with seven Mediterranean countries: Italy, Spain, Turkey, Portugal, Malta, Greece, Morocco, and South-Yugoslavia.⁷² Because the stay of foreign workers was considered temporary, a migration policy was not considered necessary. As a result of the active recruitment, at the end of the 1960's approximately 60 thousand foreign workers from the Mediterranean area resided in the Netherlands.⁷³ These workers were mostly low-educated, male and in many occasions found employment in the mines and heavy industry.

⁷¹ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1978-1979, De problematiek van de Molukse minderheid in Nederland, 14915, 1, 14

⁷² Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, *De positionering van het Nederlandse Minderhedenbeleid in vergelijkend perspectief, Overzichtsnotitie integratiebeleid 1998* (Den Haag 1998) 12.

⁷³ Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Nota buitenlandse werknemers*, 10501, no 2, 1970, 3. According to the governmental report these consisted of: 1500 Greeks, 10.000 Italians, 1850 South Yugoslavians, 14900 Moroccans, 2200 Portuguese, 125500 Spaniards and 15,400 Turks.

In 1970, the government published the *Nota Buitenlandse Werknemers*. This note concerning foreign workers was written because the ‘growing amount of foreign workers and their more permanent character in the Netherlands had become a matter of national concern’⁷⁴ The focus of the bill lay mainly on social care and housing for this ever growing group of migrants from the Mediterranean countries. Even though many Mediterranean migrants had stayed far longer than planned, economic migration was still classified by the government as a temporary phenomenon. In the report, it is repeatedly underlined that the Netherlands was ‘definitely not an immigration country.’⁷⁵ Therefore governmental policies concerning foreign labours should mainly be focused on the economic interest of the Netherlands and an encouragement of these minority groups to return to their countries of origin when they lose their economic value. Support for immigrants who had trouble adapting to the Dutch society was not seen as a task for the government but rather for private (charity) organisations. The proposed policy of the government had therefore a dual character: on the one hand foreigners were encouraged to adapt more to the Dutch society since they stayed longer than expected, on the other hand foreigners were set to live close together in order to maintain their own cultural identity. This last measure was taken to ensure that a return to a home country would be easier.

Another point of concern of the government during the 1970s was a big stream of political and economic migrants from another former colony: between 1970 and 1975 approximately 50.000 Surinamese people took the leap towards the Netherlands. Other than the previous groups of migrants, they had no trouble getting into the country. In 1954 the Dutch government had declared that citizens of Suriname, the Dutch Antilles and the Netherlands would have equal rights to travel to both countries since they both were part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.⁷⁶ Because the Netherlands were not ready to take on a vast amount of extra people, a parliamentary discussion started in 1972 revolving around the question whether it would be possible to implement further restrictions on those who were able to travel freely to the Netherlands.⁷⁷ Eventually, the Netherlands decided, amongst other reasons, to grant independence to the government of Suriname as fast as possible in order to stop the stream of immigrants. This would mean that the country was no longer a part of the Dutch kingdom and free travel would therefore be abolished. On the 25th of November 1975 Suriname got its independence. In the first five years after independence, thousands of

⁷⁴ Ibid. 13.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 14.

⁷⁶ Lucassen, *Winnaars en Verliezers*, 75-78.

⁷⁷ Srujjs, *Minderhedenbeleid en Moraal*, 9.

Surinamese migrated to the Netherlands due to a transitional measure which made it possible for citizens of Suriname to live in the Netherlands under certain circumstances.⁷⁸

During the same period, governmental discussions started about the growing number of minority groups in the country. In 1973 the decision was made to stop drafting temporary workers from the Mediterranean countries. However, the number of Mediterranean immigrants kept growing in the following years because of family reunification. In response to a parliamentary discussion on the topic, the Dutch government once again proclaimed that ‘the densely populated Netherlands is not an immigration country and should not become one in the future.’⁷⁹ In the same letter the government states that long term stay or permanent residence should be discouraged.⁸⁰ From this viewpoint the government proposed to give a ‘bonus’ of 5000 Gulden to every Mediterranean worker who would return to their own country. Although, this proposal was rejected by a majority of parliament, it signifies how the government was willing to use drastic measures in order to solve the growing socio-economic problems with ethnic minorities in the country.⁸¹

The concerns revolving around the societal position of immigrants would intensify even further because of the massive family reunification of mainly Moroccans and Turks. The government was faced with new problems concerning housing and education. Despite the intensification of social consequences for the minority groups, the government stuck with their earlier described policy of integration with a focus on the preservation of the cultural identity of ethnic minorities in the country. One of the prime examples of this is the start of a program called *Onderwijs in Eigen taal en cultuur*, education in the own language and culture with the intention to teach the children of immigrants the culture of the original country of their parents.⁸² However, it would quickly become apparent that this strategy to keep immigrants ‘warm’ for re-migration could not be sustained.

3.2 A radical change

During the second half of the 1970s the idea that immigrants would eventually return to their own nation rapidly lost credibility. The number of people who lived in the Netherlands

⁷⁸ M van Niekerk, ‘Zorg en hoop. Surinamers in Nederland nu’ in H. Vermeulen en R. Penninx (eds.), *Het Democratisch ongeduld. De emancipatie en integratie van zes doelgroepen van het minderhedenbeleid* (Amsterdam, 1994).

⁷⁹ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1970-1971, Nota Buitenlandse Werknemers, 10504,2 ,9.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁸¹ Struijs, *Minderhedenbeleid en Moraal*, 11.

⁸² Ibid., 12.

without the Dutch nationality rose from roughly 212.000 in 1970 to 470.000 in 1980.⁸³ The rise of immigrants did not come without a whole range of social and economic issues. The already prevalent poverty, hard labour circumstances and in general poor living conditions of the various minority groups in society not only intensified when their numbers increased, it also became a more demanding political issue.⁸⁴ Because most ethnic minorities lived together in rather closed poor neighbourhoods they were not encouraged to adapt to the Dutch culture. Especially the second generation of Moluccans was displeased. They protested against the way their parents and themselves were pushed back to the edge of society due to the stance of the government. In 1977 the simultaneous hijack of a train and hostage of children in an elementary school in Groningen by young Moluccans intensified the pressure on the government to create a 'real' policy for immigrants and ethnic minorities in the country. Months after the violent actions of the Moluccans, which resulted in multiple civilian deaths, the Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (WRR) (Scientific Council for Government Policy) was commissioned to compile a 'comprehensive survey of governmental policy to date with respect to a number of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands.'⁸⁵

This resulted in the *Etnische Minderheden*, the Ethnic minorities, report. The report focused on Moluccans, Surinamese people, Antilleans and Mediterranean foreign workers. The report highlighted that the 'former held belief that ethnic minorities would stay only temporarily in the Netherlands is incorrect.'⁸⁶ Rather, due to factors like family reunification, a bad economic situation in countries like Morocco and Turkey and the persistent rejection of the Indonesian government to grant the Moluccans their own state, the 'fact must be accepted that the ethnic and racial diversity in the Netherlands has increased permanently.'⁸⁷ The report highlighted in its conclusion that the Netherlands should be considered an immigration country and urged that 'the absence of intensified policies, the problems already being experienced may be expected to become more acute.'⁸⁸ The report refers to the weak socio-economic status of ethnic minorities in the country that were, at least partly, caused by the government's policy that encouraged minorities to maintain their own cultural identity in order to make it easier for them to go back to their native country.

Nine months after the report was published, the government gave an official reaction.

⁸³ CBS population numbers:

[http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLNL&PA=37296ned&D1=a&D2=0,10,20,30,40,50,60,\(1-1\),1&HD=130605-0924&HDR=G1&STB=T](http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLNL&PA=37296ned&D1=a&D2=0,10,20,30,40,50,60,(1-1),1&HD=130605-0924&HDR=G1&STB=T).

⁸⁴ Lucassen, *Winnaars en Verliezers*, 69-72.

⁸⁵ Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, *Etnische Minderheden* (Den Haag 1979) XVIII.

⁸⁶ Scientific Council for Government Policy, *Ethnic Minorities* (English Version) (The Hague, 1979) XI.

⁸⁷ Scientific Council, *Ethnic Minorities*, XV.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, XXXVI

Generally, the government agreed with the conclusions of the investigation. In reaction to the report three main goals of a future policy on ethnic minorities were highlighted: the aim to abolish social and economic deprivation in general for both Dutch people and foreigners; the aim to abolish deprivation caused by being an ethnic minority and; a specific treatment of ethnic minorities from the point of thought that adaption to the current situation of a multi-cultural society should be a mutual endeavour by both minorities and Dutch citizens.⁸⁹

In 1981 these broad aims found their way in the *Nota Minderhedenbeleid* (Minority Policy Bill). Once again the limited social participation and the threat that various minorities would live isolated from the rest of the country was highlighted. The main goal of the bill was to ‘establish a society where every member of the various minority groups in the Netherlands could get an equal place in the nation and have full possibilities to develop themselves.’⁹⁰ Measures proposed in the bill were the improvement of housing, social services and a campaign to re-educate the many Mediterranean workers who were fired from the mines and factories that closed or modernised. In order to make all these measures possible, the government raised its expenditure on ethnic minorities from six hundred to eight hundred million Gulden. Another proposed measure in the bill was a further restriction of entrance of foreigners in the country since it was already hard to improve the living conditions of those ethnic minorities who already resided in the country.⁹¹ In a more broad senses, the report marked the break of the government with the term ethnic minorities. Rather, the word *allochtoon* was used to depict those who live in the Netherlands but were born in another country. *Autochtoon* was used to depict those who are born from Dutch parents. What stands out in the change of governmental policy is a change from a collective to a more individual approach of immigrants. Because it was accepted that immigrant and ethnic majorities were more than a temporary phenomenon, they were no longer treated as homogenous groups who operated on the ‘sidelines’ of society but rather as an inherent part of society itself.

An important effect of this changed stance is the different way the concept of culture is used. Former policies highlighted that the original culture of the immigrants should be maintained. The more individualistic approach towards ethnic immigrants meant that the element of culture was no longer a major of concern of the government. Rather, because the pluralistic and diverse nature of every individual within ethnic minorities was accepted, how one approached his own culture and that of the Netherlands was deemed a matter of their own

⁸⁹ Bijlagen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1980-1981, Minderhedenbeleid 16012, 6, 7.

⁹⁰ Bijlagen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984-1985, Minderhedenbeleid 16012 21, 12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

responsibility.⁹² This changed approach of the government towards culture is grounded by the assumption that groups of foreigners should be excluded from, or assimilated in the Dutch culture. Rather, it was accepted that 'Dutch society has a lasting multi-cultural character.'⁹³

3.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter mapped out the development of government policy in the Netherlands concerning immigrants and ethnic minorities in its broadest sense. Since the end of the Second World War the Dutch government was confronted with various streams of migrants. These can roughly be categorised in two groups: immigrants from the (former) colonies of the Netherlands and the immigration of labour forces from the Mediterranean countries. Until the seventies, the Netherlands did not see itself as an immigration country. This is reflected in the development, or rather lack of, immigration policies of the country. On arrival, the Dutch Indonesians were not treated as immigrants but rather as 'not adapted' citizens of the Netherlands who needed to be incorporated in Dutch society but with the assumption in mind that they would eventually return home.

A similar approach was conducted towards the labour forces drafted from the Mediterranean areas since roughly the 1960s. The term *gastarbeider* or temporary worker was used to highlight that their stay in the country would be temporary. Because of this status, and their weak socio-economic position in Dutch society, many of them lived together in the big cities of the Netherlands. Because of this, and presumably also because they also thought that their stay was mere temporary, many of them refrained from learning the Dutch language.

At the end of the 1970s the government's policy radically changed because it was accepted that migration was not as temporary as preliminary expected. The terrorist attacks of the second generation of Moluccans and in broader sense the bad socio-economic status of ethnic minorities in the country prompted the government to act. The *Etnische Minderheden* report by the Scientific Council for Government policy marks the beginning of the turn of government policy from encouraging partial adaption of immigrants while holding their own culture intact towards a more individualistic approach where immigrants were seen as an inherent, and permanent, part of society.

The emergence of the first broad migration policy of the government can be depicted as the end of a period of nearly forty years where both the Dutch government, the various groups of immigrants and in general the Dutch citizens were uncertain whether the presence

⁹² Struijs, *Minderhedenbeleid en Moraal*, 20.

⁹³ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1982-1983, *Minderhedenbeleid* 16012, 21, 12.

of various ethnic minorities should be considered temporary or permanent. When the opening quote of Grevelink is taken in consideration, it can be said that due to a vast range of historical circumstances, and of course political preferences, the stance towards aliens has dramatically changed from a policy of exclusion towards a policy where, according to the government itself, ‘the conditions should be created that will make it self-evident that everyone in society is treated as equal and has the same changes to develop themselves.’⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Ibid., 12.

4. 1970-1977: A proposition from the left

Now that the contours in which the discussion about foreigners' suffrage took place have been drawn, this chapter maps out how this idea to broaden the political participation of aliens has developed from a minor footnote in parliamentary correspondence about Mediterranean foreigners towards a proposal to change the constitution. As will be shown, the initiative came from the leftist parties. It would however take a considerable amount of political flexibility to convince other parties of the necessity of the law. The previous chapter ended in 1979 with the emergence of the first overarching minority policy in the Netherlands. In order to understand how the formal political discussion about foreigners' suffrage developed, this chapter winds the clock back nearly ten years to the beginning of the 1970s.

4.1 Humble beginnings

Nearing the end of 1970s, the idea to give aliens suffrage was first coined in an official parliamentary document. In *Voorlopig Verslag Nota Buitenlandse Werknemers*, a report of the commission responsible for preliminary investigation of future policy concerning foreign labourers, it is -rather carefully- mentioned that the government should 'perhaps consider the possibility to give foreigners active and passive voting rights.'⁹⁵ The anonymous members of the commission proposed a term of residence of 'for example two years'⁹⁶ and the requirement of speaking the Dutch language before foreigners could participate during elections. The remark is no more than a sentence in the miscellaneous section of the document that starts with the rather obscure notification that 'many other members' agreed with this idea.⁹⁷

Despite the brevity of the remark, three matters can be deduced from its content. Firstly, the idea to grant voting rights to foreigners was first articulated in relation with the Mediterranean foreign workers rather than foreigners in general. Secondly, the idea to allow foreigners to participate politically was not considered a pressing matter by at least the members of the commission since it appeared only briefly at the end of the report. Lastly, the passage talks about voting rights in general rather than confining it to the local elections. It seems that the idea to grant voting rights to foreigners was at this point not yet politicised and merely a footnote or swift remark coined by some politicians when thinking about ways to better incorporate the Mediterranean labourers in society. This stance towards foreigners'

⁹⁵ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1970-1971, Voorlopig Verslag, 10504, 5, 20.

⁹⁶ Bijl. Hand. TK. 70-71, 10504,5, 20.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 20.

suffrage corresponds with the general prevailing notion that the foreign labourers were a temporary rather than a permanent phenomenon in society.

A year later, the idea reoccurred in a more elaborated guise in the *Eindrapport van de Staatscommissie van advies inzake de Grondwet en de Kieswet*, the final report of a commission that was responsible of preparing proposals to modernise the constitution and voting laws.⁹⁸ The anonymous members of the commission doubted whether the constitutional connection between suffrage and citizenship would be maintainable in the future. Instead, they pleaded to make residency the most important factor when determining who were allowed to vote. The commission argued that ‘the decisions made in the elected bodies of the government more often affect all those who reside in the country rather than only those with Dutch citizenship.’⁹⁹ Therefore, in the opinion of a majority of the commission, it was not deemed sustainable that only those foreigners who become citizens by means of naturalization should be given the right to participate in elections. This argument was emphasized with the remark that the ‘recognised freedom of residence and labour in the European Communion asked for a revision of earlier policy. Especially because these freedoms could in the future be expanded beyond the scope of European countries.’¹⁰⁰ In the report, the commission referred to foreigners in general rather than Mediterranean labourers.

With the above postnational themed argumentation in the back of their heads, a majority of the members of the commission argued that the legislator should be able to grant active and passive suffrage to foreigners during the local elections. However, the commission advised against foreigners’ suffrage for the provinces and parliament. No clear reason was given why the provinces should not be included in the proposed expansion of voting rights. The given reason why foreigners should not be allowed to participate in the electoral process of parliament was that national voting rights were too closely related with the Dutch nationality. How members of the commission interpreted the Dutch nationality was not elaborated in the report.¹⁰¹

Although the report about the constitution was meant to be a somewhat neutral preparation for later political discussion, fundamental stances along the lines of the various participating party members were already drawn. Footnotes scattered through the pages reveal who were opponent and proponents of certain contested passages in the main body of text.

⁹⁸ Staatscommissie van advies inzake de Grondwet en de Kieswet, *Eindrapport van de Staatscommissie van advies inzake de Grondwet en de Kieswet* (Den Hague 1971) 299.

⁹⁹ Staatscommissie, *Eindrapport*, 299.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 300.

The commission consisted of a total number of seventeen members: four members of the KVP, four members of the PvdA, two members of the VVD, one member of the GPV, one member of D'66, two members of the CHU, one member of the ARP, and two members not formally affiliated to a political party.¹⁰² Three members of respectively the VVD, GPV and KVP rejected the idea to grant suffrage to foreigners altogether. Later in the report, it is mentioned that they voted against the idea because they saw it as a 'principal matter that would affect judicial grounds of voting rights and should therefore not be taken lightly.'¹⁰³ Although this statement is not further explained in the report, it can be argued that it refers to the constitutional grounded connection between citizenship and voting rights.

Although it is stated in the main text of the report that 'a great minority' opposed the idea to grant passive voting rights to foreigners, eight members, nearly half the commission, wanted to limit foreigners' suffrage to active participation only. These were two members of respectively the VVD, KVP and CHU, one member of the GPV and one member not affiliated with a party. Five members were of opinion that foreigners' suffrage should not, at least not in the constitution, be limited to the local elections: two members of the PvdA, one of D'66, one member of the KVP and one member not affiliated with a political party were in favour of granting foreigners' suffrage to at least the provincial level.¹⁰⁴

While the specific reasons why the individual members of the commission were proponents or opponents of various elements of the proposal to grant suffrage to foreigners are not elaborated in the report, a clear divide between various political streams can already be identified in this early stage of the idea. The liberal party VVD and the confessional parties seemed to approach the proposal more cautious than the more leftist oriented parties PPR, PvdA, and the middle liberal party D66. In general, it can be stated that the 'right' was more critical towards the grant of passive voting rights to foreigners while on the contrary, the 'left' wanted to broaden suffrage to foreigners beyond the scope of the local elections.

Although it is hard to exactly determine why foreigners' suffrage 'suddenly' became a matter of concern of the commission, two plausible reasons can be taken in consideration. The first reason can be found in a periodical report of the commission published two years before the above scrutinized end report. In this report, foreigners' suffrage was not mentioned despite the fact that it contained an extensive chapter specifically about the problematic nature of

¹⁰² For a complete list of the member of the commission see: Van Leeuwen, *Uit het Spoor van Thorbecke*, 270.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 300.

voting rights.¹⁰⁵ While foreigners were not mentioned, the periodical report did however discuss the question whether those with the Dutch nationality who lived abroad should be able to participate during parliamentary elections. A minority of seven members of the commission was of opinion that Dutch people who lived abroad should not be able to cast their vote. In the report they argued that ‘the possession of the Dutch nationality was not enough to gain voting rights because an actual connection with the territory of the Netherlands is also necessary.’¹⁰⁶ These members thus argued that residency in the Netherlands was perhaps as important as the Dutch nationality when the grant of voting rights was considered. With the issue of residency and nationality openly laid out on the table, the step towards a discussion whether those who reside on Dutch soil without having the corresponding nationality seems like a small one. The second harder to confirm reason for the sudden emphasis on giving aliens the right to vote could have been the position of politician A.M. Donner as co-chair member of the commission. In the years to come, his name would frequently reappear, as will later be shown, in discussions on foreigners’ suffrage because he had expressed himself as a firm proponent of the idea.¹⁰⁷

Despite its clear recommendations about grant of voting rights to aliens, the commission was well aware of the theoretical difficulties that could emerge if foreigners would be allowed to proceed to the ballot box. In the report, the reader is warned that there is ‘no clear cut formula’¹⁰⁸ to approach the grant of voting rights to foreigners. This because the concept of voting is, in the words of the commission, closely related to ‘hard to define definitions of the people, a nation and community.’¹⁰⁹ The fact that foreigners’ suffrage could be interpreted in multiple ways was thus already clear before the topic was formally politicised in parliament. As a matter of fact, the topic was at this moment already interpreted in two broad ways: in the report about the Mediterranean labourers, voting rights for foreigners are coined as a tool that could enhance the integration of foreigners in society. The constitutional commission on the other hand interpreted foreigners’ suffrage firstly as a logical result of expanding human rights and international development and perhaps secondly as a natural result of the preferred prevalence of residency above citizenship by some of the members of the commission.

¹⁰⁵ Staatscommissie van advies inzake de Grondwet en de Kieswet, *Tweede rapport van de Staatscommissie van advies inzake de Grondwet en de Kieswet* (Den Hague 1969) 169-209.

¹⁰⁶ Staatscommissie, *Tweede rapport*, 244.

¹⁰⁷ Between 1985 and 1979 Donner was a judge at the European Court of Justice. At the time he was co-chairman of the constitutional commission he was a member of the ARP.

¹⁰⁸ Staatscommissie, *Eindrapport*, 300.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

Three years later, in 1974, the topic of foreigners' suffrage reappeared in official parliamentary documents. In a new report about future policy concerning foreign labourers, members of the PvdA emphasized that they regretted that no efforts had been taken to grant suffrage to Mediterranean workers.¹¹⁰ In a brief reaction, the party underlined, citing an article written by Donner, that any reluctance to grant suffrage to foreigners directly neglects article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the first passage of this declaration it is stated that every person has the right to take part in the government of his or her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.¹¹¹ The PvdA seems to have been of opinion that the political rights of a person should not be determined by one's nationality, but rather by their location of permanent residence. Simply stated, being an adult human should be reason enough to gain voting rights in the country of permanent residence. At this point, the PvdA used a pluralistic inclusive discourse clearly fuelled by the proximity of the political concepts of equality, democracy and basic human rights. In the same report, the PPR also expressed its preference to grant active and passive voting rights to foreigners. Rather than deriving their argument from the starting point of universal human equality, the party saw foreigners' suffrage more as a pragmatic necessity. A Member of Parliament of the PPR argued that 'because the actions of local governments influence numerous facilities that affect foreign labourers directly, these foreigners should be able to participate in politics.'¹¹²

In the same year, Donner's article would be cited once more by the PvdA in a governmental document about the position of the Moluccan minority in the country.¹¹³ Since the former KNIL soldiers and their families had stayed longer than originally expected, and there were no signals that their situation would change in the near future, the representatives of the party argued that they should be given more political influence. The PvdA party emphasized once again that voting rights should be considered 'one of the fundamental human rights.'¹¹⁴ Later, PvdA Prime Minister Joop den Uyl also referred to the article of Donner. During a written preparation of the *Nota Buitenlandse Werknemers* he assured that 'the matter (foreigners' suffrage) will get attention within the framework of the constitutional change, the cited article of A.M. Donner shall be incorporated in the considerations.'¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1973-1974, Eindverslag, 10504, 11, 4.

¹¹¹ Bijl. Hand. TK, 73-74, 10504, 11, 4.

¹¹² Ibid., 20.

¹¹³ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1973-1974, Voorlopig Verslag Regelen omtrent de positie van in Nederland wonende Molukkers die niet het Nederlanderschap bezitten, 12839, 5, 3.

¹¹⁴ Bijl. Hand. TK, 73-74, 12839, 5, 1.

¹¹⁵ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1973-1974, Nota Buitenlandse Werknemers, 10504, 12, 12.

4.2 Plenary debut

On the 16th of October 1974, four years after the idea to grant voting rights to foreigners appeared first in governmental documents, the matter made its debut in the heart of the Dutch political arena. During a plenary discussion about a new version of the *Nota Buitenlandse Werknemers* some political parties addressed foreigners' suffrage directly.¹¹⁶

The KVP argued, also on behalf of the CHU and ARP, that all foreigners who would like to participate in elections should first gain Dutch nationality to prove their loyalty to the country. During his contribution, Member of Parliament Frans Hermesen (KVP) explained that his party had made this decision because there was at the time no country in the world where people with the Dutch nationality could claim active political rights.¹¹⁷ Giving voting rights to the foreigners in the Netherlands would thus be unfair because people with the Dutch nationality who lived abroad were also deprived of active political participation. Furthermore, Hermesen underlined that the grant of local suffrage to foreigners could lead to the unwanted situation where 'foreigners could get in a position where their vote could be decisive when far reaching policy decisions are made.'¹¹⁸ The KVP party seemed to be of opinion that foreigners were in principle not able to form well thought through political opinions. The confessional party thus used an assimilationist exclusive discourse where the political concept of democracy stood in closer proximity with the concepts of citizenship and nationalism than with universal equality.

The opinion of the VVD about the matter was clear. Member of parliament Els Verder-Smit (VVD) stated that the grant of voting rights to foreigners was certainly not an option since this was a 'very valuable right' that was granted to Dutch citizens by the constitution.¹¹⁹ The party argued that voting rights should stay the privilege of those in possession of the Dutch nationality. If foreigners wanted to participate in elections, they should first become Dutch by means of naturalization. Instead of granting foreigners political influence in the existing political bodies, the liberals were in favour of the installation of foreigners' councils. These councils could give advice, and form a platform for discussion on a local, provincial and national level. Verder-Smit underlined that 'foreigners should not be allowed to have any decision making authority unless this is explicitly given to them.'¹²⁰ Just like the KVP, a close

¹¹⁶ Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1974-1975, 16 October 1974. 533-588.

¹¹⁷ Hand. TK. 74-74, 16 October 1974, 538. This statement was not true. Since 1963, foreigners are allowed to vote in Ireland as part of a program to attract foreign workers granted that they are older than twenty one, are an ordinary resident or are the owner or tenant of any land in a given area.

¹¹⁸ Hand. TK. 74-74, 16 October 1974, 538.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 584.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 584.

proximity between the political concepts of democracy, citizenship and nationalism seemed to fuel the argumentation of the VVD. However, by opting for the incorporation of special foreigners' councils, perhaps fuelled by the traditional tendency of liberal parties to focus heavily individualism, the VVD seemed to be leaning more towards a segregationist exclusive discourse rather than the assimilationist exclusive discourse used by the KVP. This because the liberal party did not reject foreigners' suffrage because foreigners were inherently unqualified to participate politically in the Netherlands. The emphasis of the liberals seemed to lie on the principal rejection of the detachment of voting rights from citizenship rather than the political capacities of foreigners.

During the same discussion, the PvdA issued a short statement about foreign suffrage. They urged the government to accelerate the process that would make it possible for aliens to go to the ballot box. While the party still expressed itself as a firm proponent of foreigners' suffrage, the dynamic of the party rhetoric had suddenly changed. During the plenary treatment of the *Nota Buitenlandse Werknemers* the earlier multiple times highlighted universal declaration of man was not mentioned. Rather, Nel Barendregt (PvdA) focused mostly on the wish to make passive and active voting rights for foreigners possible during local elections: 'We would like to give priority to foreigners' local suffrage.'¹²¹ In addition to this focus on a single political body rather than universal suffrage, the PvdA argued that voting rights should be given to those foreigners who lived 'for example a minimum of five years'¹²² in the country. Despite that both these statements were carefully formulated by the leftist member of parliament, the attachment of limitations and requirements to foreigners' suffrage gave the rhetoric of the social democrat party a different dynamic: being an adult human was not enough anymore to be granted the right to vote. A shift is noticeable from the earlier used pluralistic inclusive discourse towards a more assimilationist inclusive discourse.

The change of the discourse used by the PvdA could be explained with aid of Freedén's factors of proportionality and priority. Since the earlier preparations had made it clear that the required two third of the members of parliament necessary to change the constitution could not be acquired by using argumentation grounded on universalistic human rights, perhaps a different strategy was needed to keep the idea to grant suffrage to foreigners alive. Therefore, the political priority of the PvdA could have been downgraded from the endeavour to gain foreigners' suffrage on a supralocal level towards an effort to gain suffrage on at least the level of the local governmental bodies. In order to gain the support of the other

¹²¹ Ibid., 554

¹²² Ibid., 554.

political parties, the proportionality of the argument had perhaps shifted from its focus on humanist necessity towards a pragmatic, more politicised, approach.

Proof that the members of the PvdA party had not forgotten their humanist argumentation was given on the same day by Member of Parliament David van Ooijen (PvdA). While addressing the position of foreigners' organisations in the country, Van Ooijen criticized an earlier made remark of the government that many foreign employees were not able to handle managerial positions because of their social and cultural background.¹²³ Using an argument clearly grounded on the assumption of the universal equality of man, the member of parliament criticized this remark by stating that this line of reasoning was similar to the way white people oppressed the black population in South-Africa. Later in his contribution, the member of parliament even incorporated voting rights specifically in his reasoning: 'The argument that some people should not be given voting rights because they are not prepared for managerial positions or similar responsibilities was also used in the nineteenth century to shy away poor people from politics.'¹²⁴ It is remarkable that during the same day, two related topics were approached rather differently by the same political party, certainly when foreigners' suffrage was in earlier times depicted as a basic human right. Besides the PvdA, the only other party that expressed itself as proponent of foreigners' suffrage was the PPR. The small leftist party emphasized that in a democratic country at least local voting rights should be granted to aliens.¹²⁵

4.3 A careful proposal to change the constitution

Despite the fact that earlier discussions had made it clear that a proposition to grant voting rights to foreigners could not gain enough support to pass, the central left government of Den Uyl presented the members of parliament in October 1976 with a proposal to change the constitution in such a way that it would be possible for aliens to participate during the local elections. In the official Royal message to parliament, it was noted that there were: 'Grounds to reconsider a change in the constitution that will open the possibility to grant local voting rights to residents who are not Dutch.'¹²⁶ What stands out in the separately send clarification of the proposal is the careful way these 'grounds' why the law was deemed necessary were elucidated. The attachment of citizenship with voting rights, the democratic citizen paradox,

¹²³ Ibid., 556.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 556.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 567. D66 was at this point presumably also a proponent of foreigners' suffrage but did not mention the matter in their contribution during the debate.

¹²⁶ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1975-1975, *Koninklijke Boodschap*, 13991, 1, 1.

and the Universal Rights of Man are not mentioned prominently in the clarification. These three types of arguments only appear in a direct copy of the earlier mentioned report of the governmental commission from 1971 that was incorporated in the clarification.¹²⁷

Rather than focussing on any of the matters previously contested by politicians, the core argument to grant voting rights to foreigners was formulated as follows: ‘When a person's residency in a country is prolonged, it is understandable that the desire to have a certain right to participate politically will grow.’¹²⁸ Using this somewhat vague statement, the government seemed to avoid taking a strong position in the debate. By highlighting that there was a growing desire amongst foreigners to participate politically, the emphasis of the proposal lies more on supposed feelings of the alien population rather than the question which judicial conditions should determine who has the right to participate in elections. Later during the written preparation, the communists asked if the government had had any contact with foreigners’ organisations or representatives of ethnic minorities present in the country. The governmental answer was that ‘it was deemed not necessary to incorporate the opinions of foreigners in this matter.’ Perhaps a remarkable answer since the above outlined core argument was specifically concerned with the desires of foreigners.¹²⁹ Of course one has to be careful before drawing conclusions from these kinds of statements, but it does show that the grounds of the law were articulated rather circuitous.

Later in the proposal, it was highlighted that the grant of suffrage to aliens naturally comes with certain ‘practical difficulties.’ A few of these problems underlined in the report are the period foreigners should be a resident in the country before gaining the right to vote, and whether a foreigner should be able to speak the Dutch language. Therefore, the government concluded, ‘a frivolous decision on this matter should be avoided.’¹³⁰ Despite the difficulties inherent to the proposal, the government was of opinion that none of these were an argument ‘to keep the grant of local voting rights to foreigners blocked on a constitutional level.’¹³¹ In relation with this remark, the government once again emphasized that a change in the constitution did not mean that the decision was made that foreigners could make their way to the ballot box. Rather, the constitutional change should be interpreted as a removal of a ‘constitutional obstacle.’¹³² The actual decision whether foreigners should be allowed to vote,

¹²⁷ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1975-1976, Memorie van Toelichting, 13991, 3, 3-4.

¹²⁸ Bijl. TK, 75-76, Memorie van Toelichting, 13991, 3, 5.

¹²⁹ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1975-1976. Memorie van Antwoord, 13991,6, 7.

¹³⁰ Bijl. TK, 75-76, Memorie van Toelichting, 13991, 3, 5.

¹³¹ Ibid., 5.

¹³² Ibid., 5.

and what conditions they should meet, would be made later: ‘The legislative body will later be able to formulate their demands about matters like the time of residency and whether active voting rights should be treated differently from passive voting rights.’¹³³ Here, the progressive government of Den Uyl used, at least when this matter was concerned, a pragmatic approach towards the constitution because they presumably considered the incorporation of foreigners’ suffrage as a modernization of the Dutch polity.

The incentive to modernize the articles in the constitution concerning suffrage were grounded on postnational argumentation. The government highlighted that the grant of foreigners’ suffrage was in line with the wish of the Commission of the European Communities.¹³⁴ On the 21st of January 1974, the European Council approved a resolution with the goal to enhance the social position of migrants from third world countries.¹³⁵ One of the general aims articulated in this resolution was that all migrants in the member states would be allowed to participate during local elections by the end of 1980.¹³⁶ In its proposal, the Dutch government argued that a resolution approved by the same council on the 9th of February 1976 was evidence that this matter was still deemed relevant. This resolution did not speak specifically about political rights for foreigners, but underlined that the various member states should make concrete work of ‘point eleven of the end communiqué of the conference of heads of governments held on 9 and 10 December in Paris.’¹³⁷ This point consisted of a plea to start an international workgroup that should investigate under which circumstances and after which term special rights could be granted to the citizens of the nine member states.¹³⁸ A year later, another report of the European Union argued that one of these special rights could be interpreted as active and passive voting rights on a local level.¹³⁹ However, this advice was mainly focused on inhabitants of the member states rather than those migrants hailing from outside the European Community.

The government seemed to have based one of their main arguments to change the constitution somewhat artificially on a general remark of the European Commission made in 1974 about the political position of foreigners. The European reports mentioned in the

¹³³ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁴ In 1974 the nine members of the European Communities were: Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, France, The Netherlands, West Germany, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom.

¹³⁵ ‘Resolutie van de Raad van 21 januari 1974 betreffende een sociaal actieprogramma’, *Publikatieblad van de Europese Gemeenschappen No. C 13/1* (1974).

¹³⁶ Although political rights are mentioned in the resolution, the main aim was to improve the economic position and labour circumstances of migrant workers.

¹³⁷ Bijl. TK, 75-76, Memorie van Toelichting, 13991, 3, 6.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁹ ‘Naar een Europees Burgerschap’, *Bulletin van de Europese Gemeenschappen*, no. 7 1975, 25.

clarification of the proposed change of the constitution all hint towards the broadening of political rights in general, but do not address suffrage in particular. Also, the reports of the European Communities focused on the broadening of political rights for inhabitants of the member states, rather than foreigners from outside the boundaries of the European Communities. It seems that the proposal of the government to change the constitution was based on some kind of solidarity with future wishes of members of the European Commission rather than the particular position of migrant in the Netherlands. In the proposal, the declining social and economic circumstances of aliens in the Netherlands are not mentioned. The focus of the proposal on the European dynamic, the firm assurance that future legislators would have far reaching control to shape the eventual guise of foreigners' suffrage and the rather vague statement that foreigners should have a certain right to participate politically all feed the assumption that the government had done a considerable amount of effort to steer the attention away from earlier contested points of the matter.

Despite the careful formulation of the proposal, many parties were still not convinced that a constitutional change was necessary. In the written preparation, the small confessional parties ARP, CHU and KVP stated that they had received the proposal with 'mixed feelings.'¹⁴⁰ One of the main points of critique of these parties was the classification of the proposal as a means to lift a constitutional blockade. The confessional parties expressed that the proposed constitutional change should not be interpreted this way. Instead, it was argued that the proposed constitutional change should be considered as 'a principal matter of granting constitutional rights to a group in society.'¹⁴¹ Thus, using a symbolic interpretation of the constitution, the conclusion was drawn that the proposal was more than just 'the formal question whether a blockade should or should not be lifted.'¹⁴² The VVD expressed itself in a similar way. In the official response, it was stated that they had 'serious doubts' towards the proposal. What the party missed most was a 'solid consideration of the government why suffrage should be detached from the demand of citizenship.'¹⁴³ The GPV, SGP and CPN also underlined that Dutch citizenship should be essential to participate in any of the elections in the Netherlands.¹⁴⁴

The postnational arguments of the government grounded on decisions made by the European Communities were also criticized by opponents of the proposed bill. Using a

¹⁴⁰ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1976-1977, Voorlopig verslag, 13991,5, 1.

¹⁴¹ Bijl. TK, 76-1977, Voorlopig verslag, 13991, 5, 1.

¹⁴² Ibid., 1.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 5-6

denizenship perspective, the CPN argued that legislation made by the European Communities should not be a reason to change the Dutch constitution. The ARP, CHU, and KVP were of opinion that at least a stark distinction should be made between citizens from one of the member states of the European Communities and other foreigners. They underlined that all the ideas of the European Communities were not related to foreigners beyond the boundaries of the community. DS'70 was of opinion that the postnational arguments of the government were based on plans of the European Communities that were still in its infancy. The small party was the only political actor that expressed itself critical about foreigners from member states of the European Communities. They warned that the situation could occur that the 'thousands of Germans living in the South of the province Limburg could determine local policies while those with the Dutch nationality do not have the same political power in Germany.'¹⁴⁵

As could be expected, the PvdA and the PPR fractions were positive about the proposal. The latter party was the only one that expressed its disagreement with the limitation of the proposal to local elections. Therefore the party argued that the inevitable change of the dynamic of the principle of nationality was enough reason to change the constitution in such a way that in the future, the legislator could adapt legislation more easily when necessary.¹⁴⁶

4.4 The debate in Rotterdam

In order to make the assumption that the PvdA, and perhaps also the other leftist groups in the coalition of Den Uyl, deliberately changed their rhetoric in order to keep foreigners' suffrage alive more plausible, this next section looks at a related discussion about the grant of voting rights to foreigners in the city council of Rotterdam. Rotterdam and Amsterdam were the only two cities in the Netherlands that founded elected councils for the various boroughs in the city.¹⁴⁷ Since the number of foreigners in Rotterdam had risen considerably during the second half of the 1970s, the city council prepared its first homogenous migrant policy to cope with the cultural, economic and political problems many foreigners faced.¹⁴⁸ During the plenary discussion about the bill on the 25th of May 1978 the PvdA party were in favour to investigate if it was possible to grant foreign inhabitants of the city active and passive voting

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁴⁷ Rotterdam was divided in fourteen boroughs each with their own regional council. As a result of a national measure to enhance governmental efficiency, the borough councils were abolished in 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Handelingen Gemeenteraad van Rotterdam, 1977-1978, 25 May 1978, 150-155.

rights during the elections of the boroughs.¹⁴⁹

Before continuing to the reconstruction of the debate, I would like to emphasize that the comparison between the national and the local debate does obviously not mean that both political discussion had the same dynamic. For instance, the principle point whether voting rights could be detached from citizenship was not a matter of discussion during the local elections. Also, the boroughs in Rotterdam did not have actual legislative authority. They were enacted to perform an advisory role in the local regional system. The members of the boroughs could come up with ideas that specifically related to their district. These ideas could then be reported to the City Council. Residents of a borough could pitch ideas to these local representatives that would aid in the development and social cohesion of the region.

Despite the inherently different dynamic of the discussion in parliament and the city council of Rotterdam, the latter can be used to illustrate how different power relations between various political parties can influence the development and outcome of discussion about contested political matters. In the parliament, the seats of the centre left coalition alone were not sufficient to change the constitution, support from members of the opposition was necessary. This was certainly not the case in the city council of Rotterdam. In 1978, the PvdA had safeguarded twenty five of a total of forty five seats in the city council. The CDA had ten seats in the council, the VVD six, D'66 two, the SGP one. And the CPN one. With more than half of the seats in the council in the hands of the social democrats, they did not need support of any of the other parties in the city council to create new policies. This would, as will be shown, drastically influence the outcome of the debate.

In the earlier mentioned proposition of the PvdA, it is underlined that the party preferred to grant foreign residents voting rights to the city council, but that this was not achievable because only the national government had the authority to make this possible.¹⁵⁰ Council member Linthorst (PvdA) underlined that the members of his party considered the grant of suffrage to foreigners a 'principal matter that should not be taken lightly.'¹⁵¹ Once again, the party initially used a pluralistic inclusive discourse based on a proximity of the political concepts of democracy, equality and basic human rights. The proposal was accepted and a year and a half later, on 13 December 1979, the city council held a discussion about the concrete proposal to grant adult foreigners' active and passive suffrage for the boroughs

¹⁴⁹ Hand. Rotterdam, 1977-1978, 25 May 1978, 157.

¹⁵⁰ Hand. Rotterdam, 13 December 1978, 157.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 156.

without any further requirements.¹⁵²

The local CPN party hesitated to agree with the proposal because they feared that grant of suffrage to foreigners would eventually lead to a more powerful position of the fascist groups *Amicales* and *Grijze Wolven*.¹⁵³ 'If you only give a fingertip now, they could later claim the entire hand,' council member De Vos-Krul argued.¹⁵⁴ The CDA stated that they could support the idea to grant suffrage to foreigners, but warned for future practical and juridical problems. Because of these remarks, council member Bohré (CDA) preferred the founding of migrant councils rather than giving foreigners the same political responsibilities as Dutch inhabitants of the city. A SGP council member argued against the proposal because 'citizenship and voting rights should not be detached from each other. Not even on the lowest levels of political decision making.'¹⁵⁵

The most prominent element of the debate was a clash between members of the PvdA and the VVD. Members of the latter party expressed themselves as being not fundamentally against the proposal, but they argued that it was perhaps better to wait until the local minority policy was formally implemented. Presumably since the liberals were aware that the PvdA would back the proposal anyway, the liberal party argued that voting rights should only be given to those who feel integrated in society. Therefore, they proposed that those foreigners who would like to vote, should hand in a formal request at the local authorities before receiving a ballot-paper. Furthermore, the party submitted a motion in which it was proposed to only grant suffrage to foreigners after they were residents of the city for a minimum of three years.¹⁵⁶ Both these proposals were rejected by the inherent majority of the PvdA. Council member Bakema (PvdA) emphasized that 'foreigners' suffrage should already have been a constitutional right years ago.' He argued that the arguments of the VVD were of the same character as 'those used in the United States to keep negroes from voting.'¹⁵⁷ The PvdA was supported by D66. Council member Jansen (D66) expressed his agreement with the viewpoints of the social democrats and called every form of restriction of voting rights 'highly arbitrary.'¹⁵⁸

Unsurprisingly, the proposal of the PvdA made it through the political process without any alterations of its content. During the local elections held on the 1st of November 1981, all

¹⁵² Handelingen Gemeenteraad van Rotterdam, 1978-1979, 13 December 1979, 624-641.

¹⁵³ These fascist organizations were respectively Moroccan and Turkish.

¹⁵⁴ Hand. Rotterdam, 13 December 1979, 163.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 640.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 625.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 625.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 627.

foreigners could participate in the voting process of the boroughs.¹⁵⁹ What stands out when comparing the local and national discussion are the similarities of the initial arguments used by the various political parties. In the city council of Rotterdam, the PvdA and D66 both used a pluralistic inclusive discourse by prominently stating that suffrage was a principal human right, the VVD used an assimilationist exclusive discourse because the party emphasized that foreigners should meet certain conditions before they could be able to vote. The CDA party used an segregationist exclusive discourse because they preferred the foundation of a migrant council. The CPN's fear for radicalized foreigners' parties steers the communist party also towards the corner of the segregationist exclusive discourse. All these opinions are roughly of the same dynamic as those coined in parliament.

Despite these similarities, the outcome of the political deliberation was completely different. One of the defining factors of which path the political discussion would take was the formal political situation in which the various parties had to act. On a national level, a minority of the seats of parliament were filled with proponents of foreigners' suffrage, on the local level in Rotterdam, the situation was the other way around. This once again feeds the suspicion that the rhetoric used by the PvdA and later the government of Den Uyl would have been different if they were not dependent on the right wing members of parliament.

4.5 Chapter summary

In 1970, the idea of foreigners' suffrage appeared for the first time in governmental documents. In a mere footnote, voting rights for foreigners were proposed as means to enhance the integration of Mediterranean laborers. About a year later, the idea re-emerged in the end report of a commission established to investigate a modernization of the constitution and voting laws. The commission argued that growing globalization was a reason to focus more on the factor of residency rather than citizenship in deciding whether someone should be allowed to vote. This focus on residency was most likely the result of an earlier held discussion whether Dutch people who lived abroad should be allowed to vote. Not all members of the commission were proponents of foreigners' suffrage. A preliminary political division between leftist and rightist parties can already be deduced from the contents of the report.

In the following years, especially the PvdA would bring up the idea to grant voting rights to foreigners numerous times. In various topics directly aimed at, or related to,

¹⁵⁹ 'Wijkverkiezingen in Amsterdam en Rotterdam', *Buitenlanders Bulletin*, 6th year, no. 10, 1981, 9.

foreigners they used a pluralistic inclusive discourse based on a proximity between the political concepts democracy, equality and basic human rights. The freedom of political action highlighted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was used multiple times as the main argument to let foreigners participate in not just the local elections, but also the provincial and national voting process. The only party that also expressed itself in favor of the idea was the PPR. During a discussion about the position of foreign laborers held in 1974, especially the confessional parties and the VVD did not agree with this kind of argumentation. The right wing parties, grounded by a close proximity of the political concepts of democracy, citizenship and nationalism argued that voting rights and citizenship should not be detached from each other. Both political streams did not consider the absence of foreigners' suffrage as a democratic citizen paradox. While the confessional parties used a segregationist exclusive discourse by basically stating that foreigners should have nothing to do with Dutch politics, the liberals, perhaps grounded on the political concept of individualism, used an assimilationist exclusive discourse. Instead of broadening voting rights, they were in favor of the enactment of foreigners' councils that could give advice about the situation of ethnic minorities in the country.

During the discussion in 1974, the PvdA did not mention the Universal Declaration of rights of Man. Instead, they seemed to have changed their rhetoric from the earlier used pluralistic inclusive discourse towards a more assimilationist inclusive discourse by stating that foreigners should be a resident in the Netherlands for a certain amount of time. Also, the party suddenly limited their efforts to gain foreigners' suffrage on all political levels to only the local elections. The change of the rhetoric of the PvdA was most likely a pragmatic political choice rather than a change of heart. The members of the social democrat party knew that they would not be able to gain the support of two third of the members of parliament if they based foreigners' suffrage on a pluralistic inclusive discourse. Therefore, the priorities of the party changed from the endeavor to gain universal suffrage for foreigners towards a more modest and practical orientated approach.

The theory that the PvdA deliberately changed their rhetoric in order to adapt to the then prevailing political situation is made more convincing by a comparison with a related discussion in the City Council of Rotterdam in roughly the same period. Here, the local departments of the political parties all used similar discourses as their national counterparts. However, because the PvdA party solely formed a majority in the council, and a simple majority was sufficient, they did not need support from any of the rightist fractions. Despite efforts of the VVD, CDA (formally CHU, ARP and KVP) SGP and CPN to convince the

social democrats otherwise, foreigners were given voting rights for the boroughs without any further conditions.

In 1975, the progressive center left government of PvdA Prime Minister Joop den Uyl proposed a law to change the constitution in such a way that regular legislators could decide whether foreigners should be allowed to vote on a local level. Just like the PvdA, the government did not use any argumentation based on basic human rights. The absence of voting rights for foreigners was also not classified as a democratic citizen paradox. Rather, the proposal highlighted the desire of foreigners and cited related proposals made one a European level. Despite the careful way the proposal was formulated, the bill was received with doubts by the rightist opposition parties. They highlighted once again that voting rights should be a privilege for those in possession of Dutch citizenship.

5. 1977-1986 : The right takes initiative

Despite a tremendous electoral victory of the PvdA, the progressive government of Den Uyl was replaced by a conservative central right coalition consisting of the Christen Democratisch Appel (CDA) (the result of a merger between ARP, CHU and KVP) and VVD in 1977.¹⁶⁰ Since both parties had been firm opponents of foreigners' suffrage, it could be expected that the proposal to change the constitution would pass away silently. Surprisingly, the bill got a second life under the supervision of CDA Prime Minister Dries van Agt and VVD minister of domestic affairs Koos Rietkerk. This chapter explains why the law was not tossed aside, how the proposal to change the constitution found its way through a political minefield, and maps out the discussion about the regular bill.

5.1 *Moluccans as catalyst for change*

With a memo sent to parliament on 22nd of December 1978 the centre right government of Van Agt reopened the written preparation about foreigners' suffrage.¹⁶¹ Although the essence of the law was unaltered, the influence of the new government could immediately be noticed. In the memo, the government once again emphasized that the desire of foreigners to participate politically would grow if they resided longer in the country. This statement was supplemented with the argument that foreigners would bond specifically with their local surroundings rather than the entire nation.¹⁶² This remark was presumably added to underline once again that provincial and national suffrage for foreigners were out of the question.¹⁶³

Just as was the case with the emergence of the first Dutch minority policy, the main reasons for the unsuspected reincarnation of the proposal were the growing social and economic problems migrants in the Netherlands faced. As touched upon in chapter two, due to family reunions the number of Mediterranean foreigners in the Netherlands had grown significantly. While the growing social unrest undoubtedly caused widespread concern amongst politicians, the most direct reasons why foreigners' suffrage was suddenly given priority on the political agenda were the terrorist attacks carried out by Moluccans. On the

¹⁶⁰ Friso Wielenga, *Nederland in de Twintigste Eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2009) 284-285. The seats in parliament were divided as follows: PvdA 53, CDA 49, VVD 28, D'66 8, SGP 2, PPR 3, GPV 1, PSP 1, Boerenpartij (BP) 1 and DS'70 1. After the elections the PvdA and CDA started a lengthy process to form a new government which eventually distanced both parties further from each other. After 208 days, the longest formation time in Dutch history, the CDA and VVD came to an agreement.

¹⁶¹ Bijlagen Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, 1978-1979, Nota Naar Aanleiding van het Eindverslag, 13991, 8, 1.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶³ The emphasis on local suffrage was in line with the earlier stance of both governmental parties that supralocal voting rights were out of the question.

23rd of May 1977, two days before the parliamentary elections, second generation Moluccans simultaneously hijacked a train and took children and teachers hostage in an elementary school in Groningen, the most Northern province of the country. After almost nineteen days, the then caretaker government of Den Uyl decided to end the situation with force. Six hijackers and two hostages died when marines stormed the train under the cover of jet fighters.¹⁶⁴ In a news report broadcasted days after the end of the hostages, Den Uyl stated that ‘the South-Moluccan community should be able to live in this country as equal citizens. Granted that they would be subject to the same laws and rights as Dutch citizens.’¹⁶⁵

In reaction to the terrorist attacks, the government of van Agt reopened *De Problematiek van de Molukse Minderheid in Nederland* (The problematic of the Moluccan minority in the Netherlands) dossier one month after the new government was formally installed.¹⁶⁶ This dossier was inherited from the former government and discussed the position of the Moluccan minority in the country. In the renewed report sent to parliament on the 26th of January 1978, it was specifically highlighted that it was ‘necessary to find a way to make the Moluccans’ voice heard by the public government.’¹⁶⁷ In the same document, the government specifically referred to foreigners’ suffrage when the wish was expressed that that ‘the treatment of the constitutional change of the lower public bodies should resume soon.’¹⁶⁸

As touched upon in the previous chapter, the proposal to change the constitution overlapped to some extent with the dossier about the problematics surrounding the Moluccan minority.¹⁶⁹ This overlap was intensified by the new government of van Agt. In the continued written preparations of the proposal to grant local suffrage to foreigners by means of a constitutional change, the government argued that when it came to foreigners’ suffrage ‘a development can be noticed that particularly the Moluccan minority should be given this political right.’¹⁷⁰ Later during the written preparation, the government referred directly to the dossier about the Moluccan minority. Citing this dossier, the government argued that there were ‘firm grounds to grant Moluccans, and foreigners in general, active and passive voting

¹⁶⁴ Lucassen, *Winnaars en Verliezers*, 69-72.

¹⁶⁵ Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid, Polygoon Bioscoopjournaal weeknummer 77-25, WEEKNUMMER772-HRE00004C3C. This broadcast was viewed on youtube via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-Vp96RLLnk> (15-6-2015).

¹⁶⁶ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, 77-88, *De Problematiek van de Molukse minderheid in Nederland*, 14915, 2. This memo was sent on the 26th of January 1978.

¹⁶⁷ Bijl. Hand. TK, 77-78, 14915, 2, 52.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 53.

¹⁶⁹ The PvdA had argued as early as 1973 that Moluccans should have the right to vote as a means to enhance their position in Dutch society. Foreigners’ suffrage had appeared regularly in the governmental documents about the position of the Moluccan minority in the country.

¹⁷⁰ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, *Nota Naar Aanleiding van het Eindverslag 1978-1979*, 13991, 8, 2

rights during local elections.¹⁷¹ The discussion about the position of the Moluccans and foreigners' suffrage were at this point thus no longer merely related to each other, they rather became inherently intertwined.

While it seemed that the grant of voting rights to Moluccans was the first priority of the government van Agt, foreigners' suffrage became in the following years a topic that was even more than before related to poor (Mediterranean) migrants who lived isolated from Dutch society. The overarching atmosphere in which the political discussion about foreigners' suffrage was conducted can perhaps most clearly be illustrated by passages in the WRR report about the matter.¹⁷² In the English version of the report it was stated that 'the Council would support the possibility of full political participation for members of ethnic minority groups permanently resident in the Netherlands but without Dutch nationality.'¹⁷³ The report called the act of voting a fundamental right and argued that voting rights could give foreigners a chance to lend 'force to their aspirations by legal means' and could be an 'indirect instrument for improving prospects.'¹⁷⁴ Lastly, the council argued that as voters, foreigners would become of interest to the political parties, 'so that it may be expected their problems will enter more into political discussion and will also receive more attention in practice from the authorities.'¹⁷⁵ Foreigners' suffrage was thus persistently related to poor migrants rather than aliens in general. Since this was a reaction on the domestic situation, both the government and most political parties lost their emphasis on the postnational element of the law like globalization and the expansion of the European Communities.¹⁷⁶

5.2 *Reluctance and doubts*

After the completion of the written preparation, the plenary discussion about foreigners' suffrage began on the 27th of February 1979. Since the government of van Agt had taken the initiative to keep the proposal alive, it seemed that the chairs in the Dutch parliament of the governmental parties CDA and VVD combined with the support of the parties who had already given their blessing to the bill in 1974 already safeguarded the necessary support of two-thirds of all representatives for a change in the constitution. However, as will soon

¹⁷¹ Bijl. Hand. TK, 78-79, 13991,8, 2.

¹⁷² The WRR report was introduced in chapter two.

¹⁷³ Scientific Council, *Ethnic Minorities*, XXVII.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, XXVII

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XXVII.

¹⁷⁶ Bijlagen Tweede Kamer, 1984-1985, Memorie van Antwoord, 18694, 5, 13. The government and several other parties still mentioned from time to time during the written and plenary discussion that the law was in line with future international developments, but never used remarks of such a postnational character as main arguments to approve or disapprove the proposal.

become clear, there was still enough headroom for a thorough discussion.

Just like they had done before, the confessional parties GPV, SGP, and the communist party, rejected foreigners' suffrage because they had a fundamental issue with the detachment of suffrage from the demand of citizenship. These parties saw the bill, each on their own grounds, as a too radical measure to improve the political position of foreigners in the Netherlands. During the plenary treatment of the proposal, Henk van Rossum (SGP) argued against the bill and instead proposed for an intensification of the communication with representatives of various minority groups in society.¹⁷⁷ Bart Verbrugh (GPV) favoured the implementation of two forms of naturalization that were already used in Belgium; a complete naturalization and a partial naturalization. The former would give full Dutch citizenship to foreigners while the latter would grant them partial political liberties like the right to vote during regional elections.¹⁷⁸ The CPN warned, just like the local representatives of the party had done during the discussion about foreigners' suffrage in the City Council of Rotterdam, that foreigners could use passive and active suffrage as a means to form political parties that would only serve the interests of their own minority groups instead of the common good of the entire local community.¹⁷⁹ It is clear that the small confessional parties and the CPN had not changed their opinion about the matter. Both parties stuck to their assimilationist exclusive discourses. The democratic right to vote remained most closely surrounded with the political concepts nationalism and citizenship.

Since the government consisted at the time of a cooperation between CDA and VVD, it is remarkable that especially the former party continued to be highly critical about the law. Member of Parliament Piet van der Sanden (CDA) explained that his party still had fundamental difficulties with the detachment of voting rights from citizenship. Repeating the earlier articulated assimilationist exclusive discourse, Van der Sanden argued that those foreigners who wanted the same political rights as Dutch people should choose for naturalization. The possession of a Dutch passport would be enough proof that they had bonded sufficiently with society to make good informed political decisions. In relation to this argument Van der Sanden emphasized that it would be unjust to give voting rights to foreigners 'just like that' because the Dutch people had fought for hundreds of years to gain universal suffrage. In this respect, the CDA saw foreigners' suffrage 'as an injustice towards

¹⁷⁷ *Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1978-1979, 54, 27 Februari 1979, 54, 3675.*

¹⁷⁸ *Hand. TK, 78-79, 54, 3696.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid., 3702.*

the Dutch people and a denial of historical circumstances.’¹⁸⁰ Here, it is clear how firmly the political concept of nationalism was incorporated in the confessional party’s interpretation of democracy and suffrage. Using this historical argument, Van der Sanden generalized not only all ethnic minorities in the country, but also portrayed every Dutch citizen as a conscious advocate of suffrage. Although the CDA’s rhetoric was still closest related to an assimilationist exclusive discourse, their position had shifted more towards a segregationist exclusive discourse.

It was clear that the CDA was at this point not keen to give their support to the proposal. However, it does seem that the governmental party took the possibility that the law could pass in serious consideration. Van der Sanden presented a considerable list of conditions foreigners should meet before they should be allowed to vote.¹⁸¹ The confessional party was in favour of prioritizing members of the European Community if they desired suffrage. The CDA also argued again, just like the KVP had done, that the incorporation of an element of reciprocity in the bill was necessary. Only those foreigners hailing from countries that would allow Dutch immigrants to vote for their local governmental representatives should be able to gain active and passive local suffrage.¹⁸² Furthermore, the party underlined that a further broadening of voting rights should not be interpreted as some kind of retribution for the possible wrongs foreigners had to endure during their stay in the Netherlands.¹⁸³ Although the Member of Parliament did not explain what these wrongs were, this remark was most likely a reference to the subordinated positions of the Moluccans and Mediterranean foreigners in the nation. All these rather specific remarks about the desired character of foreigners’ suffrage feed the suspicion that not all the members of this party continued to oppose the proposal. Despite that the party was still clearly opposed to the idea in general, they seemed to open up some room for discussion.

The written and plenary contribution of the VVD revealed that the members of the liberal party were also still torn into two camps. Annelien Kappeyne van de Coppello (VVD) underlined that there were members of her party who continued to believe that the connection between citizenship and voting rights should not be abolished. The party member also expressed the wish, just like the CDA did, that subjects of the European Communities should be the only ones who could make claim of local suffrage.¹⁸⁴ Later in her contribution,

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 3657-3659.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 3657.

¹⁸² Ibid., 3657.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 3659.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 3691-3683.

Kappeyne van de Coppello addressed the position of the Moluccan minority: ‘In the last few years, we have been brutally confronted with a group of foreigners we have nearly forgotten: the Moluccans (...) For them, the grant of local voting rights could mean some kind of breakthrough towards acceptance in the Dutch community.’¹⁸⁵ Although still not all members of the liberal party were convinced that the change of the constitution was a good idea, it seemed that especially the position of the Moluccans had eased down their desire to keep citizenship and suffrage attached to each other at all costs. This is not surprising since the Moluccans were by many political parties not seen as ‘normal’ foreigners but rather as an inheritance of the colonial past of the Netherlands. Since the Dutch government could be held responsible for the overall deprived position of the Moluccans in society, it seems logical that some parties felt morally inclined to grant them more political rights.

Unsurprisingly, since the bill had finally found its way to the public domain of parliament, the PvdA reintroduced their humanist argumentation. Donner’s article about the Universal Rights of Man was once again cited. Connie Patijn (PvdA) underlined that ‘we have invited many foreigners to come here so that they could strengthen our economy. This situation legitimizes that we should give them the same rights as citizens.’¹⁸⁶ The ‘return’ of the social democrats to their original argumentation is no surprise. Since the law was reenacted by the center right government, it was clear that at least a considerable amount of members of the VVD had the intention to eventually support the law. The focus of the social democrats returned to the essence of being human rather than judicial and national boundaries. They abandoned their earlier used assimilationist inclusive discourse and shifted back towards a pluralistic inclusive discourse.

The other two parties also immediately in favour of the law were Democraten ‘66 (D66), and Politieke Partij Radicalen (PPR). Their support of the constitutional change did of course not come as a surprise. Despite their support, both parties emphasized that the proposed constitutional change could not be interpreted as a victory of equality, but rather as a confirmation that aliens were still broadly considered to be inferior residents.¹⁸⁷ During the plenary treatment of the bill D66, PvdA and PPR argued for the incorporation of voting rights for the provinces and even the national government in the bill.¹⁸⁸ The PPR expressed the fear

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 3692.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 3693.

¹⁸⁷ For the argument of the PPR see: Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1976-1977, Voorlopig Verslag, 13991, 5, 13. For the argument of D’66 see: Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1977-1978, Eindverslag, 13991, 7, 3-4.

¹⁸⁸ For the argument of the PvdA see: Hand. TK, 78-79, 54, 3696. For the argument of D66 see Hand. TK, 78-79, 54, 3670.

that the acceptance of the bill would mean that the constitution would block the implementation of voting rights for foreigners on higher political levels for decades to come.¹⁸⁹

The official argument of the government to advise against the implementation of supralocal suffrage for foreigners was two sided. Firstly, as earlier mentioned, the government was of opinion that participation in the affairs of the local government would contribute most to the integration of foreign inhabitants. This because the local government intervened most abundantly in the everyday lives of foreigners. Naturalization could then allow him or her to participate during the provincial and national elections. Secondly, the government stated that those without the Dutch nationality should not be able to influence the decision making concerning international affairs and the military. The argument of the proponents of supralocal suffrage that these were but two of many tasks of the central government was denied by the government. The minister of interior affairs argued that although the central government makes a great number of decisions that directly influence the lives of foreigners, the political system would not allow suffrage to be ‘separated and divided between various tasks of the state.’¹⁹⁰ The position of the parliament towards the provincial political bodies was given special attention during the plenary discussion. During a debate with Laurens Jan Brinkhorst (D66), Minister Hans Wiegel of domestic affairs argued a number of times¹⁹¹ that foreigners’ suffrage could not be realized on a provincial level because that would mean that foreigners would indirectly vote for the representatives in the senate.¹⁹² Since the senate was part of the national political body, foreigners would thus influence decision making on a supralocal level. Although the interweaving of the provinces and the senate seemed to be the main argument of the government, Wiegel emphasized that provincial voting rights were not relevant for foreigners since this governmental body did not have as much influence on the everyday lives of foreigners as the local government did.¹⁹³

5.3 Breaking the political impasse

Even though the law was brought back to life by the first government of Van Agt, the various political parties in parliament still had fundamental disagreements about the desirability to

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 3687.

¹⁹⁰ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1978-1979, Nota naar Aanleiding van Eindverslag, 13991, 8, 1-5.

¹⁹¹ Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1978-1979, 60, 14 March 1979, 4062. During this debate, the minister would state this argument several times.

¹⁹² Ibid., 4062. In the Netherlands, the representatives of the province elect the 75 members of the Senate every four years.

¹⁹³ Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1978-1979, 62, 20 March 1979, 4188-4199.

change the constitution. The reason why especially the leftist and the rightist parties were initially not able to come to an agreement was because they each used different interpretations of suffrage as their starting point of reasoning. As mentioned in the methodological chapter, four political concepts within the idea of democracy determined which discourse was eventually used in parliament: basic human rights, political equality, nationalism and citizenship. In order to clarify just how persistent the political impasse was, it is fruitful to take a closer look at how the dominant interpretations of suffrage of the various political parties stood in relation with each other. In order to make the next section more clear, the earlier used Venn-Diagram is reintroduced:

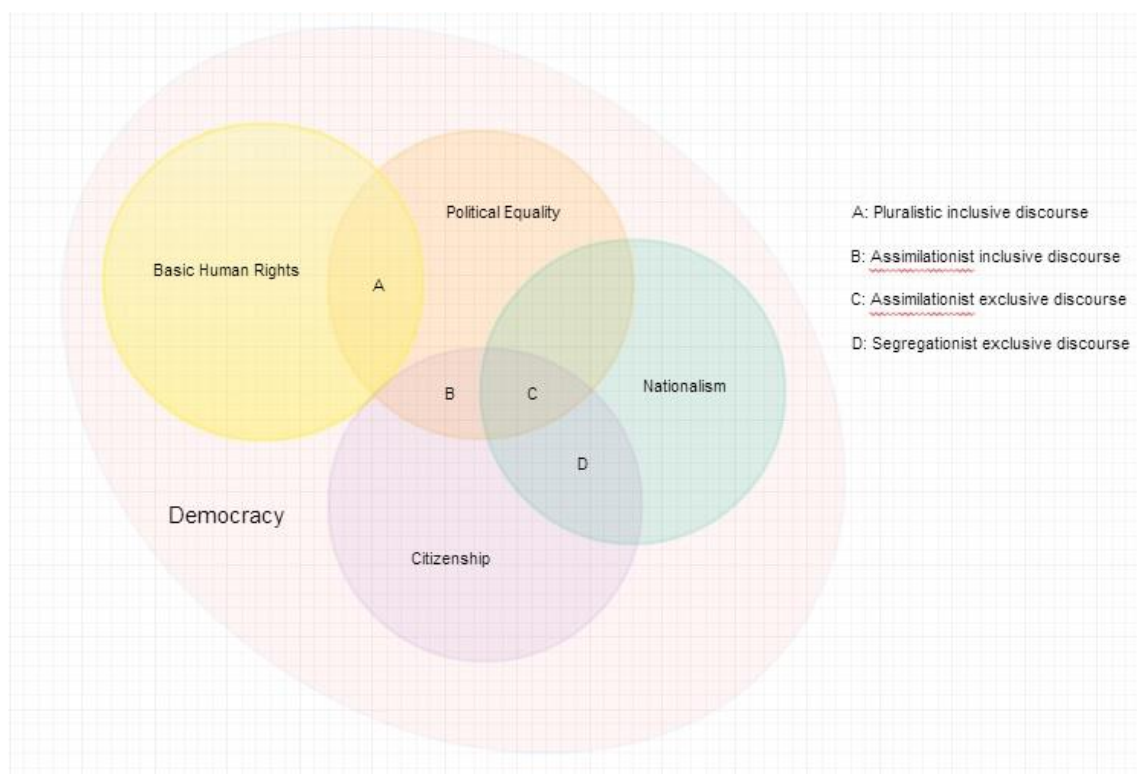


Figure 2: Figure 1: Interpretations of suffrage. This diagram shows the position of the four main discourses in relation with the most prominent political concepts that determine the by political actors used discourse.

Obviously, all political parties linked foreigners' suffrage to the concept of democracy. However, the PvdA's, D66's, PPR's, and PSP's emphasis on human rights and political inequality resulted in a pluralistic inclusive discourse (A) that was inherently not compatible with the rhetoric of the VVD and CDA situated somewhere between an assimilationist inclusive (B) and exclusive (C) discourse. As shown in the graph, when a party used the political concept of basic human rights as part of their argument, this meant automatically that every demand associated with citizenship was out of the question. The rhetoric of the small

Confessional parties and the CPN was mostly related to a segregationist exclusive discourse (D) because of their persistent emphasis on nationalism and citizenship. The principal stances of various parties with different ideological backgrounds resulted in a discussion that could not be brought to a satisfactory conclusion if its focus would lie mainly on the connection between democracy and suffrage. Although it seemed at first glance that all political parties discussed the same matter, the leftist and rightist parties had actually been talking at cross purposes with each other for years. In order to gain enough support in parliament, a different interpretation of foreigners' suffrage was necessary in order to overcome the fundamental positions of the various ideologies in parliament.

In hindsight, the solution for the political impasse presented itself quite naturally. With the exception of the constitutional commission, the topic of foreigners' suffrage had appeared almost exclusively in close relation to either the position of the Mediterranean workers or the Moluccan minority in governmental documentation. With the violent culmination of the Moluccans' discontent and the increasingly deteriorating position of the Mediterranean workers, all political parties were of opinion that something had to be done to deal with this situation. While the WRR report was yet to be published, but undoubtedly in a far stage of development, the discussion in parliament about foreigners' suffrage was no longer centred around broad interpretations of democracy, but rather as part of the upcoming minority policy. In this context, the grant of voting rights to aliens was foremost discussed as a pragmatic measure to enhance integration. It was within this context, that a sufficient majority of Members of Parliament could eventually give their support to the proposal.

The emphasis on the concept of integration rather than democracy did not mean that the parties stopped talking at cross purposes with each other. In contrary, at this point, the various parties each started using their own interpretation of integration. In his contribution Van der Sanden (CDA) argued that 'the main character of the discussion about foreigners' suffrage were Turks, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Yugoslavians. This proposal is more than anything concerned with their temporary presence in our nation.'¹⁹⁴ Without explicitly referring to integration, the Member of Parliament underlined that the confessional party would only support the proposal if it would be interpreted as an political equalization of foreigners in local communities, not as an 'way to solve the problems of the Mediterranean workers'¹⁹⁵ As mentioned before, the VVD explicitly brought foreigners' suffrage in relation with the Moluccan minority. The turn of majority of the members of the party in favour of the

¹⁹⁴ Hand. TK, 78-79, 54,3657.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 3658.

law feeds the suspicion that foreigners' suffrage was foremost interpreted by the VVD as a signal to ethnic minorities that they were taken seriously. The leftist parties all seemed to interpret local voting rights as the first step towards political equality between foreigners and Dutch people that would no longer be influenced by the presence of citizenship. Foreigners' suffrage would thus not only enhance the integration of ethnic minorities, but could also be the first step towards a true multicultural society where citizenship would no longer form a boundary to gain political rights.

With the widespread agreement that foreigners' suffrage would aid the integration of aliens, the grant of local suffrage to foreigners was eventually backed by a wide majority of VVD, CDA, PPR, PSP, D66 and CDA. The internal disagreements of both the VVD and CDA were never abolished. A few senators of both parties voted against the constitutional change during the treatment of the bill in the senate.¹⁹⁶ The second reading of the constitutional change did not trigger any surprises. The change of the constitution was formally implemented in 1983. The constitutional blockade was lifted and future legislatures were now able to write the law that would actually give foreigners local voting rights.

5.4 The regular bill

In 1979 the PvdA had stated that an optimistic and firm stance of the government towards the implementation of foreigners' suffrage could mean that the local elections of 1981 would be the first where non-Dutch residents could participate. In hindsight this was indeed a rather optimistic claim.¹⁹⁷ The constitutional amendment was not formally implemented until 1983. After that, it took another two years before the bill was presented to the representatives in parliament. On the 19th of September 1984 the government sent a royal message to parliament with the proposal to grant active and passive local suffrage to all legal adult foreigners if they resided in the country longer than five years.¹⁹⁸

Although the principal discussion whether foreigners should be allowed to vote in the first place had already been conducted six years earlier, the regular bill still sparked a lot of discussion about the requirements foreigners should meet before they could make their way to the ballot box. As could have been expected, the leftist parties PVDA, PSP and PPR and the middle liberal party D66 immediately agreed with the broad aim of the law: the grant of local

¹⁹⁶ Handelingen Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1979-1980, 6 May 1980, 20, 677. In 1980, the 75 seats of the Senate were divided as follows: CDA 27, VVD 13, PvdA 26, CPN 1, PSP 1, PPR 3, SGP 1, D66 2, and GPV 1.

¹⁹⁷ Hand. TK, 78-79, 54, 3696.

¹⁹⁸ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984-1985, Koninklijke Boodschap, 19 September 1984, 18619, 1-2.

suffrage to foreigners in order to enhance their integration in Dutch society. Although some parties expressed that they would have liked to see that supralocal suffrage would also be an option to choose from, they respected that the now thorough implemented constitutional law would not allow such a change in the proposed bill. The small confessional parties, RPF, GPV and SGP and the extreme right-wing-one man party of Hans Janmaat expressed themselves against the bill because the detachment of voting rights from citizenship was unacceptable.

While the discourses of the above parties were not all that surprising, the rhetoric of both the VVD and CDA had suddenly changed tremendously. During the plenary discussion in parliament Jan Krajenbrink (CDA) called the law a ‘refinement of our democratic constitutional state.’¹⁹⁹ He expressed that his party had ‘a very positive expectation of the political behaviour of foreigners.’²⁰⁰ The Christen Democrats, in contrary to earlier statements, agreed that naturalization could not be a substitute for the grant of suffrage to foreigners. This because there could be numerous reasons, like the loss of one’s original nationality, to decline Dutch citizenship. The CDA maintained their point of view that the grant of local suffrage to foreigners could by no means be seen as a first step towards supralocal suffrage.²⁰¹ The VVD party also expressed itself highly in favour of the law. A liberal Member of Parliament called foreigners’ suffrage ‘an excellent first step towards full citizenship.’²⁰² Despite this enthusiasm towards the proposal, the liberal party was not a proponent of granting suffrage to foreigners without some effort from the receiving side. In the written preparation, the VVD pleaded for the earlier mentioned dual form of naturalization. This would mean that only those foreigners who reported their desire to participate in local elections to the authorities would receive a voting card.²⁰³

Although some of the critical remarks had stayed the same, both the CDA’s and VVD’s rhetoric were certainly not as negative about the law as they were during the treatment of the constitutional change in parliament. This ‘change of heart’ by both governmental parties has in scholarly literature been explained by the presence of the right-wing extremist Hans Janmaat in parliament.²⁰⁴ By clearly turning away from the radical viewpoint of this unorthodox politician on this matter the parties hoped to portray themselves as progressive.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁹ Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984-1985, 74, 1 Februari 1985, 4746.

²⁰⁰ Hand. TK. 84-85, 74, 4746.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 4747.

²⁰² Ibid., 4737.

²⁰³ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984-1985, Voorlopig Verslag, 18619, 4, 2.

²⁰⁴ Hans Janmaat was a member of parliament of the Centrum Party and later the Centrum Democrats between 1982 and 1998 (with an interruption between 1986 and 1989). In 1985 he was present in parliament as the one-man party Groep Janmaat.

²⁰⁵ Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers in de politiek*, 124.

It is of course hard to determine if there was indeed a causality between the presence of the radical nationalist politician in parliament and the political stances of other parties towards the grant of suffrage to foreigners. However, it must be mentioned that the fraction of Janmaat never received a substantial amount of votes to really form a threat to other parties.²⁰⁶ Also, the acceptance of the constitutional change by the majority of members of parliament of the CDA and the VVD a few years prior to the emergence of Janmaat as Member of Parliament shows that support of the law was already guaranteed. The decision to completely back the 'normal' law seems to be smart from a political viewpoint since the fundamental discussion had already been conducted during the treatment of the constitutional change. If the parties in the coalition, especially the CDA party, would have been highly sceptical towards the fundamental desirability of the law, they would have had nothing to gain except the risk that they would be labelled intolerant towards aliens. It can thus be argued whether the presence of Janmaat indeed strongly influenced this rather complex political situation. It is perhaps more plausible that the CDA and VVD had changed their rhetoric about the topic, just like the PvdA had done in earlier times because it was at the time the most politically pragmatic thing to do.

5.5 Illegality and minimal term of residence

Despite the changed rhetoric of the CDA and VVD, a clear division still remained between the leftist and the rightist parties during the discussion about specific elements of the proposed law. The subject that got by far the most attention during the written and plenary discussions was the position of illegal foreigners. The government was, just like almost all political parties, of opinion that those who were not allowed to live in the nation should not be able to vote.²⁰⁷ In a report send to parliament, minister Hans Wiegel expressed the fear that illegals who were recorded in the population register with the wrong status could accidentally receive a voting card. Therefore, government proposed to perform regular checks on the legal status of foreigners by the *vreemdelingendienst* (the Dutch immigration authorities) in order to prevent illegals from having influence on the Dutch political system.²⁰⁸ In order to make these checks possible, the government proposed to deposit an extra million Gulden in the general fund reserved for the regional political bodies every year.²⁰⁹ During the plenary treatment of

²⁰⁶ In turn, this could of course also have been the result of an effective boycott of Janmaat by the other parties in parliament.

²⁰⁷ This opinion was shared by all parties except the communist party.

²⁰⁸ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984-1985, Memorie van toelichting 18619, 3, 11.

²⁰⁹ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984/-985, Memorie van Antwoord 18619, 5, 10. The document did not specify which municipality was used for his random survey.

the law Wiegel admitted that he did not know how many illegal foreigners were living in the Netherlands at the time. Rather, the decision to sharpen the control on illegals was based on a random survey conducted in 1982 in one of the major Dutch municipalities. Twenty to thirty of the 3500 foreigners in this regional population register (less than 1%) were recorded as illegal.²¹⁰ Although this random test could not provide any clarity about the number of illegal residents in the entire country, the government concluded that these numbers were substantial enough to perform action. Wiegel explicitly underlined that he thought that it could not be considered unrealistic that illegal foreigners would turn up to vote.²¹¹ In hindsight, the language of the minister and the proposed financial means to stop illegals from voting seem considerable out of proportion with reality. This feeds the suspicion that the minister deliberately used firm language to underline that the grant of local suffrage to foreigners did not mean that the general policy towards migrants would become less strict. Since both the VVD and CDA had internally been divided about the matter, the somewhat forced strict stance towards illegals could have been the result of an internal compromise of both governmental parties.

Perhaps because of this reason, the minister emphasized that it had often occurred that one vote had greatly influenced the outcome of local elections. According to the government, the vote of an illegal could therefore have great consequences for the local political landscape.²¹² As mentioned in the previous chapter. This argument was also used by the CDA in the earlier stages of the idea. The decision of the government to control the legal status of foreigners was made in disagreement with the Electoral Council, the advisory body on this matter. The council concluded that the number of illegals in the Netherlands was not high enough to legitimize an implementation a new money and time consuming bureaucratic process. Instead they advised that, at least when foreigners' suffrage was concerned, the fiction should be created that everyone in the population in the register was indeed legal.²¹³

Despite the negative advice of the Electoral Council, the VVD, CDA, GPV, SGP, RPF and the one man fraction of Janmaat were proponents of an investigation of the legal status of foreigners. Opponents expressed their reluctance to agree with this section of the law in numerous ways. D66 estimated that the number of illegal citizens in the entire population register of the Netherlands would approximately be 3200.²¹⁴ This was enough reason for

²¹⁰ Bijl. Hand, TK 1984-1985, 18619, 5, 10.

²¹¹ Ibid., 10.

²¹² Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984-1985, 74, 2 May 1985, 4764

²¹³ Bijl. Hand. TK 84-85, Memorie van Antwoord 18619, 5, 8.

²¹⁴ Hand. TK, 84-85, 74, 2 May 1985, 4777.

Member of Parliament Elida Wessel-Tuinstra (D66) to accuse the government of being ‘disproportionally nervous’ about the political participation of illegals.²¹⁵ The Member of Parliament tried to assure the rightist parties and the minister that costly and rigorous controls on foreigners were not necessary. She assured that illegals would not be ‘running to the voting booths because this would be the same as handing themselves over to the authorities.’²¹⁶ The presumed number of illegals who could receive a voting card by mistake was according to the middle liberals not worth millions of tax payer’s euros.²¹⁷

The communist party expressed that they had fundamental problems with the connection of voting rights to the *vreemdelingendienst*. The party argued that a strong focus on illegality was not appropriate because the law was designed to improve the integration of foreigners.²¹⁸ For the first time within the context of the discussion about foreigners’ suffrage, the CPN and PvdA seemed to agree with each other. Hessel Rienks (PvdA) hurled firm language at the minister. He called the proposed involvement of the *vreemdelingendienst* a ‘big mistake’²¹⁹ and accused the government of being centralistic, unnecessary bureaucratic, and of having a severe lack of feeling for the everyday actions of the local governmental bodies.²²⁰ The PSP was the only party that expressed the opinion that all foreigners, whether they were legal or illegal should be able to cast their vote.²²¹

The second main point of discussion was the amount of time foreigners should live in the Netherlands before they could obtain passive and active local suffrage. The government proposed a term of five years. Minister Rietkerk argued that this term would guarantee that foreigners had bonded enough with Dutch society to become politically active. During the written preparation conducted before the plenary discussion the minister had argued that despite the fact that his term would always have an inherent arbitrary element, there were numerous reasons to prefer the proposed period. The most important reason to accept the proposed term was that it would guarantee that foreigners had at least witnessed one full term of the local government. This would give them the knowledge, and possibly the necessary involvement, to adequately participate in local elections. The minister emphasized that a shorter term would not be sufficient for foreigners to make well considered political choices. A more pragmatic reason why a five year term was suggested was because this was

²¹⁵ Ibid., 4777.

²¹⁶ Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984-1985, 74, 1 May 1985, 4749.

²¹⁷ Hand. TK, 84-85, 74, 2 May 1985, 2 May 1985, 4778.

²¹⁸ Hand. TK 84-85, 74, 4734.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 4752.

²²⁰ Ibid., 4752.

²²¹ Ibid., 4755.

the same period foreigners needed to live in the country before they could qualify for naturalization or a permit for permanent stay.²²²

The VVD, CDA, GPV and SGP agreed with the government that a minimal stay of five years would be necessary before foreigners should be allowed to vote. The RPF was of opinion that the proposed term was too short for foreigners to adequately learn the Dutch language.²²³ The PSP was a proponent of the abolishment of restrictions by duration of stay. They pleaded for the immediate grant of suffrage for every foreigner enlisted in the civil register.²²⁴ D66 first had its reservations against the five year term, but later agreed because it would be easier to combine the longer term with their proposed abolishment of thorough controls on illegality. During the plenary discussion in parliament Hessel Rienks (PvdA) argued that those who wished to naturalize after five years would not benefit from the new law that was originally intended to improve the integration of foreigners.²²⁵ A more thorough argumentation against the term of five years was given by Peter Lankhorst (PPR). He accused the proposal of the government as being paternalistic. In the eyes of the party the argument that a foreigner would need five years to get accustomed to the Dutch culture and society was completely arbitrary and was not, and even never could be, backed with facts. Therefore, the Member of Parliament argued for a term of three years because foreigners would then have to pay taxes, needed an independent permit of stay, could apply for student allowances and fell under the law concerning *labor for foreign employers*.²²⁶ Another important argument of the PPR in favour of a term of three years was based on the fact that aliens who were married to a Dutch citizen could naturalize after the same term.²²⁷

Despite the many objections of mostly the leftist parties, the comfortable majority in parliament of the VVD and CDA safeguarded that no big alterations were made in the initial proposal of the government. Since the acceptance of the bill that changed the constitution was presumably based on an internal compromise because both the members of the confessional and the liberal party internally disagreed amongst each other whether the constitution should have been changed in the first place, it would not be logical to make concessions towards the leftist parties. Although the fundamental discussion whether foreigners should be allowed to vote was already completed, it is remarkable that the Moluccan minority and the Mediterranean workers were not as often as before specifically mentioned during the plenary

²²² Bijl. Hand. TK 84-85, Memorie van toelichting 18619, 3, 10.

²²³ Hand. TK 84-85, 74, 4740.

²²⁴ Ibid., 4736.

²²⁵ Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984-1985, 74, 1 May 1985, 4751-4752.

²²⁶ Hand. TK, 84-85, 4742.

²²⁷ Ibid., 4742

discussions. However, especially the long discussion about illegal foreigners feeds the suspicion that many parties associated the proposal mainly with poor and low-educate migrants like the Mediterranean workers.

Although it is hard to determine to which extent, especially the PvdA could have been influenced by a lobby of the *Nederlands Centrum Buitenlanders* (NCB).²²⁸ This was an independent organisation founded by the government in 1974 to enhance the communication between various ethnic minorities, Dutch people, and politicians. On the 18th of February 1985, a few months prior to the plenary discussion in parliament, the NCB send a letter to the PvdA, CDA, VVD, PPR, and CPN in which they commented on the proposal of the government.²²⁹ In this letter, the NCB emphasized that a term of five years before foreigners would be able to vote was strictly arbitrary. Using the same arguments most leftist parties used a few months later, the NCB proposed a term of three years.²³⁰ The NCB was also highly critical towards the idea effort to check foreigners whether they were illegal or not. In a more elaborate explanation of their arguments attached to the same letter, the NCB warned the government with firm language that it was in no one's favor to create a 'bureaucratic *apartheid*'²³¹

The treatment of the bill in the Senate on the 27th of August 1985 held no surprises. The PvdA called the bill a fitting step towards the further integration of foreigners. The social democrats once again expressed their disagreement with the connection foreigners' suffrage with checks on illegality and repeated their viewpoint that a stay of three years in the country would be long enough to receive the option of local suffrage.²³² The CDA emphasized that supralocal suffrage was out of the question and although the party could generally agree with the law, they emphasized that this bill was a radical break with the past.²³³ This last remark was not shared by Frans Feij (VVD) who reminded the Senators of the CDA that article 11 of the constitution of the Bataafse Republic granted foreigners suffrage under certain circumstances. The attachment of voting rights to citizenship was thus not as original as

²²⁸ Since most employees of the NCB were Dutch this should not be interpreted as a coordinated initiative of foreigners to achieve foreigners' suffrage.

²²⁹ Archive Nederlands Centrum Buitenlanders, ARCH02185, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, box I 279, Letter 27th of August 1985 from Nederlands Centrum Buitenlanders, Utrecht to PvdA, CDA, VVD, PPR and CPN, The Hague.

²³⁰ Ibid.,

²³¹ Archive Nederlands Centrum Buitenlanders, ARCH02185, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, box I 279, Appendix letter 27th of August 1985 from Nederlands Centrum Buitenlanders, Utrecht to PvdA, CDA, VVD, PPR and CPN, The Hague.

²³² *Handelingen Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal*, 1984-1985, 39, 27 Augustus 1985, 1531.

²³³ *Hand. EK*, 84-85, 39, 1532.

suggested by the CDA.²³⁴ In their final statement the VVD did not completely close the door for possible supralocal suffrage for foreigners. The liberals somewhat cryptically expressed that this decision should depend on ‘future social circumstances.’²³⁵

5.6 Chapter Summary

In 1977 a new right of center government consisting of CDA and VVD re-opened the discussion about foreigners’ suffrage. The main reasons for the at first glance surprising revival of the law were the terrorist attacks carried out by dissatisfied young Moluccans and the overall deteriorating position of the Mediterranean laborers in the country. In the following years, the discussion about foreigners’ suffrage would be even more entangled with these two groups of foreigners. The in 1979 published ethnic minorities report written by the Scientific Council of Government Policy specifically mentioned foreigners’ suffrage as a means to improve the social position of immigrants. The contents of the proposal to change the constitution was unaltered: the constitution would be amended to give future legislators the opportunity to grant foreigners local active and passive voting rights.

On the 27th of February 1979, the plenary discussion about foreigners’ suffrage began. Although the political situation had drastically changed due to the coming to power of the new government, most political parties did not radically alter their stance towards the proposal. The small confessional parties in parliament held firm to their believe that the detachment of citizenship from voting rights was out of the question. Despite the CDA generally maintaining its highly skeptic stance towards the proposal, a slight change in the party’s rhetoric was noticeable. Presumably due to internal disagreement the confessional party carefully opened some room for discussion. The VVD openly admitted that their party was still internally divided about the matter. Although the liberals continued to underline that they had fundamental problems with the detachment of voting rights from the demand of citizenship, the position of Moluccans was presented as the main reason to reconsider the proposal. While both governmental parties’ rhetoric was situated somewhere between an assimilationist inclusive and an assimilationist exclusive discourse, it seemed that the harsh circumstances many ethnic minority groups faced had shifted the emphasis more to the former. Unsurprisingly the PvdA, the small leftist parties and D66 were in favor of the proposal. Since the situation in parliament had radically changed, the social democratic party abandoned their pragmatically used assimilationist inclusive discourse and shifted back

²³⁴ Hand. EK, 84-85, 39, 1532.

²³⁵ Ibid., 1533.

towards the earlier used pluralistic inclusive discourse.

At this point, it was clear that the differences between the various political parties could not be solved if the main focus of the discussion continued to be on the desirability of foreigners' suffrage within the Dutch parliamentary democracy. Although all parties took the concept of democracy as starting point of their reasoning, each party gave it its own interpretation. The PvdA and the other small leftist parties were of opinion that democracy should be most closely attached to the ideal of absolute political equality. Therefore, every resident of the country should be able to participate in elections. This opinion was also shared by D66. The CDA, VVD, CPN, and the small confessional parties all maintained their opinion that, each with their own nuances, Dutch citizenship was necessary before someone would be able to vote. Naturally, the interpretation of voting rights as an privilege, or perhaps even defining characteristic, of the Dutch people was not compatible with the viewpoint of left wing politicians.

Despite this political stalemate, a considerable majority of the Members of Parliament agreed that foreigners' suffrage would be an useful tool to enhance the integration of foreigners. Just as was the case with the concept of democracy, integration was interpreted in multiple ways by the various political parties. For instance, the PvdA saw local foreigners' suffrage as the first step towards the realization of complete political equality for foreigners while the CDA insisted that supralocal suffrage was out of the question. The emphasis on integration rather than democracy had as result that the earlier used postnational argumentation became less relevant. While the international situation was from time to time mentioned, the focus of the discussion about foreigners' suffrage lay mostly on the domestic situation. Using the focus on integration rather than principal stances towards democracy, the PvdA, VVD, CDA, PRR and PSP gave their approval to the proposal which was then formally implemented in 1983.²³⁶

One year later, on the 19th of September 1984, the government proposed a bill which would grant active and passive local suffrage to all legal adult foreigners if they resided in the country longer than five years. Although the fundamental discussion whether foreigners' suffrage should be allowed was already completed, a clear division between the leftist and rightist parties in parliament remained noticeable. Most leftist parties were of opinion that the proposed condition that aliens should be a permanent resident in the country for a minimum

²³⁶ In 1982 Ruud Lubbers (CDA) had become Prime Minister. He would hold this position for twelve years in the following governments: Lubbers I: CDA and VVD, Lubbers II, CDA and VVD, Lubbers III, CDA and PvdA.

duration of five years was rather arbitrary. Another contested element of the law was the proposal of the government to perform regular checks on the legal status of foreigners in order to make sure that no illegal immigrants would accidentally be able to cast their vote. The leftist parties strongly advised against this matter. Because the VVD and CDA had small majority in parliament, no considerable alterations in the original law were made. On the 27th of August 1985, a majority of the Dutch senate approved the bill. Now, fifteen years after foreigners' suffrage was first brought up in governmental documents, those without Dutch nationality could make their way to the ballot box for the first time during the upcoming local elections held on the 19th of March 1986.

6. 1986-2000: Information campaign, elections and political aftermath

With all judiciary boundaries lifted, foreigners could finally make their way to the ballot box on the 19th of March 1986. This chapter describes the events after the formal implementation of the law. Before continuing to the analysis of further parliamentary discussions about foreigners' suffrage, the first half of this chapter takes a closer look at the way the government and the most prominent political parties approached the new foreign electorate in the months prior to the local elections.

6.1 *Living together, voting together*

A few years before the regular law was formally implemented, the government had already started preparations for an extensive information campaign to inform foreigners about their newly acquired political rights. As early as 1983 a report was published that looked into the most effective ways to inform foreigners of a broad range of ethnic variety.²³⁷ In this report, the social position, relation with media and other general characteristics of seventeen groups in society were scrutinized in order to realize a campaign that would inform foreigners of the general construction of the Dutch parliamentary democracy and the possibilities of minority groups to participate during local elections.²³⁸

This report was the base for the information campaign *Samen Wonen, Samen Stemmen* (Living together, voting together).²³⁹ In the evaluation of this campaign, it was specifically underlined that its aim was not to increase the voter's turnout but to inform foreigners on the practical side of the process during local elections. The only slogan used during the campaign that can be classified as a mild encouragement to vote during the local elections was *Alle stemmen gelden. Dus uw stem ook.* (All votes count. So yours as well).²⁴⁰ Of course the emphasis on the practical rather than the political dimension of the voting process should not be interpreted as a means of the government to keep foreigners away from the ballot box. The political side of the matter was deemed a task of the local political parties themselves.²⁴¹

The campaign was specifically aimed at the eight biggest groups of ethnic minorities in the country. In order from largest to smallest these were Turks, Moroccans, West-Germans, British, Belgians, Spaniards, Italians and Yugoslavians. The material produced for the

²³⁷ Afdeling Sociaal/Geografisch en Bestuurskundig Onderzoek van de Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten & Veldkamp Marktonderzoek bv., *Minderheden meer toekomst, Een onderzoek verricht voor de Commissie Kiesrecht Niet-Nederlandse Ingezetten* (Amsterdam/The Hague, 1983).

²³⁸ Veldkamp, *Minderheden meer toekomst*, 9.

²³⁹ Veldkamp Marktonderzoek bv., *Samen Wonen, Samen Stemmen, Gemeenteraadverkiezingen, 19 Maart 1986, Evaluatie van een Campagne* (Amsterdam, 1986) 76.

²⁴⁰ Veldkamp, *Samen Wonen, Samen Stemmen*, 77.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

campaign was considerable. In every language of the nationalities approached, posters, brochures, radio spots and video items were produced. In the weeks before the campaign, Dutch television showed a short TV commercial aimed to inform both foreigners and citizens that ethnic minorities had been given the right to participate during local elections.²⁴²

Every piece of promotional material of the campaign underlined indirectly that ethnic diversity or a different citizenship status was subordinate to the fact that all people were residents of the same country. The official logo of the campaign consisted of multiple hands with each a different skin color that put a voting card in a ballot box.²⁴³ The television commercial showed an at first glance homogenous mass of people at a market. As the commercial progresses, foreigners are marked white to emphasize that ethnic minorities lived among Dutch citizens who had, according to the narrator of the commercial, ‘the same duties as Dutch citizens and had therefore been given the democratic right to vote during local elections.’ On various distributed posters it was emphasized that both Dutch Citizens and foreigners would together give ‘a good council’.²⁴⁴ Another poster underlined that foreigners had the chance to make history during the upcoming local elections.²⁴⁵

Although some elements of the information campaign were clearly related to the overarching idea of democratic equality, especially the television commercial mentioned democracy specifically, the main focus seemed to lay on local integration. Rather than highlighting that the opinion of particular ethnic minorities would be heard, the grant of foreigners’ local suffrage emphasized that ethnic minorities were not only taken seriously as political actors, but also seen as an inherent element of Dutch society. Therefore, participating during the local elections was articulated towards ethnic minorities as a means to take matters in their own hands alongside the Dutch citizens. Thus, by highlighting that foreigners were already socially integrated in society it was, according to the campaign, a logical step that a further political integration would follow. Just like during the parliamentary discussions, foreigners’ suffrage was inherently related to an interpretation of democracy, but the main emphasis of the campaign lay clearly on integration.

According to the writers of the evaluation report, the result of the campaign was that ‘almost every foreigner was aware that they could participate during local elections if they

²⁴² Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid, *Postbus 51 Samen wonen, samen stemmen*, SAMENWONENSAM-HRE00024747. This broadcast was viewed on Youtube via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb07GVOnvUQ> (10-4-2015)

²⁴³ Veldkamp, *Samen Wonen, Samen Stemmen*, appendix 3. The posters can also be seen on the next page.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.



Figure 3: Poster of the information campaign Samen Wonen Samen Stemmen (A)



Figure 4: Poster of the information campaign Samen Wonen Samen Stemmen (B)



Figure 5: Poster of the information Campaign Samen Wonen Samen Stemmen (C)

met the demands set.²⁴⁶ Of course the actual effectiveness of the campaign is hard to measure. Local initiatives of for example foreigners' associations, political parties, churches and other groups could also have spread knowledge about the local elections amongst the ranks of various ethnic groups.

An indication of the actual level of awareness of foreigners that they were able to vote could perhaps be deduced from the turnout numbers of aliens on the election day. However, although the local elections of 1986 were the first where foreigners could participate, no extensive survey was undertaken to measure the political participation of this new group of voters in the entire country.²⁴⁷ One of the few surveys held about the voting behavior of foreigners during the elections was done in Rotterdam. In this survey, consisting of shadow elections in a selected number of boroughs, the electorate was divided in three groups: Dutch citizens, Surinamese and Antilleans (foreigners from former colonies of the Netherlands) and the non-Dutch. The turnout of these groups was respectively 63 percent, 43 percent and 38 percent. Consecutively, the Non-Dutch group was divided into three main groups: Turks, Moroccans, and other foreigners. The total turnout of the non-Dutch consisted for 61 percent of Turks, 16 percent of Moroccans and 35 percent of other foreigners.²⁴⁸ According to the report, the reason of the low turnout of the Moroccans was that the Moroccan king Hassan II had declared that those who would participate politically in the Netherlands could count on repercussions if they returned to their native country. The high percentage of Turks that had turned up to vote was, according to survey, the result of a considerable awareness campaign started by various Turkish organizations and newspapers.²⁴⁹

Since the information campaign of the government was designed to focus almost exclusively on the technical matters of the voting process, this automatically meant that the local political parties had to convince ethnic minorities of why it was important to vote and, perhaps more importantly, why some parties were better than others. According to an article in the *Buitenlanders Bulletin* a majority of the Dutch political parties did at least something to gain the attention of the foreign electorate.²⁵⁰ One can think of many reasons why a political

²⁴⁶ Veldkamp, *Samen Wonen, Samen Stemmen*, 78.

²⁴⁷ The first time a survey like this was done was during the local elections in 1994. For the most complete overview of the voting behavior of migrants between 1986 and 1999 see Jean Tillie, *De etnische stem, Opkomst en stemgedrag van migranten tijdens gemeenteraadsverkiezingen, 1986-1998* (Amsterdam, 1999).

²⁴⁸ Frank Buijs, *De stem van migranten en werklozen: de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van 19 maart 1986 te Rotterdam* (Leiden, 1986). 23.

²⁴⁹ Buijs, *De stem van migranten en werklozen*, 19.

²⁵⁰ 'Voorlichtingscampagne gemeenteraadsverkiezingen', *Buitenlanders Bulletin*, 10th year no. 10 (1985) 14-17.

party would try to get the attention of foreigners. In no particular order the following three reasons could be most likely. Firstly, it could be a genuine effort to listen to the voice of foreigners. Secondly it could be a way to confirm to the Dutch electorate that a party was tolerant towards aliens. Lastly, winning the foreigners' vote could make a difference in the outcome of the elections. Especially in cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam where foreigners had become a considerable part of the population. Of course these reasons could also have been intertwined with each other. Before continuing, I would like to emphasize that the next section is not meant to argue whether one party approached the foreign electorate better, more honest, or with good or bad intentions. What matters here is how the way the various political parties approached foreigners stands in relation with the discussions in parliament analyzed earlier.

During the local elections the most prominent parties in almost all municipalities were the VVD, CDA and PvdA. Unsurprisingly, the latter party organized the most extensive campaign aimed explicitly at the new foreign electorate. For instance, in the months before the election, the social democrats had organized two conventions explicitly aimed at the foreign population of Rotterdam.²⁵¹ On a national scale, members of the social democrat party handed out flyers in various languages. In Rotterdam, social democratic members of the city council regularly visited organizations of minority groups.²⁵² According to an article in the *Buitenlanders Bulletin*, the PvdA had always had the most contact with foreigners and their organizations and could therefore achieve a considerable electoral gain from the new foreign electorate.²⁵³ In the evaluation report of the *Samen Wonen Samen Stemmen* report it was noted that 'amongst all foreigners, the PvdA was by far the best known major political party.'²⁵⁴

The PvdA was certainly not the only prominent party that tried to win the foreigners' vote; the VVD had also prepared material to convince foreigners that a liberal vote would benefit them. A month prior to the local elections, the national department of the party published the following slogan: 'VVD, a party for the whole population. Freedom: ability to decide or act for oneself. Democracy: deciding together about matters of public interest.'²⁵⁵ This slogan was distributed to local branches of the VVD in four different languages: English, Turkish, Arabic and Chinese. This by the liberals used rhetoric towards foreigners during the local election campaign of 1986 was radically different from the assimilationist inclusive and

²⁵¹ 'Voorlichtingscampagne gemeenteraadsverkiezingen', *Buitenlanders Bulletin*, 14-17.

²⁵² Buijs, *De stem van migranten en werklozen*, 31-32.

²⁵³ 'Voorlichtingscampagne gemeenteraadsverkiezingen', *Buitenlanders Bulletin*, 14-17.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-17.

²⁵⁵ Jacobs, *Nieuwkomers*, 131.

sometimes assimilationist exclusive discourses used in parliament. Instead, when linking foreigners' local suffrage explicitly to freedom, democracy, and residency rather than citizenship, the VVD's rhetoric had shifted for the first time in the direction of a pluralistic inclusive discourse. Because of this, scholar Frank Buijs even argued in 1986 that the VVD tried to convince ethnic minorities that the existence of foreigners' local suffrage was foremost a liberal achievement.²⁵⁶ Technically, this was of course true since the regular bill that had made foreigners' local suffrage possible was formally proposed and accepted by a government consisting of CDA and VVD.

The once again changed rhetoric of the liberals exemplifies that foreigners' suffrage was a matter that could very easily been given a different interpretation depending on the situation at hand. Examples of similar political behavior can be found in statements made by Ed Nijpels, the chairman of the national executive of the VVD. When visiting prominent members of the Turkish community, Nijpels stated that his party was a proponent of incorporating Turkey in the European communities as soon as possible.²⁵⁷ However, in the VVD's programme for the European elections of 1984 and 1989 this wish was not mentioned.²⁵⁸ On the contrary, in the electoral programme of 1984 Turkey was firmly criticized because it had occupied the island of Cyprus which belonged, according to the liberals, to Greece.²⁵⁹ Later, the chairman also declared that the liberals were a proponent of subsidizing Islamic prayer rooms. This statement was also not part of the official party programme.²⁶⁰

The CDA also looked for support amongst the foreign population. The confessional party focused their electoral campaign towards foreigners mainly on their affinity with religion. In the weeks prior to the local elections both Prime Minister Lubbers and Elco Brinkman, the Minister of social affairs, public health and culture both expressed that their party was willing to support Muslim's religious activities financially. As a result, the *Federatie van Turkse Islamitische Moskeeverenigingen* (Federation of Turkish Islamic Mosque associations), an influential group in the Dutch Turkish community at the time, openly supported the CDA. All chairmen of this association had become members of the CDA. Two of them had even become members of the national campaign commissions of the party. During their campaign, members of the CDA also contacted organizations of the

²⁵⁶ Buijs, *De stem van migranten en werklozen*, 31.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁵⁸ VVD, *Een Europa van vrije en bewuste burgers, Europees Verkiezingsprogramma '89 van de Europese Liberaal-Democraten* (Meppel 1989); VVD, *Het Liberale Programma voor Europa*, (The Hague, 1984).

²⁵⁹ VVD, *Het Liberale Programma voor Europa*, (The Hague, 1984).

²⁶⁰ Buijs, *De stem van migranten en werklozen*, 32.

Chinese and Surinam minority groups in society.²⁶¹

While most parties approached the new foreign electorate in their own way, the number of prominent parties that placed foreigners on their candidate lists seemed to be marginal. In 1986, a total of 350 candidates divided over eighteen different parties tried to make it into the city council of Rotterdam.²⁶² Fifteen of these candidates did not have the Dutch nationality.²⁶³ Since the PvdA had always been a proponent of foreigners' suffrage, it is not surprising that this party had the most foreigners on their candidate list. Three Surinamese and a Turk can be found among the ranks of the social democrats. The VVD had one Turk on their candidate list. All other foreign candidates were associated with new parties that had no chance of making it into the city council. The 'abundance' of foreigners on the candidate list of the PvdA should not be interpreted as an effort of the party to incorporate foreigners better in actual political deliberations. Only one of the four candidates, the Surinamese Kenneth Woei-A-Tsoi had a high enough place on the candidate list to have a realistic chance of gaining a seat in the city council.²⁶⁴ This feeds the suspicion that the main reason why foreigners were put on candidate list was that they could convince their community to vote for their party.²⁶⁵

Despite many parties having tried to win the foreigners' vote, an overwhelming majority of the foreign electorate that had made their way to the ballot box in Rotterdam voted PvdA. In percentages, a survey in the boroughs Kralingen-West and Liskwartier resulted in the following figures:

²⁶¹ Ibid., 32.

²⁶² For a complete list of all participating parties and the exact amount of votes they acquired during the elections see: <http://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/Na1918/Verkiezingsuitslagen.aspx?VerkiezingsTypeId=1>

²⁶³ The foreigners consisted of about seven percent of all candidates. At the time, the percentage of foreign residences in Rotterdam was about fifteen.

²⁶⁴ Buijs, *De stem van migranten en werklozen*, 4.

²⁶⁵ At this point it should of course be mentioned that since Suriname had quite recently been a former colony of the Netherlands, it is not surprising that the foreigners that did secure a place on the candidate list of a Dutch political party were often former residents of these nations since they were often seen as strongly related to the Netherlands. Generally, Surinamese people spoke the Dutch language and were much better integrated in society than the Mediterranean migrants. For more detailed information about foreigners from former colonies in this period see: Lucassen, *Winnaars en Verliezers*, 75-78.

	PvdA	VVD	CDA	Links R'dam	D66	Rest	Totaal n=100%
Nederlanders	39%	17%	15%	9%	5%	15%	4.976
Surinamers	91%	2%	3%	0%	1%	3%	237
Antillianen	57%	25%	6%	4%	0%	12%	24
Niet-Nederlanders	74%	7%	6%	2%	2%	9%	346
Niet-Nederlanders onderverdeeld:							
>Turken	81%	9%	4%	0%	0%	6%	164
>Marokkanen	75%	0%	10%	4%	0%	11%	39
>Overigen	65%	7%	7%	5%	4%	12%	143
Totaal	44%	16%	14%	8%	4%	14%	5.583

Table 2: the voting behavior of the electorate in Kralingen-West and Liskwartier during the local election of 1986 in Rotterdam²⁶⁶

Since this graph only shows the results of a shadow election in two boroughs of the city, one should be cautious to draw conclusions from its contents. However, it is clear that the PvdA had by far the most appeal for every category of foreigners in the survey. While 39 percent of the Dutch turnout gave their vote to the PvdA, a considerable majority of the Surinamese, Antilleans, Turks, Moroccans and other foreigners that went to the ballot voted for the social democrats. Clearly, many foreigners trusted that this party would best aid them in strengthening their position in the country. On a national level, twenty foreigners were elected into city councils.²⁶⁷ The earlier mentioned Surinamese Woei-A-Tsoi made it into the city council of Rotterdam. Another Suriname candidate who was put on an unelectable place on the candidate list of the social democrats also made it into the city council because he received enough priority votes.²⁶⁸ Also, the fear expressed by several parties in both parliament and the city council of Rotterdam that foreigners would massively start their own parties was not realized. The only outspoken foreigners' party that made it into a city council was a Turkish One-man party active in the relatively small municipality off Oss.²⁶⁹

6.2 Foreigners' suffrage and double nationality

A few months after the local elections, national elections were held on the 21th of May

²⁶⁶ Table taken from Buijs, *De stem van migranten en werklozen*, 22,

²⁶⁷ L. Koeneman, P. Lucardie and I. Noomen, 'Kroniek 1986. Overzicht van de partijpolitieke gebeurtenissen van het jaar 1986', *Jaarboek 1985 Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen* (Groningen, 1987), 15.

²⁶⁸ Buijs, *De stem van migranten en werklozen*, 16.

²⁶⁹ Koeneman, 'Kroniek 1986', 15-17.

1986.²⁷⁰ Despite the fact that a considerable amount of parties had approached the foreign electorate in the months prior to the local elections, only D66, PPR, PSP and RPF addressed the topic of foreigners' suffrage directly in their election programmes. D66 argued that foreigners should be granted active voting rights during the provincial elections.²⁷¹ The PPR and PSP both stated that foreigners should be given both active and passive voting rights during every election.²⁷² The RPF was the only party that specifically stated that 'the detachment of voting rights from the demand of citizenship had been a mistake.'²⁷³ Although the terms democracy and integration appeared multiple times in their election programmes, the governmental parties CDA and VVD did not make any remarks about foreigners' suffrage.²⁷⁴

While foreigners' suffrage was absent in the electoral programmes of the governmental parties, the topic was briefly mentioned in the coalition agreement of the CDA and VVD. In the agreement the government promised to 'strengthen the judicial position of residents that do not have the Dutch nationality.' Alongside this remark it was specifically emphasized that 'a further broadening of voting rights will not be taken in consideration.'²⁷⁵ With the discussion about the constitutional amendment and regular law in mind, it is not surprising that both the CDA and VVD had no intention to further broaden foreigners' suffrage. Despite the clear message of both parties that supralocal suffrage was out of the question, the subject did not disappear from the political agenda. In 1987, members of the PSP and PvdA filed a proposal to amend the constitution in such a way that foreigners would be able to participate during provincial and national elections. As could be expected, this proposal did by far not get enough support to make it through parliament: RPF, GPV, SGP, CDA, VVD and D66 all voted against the proposal.²⁷⁶

Matters changed after the early elections of 1989.²⁷⁷ After a seven-year cooperation with the VVD, the CDA formed a coalition with the PvdA. Since the PvdA had returned to its

²⁷⁰ The CDA won the elections which led to continuation of the cooperation of the confessional party and VVD. The seats in parliament were divided as follows: PSP 1, PvdA, 52, PPR 2, D66 9, CDA 54, GPV 1, RPF 1, SGP 3, VVD 27.

²⁷¹ D66, *Verkiezingsprogramma 1986* (The Hague, 1986) 35.

²⁷² PSP, *Programma Tweede-Kamerverkiezingen 1986* (The Hague, 1986) 43; PPR, *Verkiezingsprogramma 1986-1990, verzet en vernieuwing* (The Hague, 1986) 22.

²⁷³ I. Lipschits, *Verkiezingsprogramma's 1986*, (Groningen, 1986) 359.

²⁷⁴ CDA, *Programma CDA Tweede-Kamerverkiezingen 1986* (The Hague, 1986) ; VVD, *Programma VVD Tweede-Kamerverkiezingen 1986, als de toekomst je lief is*, (The Hague, 1986).

²⁷⁵ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1986-1987, Brief van de informateur, 19555, 3, 74.

²⁷⁶ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1987-1988, 20260, 34. D66 voted against the proposal because they were only proponents of foreigners' provincial suffrage.

²⁷⁷ The cabinet fell because of increasing differences between the CDA and VVD. These differences culminated during a debate about travelling-expenses.

pluralistic inclusive discourse and the CDA maintained their stance somewhere between the assimilationist inclusion and exclusive discourses, some kind of compromise was necessary to form a homogenous statement about the matter that would not result in credibility loss for any of the two parties. Especially because the social democrats had broadened their desire about foreigners' suffrage in the renewed election programme of 1989, this was not an easy task. In this programme, the social democrats stated that foreigners should not only be given active suffrage on a provincial level, but also passive suffrage if they resided longer than five years in the country. Furthermore, the social democrats also expressed the wish that a state commission should be enacted to investigate whether passive suffrage for national elections could be given to foreigners.²⁷⁸

The compromise between both parties can be found in the coalition agreement of 1989. In this agreement it was stated that 'the question whether foreigners could get the same political rights as citizens, which includes voting rights for foreigners that reside at least five years legally in the country, cannot be separated from the development of a future Europe without boundaries.'²⁷⁹ Therefore, the government continued, 'deliberation and fundamental reflection on the matter is necessary. Initiatives to make this happen will be undertaken.'²⁸⁰ Stating it this way, the government could underline that the further broadening of foreigner' suffrage was still present on the political agenda without making any concrete promises about the matter. Also, the statement seemed to hint that the future of foreigners' suffrage would foremost be dependent on postnational factors.

Shortly after the new government had assumed office of the new government, the WRR published a new report about the minority policy. This report, ordered by Prime Minister Lubbers, underlined that the position of many foreigners still required considerable attention. Just like the earlier report published in 1979 had done, it was argued that suffrage on a provincial or perhaps even national level could aid the integration of foreigners. Another proposed method to enhance the integration of foreigners was a change in the policy concerning naturalization. The WRR argued that especially Mediterranean migrants did not choose for naturalization because the Dutch law did not allow two nationalities. Therefore the council advised that it would perhaps be an option to 'lose the demand that a foreigner loses his of hers original nationality if they decide to naturalize.'²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Bijl. Hand.TK, 1985-1986, 19555, 3, 74.

²⁷⁹ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, Brief van de informateur, 1989-1990, 21132, 8, 49.

²⁸⁰ Bijl. Hand. TK, 21132, 8, 50.

²⁸¹ Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, *Allochtonenbeleid* (The Hague, 1989) 95.

This last remark proved to be important for the further development of the political discussion about foreigners' suffrage. In their first official reaction, the government rejected the idea that people could be allowed to have more than one nationality. It was argued that there were too many 'serious judicial objections'²⁸² to be in favour of the proposal. The government continued that these judicial objections had resulted in the participation of 'international treaties enacted to prevent the occurrence of double nationalities.'²⁸³ Although the government did not specify which treaty they were referring to, this must undoubtedly have been the Treaty of Strasbourg of 1963 that was specifically aimed to stop residents of the European Communities from having two nationalities.²⁸⁴ The Netherlands had ratified this treaty in 1985. Despite the obvious recommendation of the WRR to continue the broadening of foreigners' suffrage, the topic was not touched upon in the official reaction of the government.

At this point it seemed that the government had decided to let the discussion about foreigners' suffrage rest for the time being. A few years later, pressure to address the still unclosed dossier rose when a commission installed to investigate possibilities for, amongst other matters, judicial modernization once again brought up the topic. In a report published on the 16th of November 1990, the commission criticized the often used argument that supralocal foreigners' suffrage was undesirable because it would diminish the value and political power of the Dutch citizenship.²⁸⁵ In response to this kind of argumentation, the commission argued that 'many matters discussed in parliament are now decided on an international level. These include foreign politics and defense.'²⁸⁶ The council saw in globalization and the still present desire of many migrants to integrate better in Dutch society enough reason to grant foreigners 'rights and duties on a (provincial and) national level.'²⁸⁷ Supralocal foreigners' suffrage was thus, just as mentioned in the coalition agreement of 1989, proposed as a logical reaction to international developments. Alongside this argument the commission once again cited the now more than two decades old article of A.M. Donner: 'the grant of suffrage to foreigners on a provincial and national level would be a concrete fulfilment of article 21 of the Universal

²⁸² Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, *Voorlopige regeringsreactie op het WRR-rapport 'allochtonenbeleid'* (The Hague, 1990) 13.

²⁸³ Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, *Voorlopige regeringsreactie*, 13.

²⁸⁴ For a good introduction of the European development of dual nationalities see: Thomas Faist, 'Dual Citizenship as Overlapping Membership', *Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers in International Migration and Ethnic relations* (November 2001). For the complete text of the treaty see:

<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/043.htm>

²⁸⁵ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1990-1991, Staatskundige, bestuurlijke en staatsrechtelijke vernieuwing, 21427,3, 30.

²⁸⁶ Bijl. Hand, TK, 21427, 3, 30.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

Declaration of Human Rights.²⁸⁸ Just like the WRR had done, the commission argued that the allowance of two nationalities rather than one could aid the integration of foreigners. Other than the WRR, the commission proposed this measure not as a substitute to existing minority policy but as a direct alternative for foreigners' suffrage. In the report the commission stated that if the government would decide to maintain the connection between suffrage and citizenship on a provincial and national level, 'at least a facilitation of the process to gain the Dutch nationality would be appropriate.'²⁸⁹

It seems that the governmental parties CDA and PvdA found in this argumentation a means to form a convincing compromise between their fundamentally opposing viewpoints about the way foreigners should be further integrated in society. A few months after the publication of the end report of the commission, foreigners' suffrage was directly linked to the discussion about multiple nationalities when the government published the *Notitie Meervoudige nationaliteit/ Kiesrecht voor vreemdelingen*. (Note Multiple nationality / Voting rights for foreigners).²⁹⁰ In this note the government proposed that in order to enhance the integration of foreigner in Dutch society, as much boundaries as possible should be taken away from the process to gain the Dutch nationality. Therefore the government proposed to get rid of the demand that foreigners would lose their 'old' nationality if they decided to take on the Dutch nationality. Later in the document it was specifically stated that 'this means that there will be no further initiative to establish the grant of voting rights to foreigners on supralocal level.'²⁹¹ Earlier, the PvdA and the new leftist party Groenlinks (the result of a merger between the PPR, PSP, CPN and EVP) had proposed in a motion that the government should reconsider the rule that only one nationality was allowed.²⁹² This strengthens the suspicion that the somewhat forced connection of foreigners' suffrage with the discussion about the desirability of dual nationality was a political compromise between the PvdA and CDA intended to put a definitive end to the discussion about foreigners' suffrage on a provincial and national level.²⁹³

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 30.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 31. The commission explicitly underlined that the Treaty of Strasbourg allowed the occurrence of multiple nationality under certain circumstances.

²⁹⁰ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1990-1991, Notitie meervoudige nationaliteit/kiesrecht voor vreemdelingen, 21971, 14, 4.

²⁹¹ Bijl. Hand. TK, 90-91, 21971, 14, 4.

²⁹² Heijs, *Van vreemdeling tot Nederlander*, 200.

²⁹³ Eventually, the proposal to allow a second nationality next to the Dutch one never made it through parliament. Instead it was agreed that a double nationality was possible under certain circumstances. For a more

6.3 Supralocal Foreigners' suffrage fades away

While the connection between the discussion about dual nationality and foreigners' suffrage seemed to be an effort to finish the discussion about supralocal suffrage once and for all. The topic reoccurred multiple times during the next couple of years. In 1992 the Netherlands signed the Treaty of Maastricht which meant the official transition of the European Communities to the European Union. Alongside the intensification of financial commitments in the form of the Economic Monetary Union, six new policy areas were introduced: trans-European networks, industrial policy, consumer protection, education and vocational training, youth, and culture. The expansion of the international European cooperation beyond the financial sphere had consequences for the local voting policies of the member states. On a European level, it was decided that those with the nationality of one of the members states would get active and passive voting rights during local elections in the state of residence.²⁹⁴ For the Dutch situation this meant that the demand of residence of five year was abolished. This judicial change was formally enacted in the Netherlands in 1996. When the law was presented, the government specifically stated that 'it was not desirable to abolish the demand of residency of five years for foreigners hailing from non-members of the European Union.'²⁹⁵ Later in the same document, the government argued that the distinction between citizens from the European Union and other foreigners was in line with the desire to realise a strong European citizenship that would 'gradually diminish the still existing differences between citizens of the various member states.'²⁹⁶ The bill was accepted without any plenary discussion in parliament.

A more elaborate discussion about foreigners' suffrage took place between 1995 and 1996. In 1995 the government regularly discussed a proposal to erect city provinces for the urban areas in the country in order to realise more organisational efficiency. This intended organizational change automatically raised the issue whether foreigners would still be allowed to vote. Since the constitution only allowed foreigners' local suffrage, the proposed status change of the cities from a municipality to a province would mean that it was not judicially maintainable to allow foreigners to participate during elections for the city council. In the statement attached to the proposal, the government announced that a commission would be

elaborated description of this political discussion see: G.R. de Groot, 'De afstandseis herleeft,' *Migrantenrecht*, 12 (1997) 59-61.

²⁹⁴ Council of the European Communities & Commission of the European Communities, *Treaty on European Union* (Maastricht, 1992) 15. All citizens of the member state could now also participate during the new European elections.

²⁹⁵ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1995-1996, Memorie van Toelichting, 24664, 3. 5.

²⁹⁶ Bijl. Hand. TK 95-96, 24663, 3, 5.

enacted to investigate this issue.²⁹⁷

The city provinces were never realised because a majority of the inhabitants of Rotterdam and Amsterdam voted against the idea during a referendum held in 1995. However, the idea of the city provinces, and its inherent consequences for foreigners' suffrage, were reason enough for the PvdA, D66 and Groenlinks to hand in a proposal in parliament to amend the constitution in such a way that provincial and national voting rights could also be granted to foreigners.²⁹⁸ The parties underlined that the direct reason for the proposal was 'the threatening loss of influence of a group of foreign voters when local governments lose considerable authority (...) a decreased value of the meaning of local voting rights for foreigners should be compensated by granting them suffrage on a provincial level.'²⁹⁹

What stands out in the proposal of the three parties was that they not only argued for the possibility to grant provincial suffrage to foreigners, which was a direct reaction to the idea of city provinces, but also for national suffrage. While the city provinces sparked the discussion, the proposal was clearly an attempt to once again achieve universal suffrage. In the statement attached to the proposal the initiators expressed that the absence of provincial and national voting rights was a 'regrettable matter.'³⁰⁰ Like these parties had done many times before, they used a pluralistic inclusive discourse in which democracy was foremost interpreted as a means to achieve universal political equality. The parties argued that 'the presence of a considerable group of deficient residents undermines the roots of the democratic state. Our democracy gains no benefit from a dichotomy between residents with and without full citizen rights.'³⁰¹ It seems that the PvdA, Groenlinks and D66 tried to use the political discussion about the city provinces to realise a political desire that had, especially in the case of the PvdA, existed for more than two decades.

The other parties' reactions on the proposal immediately revealed that the required support of two third of members of parliament would not be achieved. The CDA stated that they had 'no need for the proposal.'³⁰² They repeated their argument that citizenship and supralocal suffrage belonged to each other. Also, the confessional party rejected the statement of the PvdA, D66 and Groenlinks that foreigners were treated deficiently when compared

²⁹⁷ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1996-1997, Memorie van Toelichting, 24803, 3, 4.

²⁹⁸ Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1996-1997, Wetsvoorstel, 24803, 1.

²⁹⁹ Bijl. Hand. TK, 96-97, 3, 4.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 1.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 1.

³⁰² Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1997-1998, Verslag, 24803,5, 2.

with Dutch citizens.³⁰³ The VVD clearly stated that they could not vote in favour of the proposal. They underlined that the party had only allowed foreigners' local suffrage because the integration of aliens took place on a local level.³⁰⁴ The RPF argued that 'especially in a time of international mobility (...) it is important to keep the relation between nationality and suffrage as strong as possible.'³⁰⁵ Therefore they argued, just like they had done before in their election programme, that the attachment of suffrage with citizenship should be restored on all political levels. The SGP also argued that the initial detachment of citizenship from suffrage had been a mistake.³⁰⁶ Lastly the members of the GPV stated that they had respect for the determination of the proponents of universal foreigners' suffrage to keep bringing the matter up. Despite this remark, the GPV could not agree with the proposal. They saw foreigners' suffrage on the provincial and national levels as contra dictionary since 'foreigners would then be granted an important citizen right while they had not fully chosen for the country by acquiring Dutch citizenship.'³⁰⁷ All parties that had been opponents, or fairly critical, of the grant of suffrage to foreigners maintained roughly the same stance towards the matter as they had done a decade earlier. In an earlier published document about the proposed law, the initiators of the proposal stated that it at least gave them comfort that it had also taken a long time before all Dutch men and women had been given full-fledged suffrage.³⁰⁸

In the following decades, foreigners' suffrage still appeared in the election programs of its most notable proponents. However, the way foreigners' suffrage was approached gradually changed over the years. In the PvdA's election programme of 1994 it was stated that 'foreigners' suffrage on a local, provincial a national level would aid the integration of aliens.'³⁰⁹ In 1998 the election programme referred directly to the proposal of the PvdA, D66 and Groenlinks to change the constitution alongside a short remark that 'the Netherlands were ready for the next step of suffrage for foreigners.'³¹⁰ In 2002 it was mentioned that 'it would be a good matter if foreigners could participate during other elections than only the local ones.'³¹¹ This was the last time foreigners' suffrage was mentioned in the election programme of the social democrats.

³⁰³ Bijl. Hand. TK, 97-98, 24803, 5, 2.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 3.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 5.

³⁰⁸ Bijlagen Handelingen der Staten-Generaal, 1996-1997, Memorie van Toelichting, 24803, 4, 10.

³⁰⁹ PvdA, *Wat mensen bindt, Partij van de Arbeid Verkiezingsprogramma 1994-1998* (The Hague, 1994) 49.

³¹⁰ PvdA, *Een wereld te winnen, Verkiezingsprogramma 1998* (The Hague, 1998) 7.

³¹¹ PvdA, *Samen voor de toekomst, idealen en ambities 2010, Verkiezingsprogramma 2002-2006* (The Hague, 2002) 76.

A similar development can be seen in the election programmes of both D66 and Groenlinks. Both in 1994 and 1998 D66 argued that foreigners' should be able to participate during provincial elections.³¹² In 2002 the party, perhaps mistakenly, argued that foreigners' should receive local voting rights.³¹³ After that, foreigners' suffrage did not reoccur as an official party statement. Groenlinks stated in their election programmes of 1994, 1998, 2003 and 2006 that foreigners' should get voting rights on all political levels. In the election programmes of 2010 and 2012 foreigners' suffrage was not addressed. Thus, around 2005/2006 the three biggest proponents of supralocal foreigners' suffrage stopped addressing the matter. It is therefore perhaps not a coincidence that the 1996 proposal of these three parties to broaden foreigners' suffrage was officially revoked on the 2nd of March 2005.³¹⁴

After the proposal was revoked, foreigners' suffrage has not reappeared in governmental documents. Although it cannot be said with certainty, it seems that the parties had given up their efforts to achieve provincial and national suffrage for foreigners because this was rejected by a majority of the other parties for more than twenty years. It was clear that the CDA, VVD, and the small confessional parties would never change their opinion about this matter. A more direct reason why the proposal was revoked could have been the murder on the Dutch film maker and activist Theo van Gogh by a Muslim extremist exactly four months earlier. This murder intensified the debate the integration of migrants inside and outside parliament. Furthermore, starting in 2006, the far right and highly nationalist Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), spearheaded by Geert Wilders made its debut in parliament.³¹⁵ Their presence in the political arena had made discussions about foreigners once again a rather sensitive matter. By 2006, the chance that a proposal to further broaden foreigners' suffrage would ever make it through parliament was certainly non-existent.

6.4 Chapter Summary

In March 1986 foreigners participated for the first time during local elections. In order to inform the new foreign electorate about the details of this new political right, the government had prepared an extensive information campaign. The aim of this campaign, named *Samen Wonen, Samen stemmen* (Living together, Voting together) was to educate foreigners about the practical rather than the political side of the local elections. While explaining how the

³¹² D66, *Ruimte voor de toekomst, Verkiezingsprogramma 1994-1998* (The Hague, 1994) 36; D66, *Bewogen in beweging, Verkiezingsprogramma 1998-2002* (The Hague, 1998) 62.

³¹³ D66, *Toekomst in eigen hand, Verkiezingsprogramma 2002-2006* (The Hague, 2002) 28.

³¹⁴ *Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004-2005, Brief inhoudende intrekking van het wetsvoorstel, 24803, 7.*

³¹⁵ Since the PVV often uses firm symbolic politics, it is remarkable that that party has never publically argued that foreigners' local suffrage should be revoked.

Dutch electoral system worked in brochures, posters, a television commercial and other promotional material, foreigners were also reminded they had been given the right to vote during local elections because they were an inherent part of Dutch society. Thus, Just like during the parliamentary discussion about the regular law, the information campaign interpreted foreigners' suffrage mainly as a means to enhance integration. However, there was a subtle difference between the interpretation in parliament and that of the campaign. Instead of portraying foreigners' suffrage as a means to develop the integration of foreigners, the information campaign portrayed foreigners' suffrage as a logical result of successful integration.

In the months prior to the local elections, a great number of political parties tried to win the foreigners' vote. The three biggest parties, PvdA, VVD and CDA all used different ways to reach the foreign electorate. The CDA emphasized the importance of religion, the PvdA profiled itself as the party that was most concerned with the situation of the migrant workers and the VVD, in contrary to their earlier stance in parliament, emphasized that they saw foreigners' suffrage as a victory for democracy. Since no extensive surveys of the foreigners' turnout have been conducted during the local elections of 1986, it is hard to determine how the foreigners' votes were exactly divided. However, a small survey conducted in a few boroughs of Rotterdam shows that an overwhelming majority had given their vote to the PvdA. The amount of foreigners that had started their own political parties was very limited.

A few months after foreigners had given their vote for the first time, national elections were held on the 21th of May 1986. In the coalition agreement of the new government, once again consisting of CDA and VVD, it was specifically emphasized that a further broadening of foreigners' suffrage would not be part of the future political agenda. Probably in reaction to this remark, both the PSP and PvdA send a proposal to parliament to amend the constitution in such a way that provincial and national foreigners' suffrage could be realised. This proposal was immediately rejected by almost all other parties in parliament.

It would take two years before foreigners' suffrage re-emerged in governmental documents. Due to struggles between the CDA and VVD the second cabinet of Lubbers fell and was after an early election round replaced by a coalition consisting of CDA and PvdA at the end of 1989. Since both parties had opposing opinions about supralocal suffrage, a compromise about the matter was necessary. Eventually, the new government stated rather carefully that deliberation and reflection about a possible broadening of foreigners' suffrage was necessary. Despite that the main argument of the government to re-open the discussion

about the matter was based on the assumption that the international situation in Europe would change rapidly, it seems that the PvdA had found a way to get their desire for supralocal suffrage based on democratic equality back on the political agenda.

Presumably due to two reports respectively published by the WRR and a commission founded to investigate possibilities in 1989 and 1990 foreigners' suffrage was once again discussed in parliament. Based on similar advices in both reports, the government eventually decided to combine the discussion about supralocal foreigners' suffrage with a proposal to open the possibility of to acquire a second nationality. Since the former measure would make it easier for foreigners to gain Dutch citizenship, the government stated that discussions about provincial and national foreigners' suffrage would no longer be necessary. Because the PvdA had earlier argued that they were a proponent of doubly nationality while the CDA had rejected this idea, the somewhat forced connection between the dossiers of foreigners' suffrage and double nationality seems like a trade of between both parties. Double nationality was put on the political agenda, while provincial and national foreigners' suffrage was taken off.

Despite the compromise between the social democrats and the confessional party, the discussion about foreigners' suffrage did not disappear entirely from the political agenda. In 1992 the European Union was formed when all member states of the European Communities signed the Treaty of Maastricht. Simultaneously all member states agreed that those with the nationality of one of the member states would always have local voting rights in any of the member states without any strings attached. When this measure was formally implemented, the government specifically underlined that it was not desirable to abolish the demand of residency of five years for foreigners hailing from non-member states. None of the at the time present political parties in parliament reacted to this remark.

Three years later, the topic of foreigners' suffrage re-emerged during discussions about the possible realization of city provinces. If the status of big cities would change from a municipal to a province, foreigners would automatically lose their local voting rights. Within the context of the discussion about the city provinces, the PvdA, D66 and Groenlinks proposed to amend the constitution in such a way that both provincial and national suffrage could be granted to foreigners by future legislators. Because the proposal not only argued for the participation of foreigners during provincial but also national elections, it seems that the proposal was more than just a pragmatic reaction to the given political problem caused by the city provinces. Rather, the proposal was also most likely an attempt to use the discussion about city provinces to realise the especially by the PvdA and small leftist parties long lived

desire to realise universal suffrage for foreigners.

Eventually, the city provinces were never realised. Subsequently, the proposal of D66 PvdA, and Groenlinks was rejected by almost all parties in parliament. Most parties once again rejected supralocal suffrage because this would diminish the value of Dutch citizenship. Although foreigners' suffrage kept re-emerging in the election programmes of the three initiators of the proposal, the topic has until the present day not prominently reappeared prominently in parliamentary documents or discussions. In 2005 the proposal to amend the constitution was officially revoked by all three parties. Around this year, foreigners' suffrage also disappeared from the election programmes of D66, PvdA and Groenlinks. The exact reason for the, at least for now, rather definitive disappearance of foreigners' suffrage from the political agenda is hard to tell. However, especially with the emergence of right wing politicians like Geert Wilders in parliament, it seems futile to try to convince the required three third of members of parliament that provincial and national foreigners' suffrage is worth a constitutional change.

Concluding remarks

This thesis explained and analysed the political discussion about foreigners' suffrage in the Netherlands between 1970 and 2000. Since its first emergence in governmental documents at the beginning of the 1970s, Foreigners' suffrage has been a recurring topic in the Dutch parliament for over thirty years. In these three decades, the leftist (PvdA and other small left parties) and rightist parties (VVD, CDA and the small confessional parties) fundamentally disagreed how foreigners' suffrage should be interpreted. Unsurprisingly, both broad political streams connected the concept of foreigners' suffrage with the political concept of democracy. However, both political currents had a completely different character. The rightist parties in parliament saw democracy foremost as a political system with citizenship as one of its key characteristics. For the leftist parties, democracy was dominantly interpreted as the ideal to achieve universal political equality for all residents in a given nation. Naturally, the by the right preferred interpretation based on citizenship and the by the left preferred interpretation based on residence had a major influence on the way foreigners' suffrage was seen by the various parties in parliament. The rightist parties saw the grant of voting rights to foreigners mainly as an unwanted reduction of the political strength of Dutch citizenship. On the other hand, the leftist parties saw foreigners' suffrage foremost as a step towards the by them desired political equality.

Despite these at first glance unbridgeable differences, foreigners' local suffrage was formally realised in 1985. Perhaps counterintuitively, this was not the result of a fundamental discussion about the essence of democracy. The headroom for an actual political discussion was created by the specific circumstances and history of migrants in the Netherlands. The terrorist attacks of the Moluccans and a further deprived and isolated position of especially the Mediterranean workers in the country lead all politicians to the same conclusion near the end of the 1970s: something had to be done to cope with this situation. From this starting point, a new interpretation of foreigners' suffrage emerged: closely related to the first minority policy, the grant of active political rights to foreigners could aid the integration of fragile migrants and would at the same time be a clear message to the various ethnic minority groups that they were taken seriously. This interpretation of foreigners' suffrage was convincingly enough for a majority of the members of the CDA and VVD to vote in favour of the in 1983 accepted constitutional change that made future legislation about foreigners' local suffrage possible.

One year later, on the 19th of September 1984, the government proposed a bill which

would grant active and passive local suffrage to all legal adult foreigners if they resided in the country longer than five years. Although the fundamental discussion whether foreigners' suffrage should be allowed was already completed, a clear division between the leftist and rightist parties in parliament remained noticeable. Most leftist parties were of opinion that the proposed condition that aliens should be a permanent resident in the country for a minimum duration of five years was rather arbitrary. Another contested element of the law was the proposal of the government to perform regular checks on the legal status of foreigners in order to make sure that no illegal immigrants would accidentally be able to cast their vote. The leftist parties strongly advised against this matter. Because the VVD and CDA had small majority in parliament, no considerable alterations in the original law were made. The strict stance of both these governmental parties during the discussion about the regular law was most likely the result of internal disagreements about the desirability of foreigners' suffrage.

The by both leftist and a majority of the rightist members of parliament accepted interpretation of foreigners' suffrage as a means of integration did of course not mean that the connection between democracy and suffrage was forgotten. In contrary, the fundamental interpretation of democracy by the various political parties in parliament continued to influence the political discussion. Generally, the leftist parties interpreted the grant of local suffrage to foreigners as the first step towards universal suffrage for all residents in the country. On the other hand, the CDA and VVD saw the grant of foreigners' local suffrage as an exception of their principle that citizenship and democracy should never be detached from each other. For these parties, the grant of foreigners' suffrage could only be allowed on a local level because this was where foreigners mainly integrated. Despite numerous efforts of especially the PvdA to convince the rightist parties otherwise, supralocal foreigners' suffrage has until this day not been realised. After 2005, most likely because of the changed atmosphere surrounding the integration of migrants and the emergence of the nationalist PVV as a considerable player in Dutch parliament, foreigners' suffrage had disappeared from both the parliamentary documents and election programmes.

Although international developments were regularly mentioned by political actors since the first emergence of foreigners' suffrage in parliamentary documents, it does not seem that they had a considerable influence on the outcome of the political discussion. Of course, on a grand historical scale the advent of arguments based on the universal rights of man and the ideological backgrounds of the various political parties have roots that reach further than the Dutch boundaries. However, all arguments coined by political actors based on the international situation have never been decisive for the direction of the debate. The only

international factors that accented rather than actually influenced the outcome of the discussion in the Netherlands were the continuing expansion and intensification of the European Communities and later the European Union. Most notably, the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 forced the Dutch government to abolish the demand that citizens from any country of the European Union should be a resident for five years before they would be able to vote.

Can the grant of local voting rights to foreigners be called a victory for the Dutch democracy? It seems that during the local elections of 1986 all major political parties would answer this question with a confident yes. However, the above has made clear that this question is perhaps harder to answer than one might think. Since the meaning of democracy is always determined by ideological preferences, a straight answer cannot be given. However, it is clear that the expansion of suffrage was certainly not complete when universal suffrage for all adult citizens was achieved in most Western countries during the first decades of the twentieth century. If one accepts that suffrage is one of the cornerstones of modern parliamentary democracy, there is still considerable opportunity left to broaden its scope. If this will ever happen in the Netherlands is of course, to cite a member of the VVD one last time, dependent on ‘future social circumstances.’³¹⁶

Suggestions for further research

Although there is of course always room for improvement, three matters related to the discussion about foreigners’ suffrage can particularly be expanded in order to create a more complete reconstruction of this historical episode. Although all these matters have been touched upon in this thesis, they could each easily have had their own chapter if more time and space had been available. Firstly, the section about the electoral campaigns of local political parties can be expanded. Instead of only looking at the electoral campaign of the CDA, VVD and PvdA in 1986, the electoral campaigns of all political parties during all local elections since 1986 can be looked at to see if a development is noticeable in the way politicians approached the foreign electorate. Secondly, the role of the NCB and foreigners organisations could be further scrutinised to provide a more complete picture of the context in which the parliamentary discussion was conducted. Finally, since the main focus of this dissertation was on the period between 1970-2000, the aftermath of the discussion about foreigners’ suffrage in the years after 2000 could be explained in more detail.

³¹⁶ Hand. EK, 84-85, 39, 1532.

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis can be considered as a case study that unveils the sometimes rather complicated relation between the sovereignty of nations, citizenship and democracy. This thesis has made it clear that that the character and outcome of a political discussion about foreigners' suffrage in a western nation is predominantly determined by a country's specific history in general and historical relation with foreigners in particular. The development of similar discussions or absence of these, in other European nations can be scrutinised in the other European nations in order to form a better understanding of the general development of the interpretations of suffrage, democracy, and citizenship and migration policy in Europe. Consequently, comparative analyses between the stances of various nations can be made in order to determine if there are dominant conditions that determine whether foreigners' suffrage is accepted or rejected.

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Appendix: composition of the Dutch Parliament Since 1945

	1946	1948	1952	1956	1956*	1959	1963	1967	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
<i>Confessionelen</i>																	
Katholieke Volkspartij	32	32	30	33	49	49	50	42	35	27	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Antirevolutionaire Partij	13	13	12	10	15	14	13	15	13	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Christelijk-Historische Unie	8	9	9	8	13	12	13	12	10	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Christen-Democratisch Appel	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	49	48	45	54	54	34	29
Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	3
Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Katholiek Nationaal Partij	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
RK Partij Nederland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reformatiologische Politieke Federatie	-	-	-	-	-	-	80	73	63	54	53	54	51	59	60	41	37
totaal	55	57	55	53	80	78											
<i>Liberalen</i>																	
Partij van de Vrijheid	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	-	8	9	9	13	19	16	17	16	22	28	26	36	27	22	31	38
totaal	6	8	9	9	13	19	16	17	16	22	28	26	36	27	22	31	38
<i>Socialisten, Communisten</i>																	
Partij van de Arbeid	29	27	30	34	50	48	43	37	39	43	53	44	47	52	49	37	45
Pacifistisch Socialistische Partij	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	4	2	2	1	3	3	1	-	-	-
Democratisch Socialististen '70	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Communistische Partij van Nederland	10	8	6	4	7	3	4	5	6	7	2	3	3	-	-	-	-
totaal	39	35	36	38	57	53	51	46	55	58	57	50	53	53	49	37	45
<i>Overigen</i>																	
Boerenpartij	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	7	1	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Democraten66'	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	11	6	8	17	6	9	12	24	14
Politieke Partij Radikalen	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	7	3	3	2	2	-	-	-
Nederlandse Middenstandspartij	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Evangelische Volkspartij	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Centrum Partij/Centrum Democraten	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	3	-
GroenLinks'	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	5	11
Socialistische Partij	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	5
Unie 55+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Algemeen Ouderenverbond	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	14	16	16	12	20	10	11	19	6	-
totaal	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	14	16	16	12	20	10	11	19	41	30

Table taken from: Bosmans, *Staatkundige Vorming in Nederland*, 190-191.