

Table 15: Major Constitutional Developments in the History of the Netherlands

Year	Constitutional or Political Event
58 BC	Roman empire reaches southern edge of the Rhine. In what came to be called the Netherlands, a series of fortress cities and trading posts were established, many of which remain today.
1450	States General created for most of the Netherlands by the Burgundy provinces.
1477	Mary's letter of preference grants the States General the right to veto taxes and meet as they wish, i.e., without being called by a king or queen.
1579	The Union of Utrecht formalizes the alliance of Protestant provincial governments and provides constitutional foundations for collective decisions by the Seven United Provinces. Provinces have the right to appoint their own stadhouders, and a different stadhouder is appointed in the north than in the south, although both are from the House of Orange.
1650–72	First stadhouder-less period in Holland and several other southern provinces.
1672–02	Office of stadhouder reestablished, Willem III takes office and drives the French out.
1702–47	Second stadhouder-less period: after Willem III's death in 1702, no stadhouder is appointed in the south.
1747	Office of stadhouder reestablished. Willem IV is from the Friesland line of the House of Orange and becomes the first stadhouder for all of the Netherlands. Willem IV drives the French out.
1793	The French declare war on stadhouder Willem V, who flees to England in 1795
1798–1801	Batavian constitution adopted with a unicameral parliament elected under broad suffrage. The constitution provides for freedom of press and association, freedom of religion, independence of judges, and separation of church and state. It also formally eliminates guild privileges and feudal duties.
1801–06	Napoleon replaces the Batavian constitution with a more authoritarian system, with R. J. Schimmelpenninck at its head.
1806–10	Kingdom of the Netherlands created with Louis Bonaparte as king (Napoleon's brother).
1810	Netherlands temporarily becomes part of France.
1813–16	Kingdom of the Netherlands established, a new constitution is drafted with a bicameral parliament with a more or less noble chamber and a federal chamber. Its territories include present-day Belgium,
1830	Belgium secedes and secures independence in 1831. Its new constitution is finalized in 1839 and causes constitutional issues to be revisited in the Netherlands.
1840	Constitution reforms increase parliament's power of the purse by shortening the budget cycle from 10 to 2 years and introduces ministerial responsibility.
1844	Thorbecke (a law professor at the University of Leiden) proposes nine constitutional reforms shortly after coronation of Willem II, but they fail to receive a majority in the lower house.
1848	King Willem II proposes constitutional reforms, but these fail, and his cabinet resigns.
1848	A new constitutional commission is created on March 17 (headed by Johan Rudolph Thorbecke). Peaceful demonstrations take place in Amsterdam for constitutional reforms.
1848	Thorbecke proposes major reforms of the Dutch constitution: a compromise between liberals and House of Orange supporters is reached, with support of King Willem II.
1848	Parliament is placed on an electoral basis. The new first chamber becomes a federal chamber (essentially the existing second chamber) The new second chamber is to be directly elected by about 10 percent of male adults; it controls the budget.
1848	Members of the first chamber are elected for nine years (one-third of members elected every three years). The second chamber is elected for four years (and increasingly dominated by liberals).
1848	Freedom of press, association, and right of petition established through legislation.
1849	King Willem II dies, Willem III becomes king, and Thorbecke becomes prime minister. He has poor relations with the new king who threatens Thorbecke with the gallows.
1853	Thorbecke resigns at Willem III's request after Protestants protest the return of Catholic bishops to the Netherlands for the first time in 200 years (under the new freedom of association rules). Religious parties gain seats in the next election.

Perfecting Parliament

- 1868 Parliamentary power becomes more extensive as a consequence of bargaining over the budget; ministers now clearly require significant parliamentary support as well as support by the king
- 1870 A Liberal Party is founded.
- 1869 Anti-Revolutionary Party (conservative coalition) is founded by Kuyper
- 1880 New “socialist” parties started in the 1880s, although they did not have significant representation in parliament. They are firmly linked to the labor and social democratic movements.
- 1887-94 Parliamentary reforms: expansion of male suffrage to 27 percent of adult men. First chamber now includes 50 members and second chamber 100 members. Reforms in 1894 extend suffrage to about 50 percent of male voters.
- 1891 Special meeting of Anti-Revolutionary Party (conservatives) to address labor issues.
- 1891 Catholic parties are encouraged to pay more attention to labor by Pope encyclical 1891.
- 1900 First national unions are organized and a major strike occurs in 1903. In response, the government tries to reduce the power of unions, but fails. There are Christian and secular unions closely related to the Christian Democratic and Social Democratic parties
- 1917–22 Major constitutional reforms adopted in a constitutional exchange.
- Universal male suffrage, PR for second chamber, first chamber remains indirectly elected by provincial councils, but with no minimum wealth threshold for chamber seats. First chamber to have six-year terms, with half elected every three years (in 1980 went to four-year terms). Educational funding for religious schools is adopted in exchange for support of other parliamentary reforms.
- 1922 Women’s suffrage is adopted. Support for religion-based parties increases.
- 1938-72 Minor constitutional reforms.
- 1940–46 German occupation, government flees, no election until 1946
- Major constitutional reforms: royal authority is formally reduced and the bill of rights is extended.
- 1983 However, ministers are still formally appointed by royal decree and chambers may still be dissolved by royal decree. The first chamber has 75 members and the second 150 members.