



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 8, 2023

Dutch Elections: Support for Farmers' Party Falls as Political Mainstream Reasserts Itself

With the Netherlands heading to the polls on November 22 to elect a new parliament, the tide seems to be shifting against the Dutch Farmers Movement (BBB), according to a recent POLITICO [poll](#) that depicted waning public support for the BBB, as the EU-backed political establishment seeks to reassert itself over populist unhappiness over their “green” policies.

Established in 2019 and enlivened by the Netherlands’ ongoing dispute over the draconian enforcement of nitrogen quotas on the country’s agricultural sector, the BBB emerged victorious in regional elections in March this year.



AP Images
Farmers protesting in the Netherlands

In July, the Dutch government crumbled over its failure to agree on measures to curtail the influx of asylum seekers. It was initially believed that the BBB could take their local electoral victories to the Dutch Parliament during the upcoming elections in November.

However, the latest opinion polls paint a gloomy outlook for the BBB, showcasing a considerable decrease in public support for the party since May, down to 11 percent, as the protest movement that propelled the party to power lost momentum.

Moreover, the farmer’s movement in the Netherlands is reeling from stagnation as more radical farmers around Farmer’s Defense Force (FDF) leader Mark Van den Oever hope [to form](#) a more radical group, quoting reformism within the BBB.

Many view the farmer’s movement as temporarily replacing the traditional Dutch center-right. With BBB leader Caroline van der Plas’s [move](#) to connect with unhappy Christian Democratic politicians to join the party, many radicals were incensed.

Meanwhile, mainstream Dutch politicians are increasing efforts to reinforce “green” policies and the European Green Deal. For instance, former Brussels green czar Frans Timmermans stepped down from EU politics to tackle the BBB, as voters protested against the “green” policies he devised.

Timmermans, 62, declared his plans on July 20 after Dutch media confirmed that he would be vacating his role in the European Commission. He declared that “I want to become Prime Minister,” *De Telegraaf* [reported](#). Timmermans has hitherto been a member of Parliament and served as Dutch Foreign Minister from 2012 to 2014.

To boot, Timmermans has been spearheading a green-left electoral coalition against the BBB and other populists. The green-left alliance introduced even more dramatic cuts to livestock production — such as a 75 percent reduction in the number of live animals on Dutch farms, a move which they regard as key to halting “climate change.”



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Regarding Timmermans, Italian Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the League Matteo Salvini declared, “This man has done so much damage. We hope that the Dutch voters will treat him as he deserves,” Salvini stated.

Dutch political commentator Eva Vlaardingerbroek voiced [concern](#) that Timmermans could become the next Dutch prime minister, saying, “If Timmermans becomes our new prime minister, I sincerely believe it will be the final blow for the Netherlands.”

“The man is the literal personification of globalism and champagne socialism, and he is now clearly aiming to become prime minister of the Netherlands; which — ironically — is a country he fundamentally aims to destroy,” she posited.

Vlaardingerbroek also pointed out Timmermans’ links to policies that gave rise to the Dutch farmer protests, as the EU Commission endorsed the idea of purchasing farms to close down around 3,000 farms in the Netherlands to curb nitrogen emissions.

Additionally, a [rebranded group](#) of Christian Democrats, the New Social Contract (NCS) led by Pieter Omtzigt, seems to be rising in popularity in the country, based on polls.

The EU’s Nature Restoration Law (NRL) passed on July 12 has been rubbing salt into the wound of the Dutch nitrogen emissions battle between farmers and the government. Following the bill’s passing, the Netherlands’ largest farmers’ lobby [said](#) that the legislation would only worsen further protests.

In spite of strong objections from the conservative EPP group and agricultural lobbyists who insisted that the NRL unjustly punishes food producers, the law was passed, owing to a razor-thin 12 MEP majority at a plenary session in Strasbourg.

Based on the NRL, up to 30 percent of European land will be earmarked as environmentally protected, gravely impeding agricultural production in whole expanses of Europe, which opponents maintain would only aggravate the livelihood woes of Dutch farmers.

The dispute between Dutch farmers and the government over nitrogen-emission restrictions has been going on for years, as protestors claim the limitations would ruin the country’s economically crucial agricultural sector at a time of soaring food prices. The discontent among farmers has directly led to the ascendancy of the BBB party.

Although the news-grabbing tractor protests in the Netherlands have died down in recent months following the triumph of the BBB in regional elections, many farmers were [arrested](#) outside the Dutch Parliament this year as the state readied itself to start the compulsory purchase of Dutch farms.

Also, critics have slammed the Dutch government for inconsistency following its move to contribute 100 million euros to a World Bank [fund](#) for Ukrainian farmers, while isolating its own agricultural industry via the aforementioned stringent emission regulations.

Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Liesje Schreinemacher made the announcement about his country’s contribution to the World Bank fund at a meeting of the World Bank in April. He noted that financial aid would be for the purchase of new farm equipment for Ukraine as part of a [2.5 billion](#) euro package pledged by the Netherlands, comprising mainly military aid to Ukraine.

Notably, the conflict in Ukraine has jeopardized EU food security, as Ukraine is the key provider of rapeseed oil and corn to the European market. Central and Eastern European nations such as Poland have been in a faceoff with Kyiv and Brussels over restrictions of Ukrainian grain imports.



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