

Abstract

The work examines the attitude of Dutch political power towards university students as citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through an analysis of meetings in the lower house of parliament (Tweede Kamer) dedicated to the developments surrounding the coronavirus, it investigates the conceptualizations of students as citizens that Members of Parliament explicitly or implicitly formulated during these debates, how these conceptualizations competed with each other, and their role in shaping the government's position versus the opposition's (or individual parties'), while also considering the context of the March 2021 elections.

The COVID-19 pandemic proved an ideal source of information by compelling parties to explicitly express their value-based stances and engage in explicit debates on state support priorities. The thesis focused on four thematic areas of the (real or desired) relationship of political power to students as citizens: communication, prioritization, advocacy of interests, and the construction of the image of the student.

The optic of the approach to students did not confirm a dividing line between government and opposition, but rather between government and parliament. The latter served as the main accelerator of the debate, setting an agenda that took into account students as a group of citizens. Another dividing line could be observed between constructive opposition striving to implement the most effective measures in line with formulated student interests, and non-constructive opposition exploiting constructed student interests to delegitimize the government. In both groups, the primary argument was the care for the mental, economic, physical well-being, and political freedom of students, outweighing the argument of public interest, which only arose in extreme situations and was almost exclusively aligned with the government's standpoint.

Key words: students, COVID-19, the Netherlands, Dutch government