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Citation

Daudt, H., Maesen, C. E. van der, & Mokken, J. (1996). Political Efficacy: A Further Exploration. *Acta Politica*, 31: 1996(4), 350-371. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450439>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450439>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Political Efficacy: A Further Exploration*

H. Daudt, Constance E. van der Maesen & R.J. Mokken

Introduction

The concept 'political efficacy' and the corresponding scale 'sense of political efficacy' have become very popular in the field of political behavior since their first application. In a recent article Easton and Dennis¹ dealt with the concept and its implications. They distinguish three guises in which the concept of efficacy appears, i.e. efficacy as a *norm*, efficacy as a psychological *disposition* or *feeling* and efficacy as a *form of behavior*.

Easton and Dennis state, in criticism of the use that has hitherto been made of the concept:

Failure to distinguish these three implications of the term has left considerable ambiguity about its theoretical status and utility.

These observations led us to a further exploration of the meaning of the scale.

What should be the interpretation of various levels of efficacy? Does it mean that, for example, a person with a high level of political efficacy has internalized the *norm* of political efficacy in the process of political socialization? In other words, does it imply that better socialization of the *norm* leads to a higher *sense*, even irrespective of individual possibilities for political influence?

Or do people, in spite of the internalized norm of efficacy, react with a low level of 'sense of efficacy' when they perceive a gap between norm and possibilities?

In this context, what does the sense of efficacy as measured by the scale stand for?

Neither Easton and Dennis nor we present direct evidence on the role of the *norm*. Nor did we analyze the *conduct* suggested by that norm. We have been concentrating on formal education as an important agent of political socialization and its relation to the 'sense of efficacy'.

Our data suggest, that people generally obtain the sense of political efficacy as a result of socialization of the norm during the educational process.

We obtained strong evidence, however, that people who experience their low possibilities for acting according to the norm got a lower sense on the scale than might be expected in view of their level of socialization as indicated by the degree of education.

Thus at least two complex forces are seen to operate on the sense of efficacy. On the one hand socializing forces tend to raise it in accordance with the acquired norm of efficacy. On the other hand actual experiences in the political sphere may reveal a discrepancy between opportunity and norm, thus counteracting the former effect and eventually reducing the sense of efficacy.

I

In 1954 the concept 'sense of political efficacy' was introduced in electoral research² with considerable success: as a theoretical tool it has enjoyed the permanent interest of students of political behavior, and the corresponding efficacy-scale has been applied extensively. As one of the authors³ has pointed out, the concept sometimes figures in the literature under different names and various operationalizations, mostly amounting to the use of one or more different items in the scale. In this context we should like to mention: 'political self-confidence'⁴, 'political confidence'⁵, 'political futility'⁶, 'political effectiveness'⁷, 'political anomie'⁸, 'political potency'⁹, 'political competence'¹⁰, 'political optimism' or 'political pessimism'¹¹.

Reference should also be made to Milbrath's survey of research findings concerning the relation of political efficacy to a number of other concepts used in political research.¹²

A review of the literature concerning political efficacy and its correlates can also be found in a recent article by Easton and Dennis on the acquisition of political efficacy as a regime norm by children at an early age.¹³ This last article is particularly significant in that it contains an analysis of the theoretical backgrounds of concept and scale. The authors give an explicit formulation of much that has up to now been implicit and ambiguous in the use of the concept political efficacy. Since their ideas were of importance for the interpretation of our data, it may be worthwhile to present them more fully.

Easton and Dennis point out, that the concept of political efficacy derives its meaning only from the framework of a democratic theory and a norm central to it:

The *norm* of political efficacy therefore embodies the expectation in democracies that members will feel able to act effectively in politics.

This norm should be distinguished from the *sense* of political efficacy as an attitudinal structure based on a set of dispositions entailed by the democratic norm. 'Here efficacy identifies a disposition towards politics, a feeling of effectiveness and capacity in the political sphere.'

A third and final element evoked by the concept applies to 'the actual conduct of a person' about which they remark:

Insofar as he is in fact able to influence the course of events and take a hand in shaping his political destiny, he has demonstrated an observable capacity to behave effectively, regardless of whether he is aware of a principle of political efficacy or has a sense of being efficacious.

In their analysis, as in our paper, this third element is not considered, and full attention will be confined to the first two: 'political efficacy' as a norm salient to a democratic regime and 'sense of political efficacy' as a set of dispositions generated by that norm.

Easton and Dennis' interest is directed primarily towards the acquisition of political efficacy as a *norm*. Nevertheless, they measure the *sense* of political efficacy, stating that their respondents were children and children are unable to differentiate between norms and sentiments. Their scale is a modification of the five items that formed the basis of the original Michigan-scale. They give an interesting analysis of the elements underlying the various items:

... we can analytically distinguish a number of elements which might serve as part of the meaning of political efficacy:

- a sense of the direct political potency of the individual;
- a belief in the responsiveness of the government to the desires of individuals;
- the idea of the comprehensibility of government;
- the availability of adequate means of influence; and
- a general resistance to fatalism about the tractability of government to anyone, ruler or ruled.

Their analysis subsequently reveals the existence of an attitudinal structure, a 'sense of political efficacy' for schoolchildren as early as in grade 3 of public school.

2

The remarkable fact that a sense of political efficacy as an *attitudinal structure* crystallizes in the early years of childhood focusses our attention on political socialization, defined by Easton and Hess as the set of processes through which a young person acquires basic political orientations, such as political knowledge, attitudes and standards of evaluation, from others in his environment.¹⁴

The findings of Easton and Dennis suggest that the attitudinal basis for a sense of political efficacy is laid at a very tender age in the process of norm-acquisition.

The acquisition of a certain *level* of 'sense of efficaciousness' in the process of socialization and its relation to the democratic *norm* of efficaciousness is a problem that needs further investigation.

In a democratic regime, political efficacy as a *norm* refers to the set of expectations that people will feel able to act freely and effectively in the political sphere in relation with a government responsive to their initiatives.

The *sense* of political efficacy, on the other hand, refers to whether people do in fact feel capable of acting freely and effectively.

If too great a discrepancy is perceived by members of the system between a regime norm to which they adhere and reality, tensions may result.

Successful – in the sense of system-supporting – political socialization will aim therefore at the establishment of the norm as well as of the sense of efficacy, even if the real possibilities for members of the system are slight.

Since no political community can possibly afford to give all of its members an opportunity for effective participation, large segments of the community have to be satisfied with relatively small possibilities in this field.

Political socialization has operated with success to the degree in which members of a political community possessing infinitesimally small means of real individual political influence develop a high level of 'sense of political efficacy'. It has given them, often contrary to their factual circumstances, a feeling of 'political potency', the awareness of possessing adequate means of influence and the conviction of the comprehensibility of government.

The very inculcation of the *norm* of efficaciousness, however, provides at the same time the standards by which the members of a political community can evaluate the opportunities a particular regime offers them in confirmation of the norm.

As a result large segments of the community cannot fail to develop low levels of 'sense of efficacy' in accordance with their powerless positions. These respondents score low on the scale because they are conscious of the fact that they have no significant influence.

According to many experts this last point may be raised against the Dutch political regime of the moment. We may cite Daalder's comment:

There is much talk about political malaise, generally, in the Netherlands. Frequent complaints are uttered against the existing government system: Parliament is thought to be no longer in a position to control the Executive; ministerial and civil service recruitment is believed to have declined in quality; parties are accused of oligarchy and rigidity; interest groups are said to be too prominent; elections are felt to be insufficiently meaningful; mass apathy is thought to be spreading, etc.¹⁵

One of the most debated issues in the Netherlands at the moment is how the party system and the electoral system can be changed in order to strengthen the influence of voters on the formation of cabinets (which are now formed many months after the parliamentary elections; the election results are only the basis on which intricate negotiations start between the five main parties).

3

The results reported here are based on data from an conducted by one of the authors in June 1966, after elections in Amsterdam.¹⁶ This survey (the first step of a larger research project concerning the local power structure of Amsterdam) was based on a random sample of 1513 voters drawn from the local electoral register.¹⁷ In this survey we used an adapted version of 'sense of political efficacy'.

This adaption of the scale of political efficacy for use in Dutch electoral research started in 1965 as part of an exploratory survey of political attitudes, conducted by Daudt and Stapel.¹⁸ In view of the differences in political culture between the Netherlands and the United States and of the translation problems involved, it was decided to reanalyze the original set of five items that went into the construction of the original scale, resulting in a final scale of four items.¹⁹

The set of items was analyzed with a procedure of scale analysis, developed by one of the authors, which showed that only three of the original items scaled.²⁰ A subsequent comparative analysis on the original Michigan-data of 1952, using the same procedure led to the same results for the American data.²¹

One of the items proved not to scale because it had a different meaning for groups of very low and very high efficacy.

In further research we tried to extend the scale to more than three items. In a study of opinion leadership a set of eleven items was used. This same set was used in the study of the Amsterdam municipal elections of 1966 by Van der Maesen.²² A scale analysis of both sets resulted in a nine item-scale as presented in table 1.

The items of this scale refer to elements of the national political system. In the study reported here another eight item-scale was used referring to elements at the local level (H: .41; Rep-B: .88). After the establishment of these Dutch scales we undertook a good number of analyses in order to test the utility of the concept and cross-validate the scale for future research in the Netherlands. Some of these efforts led to the results presented here.

Table 1: Dutch efficacy scale, national (9 items)

	Scale coefficients: H = .41; Rep-B = .89	Marginals %	H ₁
1	Members of Parliament don't care much about the opinions of people like me. (Positive alternative: 'disagree')	25	.40
2	Cabinet ministers don't care much about of people like me. (Positive alternative: 'disagree')	27	.41
3	The political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion. (Positive alternative: 'disagree')	27	.43
4	People like me don't have any say about what the government does. (Positive alternative: 'disagree')	31	.39
5	Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. (Positive alternative: 'disagree')	35	.33
6	Because I know so little about politics, I shouldn't vote actually. (Positive alternative: 'disagree')	63	.47
7	I wouldn't go to the polls, if I weren't obliged to do so. (Positive alternative 'disagree')*	66	.44
8	In the determination of government policy, the votes of people like me are taken into account. (Positive alternative: 'agree')	66	.32
9	So many other people vote in the national elections that it doesn't matter much to me whether I vote or not. (Positive alternative, 'disagree')	80	.49

* In the Netherlands all people qualified to vote are obliged by statute to appear at the polling booth on election day.

In this paper we will report only results concerning the national scale, as answered by a sample of the Amsterdam electorate.

However, we have established some evidence that both the national scale and the local scale may be considered to measure the same dimension, along which the local items represent positions that are less difficult (in the Guttman-sense) than most of the national items. A scale analysis of the seventeen-item set of the national and local items combined resulted in a near-medium scale: H: .39; Rep-B: .85.

In table 2 we present the cross-tabulation of scores on the local and the national scales.

For convenience of presentation the scores on both scales have been grouped. The data show a strong correlation between the two scales. They

Table 2: Political efficacy (national scale) and political efficacy (local scale)

	Political Efficacy National scale			
	Low (0,1,2,3) %	Medium (4,5) %	High (6,7,8,9) %	
Low (0,1)%	85 55	14 11	1 1	100% (n=382)
Medium (2,3,4)%	34 35	48 57	18 26	100% (n=603)
High (5,6,7,8)%	11 10	31 32	58 73	100% (n=528)
	100% (n=585)	100% (n=510)	100% (n=418)	

also support the interpretation of the local scale as measuring an 'easier' segment of the efficacy-dimension than the national scale. In that case respondents scoring high on the national scale will be expected to score high on the local scale. In the table this proportion held for 73% of the respondents in the highest score grouping on the national scale.

Likewise one would expect respondents scoring low on the local scale to score low on the national scale too: this statement proves to be true for 85% of the respondents in the lowest score grouping of the local scale. In view of these findings the restriction in this paper to an analysis of the national scale only may not preclude the relevance of our results a more general dimension of political efficacy as such.

4

We analyzed the nine-item national scale of political efficacy with respect to background variables such as sex, age, income and education and some other variables such as political knowledge, party choice and stability of vote.

For the whole sample the sense of political efficacy was distributed as given in table 3. The scores on the scale have been grouped in three low, medium, high) throughout this paper as indicated in table 3.

The breakdown for religion did not show remarkable differences in the degree of efficaciousness for the various religious groupings. In the different

Table 3: National scale of political efficacy in Amsterdam sample

	Absolute	%
Low (0, 1, 2, 3)	585	39
Medium (4, 5)	510	33
High (6, 7, 8, 9)	418	28
	1513	100

age groupings the lowest percentage 'high' fell in the grouping of 21 to 34 years; the highest percentage in the grouping of 35 to 44 years. For other groupings the percentages stayed well in the neighbourhood of the overall value of 28%.

A strong relation was found, however, between personal income and political efficacy. The highest percentages with high efficacy as well as the lowest percentages with low efficacy were found in the highest income-brackets. The lowest income-brackets, on the other hand, showed the highest percentages with a low efficacy and the smallest percentages with a high efficacy.

These findings are in line with our expectations. A high income can be considered as an indicator of better resources and opportunities for political action and thus, in general, for the development of a sense of political efficacy.

More striking, for our purposes, were the relations we found between political efficacy and sex, level of education and political knowledge.

As in American research we found a relatively strong difference in sense of efficacy between men and women. Incidentally, our figures reproduce almost exactly the proportions mentioned in *The Voter Decides* (men: 35% high in efficacy, women: 20%).²³ In our sample 35% of the men scored high in sense of political efficacy against 21% of the women, whereas 47% of the women rated 'low' in comparison with a 31% 'low' for the men.

The findings of Easton and Dennis show that in this respect differentiation between sexes takes place in the years after primary school. They did not find any important difference between boys and girls at the primary school level with respect to their level of efficaciousness. As the authors themselves point out, in a period following their years at primary school developments must take place in the girls' lives, coinciding with their growth into womanhood, in which the full differentiation of political roles opens up for them the gap between the efficacy norm and the reality of their political roles. This results in a reduced feeling of efficaciousness.

Boys on the other hand, find their expectations fulfilled and with this reinforcement of the norm, feelings of political effectiveness have a better chance of taking root and growing.²⁴

One may ask whether it is only awareness of the gap between efficacy norm and reality that explains the overall difference in efficaciousness between men and women. This focusses attention on the role of education.

We introduced the level of education as a third variable in the analysis of the difference in efficacy between men and women. The results are given in table 4. They show that level of education alone does not explain away the difference between the sexes, but it certainly specifies it.²⁵ A similar analysis on American data led to the conclusion:

It is the sense of political efficacy that, with factors like education, age, and religion controlled, differs most sharply and consistently between men and women.²⁶

Even on the highest educational level a marked difference in the distribution of efficacy scores was found for men and women. The data in table 4 show that for the Amsterdam population (and perhaps for our national population too) these conclusions are valid only in a modified form: a sizable difference between men and women is found only at the two lower levels of education. In the highest educational group the difference is only seen to exist in a very reduced form, with equal percentages (52%) of both sexes scoring 'high' on efficacy.

Table 4: Political efficacy, level of education and sex

Level of education		Political efficacy (national scale)			Total	
		Low %	Medium %	High %		
Low	Woman	51	33	16	(566)	100%
	Men	37	35	28	(487)	100%
Middle	Women	38	36	26	(153)	100%
	Men	25	30	45	(127)	100%
High	Women	19	29	52	(69)	100%
	Men	10	38	52	(111)	100%
Total		39	33	28	(1513)	100%

These results may indicate that in Dutch society differential educational opportunities do play a role in the sense that only on the highest levels of education the perception of political disadvantages by women is so strongly reduced, that on that level they can build up a level of political self-confidence more or less equal to that of their male counterparts.

This probably implies that for women at the highest levels of education the forces of socialization have become so strong that, despite real cultural

disadvantages in the political field in comparison with men, they are upholding equally high levels of a sense of efficaciousness.

Here we have a case in which the norm is so strongly established that feelings are adjusted to it, even in the face of experiences that run counter the expectations the norm generates.

The following also lends some support to this hypothesis in a more general form.

5

A high level of education corresponds with a high level of efficacy. Does a similar result hold for political knowledge? In our survey we used as an indicator for political knowledge a question asking whether respondents could mention a number of members of the First or Second Chambers of Parliament.

As was to be expected there appeared to exist a strong relation between level of education and political knowledge as is demonstrated by table 5.²⁷

Table 5: Political knowledge and level of education

Level of education	Political Knowledge		Total
	Low %	High %	
Low	68	32	(1053) 100%
Middle	50	50	(280) 100%
High	38	62	(180) 100%
Total	63	37	(1513) 100%

In view of the equally strong relation between educational level and sense of political efficacy we investigated the relation of political knowledge and sense of political efficacy controlling for level of education. The results are given in table 6.

The overall relation between knowledge and efficacy recurs on the two lower levels of education. The results suggest that on those levels the general orientation to political phenomena as indexed by 'political knowledge' is accompanied by a relatively high sense of efficaciousness.

For the lowest level of education a high sense of efficacy is found for 33% of those possessing a high degree of political knowledge and for 16% of those with little knowledge. For the middle level of education the corresponding percentages are 49% (knowledge: 'high') and 21% (knowledge: 'low').

Table 6: Political efficacy, political knowledge and level of education

Level of education	Political efficacy (national scale)			Total	
	Low %	Medium %	High %		
Low	Pol. knowledge low	52	32	16	(720) 100%
	Pol. knowledge high	30	37	33	(333) 100%
Middle	Pol. knowledge low	45	34	21	(140) 100%
	Pol. knowledge high	19	32	49	(140) 100%
High	Pol. knowledge low	18	29	53	(69) 100%
	Pol. knowledge high	10	38	52	(111) 100%
Total		39	33	28	(1513) 100%

In the highest educational group most of the association of knowledge and efficacy has disappeared: virtually equal percentages (53%, 52%) scoring high on efficacy for both levels of knowledge. We can therefore observe in the relation knowledge – political efficacy the same pattern as in the relation sex – political efficacy; when controlling for education the relation is strongly reduced for the highest educational group.

Again the interpretation mentioned in the previous section comes to mind, namely that the forces of socialization are strongest on the highest levels of education. Since political socialization is not only directed at imprinting the norm of efficacy, often entailing an adjustment of the sense of efficacy to it, but also at imprinting the norm of upholding a high level of political information, this accounts for the relationships found between educational level and sense of efficacy on the one hand, and degree of political knowledge on the other hand.

The interrelationship of these variables is displayed clearly at lower educational levels. Here, relatively high levels of political knowledge and sense of efficacy tend to go together. At these levels of education factors seem to be involved that lead to mutually reinforcing high levels of political knowledge and efficaciousness.

At the highest educational level, however, this is not the case. Level of political knowledge and sense of efficacy are more independently distributed. Both norms will have been incorporated, but due to the prolonged process of socialization, the sense of efficacy will be adjusted to the norm irrespective of a certain level of political knowledge.

The distribution of the sense of efficacy for the middle level of education is particularly suggestive of a marginal position of this educational grouping: for a low level of political knowledge the distribution of sense of political efficacy approaches that of the lowest educational group, for the group with

'high' knowledge the distribution is more akin to that characteristic for the highest educational level.

6

Similar results were found in the analysis of the relation of sense of political efficacy and party choice.

Voters on 'anti-system oppositions'²⁸ from left (Communist Party) and right (Farmers' Party) scored low on the 'sense of efficacy'-scale, as can be seen in table 7. This table includes another leftist opposition party, the Pacifist Socialist Party, which has been drawing away voters from the Dutch Communist Party (CPN) and the Socialist Party (PvdA).

Not only do voters for these anti-system opposition parties have higher percentages of low efficaciousness than the overall percentage of 39% (58%, 43% and 43%); they also have a high sense of efficacy in a much lesser degree than the whole sample (12%, 18% and 20% against 28% overall).

The numbers were too small to warrant a further breakdown to control for educational level.

Table 7: Political efficacy and party choice

Party choice	Political efficacy (national scale)			Total	
	Low %	Medium %	High %		
Farmers' Party	58	30	12	(110)	100%
Communist Party	43	39	18	(101)	100%
P.S.P.	43	37	20	(128)	100%
Total sample	39	33	28	(1513)	100%

Table 8: Party choice and level of education

Level of education	Party choice		Total	
	Establishment	Non-establishment		
Low	57	43	(1053)	100%
Middle	64	36	(280)	100%
High	67	33	(180)	100%
Total	59	41	(1513)	100%

We subdivided the voters according to party choice—establishment parties and other parties for further analysis of the relation of political efficacy and party choice within the context of educational level. As establishment parties were designated the five major parties (KVP, PvdA, AR, CHU and VVD), from which in various combinations the government coalitions were recruited during the entire post-war period. Voters (and non-voters) who did not vote for these five parties were defined as non-establishment voters.

In table 8 we see, that with the rise in level of education a higher percentage of the Amsterdam voters cast their vote for one of the five establishment parties.

The finding that the preference for the establishment part of the party system rises with the level of education led to an analysis of the relation between this preference and sense of efficacy, again controlling for level of education. The results presented in table 9 bear a striking resemblance to those reported in tables 4 and 6.

For the two lowest levels of education there is a strong relation between sense of efficacy and preference for establishment parties.

In these educational groups the voters for non-establishment alternatives have low percentages with high efficaciousness (13% and 17%) compared with voters on establishment parties (28% and 44%). They also have higher percentages of low efficaciousness (56% and 46%).

Thus for these lower groups preference for the influential part of the party system, the set of parties from which coalitions are recruited, enhances or at least coincides with a relatively high sense of political efficacy.

On the other hand, as in tables 4 and 6, these differences almost vanish for the highest educational group. Here an orientation on establishment or non-

Table 9: Political efficacy, party choice and level of education

Level of education	Political efficacy (national scale)			Total
	Low %	Medium %	High %	
<i>Low</i>				
establishment	36	36	28	(599) 100%
non-establishment	56	31	13	(454) 100%
<i>Middle</i>				
establishment	25	31	44	(180) 100%
non-establishment	46	37	17	(100) 100%
<i>High</i>				
establishment	11	37	52	(120) 100%
non-establishment 17		32	51	(60) 100%
<i>Total</i>	39	33	28	(1513) 100%

establishment alternatives results in the same distribution of efficaciousness on the same relatively high level (Tabel 9).

For this highly socialized group a preference for non-governmental parties, with its manifestly reduced perspectives of influencing and shaping government policy, again does not reduce the high sense of efficaciousness that is required by the norm of political efficacy. Remarkable is the marginal position of the middle educational group.

For those who – by their party choice – showed a preference for establishment parties, the distribution of the sense of political efficacy is similar to that for the highest educational group.

Conversely, preference for non-establishment alternatives led to a distribution more like that for the lowest educational group.

7

The above mentioned findings concerning the relation of feelings of efficacy and party preference have some relevance in the light of the current discussions on the increasing inability of the Dutch party system to respond adequately to the changing demands of large segments of the political community.

Another interesting variable in this respect is the stability of party choice, i.e. the floating vote. Do changing voters differ in their level of political efficacy? If so, what is the role of formal education, the important indicator for the degree of political socialization? Daudt has pointed out that the accumulated evidence he surveyed did not support the validity of a notion of the 'floating voters' as an a-political, uninformed and apathetic class of 'outsiders'.²⁹

In an analysis of the differential effects of information flow in presidential and off-presidential elections Converse shows that voters who change their party choice from election to election, tend to be uninvolved and uninformed.³⁰ This research finding and others related to it have been consistently reported in American electoral studies.

The Amsterdam findings seem to limit the generality of this result. The Amsterdam sample included 205 voters, who reported a different vote for the municipal elections of June 1 than for the provincial councils of March 23, 1966. This means that over a period of no more than ten weeks no less than 13% of the respondents changed their voting behavior.

Are these voters who change their party choice within such a short period as ten weeks, the wayward, haphazardly voting political *ignorami* we might expect them to be in the light of what may now be called traditional research theory? In the Netherlands turnout for all elections is always high because, in consequence of a legal obligation voters risk a fine when they fail to answer

their summons to appear at the voting booth on election day. Given this fact one might certainly expect a higher degree of more or less random voting behavior than in England and the United States.

Van der Maesen showed that in our survey the changers did not correspond with the traditional picture of the apathetic, uninterested voter. One of the indications was that the percentage of changing voters showed a rise with level of education.³¹

Accordingly, the percentage with a 'high' level of knowledge among the changers (41%) is slightly higher than among constant voters (see table 10). These results seem to be at variance with the American findings referred to above.

Table 10: Political knowledge and stability of party choice

Stability of party choice	Political knowledge		Total
	Low %	High %	
Changers	59	41	(205) 100%
Constants	63	37	(1308) 100%
Total	63	37	(1513) 100%

In table 11 the same data are analyzed controlling for level of education. For both the lowest and highest levels of education the differences, though slight, run in the same direction: a lower percentage of changers showed little knowledge than did the constants.

Although small numbers necessitate caution, it is striking to see that the proportions are differently related on the middle level of education. There

Table 11: Political knowledge, stability of party choice and level of education

Level of education	Stability of party choice	Political knowledge		Total
		Low %	High %	
Low	changers	66	34	(118) 100%
	constants	70	30	(935) 100%
Middle	changers	60	40	(48) 100%
	constants	51	49	(232) 100%
High	changers	36	64	(39) 100%
	constants	41	59	(141) 100%
Total		63	37	(1513) 100%

the changers have a higher percentage with little knowledge (60%) than the constants (51%).

The relation between stability of party choice and scale scores of efficacy is of particular interest.

One might expect that, given the fact that in our sample the proportion changing their party choice rose with level of education, in addition to the positive relation we found between level of education and level of efficacy, the changers would display a higher sense of efficacy than constant voters.

But the data of table 12 show otherwise. Amongst changers the percentage with a high level of efficacy – 21% – is somewhat lower than amongst the constant voters (30%).

Table 12: Political efficacy and stability of party choice

Stability of party choice	Political efficacy (national scale)			Total
	Low %	Medium %	High %	
Changers	43	36	21	(205) 100%
Constants	37	33	30	(1308) 100%
Total	39	33	28	(1513) 100%

However, when we reanalyze this relation while controlling for educational level, as done in table 13, the above mentioned result appears to call for some specification.

Table 13: Political efficacy, stability of party choice and level of education

Level of stability of party choice		Political efficacy (national scale)			% Total
		Low %	Medium %	High %	
Low	Changers	45	35	19	(118) 100%
	Constants	45	33	22	(935) 100%
Middle	Changers	52	32	16	(48) 100%
	Constants	28	34	38	(232) 100%
High	Changers	21	43	36	(39) 100%
	Constants	11	32	57	(141) 100%
Total		39	33	28	(1513) 100%

For the lowest level of education there is virtually no difference between changers and constant voters in the distribution of sense of political efficacy!

The differences in efficacy level between constant voters and changers, as

found in table 12, are largely due to differences existing in this respect on the middle and highest level of education.

Constant voters and changers of middle educational level in particular differ markedly with respect to sense of efficacy: about half the changers appear to have a low sense of efficacy, whereas only 28% of the constant voters score 'low' on the scale. Only 16% of the changers score 'high' whereas 38% of the constant voters have a high sense of efficacy according to their scores on the scale.

The same holds for changers of the highest educational level; the proportion of changers with a high sense of efficacy (36%) is remarkably small compared with that for the constant voters (57%); the proportion of changers with a low sense of efficacy (21%) is higher than the corresponding proportion of constant voters (11%). These results are exactly the opposite of those found when analyzing the specifying influence of formal education on the relation of sense of efficacy with sex (table 4), political knowledge (table 6) and party choice (table 9). There, the correspondence persisted on the two lowest levels of education and disappeared or was reduced to a very weak form in the highest educational group. In these cases we sought a partial explanation in the strength of forces of socialization characteristic for that highest level of education, that prevented a reduction of sense of efficacy even in the face of small opportunities for political influence as in the case of women or an anti-establishment orientation.

Now in table 13 there are signs that these forces could not prevent a certain reduced sense of efficacy in the face of circumstances that may have induced voters in the highest educational groups to vote for different parties within ten weeks.

However, for changers and constant voters in the lowest educational group 'sense of efficacy' is equally distributed on the low level characteristic for that group.

These remarks are still true when we consider level of knowledge as a fourth variable, as in table 14, in which we give the four-dimensional breakdown for the lowest educational level only. (Small numbers did not warrant publication of these data for the other two.)

In table 14 the association between knowledge and efficacy is seen to exist in identical form for both changers and constant voters. In other words: even when we split the lowest educational group according to level of political knowledge we see no difference between changers and constant voters in the distribution of sense of efficacy.

Returning to table 13, the marginal position of the middle educational group is clear: changers have a distribution of efficacy similar to that for the lowest educational level, whereas the distribution for the constant voters approaches more the type characteristic of the highest level.

Table 14: Political efficacy, political knowledge and stability of party choice for the lowest educational level

Stability of party choice		Political knowledge	Political efficacy (national scale)			Total
			Low %	Middle %	High %	
Changers		Low	54	34	12	(76) 100%
		High	33	36	31	(42) 100%
Constants		Low	51	32	17	(644) 100%
		High	30	37	33	(291) 100%
Total			45	34	21	(1053) 100%

Concluding our analysis of the floating voters, we may say that only and particularly on the two highest educational levels, a reduced sense of efficaciousness is associated with a change of vote.

Here we may have a case in which the forces of socialization could not prevent awareness of the discrepancy between the norm of efficacy and the real possibilities of political influence.

Of course it is a matter of speculation whether these findings are typical for the Dutch electorate in general or should be restricted to Amsterdam in 1966 under the high political tensions of that year.

Nevertheless, it is very likely that during the last decade accumulating tensions due to the inability of the Dutch party system to respond to the changing situation and needs of the political community have given rise to frustrations of the type referred to above.

8

In the foregoing analyses we have empirically evaluated our interpretation of the scale 'sense of political efficacy'.

Theoretically our interpretation is consistent with the efforts of scholars striving to assess the theoretical location and importance of the concept 'sense of political efficacy'. Campbell *et al.* have observed that this variable would seem to be a basic one in the sense that it measures a set of dispositions or attitudinal structure of a rather fundamental type, constituting part of a 'political personality' and characterized by a certain degree of stability.³² The finding of Easton and Dennis that this attitudinal structure is acquired very early in childhood corroborates this assessment. Easton and Dennis also introduced the viewpoint that this process is linked with the acquisition of a

norm of political efficacy central to the political culture of a democratic regime. We have stressed the fact that the norm as such provides both a standard against which a person can calibrate his 'political self-identity'³³ and at the same time sets a frame of reference against which to evaluate the workings of the regime. As a standard it defines the ideal civic personality; as that frame of reference it defines the set of expectations a person may hold concerning the responsiveness of the regime when he acts in this role.

We investigated the role of formal education as one of the most important agents of socialization.

Results of our analyses of the role of education confirmed the strong relation between education and sense of efficacy found by other researchers. We interpreted this relation as being at least partly due to the effects of socialization. At the highest level of education the forces of socialization may be so strong that a high sense of efficacy is maintained in spite of limited possibilities of political influence.

On the other hand the marginal position of respondents of middle educational level and the remarkable results for the better educated floating voters indicate that awareness of failure of the regime to conform to the perceived norm may result in a lowered sense of efficacy and thus counteract the socializing effect of formal education.

This brings us to modify the version of the circular process that, according to Dahl, increases the political influence of the Better-Off and decreases the influence of the working classes.³⁴ Citizens with middle class resources participate in politics, therefore they develop political confidence. Because they develop political confidence they are more likely to participate in politics, etc. The same holds, in the negative, for working classes, according to Dahl.

This model stresses the view that political participation will lead to the development of political confidence.

This need not always be true. There may be many cases in which it is exactly during the process of participation that it is revealed to the individual how powerless he actually is and how great the gap between norm and reality.

Appendix

Nederlandse formulering van de schaal 'Politiek Zelfvertrouwen'

- 1 'Kamerleden bekommeren zich niet veel om de mening van mensen zoals ik' (is niet zo)
- 2 'Ministers bekommeren zich niet veel om de mening van mensen zoals ik' (is niet zo)
- 3 'De politieke partijen zijn alleen maar geïnteresseerd in mijn stem en niet in mijn mening' (is niet zo)
- 4 'Mensen zoals ik hebben geen enkele invloed op de regeringspolitiek' (is niet zo)

- 5 'Voor mensen zoals ik is de Nederlandse politiek te ingewikkeld' (is niet zo)
- 6 'Omdat ik zo weinig van politiek afweet zou ik eigenlijk niet moeten stemmen' (is niet zo)
- 7 'Als er geen opkomstplicht was zou ik niet stemmen' (is niet zo)
- 8 'Bij de bepaling van de regeringspolitiek tellen de stemmen van mensen zoals ik mee' (is zo)
- 9 'Er stemmen zoveel mensen bij verkiezingen dat mijn stem er niet toe doet' (is niet zo).

Notes

* This is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at the IPSA Seventh World Congress, Brussels, 18-23 September 1967, Specialist Meeting on Electoral Research.

1. Easton, D., and Dennis, J., 'The Child's Acquisition of Regime Norms: Political Efficacy' in *The American Political Science Review* 61 (1967), pp. 25-38 (Hereafter quoted as *Easton and Dennis, 1967*). The quotation appears on p. 25.
2. Campbell, A., Gurin, G., and Miller, W.E., *The Voter Decides*. Evanston, Ill., 1954, pp. 187-194. (Hereafter quoted as: Campbell et al., *The Voter Decides*.)
3. Mokken, R.J., *Dutch-American Comparisons of the 'Sense of Political Efficacy'*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Comparative Electoral Behavior. Ann Arbor: Michigan, April 5-8 1967. (Hereafter cited as: *Mokken, 1967*.)
4. Janowitz, M., and Marvick, D., *Competitive Pressure and Democratic Government*. Ann Arbor: Michigan, 1956, pp. 114-117.
5. Dahl, R.A., *Who Governs?* New Haven, 1961, pp. 286-293.
6. Kornhauser, A., Sheppard, H.L., and Mayer, A.J., *When Labour Votes*. New York, 1956, pp. 155-166.
7. Lane, R., *Political Life*. Glencoe, 1959, pp. 149-155.
8. Farris, C.D., 'Selected attitudes on foreign affairs as correlates of authoritarianism and political anomie' in: *Journal of Politics*, 22 (1960), pp. 50-67.
9. Agger, R.E., Goldrich, D., and Swanson, B.E., *The Rulers and the Ruled*. New York, 1964, p. 755.
10. Douvan, E., and Walker, A.M., 'The sense of effectiveness in public affairs'. *Psychological Monographs*, 70, no. 32 (1956).
11. Eldersveld, S.J., *Political Parties*. Chicago, 1964, p. 498, pp. 570-571.
12. Milbrath, L.W., *Political Participation*. Chicago, 1965.
13. *Easton and Dennis, 1967*. The quotations appear on p. 26, p. 26 and p. 29.
14. Easton, D., and Hess, R.D., *The Child's Political World*. Paper presented at the Fifth World Congress, I.P.S.A., Paris, Sept. 26-30, 1961, p. 1.
15. Daalder, H., 'The Netherlands' Opposition in a Segmented Society', in Dahl, R.A. (Ed.), *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*. New Haven, 1966, pp. 220-225.
16. Van der Maesen, Constance E., 'Kiezers op drift. Voorlopige analyse van de Amsterdamse gemeenteraadsverkiezingen' in *Acta Politica* 2 (1966/67), pp. 169-200. (Hereafter cited as *Van der Maesen, 1967*). The research reported here was made possible by a grant from Z.W.O. (Foundation for Pure Scientific Research) and was furthermore supported by a subsidiary grant from the Research Fund of the University of Amsterdam.
17. The interviews were conducted by interviewers of the Netherlands' Institute for Public Opinion and Market Research. The questionnaire contained the usual questions

concerning the direction and motivation of political choice and a number of questions designed to poll the voters' opinions on a number of local issues that were prominent at the time.

Moreover, several sets of questions were used to measure the perceptions and attitudes of the voters with respect to the *local*, as well as to the *national* political system. A set of three items, for instance, tried to estimate the consensus among the voters with respect to some, abstractly formulated, central democratic norms; another set was designed to measure the expectations concerning the applications of these norms in a number of concrete cases.

Twelve items were designed to obtain insight in the voter's perception of the local power structure. Other problems that were dealt with concerned the expectations the voter has in his role of *subject*, such as the treatment expected from local authorities when lodging complaints or expressing desires. Subsequently the voter's expectations concerning his own possibilities of exercising influence in the legislative field were investigated, e.g. his expectations in his role of *citizen*. (Almond, G.A., and Verba, S., *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, N.J., 1963, p. 214.) It was for this last purpose that our revised version of 'the scale of political efficacy' proved a valuable instrument.

18. Daudt, H., and Stapel, J., 'Parlement, politiek en kiezer: verslag van een opinie-onderzoek' in: *Acta Politica*, I (1965/66), pp. 46-76.

19. Campbell et al., *The Voter Decides*, pp. 187-194.

20. An outline of the scaling procedure used is given elsewhere (Mokken, 1967). For the present purposes we may restrict ourselves to a few remarks. The coefficient of scalability we use is Loevinger's coefficient of homogeneity (Loevinger, J., 'A systematic approach to the construction and evaluation of the test of scalability'. *Psychological Monographs*, 61, no. 4, 1947) (H). In table 1 Green's coefficient Rep-B is also given for reference. From Loevinger's H a coefficient measuring the scaling qualities of a particular item in a set (H_i) can be derived. Thus a scale can be defined as a set of items with the property that every item coefficient of scalability (H_i) is larger than a given constant (.30).

The value of H presented the opportunity to suggest a typology of scales: (a) $.50 \leq H$: a strong scale (in the sense of the original strong requirements for a Guttman-scale); (b) $.40 < H < .50$: a medium scale; (c) $.30 < H < .40$: a weak scale. The Dutch version (see Appendix p. 366) of the efficacy scale presented in table 1 qualifies as a medium scale according to this typology.

21. Mokken, 1967.

22. Van der Maesen, 1967.

23. Campbell et al., *The Voter Decides*, p. 191.

24. Easton and Dennis, 1967, pp. 36-37.

25. We formed three educational groupings. The grouping classified as lowest consisted of those respondents with not more than primary education. The middle grouping comprised only the lowest forms of secondary education. The grouping classified as highest consisted of the higher forms of secondary education onwards up to university level, and is roughly equivalent to the 'college level' of university education.

26. Campbell, A., Converse, P.E., Miller, W.E., and Stokes, D.E., *The American Voter*. New York, 1960, pp. 490-491.

27. Political knowledge has been dichotomized according to the ability to mention three or more names.

28. Daalder, H., 'The Netherlands: Opposition in a Segmented Society' in: Dahl, R.A. (Ed.), *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, New Haven, 1966, pp. 232-234.

29. Daudt, H., *Floating Voters and the Floating Vote*. Leiden, 1961.

30. Converse, P.E., 'Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes' in Campbell, A. et al., *Elections and the Political Order*, New York, 1966, pp. 139-140.

31. Van der Maesen, 1967, p. 177, table V.

32. Campbell, A., Converse, P.E. Miller, W.E. and Stokes, D.E., *The American Voter*, New York, 1960, p. 516.

33. Easton and Dennis, 1967, p. 26.

34. Dahl, R.A., *Who Governs?* New Haven, 1961, p. 292.