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Voogt, R.J.J.; Saris, W.E.; Niemöller, B.

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Non-Response, and the Gulf Between the Public and the Politicians

R.J.J. Voogt, W.E. Saris and B. Niemöller¹

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

The effect of the growth of non-response on the validity of the Dutch National Election Survey (NKO) results is causing concern in The Netherlands; in particular, the effect on the measurement of political interest among the Dutch population. Using data gathered by a telephone survey among 2000 voters, the authors have analysed three groups of respondents (respondents willing to participate in an election survey, respondents only willing to participate in a short general interview, and non-respondents) for differences in various background characteristics (age, education, sex and urbanization) and political interest. The results show large differences, especially with respect to political interest, between respondents who are willing to participate in an interview about forthcoming parliamentary elections and respondents who are only willing to participate in a general interview. Two sets of results were used in combination to estimate the level of political interest among non-respondents. First, the results provided by all groups of respondents: those who first refused, but later were persuaded to cooperate; those who were difficult to reach; and those who participated in the first wave of the NKO-surveys but were non-respondents in the second wave. Second, the information on the relation between voter turnout and political interest. We found that political interest among the Dutch population increased in the seventies and stabilized during the eighties and nineties. No evidence was found for a widening of the gulf between public and politicians.

1 Introduction

During the nineties, concern has arisen in the Dutch press and among Dutch politicians about the growing rift between the people and politics. It is feared that a section of the Dutch people is becoming increasingly alienated from politics. If this happened, the future support for democracy in The Netherlands could be endangered. The declining turnout for parliamentary and local elections in The Netherlands is often cited as evidence of such a widening gulf as is the decline in party membership (Van den Broek 1994).

There is, however, less support for this rift scenario among Dutch political scientists than among journalists and politicians. Many political scientists point out that election survey research provides no evidence for this growing gulf between people and politics. In particular, they often cite the Dutch National Election Survey (Nationaal Kiezers Onderzoek, NKO). This survey is conducted by political scientists from different Dutch universities, whenever national elections for the Second Chamber of Dutch Parliament occur. For example, the results of the 1994 NKO-survey in fact indicated an increased interest in and involvement with politics among the Dutch population compared with the results of the NKO-surveys of previous years. On the other hand, most political scientists do not support the thesis that the gulf is diminishing. They are prepared to admit that something is wrong in the relation between the people and politics, but believe that it is not as serious as most journalists and politicians seem to think (Andeweg 1997; Andeweg and Van Holsteyn 1996; Arend et al. 1997; Van der Eijk 1990; Van Gunsteren and Andeweg 1992). As for diminishing party membership and lower voter turnout, they point out that it is not the extent of political participation that has changed, but rather its nature. For example, membership of organizations like Amnesty International, Greenpeace and Natuurmonumenten (a Dutch environmental organization), all organizations that are not directly affiliated with any political party, has risen considerably over the last ten years (Kriesi 1993; Topf 1995).

Because the common feeling among a large segment of the Dutch society, that there really is something wrong in the relation between the Dutch people and politics, is not supported by the authoritative NKO surveys, it is hardly surprising that the value of the NKO results have been called into question. Criticism is focused mainly on the growth of non-response, which has increased with every new NKO-survey (from 25% in 1971 to 52.5% in 1994), and on the fact that this growing non-response has been largely ignored in analyses. Visscher (1995), one of the most outspoken critics of the NKO-surveys, argues in his book *Kiezersonderzoek op een dwaalspoor* (*Voter research on the wrong track*) that the growth of non-response is an expression of a declining interest in politics among the Dutch public. Visscher assumes that people who refuse to participate in the Dutch National Election Survey are not interested in politics and thus counts those who refuse as politically uninterested persons. NKO-researchers ignore non-response and observe an increase in the participation of the Dutch population that considers itself to be fairly to very interested, from 53% at the end of the sixties, through 74% at the beginning of the eighties to 78% in 1994. Visscher, on the other hand, includes non-response as dis-interest and sees, therefore, only an increase from 46% in the late sixties to 53% in the early eighties of those who could be considered 'interested in politics' and subsequently a decreasing trend leading to 41% in 1994 (Visscher 1995).

However, several criticisms can be levelled at Visscher's reasoning. The assumption that everyone who refuses to participate in the NKO-surveys should be classified as 'not politically interested' is too simplistic. Since the results of the NKO-surveys show that not everybody who does participate in these surveys is interested in politics (see a.o. Anker and Oppenhuis 1995), why should there not be a considerable group of politically interested people, who, for whatever reason, do not wish to participate in this survey? Further, Visscher regards those respondents who are not reached as a random fraction of the sample, and therefore assumes that a proportion of those not reached (the proportion of refusals in the total sample) would react by refusing, while the rest would respond in the same way as respondents who are successfully interviewed. Past research has been divided on the question of whether those not reached are a special group in the sample (Goudy 1976; Smeets 1995; Stinchcombe et al. 1981; Swaddle and Heath 1989). Finally, it is not only in election surveys that response is in decline, but in all kind of surveys. Therefore, it is possible that growing non-response in the NKO-surveys is merely a reflection of a general trend, rather than a sign of diminishing political interest (Smeets 1995; Steeh 1981).

In this paper we try to shed some light on the possible effects that non-response may have on the level of political interest, as represented in the NKO-surveys. First, we will establish whether there are differences in distribution on background variables and substantive variables between respondents and non-respondents. Second, we need to find out whether differences observed over time reflect real differences or whether they are the consequence of the falling response rate. Finally, we will try to correct for the effect of non-response bias on the level of political interest.

2 Method

Our main goal is to try to estimate the level of political interest among non-respondents, but before we can do so, we need to know something about the nature of the non-response. It is important to know whether the respondents and non-respondents differ in background characteristics, as weighting on these characteristics is the method most commonly used to correct for non-response. Under and overrepresentation of certain groups among the respondents is accounted for with weighting, so that the distribution among the respondents on these variables will be the same as in the population (see for example Bethlehem and Kersten 1986: 194-225; Brehm 1993: 117-121; Fuller 1974). Weighting has a few major drawbacks.

In the first place, it is only possible to weight variables for which population figures are known. Most of the time these data are only available for some

general background characteristics (like age, sex and urbanization) and not for the substantive variables that have to be explained by the study (Bethlehem and Kersten 1986; Smith 1983). In the second place, weighting the respondents by these background variables so that the distribution on these variables in the sample is in line with the distribution in the population does not automatically mean that the distribution of substantive variables in the weighted sample will also be in accordance with the distribution in the population (Armstrong and Overtone 1977; Ellis et al. 1970; Lagay 1969). In the third place, weighting only ensures that certain groups of respondents (for example, the young and the old, if the data are weighted by age) are correctly represented in the total sample; so weighting does not correct for underrepresentation of these groups (Brehm 1993; Fuller 1974; Kalton 1983; Moser and Kalton 1972). One could say that weighting on background variables can only be an adequate solution when there is a strong relationship between the background variables available for weighting and the variable of interest, in this case political interest. We will show later that this is not the case here. We will try to obtain information about the extent to which non-respondents differ from respondents by way of three different methods, using a small-scale telephone interview. The first method will compare respondents who are willing to participate in a political survey of an hour (comparable to the NKO-survey) with respondents who were only willing to participate in a short general telephone interview. The second method will compare the 47.5% of respondents (the response level of the 1994 NKO-survey) who were the easiest to interview with the rest of the respondents on the telephone interview (assuming that these 47.5% most cooperative respondents are somewhat like the respondents of the NKO). If we find differences between respondents and non-respondents on both background and substantive variables, it could be useful to weight the data by some of the background variables we have available. Using the results of the two above mentioned comparisons, we will analyse whether weighting is a useful method to correct for non-response in this situation.

The third method starts with a distinction between non-response as a result of not being able to reach a respondent and non-response because of a refusal by the respondent (Hawkins 1975; O'Neil 1979; Wilcox 1977). It will use so-called temporary refusals (respondents who initially refused to cooperate, but who were persuaded to participate when approached again) and respondents who were difficult to reach (in our case respondents who could only be contacted after four days of persistent trying) as indicators for final refusals and not reached respondents respectively (Ellis et al. 1970; Filion 1976; Smith 1983; Smith 1984; Lin and Schaeffer 1995). This method will also be used to correct for non-response.

There is no agreement in the literature whether this last method of correcting for non-response is a valid one. Some authors believe it is (Filion 1976; Smith

1983; Smith 1984), while others have concluded that this method is invalid, because there are too many differences between these so-called 'difficult' respondents and non-respondents (Ellis et al. 1970; Fitzgerald and Fuller 1982; Lin and Schaeffer 1995). If one assumes that respondents and non-respondents are taken from different, separate subpopulations, as is sometimes done to calculate the extent of bias in sample statistics (for instance Brehm 1993: 94-100), the assumption that so-called difficult respondents resemble the non-respondents is not valid. However, assuming that respondents and non-respondents are taken from different, separate subpopulations is not very realistic, because being a respondent or a non-respondent depends on many factors. This is shown by the wide range of literature that exists about why people do or do not participate in survey research and about what a researcher can do to raise the response level.

An alternative approach is to assume that every member of the population has a position on a response-continuum that ranges from 'will never respond' to 'will always respond'. Non-respondents will be concentrated at the 'will never respond' side of the continuum. How close a survey gets to this side of the continuum depends on many different factors, such as the quality of the interviewers, the number of times people not reached are called back, and the number of times refusals are recontacted to persuade them to participate. Temporary refusals and difficult to reach respondents, both members of the sample that were initially non-respondents, but that became respondents after some extra effort by the researcher, will be closer to the 'will never respond' side of the continuum than respondents who are interviewed without any problems. With respect to response behaviour they have more resemblance to the non-respondents than to the 'easy' respondents. Without claiming that 'difficult' respondents are perfect indicators for non-respondents, we think it is not incorrect to assume that 'difficult' respondents deviate from the 'easy' respondents in the same direction as final non-respondents deviate from respondents.

If the information we have on the political interest of temporary refusals and respondents who are difficult to reach could be combined with information about non-respondents it might be possible to further improve our estimation procedure. Perhaps it would be possible to identify a variable that is strongly related to political interest and about which we have information for both respondents and the general population. If that information is available, we can calculate the expected distribution of this variable for non-respondents. There is in fact such a variable: voter turnout. If we ask respondents whether they voted at the previous parliamentary elections, by using the official figures of the 1994 parliamentary elections, we can calculate how high the voter turnout was among non-respondents.

There are, however, two major problems that could distort the validity of this calculation. The first problem is the fact that we ask people to recall past

voting behaviour. It is well known that this leads to distortions – some people no longer know whether they voted or not; others think they voted, when in fact they did not, and vice versa (Cahalan 1968; Himmelweit et al. 1978). The second, more serious problem is that some people are inclined to claim they voted when in fact they did not. Studies from the United States, Great Britain and Sweden have shown that between 20 and 25% of the non-voters misreport their voting behaviour (Anderson and Silver 1986; Clausen 1968; Grandberg and Holmberg 1991; Hill and Hurley 1982; Sigelman 1982; Silver et al. 1986; Smeets 1995; Swaddle and Heath 1989). This can lead to an overestimation of the proportion of voters among respondents and thus to an underestimation of the proportion of voters among non-respondents.

Bearing this in mind, we will try to estimate the level of political interest among non-respondents by using the relation between political interest and voter turnout found among the temporary refusals and the respondents who were difficult to reach, translating this relation to the final refusals and those respondents not reached. We know the proportion of voters among the non-respondents and we will assume that the relation of voter turnout and political interest will be the same for final refusals and respondents not reached as for temporary refusals and those who were difficult to reach, respectively. By using this assumption, we will be able to estimate the political interest among non-respondents.

The same method will be used to estimate the level of political interest among the non-respondents for the NKO-surveys from 1971 to 1994. Here, however, a problem arises: we have no information about which respondents were temporary refusals or difficult to reach in the NKO-surveys. We can substitute for this missing information because most NKO-surveys (with the exception of the 1972 and 1982 NKO-surveys) comprised two waves of data collection. The elections of 1972 and 1982 followed the early demise of the cabinets from the previous years elections (1971 and 1981 respectively). Because there was not sufficient time to prepare for a complete National Election Survey, a single wave of questions was administered after the actual elections. For the years 1971, 1977, 1981, 1986, 1989 and 1994 we have two waves. The first wave, which includes questions about the political interest of the respondent, is held before the actual election, while the second wave, in which the respondent is asked about her or his actual voting behaviour, is administered shortly after election day. The group of respondents that drops out of the survey between the first and the second wave will be used as a substitute for the non-respondents (the same method was employed by DeMaio 1980; Goudy 1976; Traugott and Katosh 1979).

We assume that those whom it was more difficult to persuade to participate or to reach in the first wave are also those who drop out earliest in the second

wave. Because most of these people are refusals (they are contacted, but they no longer wish to participate) we can check whether the group of temporary refusals in our sample are the same sort of people as the second wave non-respondents in the NKO-surveys. Both the background characteristics and political interest of our temporary refusals can be compared with that of the second wave non-respondents of the 1994 NKO-survey. If these groups are not significantly dissimilar from each other, we can use the second-wave non-respondents to estimate the political interest among non-respondents in the NKO-surveys by translating the relation between voting behaviour and political interest among the second wave non-respondents to the final non-respondents. Again, we do not claim that this group of second wave non-respondents will be a perfect representation of the first wave non-respondents, but we do think that this group will be at least a reasonable indicator of these non-respondents.

Figure 1 summarizes the four different comparisons that will be made.

Figure 1 Overview of the four comparisons

<i>Groups used as indicators of the NKO-Respondents</i>	<i>Groups used as indicators of the NKO-Nonrespondents</i>	<i>Data source</i>
Respondents willing to do a face-to-face interview about politics	Respondents not willing to do a face-to-face interview about politics	Telephone survey
47.5% respondents easiest to persuade to participate in the telephone interview	Rest of the respondents	Telephone survey
Respondents interviewed without problems	Temporary refusals and difficult to reach respondents	Telephone survey
Respondents who participated in both first and second wave of the survey	Respondents who only participated in the first wave	NKO-surveys 1971-1994

3 Data collection

To minimize non-response in the telephone survey we made the questionnaire as short as possible and used a small, well-prepared team of interviewers.² Respondents were called between 18.00 and 21.00 hours on weekdays, because past experience had taught us that many people are not at home before 18.00 hours while phone calls after 21.00 hours are often regarded as an intrusion. At weekends, we called only between 12.00 and 18.00 hours on Saturdays. Occasionally, we conducted an interview session from 15.00 to 18.00 hours on weekdays in order to contact respondents who were never at home in the evening or at the weekend and to remove any telephone numbers belonging to companies from the number file: company numbers are not answered outside business hours.

When someone answered the phone, the interviewer introduced him or herself as an employee of the University of Amsterdam. This introduction was chosen deliberately because people are more willing to participate in surveys run by the government or universities than in surveys by commercial market research companies (Hox and De Leeuw 1994). The interviewer would then ask if he or she could ask some general questions to the person in the household of 18 years or older who would next celebrate his or her birthday. It was emphasized that the interview would only take two minutes. If the relevant member of the household was not at home, the interviewers asked what would be the most appropriate time to call back. We instructed the interviewers only to label a respondent as a refusal if they had themselves spoken to this respondent: indications from other members of the family that the person in question would not be interested in cooperating were not sufficient.

A respondent who refused to cooperate was asked if the interviewer might call back at a more convenient time. Respondents who could not be contacted were phoned again, on a regular base, until either they were contacted or until the end of the period of data collection. All respondents who refused were called a second time, this time by another interviewer and again asked, on behalf of the research management, if they would be prepared to answer the questions, pointing out the importance of the research.

The first four questions of the questionnaire determine the political interest of the respondent.³ Respondents were next asked about their voting behaviour during the 1994 parliamentary elections. Lastly, background questions were asked relating to age, highest level of education concluded with a diploma, postcode and sex – this last information was not asked, but noted down by the interviewer. The questionnaire was concluded by asking the respondent if he or she would be prepared to participate in an interview about the next parliamentary elections. This question described the content of this interview using the same words that the CBS (national statistics office – the organization

that carried out the data collection for the NKO-surveys of 1989 and 1994) had used in the introductory letter it sent to households selected for participation in the 1994 NKO-survey. The question was:

Finally, we would like to ask you if you would be willing to participate in an interview. This interview will be about the forthcoming parliamentary elections and about what voters and non-voters think about social matters that are at the centre of public interest. One of our interviewers would visit you at home for this interview. Are you willing in principle to participate in this research?

The data used here were gathered at the end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997. The sample of 2000 voters selected to be interviewed was built up in two phases: first we took a sample of 1000 phone numbers from the telephone file of the Dutch national telephone company (PTT – this file contains all registered Dutch household phone numbers). Next we selected a further 1000 phone numbers by randomizing the last two figures of the first 1000 numbers.⁴ Within each household, the person who would next celebrate his or her birthday and who was 18 years or older was interviewed.

After the first wave of interviews we had a response percentage of 57%, after the second wave (after recalling the refusals) the response rate was 64%, and after sending the letter it was 66%.

4 Results

The distribution of the sample at the end of the period of data collection was as follows:

respondents, also willing to participate in the political survey	14%
respondents, unwilling to participate in the political survey	52%
non-respondents	34%

When the response results of this sample are compared with the response results of the 1994 NKO-survey, the first striking feature is the fact that the group of respondents in our sample willing to participate in the political survey is less than a third of the response in the 1994 NKO-survey (14% versus 47.5%). There are several reasons for this difference. First, it is easier for a respondent to decline to participate in a survey when asked to do so on the phone than when asked in person. This is also the reason why the response rate for face-to-face surveys is higher than for telephone surveys (Hox and De Leeuw 1994). Second, the respondent has already participated in a telephone interview and may well feel that he or she has fulfilled his or her duty and

is therefore unwilling to answer a second questionnaire. Third, before people were contacted by an interviewer in the NKO-survey, they received written information about the survey. In the letter they were asked if they were willing to participate in the survey. Sending an introductory letter before asking respondents for their cooperation has a positive effect on the response level (Groves et al. 1992). Fourth, we instructed our interviewers not to try to talk people round to cooperating in the questionnaire about the parliamentary elections⁵, whereas NKO-interviewers are instructed to do all they can to persuade unwilling respondents to participate. Because of the low percentage of people willing to participate in the face-to-face survey in comparison with the percentage of NKO-respondents, we expect to find larger differences between the willing and unwilling in our survey than would have been found if the percentage of people willing to participate in the face-to-face survey had been more in line with the NKO response level.

To make our analysis more comparable to the 1994 NKO-survey we also looked at the difference between the 47.5% most cooperative respondents in the sample and the other respondents (18.5% of the total sample). The cooperative respondents are defined as those who are willing to participate in the face-to-face survey plus the 33.5% of the unwilling respondents who could be most easily persuaded to cooperate in the telephone interview, once they had been contacted.⁶ It is important to be aware that these most cooperative respondents are not a perfect representation of the NKO-respondents. The two different data collection methods (a short telephone interview versus a long face-to-face interview) make a comparison problematic: it is not necessarily the same respondents who are cooperative or not cooperative in short telephone surveys and long face-to-face surveys. Furthermore, when people are approached to participate in the NKO, it is clear for them that the interview is of a political nature. In the telephone survey, the interviewers were instructed not to mention 'politics' as the subject of the interview (to maximize the response). If politics had been explicitly mentioned as the subject of the interview, we expect this would have led to a larger number of politically not interested people among the 47.5% most cooperative respondents.

In Table 1 the differences between respondents who are willing and unwilling to participate in political surveys, and the cooperative and less cooperative respondents are compared for a number of background variables. This table also includes figures for all respondents and the expected distribution for those variables in the population. With the exception of age for the comparison between willing and unwilling respondents, and of sex for the comparison between cooperative and less cooperative respondents, significant differences are apparent.

Table 1 Comparing willing and unwilling respondents, cooperative and less cooperative respondents, all respondents and the population on the background variables age, education, sex and urbanization

	Willing to participate in political survey		Cooperative or less cooperative respondents		All respondents	Population
	Yes	No	Coop	Less		
Age						
18-29	21.2	20.9	25.0	10.5	21.0	22.8
30-44	36.0	31.1	34.9	24.9	32.1	30.8
45-64	29.5	28.0	26.8	32.3	28.3	29.5
65+	13.3	20.0	13.3	36.2	18.6	17.0
	(278)	(1029)	(945)	(362)	(1307)	
Willing versus unwilling: chi square: 7.10, p=0.07, cc=.07353						
Cooperative versus less cooperative: chi square: 88.00, p=0.00, cc=.25117						
Education						
Lower	21.9	34.0	26.5	44.3	31.4	31.3
Medium	29.5	38.2	37.2	34.0	36.3	43.0
Higher	36.3	23.7	29.7	17.8	26.4	20.2
University	12.2	4.1	6.6	3.9	5.8	5.7
	(278)	(1024)	(943)	(359)	(1302)	
Willing versus unwilling: chi square: 52.52, p=0.00, cc=.19692						
Cooperative versus less cooperative: chi square: 43.96, p=0.00, cc=.18071						
Sex						
Male	59.9	44.1	48.2	45.5	47.4	49.5
Female	40.1	55.9	51.8	54.5	52.6	50.5
	(279)	(1044)	(947)	(376)	(1323)	
Willing versus unwilling: chi square: 22.03, p=0.00, cc=.12798						
Cooperative versus less cooperative: chi square: 0.77, p=0.38, cc=.02414						
Urbanization						
Very strong	17.2	16.0	16.3	16.1	16.2	18.8
Strong/Moderate	48.4	40.0	43.9	36.3	41.8	42.1
Little/None	34.4	44.0	39.9	47.6	42.0	39.0
	(273)	(1002)	(928)	(347)	(1275)	
Willing versus unwilling: chi square: 6.99, p=0.03, cc=.07386						
Cooperative versus less cooperative: chi square: 8.46, p=0.01, cc=.08119						

The next question is whether the groups of respondents also differ with respect to political interest. In this article two indicators of political interest will be used: self-categorized political interest (a respondent's own, subjective indication of his or her interest in politics) and the NKO-scale of political interest (see also note 3). Table 2 gives the results of the comparisons between these two indicators of political interest.

Table 2 Comparing willing and unwilling respondents, cooperative and less cooperative respondents and all respondents for self-categorized political interest and the NKO-scale of political interest

	Willing to participate in political survey		Cooperative or less cooperative respondents		All respondents
	Yes	No	Coop	Less	
Self-categorized political interest					
not	10.0	33.3	25.0	37.1	28.3
fairly	69.2	61.3	65.6	56.1	63.0
very	20.8	5.4	9.4	6.8	8.7
	(279)	(1037)	(949)	(367)	(1316)
Willing versus unwilling: chi square: 104.12, p=0.00, cc=.27077					
Cooperative versus less cooperative: chi square: 19.45, p=0.00, cc=.12069					
NKO-scale political interest					
0 items	3.6	15.8	10.4	20.4	13.2
1 item	32.3	47.1	43.5	45.2	43.9
2 items	26.9	20.2	23.5	16.9	21.6
3 items	25.4	14.5	17.6	14.8	16.8
4 items	11.8	2.4	5.1	2.7	4.4
	(279)	(1043)	(950)	(372)	(1322)

For both comparisons, between the willing and unwilling respondents and the cooperative and less cooperative respondents, the same result is found. Among the willing and cooperative respondents, people with a higher level of political interest are overrepresented, whereas among the unwilling and less cooperative respondents people with less political interest are overrepresented. (Although the result is more marked for the willing versus unwilling than for

the cooperative versus less cooperative, just as we had expected.) This overrepresentation is applicable for both self-categorized political interest and the NKO-scale of political interest.

These results show that there are substantial differences between willing and cooperative respondents on the one hand and unwilling and less cooperative respondents on the other. As we have noted before, weighting is considered to be a possible method to correct for differences found between the respondents and the total population. It is assumed that, if respondents are weighted on the relevant background variables so that respondent characteristics perfectly reflect the characteristics of the total population, deviations in substantial variables will also disappear or at least diminish. We can test if this assumption is valid in our case, by showing whether the relation between willingness to participate in the political questionnaire on the one hand and political interest on the other disappears when we control for the background characteristics. If this happens, then political interest itself has no effect on participation, only the background variables, and weighting on these variables is then a good solution. However, if the introduction of the background characteristics has little or no effect on the relation between political interest and participation, weighting on the background variables is not an acceptable solution, as political interest itself has an effect which is not taken into account by weighting.

Table 3 Logistic regression with willingness to participate as dependent variable and age, education, sex, urbanization and political interest as independent variables. Model 1 only incorporates the political interest variables. Model 2 incorporates the political interest and background variables.

	Willingness to participate in a political questionnaire				Cooperativeness of a respondent			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	Beta	P	Beta	P	Beta	P	Beta	P
Age: 18-29			-.2347	.07			-.7409	.00
Age: 30-44			-.2396	.05			-.4932	.00
Age: 45-64			-.1613	.18			-.2973	.00
Education: low			.3217	.03			.1247	.43
Education: middle			.4030	.00			-.0206	.89
Education: high			.1530	.28			-.2156	.28
Sex: male			.2168	.00			-.0657	.34
Urbanization: big city			-.0626	.57			-.0344	.72
Urbanization: small city			-.1950	.02			-.1691	.02
Political interest: very	1.2732	.00	-1.1358	.00	-.3360	.01	-.3834	.01
Political interest: rather	-.6594	.00	-.5795	.00	-.2883	.00	-.1799	.02
Constant	-.5787	.00	-.6264	.02	1.1223	.00	-2.1622	.00

Table 4 Comparing temporary refusals, those difficult to reach and respondents interviewed without problems for the background variables age, education, sex and urbanization and for self-categorized political interest and the NKO-scale of political interest.

	Temporary refusals	Difficult to reach	Interviewed without problems
Age			
18-29	14.5	30.6	20.5
30-44	27.2	27.6	33.9
45-64	32.4	31.2	27.1
65+	26.0	10.6	18.5
	(173)	(170)	(962)

Chi Square: 27.43, $p=0.00$, $cc=.14347$

Education			
Lower	44.6	30.0	29.2
Medium	30.9	39.4	36.8
Higher	18.9	23.5	28.3
University	5.7	7.1	5.6
	(175)	(170)	(956)

Chi Square: 19.39, $p=0.00$, $cc=.12120$

Sex			
Male	49.7	58.5	45.2
Female	50.3	41.5	54.8
	(177)	(171)	(970)

Chi Square: 10.76, $p=0.00$, $cc=.08997$

Urbanization			
Very strong	14.5	23.2	15.2
Strong/Moderate	38.8	38.7	42.8
Little/None	46.7	38.1	42.0
	(165)	(168)	(935)

Chi Square: 8.40, $p=0.08$, $cc=.08114$

	Temporary refusals	Difficult to reach	Interviewed without problems
Self-categorized political interest			
Not interested	31.1	25.7	28.3
Fairly interested	62.1	66.7	62.5
Very interested	6.8	7.6	9.2
	(177)	(171)	(968)
Chi Square: 2.56, p=0.63, cc=.04409			
NKO-scale political interest			
0 items	15.8	12.3	15.7
1 item	45.8	44.4	46.9
2 items	16.9	26.9	20.5
3 items	18.1	12.9	14.6
4 items	3.4	3.5	2.3
	(177)	(171)	(974)

The results of the logistic regression carried out to test the assumption can be found in Table 3. These results show clearly for both comparisons (willing versus unwilling and cooperative versus less cooperative respondents) that inclusion of the background variables age, education,⁷ sex and urbanization only influenced the effect of the political interest variable slightly. The parameters of the political interest variable remain significantly different from zero. Therefore, we conclude that weighting by background variables is not an adequate correction for differences between willing versus unwilling and cooperative versus less cooperative respondents.

Having so far focused our attention mainly on different groups of respondents in our telephone survey, we now turn to the non-respondents. We described above a method for obtaining information about non-respondents by using the temporary refusals and those difficult to contact. First, we have to see if there are any significant differences between these two groups of respondents and respondents who were contacted and cooperated without problems.⁸ Table 4 demonstrates that there are significant differences with regard to age, education and sex, but not with regard to urbanization.

Curiously, while significant differences are found among the three groups with respect to most of the background variables, no significant differences are found for political interest, although the results do head in the right direction: among the temporary refusals (mainly older, lower educated people from less urbanized areas) less politically interested people are found and among the difficult to reach (mainly younger males from urbanized areas)

more politically interested people are found than among those interviewed without problems.

Next, we looked briefly at the relation between voting behaviour and self-categorized political interest in each of the groups of respondents, because we wanted to use this relation to estimate political interest among the non-respondents. The question we want to answer is whether the number of people who claim not to be interested in politics (i.e. our definition of the gulf between people and politics) has grown over the years. To answer this question, it is sufficient to distinguish between people who are not interested in politics and people who are interested in politics, regardless of whether the latter are only slightly or very interested in politics. We therefore focus on the correlation between voting behaviour (either did vote or did not vote) and political interest (either interested or not interested).

Table 5 shows significant differences between the temporary refusals on the one hand and both those difficult to reach and respondents who were interviewed easily on the other. The correlation between voter turnout and political interest is much higher among the temporary refusals than among the two other groups of respondents.

Table 5 Correlations between voting turnout and political interest*, compared for temporary refusals, those respondents difficult to reach and respondents interviewed without any problem.

Temporary refusals vs. difficult to reach	-.4188	-.1780	Z=-2.41, p=0.01
Temporary refusals vs. interviewed without problem	-.4188	-.2355	Z=-2.44, p=0.01
Difficult to reach vs. interviewed without problem	-.1780	-.2355	Z= .70, p=0.24

* Voting turnout is categorized as 1 "voted" and 2 "not voted" and political interest as 1 "not interested" and 2 "interested". A negative correlation means a positive coherence between voting and being politically interested.

Using this information in combination with the official figures of the 1994 voter turnout, we can now try to estimate the number of politically uninterested respondents among the refusals and those not contacted. By using the known voter turnout of willing and unwilling respondents and of the total sample (91.4, 80.4 and 78.8 respectively), we are able to calculate the voting turnout of those not reached, the refusals and the non-respondents as a whole.⁹ On the basis of this calculation one would expect the voter turnout to be lowest among those not reached, followed by the refusals. This is in accordance with past research (Marsh 1985; Swaddle and Heath 1989).

Since we now know the expected voter turnout for the refusals and those not reached, we can estimate the percentage of politically interested among the

final refusals and those beyond reach, by using the relation found between voter turnout and political interest among the temporary refusals and those difficult to contact. The percentages of politically non-interested respondents found among voters (.194) and non-voters (.686) who were temporary refusals are taken as a starting point to estimate the number of uninterested among the final refusals. In the same way, using information on those difficult to reach and on the politically uninterested among the voters (.202) and non-voters (.444), we have calculated the percentage of politically interested among the non-respondents who were beyond reach.¹⁰ The results of this calculation can be found in Table 6. For reasons of comparison, we have added the distribution of political interest among the willing and unwilling respondents to this table.

Table 6 Distribution of the politically interested and uninterested among the willing, the unwilling respondents, the non-respondents, the final refusals and those not reached

	Willing to participate	Unwilling to participate	Non-respondents	Final refusals	Not reached
Politically interested	90.6 (241)	67.8 (666)	67.7 (509)	67.0 (361)	69.5 (148)
not interested	9.4 (25)	32.2 (316)	32.3 (243)	33.0 (178)	30.5 (65)

It is evident from Table 6, that the differences in political interest between the unwilling, the refusals and those beyond reach are not very large. The only group that really deviates is that of the willing respondents.

5 Correcting the proportion of those found to be politically interested in the NKO-surveys

As a final step, we will attempt to estimate the proportion of politically interested people in the period 1971-1994, for each of the NKO-surveys. As pointed out earlier, the problem is that we have no information about temporary refusals and those difficult to contact in the different NKO-surveys. Before we can know whether the second wave non-respondents can be used in substitution, we have to see whether they resemble the temporary refusals in our data. Table 7 shows that the differences between the 1994 second wave non-respondents and the temporary refusals in the telephone survey are not great. We believe, therefore, that it is acceptable to use the second wave non-respondents as a substitute for the temporary refusals when estimating the proportion of politically interested among the non-respondents in the NKO-surveys.

Table 7 Comparing the temporary refusals with the second wave non-respondents of the 1994 NKO

	temporary refusals	second wave non-respondents 1994 NKO
Age		
18-29	14.5	16.5
30-44	27.2	26.7
45-64	32.4	29.5
	26.0	27.4
	N=173	N=285

Chi Square: 0.67, $p > 0.25$

Education

Low	55.4	60.8
Medium	27.4	26.9
	17.1	12.4
	N=175	N=283

Chi Square: 3.24, $p > 0.15$

* because a different categorization was used in the 1994 NKO than in our survey, we had to reclassify the values on this variable in three categories

Sex

Male	49.7	40.0
Female	50.3	60.0
	N=177	N=285

Chi Square: 4.18, $p = 0.05$

Urbanization

Very strong	14.5	23.5
Strong/moderate	38.8	37.5
	46.7	38.9
	N=165	N=285

Chi Square: 5.73, $p = 0.10$

Self-categorized political interest

Not interested	31.1	37.2
Fairly interested	62.1	56.1
Not interested	6.8	6.7
	N=177	N=285

Chi Square: 1.86, $p>0.25$ **NKO Political interest scale**

0 items	15.8	21.8
1 item	45.8	40.0
2 items	16.9	21.1
3 items	18.1	13.7
4 items	3.4	3.5
	N=177	N=285

Chi Square: 5.17, $p>0.25$

Table 8 compares the level of political interest of the respondents who only participated in the first wave with that of the respondents who participated in both waves. It is evident that the level of political interest differs significantly between these two groups. For every year in which a complete NKO-survey (with two waves) was held the "first wave only" respondents are less interested in politics than those who participated in both waves. The only exception is 1971, when the difference did not differ significantly from 0. It is also striking that the difference between the "first wave only" respondents and the "first and second wave" respondents has increased over time. This could indicate that the

Table 8 Development of the difference in political interest of the 'first wave only' respondents and the 'first and second wave' respondents in the NKO-surveys

	1971	1977	1981	1986	1989	1994
Politically uninterested among:						
the 'first wave only' respondents	50.1	47.6	38.6	33.6	36.7	37.2
the 'first and second wave' respondents	45.9	37.0	28.9	26.2	20.3	18.6
difference between the two	4.1	10.6	9.7	7.4	16.4	18.6
mean difference, when a three point scale of self-categorized political interest is used	.0742	.1529	.1149	.1652	.1916	.2574
contingency coefficient	.0479	.0984	.0945	.1024	.1351	.1684
probability	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
response on first wave	74.8	67.7	69.3	58.8	46.1	47.5
response on first and second wave	59.4	52.3	48.7	48.9	39.5	40.0

difference in political interest between respondents and non-respondents in the NKO-surveys has also increased. If this is the case, then the validity of recent NKO-survey results are at stake.

Table 9 compares the proportion of politically interested people estimated for the different NKO-surveys with the proportion of politically interested people found by NKO-researchers (both unweighted and weighted) and the proportion calculated by Visscher.¹¹ Appendix 1 explains how we computed our corrected figures. Appendix 2 presents the results of the different computational steps for each of the six NKO-surveys. If the level of political interest is used as an indication of a rift between politics and the public in the eighties and nineties, Table 9 shows that there is no evidence for such a widening rift.

Table 9 Development of political interest in Dutch society on the base of the NKO-data, calculated according to the NKO-method (unweighted and weighted), the method of Visscher and the figures corrected according to our method

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994
Proportion politically interested:								
NKO (unweighted)	54.0	56.2	61.0	68.2	74.3	72.4	77.3	78.3
NKO (weighted)	#	#	#	#	#	71.3	73.3	74.4
according to Visscher's method	44.0	45.0	48.0	52.0	53.5	48.5	42.0	41.0
according to our method	51.1	*	56.1	64.6	*	68.5	67.6	68.3
Voter turnout	79.1		88.0	87.1		85.8	80.3	78.8

no weighting factor available

* cannot be computed

6 Discussion

The results of our estimation procedure for political interest suggest that the true situation with regard to the growth of the gulf between the people and politics lies somewhere between Visscher's views on the one hand and those of the 'rift-sceptics' on the other. This is clear from the figures shown in Table 9.

Visscher's view appears to be vindicated if respondents who are prepared to participate in an extensive interview about politics, as in the Dutch National Election Survey, are compared with the group of respondents only willing to participate in a short, general telephone survey. The distribution of background variables such as age, education and sex, as well as the distribution of

the two indicators for political interest, differ widely between these two groups. In other words, there would seem to be systematic distortion due to non-response. It should be mentioned that the response in NKO-surveys is much higher than the proportion of respondents in our own survey who were willing to participate in an interview about politics. But, even when the most cooperative 47.5% of respondents (mimicking the response rate of the 1994 NKO) is compared with the rest of the respondents, significant differences between the two groups are found.

There is no support for another aspect of Visscher's criticism of the 'rift-sceptics': his assumption that all non-respondents who refused participation can be considered uninterested in politics. From the estimation of the political interest among non-respondents it would appear that the proportion of those politically uninterested is higher among the refusals than among people who participated in the survey. But, even among non-respondents there are more people who are politically interested than uninterested (that is, from 1977 on; see Appendix 2). It is not surprising, though, that dropout in the telephone survey was not determined by political interest: the questionnaire was of a general design and every reference to politics was avoided in the introduction. The fact that the survey was political was not explained until the question was introduced in which the respondent was asked if he or she was willing to participate in a face-to-face interview. In this survey, 34% of the sample was a non-respondent, of which, in our estimation, only one third lacked political interest while the level of political interest among respondents was somewhat higher. It is not credible, therefore, that the percentage of politically uninterested people in the 1994 NKO-survey should be as high as 59%, as Visscher supposed. The 22% estimated by the NKO-researchers seems, on the other hand, rather low. In short, Visscher's criticism of the NKO-results is supported by our analyses (i.e. political interest is indeed overestimated in the NKO surveys) whereas his thesis that political interest has steadily declined among the Dutch population since 1981 is not.

The analysis presented in this article is but a first step in the study of non-response in election surveys and the doubts surrounding the validity of the results of the Dutch National Election Survey. It is also important to realize that non-response is not the only factor that can distort the results. We have already pointed to the tendency of non-voters in election surveys to claim that they did vote, a result that has been found in several different countries. If such an effect also exists in the Netherlands (i.e. turnout in the sample is actually lower than answers to questions about voting behaviour indicate), this would mean that the difference between turnout among interviewed respondents and the non-respondents is less than the ratio we have found. This would mean in turn that there are more politically interested people among the non-respondents than we have found so far.

One way to find out the extent of such a distortion in the case of the NKO-survey would be to use the electoral register as a sample framework. In some countries (for example, the United Kingdom, Sweden and the United States) this is done already. By asking for permission to study the lists of voters from the polling stations where the sampled people have cast their vote or failed to turn up, it would be possible to compare the voting behaviour reported with actual voting behaviour. In addition, we would have information about the voting behaviour of the non-respondents and about such background variables as their sex, age and urbanization. Combining this information with the information about the turnout of the non-respondents would enable us to make an even more precise estimate of the level of political interest among non-respondents, and thus also of the population as a whole.

The falling response rates indicated by market and opinion research is not a phenomenon of the last few years, and it is unlikely that it will cease. With the rise of Telemarketing in the nineties, the growth of non-response is actually accelerating: people are inundated with requests for telephone interviews, provoking resistance and an increasing reluctance. If the National Election Survey wishes to maintain its leading position in research into the political attitude of the Dutch people, it must adjust to this changing situation, and find ways to learn more about the non-respondents.

The approach chosen for the 1998 NKO showed that the researchers responsible for the NKO-survey are aware of this, and are prepared to do something about it. In contrast with previous NKO-surveys, the election registers were used as a sampling framework in the 1998 NKO, which means that some background characteristics were known for non-respondents as well. Besides that, measures were taken to diminish the non-response (for example, a lottery ticket was enclosed with the letter in which the respondents were asked to participate, and refusals were called back by a team of specially trained interviewers). Furthermore, even the non-respondents who continued to refuse were asked to answer a small number of questions. In this way, the non-respondents who were prepared to answer at least those questions could be compared with the respondents on a number of important variables. Hopefully, these results will give more insight in the distortion of the NKO results as a consequence of non-response bias.

Appendix 1: Computing the proportion of politically interested respondents in the sample

To estimate the political interest in the sample as a whole we used the results to the question about the respondents' political interest from the first wave of the questionnaire and to the question about actual voting behaviour from the second wave. Because we needed at least two interview waves, the National Election Surveys of 1972 and 1982 could not be used, as there was only one wave of interviews in those years

We defined the following terms:

$\Pr(V R_1)$	Probability of voting among respondents from wave 1 only
$\Pr(V R)$	Probability of voting among respondents from wave 1 and 2
$\Pr(I V_1)$	Probability of political interest among voters from wave 1 only
$\Pr(I NV_1)$	Probability of political interest among non-voters from wave 1 only
$\Pr(I V, NR)$	Probability of political interest among the voters among the non-respondents
$\Pr(I NV, NR)$	Probability of political interest among the non-voters among the non-respondents
$\Pr(I R_1)$	Probability of political interest among respondents from wave 1 only
$\Pr(I R)$	Probability of political interest among respondents from wave 1 and 2
$\Pr(V)$	Probability of voting in the population at large
$\Pr(V NR)$	Probability of voting among non-respondents
$\Pr(I NR)$	Probability of political interest among non-respondents
$\Pr(I)$	Probability of political interest
NR_1	Number of respondents from wave 1 only
NR	Number of respondents from wave 1 and 2
NNR	Number of non-respondents
N	Sample size

The first problem we encountered was that we did not know the voting behaviour of those respondents who only participated in the first wave of the NKO-survey. We used an imputation procedure to estimate their voting behaviour. We carried out a logistic regression with voting behaviour (two categories: 'voted' and 'did not vote') as the dependent variable. In all six NKO-surveys political interest, adherence to a political party, voting intention, voting behaviour in the previous parliamentary elections (not available for 1986), voting behaviour in the last local elections (not available for 1971, 1977 and 1981),

political satisfaction (not available for 1977 and 1981), and the background variables age, education, sex, urbanization, social class and religion were used as explanatory variables. All the explanatory variables that had a regression coefficient significantly different from zero were kept in the equation. Because there was a group of respondents who had missing values for some of the explanatory variables, we also retained the variables whose coefficients became significant when the variables with missing values were omitted from the regression equation. We eventually had between six and eight explanatory variables in each of the regression equations. Below, we list the explanatory variables that were used in each of the six NKO-surveys, with the variance that can be accounted for by these explanatory variables in brackets.

- 1971: political interest, adherence to a party, voting intention, voting behaviour in the previous parliamentary elections, education and age (pseudo R^2 : .2439).
- 1977: political interest, adherence to a party, voting intention, voting behaviour in the previous parliamentary elections, sex, urbanization and social class (pseudo R^2 : .3302).
- 1981: political interest, adherence to a party, voting intention, voting behaviour in the previous parliamentary elections, sex, age and religion (pseudo R^2 : .3225).
- 1986: political interest, adherence to a party, voting intention, voting behaviour in the last local elections, political satisfaction, sex, age and education (pseudo R^2 : .4190).
- 1989: political interest, adherence to a party, voting intention, voting behaviour in the previous parliamentary elections, voting behaviour in the last local elections, sex and education (pseudo R^2 : .4002).
- 1994: political interest, voting intention, voting behaviour in the previous parliamentary elections, voting behaviour in the last local elections, sex, age and education (pseudo R^2 : .3923).

Using the regression coefficients found and stochastic regression imputation (i.e. a random error term is added to the imputed value; see for instance Little & Rubin 1989: 299) we were able to estimate the voting behaviour of those respondents who had only participated in the first wave of the NKO-survey ($\Pr(V|R_1)$).

Since we now knew the voting probability in both groups of respondents, we were also able to calculate the voting probability among non-respondents, by taking the expected number of voters in the sample (because our sample is representative, we assumed the proportion of voters in the sample to be the same as in the population) and subtracting from it the number of voters among the respondents, as in formula (1).

$$\Pr(V|NR) = (\Pr(V) * N - (\Pr(V|R) * N_R + \Pr(V|R_I) * N_{R_I}))/N \quad (1)$$

We then turned to the number of politically interested people among the voting and non-voting 'first and second wave' respondents and the 'only first wave' respondents.

For both 'first and second wave' respondents and 'only first wave' respondents the number of respondents who considered themselves politically interested can be read from the data [$\Pr(I|R)$ and $\Pr(I|R_I)$ respectively].

In order to estimate the probability of political interest for the non-respondents, two assumptions must be made, because we do not know the relation between being politically interested and voting for non-respondents. In the first place, it is assumed that the probability of being politically interested among the voting non-respondents equals the probability of being political interested among the voting 'only first wave' respondents (formula 2). In the second place, we assume that the probability of being politically interested among the non-voting non-respondents equals the probability of being political interested among the non-voting 'only first wave' respondents (formula 3). With the help of a cross-tabulation, using the dichotomized self-categorized political interest and the imputed voting behaviour, we find the proportion of politically interested people among the voters and non-voters of the 'only first wave' respondents [$\Pr(I|V_I)$ and $\Pr(I|NV_I)$ respectively].

$$\Pr(I|V, NR) = \Pr(I|V_I) \quad (2)$$

$$\Pr(I|NV, NR) = \Pr(I|NV_I) \quad (3)$$

This leads to the following formula for estimating the probability of being politically interested among the non-respondents:

$$\Pr(I|NR) = \Pr(V|NR) * \Pr(I|V, NR) + (1 - \Pr(V|NR)) * \Pr(I|NV, NR) \quad (4)$$

Finally, the probability of being politically interested in the sample (thus in the population at large) is calculated by multiplying the probabilities of being politically interested for each of the three groups with the number of respondents belonging to that group, summing this and dividing the result by the number of respondents in the total sample:

$$\Pr(I) = (\Pr(I|R_I) * N_{R_I} + \Pr(I|R) * N_R + \Pr(I|NR) * N_{NR})/N \quad (5)$$

Appendix 2: The relation between voter turnout and political interest for the 'first and second wave' respondents and the 'first wave only' respondents for the 1971, 1977, 1981, 1986, 1989 and 1994 NKO-surveys

	1971			1977			1981		
	1 and 2	only 1	nonresp	1 and 2	only 1	nonresp	1 and 2	only 1	nonresp
voter turnout	86.7	78.1"	61.8*	91.1	87.9"	83.0*	93.5	88.6"	75.9*
relation voting-pol.interest									
among voters	57.5	56.9	56.9#	65.1	56.4	56.4#	72.7	65.9	65.9#
among non-voters	31.9	25.2	25.2#	40.8	23.5	23.5#	46.6	27.3	27.3#
pol.interested	54.1	49.9	44.8*	62.9	52.4	50.8*	71.0	61.5	56.6*
N	1980	515	835	1434	422	886	1620	685	1021

	1986			1989			1994		
	1 and 2	only 1	nonresp	1 and 2	only 1	nonresp	1 and 2	only 1	nonresp
voter turnout	93.2	89.7"	76.0*	92.6	86.7"	70.5*	92.2	81.1"	68.3*
relation voting-pol.interest									
among voters	75.9	69.6	69.6#	81.7	66.3	66.3#	84.2	68.0	68.0#
among non-voters	47.3	39.3	39.3#	54.1	42.4	42.4#	47.9	40.7	40.7#
pol.interested	74.0	66.7	62.3*	79.7	63.3	59.3*	81.4	62.8	59.3*
N	1357	273	1142	1506	248	2054	1527	285	2004

* calculated
substituted
" imputed

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Leonie Huddy and two anonymous referees for their useful comments on earlier versions of this article.
2. Provided by Telepanel Research Centre (STP), an institution linked to the University of Amsterdam.
3. The four questions together constitute the political interest scale, which is used in the NKO-surveys to measure political interest: Q1: "When there is Dutch news in the newspapers, for example about governmental problems, how often do you read such news: (nearly) always (1), often (2), now and then (3), seldom or never (4), I do not read newspapers (5)"; Q2: "When there is a discussion in a group about such problems in our country, do you: generally join the conversation (1), listen with interest (2), not listen, or are you not interested (3)"; Q3: "When there is foreign news

in the newspaper, for example about tensions or discussions between different countries, how often do you read such news: (nearly) always (1), often (2), now and then (3), seldom or never (4), I do not read newspapers (5)"; Q4: "Are you very interested in political topics (3), fairly interested (2) or not interested (1)". The categories 1 for question 1, 3 for question 4 and 1, and 2 for questions 2 and 3 are coded as 1, the other answers as 0. Next, the scores on the four questions are summed and in this way a five point Mokken-scale is created to measure political interest, running from 0 to 4. See also Anker and Oppenhuis (1994: 325-328).

4. The two parts of the sample (the part with the addresses drawn from the telephone file and the randomized part, which also contains non-registered phone numbers) are compared for the measured background variables and for the dependent variables in this study. We found no significant differences between these variables in the two different parts of the sample. The response level among those with the phone numbers taken from the file was much larger than among the random numbers (71% compared to 61%). This difference was caused, in the first place, by sending a written questionnaire to all people who had refused to cooperate in the telephone interview and all people who weren't reached, 50 (5% of the file sample) extra interviews were obtained. In the second place the phone was not answered more often in the randomized sample. It is possible that this was caused by the fact that these were company phone numbers (where, because the interviews were mostly held in the evening and in the weekend, no one was present) or that these phone numbers were in fact non-existent (past experience showed that not all non-existent phone numbers give the signal of a disconnected line, some just ring, see also Cummings 1979: 237).

5. This was done because we did not plan to carry out a second phase with face-to-face interviews.

6. At the end of each interview, the interviewer was asked to give a score on a 5-point scale for the ease of persuading the respondent to answer the telephone questionnaire. Because the mean scores for ease of persuading respondents differed considerably between interviewers we standardized all interviewers on the overall mean score.

7. The different Dutch educational levels are categorized as follows: 1. lower: primary education (basisschool), lower professional education (VBO); 2. medium: medium general education (MAVO) and medium professional education (MBO); 3. higher: higher general education (HAVO/HBS/VWO) and higher professional education (HBO); 4. university.

8. A small group of respondents (20 in total) was both difficult to reach and temporary refusals. They were contacted after a minimum of 4 days of trying and when they were eventually contacted, they refused. When called again later, the interviewer was able to persuade them to participate. These respondents are counted among the temporary refusals in our analysis. Classifying them as difficult to reach rather than temporary refusals would only lead to minor changes in the results.

9. We calculated the voter turnout among the refusals and not reached as follows. First, we calculated the number of voters and non-voters expected among non-respondents, using the information we already had about the respondents (we knew which respondents had voted) and the number of voters and non-voters in the population (we assumed the distribution between voters and non-voters would be

the same in the sample as in the population at large). Thus we knew the row and column totals of a cross-tabulation, showing response behaviour of the nonrespondents (i.e. whether they refused or could not be contacted) in the columns and the voting behaviour of the non-respondents (i.e. whether they voted or did not vote) in the rows. We then used Yule's Q to estimate the vote turnout of the refusals and the not reached. Yule's Q is defined as $(f_{11}f_{22} - f_{12}f_{21}) / (f_{11}f_{22} + f_{12}f_{21})$, where f_{11} , f_{12} , f_{21} and f_{22} stand for the four cells in a cross-tabulation. See also Upton (1978: 18-19). By equating the Yule's Q found in the cross-tabulation with the voting behaviour of the temporary refusals and those difficult to reach with the Yule's Q in the cross-tabulation of the final refusals and not reached, we were able to estimate the voter turnout of these two groups of non-respondents.

10. This is done as follows: among the refusals it is expected that 72.5% voted in 1994 and the other 27.5% did not vote. Because we found 539 refusals in the sample, 391 of them voted and 148 did not. Starting from the principle that 80.6% of the voters are politically interested and the remaining 19.4% are not (on the basis of the ratio found between politically interested and non-interested voters who were also temporary refusals) we thus expect that among the 391 voters, 315 people would be politically interested and 76 politically uninterested. In the same way we expect 46 (31.4%) politically interested and 102 (68.6%) uninterested respondents among the non-voting refusals. If we then sum the political interested among the voters and the non-voters and the politically uninterested among the voters and non-voters we get a total of 361 politically interested (that is 67.0%) and 178 (33.0%) politically uninterested respondents. In the same way we have calculated the percentages for the respondents not reached.

11. To calculate the weighted figures for political interest, we used the weighting factors that were provided by the organizations who did the fieldwork for the NKO-survey. For 1986, two weighting factors were given. The first one had no influence on the proportion of political interest; we used the second one, which had a slight influence. For the years 1971, 1972, 1977, 1981 and 1982 no weighting factors were available in the NKO-data set.

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Debates and Discussions

The European Constitution of the Netherlands Reflections on Interdependent Statehood

Ernst M.H. Hirsch Ballin

University of Tilburg

Abstract

The emerging constitutional structure of the European Union does not show a hierarchical relation with the constitutions of the member states, but rather a network relation including hierarchical and cooperative elements. Even if they are aware of the unprecedented character of European unification, many constitutionalists and politicians still conceive this as a problem of European law and nothing more. In their own constitutional thinking, Europe just has to be defended against "loss of democratic control", "loss of sovereignty", and "loss of national identity". They dwell on the illusion that national institutions are as able and even better and more reliable than foreign or European institutions in serving the public good. The author regards this approach as dangerous, not only because it can foster nationalistic views and intolerance, but above all because it is based on an illusion that will end up in frustration and a possible fatal retardation in developing shared political values.

1 Events to commemorate

1.1 A special year

1998 is a special year for Dutch constitutionalists. The Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs decided to celebrate "150 years of Constitution", in remembrance of the far-reaching amendments to the Dutch constitution adopted in 1848. This peaceful change in Dutch political life was not only due to the vision of the statesman J.R. Thorbecke, but also to the prudence of King William II who understood the sign of the times when revolutionary movements shook several capitals of Europe. From a legal point of view, however, the constitution in force in the Netherlands today is still the (since amended) Basic Law that was adopted in 1815 after the Vienna Congress. Before as well as after 1848, the