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What Dutch Parliamentary Journalists Know About Politics¹

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Abstract

In spring 1999 telephone interviews were carried out with Dutch parliamentary journalists to research their political knowledge. The response rate was 81%. This paper reports analyses of their responses to questions in five domains: public law, parliamentary history and political ideology, European integration, decolonization, and core statistics. Results for each of the 43 questions are given in the appendix. Fifteen questions formed a Mokken scale, which was used to compare the political knowledge of different groups of journalists. Male journalists were found to have more political knowledge than female journalists. This gender gap, which is consistent with that found in earlier studies of political knowledge, could not be explained away by reference to age or experience, education, being a generalist or a specialist, political preference, or journalistic medium. Results for these variables are given. The paper briefly characterizes the relationship between political knowledge and political insight, and discusses the difficulty of giving a normative description of what journalists ought to know.

1 Introduction

All societies need a minimum of shared cultural elements in order to be able to function cohesively. A common language is a prerequisite, and a common educational system and a pervasive system of mass communication are important. Once we have left school, most of what we learn about our society is learned directly or indirectly through the mass media. It tells us who our heroes are in sports, in the arts and in politics. It informs us about the changing structure of our society, about its history, and about its present predicaments. It defines the topics of our public debates. Most of what we share with other members of our society we share through the use of the same mass media.

With an increasing flood of specialized information geared towards specific segments of the population, however, people seem to have a decreasing overview of society as a whole, and to share fewer cultural symbols with each other. Some scholars warn that people, especially young people, do not read

newspapers anymore (Smith 1989; Tillinghast 1981), and have no knowledge of the common history of their own society.² Hirsch (1987) refers to this phenomenon as "cultural illiteracy". Cultural literacy is

the network of information that all competent readers possess. It is the background information, stored in their minds, that enables them to take up a newspaper and read it with an adequate level of comprehension, getting the point, grasping the implications, relating what they read to the unstated context which alone gives meaning to what they read (Hirsch 1987:2; see also Claessen[undated]).³

The specialization of politics is a part of this general process of specialization. Political actors – not just the officials and the politicians, but the spokespersons of interest groups as well – speak a specialized language that is not always understandable, even for generally well-educated people. Empirical studies (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996; Vis & Foekema 1997; Wittebrood 1992) show that the general public has a lack of knowledge of political affairs. We regard 'political illiteracy' – the lack of political understanding among members of a democracy – as a specific aspect of cultural illiteracy.

Parliamentary journalists have a special responsibility for combating political illiteracy. They have the task to inform citizens about the processes and products of government policy-making, as well as to analyse, and – where necessary – to criticize political actors (members of government, parliament, political parties, pressure and interest groups). They could regard themselves, quite rightly, as the 'watchdogs of democracy'. The professional expertise and competence of parliamentary journalists can thus be seen as setting an upper boundary on the political expertise and competence of the general public, since the public relies mainly on the mass media for its political information.

In a study about fifteen years ago, parliamentary journalists acknowledged their special responsibility to the public. They saw their major task as: "to inform the public as well as possible; to analyse political affairs; and to write concisely and clearly" (Kaiser 1985: 96). Teachers in schools of journalism agree. In addition to having the good social and observational abilities, empathy, caution, curiosity, and a good command of language and technical inter-viewing skills required by any journalist, parliamentary journalists need to have very good general knowledge so that they can relate events to the social and historical context in which they occur (Jansen 1987, 1988).

However, journalists themselves have expressed worries about the general level of political knowledge in their own profession. For example, "Journalists who are insufficiently informed either because of lack of specialised knowledge or lack of information because their sources are too restricted confirm the reality that policy makers and politicians so much like to show us" (Toirkens 1983, a renown Dutch journalist). Similarly: "I came to The Hague and saw some excellent journalists. But about the rest I thought... if this is our top of jour-

nalism... There were colleagues who did not even know the most elementary rules of public law" (Jansen 1987: 118).⁴

Members of Parliament have also criticized the quality of parliamentary journalists. For example, an MP in Kaiser's (1985: 75) study remarked: "I believe that parliamentary journalists do not have sufficient knowledge of the things that are going on in Parliament. Reports often contain too many errors, and are often too shallow."

According to the Dutch National Election Survey of 1998, confidence in the press was lower than for any other Dutch institution. Whereas 60% of Dutch voters had 'much confidence' in the legal system (the most trustworthy institution in this survey), and 11% even had 'very much confidence' in it, only 29% had 'much confidence' in the press (the least trustworthy institution), and only 2% have 'very much confidence' in it. Other institutions, such as parliament, large companies, and the army all enjoy substantially more confidence from the general public than the press.

Parliamentary journalists may (and often do) challenge the need to master political knowledge that is readily reproducible. In current society any kind of information can be looked up; large libraries of facts are available, and there are addresses on the Internet that specifically cater to the information needs of (American) journalists.⁵ In the eyes of some journalists, then, tests of political knowledge are irrelevant. Understanding and insight are indeed important, but factual knowledge? No – one can be a good parliamentary journalist, according to this perspective, without having all the facts in one's head, since they are available at one's fingertips.

Kaiser found this attitude in her study fifteen years ago. Given ten requirements that might be desirable for parliamentary journalists to possess, journalists rated factual knowledge (of public law) last. The four requirements deemed most important were – in descending order – political insight, broad societal interest, intuition for news, and analytical thinking (Kaiser 1985: 75). Insight, therefore, seems to be distinguishable from factual knowledge.

The separation of insight and factual knowledge is generally defended on the grounds that the lasting effect of education and experience is to have insight and understanding, as a way of thinking, a way of looking at the world. Long after we have forgotten most of the information that we learned in school, we still know where to go for the finer details.

In our opinion, journalists' claim that every bit of information can be looked up is untenable. Time pressure is one reason it is impossible to find 'all one needs to know'; incomplete archiving or incomplete availability of information is another. But the most important reason why this is not true is simply that one does not know what one does not know! One's (necessarily limited) frame of reference, one's 'insight', determines which facts will be looked up and which facts will remain uncovered.

One example should suffice. In October 1992 an El Al aeroplane crashed in a suburb of Amsterdam. According to the freight papers, the plane contained a load of dimethyl methylfosfonat (DMMP).⁶ None of the officials, politicians or journalists was familiar enough with chemistry to understand the significance of these chemicals, until one journalist eventually showed a copy of the papers to an expert. It turned out that the chemicals could be used as raw materials for producing sarin, a poisonous gas that was used to kill passengers in a Tokyo subway station several years ago. Not until then – September 1998, or six years after the crash – did the chemicals become newsworthy. Only knowledge of facts can lead to insight into their meaning.

We therefore reject the division between knowledge and insight. By political knowledge we mean readily reproducible information about the political process, including legal procedures, political problems, government policies, political organizations, and their histories. We define political insight as the availability of a frame of reference, a context to which new information can be related. Factual knowledge is *continuously* necessary to maintain this frame of reference. If existing facts have to be looked up before we can understand how new information relates to a broader context, then it is not just factual information that is missing, but insight as well. 'Insight' that is not connected to true factual information is indistinguishable from prejudice. This is obviously true not only for journalists, but also for officials, politicians, and every one else.

2 The gender gap in political knowledge

The present study explores the political knowledge of Dutch parliamentary journalists. It builds on earlier studies of the political knowledge of secondary school teachers in history and civic studies (Vis 1995), and on a telephone survey about the historical knowledge of Dutch Members of Parliament (Rensman & Bossman 1996). In contrast to Rensman & Bossman, however, who evaluated the historical knowledge of most Dutch MPs as deficient, we will not make any normative claim about whether parliamentary journalists know 'enough'. We return to this point in the discussion. Rather, we will compare different groups of journalists to determine whether some groups know more than others. In particular, we will explore a possible gender gap.

Several studies have shown that, on average, men have more political knowledge than women. The discrepancy was found in surveys throughout the second half of the last century among Dutch (Daudt & Stapel 1965/1966), American (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1991, 1992, 1993; Dimock & Popkin 1997; Kriesberg 1949: 54-55; Smith 1970: 671), Canadian (Lambert et al. 1988), and Belgian voters (Dewachter 1993). Even when political interest, education

and media consumption are controlled for, differences in political knowledge remain (Bennett 1988: 485; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 1991: 221; Wittebrood 1992: 155).

The gender gap is already noticeable at a relatively young age. Studies of American high school students and their parents (Jennings & Niemi 1974), Dutch freshmen psychology students (Roe 1975:137), Canadian freshmen students (Maghami 1974: 337), and students in West Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom (Hewstone 1986: 148) show that male students have more political knowledge than female students. Similar results are found among children of primary school age (Dijkman 1987; Furnham & Gunter 1987; Pattijn 1986; Portengen 1994; Stradling 1977).⁷

Several explanations have been suggested for this ubiquitous difference. Meyer (1992) proposes that the usual definition of politics disregards the difference in the nature of political knowledge between men and women. This proposal is nicely illustrated in a cartoon in which the caption reads:

Lou makes all the *big* decisions ... like should we have a trade agreement with China, or should we set up a space station on the moon. He leaves all the little decisions to meY like where we should live, or where we should send the kids to school (reproduced in Janis & Mann 1977: 5).

Tannen (1990) shows that there are differences in political socialization between boys and girls. Boys more often learn behaviours and interaction patterns that they can use to their advantage in the political world. Bügel (1993) shows that boys and girls differ in their areas of interest and in their media consumption. Boys read about different (i.e., more political) things in the newspaper than girls. Still other explanations are that men have a paid job more often than women, and enjoy more occupational experience and a higher level of education. Women take more responsibility for their children and for domestic work, and therefore have less time for political interests (Vis 1995).

Whatever the merits of these explanations, they lose some of their weight when we compare men and women in the same profession. We may expect more similarity in education and political interest between them than between men and women in society as a whole. In fact, none of our journalist consultants expected that there would be any differences among their male and female colleagues in amount of political knowledge. We return to this point later, after our report of the empirical findings.

3 Data and method of analysis

3.1 The respondents

The population of parliamentary journalists in The Netherlands was operationally defined as those who appear on the list of members of the *Nederlandse Parlementaire Persvereniging* (Dutch Parliamentary Press Organization), which was given to us by the board of the organization in autumn 1998. This list, numbering 199 people, contained names, addresses, telephone numbers and professional affiliations. When the journalists were approached by telephone in spring 1999, twenty-one listed members were dropped from the study because they no longer worked as parliamentary journalists. Of the remaining 178, one had helped with the formulation of our questions, two could not participate due to personal circumstances (e.g., illness), thirteen could not be reached despite numerous attempts, and seventeen opted not to cooperate. The remaining 145 respondents constitute 81% of our population. This response percentage is very similar to that in an earlier study of political knowledge among Dutch secondary teachers in history and civic studies (Vis 1995). Since we sought to analyse the whole population of parliamentary journalists, rather than a representative sample, we are not concerned with whether our results can be generalized to a larger population. This means that we do not in principle need to test for statistical significance. However, we will use the language of statistical significance to help us decide which effects are large enough to be interesting. In general, we will consider statistically non-significant differences to be substantially irrelevant.

Four out of five respondents were men, so only about 20 per cent were women. Three out of four worked for the written press, and a quarter for radio or television. There were few women in the age bracket 40-45 years (only 4%, compared to 28% of the men), but there was an overrepresentation of women in the younger age bracket of 34-39 years (44%, versus 26%). Gender and age groups are represented in more or less the same proportions among the different media. About half the journalists had an academic degree, and, especially in the youngest age bracket, a majority had followed a specialized training at a school for journalism. Interestingly, more men worked part time (28%) than women (only 16%). And even though men brag about their long working week more than women, the average reported working week is more or less the same (48 hours). More than half of the parliamentary journalists had been in the profession for five years or less, although the mean experience is more than 9 years. On average, our respondents expected to continue working in their specialized occupation as parliamentary journalist for an additional four years. Only a minority of those over the age of 46 years (22%) expected

to end their professional career as a parliamentary journalist in the short term. For most, being a parliamentary journalist was a temporary stage in their professional development.⁸

3.2 Operationalizing political knowledge

How can we go about comparing the political knowledge of different groups of respondents within a society? Making meaningful comparisons presupposes that there is some *structure* in people's answers to political knowledge questions, enabling the construction of a measurement instrument such as a scale or a factor. If this is not true, i.e., there is no structure, then the apparent amount of knowledge of different groups would vary idiosyncratically according to the particular questions researchers pose on any one occasion.⁹

Previous research suggests that there is indeed structure in political knowledge, although not always among all the knowledge questions asked. It is unclear at this point whether this structure is best characterized as domain-specific, and so needs to be measured by multiple scales (e.g., one for historical knowledge and another for legal knowledge), as found by Vis (1995), or whether it can be captured with a single, overarching measurement instrument, as suggested by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996). (Vis also combined a subset of scalable knowledge items from different domains and used them together as a single measurement of political knowledge.)

Our effort to devise an effective way to measure political knowledge involved three stages: first, we discussed the questions to be asked with a panel of experienced (former) parliamentary journalists and experts in specific areas¹⁰; next, we conducted our telephone survey; and finally, we analysed the response patterns to see which of the questions used in our questionnaire elicited responses that could be used for comparative purposes, and which gave rise to more idiosyncratic responses.¹¹

In the first stage we distinguished five potential domains of political knowledge: 1) knowledge of recent parliamentary history, 'recent' being post World War II; 2) knowledge of the process of Dutch decolonization, which also started after World War II; 3) knowledge of the process of European integration, especially Dutch participation in the European Union and its predecessors; 4) knowledge of public law, especially parliamentary procedures; and 5) knowledge of a number of core statistics about Dutch society. For each domain a number of knowledge questions was formulated, giving a total of 43 questions. Open questions were used rather than multiple-choice questions to discourage guessing.

The second stage, the survey itself, was carried out mainly in March 1999 with computer-assisted telephone interviewing, using trained students as

interviewers, mainly from the Departments of Sociology and Journalism. It also included questions about journalists' daily activities and opinions about their profession, the answers to which are not reported here. Since it was a telephone survey, it would have been too time-consuming to write down all the responses. Therefore, the interviewers were asked to code the answers as either the correct response, an incorrect response, or a don't know/no answer, except when figures were asked for (such as a percentage, a year), in which case the actual response was written down. The result led to a machine-readable SPSS system file.

In the third stage we submitted the answers to the 43 questions to a Mokken scale analysis (Mokken 1997; Sijtsma et al. 1990). Mokken scale analysis is a non-parametric probabilistic version of a Guttman scalogram analysis. The essence of this technique lies in the assumption of transitivity¹², the idea that if a respondent gives the correct ('positive') response to a 'difficult' question, he can be expected to give the correct response to all 'easier' questions as well. The order of difficulty of the items is established according to the proportion of respondents who gave the correct response (denoted as $p(i)$ in the Appendix). So an item with a $p(i)$ -value of 0.39 (e.g., V64) is more 'difficult' than an item with a $p(i)$ -value of 0.97 (e.g., V65). The Appendix lists the questions for each of the five knowledge domains from top to bottom in descending order of difficulty. The correct answer for each question is given in italics, as are the percentages of respondents who gave the correct response or who either said they did not know or failed to answer the question. (The percentage of wrong responses is found by deducting these percentages from 100.)

To determine whether the assumption of transitivity is indeed correct, we compare each respondent's response to each pair of questions. Summary measures of transitivity can be given for each respondent, but also for each pair of items, for each item separately, and for all the items taken together (i.e., for the whole candidate scale). As a measure of transitivity we used Loevinger's coefficient of homogeneity. This is denoted as H for the whole scale, as $H(i)$ for item i , and as $H(ij)$ for each pair of items i and j . ($H(i)$ and H are derived from the $H(ij)=s$.) H should be greater than 0.30 if the scale as a whole is to be considered an acceptable measurement instrument, and $H(i)$ should be greater than 0.30 if item i is to be retained as an item in the scale.¹³

The result of any Mokken scaling procedure is usually the identification of a subset of two or more of the items – sometimes even the entire set – that are sufficiently transitive to constitute a measurement instrument. Respondents get one point for each correct response to an item from the scale.¹⁴ They are assigned a scale value that corresponds to their total number of correct responses. This scale value is interpretable as a rank number: the higher the number, the more knowledge a respondent is deemed to have. For some

statistical tests (e.g., t-tests, correlations, and regressions), however, we will interpret respondents' scale values as if they were measured on an interval scale.

4 Results

4.1 Results of the scale analyses

Before looking for an overarching scale that would incorporate questions from all five potential domains, we looked for scales in each domain separately. In each of the domains a number of items were found that together formed a Mokken scale. However, there were also one or more items in each domain that did not take part in a domain scale. (These items did not form the kernel of a second scale either.)

The Appendix shows first the items that make up a scale for each of the five domains, followed by the items that do not. The last scale reported is a general scale, which consists of a subset of 15 items from the 43 items and which reflects all five domains. All the items in the general scale also formed part of the scale for their own domain. Note that most item homogeneity coefficients are above the critical lower boundary of 0.30. We accepted one item with a $H(i)$ value of 0.29 and two with a value of .28.

Even though the scales are adequately homogeneous by the default criteria used in Mokken scale analysis, most of them are not very reliable, as measured with the reliability coefficient ρ (Mokken 1971). The domain scale on parliamentary history and political ideology is an exception, with a ρ of 0.69. Only the general scale can be regarded as adequately reliable (with a ρ of 0.78), so we will concentrate on this scale in our discussion of the gender gap in political knowledge.

One striking result from this scale analysis is that the items in the general scale are less difficult on average than the whole set of 43 items. Most of the more difficult items have been sifted out of the general knowledge scale as too idiosyncratic (i.e., respondents' ability to answer them did not predict their ability to answer other questions). Ten of the fifteen items in the general scale were answered correctly by more than half the journalists (they are relatively 'easy', with a $p(i)$ -value over .50), whereas the whole set of items contained 19 'easy' and 24 'difficult' items.¹⁵ Retrospective analysis of the results obtained by Vis (1995) shows the same pattern. In Vis's study, only 22 of the original 60 items remained after a Mokken scale analysis, and these were also mainly 'easy'. This may well be the consequence of trying to find common ground among all parliamentary journalists. But when the 'difficult' items are left out, the overall evaluation of respondents' political knowledge automatically becomes more positive. Conversely, applying any set of knowledge questions without

first sifting them for common structure leaves more 'difficult' idiosyncratic items in, which is likely to lead to lower average scores. We suspect that this happened with the measurement of historical knowledge of Dutch Members of Parliament (see also endnote 11).

4.2 Political knowledge of parliamentary journalists: the gender gap confirmed

The general scale consisted of 15 items, so our respondents could obtain between 0 and 15 points. Their mean score was 9.0 (standard deviation 3.0). This is 60% of the maximum score. In a meeting at which we gave a preliminary overview of our first findings, the parliamentary journalists interpreted this score as a school grade, which made the headlines in the newspapers the next day: "Journalists get a fat six" (*Volkskrant* 1999), and "Meager six for journalists" (*Trouw* 1999).¹⁶ Both newspapers noted that this was emphatically *not* the interpretation of the researchers, however much we had been invited to give such an evaluation.

Knowledge differed widely across the five potential domains. Our respondents were most at home in matters of public law, followed by questions about European integration, decolonization, and recent parliamentary history and ideology. They were the least knowledgeable about core statistics. See Table 1. Of the 43 items there were six for which the female respondents received a higher score than the men, although not significantly so. These were for questions about the head of the province (men: 74%; women: 81%); the difference between Kok and Blair (men: 55%, women: 65%); Article 7 of the Constitution (men: 30%, women: 42%); differences between two courts

Table 1 Correct responses to knowledge scales in different political domains (N=145)
(N: number of respondents; k: number of items in the scale)

	mean score	percentage of maximum score	standard deviation
General scale (k=15)	9.0	60%	3.0
Public law (k=4)	2.7	67%	1.0
European integration (k=4)	2.5	62%	1.1
Decolonization (k=5)	2.7	56%	1.2
Recent parliamentary history and political ideology (k=8)	4.1	51%	1.9
Core statistics (k=5)	1.9	38%	1.2

of justice (men: 22%, women: 35%); the percentage of organized labour (men: 11%, women: 12%); and the minimum wage (men: 5%, women: 15%). Of the remaining 37 items, men had a significantly higher score than women on only 5: the size of the budget (men: 25%, women: 0%); the meaning of the mandement (men: 57%, women: 23%); first supra-national European organization (men: 80%, women: 62%); the number of members in the European Parliament (men: 67%, women: 23%), and the parties that constituted the Den Uyl cabinet (men: 41%, women: 12%).

However, for reasons explained above, it is better to compare subgroups of respondents by looking not at all items, but just at those items that together make up a scale. Our expectation that female journalists have less political knowledge on average than their male colleagues is corroborated by their performance on the general scale, in which they scored an average of 2.2 points less (out of a maximum of 15) than the men. Among the men, 8% had a score of 5 or less and 40% had a score of 11 or more. Among the women, 31% had a score of 5 or less and 4% had a score of 11 or more. Women also scored lower on all five domain scales, significantly so for all domains except knowledge of legal procedures (see Table 2).

Table 2 Correct responses to knowledge scales in different political domains for men and women

	Men N=117		Women N=26		significance
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	
General scale (k=15)	9.4	3.0	7.2	2.5	$p < .001$
Public law (k=4)	2.8	1.0	2.5	0.9	$p > .10$
European integration (k=4)	2.6	1.1	2.0	1.3	$p < .05$
Decolonization (k=5)	2.9	1.1	2.0	1.1	$p < .001$
Recent parliamentary history and political ideology (k=8)	4.3	2.0	3.2	1.5	$p < .01$
Core statistics (k=5)	2.0	1.2	1.5	0.9	$p < .05$

4.3 Explaining the gender gap

What should we make of the difference in political knowledge between male and female journalists? Is it 'real', or can it be explained away by controlling for other more truly explanatory variables? In this section we test five possible alternative explanations for the gender gap in a multivariate analysis design: 1)

age and experience, 2) education, 3) generalist versus specialist orientation, 4) political preference, and 5) branch of the press.

We evaluated these explanations with a multiple linear regression analysis, using the knowledge scale (Knowscale) as the dependent variable. First, we will 'explain' the variation in political knowledge using gender as the single explanatory variable, i.e., as the simplest model, and then compare the explanatory power of gender with that of our other five candidate explanatory variables.

Gender – A simple regression analysis with the total scale score (Knowscale, values between 0 and 15) as the dependent variable and Gender (Man=1, Woman=0) as the independent variable gives the following result:

$$\text{Knowscale} = 7.23 + 2.20 \times \text{Gender} \quad R = .28 \quad R^2 = .08$$

This shows that the score on the knowledge scale has the predicted value of $7.23 + 2.20 \times 0 = 7.23$ for all women, and the predicted value of $7.23 + 2.20 \times 1 = 9.43$ for all men. Since not all women in fact have the value 7.23, and not all men have the value 9.43, these predicted values correlate only 0.28 with the values on the political knowledge scale that were actually observed for women and men. This in turn means that 8% of the variation in political knowledge is explained by the gender difference.

Age and experience – Is it plausible that older or more experienced journalists have more political knowledge than younger or less experienced ones? If women are on average younger or less experienced than men, this might explain away the gender differences. Both Kaiser's (1985) study and our own discussions with our journalist consultants suggest that experience of at least five years as a parliamentary journalist is beneficial for understanding "life under the cheese dome of The Hague". In our study, age and years of experience correlate significantly with the knowledge scale ($r(\text{age}, \text{knowscale}) = .26$, and $r(\text{experience}, \text{knowscale}) = .21$). They can therefore be considered as explanatory variables. However, neither the age difference between men and women (men are on average 40.6 years old and women 38.5 years old) nor the difference in years of experience (men have on average 7.4 years experience and women 7.9 years) are statistically significant. This means that it is unlikely that age and experience can explain away the gender gap.

Given the high correlation between age and experience ($r = .58$), one of them is superfluous in a regression equation. We have selected age rather than years of experience, because it has a higher correlation with the knowledge scale. Treating both gender and age as explanatory variables shows separate significant effects for both variables. The regression equation now becomes:

$$\text{Knowscale} = 3.99 + 2.11x\text{Gender} + 0.082x\text{Age} \quad R = .36 \quad R^2 = .13$$

Gender: man=1, woman=0; age: between 23 and 59

A 23-year-old female journalist would be predicted to have a value of $3.99 + 2.11 \times 0 + 0.082 \times 23 = 5.88$, and a 59-year-old male journalist would be predicted to have a value of $3.99 + 2.11 \times 1 + 0.082 \times 59 = 10.94$.

Adding age as an explanatory variable increases the correlation between predicted and observed value on the knowledge scale, and increases the explained amount of variance of the knowledge scale. However, age differences are additional; they do not explain away gender differences.

Education – Political knowledge may increase with the amount of formal education. If the female journalists are less educated than the male, educational differences may be enough to explain away gender differences.

In our study half of the parliamentary journalists had completed a university education. Another 10% had followed a higher professional education, 25% a higher secondary education, and 15% a medium-level education or less. A one-way analysis of variance shows that there is a significant difference in political knowledge among these four groups ($F=2.68$, $df_1=3$, $df_2=140$, $p=.05$). Education can therefore be considered an explanatory variable. Paired comparisons show that the only significant difference is between students who followed a higher professional education and those who did not: students who followed a higher professional education have significantly less political knowledge than the other groups combined ($t=2.82$, $df=143$, $p=.005$).

There is a significant difference in the education of male and female journalists ($\chi^2=7.76$, $df=3$, $p=.05$; see Table 3). Female journalists had followed secondary or higher professional education more often than men. Education therefore might indeed explain away the gender gap.

A two-way ANOVA with gender and education as the independent variables shows that there are significant differences in political knowledge among the different groups ($F=3.26$, $df_1=7$, $df_2=134$, $p=.003$, $R^2 = .15$). Here again, only the parameters for gender and for the dummy variable that indicates higher professional education are significant.

Table 3 Level of education of male and female parliamentary journalists.

	Medium level	Secondary level	Higher professional level	University level	total
Women	4%	39%	19%	39%	100%
Men	17%	22%	9%	52%	100%
Total	15%	25%	11%	49%	

Following different forms of education may well depend on the respondent's age. Higher professional education has only become popular in the recent past, so these differences in knowledge by education may be explained away by age difference. A one-way ANOVA shows, however, that there is no systematic difference in age among the groups who followed the four types of education ($F=2.11$, $df_1=3$, $df_2=134$, $p=0.10$). And a regression analysis with education simplified into a dummy variable (higher professional education followed=1, not followed=0), together with gender and age as the three predictors shows that all three predictors have a significant effect. The regression equation is now:

$$\text{Knowscale} = 4.36 + 2.17x\text{Gender} + 0.093x\text{Age} - 1.84x\text{HighProfEduc} \\ R = .40 \quad R^2 = .16$$

Gender: man=1, woman=0; age: between 23 and 59

HighProfEduc: higher professional education followed=1, followed something else=0;

Since the most important place for higher professional education among journalists is schools of journalism, we asked our respondents whether they had attended such a school. 31% had and 69% had not. There is no significant difference between men and women here. The respondents who attended such a school are, however, significantly younger (36.5 years old) than the ones who did not (41.9 years old). The difference in political knowledge between respondents who did or did not go to a school of journalism is significant ($t=-3.12$, $df=142$, $p=.002$). Alumni of schools of journalism score on average 8.4 points (out of the maximum of 15), and the remaining group scores on average 10.2 points.

And indeed, replacing the dummy variable for education ('followed higher professional education or not') by the dichotomous variable attended a school for journalism or not (yes=1, no=0), increases the explained variance of the model. The regression equation now becomes:

$$\text{Knowscale} = 5.44 + 2.38x\text{Gender} + 0.068x\text{Age} - 1.44x\text{SchoolofJ} \\ R = .42 \quad R^2 = .17$$

Gender: man=1, woman=0; age: between 23 and 59

School of journalism: attended=1, not attended =0.

Generalists versus specialists – Journalists who specialize in certain departments of government may focus so strongly on their specialization that they lose an overview of the whole spectrum of political events. In this case generalists would outperform the specialists on a scale of political knowledge that taps

questions from a broad spectrum. We asked our respondents whether they considered themselves to be specialists, covering specific departments of government, or generalists, following politics as a whole. Only 10% of the respondents said they did both. The remaining 90% was approximately equally divided between generalists (43%) and specialists (46%). Generalists score 10.2 points on the general political knowledge scale, and specialists 9.1 (the third group scores 9.8 points). The difference between specialists and generalists is borderline significant ($t=1.93$, $df=128$, $p=.056$). There is a significant difference in the number of male and female generalists (men: 48%, women: 27%), and specialists (men: 41%, women: 69%). Among the men, 11% considered themselves both specialist and generalist (this was true for 3% of the women) ($c^2 = 6.93$, $df=2$, $p=.03$).

Adding the specialist-generalist distinction as a dummy variable (specialist=1, not a specialist=0), and adding this predictor to the existing regression equation, shows that being a specialist does not change the equation. Nor does leaving gender out of the equation as a predictor turn 'being a specialist' into a significant variable. Hence, to the extent that specialists and generalists differ in their amount of political knowledge, this difference does not explain the difference between male and female journalists. Generalists are slightly older than specialists (41 versus 39 years), but this difference is not statistically significant ($t=1.59$, $df=121$, $p=.12$).

Political preference – It has been suggested to us that political preference could be an additional reason for differences in political knowledge.¹⁷ Perhaps the underlying idea is that in the public at large, people who are ideologically oriented to the left have more political interest and more political knowledge than those who lean toward the right, or vice versa. Whether such a difference can be found among a group of professional journalists remains to be seen. We asked our respondents which party they had voted for in the last general election for the Tweede Kamer (May 1998). 14% of the journalists did not want to disclose their party choice. 30% had voted PvdA; 26% D66; 14% Green Left;

Table 4 Party choice of male and female parliamentary journalists who gave an answer to the question.

	PvdA	D66	GroenLinks + SP	Christian (CDA, GPV, SGP and RPF)	VVD
Women, N=19	18%	36%	41%	5%	0%
Men, N=99	39%	29%	12%	11%	8%
Total	35%	31%	17%	10%	7%

6% VVD; 4% GPV; 2% CDA; 2% SGP; 1% SP; and 1% RPF. There are significant differences between men and women in party preference ($c^2 = 13.7$, $df=4$, $p=.008$). These differences are shown in Table 4.

The overwhelming majority of parliamentary journalists voted left of centre in 1998. Only a few journalists voted VVD, and even fewer voted CDA. A one-way ANOVA shows significant differences in political knowledge among the members of these five party groups ($F=4.02$, $df=4$, $df_2=118$, $p=.004$). Mean scores on the political knowledge scale are: VVD: 7.8; Green Left: 9.4; PvdA: 9.7; D66: 9.9; and the Christian parties: 12.8. Adding dummy variables for having voted VVD and for having voted for a Christian party to the regression equation increases the percentage of variance explained. The regression equation now becomes:

$$\text{Knowscale} = 5.21 + 2.73 \times \text{Gender} + .066 \times \text{Age} - 1.19 \times \text{School of J} + 2.47 \times \text{Voted Christian} - 2.32 \times \text{Voted VVD}.$$

$$R = .54 \quad R^2 = .29$$

Gender: man=1, woman=0; age: between 23 and 59

School of journalism: attended=1, not attended=0; Voted Christian/ voted VVD: yes=1, no=0.

If we omit gender as an explanatory variable from this regression equation, R drops to .44 and R^2 to .19, so gender alone accounts for a substantial amount of the explained variance in political knowledge.

Branch of the press – Research has shown that newspapers and television play different roles in distributing news: television is better suited to directing initial attention to an issue, whereas newspapers are better suited to continuing a debate (Dimock & Popkin 1997; Noelle-Neumann 1992; Saxer 1992). The public regards the radio and television as more volatile media than newspapers and magazines. For fear that listeners or viewers might switch to a different channel, sound bites of politicians generally do not last more than 15 seconds. This might mean that the political knowledge of journalists from radio and television is more superficial than that of their colleagues from the written press. In a study with a slightly different purpose, Croteau (1998) found that American journalists judged the quality of economic policy coverage as 'excellent' or 'good' more often for the major daily newspapers (65%) than for public broadcasting (45%), cable news service (32%) and broadcast network TV news (6%). Our journalist consultants did not share our expectation, however. They did not see any reason why there should be differences in political knowledge between journalists from different media.

They were right. We do not find significant differences in political knowledge between journalists working for the two types of medium ($t=1.07$,

$df=142$, $p=.29$). Nor is there a significant difference in the percentage of women working for the written press (19% of them are women, 81% are men) and those working for radio or television (16% women, 84% men). A regression analysis with type of medium and gender as predictors shows that only the gender effect is significant.

In short: the difference in political knowledge between men and women cannot be explained away by invoking a number of other explanatory variables. The puzzle remains.

5 Summary and discussion

Our study of Dutch parliamentary journalists is the first since Kaiser's (1985) somewhat broader investigation. In this paper we have focused on the political knowledge of parliamentary journalists. We distinguished five domains of political knowledge: public law, parliamentary history, decolonization, European integration, and core statistics. Of the 43 knowledge questions asked, 15 could be used as a general measurement instrument or scale to compare journalists on their political knowledge. On average, they gave the correct response to 60% of these questions. Knowledge of public law had the highest score (67% of scaleable questions answered correctly), and knowledge of core statistics the lowest (38%).

As expected, male journalists have more political knowledge than their female colleagues, and political knowledge increases with age and amount of experience in the field. More surprisingly, we also found that students of a school of journalism had significantly less political knowledge than those who had followed a different education, and that political party preference mattered to some extent: journalists who had voted vvd had less political knowledge, and journalists who had voted for a Christian party more political knowledge than their colleagues. We did not find systematic differences in political knowledge between journalists from the written press and from radio or television, nor did we find that generalists had more political knowledge than specialists.

In a meeting in The Hague on July 24 1999, we presented a number of first results to our group of respondents. We wanted to thank them for their willingness to respond: the response rate in this study was 81%, which was much higher than we had initially hoped for. The journalists present at this meeting were mainly interested in hearing a normative judgment about their political knowledge: do they know enough? And do they know more than the Dutch Members of Parliament, who had been criticized for their lack of historical knowledge? Even though we refused to answer these questions, they gave their own interpretation: 60% correct answers implies that their political

knowledge is sufficient.

By this standard (60% correct answers for scaleable items), journalists' knowledge of one domain – core statistics – is, however, insufficient. Many journalists seem to feel that there is no need to know numbers. Numbers change all the time, and they can easily be looked up. The Nobel price winner Paulos (1988) calls this attitude "innumeracy". Even though it is uncivilized not to be able to use letters (i.e., not to read or write, to be illiterate), it is seen as acceptable – even elite – not to be able to use numbers (i.e., not to be good in arithmetic and mathematics, to be innumerate). Just like medieval kings, who left reading and writing – the use of letters – to their clerks, present day elites leave the use of numbers to their competent subordinates. In our opinion, however, it is important to have a frame of reference in which new numbers can be compared to meaningful existing numbers. We regard innumeracy as a corollary of the cultural illiteracy that Hirsch talked about.

Is the political knowledge of Dutch parliamentary journalist sufficient to prevent political illiteracy in the general public of The Netherlands? The question, 'what should journalists know', has not been answered in this paper. But it is probably the most interesting one of all. This question is easily extended to 'what every American should know' (the title of Hirsch's book on cultural literacy), or 'what every student should learn at school'. If everything can be looked up, then who decides what it is important to know, and what it is not? These are important issues, which touch on the cultural roots of our society, but we are not able to resolve them. We believe that it is important to explore the descriptive issues before embarking on the normative issues. In this study, then, we have focused on *describing* the amount of political knowledge without necessarily knowing which or how much political knowledge should be *prescribed*. Only by allowing empirical research in these matters will we be able to understand what is happening to the shared cultural elements in our society. We are grateful to the Dutch parliamentary journalists for their cooperation.

Notes

1. Previous versions of this paper were presented at the European Sociological Association Meeting in Amsterdam, August 18-21 1999, and at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops in Copenhagen, April 14-19 2000. The authors thank Melissa Bowerman and Herbert H. Clark for their editorial help, and two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

2. "... half could not locate the half century in which the First World War occurred; a third did not know that Columbus sailed for the New World "before 1750"; "... and one-half of our high school seniors did not recognize the names of Winston Churchill or Joseph Stalin" Hirsch 1987:218.

3. This paragraph is based on Claessen's paper.
4. A. Scherphuis (1986), "Als je iets wilt bereiken moet je in strategieën denken", in: *Voor zover plaats aan de perstafel*. Amsterdam. As quoted in Jansen.
5. For instance: for the Netherlands:
www.villamedia.nl;
www.parlement.nl;
www.dnpp.rug.nl;
 for the USA:
www.nerdworld.com/trees/nw1150.html;
www.abanet.org/publiced/tools.html;
www.spj.org;
www.vote-smart.org/about/services/reporters.html;
www.ajr.newslink.org;
www.mediasource.com/faq.html;
www2.netdoor.com/~smlady/newspaper.html.
6. See Eindrapport Bijlmerenquete, Chapter 4.1. SDU: 's-Gravenhage. Also on Internet: <http://www.parlement.nl>.
7. Gender differences are also found in geographical knowledge (Beukenkamp & Van der Schee 1989: 6-7; Kuhlemeijer et al. 1994: 80-82, 134).
8. Frequency distributions that show the actual figures are available from the authors on request.
9. In 1998 the author of a Dutch Cultural Dictionary (Kohnstamm), asked a number of first-year psychology students about their knowledge of some Dutch cultural symbols (e.g., names of celebrities or notorious people, important dates). He was appalled by their lack of cultural knowledge. In a television programme his approach was criticized by a historian (Van Rossem), who believed that researchers who ask knowledge questions always and only take their own knowledge as a frame of reference: "Everybody else should know what I know". This attitude seems to rule out the possibility of making meaningful comparisons.
10. We would particularly like to express our thanks to the journalists Willem Breedveld, Max de Bok, Henk van Hoorn, Jean-Pierre Geelen, Lucas Goossens, Mark Kranenburg, Stephan Koole, Hans Laroës, Clairy Polak, and Max van Wezel, and to the field experts Jos Beishuizen (faculty of psychology, University of Leiden), Alfons Dölle (faculty of law, University of Groningen), Gerrit Voerman (faculty of history, University of Groningen) and Huub Wijffjes (faculty of journalism, University of Groningen).
11. In passing we note that this procedure was not followed in the 'measurement' of the historical knowledge of Dutch MPs. The implication of the procedure followed by Rensman & Bossman is, however, that their measurement instrument may contain many largely idiosyncratic items, and may therefore be useless for evaluative purposes.
12. In some disciplines the term 'transitivity' is replaced by another term like 'cumulativity', or 'implication'.
13. For the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that Mokken defines two probabilistic models, the MH model of monotone homogeneity and the DM model of double monotonicity. The scales that we present here conform to both models. This

conclusion is based on model tests executed with the MSPWIN program (Molenaar et al. 2000).

14. Mokken's scale analysis is not restricted to dichotomous items. It can also be applied to ordered multi-category items (e.g., Likert-type rating scales) (Sijtsma et al. 1990).

15. It must be emphasized that whether an item is sufficiently homogeneous or not (i.e., not idiosyncratic) is independent of its 'easiness' or 'difficulty'.

16. In the Dutch school grading system, a six (on a scale between 1 and 10, where 1 is terrible and 10 is excellent) is a pass grade. It means 'sufficient', but no more than that.

17. By one of the anonymous reviewers.

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Appendix: The knowledge questions and the different scales

Scale 1: Legal procedures

(Homogeneity value: 0.41)

- p(i) percentage of respondents who give the correct answer to knowledge question i.
Reading example: 39% of the respondents gave the correct answer to question V64.
- H(i) value of Loevinger's coefficient of homogeneity of knowledge question i from a Mokken scale analysis. Values should be larger than 0.30 to be sufficiently homogeneous to be part of a scale.
- D.K. Percentage of respondents who do not give an answer or who indicate that they don't know. The percentage of respondents who give the wrong answer is 100% - p(i) - p(D.K.).

	p(i)	H(i)	D.K.
V64 What are the four rights of the Eerste Kamer (Upper House) to check on the government? <i>Answer: 1. Right to interpellate; 2. Right to ask written questions; 3. Right to check the budget; 4. Right to enquire. Accepted as correct: at least two mentioned.</i>	39%	.42	30%
V63 What are the two rights of the Tweede Kamer (Lower House) in the area of legislation? <i>Answer: 1. Right to take initiative; 2. Right to make amendments. Accepted as correct: both rights mentioned.</i>	53%	.34	11%
V67 After a decision in the council of ministers, can a minister pronounce that he is against that decision? <i>Answer: No. (Otherwise he will have to resign. Every minister is responsible for the entire government policy.)</i>	83%	.43	4%
V65 What are the prerogatives of the enquête-commissie (parliamentary inquiry commission) that are unavailable to an ordinary commission of the Tweede Kamer? <i>Answer: to interrogate people under oath.</i>	97%	.66	1%

Reliability rho: .51.

Non-scalable items in this domain:	p(i)	D.K.
V62 What is the content of Article 7 of the Dutch Constitution? <i>Answer: Freedom of speech, freedom of the press.</i>	32%	54%
V68 What is the legal difference between the SER and the Stichting van de Arbeid? <i>Answer: the SER is a public organization, the Stichting van de Arbeid is a private organization.</i>	42%	28%
V66 How does the relationship of the Dutch and British prime ministers to the other ministers differ? <i>Answer: the British prime minister can fire another minister, the Dutch prime minister cannot.</i>	56%	23%
V61 What organ is formally the head of the province? <i>Answer: The Provincial Council.</i>	74%	2%

The items in the scale all deal with situations of the national parliament or the government, whereas the non-scaling items deal with other situations. Knowing the reference to the specific article in the Constitution that deals with freedom of the press apparently is not part of Dutch journalistic culture. We note that the survey was held in the months immediately after the elections for the Provincial Council. This makes it all the more remarkable that 26% of the respondents did not know that the Provincial Council is formally the head of the province.

Scale 2: Core statistics

(Homogeneity coefficient: 0.34)

	p(i)	H(i)	D.K.
V71 What percentage of the national budget of 1999 is devoted to paying back the national debt and the interest over it? ¹ <i>Answer: 13.5%. Accepted as correct: 12-15%.²</i>	7%	.40	50%
V69 What is the size of the national budget of 1999? ³ <i>Answer: 232 billion guilders. Accepted as correct: 200-260 billion.⁴</i>	20%	.32	35%
V76 What is presently the monthly legal minimum wage for people 23 years or older? <i>Answer: f2345.20. Accepted as correct: 2100-2600 guilders.⁵</i>	27%	.28	17%
V74 What was the number of waoers (people unable to work) in autumn 1998? <i>Answer: 900.000. Accepted as correct: 800.000-1.000.000.⁶</i>	69%	.44	6%
V70 What are the three largest items on the national budget? <i>Answer: National debt, education (including culture and science), social benefits and employment. Accepted: at least two correct.</i>	69%	.28	5%

Reliability rho: .51.

Non-scalable items in this domain:	p(i)	D.K.
V75 What is presently (since January 1, 1999) the monthly net benefit for a single adult (21 years of age or older, no children). <i>Answer: f999.61. Accepted as correct: 900-1100 guilders.⁷</i>	8%	9%
V73 What percentage of the Dutch labour force is organized in a trade union? <i>Answer: 25%. Accepted as correct: 22-28%.⁸</i>	11%	9%
V78 From which two countries did most of the political asylum seekers come in 1997 and 1998? <i>Answer: Afghanistan and Iraq. Both mentioned.⁹</i>	21%	6%
V77 What percentage of Dutch inhabitants is Muslim? <i>Answer: (in 1998:) 4.4%. Accepted as correct: 3-5%.¹⁰</i>	33%	18%
V72 What is the size of the Dutch labour force? <i>Answer: 6.8 million. Accepted as correct: 6.0-7.5 million.¹¹</i>	34%	15%

It is possible that questions about asylum seekers and the size of the Muslim population do not fit a scale that consists predominantly of socio-economic indicators. But we have no explanation for the lack of scalability of the other three items.

Scale 3: European Integration

(Homogeneity coefficient: 0.37)

	p(i)	H(i)	D.K.
V88 How many members does the European Commission have? <i>Answer: 20. Accepted as correct: 18 - 22.¹²</i>	41%	.42	8%
V86 How many members does the European Parliament have? <i>Answer: 626. Accepted as correct: 550 - 700.¹³</i>	49%	.33	14%
V79 What was the first form of cooperation within Western Europe after the Second World War with a supranational character? <i>Answer: The European Union for Coal and Steel.</i>	77%	.29	4%
V84 Can the European Parliament remove an individual member of the European Commission? <i>Answer: No (only the full Commission).</i>	84%	.48	3%

Reliability Rho: .55.

Non-scalable items in this domain:	p(i)	D.K.
V83 What is the difference between the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg and the European Court of Justice in Strasbourg? <i>Answer: The court in Luxembourg is the court of the European Union. It ensures that the treaties are abided by. The court in Strasbourg ensures that the European Treaty of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms is implemented.</i>	25%	54%
V80 Which three motives were at the foundation of the European unification after the Second World War? <i>Answer: a) no more war between France and Germany, create an axis between the two; b) economic: scale advantages of single market; removal of toll boundaries; c) political: abolish nationalism, increase European integration. Accepted as correct: at least two motives mentioned.</i>	30%	6%
V87 How many Dutch members does the European Parliament have? <i>Answer: 31. Accepted as correct: 28-34.¹⁴</i>	32%	19%
V82 What is the highest organ in the European Union? <i>Answer: the Council of (national) Ministers.</i>	52%	4%
V85 Does the European Parliament have the prerogative of co-legislation? <i>Answer: Yes.</i>	54%	9%

	p(i)	D.K.
V81 Who appoints the members of the European Commission, except for the Chairman?	59%	7%
<i>Answer: national governments select their own national candidates.¹⁵</i>		

One reason for the non-scalability of some items may be that the question was improperly phrased (as has been suggested for the question about the selection of members of the EC). Another reason may be that respondents have a good memory for a preceding period (e.g., when The Netherlands had 25 members in the EP, before its extension from 567 to 626 members in 1995). Still other reasons why some of the items do not form part of the scale may be the existence of commonly held false perceptions (e.g., that the European Commission is the highest organ in the EU), or that knowledge of a fact requires too specialized knowledge (as in the case of the question about the different European Courts of Justice).

Scale 4: Parliamentary history and political ideology

(Homogeneity value: 0.37)

	p(i)	H(i)	D.K.
V96 What is an important difference in legal views between SGP and GPV (two small Dutch protestant parties)?	24%	.4	41%
<i>Answer: SGP does not accept the separation of church and state, gpv does.¹⁶</i>			
V97 Since when has The Netherlands existed as a separate state? ¹⁷	27%	.33	18%
<i>Answer: since 1648.</i>			
V90 Which political parties participated in the Den Uyl cabinet?	36%	.42	2%
<i>Answer: PvdA-KVP-ARP-D66-PPR – all 5 parties must be mentioned.¹⁸</i>			
V89 From which social current did the first nationally organized political Party originate?	39%	.33	10%
<i>Answer: protestant - Calvinist.</i>			
V92 What was the content of the (Roman Catholic) Bisschoppe-lijk Mandement of 1954?	51%	.41	35%
<i>Answer: Roman Catholics should not participate in social-democratic organizations, e.g., be a member of the social-democratic broadcasting corporation.</i>			
V91 In what period of Dutch history did the first large political parties originate?	56%	.36	6%
<i>Answer: in the last quarter of the 19th century.</i>			
V95 Of which party group in the European Parliament is D66 a member?	86%	.47	7%
<i>Answer: European Liberal and Democrats.</i>			
V93 What political issue led to the largest protest marches in the early 1980s?	94%	.41	3%
<i>Answer: nuclear armament, cruise missiles.</i>			

Reliability Rho: .69.

Non-scalable questions in this domain:	p(i)	D.K.
V94 How many Dutch Jews were deported to the concentration camps during the Second World War?	20%	28%
<i>Answer: 107.000. Accepted as correct: between 95.000 and 120.000.¹⁹</i>		

This set of questions forms the most scalable domain of political knowledge. It has a higher reliability than scales in the other domains. The question about the Jews is the most difficult in this group.

Scale 5: Decolonization²⁰

(Homogeneity value: 0.37)

	p(i)	H(i)	D.K.
V100 What was the highest number of Dutch soldiers after the Second World War in the Dutch Indies? <i>Answer: 140.000. Accepted: 120.000 - 160.000.</i> ²³	5%	.45	52%
V101 In what year did The Netherlands lose legal control over West New Guinea? <i>Answer: 1962. Accepted as correct: 1960 - 1964.</i> ²⁴	48%	.43	12%
V98 In what year was the RMS (Independent Molukken Republic) founded? <i>Answer: 1950. Accepted as correct: 1948 - 1952.</i> ²⁵	55%	.34	22%
V103 What are the three parts of the Kingdom of The Netherlands? <i>Answer: The Netherlands, the Dutch Antilles, and Aruba.</i>	81%	.35	5%
V99 What does the abbreviation KNIL mean? <i>Answer: Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger (Royal Dutch Indian Army).</i>	86%	.34	12%

Reliability Rho: .55.

Non-scalable item in this domain:

	p(i)	D.K.
V102 Can you mention at least two names of presidents of independent Surinam? <i>Answer: Ferrier, Shankar, Chin a Sen, Kraag, Venetiaan, Wijdenbosch. Accepted as correct: at least 2 mentioned.</i>	32%	15%

Most questions in this scale deal with the former Dutch colonies in the East. Apparently we should not look for structure in knowledge about the Dutch ex-colonies as a whole, but for separately structured knowledge about the different ex-colonies.

General scale, consisting of 15 items

(Homogeneity coefficient: 0.37)

	p(i)	H(i)
V71 What percentage of the national budget is devoted to paying back the national debt and the interest over it? <i>Answer: 13.5%. Accepted: 12-15%.</i>	7%	.32
V96 What is an important difference in legal views between SGP and GPV (two small Dutch Protestant parties)? <i>Answer: SGP does not accept the separation of church and state, GPV does.</i>	24%	.39
V97 Since when has The Netherlands existed as a separate state? <i>Answer: since 1648.</i>	27%	.32
V90 Which political parties participated in the Den Uyl cabinet? <i>Answer: PvdA-KVP-ARP-D66-PPR - all 5 parties mentioned.</i>	36%	.48
V101 In what year did The Netherlands lose legal control over West New Guinea? <i>Answer: 1962. Accepted: 1960 - 1964.</i>	48%	.38
V92 What was the content of the (Roman Catholic) Bisschoppelijk Mandement of 1954? <i>Answer: Roman Catholics should not participate in social-democratic organizations, e.g., be a member of the social-democratic broadcasting corporation.</i>	51%	.45
V91 In what period in Dutch history did the first large political parties originate? <i>Answer: in the last quarter of the 19th century.</i>	56%	.30
V74 What was the number of WAOers (people unfit to work) in autumn 1998? <i>Answer: 900.000. Accepted: 800.000 - 1.000.000.</i>	68%	.32
V70 What are the three largest items on the national budget? <i>Answer: National debt, education, social benefits. Accepted: at least two correct</i>	69%	.29
V79 What was the first form of cooperation, within Western Europe after the Second World War with a supranational character? <i>Answer: The European Union for Coal and Steel.</i>	77%	.37
V103 What are the three parts of the Kingdom of The Netherlands? <i>Answer: The Netherlands, the Dutch Antilles, and Aruba</i>	82%	.39
V67 After a decision in the council of ministers, can a minister pronounce that he is against that decision? <i>Answer: No.</i>	84%	.33
V95 Of which party group in the European Parliament is D66 a member? <i>Answer: European Liberal and Democrats.</i>	86%	.37

		p(i)	H(i)
V93	What political issue led to the largest protest marches in the early 1980s? <i>Answer: nuclear armament, cruise missiles.</i>	94%	.41
V65	What are the prerogatives of the enquête-commissie (parliamentary inquiry commission). <i>Answer: to interrogate people under oath.</i>	97%	.68

Reliability rho: .79.

Notes

1. After we had presented our first results in a meeting of parliamentary journalists, one journalist wrote in a column in his newspaper that he felt indignant that he should have to know such a thing. He compared the knowledge of this number to knowing the final result of the Dutch soccer competition of twenty years ago. (Verdonk, in *Trouw*, 26 July 1999).

2. Approximately as many too-low answers (lowest: 0, 1, or 2%) as too-high answers (highest: 60, 70, or 75%).

3. One of our senior journalist informers suggested skipping this question because it would be too easy: "surely every parliamentary journalist knows this?" Not so, apparently.

4. A quarter of the answers were too low (lowest: 3, or 16 billion), and more than 40% of the answers were too high (highest: 600, 700, 800, and even 900 billion).

5. 70% gave a too-low response (lowest: 1000, 1100, or 1200), and only 2% gave a too-high response (highest: 2800).

6. 17% gave a too-low answer (lowest: 90, 100 or 200 thousand); 10% gave a too-high answer (highest: 0.98, 1.00, or 1.4 million).

7. A too-low answer was given by 2% of the respondents (lowest: 600, 850), but 90% were too high (highest: 2100, 2300, or 2500).

8. A quarter of the answers were too low (lowest: 0, 5, or 10%), 40% were too high (highest: 70, 75, or 85%).

9. Other countries mentioned: Iran (25%), Somalia (19%), Yugoslavia (including Serbia and Croatia, 40%), Ghana (2%).

10. 18% of the answers were too low (2% or less), and 40% were too high (highest: 11, 15, or 20%).

11. One third of the answers was too low (lowest: 2, 3, or 3.5 million), a quarter was too high (highest: 10, 10.5, or 11 million).

11. More than 50% of the answers were too low (lowest: 6, 7, or 8), and 5% were too high (highest: 25, 26, or 28).

12. 40% of the answers were too low (lowest: 200, 300, or 350); 3% were too high (highest: 750, 780, or 900).

13. 35% of the answers were too low (lowest: 10, 12, or 12); 25% were too high (highest: 70, 80, or 100).

14. In a meeting with parliamentary journalists this answer was criticized on grounds that national governments only make a proposal. The European Parliament makes the final decision. So far, however, no proposal has ever been denied by the European Parliament.

15. The answer that women are not allowed to participate in the SGP whereas they are in the GPV was dismissed by the authors as not a distinction in legal view.

16. In a meeting with parliamentary journalists this question was criticized on grounds that what was founded in 1648 was not 'The Netherlands' as we know it now. Nevertheless, in 1998, a large German-Dutch celebration was held in Münster to celebrate the Peace Treaty of 1648.

17. Other parties mentioned: CDA (18%), Ds'70 (5%).

18. 6% gave a too-low answer (lowest: 30.000, 50.000 or 80.000), and 65% gave a too-high answer (highest: 1, 2, and 3 million).

19. In our meeting with parliamentary journalists this whole domain of political knowledge was criticized on grounds that knowledge about our colonial relations is irrelevant in present national politics.

20. 75% mentioned a lower number (lowest: 3, 4, or 6 thousand); 15% mentioned a higher number (highest: 200, 300, or 500 thousand).

21. 40% mentioned an earlier year (earliest: 1933, 1941, 1946), and 4% mentioned a later year (1968, 1969, or 1970).

22. 10% mentioned an earlier year (earliest: 1945, 1946, 1947), and 25% mentioned a later year (latest: 1966, 1972, 1974).