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## The 1979-1980 Dutch MP Questionnaire

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46. Een theorie en geen begrippenschema, typologie, raamwerk, of paradigma. De laatste bevatten in tegenstelling tot een theorie geen axiomatisch systeem, sluiten dientengevolge niets uit en zijn niet meer dan bonte collecties van definities en beschrijvingen van factoren, waarvan de onderzoeker vermoedt dat ze 'best' wel eens relevant zouden kunnen zijn voor de te verklaren verschijnselen. De gelijkenis met waslijsten is treffend.

Het grote probleem van deze typologieën, paradigmata, enzovoorts, is dat niet duidelijk wordt waarom bepaalde begrippen wel en andere begrippen niet zijn opgenomen, laat staan hoe deze begrippen zich tot elkaar verhouden. Dat de keuze van begrippen wel niet tot stand zal zijn gekomen middels een a-selecte steekproef uit de populatie zelfstandige naamwoorden, lijkt aannemelijk. De opsteller heeft criteria toegepast om te kunnen kiezen, de vraag is alleen: welke criteria?

47. C. E. Osgood, geciteerd door Przeworski en Teune (1970), blz. 11.

48. J. W. N. Watkins, *Historical Explanations in the Social Sciences*, in: O'Neill, J. (ed.), *Modes of Individualism and Collectivism* (London, 1973), blz. 166.

49. Lijphart (1971), blz. 687.

50. Meckstroth (1975), blz. 134.

51. Albert, Hans, *Theorie en Kritiek* (Meppel, 1976), blz. 57.

52. Hoetjes, B. S. J., Commentaar, in: *Acta Politica*, Vol. 8 (1973), 1, blz. 21.

53. Almond, Gabriel, *Political Theory and Political Science*, in: *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 60 (1966), 4, blz. 878. Zie ook Czudnowski (1976), blz. 10, Noldus, T., *Vergelijkende Politicologie*; kanttekeningen bij het artikel van U. Rosenthal, in: *Acta Politica*, Vol. 8 (1973), blz. 349; en De Vree, Johan K., *Foundations of Social and Political Processes* (Bilthoven, 1982), blz. 22-25.

54. Rosenthal (1973), blz. 19.

55. Wright, Quincy, *The Study of International Relations* (New York, 1955), blz. 25. Noldus geeft dan ook de volgende verklaringen voor het streven naar afbakening van subdisciplines: '... omdat al of niet erkenning van een subdiscipline doorgaans voor zijn beoefenaren wel of geen faciliteiten bij de academische bedrijfsorganisatie impliceert'. Noldus (1973), blz. 347.

56. Zie bij voorbeeld: Dray, William, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Londen, 1957), Gardiner, Patrick, *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (Oxford, 1952), Danto, A. C. *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge, 1965) en Wright, George H. von, *Explanation and Understanding* (Londen, 1971).

57. A. C. Pigou, in: *Economica*, New Series, Vol. V (1938), blz. 350. Zie voor deze problematiek met name: Hayek, F. A., *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Londen, 1967), blz. 3-42.

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## Onderzoek

### The 1979-1980 Dutch MP-Questionnaire\*

M. P. C. M. van Schendelen

'Empirical research has not been accompanied by the scientific self-consciousness that the many contradictory findings of legislative research demand'. (Eulau and Hinckley, 1966, 180)

It is generally believed that Members of Parliament are an important group of politicians, worth to be subjected to scientific research. But how should they be studied? In the leading journal, the *Legislative Studies Quarterly* not even one article has ever been devoted to this topic. The same applies to the two other journals in the field, the British *Parliamentary Affairs* and the German *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*. A book on 'parliametrics' does not exist. In none of the general handbooks on 'strategies of inquiry' there is a special chapter on 'how to inquire Members of Parliament'. The main research tools – content analysis, biographical analysis, interviewing, and behavioral analysis (including roll-calls) – seem to be taken for granted; only on roll-call-analysis some specialized literature exists (Fiorina, 1974). There is a seemingly wide-spread belief that the generally accepted tools of research in social science are also applicable to the case of parliaments. How valid is this belief? Both to stimulate a self-conscious reflection on the practice of parliamentary interviewing and to pass our own recent experiences and insights to future researchers, we shall here shortly describe the *1979-1980 Dutch MP-Questionnaire*: events that occurred, problems we got, and solutions we made.

#### Interviewing Dutch parliamentary elites

Until 1968 research on the Dutch Parliament was mainly legalistic and journalistic. The focus of research was on the constitutional powers of the Parliament and on the formal activities of its members. The main tool of research was analysis of the official Proceedings of the Parliament. As far as

\* This article is a much shortened version of my 'Interviewing Dutch Members of Parliament; events, problems, and solutions', paper presented to the ECPR Workshop on Elite Interviewing, Aarhus, 1982.

the tool of interviewing was used, it was limited to very small and select samples of MPs, approached and described in a journalistic way (Van Schendelen, 1974).

In 1968, for the first time, an oral questionnaire was carried out among the 150 members of the Second Chamber – which in the Netherlands is the main Chamber – and the 75 members of the First Chamber. The questionnaire, initiated by the political scientist Daalder, had an explorative nature and covered items as social backgrounds, recruitment, elections, Cabinet-formation, parliamentary influence, formal activities, staff-facilities, and personal involvement. The response-rate was 94%. The research resulted in a small mimeo-report and a few articles (Daalder, 1971). In 1972 a second MP Questionnaire was carried out. Again initiated by Daalder, it was now carried out in collaboration with political scientists from Tilburg and Rotterdam. It did not extend to the members of the First Chamber. The Second Chamber's response-rate was 87%. The questionnaire was explorative again and extended with such topics as: sympathy for MPs of other parties, policy-preferences, and aspects of information and decision-making processes. This time a small part of the questionnaire had a written form, to be filled in by the MP and, at the start of the oral interview, checked by the interviewer. The results of the research were put down in a few books and several articles (Van Schendelen, 1975; Kooiman, 1976; Hoogerwerf, 1979, for an overview).

In the winter of 1979-1980 the third MP Questionnaire was carried out, this time initiated by this author and with the participation of political scientists from six Dutch universities and three members of the Parliament's staff (including the Clerk of the Second Chamber). The response-rates were 93% for the Second Chamber and 88% for the First Chamber. Again the nature of the questionnaire was mainly explorative. More than half the questionnaire consisted of new questions, including new topics, such as: parliamentary ethics, governmental policy-making, the relationship with the political parties, social inequalities, mass-protests, and the relationship with common citizens. Again part of the questionnaire was in a written form, dealt with as in 1972. The results have recently been published in two books (Van Schendelen, a.o., 1981; Van Schendelen, 1981).

In more detail we shall now describe the ways in which the third questionnaire was carried out: the interview-design, the interviewer, the interviewee, the interview-setting, and the results.

(A) *The interview-design.* The 1979-1980 MP Questionnaire was not centered around one problem, leave alone around one theory to be tested; it was

a so-called 'omnibus-questionnaire'. This omnibus-character was an effect of the bringing together of about fifteen political scientists in one research-group. The main reason for this group-formation was a financial one: the final sponsor (ZWO) had made clear before that inter-university cooperation should strongly improve the chances of acquiring the research-money. A grant of about 200.00 Hfl. (appr. US\$. 90.000), including one research-fellow, was indeed made available within half a year after the date of request. But, having about fifteen political scientists in one research-group, it became inevitable to include in the questionnaire a wide variety of themes and topics: the same applies to the 1972 MP-Questionnaire, in which, on order of the sponsor, two initially separate interviews had to be pooled. The organizational structure of the project was basically a hierarchical one (compare Eaton, 1951). The daily management was in the hands of this author and the research-fellow (a position which, later on, was split up into two assistants). The functions of the plenary groups' participants were limited to the proposing of questions (a right) and, for each, the writing of one analytical chapter on the results (a duty). The daily management was controlled by a small group of three political scientists (Daudt, Van Schendelen, Thomassen), which group also edited the final questionnaire (of about 200 'oral questions' and 50 mainly biographical questions in written form) and the book with analytical chapters (Van Schendelen a.o., 1981).

(B) *The interviewers.* A team of fifteen interviewers (advanced students) was formed. Criteria of recruitment were not only advanced level of study, personal interest in MPs, adult appearance, accuracy, and social behavior, but also sex and outfit. From the 1972 and 1968 researches it had been understood that some MPs might be much more accessible to women than to men. Because, also among Dutch MPs, somebody's outfit seemed to be an important symbol of his political opinions, recruitment was also partially based on outfit. In order to facilitate a relationship of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee, both some interviewers with a rightwing outfit (clean, decent clothings, no beard) and some with a left-wing one (the opposite), were included in the team (compare Williams, 1964). As far as we had knowledge about the MPs' preferences and time-pressures permitted, we took the interviewers' sex and outfit into account during the interview process.

In advance, the interviewers were given a training in interview-techniques, this with the help of audio-visual aids and role-play, and they received detailed instructions on elite-interviewing in general (Jones, 1959) and our survey in particular. A main instruction was to feed-back all

special or unexpected experiences during the field-work and to come around at regular times, with the completed interviews, in order to check the progress and to keep high their commitments to the research. Similar procedures were followed in 1972. They have proven to be effective.

(C) *The interviewees.* The 1979-MPs were approached in the following way. To each MP a personal letter was sent, announcing the coming interview, providing basic information on its scientific purposes and its broad support from most of the Dutch universities and from the Second Chamber's Clerk, indicating that this major questionnaire would take between 1½ and 2 hours but also would save the MPs from several minor questionnaires in the next years, promising full individual anonymity, and asking for their willingness to cooperate. In order to hinder any possible official or collective reaction from their side, this letter was sent to the MP's private home address and not to his parliamentary office. About one week after the letter was sent, the MP was approached (personally or by phone) by the interviewer, who asked for a concrete appointment. Date, time and place were to the choice of the MP. Immediately after the appointment was made, a written confirmation was sent to the MP, together with the written part of the questionnaire. Similar practices to get accessible and willing respondents, have been followed in the earlier MP-researches.

Although many MPs showed hesitance to cooperate, most of them agreed to be interviewed. Within one month, nearly 75% of all final respondents (N = 205) were already been interviewed. The hesitant or unwilling MPs gave various reasons for this attitude. Some complained about some other questionnaire, in which the promise of anonymity was not kept; we replied that not we should be blamed for this and that our interviews would be held under anonymous numbers, would be destroyed afterwards, and would be protected against computerized re-identification (which are also the real facts). Others complained about never having received any results of the first and second MP-Questionnaire; the interviewers were instructed to explain that, whatever the case with these previous surveys was, this time the MPs would become informed about the results and, besides, they were given a quickly-made list of publications on the 1972 and 1968 questionnaires. The members of the Communist Party said to refuse out of principle ('bourgeois-research') and, as in 1968 and 1972, they could not be converted. Among the initial refusals were many members of the Liberal Party, in size the third party in Parliament; after making use of a private relationship with the chairman of this parliamentary party, finally nearly all these Liberals agreed to be interviewed. Some other reasons for initial or final non-response were

visits abroad and sickness. The final non-response was 9%.

The MP's reliability and honesty we have tried to check through an *inconsistency-test* on their answers. Four questions, put in the beginning of the interview, were repeated at the end, of which one in the same formulation and the other three with reversed contents. Consistency demands that the same question should get the same answer and the reversed questions the opposite answers. Although between the beginnings and the end of the interview there was a mean duration of more than 1½ hour, most respondents very soon appeared to recognize the repetition as such and became intensely irritated. Already in the second week of the interviewperiod, we decided to drop the inconsistency-test, partly because of the harmful irritation and partly because the general unmasking of the test proved that the MPs responded in a very well-considered way; in that respect the test certainly was a success. Further analysis makes clear, besides, that only 4 out of the 185 given answers on these control-questions (43 to 52 MPs), did not meet the test and were inconsistent. This was seen as an indicator of satisfactory MP-consistency and, in spite of all the provoked irritation, as a second success of the test.

Included in the oral questionnaire were also some so-called '*political taboo*'-questions, which always have a high chance to elicit politically desirable answers, in short: unreliability (Locander a.o., 1976). They were about careerism of MP-colleagues and about political shortcomings of both the general public and the party-adherents. Because we did expect from the respondents sharp irritation about these questions and perhaps a final non-response, we had placed them at the end of the questionnaire. Surprisingly enough, the non-response on these questions was only between one and five percent of all respondents; no interview was disrupted; and on each question majorities of MPs gave the 'forbidden', taboo-breaking answers (Van Schendelen, 1981-B). How to explain this response? Were the questions no taboo at all or did the MPs forget about their image maintenance? The first possibility is countered by the facts that, a few years earlier, the topic of MP-careerism had been under passionate public debate and that, immediately after our publication of the results, precisely these assumed taboo-questions received voluminous mass-media attention and sharp public protests from ... Members of the Parliament. So the second possibility might ring true. For many MPs, part of their role of politician might have become isolated, during the interview, from their role of respondent. Perhaps they did not feel obliged themselves to give, first of all, politically desirable answers; anyhow, after the date of publication, many MPs considered their answers as highly undesirable.

(D) *The interview-setting.* Through the mediation of the Clerk, quiet rooms in a separate building of the Parliament, far away from the working-offices, were at our disposal. Most interviews have been held there or at other quiet locations in the Parliament buildings. The few other interviews took place at the MP's private home, throughout the country, or at such occasions as during train-journeys and in railroad-stations.

The main duration of the interviews was two hours, with a range between 45 minutes and 5 hours; within this time also the written questionnaire, given before, was quickly gone through, to check its completeness. For the length of the interview-time it might have been both a facility and a problem that, shortly after the start of the interviews, (again) a Cabinet-crisis was broken out. Part of the daily business of the Parliament (committee-meetings, plenary sessions) was scheduled-off. This created time for interviews. But, because of the hectic political atmosphere, there was an increase of party-meetings, convened at irregular times. Partly because of this, many interviews needed a second or even a third appointment, sometimes in order to finish an already started interview.

The atmosphere during the interviews was usually pleasant. After each interview, the interviewers had to assess the atmosphere. Their assessments were: 37% of the respondents were 'quiet', 9% 'hurried', 18% 'interested', 3% 'not interested', 3% was without special qualification, and the other 29% got various assessments, such as 'interested but prolix', 'rude and not motivated', 'quiet at first, but gradually more hurried', 'hurried at first, but gradually more interested', 'tired', and 'driveling'. In one case the MP became so upset about the questionnaire that it was broken off. In two cases the MP was in a state of inebriation (even in the morning); new appointments were made. Three respondents expressed their disbelief in the promise of anonymity, as far as it concerned the written part of the questionnaire; they refused to fill it in, but they did not object to the oral questionnaire.

In general it can be said that the interview-setting was characterized by mutual trust and interest between the interviewer and the interviewee. We did not receive any complaint about an interviewer. No interviewer dropped-off during the entire interview-period. The interviewees made a lot of their time available for the interviewers; only one stopped her interview. All questions got a very high response-rate, even the 'political taboo'-questions; refusals to answer specific questions, perhaps under a 'don't know' disguise, were usually zero or extremely low. For the 1968 and 1972 Questionnaires, which, however, were shorter and without taboo-questions, the same characteristics apply.

For a large part the effectiveness of any interview, how well-designed it

may be, is identical to the effectiveness of the interviewer. What type of interview-atmosphere is he able to create? Here are the reflective thoughts of a senior-interviewer:

'You'll want to present yourself as honestly interested in the man or woman himself(herself). Don't pretend to be an expert about his (her) work, nor to be a lay-man. Make clear you want to fill the gaps in your knowledge. The MP then is apt to behave much more open-minded and less cautious than in front of a dyed-in-the-wool interviewer, for whom he has to watch out. In that way the atmosphere becomes relaxed and the respondent may very well become eager to tell about his life and work. As to the interviewer: relaxed friendliness pays more than conventional politeness, pleasure about the acquaintance more than respect or, worst of all, awestruck humility, and an easy outfit more than formal clothings. You have to give the MP the feeling that you are different from the political people who usually approach him with conventions, humbleness and formalities, and for whom he has learned to be cautious. Then, he may leave his formal role-behavior too and, quite possibly, give confidential answers and candid opinions. Since he feels to have no reason to distrust you, he may trust you and often even becomes amicable. The major problem left then remains the respondent's time-budget. As an interviewer you have to show that you consider this your concern too ('don't forget your committee-meeting; it is nearly two o'clock'). He will feel that you understand and care for his tight schedule too, and he will often complete the interview after all or will be quite willing to do so as soon as possible. But the key-word remains: improvisation'.

(E) *Results.* A questionnaire only produces the answers (or non-answers) of some respondent to specific questions, posed by an interviewer under specific circumstances. All these variables are dynamic. The one respondent is not the other; the one interviewer not the other one. Circumstances differ for each interview-setting, in particular over a period of several months. A question should have the same meaning to all, but, as in any system of communication, semantics and interpretation are always partially receiver-related and, because of this, can be different to different receivers. The reverse applies to the given answers: similar answers can get different understandings and quotations from different interviewers and different answers can be recorded so that they become similar. Some solutions exist for these problems of research. Our choices have been the following ones. No sample, but try to get the whole population of MPs (in the Netherlands a maximum number of 225 persons). Keep the period of interviewing as short as possible, because the variability of time seems to be wider and more difficult to keep under control than the variability of interviewer-characteristics. In the 1979-Questionnaire this resulted in a number of 15 interviewers, all similar by advanced-study-status and kept under some control by instructions and by feed-back contacts with the

research-management. Another choice excluded the use of tape-recorders. A more open-mindedness of the respondent, with perhaps some loss of accuracy of its recording on paper, seemed to be more valuable than an accurate taping of reserved answers. Comparability we have tried to achieve through a strict formulation of the questions, which had to be asked literally, and by the use of closed-questions, with pre-coded answer-possibilities. To balance its disadvantage of creating a sterile atmosphere or losing additional answers, we did include, at nearly fixed intervals, open-questions where the MP could 'bring his story'; and, besides, most closed-questions provided a final opportunity to mention 'something else, namely ...'.

### An evaluation of Dutch parliamentary interviewing

Here we discuss a few central concerns of Dutch MP-interviewing: reactions to the results, the ethics of MP-interviewing, the relationship between theory and method, and the specific approach of MP-respondents.

(A) *Reactions.* Although we had approached all MPs individually, in order to side-step any structure of group-control – such as a party or a committee – we received, nearly two months after the start of the interviews, an official complaint-letter from the largest parliamentary party (Christian-Democrats). The contents of the complaint was that 'some questions were phrased so general, that the answers have much of 'a blow in the air'. We have the impression, based on oral comments, that the complaint in particular refers to the so-called taboo-questions on MP-colleagues, ordinary people, and party-adherents. Through the one control-structure, their parliamentary party, they approached another: the complaint-letter was sent directly to the Board of the Erasmus University. This redirected it to us, without comments. Because we still had to interview a remaining 20% of the MPs, we did not react.

At the end of his interview each MP was asked to comment on the questionnaire. Only 18 members of the First Chamber (27% of the respondents) and 38 of the Second Chamber (27% as well) made use of this opportunity. Some comments were of a general nature, others were related to a few specific questions; some were highly critical and negative, others were put in positive terms (full account: Van Schendelen, 1981). The utility of these comments can best be illustrated by the following contrasting examples:

- 'the questions are unnecessarily shaded; too scientific' (resp. 298), versus 'the questions are too unshaded, too wide ranging' (resp. 284) or:

- 'the question-posers certainly know what happens in the Chambers as well in the society' (resp. 305), versus 'the composers of the questionnaire demonstrate a lack of expertise' (resp. 224) and 'the questioners are not informed about practical affairs' (resp. 170).

More specific comments were related to an alleged bias of the questionnaire in favour of the Second Chamber, because of which some MPs of the First Chamber said to have problems with answering; to the scaled questions (usually 7-points) and the closed questions, which were said to provide not enough possibilities to answer; to the length of the questionnaire; to the difficulties to give accurate answers on fact-finding questions; and to the missing of topics like salaries, time-management, emancipation of women, and the MP's private life. One MP commented that the questionnaire should have been submitted before 'to a parliamentary expert, c.q. the office of the Chamber's Clerk'.

In the second half of 1980 the results of the taboo-questions were presented in a private paper to a committee of the International Political Science Association. It leaked-out. A leading Dutch newspaper brought the results, in head-line, on its frontpage: 'The Dutch MP is disaffected about his electors'. The figures were, indeed, that, on different items, 50% to 90% of the MPs had expressed critical opinions about the ordinary people, the party-adherents and the MP-colleagues (Van Schendelen, 1981 B). Most other newspapers presented the data too. On television the chairman of the Second Chamber was invited to comment on the data. His public comment was that 'the questions are wrong ... and this research is poor' (for these public comments, see *Beleid Beschouwd*, 12-11-1980, no. 4204). We decided not to give any comment until the date of publication of all results.

In May 1981 – three weeks before the new elections for the Second Chamber – all results of the questionnaire were published. The answers on the taboo-questions again caused a massive public reaction, although they were exactly similar to the data leaked out before. Other major news-items were the abundant antipathies of the MPs of the parties-in-coalition for each other; the 70% recruitment of MPs out of the public sector; the 78% response of grievances against party-discipline; and the examples of corruption, which some MPs said to have experienced. In nearly all cases the news-reports were factually correct; in order to foster this result an intensive press-meeting had been held before, in which all major questions and answers were gone through one by one. By several mass-media the Chairman of the Second Chamber was again asked to comment on the research. Except in one case he refused, as he refused as well any direct

confrontation with the researchers. In that one case (a national newspaper) he amply declared that the publication of the research should have been postponed until after the elections; that the 'taboo-questions' are wrongly posed; and that, in the case of another MP-questionnaire-in-preparation, he has now contacted the researcher 'in order to prevent that again questions are included, which can produce misunderstandings'. (For these public comments, see *Beleid Beschouwd*, 21-09-1981, no. 4412). Some other MPs – all of whom had received, on the date of publication, an extensive summary of the results and a letter of thanks – also commented highly critically on the questionnaire and the results. Their comments varied between 'false questions make false answers' and 'answers are not real facts'. Finally, the Second Chamber's Chairman was officially invited by the Dutch political science journal *Acta Politica* to adstruct his criticisms; as his reply, he only referred to his earlier comments on TV.

(B) *Ethics*. From these reactions we can deduce that the publication of the results greatly embarrassed – not to say: irritated – at least some of the MPs. In fact, nearly all the critical comments came from their side and all neutral or positive comments came from non-MPs (journalists etcetera). The value of Parliament itself seemed to have been brought into debate.

Some people may consider this to be an ethical problem: that value should remain undebated. However, as researchers we have given priority to the value of science: acquiring knowledge about the Parliament, through the tool of interviewing. All results should always be published, in order that they may be controlled as to their validity and reliability. As authors we have limited ourselves to an academic description and basic analysis of the results ('this book is neither an attack on nor a defense of the Parliament') and tried to avoid any further interpretation, because that could have brought disturbing emotions into the discussions; nevertheless, the results themselves created already plenty of emotions.

Another ethical question does not concern the fact, but the date of publication: three weeks before the elections. Although this date had not been planned – it is impossible to plan so precisely a four-year-project – the final decision not to postpone the publication until after the elections, was well-intendedly taken. Our considerations were: either our results have influence on the voter's behavior or not; if not (what we expected, given most theories of voting behavior), then the publication-date is no problem at all; if yes, then it is ethically more desirable to give the voters an additional source of information on the Parliament before the elections than to protect the MPs against an informed mass-public.

A third ethical question relates to future research. It is possible that any

next questionnaire may experience a lower degree of accessibility and willingness to cooperate from the side of the MPs. As already indicated by the Second Chamber's Chairman, any new questionnaire possibly is to receive a 'nihil-obstat' imprint from the Parliament. Other possibilities are: the MPs, being more cautious now, are more inclined to give politically desirable answers; political efforts to control both the contents and the conditions of the next questionnaire's publication; and selective support to more compliant researchers.

We consider these possibilities to be a problem, but wonder whether they could or (if foreseen) should have been avoided. Firstly, the prime purpose of research is to improve scientific knowledge and understanding and not to keep possible future research. The present gain is, for example, our new knowledge on 'disaffected representation in the Netherlands'. Secondly, according to any international standards, the response-rates of the three MP-Questionnaires are exceptionally high. There are good theoretical reasons to argue that these high rates are related to the peculiar Dutch elite-culture, which arose in 1966-67 and generally has been labelled as 'de-pillarization and polarization' (Lijphart, 1975). In contrast to the elite-culture before, the new mood was characterized by an exceptional openness and publicity of the Parliament and its members. There are strong indications that this era has ended by the start of the eighties. With or without the third MP-Questionnaire, probably any future interviewing of Dutch MPs should have met the problems of access and willingness, which are common and well-known in other countries. We also believe that this is a 'normal' state of affairs: where both political science and politics-in-practice are functioning well, there is a normal clash between the value of knowledge and the value of power. Political scientists have a vested interest in discovering political facts; politicians very often have one in hiding facts and presenting political myths.

(C) *Theory and Method*. The study of Parliament is characterized by an abundance of data produced through various research-tools (interviewing, content analysis, biographical analysis, and behavioral analysis). One should expect that any new research is based on well-developed theories and at least that the research contains more than a scanning of MP-opinions on a multitude of topics. All MP-Questionnaires have had, however, an omnibus-character and were mainly explorative by orientation. The main reasons for this are: the need to explore new topics, in each questionnaire anew; the need to repeat old questions, in order to measure opinion-changes, but with the consequence that the omnibus-character is repeated too; the need, caused by the financial sponsor, to bring together in

the research-group many political scientists, each with his own interests; and the fact that most of these participants had earned their credits in other fields of research than the study of Parliament, leave alone its empirical study.

Notwithstanding these factors, behind many series of questions there have been theoretical considerations of a rather implicit or simply plausible nature. For the future one may expect, given the scarcity of financial resources, a continuation of the omnibus-formula; and one can only hope that, then, more participants have some specialized know-how in the field of legislative studies, from which they can develop theoretically based questions. In the present case, the linkage from theory to method has only been weak.

As a first step to a stronger linkage, there could—and should—be tried out the reverse linkage: from method to theory. The questionnaire-results should be viewed in the light of leading theories on parliament, such as theories on representation, the power of parliament, the relationship between parliament and cabinet, the policy-making role of parliament, role-conflicts of MPs, and the group-politics involved. The questionnaire-results should, however, not be taken for granted. Before any result can be fed-back to present theories, the major and preliminary question should be put whether the results are tool-independent or not. Are, for example, the MPs' overwhelmingly disaffected opinions about the ordinary people and their MP-colleagues perhaps inflated by the tool of interviewing or not? Is an interview-setting, in which some part of the MP's role of politician is isolated from his role of respondent, more reliable or not? And which are more relevant to the MP's political behavior: his candid opinions or his politically-biased ('image-maintaining') answers? Whatever our beliefs are now, questions as these should be answered. If, for example, the MP's disaffection for the ordinary people is factually true, then it should also appear from other aspects of his personality. The one tool of research—for example behavioral analysis—can be used here to (try to) evaluate the value of another tool such as interviewing.

*(D) MP status.* Next to the abundance of data we see as a second distinguishing characteristic of parliamentary interviewing the special status of the MP as an interviewee: usually well-educated, always very busy, and a politician. Although the literature on interviewing hardly provides guidelines for the effective approach of MPs, we nevertheless managed to interview nearly all MPs for averaging as long as two hours; the earlier questionnaires were equally effective. This looks like a paradox. It seems easier to interview MPs for two hours and with only 9% non-response,

than housewives.

Special circumstances can account for this effectiveness. We already mentioned the specific Dutch elite-culture of openness and publicity, which existed in the seventies and now seems to be passing. To that culture we have to add the high status 'science' has in Dutch politics. Most MPs have an academic background and for most MPs, in their role of party-specialist, 'science' is one of the top-four sources of information for their decision-making (Van Schendelen, 1976); in many political conflicts scientists are called in, to find a solution; the government has a great variety of 'scientific councils'. Scientific research—even social science research—usually is (still) well-respected.

Other circumstances, not related to the interviewee, but to the interview, the interview-setting and the interviewer may also have played a favourable role. At the start of the third MP-Questionnaire it was thought to be difficult to equate the response-rates of the earlier questionnaires. Therefore, much extra energy and ingenuity was spent on winning the MPs as respondents. This mixture of reliance, competition and tenacity might explain some part of the final response and in particular of its last 20% (which took as much time as the first 80%). Another factor might have been the interview-setting, which accounted for most MPs being characterized as 'relaxed' and 'interested'. After the start, our research became familiar among the MPs and, apparently, not in a most negative way, that could have discouraged other respondents. In particular, trust in the interviewers and in the guarantee of anonymity may have played a stimulating role. It facilitated the MPs to forget more-or-less about their role of politician and about their accustomed behavior of cautiousness. Two seemingly weak points of the research may, paradoxically, have been an advantage too: the length of the questionnaire and the non-professional status of our interviewers. The length was so exceptional—not to say arrogant—that the MPs might have got the idea that the questionnaire was very important indeed. Advanced students seem to have some important advantages over professional interviewers: their interest is more spontaneous, their commitment is less economic, and their backgrounds are more 'scientific'; in short: they are easier to trust and to like.

All these last-mentioned circumstances and possible factors of success are, of course, at most necessary or favourable; they are not sufficient. In many countries, MP-Questionnaires are well-designed, well-organized, and well-conditioned, but in most cases their response-effectiveness remains low. Usually MPs are difficult to access and to make cooperative. The researchers, then, have to limit themselves to a 25-minute talk, an only written questionnaire, a sample of MPs (a-select or not), a smaller unit as a

party or a committee, key-respondents around the MP (c.q. staff-members, clerks), research in joint-venture with a pressure-group, or they simply have to use quite different tools of research, such as participatory observation, content-analysis, etcetera. All these limited researches or other tools may be very useful too – and often they are the highest possible achievement – but they do not fulfill that one particular research-need: extensive interviews with (nearly) all representatives.

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