

Political knowledge of Dutch citizens

[Do Dutch voters know what they need to know?]

by

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Abstract

There is much literature about politics and citizens and their incentives to vote. There is however not much information about whether or not citizens have sufficient political knowledge before they vote in elections. This thesis therefore focusses on that subject and then specifically on the Dutch situation. The main question is “*What knowledge should Dutch voters have about democracy, according to democratic theory, and what is the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters?*” To support this main question, other questions have been drafted: What is the importance of political knowledge for a functioning democracy according to the literature? What does democratic theory say about the knowledge of democracy that voters require? What is the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters, across different educational groups, as researched in a representative survey? With these questions a literature review and an analysis of existing surveys has taken place.

The conditions for political knowledge citizens require for a functioning democracy can be summarized in three categories according to the academic literature. The first category is knowledge about the issue positions of political parties. Issue positions are an important factor for citizens to base their vote on in elections. Therefore they should be able to identify the issues discussed around the elections and on issues that have been around a long time. The second category is about the differences between the political parties (left-right perspective). This means that citizens are able to identify parties in the political spectrum. The final category is general knowledge on the Dutch political system and its representatives in government. An example of this category is that citizens are able to identify important persons in the government such as a minister.

The political knowledge of Dutch citizens is researched by looking at data from those three categories. The data that is used comes from the Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (NKO). The data used to analyse is from the year 2012, which is the most recent data. To measure political knowledge an index has been made where the scores on every individual category are added up. The scores are differentiated on an individual level by looking at level of education respondents have. Education is an important indication in categorizing the level of citizens’ political knowledge. The index on the political knowledge of Dutch citizens shows that the amount of knowledge Dutch citizens have can be seen as sufficient. On every individual level the scores indicate that citizens show sufficient, basic, political knowledge (more than two-thirds of the points in the index). The index also shows that the higher the level of education of someone, the more likely he or she is to have a higher amount of political knowledge.

Preface

With this research I conclude my Master Public Administration with the profile Corporate Communication at the University of Twente. The subject of the research is something that really interests me. My whole life I have been interested in politics and everything around it. In this thesis I filled in some of the gaps that I did not know the answer to before I began this study.

In 2016 I finished my HBO-study of Public Administration at Saxion in Enschede. I already experienced an internship and I graduated with an external assignment at the municipality of Enschede. Therefore I really wanted to challenge myself and conduct this research on my own. That meant that I could be independent from other people and I really had to focus and show discipline to finish my Master. I am really happy with the end result and I felt like I really challenged myself and learned a lot during the process of writing the thesis.

The thesis would not have been possible without the help of dr. Martin Rosema and prof. dr Bas Denters. I want to thank mr. Denters for being the second reader. A special thanks goes out to dr. Martin Rosema. He is an expert on the subject and from the beginning of the second quartile he helped me gain information on political knowledge and democratic theory. Furthermore the meetings, sometimes in groups sometimes individually, really helped to sharpen the process and the thesis itself. I really want to thank him for all of his help and his commitment to me during a busy year.

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Introduction

Democracy is one of the most important goods that citizens in a state like the Netherlands have. Generations fought hard to gain the right to vote and not be ruled by dictators. Democracy is defined by Lupia and McCubbins (1998, p. 3) as; “a method of government based upon the choices of the people”. Indirect democracy means that the people elect others that will represent them and act on their behalf (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, p. 3). Direct democracy is a form of democracy where citizens have direct influence on legislation, for example through referenda. But democracy is not a ‘one way street’, voters must have a certain degree of knowledge in order to make an educated decision and thus take action to inform themselves. In this thesis the research topic is the political knowledge of Dutch voters. This thesis will consist out of a literature review of, international and national, literature and an analysis of an existing dataset (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek) of a recent year, 2012, about the current state of political knowledge of Dutch voters.

Aim of the research.

The knowledge of Dutch voters about democracy and the state of their knowledge is a relevant thesis subject. The knowledge of voters in general has been widely debated. One of the most famous quotes of Winston Churchill is “The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.” (Brainy Quote, 2016). But at the same time Churchill said in 1947 “Many forms of government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” (Lewrockwell, 2005). This shows that even one of the most prominent political figures of the 20th century had conflicting opinions of the knowledge of voters and even democracy itself. This leads to the so called ‘democratic dilemma’, meaning that the people who are called upon to make reasoned choices may not be capable of doing so. When people are not competent in making sound political choices, effective government is an illusion (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, p. 13).

In the country of the Netherlands there are many different political parties, the political playing field is very scattered. This means that there is a variety of political ideas, changing ideologies and available political information. The Dutch voters need to order this political information to make reasoned choices in elections. Previous research has explained what democratic theory is and has investigated political knowledge. Furthermore there are studies

that researched the state of the Dutch political knowledge (EenVandaag Opiniepanel, 2016) (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, 2012). There is for example research done by TNS-NIPO (Dutch research institute) in where they were very critical on knowledge of Dutch citizens on the system (NRC, 2012). The data for this survey is not available, but there are various statistics mentioned in the newspaper article. For example they mention that little more than 50 percent of the Dutch citizens know what a coalition is (NRC, 2012). The goal of this thesis is to research with the help of the Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (NKO) survey if Dutch citizens actually have limited knowledge of the democratic system and political knowledge in general.

The contribution of this study will be to combine the previous research and literature with existing surveys. This will add value to the discussion about political knowledge. Furthermore it contributes to the total picture of the political knowledge of Dutch voters based on a sound literature review. The aim of the research is to combine democratic theory and to create a framework for the political knowledge that citizens should have about democracy. Furthermore, with the combination of the various surveys about the political knowledge of Dutch citizens, the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters can be measured, evaluated and assessed.

Research question and sub questions.

To research this topic the following research question has been formulated:

“What knowledge should Dutch voters have about democracy, according to democratic theory, and what is the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters?”

To support this main question, other questions have been drafted:

- What is the importance of political knowledge for a functioning democracy according to the literature?
- What does democratic theory say about the knowledge of democracy that voters require?
- What is the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters, across different educational groups, as researched in a representative survey?

With these questions an answer about the knowledge Dutch voters should have and the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters will be given (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997) (Hermsen & Verbeek, 1992). This is a very broad group of people, but in our democracy every person,

older than 18 years old, with a Dutch passport and mentally able is allowed to vote (Van der Brug, 1997).

The analysis for each empirical sub-question

The empirical sub-questions in the research are analysed, the way in which these questions are analysed and answered is described in sequence.

The first sub-question (as stated in the last part of the question) is analysed by researching the literature extensively for the connection between political knowledge and a functioning democracy. Examples of literature that looks into this subject are the books of Delli Carpini and Keeter (1997) and Lupia and McCubbins (1998) and the research articles of Hooghe and Stiers (2016), Van der Brug (1997) and Niemöller (1992).

To investigate the second sub-question, democratic theory and literature about this topic is analysed. There are various books and articles written about democratic theory. The meaning of this question is to define a scope of what democracy includes and what theory says about this. This analysis is done through desk research. Examples of literature about democratic theory and the relation to political knowledge are the books of Delli Carpini and Keeter (1997) and Lupia and McCubbins (1998).

For the third sub-question, the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters across different educational groups is analysed. This is done by first analysing the definitions of political knowledge, as described in the literature. When the definition and scope of political knowledge is clear then the relevant questions of the surveys conducted by the 2012 NKO (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek) that are used in this research are distilled from this survey. The state of political knowledge is researched by also looking at the educational level of the respondents. This is done because various authors indicate that the Dutch democracy is becoming a diploma-democracy (Bovens & Wille, 2011) (Hakhverdian, van der Brug, & de Vries, 2012). This means that the amount of education an individual has, partly, determines how much political knowledge someone has.

Research design.

The thesis will be structured in a logical order, first the (international) literature about political knowledge and democratic theory will be analysed. This thesis looks at the knowledge that is required for a functioning democracy. The literature that is used is based on all kinds of democracies all over the world. On the basis of the researched democratic literature,

conclusions about political knowledge, necessary for citizens to make informed decisions, are drawn. Political knowledge will also be researched by using an existing survey about the political knowledge and preferences of the Dutch voters. Combined, this will give an image about the state of knowledge of Dutch voters. The literature used in the thesis is looked at and contradictions are researched and analysed. The thesis is constructed in accordance with the conditions as are stated in the book ‘‘Leren Communiceren’’ (Steenhouder, Jansen, Mulder, Pool, & Zeijl, 1999, pp. 273-295).

Data collection.

The data used for the thesis will consist out of a different parts. The theory is collected by researching literature on the topic of political knowledge of voters and literature of democratic theory. This literature is then analysed through desk research and the most important findings are published in the thesis. This part of the research will result in criteria to evaluate the political knowledge of Dutch voters. These criteria are stated to support the quantitative part of the research. One criterion can, for instance, be the factual knowledge Dutch voters have about democracy, literature may show that this is important in political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997, pp. 1-25).

The quantitative data in the thesis will be analysed by using the Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (NKO) from the year 2012. In English the NKO is called; Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies. The NKO is the main source of information, the questions asked fit the best for the research questions proposed in this thesis. There are other surveys, like the LISS panel, but they use the same dataset as the NKO or conduct different research (LISS panel, 2014). The questions asked to Dutch voters in the NKO are of a great variance and very useful for this thesis. There are questions about the political knowledge of Dutch voters, like right/left-wing knowledge. The surveys of the NKO go back as far as 1971 (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, 2012) (Dutch Parliamentary Electoral Studies, 2016).

Democracy and political knowledge of citizens.

First forms of democracy.

Democracy is one of the oldest state forms, even though thousands of years ago it was different than it is now, the old Greeks had some form of democracy. One of the people, that is known, to first philosophize about democracy is Aristotle. He defined democracy as; a state form that is not simply something where the majority has sovereign authority. Democracy according to Aristotle is when the authority of the state lies with all the free-born people of that state (Bremer & Kessels, 2011, p. 164).

People in democratic states have certain roles according to Aristotle. He states that not everyone can be a politician; some functions in a state should be left to specialists. The reasoning behind this statement is that people cannot be a member of a judicial court and be a farmer at the same time. The best way of organising a democracy is the model in which it brings the community the highest form of welfare (Bremer & Kessels, 2011, p. 291). Aristotle wanted a profound role-division in society where everyone had a clear function and specialism. One of the most common forms in which democracy expresses itself is through elections (Bremer & Kessels, 2011, pp. 280-295).

Aristotle believed norms and values were the most important virtues for citizens, with these values they would be able to make a good decision in elections (Bremer & Kessels, 2011, pp. 118-125). He also had some faith in the wisdom of the people, as opposed to his teacher Plato. Aristotle identified various important values for citizens that he thought necessary for a functioning society and democracy. First of all citizens should accept that they can learn from each other in the governing-process and thus be humble. This means that to be able to guide a society, citizens should accept guidance from others as well. Then it is important for citizens to be righteous, when they are voting and when they run for office. Officials should be in office to look for the happiness of their citizens, that would be the main aim of a democratic government, not power or wealth. This also goes for citizens that vote, they should vote for the person that would ensure their happiness the most (Dahl, 1989, p. 15). Some of the ideas of Aristotle are a bit outdated in our time, but much of the principles still stand (Bremer & Kessels, 2011, pp. 110-130). Dahl (1989) called these Greek ideas the first democratic transformation: from the idea that only a few people should rule to the idea and the practice that the many should rule.

One of the most important periods for the development of political knowledge on democracy is the enlightenment-period. The people in a democracy are the sovereign power according to Montesquieu. They govern through their chosen senate (Standford, 2014). The principle of democracy can even be called a political decency according to him. In this statement the virtues of Aristotle can be found again. Montesquieu stated that there should be a strict separation of powers in democracies. This means that there is a qualitative differentiation for the various functions in a government, the legislative, adjudication and executive part of the administration (Waldron, 2013). This separation of power defends the liberty of the people against totalitarian powers. This idea of Montesquieu was not shared by Rousseau who stated that the idea of limitless sovereignty lies with the people rather than a monarch or sovereign ruler and should not be divided as was suggested by Montesquieu (Vile, 1998, pp. 10-60, 208). These thinkers greatly influenced the way of thinking about democracy and the way the power should be divided.

The separation of power where Montesquieu stood for is not fully reflected in the Dutch democracy these days. There is no strict separation of powers, this shows in for example in the second chamber of the Netherlands (Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1992). In the second chamber there is no strict difference between the executive and legislative power, both the cabinet and the members of parliament can introduce legislation. Also the so called 'Council of State' is an independent advisor of the government about legislation and governance and is also the highest administrative court in the Netherlands (Council of State, 2017). The principles of Montesquieu, however, are maintained largely in the Dutch system. The Dutch system is a constitutional monarchy, which means that the Dutch monarch's (the king) power is regulated by the Dutch constitution (ProDemos, 2013). Although it varies in degree the Dutch political system is still very strongly linked to a consensus-model because of its broad coalition cabinets (Lijphart, 1999, pp. 78 - 82).

Modern forms of democracy and the Dutch situation.

Modern democracies are characterized by allowing everyone above the age of 18 years to vote, no matter race or gender. The democracies these days consist mainly out of the election of political parties, not just persons that represent the citizens in senates and houses of representatives (see also p 13). There are various (western) democracies that have a multiparty system, like the system in the Netherlands (Hermsen & Verbeek, 1992). In the Netherlands once every four years people can vote for their representatives, united in political parties, on a national level. Furthermore there are elections for the various provinces,

municipalities and the European Union. This research will focus on the political knowledge of citizens on a national level. The voters in modern democracies choose representatives to make binding decisions for the whole of society (Seeberg, Slothuus, & Stubager, 2017). According to the Dutch voters national politics is more important than sub-national politics (EenVandaag Opiniepanel, 2016). This thesis focusses, with the help of the NKO, on the political knowledge of Dutch citizens on a national level.

Conditions for a democracy.

Before answering the question what knowledge citizens require to be able to have a functioning democracy, the conditions for a functioning democracy are explained. Some democratic literature states that one of the most important conditions for a functioning electoral democracy are fair elections (Bingham Powell, Jr., 2000, p. 5) (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, pp. 2-4). The citizens that are allowed to vote empower various office holders like, commissions, governments and representatives. These delegation of power by the citizens form the foundation of an electoral democracy (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, p. 3). Other authors argue differently, for example Frank Cunningham (2001) argues the importance of participatory democracy. He sees this as the opposite of the liberal democracies where active politics is the domain of politicians, government officials and interest group leaders (Cunningham, 2001, pp. 123-124). Cunningham (2001) states that this form of democracy enhances the apathy and political inactivity of citizens in a state. Lubia and McCubbins (1998) stated that the most important condition for a democracy is that there are fair elections. Thinkers like Schumpeter agree with this, he states that democracy is nothing more than a method that composes the political community. Democracy is an institutional arrangement that leads to political decisions through the competition of politicians for the votes of citizens (Elliott, 1994). This is a more economical way of thinking about democracy and the way it (should) work(s).

Participatory democracy on the contrary aims at maximizing the engagement of citizens in politics. The main task of democrats is to activate citizens (Cunningham, 2001, p. 123). Where in many democracies voting is considered as one of the most important rights and features of a democracy the participatory democrats see representation by others and voting in elections as necessary evils at the most (Cunningham, 2001, pp. 123-124). Participatory democracy is aimed at replacing the representation by officials and elections with decision-making through debates and trying to find an accord. This way of thinking is aimed at solidarity between citizens of a state and sharing common virtues. The works of researchers

that adopt the theory of a participatory-democracy stem from the works of Rousseau as is discussed in the *first forms of democracy* paragraph (p. 10) (Cunningham, 2001, p. 123). Furthermore an author like Benjamin Barber (1984) states in his book that participatory democracy is better than the representative democracy. He argues that participatory-democracy is closer to the virtues of democracy like participation, citizenship and being politically active (Barber, 1984, pp. 25-28). Barber (1984) even calls the direct form of participation-democracy “strong democracy” and refers to representative democracy as “thin democracy”. He argues at the same time that no system is perfect but people should have some form of participation in some form of self-government (Barber, 1984, pp. 25-28, 98).

Another thing that is important for the foundation of a democracy is legitimacy. Gilley (2006) defines legitimacy as follows: “A state is more legitimate the more that it is treated by its citizens as rightfully holding and exercising political power”. Finally it is important for a functioning democracy to have a certain amount of separation of power. This means that every branch of government maintains their own integrity and has their own separate function, the checks and balances system stems from this (Waldron, 2013).

To summarize, for a functioning democracy there various elements necessary. Some democratic literature states that it is important that there are fair elections where citizens are allowed to vote. Furthermore, for a functioning democracy the legitimacy of that democracy according to its people is important. For legitimacy there needs to be a certain ‘checks and balances system’ (separation of powers) in place. There are also voices in the democratic literature that state that participatory-democracy is more important and even refer to it as “strong democracy” (Barber, 1984, pp. 25-28). When looking at the current state of democracy in the Netherlands, the so-called liberal democracy that Schumpeter explained is an accurate view of reality. However there are some forms of participatory-democracy that are part of the Dutch democracy. An example of this participation of citizens is a referendum, where citizens have direct influence in a matter. This thesis is however aimed at the practical reality of the Dutch electoral democracy and the knowledge of Dutch citizens on this form of democracy.

Representatives.

In the practical reality of the Dutch electoral democracy representatives are chosen in elections. In the table below (P. 14) Bingham Powell Jr. (2000) explains how voters choose their representatives in elections. Looking in the retrospective, the time perspective of voters,

governments and parties can be held accountable for their actions of the previous period in the election. The same thing applies for individual representatives, voters look at them and how they have performed in the past years, before they trust them with their vote again. In the party system of the Netherlands it is less important which region the representative comes from and more important which party is chosen to represent citizens (Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1992). Although the delegate system does not fully apply in the Netherlands, it is certainly possible that voters have a certain affiliation with a representative that represents their regional interests on a national level. In the prospective, in the voters time perspective, Bingham Powell Jr. (2000) shows that voters target their choice on the mandate they want to give political parties. Furthermore it is important which ideals they would like to see realized or governments they would like to see being formed.

Table 1: Citizen Control Through Elections: A Voter's Eye View of the Processes (Bingham Powell, Jr., 2000, p. 8).

Voters time perspective			
Voter's Target of Choice		Retrospective	Prospective
		Collective government/party	Government/party accountability
	Representative Agent	Representative trustees/political parties	Representative delegates/political parties.

The representatives in the Dutch Second Chamber are directly chosen. Every four years there are elections in where citizens can vote for a new parliament. Beside the party, citizens vote for an individual on the list. These individuals form the parliament that consists out of 150 seats. Each individual is the ‘owner’ of this seat and is not obligated to vote according to the wishes of the party, or to give the seat back to the party if they wish to leave the party and are thus sovereign in theory. This does not happen that often in the Netherlands because there is a lot of party unity (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2010). This party unity implies that there is a lot of party discipline in political parties in the Netherlands and representatives vote according to party lines (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2010). The representatives in the Second Chamber are directly chosen by the citizens of a country, this is opposed to the First Chamber, also called the Senate. The First Chamber in the Netherlands is indirectly chosen through the provinces of the Netherlands. The Dutch citizens choose members of the so called Provincial States, these representatives then choose members of the First Chamber. The role of the first chamber is to check the legislation that comes from the Second Chamber. They check this legislation on its rectitude and if it corresponds with other legislation that already exists. The First

Chamber also has the possibility to control the government, although this does not happen that often (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, 2017). The representatives of the Provincial States are united in political parties as well and choose the representatives of the First Chamber also on the basis of which party they are from. This leads to discussion in the Netherlands about the role of the First Chamber, and if it still has a useful function. This discussion exists because of the party unity that also dominates the First Chamber (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2010). This discussion also leads to the conclusion that, in the Netherlands, knowledge on individual representatives of the parties in the second chamber cannot be seen as necessary political knowledge because of the party unity. In table 1 Bingham Powell, Jr (2000) describes the voters time perspective in elections. In this thesis the focus lies thus on the collective government, or parties, target of choice for voters and the representatives of the government.

Importance of political knowledge for a functioning democracy.

Aside from the theories for a functioning democracy there is the fact that there is also sufficient political knowledge of citizens needed to make weighted decisions in for example elections or referendums (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, pp. 1-5). Political knowledge and what it entails is researched in the next chapter of the research. The knowledge of voters differs, it has been established that not every voter has the same access to knowledge and resources as other voters (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, pp. 6-8). The improvement of quality of democratic choice however, is not less important with less knowledgeable citizens. For more legitimisation of an electoral democracy a high turnout in the elections is wished for by politicians. In the public debate a low turnout is considered to be undesirable (Karp & Brockington, 2005). Some countries, like the Netherlands and Belgium, tried to create more legitimisation with compulsory voting, but this is no longer the case in the Netherlands. Compulsory voting was abolished in 1970 and since then voting in elections is voluntary (Parliament, 2017). Furthermore voluntary voting is perceived as superior in regard to compulsory voting (Krishna & Morgan, 2012).

There is always a group of voters that does not turn up in elections. According to Tyson (2016) increased voter turnout is only beneficial when voters are informed about their democratic choices. The important task for public policy makers is then to improve the quality of the democratic choice. These policies have to consist of two branches, the incentive to become more knowledgeable, politically seen, and the incentive to then also vote in elections (Tyson, 2016). When citizens have the political knowledge needed and there is a high turnout, the legitimacy of elected officials and the government increases. With these conditions a democracy that is able to function, is more likely to function stable. Public approval for the political system and government depends on the way citizens perceive them. It is mostly about whether or not citizens see that the institutions representing them are fair and honest (Linde, 2012).

Quality of democratic choice.

Many governments try to improve the quality of democratic choice of citizens and with it the civic engagement and political knowledge (Tyson, 2016). There are countries that try to improve participation in elections with various regulations and policies. However, trying to improve the level of voter turnout is only useful when the citizen that adds his vote knows which political parties, or representatives, best embody his or her interests (Tyson, 2016). Much like Aristotle, Tyson (2016) identifies the best choice for an individual as a choice that

best represents their concerns (Bremer & Kessels, 2011, p. 169). This means that the best choice is a party that best defends the issues and views of an individual or the social group that the citizens belongs to. When someone works in a factory he or she is probably more likely to be sympathetic with a party that really fights for the rights and wages of workers. Knowing which party or parties best represent the interests of a voter is part of being politically informed and essential to the quality of democratic choice.

Political learning.

The founding fathers of the republics and constitutional monarchies around the world believed that democracy forces citizens (in a good way) to make reasoned choices. If a citizen makes this reasoned choice, the requirement is that they know the consequences of these choices. The question is if, and in which way, voters can make reasoned choices in elections. Because if citizens are politically informed, democracy functions best (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997, p. 1) (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, p. 1). The other side of the coin is that citizens without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, can lead a country into tragedy. In the daily life of citizens in Western democracies there are, fortunately, many ways to acquire political knowledge. This so called political learning is an activity that lasts a lifetime, it is influenced by social, cultural economic and other aspects (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, pp. 1 - 5).

Even though reasoned choice of citizens was one of the aims of influential thinkers like Aristotle and Rousseau, this can be difficult. The difficulty lies in the fact that politics and governments present problems that the citizens are not familiar with. The consequences of restricted political information can be severe. People these days do not suffer the consequences of a lack of information too often (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, p. 64). This is because there is, almost, unlimited access to the information supply over (social) media, television and the internet. Most information is available and freely accessible, the question however is if every citizen is able to access and comprehend the available information.

Gaining political knowledge.

According to Hermsen and Verbeek (1992) political knowledge is not only knowing what the parties want and plan for the future. Political parties are expected to a few aims, one of these aims is the maximization of the number of votes (Hermsen & Verbeek, 1992). This means that parties will provide information to voters that will mostly benefit their own interests. Furthermore parties want to realize their political goals, broad support for their plans is

therefore necessary. Not only support from the voters, but also support from other parties (Hermsen & Verbeek, 1992). So voters cannot only depend on the knowledge that political parties provide but there needs to be a certain deepening in knowledge to make weighted decisions. Citizens can gain political knowledge, by for example following the election campaign on television, through debates (Bingham Powell, Jr., 2000). There seems to be adequate information about politics and the opinion of politicians available for citizens. Furthermore this knowledge is very accessible, for example through the (social) media. The political choices people make seem therefore more and more related to the question; ‘whom should we trust?’ (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, pp. 6-8). At the same time, knowledge is easier to acquire for people that are already politically active and have enough social and economic resources (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997, p. 1).

Citizens can learn from others as well in order to make a reasoned choice. There are a few conditions if citizens want to learn political knowledge from others. This can happen through enlightenment, this is the process where people hear the observations and statements of others and learn from that. Furthermore the people that inform citizens on political knowledge have to be trustworthy in order to be persuasive (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, pp. 68-70). Because of the rise of the internet and the increase of citizens that do not know what they want to vote there are more Voting Advice Applications (VAAs), like *Stemwijzer*, developed (Rosema & Louwse, 2016). These tools are often used in multi-party systems like the Netherlands. They make a summary of the party programs and translate them into statements that citizens can agree or disagree with and get a voting advice.

For citizens to acquire political knowledge it is important that politicians explain their ideas and make their plans for the future known. People learn about certain issues if they are interested, able and motivated to do so. This so called ‘triad of learning’ is key to the understanding of political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997, pp. 178-179). Voters cannot be expected to be interested in all relevant subjects in politics. Most citizens do not participate actively in politics and may not even be highly interested in politics. These citizens can, however, still find specific aspects of politics relevant and interesting. People that do not have knowledge on every subject that is discussed in debates prior to elections, or on policies that the government made, can still be knowledgeable (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997, p. 187). Therefore it cannot be stated that citizens need to gain knowledge on every subject to state that they have sufficient political knowledge before making decisions in elections. As is discussed before, for a functioning democracy political knowledge of citizens is important and

with it the quality of the democratic choice citizens make. The importance of political knowledge lies in the ability to place the political news and the making of weighed choices in a democratic process (Vis, 1995). The political knowledge that is required to make decisions is described in the next section of the research.

Knowledge that citizens require for a functioning democracy.

The basis for democracy and its history are discussed in the previous section of the research. The requirements for a functioning democracy and the importance of a quality democratic choice are also explained. In this section of the thesis the political knowledge that citizens require is researched. The research is aimed at the Dutch situation. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1997, p. 10) define political knowledge as follows; “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory.” This is the definition for political knowledge that will be used in this research. Mostly political knowledge is described as factual knowledge, what the government does and is (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993). But political knowledge is also more than just facts, because policy influences every aspect of the lives of citizens. Voters choose their representatives to make rules and regulation for the society as a whole, entrusting them to influence their daily lives. For the rules and regulations to be eloquent the citizens that vote are anticipated to inform themselves. Informed citizens can make the choices that give the representatives a mandate to make policy in a country for the coming years (Seeberg, Slothuus, & Stubager, 2017).

Knowledge on issue positions.

It was previously explained that one way of gaining political knowledge is through watching debates or learning about politics through (social) media outlets. When watching for example electoral debates citizens are gaining knowledge on various subjects. Citizens are for example learning the issue positions of parties and gaining knowledge on the party leaders that represent the parties (Tyson, 2016). Issue positions of parties is one of the reasons people vote for a particular party. This is called issue voting, it means that people vote in elections based on political issues. Citizens that use issue voting and have knowledge about these issues are seen as better informed (Carmines & Stimson, 1980). In for example election campaigns the differences between parties become clear with their stances on certain issues. People are likely to vote for a party that best represents their interests (Tyson, 2016). Gaining knowledge on various issues is therefore not only important for the choice for a party citizens make in elections, but it is also necessary political knowledge. The knowledge on issue positions

Various issues come up in an election and are discussed in debates and other formats. To be able to make statements about the knowledge of Dutch citizens in regard to issue voting, issues where there is a clear contrast between political parties are chosen. Examples of these issues are: the positioning of political parties in regard to foreigners, or the position of the

parties in regards to the European Union. The voters time perspectives that play roles in this category of political knowledge are both retrospective and prospective. The knowledge that voters have on the position of parties on various issues can vary from issues that are have played in the past and where they see a certain party as accountable for. But in this category of political knowledge, the issues and issue voting will be aimed mostly at the prospective voting because mostly issues that are about future (events) will be central in election campaigns (Bingham Powell, Jr., 2000).

Left-right perception of voters.

Party ideologies.

The scattered political field in the Netherlands does not make oversight easier, certainly for citizens in the Netherlands (Hermsen & Verbeek, 1992). Citizens base their choice, besides on issues, on the ideological identity of parties. Ideology is the system of the ideas, norms and ideals that a group or society has (Van der Brug, 1997). Citizens can be attracted to a certain ideology and thus base their vote on that aspect of a political party.

One category that is essential for political knowledge is thus the knowledge on the right placement of parties in the political spectrum. Parties represent certain ideologies and need to have those to give direction to voters and give them guidance in an complicated political landscape. Parties do this because, as mentioned earlier, citizens cannot judge every detail of all issues that plays in society (Evans, 2004). Citizens cannot relate their own views and philosophies of society on every specific issue. The role of parties, also in the Dutch system, is to provide a framework of information for voters that they can base their electoral choices on. In computing the apparent use of the outcome of policies of a party the citizens can better orientate themselves on the important issues in the coming years (Evans, 2004). According to Hermsen and Verbeek (1992) political knowledge is not only knowing what parties want and what kind of plans they have for the future, but also being able to identify parties on their ideology. Parties are traditionally identified as left, right or middle. Traditionally the left political parties advocate social change towards more political, social and economic equality for citizens (Otjes, 2016). The right favours opportunities for people and that not everything has to be equal, because with, some, inequality the performances will be better. This way of thinking means that the left side of the political spectrum favours equal outcomes whereas the right wants equal opportunities (Otjes, 2016). The traditional middle parties have aspects of

both the left and the right characteristics. The position of the middle parties can be seen as left of the right parties and right of the left parties (Van der Brug, 1997).

The political left-right perception of Dutch voters is strongly linked to the election programs of the parties (Van der Brug, 1997). This means that there are certain issues that Dutch voters perceive as a left, or right, issue. The ideological standards of parties are mostly recognizable and easier to place on the left-right spectrum of the political playing field. It is a logical thing for voters to do by using these views in the short term to inform themselves. If the parties' actions when they are in government or in the national parliament do not match their words, it is more clear for voters than when they have to look at every single issue (Evans, 2004). When citizens get disappointed by a party they are more likely to disregard this ideology, at least for the next election, and look at other parties to vote on (Evans, 2004). The important knowledge citizens need to have on this category is thus knowledge about the positioning of political parties in the right place of the political spectrum. The indicator for this category will be the left-right positioning of political parties in the spectrum. The time frame that is used here is the retrospective time frame. Citizens base their answer on their knowledge of previous actions of political parties when placing them on the political spectrum.

General knowledge on politics and its representatives.

Coalitions in the Netherlands.

Even though parties in the Netherlands almost always have to make coalitions to form a government, because of the multi-party system, they cannot deviate too far from their ideological ideas. This means that sometimes the more left-wing orientated party has more influence and sometimes the right-wing orientated one, depending on the amount of votes they get. Most of the time this leads to a balance in the division of power (Hermsen & Verbeek, 1992). It is important that when a party considers to join a government-coalition that it can carry out at least some of their main ideas. This is not only critical for the ideal that a party stands for, but also for the loyalty of voters in the next election and prevent them from giving their vote to other parties (Evans, 2004). Because coalition-forming is essential in the Dutch political system and a government without at least two parties is, in practice, impossible it is necessary knowledge for Dutch citizens. This is therefore an indicator of general political knowledge Dutch citizens should have. These parties represent a majority in parliament and are therefore able to set the political agenda (Van der Brug, 1997). Specific knowledge about subjects of politics and having less general knowledge is not necessarily

dangerous to a functioning democracy. However, Tyson (2016) and Delli Carpini and Keeter (1997) do state that basic knowledge about the way democracy works in a state is necessary.

The politicians that stand out the most in Dutch politics are the representatives of the government, the ministers and secretaries of state. These people are the countries leaders in government on various fields of interest, for example in finance, economics and public health (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993). Knowledge about political leaders is seen as an indicator for the category of general political knowledge. Citizens should be able to identify a leading figure in the government such as a minister or secretary of state (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993). The time perspective in this category is the retrospective one, the indicators used in this category is knowledge on previous government coalitions and knowledge of certain (current, or past) important political figures.

The effect of education on political knowledge.

There could be various explanations for the difference in the level political knowledge of citizens. One of the most important explanatory variables, according to various authors, is the education-level of citizens. Various authors have argued that the Netherlands is a ‘diploma-democracy’ (Bovens & Wille, 2011, pp. 9-12) (Hakhverdian, van der Brug, & de Vries, 2012). A diploma-democracy is a democracy which is governed by the citizens that have the highest degrees (Bovens & Wille, 2011, p. 13). This means that the highly-educated people are dominating the political process in the Netherlands (Bovens & Wille, 2011, pp. 9-15).

Having access to political knowledge, or being able to understand, comprehend and apply this knowledge is not the same. As has been argued before in the thesis citizens have almost unlimited access to political information through, social and traditional media (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993, p. 16). The knowledge citizens should have is explained in the previous paragraphs, part of this knowledge is understanding which parties represent the citizens. Political representation is the process where citizens can make their ideas, opinions and voices known through political representatives that speak for them in the political arena. The political representation should then also be a reflection of society, in some way, thus including the voice of various educational classes as well according to Bovens and Wille (2011).

In modern society knowledge and information are very important goods. The political power is more and more concentrated among the well-educated people. Furthermore higher educated people are more likely to be members of political parties, vote and have higher levels of

political interest (Hakhverdian, van der Brug, & de Vries, 2012). It is argued that citizens with a lower educational level will therefore be less inclined to trust their governments because they feel excluded from political and social participation that has meaning (Bovens & Wille, 2011, pp. 80-95). Hakhverdian, van der Brug and de Vries (2012) even state that education, to some extent, is an indicator for which party people vote for. They agree, for a large part, with Bovens and Wille (2011) but disagree on the notion that the education-gap between educational groups is widening. Education has, more or less, the same effect on political interest today as it had 40 years ago (Hakhverdian, van der Brug, & de Vries, 2012). This is important for this thesis because then education is a good variable to measure political knowledge on a more individual level with. Education on political knowledge, relevant societal issues and politics in general is important for young people to learn early and on every school-level (Vis, 1995). Because as has been stated before knowledge is a process of (a lifetime) of learning and it is important to start with this early in a individuals life.

In this research the level of political knowledge of Dutch citizens is compared with the variable of the educational level citizens have. It is therefore useful to know how the educational levels of the Dutch population are build up. The Dutch population had the following division of education in 2012. Unknown: 0,9 percent, elementary: 9,3 percent, lower vocational and secondary (together): 23,6 percent, middle level (vocational/higher level secondary): 39 percent and higher level vocational/university: 27,2 (Rijksoverheid, 2016). In the beginning of this paragraph is was discussed whether or not the Dutch democracy was becoming a diploma-democracy. This questions will be answered in the conclusion of the thesis. But it can be stated that the members of parliament are not a representative reflection of society in terms of educational level. In 2010 the educational level of the members of parliament was the following: 7 percent vocational/higher level secondary and 93 percent had a higher level vocational/university level education (Parliament, 2015).

Summary.

To conclude the researched question about the knowledge citizens require, a few statements can be made. First of all political knowledge is mostly about knowledge itself. Knowledge about the government and what it does and is key to political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993). General knowledge about which parties represent certain interests is something citizens require for a functioning democracy. The knowledge of which parties represent certain interests is reflected in the knowledge of citizens on the left-right perspective of political parties. Besides being able to place the political parties in the political spectrum

citizens should be knowledgeable on general political knowledge such as knowing what a coalition is or being able to identify the most important political representatives such as ministers. A third category citizens need to have knowledge about, is the position of political parties on certain important political issues. This could be on issues that are of a more ideological nature, for example whether income differences should decrease, or issues that are more actual in present political debates. An example of a more current issue is the issue of the further integration on a European level. An important factor in acquiring political knowledge is through debates, discussions and speeches of political leaders (Tyson, 2016). Citizens thus need to inform them on the views of political parties, this can also be done by looking up speeches on the internet or reading the programs of the parties online.

Citizens are not expected to know everything about politics, representatives and policies. But the points described above are minimal required for the political knowledge necessary to make a weighted decision in elections. These points are the base for the analysis of the surveys. These points described above can be seen as three individual categories that are key elements for political knowledge and will be researched.

Three categories of political knowledge.

- Knowledge on the issue positions of parties.
- Knowledge about the differences between the parties (left-right perspective).
- General knowledge the Dutch political system and its representatives in government.

Based on the literature review and the knowledge citizens need to have as described in the points above, there can be three categories of political knowledge identified that citizens need to have for a sufficient amount of political knowledge. Based on these three points an index will be made that scores citizens on every issue. In this thesis it is argued that sufficient knowledge means that citizens score more than two-thirds of the points in this index (7 out of 9 or more). As indicated before it is not necessary for citizens to know all aspects of political knowledge before the engage in the democratic process. But they should be able to score more than two-thirds on the index of this level of basic political knowledge. Differences across the respondent-groups are shown by looking at the education level of the individual respondents. This is done to be able to make individual statements about the level of political knowledge of Dutch citizens. It is then argued whether or not education has influence on the level of political knowledge that citizens have.

Political knowledge of Dutch citizens analysed.

Various studies have shown that political knowledge, as conceptualized in the literature chapter, is highly correlated. Even so much that political knowledge can generally be seen as a relatively unidimensional concept (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993) (Tyson, 2016). In the literature review in the previous chapters, regarding to political knowledge, a number of key items of political knowledge stand out. First of all political knowledge is partly factual knowledge. To research this part of political knowledge questions from the surveys are chosen that reflect this.

As stated in the literature review, part of the process of achieving political knowledge is learning that lasts a lifetime (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997, pp. 178-179). Therefore differentiating on an individual level in questions is relevant. For example with questions about the left-right perception of Dutch citizens of the political parties. The selection of test items is an important step to succeed in determining the content validity of the eventual measure. Mostly content-validity is characterized as the extent to which sets of items affect a certain area of interest. Furthermore, the adequacy of important subject matter and how it has been measured and in which way the content has been set in the form of certain test items. Lastly the way in which the tasks in the used test fit with the description and definition of the domain of political knowledge is analysed (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993).

The way this survey-analysis is designed is to evaluate questions in the Dutch NKO-survey of 2012 about political knowledge and political preferences. The surveys-questions will be selected on the standards as described in the theoretical chapter about the political knowledge required for a functioning democracy (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998, pp. 185-188). When these questions are chosen, the used surveys will be combined to make statements about the state of political knowledge in the Netherlands (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, 2012).

The survey that will be analysed will consist of data from the year 2012. This is done because then statements about the current state of political knowledge of Dutch citizens can be made, because this is the most recent survey. The Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek (NKO) is done every time around national elections. So the most recent data is from 2006, 2010 and 2012, the data from 2017 is not yet available. The data from the NKO is published in the database of Dutch Parliamentary Electoral Studies. The NKO takes a representative sample of the Dutch population and publishes this data. It is important to keep in mind that the election turnout in the Netherlands is mostly around 75-80 percent, 2006 (80,4 percent), 2010 (75,4 percent) and

2012 (74,6 percent) (Kiesraad, 2017). This means that on average almost a fourth of the Dutch citizens do not vote for a government in national elections. Those people are also part of the NKO and thus influence the answers on political knowledge. The number of respondents that did not vote in elections is lower in the NKO than the Dutch average (Dutch Parliamentary Electoral Studies, 2016).

The data that is used from the NKO is a representative sample from the Dutch population. The survey that is utilized was conducted after the election of 2012. The population of the survey consists out of citizens that are 18 year and older and are allowed to vote. In 2012 the sample size was 2710 persons with a responds of 1677 (61%) (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, 2012). This sample size of Dutch respondents is a representative view of the Dutch population (Dutch Parliamentary Electoral Studies, 2016). Therefore statements about the state of political knowledge of Dutch citizens can be made. However, the NKO it is not a fully random selection of the researched individuals, this is due to the nature of the survey. Citizens that participate in these kind of surveys tend to be more engaged in civic activities than the citizens that do not participate (Pew Research Center, 2012). This is a limitation of the research and the limitations for the findings will be discussed in the conclusion. In table 2 is shown how the non-response is build up. Like in other NKO-surveys the respondents are differentiated by looking at their gender, voting behaviour, education or marital status (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, 2012).

Table 2: Sample size and explanation of non-response (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, 2012).

	N	Percentages
Sample	2750	100
Error in sampling frame		
Died/ Moved abroad/ Unknown/ Institution or elderly home/ other reasons.	40	1,5
Effective sample	2710	98,5
Administrative non-response		
Language barrier / returned / moved within the Netherlands	136	5,0
Non-response		
Refusal / no contact / No opportunity during field work period	881	32
Response		
Total	1693	61,6
Aborted	16	0,6
Complete	1677	61,0

Questions that measure political knowledge.

In the NKO there are numerous questions that are relevant for measuring political knowledge. As researched in the theory section of this thesis, general knowledge is an important part of political knowledge. There are questions in the NKO that are relevant for the measurement of political knowledge. The NKO mostly uses the Likert scale for measuring the answers of the respondents. As mentioned earlier, data from 2012 is used because that survey is the most recent one. This survey is thus seen as the most recent one. Every category of political knowledge is recoded and given points to be able to create an index where the knowledge of Dutch citizens can be measured. There are various variables that can measure political knowledge on a more individual level. But as has been discussed before education is one of the most important variables because it has been argued that the Dutch democracy is becoming a diploma-democracy (Bovens & Wille, 2011, p. 13). To be able to make statements about the individual level of Dutch citizens every category of political knowledge has been investigated by comparing the answers with the level of education a respondent has.

The level of education a respondent has is measured with the highest completed education of citizens. The levels of education as described in the NKO are: lower level (elementary, lower vocational and secondary). Middle level (vocational/higher level secondary) and higher level vocational/university. In the Dutch political playing field there are many political parties. In this research the knowledge on the position of the traditional left, middle and right parties (PvdA, CDA and VVD) are analysed. These parties are chosen because they have a clear identity and they have been in politics for a long time which makes them recognizable. Every category is individually researched, the index per category is displayed at the end of every paragraph.

Knowledge on issue positions of parties.

In the time of the parliamentary election of 2012 there were various issues that were central in the Dutch society. Three issues are described and analysed in the following section, to measure the political knowledge of Dutch citizens. There were various questions in the NKO related to political knowledge of citizens about the issue positions of the political parties. This means that citizens can link a party to certain to certain issues. The three traditional parties, the PvdA, the CDA and the VVD, are analysed.

Issue: integration of foreigners.

One of these themes that were central in and around the time of the 2012 election is the integration of foreigners, both western and non-western, in the Dutch society. The PvdA has a

welcoming, accommodative approach towards foreigners. The PvdA reasons from the point of view of the foreigners and their rights. They state that children from parents whom were foreigners and have roots in the Netherlands cannot be send back, the same goes for under-aged foreigners. The PvdA focusses more on the aspect of corporation at international level and human rights and not as much on the integration. They want to help foreigners with subsidies for language courses and create jobs for them to participate in the Dutch society and give them time to fully integrate (PvdA, 2012). Furthermore the PvdA sees it as important that foreigners are able to keep their own culture and traditions (Hermsen & Verbeek, 1992).

The VVD has a more restrictive approach. The VVD for example focusses on the duties that foreigners have. Duties like learning the language and participating (economically) in society are central for the VVD. Foreigners need to accept the Dutch society and its norms and values. In short; foreigners must adapt to the Dutch society and need to integrate and participate as soon as they can. Furthermore the VVD advocates that subsidies for integration should be limited and foreigners should do most of their integration-process on their own (VVD, 2012).

The CDA tends to be more on the VVD line of reasoning but is less restrictive and more accommodating than the VVD The CDA has a more nuanced attitude towards this issue, they aim at shorter, more efficient, procedures. They also plead for stricter requirements for foreigners, like language demands and limitation of foreigners that have no changes in the Dutch labour market. But at the same time argue that, however it is important that foreigners adapt to the Dutch culture, they should also be able to keep their own traditions (Niemöller, 1992).

The differences in approach of the issue of integration of foreigners shows the differences between the three traditional parties. Citizens should be able to identify the position of the parties on such an issue. In the NKO the question was asked how the respondents viewed the position of certain parties on the issue of integration of foreigners. Respondents could indicate on a scale from 1-7 which position they thought a party had. With 1 meaning admit more foreigners and 7 meaning send back more. Based on the election-programs of the parties it is likely that the PvdA will be more likely to admit more foreigners than the CDA, who in their turn are more likely to admit more foreigners than the VVD. To research this issue the question has been recoded, the answers that are seen as wrong are given 0 points and the answers that are seen as right are given 1 point. The right answer for the PvdA is seen as a

score lower than the CDA, the right answer for the CDA is seen as a score lower than the VVD. The right answer for the VVD is seen as scoring more than the CDA. The results of the first issue (foreigners) are displayed in table 3. Looking at the results of table there are a few things that stand out. First of all, the biggest differences in results show in the scores of the lower educational level (correct 69 percent) and the higher educational level (88 percent).

Table 3: Knowledge on the positioning of the VVD, CDA and PvdA on the issue of foreigners.

Positioning of the VVD, CDA and PvdA on the issue of foreigners					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	Total (percentage)
Wrong positioning	0	31	23	12	22
Right positioning	1	69	77	88	78
Total		100 (N = 448)	100 (N = 650)	100 (N = 495)	100 (N = 1593)

Value (table 3)			
	Value	Df	P-value
Chi-Square	60,043	4	,000

Issue: income differences.

The second issue that is researched is the issue of the income differences and the position of the traditional parties on this issue. Especially after the economic crisis that started in 2008 some parties advocated that those income differences should be reduced significantly. Traditionally the PvdA can be seen as a more left-wing party that wants to reduce those differences (Niemöller, 1992). The VVD is more concerned with the wealthier people and is far less likely to want to reduce those differences (Niemöller, 1992). The CDA is less likely to be wanting to reduce the income differences than the PvdA and more likely to want to do something about this than the VVD. This information can be distilled from the election programs of the political parties. The VVD for example emphasizes the importance of the self-development and own responsibility of citizens whereas the PvdA indicates that people with a low income need the support of the government (PvdA, 2012) (VVD, 2012). The CDA points at the responsibility an individual has for their own development. At the same time they see a responsibility for the government to create a safety net for people that cannot look out for themselves or that have a low income (CDA, 2012). By identifying the position of political parties on this issue citizens can display political knowledge on a subject that has been part of the debate for a long time (Niemöller, 1992).

The respondents could rate a party on a score from 1-7. The scores in this case mean 1: *bigger income difference* and 7 means: *smaller income difference*. The right answer for the PvdA is seen as a score higher than the CDA, the right answer for the CDA is seen as a score higher than the VVD. The right answer for the VVD is seen as scoring lower than the CDA. To research this item the question has been recoded and the correct answers have been given 1 point, the wrong answers have been given 0 points.

When looking at the results of table 4 a few things stand out. First of all, the fact that the respondents of all educational levels were in a great majority able to identify the right positioning of the political parties on the issue of income. The biggest difference in knowledge on this issue is between the lower level of education (76 percent) and the higher level of education (94 percent).

Table 4: Knowledge on the positioning of the VVD, CDA and PvdA on the issue of income.

Positioning of the VVD, CDA and PvdA on the issue of income					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	Total (percentage)
Wrong positioning	0	24	16	6	14
Right positioning	1	76	84	94	86
Total		100 (N = 448)	100 (N = 650)	100 (N = 495)	100 (N = 1593)

Value (table 4)			
	Value	Df	P-value
Chi-Square	44,846	4	,000

Issue: European unification.

The third issue that is researched is the issue of the position of the parties on the European Unification. Respondents were asked where the parties' position in this debate was. This issue has been a controversial issue for quite a period of time. As argued before because of the depillarization of society since the 1970's, the strict division in left and right parties has somewhat decreased (Van der Brug, 1997). Knowledge on the identification of the parties in the political spectrum is still necessary and important political knowledge as argued earlier (p 17). But certain issues cannot strictly be seen as left or right. This is for example the case with issues that involve the European Union, the traditional parties tend to think more or less the same about the unification of the European Union (Van der Brug, 1997). The VVD had, based on their program, the most positive attitude towards European integration and wants to

integrate more in the European Union, based on the 2012 campaign (VVD, 2012). Knowledge on such an issue is important for citizens because then they are able to identify the positions of parties on issues that are not traditionally left or right issues.

Based on the party programs the correct answers for the parties are seen as follows: the right answer for the PvdA is seen as a score higher than the CDA, the right answer for the CDA is seen as a score higher than the VVD. The right answer for the VVD is seen as scoring lower than the CDA. In the survey a score of 1 means *should go further* and the score of 7 means *has gone too far*.

Looking at the results of table 5 it seems that every educational group seems to be able to identify the parties on the issues of further EU integration. The biggest differences appears between the lowest educational level (73 percent) and the highest level of education (89 percent).

Table 5: Knowledge on the positioning of the VVD, CDA and PvdA on the issue of European unification.

Positioning of the VVD, CDA and PvdA on the issue of European unification					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	Total (percentage)
Wrong positioning	0	27	20	11	19
Right positioning	1	73	80	89	81
Total		100 (N = 448)	100 (N = 650)	100 (N = 495)	100 (N = 1593)

Value (table 5)			
	Value	Df	P-value
Chi-Square	39,260	4	,000

Index scores on the scores on issue positions.

When combining these three issue positions and their scores a few things stand out. As is shown in table 6 the three scores on the issue positions are combined and crossed with the highest completed education of the respondents. The respondents of the lowest level of education are correct on all three issue positions 52 percent of the time. This is quite different from the score of the respondents of higher vocational/university level, they have a 76 percent correct-score on all three issues. There is however something that also stands out, every educational level shows for three-fourths or more knowledge on at least two of the tree issues or on all three.

Table 6: Knowledge of issue positions of political parties.

Knowledge of issue positions of political parties (CDA, VVD, PvdA)					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			Total (percentage)
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	
No knowledge	0	9	5	1	5
Knowledge on one issue	1	12	10	4	9
Knowledge on two issues	2	27	24	19	23
Knowledge on all issues	3	52	61	76	63
Total		100 (N = 448)	100 (N = 650)	100 (N = 495)	100 (N = 1593)

Value (table 6)			
	Value	Df	P-value
Chi-Square	91,661	12	,000

Knowledge about differences between Dutch parties (left-right perspective).

In the multi-party system of the Netherlands there are a lot of parties where citizens can choose from. The parties all represent a different perspective from the political spectrum. There are parties based on religious beliefs, liberal parties, socialist parties and more extreme parties on both sides (Van der Brug, 1997). Even though the position of parties in the political spectrum sometimes shifts, there are certain statements that can be made about the positioning of political parties (Van der Brug, 1997). The left-right perception means that citizens can place the political parties in the Dutch political playing-field in the right place.

In the survey there are various questions about the left-right knowledge of Dutch citizens. All political parties are analysed, but as stated in the theoretical part it is about the general knowledge. The answered questions in the NKO-survey are analysed on the position in the political spectrum of the three traditional left, middle and right parties (PvdA, CDA and VVD). The question was where the respondents put the parties on the scale in the political spectrum. The position of parties in the spectrum is widely discussed, that is why the traditional parties are analysed because they have recognizable ideology. The PvdA can be seen as a party that is left in the political spectrum, the CDA is a middle-party and the VVD can be seen as a right party. This positioning is not always 100 percent precise, for example the PvdA can be a middle party in some issues and the CDA can be more right oriented.

Even though there are differences in emphasis between the parties this stereotypical position of parties in the spectrum is maintained to measure the knowledge of citizens in this regard. In the NKO, survey respondents could rate a party on a 10 point scale to measure their position in the political spectrum. This question is recoded and there are categories made where the answer could be ‘correct’ or ‘false’. The correct answer is given 1 point and the false answer is given 0 points. For the left-right perspective of Dutch parties the correct answer for the PvdA is seen as scoring lower than the CDA on a 10 point scale, the correct answer for the CDA is seen as scoring lower than the VVD on a 10 point scale and the correct answer for the VVD is seen as scoring more than the CDA on a 10 point scale. This is done to be able to identify if the knowledge of respondents on the right order of placement of political parties. In this case the score of 0 is *left* and the score of 10 is seen as *right*, the scores in between are indicated to place a party in the political spectrum. To be able to make statements about the scores of individuals the variable of education is added to be able to make statements about the specific knowledge of the respondents.

Figure 1: Position in spectrum (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, 2012).

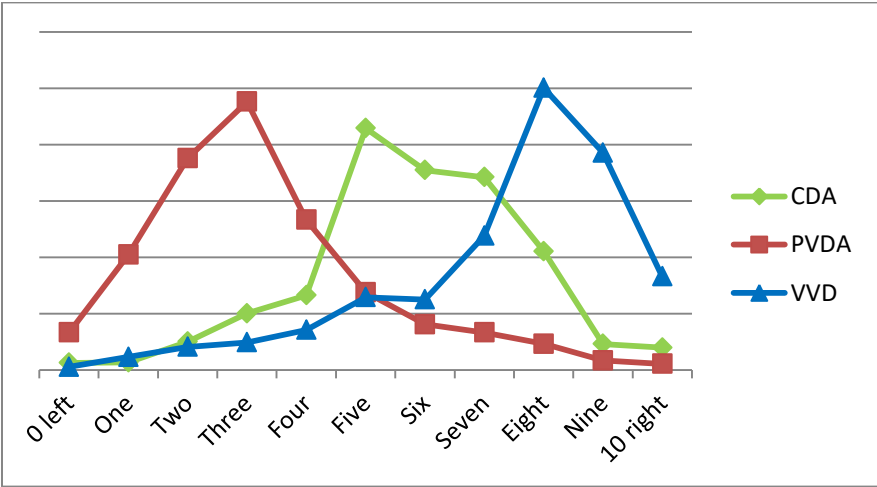


Figure 1 shows that left-right perception of Dutch citizens is quite accurate. This knowledge is graphically shown in figure 1 where the positions of the PvdA as a left, CDA as a middle and VVD as a right party are displayed. The tops of the graphs are exactly where you would expect them at the left (three), middle (five) and right (eight).

When the position of the three traditional parties (CDA, VVD and PvdA) are combined the output gives the following image of the knowledge of Dutch citizens. The results are presented in table 7. The respondents with the highest level of education show in a great majority (84 percent) that they know where to place all three traditional parties in the left-

right spectrum. The lowest score is of the lower level of education, 39 percent correct on the placement of all three political parties. Another thing that stands out is that respondents from all levels of education show in a majority to be able to place at least two of the three traditional parties correctly in the political spectrum.

Table 7: Knowledge of left and right-rating of the VVD, CDA and PvdA (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, 2012).

Knowledge of left-right rating of political parties					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	Total (percentage)
No knowledge on the right position of parties.	0	25	16	4	15
Knowledge on the position of one party	1	12	11	3	9
Knowledge on the position of two parties	2	24	20	9	18
Knowledge on the position of three parties	3	39	53	84	58
Total		100 (N = 448)	100 (N = 650)	100 (N = 495)	100 (N = 1593)

Value (table 7)			
	Value	Df	P-value
Chi-Square	240,740	12	,000

General knowledge on the political system and its representatives.

In this part of the thesis the knowledge of Dutch citizens on the political system in the Netherlands is researched. Examples of such knowledge are; knowledge about the current government coalition and its representatives. In the literature part of the thesis there were a few statements made about knowledge on the political system that citizens require. This knowledge can consist of knowledge on the current government coalition and its representatives. The knowledge of Dutch citizens is researched by researching if the respondents of the NKO were able to identify the minister of finance before 2012 and if they know of which parties the previous government coalition consisted.

The two items of general are added to be able to make statements on the score of general knowledge on the political system and its representatives. If a respondent is correct on only one of the two items a score of 2 is given, if the respondent is right on two items a score of 3 is given. When neither are correct, a score of 0 is given. The items are recoded, added and

presented in a table. This decision is made to be able to present a fair distribution in the final index between the three categories of political knowledge.

Knowledge on representatives.

The political system has its representatives in, for example, parliamentarians, ministers and state secretaries. Knowledge on who the key-individuals are that represent the citizens in ministries is researched in the NKO. For example the question is asked who the minister of finance before 2012 was, the correct answer in this case is *Jan-Kees de Jager*. The minister of finance is an important figure in a government and therefore a good indicator to measure the knowledge of Dutch citizens on representatives with.

The results are shown in table 8. As is shown in the results every educational level scores more than 90 percent on the recognisability of the minister of finance. The higher level of education almost scores 100 percent on the knowledge of the minister of finance (97 percent). This is a very high outcome, this can be due to the fact that Jan-Kees de Jager was a well-known minister and was on television regularly.

Table 8: Score on the knowledge of the minister of finance.

Knowledge on the minister of finance					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	Total (percentage)
Wrong person	0	8	9	3	7
Right person	1	92	91	97	93
Total		100 (N = 372)	100 (N = 554)	100 (N = 481)	100 (N = 1407)

Value (table 8)			
	Value	Df	P-value
Chi-Square	19,950	4	,001

Knowledge on the government coalition.

It is also investigated if the respondents knew which parties were part of the former government coalition, the correct answer in this case was *VVD, CDA with support of the PVV*. There are more differences noticeable when looking at the knowledge of the government coalition than with the knowledge of the representative (table 9). Again the highest score was achieved by the respondents that have the highest level of education. 94 percent of the respondents with the highest level of education were able to identify the right coalition. The biggest difference is with the lowest level of education. 71 percent of the respondents that have the lowest level of education were able to identify the right coalition.

Table 9: Knowledge on previous government coalition.

Knowledge on previous government coalition					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	Total (percentage)
Wrong coalition chosen	0	29	17	6	17
Right coalition chosen	1	71	83	94	83
Total		100 (N =446)	100 (N = 650)	100 (N = 495)	100 (N = 1591)

Value (table 9)			
	Value	Df	P-value
Pearson Chi-Square	114,717	4	,000

Index scores general knowledge on Dutch political system.

As indicated in the introduction about the general knowledge Dutch citizens need to have an index is made and the two individual items are added. When looking at the results of the index (table 10) a few things stand out. First of all, citizens that have a higher level of education score very high on general knowledge (92 percent). The biggest difference between the scores is between the respondents that have the lowest level of education (73 percent) and the respondents with the highest level of education (92 percent). This means that most of the respondents were able to identify who the former minister of finance was and know which parties formed the previous government coalition. As was explained earlier the respondents that were correct on one of the two items of general knowledge scored 2 points.

Table 10: General knowledge of Dutch citizens on representatives and government coalition.

General knowledge on representatives and government coalition					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	Total (percentage)
No general knowledge	0	4	2	1	2
Knowledge on one aspect	2	23	18	7	15
Knowledge on both aspects.	3	73	80	92	83
Total		100 (N = 371)	100 (N = 554)	100 (N = 481)	100 (N = 1406)

Value (table 10)			
	Value	Df	P-value
Pearson Chi-Square	78,216	8	,000

Index score on political knowledge.

To investigate the political knowledge of Dutch citizens questions from the NKO (2012) have been researched. These questions have been researched by looking at three categories of political knowledge. Those categories are; knowledge on the issue positions of political parties, knowledge about the differences between parties (left-right perspective) and general knowledge on the Dutch political system and its representatives. These categories came forth from a literature research on democratic literature and other secondary literature related to politics and knowledge. Based on these three categories an analysis has been made and scores have been given for every category.

To be able to make statements about the political knowledge of Dutch citizens the categories have been measured by looking at the educational level of the respondents. In the literature

review it was suggested that some authors see the Dutch society increasingly as a diploma-democracy, meaning that the higher educated people are more able to be informed about politics (Hakhverdian, van der Brug, & de Vries, 2012). Furthermore the political power rests, increasingly, with the higher educated (Bovens & Wille, 2011, pp. 80-90) (Parliament, 2015). A new variable is created and the scores on the three individual categories are added up in an index. This index is shown in table 11 (P. 40) and displays the scores of the respondents per category of education.

There are a few things that stand out in this index. First of all it stands out that 61 percent of the respondents that completed a higher level of education scored 3 points on all categories of political knowledge (total of 9 points). This is far more than any of the two other educational categories. For example, 23 percent of the respondents that have the lowest level of education scored all 3 points on each category. Of the middle level of education 35 percent of the respondents scored all three points on the categories of education (total of 9 points).

Table 11: Total score on the knowledge of Dutch citizens on three categories of political knowledge.

Total score on political knowledge of Dutch citizens					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	Total (percentage)
No knowledge	0	1	0	0	1
	1	1	0	0	1
	2	2	1	0	2
	3	5	3	1	3
	4	6	4	1	4
	5	9	8	3	6
	6	13	11	4	9
	7	19	14	6	12
	8	21	24	24	22
Knowledge on all aspects	9	23	35	61	40
Total		100 (N = 353)	100 (N = 542)	100 (N = 477)	100 (N = 1372)
Average		6,8	7,4	8,3	7,5

Value (table 11)			
	Value	Df	P-value
Chi-Square	213,882	32	,000

Based on these results a few statements can be made. First of all, based on the results it can be stated that education is a good indicator for the amount of political knowledge an individual has. Secondly, it is good to keep in mind that the middle level and higher level make up for more than 60 percent of educational levels of the Dutch population (Rijksoverheid, 2016). As indicated the emphasis in Dutch society is more and more on the level of education of an individual and the diploma's someone has. The amount of people with an lower level of education has been decreasing over the last years and more and more people have a middle level or higher educational level (Rijksoverheid, 2016). The last years there is a bigger emphasis on education about democracy and politics and based on these results, as shown in table 11, education is a factor that influences the political knowledge of an individual.

In this thesis it is stated that a sufficient amount of political knowledge means that an individual scores on more than two-thirds of the points of political knowledge. This means that an individual has a score of 7, 8 or 9 in the index to qualify as having sufficient amount of political knowledge, the results are shown in table 12. Based on this assumption of sufficient political knowledge a few statements can be made. First of all, the respondents that have the lower level of education have a sufficient amount of political knowledge in 63 percent of the cases. Again this is a big difference with the respondents that have a higher level vocational/University, almost all of those respondents (91 percent) had a sufficient amount of political knowledge. Based on results as are displayed in table 12 it can be stated that the vast majority of the Dutch population has sufficient amount of political knowledge. Respondents show to have knowledge on at least two of the three categories of political knowledge that came from the research of (inter) national literature on political knowledge and democracy.

Table 12: Sufficient amount of political knowledge.

Sufficient amount of political knowledge (index 7, 8 or 9 points)					
		Educational level of respondent (percentage)			
		Lower level	Middle level	Higher level	Total (percentage)
	7	19	14	6	12
	8	21	24	24	22
	9	23	35	61	41
Total		63	73	91	75

The variable of education is used to look at the political knowledge of Dutch citizens on an individual level. One of the main concerns of various authors is that the Dutch democracy is becoming a diploma-democracy (Hakhverdian, van der Brug, & de Vries, 2012) (Bovens &

Wille, 2011). Based on the level of education of the representatives in parliament this statement can be seen as correct (Parliament, 2015). Based on this research it can also be stated that the level of education an individual has is a good indicator for the level of political knowledge a person has. When for example looking at the difference between the respondents that have a higher level of education and the respondents that have a lower level of education the difference in sufficient political knowledge is quite substantive (91 versus 63 percent). It is however also remarkable that a majority of every respondent level of education scores a sufficient amount of points on the index of political knowledge. This is the case in at least 63 percent (and increasingly more) of the cases.

The results of some other research indicated that the level of political knowledge of Dutch citizens is limited (NRC, 2012). Based on this research however, it can be stated that the basic political knowledge of Dutch citizens is sufficient. A total of 75 percent of the respondents show sufficient political knowledge (table 12) on the three categories of basic political knowledge.

Conclusion

In the conclusion the various subjects of the thesis will be discussed, first of all the sub-questions are answered. The answering of the sub-questions lead to the answering of the main research-question. Furthermore the implications of the research and the scope of the results of the thesis are discussed. Also recommendations are made for future research into political knowledge of Dutch citizens. The way the NKO is set up is discussed and statements and observations are made. This is done to see how it can be better suited for research into political knowledge. Finally other recommendations are made about how to research political knowledge further and which gaps there are and need to be filled in future research.

Research questions

In this thesis the following research question was raised: *“What knowledge should Dutch voters have about democracy, according to democratic theory and what is the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters?”*

To support this main question there were other questions that needed answering in order to answer the research question. These questions were formulated as follows:

- What is the importance of political knowledge for a functioning democracy according to the literature?
- What does democratic theory say about the knowledge of democracy that voters require?
- What is the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters, across different educational groups, as researched in a representative survey?

Importance of political knowledge for a functioning democracy.

The first sub-question is about the importance of political knowledge for a functioning democracy. The literature states that it is key for a democracy that its citizens are well-informed and possess political knowledge. People can learn about certain issues if they are interested in them and motivated to do so. Learning is therefore an important key to the understanding of political knowledge. Voters cannot be expected to be interested in all relevant subjects in politics. Most citizens do not participate actively in politics and may not even be highly interested in politics. These citizens can, however, still find specific aspects of politics relevant and interesting. People that do not have knowledge on every subject that is discussed in debates prior to elections, or on policies that the government made, can still be knowledgeable. The importance of political knowledge lies in the ability to place the political news and the making of weighed choices in a democratic process. Citizens that are

knowledgeable on politics are also more likely to be more consistent in their choices leading to more stability.

Conclusion on the research of theory on political knowledge.

As has been established in the literature review, political knowledge is mostly about knowledge itself. The knowledge about democracy and the democratic process that citizens require has been answered by looking extensively at literature that is available on this subject. First of all a history of democracy has been described. Citizens should inform themselves on various issue positions of political parties and the political system in general. There is no need for knowledge on every individual subject, but basic knowledge is necessary to be able to make weighed decisions in elections. Various subjects have been researched in both the retrospective and prospective time perspective of voters. This is done because voters base their votes on the actions of political parties in the past and their plans for the future.

It is important for citizens to be able to link political parties to certain issues. These issues can for example come from the election campaign and be very actual. Or the issues can indicate the traditional position a party has on that issue, an example of this is the issue of the difference in income of citizens and if it should be decreased by the government or if that is the responsibility of individuals themselves. Because of the complication of the Dutch political playing-field it is important for citizens to be able to place political parties on the right place in the political spectrum. This left-right perspective is basic politic knowledge and thus necessary knowledge for citizens. Literature on these topics of elections, democracy and parliament has been extensively investigated. The thesis focusses on the Dutch situation and therefore general knowledge about the coalition is important. The way Dutch politics works is that there is a need for coalition-forming, there is not one party that can rule on its own. This specific knowledge is needed in order to understand how the political system works and how it functions. Furthermore citizens should be able to identify some key figures of the government (for example ministers). Those are the people that lead the country and knowledge on the representatives is therefore important.

The combination of research in books, journal articles and websites on the subject led to the following themes citizens need to require knowledge about for a functioning democracy: These themes have been researched in the literature-part of the thesis and answer the second sub-question. Based on the points that are necessary for political knowledge, three categories

of political knowledge citizens require, according to the democratic literature, can be distinguished.

- Knowledge on the issue positions of parties.
- Knowledge about the differences between the parties (left-right perspective).
- General knowledge the Dutch political system and its representatives in government.

Conclusion on the state of political knowledge of Dutch citizens.

In the research of the surveys, the author has stated whether or not Dutch citizens have a sufficient amount of knowledge. The results are shown in various tables and there is differentiated on an individual level by looking at the educational level of the respondents. This is done because, according to various authors, education is an important indicator of political knowledge of individuals. Some authors argue that the Dutch democracy is increasingly becoming a diploma-democracy where the higher educated possess the political knowledge and power. Looking at the political knowledge of Dutch citizens on an individual level by differentiating on educational levels is therefore important to be able to make statements about this conclusion.

The determination if something was sufficient or not has been done on the basis of the literature review and on the interpretation of the results of the author. As was indicated by the literature, citizens could not be expected to have knowledge on every single issue. Therefore it was determined that sufficient knowledge was seen as having more than two-thirds of the points in the index created in the analysis chapter (total of 7, 8 or 9 points). When asking questions on the position citizens would place in the political spectrum and on certain issues the three traditional left, middle and right-parties are used (PvdA, CDA and VVD). This is done because those parties are traditionally easier to place in the spectrum on an issue. They also have a long history in the Dutch political playing-field and are therefore well known.

To answer the third sub-question, about the state of political knowledge of Dutch citizens, data from the NKO (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek) has been used. The outcomes of these surveys has been displayed in the chapter of the analysis and answer the third sub-question. The three categories are added up in an index and based on this index statements have been made on the political knowledge of Dutch citizens.

The first category researched is the positioning of parties on certain political issues (table 6). The image comes forward that the respondents with the highest level of education have the

knowledge. Of the lower level category 52 percent of the respondents score all 3 points on the index. The respondents with the highest level of education score 3 points in 76 percent of the cases. On the category of the left-right rating of Dutch citizens there is a mixed image (table 7) Of the various educational levels lowest level has the lowest percentage of individuals that were correct on the placement of all three political parties in the political spectrum (39 percent). This is opposed to the highest level of education where 84 percent of the respondents were correct on the placement of the three traditional parties in the political spectrum. On the category of general knowledge of Dutch citizens there is the same mixed image (table 10). Of the lowest level of education 73 percent of the respondents scored the maximum amount of 3 points on the index. Of the highest level of education more than 90 percent, 92 percent, scored 3 points in the index.

When combining these results in an index the following image shows (see table 11). As stated earlier sufficient political knowledge is seen as being able to score points on more than two-thirds of the index. The index shows that Dutch citizens have a sufficient amount of political knowledge. On every educational category far more than half the respondents show sufficient political knowledge. For example 63 percent of the respondents with the lowest level of education score a sufficient amount of points. The respondents with the highest level of education here also show a sufficient amount of political knowledge (91 percent). When looking at the different levels of education it can be stated that the higher people are educated, the more likely they are to have more political knowledge. Therefore it can be stated that education plays a big role in the democratic process. The remarkable thing that comes from the index is that, even though citizens are not always able to identify all aspects of political knowledge fully, the majority shows to have a sufficient amount of political knowledge 75 percent (see table 12).

Limitations.

There are however a few limitations in this thesis. For example looking at the total of respondents per category, the limitation of the research is shown. As indicated earlier, the NKO is seen as a representative survey. But it is also known that it is difficult to get a good reflection of society to respond on surveys. People with less interest in politics are less likely to respond to these kind of surveys. Another limitation is that there are far more issues that can be researched or general knowledge items that can be measured. The NKO however, does not offer more indicators than used in this thesis. It can be useful for further research to ask

respondents more questions on the three categories of basic political knowledge as indicated in this thesis.

Discussion

This thesis was set up to investigate two items, the research of democratic theory leading to statements about what knowledge citizens should have about democracy. The second item investigated is the state of political knowledge of Dutch citizens. These items have both been answered in this thesis, there are basic points formulated on which every citizens should be knowledgeable. In this research various literature on the subject has been bundled and clear statements are made on what basic political knowledge is. The second aim of the research was to investigate what the state of political knowledge of Dutch voters is. This has been answered with the help of the NKO-survey and conclusions are drawn based on these results. The state of political knowledge of Dutch citizens is seen as sufficient. The use of the NKO as the primary source for a survey was the right choice. There are questions in the NKO that can be well used for the evaluation of the three categories of political knowledge. Furthermore the researchers that perform this research have the means to reach a lot of people and conduct a large sample of the Dutch population.

There has been a lot of research into political knowledge of citizens, there is however not much research into the factual knowledge that citizens need to have. Literature on the subject of factual knowledge on political issues is an interesting subject for researchers to further investigate. This research has been a step to try and establish a basic understanding of the political knowledge of Dutch citizens. Dutch citizens have a sufficient amount of political knowledge based on the results of this thesis. It would however be interesting to further investigate if more education on democracy and politics is useful to further inform Dutch citizens. It is indicated that the higher the level of education a person has, the more likely it is that he or she has more political knowledge. The results of this thesis confirm this conclusion.

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