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EVIDENCE BASED POLICY AND COVID-19

CASE STUDY ON NATIONAL POLICY MAKING REGARDING FACEMASK USE IN THE NETHERLANDS

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1. ABSTRACT

Compared to its neighboring countries, the Netherlands was belated in implementing a non-medical facemask obligation in public areas. There has been much debate about if non-medical facemasks work, and whether they should be used in the exit strategy from the corona crisis. From the theories within evidence-based policy, this research will be shaped. This research aims to find factors that can explain the belated response of Dutch government regarding facemasks. The following central research question will guide us through the study: *Which factors at the science-policy interface could explain the belated decision of the Dutch government to make the use of facemasks mandatory during the COVID-19 pandemic?* The factors being investigated are controversy in expert advice, the possible failure of political opposition and the failure of the media in their watchdog role. Through qualitative research, relevant documents will be analyzed. Expert recommendations, minutes of political debates, notes from technical briefings, and relevant media articles are included in the analysis. The analysis was performed by means of deductive coding. This research concludes that expert controversy and failure of political opposition contributed to the belated response of the Dutch government on the introduction of facemasks.

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2. INTRODUCTION

In the Netherlands, from the beginning of 2020 onwards, we had to deal with the consequences of the coronavirus. In a short period of time, this virus spread quickly. It soon became clear that this was a deadly virus, which could start causing great damage in society. It therefore appeared inevitable for the government to take protective measures against this virus. With the aim of protecting the vulnerable in society, and the healthcare system. One of the measures considered was the use of non-medical facemasks (now written as: 'facemasks') to slow down the spread of the virus. This measure is the focus of this study, because of the wide variations in national policies on the use of facemasks that have existed. In this study, it is argued that the Dutch government was belated in terms of the introduction of obligatory facemask use. Looking at other European countries, we see an interesting picture. We see in Germany, Poland, Austria, Belgium, France, Italy and Portugal on May 6, 2020, there was a requirement to wear facemasks in public transport and indoor public areas. We see urgent advice in Ireland, United Kingdom, and Finland (NOS, 2020). On this date, facemasks were not advised in the Netherlands. Specifically, it covers the period from the 1st of January 2020 to the 1st of December 2020. This time frame was chosen because of the start of the pandemic early 2020, and the introduction of the mandatory use of facemasks in the Netherlands from the 1st of December onwards.

More specifically, this study deals with the following problem. The director of the Dutch National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) indicated at the beginning of the pandemic that the effect of facemasks would be 'extremely low'. Next, an obligation to wear facemasks in public transport was introduced. A period later, an 'urgent advice' was given to use these facemasks anyway. Finally, as of the 1st of December 2020, there was an obligation for the use of these facemasks. The cabinet used advice of the Outbreak Management Team (OMT). This team advised the cabinet on measures surrounding the coronavirus. Fluctuation could be noticed in this advice. From the team, and from the individuals within the team. For instance, several stakeholders indicated that facemasks could make a positive contribution, but the director of RIVM, speaking for the OMT, flatly contradicted this. As in the technical briefing to the Second Chamber on the 1st of April, in which he responds to a question on behalf of the OMT: "If you mean face masks for us: of course, that makes no sense, because we are at a distance where there are already no more drops. If I put on a facemask, you won't hear me, and if you were to put on a facemask, it wouldn't offer any protection."(Rijksoverheid, 2020a, p. 10) The World Health Organization

(WHO) previously came out with statements referring to the possible usefulness of facemasks. So, there is something going on here, which generates interest.

From the theory of Evidence Based Policy (EBP), it is possible to look at how this fickle process occurred. Which different channels have a role in this, what they did well or not, is interesting to examine. First, we will elaborate on the concept of EBP, and its importance in the Netherlands. The concept of EBP originated in the health sector in the UK, around the 1990s, as 'evidence-based medicine' (Yanow, 2018). In the Netherlands, the importance of scientific evidence has increased since the Second World War. Think of the establishment of the Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB), and the Bureau for Social and Cultural Planning (SCP). In addition to these institutions, advisory committees are regularly set up in the Netherlands, comprising members with different backgrounds and perspectives, to provide political decision-making bodies with scientific advice (De Groot, 2010). The establishment of a scientific advisory board was important in the Dutch approach to the coronavirus. An OMT was convened at the request of the Center for Infectious Disease Control (Cib). Such a team is convened when existing guidelines or scripts do not provide enough guidance. Despite a team of specialists being assigned to brief the cabinet on the developments of the virus, and provide advice, the Netherlands were at the bottom of the list in terms of the use of facemasks.

By studying the place of evidence in the policy process regarding facemasks, we can evaluate what the commitment of the Netherlands to EBP means in practice. In this study, the role of expert bodies, political opposition and the media in EBP will be examined by looking into the workings of scientific boards such as the RIVM, the government and public debate. Experts, opposition and the media are of great value in a liberal democracy. The core features of a liberal democracy include having expert groups, a political opposition and the media. This can be considered as scientifically important, because public administration studies need to have a good understanding of factors that determine EBP-making. In the existing literature, there has not yet been a study examining the role of the bodies regarding policy making on facemasks, based on EBP. EBP is discussed in the general Dutch context, but not on this case. EBP is furthermore not yet sufficiently associated with liberal democracy. This is another area where this study can contribute to the academic debate on EBP. Next to the importance in science, there is societal importance for examining this case. This virus will never disappear, and it could become more severe again due to, for example, a mutation. When it does, different considerations could be made when assembling an expert group. This study can be read by expert bodies, political parties, journalists, and the general public. Channels that fell short can better prepare themselves for the next crisis. Moreover, this research can help ensure a better

understanding in society about the course of action surrounding these measures. The latter is important to get a better understanding among society of why several restrictions were made, which can lead to a better understanding among society when the government needs to act again.

2.1 Research question and sub-questions

The aim of this study is to find out why the Netherlands were belated in introducing the compulsory use of facemasks, considering the Dutch commitment to EBP. By examining different channels that could have had a contribution in providing evidence, in controlling the government and in policy decisions, we can determine which actor(s) fell short in their task. The channels are not mutually exclusive. In order to guide us through the study, the following main research question is formulated:

Which factors at the science-policy interface could explain the belated decision of the Dutch government to make the use of facemasks mandatory during the COVID-19 pandemic?

This research question consists of two parts. The first part is not literally in the research question, but it is important for the study. From the Dutch commitment to EBP, it looks at what issues affect the policy process. By using theories within EBP, an explanation can emerge for the belated policy. The second part considers important factors at the interface between science and policymaking in a liberal democracy. These are expert bodies, political opposition and the media. In this study, it will be investigated what the role of each of these factors was in the policy-making process.

To find an answer to the main research question, four sub-questions are defined. Each of these sub-questions will help to find the information needed regarding each actor group in a liberal democracy. In the main research question, two main parts have been highlighted. In terms of the first part on Dutch commitment to EBP, a good understanding of the existing theories in the field of EBP must be acquired. Theories in this field regarding the use of EBP in the policymaking process need to be studied. The first sub-question is important, because this field in public administration needs to be examined to provide a good theoretical framework for this study. Therefore, the first sub-question is defined as follows:

1. *What does the theory on Evidence Based Policy say about the use of evidence in the policymaking process?*

Starting from the theory of EBP, there are three more specific sub-questions dealing with a specific actor group that offers a possible explanation for the belated response. The second sub-question is about the role of expert bodies in a liberal democracy. Expert bodies can provide scientific evidence to decision-making bodies. Considering this study, an expert body as the OMT can provide evidence and advice to the Dutch government. It can be that expert bodies are uncertain or conflicted in their advice. The government receives a lot of evidence directly from expert and expert groups. If there is uncertainty and/or conflicts within and between expert groups, this may cause the expert evidence delivery channel to be less than optimal. This can ultimately result in a belated policy response by the government. Therefore, the second sub-question is defined as follows:

2. *Were the RIVM and OMT uncertain and / or conflicted about the usefulness of facemasks?*

Where the second sub-question will provide us with an answer on the performance of the expert bodies regarding the use of facemasks, the third sub-question deals with the political opposition as another central actor group in a liberal democracy. Political opposition are the parties opposed to the ruling majority. They, in cooperation with the coalition parties, are supposed to check the government on their policies and legislation. Therefore, the third sub-question is defined as follows:

3. *To what extent did the political opposition present evidence or counterevidence regarding the usefulness of facemasks?*

This sub-question will provide us with an answer on the performance of the political opposition during the time of the facemasks-debate, and if they fulfilled their role in a liberal democracy sufficiently. The fourth sub-question covers the media as the third and final actor in a liberal democracy that we discuss. The media controls the government and is the bridge between the government and the people. Media can provide new evidence by their own research and denounce policies that are not based on enough evidence. Therefore, the final sub-question is defined as follows:

4. *To what extent did the media discuss evidence or counterevidence regarding the usefulness of facemasks?*

This concludes the part on how we will be guided through this study. In the next part, I will elaborate on the research approach of this study.

2.2 Research approach

A research approach is a broad term in which two important components come together, being the research design, and specific research methods (Creswell, 2017, p. 5). This study will make use of qualitative methodology to answer the research question and sub-questions. A qualitative study aims to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2017, p. 4). This approach has been chosen because of the nature of the research will be conducted. The nature of this research is to answer the "why" question, by asking questions that can explain facemasks policies in the Netherlands. Relevant documents will be analyzed and articles that may provide an answer to the question why the Dutch government was belated in obligating the use of facemasks. This can be done best by means of a qualitative study.

In terms of the research design, this study will be a 'explanatory case-study'. Its aim is to identify processes and patterns underlying the decision to make the use of facemasks compulsory. A case study is a strategy in which several cases of the study subject are investigated in their natural situation, in a given time interval (Thiel, 2015). The central case in this study is the development of the policy process that resulted in the belated response of the Dutch government regarding obligatory facemasks.

In terms of the research methods used, this study will use different data for each channel involved in a liberal democracy. By means of deductive coding, this data will be analyzed. Once the documents have been coded, the results will be presented and explained. They will be compared with the theory provided. Hypotheses will be accepted, rejected or neither.

By using this research approach, an answer to the sub-questions, and eventually an answer to the main research question can be provided. In the next section of this study, a broad elaboration will be provided about the theories used in this study. Theoretical arguments and findings from previous studies will be discussed, and testable hypotheses will be formulated.

3. THEORY

3.1 Introduction

In this section, the theoretical framework that will be used to conduct this study will be discussed. The leading theory in this study comes from the field of evidence-based policy research. By using theories from this field, the main problem can be assessed and analyzed. More specifically, the thesis draws on three different theories that could shed light on the policymaking process. By means of these three theories, three hypotheses are defined. These are testable hypotheses, each containing a possible explanation for the policymaking process regarding the use of facemasks. These theories concern the three channels in a liberal democracy discussed in this study, being expert bodies, political opposition, and the media. By means of theories on expert controversy, failure of political opposition and media failure, the hypotheses will be drawn up.

3.2 Evidence-based policymaking and channels in liberal democracy

EBP has everything to do with policy decisions, that should be guided by accurate use of scientific evidence (Parkhurst, 2017). EBP is a discourse or set of methods which informs the policy process. It does not aim to directly affect the eventual goals of the policy. It advocates a more rational, rigorous, and systematic approach (Sutcliffe, 2005). Evidence can be used in the policy-making process, while two things must be considered, being social values and scientific context. In this way, scientific evidence can be used in the policy-making process. This can be explained as *the good governance of evidence* (Parkhurst, 2017). There are proponents and opponents of EBP. Proponents of EBP fear technical bias within politics. They fear the 'politicization of science'. This involves politicians manipulating scientific evidence through cherry picking, or manipulating the evidence, for political gain (Parkhurst, 2017). Opponents of EBP have a problem with what is called 'issue bias'. This is opponents fear that scientific evidence may cause attention to be shifted to specific questions or concerns within the political debate in a non-transparent way. As a result, scientific evidence undesirably influences the political debate (Parkhurst, 2017).

Scientific evidence can reach politics in different ways. This study will examine three channels in what their role has been in the policy-making process regarding the use of facemasks. First, the importance of expert bodies in providing evidence. At its core, expertise is about delimiting and defining available choices, lest an overabundance of choices render

decision-making impossible (Majdik & Keith, 2011, p. 382) According to Nelkin (1979, p. 106) scientific expertise is ‘a critical political resource and control over knowledge, its production, and its codification is intrinsically linked to power and influence’. It is evident that there is an important relationship between democracy and expertise.

Second, evidence is important in political opposition. Political opposition is important in a liberal democracy. Political opposition are the parties opposed to the ruling majority. They, in cooperation with the coalition parties, are supposed to check the government on their policies and legislation. The relationship between the government and opposition rarely is purely conflictual because most opposition parties support at least some governmental legislation (Louwse, Sieberer, Tuttnauer, & Andeweg, 2021). In further paragraphs, we will discuss more in depth the theories on *patriotism school*, *opinion leadership school* and the blurring between government and opposition.

Finally, evidence can feed into the watchdog role played by the media. The media controls the government and is the bridge between the government and the people. Media can provide new evidence by their own research and denounce policies that are not based on enough evidence. Freedom of press exists when journalists can publish what they want independently of those in power, without fear of receiving threats or facing violence as a result. Media control power and should therefore be able to operate independently of it. Only then, journalists can provide reliable information to citizens (Koster, 2022). Considering the coronacrisis, De Gruijter (2020, p. 1) indicates that the steps taken by the authorities have placed limits on the freedom of the individual, because the government now has more extensive powers. The government has become less accessible, making it more difficult to shed light on government affairs and engage in critical journalism. This could limit journalists’ abilities to fulfil their watchdog role. This can have two reasons, being that the media has a role of conduit in times of crisis, or that the media censors itself out of a sense of urgency and social responsibility. In the following three paragraphs, the channels mentioned above will be discussed individually, leading to three testable hypotheses to answer the research question.

3.3 Hypotheses 1: Expert Controversy

Scientific advice to politicians can be used in different ways, and this is not always the way to which the researchers agree. Expert bodies, such as the OMT, can be formed by request of the government, to inform them about current situations, and provide advice on implications of policy. According to Reiss (2020), the coronacrisis made us see that the role of experts in

democracies is a big challenge that we currently face. It should be a core issue in contemporary political theory and adjacent fields, such as economics and philosophy of science. We see that close collaboration between science and politics is needed in democracies that face fundamental challenges, of which the coronacrisis is a recent one. On the other hand, the reliability and trustworthiness of expert judgement can be doubted for many reasons (Reiss, 2020). One of the reasons why expert judgement can be doubted, is disagreement or undecidedness between experts, and within expert bodies. As stated by Reiss (2020), “experts recommended against the wearing of face masks early in the crisis only to reverse their judgments a few months later, without any new evidence to support this change of mind”. In terms of opinions regarding experts, we can distinguish between two camps, being *the apologists*, and the *critics*. Especially, we will be looking at the side of the critics. Critics of expert judgement look at disagreement, that can lead to undecidedness. This undecidedness can reflect on the policy outcome as decided by government.

Expert agreement is essential for the feasibility of expert groups in a political system. If there is no agreement between experts, policymakers must take decisions with information from disagreeing experts. How can policymakers take important decisions, in a way that does not bias selection along political lines, in the absence of social science expertise on their part? The problem with regards to expert disagreement, can be explained via four issues (Reiss, 2020). The first issue is about *value disagreement*. There is a difference between politicians and policy experts on what they place value on. This could be referred to as value pluralism. values are not just plural; they can also be conflictual. Choices must be made between which values are more important. This is called value judgment. This can affect the policy-making process. The second issue concerns the *fact/value entanglement*. When there is disagreement about values, this can feed through the factual opinions. This can ultimately lead affect the predictions that follow from them. The third issue concerns the *fragility of facts*. Facts in the social sciences are fragile, which can cause facts to be interpreted differently by multiple people. This can lead to disagreement among experts because of different interpretations. The fourth issue concerns the *absence of evidential standards*. Currently, there is no agreement in the social sciences on how to use evidence; there are no evidential standards. We use the discussed issues in this study to find indications of expert disagreement and uncertainties (Reiss, 2020).

What we see, is that there are sources for disagreement between experts, and this can work through to the policymakers. Furthermore, undecidedness of experts can have negative effects on the policymaking process. In this study, we will look at if expert disagreement and

undecidedness lead to controversy among expert advice to the government about the usefulness of facemasks in society. Therefore, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: The belated response of the Dutch government regarding compulsory use of facemask can be explained by the disagreement and undecidedness of the OMT in its expert judgment of the effectiveness of facemasks.

3.4 Hypotheses 2: Failure of political opposition

The role of the political opposition can be conceptualized in two independent manners: scrutiny and policymaking. Scrutiny is controlling and criticizing actions of the government. Policymaking is direct influence in legislative production or participating in it (Louwse & Otjes, 2019). In the Netherlands, there is a blurring between opposition and government in recent years. It is no longer taken for granted that the opposition stands against government policy. This can be dangerous for the opposition's monitoring and critical role (Andeweg, 2013). From the opposition's investigative and monitoring role, they can look for evidence, which is ignored or not yet discovered. Several theories can be of influence in the role of political opposition and could have played a role in the belated introduction of a facemask obligation. The theories are the patriotism school, opinion leadership school, and the blurring between government and opposition.

The relationship between the government and opposition rarely is purely conflictual because most opposition parties support at least some governmental legislation (Louwse et al., 2021). In times of crises, this relationship can change. The *patriotism school* argues that from a feeling of national unity in times of crisis we need to come together to support 'one side'. Looking at this study, we might find statements or compromises in minutes of political debates about the coronavirus that are consistent with the patriotism school. If so, it would mean that from this sense of national unity, politicians have been less keen on government policies. It could be, that government policy has been more readily agreed to because of the urgency of the matter and the national interest. If this is the case, then we can say that there has been (partial) failure of political opposition. The *opinion leadership school* argues that 'rallies do not occur in all crisis situations, but only when leaders of the opposition refrain from openly criticizing the president or government.' This is because in times of a rapidly developing crisis, information available to the government is much better than that available to opposition. (Louwse et al., 2021, pp. 1027-1028). As we move into the analysis of this study, , it may be

noticed that opposition leaders publicly criticize government policies. When these leaders do so, there may be a greater sense among the population that they disagree with the policies being pursued. This would mean that the government needs to defend or even adjust its policies more strongly. If so, there is no agreement with the opinion leadership school. So, this would also mean that there is no failure of political opposition. Conversely, if we do not observe this public criticism, it may well be that there is an agreement with the opinion leadership school, and thus a (partial) failure of political opposition.

In addition to the two schools, there may be another phenomenon that contributes to the failure to properly perform the function of opposition. This concerns the phenomenon we see in the Netherlands, which is the blurring between government and opposition. Already in 1987, Von Beyme argues that “it is striking how exceptional it seems to be that opposition parties actually oppose government proposals in parliament”. When the opposition parties go along too much with the government's policies, they do not look at the government's policies critically enough, do not ask enough critical questions, and do not come up with counterarguments or alternatives. This results in a major blurring between the government in the opposition. In this way, the government is not kept on its toes, which can lead to not well enough considered policy decisions, which can have major consequences for society. In the political realm, the distinction between government and opposition may blur when one or more of the following occur: 1) government parties oppose the government, 2) opposition parties give structural support to a minority government, 3) opposition parties continuously support the government's policies, 4) and when the government anticipates an opposition majority in another government institution (Andeweg, 2013). This are four theories that in the end can prove the same point considering the hypothesis. The opposition must ensure that the government forms policies that have been thought through so that these policies do not have to be adjusted after implementation. When it turns out that the opposition does not look critically enough at government policies, and does not come up with alternatives, they are failing in their duties as an opposition. In that case there is failure of political opposition. If this occurs, it is possible that the government does not receive the evidence that the opposition could have gathered. The opposition has, as discussed, a task in providing evidence to the government that they missed or did not yet discover. Therefore, the second hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H2: The belated response of the Dutch government regarding compulsory use of facemasks can be explained by the blurring between government and opposition, while opposition fails to fulfill its role in the decision-making process.

3.5 Hypotheses 3: Media failure

The media has three main functions in a democracy: the information function, debate function, and watchdog function. The first one includes disseminating reliable information to the population. The second includes informing the voices of the public debate to the government. The latter involves media access to important information, thus creating transparency (Muller, Leun, Moerings, & Van Calster, 2010, pp. 355-356). What can be noticed from various newspaper articles, studied by Teunissen (2021), is that at the time of the Second Chambers' agreement to introduce the obligation, there were differences between the government and the media. De Gruijter (2020), states that 'restrictions on individual freedoms have placed some limits on the ability of Dutch journalists to perform their watchdog role.' It is important that the media provides evidence from own research and denounces policies that are not evidence-based. In this research, the watchdog role of the media will be investigated. The media has a monitoring function as a watchdog of power and abuse of power. They hold the government accountable for keeping its promises and implementing policy. According to some, that control also includes agenda setting as a function, when journalists believe that certain issues are unjustifiably not on the political agenda or are deliberately kept off it. (Brants, 2008).

In light of the study that we are conducting here, De Gruijter (2020), argues that since the start of the pandemic in the Netherlands, the media have been struggling with balanced reporting. One of the reasons mentioned, is the fear of journalists to cause panic in society or provide false reassurance. Because of this, they were reluctant in publishing their news. This is an important situation, because if this happened, the media did not fulfill one of its core tasks, being to control government the government in its watchdog function. What furthermore can be noted from De Gruijter (2020), is that the media became more critical, sometime after the introduction of the so-called 'intelligent lockdown'. They provided experts and interest groups with a platform, where the measures taken were doubted for several areas: economic, social and psychological challenges. They tried to look at the consequences for those sectors, while the focus before was merely on the health sector.

What we see, is that the watchdog role of the media is extremely important in a liberal democracy. It is of utmost importance that the media controls the government and provides them with information that has not yet been considered. The importance of providing evidence from their own journalistic research and denouncing policies that are not evidence-based can be seen here. It could be that media failed in its task to control and correct the government and

did not fulfill its role as watchdog. This can be an explanation for media failure. Therefore, the third hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H3: The late response of the Dutch government regarding compulsory use of facemasks was because the media failed to execute their watchdog role.

Next, the methods for conducting this study will be provided and elaborated on. After defining these methods, the analysis and results will be provided.

4. METHODS

4.1 Introduction

In this section, there will be elaborated on the methods that will be used to conduct this research. It is important to adhere to a consistent method of research, in order to conduct a reliable and valid study, and present the results. There will be elaborated on the research design, the method of data collection and on the method of data analysis. The coding scheme used in the data analysis will be provided.

4.2 Research design

This research uses a qualitative ‘explanatory case study’ design. Its aim is to identify processes and patterns underlying the decision to introduce compulsory use of facemasks. A case study is a strategy in which several cases of the study subject are investigated in their natural situation, in a given time interval (Thiel, 2015). An explanatory case study is a type of research that is used to explore a particular phenomenon or event in detail. This type of research looks at the underlying causes of the phenomenon or event and is often used to identify trends or patterns. This case study is an explanatory one, since it will look for causal relations and factors that may explain the problem investigated here. The central case is the belated response of the Dutch government in terms of the implementation of obligatory facemask use in the public area. In early 2020, the corona crisis started in the Netherlands, and the obligation to wear facemasks in public places was instituted from December 1, 2020.

Within this case, there are three possible failures in political channels that can provide evidence are core. These are expert groups, political opposition and the media. These three were selected because for their high impact within a liberal democracy, and their possible influence in the corona policies. The channels are not mutually exclusive. This means that the channels may complement each other, and multiple channels may have contributed to the belated introduction of mandatory facemasks. Large amounts of data can be found within each case. The reason for using these three channels is to properly demarcate the case. For each of the channels, hypotheses are drawn up. These are hypotheses that will be tested in accordance with the theories assigned to every channel. These theories are used in the coding process. This research follows the following order. First, the possibility of expert controversy will be tested. Second, the possibility of failure of political opposition will be tested, and finally the possibility of media failure in terms of their watchdog role will be tested. This research design is best

fitting this research, because by investigating this case with the mentioned channels, and comparing the results, an answer to the research question can be provided.

4.3 Method of data collection

Different data should be used for each channel. All the following data is data from the time period January until December 2020. The primary sources of textual data used for the theory 'expert controversy' are OMT advisory reports, reports from the RIVM's technical briefing to the Second Chamber, and WHO advice on facemask use will be studied. WHO advice is included here, because this is an expert group where the Dutch expert bodies rely on. The selection of documents within the time frame depends on the presence of information about facemasks in the public area. If this is not discussed in a document, this document is disregarded. It will be counted how many documents are excluded for this reason.

For the theory 'failure of political opposition', minutes of debates in the Second Chamber surrounding the development of the coronavirus will be studied. Furthermore, the reports from the RIVM's technical briefing to the second chamber will be studied from the opposition point of view. To keep the dataset from being too large, documents specifically discussing facemasks will be included in the study. It will be counted how many documents are excluded for this reason. If needed, relevant news articles will be studied for the complete picture of opposition opinion.

For the theory on media failure, newspaper articles will be used. There was an intention to include the online sources NOS and RTL Nieuws in the study, unfortunately this data was no longer available. As a result, the number of newspapers was expanded. The newspapers included in the analysis are the Volkskrant, the Telegraaf, Trouw, NRC, and the AD. These were chosen because of the different types of constituencies these newspapers originally represent. The emphasis on newspapers is because research shows that Dutch people most often consult traditional media to look up information on coronavirus (te Poel, Linn, Baumgartner, van Dijk, & Smit, 2020). By using NexisUni, with a set of commando functions, the important articles for this research can be found.

There are some important documents that will be studied in general, because they will serve a general goal. The Onderzoeksraad voor de Veiligheid (OvV) has published two documents called '*aanpak coronacrisis*', in which the council research the government and other stakeholders' handling of the coronacrisis. These documents will not be integrated in the analysis but serve as background knowledge.

4.4 Method of data analysis

This study will use the method of content analysis. Holsti (1969) described content analysis as “Any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages.” Various documents will be studied here, as can be seen in the data collection section.

This study will work with deductive coding, which means that it will have a set of coding variables prior to the study of the relevant data. The study starts with a preliminary set of initial codes, which will most likely evolve during the coding process in the research. From the initial codes, expanded codes will emerge. Eventually, the codes will be rationalized in order to effectively perform this research (Atkinson, 2002). The actual coding starts after rationalizing the codes. Using ATLAS.TI, the relevant documents will be coded and studied. The coding scheme is divided by the three theories, with each theory having themes with its specific code. In terms of the theory on expert controversy, the themes controversy in OMT advice, the technical briefing to the Second Chamber, and international advice of the WHO are specified. For the theory on failure of political opposition, the debates of the second chamber surrounding the development of the coronavirus, technical briefings to the second chamber, and opposition in the media are specified. For the theory on media failure, two themes are specified, being the watchdog role of traditional media and research by traditional media. The coding scheme is provided in table 1: coding scheme.

4.4.1 Coding Scheme

<i>Theory</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>
1. Expert Controversy	1.1 Controversy in OMT and its advice	1.1.0. N/A No controversy
		1.1.1 Is unlikely to counter the spread of virus
		1.1.2 The risk of transmission might be prevented
		1.1.3 There is indirect evidence of effectiveness
		1.1.4 There is no consensus yet
	1.2 Technical briefing to Second Chamber	1.1.5 Clear evidence and advice is provided, without controversy
		1.2.0 N/A No controversy
		1.2.1 Is unlikely to counter the spread of virus

		1.2.2 The risk of transmission might be prevented
		1.2.3 There is indirect evidence of effectiveness
		1.2.4 There is no consensus yet
		1.2.5 Clear evidence and advice is provided, without controversy
	1.3 International advice WHO	1.3.0 N/A No controversy
		1.3.1 Is unlikely to counter the spread of virus
		1.3.2 The risk of transmission might be prevented
		1.3.3 There is indirect evidence of effectiveness
		1.3.4 There is no consensus yet
		1.3.5 Clear evidence and advice is provided, without controversy
<p>Accept H1 if the codes indicating controversy significantly outnumber the codes indicating no controversy. Reject H1 if the codes indicating controversy are significantly outnumbered by the codes indicating no controversy Don't accept or reject H1 if there is no significant difference between the codes.</p>		
2. Failure of Political Opposition (FPO)	2.1 Debates House of Representatives on development coronavirus	2.1.1 Opposition advises cabinet on use of facemasks
		2.1.2 Opposition presents evidence on functioning of facemasks
		2.1.3 Opposition does not discuss use of facemasks
		2.1.4 Opposition asks cabinet to look at use of facemasks
	2.2 Opposition in the media	2.2.1 Opposition expresses desire for facemasks in media
		2.2.2 Opposition presents evidence in media about benefits of facemasks
		2.2.3 There is no mention in the media of the usefulness of facemasks by the opposition
		2.2.4 A joint statement by opposition parties in the media on the usefulness of facemasks
		2.2.5 Opposition agrees with cabinet policy on use of facemasks
	2.3 Opposition during technical briefings	2.3.1 Opposition advises experts on use of facemasks
		2.3.2 Opposition presents evidence on functioning of facemasks
		2.3.3 Opposition does not discuss use of facemasks

		2.3.4 Opposition asks experts to look at use of facemasks
Accept H2 if the codes indicating FPO significantly outnumber the codes not indicting FPO. Reject H2 if the codes indicting FPO are significantly outnumbered by the codes not indicating FPO. Don't accept or reject H2 if there is no significant difference between the codes.		
3. Media Failure (MF)	3.1 The watchdog role of traditional media	3.1.1 Cabinet policy on facemasks under critical review (non-MF)
		3.1.2 Cabinet policy on facemasks not under critical review (MF)
		3.1.3 Unclear
	3.2 Research by Traditional Media	3.2.1 Media research shows that facemasks are effective (non-MF)
		3.2.2 Media research does not show that facemasks are effective (non-MF)
		3.2.3 No research has been conducted on the effectiveness of facemasks by the media (MF)
		3.2.4 Research was conducted, but no sufficient results came out. (non-MF)
Accept H3 if the codes indicating MF significantly outnumber the codes not indicting MF. Reject H3 if the codes indicting MF are significantly outnumbered by the codes not indicating MF. Do not accept or reject H3 if there is no significant difference between the codes.		

Table 1: coding scheme

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

In this section, the data used in order to test the hypotheses will be analyzed, and the results of these analysis will be shown and discussed. The content analysis has been performed as discussed in the method section. This section will be structured according to the hypotheses drawn up. We start with the possibility of expert controversy, followed by the possible failure of political opposition, and we end with possible failure of the media. After the discussion of each theme, a short conclusion will be provided. The decision to accept the hypotheses will be made in the conclusions section. All conclusions drawn are consistent with the timeframe of the study.

5.2 Analysis of expert controversy

a) Expert controversy in OMT advice

In order to test if expert controversy contributed to the belated response of the Dutch government to implement the compulsory use of facemasks, we analyzed three different types of possible failure. First, we look at the possible controversy in relevant advice of the OMT. Within the timeframe of this study, 28 advices were provided by the OMT, of which 14 were relevant for this study. The documents have been coded according to the codes in the coding scheme provided. There were several findings that are interesting to point out.

First, we see that the OMT has stated from beginning until the end of this timeframe, that there is not enough scientific evidence that facemask work in public areas. But consequently, it is also stated that if the scientific studies do not rule out the possibility that it works. As example, in their *advice on facemasks in public areas (2020)*, they state that “there is no scientific evidence that non-medical facemask use in public areas will reduce the transmission of COVID- 19, but the available studies do not rule out a minor or a negative effect”. The OMT keeps, up and until a turning point, repeating the advice that there is no scientific rationale to encourage the use of facemasks in public spaces” (OMT advice 15, rationale on facemasks advice). In terms of consistency and controversy, we can say that regarding the availability of scientific evidence, the OMT has always stated that there is not enough of on the effectivity, which is not indicating controversy.

Second, what is striking, is the number of times words expressing some forms of doubt are being used, when discussing the effectiveness of facemasks. Examples are ‘not very

enthusiastic’, ‘probably diminishes’, ‘limited’, ‘not really realistic’, ‘somewhat’, ‘possibly some effect’, ‘could contribute’, ‘minor effect’, and more. An example can be seen in the *advice on facemasks in public areas (2020)*, in which they state that “non-medical oral nasal masks may contribute somewhat to limiting spread of COVID-19 by presymptomatic patients in public places, where adequate distance keeping is not always possible”. In many statements about the possible positive or negative effect of facemasks, words expressing some forms of doubt are used on a statement made, so as not to exclude the other side of the story. This can indicate a level of undecidedness among experts.

Third, are the statements made on their being no consensus between scientists, and between OMT members. In several advices of the OMT, they stated themselves that within the OMT there was no consensus about a typical subject, in this case the facemasks. For example, in the advice of the 65th OMT meeting, they state that “there is no consensus within the OMT about this subject”. This statement was made regarding the effectiveness of facemasks. This can indicate a level of disagreement among experts.

In conclusion, to analyze controversy in OMT advices, five codes were provided. The analysis showed that the extent to which these codes occurred was quite distributed. There were found several codes that are not controversial. But there are also found several codes indicating that it is unlikely to counter the spread of the virus, or the risk of transmission might be prevented. Furthermore, there are found many statements indicating that there is no consensus yet. There is found only one statement indicating clear evidence without controversy. Based on the findings in the analysis, I state that there was controversy within the OMT and in its advice regarding facemask use.

b) Expert controversy in technical briefing to the second chamber

In the technical briefing to the second chamber, the director of the center for infectious diseases, sometimes with help of colleagues, briefs the members of parliament about the developments regarding the coronavirus. Analyzing the technical briefings, it was noticeable that quite a few statements were made that did not involve controversy. These were often statements to the effect that it is useless for the public to use facemasks because it does not add value in addition to other measures. For example, at the briefing on the 1st of April 2020, the following statement was made which characteristically summarizes the other comments found, “If you mean facemasks for us: there is no point. If I put on a facemask, you won’t hear me, and if you put on a facemask, it wouldn’t provide any protection. That is what we have always said and that

is still the position.” Another example is the statement that “in our view, facemasks don’t work at this time.” (Technical briefing, 16th of April 2020).

Looking at the codes that might indicate that controversy was present, three things stand out. First, on the one hand, it is said that it hardly helps to reduce the spread of the virus, but on the other hand, it is often said that the risk of transmission might be prevented. What is striking is that these two sides are often stated in short succession. Second, at no point is it mentioned that there is direct or indirect evidence for the usefulness of facemasks. Third, statements are often made that there is no scientific evidence for the use of facemasks in the general population. In conclusion about expert controversy in the technical briefings, there are found statements that do not indicate controversy. Furthermore, there are found several statements indicating that facemasks are unlikely to counter the spread of the virus, or the risk of transmission might be prevented. Moreover, there are found many statements that indicate there is no consensus among experts and between expert bodies yet. Based on the findings in the analysis, I state that there was controversy detected in the technical briefings to the second chamber.

c) Expert controversy in WHO advice

During the timeframe of this study, the WHO provided four advisory documents regarding the use of facemasks. The first one studied only contained information about medical facemasks, so is therefore left out of the analysis. From the second to the fourth, a distinction was made between medical and non-medical facemasks. What is first noticeable is a difference in advice over time. The April 6, 2020, advice clearly states that there is no evidence at that time that wearing a facemask is effective against COVID-19. In the section on community settings, this is referenced by: “However, there is currently no evidence that wearing a mask (whether medical or other types) by healthy persons in the wider community setting, including universal community masking, can prevent them from infection with respiratory viruses, including COVID-19.” The June 5, 2020, advice cites that facemasks can be used, but only for source control, not for prevention, as there is not yet enough evidence for this. The December 1, 2020, advice makes the use of these facemasks very important, citing several studies showing the potential of these facemasks. With the disclaimer that facemasks alone are not enough.

In addition, what is striking in the opinions is that there is little controversy to be detected. It is sometimes cited that there is not yet agreement on the efficiency of facemasks, but always with the conclusion that because there is no convincing evidence, facemasks are not yet recommended. The WHO emphasizes in the April and June advisories that it calls on

countries to conduct research on the efficiency of non-medical facemasks in order to arrive at sound advice. In June, for example, it refers to it in the following way, “WHO urges countries that have issued recommendations on the use of both medical and non-medical masks by healthy people in community settings to conduct research on this important topic. Such research needs to look at whether SARS-CoV-2 particles can be expelled through non-medical masks of poor quality worn by a person with symptoms of COVID-19 while that person is coughing, sneezing or speaking.” All the advice is clear and uncluttered in that regard and shows no controversy.

In conclusion regarding the possible controversy in WHO advice, it can be said that WHO sticks to the facts. But they also clearly indicate that these facts may be there, and that research is needed for this. There are no statements found in the advice of the WHO regarding facemasks. Based on the findings in the analysis, I state that there was no controversy detected in the WHO advices regarding facemask use.

5.3 Analysis on Failure of Political Opposition

For the analysis on possible failure of political opposition, it is important to acknowledge that the timeframe can be divided into four periods. These periods can be found in the table below.

Period	Timeframe	Description
1	27-01-2020 – 05-05-2020	The OMT indicates on January 27 that wearing facemasks does not appear to add value. Cabinet adopts this advice. On April 16, several leaders of opposition parties jointly file a motion to make facemasks part of the exit strategy. Facemask use is not advised at this time.
2	06-05-2020 – 28-07-2020	At the May 6 press conference, the prime minister indicated for the first time that facemasks could potentially have a beneficial effect, in situations where 1.5 meters distance is not possible. On June 1, it will become mandatory to wear facemasks in public transport. On July 22, the president of the Security Council calls for a facemask requirement in public spaces. Cabinet asks OMT for advice on this.
3	29-07-2020 – 27-09-2020	Starting July 28, safety regions may experiment with facemasks in public spaces. On July 30, the OMT indicates that there is no scientific evidence to use facemasks in public spaces and advises

		against it. From Aug. 5 to Aug. 31, facemask obligations in public spaces will apply in 2 safety regions as an experiment.
4	28-09-2020 – 13-10-2020	On September 28, Cabinet seeks OMT's advice again on facemasks. The September 30 debate included several motions on requiring facemasks in schools and public spaces. Following this debate, there will be a national recommendation for wearing facemasks in public spaces, and in contact professions. On October 13, a facemask obligation is announced at the press conference, effective as of December 1.

Table 2: four periods in facemask policy

a) Failure of political opposition in debates about the coronavirus in the second chamber

For the analysis on failure of political opposition, first the debates about the developments regarding the coronavirus in the second chamber were analyzed. In the transcripts of these debates, statements were looked upon where the opposition advises the cabinet on the use of facemasks, opposition presents evidence on the functioning of facemasks, and statements where the opposition asked the cabinet to look at the use of facemasks. The final option is that the opposition does not discuss the use of facemasks.

During the first period, there were seven debates on coronavirus developments. What is striking is that the first five debates, with some exception, do not discuss facemasks in public spaces. In the first, second and fifth debates, each time an opposition party briefly touches on the point, asking the cabinet if they already know if they work, and if this could also be an idea for the Netherlands. No evidence is presented by the opposition during these first debates. There are no calls to introduce the facemasks. There is only being asked, by separate opposition parties, for the cabinet to investigate the usefulness of facemasks. In the sixth debate, this becomes different. In this debate, the opposition makes it clear that using facemasks in society can be part of the so-called exit strategy. For example, questions are asked such as, "Do you agree with me that considering the RIVM in 2009, certainly as part of an exit strategy as colleague X mentioned, we should call on the cabinet to promote the use of some form of mouth protection by people?" (Debate 68), and "Shouldn't wearing facemasks - we just talked about it - just be part of the exit strategy here in the Netherlands as well?" (Debate 68). In this debate, the opposition is sending a strong message that serious consideration should be given to wider use of facemasks.

During the second period, there were four debates on coronavirus developments. This is the period in which an obligation to wear facemasks in public transport was put into force. What stands out in the debates during this period is the opposition's difficulty in understanding the government's policy. Many questions are asked to the effect that the cabinet indicates that facemasks do not work, but from June 1 they will be mandatory in public transport. It is urged by the opposition to come up with a well-reasoned policy. Secondly, what is striking is that the opposition disagrees. Some parties continue to insist that facemasks should be mandatory in indoor public spaces, while others indicate that research shows that they do not work, and therefore a requirement is not necessary. For example, one opposition party claims that "there are fifteen scientific studies that show that these facemasks just do not do anything." (Debate 73) On the other hand, a motion was introduced by other opposition parties that "requests the government to recommend face protection in indoor areas such as supermarkets and stores" (Debate 70).

During the third period, there were two debates on coronavirus developments. During this period, the opposition mainly criticized the lack of clarity surrounding the facemask policy. According to the opposition, there is no consistency in the policy, making it difficult for society to understand. In addition, during this period, it is again notable that the opposition disagrees. A split has emerged between opposition parties who say the facemask does not work and do not want an obligation, and parties who do see its usefulness and want it to be part of the exit strategy. No other relevant statements have been found during this period.

During the fourth and final period, there were six debates on coronavirus developments. In this period, the obligation to wear facemask in public areas was announced on the 13th of October, coming into force as of the 1st of December. In the first debate of this period, from September 30, it appears that the opposition wants to make two things clear to the cabinet. First, they indicate several times that they want a facemask obligation in public spaces. Motions for this are filed. Second, they indicate that they are very dissatisfied with the cabinet's swabbing policies. The SGP indicates that: "Cabinet policy, meanwhile, is inimitable when it comes to facemasks. There have been numerous pleas in this Chamber for months for nationwide preventive use of personal protective equipment." And indicates LHK that "First it was "facemasks don't work," then it was "yes they do in public transportation and not in nursing homes and not in home care either." And then it became possibly for everyone and now there is an urgent recommendation to wear facemasks." In this final period, you can see that opposition is relieved that the cabinet is finally giving way, but it is highly critical of the inconsistent policies.

Looking through the four periods, we see several similarities and differences within the opposition. From period two, the opposition pushed for the use of facemasks in society. Another similarity is that the opposition is very critical of the government's policies. According to them, it is fickle and unclear. A difference is that in periods three and four the opposition diverged, in terms of a facemask obligation or facemask advice. In conclusion, we have seen that the opposition provided a large amount of advice to the cabinet on the use of facemasks. Furthermore, we have seen that they did to some extent provide evidence on the functioning of facemasks. Moreover, only in the first period, the discussion of facemasks is very low. Finally, the opposition did ask the cabinet several times to look at the use of facemasks. Based on the findings in the analysis, I state that there is no failure of political opposition in the debates.

b) Failure of political opposition in the media

For the analysis of possible failure of political opposition, the four periods as mentioned before will be used. As for the first period, we see that in all the newspapers included in the analysis, the opposition does not come with statements regarding the usefulness of facemasks. 22 useful newspaper articles were found, that included the words '*mondkapje*' and '*oppositie*'. There are no indications that they express desire for facemasks, they do not present evidence about the benefits of facemasks, and no joint statement by the opposition has been found regarding facemasks. The code expressing that the opposition does not mention the usefulness of facemasks is accurate for all the found articles. Furthermore, there is no indication that the opposition agrees with the cabinet policy on the use of facemasks. The media does write about the use of facemasks in other countries, but there are no voices of the Dutch political opposition.

In the second period, a slight switch can be seen compared to the first period. In this period, 15 relevant articles were found regarding facemasks and opposition. More is written about opposition positions, and there is also an occasional statement from a party highlighted that sends a clear signal. It can be seen during this period that the media is reporting the opposition's views. The opposition wants more consideration of what can be done if we do use facemasks. What is not happening in this period is that the opposition is using the media as a channel to speak to society. Some statements indicate that the opposition expresses their desire for facemasks. No evidence is presented by the opposition. Furthermore, there were no joint statements of the opposition found that indicate a desire for facemasks. The code that the opposition agrees with cabinet policy is also not found.

In the third period, 15 relevant newspaper articles were analyzed. What is striking is that the opposition's criticism of the cabinet's policy is becoming more vehement and articulate.

There is criticism about communication regarding facemasks, and about unclear policy. The media shows many statements by opposition parties indicating that they have a desire for facemasks. Furthermore, there are statements from the OMT cited in the papers to provide evidence that wearing facemasks can be useful. A joint statement was found from Groenlinks, PvdA and the SP indicating that the cabinet should be clearer in communication and endorsing the usefulness of using facemasks. No indication was found that the opposition agrees with cabinet policy on facemasks.

In the fourth and final period, things come together. For this period, 18 relevant newspaper articles were analyzed. In this period, the cabinet tackles and comes out with an overall recommendation to wear facemasks after all, before it becomes a national obligation. In most of the articles, the opposition clearly indicates its desire for facemasks. Media reports also indicate that the opposition brought experts with evidence to the Second Chamber. The opposition is happy that the cabinet is changing tack but is critical that it has taken so long. Communication is also frowned upon. Furthermore, many joint statements are given by opposition parties regarding the facemasks. It is also notable that the opposition parties receive support from the coalition parties in the House during this period. A combination of the foregoing, among other things, seems to have caused the cabinet to change tack after all. These newspaper articles did often reveal that the opposition (eventually) agreed with the cabinet's policy going forward. A great deal of relief can be seen in the statements of the opposition parties and this period.

In conclusion, during the first two periods, there is almost no expression of desire for facemasks. They present no evidence, and no joint statements are found. During the last two periods this is becoming better, but the focus is more about criticizing the government for the first periods. Furthermore, we found a low number of times that the opposition uses the media as channel to society. Based on the results found in the analysis, I state that there is failure of political opposition in the media.

c) Failure of political opposition in technical briefings to the second chamber

In addition to analyzing reports of coronavirus debates, reports of technical briefings to the second chamber were analyzed. In this case specifically on the opposition. Statements were searched for that the opposition is advising the experts to do more research on facemasks, that they are presenting evidence, and that they are asking the experts to see if facemasks can be useful in society. The last possibility is that the opposition does not mention the use of facemasks. For this analysis, the four periods mentioned will be used again.

In the first period, there have been eleven briefings, with the first one on the fourth of February. What is striking is that the first six briefings do not mention the use of facemasks in society. Starting in April, this does begin to come up. In the April debates, the PvdA and FvD ask the experts whether facemasks can have utility in society, for public health and in exit strategy. For example, on April 8, FvD asks, "Isn't that something we could also consider in the Netherlands and experiment with, so that in some cases we say 'distance' and in other cases we make more things possible with facemasks, also to start shaping that organized intelligent exit strategy?" The experts clearly indicate in the April briefings that facemasks do not work. However, the experts do indicate, in the April 22 briefing, that many facemasks will be purchased should it become part of the exit strategy.

During the second period, four briefings took place. Only in one of these four briefings did the opposition address the use of facemasks in society, on May 7. In this briefing, the PVV cited the precautionary principle. They indicate that the precautionary principle is used in science, so if there is some evidence of a beneficial effect of facemasks, should they not be used? The experts indicate that there certainly is, but that the OMT should advise based on scientific facts.

Looking at the third period, only two briefings took place. In both, the use of facemasks is discussed by the opposition. In the briefing of August 11, 50PLUS is critical toward the experts regarding their reluctance toward facemasks. They indicate the following: "And yet you remain so reticent when it comes to facemasks. Especially for those people who can infect others, don't know themselves and wait too long before testing, we could stop a lot of infections. Why do you remain so reluctant to do that?" In the August 22 briefing, PVV is also critical toward the experts, and they ask why it is not wise to have people wear facemasks in indoor areas. They stress that facemasks can have a potential effect, but do not present evidence.

In the fourth and final period, five briefings took place. In two of these briefings, the opposition discusses the use of facemasks. In the September 29 briefing, FvD denounced the expert's statements from July, in which he indicated that 200,000 people should wear a facemask for at least a week to avoid contamination. They ask what has changed that they do now recommend the use of facemasks. Also in the November 18 briefing, the opposition is critical of previous statements by the experts, including from the PVV and the Van Haga Group. The SGP also asks, "From the point of view of health and virus control, what is now the added value of turning the advice into an obligation?" Advice are being critically examined in this period.

In conclusion, we see during all the periods that the opposition does pose questions to the experts regarding facemasks. In almost all cases, they pose questions to the experts where they ask them to look at the use of facemasks and the potential benefits. We found no indication of the opposition discussing findings of experts on the use of facemasks. We only found one statement providing evidence to experts on the usefulness of facemasks. In 13 out of 22 briefings the use of facemasks is not discussed. We did find several statement indicating the opposition asking experts to look at the use of facemasks. Based on the findings in the analysis, there is a failure of political opposition during the technical briefings.

5.4 Analysis on media failure

This section presents the results of the analysis of possible media failure. As described in the methodology, five major newspapers will be included in the analysis. These are the Volkskrant, the Telegraaf, Trouw, NRC, and the AD. We specifically looked for indications that the cabinet policy is on critical review, to investigate their functioning in terms of their watchdog role. Furthermore, we looked for statements that indicate own research by the media on facemask use. For this analysis, the four periods as discussed before, are used again.

a) The watchdog role of & research by traditional media

In the first period, especially toward the end of the period, we see more discussion of facemasks. 28 relevant newspaper articles were analyzed. In the articles that were analyzed, 13 statements were found from the media in which cabinet policy on facemasks is under critical review. Often comparisons are made with neighboring countries that do advise it. The question "Why do they do it, and we don't?" is common. Similarly in an April 17, 2020, Trouw article, "In many other countries, they believe that this added value is already there. Governments advise (or require): wear a facemask outside because it helps slow the spread of the coronavirus." A majority of the Second Chamber yesterday urged the cabinet to allow citizens to use facemasks. Why does this happen in other countries and not here, it sounded." This statement occurred several times in different articles. The media also cited studies on facemasks a few times. Eight articles referred to studies on facemasks and their usefulness. This is not to say that these studies all indicated that they work. Studies were cited that showed both sides of the story. It was not research done by journalists themselves.

In the second period we see a less critical media. In this period, 13 relevant newspaper articles were analyzed. This is less than for period 1 but makes sense because of the shorter

time span. Statements were found in 5 of these articles that indicate that the government's facemask policy is under critical review. Questions are mainly raised about the unclear communication about the usefulness of facemasks. Criticism is being brought forward from the opposition point of view. The media itself does not come up with many critical questions. On 27 July, NRC Handelsblad published an extensive interview with the chairman of the OMT. Critical questions are asked in this interview, but not about what concerns this study. You can see it as a missed opportunity in this period that the media has not looked critically enough at government policy. In this period, we see the same picture as in period 1 in terms of presenting research into the usefulness of facemasks. Statements from the OMT and independent studies are discussed. However, we do not see the media's own research, only reactions to the policy, supported by studies.

In the third period, we see a very critical media. For this period, 19 relevant newspaper articles were analyzed. What stands out in this period is that the media reacts quickly to the approach of a second wave of corona infections. The facemask debate is restarted. Opinion pieces, experts and other scientists have been heard arguing for a consistent policy from the government. Especially the trial of facemask policies by region (such as in Amsterdam and Rotterdam) is viewed very critically, because of the inconsistency it causes. There is a lot of media criticism of the unclear, non-uniform policy from the national government. A good example comes from an article in Trouw, dated August 5, 2020: "Behavioral scientists agree on one thing: consistent policy works best." You notice that the media is trying to keep the administration sharp by critically evaluating policy.

Furthermore, the media is reporting an incredibly large amount of research during this period. From different perspectives (behavioral scientists, virologists and political scientists), facemask use is being looked at.

The fourth period largely follows the findings from the third period. 21 relevant newspaper articles were analyzed in this period. What is striking is that the line from period 3 is continued. The media continues to be critical of the policy regarding facemasks. The ambiguity needs to get out. The media let different sectors have their say in the articles. They all call for a consistent, unambiguous policy for the entire country. There is also much talk about support for the measure regarding facemasks. Often dismissed as not working, this support is low. In an October 1 Telegraph article, it is described as "My call to the cabinet is therefore to ensure uniform and nationwide policy. This only creates confusion." The media has provided a clear picture during this period regarding the measures taken and the reactions

to them from society. By using the four time periods, we were able to do a good analyze of the media's attitude about facemasks, and the cabinet's policy on them.

In conclusion, in terms of the watchdog role, W\we have found many statements that indicate the media critically reviewing the cabinet policy on facemasks. The critical review increases over time. Based on the findings in the analysis, I state that the media fulfilled its watchdog role. In terms of the research done by journalists, during the first three periods, we have seen that the media provides research done by experts. We have not seen research by journalists themselves during these periods, both on effectiveness and non-effectiveness. Only in the last period, we have seen that journalists provide articles with information from own experts. However, more evidence has also emerged over time. In the case of the media, it is difficult to assess what available evidence, if any, has been underused. Therefore, I state that the journalists did not fail, but neither did they succeed in doing and presenting research.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Conclusions

This research aimed to answer the central research question “*Which factors at the science-policy interface could explain the belated decision of the Dutch government to make the use of facemasks mandatory during the COVID-19 pandemic?*” In order to answer this question, four sub-questions were formulated that could guide us through the research. The first sub-question provided us with the necessary background information regarding the field of evidence-based policy. The second sub-question concerned the possibility of uncertainty and conflicting arguments within the RIVM and the OMT on facemask usefulness. The third sub-question concerned the political opposition presenting evidence or counterevidence regarding the usefulness of facemasks. The fourth and final sub-question concerned the media discussing evidence or counterevidence regarding the usefulness of facemasks. Three hypotheses were drawn up which were tested in the analysis. These hypotheses concerned expert controversy, failure of political opposition and media failure. After discussing the hypotheses, an answer to the central question will be provided.

For the first hypothesis, it was expected that the belated response of the Dutch government regarding compulsory use of facemasks could be explained by the disagreement and undecidedness of and within the OMT in its expert judgment of the effectiveness of facemasks. In the analysis, it was argued that there is controversy within the OMT and its advice. Furthermore, it was argued that there is controversy from the expert side in the technical briefings to the Second Chamber. Moreover, it was argued that there is no controversy in the WHO advices regarding facemask use. Laying these findings alongside the theory, we reach the following conclusions. It can be seen from the OMT advice that there has been much debate within the OMT regarding the advice on facemasks. If we look at where the OMT values lie in these advises, it is pure scientific evidence. They indicate that they are not going to advise to use facemasks until there is enough scientific evidence to do so. And when there is no consensus within the OMT yet, they will not advise. This indicates that there may have been disagreement among experts on the assessment of evidence. The government takes more into account than scientific evidence, which can indicate value pluralism. This disagreement is in specifying what issues should be considered, purely scientific evidence, or also social and economic aspects. In the theory, we have seen that this disagreement can carry through to policymakers, considering the fact/value entanglement. Furthermore, we have seen that there

is a level of undecidedness among experts. If we look at the technical briefings to the second chamber, we see the same picture as in the OMT advice. If we look at the WHO advice, we see a clear picture. The WHO looks purely at the scientific evidence and has been clear about this from the beginning. Based on the findings in the analysis, the first hypothesis is accepted.

For the second hypothesis, it was expected that the belated response of the Dutch government regarding compulsory use of facemask could be explained by the blurring between government and opposition, while the opposition fails to fulfill its role in the decision-making process. In the analysis, I argued that there is no failure of political opposition in the debates in the Second Chamber on coronavirus developments. Furthermore, I argued that there is failure of political opposition in the media. Moreover, I argued that there is failure of political opposition during the technical briefings to the second chamber. During the four periods, we have seen some interesting results. When comparing these results to the theory as provided, we can state the following. During the first period, there are signals of opposition following the *patriotism school*. This school argues that from a feeling of national unity in times of crisis we need to come together to support ‘one side’. Statements were made by opposition parties that they are not going to whine too much about the policy because the national interest is now paramount. This changed over time, because the opposition became more critical over time. I have not seen indications for the *opinion leadership school*. This school argued that rallies do not occur in all crisis situations, but only when leaders of the opposition refrain from openly criticizing the president or government. Furthermore, we have seen that to some extent there is a blurring between the government and the opposition parties. During the first period this was very clear. During the other periods, some opposition parties became more critical and demanded more action by the government, but not all of them. The opposition did not form a front against the government to control them and make critical implications. As for the four types that were provided in the theory about this blurring, we can state that some of them are at least partially true. The statement that opposition parties give continuously support to government’s policies is true for a part of the opposition, but not for the whole opposition. Next to that, we have seen that during the third and fourth period the coalition parties became more critical and started to oppose the government. In the coding scheme, I stated that we would accept the hypotheses if the codes for FPO significantly outnumber the codes that do not indicate FPO. Based on the findings in the analysis, the second hypothesis is accepted.

For the third hypothesis, I expected the late response of the Dutch government regarding compulsory use of facemasks could be explained by de media failing to execute their watchdog role. In the analysis, I argued that the media often critically reviewed the cabinet

policy on facemasks, which indicated that they did fulfill its task as a watchdog. Furthermore, I argued that the media did not present their own journalistic research on the usefulness of facemasks. In the theory, the importance of the watchdog role is emphasized. The media did denounce policies that were not evidence-based. They monitored the decisions made by the government and discussed them. They held the government accountable for keeping promises and implementing policy. Especially in from period two onwards. By discussing the facemask use from several point of views, they helped putting the issue of facemask use on the political agenda. Looking at the results of the analysis in combination with the theory, I state that the media did not fail in fulfilling its watchdog role. Therefore, I reject the third hypothesis.

6.1.1 Answer to the research question

Based on the results from the analysis, I arrive at the following answer to the research question. The factors within the science-policy interface that may have caused the belated response of the Dutch government are, first, the controversy between experts, expert bodies and in its recommendations. Expert controversy was visible and could have contributed to the late and unclear action of the Dutch government regarding facemasks. Second, the failure of political opposition in the media and in technical briefings contributed to the Dutch government's late action on facemask use. Failure of political opposition was visible and could have contributed to the late and unclear action of the Dutch government regarding facemasks. Finally, media failure was not visible, and did therefore not contribute to the late and unclear action of the Dutch government regarding facemasks.

6.2 Discussion

Reflecting on the study, we can see some strengths, and some weaknesses. We will also discuss the theoretical implications of this study in this discussion. First, the strengths. In this study, we looked at factors from different perspectives within a liberal democracy that may have influenced decision-making around facemasks. Since it was likely that the answer did not lie with one factor, it is a strength that we looked at this from multiple perspectives. The case selection is also a strength, since a relatively small aspect in corona measures was the subject of a, comparatively broad, study. Another strong point of this study is the clarification of why we came to the statement that the Netherlands were belated. In the early stages of this study this has been clarified and thus provided a good starting point. There is a lot of data available within decision making, and by filtering to this case, we could come to a strong conclusion.

Next, the weaknesses. First, the absence of online media (NOS/RTL News) is a weakness within this study. This data was no longer accessible or could not be filtered properly. For the analysis on media failure, and opposition in the media, this might have made a difference in the outcome of the analysis. Furthermore, it is difficult to demonstrate causality between the possible failure of the media regarding its watchdog role, on the one hand, and the belated policy in the Netherlands, on the other. It is difficult to indicate what evidence the media was able to make use of at what point. Explanatory factors have been found in this study, but there should be a waiver on how important these identified factors are. Second, because minutes of councils of ministers are not public, we are not fully aware of the facts as to why certain decisions were made. This could have provided more insight into the issue. Third, EBP theory could have been used more throughout the study. Finally, it could have been more clarified that accepting or rejecting a hypothesis, does not mean that the actor did fulfill its task as complete as they should.

To conclude, the theoretical implications. In terms of scientific importance, this study highlighted the importance to get a good understanding of factors in a liberal democracy that can be determined with EBP. Using the theory on EBP, three factors were identified and analyzed. Furthermore, we stated that EBP has not yet been sufficiently associated with liberal democracy. This study has made this association, but more research on this relationship needs to be conducted. You can see this as a starting point for studies that use EBP in a liberal democracy. This research has contributed to scholarship in public administration because it has examined a major social and political debate that has generated considerable interest. In terms of societal importance, we highlighted the that this study could lead to different consideration when assembling expert groups. From this study alone, there will be too little information to change to another composition, but this study can be used along with other studies regarding expert groups. This study can be read by expert bodies, political parties, journalists, and the general public. All of these can use this study in its own way. For society specifically, this study can ensure a better understanding of why certain measures were taken, en why this must maybe be done again in the future. There is enough room to do more research in the future on facemask policy, and each factor can be explored in more depth. More research can also be done in the future on the relationship between EBP and liberal democracy.

7. REFERENCES

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8. DATA APPENDIX

Number	Title
1	27-02-2020 - OMT 57 - 2 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19
2	17-03-2020 – OMT 60 – 5 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19
3	30-03-2020 – OMT 62 – 7 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19 (inclusief kamerbrief update)
4	06-04-2020 – OMT 63 – 8 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19
5	20-04-2020 – OMT 65 – 10 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19
6	04-05-2020 – OMT 66 – 11 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19
7	15-05-2020 – OMT 67 – 12 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19
8	23-06-2020 – OMT 70 & 71 – 15 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19 (Inclusief Update onderbouwing adviezen mondneusmaskers 06-2020)
9	28-07-2020 – OMT 73 – 16 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19 (Inclusief Bijlage 73.3.1 Advies mondneusbescherming in openbare ruimten - 27 juli 2020)
10	14-09-2020 – OMT 77 – 19 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19 (only part 2)
11	28-09-2020 – OMT 78 – 20 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19
12	05-10-2020 – OMT 79 – 21 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19 (only part 2)
13	12-10-2020 – OMT 80 – 22 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19
14	27-11-2020 – OMT 89 – 28 ^e OMT-advies COVID-19
15	04-02-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over coronavirus
16	01-04-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
17	08-04-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
18	16-04-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over ontwikkelingen Coronavirus
19	22-04-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
20	07-05-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus

21	20-05-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
22	04-06-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
23	25-06-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
24	11-08-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
25	22-09-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
26	29-09-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
27	04-11-2020 TBTK Conceptverslag Update coronavirus
28	18-11-2020 TBTK Verslag van een technische briefing, over update coronavirus
29	06-04-2020 WHO advice on use of facemasks
30	05-06-2020 WHO advice on use of facemasks
31	01-12-2020 WHO advice on use of facemasks
32	Tweede Kamer, 60e vergadering, 05-03-2020: verslag
33	Tweede Kamer, 64e vergadering, 18-03-2020: verslag
34	Tweede Kamer, 67 ^e vergadering, 08-04-2020: verslag
35	Tweede Kamer, 68 ^e vergadering, 16-04-2020: verslag
36	Tweede Kamer, 69 ^e vergadering, 22-04-2020: verslag
37	Tweede Kamer, 70 ^e vergadering, 07-05-2020: verslag
38	Tweede Kamer, 73 ^e vergadering, 20-05-2020: verslag
39	Tweede Kamer, 79 ^e vergadering, 04-06-2020: verslag
40	Tweede Kamer, 93 ^e vergadering, 12-08-2020: verslag
41	Tweede Kamer, 4 ^e vergadering, 22-09-2020: verslag
42	Tweede Kamer, 8 ^e vergadering, 30-09-2020: verslag
43	Tweede Kamer, 11 ^e vergadering, 07-10-2020: verslag
44	Tweede Kamer, 14 ^e vergadering, 14-10-2020: verslag
45	Tweede Kamer, 26 ^e vergadering, 18-11-2020: verslag

46-68	22 newspaper articles from 01-01-2020 until 05-05-2020, via NexisUni, with search terms 'mondkapje' and 'oppositie'
69-84	15 newspaper articles from 06-05-2020 until 28-07-2020, via NexisUni, with search terms 'mondkapje' and 'oppositie'
85-100	15 newspaper articles from 29-07-2020 until 27-09-2020, via NexisUni, with search terms 'mondkapje' and 'oppositie'
101-119	18 newspaper articles from 28-09-2020 until 01-12-2020, via NexisUni, with search terms 'mondkapje' and 'oppositie'
120-148	28 newspaper articles from 01-01-2020 until 05-05-2020, via NexisUni, with search terms 'mondkapje', 'kabinet' and 'beleid'
149-162	13 newspaper articles from 06-05-2020 until 28-07-2020, via NexisUni, with search terms 'mondkapje', 'kabinet' and 'beleid'
163-182	19 newspaper articles from 29-07-2020 until 27-09-2020, via NexisUni, with search terms 'mondkapje', 'kabinet' and 'beleid'
183-204	21 newspaper articles from 28-09-2020 until 01-12-2020, via NexisUni, with search terms 'mondkapje', 'kabinet' and 'beleid'

Table 3: data appendix