Policy frames and the evolution of soft drugs policy in the Netherlands (1990-2012)

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Abstract

Recent methodological advances (evolutionary factor analysis, discourse networks, etc.) have re-invigorated interest in the study of policy frames and discourses. In this paper we study the changing policy frames surrounding Dutch soft drugs policy. The Dutch case is especially interesting not only because the Netherlands was the first country to (de facto) legalize soft drugs use in the 1970s, but also because the policy has experienced significant changes towards more stringent control in the last decades. The discursive and normative context of the policy has also been under transformation with increasing salience of cross-border effects and transnational crime issues. We identify articles published in several major newspapers on the topic of soft drugs (cannabis in particular), we analyze and classify the claims and arguments put forward in these texts. On the basis of this data we are able to trace the overall attention to the topic over the last 20 years and the tone of the debate. Using a form of evolutionary factor analysis we also show the rise and decline of different policy frames and explore their relationship with the policy outcomes.

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1 Introduction

When and why do public policy changes? Why does the regulation of public issues differ, often dramatically, across national borders? Social scientists have provided a long list of potential answers to these puzzles: a list which includes private interests and social norms, institutions and ideology, political parties and policy entrepreneurs, advocacy networks and international diffusion, path dependency, critical junctures, and crises, to name but just a few of the more prominent themes. The influence of policy ideas, narratives and framing has long been a part of the public policy explanatory arsenal. But recent years have seen a revival of interest in their study - a revival fueled by new methods to systematically document, explore and test the potential impact of policy frames (Baumgartner et al. 2008, Leifeld and Haunss 2012). These novel methods and the increasing availability of digitalized data sources offer new hope for studying the way in which ideas and public discourses guide and shape, enable and constraint public policies.

In this paper we analyze the policy framing of the regulation of soft drugs, and cannabis in particular, in the Netherlands for the period 1990-2012. Dutch policy towards soft drugs is interesting not only because the Netherlands was the first country to de facto liberalize the use and sale of cannabis in 1976 (Dolin 2001, Bruinsma 2003, Uitemark 2004, Uitemark and Cohen 2005), but also because the policy has been undergoing a series of incremental changes over the last 20 years. While these changes have made the policy somewhat stricter, they have failed to fundamentally transform the policy core despite repeated challenges from the international community and from within the Dutch political system. We explore whether these changes reflect or are reflected in broader public debates about the future direction of the policy and whether we can observe a shift in the policy frames dominating the media discussions.

In principle, soft drugs policy can be conceptualized as a morality policy (Knill 2013, Euchner et al. 2013) and framing is supposed to be especially consequential for issues which can be debated primarily in moral terms (or not) (Heichel et al. 2013). But whether a specific policy in a specific jurisdiction at a certain point of time is framed as a morality policy is an empirical question and an important contribution of our study is to determine the extent to which soft drugs policy in the Netherlands since the 1990s has been framed as a problem of morality or in other terms. Our results show that it has not. The finding that the morality frame is getting lost after the early 1990s contributes to the emerging study of the evolution of morality policies in Europe (see for example the recent issue (20:3, 2013) of the Journal of European Public Policy).

Our goals are primarily descriptive and exploratory. We aim to systematically document and explore the public debate on soft drugs as reflected in three major Dutch newspapers (1990-2012). We trace both news and opinion pieces on the
topic. We present the overall volume of attention (news) and the major contexts in which news about soft drugs appear (1). Then we trace the overall tone (support or opposition) towards three main policy dimensions: liberalization, formalization, and centralization (2). After that we analyze the dominant themes and frames of the opinion pieces dealing with soft drugs and cannabis in particular published in the newspapers (3). Having identified the major dimensions of the public debate we trace its evolution by conducting a series of factor analyses for several non-overlapping time periods (4). Our analytic approach is similar to the evolutionary factor analysis suggested by Baumgartner et al. but instead of the year, we take the individual newspaper item (opinion piece) as the unit of analysis. We argue that this methodology reflects better the purpose of finding stable associations between arguments which constitute a policy frame.

Our findings reveal that the public discourse on Dutch soft drugs policy has been dominated by a rather diverse set of arguments only loosely coupled into frames. The net tone has remained on average supportive of the (rather liberal) status quo and further liberalization. The supporters of a liberal approach have relied on a pragmatic policy frame emphasizing policy effects and control and on another frame arguing for the positive effects of a liberal policy on crime. Interestingly, the supporters of stricter regulation have also used a crime-centered frame which is built from the same references but with opposing interpretation. In addition, a health-centered frame has complemented the pro-regulation discourse. We see that proponents and opponents of a liberal approach compete both by providing contrasting interpretations of essentially the same issues (crime) but also by selectively emphasizing different issues (control vs. health). Perhaps more important is the nearly total absence of a morality frame from the Dutch public discourse after the early 1990s (see also Euchner et al. 2013), and the equally puzzling lack of attention towards the issue of medical marijuana which has had a decisive influence on the shifts in the US policy approach on soft drugs (Conboy 2000).

Before we present our four-part empirical investigations, we briefly review the evolution of soft drugs policy in the Netherlands, the theoretical ideas of policy framing and our research design strategy. The last section of the paper discusses our empirical findings in the context of the observed policy transformation and the possible links between the two. An appendix contains details about the data collection and additional analyses.

2 Soft drugs policy in the Netherlands

The Dutch drug policy is regulated in the Opium law, which came into effect in 1919. Until changes in the law were made in 1976, it was fairly strict. All
drugs that were discerned in the law were prohibited, and could only be produced, traded and used for medical or scientific purposes (Blom 2008, 40). Until the 1960s, drug use in the Netherlands was rather low and did not create major problems for society: between 1928 and 1966, only 1010 prosecutions were made under the Opium law (Blom 2008, 166). However, cannabis use increased dramatically in the second half of the 1960s, which can partly be explained by the rise of the hippie culture. The number in prosecutions rose dramatically: in 1970 alone, more cases were prosecuted than in the whole period between 1928 and 1966. A large number of users were imprisoned and a debate started on the question if this was an appropriate way deal with the drug problem (Blom 2008, 41).

It became clear that the policy had to be changed to cope with the new situation. The government instated a number of commissions to advice on a new policy that would deal with the drug problem in a more efficient way. The Baan Commission in particular proved to be very influential: it recommended a policy in which cannabis use would be decriminalized. According to its report, cannabis use was relatively unharfiful for personal health, and did not lead to addiction. As such, the commission proposed to make a distinction in the policy between softdrugs and harddrugs, related to the risks a drug posed for the individual and for society as a whole (Werkgroep Verdovende Middelen 1972). Furthermore, an evaluation of the police enforcement revealed that many of the arrests that were made were for possession of small amounts of cannabis, often for personal use. This lead to another recommendation: the attention of the police should shift to the suppliers of cannabis.

The recommendations of the commissions and internal evaluations lead the government to adapt the Opium Law in 1976 (Dolin 2001). The changed law differentiated between different types of drugs. Harmful drugs that posed a high risk such as cocaine, heroin and amphetamine were placed on list I. Cannabis and some hallucinogenic mushrooms were placed on list II. The penalties for possession of drugs on both lists were lowered, but the penalties for trafficking and trading of drugs on list I were considerably increased. Furthermore, use of all drugs was legalized. One of the thoughts behind the differentiation between drugs on their risk for the individual and society was that it would keep the users of substances from both lists separated. Before 1976, the chance of running into a cannabis dealer which also dealt in other drugs was high. This was assumed to increase the chance of users of low-risk drugs changing to high-risk drugs. Apart from this, guidelines were provided for the enforcement of the policy. The highest priority was put on the investigation of cases involving drugs from list I. Investigation of the trafficking and trade of list II drugs was put directly below. Investigation of cases concerning possession of drugs on list II was given a low priority, which was an expression that criminal prosecution of users of these drugs was more harmful.
for them than the use of the drug itself (Blom 2008, 51).

The amended law did not formally allow for possession and sale, but in practice a situation developed in which small scale retail businesses were allowed to sell cannabis to users. This discrepancy between formal law and practice is often referred to as gedogen (sometimes translated as toleration or discriminatory enforcement). Only those practices that were seen as harmful for society were targeted by the police. The number of retail businesses (in Dutch referred to as coffeeshops) rose steadily, and were put under stricter regulation in 1991. To control the number of coffeeshops, a licensing system was installed, and four rules for coffeeshops were put in place with the instatement of the AHOJ-criteria. Under these criteria coffeeshops were not allowed to: (A) use advertisements, (H) sell hard drugs, (O) allow for disturbances or nuisance in the area around the shop, and (J) sell cannabis to minors. Later, a fifth criterion (G) was added: coffeeshops were not allowed to sell more than 5 grams of cannabis to an individual, or have more than 500 grams of cannabis in stock (Staatscourant 1996).

In 1995, the Dutch government published a report in which the drug policy was evaluated and policy changes were announced (Kamerstukken II 1994/1995). The report was positive in general about the effectiveness of the Dutch policy in containing health risks and separating hard drugs and soft drugs. Hence, a more restrictive policy regulating the use of cannabis was not deemed necessary. However, the report identified a number of issues that needed to be dealt with in a more efficient way, such as the large role of criminal organizations on the drug market, and nuisances in the neighborhoods around coffeeshops. Stricter penalties were announced for professional growth of cannabis, which were put in place in 1999. To tackle local nuisances, a larger part of the coffeeshop regulation was to be placed in the hands of the municipalities.

Providing licenses to coffeeshops under the AHOJ-criteria was already in the hands of the municipalities, but the report announced a further expansion of local administrative control. A change in the Opium Law (which entered into force in 1997) provided mayors with the capacity to close down coffeeshops. Municipal control was further expanded in 2002 with a law that made it possible for municipalities to control the integrity of coffeeshop holders. The increased decentralized control has greatly reduced the number of coffeeshops over the past 15 years. There are currently around 650 coffeeshops in the Netherlands, whereas there still were 1179 in 1997 (estimation by Bieleman, Biesma and Smallenbroek 1997). This number is likely to decrease further when a new rule gets implemented in 2014, which prohibits coffeeshops to operate within a radius of 350 meters around schools.

2012 marked a new episode for Dutch drug policy. After consultation with a number of mayors of cities in the southern provinces, a new policy was implemented which would restrict entry to coffeeshops to Dutch inhabitants. This
was to decrease the drug tourism that is widespread in these provinces, which is often accompanied by nuisances for the local citizens. To accomplish this, the coffeeshops would be changed into clubs for which a membership was required to enter and purchase cannabis. This policy was changed shortly after a new government entered into office in November 2012 (Rijksoverheid 2012). The membership requirement was dropped, and customers now only have to demonstrate that they are living in the Netherlands by providing an ID and a document from the municipality where they reside. The policy leaves room for municipalities to decide on the enforcement themselves. Amsterdam still allows foreigners in their coffeeshops, but the enforcement is stricter in the southern provinces.

An often discussed aspect of the Dutch policy is the approach towards illegal growth. Although the sale of cannabis is regulated, all growth is still illegal. The cannabis that is sold by the coffeeshops is thus illegally grown, and the supply to the shops happens through the back door. Critique has been given that this is an inconsequent policy, since it makes it impossible for coffeeshops to be supplied in a legal way. In 2000, a motion was adopted in parliament to regulate this supply chain. However, it was not executed by the responsible minister because of fear for international critique (Kamerstukken II 1999/2000). Penalties for professional growth of cannabis have become more severe over the last decades, and every year many plantations are dismantled. The priority for detection lies with professional growth, and possession of up to five cannabis plants does not lead to prosecution. The supplies for cannabis growth are freely obtainable through growshops. These businesses are reported to be often linked to criminal networks (Monitor Georganiseerde Criminaliteit 2012, 148). However, since they sell legal products, prohibiting them is not an option.

The Dutch approach towards cannabis is still a liberal one compared to many other countries. Nonetheless, the policies regulating trade and growth have become much stricter during the last 15 years, and this is likely to continue in the near future. Yet, no government has dared to change the status quo by fully legalizing of prohibiting cannabis. It is unlikely that this will happen. Legalizing seems impossible because of the international treaties the Netherlands is bound to. Complete prohibition is generally deemed undesirable due to the relative success the Dutch policy has had in containing public health risks.

3 Policy frames and the policy process

Explaining changes in public policies and persistent patterns of policy differences across jurisdictional borders is a social-scientific endeavor sitting at the borders of political science, public administration and the more specialized policy sciences. Given the inter-disciplinary character and theoretical pluralism of field, the range
of factors proposed at one time or another as possible determinants of policy persistence and change is rather long. At the same time, there seems to be a shared understanding that theoretical approaches that rely exclusively on narrowly-defined interests of unitary actors and their strategic interplay do not generally provide sufficient explanations. In fact, the field has shifted so far away from interest-based accounts that politics, political actors, and political bargaining are oftentimes completely missing from academic accounts of the process of public policy (see Toshkov 2013).

While we acknowledge that by definition public policy in democracies is made by political actors directly or indirectly put centerstage by the electoral process, the interests of these actors are much more uncertain, fluid, and amenable to change than assumed by standard rational choice models of decision making. As a consequence, the analysis of public policy making cannot be subsumed under the general formalized theories of collective decision making (game theory most prominently). This is not because these theories are wrong as such and the method they provide is flawed, but because they need that the decision making institutional structure is clear and relatively stable and, more importantly, that the actors have well-defined and well-behaved preferences over the policy outcomes. In real life, however, it is too often unclear who is a relevant actor, what are the alternatives, what are the preferences over these alternatives, and what are the rules of the policy making game.

**What is a policy frame?**

The study of policy framing takes up exactly the issues of definition and formation of interests, preferences, and alternatives. In essence, the framing approach argues that the way social problems are portrayed in the public sphere is consequential for how actors come to define their interests and positions, how the policy making process becomes structured, and as a consequence who wins and who looses.

The mechanisms of framing work at different levels and some are more subtle than others (for a recent review see chong and Druckman 2007). Over the last few decade cognitive scientists and psychologists have uncovered a long catalog of biases and heuristics people are subject to when making decisions and forming opinions. Anchoring, attentional bias, availability heuristic, framing effect (in the narrow sense used by cognitive science), loss aversion, and many other 'deviations' from rationality provide for numerous ways through which framing can affect opinions and decisions (see Kahneman and Tverski 2000 for an entry point into the scholarship). These micro-mechanisms can account for the way in which framing works. Experiments have shown that providing information in slightly different ways (for example emphasizing potential gains vs. potential losses) has discernible effects on the decision making process of individuals (Kam and Simas
2010). For another example, framing an issue as a free speech issue or as a public order disruption affects tolerance for Ku Klux Klan (Nelson et al. 1997).

But framing does not need to involve individual-level cognitive biases. Frames in general and policy frames in particular provide the language, the symbols, the metaphors and the narratives through which people, and policy makers, make sense of the social world. The way a social problem is interpreted, the context into which it is put can affect who gets engaged, what positions are taken, and ultimately what decisions are adopted (for this more sociological understanding see Cambell 2002 and Schmidt 2008).

Framing also works by manipulating attention. The dynamics of issue attention in the public sphere has a logic of its own so that small interventions in the attention a problem receives in the media can have potentially lasting effects (Baumgartner and Jones 2009).

A policy frame, at its most basic, is a collection of arguments that stick together. It is not really necessary that the arguments imply each other logically or, indeed, that they to not contradict each other. They work because they provide a narrative, a story that binds together different aspects of the problem and interpretations of social reality. While a frame as such can be neutral with respect to the potential solution of a problem, often adopting a certain frame means adopting a certain attitude. Often, the frame affects the tone (of course, frames can be strategically employed to justify a certain tone and induce an attitude in the public).

Framing is a contest that takes place in public. Social agents devise, promote and contest different policy frames. A frame needs constant reenactment to remain relevant. The subjects of framing are the passive spectators of the policy-making game and the policy making community as such. The former are targeted by the general media, while the latter by specialized policy reports, studies, government documents, political speeches, and the like. The two domains (the media and the politico-administrative) need not be in synchronized, and it is in fact a crucial empirical question who the two relate.

In sum, policy frames are relatively stable sets of arguments that tend to cluster together binding different aspects of a problem in particular ways. They work by 1) procuring attention to an issue, 2) emphasizing some aspects at the expense of others, 3) combining different arguments into more or less coherent stories which can influence how we think about the problem and how we evaluate the possible solutions. While frames posses some stability, 4) they constantly evolve and compete. These four aspects of framing will each be tackled below in the empirical part of this paper.
Frames and morality policies

Morality policies, as a particular kind of policy where conflict over fundamental values play a bigger role than redistributional goals might be especially prone to framing (Knill 2013). First, whether a policy is perceived as a manifest or a latent morality issue (or no at all) is not set in stone but subject to intervention. All important problems facing contemporary society are multifaceted touching upon various moral, economic, ideological and identity aspects (Heichel et al. 2013). At any point in time different dimensions of these problems can be emphasized, with important consequences for the way the policy problem is structured. Of course, framing itself is a process of contestation with some actors emphasizing one set of aspects while others argue in different terms. Politics and policy making are as often fights over issue framing and definition rather than bargaining over a fixed and commonly-accepted set of potential solutions.

Framing an issue as a problem of morality means that change becomes more difficult as people rarely change their fundamental values and are not open to persuasion with respect to their basic beliefs. Unlike redistributional, coordination, or efficient issues, there is rarely common ground, a surplus to split, or a Pareto-efficient frontier to reach. Morality frames also foster public mobilization since they reduce complexity to a level at which everyone can relate to a problem. They also making the provision of new information (e.g. by scientific studies of policy effects) less consequential (Knill 2013). But again, whether an issue is perceived predominantly in light of morality, or efficiency, or ideology, or something else is a matter of framing and can change over time and in space which demands empirical analysis for each particular policy and policy episode we are interested in.

4 Data collection

The empirical context of our study of policy framing is Dutch soft drugs policy since 1990s. The policy domain is selected because of the unique early experience of the Netherlands with a liberal approach towards cannabis and the more recent pressures for strengthening of the regulation if not prohibition. We focus on general media instead of the politico-administrative frames both because the latter have been studied and because of our interest in attitudes and predisposition among the broader society. Media discourse is richer than the technical one oriented at the policy community and is more suitable for detecting shifts in frames and opinions in the general population. In this section we will outline our data collection strategy. Unlike other methods, the analysis of policy frames is relatively less formalized so we need to document in some detail our coding and classification strategies in order to make our approach comprehensible.
As a first step we identify using the Lexis-Nexis database all materials published on the topic of soft drugs in three major Dutch newspapers from 1990 onwards. The search included terms like 'soft drugs', 'cannabis', 'hash', 'marijuana', 'coffee shops', and the like. The search was limited to the headers and leads of the articles to prevent too many irrelevant articles being selected. The newspapers that were being studied are the three largest quality newspapers in the Netherlands: De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad and Trouw. Unfortunately, the database does only go back until 1990 for NRC Handelsblad, 1992 for Trouw, and 1995 for De Volkskrant, so the period that could be studied was limited. The total sample consisted of 6311 articles, of which still around 55 percent were considered irrelevant.

Two subsets were created out of this sample: a collection of news articles, and a collection of opinion pieces. The former was used to track the general media attention, the latter to study the specific arguments of the debate on Dutch drug policy. Opinion pieces include opinions, letters, columns, but also editorial commentaries. While news items sometimes can be related to certain frames, we opt to analyze them separately since they often lack clear direct arguments for or against the policy.

For the news articles, only the NRC Handelsblad was used, since the database went back furthest for this newspaper. However, due to some problems with the database, the search did not return a complete sample of articles for the period between 1990 and 1992, so only news articles from after 1992 were studied. The total number of articles in NRC Handelsblad was 2227, of which 1060 remained after manually deleting the irrelevant articles. Every article was assigned into a category from a previously-defined set. The list of categories included 'health and social effects', 'crime' (with subcategories), 'economy', 'domestic policy development' (with subcategories), 'international developments', and 'others'. For details see the full list include in the Appendix. The coding of the news items in this way allows us to trace media attention to the topic but also the major contexts in which the topic appears in the news.

The second subset of materials - opinion pieces - was created by selecting those articles from the total sample that appeared in the opinion section of each newspaper. Unfortunately, the database 'section' field is not entirely reliable as it is often missing or inconsistently coded. If we only relied on the 'section' field search we would have missed many relevant opinion pieces. So some opinion articles were manually selected for each newspaper from the complete sample, especially for the early period for which the 'section' code was missing almost completely. In years for which no opinion articles or letters were found at all, one or two comprehensive news articles were selected to still get some information on the content of the debate at that time.
Hence, the number of articles per year in this subset does not provide a reliable account of the relative attention on the discussion on drug policy (but the news sample does). Most articles from this subset come from NRC Handelsblad, since information on the section in which each article was published was best available for this newspaper. A comparison of the articles from the different newspapers did not point at large differences in the tone or content between the newspapers, so the overrepresentation of articles from NRC Handelsblad was assumed not to affect the validity of the results. This strategy resulted in a total of 134 opinion pieces which covered the entire period under study.

These opinion pieces were coded along several dimensions. First, we coded the overall tone of the time with respect to three policy dimensions: further liberalization/stricter regulation (prohibition), formalization (vs. the *gedogen* status quo), and centralization (which we expected would be salient given the importance of municipalities in the current regulatory setup). The tone gives us an idea which policy options along these three dimensions the article advocated for. Second, we assigned the opinion pieces into three major contexts (frames) from a previously-defined set. These categories are rather general (‘health’, ‘crime’, etc. see the full list in the Appendix and the discussion below).

Third, we coded extensively each article for the presence of particular detailed arguments. We started the list of possible arguments on the basis of prior information and updated it on several occasions until it became comprehensive enough. These arguments are nested into the general themes mentioned above. For example ‘202: Cannabis liberalization increases petty crime and social nuisances’ is part of the ‘Crime’ theme. The full list contains 78 arguments and can be seen in the Appendix. Every opinion piece was coded for every argument we could clearly identify in the article.

In sum, our data collection resulted in two sets of articles - news and opinion pieces. The sampling of news items allows to trace total attention over time and the coding for general categories allows us to trace the changing context of soft drugs news. The extensive coding of the opinion pieces allows us to trace the tone over time, and the explore the composition and evolution of the policy frames. We now turn towards the results from the analysis.

5 Empirical analyses

Media attention towards soft drugs policy in the Netherlands has fluctuated considerably over the last 20 years. In addition to the overall volume of attention, the terms of the public debate have been shifting. In this part of the article we are going to present our findings from the empirical analyses of media attention. First, we are going to look at the volume and content of news on the topic; second,
we are going to examine the main frames and arguments put forwards in opinion pieces; third, we are going to identify the major policy frames; finally, we are going to analyze the evolution of the frames over time.

**News on soft drugs in Dutch media**

Let us start with the examination of the prominence of soft drugs-related news in the Netherlands. Figure 1 shows the total number of news items related to soft drugs, cannabis, hash, coffeeshops, and other related terms in three of the major Dutch newspapers (for data collection details see the research design section).

![Figure 1: Soft drugs-related news in Dutch newspapers](image)

Notes: *De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad and Trouw for the period 1993-2012. Search via LexisNexis. Major policy changes indicated by the vertical lines.*

On average 53 news items related to soft drugs have been published in the three newspapers per year (the median is slightly lower at 40): that makes for a little more than one news item per month per news source. We can say that the presence of soft drugs in the Dutch media is small but persistent. Attention has not dropped between 20 items per year and has a peak of 185 news items in 1996. The period 1994-1997 has witnessed the greatest attention to the issue but afterwards the time series has been quite steady.

The peak attention in the early 1990s is related to a rise in international drug-related crime, and the 'internationalization' of the Dutch policy with interventions
from France and other neighboring countries. It is interesting to note that the volume of news on soft drugs peaks before the major policy changes in 1997 (see above) and interest dwindles after. News reporting is driven both by objective developments and events in the world, and by editorial policy. As a result, the shifts in the number of news items on the topic reflect both the objective and the editorial components. In any case, there have been no spikes in news attention around the time of the 2010 policy changes. We are going to see whether media attention towards soft drugs as reflected in the opinion pieces published by the newspapers follows similar patterns over time in the next section but before that let us focus on what the news have been about.

Figure 2 disaggregates the population of news items into several distinct categories - health and social effects, crime, economic effects, domestic policy developments, international policy developments, and a residual group ('other'). The figure shows both the absolute numbers of articles in each category (top panel) and the relative share of each category from all news items published in each year (bottom panel). The relative importance of different themes within the soft drugs issue shifts quite a bit but there is hardly a dominant theme at any single point of time. Crime seems to be the most often encountered context of the news in the late 1990s while domestic policy developments have an increasingly prominent place since the early 2000s. Health and social effects-related news play a minor role and their relative share never surpasses 25 percent (similarly for international policy developments and economic effects).

Looking into more detail within the set of domestic policy-related articles (see Figure 1 in the appendix) we can see that news on policy discussions comprise the bulk of the news, but, importantly, the external effects of domestic policy increase their share in the early 1990s and around 2005. News on policy effects and enforcement (!) play a rather minor role. Turning towards the crime-related news we can distinguish between organized/international crime related news and domestic petty crime/misuses related news (see Figure 2 in the appendix). The former dominates the news throughout the period, but the latter approaches 40 percent of the total soft drugs crime news set between 2002 and 2006.

Altogether, media attention in terms of news reporting has been rather constant over the study period with one pronounced peak in the early 1990s, and a relatively steady distribution of context for the news with occasional relative peaks in reporting about domestic 'small' crime or ongoing policy discussions. The timing of these shifts in attention and context do not seem to be systematically related with the measure policy shifts: policy changes sometimes follow increased reporting (mid-1990s) but the 2010 amendments do not seem related to shifts in the volume or composition of news.

Opinions on soft drugs policy in Dutch media

Having analyzed the volume and composition of news about soft drugs policy in the Netherlands we turn towards the exploration of the opinion pieces published in
the three newspapers part of our sample. It should be reminded that our sampling strategy does not allow us to trace shifts in the overall volume of opinion pieces published but we can nevertheless study the composition and the average tone of the items.

Net tones: liberalization, formalization, and centralization

Let us start with the question about the net tone of the opinions. The three dimensions we code the tone are liberalization, formalization, and centralization - the three major aspects of the policy as designed and implemented in the Netherlands.

Heichel et al. (2013) posit that 'morality policy change often occurs on the sanctioning dimension ..., rather than the regulatory dimension’ (p.323). In the case of soft drugs policy we can conceptualize the main dimension as one between complete liberalization and complete prohibition. The policy options in-between the two poles include partial liberalization and decriminalization. The status quo in the Netherlands after 1976 can be characterized as one of partial liberalization with all the disclaimers about the differential treatment of use, sale, and production of cannabis (see above) and the tension between formal and informal policy (also discussed below). Thus when we measure the tone of the opinion pieces we register their tone with respect to the status quo. Articles which argue for further liberalization (for example of cannabis growth, or dropping restrictions on coffeeshops) are coded as pro-liberalization (permissive). Articles which argue for stricter regulation, more government control, or complete prohibition are coded as anti-liberalization (restrictive). We have to note that sometimes it is difficult to assign articles arguing for increased role of the state as pro or against liberalization. On the one hand, more state involvement (for example, the institution of a state monopoly for cannabis growth) implies a less liberal policy, on the other hand the implication of the proposal might be that the regime for sale and use becomes more permissive.

With these observations in mind, let us look at Figure 3 which presents the total and average annual tone towards liberalization. We present both measures but they suggest essentially the same conclusion. Since the 1990s the tone of Dutch opinions towards soft drugs policy, as expressed in the print media, has been one of moderate pro-liberalization. There are occasional years in which the pro-regulation arguments are more popular (1993, 1996-7, 2007), but during the rest of the time, the tone is predominantly in favour of further liberalization of the regime. But the opinions expressed in the newspapers are in fact rather moderate and advocate only small adjustments of the policy in either direction. Calls for complete prohibition or complete liberalization are rare and the vast majority of articles embrace the core of the existing policy while proposing incremental changes to particular aspects, like the regulation of coffeeshop opening times or the amount

of cannabis that people can buy.

There is no trend in the data. The total number of pro-liberalization opinion pieces seems to be on the increase since 2006 but when we look at the average annual tone, there is no evidence for a real change. This is nevertheless remarkable since the policy debate has definitely shifted in a pro-regulation direction, as has to some extent the policy itself.

We expected that besides the overall direction of the policy in terms of pro/anti liberalization, two other aspects will be prominent in the public debates: formalization and centralization. Both are related to particularities of the Dutch approach which has at its core the discrepancy between the letter of the law and what is practically enforced, and the considerable discretion local government have in deciding how to interpret and enforce the policy.

Surprisingly, none of these two aspects proved to be very salient in the articles we analyzed. While there were occasional references to these policy dimensions, most pieces that mentioned them were content with the status quo. But the majority did not discuss them explicitly at all.

Figures 3 and 4 in the appendix plot the total and average tone with respect
to formalization and centralization respectively. When the articles discuss the formalization aspect they tend to support the codification of the status quo as a formal policy (mostly due to its effects on legal certainty). Over the last few years, these voices have increased in strength. With respect to (de)centralization the net tone tends to favour further strengthening of local competencies rather than central government prerogatives, but the dimension is very rarely discussed. It appears that commentators take for granted the distribution of powers with respect to soft drug policy and are content with the wide discretion municipalities have in applying the policy. (De)centralization and formalization are tied together to some extent since formalization would require an explicit policy debate about how to fix the competencies while the regime can remain somewhat flexible under the gedogen policy. In any case, the relevance of either of the two for the public should not be exaggerated given their minor presence in the media discourse. Indeed, when the policy has been changed during the last 20 years the formalization and centralization aspects were left almost untouched. If anything selective enforcement, local powers, and geographical differentiation were reinforced rather than challenged.

Main themes of the debate over time

While the tone of the articles with respect to the three main policy dimensions presented above reveals a lot about the public debate, it is equally important to explore the actual arguments put forwards in defense of one or the other position. What our empirical analysis aims at shedding light at the connections between arguments, the frames they make, and the positions they entice.

To study the main themes of the debate we attributed to each article up to three general themes from a pre-defined list. These general themes capture the overall context in which the opinions are presented and the main points around which the debate resolves.

Looking at the distribution of the observed themes, or dimensions, of the opinion pieces, the most striking conclusion is that the debate is very fragmented (see Figure 4). No theme, be that crime or health, has been able to dominate the debated at any single point of time. The public discourses as reflected in the opinion pieces is even more fragmented (or richer if you will) than the soft drugs news stream presented above. Certain themes like crime or enforcement have a rather stable presence in the debate while the prominence of others (morality, international aspects) waxes and wanes. The health dimension also has a reserved place but even it cannot peak beyond 25 percent of all articles at any point of time. Interestingly, articles having policy effectiveness as the main theme tend to cluster around the policy change episodes but loose prominence afterwards. But the overall impression remains one of fragmentation.
The simultaneous presence of so many different themes at any single point in time begs the question whether and how are the themes related. We will have more to say on that in the next section when we look at more specific arguments rather than general themes but we can already look into the relationships between themes. Since we coded all articles for up to three themes, we can visualize which themes tend to go together and which themes have a central place in the debate.

Figure 5 shows a network graph based on the connections between themes. Each line is based on the simultaneous presence of the themes in one article and the distance between the themes is related to their analytical proximity. Crime appears to be the most central dimension having strong connection to any other dimensions: that is, articles that discuss crime can also discuss any other theme as well. Enforcement and health also have a rather central place in the network of themes (hence, a diverse set of partner themes). On the other hand articles focusing on the social context, morality, or economic issues are less 'connected' with other themes.
While the network graph is suggestive, a more fine-grained analysis is needed to explore the connections between specific arguments which give rise to policy frames. The next part of the text turns towards the task.

**Policy frames on soft drugs policy**

For now we concentrate on identifying policy frames spanning the entire period of analysis. Thus, we explore the general relationships in the entire dataset of opinion pieces. Later we trace the evolution of the frames and the dynamics of their development over time.

The data we use for these two parts of the analysis consists of opinion pieces coded for the presence of each of more than 70 specific arguments part of the general themes discussed above (for the list see the appendix). Hence, the data matrix is a string of zeros and ones describing the argumentative profile of each article.
The article forms the unit of observation and the arguments can be thought be as variables. We need a method to uncover the associations between the arguments using the co-occurrence in individual articles as input data. We use factor analysis to study these associations.

In principle, factor analysis is not appropriate for the binary data we have. Usually, an approach based on item response theory (IRT) or latent (underlying) variable approach is preferred. Below we present the results based on factor analysis because an IRT analysis yielded very similar results while the factor analysis has the advantage of familiarity for students of policy making and the results are more directly interpretable than the output from IRT which has been developed primarily as a measurement tool.

As explained in this part we use all items (opinion pieces) irrespective of the year in which they were published. We only filter for items with less than three arguments and arguments mentioned less than four times which results in 111 items (observations) and 51 arguments (variables) (see the distributions plotted in Figure 5 in the appendix).

The exploration starts with a principal component analysis to try and determine the number of factors to extract later. As expected from the sparse data matrix and the binary data, there is little structure. There are 20 principal components with eigen values more than one. At the same time, each accounts for a very small percent of the total variation (between 7.9 percent and 2.1 percent). Even with all of the first 20 components only 71 percent of the variation is accounted for. Hence, the principal components analysis can be of little help for restricting the number of factors to extract and interpret.

We opt to run the factor analysis with six factors (those with more than four percent variation accounted for) in order to keep the number of factors manageable and the dimensions interpretable. Including more factors results in solutions in which only individual statements load on many of the factors which is not useful for identifying the structure in the data. But to check the stability of the results, we replicate the factor analysis with a higher number of factors.

The six-factor solution (varimax rotated) is presented in detail in Table 1. If we restrict our attention to those arguments which load heavily (cut-off set at 0.4) on the dimension, the following picture emerges. The first factors groups statements 101, 801, and 701. All these statements are negative in tone (anti-liberalization) but cover different domains: health, social environment, and policy effectiveness. The statements are the following: ’701: Cannabis liberalization (coffeeshops) is bad for the social environment’, ’801: A liberal policy increases cannabis consumption’, and ’101: The use of cannabis is bad for health (in general)’. So the first factor with the highest sum of squares of factor loading and proportion of variation accounted for reveals a rich negative frame which connects heath and social concerns.
The second frame is also negative in tone but predominantly focused on crime. It groups the statements: '203: Cannabis liberalization increases organized and violent crimes', '204: Cannabis liberalization increases drug smuggling and trade', and '205: Cannabis liberalization leads to illegal growth (and growth-related crime more generally)', together with an argument about enforcement: '603: The police should have more resources (and legal backing) to enforce the policy'. Clearly, unlike the previous frame, this one sees a crime problem rather than a solution in liberalization of soft drugs.

A useful way to visualize the relationships between the first two factors is to plot the factor loadings of all statements on the two factors. Figure 6 shows the result: higher values on both axes indicate higher loadings on the particular factor.

The third factors brings together health arguments which claim that cannabis is bad for the health of youngsters (102), especially newer enhanced varieties (105) rich in THC (the active substance in cannabis) (104). An argument that cannabis is addictive (106) completes the frame.
Notes: Six factor solution (varimax rotation). All years. For description of the statements see the Appendix.

It is interesting that the first three highest-loading factors are all negative in tone while we saw that the average tone of the opinion pieces is mostly supportive of the status quo (which can be characterized as relatively liberal) and further liberalization. This can be explained by the fact that negative opinions draw from a richer and more internally-coherent set of arguments. These have both general scope (like the first frame) or specific scope (like the predominantly crime and health-focused ones).

The fourth factor and the three arguments associated with hints towards a positive frame, but one focused mostly on crime: '212: Cannabis liberalization decreases petty crime and social nuisances' and '215: Cannabis liberalization decreases street-sale' with the addition of '802: Registration/wietpas is ineffective in general'. This frames is tightly connected with the debate about restricted access to the coffeshops present on a number of occasions during the study period. The story that links the arguments together is that restricted sale would not only be ineffective but would also push sales in the streets increasing petty crime and street-sale.

The fifth factor brings together economic and control arguments with a predominantly positive tone: '411: Cannabis legalization is good for the economy', '413: Cannabis legalization brings taxes for the government', and '114: Liberaliza-
tion allows for a better control on the quality/sale of cannabis’. This frame looks pragmatically at the problem of regulation and focuses on the benefits for the state and the economy.

Finally, the sixth factor we extract reveals a diverse positive frame which can be dubbed ‘Dutch pride’ as it emphasizes positive aspects of the Dutch policy on the social environment (711), on reducing drug smuggling and trade (214) in the face of failing world war on drugs (515) and a global trend towards liberalization (513).

Altogether, the first six factors can be clearly associated with negative or positive attitude towards stricter regulation of soft drugs policy. Three frames are negative in tone, and three frames are positive. The fact that the negative ones come first should not be over-emphasized because the cumulative explained variance by the first three (negative) factors is 13 percent while for the set of three positive frames is 11 percent. Both the positive and the negative frames have one diverse set of arguments (Factor 1 and Factor 6 respectively) but the negative ones seems to be more widely used. Interestingly, crime-related arguments are used in both a negative and a positive frame. This implies that there are serious disagreements in the interpretation of the effects of liberalization on drug-related crime. Both camps look at the same things but see a very different picture. Finally, health arguments are only brought together in a negative frame while economic arguments only in a positive one. In sum, the different sides in the public discussion of soft drug policy in the Netherlands compete both by interpreting differently the same issues, and by selectively emphasizing different aspects of the topic.

Policy frames over time

Are these policy frames relevant for the entire period between 1993 and 2012? Have there been major changes in the framing of the public discussions of soft drugs policy? Are any new frames emerging or old ones loosing ground? To answer these questions we need to trace the evolution of the debate. To do that we conduct a series of factor analysis on subsets of the data covering different time periods. Our approach is inspired by the evolutionary factor analysis routine of Baumgartner et al. (2008) but differs significantly in the details. Since our unit of analysis is the opinion piece (item) and not the year, we do not run the factor analyses on overlapping five-years time windows, but partition the entire time period in advance. We are also limited by the number of observations in each period so we adjust its boundaries to include a reasonable number of opinion pieces in each. Our approach allows us to detect major changes in the debate and the underlying frames. Once the major shifts are identified one can tweak the beginning and end terms of the time period to explore when exactly the change occurred. Since the public debate most likely changes slowly and incrementally, the question of pinning
Notes: Four factor solution (varimax rotation). 1993-1997. For description of the statements see the Appendix.

down the rise and decline of particular frames to a single year is perhaps of lesser importance.

1993-1997

We start the historical analysis by zooming-in on the earliest period we have data on - the 1990s. We extend the time window from 1993 to 1997 (inclusive) to attain a sufficient number of observations in order to produce a stable factor solution. After filtering for items with less than two arguments and arguments mentioned less than three times, we end up with 33 observations on 21 variables. Eight principal components have eigen values of more than one for a combined explained variance of 76 percent. The first four components account individually for more than ten percent each. After that the variation accounted for drops below eight percent so we decide to run a four-factor solution.

Figure 7 shows the items loading on the first two factors (the details are include in the appendix). The most prominent frame (again, the differences in explained variance between the first four factors are very small) combines enforcement and morality arguments: '602: The current state of the policy is bad for legal certainty (contradiction between formal and informal)', '604: Status quo is not enforceable',
'311: Drug use is an individual right (individual liberty comes first)’. It is hard to ascribe tone to the frame but it is definitely related to the discussions prior to the 1997 changes in the policy. The dissatisfaction with the status quo is coupled with an attempt to frame the debate as one of individual rights and liberties. We will see that this morality component will be invisible in the later periods and is indeed missing from the general analysis presented above.

The argument about individual liberty is related to the second frame as well. But the tone of the second frame is unmistakably positive. The frame is also very diverse. It focuses on the effectiveness (800) and positive effects on the policy on control (114), the economy (taxes) (413), and crime in general (211). We can recognize in this frame the fifth factor from the general analysis but it has certainly lost some prominence since the early 1990s. Again, it is interesting that the morality (liberty) connection has been lost.

The third frame is something that did not show up in the general analysis and is one related exclusively to the negative international effects of the Dutch approach. The international aspects certainly played a large role (if not that of a prime motivation) for the reforms of the policy in 1997 which tightened the regulation of soft drugs. This frame argues that '501: Drug tourism is bad for the international standing (image, reputation) of the country’, '502: Cannabis legalization creates problems with the neighboring countries’, and other international arguments (519).

The fourth factor groups together negative evaluations about the effect of cannabis on health (101) and on increased drugs consumption (801). Clearly, this is the core of the negative policy frame that appeared most prominent in the general analysis.

Altogether, the debate in the early 1990s is characterized by more attention to the effects of the policy on a more diverse set of issues. Liberty, legal certainty, and international aspects of the discussion play a prominent role. Crime and social effects are only of secondary importance. We also see some connections between arguments (e.g. morality and policy effects) that were missing in the general analysis. When do the terms of the debate change?

5.0.1 1998-2005

Interest to soft drugs policy in the Dutch media drops after the 1997 policy reforms and the annual number of opinion pieces published is smaller in the years to follow. Therefore we extend the time window to cover the eight years until 2005 (including). This results in a sample of 39 observations (opinion pieces) and 25 variables (arguments). Again, we retain four factors (those accounting for more than 8 percent each).

The details of the factor analysis of this period can be found in the appendix and the first two factors are plotted in Figure 8. Instead of describing the frames
In fact, a lot has changed. The most prominent frame now is one that combines arguments about the positive effect of liberalization on control (114), with a concern about the legal certainty created by the status quo (602) and calls for liberalization of growth (617). In essence this frame takes some some arguments form the previous period (control, legal certainty) but adds the issue of growth regulation which has meanwhile emerged as central in the debate. Reference to individual liberty has been lost. This can be due to the fact that the core of the relatively liberal policy appears more firmly established so it does not need to be defended and attention needs to be focused on the main remaining points of contestation among which cannabis growth is rather prominent.

The international adverse effects of Dutch policy (504) have been combined with an argument that liberalization has led to more crime (201). The remaining frames focus on health (and high-THC cannabis in particular) and crime (in a positive tone). The internationalization aspects have spilled over and been combined with arguments from other domains. But what we see is a gradual evolution of the debate rather than a radical transformation. With the exception of the lost morality aspect and the addition of growth control and high-THC cannabis effects in the main frames, the development of the public debate is incremental with both sides
focusing on crime, pro-liberalization supporters emphasizing the more pragmatic policy effects while the pro-regulation camp putting relatively more emphasis on health.

5.0.2 2006-2009

The third period we discuss is from 2005 until 2009. It provides us with 22 observations on 16 variables. The first four principal components account for ten percent or more variation each so we retain them.

Figure 9 plots the loadings on the first two factors. The first one is now a diverse negative frame combining arguments that liberalization is bad for organized crime, the social environment and health, as well as a call for more resources to the police for enforcement (details about the statements and loadings are in the appendix).

The second frame is focused on crime but argues instead that liberalization decreases petty crime and social nuisances and street-sale. The third frame is in fact rather similar but adds a call for growth to be liberalized. The fourth frame combines health issue (cannabis is bad for health with concern about the social environment and youth in particular).

Altogether the frames from this period reflect the build-up towards the policy
(changes discussed around 2010. Morality has completely disappeared. Th focus is squarely on crime, health, and social effects. Both the pro and contra-liberalization deal with the same issues but conceived the policy effects in a different light.

5.0.3 2010-2012

The final period we discuss is from 2010 until the end of the observation period in 2012. It provides us with 34 observations on 27 variables. The debate has disintegrated further. Only two principal components account for more than ten percent variation; four for more than eight.

The focus of the debate has shifted quite considerably (see Figure 10). Two new positive frames are on the rise. First, a collection of rather diverse arguments spans (positive) effects on the economy, social environment, control, and argues that liberalization has no effect on consumption. The collecting theme seems to be nothing more than pragmatism. The second frame is also positive but focused on international aspects. It is the first time that the theme features in the analysis in a positive light, but its appearance is connected to the discussions about introducing restrictions for foreigners visiting coffeeshops. The story binding the arguments is that the the Dutch approach works especially with respect to
decreasing smuggling and street sale, the international war on drugs fails anyway, more countries are liberalizing theory policies, and restrictions are ineffective. The third frame is the familiar diverse negative frame with arguments about health, the social environment, and consumption.

6 Discussion and conclusions

In this paper we analyzed the public debate on soft drugs policy in the Netherlands over the last 20 years. The debate in 2012 would be recognizable to someone who stopped following it in the early 1990s. The major dimensions of the public discussion, as reflected in the major national newspapers as well as the overall tone and the general attention to the topic have not changed much.

News on different aspect of soft drugs follow a steady patterns and outside of a period of unusual interest in the early 1990s the annual number of news items on the topic has remained roughly the same. The context of the news fluctuates and while crime is the most popular one, there is no dominant theme.

Opinion pieces are similarly fragmented in their major themes and dimensions. Despite the multitude of themes and arguments, the debate has retained a mostly pro-liberalization tone but one that is very moderate and avoids advocating either pole of the liberalization-prohibition dimensions. Other aspects of the policy, like formalization and centralization receive little attention in opinion pieces despite their obvious relevance for the shape of the policy.

When we look at the policy frames structuring the debate what we do not find is as interesting and informative as what we do find. First, morality has almost completely disappeared as a frame since the 1990s. While occasional references exist, there are not coupled into broader frames with more more general appeal. Arguments about the possible positive health effect of cannabis on certain patients are even harder to find: a fact which is in stark contrast with their prominence in the American debate on marijuana and the related policy changes since the early 2000s.

What we do find is that both proponents and opponents of liberalization focus on the effects liberalization has on crime and try to connect these arguments to more encompassing discourses. The exact connections between arguments proposed differ over time but what remains at the core is a fundamental disagreement about the effects decriminalization and liberalization have on international organized crime, domestic crime and street sale, drug traffic and social ’nuisances. Both camps like to refer to the issue of the effect of liberalization on drug consumption but see the effects in opposing ways.

While the two camps vigorously disagree on these questions, the mere fact that they focus on the same issues holds some potential for reconciliation. It
is conceivable that if new information comes to light about the actual effects of cannabis liberalization on crime, people could adjust their positions. Debates about policy effects hold potential for resolution provided that a consensus emerges about the likely direction and magnitude of these effects. Such a consensus does not seem within sight for our issue.

But proponents and opponents of liberalization also compete by selective attention to certain issues. Most importantly, negative effects centered on health seem an important and constant feature of the debate. Negative health arguments are also not counterbalanced by a competing perspective on the same issues: rather, proponents of liberalization rarely discuss the health effects of cannabis use. At the same time, proponents of stricter regulation and prohibition seem to avoid the theme of enforceability and the effects of the policy on control.

When we look at the evolution of the debate over time, while each period puts the emphasis on different issues there is a lot of continuity as well. The earliest period still retains some importance for morality issues while the last one is focused more on international aspects. but in-between it is mostly a discussion revolving around crime, health and control. While relatively few genuinely new arguments appear (THC, social nuisances, effects on youth), there are no radically new ways of combining the arguments on either side of the debate.

The study of the policy frames would have limited relevance if no attempt is made to link it to the actual policy developments. While it is beyond the purposes of this paper to test the relationship between policy and the public debate, it is already clear that there is no straightforward link between the two. The more specialized politico-administrative discourse on soft drugs in the Netherlands (Euchner et al. 2013) both resembles overall the broader public debate that we study and differs in the details. For example, both agree that soft drugs policy is not predominantly seen as a morality issue. But the timing of the rise of importance of different themes differs and should be a subject of further study. But it is already clear that many of the major rhetorical weapons of the policy-makers discourse used in promoting policy change (social nuisance in the mid 1990s, international drug tourism in the late 2000s) do not have a dominating role in the broader public debate. Instead, these issues are taken up and bound to existing arguments.

Future research on the topic can take a variety of directions. First, a longer time frame of analysis stretching back to the 1970s when the core fo the policy took shape would be informative about possible greater long-term shifts in the policy frames. Unfortunately, currently data limitations prohibit such an analysis. Second, it would be highly interesting to compare the Dutch policy discourse and its evolution to those in neighboring countries which have retained very different policies with respect to soft drugs. From our analysis it does not appear that something peculiar is going on in the Dutch debate but, of course, a systematic
analysis is needed to demonstrate the similarities and differences of cross-national policy framing.

The empirical analyses that we presented in this paper explore rather comprehensively the world of policy ideas and arguments but they have remained silent about the actors advancing these ideas and arguments (beyond the simple categorization of pro and contra liberalization advocates). It is possible to link arguments and frames to actors (Leifeld and Haunss 2012) and explore how the two analytical layers evolve together - a strategy that holds potential for cracking the hard nut of policy persistence and change.

7 References

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8 Supplementary information

Additional graphs: news analysis

Figure 11: Categories of policy-related soft drugs news in Dutch newspapers

Figure 12: Categories of crime-related soft drugs news in Dutch newspapers

Additional graphs: opinion pieces analysis

Figure 13: Tone towards soft drugs policy formalization in opinions pieces in Dutch newspapers


Figure 14: Tone towards soft drugs policy centralization in opinions pieces in Dutch newspapers

Figure 15: Distributions of arguments popularity and arguments per article
Details about the factor analyses

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Table 2: Factors and loadings (four-factor solution). 1993-1997

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Table 3: Factors and loadings (four-factor solution). 1998-2005
Table 4: Factors and loadings (four-factor solution). 2006-2009

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Table 5: Factors and loadings (four-factor solution). 2010-2012

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Codebook: news

1. Health effects and social effects-related news
2. Crime-related news
   2.1 Petty crime and nuisances
   2.2 Organized and international crime and trafficking
3. Economic effects-related news
4. News about domestic policy developments
   4.1 News about new policies and changes in the policy
   4.2 News about discussions/preparations/negotiation/drafting of new policies and changes in the policy
   4.3. News about the effects of the policy (on drug consumption, society, health, crime, etc.)
   4.4 News about the enforcement of the policy
   4.5. News about the external (international) effects of Dutch policy
5. News about foreign and international policy developments. International effects of Dutch policy
6. Other news
Codebook: arguments

1. Health arguments
   100: General health arguments, for example new study discusses the health effects of cannabis
   101: The use of cannabis is bad for health (in general)
   102: The use of cannabis is bad for the health of youngsters
   103: Smoking cannabis is bad for health
   104: High-THC cannabis is bad for health
   105: Newer enhanced varieties of cannabis are especially worrisome and dangerous
   106: Cannabis is addictive
   107: High-THC Cannabis is not bad for health
   110: The use of cannabis has no (bad) effect on health (also: in comparison to other drugs)
   111: The use of cannabis is beneficial for health (in general)
   112: The use of cannabis is beneficial in certain cases (medical marijuana)
   113: Cannabis is not addictive
   114: Liberalization allows for a better control on the quality/sale of cannabis
   119: Other health-related arguments

2. Crime arguments
   200: General crime arguments, for example, cannabis export accounts for 25 percent of the hidden economy
   201: Cannabis liberalization increases crime in general
   202: Cannabis liberalization increases petty crime and social nuisances
   203: Cannabis liberalization increases organized and violent crimes
   204: Cannabis liberalization increases drug smuggling and trade
   205: Cannabis liberalization leads to illegal growth (and growth-related crime more generally)
   210: Cannabis liberalization has no effect on crime
   211: Cannabis liberalization decrease crime in general
   212: Cannabis liberalization decreases petty crime and social nuisances
   213: Cannabis liberalization decreases organized and violent crimes
   214: Cannabis liberalization decreases drug smuggling and trade
   215: Cannabis liberalization decreases street-sale.
   219: Other crime-related arguments

3. Normative (morality) arguments
   300: General normative issues, for example Drug consumption is an important area for regulation
   301: Drug use regulation is a responsibility of the state (and not the individual)
302: The state has the right to restrict differentially access to drugs (registrations, permits, etc.)
303: Drug use is forbidden by religion
304: People have the right to a drug-free social environment (and workspace)
311: Drug use is an individual right (individual liberty comes first)
312: The decision to use drugs or not is individual responsibility
313: Wietpas/registration is discrimination
314: Drug use is part of the spiritual development of people
319: Other normative arguments

4. Economic Arguments:
   400: General economic arguments, for example Cannabis production accounts for 55 billion euros worldwide
   401: Cannabis legalization is bad for the economy
   411: Cannabis legalization is good for the economy
   412: Cannabis legalization brings revenues from tourism
   413: Cannabis legalization brings taxes for the government
   414: Cannabis legalization brings employment (closing of coffeeshops causes loss of jobs)
   419: Other economic-related arguments

5. International issues/arguments
   500: General international issues/arguments
   501: Drug tourism is bad for the international standing (image, reputation) of the country
   502: Cannabis legalization creates problems with the neighboring countries
   503: More countries regulate strongly cannabis (including news for tougher policies)
   504: The national approach clashes (creates trouble) with EU and international law
   505: The national approach does not clash with the EU/international law (also: there is room within the international regulations to pursue our own policy)
   511: Drug tourism is good for the international standing (image, reputation) of the country
   512: Cannabis legalization improves relations with the neighboring countries
   513: More countries liberalize cannabis (including news for weaker policies)
   514: The national policy sets a best practice for the other countries (also other countries learn)
   515: The international war on drugs fails
   519: Other international arguments

6. Enforcement arguments
   600: General enforcement-related arguments
601: Cannabis legalization makes it harder for the policy to enforce law and order
602: The current state of the policy is bad for legal certainty (contradiction between formal and informal)
603: The police should have more resources (and legal backing) to enforce the policy
604: Status quo is not enforceable
611: Cannabis legalization makes it easier for the police to enforce law and order (focus on more important issues)
612: The current state of the policy is good for enforceability (gives discretion to police)
613: Cannabis prohibition is not enforceable (or costs too much resources)
614: Only sale should be regulated
615: Only use should be regulated
616: Only growth should be regulated
617: Growth should be liberalized
619: Other enforcement-related arguments

7. Social context arguments
700: General arguments discussing the effects of soft drugs policy on the social environment (quality of neighborhoods, etc.)
701: Cannabis liberalization (coffeeshops) is bad for the social environment
702: Cannabis liberalization (coffeeshops) is bad for the social environment of youths (schools, places to hang around, etc.)
703: Cannabis is a stepping stone for other drugs
705: Cannabis use leads to unemployment
706: Cannabis use is bad for minorities (alochtonen)
711: Cannabis liberalization (coffeeshops) is good for the social environment
712: Cannabis liberalization (coffeeshops) is good for the social environment of youths (keeps them away from drug dealers, etc.)
713: Cannabis is no stepping stone towards other drugs/ cannabis use prevents people from turning to other drugs
714: Newer enhanced varieties of cannabis are safer [N.B. Not sure this fits here]
716: Cannabis use is good for the (integration) of minorities (alochtonen)
719: Other social environment-related arguments

8. Policy effectiveness
800: General policy effectiveness arguments
801: A liberal policy increases cannabis consumption
802: Registration/wietpas is ineffective in general
809: The status quo doesn't work (but no direction of change suggested)
810: A liberal policy has no effect on cannabis consumption
811: A liberal policy decreases cannabis consumption

9. Other arguments
   900: other arguments