

May we have the votes, please?

Attitudes towards compulsory voting

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I Introduction

Low and declining levels of voter turnout are seen as 'bad for democracy' (Franklin, 2004: 2) and as a serious threat to its legitimacy. Since 'mass participation is the lifeblood of representative democracy' (Norris, 2002: 5), both politicians and political scientists have begun to search for ways to increase the number of voters who participate in elections. In some ways perhaps the simplest option would be the introduction of compulsory voting. Both experience and scientific studies have shown that compulsory voting may be an effective means for increasing turnout. "Not surprisingly, and consistent with what others have reported, compulsory voting has a strong positive effect on turnout." (Black, 1991: 106; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Hircy, 1994; see, however, Norris, 2002: 75; Norris, 2004: 169).

In recent years there seems to be a revival of interest in this option. Certainly among the academic community, a large portion of the impetus behind this revival can be credited to Arend Lijphart. In the Netherlands, he made headlines in 1994 when he gave a university lecture calling for the reintroduction of compulsory voting. His position was clear and straightforward: "Because compulsory voting is a simple and effective remedy for a serious problem of democracy. I have become convinced that, in democracies that do not have it, it should be adopted - or, in the case of the Netherlands, where it was abolished in 1970, it should be re-adopted." (Lijphart, 1995: 22) Internationally, Lijphart attracted much more attention when he devoted his presidential address to the American Political Science Association in 1996 to a call for compulsory voting in the United States as a means not merely for increasing turnout, but also for redressing the imbalance in social class among voters (Lijphart, 1997).

The discussions in the academic literature have centred on questions such as whether compulsory voting is effective in raising turnout; what the arguments for and against compulsory voting are; whether it is enforceable; whether it favours particular political parties; and whether it might lead to a higher number of (right-wing) extremist or protest votes. However, almost nowhere in the discussion does there seem to be a consideration of how the citizens themselves view compulsory voting. For example, Lijphart discusses the positions taken by political parties, but makes no mention of the positions of voters. Yet, if compulsory voting is to be considered as a means for raising turnout, it would seem necessary that its introduction had the support of, or was at least tolerated by the electorate. Compulsory voting could hardly contribute to the health of democracy and an increased legitimacy of the democratic system - one of the main goals stated for its introduction! - if the electorate rebelled *en masse* against it.

On the whole, it seems that data on how voters feel about compulsory voting are extremely limited. Compulsory voting has been employed in some 30 countries worldwide (e.g., Gratschew, 2004), but a search for data on how voters view this system has turned up data in only a limited number of these. Mackerras and McAllister (1999) report levels of support in Australia between 1943 and 1996 and in footnotes in two articles; Hill (2002; 2002) also mentions figures for Australia. For those countries in which surveys have been carried out on a regular fashion, the public debate has not reached a level that it would make much sense to ask a question concerning compulsory voting. This paper attempts to rectify this oversight by presenting data on attitudes towards compulsory voting from the Netherlands. Attendance at the polls was compulsory between 1917 and 1970 (see e.g., Andeweg and Irwin, 2005) and some data are available from this period that indicate how voters felt about compulsory voting. Data are similarly available from surveys from 1999 and 2002 in which several relevant questions were posed. The Netherlands is thus a unique case, since the questions have been asked both when compulsory voting was in place and a number of years after it had been repealed.

Using these data, the following questions will be examined. What was the level of support for compulsory voting in 1966 and in 1999 and has support changed after the repeal of compulsory voting? Who supported compulsory voting both before and after repeal and have the relationships with key variables changed over time? What views of society and towards the act of voting are associated with support for compulsory voting? And do the voters themselves believe that compulsory voting would increase turnout and do they see it as more or less effective than various alternative means to reach this end?

II Support for compulsory voting

The few sources that are available indicate that where compulsory voting is in place it has reasonably strong support among the electorate. For Australia Mackerras and McAllister (1999: 221) report: "Going back to the earliest opinion poll which asked voters' views on the topic, conducted in 1943, never less than six out of every 10 voters have supported compulsory voting (...). Support for the system increased gradually during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, peaking at 76 per cent in a survey conducted in 1969." Their series end with a level of 70 per cent in 1996. Hill (2000; 2002) reports that a poll immediately following the 1996 federal election showed 74 per cent in support and a poll in 1997 found 67 per cent in support of compulsory voting.

Some surveys in the Netherlands indicate similar levels of support, but there are exceptions. In January 1946, a survey conducted by the Netherlands Institute for Public Opinion (NIPO) reported 66 per cent favouring repeal of compulsory voting. Unfortunately the wording of the question posed is not available, as it might help account for the differences found in surveys two decades later. In 1966 the Politics in the Netherlands survey asked the following question: "Everyone 21 years of age and older is compelled to go to the polling station; other countries do not have this compulsory attendance. What do you think is better, compulsory attendance or not?" The 69 per cent level of support is quite similar to the figures in Australia, but contrasts substantially with the 1946 figures (*Politiek in Nederland*, 1967; Irwin, 1974; Irwin and Van Holsteyn, 2005: 9). In 1967 the first national survey of voting, which was organized by the Free University of Amsterdam, posed the question: "Law obliges us to go to the polling station on Election Day. Do you think this is right or wrong?" The results obtained showed that 70 per cent favoured the then current system, with 28 per cent feeling it was wrong and 2 per cent having or giving no opinion (*De Nederlandse kiezers in 1967*, 1967; 56). In January 1969 the Netherlands Institute of Public Opinion again organized a poll on the topic and posed the question: "This question is on voting at elections. At this moment there is an obligation to vote in the Netherlands. If you do not show up at the polling station, you can get a fine. Many political parties want to change this, so that people no longer are obliged to vote but are allowed to do so. What do you think: should compulsory voting be maintained or abolished?" In this case, 53 per cent favoured abolishing compulsory voting, while 29 per cent favoured maintaining it (NIPO press release no. 1266, February 24, 1969).

A controlled experiment would have been useful - and it would be extremely interesting if such an experiment could be carried out in some country that now employs compulsory voting - as it seems quite possible that question wording may have played an important role in producing these diverging results. The question wording in the *Politiek in Nederland* (Politics in the Netherlands) and the Free University survey seems much more neutral than that posed by NIPO in 1969 (and possibly in 1946). This might indicate that voters did not have well-thought out or strong views on the subject and were strongly influenced by how the question was presented (see e.g., Bishop, 2005; Schuman and Presser, 1981; Zaller, 1992). It could also have been that changes in the political climate that would lead to repeal of the law 13 months later were already perceived by the electorate and that this influenced their views and opinions.

If voters do not have particularly strong views on the subject and are influenced by impending or current practice, it is not surprising to find that support for compulsory

voting had fallen to 35 per cent by 1999 (Aarts, 1999: 59) Or perhaps one should see this as surprisingly strong support for compulsory voting; at the moment of interviewing it had been three decades since an election with compulsory voting had been held in the Netherlands.

Data on support for compulsory voting are too limited to draw strong conclusions. As with any frequency distribution, one can look at it as indicating that the glass is half empty or half full (although in this case, the distributions seem to be split more two-thirds versus one-third). In either case, in no case does there seem to be unanimity of opinion and there is a sufficient division of opinion to ask questions concerning who supports compulsory voting and who opposes it.

III Explaining support for compulsory voting

Trying to explain support for compulsory voting is handicapped by a lack of theory. No published work has been found relating any variables to support for compulsory voting.¹ As the publications on compulsory voting almost never refer to public opinion, only vague hypotheses concerning support for compulsory voting can be derived from the literature. The following analysis is therefore guided more by general insights than by solid theory and must be seen as exploratory rather than as the testing of hypotheses.

Age

Mackerras and McAllister suggest that the rise in support for compulsory voting in Australia "is probably a reflection of the large number of voters who have grown up under the system, together with the absence of any political debate concerning its advantages or disadvantages" (1999: 221). This seems to be a reasonable hypothesis. If a system is non-controversial and functions well, it should not be surprising that those who have experienced it will give it their support. This would mean that in the Netherlands we expect to find a relationship between age and support for compulsory voting both in 1966 and in particular in 1999. In 1966 the reasoning would be similar to that by Mackerras and McAllister, whereas in 1999 we might assume that those voters who had voted under the system of compulsory voting might be more amenable to its reintroduction than those who had never known it.

The percentages as presented in Table 1 provide support for the hypothesis, although the relationship could hardly be called strong. In 1966 the youngest group

¹ The only analysis that has been found is that by Irwin in an unpublished paper from 1972 that was fully reproduced in the Irwin and Van Holsteyn (2005).

shows the weakest support, but the differences with all of the age groups except the 65+ group are not that great. And although the degree of support was considerably lower in 1999, the pattern is similar; the 17-20 group is slightly lower in support than all groups except the 65+ group. If the 40-64 group is broken down into those who could have voted under the last election with compulsory voting (ages 53 to 64) and those who could not have (ages 40 to 52), the support for compulsory voting is 38 per cent and 35 per cent respectively. In both cases it is the 65+ group that is more supportive of compulsory voting; in 1999 the difference is substantial.

	17-20	21-24	25-29	30-39	40-64	65+
1966	63	69	69	67	72	78
1999	28	33	24	30	36	55

Note: The age categories are those listed in the Irwin (1972) and are reproduced for 1999.

Religion

In the Netherlands, the Catholic Peoples Party and the protestant Christian Historical Union were the strongest supporters of introduction of compulsory voting (Aarts, 2001: 82). Other protestant parties, such as the Anti-Revolutionary Party and the small orthodox SGP and GPV, were opposed. These differences were related to the ideology of the party concerning the relationship between the individual, society, and the state (e.g., Aarts, 2001: 82; Verplanke, 1965). According to Pilet (2007), in Belgium, compulsory voting was promoted by the Catholic right. We thus have a weak hypothesis that support for compulsory voting might be related to religious preference, in particular Roman Catholicism.

	Roman Catholic	Dutch Reformed	<i>Gereformeerd</i> [Calvinist]	Other	None, raised in religion	None, not raised in religion
1966	69	77	92	64	62	67
1999	41	43	36	20	30	32

The results for the Netherlands (see Table 2) are inconsistent with expectations. The parties that were supported by *Gereformeerden* or Calvinist adherents may have opposed compulsory voting, but the Calvinist adherents were the strongest in supporting compulsory voting in 1966. Catholics were lower than either of the protestant denominations. All three, however, showed more support for compulsory voting than did those with no religious identification. This latter conclusion is found again in 1999, although all groups showed a considerably lower level of support. Among the major denomina-

tions, the *Gereformeerden* now showed the lowest level of support, with the Dutch Reformed the highest followed closely by Roman Catholics.

Other background characteristics

The above relationships could at least be weakly derived from the literature on compulsory voting. However, no further indications of hypothesized relationships, except perhaps for party choice, can be found. The following analyses are therefore strictly exploratory and based simply upon general knowledge of voters and intuition based upon experience with analyzing voting behaviour.

It is almost standard to examine public opinion by education and social class, and measures are available to do so here. The coding of social class in the two surveys is quite different. In the 1966 a social status code running from A3 (high) to D2 (low) was employed; in 1999 the measure is how the respondent assigned himself or herself to a social class. Because of the different coding and lack of a relationship in either case, the results are not presented here.

Educational level, however, is related to support for compulsory voting, as can be seen in Table 3. In 1966, when support was high, the relationship is not particularly strong but it is clear that those with lower levels of education tended to have greater support for compulsory voting. This is even more evident in 1999: although the percentage of the population with only elementary education had declined (and education is correlated with age), among those with only elementary education support is twice the level found among those with higher education.

Table 3. Educational level and support for compulsory voting, 1966 and 1999 (in percentages)				
	Elementary	Vocational	Secondary	Higher
1966	72	70	70	66
1999	51	38	37	25

Finally, in 1966, 67 per cent of those residing in the larger cities supported compulsory voting, as compared to 69 in smaller cities and 74 per cent in more rural areas. However, this already weak relationship had completely disappeared in 1999.

Political Interest

One might presume that support for compulsory voting would be related to interest in politics. After all, if a law were passed requiring citizens to attend football matches, this might be no problem for those already highly interested in football, but considered an imposition by those who are not interested at all. Similarly, those interested in politics

might be more supportive of compulsory voting than those who are not. The results, however, show that this is not the case (see Table 4). The indicators of political interest available in 1966 were reading about politics in the newspapers and watching political programs on television. Roughly comparable items were chosen for 1999. In both cases, the relationships with support for compulsory voting are weak. No tests were reported for the 1966 relationships, although it is unlikely that the relationships are statistically significant; they are not so in 1999.

Table 4. Interest in politics and support for compulsory voting, 1966 and 1999 (in percentages)					
<i>1966</i>					
Read about politics in newspapers	Read regularly	Now and then	Occasionally	Don't read newspapers	
	68	70	65	74	
<i>1999</i>					
Read about national news in newspapers	(Nearly) always	Often	Now and then	Seldom or never	Don't read newspapers
	39	31	37	31	25
<i>1966</i>					
Watch political programs on TV		Watch TV politics	Do not watch TV politics	Do not watch TV	
		69	69	76	
<i>1999</i>					
Watch NOS newscast	Almost daily	3-4 times per week	1-2 times per week	less than once a week	
	37	30	35	34	

Other political attitudes

In 1966 three attitude statements had been presented to respondents that seem to be related to such political science concepts as political efficacy or cynicism. Irwin (1972, also in Irwin and Van Holsteyn, 2005; 14) reported that “those who feel that members of parliament do not understand what is important to the people; those who feel that the political parties do not keep their promises; and those who feel there are no differences among the parties show lower levels of support.” The results are reproduced in Table 5 and show that with the exception of the statement related to political parties, the relations were quite moderate.

For 1999, a somewhat larger number of statements were presented, including the following that are fairly similar in content to the 1966 statements: Members of Parliament do not care about opinions of people like me (sig. = .04); Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion (sig. = .46); Usually our representatives in the Second Chamber quickly lose contact with the people in the country (sig. = .69); Although they know better, politicians promise more than they can deliver (sig. = .11);

Most Dutch parties look so much alike that it makes little difference which parties govern and which do not (sig. = .57). The significance levels for the relationship between these variables and support for compulsory voting in 1999 are reported in parentheses following the statement and show that only in a single case does the significance level (barely) exceed the .05 criterion; therefore the percentages are not reported. And in the exceptional significant case, the percentages do not run as expected: support for compulsory voting was actually higher (33 per cent) among those who felt that MP's do not care about their opinions than among those who denied the statement (30 per cent support). Thus we must conclude that if a critical attitude towards politics, parties, and politicians led to less support for compulsory voting when it was in effect, this relationship can no longer be found in 1999 if voters are asked whether compulsory voting should be reinstated.

Members of Parliament do not understand what things are important to the people	Agree completely 67	Agree generally 72	Disagree 73
The political parties do not keep their promises	Keep promises 81	Depends on party 69	Do not keep promises 66
There is not much difference in the big parties, considering the way they are performing		Parties are all alike 69	Parties are different 74

Attitudes towards the state and the nation

Social background variables and standard measures of political attitudes are extremely limited in their ability to explain attitudes towards compulsory voting. This was true in 1966, when compulsory voting was in force in the Netherlands, and it was evident again in 1999, almost three decades after compulsory voting had been repealed. So if any explanation is to be found, other variables must be examined. Unfortunately, this is possible only for 1999, since no additional relevant variables are available for 1966.

Above it has been mentioned that when parties in the Netherlands developed their ideas concerning compulsory voting, they were heavily based upon broader ideas concerning the relationship between the individual, society, and the state (Aarts, 2001: 82; see also Loots, 2004; Zwager, 1981). It is quite possible that today the attitudes that individuals have towards compulsory voting can also be explained within a similar context. Questions that relate to such topics are not often included in political surveys but with the rise of extreme-right and anti-immigrant parties, some attention has been paid to such matters. In the 1998 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study, seven statements

were presented to respondents that might prove relevant here. The first two relate to what might be called socialization of children and nationalism; the second pair of attitudes relates to authoritarianism and the last three statements refer to foreigners and their place in Dutch society and are indicators for ethnocentrism (cf. Meijerink, Mudde and Van Holsteyn, 1998). All are Likert-type statements; in Table 6 the percentages supporting compulsory voting for various levels of agreement with the statement are presented.

Table 6. Attitudes towards nation and support for compulsory voting, 1999 (in percentages)					
	Fully agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Fully disagree
<i>Nationalism</i>					
An important job is to teach children patriotism	54	41	37	25	25
Every Dutchman should observe our national symbols	49	37	28	30	23
<i>Authoritarianism</i>					
Youngsters should learn self-control and determination	40	38	32	23	22
Children should learn obedience and respect for authorities	46	38	31	30	14
<i>Ethnocentrism</i>					
Our social provisions are not meant for foreigners	(8)*	42	44	35	23
Foreigners are a threat to our culture	30	44	43	33	21
Foreigners abuse social provisions more than Dutchmen	40	40	40	29	21
* Based on 12 cases					

The patterns for statements related to foreigners are statistically significant and show that, with exceptions, those with ethnocentric attitudes were more likely to support compulsory voting. Although the relationships are moderate, they are stronger than most of those found for the political and background variables above. However, the relationships for statements related to nationalism and authoritarianism are much stronger. In every case, those stressing such values are considerably more likely to favour compulsory voting than those who do not agree with such interrelated values (see also Meijerink, Mudde and Van Holsteyn, 1998: 171-172).

These relationships indicate that attempting to understand why citizens support or oppose compulsory voting is not to be found in standard social-background characteristics or those political attitudes that are commonly studied, but in attitudes that relate to the relationship between the individual, the society, and the state. Nationalistic and authoritarian citizens are more likely to support compulsory voting. They translate their more general attitudes of nationalism and authoritarianism into an

attitude that allows the state to place demands on its citizens, in this case compelling the citizen to cast a vote at an election.

Attitudes towards the act of voting

In our quest to discover the factors that account for support or opposition to compulsory voting, it is also important to examine citizen attitudes towards the act of voting itself. If one examines, for example, the Ajzen and Fishbein model, one finds such attitudes play a crucial role. Attitudes towards an act are one of the final mediating attitudes between other acts and behaviour (e.g., Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). In the case of compulsory voting, such attitudes are also important. How do voters view the act of voting? What is according to them the purpose of voting? Why does one do it? Fortunately, the 1998-2002 national election panel study has presented respondents with nine four-point Likert-type statements that at least allow for an initial analysis. All nine were presented to the respondents in 1998 and seven were repeated again in 1999. At the time, the statements were not presented with an eye towards explaining attitudes towards compulsory voting and therefore they do not cover all aspects that would be particularly relevant from our point of view. The most glaring lack is that no statement was presented concerning voting as a right, especially a possible 'right' not to vote. Nevertheless, these statements do provide further insight into ideas behind support for or opposition against compulsory voting.

In a factor analysis of these nine statements, a three-factor solution emerged as best. The results of this factor analysis are presented in the Appendix. An attempt has been made to tentatively name these factors - 'civic obligation', 'rational citizenship', 'system support' and 'influence' - and the statements are grouped in Table 7 according to this name and for both 1998 and 1999.

A quick look at the last column of Table 7 reveals that in both years, only two of the statements are statistically related to support for compulsory voting. None of the statements that have been grouped under the labels 'rational citizenship' or 'influence' are significantly related to support for compulsory voting. However, the two statements that have been labelled 'civic obligation' show fairly strong relationships. One of the strongest arguments for requiring citizens to vote appears to be that it simply is an obligation that one has towards the state. It has been asserted that Australian voters subscribe to this idea (Hill, 2000: 33) and apparently Dutch citizens concur. Certainly these results show that those who feel that voting is an obligation that one has towards the state are far more likely to support compulsory voting than those who do not feel

such an obligation. However, even here only about half of those who fully agree with this statement are prepared to turn a moral obligation into a legal one, i.e. support the idea of compulsory voting. Agreement with the old adage 'If you don't vote, don't gripe' also shows a significant relationship with support for compulsory voting.

Table 7. Attitudes towards voting and compulsory voting, 1998 and 1999 (in percentages)					
	Fully agree	Agree	Disagree	Fully disagree	Chi square significance
<i>Civic obligation</i>					
- Voting is a duty to society					
1998	48	40	17	13	.000
1999	53	39	7	14	.000
- If one does not vote, one loses the right to criticize					
1998	45	37	25	12	.000
1999	45	49	26	17	.000
<i>Rational citizenship</i>					
- Voting costs me a great deal of time and effort					
1998	(14)	30	34	36	.560
1999	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a
<i>System support</i>					
- Voting is a way of declaring ones political convictions					
1998	35	36	32	(22)	.713
1999	37	35	31	(57)	.458
- Voting is a way of supporting a political party					
1998	36	36	25	(0)	.381
1999	36	35	25	25	.688
<i>Influence</i>					
- Voting does not help to exert political influence					
1998	28	33	36	34	.813
1999	31	34	36	30	.615
- Voting does not avail me of anything					
1998	30	35	36	29	.584
1999	40	32	37	32	.454
- It makes no sense to vote when all is going well					
1998	25	36	36	33	.702
1999	(25)	39	35	33	.754
Note: Percentages in parentheses are based on fewer than 10 cases.					

Finally, two additional questions were posed in the 1998 survey that are related to voting and the act of voting and can be examined with relationship to support for compulsory voting. Respondents were asked to place themselves on two seven-point scales. The first asked how much trouble one was willing to take to cast a vote and the second asked how important one felt that a high turnout at elections was. The results are presented in Table 8 and show that whether one is willing to make a major effort to

vote or not is only weakly related to support for compulsory voting. Although those who are most willing are the most supportive of compulsory voting, overall the percentages do not differ enough to make the relationship significant at the .05 level. How one feels about the importance of a high turnout does, however, show a highly significant relationship. Because the distribution on this independent variable is highly skewed, the n for each category has been shown in the table. The results show that those who think a high turnout is very important are more likely to support a measure that would indeed almost certainly insure a high turnout. Support for compulsory voting drops below the average level in all of the remaining groups.

Willing to exert oneself	willing to take much trouble						not willing to take trouble	Chi square significance
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
	40	36	30	36	24	21	29	.073
Importance of high turnout	Very important						Very unimportant	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	41	35	24	17	14	24	32	.000
n	511	232	110	53	21	17	19	

Multivariate analysis

In the bivariate analyses above, only a few variables have been identified that revealed a statistically significant relationship with support for compulsory voting in the Netherlands. Many of these relationships were not particularly strong. The question that may immediately be raised is whether the weak bivariate relationships can be combined to jointly explain a substantial portion of the variance in support for compulsory voting, or whether there is substantial overlap among these variables and that even together we still lack much understanding of why voters do or do not support compulsory voting. To make this determination, multivariate analysis is needed. As the dependent variable is dichotomous (i.e., for or against compulsory voting) and the independent variables are predominantly categorical, the obvious choice is to employ binary logistic regression.

At least one variable, age of respondent, might have been considered to be interval, but since the bivariate analysis indicated that the primary difference was between the older categories and the rest, this variable has been dichotomized to include the categories of those who might have voted under the old Dutch system of compulsory voting (i.e., citizens of ages 53 and older) and those who were at the moment of interviewing too young to have voted under that system. The other variables were entered as categorical variables are presented in the analyses above, except that for religion no

distinction has been made among those with no religious preference whether one had been raised religiously or not.

Table 9 indicates the Wald statistics and significance thereof for the variables included in the analysis. No additional information (such as estimates of b-coefficients for the various categories) is reported, since these figures indicate that most of the variables simply do not achieve significance. One variable clearly stands out, however: if one feels that voting is a duty one has towards society, there is a greater willingness to make this a legal obligation. Only a few other variables attain significance at the .05 level. Firstly, a feeling that high turnout is important leads to greater support for compulsory voting. Secondly, there is a relationship with religion. That religious preference would achieve significance is somewhat surprising. The analysis above revealed that Catholics and Dutch Reformed adherents were more likely to support compulsory voting than those with no religious preference, and those who were adherents of denominations or religions other than the dominant three were less likely to support compulsory voting. The overlap with other attitudes seems to be small enough that this relationship remains significant in the multivariate analysis. Finally, the importance of teaching children patriotism and agreeing that if you don't vote you should not gripe show relationships that are almost significant at the .05 cut-off level.

	Wald	significance
Age (experience under compulsory voting or not)	.925	.336
Religious preference	11.848	.019
Education	5.949	.114
Teach children patriotism	9.259	.055
Observe national symbols	4.055	.399
Learn self-control and determination	3.265	.514
Learn obedience and respect for authority	1.734	.785
Voting is duty to society	29.920	.000
If you don't vote, don't gripe	6.873	.076
Importance of high turnout	12.934	.044

<i>Observed</i>	<i>Predicted</i>		Total
	Support compulsory voting	Oppose compulsory voting	
Support compulsory voting	133 (40%)	201 (60%)	334 (100%)
Opposed compulsory voting	89 (15%)	526 (85%)	615 (100%)
	222 (23%)	727 (77%)	949 (100%)

The modesty of the results is emphasized if one looks at the classification table (Table 10) for this analysis. The analysis correctly predicts 85 per cent of those who opposed compulsory voting in the survey, but only 40 per cent of those who supported compulsory voting. The overall correctly predicted percentage is 69.4 per cent. However, if one realizes that 64.8 per cent opposed compulsory voting and that if all respondents had been predicted to oppose, this percentage would have classified correctly, it becomes clear that the results of the logistic regression are quite modest.

IV Effectiveness of compulsory voting

The analysis above has, at best, been moderately successful in understanding why Dutch citizens favour or oppose the system or reintroduction of compulsory voting. The only factors of true importance are how one feels towards the country and authority and the conviction that voting is an obligation one has towards ones country. The possibilities for exploration of attitudes towards compulsory voting in the Dutch panel study have more or less been exhausted, but data from the 2002 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study provide at least one indication for possible further investigation.

In the literature on compulsory voting, one regularly encounters statements and analysis concerning the effectiveness of compulsory voting. Compulsory voting is said to increase turnout by about 6 to 7 per cent according to some (e.g., Franklin, 2002: 158) or even 10 to 15 per cent according to others (e.g., Gratschew, 2004: 20; see also e.g., Norris, 2004: 69; Katz, 1997: 240). However, there has long been a concern that a law mandating attendance at the polls would - if accepting such a law would be possible in the first place (Wattenberg, 2002: 164-165) - not be sufficient, but that it was necessary to impose some sort of sanction and to enforce it (e.g., Robson, 1923, as cited in Kato, 2007; Hill, 2002: 441). Kato (2007) has shown that the level of turnout is related to the strength of the sanctions imposed.

In the discussions concerning compulsory voting, opposition to imposition of a legal obligation has been based upon concerns that it was impossible to enforce such legislation fully (e.g., Pilet, 2007: 8). For example, in reply to Lijpharts' plea for the reintroduction of compulsory voting in the Netherlands, this was the main point of critique by some MP's from the social-liberal Democrats 66, De Graaf and Scheltema. They in particular stressed the practical problems that the introduction of compulsory voting would have, since one of the supporters of Lijphart, the Labour MP Rehwinkel, wanted the obligation without any serious sanctions for the people who did not vote (*Trouw*, March 1, 1995). It is thus possible that the opposition to compulsory voting that

is currently found in the Netherlands is based more on practical and pragmatic concerns than on principle and normative reasons, i.e. is due to concerns about the effectiveness of compulsory voting to increase turnout. Also, not only is it “more constructive to analyse compulsory voting as a spectrum, ranging from the existence of a symbolic but basically impotent law to a system that systematically follows up each and every non-voting citizen and implements sanctions against them.” (Gratschew, 2004: 26), but also to consider compulsory voting as only one of the potential means to increase voter turnout. In the 2002 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study, respondents were presented with nine ‘ways [including compulsory voting] by which to make voting more attractive and to increase turnout at elections’ and were asked to rate whether each measure would work ‘very badly’ to ‘very well’ on an 11-point scale. It is not possible to relate these evaluations to the question concerning support for compulsory voting, but it is possible to compare how citizens feel about the effectiveness of compulsory voting.

These nine possible ways of affecting turnout are listed in the following tables. A principal components analysis (PCA) has been performed in order to determine whether they can be grouped in a meaningful way. This analysis itself provides insight into how citizens view various measures to affect turnout at general elections (see Table 11).

	I	II	III	Communalities
Politicians listen better to citizens	.83	.06	.08	.70
Parties take clearer positions	.78	.01	.05	.62
Politicians keep their promises	.82	.02	.00	.65
Politicians speak clearly	.78	.09	-.06	.62
Citizens vote wherever they want	.20	.50	.17	.32
Hold elections on weekends	-.05	.74	-.02	.55
Introduce district system of election	.07	.65	-.03	.42
Compulsory voting	.01	-.09	.85	.74
Hold different elections at same time	-.01	.33	.65	.53

Three components had eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and have been rotated to facilitate interpretation. The first component clearly relates to parties and the behaviour of politicians. All statements relate to what political parties and politicians might do and do better that would help to stimulate voters and increase turnout: they should listen to the people, speak clearly, take clear positions and they should keep their promises. The second component is related to procedural changes (cf. Black, 1991; Franklin, 2002) that have been proposed to stimulate turnout: let voters vote where they want, hold elections on weekends, and introduce a district system of election. Although compulsory voting could also be viewed as a formal, procedural change it does not load on this second component, but on a third component. The only other change to load on this factor is ‘to

hold different elections at the same time'.² It is somewhat understandable that compulsory voting does not load with the three procedural measures of the second component, since it involves an imposition on the voter, whereas the other procedures are more a facility for the voter, but it is less clear why holding elections on the same day would not fit with the other group. This finding might warrant further investigation, but here the main purpose of the component analysis has been to determine a grouping of the measures.

In the following table (12) the nine items are grouped according to these three components and various descriptive measures for these nine items are presented in order to determine how voters view their relative effectiveness. The views of the voters are quite clear. Although on average each measure is seen as potentially having a positive impact on turnout, the voters clearly see much more effect from changing the politicians and parties than changing the political and electoral rules - except for compulsory voting. For each item related to the items on the first factor or component dealing with parties and politicians, the average is close to 8.5 and the mode is 9. Except for compulsory voting, the mode for each of the procedural items is 6 and the mean values vary between 5.6 and 7.5.

	Mean	Standard deviation	Mode	Score > 5 (on 11-point scale)
Politicians listen better to citizens	8.5	1.7	9	86%
Parties take clearer positions	8.4	1.6	9	88%
Politicians keep their promises	8.6	1.7	9	85%
Politicians speak clearly	8.6	1.6	9	82%
Citizens vote wherever they want	7.5	1.9	6	65%
Hold elections on weekends	5.6	2.2	6	18%
Introduce district system of election	6.4	2.1	6	30%
Compulsory voting	8.0	2.7	11	68%
Hold different elections at same time	6.3	2.4	6	43%

Again, these findings are of interest in and of themselves and could be explored further, but here we are primarily interested in compulsory voting and its relative position among alternative measures to raise turnout at elections in the Netherlands. This item differs from all the remaining items. The mean value is considerably higher than that for any of the other procedural items, but it is in fact not as high as the means for the items related to parties and politicians. However, the mode for compulsory voting

² There are four elections that are held in the Netherlands, involving electing representatives to legislative bodies at the municipal, provincial, national, and European levels of government. Each election is always held on the same day, but it has been suggested that turnout, especially for provincial and European bodies might rise if the elections were held together with municipal and/or national elections.

is 11, which is higher than the mode of 9 for these four items. This is explained by the fact that the standard deviation for compulsory voting is considerably higher than that for the parties and politicians items (2.7 versus 1.6 to 1.7). The differences are also revealed in the final column, which indicates the percentage of respondents who gave a value of 6 or higher for each measure (0-4 indicated that the measure would have a dilatory effect on turnout, whereas 5 indicated it would have no effect). Extremely high numbers of respondents (more than 80 per cent), agreed that if parties and politicians would listen better, speak more clearly, and keep their promises that this would have a positive impact on turnout. For compulsory voting, only 68 per cent felt it would have a positive impact (32 per cent felt it would have no impact). Almost 16 per cent actually felt introduction of compulsory voting would have a negative influence on turnout.

V Concluding remarks

Over the past ten to fifteen years, there seems to have been a rise, at least among academics and some politicians, in interest in compulsory voting as a means to combat low and declining turnout. Lijphart, for example, has called for the reintroduction of compulsory voting in the Netherlands and for introduction in the United States (where, he argues, it is needed to correct inequities in the social composition of those who actually vote.) Attention has focussed on the arguments for and against compulsory voting and the possible consequences that its introduction might have. Little or no attention, however, seems to have been given to how the voters themselves view compulsory voting.

This paper is an attempt to introduce this element into the discussion.

Examination of public support for compulsory voting in the Netherlands is of interest, because of its history of having had compulsory voting, but abandoning it in 1970.

Fortunately, at least some data are available to examine how the electorate felt about compulsory voting when it was in effect and three decades later. It is not surprising that support for compulsory voting has declined substantially since it was repealed, but even in 1999 35 per cent of those interviewed favoured its (re)introduction.

If compulsory voting is to be considered seriously in a country, it seems unlikely it could be introduced without having the support of the electorate. Either a groundswell of support would have to come from outside the political system, or politicians and/or the government would have to mount a campaign to sell the proposal to the electorate. At least for the present, in the Netherlands, only about one-third favour compulsory voting and voters accord other means of improving turnout at least as much, and maybe even

more, importance than compulsory voting. Trying to understand who now favours compulsory voting and why would be necessary in order to determine how to mount the appeal.

Unfortunately, our analysis provides only a few possible points to be employed in such an appeal. It should first be noted that support for compulsory voting is not strongly related to any particular social group in society. In the Netherlands, weak relationships were found with age, religious preference, and education; only religious preference retained significance in a multivariate analysis. The factor that best explains how one feels about compulsory voting is whether one feels that there is a duty by the citizen to vote in elections. A feeling that a high turnout is important also contributes to support for compulsory voting. In the bivariate analysis, various aspects of nationalism and authoritarianism were found to be related to support for compulsory voting. Those who felt that children should be taught patriotism, to learn self-control and to learn obedience and respect for authority were more likely to support compulsory voting. However, these are apparently indirect causes, since they are found to be much weaker in significance in multivariate analysis.

In order to understand support or potential support for compulsory voting, the academic community will have to become more imaginative and conduct studies designed specifically to understand this phenomenon. Secondary analysis of data has not produced sufficient results. Should the Netherlands wish to reintroduce compulsory voting, the campaign to sell it to the electorate should be framed in terms of the obligation one has to the country. It should be stressed that a high turnout is important for democracy, and that one has a patriotic duty to support democracy. The message should be voting is a small price to pay for something that is so important.

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Appendix A. Component analysis of attitudes towards act of voting, 1998 and 1999.

Varimax rotated solution, 1998 data				
	I	II	III	communality
Voting costs me a great deal of time and effort	-.55	.17	-.02	.33
Voting supports the democratic system	.60	-.31	.13	.48
Voting is a way of declaring ones political conviction	.58	.02	.27	.41
Voting is a way of supporting a political party	.74	.07	.16	.57
It makes no sense to vote when all is going well	-.57	.45	.10	.53
Voting does not help to exert political influence	-.17	.72	.10	.57
Voting does not avail me of anything	-.03	.81	-.05	.65
Voting is a duty to society	.24	-.18	.72	.61
If one does not vote one loses the right to criticize	.05	-.00	.86	.74

Variance explained by component analysis, 1998			
	Eigenvalue	% variance explained	Cumulative variance explained
I	2.71	30.1	30.1
II	1.21	13.4	43.5
III	.98	10.9	54.4

Varimax rotated solution, 1999 data				
	I	II	III	communality
Voting is a way of declaring ones political conviction	-.11	.75	.16	.60
Voting is a way of supporting a political party	.03	.82	.10	.69
It makes no sense to vote when all is going well	.55	-.44	-.06	.50
Voting does not help to exert political influence	.76	-.12	-.11	.60
Voting does not avail me of anything	.77	.10	.03	.61
Voting is a duty to society	-.18	.19	.72	.59
If one does not vote one loses the right to criticize	.07	.06	.95	.73

Variance explained by component analysis, 1999			
	Eigenvalue	% variance explained	Cumulative variance explained
I	2.10	30.0	30.3
II	1.28	18.3	48.3
III	.94	13.4	61.7

Appendix B: Data

The data from 1966 were collected by Attwood Statistics in August 1966 and are known under the title 'Politics in the Netherlands'. These data are archived under the title 'Nederland en politiek 1966' P0026 at http://www.dans.knaw.nl/nl/data/steinmetz_archief/datacollections/11025/. The sample was a national, multi-stage sample of citizens over the age of 17. The unweighted n is 1594.

The 1998 and 1999 data are part of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study of 1998. The original 1998 study was part of the regular series of election studies carried out at each election by the Stichting KiezersOnderzoek Nederland (SKON). The standard design for this series is a pre-election interview, followed by a post-election interview with the same respondents. The data for this study catalogued as P1415 at the website

<http://www.dans.knaw.nl/databases/star/documentation/12373/>

The national election studies are national samples of the population 18 and over.

The Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 1998 was made possible by grants from the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdomrelations (BZK), the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS), the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP), the University of Amsterdam and the Department of Public Administration and Public Policy of Twente. Computing and printing facilities were contributed by the University of Twente.

The Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 1998 was conducted by a team at the University of Twente under the auspices of the Dutch Electoral Research Foundation SKON (Stichting KiezersOnderzoek Nederland). The team consisted of Kees Aarts, Henk van der Kolk (study directors), Marlies Kamp (assistant study director) and Jacques Thomassen (Chair of SKON), all associated with the University of Twente (UT). This team designed the study and the questionnaires under the auspices of the board of SKON. SKON is the formal successor of the interuniversity workgroups that were responsible for the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies in the 1971-1986 period. In 1998 the board of SKON consisted of: Jacques Thomassen (University of Twente, Chair), Cees van der Eijk (University of Amsterdam), Irwin Ph.D. (University of Leiden), Kees Aarts (University of Twente), Paul Dekker (SCP) and Hans Anker. The fieldwork of the DPES was conducted by the Institute of Applied Social Research (ITS) at the University of Nijmegen (supervisors: Harm Hartman, Jan Bilo and Henk Verhoeven). The face to face interviews were held by interviewers of the ITS using notebook computers (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing: CAPI).

In april 1999, the Ministry of the Interior asked Kees Aarts of the University of Twente to carry out a third wave of this panel study. Between May 26 and June 9, 1999 all respondents from the second wave were again approached. Information concerning these data may be obtained C.W.A.M.Aarts@bbt.utwente.nl.

The 2002 data utilized here were originally collected for the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies 2002 by Galen A. Irwin, Joop J.M. van Holsteyn and Josje M. den Ridder on behalf of the Foundation for Electoral Research in the Netherlands (Stichting Kiezersonderzoek Nederland, SKON). The 2002 and 2003 election studies were made possible by grants from the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK), the Remote E-Voting Project (Kiezen op Afstand, KOA), the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS), and the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP), and the Department of Political Science, Leiden University.

These data are catalogued under P1628 at <http://www.dans.knaw.nl/databases/star/study/156/>