

# Dutch public opinion on the ISAF mission in Uruzgan

The role of heuristics and values in determining public support

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On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2005 the Dutch Cabinet informed the Dutch parliament that the Netherlands would significantly contribute to the ISAF mission in the Afghan province of Uruzgan. The purpose of this mission was to support the Afghani government in rebuilding the country and to provide safety and stability for its inhabitants. Even though the Netherlands had supported the international mission in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2005 with a relatively small number of troops, no mission of this size had been performed in Afghanistan yet. When parliament debated the decision on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2006 the word “draagvlak” (support) was frequently mentioned, however, contrary to similar debates about contributing to the war in Iraq, “draagvlak” was defined as parliamentary support instead of public support in this debate (Everts, 2012, p. 107). This parliamentary support was present, as a large majority of 127 out of 150 members of parliament voted in favour of the government’s decision to send a large number of troops to Uruzgan. However, public support was lower, and more negative, compared to the support for earlier missions (Everts, 2012, p. 107). When the mission was evaluated by a government commission in 2011, it was recommended that in future military missions a good media strategy should be developed by the ministries involved, in order to create larger public support for such a mission (Feith, Gruiters, Ruijter & Urlings, 2011). This recommendation stresses the importance of public support besides parliamentary support, by suggesting that a media strategy could influence the opinion of the population, and implies the belief that there is a connection between public opinion and the political elite in foreign policy issues. The questions that arise from the case of the Dutch decision to send troops to Uruzgan concern the existence and nature of this connection between the public opinion and the political elite. How does the public form an opinion on such issues?

The relevance of answering the question concerning the Dutch public opinion on the mission to Uruzgan can be deduced from the core tasks of the Dutch military. One of the three core tasks of the Dutch military is: “Protecting and promoting international rule of law and stability” ([www.rijksoverheid.nl](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl)). Missions like the ISAF mission in Uruzgan are a central part of achieving this core task, and it is therefore likely that the Netherlands will participate in similar missions in the future. By studying the public opinion concerning the mission in Uruzgan, one of the largest and most recent examples of this type of mission, valuable lessons can be learned for similar future military missions.

## **Why does public opinion matter in foreign policy?**

Since the invention of the modern survey by Gallup, governments have increasingly used polls as means to measure the public opinion of their population, and more importantly their voters, on topics including foreign policy issues (Eisinger, 2008, p. 489). The increasing use of polls has sparked a debate on democratic legitimacy and the (possible) political responsiveness to the wishes of the public; should a democratically chosen government listen to, and act because of (possibly flawed) data on public opinion between two elections? Apart from this normative debate whether or not a government should take the public opinion into account, which shall not be continued here, there is evidence that governments do so in practice. Researchers such as Wlezien (1995) have found a statistically relevant connection between public opinion and policy making, however, the exact nature of the responsiveness of politicians remains a matter of debate (Eisinger, 2008, p. 493). As mentioned before, Wlezien (1995) is one of the scholars to find a statistical relevant connection between foreign policy and public opinion. In his research he compares public opinion to a thermostat; when the public wants more or less spending in a certain policy area, signals are sent and received by the government, thereby restricting or enlarging the manoeuvring space of policy makers (Wlezien, 1995, p. 985-988). Different research by Powlick also found that politicians and government officials are influenced by, or at least informed of, the wishes of the public on foreign policy (Powlick, 1995, p. 441). The results of studies, such as by Wlezien or Powlick, indicate that public opinion is a factor to be taken into account when investigating the forming of foreign policy.

Most research in this area, including aforementioned research by Wlezien and Powlick, has focused on the United States (Baum & Potter, 2008, p. 58). Some comparative research has taken place, for example by Isernia, Juhász and Rattinger (2002), that extended the conclusion that public opinion does have an effect on policy to Germany, France and the United Kingdom. One can expect that, because of the general cultural, geographical and geopolitical similarities between the Netherlands and the other four mentioned states, the effect of public opinion on foreign policy in the Netherlands also follows the same basic pattern. However, specific differences in public opinion are to be expected, as voting system and political parties, which will be commented on later, are not exactly similar in all cases.

In order for the public to form an opinion, and exercise influence over government officials and foreign policy, the public needs to be reasonably well informed of the policy or policy alternatives. Without knowledge of the alternatives or possibilities, the public cannot send specific signals to the policy makers (Wlezien, 1995, p. 981). However, in the two decades after the second World War, research concluded that public opinion on international relations is (1) volatile and therefore not a stable basis to form policy on, is (2) not coherent and (3) it has little effect on foreign policy in the end (Holsti, 1992, 442). The third element of this so called “Almond-Lippmann consensus” has since then been challenged by studies including those by Wlezien (1995), Powlick (1995), and Isernia, Hosház and Rattinger (2002). These studies found evidence that policy makers and the policy’s themselves are influenced by the public opinion to some degree. Also the first two elements of the consensus have been researched and evidence has been found that public opinion is in fact quite stable, rational and coherent when aggregated into a single public opinion (Page & Shapiro, 1992). Research by Mueller into the wars in Korea and Vietnam showed for example that public opinion does not randomly change but reacted in a rational way on American casualties in both wars (Mueller, 1971, p. 367).

Also the second element of the Almond-Lippmann consensus is challenged by Holsti, concluding on the basis of several other pieces of research that, despite the apparent lack of information on foreign policy, the public can structure its opinion (Holsti, 1992, p. 446-448). The same conclusion is reached by Aldrich et al., stating that: “ the American public has coherent foreign policy attitudes and that it can—under some circumstances—translate those attitudes into choices at the ballot box” (Aldrich, Gelpi, Feaver, Reifler & Thompson Sharp, 2006, p. 491). All in all there is enough evidence to reject the Almond-Lippmann consensus and to conclude that the public can overcome its lack of specific information and can form a stable and coherent opinion in the area of foreign policy. Furthermore, once formed, this public opinion can have an effect on policy makers and foreign policy.

### **How does the public form an opinion?**

The question that arises from the fact that the public can form a stable and coherent opinion on foreign policy is; how exactly is this opinion formed? According to Holsti there is overwhelming evidence that the American public is poorly informed about international affairs (Holsti, 1992, p. 450). How then, can the public form this stable and coherent opinion on foreign affairs? Within

the public opinion research a much heard mechanism, employed by the public for overcoming the lack of information, are heuristics; rules of thumb that enable voters to decide on the basis of very limited information (Holsti. 1992; Aldrich et al. 2006). Among these heuristic party identification and elite cues are the most influential on the formation of public opinion, as information originating from a party that a person belongs to or identifies with is considered as being more credible (Baum & Groeling, 2009, p. 181). However, there are also other researchers who have come up with alternative ways in which the public can form an opinion, most notably their own values, ideals and beliefs (Reifler et al., 2014; Popkin & Dimock, 2000; Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000). The general question of how the public overcomes its general lack of information to form a stable an rational opinion on foreign affairs has been answered in several different ways, and one can distinguish three main categories of explanations.

The first category concerns the heuristics the public can use to form an opinion based on the very limited amount of information available, such as elite cues, leader image and party identification (Baum & Groeling, 2009). In short; heuristics can be seen as rules of thumb to simplify the complex reality and process the available information efficiently in order to make a rational decision on the issue at hand. Baum and Groeling state that the public is indeed poorly informed when it concerns foreign politics, and instead relies on cues from credible partisan sources (Baum & Groeling, 2009, p. 161). According to Gilles & Murawaka (2002) the public takes cues from experts and elites because it is costly and time consuming to research the complicated, and often distant, topics on their own. The more complex a topic, and thus more time consuming to research, such as foreign affairs, the more likely the public is to use heuristics (Gilles & Murawaka, 2002, p.19).

An important heuristic in connection to elite cues is party identification; a long term preference for a certain party and its candidates, or even a sense of belonging to a certain party, based on its attitudes or common beliefs (Thomassen & Rosema, 2009 , p. 6). Because of the preference for one party, based on previous issues, a person accepts the party position on complex issues more easily than other positions, as the preferred party is regarded as a credible source in comparison to other parties. This relates closely to the heuristic of elite cues, as the credibility of a member or expert from the elite is partly judged on the basis of their party membership.

The research mentioned above by Baum and Groeling has been conducted in the United

States, similar for most of the research in this area. The conclusion that the public makes extensive use of heuristics can therefore not immediately be extended to the Netherlands because of the difference in political system. Whereas the American political system has led to the emergence of only two parties and therefore distinctly polarized elite cues (in most cases), the Dutch proportional system has led to a severely fragmented parliament with nine parties at the time of the decision to send troops to Uruzgan. The larger number of parties give the voter more alternatives to choose from, and may reduce the effect of each individual party and its cues on foreign policy. The effect of the presence of multiple parties on the use of heuristics depends on the positions taken by the parties; nine different parties can have anything between one and nine different positions. Research has indicated that the way the elites are divided, consensus or conflict, can have a major impact on the public opinion (Berinsky, 2007; Reifler et al., 2014). If elites are more divided and opposed the public can easily distinguish the different cues offered by the parties and politician. When there is consensus among the elite, the public finds it difficult to side with a certain party, as there is little to choose.

The second category of explanations states that the population does not simply parrot the messages sent by the elites, but has own core values and can reason about foreign policy themselves. For example, they can base their opinion on previous experiences, trust in their government and the people they encounter every day, and their knowledge of the political institutions (Popkin & Dimock, 2000). This explanation assumes that the public has an internal moral compass and uses this besides, or instead of, heuristics in order to form their opinion on foreign policy. In the case of international conflict, studies have shown that the desire for retribution or punishment, so called “moral reasoning”, is a good indicator for the use of values by individuals attitudes towards war. Because of this mechanism, support for issues like the death penalty have been used as a proxy to measure this effect (Reifler et al., 2014, p. 33). Popkin and Dimock (2000) also challenge the view that the public does not reason about politics and is easily influenced by elite messages. The authors argue that citizens have certain predispositions apart from their partisanship and ideology, most notably trust and knowledge, that allow them to do more than just parrot elite opinions (Popkin & Dimock, 2000, p. 215). Because the public can use past experiences and other predispositions as a substitute, knowledge of an issue is not essential in forming an own opinion, however, a person with more knowledge perceives the word differently. A knowledgeable person can understand complex

reasoning and the different positions politician offer in debates on foreign policy. In contrast, a person with less knowledge cannot distinguish the different positions and therefore sees the outside world as out of control and more dangerous (Popkin & Dimock, 2000, p. 229). In comparison to heuristics values are not issue based, but are a constant factor within every individual when judging new foreign policy issues.

The third explanation models the process by which the public forms their opinion on foreign affairs as a cost-benefit analysis (Reifler et al., 2014). The costs and benefits can both be personal and general. For example possible casualties (personal) and financial aspects (general) can be seen as costs while the probability of success can be seen as a measure of benefits. This model assumes that there are rational citizens, and it requires them to have the correct and complete information to make such a cost benefit analysis. The classic study of Mueller (1971) on the wars in Vietnam and Korea, where the support for the war decreases when casualties(costs) increase, is an example of this explanation. However, this explanation has been challenged by several researchers, for example by Berinsky. He found little evidence of such cost benefit calculations made by the American public during the Second World War when analysing data from that time (Berinsky, 2007). Other authors, such as Voogd and Vos (2010) suggest that a more nuanced view is needed when reviewing the effects of casualties on the level of public support as the context and circumstances of the casualties are a significant factor (Voogd & Vos, 2010). Factors such as probability of success and legitimacy of the mission play an important part in determining the effects of casualties.

As mentioned before the level of knowledge of the public is relevant in all three of the explanations. If the public is in possession of the complete and correct information concerning a certain foreign issue, they do not need to rely on heuristics to form an opinion. As heuristics, such as elite and party cues, are a way of forming an opinion based on incomplete knowledge, they become obsolete when the public is fully informed (Baum & Groeling, 2009; Gilles & Murawaka, 2002). Furthermore, knowledge of specific events and circumstances can influence the perception of the international issue, and as a result influence the values the public connects to the issue. For example; if the public is not informed of human rights violations during a conflict they cannot approve or disapprove of the conflict for that reason. In addition to knowledge on the foreign policy topic itself, knowledge of domestic politics can influence the way the public opinion is formed. If the public has little knowledge of the different party

positions or the position and identity of politicians, they cannot form their opinion based on these heuristics. Therefore both knowledge of domestic politics and knowledge of international politics and events can have an effect on the way certain heuristics and values influence the public opinion.

### **Specific factors in the Dutch case**

All three models of opinion forming have been shown to have some effect in certain cases and of various magnitude on public opinion, but not much research has been done on the relative importance of each model compared to one another. The research that has been done in the United Kingdom showed a minimal influence of heuristics in the case of the use of military force in both Afghanistan and Libya (Reifler et al., 2014). As most of the research on these models in the context of the Afghan war has taken place outside the Netherlands, most significantly in the United States and the United Kingdom, one cannot extend the conclusions of that research directly to the case of the Dutch participation in the ISAF mission in Uruzgan. There are several factors that can influence the relative importance of each of the models in the Netherlands.

First of all the Netherlands has a fragmented political system with, at the time of the decision to send Dutch troops to Afghanistan, nine different parties (and two additional fractions). As most research has taken place in the United States, with a two party system, this might lead to very different results, as the presence of more parties in the Netherlands may have an effect on the level of elite conflict. Reifler et al. (2014) suggest that the absence of consensus among the elite will increase the importance of heuristics. Berinsky (2007) also views the (absence of) elite consensus as an important factor in public opinion concerning international conflict. The author suggests that there is a major difference in public opinion when the elite is united instead of divided on the issue of war (Berinsky, 2007, p. 986). In the Netherlands not all parties had distinctly different positions on the decision to send Dutch troops to Uruzgan, but the different parties stressed different aspects of the issue in the debate on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2006 (Official transcript of debate retrieved from: [officielebekendmakingen.nl](http://officielebekendmakingen.nl)). Among the parties that supported the deployment of Dutch troops, the VVD, PVDA and CDA all stressed the security aspect and the importance of fighting terrorism, while the CDA and the PVDA also mentioned the moral obligation to help the people of Afghanistan. This moral obligation was also stressed by the SGP and CU, whom because of this, also supported Dutch participation in



Uruzgan. The last party that supported the decision to send troops was the LPF, who questioned the high financial costs, but nevertheless supported the mission because of the Dutch international obligation to do so. The parties that opposed the decision to send Dutch troops to Uruzgan, GroenLinks and SP, did so because they objected to the fact that the mission would be closely related to the fighting mission conducted by the United States. This mission of the United States included the infamous, and morally questionable, torture of prisoners. Furthermore the SP stressed that, in their opinion, it would be highly unlikely that the mission would be a success. The position of D66 was complex, as its leader opposed the decision to send Dutch troops to Afghanistan in the parliamentary debate, but was later forced by the party to step down. He was forced to step down because the party disagreed with his objection during the debate, and supported the decision to send troops to Uruzgan in the end.

As becomes clear from the party positions above, the presence of nine parties does not lead to an equal number of positions. The presence of nine parties does lead to different aspects of the debate being highlighted by the different parties, giving the supporters of different parties various cues if and why they should support the Dutch participation in Uruzgan. However, the Dutch elections have become increasingly volatile over the years indicating that fewer voters identify on a long-term basis with the position and attitudes of one party, likely decreasing the relevance of the party identification component of the heuristic (Dijstelbloem, Hoed, Holtslag & Schouten, 2010). Because the Dutch voters are apparently less bound to one party, and therefore do not simply copy the position of their preferred party, it can be expected that the Dutch public does not rely extensively on heuristics originating from specific partisan sources or cues. The effect of the increased volatility is only relevant to the specific position, arguments and cues of the parties. The general ideological position of both the voter and the party (for example on the well-known left-right scale) has not necessarily changed together with the increased volatility of the elections. Even though voters voted for a different party than last time, they might still vote for parties on the same side of the left-right scale.

Even though voters may rely less on cues from a specific party, as they more often switch between parties, they may still share the general position of the parties they feel close to, because they stand on their side of the political spectrum. From the positions taken by the parties one can see that, in general, the parties on the left side opposed the decision, while parties on the right supported the deployment of Dutch troops. Therefore, it is expected that respondents who feel

connected, via common positions(ideology) or identification, to a right wing party, will support the decision to deploy Dutch troops to Uruzgan more than respondents attracted to left wing parties. In connection, it is expected that respondents, who place themselves on the right hand side of a left right scale, will support the mission in Uruzgan more than those who place themselves on the left hand side of the scale.

Secondly, research by Everts (2012), into the role of Dutch public opinion in the Iraq war, showed that the Dutch public found a mandate from the United Nations, meaning international legitimacy, very important. When asked whether the respondents thought the Netherlands should participate in the invasion of Iraq without a UN mandate support dropped to 20%, while support for Dutch participation with a UN mandate was 40% (Everts, 2012, p. 96). Furthermore, support dropped when reports about torture by the Americans in the Abu Graib went public, indicating a moral rejection of torture (Everts, 2012, p. 98). This reveals that values of the Dutch population can play an important part in the forming of their public opinion. It is therefore expected that the Dutch public makes use of moral reasoning when forming an opinion on international issues. When looking at the moral reasoning among the Dutch public it is expected, that respondents with a large desire for punishment, retributiveness, will support the war in Afghanistan more than respondents who do not desire punishment .

Thirdly, the expected costs of Dutch military participation were not extensively debated in parliament at the time of the initial decision to send troops to Uruzgan. The mission was mainly directed towards rebuilding Uruzgan, instead of fighting. The costs in lives did therefore not dominate the debate at that time. In the parliamentary debate of 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2006, on the participation of the Netherlands in the ISAF mission, the terms “costs” and “casualties” were mentioned only once in the entire debate. Research by Voogd and Vos, into public opinion on the mission in Uruzgan, indicated that in this case the actual amount of casualties, frequently used as an indication of costs, did not have an significant effect on the level of support for the mission (Voogd & Vos, 2010, p. 451). The results from earlier research and the absence of extensive political debate on the costs of the mission, makes it less likely that the public debates the costs, as the public generally is less informed on such complex foreign policy issues than the political elite. This leads to the expectation that the cost-benefit model will not be the most important factor in the forming of the public opinion in this case.

Reviewing the specific aspects that can have an effect on the public opinion in the

Netherlands, concerning the decision to send a significant number of troops to Uruzgan, one can expect that each of the three models has some effect on the forming of public opinion in this case.

### **Operationalization and measurement**

In order to investigate the relative importance of these factors, the data from the “Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek 2006” (National Voter Survey) will be used (CBS & SKON, 2006). This survey contains questions on relevant factors concerning heuristics and values. At the time of the election, in 2006, it included the military task force in Uruzgan. The “Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek 2006” was conducted over two periods shortly before the elections on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2006 and contained 4000 randomly selected respondents in total.

The general support of the public, for sending the Dutch military to Uruzgan in 2006, can be measured by the question: “The Netherlands have made a right choice by sending soldiers to the Uruzgan province in Afghanistan” (translated). The respondents answered this question on a four point scale ranging from totally disagree to totally agree. This will be the dependent variable of the research. In the survey, it was not asked why the respondent thought sending Dutch soldiers to Afghanistan was either good or bad. It is also important to note that this survey was taken several months after the decision to send troops to Uruzgan was made, and so events that took place between the political decision and the survey might have had an effect on the results.

The heuristics consist of several factors and in order to measure the influence of heuristics, one can look at the relation between a respondent and the different parties. The exact message and frame of elite cues, and their effect on the individual, will and cannot be measured in this study. However, as the literature (Gilles & Murawaka, 2002) indicates that individuals form their opinion on the basis of certain cues sooner when identifying with the party the cue comes from, as it is a more credible source, it is to be expected that party identification captures both factors. However, as stated before, party identification is decreasing in the Netherlands; in the NKO only 125 respondents identified strongly with a certain party and is therefore not a useful indicator. Instead of party identification, and the absence of a different measure of closeness to a party, the sympathy score of the respondents will be used to measure the possible partisan effects on the public opinion. When indicating the sympathy for a party the respondent likely includes sympathy for the leader of the party and sympathy for the ideas of the party. In

the survey, the respondents were asked to score the sympathy for the six major parties on a scale ranging from 1 to 10. The parties that were scored were the coalition parties VVD, CDA and D66 (which left the coalition on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2006) and the major opposition parties PVDA, SP and GroenLinks. I expect to find that respondents with a high sympathy for parties that supported the decision to send troops to Uruzgan, the parties VVD and CDA, to also tend to support the decision to send troop to Uruzgan. Vice versa I expect sympathizers for PVDA, SP and GroenLinks to support the decision to send troops to Uruzgan less. As D66 had an internal conflict within the party on this issue, the (former)leader image and party position are opposed to each other, and no clear expectation of the effects on sympathizers of this of this party can therefore be formulated.

In addition to the party preference (identification and closeness), the literature has indicated that the level of political knowledge is relevant to the way individuals perceive and process cues (Popkin & Dimock, 2000; Wlezien, 1995). In the survey the respondents were asked several questions to determine their level of political knowledge, such as identifying specific politicians and their function. These questions were scored and combined into one single 'political knowledge' score. This score was focussed on domestic politicians and did not include foreign issues. So it can be used in the analysis to see if higher levels of political knowledge lead to different levels of support for the mission in Uruzgan or if higher political knowledge will lead to a larger effect of partisan factors. In addition to the political knowledge score, the frequency of reading articles on foreign issues in the newspaper will be used as an additional measure of knowledge, in order to include the effects of knowledge on foreign issues.

The values of the public can be measured by looking for evidence of "moral reasoning" in the survey. Research by Liberman (2006) has shown that support for the death penalty is a good proxy for the support of wars by measuring the level of retributiveness and humanitarianism of the respondents. In the National election survey of 2006 the respondent is asked to indicate their support for the death penalty. The expectation is that the higher the support for the death penalty, and thus higher level of retributiveness of the respondent, the higher the support for military action in Uruzgan. However, because the Dutch mission in Afghanistan was directed at rebuilding besides security, the mission is not a typical punitive war. Therefore the questions: "The Netherlands needs to spend more on foreign aid" and "Illegal refugees should be allowed to stay" will be used to more specifically measure the humanitarian

values of the respondent. The expectation is that the more the respondent agrees with these two statements the higher the level of humanitarianism of the respondent, and therefore supports the deployment of the Dutch troops as well.

The cost benefit analysis cannot be researched with any validity as no question in the survey addresses this topic. In the survey there is no viable proxy for incorporating the two factors most commonly used to measure the effect of the costs and benefits, namely casualties and perception of mission success (Voogd & Vos, 2010). Between the start of the mission and the date of the survey, four Dutch soldiers died in Afghanistan. As these were not combat related deaths, but accidents which could also have taken place in the Netherlands during training, they are not likely to be very significantly important to the public opinion (Voogd & Vos, 2010, p. 447). It cannot be excluded, it is even likely, that a cost/benefit analysis is used by the respondents when answering either the question about sending soldiers to Uruzgan or the question on increased spending on foreign aid. However, considering the state of the debate, it is not likely that the cost-benefit analysis dominates over either heuristics or values in the questions that will be used to test the other factors.

Because of data limitations and the absence of relevantly formulated questions in the existing surveys, the measure of the morals and cost benefit analysis cannot be completely valid. However, the relative influence of heuristics in comparison to the values of the population can be researched in the case of the Dutch participation in the ISAF mission.

## Results

The general public support for sending soldiers to Uruzgan at the time of the survey was generally positive, Figure 1 shows that a majority of 60% agreed with the decision. This is in itself interesting as initially the support for sending Dutch troops to Afghanistan was initially generally negative (Everts, 2012). There was no significant difference in level of support when splitting the sample into a part with high political knowledge and into a part with low political knowledge.

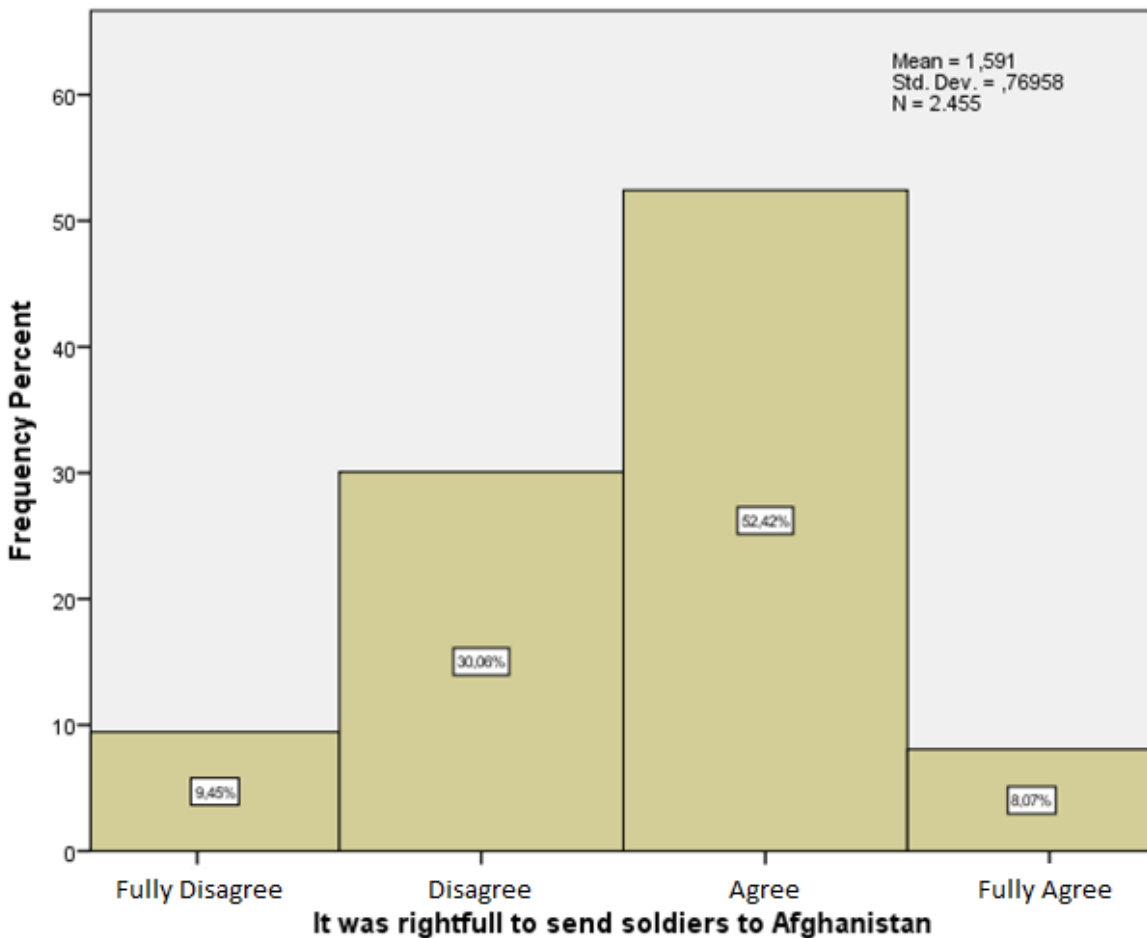


Figure 1. Support for sending soldiers to Afghanistan among respondents of the 2006 National voter survey. Data from CBS, SKON, Brinkman, M., Kolk, H. van der, Aarts and C.W.A.M., Rosema, M. (2007). *Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, NKO 2006*.

**Table 1**

*All factors influencing approval of sending soldiers to Uruzgan, including separate results for the level of political knowledge of the respondents.*

	Full sample		Low political knowledge		High political knowledge	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Constant	1,239	0,124	1,324	0,182	1,139	0,172
Support for Death Penalty	0,031*	0,013	0,035	0,02	0,03	0,017
Support for foreign Aid	0,082**	0,023	0,113*	0,038	0,064*	0,03
Support for torture	0,003	0,013	0,012	0,022	-0,005	0,017
Support for allowing illegal immigrants to stay	-0,035	0,022	-0,003	0,035	-0,051	0,029
Sympathy score PvdA	0,002	0,011	-0,017	0,016	0,019	0,014
Sympathy score VVD	0,025*	0,01	0,027	0,017	0,023	0,013
Sympathy score D66	0,013	0,009	0,015	0,015	0,013	0,011
Sympathy score CDA	0,053**	0,011	0,044*	0,017	0,059**	0,014
Sympathy score SP	-0,057**	0,01	-0,044*	0,016	-0,067**	0,014
Sympathy score GroenLinks	0,001	0,011	-0,011	0,018	0,011	0,015
Left-right self-rating	0,007	0,01	-0,006	0,015	0,018	0,014
	N = 2623		N = 1161		N = 1462	
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.311		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.275		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.339	

\*  $p \leq 0.05$  \*\*  $p \leq 0.001$

Data from CBS, SKON, Brinkman, M., Kolk, H. van der, Aarts and C.W.A.M., Rosema, M. (2007). *Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, NKO 2006*.

The result from the regression analysis, with separate results for both low and high domestic political knowledge, are shown in Table 1. Collinearity statistics showed no problems. Results from the full sample indicate significant positive effects for the factors support for the death penalty, support for increasing foreign aid, the sympathy score for the VVD and the sympathy score for the CDA. The only significant negative effect indicated was the sympathy score for the SP. The results indicate that partisan factors have an effect on the support for the mission in Uruzgan. The effects found are in line with the party positions, as the VVD and CDA supported the decision to send troops to Uruzgan and the SP opposed the decision. These results also indicate that moral reasoning was present among the Dutch public. In this case the desire for punishment leads to higher support for the decision to send Dutch troop to Uruzgan. In addition, the humanitarian feelings of the respondents, measured by the support for increasing spending on foreign aid, also seem to lead to higher support for the mission.

When splitting the sample on basis of knowledge on domestic politics, several effects change in size and significance. In both the analysis including respondents with low political knowledge and the analysis including respondents with high political knowledge, the support for increasing foreign aid and the sympathy score for the CDA have an significant positive effect. The results also indicate a significant negative effect for the sympathy score for the SP, while the support for the death penalty and the sympathy score for the VVD are no longer significant.

Even though the same factors are indicated to have a significant effect in both analysis, the magnitude of the effects differs. The effect of support for increasing foreign aid is larger in the group with low domestic political knowledge than in both the full sample and in the group with high political knowledge. The partisan effects are larger for the group with high political knowledge than for the full sample and the group with low political knowledge.



**Table 2**

*All factors influencing approval of sending soldiers to Uruzgan, including separate results for the frequency of reading about foreign news.*

	Full sample		Seldom or never reads foreign news		Frequently reads foreign new	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Constant	1,239	0,124	1,033	0,194	1,155	0,185
Support for Death Penalty	0,031*	0,013	0,059*	0,02	0,020	0,019
Support for foreign Aid	0,082**	0,023	0,025*	0,036	0,107*	0,035
Support for torture	0,003	0,013	0,044*	0,021	-0,017	0,019
Support for allowing illegal immigrants to stay	-0,035	0,022	-0,011	0,034	-0,058	0,032
Sympathy score PvdA	0,002	0,011	0,025	0,016	-0,003	0,016
Sympathy score VVD	0,025*	0,01	0,023	0,016	0,014	0,015
Sympathy score D66	0,013	0,009	0,029	0,013	0,016	0,013
Sympathy score CDA	0,053**	0,011	0,032	0,016	0,079**	0,016
Sympathy score SP	-0,057**	0,01	-0,053*	0,016	-0,064**	0,015
Sympathy score GroenLinks	0,001	0,011	-0,06	0,018	0,021	0,017
Left-right self-rating	0,007	0,01	0,025	0,016	0,006	0,015
	N = 2623		N = 1161		N = 1462	
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.311		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.317		R <sup>2</sup> = 0.341	
	* p ≤ 0.05		** p ≤ 0.001			

Data from CBS, SKON, Brinkman, M., Kolk, H. van der, Aarts and C.W.A.M., Rosema, M. (2007). *Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, NKO 2006*.

The regression analysis was also conducted with the sample split on the level foreign news readership. The results in Table 2 show that among the respondents who seldom or never read foreign news, the factors support for the death penalty, support for increasing foreign aid and the support for torture have significant positive effects. The sympathy score for the SP is the only negative effect indicated. Among the respondents who frequently read foreign news the support for foreign aid and the sympathy score for the CDA have significant positive effects, while the sympathy score for the SP has a significant negative effect.

The effect of the support for increasing foreign aid is larger in the sample of respondents who frequently read foreign news than in the full sample and in the sample of respondents who seldom or never read foreign news. Also the effects of the partisan factors are larger in the group with high readership of foreign news than in the group with low readership of foreign news in the newspapers.

When comparing the data from Table 1 and Table 2 it can be observed that higher knowledge of both domestic politics and of foreign issues leads to larger effects of the partisan factors. The effects of the sympathy score for the parties is in line with the party positions as observed in the debate on the mission to Uruzgan in 2006. It is not surprising that higher knowledge of domestic politics leads to a larger effect of partisan factors, as the public needs to be able to identify and take note of the different party positions in order for the partisan factors to have effect. Also the knowledge of foreign issues, measured by reading about foreign issues in the newspapers, leads to partisan factors having a larger effect. This might be due to the fact that individuals with higher knowledge on an issue can more easily follow the different arguments offered by the elites on a topic (Popkin & Dimock, 2000, p. 229).

Among the proxies used to measure the values of the respondents only the support for increasing the spending on foreign aid is significant in all categories of political knowledge levels and foreign news readership. In this case the effect of support for increasing spending on foreign aid is larger in the part of the sample with low domestic political knowledge than in the part of the sample with high political knowledge. When analysing the same factor with the sample split on knowledge on foreign issues the opposite seems to be indicated; the effect of support for increasing spending on foreign aid is larger among the part of the sample that frequently reads about foreign news than among the part of the sample that seldom or never reads about foreign news. Assuming that individuals who read more about foreign issues are also

more interested in these issues, it is logical that the effect of the support for increasing foreign aid is larger among them than among those who are not as interested in foreign issues.

## **Conclusion**

The statistical analysis indicates that both heuristics and values have effects on public opinion in this case, although both small. Among the heuristics partisan factors have an effect on public opinion, in line with the party positions. Respondent who sympathize with parties that supported the decision to send troops to Uruzgan also tended to support the decision more themselves and supporters of parties that opposed the decision also tended to oppose the decision more. This effect was indicated for all different portions of the sample, both in the parts of the sample with high and low political knowledge and also both in the part of the sample with frequent or little readership of foreign issues in the newspapers. However, the effects were largest in the part of the sample with high political knowledge and in the part of the sample with frequent readership of foreign issues in the newspapers. This suggests that, as indicated in the literature, a higher level of knowledge enables respondents to interpret the different arguments the parties offer better than the respondents with a lower level of knowledge. Also the presence of elite conflict may have led to partisan factors being relevant, as suggested by Reifler et al. (2014) and Berinsky (2007).

It is difficult to distinguish between heuristics and the possible correlating predispositions of the party and the sympathisers of the party. It is possible that supporters of a party come to the same conclusion as the party itself independently, without consulting the party position, thus not using heuristics. However, even individuals with a high level of knowledge, both on domestic and foreign issues, are not likely to always be able to, or willing to, research every issue and form their own opinion because this would be very time consuming and costly. It is therefore probable that both heuristics and the correlation of conclusions reached by the supporters of a party and the party itself are present in this sample.

Among the values, desires of retributiveness and humanitarianism both have effects in the full sample, albeit small, on the public attitudes towards the decision to send Dutch troop to Afghanistan. The mixed positive and negative effects found from the variables to test for retributiveness and humanitarianism can be explained by the equally mixed nature of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan. Even though the mission was directed at rebuilding the province, there was

a significant chance of violent encounters with insurgents. As expected the higher the support for the death penalty, measuring the punitive sentiments of the respondents, the higher the support for the mission to Uruzgan. Also the higher the support for increased spending on foreign aid, measuring the humanitarianism of the respondents, the higher the support for the mission to Uruzgan. When splitting the sample into a part with high political knowledge and a part with low political knowledge only the support for increased spending on foreign aid remained significant. The results indicate that the effect of this factor is larger among those with lower political knowledge than among those with high political knowledge. When splitting the sample on basis of foreign issue knowledge the opposite seems to be true.

## **Discussion**

When reviewing the Dutch military participation in the ISAF mission in the Afghan province of Uruzgan it is important for policy makers and the government to understand the public opinion and its effects. By understanding the ways in which public opinion is formed policy makers can try to influence the opinion or incorporate the public opinion into their decision. A lot of research has been done to explain the connection between the political elite, foreign policy and the public opinion. The three most researched mechanisms by which public opinion can be formed are heuristics, values and cost-benefit analysis. By using data from the National voter survey (Nationaal kiezersonderzoek) of 2006, the influence of both heuristics and values on the public support for sending troops to Uruzgan has been researched.

As there is no single dataset concerning this case that includes all three of the mechanisms of heuristics, values and cost-benefit analysis it was not possible to research the relative importance of each of the categories. In this analysis it was impossible to include the cost-benefit analysis as the data was not available in a survey that also included the heuristics and values of the respondents. Therefore it may be necessary for future researchers to conduct their own survey in order to gather all relevant data in a single dataset. For relevant research into the cost-benefit analysis of the Dutch public in the case of Uruzgan see Voogd and Vos (2010). However, the proxy used to measure the humanitarian feelings of the respondents, support for increasing spending on foreign aid, includes the costs and enables the respondents to answer the question using a cost-benefit analysis. It is not unlikely that a part of the sample used the cost-benefit analysis besides, or instead of, using values in order to determining their opinion.

It is also important to note that the effects of the media and framing are not taken into account in this analysis, as they could not be established from the available survey data. In this analysis the link between party positions and respondents attitudes was, apart from the knowledge level, investigated without considering the way the media portrayed the different parties and the debate on the issue. Similarly, the way the media portrayed the nature of the conflict was not analysed in this research.

It is important for policy makers and politicians to realize that in this case both internal values of the respondents and partisan factors played a role in forming the public opinion. Also important is the conclusion that the level of knowledge can have a significant effect on these partisan factors and values. The recommendation by the government commission to create a good media strategy in order to create larger support for future missions seems to be a good recommendation on the basis of the results of this analysis. It can be added that this strategy should focus on informing the respondents on the events during the mission in order to enlarge the effects of moral reasoning. Also the state of the elite consensus/conflict needs to be taken into account when trying to create public support, as elite conflict seems to enlarge the effects of the partisan factors.

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