The political adoption of expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues: The Dutch case of the WRR

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Abstract

This thesis has investigated the extent to which expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues, as expressed by the WRR in its reports, led to political adoption at the national level in the Netherlands. Text analysis of cabinet reactions showed levels of agreement indicating degrees of influence. High levels of agreement, and thus strong influence, were found. A supplementary citation analysis of parliamentary debates showed references to reports indicating types of influence. Very limited references were found. In conclusion, the WRR possesses expert influence to a great but limited extent.

Keywords: cross-cutting policy issues, expert advice, expert influence, political adoption, WRR

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Foreword

This thesis is the concluding chapter of both my time at Leiden University and as a student in general, although the innate drive to learn naturally remains. Having spent over a decade at various institutions of higher education, I look back on incredibly formative years, in an academic and a social sense. Now, the time has come to fully devote myself to my professional career.

Expert influence is a highly interesting and relevant topic, on the crossroads of science and politics. Salient developments such as the coronavirus pandemic, artificial intelligence and climate change underscore the importance of expertise in dealing with cross-cutting policy issues. In this thesis, I endeavor to contribute to this area of knowledge, by assessing the influence of the WRR, the national expert advisory body to the government of the Netherlands.

For their support, I would like to extend my gratitude towards a few people. First, I wish to express my thanks to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Johan Christensen, for his valuable advice and for his patient and understanding attitude. I am also thankful towards my parents and brother, Geert, Willeke and Michiel, for their unwavering support and words of motivation. To complete the family, walks with my dog Beatle were essential for clearing my head when needed.

Finally, I wish those who are about to read this thesis much enjoyment in doing so.

Jules Arts, 8 March 2024

List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
APB	Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen (General Political Considerations)
CDA	Christen-Democratisch Appèl (Christian Democratic Appeal)
CU	Christen Unie (Christian Union)
D66	Democraten 66 (Democrats 66)
EFI	Expertenkommission Forschung und Innovation (Commission of Experts for Research and Innovation)
EMU	European Monetary Union
EU	European Union
GL	GroenLinks (GreenLeft)
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPM	New Public Management
PM	Prime Minister
SGP	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (Politically Reformed Party)
WRR	Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

§1.1: Context

Dutch climate policy should be based on justice next to efficiency and lawfulness. The Netherlands will have to adapt to a changing climate by reducing its carbon emissions to zero by 2050 and by preparing for more extreme weather events. This adaptation will be costly, and these costs must be justly distributed to create and maintain public support for such climate policy. To achieve this, the discourse should be broadened, the attention for just distribution explicated early in the policy process, and keeping checks on this attention should be institutionalized. The preceding summarizes the findings and recommendations of the WRR in one of its latest full reports, the 106th, published in February 2023, on the cross-cutting policy issue of climate change (WRR, 2023).

The WRR (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid)* or Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy is an independent think tank which advises, and if necessary, criticizes, the government of the Netherlands on long-term strategic issues by employing information on ongoing trends and developments to formulate policy alternatives. It does so with the contributions of university researchers who conduct policy studies. It offers both solicited and unsolicited advice, though mostly the latter. Its main publications are lengthy reports, usually issued one to three times per year. These reports cover broad themes, such as climate change, digitalization and self-reliance of citizens, issues which often cover the working terrain of more than one ministry or agency. The government is obliged to comment on the WRR's reports (Kremer, 2019). The WRR actively participates in the European Science Advisors Forum (ESAF) and the International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA) (WRR, n.d.). In recent decades, the WRR has faced occasional criticism, such as when it published a controversial report in 2007 on immigration, in which it went against majority public opinion at the time (Kremer, 2019).

The case of the WRR is interesting in relation to cross-cutting policy issues. In its February 2023 report, the Subramaniam evaluation committee concludes that the WRR is unique in its focus on long-term strategic matters combined with it rising above specific policy fields. It is appreciated for its objectivity, attention for novel issues and for reaching beyond the national government and parliament to inform other governments, such as municipalities (Subramaniam et al., 2023). As such, the WRR cuts across "established policy fields and administrative boundaries" (Christensen & Serrano Velarde, 2019, p. 51). The long-term and broad impact of WRR advice is, according to Subramaniam et al. (2023), seen in reports being referred to years after the publication date and by policy actors outside of cabinet and parliament circles, even claiming an impact on broader societal debates. Writing about its report on integration, Scholten (2008, p. 209) states that the WRR occupies a niche in the Dutch national institutional landscape by focusing on "topics that cover multiple policy sectors, which are studied from multiple scientific disciplines, and that are relevant for the development of long-term government policy".

These characteristics point to the WRR reports being inherently about cross-cutting policy issues. What this means for the influence of the WRR as an expert advisory body on these issues is a relevant question to ask and endeavor to answer.

The words of MPs Heerma and Pechtold (Tweede Kamer, 2015a; 2020c) at least promise that the WRR's influence is not a given:
"when you pose the question whether we have been too short-sighted, the interesting thing is that you often find out the WRR had already warned us about it" and "will the scientific agenda disappear into the drawer of the ministry together with the WRR report on learning economy?"

§1.2: Problem statement

Assessing the influence of expert advisory bodies, such as the WRR, points to one of the underlying concepts for this thesis, namely expert influence. It is generally defined as "the ability of an expert actor to shape a policy decision in line with its knowledge-based preferences" (Christensen, 2022, p. 4). Christensen and Serrano Velarde (2019) examine and compare the role of expert advisory bodies in innovation policy, a cross-cutting policy issue. These cross-cutting policy issues are so broad, that approaching them requires a great amount of expert knowledge. Still, it is another matter whether such knowledge is actually utilized and thus, to what extent expert influence is present. The issue may not be addressed with expert knowledge because of the mentioned spread over multiple sectors. In short, "crosscutting issues may facilitate the involvement of experts but hinder political adoption of their advice" (Christensen & Serrano Velarde, 2019, p. 51). Such issues are characterized by the way they cut across "established policy fields and administrative boundaries", they are not limited to one sector, which is the scope of orientation for ministries and other bureaucratic and societal actors. This leads to issues entering a limbo sphere of political inaction, a lack of activity on the part of government agencies, because of the issues' spread across different policy fields. Governments and their agencies or departments thus lack incentive to deal with the given issue, as it is not specific enough for them to include in their activities, coupled with a lack of clarity on who is responsible for the topic.

As mentioned, Christensen and Serrano Velarde (2019) examine a specific cross-cutting issue: innovation. They do so in two different national contexts, Germany and Norway. Their analysis focuses on the political adoption of expert advice on innovation. In Norway, the expert advisory bodies examined were individual commissions created ad hoc, when necessary, whereas in Germany the EFI (Expertenkommission Forschung und Innovation or Commission of Experts for Research and Innovation) was established as a permanent advisory commission on innovation. The results of Christensen and Serrano Velarde (2019) show that the Norwegian and German cases differ in the levels of political adoption of expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues. In the case of Norway, despite the various commissions repeatedly calling attention to the need for political action on innovation, results were disappointing. Political adoption occurred sparingly, and as of 2017, Norway's performance on innovation indicators remained subpar, with little progress compared to a few decades ago.

Contrary to the general expectation of a lack of adoption, and the confirmatory results in the Norwegian case, the advice issued by the German EFI on innovation as a cross-cutting policy issue, *did* find an audience with German political actors and resonated through the political landscape. Notably, in parliamentary debates German MPs are referred to by all MPs, regardless of which political party they belong to (Christensen & Serrano Velarde, 2019).

As discussed by Christensen and Serrano Velarde (2019), innovation is only one example of a cross-cutting policy issue and more research is needed on other such issues. The WRR reports on a wide array of topics, such as climate change, digitalization and immigration. Because of that, it provides a highly suitable canvas for broadly researching cross-cutting policy issues. There is a dual knowledge gap on the influence of expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues: first, on the influence per policy issue and second, on the influence per country. Exploring the influence of the WRR provides an additional national context, and presents that context by covering a large selection of cross-cutting policy issues. Further, a contribution is made to knowledge on expert influence in general. There is lacking empirical research on the impact of experts on policy in general, given limited methodological tools (both in their development and practical application) (Christensen, 2022). The research of this thesis paints an inclusive picture of the political adoption of expert advice on cross-cutting policy domains by the government and parliament of the Netherlands, with the WRR providing a very appropriate 'test case'. The measurements show how much influence the WRR has on cross-cutting policy issues, and how this influence varies between different issues of that kind. As such, this will broaden our knowledge of cross-cutting policies' conjunction with expert influence. Namely, the extent to which advice is actually (politically) adopted.

§1.3: Methodology

Quantitative analysis of a combination of policy documents and parliamentary debates provides the framework for an assessment of the WRR's influence on the Dutch government and parliament by assessing political adoption both in terms of agreement to reports by the government and inclusion in debates. The described assessment of the WRR's influence will be researched by using 22 WRR reports, published since late 2010, as cases. These cases are analyzed in two ways. First, using text analysis for the corresponding cabinet reactions, the level of agreement with certain specific recommendations of the WRR by the cabinet is measured. Second, citation analysis for the annual general plenary debate (*algemene politieke beschouwingen, APB)* of the *Tweede Kamer*, the Dutch lower house, provides insight into how often a specific report is referred to in arguably the most high-profile debate of the year in the Netherlands (Tweede Kamer, 2023). Additionally included in the citation analysis of the APB are who refers to a report, PM or MP. For MPs, it is further recorded which party they belong to, to add this as a measure of variation and comparison to Germany.

For the method of data collection, all required publications, namely the WRR reports, cabinet reactions and stenographs of APBs are readily available and publicly accessible online. They can be searched for relevant information and keywords directly in the relevant files.

§1.4: Research question and research aim

This leads to the following research question**:**

To what extent has the expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues, as expressed by the WRR in its reports, influenced the policy publications and debates of the cabinet and parliament of the Netherlands?

To aid in answering this question, the following sub-questions are formulated:

Wat are the theoretical expectations regarding expert influence on cross-cutting policy issues in the Netherlands?

To what extent has the cabinet of the Netherlands agreed with the recommendations contained in WRR reports?

To what extent have participants referred to WRR reports in annual plenary parliamentary debates of the Tweede Kamer?

Because the effect of expert knowledge is assessed, we are dealing with explanatory research. The identification and examination of general causal effects and their mechanisms is the aim of this thesis. Partial explanation, in the sense of the relationship between phenomena and not the explanation of specific events, further characterizes this research (Toshkov, 2016).

Although this thesis also zooms in on one such context, the Dutch WRR, this expert advisory body covers a broad array of cross-cutting issues. The WRR has covered many such issues, from climate change to digitalization to immigration. In that sense, this thesis, while mainly explanatory, has an exploratory character as well. It paints a broad picture of the political adoption of expert advice on cross-cutting policy by the government of the Netherlands, with the WRR providing a very appropriate 'test case'. The government is legally obliged to respond to reports and the notion of agreement matching up with influence is of course somewhat rough around the edges. It is conceivable that agreement expressed in a cabinet reaction does not lead to adoption in actual policy. Mirrored, disagreement in reactions does not preclude translation of advice into policies. Therefore, the second research method is added, analyzing sources where inclusion of, or reference to, WRR findings is not required. When the WRR is cited on a voluntary basis, influence can be more readily assumed.

§1.5: Academic and practical relevance

This thesis contributes to academic knowledge on expert influence on cross-cutting policy issues in the so-far under-researched context of the WRR as an important part of the knowledge regime of the Netherlands. It adds the Dutch case to the German and Norwegian cases previously researched (Christensen and Serrano Velarde, 2019), expanding knowledge to another European country and enabling a broader international comparison. It puts certain derived theoretical expectations on the expert influence of the WRR to the test. More broadly, there is limited insight into the extent to which policy is based on expert knowledge, and the variation in this influence across expert bodies, policy issues, and national contexts (Christensen, 2022). Examining the WRR's influence through a novel quantitative method proposed by Christensen (2022) to assess expert influence, citation analysis, adds methodological academic relevance. It can help chart its usefulness for research on expert influence, providing a foundation for future research.

Practical relevance is found in the impact of the WRR on societal discourse, which in turn sheds light on its broader (long term) societal influence. As noted by Scholten (2007), the WRR serves the public debate by preserving an appropriate distance from both the political and the academic realm, forming a bridge between them. Because of this distance, it is capable of introducing new ideas and perspectives in salient public issues. This was exemplified with its critical stance during the discussion about its report on integration. The report discussed the factual increased cultural diversity and accompanying challenges. It was faced with criticisms of being politically correct and naïve. What is clear, is that the WRR does not eschew discussing (potentially) divisive issues which lead to broader political and societal debates. The reports of the WRR are regularly discussed in credible national newspapers, recent examples including NRC Handelsblad paying attention to the report on companies contributing societally (Bergshoef, 2023) and de Volkskrant discussing the report on citizens experiencing grip on their lives (Kraak, 2023). In summary, the WRR is visible in, and exerts influence on, societal debates, rendering it relevant to assess its influence in the political realm as well.

Undertaking research on the impact of WRR reports thus provides insight into expert influence on cross-cutting policy issues in the Netherlands. Assessing the effect of each report on Dutch politics can showcase the saliency per cross-cutting policy issue, allowing for a comparison between the impact per topic on government and parliament. Answering this question provides insight into the expert influence of the WRR on policy institutions and political trends in the Netherlands for the past two decades. This will in turn help solve the puzzle of when cross-cutting policy issues are suited to (political) adoption.

§1.6: Structure of the thesis

This thesis proceeds as follows. In chapter 2 on theory, a review of relevant literature answers the questions of what expert influence is, and how cross-cutting policy issues relate to that influence. Adapted from interest group literature, hypotheses are formulated which aid in answering the research question. A theoretical framework is included, which provides an overview of the concepts to be measured.

How this measurement is done, is explicated in the third chapter on research design. The overarching approach is explained, after which the methods of data collection and analysis are detailed. For the method of analysis, an operationalization of the theoretical concepts with a coding scheme is provided. The chapter concludes with a reflection on reliability and validity of the research.

The following chapter four contains (an overview of) the results of the empirical research. The fifth chapter on analysis answers the research question through the interpretation of the results provided in the preceding chapter. Finally, in chapter six, the conclusion and discussion are given. The conclusion summarizes the thesis, while the discussion contains a critical reflection on the used theory and methodology, with a look at what could have been done differently. Additionally, recommendations for future research are provided.

Chapter 2: Theory

§2.1: Literature review

§2.1.2: Influence, expert influence, and expert advisory bodies

The general concept of influence can be summarized as a causal relationship between an actor's preferences on the one hand and the outcome of the decision in question on the other, working through the actor's ability to express their preferences, exert pressure, and shape the decision-making process (Dür, 2008).

One of the forms this influence takes is expert influence. It is generally defined as "the ability of an expert actor to shape a policy decision in line with its knowledge-based preferences" (Christensen, 2022, p. 4). This definition contains a few elements requiring further explanation. Experts are defined in a twofold way: they are academically trained in a certain area, showing and building on this training through their careers. Second, experts can be found in many different institutions, such as national governments, international organizations, and universities. However, it is important to clarify that expert actors are usually not experts, in the sense of individuals. Neither are they overarching communities and professions. Rather, expert actors are smaller and more cohesive. A specific form of expert actors are expert advisory bodies. An example of that category, which includes the WRR, is the advisory council (Christensen, 2022).

The WRR thus constitutes an example of an expert advisory body. It fits neatly into the definition provided by Fobé et al. (2017) and Stewart and Prasser (2015): it is a permanent, publicly established and funded, independent academically composed organization, which advises on policy, published in reports. The WRR was made permanent by law in 1976. It has always consisted of academics, although it started basing its advice on societal organizations and political party scientific bureaus as well after a few years. It moved from a heavy focus on current policy to a longer term and broader approach in 1980, while still providing concrete recommendations. It further evolved into an expert advisory body providing reports with advice on a general direction to follow rather than giving more specific advice. Since 2003, the WRR has also been giving more attention to topical issues (WRR, n.d.).

Having defined expert actors, the next step is to make clear what is meant with preferences of such actors and how to understand policy decisions. Policy preferences are mainly derived from the knowledge produced by experts, influencing ideas concerning causal relationships and appropriate policy solutions. Still, political opinions and self-interest may influence preferences as well. Peer review is an example of a mechanism aimed at mitigating such unwanted influences. In the end, it can only be answered empirically to what extent preferences are based on knowledge or personal interests (Christensen, 2022). Policy decisions shape the result of expert influence, either policy change or policy stability.

This effect on the content of public policy can be based on a single policy decision or multiple decisions. Furthermore, the issue at hand can be policy formulation or policy implementation.

Mirroring research done on EU agencies and interest groups, the institutional characteristics of the WRR point to access and participation in the policy process. Access to the political arena has been granted by the government and has been legally entrenched. Participation, at the discretion of the actor itself, also takes place through the active publication of, especially, unsolicited advice. However, just as there is limited empirical research on the actual influence of EU agencies on policy decisions, so is there a lack of empirical insight for expert advisory bodies such as the WRR (Joosen et al., 2022).

§2.1.1: Knowledge regimes and structural characteristics of expert advisory bodies

Christensen and Serrano Velarde (2019) (partially) attribute the result of political adoption in Germany to the institutional characteristics of the EFI as an expert advisory body. Its structure is formalized in law and its annual reports had to be debated in parliament. As a permanent body with a large degree of autonomy, the EFI reports directly to the federal government. Although the EFI focuses specifically on innovation, while the WRR has a very broad, virtually unlimited, playing field, the similarities in terms of institutional characteristics are striking. As pointed out, the WRR was established as an independent organization on a permanent basis nearly five decades ago. Although there is no requirement to discuss its reports in parliament, there is a requirement for them to be responded to by the national government (Kremer, 2019).

Campbell and Pedersen (2014) present the overarching concept of knowledge regimes, which frame how a country's institutions create, disseminate, and integrate(scientific) knowledge for and into policy. They point out how ideas matter for politics and policy, in that they shape and influence policymaking and (attempts at) solving national economic issues. Such ideas can be understood as overarching policy paradigms such as neoliberalism but also as the framing of policy debates through specific discourses. Campbell and Pedersen (2014) further state that the way these ideas are created and distributed varies per country, focusing on the examples of Denmark, France, Germany, and the United States. For these countries, the "organizational and institutional machinery" producing the ideas are zoomed in on. The states are divided into four main categories: negotiated (Denmark), statist (France), coordinated (Germany), and competitive (United States).

In Germany's coordinated model, there is a strong presence of permanent (semi)public policy research organizations. Germany's knowledge regime is set in a decentralized, open state with a coordinated market economy. The landscape of its knowledge regime is dominated by six large economic and social research institutions, receiving most of their funding from the federal and state governments.

Stemming from a history of manipulation of scientific knowledge for political purposes by fascist and communist governments in the twentieth century, has led to the German state and society placing much emphasis on objective scientific research, produced by institutions based in, and taking account of, a consensus-oriented policy-making culture (Campbell and Pedersen, 2008).

The description of Germany's knowledge regime as presented above, can be applied to the Netherlands with great similarity between the two countries. The Dutch knowledge regime is also characterized by coalition governments seeking consensus. US-styled advocacy research units are rare, while there is, as in Germany, a group of academic research institutions, providing independent advice to the government, from which it receives its funding. Campbell and Pedersen (2008, p. 15) even refer specifically to the WRR as an important example of such a research institute. Crucially, they state that the WRR "seems to have influence on the policy-making process", as an organization taking care to avoid political or ideological biases. It is considered the "research unit par excellence" of the Netherlands.

The case of the WRR, as a representation and specification of the case of the Netherlands, parallels the case of Germany as researched by Christensen and Serrano Velarde (2019). The result of political adoption of advice on innovation as a cross-cutting policy issue could potentially be explained by a difference in knowledge regime compared to Norway. However, as noted by Christensen and Holst (2020), Norway also has an overall consensus-seeking political culture. It fits into Denmark's category in that sense, and also lines up with Germany and the Netherlands. Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany all have a (neo)corporatist tradition, referring to participation by societal representatives, such as trade unions (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014; Hustedt, 2019). The Dutch and German regimes are also different from each other in several respects. The reforms of New Public Management (NPM) from the 1980s onward especially impacted the Anglosphere, resulting in less capacity for policy expertise of the public service because of politicization of advice, leading to a shift towards policy advice from the private sector. The Netherlands was less affected but still more than Germany, where this effect was far less pronounced, remaining largely unaffected by NPM thought and practices. Additionally, it has been found that neo-corporatism is on the decline in the Netherlands, whereas Germany's situation has remained largely unchanged (Hustedt, 2019).

With this said, similarities and differences in consensus-seeking, neo-corporatist or NPM policymaking culture fail to account for the difference in political adoption of expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues. Rather, it appears to depend on the level of entrenchment of expert advisory bodies in the institutional-structural framework of a country.

§2.1.3: Expert influence on cross-cutting policy issues through permanent expert advisory bodies

Cross-cutting policy issues are characterized by the way they cut across "established policy fields and administrative boundaries" and by how they "may facilitate the involvement of experts but hinder political adoption of their advice" (Christensen & Serrano Velarde, 2019, p 51). They are linked to multifaceted and complex societal challenges, creating similarly complex policy issues. Dealing with such issues presents a problem to governments because of the mentioned cutting-across of administrative boundaries. This creates vagueness about the extent to which specific ministries or organizations carry responsibility for a given issue. Even if this is clear, intradepartmental responsibility may be diluted, spread out across different areas (Lægreid et al., 2015).

As for Denmark, there is a strong presence of temporary (semi)public policy research organizations in Norway, whereas this type of organization is (nearly) absent in the German model (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014; Christensen & Holst, 2020). The ad-hoc nature of Norwegian advisory commissions is expected to lead to less expert influence when it comes to cross-cutting policy issues, because of the dilution of responsibility. Specifically, the permanence of expert advisory bodies in the German and Dutch political landscapes is expected to have the opposite effect, as it leads to ministries and other actors claiming ownership of issues. Further empirical research strengthening this expectation can be found in the analysis of Easton et al. (2024) of policy responses based on expert advisory bodies in Australia and Belgium during the cross-cutting COVID-19 crisis. Easton et al. (2024) found that in Australia policy advice was provided to the cabinet by cohesive actors with a degree of permanence, whereas for Belgium, a country with a consensus seeking and neo-corporatist culture (Pattyn et al., 2022), advisory bodies were fragmented and prone to internal changes, leading to similarly fragmented advice flowing into the public sphere.
It is therefore not the overall consensus- and coordination seeking political cultures within the Belgian, Dutch, German, Danish and Norwegian knowledge regimes that lead to the noted difference, as they are rather similar. Instead, the degree of permanence of expert advisory bodies within those knowledge regimes, determines expert influence, at least when applied to cross-cutting policy issues.

Concretely, this is most importantly exemplified in the German case of the EFI and is expected for the Dutch case of the WRR as well. In the Norwegian case, although the issue of innovation received much attention, it was not as much transformed into political action. Further empirical research strengthening this expectation can be found in the analysis of Easton et al. (2024). This is in line with the overall expectation that cross-cutting issues generate attention (the involvement of experts) but not necessarily action as well (political adoption) (Christensen & Serrano Velarde, 2019). The permanence and legal codification (including the cabinet having to respond to reports) lead to the expectation of the WRR having influence on cross-cutting policy issues.

In addition to this general expectation, it is relevant to refer to the result of Christensen and Serrano Velarde (2019) that German parliamentarians referred to EFI reports, independently of their political party. Although annual EFI reports must be discussed in plenary sessions of parliament, this does not necessarily impact which parties refer to them in other innovation debates. Thus, an additional theoretical expectation can be derived from the German case for the Dutch case. Namely, that there will be a balanced distribution of which political parties refer to reports, and how often they do so. There is no requirement for Dutch parliamentarians to refer to them, meaning their reference is indicative of political adoption. A balanced distribution of references thus points to balanced political adoption across political parties.

§2.2: Theoretical framework

The expected causal relationship relevant to this thesis between the described concepts can be summarized as follows: the independent variable of expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues leads to political adoption of that advice in policy documents and debates, the dependent variable. This effect is moderated by the degree of permanence of relevant expert advisory bodies. Schematically, this can be displayed as such:
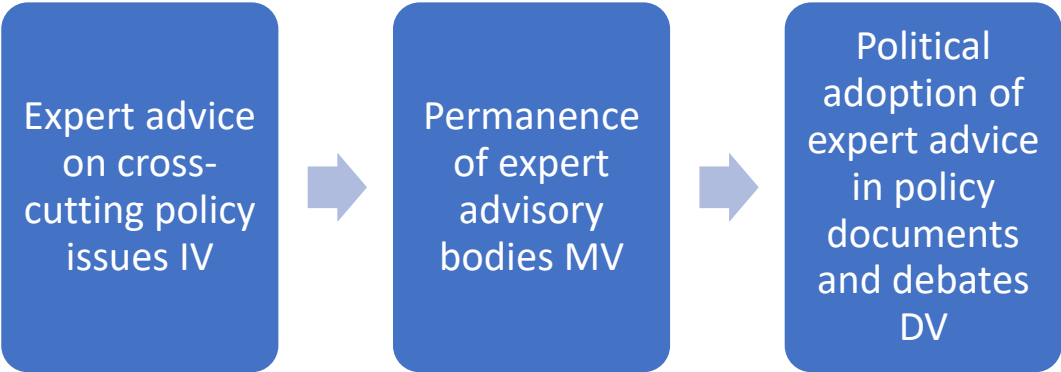
Figure 2.1 The expected causal relationship between the relevant concepts

To summarize: the results for the German EFI on the cross-cutting policy issue of innovation, where political adoption occurred because of its structural characteristics within the German knowledge regime on the one hand, and the results for the Norwegian ad hoc individual advisory commissions, where advice did not lead to political adoption on the other, show that the general theoretical expectation of a lack of political adoption on cross-cutting policy issues does not hold, as put forward by Christensen and Serrano Velarde (2019). Rather, it appears influential how the specific advisory institutions are set up and entrenched.

The WRR, with its focus on cross-cutting policy issues within the Dutch knowledge regime, falling into the same category as the German EFI as a permanently established expert advisory body, can therefore be expected to similarly have influence. Of course, the EFI only advised on innovation, and it can be called into question how generalizable the results are to all-issue expert advisory bodies. Still, the basis of institutional entrenchment appears strong enough to lead to the theoretical expectation, the hypothesis to be tested, that the WRRs publications lead to political adoption, and that the organization therefore has expert influence on cross-cutting policy issues.

H1: Expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues, published by permanently established expert advisory bodies, exerts more influence on policy publications and debates than that published by ad hoc counterparts.

The additional hypothesis testing variation on reference in parliamentary debates by political factions reads as follows:

H2: References to expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues, published by permanently established expert advisory bodies, are not dependent on which political party the referrer belongs to.

Chapter 3: Research design

§3.1: Introduction

As defended, the research goal of this thesis is explanatory. It will further be a theory-testing undertaking. It puts a (relatively) abstract proposition (cross-cutting policy issues are sensitive to political adoption, depending on whether the expert advisory bodies advising on them have permanence) to the test empirically (Toshkov, 2016). The differing results in Germany and Norway (Christensen & Serrano Velarde, 2019) make it relevant to examine the Netherlands and see whether it lines up with one or the other.

A large-N approach is well-suited to theory testing research, as it allows for patterns of variation to be uncovered and examined. Causal effects will inevitably vary between cases. Large-N research mitigates the impact of this variation by providing many observations to pick up an explanatory signal from the tall pile of analyzed cases (Toshkov, 2016). Trends can be filtered out.

§3.2: Case selection

The WRR publishes four types of documents: reports to the government, policy briefs, investigations and working papers (WRR, n.d.). The reports contain extensive advice on government policy. The policy briefs are shorter, reflecting and advising on current topics. Investigations are used to point out societal issues, whereas working papers are background studies. These last three publications, by their nature, do not refer to cross-cutting policy issues, leaving the reports as relevant cases. The WRR has published 109 main reports since 1974, and eighteen in the past decade, since 2014.

For the case selection, a total of 22 WRR reports are analyzed. These WRR documents provide, together with the cabinet reactions, the texts used in text analysis, and the citations to be gathered in citation analysis. This selection has been made with a few considerations in mind. First, it excludes the two most recently published reports from the analysis of cabinet reactions, as no such reactions have been formulated yet. These reports were published in September and November 2023, respectively. Although the first of the two is referenced in the 2023 APB, it is still not included in the case selection, as no comparison to the cabinet reaction is possible and including it may compromise overall clarity. The 22 reports provide a total of 73 recommendations which are examined in the text analysis.

Second, the selected 22 reports cover a period of over twelve years, November 2010 to February 2023, the starting point of which coincides with the start of the first cabinet of Prime Minister (PM) Mark Rutte, who took office on 14 October 2010. With his announcement of leaving Dutch politics, the case selection covers, the reports to which no reaction has yet been published excepted, his cabinets' dominance in Dutch politics. This makes it a factor that is kept constant for both methods of analysis (Selderbeek, 2023).

Further, by not going back too far in time, the research covers topics with a higher chance of still being relevant today (and into the future).

Third, by making the number of cases large enough for comparative purposes but not too large, it balances the pros and cons of large-N case selection. Too few cases make precise interpretations of results and causal effects more difficult, while too many cases increase dissimilarity of cases. The benefits of having fewer cases often outweigh the benefits of having many cases, by preventing the heterogeneity bias versus losing some precision in drawing conclusions (Toshkov, 2016).

Table 3.1: Case selection of 22 WRR reports

Number (general/WRR issued)	Title	Date of publication
1/85	Attached to the foreign. Concerning anchoring and strategy of Dutch foreign policy	30-11-2010
2/86	iGovernment	15-3-2011
3/87	Public affairs in the market society	12-4-2012
4/88	Faith in citizens	22-5-2012
5/89	Supervizing public interests. Towards a broader perspective on national supervision	9-9-2013
6/90	Towards a learning economy	4-11-2013
7/91	From diptych towards triangles. Strengthening of internal checks and balances at semipublic organizations	27-5-2014
8/92	Policymaking with behavioral insights	10-9-2014
9/93	Towards a food policy	2-10-2014
10/94	The public core of the internet. Towards a foreign internet policy	31-3-2015
11/95	Big Data in a free and safe society	28-4-2016
12/96	Society and financial sector in balance	12-10-2016
13/97	Knowing is not doing. A realistic perspective on self-reliance	24-4-2017
14/98	Security in an interconnected world. A strategic vision on defense policy	10-5-2017
15/99	European variations	4-9-2018
16/100	Money and debt. The public role of banks	17-1-2019
17/101	Preparing for digital disruption	9-9-2019

18/102	Improved work. The new societal challenge	15-1-2020
19/103	Living together in diversity. Policy for the migration society	14-12-2020
20/104	Choosing for resilient healthcare. People, means and societal support	15-9-2021
21/105	Challenge AI. The new system technology	11-11-2021
22/106	Justice in climate policy. About the distribution of climate costs	9-2-2023

§3.3: Methods of data collection

The evaluation of the cases, the 22 WRR reports, will be done by using two distinct sources of data: the cabinet reactions to the reports and the stenographs of the *Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen* (APB), the annual general plenary debate of the *Tweede Kamer*. What these sources of data entail, and how they will be used, is detailed below.

Written reports appear to be, both for the government and the public, the most important channel of communicating advice by the WRR. Focusing on these reduces the risk of missing out on orally or otherwise informally issued advice. The mirror image of the WRR reports is formed by cabinet reactions, in which the government responds to the body's advice. Because of practical workability, and to stay sharp on main instead of side issues, the data used from the reports and reactions are focused on the main recommendations. These recommendations summarize the main points of advice on a certain issue, and the cabinet responds to these recommendations specifically. The WRR commonly presents these in the summary, introduction, or conclusion of its reports. These cabinet reactions form the most logical source of data to research the WRR's influence. They are authored by the national government in direct and concrete response to the body's recommendations. Logically, there are 22 cabinet reactions to be examined in this thesis.

The second source of data is formed by the so-called *Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen* (APB), or, literally, the general political considerations. This is a plenary debate of the *Tweede Kamer* (House of Representatives), the lower and more powerful chamber of the Dutch parliament, held annually in September, in the days following the throne speech, during which the monarch outlines the policies the government intends to implement in the upcoming year. The speech is given on behalf of, and is authored by, the government. During the APB, the cabinet is questioned by parliament (specifically, faction leaders of political parties) on these main policy plans. The APB is an appropriate source of data for several reasons. As mentioned, its focus is on the general policy of the government for the upcoming year, providing a logical venue and expected opportunity for references to the cross-cutting policy issues covered by the WRR reports.

Because parliamentarians, in contrast to the cabinet, are not under any obligation to refer to WRR reports, it provides a measure of the organization's 'spontaneous' influence. This is made even more relevant because of the APB's broad public reach. It is generally considered the most important national political debate of the year. It receives much media attention and speakers often (implicitly) address citizens watching at home, enabling them to present their parties and policy ideas to the public (PDC, n.d.). There are thirteen debates to be analyzed, from September 2011 up to and including September 2023, covering the period in which the relevant reports were published. These debates are recorded in stenographs, in two to four files per debate.

All sources of data are readily available through online archives of the WRR, the government and the parliament. Stenographs of debates are searched using the key terms '*WRR*' and '*wetenschappelijke*' to search for citations of WRR reports. Care is taken to ensure that reference is made to the 22 reports and not to older or more recent reports, other WRR publications or to the WRR in general.

§3.4: Methods of analysis

To (partially) close the mentioned knowledge lacune, the main analysis is twofold.

First, it is based on content analysis through hand coding, as part of the text analysis approach (Klüver, 2009). This approach was conceived for the measurement of interest group influence but can be readily applied to measuring expert influence. Text analysis works by comparing policy positions, the preferences expressed by experts and the output of decisionmakers. Multiple ways to measure exist for text analysis. It can be done more or less automatically using programs such as Wordfish, quantitative text analysis, or it can be done manually through hand coding, qualitative text analysis. The reasons for not using Wordfish or a comparable program are both practical and related to content. These programs require editing of used documents and its applicability on Dutch-language sources has not been convincingly shown (Proksch & Slapin, 2009). More importantly, hand coding provides in-depth knowledge of the content (Klüver, 2009), which is necessary to extract meaning from the data. Agreement or disagreement is not usually expressed in simple yes/no terms but is rather more subtly communicated. Whether the specifically operationalized text analysis used in this thesis is qualitative or quantitative is disputable. On the one hand, in-depth close reading to assess meaning through interpretation, and communicating those meanings descriptively, is a qualitative approach. On the other hand, the results are also presented as frequencies and percentages. On an overarching level, the research is theory-testing, for which quantitative research is commonly used. With this said, the qualitative/quantitative distinction may in general not be that relevant to (the logic of) research design (Toshkov, 2016), rendering a hybrid version of sorts not necessarily problematic.

Second, it is also based on (an adapted form of) citation analysis of parliamentary debates, as a measure of the expert body's influence on political discourse and, indirectly, wider society. Citation analysis works by collecting and categorizing citations, providing an indirect measure of expert influence. Possible is to count how many policy decisions cite expert documents or to measure how central certain expert documents are in a citation network. The indirectness of citation analysis means that the relationship between expert influence and policy decisions is not explored substantially. A citation in and of itself provides little information. Inclusion could be due to background or procedural information or, more normatively, to criticize or outright reject expert advice (Christensen, 2022). These disadvantages of citation analysis are mitigated by adapting the method to parliamentary debates. This limits the risk of inclusion due to background or procedural information. It is also unlikely, due to parliamentarians debating in favor of their political points of view, that WRR reports are referenced to criticize them. Furthermore, the more in-depth approach of text analysis described above counterweighs the disadvantages of citation analysis. The supplementary method of citation analysis of debates is necessary because the government is required to respond to the reports, rendering citation analysis of cabinet reactions moot. Moreover, the government's response says something about the cabinet's level of agreement but not necessarily about how much priority is given by the government to the issue in general or about its wider (societal) impact. Examining parliamentary debates does provide an indication of these points, not in the last place because the cabinet reactions are formally published as letters to the Speaker of the Tweede Kamer.

As denoted by both Christensen (2022) and Klüver (2009), text analysis and citation analysis share certain advantages in general. Both can be applied to a great number of cases through widely available documents and allow for the examination of expert influence on multiple policy decisions through multiple channels of influence.

§3.5: Operationalization

The independent variable of expert advice is operationalized as the described main recommendations expressed in reports for the text analysis approach, while for the citation analysis approach, the reports in general (and thus identical to the cases) are the operationalization of expert advice.

Operationalizing the concept of expert influence through political adoption requires two different approaches for the two different methods of analysis. For the text analysis, adapted from Joosen et al. (2022), the concept of expert influence is mainly divided into five indicators: accepted, partially accepted, not accepted, noted and no response. Accepted denotes full and unequivocal agreement with a recommendation, leading to clear influence. Partially accepted occurs when the government agrees with elements of a recommendation, while being critical of other elements. Noted occurs when the government merely acknowledges a recommendation but does not express a clear view on it. When a recommendation is not even noted, it is classified as no response. Accepted and partially accepted point to either strong or weak(er) influence.

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How to rank the other categories is less obvious. No response generates no traction for a recommendation and does not provide any leads for the government's stance on the matter. Noted at least generates attention for the point in question by its inclusion in the cabinet reaction. The mirror-image of accepted, not accepted, logically denotes full disagreement, indicating a complete lack of influence. It must be mentioned that not accepted may, counterintuitively, lead to more influence beyond the government than noted or no response, because it more readily invites criticism from third parties, such as parliamentarians. However, contained to the cabinet reactions, it clearly points to no (direct) influence.

Table 3.2: Indicators for text analysis

Level of agreement	Degree of influence
Accepted	Strong influence
Partially accepted	Moderate influence
Noted	Weak influence
Not accepted	No influence
No response	No influence

Note. Original general table note. Adapted from "Shaping EU agencies' rulemaking: Interest groups, national regulatory agencies and the European Union Aviation Safety Agency" by R. Joosen et al., 2022, *Comparative European Politics(20),* 421. Copyright 2022 by Springer Nature.

Operationalizing expert influence through political adoption for citation analysis is more straightforward. First, it is recorded whether a report is cited in the debates at all. Then, how many times that has occurred across different debates (measuring variation across multiple years) are also counted. It is further assessed who refers to reports (PM or MP) and, in the latter case, which party that MP belongs to. Influence is of course not simply indicated by the absolute number of references made in a debate, because the same report can be referenced in the same debate several times to call back to the original reference and how often this occurs is arbitrary. Rather, the original reference, and who makes it, is what constitutes a relevant citation.

Table 3.3: Indicators for citation analysis

Type of citation	Type of influence
Reference in year of publication report	Short-term
Reference in year(s) before or after publication report	Long-term
Reference by MP	Beyond government
Reference by MP by party	Beyond government with broad political reach

Finally, the analysis will provide an assessment of the synthesis between the results of both methods of analysis. In other words, the correlation between agreement with the WRR reports by the cabinet and the number of references to those reports is established and presented.

In the comparison between both methods, the degree of congruence between level of agreement found in cabinet reactions on the one hand, and number of citations found in debates on the other, it becomes clear whether, and if so to what extent, the cabinet's level of agreement with reports correlates with the citation of those reports.

§3.6: Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are important concepts when it comes to the quality of scientific research and their relationship to the research of this thesis therefore requires elucidation.

Reliability is about how precise and consistent the measuring of the variables is. This means that, should other researchers use the same or highly similar measurement techniques, the results would also be the same or highly similar (Toshkov, 2016). For the citation analysis, replicability is fairly guaranteed through the binary yes or no results of a report either being cited or not. The same goes for the number of citations per report, the party a specific parliamentarian belongs to and similar factual data. Text analysis is not as insulated from errors in replicability as an objective and precise way of measuring influence. It relies, at least when done by hand, on the researcher's interpretation of the texts' meaning. Still, because levels of agreement are assessed, replicability and thus reliability are made somewhat likelier, given that these categories are relatively easily distinguished, at least when it comes to full agree- or disagreement. Assessing 22 cases reduces the risk of random measurement error. If such an error occurs, the damage is absorbed by the other (well-measured) cases (Toshkov, 2016). The risk of non-random measurement error is mitigated by the fact that the data used was either, in a sense, produced for this study (the cabinet reactions) or by their nature are entirely accurate in their reporting (the stenographs of debates) (Gallop & Weschle, 2019).

Validity concerns generalizability, the extent to which the results are valid for other comparable cases (Van Thiel, 2015). Content analysis through hand coding provides high validity because of the structured and systematic nature of the data (Klüver, 2009). In general, validity is provided because the operationalization of the variables expert advice and expert influence ((recommendations from) WRR reports, cabinet reactions and citations) can readily be applied to the population of 109 WRR reports. Overall validity is further increased by the triangulation of methods. Triangulation leads to more confidence in the validity of the results if they are the same in both instances. Triangulation is especially effective when completely different methods are used, as is the case for the research of this thesis (Toshkov, 2016). In conclusion, citation analysis provides high reliability, while text analysis provides high validity, with validity heightened through triangulation.

Chapter 4: Analysis

§4.1: Empirical results

§4.1.1: Text analysis

Note: the detailed descriptive results of the text analysis can be found in Appendix A.

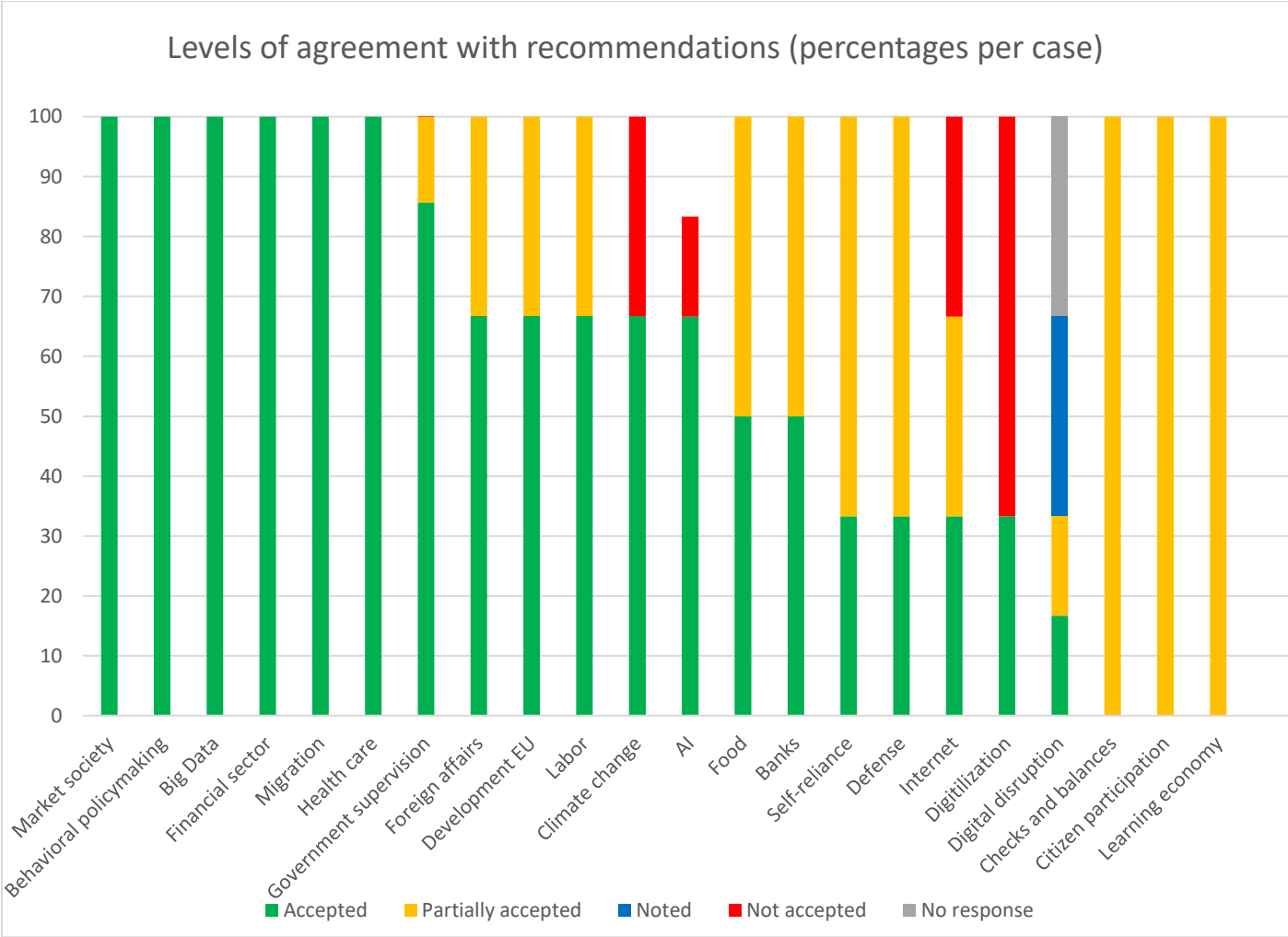*Table 4.1*: Results of the text analysis

Report	Policy issue	Levels of agreement to number of recommendations	Percentages
1/85 (2010)	Foreign affairs	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 66,7% Partially accepted: 33,3%
2/86 (2011)	Digitalization	1. Not accepted 2. Accepted 3. Not accepted	Accepted: 33,3% Not accepted: 66,7%
3/87 (2012)	Market society	1. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
4/88 (2012)	Citizen participation	1. Partially accepted 2. Partially accepted 3. Partially accepted 4. Partially accepted	Partially accepted: 100%
5/89 (2013)	Government supervision	1. Not accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted 4. Accepted 5. Accepted 6. Accepted 7. Accepted	Accepted: 85,7% Not accepted: 14,3%
6/90 (2013)	Learning economy	1. Partially accepted 2. Partially accepted 3. Partially accepted 4. Partially accepted	Partially accepted: 100%

7/91 (2014)	Internal checks and balances of semipublic organizations	1. Partially accepted	Partially accepted: 100%
8/92 (2014)	Behavioral policymaking	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
9/93 (2014)	Food	1. Accepted 2. Partially accepted	Accepted: 50% Partially accepted: 50%
10/94 (2015)	Internet as part of foreign affairs	1. Partially accepted 2. Not accepted 3. Accepted	Accepted: 33,4% Partially accepted: 33,3% Not accepted: 33,3%
11/95 (2016)	Big Data	1. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
12/96 (2016)	Balance between society and financial sector	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
13/97 (2017)	Self-reliance of citizens	1. Accepted 2. Partially accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 33,3% Partially accepted: 66,7%
14/98 (2017)	Defense	1. Partially accepted 2. Accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 33,3% Partially accepted: 66,7%
15/99 (2018)	Development of the EU	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 66,7% Partially accepted:33,3%
16/100 (2019)	Public role of banks	1. Partially accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted 4. Partially accepted	Accepted: 50% Partially accepted: 50%
17/101 (2019)	Digital disruption (security)	1. No response 2. Accepted 3. Noted 4. Noted 5. Partially accepted 6. No response	Accepted: 16,7% Partially accepted: 16,7% Noted: 33,3% No response: 33,3%

18/102 (2020)	Labor	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 66,7% Partially accepted: 33,3%
19/103 (2020)	Migration	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted 4. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
20/104 (2021)	Health care	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
21/105 (2021)	Artificial intelligence	1. Accepted 2. Partially accepted 3. Accepted 4. Accepted 5. Accepted 6. Not accepted	Accepted: 66,6% Partially accepted: 16,7% Not accepted: 16,7%
22/106 (2023)	Climate change	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Not accepted	Accepted: 66,7% Not accepted: 33,3%
Total of all reports		Out of 73 Accepted: 41 Partially accepted: 22 Not accepted: 6 Noted: 2 No response: 2	Accepted: 56,3% Partially accepted: 30,1% Not accepted: 8,2% Noted: 2,7% No response: 2,7%

Sources: WRR (2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2023), Eerste Kamer (2019), Tweede Kamer (2011a; 2011c; 2012a; 2013a; 2014a; 2014b; 2014d; 2015b; 2016a; 2016b; 2016d; 2018a; 2018b; 2018d; 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2022a; 2022b; 2023a)

Figure 4.1

Levels of agreement with recommendations (percentages per case)

Legend: Accepted (green), Partially accepted (yellow), Noted (blue), Not accepted (red), No response (grey)

§4.1.2: Citation analysis

Note: the detailed results of the citation analysis can be found in Appendix B.

Table 4.2: Results of the citation analysis

Report	APB(s)	Reference by PM/MP (party)
6/90 (2013)/ Learning economy	1.2014 2.2015	1. MP Van Ojik (GL) 2.MP Pechtold (D66)
9/93 (2014)/ Food	1.2016	1. PM Rutte
14/98 (2017)/ Defense	1.2020 2.2021 3.2022	1.MP Heerma (CDA) 2.MP Heerma (CDA) 3.MP Heerma (CDA)
15/99 (2018)/ Development of the EU	1.2018	1.MP Van Haersma Buma (CDA)
16/100 (2019)/Public role of banks	1.2019	1.MP Heerma (CDA)
19/103 (2020)/ Migration	1.2018	1.PM Rutte

Sources: Tweede Kamer (2011b; 2012b; 2013b; 2014c; 2015a; 2016c; 2017; 2018b; 2019; 2020c; 2021b; 2022c; 2023b)

§4.2: Analysis

The results of the text analysis show that, overall, acceptance is notably high. For all reports, recommendations were either accepted or partially accepted nearly 90 per cent of the time. In addition, there is not a single case where there was not at least partial acceptance of at least one recommendation. Complete non-acceptance occurred only in six cases. Noted and no response occurred very rarely, and, notably, exclusively for the digital disruption report. The degrees of influence, as coupled earlier to the levels of agreement, therefore point to, depending on the issue, strong or moderate influence of the WRR on the government's policy publications. Even where no response occurred, there was simultaneous weak, moderate, and strong influence through the codes noted, partially accepted, and accepted, respectively. Similarly, in cases of non-acceptance, there was moderate to strong influence from (partial) acceptance of recommendations.

Contrastingly, the citation analysis results show that, out of 22 reports, only six were referred to in the APBs of 2011 through 2023. Of those, four were referenced by MPs. Only in one instance did two different parliamentarians refer to two different reports in different APBs. What is notable is that the CDA party is highly represented, with two other parties, D66 and GL, Moreover, of the thirteen debates, four did not contain any references. These results can be interpreted in conjunction with the types of influence presented earlier. Notably, only one report was referred to in the year of publication, report 99 in 2018.

Reports were usually referred to in years following publication, with the longest period in between both moments occurring for report 98 (2017), which was referred to as recently as 2022. One report was referred to prior to publication, report 103 (2020), in 2018. This generally indicates long-term influence. A few references were made by the PM, but most were done by MPs. The diversity in parties was limited, with references all coming from CDA, with two exceptions.

As far as patterns of variation in the cases are concerned, there are no overly clear groupings of levels of agreement with thematically similar cross-cutting policy issues, as can be seen in figure 4.1. Having said that, a few noteworthy patterns do occur. Issues covering broadly related issues such as market society and learning economy, or behavioral policymaking and citizen participation, do share that recommendations are (partially or fully) accepted. The pattern that stands out the most is that recommendations on digitalization, digital disruption, internet, and AI, also issues in the same 'cross-cutting arena', share relatively high levels of disagreement, in addition to the one instance of recommendations being noted or ignored for digital disruption. When assessing the results of the text analysis for these reports, a preliminary explanation can be formulated. On digitalization, the cabinet points to existing institutions, practices and legislation covering the recommendations. For the report on the internet, the vagueness of a recommendation, and the difficulty of practical application for another, are noted by the cabinet. The report on digital disruption, similar to the digitalization report, leads the cabinet to point to existing policies. Finally, for the AI report, the cabinet rejects specific proposals, such as establishing a coordination center, once again stating that existing institutions suffice. In conclusion, the pattern for 'digital' reports can be explained by the cabinet preferring using existing institutions and policies, in part due to recommendations being unclear or difficult to implement. Given the limited number of references to reports in debates in general, the fact that none of these reports were referred to is unlikely to be causally related to the content of the cabinet reactions. Still, the combination of no references on the one hand, and these issues having the highest levels of non-acceptance, merely being noted and not getting a response on the other, is an interesting blend. In terms of variation over time, there does not appear to be a notable increase or decrease in acceptance levels through the years included in the measurement. This lack of a certain direction of development does not provide pointers for formulating an expectancy on future variations through time.

The findings described above have implications for the hypotheses formulated in the theory chapter. These will now be dealt with in turn.

H1: Expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues, published by permanently established expert advisory bodies, exerts more influence on policy publications and debates than that published by ad hoc counterparts.

From the results of the text analysis, showing very high levels of agreement by the cabinet to the recommendations contained in WRR reports, the expert influence on policy publications is confirmed.

There are no significant differences in the levels of agreement, and thus degrees of influence, between different cross-cutting policy issues. The one notable pattern of reports dealing with digital issues leading to less political adoption can mainly be explained by the cabinet's preference for existing configurations. However, this deviation is cancelled out by the overall levels of agreement and lack of such patterns for other groupings of cross-cutting policy issues. The citation analysis has shown that there is very limited referencing to reports in APBs, indicating similarly limited influence on debates. Given that the APB is the most publicly visible debate of the year and one that concerns general affairs, it would provide a logical venue to refer to the WRRs reports on cross-cutting policy issues. The lack thereof indicates limited political and societal reach of reports. It must still be noted that, contrary to cabinet reactions, citing WRR reports in parliamentary debates occurs on a voluntary basis, giving the cited reports some extra weight.

Based on these conclusions, the first hypothesis is partially rejected. For debates, evidence has been presented that expert influence is limited. However, the hypothesis is mostly accepted as the most important measurement of expert influence, adoption in publications, has been shown to take place to a great extent in most cases. The permanence of the WRR as an expert advisory body thus provides a satisfactory explanation for political adoption of expert advice in policy publications. In terms of political adoption in debates, this permanence does not lead parliamentarians to cite reports, given that this occurs to a very limited extent. This in turn suggests, albeit cautiously so, that the wider impact of reports, politically and in turn societally, is limited.

H2: References to expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues, published by permanently established expert advisory bodies, are not dependent on which political party the referrer belongs to.

The additional hypothesis of references to reports not being dependent on the party of an MP has been rejected. Although the representativeness of the number of references found can be called into question, the preliminary conclusion, based on the available evidence, must be that there is no balanced distribution of parties. Reports have mostly been cited by MPs of CDA, with only two other parties citing a singular report once. This contrast with the findings of Christensen and Serrano Velarde (2019) for the German parliament can be explained by EFI reports having to be discussed in annual plenary sessions. Although this does not create an obligation for parliamentarians to refer to them in other settings, it does create an incentive for doing so by the created visibility of the EFI during the annual debate. The WRR's reports are not required to be discussed annually and plenary. Therefore, Dutch parliamentarians lack the reference-incentive German parliamentarians do possess.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and discussion

§5.1: Conclusion

In this thesis a contribution has been made to closing the dual knowledge gap of expert influence on cross-cutting policy issues per issue and per country. It has added the national context of the Netherlands and has explored variation in issues. This was done on the basis of the main research question, which asked to what extent the expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues, as expressed by the WRR in its reports, influenced the policy publications and debates of the cabinet and parliament of the Netherlands. In preparation for the research, the main theoretical expectation was that this influence does occur, given the permanence of the WRR as an expert advisory body. The research, done through a combination of text analysis and citation analysis, led to an analysis of results. The main hypothesis, based on the described theoretical expectation, was accepted for the cabinet, and rejected for the parliament. A supplementary hypothesis about a balanced distribution of political parties in references to reports was rejected.

The partial acceptance and partial rejection of the main hypothesis provides the answer to the main research question. The sub-question of the cabinet's agreement to reports of the WRR is answered positively, the sub-question of parliamentary references to reports is answered negatively. Therefore, the expert advice on cross-cutting policy issues contained in WRR reports leads to influence on policy publications of the Dutch cabinet, while it does not lead to influence on policy debates of the Dutch parliament. Thus, although clear limits exist, the WRR has expert influence to a great extent.

§5.2: Discussion

Reflecting on the theory employed for this thesis, several considerations present themselves. First, the literature on knowledge regimes proved useful for charting differences between countries, though it was established, aided by literature on cross-cutting policy issues, that institutional entrenchment of expert advisory bodies has explanatory force, as opposed to characteristics of different national knowledge regimes, for when political adoption occurs in different countries. The theory has been enriched by the research of this thesis, through providing evidence that the national context of the Netherlands is in line with that of Germany on the presence of expert influence. This has been done by testing the theoretical expectation that the permanence of expert advisory bodies conditions the influence of experts on cross-cutting policy issues. The literature did not provide leads for explaining the variation in when and why advice on specific cross-cutting policy issues is adopted. This thesis has aided in exploring an explanation for the adoption of advice on cross-cutting issues of digital policies.

In terms of methodological reflection, both text analysis and citation analysis offered advantages and disadvantages. Text analysis proved to be, as expected, dependent on interpretation. The anticipated (relative) ease of distinguishing levels of agreement, increasing reliability, indeed occurred. The close reading provided the in-depth knowledge needed to effectively code agreement and thus degrees of influence. However, because what constitutes the main recommendations had to be distilled from reports on more interpretative grounds than foreseen, replicability suffered somewhat. However, assessing a relatively large number of cases mitigated the risk of misinterpretation. The in-depth reading and hand coding provided a high degree of validity, forming the expectation that the results are valid for other WRR reports as comparable cases. The citation analysis provided an objective measure, offering general insight into the transmission of reports to debates, with very high reliability and virtually error-free replicability. The proposed benefit of triangulation for increasing validity proved weakened by the divergent results of the different methods of analysis. Overall, reliability and validity were, at least on a foundational level, provided by the used methods. The methods generally proved useful for their intended theory-testing purposes.

An unexpected insight the citation analysis has provided is that it may be advisable for the WRR to investigate, and possibly mend, the lack of references to its reports in the APBs. On that note, future research in a similar direction as this thesis could benefit from exploring several routes. Methodologically, interviews and surveys could be conducted to ascertain levels of agreement or other indicators of expert influence, for the WRR or other comparable institutions. This could provide more detailed insight, although these methods suffer from issues of subjectivity, timing, political sensitivity, and social desirability. To further test the conclusions of this thesis, a larger sample of cases of WRR reports could be assessed, method permitting all 109 reports. Alternatively, other WRR publications such as policy briefs and investigations could be included. Instead of increasing the breadth of the research, it could also be deepened. Possible avenues for this include research using one or a few reports, where its usage is traced, from publication, through national governmental institutions, to regional and local governments, and wider society. Media research could be an option for research on societal impact. It could also be traced to concrete policy decisions, although this may prove difficult in practice due to the overarching nature of cross-cutting policy issues and the expert bodies advising on them. Still, this could enable research into explaining variation between the adoption of different cross-cutting policy issues. In a wider international perspective, the results of this thesis could be integrated into comparative research of permanently established national expert advisory bodies in comparable countries, to assess mutual variation and to provide further credibility to the explanatory factors provided in this thesis.

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Appendix A

Table A.1: Detailed results of text analysis

Report/policy issue	Recommendations	Reactions	Levels of agreement	Percentages
1/85 (2010)/ Foreign affairs	1. Make clearer strategic-substantive choices. 2. Strive for excellence in the European arena. 3. Become a facilitating player in a world with increasing non-state actors.	1. The cabinet pledges strategic cooperation in the EU, clearer choices in multilateral organizations, and a more focused approach of bilateral cooperation. 2. The cabinet agrees that it is necessary to strengthen the Dutch economic position in the EU arena and that cooperation with like-minded (specifically Belgium and Luxembourg) member states. 3. The cabinet acknowledges non-state actors as important actors, whose interests must be weighed in policymaking, However, it is added that care must be taken to not become overly facilitative and to preserve the international legal order.	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 66,6% Partially accepted: 33,3%
2/86 (2011)/ Digitalization	1. Balance driving, anchoring and procedural principles in explicit, testable, and publicly accountable ways. 2. Be aware of the risks of digitalization for the creation, enrichment, and networking of information, in addition to its usage for	1. The cabinet agrees in principle but points out that existing legislation and practices already cover this recommendation. 2. The cabinet agrees and presents concrete plans for implementation, such as internal checks and	1. Not accepted 2. Accepted 3. Not accepted	Accepted: 33,3% Not accepted: 66,6%

	preventive and proactive policies. 3. Institute permanent authorities for the state of information, transparency, and accountability.	awareness campaigns. 3. The government rejects these proposals, on the grounds of integrating the underlying needs for such institutions in existing institutions and legislation		
3/87 (2012)/ Market society	1. Involve other societal parties in public affairs, while retaining governmental control, to solve issues with the security of public interests caused by market forces.	1. The cabinet acknowledges the noted complexity and intends to use an integral framework for this, including all relevant quality norms and tests.	1. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
4/88 (2012)/ Citizen participation	1. Create and encourage opposition by improving access to data and broadening governmental gathering of information 2. Increase influence of everyday experiences through institutionalization of public interests in cooperative partnerships. 3. Stimulate societal traffic through stimulation of counter-binding in public spaces and providing frontline workers with space to unite. 4. Create pillars through establishing new connections and through guaranteeing solidarity between governments and other organizations.	The cabinet mentions these recommendations and implicitly partially agrees with them by acknowledging it can create optimal conditions but should not interfere too much. It does not respond to the recommendations specifically.	1. Partially accepted 2. Partially accepted 3. Partially accepted 4. Partially accepted	Partially accepted: 100%
5/89 (2013)/ Government supervision	1. Recalibrate the national vision on supervision and supporting departmental visions.	1. The cabinet rejects this recommendation on the basis that the 2005 vision is still up to date.	1. Not accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted 4. Accepted 5. Accepted	Accepted: 85,7% Not accepted: 14,3%

	2. Stimulate a yield-orientated culture through strengthening the scientific basis for supervision. 3. Stimulate usage of forcefield-analyses when dealing with matters of creating, shaping, or exercising government supervision. 4. Strengthen the reflection capacities of national supervisors. 5. Strengthen the impartial and independent positioning of national supervisors. 6. Ensure supervisors' public accountability on results and instruments. 7. Ensure a realistic ratio between expected tasks and available capacities of supervisors.	2. The cabinet agrees and will emphasize scientific insights more in the future. 3. The cabinet agrees and will stimulate departments to employ such analyses. 4. The cabinet agrees and will improve on this point through periodic talks. 5. The cabinet agrees and will evaluate existing legislation following an ongoing investigation. 6. The cabinet agrees and stresses the need for proper accountability. 7. The cabinet agrees and will pay attention to this in future evaluations of supervisors.	6. Accepted 7. Accepted	
6/90 (2013)/ Learning economy	1. Improve the circulation of knowledge by making usage of existing knowledge more effective. 2. Improve education by differentiation and quality improvements in educational institutions. 3. Improve and stimulate schooling opportunities of working people. 4. Make institutions more responsive through regional entrenchment, national institutional improvements, and an international strategy.	The cabinet states that it agrees with the WRR's recommendations in broad terms but does not further specify this, instead detailing its own vision on the state and future of the Dutch economy. Therefore, partially accepted is assigned.	1. Partially accepted 2. Partially accepted 3. Partially accepted 4. Partially accepted	Partially accepted: 100%
7/91 (2014)/ Internal checks and balances of	1. Consider the development of a governance framework for norms of internal governance in the	1. The cabinet agrees that there is a role for the government to exert general supervision but does	1. Partially accepted	Partially accepted: 100%

semipublic organizations	semipublic sector, should self-regulation not prove sufficient.	not want to get involved too much, leaving the initiative with semipublic organizations.		
8/92 (2014)/ Behavioral policymaking	1. Anchor behavioral science perspectives intradepartmentally. 2. Anchor behavioral science perspectives interdepartmentally. 3. Anchor behavioral science perspectives through checks and balances in legislation and policy.	1. The cabinet agrees and points out how departments are already organizing behavioral expertise 2. The cabinet agrees, knowledge and experiences are shared in interdepartmental networks. 3. The cabinet agrees that behavioral science can be used in policymaking and in (tax) legislation.	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
9/93 (2014)/ Food	1. Make food policy more concrete, taking into account diverting values, changing power relationships, and coherence of production, processing, distribution and consumption. 2. Strengthen resilience of policy by stimulating variety, learning capacities and sustainable management of resources.	1.The cabinet agrees and presents integral policy initiatives, from producers to consumers, while also acknowledging shifting power dimensions. 2. The cabinet acknowledges the need for sustainable management of resources but does not pay attention to variety or learning capacities.	1. Accepted 2. Partially accepted	Accepted: 50% Partially accepted: 50%
10/94 (2015)/ Internet as part of foreign affairs	1. Stimulate the codification of the principle that central protocols and infrastructure of the internet are public goods, free from government interference. 2. Stimulate a clearer separation of different forms of internet security nationally and internationally.	1. The cabinet agrees in principle but finds the WRR's recommendation too vague. 2. The cabinet disagrees because separating domains is often difficult or unwanted in practice. 3. The cabinet states it operates fully within this recommendation and	1. Partially accepted 2. Not accepted 3. Accepted	Accepted: 33,3% Partially accepted: 33,3% Accepted: 33,3%

	3. Broaden the diplomatic work field as part of the agenda for internet diplomacy.	will strengthen it further through several initiatives, including inviting more countries to international discussions.		
11/95 (2016)/ Big Data	1. Broaden the regulatory framework for Big Data from regulation of the collection of data to include the regulation of the analysis and use of data, to prevent Big Data changing from a societal aid to risk.	1. The cabinet agrees and states it will strengthen existing safeguards.	1. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
12/96 (2016)/ Balance between society and financial sector	1. Lessen the dependence of society on the financial sector. 2. Formulate strong policies to increase the financial sector's robustness. 3. Strengthen political involvement in the financial sector.	1. The cabinet agrees and points to stricter policies for, for instance, housing associations. 2. The cabinet agrees and points to measures already taken, such as increased capital ratios. 3.The cabinet agrees, pointing out involvement should not be contained to incidents.	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
13/97 (2017)/ Self-reliance of citizens	1. Take citizens' mental capacities into account in formulating policies, including researching reduction of mental toll of stressful life events 2. Initiate a choice architecture, based on realistic image of citizens: reduce choice pressure, limit freedom of choice regarding products such as insurances and pensions. 3. Initiate early and personal contacts with citizens during the policy formulation stage, in	1. The cabinet agrees and will initiate a test of citizen capacity to act. It will also act on the life events debt, divorce and missing out on income support. 2. The cabinet stresses the importance of freedom of choice, especially for insurances and pensions. It does agree choice architectures must be created, including	1. Accepted 2. Partially accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 33,3% Partially accepted: 66,7%

	order to differentiate between lack of will and lack of capability, through a knowledge center.	through offering default options. 3. The cabinet agrees generally but finds the recommendation too generic. It will not establish a knowledge center, instead strengthening the knowledge of existing departments.		
14/98 (2017)/ Defense	1. Organize defense policy in a manner adapted to the worsened security situation in the Netherlands, including through merging the two security strategies, founding a general council for security, and founding a central planning bureau for security. 2. Provide a leading role in security policy for constitutional and alliance-based obligations, including NATO and EU membership. 3. Increase focus and funding for the military, including fulfilling the NATO norm by 2024	1. The cabinet agrees that the security situation has worsened, and the strategy-merging and council-founding recommendations are (indirectly) followed. The cabinet does not wish to establish a planning bureau. 2. The cabinet expresses full agreement. 3. The cabinet agrees with the importance of the NATO norm but cannot realistically reach it by 2024.	1. Partially accepted 2. Accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 33,3% Partially accepted: 66,7%
15/99 (2018)/ Development of the EU	1. Explore options for variation between member states of the EU regarding the internal market. 2. Explore options for variation between member states of the EU regarding the EMU 3. Explore options for variation between member states of the EU regarding asylum, migration, and border controls	1. The cabinet is open to exploring this option with no reservations mentioned. 2. The cabinet confirms the complexity of this option but, barring a few minor points, agrees with it in general. 3. The cabinet agrees in general, but heavily disagrees with providing much	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 66,7% Partially accepted:33,3%

		flexibility on states being able to exchange relocations of asylum seekers.		
16/100 (2019)/ Public role of banks	1. Ensure diversity in the financial sector by offering alternatives in payment and saving, and by supporting challengers of large banks. 2. Tame excessive growth of debt by tackling the fiscal preference of debt and by integrating macroprudential thought in policy. 3. Be more prepared for the next crisis by accepting losses and exploring legislative options. 4. Anchor the public role of banks by organizing them differently and by creating civilian, NGO, or political counterweights.	1. The cabinet agrees yet signals friction between increased diversity and legal regulations banks must comply with. 2. The cabinet agrees and has formulated policy initiatives. 3. The cabinet agrees. 4. The cabinet states organization models are primarily for the private sector. It agrees to create civilian counterweights.	1. Partially accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted 4. Partially accepted	Accepted: 50% Partially accepted: 50%
17/101 (2019)/ Digital disruption (security)	1. Initiate a public debate on the preparedness of Dutch society for digital disruption. 2. Draft an imaging of cyberdependencies of vital processes. 3. Include chains and networks supporting vital infrastructure in policy. 4. Create a legal ground for digital auxiliary troops. 5. Stimulate research into a Dutch or European cyberpool for financial coverage of damages of digital disruption. 6. Improve collective learning by	1. No response 2. The cabinet agrees and provides institutions to undertake this. 3. Noted 4. Noted 5. The cabinet generally agrees but states that existing insurance policies increasingly provide coverage, rendering new legal measures unnecessary. 6. No response	1. No response 2. Accepted 3. Noted 4. Noted 5. Partially accepted 6. No response	Accepted: 16,7% Partially accepted: 16,7% Noted: 33,3% No response: 33,3%

	systematically making incident data available internationally.			
18/102 (2020)/ Labor	1. Ensure workers' grip on money through policies on fair competition and affordable insurance. 2. Ensure workers' grip on work through programmatically promoting best practices within companies. 3. Ensure workers' grip on life through a balance of work and home life.	1. The cabinet agrees and points to overlap with futureproof commission rules 2. The cabinet agrees 3. the cabinet agrees but points to this balance primarily being a private matter.	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Partially accepted	Accepted: 66,7% Partially accepted: 33,3%
19/103 (2020)/ Migration	1. Improve the reception and integration of migrants through municipal services. 2. Stimulate social cohesion by providing clear rules, intercultural competences, and strong local physical and social infrastructures. 3.Invest in labor market policies preventing discrimination with increased municipal direction. 4. Subject migration policy to social cohesion and labor participation, taking into account societal costs and incorporation capacity.	1. The cabinet agrees and points to several ongoing initiatives. 2. The cabinet agrees and points to several ongoing initiatives. 3. The cabinet agrees and points to several ongoing initiatives. 4. The cabinet agrees and points to several ongoing initiatives.	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted 4. Accepted	Accepted: 100%
20/104 (2021)/ Health care	1. Strengthen societal support for sharper decisions on scarcity and care for young, old, and mentally ill people. 2. Make sharper political choices for sustainable care, through evaluation, budgeting, quality checks, prevention, and personnel retention. 3. Clearly demarcate collective care by	1. The cabinet agrees on the need for such choices for these target groups. 2. The cabinet agrees and sees the urgency of these choices. 3. The cabinet agrees that collective care must remain guaranteed and costs assessments are thus needed.	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Accepted	Accepted: 100%

	assessing costs effectiveness broadly.			
21/105 (2021)/ Artificial intelligence	1. Demystify AI by educating the public, including through algorithm-registers. 2. Contextualize AI by creating a Dutch AI identity and by improving users' critical skills. 3. Provide engagement with AI by increasing societal groups' capacity for handling it. 4. Regulate AI by creating a broad legislative agenda to track and curtail developments. 5. Internationalize AI by establishing an EU AI diplomacy and defense capacities. 6. Coordinate AI by building a coordination center with a ministerial sub-council.	1. The cabinet agrees and refers to several ongoing initiatives, including an algorithm-register. 2. The cabinet feels a Dutch AI identity is unnecessary but agrees that improving users' skills is useful. 3. The cabinet agrees and refers to several ongoing initiatives. 4. The cabinet agrees that this broad approach is necessary. 5. The cabinet agrees and points to several international initiatives and visits that have been or will be organized. 6.The cabinet disagrees as it intends to provide the Commission Digitalization with this coordinating role.	1. Accepted 2. Partially accepted 3. Accepted 4. Accepted 5. Accepted 6. Not accepted	Accepted: 66,6% Partially accepted: 16,7% Not accepted: 16,7%
22/106 (2023)/ Climate change	1. Treat climate policy as a matter of distributive justice. 2. Organize early and precise attention for distributive justice and explicitly substantiate policy choices. 3. Ensure that attention for distributive justice is entrenched in the policy process.	1. The cabinet agrees, and already integrates this principle in ongoing debates, pledging to continue to do so. 2. The cabinet agrees that distributive justice is still implicit too often. 3. The cabinet disagrees, as it states that the incumbent Climate Act already offers sufficient guarantees for this recommendation.	1. Accepted 2. Accepted 3. Not accepted	Accepted: 66,7% Not accepted: 33,3%
Total of all reports			Out of 73 Accepted: 41	Accepted: 56,3%

			Partially accepted: 22 Not accepted: 6 Noted: 2 No response: 2	Partially accepted: 30,1% Not accepted: 8,2% Noted: 2,7% No response: 2,7%
		51		

Sources: WRR (2010; 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2023), Eerste Kamer (2019), Tweede Kamer (2011a; 2011c; 2012a; 2013a; 2014a; 2014b; 2014d; 2015b; 2016a; 2016b; 2016d; 2018a; 2018b; 2018d; 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2022a; 2022b; 2023a)

Appendix B

Table A.2: Detailed results of citation analysis

APB	Reference	By	Relevant
2011	-		-
2012	-		-
2013	-		-
2014	1. Reference to investigation 2. General reference to WRR 3. Reference to investigation 4. Reference to report 90	1. MP Slob (CU) 2. PM Rutte 3. MP Van der Staaij (SGP) 4. MP Van Ojik (GL)	1. No 2. No 3. No 4. Yes
2015	1. Reference to report 90 2. Reference to investigation	1. MP Pechtold (D66) 2. MP Van der Staaij (SGP)	1. Yes 2. No
2016	1. Reference to report 93	1. PM Rutte	1. Yes
2017	-	-	-
2018	1. Reference to report 99 2. Reference to report 103	1. MP Van Haersma Buma (CDA) 2. PM Rutte	1. Yes 2. Yes
2019	1. Reference to report 100	1. MP Heerma (CDA)	1. Yes
2020	1. Reference to report 98	1. MP Heerma (CDA)	1. Yes
2021	1. Reference to report 98 2. General reference to WRR	1. MP Heerma (CDA) 2. PM Rutte	1. Yes 2. No
2022	1. Reference to report 98 2. Reference to policy brief 3. General reference to WRR	1. MP Heerma (CDA) 2. PM Rutte 3. PM Rutte	1. Yes 2. No 3. No
2023	1. Reference to report 107 (not in case selection)	1. MP Bontenbal (CDA)	1. No

Sources: Tweede Kamer (2011b; 2012b; 2013b; 2014c; 2015a; 2016c; 2017; 2018b; 2019; 2020c; 2021b; 2022c; 2023b)