Explaining Capital Punishment Support in an Abolitionist Country: The Case of the Netherlands

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A substantial minority (35%) of the Dutch population is in favor of capital punishment. In this paper, it is argued that in a staunchly abolitionist country such as The Netherlands, the existence and perseverance of such support can be better understood and explained by conceiving of capital punishment support in attitudinal terms as part of a law and order syndrome. Death penalty attitudes are analyzed by means of hierarchic logistic regression analysis. It is shown that support can be modeled quite well, partly in terms of general attitudes to criminal justice, partly in terms of political and sociodemographic parameters. Within the criminal justice attitudes complex, more support is found among those endorsing harsh treatment of offenders, those willing to grant far-reaching powers to justice authorities, those believing that the government is not delivering on the topic of crime fighting, and those who are concerned about the level of crime. Within the political context, more support is enlisted among people who abstain from voting and those who vote at either extreme of the political spectrum as opposed to central parties' supporters. In sociodemographic segments it is the younger and poorly educated who are the strongest supporters of capital punishment. It is suggested that endorsing capital punishment can be better understood as an expressive act, displaying dissatisfaction with judicial and political elites in the country.

KEY WORDS: capital punishment support; criminal justice attitudes; The Netherlands.

In 2001, the number of abolitionist countries in the world totaled 111 (abolitionist either in law or in practice), whereas 84 countries continued to endorse capital punishment (Amnesty International, 2002).⁵ In the same year, 90% of all known executions took place in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. In the

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⁵ Abolitionist for all crimes: 74; abolitionist for ordinary crimes only: 15; abolitionist in practice: 22. According to Hood (2001) these numbers were in December 2000: 76 (abolitionist for all crimes), 11 (abolitionist for ordinary crimes), 36 (de facto abolitionist), and 71 (retentionist).

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United States alone, 15 states and the Federal Government executed 66 prisoners in 2001 (Snell & Maruschak, 2002).

In 1860 Johan Nathan was sentenced to death for killing his mother-in-law. He was the last person to be executed in The Netherlands for committing a crime during peace time (Van der List, 2001). Ten years later the death penalty was abolished for crimes committed in peace time. However, in military law the death penalty persisted. After World War II, 40 persons were executed, the last on March 21, 1952. In 1983 the death penalty was formally abolished in The Netherlands for all crimes, war crimes included.

Public attitude toward the death penalty is more favorable in retentionist than in abolitionist countries: overall 62 against 42% (Human Development Report Office, 1999). Since 1980 between 31 and 44% of the Dutch population continues to be in favor of the death penalty (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 1999), with one exceptional year: in 1996 the percentage suddenly rose to 52 (Van Koppen, Hessing, & De Poot, 2002). This sudden rise in support was explained by a gruesome series of killings in neighboring country Belgium (by a man named Dutroux), which was extensively covered in the Dutch media. The 1996 survey was administered at the height of media coverage and public outrage over this Dutroux case (Van Koppen et al., 2002). In our study (data collected in 2001), 35% of the population answered "in favor" to the question: "Are you personally in favor of or against the death penalty?"

Although the penal climate as such is a recurring theme in Dutch Parliament, and many parties clamor for harsher punishment, the death penalty is not on the public agenda. None of the political parties (except for one minor party) mention the death penalty at all in their political programs, let alone express a desire to reintroduce it. The lack of public debate is remarkable, as a substantial minority of the Dutch remains in favor of the death penalty. A topic such as capital punishment that has no coverage in public debate may be expected to extinguish after some time. Obviously, this is not the case. Moreover, among the younger generations we observe a substantial proportion of death penalty supporters (cf. Van Koppen, 1997).

Because of social, political, and cultural circumstances, reintroduction of the death penalty in The Netherlands, as well as in most other western European countries that have abandoned capital punishment, is believed to be highly unlikely (Van Koppen et al., 2002). The pool of abolitionist countries continues to expand, partly because of the indirect influence of the European Convention on Human Rights. Because this treaty supersedes national law, (re-)introducing or retaining (for candidate members) the death penalty would be incompatible with EU membership and result in exclusion from the European political and economic arena. For example, only recently, the Turkish parliament voted in favor of abolition of the death penalty, which is generally believed to be a gesture toward the European Union that Turkey is now ready and eligible to enter the EU. Regardless of the fact that in most European countries capital punishment is no longer considered to be a topic of serious political debate, it continues to draw the attention of researchers. Moreover, even in abolitionist countries, polls show the public to retain articulated opinions on the matter. For instance, in The Netherlands, polls consistently show about 85% of the public to have an articulated attitude on the subject (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 1999).

Although death penalty support in The Netherlands is polled on a regular bases, there have been no attempts to explain these attitudes using a multivariate approach. Moreover, there is no discussion on what these attitudes mean or imply. It is our intention in this paper to fill this gap. In part drawing on evidence from abroad, we will construct and subsequently test a theoretically informed hierarchical logistic regression model of capital punishment attitudes, using data collected in a nation-wide survey in The Netherlands. As such we aim to distinguish an interpretable pattern that is helpful in understanding the existence and perseverance of Dutch prodeath penalty attitudes. Before doing so, however, we will briefly discuss the complex meaning of death penalty attitudes and their measurement.

ATTITUDES TOWARD CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

In this paper we analyze peoples' answers to the question: "Are you personally in favor of or against the death penalty?" Such answers, we argue, should not merely be interpreted as opinions on the concrete issue of capital punishment as such. Better understanding of responses to this question may be attained by viewing them as statements of attitude. According to Allport's classic definition, an attitude is "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" (Allport, 1935, p. 810). As such capital punishment support may be understood, in a broader sense, as reflecting a person's evaluation of a complex of criminal-justice-related issues. This conception of capital punishment support is in line with previous studies on the subject. Tyler and Weber (1982) stressed that expressed support for capital punishment should primarily be conceived of as a symbolic attitude, representing people's more basic political-social values (see also, Ellsworth & Ross, 1983; Jurow, 1971). On a similar line of reasoning, Bowers (1993) argued that support expressed in polls is not necessarily a deep-seated or strongly held commitment to capital punishment, but may reflect a general desire for harsh(er) punishment (see also, Rankin, 1979; Stinchcombe et al., 1980). Indeed, Warr and Stafford (1984) found that support for capital punishment is closely related to a retributive penal attitude, as did Bohm, Clark, and Aveni (1991). More generally, public attitudes toward capital punishment should be seen as indicative for people's social norms of justice (Jurow, 1971; Warr & Stafford, 1984). As such, in addition to opinion on the concrete issue, these attitudes may further represent a deeper rooted meaning. As Ellsworth and Ross put it, "The attitude is a matter of ideological selfimage; its function is to define the person and his or her general stance in regard to criminal justice" (Ellswerth & Ross, 1983, p. 168; italics added). Put differently, death penalty support may be viewed as part of a law and order syndrome (Fox, Radelet, & Bonsteel, 1990-91; Rankin, 1979).

Conceiving of death penalty support in attitudinal terms, as part of a "law and order syndrome," may in fact be crucial for understanding the existence and perseverance of support in an abolitionist country such as The Netherlands. To what degree then can capital punishment attitudes be explained in terms of criminal-justice-related

attitudes as compared to other (nonattitudinal) characteristics of respondents? Our methodology (cf. below) will allow us to answer this question.

CAUTIONARY NOTES ON MEASUREMENT OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT SUPPORT

Extensive research on capital punishment attitudes has shown public opinion and informed opinion to be two different things (cf. Bohm et al., 1991; Bohm, Vogel, & Maistro, 1993; Ellsworth & Ross, 1983; Sarat & Vidmar, 1976; Vidmar & Dittenhoffer, 1981). When conceived of as an indicator of an individual's general stance to criminal justice, it nevertheless remains a highly interesting and valuable characteristic to measure. However, it has been argued that measurement of this particular type of public opinion is especially sensitive to specific historic influences (e.g., a temporary effect of an especially horrendous and widely publicized murder case), question wording and framing influences within the survey (cf. Bohm et al., 1991; Ellsworth & Ross, 1983; Fox et al., 1990-91; Hood, 1996; Jurow, 1971; Vidmar & Ellsworth, 1974). Moreover, Radelet and Akers (1996) observed that in most opinion polls respondents are not given alternatives to capital punishment. When this is done, support for the death penalty decreases substantively (cf. Bowers, 1993; Fox et al., 1990-91). On July 10, 1988, the Miami Herald reported a survey of the Field Institute demonstrating that in 1990, 82% approved in principle of the death penalty, but when asked to choose between the death penalty and life imprisonment plus restitution, only a minority (26%) continued to favor the death penalty (Bedau, 1992).

A further methodological note relates to single- versus multiple-item measurement of attitudes. Although public opinion on capital punishment is typically polled using a single item (for notable exceptions, see Bohm et al., 1991; Jurow, 1971; Thurstone, 1932; Tyler & Weber, 1982), the methodological limitations of this type of measurement are widely recognized (cf. McIver & Carmines, 1981; Nunnally, 1981). Such single general questions, in themselves, have limited capacity to provide detailed and comprehensive information on these attitudes (Ellsworth & Ross, 1983; Vidmar & Ellsworth, 1974).

As such, it is important to realize that answers to a single question probing capital punishment support have limited value *in absolute terms*. However, within the context of explanatory multivariate analysis, the primary focus is to relate the differences between answers to increases or decreases in the levels of other (explanatory) variables. Furthermore, consistent and unchanged single-item measurement may be useful for trend analysis (Zeisel & Gallup, 1989).

A HIERARCHICAL EXPLANATORY MODEL OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT ATTITUDES

As noted above, the absence of multivariate explanatory research to Dutch capital punishment attitudes is remarkable. We aim to fill this gap using a blockwise hierarchical logistic regression model of capital punishment attitudes. Our conception of

the dependent variable dictates a strict hierarchy among the blocks. Because we conceive of capital punishment support as *primarily* part of a law and order syndrome (see above), attitudinal characteristics that relate to different aspects of criminal justice need to be included as first block in the analysis. The variance subsequently left unaccounted for is then available for a second general block including variables not directly connected to criminal justice but regularly suggested in the literature as predictors of death penalty attitudes. These involve sociodemographic and political variables. Apart from evaluating the extent to which total variance in Dutch capital punishment attitudes can be explained, our model enables us to determine the relative importance of the two theoretically distinctive blocks of variables.

Within the two general blocks of our hierarchical model, informed choices needed to be made regarding the specific predictors to incorporate. Below, we describe the blocks and state the rationale for incorporating each concrete variable.

BLOCK I: CRIMINAL JUSTICE ATTITUDES

We have identified four subgroups of criminal justice related attitudes that we consider relevant for explaining capital punishment support in the current context: (i) harsh treatment penal attitude; (ii) readiness to give justice authorities farreaching powers for law enforcement; (iii) concerns and evaluation of government performance in combating crime; and (iv) tolerance of deviance.

Subblock I-i: Harsh Treatment Penal Attitude

There is strong empirical evidence that preference for goals of punishment that are associated with harsh treatment of offenders, is positively correlated with support for capital punishment (cf. Warr & Stafford, 1984). These goals comprise incapacitation, general deterrence, and desert or retribution. Although in the research community a general deterrent effect of capital punishment is frequently seriously questioned (e.g., Cheatwood, 1993; Hood, 1996; Waldo, 1981, for a comprehensive overview of capital punishment deterrence research), and some even demonstrate a brutalizing effect of executions (e.g., Bowers & Pierce, 1988; Cochran & Chamlin, 2000), this does not appear to disturb the public. One of the reasons for this is that public opinion on capital punishment is not necessarily informed opinion (see above). In the 1986 Gallup poll, two thirds of all respondents believed the death penalty to be an effective deterrent (Zeisel & Gallup, 1989). Furthermore, as a statement to define one's general position with regard to criminal justice, such information may simply be considered irrelevant.

The goals of punishment associated with harsh treatment originate from different moral legal approaches, i.e., desert stems from retributivism, and incapacitation and deterrence from utilitarianism (cf. De Keijser, 2000; Duff & Garland, 1994; Von Hirsch, 1993; Walker, 1991). Despite philosophical demarcations, De Keijser (2000) and De Keijser, Van der Leeden, and Jackson (2002) have empirically shown these particular penal attitudes to be consistently representative of a more general underlying dimension that can be labeled "harsh treatment."

Subblock I-ii: Readiness to Accept Far-Reaching Measures

Peoples' readiness to accept and embrace intrusive government law enforcement measures can be conceived of as indicative for the lengths that they are prepared to go to prevent and combat crime. Moreover, it represents confidence in the effectiveness of stiff government action with regard to crime and law enforcement. As such, willingness to accept far-reaching government intervention may facilitate a pro death penalty attitude.

Subblock I-iii: Concerns: Perceptions of Crime and Law Enforcement

Ellsworth and Ross (1983) argue that emotional motives are important contributors to support for capital punishment. These emotional factors may have much to do with fear and dissatisfaction (Zeisel & Gallup, 1989). We believe that fear of crime, overestimation of crime levels, and dissatisfaction with government law enforcement policies, form the emotional feeding ground for pro capital punishment attitudes. The little evidence there is in The Netherlands supports the idea that people who perceive the level of crime in The Netherlands as high or extremely high, are more likely to endorse the death penalty (cf. Van Koppen, 1997). Support for capital punishment may be seen as an instrumental punitive response to concerns for crime and law enforcement. Tyler and Weber (1982) found some support for favoring the death penalty as a result of instrumental crime-related concerns.

Subblock I-iv: Tolerance of Deviance

The more a person tolerates or accepts the fact that deviance in modern society is a fact of life, the less likely he or she is to endorse extreme sanctions. On the other hand, the stronger a person's belief in law and order and the more he or she is intolerant of deviance, the likelier this person may be expected to be in favor of capital punishment.⁶

Block II: Political and Sociodemographic Determinants

The variance remaining unaccounted for after the criminal justice attitudes have been entered in the model is available for this second block of predictors. This block includes sociodemographic and political variates that are not directly related to criminal justice, but have time and again been shown in empirical research to be significant in explaining capital punishment attitudes. In our model we investigate these predictors in two subgroups: (i) political preference and (ii) sociodemographic characteristics.

Subblock II-i: Political Preference

There is strong and abundant evidence that political preference is an important factor in explaining penal attitudes (Bohm et al., 1993; Ellsworth & Ross, 1983; Fox

⁶Indeed, attitudes on closely related concepts as authoritarian legal attitudes have been shown to be important determinants for preferring harsh sentences (Jurow, 1971).

et al., 1990–91; Jurow, 1971; Tyler & Weber, 1982; Zeisel & Gallup, 1989). Consistently, research (almost exclusively carried out in the United States) shows Republicans and Conservatives to be much more in favor of capital punishment than Democrats, Liberals, and moderates (Fox et al., 1990–91).

Indeed, as argued above, attitudes toward capital punishment may be conceived of as an expression of ideological self-image and basic political–social values. It should, however, be kept in mind that political preference is not an autonomous, inborn characteristic. It is an expression of the political and social outlook that a person has, resulting from a number of other influences, some of which are directly measurable, whilst it functions as a catch-all for a myriad of other more volatile and elusive personal characteristics. Therefore, and because our model is not aimed at or tailored to explaining political preference, we enter this variable at the second stage of the model, representing in this way other societal preferences than those already expressed through attitudes to criminal justice in general.

Subblock II-ii: Sociodemographic Characteristics

A myriad of social and demographic characteristics have been linked to penal attitudes in general and attitudes toward the death penalty in particular. These characteristics are concrete, and represent factual information about the person. In previous research on capital punishment attitudes, these characteristics particularly include sex, age, community size, socioeconomic status, education, and religious denomination (cf. Ellsworth & Ross, 1983; Fox et al., 1990–91; Tyler & Weber, 1982; Zeisel & Gallup, 1989). As such, these variables will be included in this block.

SAMPLE

Data were obtained from the *Telepanel* of The Netherlands Institute for Political Opinion and Market research (NIPO). The *Telepanel* (NIPO, 2002) is a representative panel of some 1,000 households, comprising 2,000 individuals over 15-years old. Questionnaires are administered to members of the panel using e-mail. The panel has proven to be very stable (panel attrition is less than 10% of households per year), hence it is possible to combine questions from different waves for the same persons. In the present analysis we are combining questions from four different waves, all administered in the year 2000. Combining the four waves yielded a random subset of 520 members of the panel aged 18 years and older.

MEASURES

Dependent Variable

Capital punishment attitude (CAPPUN)⁷ was measured using the following straightforward question:

"Are you personally in favor of or against the death penalty?,"

⁷Acronyms between brackets will be used throughout the paper to refer to specific variables.

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for which the respondent could choose from three answers: *in favor of-against-don't know*.

Almost half of all respondents (49%) opposed the death penalty, one in three (35%) is in favor, whereas one in six is undecided (17%). Acknowledging the previously discussed limitations of such single item measurement of capital punishment support, it is important to note that these percentages are consistent with earlier measurements of Dutch capital punishment support (cf. Introduction section). Moreover, our interest here is not so much in interpreting these percentages in absolute terms, but to put them in a multivariate explanatory perspective.

BLOCK I: CRIMINAL-JUSTICE RELATED-ATTITUDES

Block I-i: Harsh Treatment Penal Attitude

In autumn 2000 the Telepanel administered a scale previously and extensively validated by De Keijser (2000); and De Keijser et al. (2002) addressing penal attitudes. It is a 25-item scale designed to assess preferences for various goals of punishment in penal context. Here we use a 17-item subscale measuring people's preference for harsh treatment of offenders (HARSH). It combines items that relate to desert, incapacitation and deterrence, and displays good internal consistency.⁸ The scale has a Cronbach's α of 0.87 in the present sample, and a mean score of 3.95 (on a scale from 1, *absolutely reject*, to 5, *absolutely endorse*) with a standard deviation of 0.48.

Block I-ii: Readiness to Accept Far-Reaching Measures

The debate on the acceptability of closer supervision and control by police and justice authorities on citizens is rather actual in The Netherlands. In this block we include questions posed in 2000 to the members of the panel (cf. Elffers, 2000) on three such important topics: Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), DNA-registration, and public availability of a database of released sexual delinquents. All of these questions were preceded by a short description of what CCTV, DNA, and sexual criminal databases consist of. Respondents were subsequently asked:

[CCTV] It is my opinion that such CCTV should be applied:

not at all (3%); only where circumstances demand it (53%); as much as possible (44%).

[DNA] It is my opinion that a DNA data bank should be constructed:

I am against such DNA banks (6%); I endorse such data banks, with data of all Dutchmen, all Dutchmen criminally prosecuted even if not convicted, all convicted for a 4-year sentence at least (together 94%).

[DATABASE] It is my opinion that a database of sexual delinquents should be made available:

not at all (7%); only accessible for police (79%); accessible for all citizens (14%).

⁸To illustrate, two such items are "Heavy sentences increase the credibility of the criminal justice system" and "Punishment is deserved suffering."

Although all three items cover heated debates in The Netherlands on people's readiness to accept closer supervision and control by police and justice authorities, they may be considered to be conceptually distinct. We therefore decided to introduce them separately within this subblock in the analysis.

Block I-iii: Concerns: Perceptions of Crime and Law Enforcement

Concerns, i.e. perceptions of crime and law enforcement are usually measured using straightforward items on peoples' general concerns on the crime problem, perceptions of increases or decreases in the volume of crime, and the rating of authorities' achievement in fighting crime (cf. Houts and Kassab, 1997; Mirrlees-Black, 2001; Tyler and Weber, 1982). In 2000, we presented members of the panel the following three questions:

[CONCERN] How concerned are you personally about the level of crime in The Netherlands?

Four-point scale dichotomized: not concerned (10%), concerned (90%).

- [GROWTH] What is your perception of the development in crime over the past 5 years? Five-point scale trichotomized: strongly increased (56%), somewhat increased (36%), stayed the same or decreased (8%).
- [GOODJOB] Would you say that the government is doing a good job in fighting crime?

Four-point scale dichotomized: bad job (76%), good job (24%).

We introduced these straightforward variables separately within this subblock in the analysis.

Block I-iv: Tolerance of Deviance

We use the "Tolerance of deviance" [TOLDEV] subscale from Weigel, Hessing, and Elffers's (Weigel, Hessing, & Elffers, 1999) scale for egoism.⁹ This is a fouritem scale, based on the work of Rundquist and Sletto (1936) and validated for The Netherlands by Verkuyten, Masson, and de Jong (1990). The scale displayed a mean of 2.09 (on a scale ranging from 1, *intolerant*, to 5, *tolerant*), standard deviation of 0.63 in this sample, and Cronbach's α is 0.63. As Cronbach's α here is low in comparison with values reported in the literature above, possibly a more extensive scale (i.e. more items) would have been more adequate. However, 0.63 may still be considered satisfactory.

BLOCK II: POLITICAL AND SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Block II-i: Political Preference

The first subblock within this second block of variates concerns *political preference*, measured by means of a question about what political party respondent would

⁹The scale includes such items as, "It is alright for a person to break the law if he doesn't get caught" and "A person should obey only those laws that seem reasonable."

vote for if parliamentary elections would be held the next day. The question was presented to respondents in November 2000, which was well in between the actual dates of real parliamentary elections. Apart from a list of political parties represented in parliament at that date, they were offered the choice: *other party/do not know/I do not think I will turn out and vote*. The first of these three choices was only indicated by six people, and within this group support for different other parties could be observed as well. This fragmentation precludes a powerful analysis and we have left those people out of the analysis altogether. The exact form of the question reads

[POLPREF] If tomorrow general parliamentary elections would be held, what party would you vote for?

We have translated the names of the Dutch political parties in the fragmented Dutch political landscape in a way that gives an impression of their stand to a non-Dutch public as well, using the following correspondence: PvdA: Labor (19%); VVD: Conservatives (18%); CDA: Christian Democrats (13%); Groen Links: Green party (9%); SP: Socialists (7%); D'66: Liberal Democrats (5%); SGP, GPV, RPF: Orthodox Christian Democrats (4%). A quarter (25%) of all respondents did not know what to vote or intended not to vote.

Block II-ii: Social and Demographic Characteristics

We include a number of demographic variables, viz.

[SEX] sex of respondent

49% females.

[AGE] age group

Age recoded into six categories—24 (7%); 25–34 (16%); 35–44 (23%); 45–54 (22%); 55–64 (14%); 65+ (18%). Minimum in the sample was 17, maximum 90. Mean: 48 (*SD* 16.0).

[COMSIZE] community size

Community size recoded into six categories: >400.000 inhabitants (10%); 100.000–400.000 inhabitants (20%); 50.000–100.000 inhabitants (15%); 20.000–50.000 inhabitants (35%); 10.000–20.000 inhabitants (15%); <10.000 inhabitants (4%).

[SES] socioeconomic status

We use the standard Dutch socio economic classification in five classes, resulting in the distribution: first (highest) class (18%); second class (27%); third class (23%); fourth class (28%); fifth (lowest) class (4%).

[EDUCATION] education

Highest education completed was dichotomized in two groups: lower (70%); higher (college and university level, 30%).

[RELIGIOUS] religiosity

People were classified as belonging to a religious denomination (56%) or not (44%).

ANALYSIS

Method

Data were analyzed using logistic regression analysis (cf. Menard, 2002). Logistic regression requires the dependent variable to be dichotomous, whereas our self-reported support for the death penalty is to endorse, oppose, or be undecided. Our main analysis excluding the undecided respondents (17%) will, therefore, be compared to an analysis assuming this particular group as endorsing capital punishment as well as to an analysis assuming the undecided respondents to opposing capital punishment.

Especially within block I (criminal-justice-related attitudes) it was anticipated that a fair amount of variance in the dependent variable is shared by more than one of the explanatory variables. This would hamper interpretation. We therefore chose to take our blockwise approach one step further and perform the regression analysis in a subblock-wise mode. In our analysis these subblocks are the above-mentioned six complexes of variables. Sequencing in a blockwise regression boils down to attributing shared variance between two blocks to the first block introduced. When the sequencing of (sub)blocks has no anchoring within a theoretical framework this would be arbitrary. Given our discussion and conception of the primary meaning of capital punishment attitudes (cf. above) it is obvious that main block I is to be introduced before main block II. Within the main blocks, the subblocks are introduced retaining the sequence as presented above. Within block I, this implies that we move from concepts very directly related to the process of punishment away to more peripheral justice related attitudes. Within block II (nonjustice-related variables), political preference is introduced first as a type of general proxy to one's general views on society. Thereafter, sociodemographic variates are introduced indicating a person's more or less fixed position within society.

Except for political preference, all explanatory variables in the regression analysis are treated at the interval level. Political preference is treated by introducing a dummy variate for every party. A dummy for "*don't know or won't vote*" is introduced as well.

After introducing the variables of a given subblock we inspected which of these displayed a significant coefficient. Before introducing a subsequent subblock, non-significant variables were excluded from further analysis. As such we arrived at a parsimonious final model including only those variables displaying statistically significant effects.

Results

Proceeding in the way as described in the previous section, we carried out our blockwise logistic regression analysis, retaining only those variables per block that displayed statistically significant and substantive effects. Results of the analysis on the level of blocks are summarized in Fig. 1. The figure is based on the Nagelkerke's R^2 statistic for logistic regression (cf. Nagelkerke, 1991). This statistic may be interpreted



blocks of explanatory variables

Fig. 1. Logistic regression results for capital punishment attitudes; Nagelkerke's R^2 per block and cumulative.

as relative amount of variance explained. Figure 1 shows Nagelkerke's R^2 per mainand subblock in the analysis as well as cumulative according to our specified sequence of blocks. Overall, after having introduced all blocks, Nagelkerke's R^2 reaches 0.424. Interpreting Nagelkerke's R^2 analogous to R^2 in linear regression analysis, 42% explained variance may be considered rather high. An alternative way of expressing the strength of our model is by comparing the percentage correctly classified cases in the null model (only intercept) to the percentage correctly classified in the full model. Percentage of cases correctly classified by the model rises from 57% in the null model (no explanatory variables included) to 75% in the specified full model.

Except for the "tolerance of deviance" block (i.e., block I-iv) all subblocks displayed a statistically significant and substantive contribution in the model. Regarding the two main blocks 24.1% of total explained variance is attributable to block I, criminal-justice-related attitudes, whereas block II, political and sociodemographic characteristics adds a further 18.3%. The largest subblock contributions stem from harsh treatment penal attitude and demographics (R^2 of 17 and 12%, respectively; see individual bars in Fig. 1).

Although Figure 1 summarizes the main findings of our hierarchical logistic regression analysis on capital punishment attitudes, Table 1 provides a more detailed account on the level of concrete variables within the model. Logistic regression models the log-odds of the dependent variable as a linear function of the independent

Block	Variable	В	exp(B)	<i>r</i> _{partial}	
I ^a	Criminal justice related attitudes				
I-i	HARSH	1.44**	4.20	.20	
I-ii	CCTV	0.90**	2.45	.15	
I-iii	CONCERN	1.04^{*}	2.83	.06	
	GOODJOB	-0.78^{*}	0.46	.08	
Π^b	Political ^c and sociodemographic				
II-i	CONSERVATIVES	1.10^{**}	3.00	.13	
	SOCIALISTS	1.22^{*}	3.38	.08	
	NO VOTE/DON'T KNOW	0.94**	2.58	.11	
II-ii	SEX	-0.48^{*}	0.62	.06	
	AGE	-0.49^{**}	0.61	.22	
	EDUCATION	-0.92^{**}	0.40	.13	
	RELIGIOUS	-0.49^{*}	0.61	.06	
	Constant	-5.80^{**}	0.00		

 Table 1. Logistic Regression Results for Capital Punishment Attitudes; Variable

 Level Findings

"Excluded variables: [DNA]; [DATABASE]; [GROWTH]; [TOLDE]

^bExcluded variables: [COMSIZE]; [SES].

^cReference category = all parties not included.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

variables. The odds of a positive attitude towards capital punishment is defined as the probability p_i that a person endorses capital punishment divided by the probability $1 - p_i$ that he does not, given the values of the explanatory variables. Although standardized regression coefficients in linear regression models are directly comparable in terms of relative effect sizes of predictors, odds and log-odds cannot be used as such when predictors are measured on differing scales. It is possible, however, to calculate partial correlations between predictors and the dependent variable which may be interpreted as such (cf. Atkinson, 1980; Norusis, 1997).¹⁰ In Table 1, therefore, we have included these partial correlations in the final column. For each variable retained in the final model, the other entries in the table are the logistic regression coefficient *B*, to be interpreted as change in log-odds ratio of the dependent when the independent changes one unit, and exp(*B*), which can be interpreted as change in odds ratio of the dependent when the independent changes one unit.

Table 1 shows that in all subblocks retained in the model the variables exert a substantial amount of influence (i.e., $|B| \ge 0.5$). Partial correlations in the final column make direct comparisons between variables possible. Inspection of these partial correlations shows that favorable attitude toward harsh treatment of offenders is among the strongest predictors in the model ($r_{\text{partial}} = .20$), together with age ($r_{\text{partial}} = .22$). Political preference is of comparatively less importance, the highest partial coefficient being for voting conservative ($r_{\text{partial}} = .13$), comparable with the influence of endorsing additional power to police and justice authorities, as measured by the CCTV variable ($r_{\text{partial}} = .15$), and education ($r_{\text{partial}} = .13$). Other variables, though significant, have less individual influence ($r_{\text{partial}} \le .10$).

 $^{{}^{10}}r_{\text{partial}} = \text{sign}(B) \times \text{sqrt}((W - 2K)/-2\text{LL}_{(0)})$, in which W is the Wald statistic calculated as $B^2/\text{SE}(B)$; K = df corresponding with this variable; $-2\text{LL}_{(0)} = -2 \times \text{loglikelihood of the base model (i.e., with intercept only)}$.

Wall Block Order					
Block order: I, II	Block order: II, I				
24.1%					
18.3%					
	23.3%				
	19.1%				
42.4	%				
19.1	%				
18.3	%				
5.0	%				
	Block order: I, II 24.1% 18.3% 42.4 19.1 18.3 5.0				

 Table 2. Explained Variance (Nagelkerke's R²) Compared After Reversing Main Block Order

Note. If $V_{\rm I}$ is percentage variance explained in capital punishment attitude after introducing only block I, and $V_{\rm II}$ when introducing only block II, and when $V_{\rm tot}$ is percentage explained when both blocks are introduced together, we consider $V_{\rm tot} - V_{\rm II}$ to be the amount of variance uniquely attributable to block I, and $V_{\rm tot} - V_{\rm I}$ as uniquely attributable to block I. The overlap (shared explainable variance) is defined as $V_{\rm I} + V_{\rm II} - V_{\rm tot}$. Notice that this definition is valid only if $V_{\rm tot} < V_{\rm I} + V_{\rm II}$, i.e. the blocks are not acting as mutual suppressors with respect to the dependent variable.

We have employed a hierarchical approach in a blockwise fashion for these analyses. This approach has been justified drawing on theoretical notions of the dependent variable. Any overlap in explanatory power for the two main blocks of variables (i.e., common variance) is, by definition, attributed to the first block. It only seems fair to check the amount of shared explained variance because our sequential approach by itself does not show this. We have done so by carrying out the same analysis in reversed order and comparing variance explained per main block with the original model. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2 shows only a very modest amount of shared explained variance between the two main blocks in our logistic regression analysis (overlap is no more than 5%). Obviously, the two blocks of variates have quite unique contributions to make in explaining capital punishment attitudes. Reversing the order of (main)blocks does not greatly influence the amount of explained variance that can be attributed to each of them. So the amount of explained variance is to a large extent uniquely tied to each individual block.

Robustness of Results

We have checked for the consequences of excluding the undecided responses on the dependent variable in our model. The final analysis was repeated twice; first by treating the undecided respondents as if they oppose capital punishment, second by treating them as being in favor of capital punishment. Both these analysis yielded very minor variations compared to the main analysis reported here. The alternative treatment of the middle category ('don't know'), results in no substantive alterations to the model whatsoever.

As a further scrutiny of robustness of our findings, we checked our hierarchical and parsimonious model against more liberal methods by performing two alternative analyses. First we force entered all the variables in the analysis. In this model total variance explained rose with a minor 2.4%. All variables reported in Table 1

still displayed significant and comparable effect sizes in terms of *B*s and partial *r*s. The variables initially excluded from our model (see Table 1) displayed statistically insignificant contributions.

In a second analysis, we used stepwise analysis with the whole pool of variables. In this case the same variables were incorporated as in Table 1, except for the community size variable, which was now taken aboard, albeit with a low *B* value of 0.19, and without increasing Nagelkerke's R^2 .

We thus feel safe to conclude that our hierarchical, parsimonious model has not misrepresented the relations observed.

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Considering that the topic of capital punishment has been absent from the Dutch public and political agenda since the fifties, the remarkable support in The Netherlands for the issue of capital punishment asks for explanation. In line with the literature we have suggested that support for capital punishment may be better understood as reflecting a *complex* of criminal justice related attitudes. We expected to find that variables not directly related to criminal justice, such as political preference and sociodemographics, have a relatively minor contribution to offer.

Our model reaches an overall Nagelkerke's R^2 of 42%, which is rather high for an attitudinal model. Although capital punishment is not at all a salient and serious issue in public and political debate in The Netherlands, our parsimonious model offers a high degree of predictive capability. The largest portion of variance in capital punishment attitudes is indeed attributable to the block of general criminaljustice-related attitudes. This corroborates up to a point that attitude toward capital punishment can and should be seen as representative of a criminal-justice syndrome: more support for capital punishment is to be found among (1) those endorsing harsh treatment of offenders in general, (2) those willing to grant far-reaching powers to police and justice authorities, (3) those believing that the government at present is not delivering on the topic of crime fighting, and (4) those who are concerned about the level of crime. However, it is not true that variance explained is overwhelmingly covered by the attitudinal variables vis-à-vis criminal justice. Nearly half of the explained variance is attributed to the more exogenous characteristics of the second block, for example political preference and demographics. Age and education level are among the most important ones: younger and poorly educated people are (after having corrected for their general attitudes to criminal justice related matters) more in favor of the death penalty, and to a lesser degree are males and nonreligious people. Likewise, people voting at both ends of the political spectrum (conservatives, socialists) as well as the abstainers are more in favor of capital punishment than the central political voters.

The fact that after accounting for criminal-justice-related attitudes, such a large portion of variance can still be attributed to demographic and political variates asks for explanation. Two explanations come to mind. There is always the possibility that our first block has been too parsimonious. Although this could be true and additional criminal justice variables may be able to enhance the first block, this cannot dismiss us from elaborating on potential explanations related to the noncriminal justice variables. The contribution of the second block may also be a strong indication that part of this should be explainable in terms of substantive theory as well; a theory that can then be used to explain why exactly in those politicodemographic segments of the population we may expect more than average support for capital punishment. We cannot but admit that the following is mere speculation. In terms of political affiliation, and after criminal-justice-related attitudes have been accounted for, we observed that those who do not identify with the central parties-in a broad sensedisplay more capital punishment support. We tend to interpret this group as one not feeling well represented within the political mainstream, who feel a degree of political alienation perhaps. Consequently, these people may tend to express their alienation with a distancing from the silent consensus on opposing capital punishment; a type of silent consensus that is so typical for the political elite of mainstream politics in The Netherlands. It is interesting to note that recent developments in Dutch politics in 2002 have seen the rise of a new political party, LPF (initially headed by Pim Fortuyn, who was murdered at the eve of what was to become a land-sliding election outcome). This party attracted especially the voters with a strong degree of political cynicism (cf. Van Praag, 2002). In a recent poll, no less than 70% of the LPF voters claimed to be in favor of the death penalty (NIPO Telepanel, 2002). This explanation seems well deserved for the abstainers as well as for the socialists (a party that never was a part of a governing coalition and that profiled itself as a protest party). For the conservatives it seems less attractive, as the Dutch conservatives are a major player in Dutch parliament, often participating in government coalitions as well. However, it may well be that the conservative voters are for a considerable part more extreme than their representatives, especially so as there was not a serious party to the right of the conservatives at the time data for this study were collected. Our suggestion takes force from observing that the demographic variables age and education are contributing as well. In modern value segmentation research within a marketing context, Hessing-Couvret and Reuling (2002) distinguished eight segments in the Dutch population, of which indeed the segment that contains comparatively many young and poorly educated people displays a strong degree of political cynicism.

Our speculation leads us to suggest that apart from criminal-justice-related attitudes, capital punishment support should be explainable in terms of political alienation: people expressing a pro-capital punishment attitude to a degree which is more than to be expected on account of their general criminal justice attitudes may do so in an expressive way, showing that they are in favor of unorthodox measures, not being considered by mainstream politics. If this hypothesis is valid, we again suggest that endorsing capital punishment should be explained not necessarily in terms of a preference per se, but as an expressive act of the respondents, displaying their dissatisfaction with judicial *and* political elites in the country.

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