ELITE ETHICS

Comparing Public Values Prioritization between Administrative Elites and Political Elites

Abstract
In this paper we compare how representatives, ministers, and senior public managers in the Netherlands, European Union, and United States perceive and prioritize four key public values in decision making – responsiveness, expertise, lawfulness, and transparency. Our data from a series of 94 in-depth interviews show that political elites and administrative elites differ most in their perception and prioritization of expertise and transparency while they show more similarities for responsiveness and lawfulness. In addition, these politico-administrative value differences largely hold across the institutional settings in which these elites operate. Thus, administrative or political function rather than institutional setting seems dominant in elites' assessment of how these values matter when they make decisions. Theorizing on our results, we formulate eight propositions on differences between administrative elites and political elites for future studies. Our study contributes innovatively to current public values research by using qualitative methodology and comparing politicians and public managers.

"Procedural openness and transparency are not necessarily functional. Of course, outcomes need to be clear as well as division of responsibilities and accountability, but a certain degree of secrecy is an absolute necessity. At the moment, I am involved in a major governance process: I cannot tell you what kind of process because it is highly secretive. And please, no transparency at this stage because it will inevitably lead to immediate failure! It is also a matter of (…), secrecy – or perhaps exclusiveness of information is a better term – is not such a big issue as such as long as you do not lie to people. And even that is not really a crime as long as long you're acting in the public interest, right?"
Case #48, Deputy Prime-Minister

INTRODUCTION
Government elites prioritize and balance public values on a daily basis. How and why they do so is largely concealed from us, except for when memoires or journalistic uncoverings allow us to listen in on the monologue intérieur of statesmen amidst major moral dilemmas (e.g., Blair, 2010; Bush, 2010; Woodward, 1994, 2004, 2010). However, as exciting as these accounts may be, they are by nature individual and often overly polished and self-satisfied. Moreover, they focus exclusively on political celebrities while neglecting the vast majority of administrative and political elites who "individually and together, have a substantial impact on what gets proposed for consideration by governments, what gets passed into law, and how law gets implemented" (Aberbach et al., 1981: 24). For this reason alone it is worth knowing more about how those who govern us frame and prioritize public values. In this paper, we compare in-depth reflections on four key public values – responsiveness, expertise, lawfulness, and transparency – between representatives, ministers, and senior public managers in The Netherlands, European Union, and United States, based on a series of 94 semi-structured interviews.

Our field is in dire need of thick description of political-administrative value differences for at least three reasons. First of all, despite proliferation of studies into public values, resulting in 130 publications within Public Administration in this century alone (Van der Wal et al., 2013), we still lack contextual understanding of *how and why* specific values are important (cf. Rutgers, 2008; Van der Wal, 2011), in other words: how they are perceived as well as prioritized. This is due to overreliance on quantitative methodology and attempts to classify dozens, sometimes even hundreds of values (cf. Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman, 2007; Van der Wal et al., 2006) rather than examining a few key values "up close and personal" (cf. Rhodes et al., 2007). To address this shortcoming, we zoom in on four specific public values which we will discuss in detail in the next section of our paper.

Second, public values scholarship has until now completely ignored politicians, corroborating Fry and Raadschelder's (2013) diagnosis of increasing segregation and troublesome relations between Public Administration and Political Science. Such segregation impedes our understanding of how public values are manifested in public sector decision making. It makes one wonder if we can even claim real progress in this field without any evidence on legislative and executive actors. Indeed, we have to go back almost four decades for large-scale comparisons between values of political elites and administrative elites (e.g., Aberbach et al., 1981; Putnam, 1976; Searing, 1969). However, political-administrative dynamics across Western democracies in recent decades limit present-day applicability of these seminal works. Such dynamics include increased clashes between public managers and politicians on primacy in policy making, increasing media attention for public managers, and alleged politicization of the senior civil service (e.g., Lee

and Raadschelders, 2008; Rhodes and Wanna, 2007; 't Hart and Wille, 2006). These dynamics further add to the relevance of our current research.

Third and final, a more overarching issue is whether politico-administrative values differences are universal. Aberbach et al. (1981) showed how the worlds of both elite groups overlap much more in the US than in Europe. However, their emerging "politico-administrative hybrid" (261) might be a reality in many countries nowadays, with value congruence between both groups and between settings as a result. Sporadic cross-country research into public values provides us some insights in how prioritizations differ between settings (e.g., Jelovac et al., 2011; Van der Wal et al., 2008), but these studies focus exclusively on administrators.

We realize that the size and composition of our sample and our qualitative method of study do not allow us to generalize findings to countries or "test" effects of institutional variables. However, we can deliver initial insights into the universalism and consistency of politico-administrative value differences across three settings which differ considerably in terms of administrative and political career dynamics, formal and informal political-administrative relations, and distribution and media scrutiny of decision-making power (see Aberbach & Rockman, 2000; Nugent 2010; Van der Meer, 2011). Such insights may enrich current debates on public values and spark exciting new research avenues.

To elucidate the abovementioned issues we engaged in a year-long series of in-depth conversations with a unique sample of influential government actors in three Western "centers of power". In this paper, we aim to answer the following exploratory research question:

How do administrative elites and political elites differ in their perception and prioritization of key public values?

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, we define our central concepts: government elites, elite ethics, and public values. Then, we discuss why we selected four crucial public values to study in detail: responsiveness, expertise, lawfulness, and transparency. After explaining whom we interviewed and why and how we analyzed our interview data, we present our results and analysis. We conclude this paper with a discussion of the implications of our findings for the study of public values and government elites, and we formulate eight propositions for quantitative follow up studies.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Government Elites

To demarcate the concept of elites we draw on the classical works of Pareto (1935: 1422) who distinguishes between non-elites – "a class that is ruled" – and elites – "a class that rules" – consisting of a governing and a non-governing elite. Broadly interpreted, governing elites are "an organized minority with the political power to make decisions," (1423-24) which include not only elected officials and bureaucrats but also leaders from the military and business community. In the same vein, Frissen (2009) states elites are "those that execute power within the public domain, permanent as a societal group but contingent in their appearance" (2009: 99).

We view elites "neutrally" in contrast to political scientists and sociologists who have traditionally studied elites in relation to power and status, and inequality (Bottomore, 1964; Domhoff & Dye, 1987). In the same vein, Public Administration scholars have studied mobility and career paths of elites (Theakston & Fry, 1989), and circulation and networks (Del Alcazar, 2002). Put shortly, we do not perceive their mere existence as a result of global conspiracy, as

suggested by recent populist discourse and concepts such as "superclass" (Rothkopf, 2008). Rather, political history is a "permanent spectacle of elites that take each other's place and merge into one another" (Pareto, 1935: 1304). Sometimes, deliberate collaboration and association determines who become elites but more often this process is an unintentional result of interests and sentiments of a given minority (1444-1447). Elites exist, and according to Frissen (2009: 98), they have to exist to provide political and societal order and stability.

In our study, we accept the existence of elites as a given, and as a starting point for thick description of their reflections on public values. Specifically, we study *government* elites (Rhodes et al., 2007) rather than *governing* elites, comparing elected and appointed individuals with public decision-making powers: representatives, executives, and senior public managers (cf. Aberbach et al., 1981).

Elite Ethics
What, then, do we mean by "elite ethics"? Contrary to the common usage of ethics as "morals in use" in the American literature (cf. Menzel, 2007), we define ethics in accordance with its classical academic usage, as "critical reflection on everyday morals, or values and norms" (Van Es, 2011: 78). Such a conceptualization fits better with our empirical approach and the aims of our study. After all, we do not pretend to directly study the enactment of values by politicians and public managers. Frankly, we have yet to see successful attempts of such action research into values and decision making (cf. Van der Wal, 2011; Van Rekom et al., 2006). In fact, we analyze *thorough reflection of government elites on how and why key public values matter*, and how they interplay. In doing so, we realize such reflections are never entirely free from self-justification and cognitive dissonance (see Vroom, 1966). However, through our systematic aggregate categorization and comparison between groups we aim to mitigate these challenges, at least partly.

On a final note, our concept of "elite ethics" is more specific than that of "elite ideology" as utilized by Aberbach et al. (1981). Whereas elite ideology includes outlines of the good society, systematic criticism of present social arrangements, a strategic plan of getting from present to future, and a set of moral values (1981: 115), we limit ourselves to the latter in relation to governmental decision making.

Public Values
How do we define public values here, a concept rife with confusion and misunderstanding (Rutgers 2008)? Bozeman (2007: 13) describes society's public values as "those providing normative consensus about (1) the rights, benefits, and prerogatives to which citizens should (and should not) be entitled; (2) the obligations of citizens to society, the state and one another; (3) and the principles on which governments and policies should be based". Our definition is situated within the third category which supposedly guides conduct and decision making of government elites. Specifically, this study employs the following definition that served well in earlier empirical studies: "values are important qualities and standards that have a certain weight in the choice of action" (reference omitted). To provide a bit more context, let us further assume with Bozeman (2007: 116) that a value is (1) relatively stable, (2) has strong potential to affect behavior, (3) changes (if at all) only after deliberation, and (4) helps define one's sense of oneself.

Examples for *public managers* include accountability, expertise, efficiency and lawfulness (Van der Wal et al., 2008: 472), as well as adaptability and stability (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007: 360). For *politicians* they include transparency, social cohesion, will of the people, collective choice and citizen involvement, whereas political loyalty as specified through accountability and

responsiveness is most important for the *relationship* between the two (Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman 2007; Van den Heuvel, Huberts, and Verberk 2002).

A Focus on Four Crucial Public Values
This study focuses on four public values: responsiveness, expertise, lawfulness, and transparency (e.g., Meijer, 2009, 2012; Piotrowski, 2010; Rosenbloom, 2007; Van der Wal, 2008, 2011). These values are important for legislators, executives, as well as public managers, but we expect that each group will interpret and prioritize these values differently given their respective roles and responsibilities (cf. Aberbach et al., 1981: 24; Van der Wal, 2012: 263). However, given recent dynamics in these roles and responsibilities in the systems we study, formulating testable hypotheses is hard at this stage. Therefore, critical reflection of elites on such prioritization should produce insightful shades of grey which add to our understanding of public values. We also selected these values because their importance is not as self-evident or prone to political correctness as cliché "truisms" which dominate codes of conduct, such as honesty, integrity, or excellence (cf. Van Rekom, 2006). In fact, prioritizing these four values inevitably produces tension and internal conflict (Van der Wal, 2011).

Responsiveness ("meeting wishes and demands of important stakeholders")[1]
Meeting demands and wishes of key stakeholders seems evident for politicians or "vote-seekers" (Pedersen, 2013), regardless of whether they are pluralists or populists (cf. Aberbach et al., 1981). Interestingly, Dutch survey research shows responsiveness is not a dominant value for politicians (Van den Heuvel et al., 2002), but we should note a sizeable part of its sample consisted of regional politicians who do not face much electoral pressures. However, because politicians legitimize their power through democratic processes while public managers legitimize their power through expertise (Nieuwenkamp, 2001), we may expect political elites to not only view this value as more important but also *characterize it differently*, by emphasizing external stakeholders rather than internal bureaucratic hierarchy. In a recent study into value preferences of public and private managers (Van der Wal, 2011), the former reject the notion of being too responsive to outside opinions; they ascribe this value to the political habitus (cf. Aberbach and Rockman, 1994). In addition, directly elected MPs and ministers may also perceive responsiveness differently; after all, their democratic legitimacy differs.

Expertise ("making decisions based on timely and state-of-the art evidence")
Many have suggested that public managers derive much of their legitimacy from domain knowledge and experience whereas politicians often lack such expertise, resulting in dependence on their administrative counterparts (Aberbach et al., 1981; Nieuwenkamp, 2001; Weber, 1922). Indeed, studies suggest that expertise is among the most appreciated values of public managers (Van der Wal 2008; Yang and Van der Wal 2014). In fact, two thirds of civil servants designated expertise as the most important value for their profession vis-à-vis less than a quarter of politicians in the aforementioned survey study (Van den Heuvel et al. 2002). However, importance of expertise for public managers may have decreased in recent years, or at least shifted towards management skills rather than policy domain knowledge, as a consequence of increasing job rotation and emphasis on managerial skills within senior executive services in most Western countries (Bekker 2009; 't Hart and Wille 2006; Van der Wal 2012).

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[1] Each value is defined in relation to conduct. It prescribes how to 'act'. These definitions were one-on-one presented to the respondents in the interviews. They proved to be useful before in empirical studies into value prioritization of senior officials in the public sector (reference omitted).

***Lawfulness* (*"acting in strict accordance with existing laws, rules, and regulations"*)**
Even though the importance of lawfulness within the public sector appears to be self-evident, previous studies show a plethora of gradations among public managers regarding the extent to which they should abide by laws, rules, and regulations, and whether the "spirit" or the "letter" of the law should be the guiding principle (Jelovac et al., 2011; Van der Wal, 2011). Often, lawfulness is seen as a barrier to efficient and effective public governance. In fact, for politicians, lawfulness appears to be even less important than expertise; however, the same applies to civil servants in relative terms (Van den Heuvel et al., 2002: 116). Of course, a key difference here is the role of both groups in the legislative process itself: Politicians usually initiate, adopt, and execute laws and rules, whereas civil servants have a supportive role, at least formally (Bovens et al., 2012). Moreover, because the latter are subject to ministerial responsibility they may be more inclined to act in accordance with the letter of the law (Steen and Van der Meer, 2011). However, aforementioned studies also show considerable contrasts between puritan civil servants and their more lenient colleagues.

***Transparency* (*"acting openly, visibly and controllable"*)**
Supposedly, this value is of absolute importance to politicians (Piotrowski, 2010; Van den Heuvel et al., 2002). Public managers admit they cannot, and perhaps should not always act with complete transparency, particularly during delicate decision-making processes (Van der Wal, 2008:. 83). Our study will have to show whether this applies equally to politicians. Increasing media attention to public managers' conduct is important here, because this may have affected their perceptions of this value, also in light of their increasing "political roles" ('t Hart and Wille, 2006; Lee and Raadschelders, 2008). Media also play an important role in accountability obligations of government; together with public information acts and transparency legislation enacted in the systems we study (Meijer, 2012; Piotrowksi, 2010). Such developments may have led to preventive rather than informative conduct on the side of public managers. Politicians, on their part, seem to demand restraint from their administrative counterparts in this regard ('t Hart and Wille, 2006; Van den Heuvel at al., 2002).

Clearly, we derive only tentative and sometimes ambiguous expectations derived from this rather discordant literature. Therefore, we are reluctant to formulate research propositions let alone testable hypotheses at this point. Rather, *we use our exploratory data to formulate propositions* on differences between perception and prioritization of public values by administrative and political elites.

METHODOLOGY

In-Depth Elite Interviews
We employed qualitative methods because we wanted to know how particular values matter, and how elites word and explain their importance: "Interviewing is often important if one needs to know what a set of people think, or how they interpret an event or series of events, or what they have done or are planning to do" (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002: 673). Moreover, "elites especially – but other highly educated people as well – do not like being put in the straightjacket of close-ended questions" (2002: 674). Thus, we used *semi-structured* interviews consisting of "a set of questions carefully worded and arranged for the purpose of taking each respondent through the same sequence, and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words" (Patton 1987: 112).

Elites are by definition less accessible and more conscious of their self-interest than less prominent respondents. This is exactly why elite interviews are relatively rare (Richards, 1996). As a consequence, the data we collected are unique but they should be handled with care as well. It would be naïve to act overly trusting towards individuals that are very well equipped to 'spin' facts and events, 'play' interviewers, and dominate and take over conversations entirely. In fact, they would never have become government elites had they not developed such skills. Nevertheless, all conversations were open, critical, and often quite intense. Not one respondent felt the need to substantially change, revise, let alone censor transcripts, or view interview questions beforehand.

The interview ratio was basic. We used an interview guide, "a listing of areas to be covered in the interview along with, for each area, a listing of topics or questions that together will suggest lines of inquiry" (Weiss, 1994: 48). We started each interview by asking the respondent to describe in detail a crucial recent decision-making process in which he or she was closely involved. We then used this decision as context to discuss at length the four aforementioned public values; how, when, and why they were important (or not), and in which cases they conflicted. The in-depth conversations that followed lasted between 40 and 70 minutes, depending on time availability and progress. We interviewed 94 respondents between May 2010 and August 2011. About ninety-five percent of the interviews were face-to-face and took place within the respondents' professional environment. Only a few were conducted at home, at railway restaurants, or at the author's university; we conducted four interviews by Skype or telephone. Table 1 shows whom we interviewed.

Whom we Interviewed and Why
Our selection aimed at maximizing range and depth rather than probability parameters (Weiss, 1994: 23). We combined at-random probability sampling and convenience sampling because we had limited possibilities to gain access to elites – especially outside of the Netherlands – through our own network or "snowball sampling" (1994: 26). This is also the main reason why the number of interviewees differs substantially between our three samples. However, we stress once more that we do not attempt to generalize results beyond the selected populations, let alone generalize them statistically. Because current comparative data on elite values is non-existent, we needed to start somewhere. Furthermore, we use the different institutional environments as "most different" contexts – to assess the extent to which differences between functional groups hold – and not independent variables (cf. Yin, 2009). To put it more directly: We compare *elite groups in different systems* and not systems as such. Finally, although convenience sampling may not be the ideal base for generalization, good reasons exist for using this technique here: (i) the respondents' own assessment of generalizability; (ii) the interviewer's own identification of others worth recruiting, and (iii) "the idea that a certain amount of universalism with regard to the phenomenon studied, exists among a certain group of respondents" (Weiss 1994, p. 26).

In The Netherlands, we invited all 150 members of parliament in May 2010, 16 of which responded positively, representing seven out of 10 factions across the political spectrum. Such a low response rate is common for politicians at the national level (see Aberbach et al., 1981; Van den Heuvel et al., 2002). In addition, we approached about 60 (deputy) ministers of the last nine cabinets (1982-2010), mainly through our personal networks. Thirteen responded positively, many of which held multiple cabinet positions throughout the years, including a former prime-minister and three so-called "State Ministers". We randomly selected public managers from the online database of the *Algemene Bestuursdienst* (the Senior Executive Service). We interviewed 22 regular members and 13 members of the Top management group (TMG); the top-70 most senior Dutch public managers.

Table 1: Interviewed (former) government elites by type, function and party affiliation if applicable/known (n between brackets; total n=94)

	Politicians	*Public Managers*
The Netherlands	*Member of Parliament (MP):* ▪ MPs Christian-Democrats (6) ▪ MPs Socialist Party (3) ▪ MPs Liberal Party (3) ▪ MPs Other Parties (4) *Minister:* ▪ One-term Minister (5) ▪ Two-term Minister (4) ▪ (Dep.) Prime-Minister (3) ▪ Four-term Minister (1) **Total: 29**	▪ Director of Agency/Quango (14) ▪ Departmental Director (12) ▪ (Dep.) Secretary-General (6) ▪ Director-General (3) ▪ Inspector-General (1) **Total: 36**
European Union	*European Parliament (EP):* ▪ EP Christian-Democrats (1) ▪ EP Christian Union (1) ▪ EP Social-Liberal Party (1) ▪ EP Green Left (1) ▪ EP Social-Democrats (1) ▪ EP Liberal Party (1) **Total: 6**	▪ (Dep.) Head of Unit (7) ▪ Director-General (1) ▪ Director (1) ▪ Head of Sector (1) **Total: 10**
United States	*Representative:* ▪ Member, NY State Assembly, Dem. (2) ▪ President, City Council, Dem. (1) *(Deputy)Minister:* ▪ Two-term Secretary, Dem. (1) **Total: 4**	▪ Managing Director (2) ▪ Ambassador (2) ▪ Chief Operating Officer (1) ▪ Dep. Attorney General (1) ▪ Senior Advisor (1) ▪ Chief of Staff (1) ▪ Assistant Secretary (1) **Total: 9**
Total	**39**	**55**

In Brussels, we interviewed all six Dutch faction leaders of the parties represented in the European Parliament, except for the Freedom Party that had just joined parliament for the first time. In addition, we recruited 10 senior public managers with different national backgrounds from the

various Directorate-Generals through our personal networks. Our American interviewees represent a more diverse group. Because politicians at the level of Congress and Cabinet are almost impossible to reach, even for well-established US academics (cf. Aberbach and Rockman 2002), we interviewed whoever was accessible and met our general criteria. In the end our interviewees include a majority leader of a large state's assembly and the president of a large municipal council, a two-term cabinet secretary, two ambassadors, a chief of staff of a cabinet secretary, and several members of the Senior Executive Service.

We rightly admit that the selected sample of elites displays considerable variance. However, all our respondents hold or have held government positions that yield considerable power and influence, resembling characteristics of government elites studied in authoritative publications (e.g., Aberbach et al., 1981; Rhodes et al., 2007; Rhodes, 2011).

Issue-Focused Between-Group Analysis

Since the primary objective of this study is to portray value perceptions of political elites and administrative elites, our analysis was *issue focused* rather than case focused and situated at the "level of the generalized" rather than the "level of the concrete" (Weiss 1994: 152). Thus, single respondents and cases were less important than the objects of analysis. The aim of issue-focused analysis is "to describe what has been learned from all respondents about people in their situation" (153); in other words, to paint a general yet contextual picture. According to Eisenhardt (1989), it allows the researcher to recognize general patterns in different settings.

We transcribed every interview, resulting in immense quantities of data (over 700 pages of text) that needed to be systematically analyzed. Coding of these literal transcriptions began after we created a monster-grid – a data matrix with the respondents (R#1-R#94) on one axis and the core quotations on the other, which is a more elaborate version of what Weiss (1994: 157) calls "excerpt files." The next step involved reading all responses to a particular question to derive first impressions of overall patterns that were then juxtaposed with the empirical data. This inductive process, described by Weiss (1994: 158) as "local integration," is clearly not just a matter of counting. As a result, we repeated the inductive process many times before we wrote our first analysis.

However, data analysis is not just retrospective comparison (Strauss, 1987). Rather, analysis begins as soon as there is data collection. Indeed, as Miles and Huberman (1994: 49) observe, "the more investigators have developed understandings during data collection, the surer they can be of the adequacy of the data collection and the less daunting will be the task of fully analyzing the data." In the same vein, we started coding chronologically, regardless of whether the interviewee was a politician or a public manager.

Coding and reporting

Each relevant quotation (564 in total) received an initial open code that characterized the statement's core (e.g., "lawfulness is an all-important value – *letter of the law*"). During a process of going back and forth more definitive codes were established as new codes were created or old ones adapted (cf. Klostermann, 2003: 43). Because qualitative data analysis is as much "data reduction" as quantitative data analysis (cf. King et al., 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994), we limited the number of codes for each value by grouping resembling statements across groups into identical codes (in this case, between three and six). When we finished our coding, we distributed the statements according to the three groups of respondents in 18 aggregate coding categories; 16 of which apply only to public managers, and 14 only to either elected representatives or political executives.

Given the nature of our analysis we categorized by counting statements and not individual respondents. Moreover, as the number of respondents differs quite substantially between our groups, we use percentages adding up to hundred within each group to indicate how our three groups – elected representatives, political executives, and senior public managers – compare in terms of interpreting and weighing each value. We use some of the most characteristic quotes of participants to illustrate our categories, as displayed in Tables 2 to 5. The core of our analysis centers on the comparison between administrative and political elites. After our main comparative analysis, however, we assess how groups compare across the three institutional settings, to see whether key politico-administrative differences hold.

RESULTS: ADMINISTRATIVE ELITES VERSUS POLITICAL ELITES

Responsiveness
We distinguish five different perspectives on the importance and meaning of responsiveness, as shown in Table 2. The most dominant view on responsiveness which bridges across functional groups is that of a critical evaluation of different interests and stakeholder claims. Representatives frame this in terms of having the patience to hear out many different stakeholders and constituents as well as the guts to say no to their demands, as a former MP illustrates: "*You ask, we provide: I am very much against that. I am in favor of good listening and not excluding certain voices and views. Despite your convictions you need to be able to adapt and fine-tune. So be responsive, but based on a clear stance and position. In most areas you have a set of norms, a framework of reference which guides your actions, and you want to include the outside world in that framework, rather than the other way around.*" Some of the ministers we interviewed extend this into a separate category in which responsiveness is tied to transparency. What is important here is to *clarify and justify why* you cannot meet certain demands of certain groups: "*For me, responsiveness is situated in the realm of transparency. Stakeholders, and ultimately the citizenry, are in need of sound explanations why certain demands can or cannot be met.*"

In turn, public managers weigh stakeholders' demands based on political guidelines or mandates: in a separate category, however, responsiveness is framed in terms of *being loyal and serviceable to the political leadership rather than outside parties*. In between the lines, many of them explain this rather traditional role-based interpretation by displaying their disdain of simply "pleasing" voters and stakeholders, as phrased by a deputy secretary-general: "*You know, I don't mind to meet wishes of stakeholders but it is up to the politicians which wishes and demands should ultimately be prioritized. For me, I have to be careful to make decisions "wearing the right hat"; maintaining intimate and frequent ties with certain stakeholders may impede the job of a civil servant. Frankly speaking, I loathe the current "crying with the wolves" mentality of some politicians. Organizational effectiveness and policy effectiveness are way more important than pleasing everyone.*" At first sight, our three groups appear similar in their dominant frames but their institutional responsibilities explain why interpretations differ. Politicians and administrators differ most in their assessments pertaining *to whom* government should be responsive.

Table 2: How Political Elites and Administrative Elites View Responsiveness

RESPONSIVENESS	Public Managers	Elected Representatives	Political Executives

	(n=55)	(n=25)	(n=14)
1. As critically weighing and balancing different interests	34%	69%	37%
"Stakeholders are important and you have to listen to them. But you should not take at face value what these stakeholders try to tell you."			
2. As being loyal and serviceable to politics	32%	0%	0%
"You are not here to push through your own political viewpoints. So responsiveness means you have a well-developed ability to react and adapt to the policy questions of the politician."			
3. As subordinate to lawfulness	22%	8%	13%
"So, responsiveness is an important value but it can never be decisive for the direction that is ultimately chosen. Laws and their interpretation take precedence in setting such directions."			
4. As tied to transparency	8%	8%	25%
"In the end we try to decide on the basis of objective criteria, as objective as possible. Different deliberations play a role. So, stakeholders are important but you can never satisfy everybody. As such, responsiveness is very much linked to transparency because taking into account stakeholders implies transparency in decision making."			
5. As subordinate to effectiveness	4%	15%	25%
"I find organizational effectiveness much more important. It's fine with me to meet stakeholder demands but I cannot meet all demands of all stakeholders."			
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

A final observation is that respondents in each group *juxtapose* responsiveness *against* other important public governance values; as being less important, in the case of lawfulness and effectiveness, or neighboring, in the case of transparency. Overall, four out of five categories apply to politicians as well as public managers.

Expertise
The frames of "expertise" are less similar between our three groups of government elites than was the case for responsiveness: three out of six categories apply to all groups (see Table 3). In all three groups, albeit in different percentages, we see a view of expertise in terms of the importance of domain knowledge. Even more important is the ability *to organize sufficient expertise* due to the sheer impossibility of having all the necessary knowledge "in house". MPs in particular adhere to this view of expertise: "*I have to research dossiers with half a staffer a week whereas ten civil servants can debate over one single report. They say, on their turn: Those MPs, they are never well prepared, they have no clue. This is true, but for both sides. I also know civil servants who don't know what they're talking about... The art for the politician is to tap into all the expertise that is available in society nowadays, rather than having all the expertise yourself.*"

Table 3: How Political Elites and Administrative Elites View Expertise

EXPERTISE	Public Managers (n=55)	Elected Representatives (n=25)	Political Executives (n=14)
1. As combination of domain knowledge and management skills	31%	0%	8%
"To me, striking a balance between having people with domain knowledge and people with process skills is of the utmost importance."			
2. As loyalty and serviceability to politicians	19%	0%	0%
"Making sure politicians are really well informed when they make decisions. Having looked at the pros and cons of things. Technical pros and cons are even more important than political pros and cons."			
3. As *organizing* sufficient expertise	20%	57%	33%
"You do not always have to possess this expertise yourself but you have to utilize it. So, when making decisions it is crucial to make sure you're well-informed. You do not have to know everything yourself but you should know how to make use of available knowledge."			
4. As specific domain knowledge	15%	36%	15%
"I just don't believe managers can be managers everywhere. I see too many things go wrong. A certain state of knowledge has to be present at each level of the organization. Whether in the public or the private sector. People without such expertise fall short sooner or later"			
5. As management skills	15%	0%	8%
"For most functions general management qualities are what matters. Being good at telling people what to do, and what they should not do. And make clear why. This goes for almost all parts of the central government; such an approach works well there."			
6. As *administrative* responsibility	0%	7%	36%
"In this, of course, you depend on your civil servants."			
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Perhaps self-evident and comparable to what we observed for responsiveness, only public managers sometimes view expertise in terms of political loyalty and serviceability: respondents with statements in this category feel a duty and responsibility to feed their political masters with sufficient factual information so they can make sound decisions. As a corollary, about one third of the ministers see expertise solely as administrative responsibility. "*You cannot know everything. Yes, of course you are dependent on your civil service apparatus, and that's a good thing. If your apparatus is incompetent, boy you are having a very tough time. You cannot just change that within a year or so.*"

Lawfulness

Safeguarding lawfulness seems self-evident in public governance but the process of doing so produces many dilemmas for government elites. Even though a substantial number of respondents in all three groups view lawfulness as *sine qua non*, as shown in Table 4, a fair share of public managers and ministers ascertain that lawfulness is subordinate to efficiency and effectiveness. Clear unlawful action is always rejected and is viewed at odds with both the letter and spirit of the law. However, to improve efficiency and effectiveness in producing public value, strict adherence to the letter of the law is seen as constraining, particularly by ministers.

Table 4: How Political Elites and Administrative Elites View Lawfulness

LAWFULNESS	Public Managers (n=55)	Elected Representatives (n=25)	Political Executives (n=14)
1. As all-important value ("letter of the law")	48%	36%	25%
"*Every now and then you encounter limitations. Something is not possible. And those limitations have been established collaboratively and democratically. I'm very straightforward, you have to maintain those or it's the end of all things.*"			
2. As subordinate to efficiency and effectiveness ("spirit of the law")	29%	14%	42%
"*In certain process lawfulness is a constant barrier. In my opinion, government should operate in the spirit of the law more frequently.*"			
3. As subordinate to righteousness ("spirit of the law")	0%	14%	0%
"*Yes, 'it's all fine we have rules but rules should be there because of people and not because of rules as such. We tend to forget that sometimes. I see a lot of rigidity when it comes to rules: 'yes, we do this because the rules say so'. Rules should follow interests and not the other way around. Righteousness, that's what it's all about.*"			
4. As linked to accountability ("spirit of the law")	23%	36%	33%
"*In my view, you have to be able to explain why you do things. If I cannot explain why I am doing something I am not doing it right. If there are no arguments to say: 'I do this because of that.' And if it's lawful it fits in a certain framework. And I have a good story to tell.*"			
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Another oft-mentioned view links lawfulness to accountability: as long as one can account for non-abidance with the letter of the law, such conduct is acceptable. Strikingly, political and administrative elites are rather similar in how they categorize lawfulness: three out of four perspectives occur in each group, sometimes with small relative differences. Just as for responsiveness, we see that elites often juxtapose lawfulness against other values.

Public managers, though, seem stricter in their views: almost half of them never want to tamper with the *letter of the law*. Even though they seek room for maneuver, it is not up to the civil service but up to politicians to alter laws if they become burdens, as voiced by a departmental secretary: "*It is my job to make sure lawfulness occurs in relation to efficiency. Of course, that*

produces tensions. In some case, you have more leeway than in others, certainly when time is of the essence. But still it's better to facilitate politicians to change laws than to act less lawful. As a government, you cannot delegate such decisions to the individual civil servant."

Transparency

As Table 5 shows, clear differences exist in how our three groups of elites view transparency. Again, we see how respondents (in this case, a majority of MPs and many civil servants) link up this value with accountability. A MP of a majority faction explains: "*When you're part of a coalition, there are moments when you have to make deals and you cannot be transparent. If media ask you out, you just have to stay silent. But in those cases I just say: 'listen, these are rules of the game we've agreed on.' Rather than coming up with all sorts of excuses. Backdoor politics? What is that? Everyone knows you sometimes have to keep things inside until you can communicate a final decision.*"

Table 5: How Political Elites and Administrative Elites View Transparency

TRANSPARENCY	Public Managers (n=55)	Elected Representatives (n=25)	Political Executives (n=14)
1. As linked to accountability	45%	62%	0%
"It means of course I have to account for things and be responsible for them, just like the words say. I have to show what I've done with the resources allocated to me."			
2. As subordinate to efficiency and effectiveness	45%	23%	85%
"But if you would communicate everything real-time you could bring government to a halt. There has to be a space to provide advice in all confidentiality."			
3. As most important value, as *sine qua non*	10%	15%	15%
"The most important of all things. You cannot be transparent enough as a government."			
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

We do not find this view among ministers. In fact, most of them see transparency as subordinate to efficiency and effectiveness. According to them, transparency in every phase of the decision-making process is not conducive to good outcomes in terms of public value. They highly value the secrecy of weekly council meetings and European summits, as one seasoned Minister from the Netherlands explains: "*I am against transparency in such processes. The council of ministers has to be able to debate freely and disagree vehemently. But you also know you have to present a joint solution at the end of the day. You cannot defend such a solution wholeheartedly if the whole world has tuned in on your negotiations.*" In this context, a majority of ministers expresses very negative views on phenomena such as Wikileaks. Openness about outcomes is held in high regard whereas openness about processes is considered not opportunistic. Perhaps surprisingly, only a small minority in all three groups sees transparency as most important value.

RESULTS: COMPARING GROUPS ACROSS SETTINGS

In this section, we assess whether the politico-administrative differences in perception and prioritization of public values hold across the three institutional settings in which our respondents operate. We do this in two steps: first, we compute the percentages of statements within the established codes for politicians alone[2] within the three settings, and we do the same for public managers. We exclude codes with zero percentages for either group in our overall analysis from this analysis. Second, we juxtapose these percentages within that particular code with the percentages from the overall comparison between both groups. The aggregate percentages of our overall comparison in Tables 2 to 5 are presented in the last column of Tables 6 and 7.

We use percentages here because absolute differences in terms of statements (and respondents) differ tremendously between the three settings. Aggregate percentages in the last column should, therefore, not be read as average of percentages of statements of the three settings. Rather, by comparing overall distribution of statements per code and distribution within settings we are able to distinguish setting-specific idiosyncrasies and deviations from the overall picture.

Table 6: Views of Political Elites on Public Values across Settings (in percentages)

	The Netherlands	*European Union*	*United States*	*Aggregate*
Responsiveness				
1.	54	35	66	53
3.	10	10	17	11
4.	11	30	0	16
5.	25	25	17	20
Expertise				
1.	3	11	0	4
3.	47	44	50	46
4.	25	22	33	25
5.	8	1	0	4
6.	17	22	17	21
Lawfulness				
1.	24	40	50	30
2.	34	10	0	28
3.	14	10	0	7
4.	28	40	50	35
Transparency				
1.	28	43	33	31
2.	53	57	50	54
3.	19	0	17	15

Political Elites across Settings
Table 6 shows that distributions of views within institutional settings do not show major outliers when compared to the overall distribution. Thus, our slight overrepresentation of Dutch respondents did not distort the overall picture. A few setting-specific contrasts are worth mentioning here. Still, political elites in the USA are a bit more pronounced in their views on "responsiveness". Indeed, a vast majority viewing responsiveness "as critically weighing and balancing different interests" and no respondents perceive responsiveness "as tied to transparency".

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[2] Representatives and executives are taken together here because no political executives were interviewed within the EU and only one within the USA. Moreover, absolute numbers for each group in these settings are too small to enable meaningful comparisons across settings.

For "lawfulness" we find that respondents from the USA adhere either to the strict legalistic perception of this value or perceive the value "as linked to accountability" (arguable, a constitutional rather than strict legalistic perspective). Support for lawfulness as "subordinate to efficiency and effectiveness" – a NPM or managerial perception – is relatively overrepresented among Dutch political elites. We hardly find this view among EU respondents and not at all among US respondents. For "expertise" and "transparency" we cannot identify any noteworthy contrasts between setting-specific distributions and aggregate distributions.

Administrative Elites across Settings
Interestingly, we find that public managers in the US and EU view responsiveness relatively more often "as subordinate to lawfulness" and "tied to transparency" than Dutch public managers. For "expertise" the only setting-specific outlier is the relative large portion statements of American public managers in the category "as combination of domain knowledge and management skills" (which is, however, still the main overall category for administrative elites). Just as for political elites, public managers from the US and – to a smaller extent – the EU view "lawfulness" more often in a strict, legalistic way compared to their Dutch counterparts. Finally, EU and US public managers see "transparency" more often as a nuisance which should not be prioritized, certainly not when decision-making processes are still ongoing, when compared to their Dutch colleagues.

Table 7: Views of Administrative Elites on Public Values across Settings (in percentages)

	The Netherlands	*European Union*	*United States*	*Aggregate*
Responsiveness				
1.	38	27	33	34
2.	41	29	22	32
3.	9	23	28	22
4.	6	21	17	8
5.	6	0	0	4
Expertise				
1.	38	25	50	31
2.	22	27	15	19
3.	16	33	20	20
4.	17	5	5	15
5.	7	10	10	15
Lawfulness				
1.	34	43	88	48
2.	35	30	6	29
4.	31	27	6	23
Transparency				
1.	57	24	44	45
2.	31	58	56	45
3.	12	18	0	10

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY
Before we discuss our findings and answer our central research questions, we elicit a number of limitations of our study and what they mean for future research endeavors. First of all, when commencing this study, we knew that our sample would never be large enough to generalize conclusions to groups of government elites, *let alone* countries and systems. Moreover, our

aggregate results are undoubtedly "colored" and perhaps even biased by the overrepresentation of Dutch respondents in our sample. However, the relative universalism of differences between political and administrative elites evidenced by our comparison across settings allows us to draw conclusions on government elites in the studied contexts. Still, we are unable at this point to comprehensively develop current theory on the intersection between public values scholarship and scholarship into politico-administrative differences and government elites; we merely proposed incremental contributions and alterations to the study of public values in our field. Another potential shortcoming is that we did not differentiate between politicians with a different party background. We did not, however, detect positions towards these public values which were too "party specific" to fit in the more general categories.

It would be too easy here just to propose a large quantitative follow-up study among government elites in different countries, even though our next section provides propositions such a study could test. After all, we still know little of how specific contextual factors related to countries and governance systems might (indirectly) affect differences in perception and prioritization of public values. Additional elite-interviews in the countries under study would greatly add to the validity and range of our results, which in turn would provide support for more generalizable hypotheses to compare countries with very different institutional settings and elite populations, beyond the Western or developed world.

Finally, we should not be naïve in blindly accepting elites' accounts of their public service ethos and values (cf. Schlesinger, 1966). Clearly, interviewing or surveying well-spoken and highly intelligent individuals about their own conduct, values, or motivations inevitably suffers from a degree of social desirability bias (Vroom, 1966) and even common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, our approach of comparing in-depth reflections on values-in-use (elite ethics) rather than survey-based espoused values mitigates this caveat, at least partly.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
With our study we wanted to answer the following research question: "*How do administrative elites and political elites differ in their perception and prioritization of key public values?*" Overall, after careful categorization of our data, we find slightly more similarities than differences in terms of the number of categories and their distribution. However, we would not go as far as to support Aberbach et al.'s (1981) hybridization thesis. Indeed, the areas which show most striking differences reinforce traditional role conceptions and institutional positions (e.g., Demir, 2009; Svara, 2001) rather than hybridization or (related) recent politico-administrative dynamics (Gains, 2009; 't Hart and Wille, 2006), except for the results for expertise.

To start with *responsiveness*; the fact that one third of the statements of administrative elites embrace political loyalty – vis-à-vis zero from political elites – corroborates classical views on political neutrality of administrators and a preference for distance to voters and citizens (Aberbach and Rockman, 1994; Rohr, 1989; Van der Wal, 2011). In the same vein, we find more support for lawfulness as a superior value in decision making among public managers, and for effectiveness among political elites, particularly executives. The former suggests a careful, legalistic approach to meeting stakeholder wishes and demands whereas the latter suggests a vote-seeking, results-oriented approach by political elites, particularly in lieu of their critical weighing and balancing of different interests – by far the largest category – and the need to be transparent. Such prioritization of values corroborates earlier findings on executive political elites being primarily motivated by having impact and sitting in the driver's seat (Van der Wal, 2013).

Overall, however, four out of five categories find support in all three groups and differences in distributions of statements are modest. These findings bring us to our first research proposition:

P₁   Administrative elites view responsiveness in terms of political loyalty, law, and careful advice whereas political elites emphasize a critical balance between stakeholder interests, transparency, and organizational effectiveness

Our results for *expertise*, a public value associated with administrative elites throughout the history of our field (e.g., Wilson, 1887; Weber, 1921), are mixed in terms of how both groups differ and why. Moreover, we needed more categories to code the different positions than for any of the other values. Again, we see traditional role differences – with "loyalty and serviceability to politicians" pertaining only to administrative elites and "administrative responsibility" to politicians, particularly executives – but they are less dichotomous than for responsiveness. Moreover, administrative elites' emphasis on management skills and the *ability to organize* expertise in addition to domain knowledge itself does support recent findings on the devaluation of content-specific policy expertise vis-à-vis management skills, arguably as a result of NPM-related reforms and the way senior executive services operate nowadays (cf. Bekker, 2009; Clarke and Newman, 1997). However, both groups do not necessarily frame this perception of expertise in terms of worries and fears (cf. Frederickson, 2005), with few exceptions. Elected representatives are most outspoken here – their statements are positioned in only half the categories – and divided between two seemingly opposing views: "organizing expertise" and "specific domain knowledge". Looking closely, many representatives express their ambiguous and sometimes frustrated stance on expertise through their desire to know their dossiers inside out while realizing their schedules are too full and their staff too small to match the operant knowledge at the disposal of their administrative counterparts.

These findings suggest the following research propositions:

P₂   Administrative elites and political executives portray a variety of views on expertise whereas representatives emphasize either the need to organize sufficient expertise or to possess specific domain knowledge

P3   One of the dominant views held by political executives perceives expertise purely as administrative responsibility; this view is hardly found among representatives

Lawfulness, then, is a public value which importance may seem self-evident, even a sine qua non in elite decision-making. However, as previous research has shown, many gradations exist in how public managers view lawfulness and the extent to which they should abide by *the letter or rather the spirit of the law* (Van der Wal, 2011: 652). Moreover, Dutch politicians did not perceive lawfulness that important at all when compared with other values (Van den Heuvel et al., 2002). Our results certainly support the latter view when it comes to political executives: just as for some of the other values almost half of their statements subordinate this value to efficiency and effectiveness ("getting things done"). A considerable number of statements by executives links this value to transparency; upon closer look, however, these seem to suggest one can be less lawful if actions and decision can be properly accounted for afterwards, which amounts to de facto subordination as well (cf. Van der Wal et al., 2008). Representatives are most mixed in their views on lawfulness, with some of their statements making up a unique category of "lawfulness being subordinate to righteousness", corroborating their slightly more ideological and activist stance in decision making (cf. Aberbach et al., 1981).

Public managers hold a stricter interpretation of lawfulness than representatives and ministers, which seems somewhat at odds with earlier findings by Van der Wal (2011), even though

we find more statements in the "all-important value" category here for all three groups than for any other value. Based on the findings for lawfulness, we formulate hypothesis four and five.

P4   Administrative elites perceive lawfulness more strictly, in terms of the letter
       of the law, than political elites
P5   Representatives place more value on abiding by the letter of the law than
       political executives

Intriguingly, our findings suggest that administrative elites and political elites differ most clearly in their views on *transparency*. Statements are more outspoken, leading to less categories (three) when compared with the other values yet immense contrasts between our three groups for two of these categories. So far, despite the recent surge in studies on transparency within the domain of public management (Meijer, 2012; Piotrowski, 2010) we knew very little about whether, why, and how politicians and administrators (should) view this value differently. Our data show that political executives subordinate this value to the efficiency and effectiveness in overwhelming majority whereas a minority holds an opposite view by viewing this value as most important (interestingly, this is a minority viewpoint among all the interviewed elites). These results clearly reinforce those for responsiveness (cf. Van der Wal, 2013). Quite a number of statements by executives even contain praise for those maintaining as much secrecy as possible during decision-making processes; others are immensely fierce in their condemnation for whistle blowers and Wikileaks in this regard. In addition, executives do not view transparency as closely connected with accountability whereas a considerable number of administrative elites and representatives perceive them to be neighbour values or even co-values (cf. Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007: 371; Van der Wal, 2011: 651). Administrative elites also balance the need to be transparent in decision making with the need to be efficient and effective at the same time (cf. Van der Wal, 2011: 654), but they are much less outspoken than executives.

Based on our data we formulate the following propositions on transparency:

P6   Political executives give considerably lower priority to transparency in
       decision making than representatives and public managers; they find
       efficiency and effectiveness much more important
P7   Differences in the perception and prioritization of transparency between
       administrative elites and political elites are clearer than for other public values

Finally, our findings show most of the politico-administrative differences hold when we dissect the categories for the three institutional settings, with few exceptions which merely reinforce earlier notions on legalist and constitutionalist approaches to public values in the USA (cf. Rutgers, 2000; Spicer, 1995; Rohr, 1989).

P8   Differences between perception and prioritization of public values by administrative
       elites and political elites largely hold across institutional settings; function rather
       than system seems to determine what's valued most

To conclude, an intriguing overall finding is that our qualitative categorizations of elite reflections on values often show elites connect particular values to other values in decision making (either as part of our beyond the four values we studied) and view them as either inseparable or incommensurable. This finding lends support and adds thick description to earlier quantitative

correlations between and categorizations of interrelated public values as "neighbor values" or "co-values" (Beck Jorgensen & Bozeman 2007).

Does this mean we have unraveled the "public values universe" (Van der Wal et al., 2013) just a bit more through our qualitative approach and by including politicians, or does classifying and understanding public values remain fuzzy and is this just "as good as it gets" (Rutgers, 2014)? In our view, critical reflection on the content and context of public values by key governance players adds to the current rather monolithic body of knowledge on public values. We hope our study inspires others to expand a qualitative research agenda in this area which no longer neglects politicians. This way, we will not only improve the quality of scholarship on public values and government elites but also mitigate the troublesome relationship between Public Administration and Political Science which impedes serious progress in studies on any topic in public governance.

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