



# Parliamentary attention for integrity

Analysis of Parliamentary questions in  
the House of Representatives  
in the period 2000 – 2015

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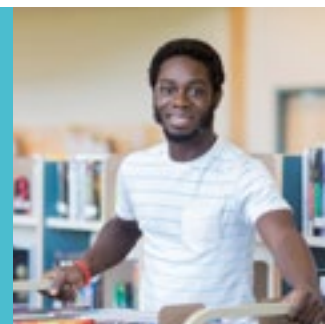
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# Management summary

'Parliamentary attention for integrity' contains the results of a preliminary review of Parliamentary attention for integrity in the period 2000 – 2015. This attention is important as this often serves as an incentive to improve integrity in the public, semi-public and private sector. This review spans a limited portion of the House of Representatives' attention for integrity. Parliamentary questions in writing containing the term 'integrity' were reviewed.

The review analyses various aspects. For example, it details to what extent members of the House of Representatives paid attention to the theme of integrity in the period 2000 – 2015 by asking Parliamentary questions. The review checked which political parties and members of the House of Representatives have focused on the subject of integrity. The review also analysed if these persons acted mainly on integrity violation cases covered in the media, or if they pro-actively put the subject on the agenda. Furthermore, the review analysed which type of integrity violations the members of the House of Representatives have raised and to what extent they focus on the context of the cases. Also the type of sector (public, semi-public or private) that received the most attention was included in the analysis.

The results show that in the period 2000 – 2015, the number of Parliamentary questions on integrity has increased, with highs and lows. Large and left parties are leading in asking Parliamentary questions on integrity. Furthermore, the review shows that some Representatives have frequently put the subject of integrity on the agenda. The reason for Parliamentary questions is often media coverage of violations. Members of the House of Representatives seldom put integrity on the agenda in a preventative context. Furthermore, abuse of authorisations, conflicting interests and corruption often lead to Parliamentary questions. Most members of the House of Representatives ask questions about the context of the relevant violations. This creates attention for the circumstances of the violations within the relevant organisations or Boards. In the Parliamentary questions on integrity, most of the attention concerns the public sector, and relatively few questions relate to the semi-public and private sector. Parliamentary questions on integrity creates political attention which supports the creation of legislation and regulations.

The authors make the following recommendations in their review:

- 1 More extensive follow-up research into Parliamentary attention for integrity is desirable.
- 2 More Parliamentary attention for integrity in the semi-public and private sector is desirable.
- 3 A more pro-active attitude of members of the House of Representatives to put the subject on the agenda in time and more prominently.

A detailed overview of conclusions and recommendations is set out in Section 8.

# 1 Introduction

'Parliamentary attention for integrity' contains the results of a preliminary review of Parliamentary attention for integrity. This is important as Parliamentary attention often serves as an incentive to improve integrity in the public and private sector. For example, it can instigate a Minister to encourage the public and private sector to take extra measures.

Integrity within organisations is not self-evident. Among others in the industrial sector, construction, sports, banks, charities, healthcare, education and public administration, integrity violations is a frequent occurrence. This often results in major consequences and social indignation. This is why the subject of integrity is on the agenda in the House of Representatives. This is extra important because members of the House of Representatives give an important incentive to improving the ethical climate in the Netherlands by asking critical questions, expressing disapproval, ordering inspections, calling for self-regulation and – as a last resort – announcing legislation. But is the theme of integrity top-of-mind for members of the House of Representatives?

The review assesses to what extent the House of Representatives paid attention to integrity in the period 2000 – 2015. In addition to the question whether or not attention for integrity is increasing or decreasing, the review also analysed when members of the House of Representatives 'hook on' to the theme of integrity. Do they respond pro-actively or reactively? Do they act mainly on integrity violations cases covered in the media, or does their attention stretch beyond that? Do they mainly focus on the public, semi-public or private sector, or is their attention evenly distributed? How is their attention distributed over the political spectre? These are questions that are answered in this review.

## DEFINITION OF INTEGRITY

Integrity is defined as acting in accordance with the morals, values and standards shared in society. Integrity is a core element of good governance (Huberts 2014). It contributes to people's trust in the governance and the constitutional state, encourages economic growth, promotes social stability and leads to better public service provision (Bossaert and Demmke 2005). Integrity is naturally also crucial to corporate life, improving the continuity and reputation of organisations, preventing new regulations, facilitating business, restricting transaction and supervisory fees, and it drives social progress (Boschman and Kaptein 2016).

## Structure of this review

This review is based on analysis of Parliamentary questions in writing. Other Parliamentary documents such as amendments, motions or bills were not considered. Only the Parliamentary questions were analysed; the responses were not considered. The search term 'integrity' was used to find the relevant documents. Associated search terms such as leaking information, nepotism and fraud were not considered. This also applies where the word integrity did not directly relate to ethical performance of people and organisations, such as territorial integrity. This is why the review spans a limited portion of the House of Representatives' attention for integrity.

The Parliamentary questions containing the term integrity were retrieved from the website [officielebekendmakingen.nl](http://officielebekendmakingen.nl). The Parliamentary questions<sup>[1]</sup> were asked in the period 2000 – 2015. Then a selection was made based on the criteria set out above. The remaining 154 Parliamentary questions were further analysed. Subsequently, factual characteristics were recorded, such as the year of the question, the relevant member of the House of Representatives and the political party that submitted it, and the Minister/ Ministers that the question was addressed to. In addition, substantive aspects were recorded. This concerns the reason for the Parliamentary question, the sector it relates to and whether the question concerns the administrative<sup>[2]</sup> level (political delegates, members of the Executive Board or Supervisory Board, high ranked civil servants, Secretaries of State or Ministers). The review also charts if the question is about specific forms of integrity violations or a broader context. The typology of De Graaf and Strüwer (2014) was used for qualification of the specific forms of integrity violations (see attachment 1).

[1] Specifically, this concerns the documents 'Parliamentary questions without responses'.

[2] Administrative level concerns the elected and appointed holders of public office.

## 2 Gradually more attention for integrity

Between 2000 through 2015, a gradually increasing line is detected in the attention for integrity in the House of Representatives (see Figure 1).

From 2003 onwards, a clear increase is visible, with highs in 2004 and 2005. In both years, the Parliamentary questions were almost all focused on integrity within the public sector. After a decrease in the number of Parliamentary questions in 2006 and in part in 2007, it increases again, once more with most of the focus on the public sector. The outliers in terms of numbers are 2011 and 2013. Furthermore, it is remarkable that the Parliamentary questions mainly concern integrity on administrative level after 2011.

This impression is in line with previous policy reviews on integrity policy within the government (Hoekstra and Kaptein 2011; Hoekstra, Huberts and Gaisbauer 2016). This shows that in the period 2003 – 2007, the theme of integrity was more prominently on the political agenda than in the previous period. Explicitly including the theme of integrity in the coalition agreement of the Balkenende II Cabinet in the year 2003, the debates in the House of Representatives about the theme of integrity, and the

public moral in the year 2004 are exemplary. Several policy evaluations state that another significant impulse is needed to improve the integrity policy of the civil service. The outcomes of this evaluation, the conclusion of the Parliamentary investigation of Construction Fraud<sup>[3]</sup> (December 2002) and the amendment of the Civil Servants Act about integrity in the year 2006 contribute to more attention for the theme integrity. From 2007, the attention for integrity gradually increased. Critical evaluations of the implementation of integrity policies within the government in 2008 and 2010, of the whistle blower regulation in 2008 and news articles about the negative consequences for some prominent whistle blowers indicate that there is plenty of room for improvement. Attention for integrity on administrative level is also increasing. This also seems to be caused by a number of integrity violation cases and growing dissatisfaction about high incomes, secondary positions with conflicting interests and misuse of expenses of public administrators. Eventually this resulted in an amendment in 2015 (State Journal of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2015) explicitly highlighting the importance of integrity for the administrative level in the Province, Municipality and Water Boards Act.

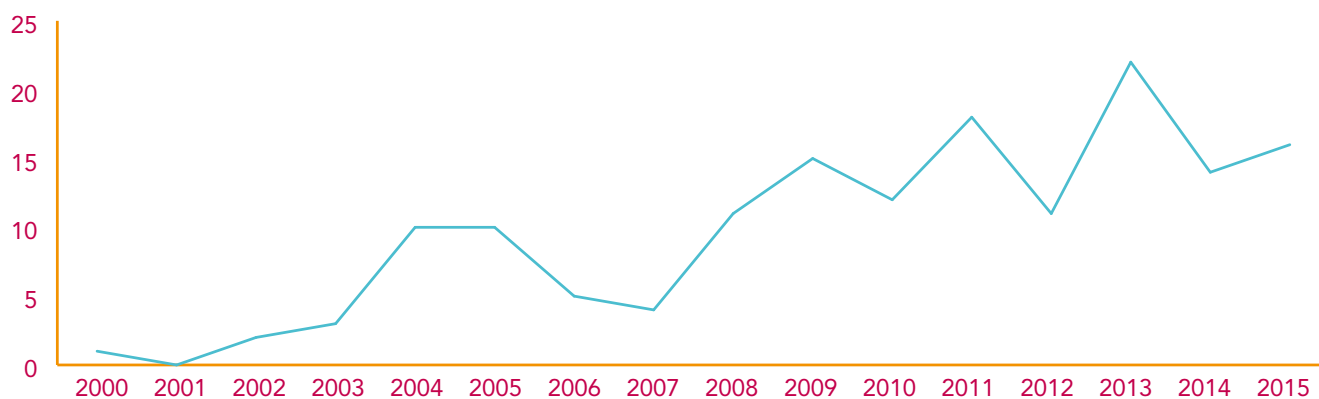


Figure 1: Number of Parliamentary questions with attention for integrity during the period 2000 – 2015

[3] This concerns a difference in the policy as documented and the follow-up actions on that policy.

### 3 Large and left parties are leading

Large and left-wing parties have the most attention for integrity in the House of Representatives, as shown in Figure 2.<sup>[4]</sup> The fact that smaller parties – certainly the one-person fractions – simply have fewer members in the House of Representatives to prepare and ask questions plays a role in this.

The top four political parties asking the most Parliamentary questions on integrity are the SP (democratic socialist) leads, followed by PvdA (social democratic), CDA (Christian democratic) and VVD (conservative liberal).

A comment to Figure 2 is that political parties such as LPF and PVV were not able to ask as many questions, as they were active in the House of Representatives for only part of the period reviewed.

The 154 Parliamentary questions selected for this review were submitted by 89 different members of the House of Representatives. Although virtually all of these members had a single question on integrity, some asked more than one question. This was most frequently the case within SP with Ronald van Raak as the ‘top scorer’. Former VVD member Laetitia Griffith also asked several questions about integrity. The fact that some asked more than one question may be related to the portfolio distribution within the party, but it could also be based on the member’s personal affinity with the subject.

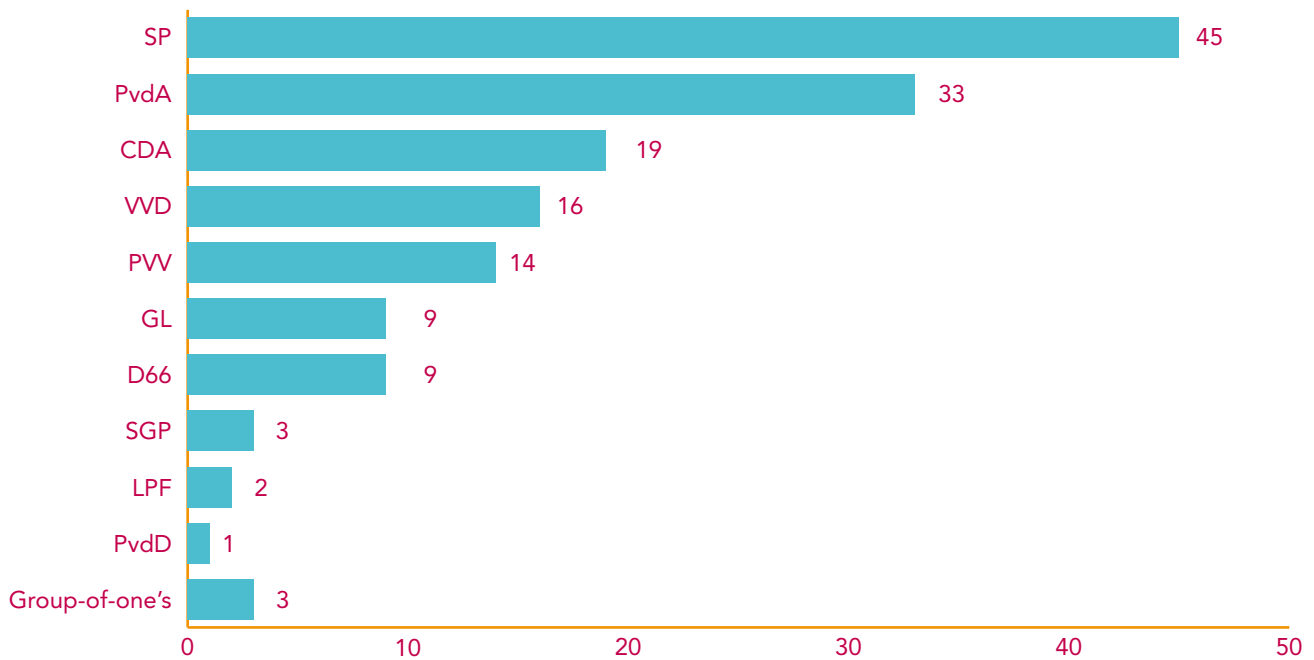


Figure 2: Total number of Parliamentary questions by political parties in the period 2000 – 2015

[4] The analysis considers only the background of the first person submitting the Parliamentary question.



# 4 Media influence and consideration of context

## Media influence high

The reasons for Parliamentary questions were also analysed. Do the members of the House of Representatives take a personal interest in integrity and integrity policies, or do they mainly respond to specific integrity issues that occur in society. The latter seems to predominate: by far most cases are a reaction to news articles and other media features regarding specific incidents.

## Attention for different types of integrity violations

The sort of integrity violation cases that members of the House of Representatives have raised are of a diverse nature. Issues that most frequently occur are related to misuse of authorisations, positions that are not reconcilable, and corruption / bribery (see Figure 3).

## Similarities with other publications

The above integrity violations seem to occur in similar ratios. This is indicated in research conducted by VU (Free University of Amsterdam) into the nature and scale of integrity violations within the Dutch government (De Graaf en Strüwer 2014). For this review, over 7.300 civil servants completed a survey about integrity violation cases that they observed in the past few years. Remarkably, this survey also shows a high score for misuse of authority,

and irreconcilable positions. Although corruption / bribery are far less frequent in the VU survey, the fact that this category is relatively overrepresented in Parliamentary questions can be explained: corruption is a severe form of an integrity violation, and therefore has a high profile.

The interest of the House of Representatives in irreconcilable positions is also visible at the [Steunpunt Integriteitsonderzoek Politieke Ambtsdragers \(National integrity advice desk for political administrators\)](#). From the [2015 Annual Overview](#) it is apparent that most of the cases concern conflict of interest. This is understandable in particular at a local level. Local political delegates are often active and engaged members of the municipal community, giving rise to more tension between the various interests.

## Consideration of context

Most of the Parliamentary questions go beyond the specific integrity issue and also highlight the context in which the violation took place. Such context-related questions are indicated with 'Category General' in Figure 3. The members of the House of Representatives not solely focus on the specific integrity violation, but also aim to have an adequate impression of the general situation (induction). What is going on within a certain organisation, occupational group or public body? How about their integrity policies and supervision and enforcement? Those are examples of their contextual questions about incidents.

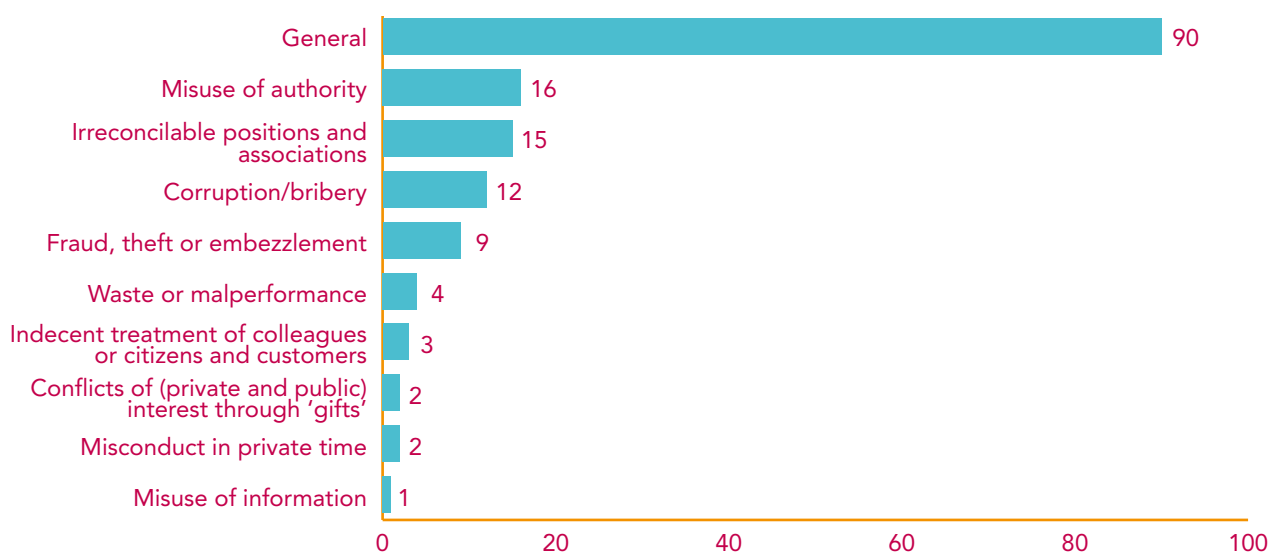


Figure 3: Total number of Parliamentary questions by subject in the period 2000 – 2015

## 'Bad apple' versus 'bad barrel'

From literature, organisations are known to have a choice of two different perspectives on incidents (Hoekstra 2012; Kaptein 1998). From the first perspective organisations focus solely on the integrity violation. The principle is that some individuals simply have an inadequately developed ethical notion. Such 'bad apples' should quickly be traced and removed from the organisation. Incidents are considered as regrettable and isolated events that are attributable to the individual actions of a single person. After the proverbial 'bad apple' has been removed, the organisation returns to the order of the day.

In the second perspective, the focus shifts to the organisational context. This considers the organisational structure and culture within which the violations occurred.

If it goes wrong, the 'bad apple' is eliminated, and any system errors interwoven in the structure and culture of an organisation are considered ('bad barrel'), as this could infect all the healthy apples. Examples of this type of shortcomings are unrealistic targets, exercising pressure, a sick culture, bad ethical leadership and inappropriate role modelling. The review shows that members of the House of Representatives ask questions from this broader, contextual, perspective.

Figure 4 shows the top five of relatively most asked contextual questions. Most questions highlight an integrity issue and then relate this to the integrity of the full organisation, occupational group or the sector. Alerts from whistle blowers also lead to questions about their reporting options, protection and offering appropriate positions.

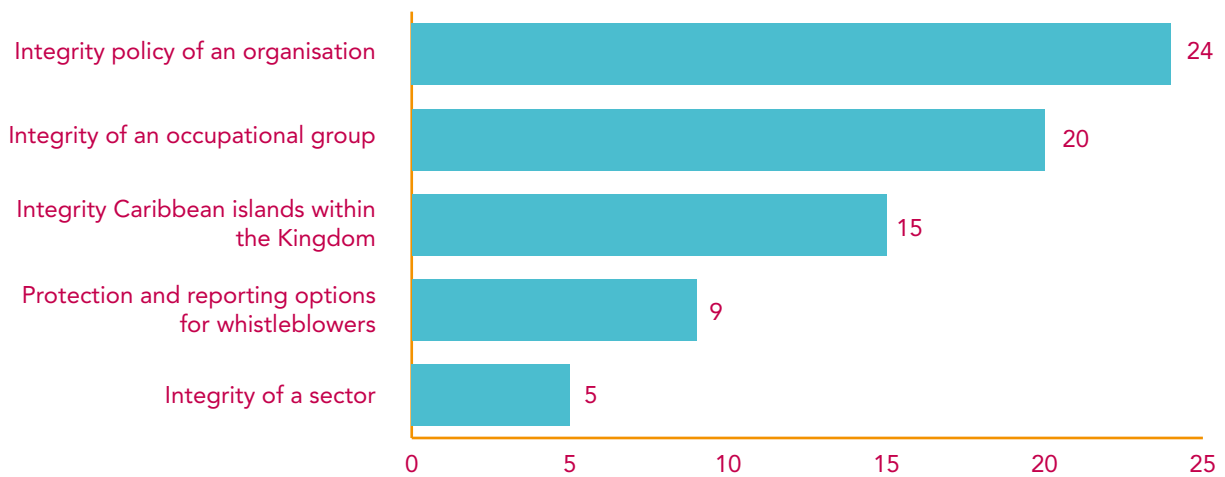


Figure 4: Top five of general integrity-related Parliamentary questions in the period 2000 – 2015

# 5 Most Parliamentary questions concern the public domain

Which sector did the Parliamentary questions concern? The review discerns three sectors: the public, semi-public and private sector. The public sector includes the National Government, Provincial authorities, Municipal authorities and Water Boards. The semi-public sector includes health-care institutions, educational institutions, welfare institutions and housing corporations. The private sector comprises all independent and autonomous organisations such as banks, manufacturing or healthcare insurers. Almost seventy percent of the Parliamentary questions regarding integrity relate to the public sector (see Figure 5).

This major attention for the public sector is plausible. After all, the government is funded by tax payers' money and has a monopoly position. This results in strong dependence of citizens on adequate implementation of public tasks with integrity. This is not so much the case in the private sector.

By far the fewest questions concern the semi-public sector. This is remarkable in view of the large amounts concerned. Furthermore, the analysis of the Parliamentary questions in the past fifteen years shows that attention for integrity in the public sector has increased more than relating to the semi-public and private sector (see Figure 6).

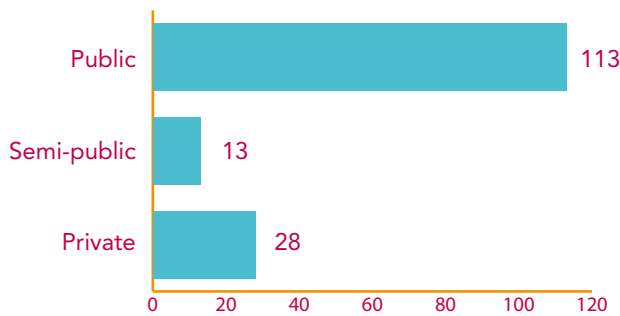


Figure 5: Public, semi-public or private sector that are the subject of Parliamentary questions in the period 2000 – 2015

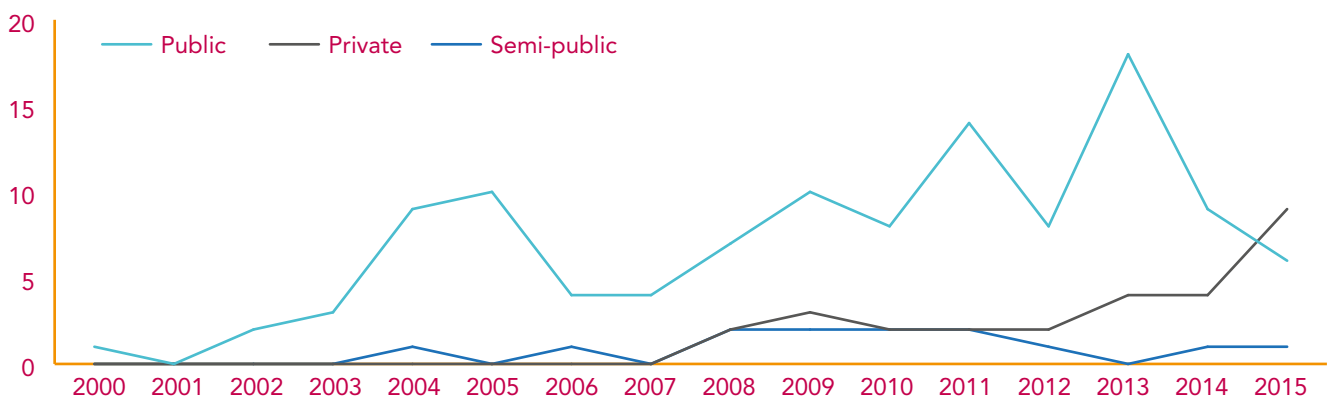


Figure 6: Parliamentary questions by sector in the period 2000 – 2015

## 6 Gradually more attention for administrative integrity

The analysis also showed that one third of the Parliamentary questions concerns administrative integrity. Administrative in this review is defined as the political delegates, Secretaries of State and Ministers, senior civil servants and members of Executive Boards and Supervisory Boards. Of the Parliamentary questions under review concerning the public sector, 39 percent is related to administrative integrity. This is 21 percent in the semi-public sector and 38 percent in the private sector. From 2010 onwards, attention for administrative integrity is clearly increasing, with a peak in 2013.

The increasing attention for administrative integrity in the House of Representatives may be related to increasing internal attention for this subject within the government (see paragraph 2). For example, having a Code of Conduct is mandatory for political administrators. In 2013 the [Integrity guideline of political administrators at Municipal authorities, Provincial authorities and Water Boards](#) was published by the government, containing a template Code of Conduct. The national integrity advice desk for political administrators, reflects the increasing attention for administrative integrity. The national desk advises the Provincial Commissioners, Mayors and Water Board Chairmen relating to possible integrity violations by a political delegate.

## 7 Most Parliamentary questions concern the Ministries of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and Security & Justice

In the past fifteen years, by far the most Parliamentary questions were asked to the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BKZ) and the Ministry of Security and Justice (VenJ) (see Figure 7). This outcome is not surprising in view of their role and responsibilities. For example, BKZ is responsible for public governance and therefore for its quality and integrity. The Ministry has four roles in the systemic responsibility for integrity: standards, supervision,

support and interventions. VenJ is responsible for anti-corruption and fraud policy. The services of this Ministry intervene in people's lives. This would include penitentiary facilities, the Child Protection Board, the National Police (NP) and the Immigration and Naturalisation Department (IND). Any integrity violation cases in that environment have a disproportional impact on society and affect the citizens' trust in the government.

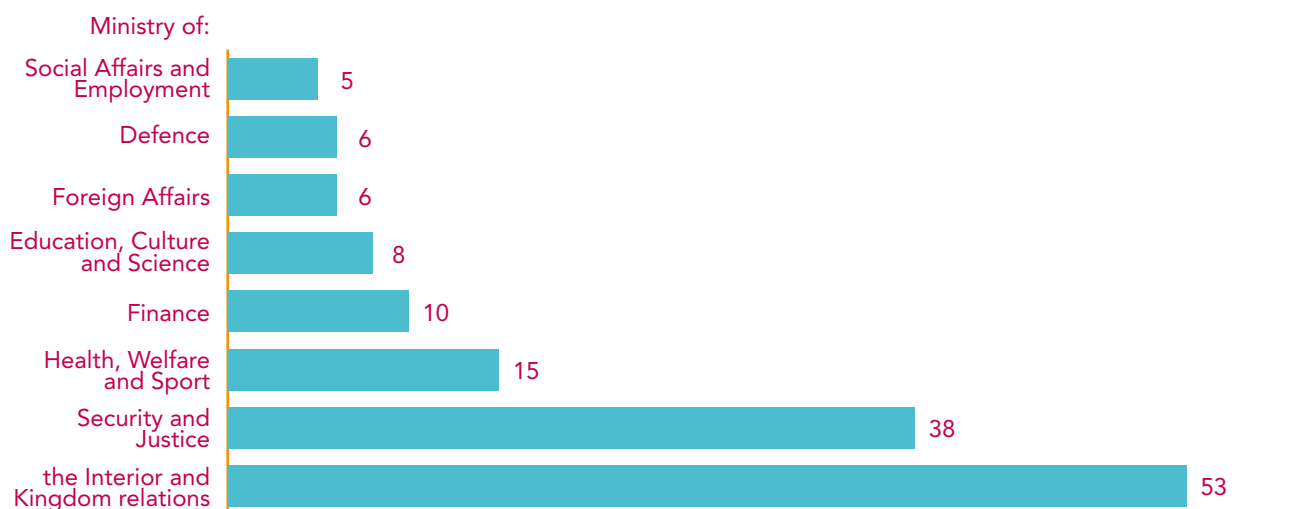


Figure 7: Overview of the Ministries receiving the most Parliamentary questions in 2000 – 2015.

# 8 Conclusions and recommendations

This review of the development in attention of the members of the House of Representatives for the theme of integrity covers a 15-year period. Because the review has a limited scope, a conservative indication of attention in the House of Representatives for the theme of integrity can be provided. The House of Representatives plays a major role in adequate performance of the public, semi-public and private sectors, and building trust with the citizens. An actual or suspected integrity violation quickly gathers media attention and affects trust. Asking critical Parliamentary questions is a major impulse for a better ethical climate in the Netherlands.

## Conclusions

The analysis offers the following preliminary conclusions:

- 1 During the period from 2000 – 2015, the number of Parliamentary questions about integrity has risen. This is a positive trend in spite of the highs and lows.
- 2 Large and left parties are leading in asking Parliamentary questions, specifically putting the theme of integrity on the agenda.
- 3 The reason for Parliamentary questions is often media coverage of violations and integrity investigations. Members of the House of Representatives seldom put integrity on the agenda in a preventative context.
- 4 Abuse of authority, conflicting interests and corruption often lead to Parliamentary questions due to their impact.
- 5 Most members of the House of Representatives ask questions about the context in which the integrity violation took place. They aim to have an adequate impression of the general situation of integrity in the organisation, sector or profession.
- 6 Some Representatives have frequently put the subject of integrity on the agenda. They seem to have personal affinity with the theme.
- 7 In the Parliamentary questions on integrity, most of the attention concerns the public sector, and relatively few questions relate to the semi-public and private sector. This may be related with the special role that the government fulfils within society. The underrepresentation of the semi-public sector is remarkable.
- 8 Most Parliamentary questions were asked to the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Ministry of Security and Justice. This is due to their responsibility for respectively the integrity, anti-corruption and anti-fraud policies.
- 9 Political attention contributes to creating legislation and regulations. This is shown by the whistleblower cases. Various Parliamentary questions focused on the position of whistleblowers in the Netherlands. Also for this reason, the Whistleblower Act was adopted in 2016, and in its wake the new institute [Huis voor Klokkeluiders](#) (Dutch Whistle-blower Authority) opened its doors in July 2016.

## Recommendations

The authors make the following recommendations:

- A The report has an explorative nature and provides a preliminary impression. More extensive follow-up research is desirable. If another study is conducted based on associated search terms and other Parliamentary documents such as Parliamentary Responses, this will provide more insights into how the House of Representatives actually puts integrity on the agenda and audits integrity in the various sectors.
- B Members of the House of Representatives can give an important incentive to improving the ethical climate in the Netherlands by asking critical questions, expressing disapproval, ordering inspections, calling for self-regulation and – as a last resort – announcing legislation. For example, the House can urge a Minister to encourage the public and private sector to take extra measures. Furthermore, it is important for members of the House of Representatives to continue fulfilling their critical role. For the public sector, a positive trend has become clear; for the semi-public and private sector, more attention would seem desirable.
- C The reason for a Parliamentary question into integrity is almost always an integrity violation case or integrity issue. This means members of the House of Representatives are mainly reactive. They could adopt a more pro-active attitude to put the subject on the agenda in time and more prominently.

## APPENDIX

# Overview categorisation type wrongdoing and sub-categories

- Dubious commitments or gifts
- Misconduct off the job
- Irreconcilable positions and associations
- Misuse of information or access to information
- Corruption/bribes
  - Old boys' network
  - Non-compliance with tender rules
  - Bribes
  - Other
- Fraud, theft or embezzlement
  - Non-permissible items expense form
  - Theft
  - General benefiting
- Waste or malperformance
  - Working hours
  - Inappropriate performance in terms of working hours
  - Private issues
  - Marginalised
  - Responsibility for suffering on the work floor
  - Non-representative
  - Alcohol
  - Other
- Misuse of authorisations
  - Education
  - Enforcement, legislation, regulations and procedures
  - Non-compliance with tender rules (overlap with authorisations)
  - Criticism
  - Individual authorisation
  - Other
- Undesirable interaction
  - Harassment
  - Threat
  - Other

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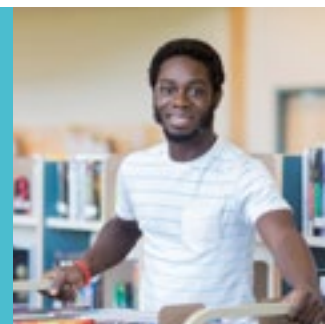




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