

Summary

Support for the Dutch rule of law among asylum permit holders

Identification, shared values, evaluations, and institutional trust

Background

In recent years, the Netherlands have received large groups of asylum migrants, among which Syrians and Eritreans were the prominent nationalities. Now that many of these migrants have received an asylum permit in the Netherlands, there are worries regarding their structural integration, for instance in terms of their labor market participation and social integration. Furthermore, there are concerns with regards to support for the Dutch rule of law among this group. An important cause for these latter concerns is the national context that many asylum permit holders come from. Given that the rule of law tends to be challenged in the origin countries of many asylum permit holders, an often-heard assumption is that they will struggle to recognize and accept the values of the rule of law as they apply in the Netherlands. At the same time, however, one could argue that exactly the absence of an adequate rule of law could have played a role in the decision to migrate in the first place. If this were true, we would expect exceptionally high support for the Dutch rule of law among asylum permit holders. As opposed to questions regarding structural and social integration of asylum permit holders in the Netherlands, which have long been a topic of study, little is known about how this group relates to the Dutch rule of law. The current study provides a first insight in support for the rule of law among asylum permit holders.

Asylum permit holders are an interesting group with regards to support for the rule of law. This is firstly because, as mentioned previously, their national background implies that their frame of reference will differ from that of the average person living in the Netherlands. Being newcomers, asylum migrants get acquainted with all aspects of the Netherlands, of which the rule of law is merely an element. It is currently unknown to what extent asylum permit holders support the Dutch rule of law and how this relationship is shaped. Secondly, from the first moment they arrive in the Netherlands asylum permit holders are confronted with the rule of law in the form of the Migration Service (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst (IND)) and the procedures relevant to their asylum request. Arguably, these experiences are related to their support for the rule of law. Support for the rule of law among the people is essential to its functioning and very existence, making the questions posed here relevant beyond the field of migration studies or integration policy. A better understanding of support for the rule of law and the underlying processes can contribute to evidence based policy aimed at guaranteeing support for the rule of law among the population as a whole. The current study should be seen as a pilot aiming to provide a first tentative answer to the posed questions.

The concept of support in this study and research questions

The concept of support for the rule of law can be defined in several ways. The current study distinguishes four elements: (1) identification as a member of the Dutch rule of law; (2) support for the core values and principles of the Dutch rule of law; (3) evaluations of the performance of the Dutch rule of law; and (4) trust in the institutions of the Dutch rule of law. The analytical model is described in more detail

in chapter 2. This study considered two factors that could potentially influence support for the rule of law. The study focused on the following research questions.

- 1 To what extent do asylum permit holders identify as members of the Dutch rule of law?
- 2 How do asylum permit holders view the core values and principles of (the institutions of) the Dutch rule of law?
- 3 How do asylum permit holders evaluate the performance of the Dutch rule of law?
- 4 To what extent do asylum permit holders trust (the institutions of) the Dutch rule of law?
- 5 Do experiences with institutions matter for support for the rule of law?
- 6 Does knowledge of the rule of law matter for support for the rule of law?

Methods

Given that asylum permit holders form a group that is typically hard to reach for research purposes, this study called for a careful approach. For this reason, we studied the research questions using a combination of various (quantitative as well as qualitative) methods, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. We interviewed twenty Syrian asylum permit holders, who differed in their duration of residence in the Netherlands; we distributed a questionnaire among 72 participants in the PVT workshops; and organized focus groups with trainers of the PVT workshops in various locations across the Netherlands. These methods complement each other, and together they provide a first insight into support for the rule of law among asylum permit holders. The methods, as well as the representativeness of the participants, are further discussed in chapter 3.

Main results

The results of our study point at generally high support for the Dutch rule of law among the participating asylum permit holders, with regards to all defined aspects of support. The results are discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

Interviewees identify as members of the rule of law; insecurity about permanent residence plays a role

The interviewed asylum permit holders generally identify as members of the Dutch rule of law. They feel treated equally compared to other people in the Netherlands and perceive that they have equal rights. Several of the interviewees realize that this does not apply (yet) to electoral rights, but most of them believe this to be logical and do not interpret this as inequality. Hence, this difference in electoral rights does not form an obstacle to identification as a member of the rule of law. In contrast, insecurity about permanent residence does. Several of the interviewees indicate that they do not feel entirely protected by the Dutch government as long as there is a chance they might be sent back to Syria. Some of the PVT trainers point out the importance of feeling secure about one's permanent residence for newcomers' position in the rule of law as well.

Broad support for freedom among interviewees

The interviewees share the values of freedom and equality, two of the core values of the Dutch rule of law. Many of them also believe that parliament should not get involved in legal procedures, thereby showing support for the principle of the separation of powers. The interviewed asylum permit holders value freedom and unanimously believe that freedom cannot exist without limits. The interviewees mentioned harming or offending others as examples of limits to freedom. Research among the general Dutch population reveals similar patterns, as well as showing that people believe there should be limits to freedom. The current study also finds broad sup-

port for freedom of religion, among religious as well as non-religious participants. Furthermore, religious interviewees believe that people should also have the right to be atheist. This suggests that support for freedom reaches beyond self-interest.

Interviewees value equality, and gender equality in particular

The asylum permit holders who were interviewed for the present study value equality and believe this should come without limits. A recurring topic in interviews with both male and female respondents is that of gender equality. The interviewees collectively share the importance of equal rights for men and women, although some of them question the extent to which all Syrians in the Netherlands actually live by this. This impression is shared by the PVT trainers, who observe that recent asylum permit holders are generally aware of the existence of gender equality in the Netherlands, although it is the trainers' impression that not all of them have fully accepted this idea. In addition, some of the trainers voice their concerns regarding support for LGBTQI rights among recent asylum permit holders. However, in the large majority of the interviews in which this topic was discussed, the participants expressed positive attitudes about gay rights.

Interviewees evaluate the Dutch rule of law positively compared to the Syrian one; some criticisms as well

The interviewees are generally satisfied with the performance of the Dutch rule of law. This becomes especially obvious when they make comparisons with the Syrian rule of law or police. People appreciate the freedom and equality they experience in the Netherlands and generally recount positive experiences with the Dutch police, especially compared with the Syrian police. Some people spontaneously confront the situation in the Netherlands with their expectations of the rule of law, and express somewhat critical opinions. An example of this is the unequal pay between men and women; interviewees indicate that they did not expect that this could exist in the Dutch rule of law.

Participants trust the Dutch rule of law and its institutions

Both the interviews and the questionnaires show that participants in the study trust the Dutch government, the IND and the police. In addition, the questionnaire suggests that the participating asylum permit holders trust that Dutch judges would treat suspects with different backgrounds equally. With regards to trust in the government, the results once again point at the importance of security about permanent residence: interviewees who worry that they might be sent back to Syria indicate that they have no or only limited trust the Dutch government.

Experiences with institutions are related to several forms of support for the rule of law

The results point at the importance of experiences for the various forms of support for the rule of law. Several interviewees base their feelings of identification as members of the Dutch rule of law on their experiences of equal treatment by (government) institutions. At the same time, some interviewees recount experiences with institutions that made them feel like outsiders, thereby undermining their feelings of identification. It goes without saying that experiences also play a role in evaluations of the performance of the Dutch rule of law. Finally, several people indicate that their experiences with the IND and Dutch police have contributed to their trust in these institutions. When interpreting these results it is important to keep in mind that the asylum applications of all of our interviewees was accepted, and, given the situation in Syria, that this happened relatively quickly. Arguably, asylum migrants

whose applications were rejected or required a longer processing time will have more negative experiences with (and hence views of) the Dutch rule of law.

Limited importance of knowledge for support for the rule of law

The importance of knowledge for support for the rule of law seems only limited. Some interviewees indicate however that they feel certain of their position in the Dutch rule of law thanks to their language skills and knowledge of their rights. This is an indication of identification as a member of the rule of law. Moreover, all interviewees who are opposed to parliamentary involvement in legal proceedings are familiar with the principle of *trias politica*. With regards to support for freedom and equality, the two other core principles that were considered in this study, we do not observe differences between people with more or less knowledge of the rule of law. In addition, neither the interviews nor the questionnaire indicates a relationship between knowledge and trust.

Additional research necessary for better understanding of support for the rule of law and underlying processes

The present study has provided a first attempt at understanding support for the rule of law among asylum permit holders. Due to the limited number of participants, however, we cannot assume that the results reported here are representative for all asylum permit holders in the Netherlands. Moreover, lacking a benchmark for support for the rule of law among other groups, including the general Dutch population, it is hard to qualify the outcomes of this study. Future research should aim to fill this gap. In addition, further research is necessary to study in a more systematic fashion how support for the rule of law relates to knowledge and experiences. This will allow for a more general impression of support for the rule of law among asylum permit holders.