The Dark Side of Politics:
Kynicism, Cynicism and Political Behaviour

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Abstract

Scholars provide evidence of increasing political cynicism in the Netherlands and other European countries. Although some warn about its alarming implications, others see a moderate and healthy critical type of cynicism, or distrust, as facilitator of democracy modernization (De Vreese, 2005; Dekker & Schyns, 2006; Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Warren, 1999; Sloterdijk, 1984/20056). In this paper I investigate the nature of cynicism in Dutch politics.

Borrowing the notions of cynicism and kynicism from Sloterdijk (1984/20056) we can identify as kynics the cynical citizens that remain hopeful, and as cynics, the cynical citizens that lack hope. On the basis of this distinction, I test for differences between kynics and cynics regarding their political behaviour.

Data is collected through three web-surveys. Results show that there are no differences between kynics and cynics regarding interest in politics, participation and involvement. Other findings indicate differences between kynics and cynics regarding political ideology and self placement in the political spectrum.

For future research I recommend a more distinct characterization of kynics and cynics than solely based on the emotion hope. This study is original because the element of emotion is for the first time used to identify how cynical citizens react towards political parties and candidates.
Introduction

Several scholars claim that cynicism is the most important problem facing the democratic world today (Chaloupka, 1999; Citrin & Green, 1986; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Dogan, 2005; Goldfarb, 1991; Pharr & Putnam, 2000). Sloterdijk states that the discontent in our culture has assumed a new quality; it appears as a universal diffuse cynicism (Sloterdijk, 2005, p. 3). Studies struggling with this problem often focus on the possible sources of cynicism like political corruption, or the media (Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Other studies focus on the characteristics of cynics and their effects. Dekker (2006, p. 45) for instance states that it is still not clear why one cynic will vote and another cynic won’t. However beyond the question of the intension and the origins of cynicism in democratic societies, another matter remains unsolved: what lies in the hearts of the cynics, and is being a cynic ‘bad’ for democracy?

According to Dekker scholars should pay more attention to different kinds of political cynicism which means, we need to focus on the nature of the cynicism of different kinds of people (Dekker, 2006, p. 47). Sloterdijk describes two different types of cynicism: kynicism is the cheeky, subversive practice, the motif of self-preservation in crisis ridden times, a critical, ironical philosophy of so-called needs. Modern cynicism on the other hand is seen as a kind of shameless dirty realism without regard for conventional moral inhibitions (Chaloupka, 1999, p. 171; Sloterdijk 2005, p. 193). Chaloupka, in addition, follows Sloterdijk’s reasoning and states that ‘the different varieties of cynicism make a difference’ (Chaloupka, 1999, p. 182). In line with the above Dekker points to three groups of cynics: the negative cynics, the less involved and the critical cynics (Dekker, 2006, p. 44). These scholars strengthen the assumption of multiple kinds of cynicism.

Another kind of discrimination among cynical citizens can be one based on emotional characteristics. In the literature we find some evidence of the importance of emotions in terms of cynicism. For instance Dekker & Schyns (2006) describe cynicism as an attitude, and conclude that cynicism has an affective component. Although they point to the importance of studying emotions in respect to cynicism, no studies have yet been conducted. Sloterdijk’s distinction between kynics and cynics also point to the importance of emotions. The kynical citizen has hope and carries a positive affective character. The cynical citizen has a detached pessimistic, negative
affective character that scarcely allows itself any hope and does not have the ability to perhaps regain his / her hope (Sloterdijk 2005, p. 6).

My aim in this paper is to make a distinction between cynical citizens. I will identify kynics from cynics by focusing on their levels of hope and explore their political behaviour. This is an important question, according to Chaloupka, since identifying who the kynic is and who the outsider-cynic (...) is a crucial political act in a cynical age (Chaloupka, 1999, p. 173).

The Importance of Understanding C(K)ynicism

Cynicism is seen as a cultural mood with serious implications for democracy (Boukaert, Van der Walle, Maddens & Kampen, 2002; Cappella & Jamieson 1997; Chaloupka, 1999; Dekker (Ed.), 2006; Dogan, 2005; Goldfarb, 1991; Pharr & Putnam, 2000). The consequences of cynicism are far-reaching for politics. For instance, according to Cappella and Jamieson (1997), ‘cynicism saps people’s confidence in politics and public officials and it erodes both the standing and the standards of journalism; if the assumption is that nothing is on the level and nothing is what is seems, then citizenship becomes a game for fools and there is no point in trying to stay informed’ (p.17). Moreover, ‘cynicism dominates the assumptions of our political and cultural life’ (Goldfarb, 1991, p.2). Cynicism may lead to keeping oneself aloof from collective action, calculating behaviour, and protest regarding politics (Dekker, 2006, p. 13). All these consequences of cynicism point to a withdrawal of political participation.

Interesting here is the relationship of cynicism with criticism. A critical citizenry is a signal of healthy democracy; in a democracy everybody can speak up and that’s exactly what critics do. Furthermore criticism can help establish new forms of political action like activism, protest potential and referenda. Finally, in the end government is supposed to give people what they need, not what they want, so criticism is nothing but logical and inevitable (Pharr & Putnam, 2000). Responsiveness diminishes when people lose faith in the entire political class. As citizens become passive and disengaged, we are in danger of becoming a world of spectators (Chaloupka, 1999). If we are overwhelmed by cynicism, our democratic hope diminishes, if we on the other hand celebrate our democracy overlooking the implications of our cynicism, the results are the same. Therefore we must understand the foundations of democracy and cynicism and their relation to one another.
(Goldfarb, 1991). To do so, Goldfarb also traces the origins of cynicism as a cultural form and goes back to the kynics and cynics.

By identifying cynics and kynics on the basis of their emotional responses to political objects (candidates and parties), this study can help the conceptual understanding of the complex cynic world, and the development of better measurements for multiple kinds of cynicism.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. In the first place it highlights the emotional character of cynicism by using hope to separate kynics from cynics. In the second place, it pays attention to the interaction of emotionality with cynicism as indicators of political behaviour. As stated by Chaloupka (1999, p.7), ‘a successful treatment of cynicism has to start closer to the ground, perhaps by listening carefully to how we talk about it’.

My paper has the following outline: In the first part, I discuss political cynicism in the Dutch political setting and its implications. I will elaborate on the theory of political cynicism, kynicism, and emotions. In the second part, I lay out my expectations on the subject of the consequences of cynicism and kynicism for political behaviour. Followed by an overview of the research methods used for testing the hypotheses. Next, I will show the analyses of the data. In the final part of this paper I will come to my conclusions regarding the theory of kynicism and cynicism. In my discussion I will elaborate more on future research on this topic.

**Theoretical overview**

In the Netherlands political cynicism has become a popular concept to describe the negative political atmosphere of the recent years. In politics as well as in science, political cynicism attracted the interest of many. Paul Dekker describes cynicism as the ‘conviction that politics or politicians as such are no good; they’re immoral, mendacious and consumed by self-interest and in the best case are merely competent’ (Dekker, 2005, p. 3). Peggy Schyns and Christel Koop define cynicism as an “individual’s attitude consisting of a conviction of the incompetence and immorality of politicians, political institutions and/or the political system as a whole” (Schyns & Koop, 2007, p. 5). Although cynicism as such is not a new attitude, it became more and more apparent after the loss of ‘old’ and ‘new’ politics after 2002.

The former Dutch voting model was based on religion, ideology and social class (Van Wijnen, 2000). The whole Dutch society was split up into tightly organised
social groups or subcultures. During this ‘pillarization’ period, each of the groups represented a pillar. The voting model was simply constructed by measuring the strength and size of the pillars (Andeweg & Irwin, 1993; Andeweg & Irwin, 2005).

Depillarization meant a loss of identity, and brought about more fragmentation in society, by breaking up political and social divisions into smaller fragments. The number of parties increased and so did the insecurity for citizens. With that the ideological line lost its ability to explain political behaviour (Andeweg & Irwin, 1993; Van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2003). During the pillarization period, campaigning was useless; the social group were individuals belonged where the ones who decided who to vote for. After the collapse of this system, political campaigns became growingly important and nowadays we can even detect a more candidate-based campaign strategy in the Netherlands (Andeweg & Irwin, 2002).

Cynicism became a hot debate topic after the 2002 elections. The increasing power of Fortuyn, an anti-establishment, populist politician, was based on his appeal towards more cynical voters. The personal popularity of Pim Fortuyn, when combined with a cynical attitude towards politics and/or dissatisfaction with the government, explains a great deal of the electorate success of the LPF (Van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2003, p. 61). In the 2003 elections, the LPF lost most of its seats (from 26 to 8) and with this, cynical voters were expected to become even more cynical: their only hope had failed, the system failed thus when entering politics one becomes infected with its failure. The main thought among cynics then was that politics was contagious; one could have great ideas for reforms, but after being in politics one becomes part of it (Van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2003).

However, not only the LPF attracted cynical voters. As we know from several studies, cynical citizens are more likely than non cynical citizens, to abstain from voting or to vote for so called populist parties. Schyns et al. (2008, p. 10-12) find that citizens who either did not vote during the 2006 elections, gave their vote to the right-wing Geert Wilders’ party Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid or PVV) or the Socialist Party (SP) are more cynical about politics. These results are in line with earlier analyses of the DPES 2002 and 2003 (Dekker 2006: 39), except that the position of the former LPF – the party of Pim Fortuyn - appears to be taken over by the Party for Freedom. Thus one can conclude that with the fall of the LPF in 2006, several other parties try to fill the gap in the political spectrum. In the next elections (planned for 2010) another new populist party is most likely to join the elections.
After a separation from the VVD, Rita Verdonk founded Proud of the Netherlands (Trots op NL) and today the movement has a large following; the opinion polls estimate the value of seats if there were to be elections today on 20. Preliminary findings show that Proud of the Netherlands indeed attracts voters with very low trust in government (Synovate/ Interview NSS, 2008).

**Political Cynicism: Definitions**

The concept of cynicism cannot be captured in one definition. According to Cappella and Jamieson (1997) cynicism reflects *absence of trust*. Characteristically, ‘cynicism implies that the self-interest of political actors is their primary goal and that the common interest is secondary at best or played out for its political advantage. Cynicism is the absence of trust and a fundamental belief that people and groups cannot be trusted even in absence of proof’ (p. 141). According to Lane (1962) cynicism also reflects *lack of values, and selfish actions*. Namely ‘the individual who finds neither in society nor in himself a source of values may take another road. This road is described in a variety of ways: deceit, imposture, trickery, I do as I like. Cynicism is a corrosive attitude that makes altruistic and self-denying motive or behaviour evaporates into thin air’ (p. 408). Cynicism also comes with *low expectations of competence and pessimism*. Chaloupka (1999) notes that ‘defined concisely, cynicism is the condition of lost belief’ (p. xiv). As Eisinger (2000, 55) puts it: ‘One who believes that human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interest. A person who expects nothing but the worst of human conduct and motives […] someone who does not trust or respect the goodness of other people and their actions, believing that other people are only interested in themselves’.

While definitions vary, all agree that political cynicism is more than political distrust. Distrust includes negative expectations of the acts of others; it is an attitude of suspicion, alertness, and insecurity which results in a negative engagement (Krouwel and Abts, 2006, p. 101). According to Suijkerbuijk (1983) ‘political distrust is the expectation of the citizen that government will not act according to norms of competence, integrity, susceptibility and justice’ (p. 24). Distrust differs from cynicism in the sense that distrusting citizens are still capable of self-reflection, vigilance, and involvement (Krouwel and Abts, 2006, p. 102). A shared element of the above definitions is that cynicism is not just a feeling or a belief. It is a complex
state of mind with a core belief that politics, politicians and political institutions are untrustworthy, unreliable, immoral and incompetent.

**Causes of Cynicism**

Research on the sources or causes of political cynicism points various factors; political corruption, policy fiascos exclusively negative media attention, negative election campaign and less education about politics, as some of the main culprits (Chaloupka, 1999; Dekker (Ed.), 2006; Goldfarb, 1992; Pharr & Putnam, 2000).

As a possible cause of cynicism, the media is the most important source of political information for most citizens. But few citizens can get their information directly from politicians or political parties. The tendency is to portray politics as a process or a strategic game (De Vreese and Elenbaas, 2006). Cappella and Jamieson (1997) also point to corrosive individualism, sloganeering campaigns and the disjuncture between the promise and performance of leaders. The overwhelming attention for the so-called dark side of politics such as political scandals, failures or interpersonal disputes shows only one side of the coin. Although more contents and policy-based information is in the end much more informative, the personalization of politics is more entertaining.

Hence the media might be a source of cynicism through framing politics negatively, but sometimes, the media is not to blame for negative news. Often politics is about compromise and opaque policies and/or poor economic periods combined with the complexity of today’s societies makes people insecure (Dogan, 2005).

By some democratic politics as such is suggested to provoke cynicism for citizens; politicians are focussed on the general interest as well as on getting re-elected. Citizens suspect (quite rightly) behind the achievements for the public interest also the self-interest of the politician and presuppose that private policy is also the outcome of institutional interests and tactic considerations of those concerned. For this reason Dekker (2006) and Goldfarb (1992), for instance believe that cynicism is an inevitable phenomenon in a democracy and just must be accepted. An argument to strengthen this idea is that of a healthy critical citizenry.

To provide empirical evidence to state that these are indeed sources of cynicism, the above mentioned are difficult to measure. Rodgers (1974) gives five explanations for political distrust but for only two of them Dekker and Schyns (2006, p. 63) found empirical support; these are political knowledge and political
socialization. Dekker and Schyns (2006) also conclude that the existing analysis of political cynicism is not complete: there are doubtful measurements, unanswered questions and limited insights about its sources.

Some research on the characteristics of highly political cynics show a large part of the high politically cynical could be found among the people who tend to distrust people in general, who are dissatisfied with the government, vote for populist parties of don’t vote at all, do not participate in conversations about politics and who are lower educated (Dekker, 2006; Schyns et al., 2008). Although characteristics cannot give a direct causal relationship with cynicism as foundation of cynicism, they might be good indicators of where to look for the sources.

**Cynics and Kynics: How Each Develops**

There are two theories about the origin of the word *cynicism* as we now know it. Literally cynical means doggish and comes from the word ‘kyon’, meaning dog in Greek. Another theory says that cynicism refers to the building where Antistenes (regarded by many as the founder of Cynicism) was teaching, named ‘Kynosarges’, meaning white or quick dog (Schyns and Van Dorp, 2006, p. 19-20). Although there is no consensus about the origin of the word cynicism, most scholars support the presumption that cynicism derives from the word ‘kyon’. The first well-known practitioner of kynicism was Diogenes (ca. 412 BC-323 BC). Contemporaries called him a dog because his living standards did approximate that of a stray canine (Chaloupka, 1999, p.5; Schyns and Van Dorp, 2006, p. 20).

There are no authentic lines preserved from Diogenes. Sloterdijk says this is understandable ‘since Diogenes was one of those philosophers of life for whom life is more important than writing’. His existence is absorbed in the anecdotes he provoked. In them he became a mythical figure (Sloterdijk, 1984/2005).

Holding a lit lantern aloft as he walked the sunlit streets of Athens he was telling curious onlookers that he was searching for an honest man. He complained that philosophers did not and could not live the life they preached, and that their nostrums were a cover for political privilege and comfortable circumstances (Chaloupka, 1999). Diogenes initiated confrontation against this rooted type of philosophy: ‘since

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1 The other three explanatory factors according to Rodgers are education, social deprivation and intelligence (Rodgers, 1974).
philosophy can only hypocritically live out what it says, it takes cheek to say what is lived’ (Chaloupka, 1999, p. 4).

Diogenes and his kynics had the same shameless, rudeness and brashness attitude as dogs (Chaloupka, 1999, p. 3-5). From this kynicism comes the modern cynicism. But they are actually distinct. As Sloterdijk notes:

“There is a link connecting dissimilar phenomena over millennia: the link, so we believe, consists in two formal, common points between kynicism and cynicism: the first is the motif of self-preservation in crisis ridden times, the second a kind of shameless “dirty” realism that without regard for conventional moral inhibitions declares itself to be for how “things really are”. Compared with the existential realism of ancient kynicism however, modern cynicism is only the “half of a whole”. For its sense of facts as shown is directed only toward an unscrupulous matter of fact way of dealing with means to an end not toward the ends themselves. (…) The cynicism of means that characterizes our instrumental reason can be compensated for only by a return to a kynicism of ends. The essence of kynicism consists in a critical, ironical philosophy of so called needs in the elucidation of their fundamental excess and absurdity. (…) Those who reject all so-called goals and values in a kynical sense break through the circle of instrumental reason, in which ‘good’ goals are pursued with ‘bad’ means.” (2005, pp. 193-194).

Let’s review the main points of this analysis. Kynicism, unlike cynicism, is the motif of self-preservation in crisis ridden times (Sloterdijk, 1984/2005). Kynicism aims for a life in virtue and focuses on discipline with the goal of self-satisfaction in a positive sense kind. Goal here is happiness. A kynical person does not need anyone or anything to be happy. While others become dependent of things such as power, status and money just by pursuing them, a kynic has a happy and independent life since all vital necessities are fulfilled (Schyns and Van Dorp, 2006, p. 20-21). “The classical kynic is the ultimate body of resistance against political power” (Idem, p. 22).

Modern cynicism, as we saw above, is the rejection or disgust of values and ideals where contempt and shamelessness are important factors. According to Sloterdijk, every social group builds on a morality suitable for its own good. The enlightenment about the non-universal validity of its own morality makes a group miserable. ‘Cynicism is enlightened false consciousness (Sloterdijk, 2005, p. 5). The cynic is miserable because he sticks to something he doesn’t believe in. Belief no longer matters to a cynic, except when its image offers some opportunity (Chaloupka, 1999, p. 11). However, even knowledge cannot provide him with a firm basis for action and this is thus another reason for being so miserable (Sloterdijk, 2005).
Sloterdijk states that kynicism is the antidote for modern cynicism (Sloterdijk 2005, p. 193). “Cynicism can only be stemmed by kynicism, not by morality” (Sloterdijk, 2005, p. 194). Kynicism has an enlightened consciousness that is cheerful, life-affirming and full of vitality. According to Chaloupka (1999, p. 15) ‘if the problem is cynicism, the solution must be belief, in leadership, education, obedience, and the responsible application of moral criticism’. Sloterdijk finds only a few social institutions where the kynical lifestyle is possible. These are at carnival, in universities and a life as a bohemian (Sloterdijk, 2005, p. 111).

Cynicism and kynicism share certain similarities: they are a state of consciousness that is far beyond the belief of idealism and stable absolute values. But the literature suggests that cheekiness, knowledge, life-affirmation, and living (Sorgner, 2003) discriminate the kynics from the cynics. Table 1 below shows characteristics of cynics and kynics. Parallels between the two groups can be drawn only in so far as they both lack trust in politics and both have an enlightened consciousness. Sloterdijk states that this enlightened false consciousness is the ‘modernized unhappy consciousness, in which enlightenment has labored both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered’ (Sloterdijk, 2005, pp. 5-6).

The theory of Sloterdijk on cynicism and kynicism is by nature philosophical. Therefore, the conceptualization of the two kinds of cynicism is difficult. In political science studies, as Chaloupka (1999) notes, the distinction between cynics and kynics is often lost. This is not because kynics don’t exist anymore but rather because they are discounted too quickly (Chaloupka, 1999). ‘The problems visited by dangerous, corrosive and corrupting cynicism require a response that is also cynical if in a somewhat different way. Politics must become more lively, contentious, serious, honest and smart’ (Chaloupka, 1999, pp. 223-224). But assuming that the inverse of a cynic is necessarily a believer is a mistake (Chaloupka, 1999, p 171). In this sense, Sloterdijk proposes to reintroduce cheekiness and kynical life-style elements into our society to make our lives more colourful, and cheerful. It is not that he portrays kynicism as a new God, but he solely wishes to increase its importance (Sorgner, 2003).
Table 1. Characteristics of Kynicism and Cynicism according to Sloterdijk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kynics</th>
<th>Cynics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Absence of trust</td>
<td>Absence of trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Shameless, rudeness, brashness</td>
<td>* Lack of values</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Intention for self-preservation</td>
<td>* Selfish actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Appreciation of crisis in politics</td>
<td>* Low expectation of competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Optimism life affirmation</td>
<td>* Pessimism, lost belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Vitality, laughing</td>
<td>* Sticking to something one doesn’t believe in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Knowledge</td>
<td>* Knowledge tentative (cannot provide a firm basis for action and thus makes him miserable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Enlightened consciousness that is cheerful, life-affirming and full of vitality.</td>
<td>* Enlightened false consciousness</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Focus on ends</td>
<td>* Focus on means</td>
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**Hope: the Affective Element**

‘Emotion is attached to the salient feature of experience and emotions once formed, control our reactions, orientation, dispositions and behaviour towards these objects whether favourable or unfavourable’ (Marcus, 2003, p. 189). Thus, the emotional context of politics cannot be overlooked (Evans, 2004; Franks, 2001; Kuklinsky, 2002; Marcus, 2000/2003; Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Ragsdale, 1991; Rosema, 2004; Stearns, 2001; Zajonc, 1980). Emotional reactions are important for the way citizens make sense of politics. Marcus and his colleagues show that the four emotions that are most prominent are enthusiasm, pride, anger and hope (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993).

Although political emotions might be an important contribution for the explanation political attitudes such as cynicism, research on political emotions is still in its infancy. There are no studies on the emotional characteristics of cynicism, although there are speculations about the importance of anger, disgust and fear for as indicators of cynicism (Dekker and Schyns, 2006, p. 66).
Taking the characteristics of cynics and kynics drawn by Sloterdijk into account, a hypothesis about the emotional characters of cynics and kynics can be made. Both cynics and kynics are expected to show low enthusiasm towards politics, and similarly low levels of pride. The kynic is similar to the cynic regarding their comparable critique against politics; they do not trust politics and politicians and both rather want a more trustworthy system. Fear and anger are expected to be present for both kynics and cynics. Like cynicism, kynicism is a realist position, which rejects idealism, absolutes, and unconditional truths.

Hope however is a very important emotion for the distinction between cynics and kynics. The enlightened consciousness of the cynics is identified as false by Sloterdijk, because their consciousness makes them miserable. On the other hand, the enlightened consciousness of the kynics is identified as appropriate, because they are cheerful, life-affirming, and full of vitality and therefore also cheeky (Sorgner, 2003). Vitality, life affirmation, living, laughing, and celebrating are linked to kynicism. Cynics, on the other hand, don’t have this positive attitude. The cynics are living without any passion for life, are miserable, and regard the world to be futile and as something which has to be rejected. The bitterness, the life denying attitude, the pessimism and the double standards are essential to being a cynic (Sorgner, 2003). This presence and lack of an optimistic mind-set is manifested as lack of hope which distinguishes cynics. We can say that the kynical character contains hope whereas the cynical character does not.

As Sloterdijk states: ‘(…) a detached negativity comes through that scarcely allows itself any hope, at most a little irony and pity.’ (Sloterdijk, 2005, p.6). And while negative emotions do not strongly influence one’s involvement, positive emotions result in more involvement, for example voting (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993). Therefore, kynics are characterised as being hopeful, whereas the cynical character lacks hope.

**Hope and Democratic Politics**

On the basis of the discussion of the affective (hope) element of cynicism, in the figure below I attempt a classification of types of citizens.

The overall overlapping element in this figure is the level of trust. The focus is on the two types of cynicism; cynicism with hope (kynics) and without hope (cynics). These types show several behavioural consequences under different circumstances as
follows. The non-cynical citizens with hope are suggested as optimists and the ones without hope as pessimists.

<table>
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<td></td>
<td>Cynical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeful</td>
<td>Kynic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not hopeful</td>
<td>Cynic</td>
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Note: The names for the non-cynical respondents are merely suggestions.

Several scholars point to the importance of hope for democratic politics. Government unites people, societies and whole cultures and as therefore has the capability to influence citizen’s levels of hope. Moreover, government can provide personal goals easier of can make it harder to attain them. And finally, government can facilitate (or hinder) the ways toward collective goals. A high hope government should facilitate the rising and falling of individuals on the basis of merit and effort alone, thus avoiding the maintenance of an underclass culture of low hope. By facilitating the setting and achieving of collective goals, a high hope government should lead to a high hope citizenry (Snyder and Feldman, 2000, p. 405-406). We may expect politically cynical citizens to be less willing to obey laws and to suffer sacrifices for the good of the country, although some state that there is little agreement about the consequences (Dekker and Schyns, 2006; De Vreese, 2005; Levi and Stoker 2000).

Snyder and Feldman (2000, p. 390-391) give some reasons why higher hope citizens, in contrast with low hope citizens, attend do the collective in their thinking; people realize that what they want frequently involves dealing with other people and for the viability of attending to others, seeing the perspective of other is necessary. In addition, they state that historically, hopeful ancestors, thinking in terms of self and communal goals, prospered.

Although a lot of studies of cynicism begin with pointing out the importance of cynicism for political participation and democratic politics, (De Vreese, 2005; Dekker & Schyns, 2006; Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Warren, 1999; Sloterdijk, 1984/2005b) until now, it is not clear whether there really is such a direct relationship.
As remarked above, Dekker argues there is no consensus among scholars why some cynics will vote while other cynics won’t (Dekker, 2006, p. 45). Research of De Vreese suggests that there might be a difference between alienated and involved cynical citizens. ‘It may very well be that voters have the capacity to distinguish between their cynical views of politics and the importance of participating in an election’ (De Vreese, 2002, p. 633). Empirical evidence for effects of political cynicism is quite scarce; and previous studies found only small negative or non-significant effects of political cynicism on political participation and voting for the Netherlands (Dekker and Schyns, 2006; Schyns and Koop, 2007; Schyns et al., 2008).

Several citations of De Vreese (2002, p. 633) can point to measuring cynicism while expecting to measure cynicism; ‘Voters may be dissatisfied, cynical, and negative but still mobilized and sufficiently engaged to turn out to vote’. In another study De Vreese again points out to the possibility that cynicism (as measured by his studies) might be little more than an indication of critical but involved citizens. ‘It seems that citizens have the capacity to be both interest and knowledgeable about politics while at the same time critical and rather disparaging about politicians and their performance’ (De Vreese, 2005, p. 294).

Distinguished theoretically on the basis of hope, kynics are expected to be critical but active citizens who vote. The cynics are the citizens who to distract themselves from participation, and they are the ones scholars should be worried about. A shift in hope can turn a cynic into a kynic, and when hope decreases, the kynic can become a cynic (although this shift is less likely since it also implies that the obtained enlightenment and knowledge must become useless).

For democracy the best ‘cure’ for cynicism is increasing hope to turn the cynic into a kynic. This is in line with Sloterdijk: kynicism is the antidote for modern cynicism as it can be stemmed by kynicism, not by morality” (Sloterdijk, 2005, p. 194). “The cynicism of means that characterizes our instrumental reason can be compensated for only by a return to a kynicism of ends” (Idem, p. 193). Citizens then change from destructive miserable cynics to optimistic, participating and critical kynics. At their best, kynics are so attractive that any attempt to describe them ends up sounding like a recruiting pitch. But what is important about the kynic is their role as a key to understanding society. We know cynicism, but have focused on only one of its modes (Chaloupka 1999 180). We can begin to better understand the political
process by better understanding cynicism. As stated before with the words of Chaloupka; the different varieties of cynicism make a difference.

To recap, following Sloterdijk’s theoretical distinction between cynicism and kynicism, I use hope to identify two groups of different kinds of cynicism. On the one hand, the kynics with high levels of hope and on the other the cynics who show very little hope. Overall, I expect kynics to show higher levels of political participation and higher levels of political interest than cynics. Of importance is here the relation between hope and cynicism. Therefore I expect that kynics have higher levels of political participation and involvement than cynics. In addition I expect for the same reasons that kynics are more interested in politics than cynics.

**Methodology: Design**

To test the above, I use survey data. The data is collected via three web surveys administered in Dutch and designed to capture emotional reactions and cynical reactions of Dutch citizens. Respondents are students of Leiden University and off-campus respondents contacted via a snowball sample. The first survey is administered in December 2006 (right after the November 2006 national elections). The second takes place in April 2007 (right after the coalition agreement). The third is administered in December 2007. The three surveys share certain measures but also include different measures of political cynicism, participation, and emotions. I divided the items in three surveys because it would be too large a questionnaire for the respondents to include all items in one survey. Afterwards I combined the three questionnaires into one dataset. This resulted in a total number of 752 respondents. The average age of the respondents was 35 years (SD= 15.46), however half of all respondents (52 %) is 27 years of age or younger (range= 18-92).

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2 Snowball sampling is a special non-probability method which relies on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects. It is often used by studies which aim to develop measures to be tested in larger samples. Although care must be taken when making estimates, snowball and respondent-driven samples can provide asymptotically unbiased estimates, with the use of appropriate estimation procedures (Salganik and Heckathorn 2004; Snijders 1992).

3 This sample contains 244 respondents of which 144 are students and 100 are off-campus respondents.

4 This sample contains 330 respondents of which 95 are students and 255 are off-campus respondents.

5 This sample contains 178 respondents of which 68 are students and 110 are off-campus respondents.
Measurement

To test my hypotheses, the three web surveys contain items on political distrust,\(^6\) political participation, emotional reactions to parties and candidates (to assess hope), attention to the political campaign, and a set of standard demographic questions.\(^7\)

In all three surveys political cynicism is measured through three statements regarding the integrity, honesty and fraudulent character of politicians and employees of the government. Respondents are asked to indicate for all statements separately on what level they agree with these statements. The statements are based on several political cynicism scales (Citrin and Muste, 1999, pp. 501-509).\(^8\) Moreover, to control for an overall distrusting attitude, I include a measure of general trust.

Since I want to distinguish the kynics from the cynics based on hope, I have included several emotion questions in all three surveys. There are 5 closed-ended questions for specific emotions towards the four prominent politicians in all three surveys. The emotions asked are hope,\(^9\) pride, fear, anger and boredom. I included all these emotions to check whether cynical citizens differ in their emotional reactions toward politicians from non cynical citizens. In the third survey I’ve also included one question about optimism. I asked respondents to indicate whether they are in general optimistic or pessimistic persons. Moreover I asked them to point out how satisfied they are with their life. Since kynicism is expected to be life affirming, living and celebrating, I expect that kynics are overall more optimistic and are more satisfied with their lives.

Political participation is expected to be an important behavioural difference between kynics and cynics, as the first hypothesis suggests. I measured political participation in all surveys by asking respondents to indicate whether they have voted in the last elections or not. In the third survey, more measures for political participation are included. I asked respondents how likely it would be for them to undertake action when the government plans to pass an unfavourable bill. Other non-electoral measures contain questions about non-electoral participation such as signing a petition, contacting a politician, walking a protest march. Political involvement

\(^6\) Since I distinguish the regular cynicism into kynicism and cynicism, I will name the measurements of the regular cynicism as measurements of distrust.
\(^7\) The exact wording of all questions are listed in appendix 2
\(^8\) Frequencies for distrust are shown in appendix 1, table 2.
\(^9\) Frequencies for hope are shown in appendix 1, table 3.
questions are included in all three surveys asking respondents whether they are attached to a particular political party. In the third survey the political involvement items are extended with asking the respondents to indicate how involved they think they are. In addition I asked them how often they discuss politics and if they would participate when other people talk about politics.

According to the second hypothesis kynics are more politically interested than cynics. To measure the level of political interest among respondents I asked them how interested they are and how involved they feel with politics.

To indicate whether the sample is representative for the national population I also included several control variables. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they are male of female, what their age is, and what the highest level of education they have completed, if they are religious and if so what religion they have, what their income is and what their family status is.

Identifying Cynics and Kynics

To make the distinction between cynical and kynical citizens I took respondents with a high score on both cynicism and hope as kynical citizens and respondents with a high score on cynicism but a low score on hope as cynical citizens.

The distrust scale consists of the scores for the three distrust items added together. The scale ranges from 0 to 10, with a mean score of 4.74 (SD= 1.66). Although the reliability of the scale is low (cronbach’s $\alpha = .51$) I decided to keep all three distrust items in the cynicism scale. Persons with a score above the mean score of all respondents on that scale are regarded as cynical.\(^\text{10}\)

The hope scale consists of the scores for the hope towards candidates questions added together. The scale ranges from 0-10, with a mean score of 3.27 (SD= 1.54). The mean score is used to discriminate hopeful and not hopeful citizens; values below the mean indicate no hope and values above the mean indicate hope. Again the reliability of the scale is very low (cronbach’s $\alpha = -.06$). This might be due to the questions used to create the scale. Since these are the only hope items asked in all three surveys, I decided to keep all four hope items in the hope scale. The interpretation of the scale is however difficult because levels of hope towards leaders in opposition and in coalition are mixed. The reliability check shows that the alpha for

\(^{10}\) The scale ranges from 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all cynical and 10 is very cynical.
the items Bos and Marijnissen (during the study, leaders in the opposition) are negative and that the alpha for the items Balkenende and Rutte (during the study, leaders in the coalition) are positive. Unfortunately I could not form a hope scale which consisted of the levels of hope towards respondents own leader (the leader of the party they feel attached to) since if doing so, the N for the cynics and kynics would lower drastically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Frequencies non-cynical and cynical respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not hopeful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: scores are percentages, exact numbers in parentheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4a: Frequencies non-cynical and cynical respondents DNES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: scores are percentages, exact numbers in parentheses, source DNES 2006.

Unfortunately the Dutch National Election Studies (DNES) do not contain specific measures of hope to political leaders or their parties. It is therefore impossible to compare my findings based on the survey with findings of a larger and nationally representative sample. In order to establish some sense of comparability between our data and the general population, I compared the performance of our sample in measures available in the DNES that can signify cynicism and enthusiasm towards politicians. Out of three cynicism questions I’ve created a scale (cronbach’s α= .58) running from 0-10 with a mean of 5.59 (SD= 1.45, N= 1649). For a comparison with the hope items, enthusiasm scores towards the same prominent leaders as in my own hope scale were used to form an enthusiasm scale (cronbach’s α=.06) which runs

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11 The three items are: Politicians promise more than they can deliver, Ministers and junior-ministers are primarily self-interested, Friends more important than abilities to become MP.
from 0-10 with a mean of 4, 48 (SD= 1,45, N= 1646). Table 4a shows the frequencies for all four types constructed of the combination of cynicism and enthusiasm.

The percentages for the cynical citizens from the DNES are much lower than those from the dataset used in this paper. Only a third (29.9 %) of all respondents can be characterised as cynical against 54,3 % of the whole sample of the web survey. One of the probably many differences between my own data and the DNES is the average age. The age of respondents in the DNES ranges from 20 to 93 and with a mean age of 51 (SD= 16,93, N= 1893), these respondents are older than the ones in the sample used for this paper. Differences in scores on other control variables also indicate that my sample is not nationally representative.

To make a complete characterization of kynicism I compared results on the interpersonal trust item, the optimism item and the life satisfaction item of kynics and cynics. A mean comparison shows that there is no difference between kynics and cynics for there level of general trust, F(1, 431)=0,997, p>.05. Moreover, there is no significant difference between cynical and not cynical citizens, F(3, 415)=1,992, p>.05..

As we see in table 5, there is no significant difference between any of the types regarding there level of optimism, however a significant difference between on the one hand the not cynical, not hopeful (“pessimists”) citizens and on the other hand the cynics and kynics (p .025).

| Table 5: Mean comparison between cynics and kynics on optimism and satisfaction |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| “Optimists”                     | “Pessimists”    | Cynics          | Kynics          |
| Optimism                        | 1.93a           | 1.91a           | 1.60a           | 1.70a           |
| Satisfaction*                   | 2.13ab          | 2.41a           | 2.02b           | 2.04b           |

Note: scores are means, item runs from 0-3. Higher means indicate higher levels of the emotion. Different letters indicate significant differences, *p< .05 level, **p< .01 level, ***p< .001 level.

**Emotions other than hope**

To provide an additional test for the differences in characteristics between cynical and not cynical citizens and between cynics and kynics in particular, I will

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12 As mentioned above, the range of age in my dataset runs from 18 to 92, with a mean of 35 (SD= 15,46, N= 734).
13 OneWayAnova with Tukey HSD and a Bonferroni correction as post hoc tests.
show some results here on emotions other than hope. As stated above, cynical citizens are expected to distinguish themselves from not cynical citizens on the emotions of anger, fear and pride. That is, cynical citizens are expected to show higher levels of anger and fear and lower levels of pride than not cynical citizens. Previous results on the emotional character of the Dutch voter (Capelos, Leeuwenburg, Rijkhoff, 2007) shows that boredom is a very important emotion in Dutch politics. For this reason, I’ve included a measurement of boredom towards the four most prominent Dutch political leaders.

The scores for the emotions are created through scales consisting of the sum of the scores of the particular emotion towards each of the four leaders. As stated above, creating and interpreting these scales is difficult since some of the leaders, during the collecting of data, were in the coalition as where other were in the opposition. The reliability scores of the scales aren’t very high, but to remain consistency, I’ve created the scales the same way as I’ve created the hope scale mentioned earlier.14

Table 6 shows that indeed cynical and not cynical citizens show different levels of emotions towards political candidates. The ANOVA15 shows that cynical citizens are angrier, more afraid, more bored and less proud with politics than non-cynical citizens are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not cynical</th>
<th>Cynical</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger***</td>
<td>2.2113a</td>
<td>2.7945b</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear*</td>
<td>1.9488a</td>
<td>2.3590b</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride*</td>
<td>2.4508a</td>
<td>2.1272b</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom**</td>
<td>3.4613a</td>
<td>3.9411b</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: scores are means, item runs from 0-10. Higher means indicate higher levels of the emotion. Different letters indicate significant differences, *p<.05 level, **p<.01 level, ***p<.001 level.

14 The score for Cronbach’s α for the anger, fear, pride and boredom scale are respectively: .20, .45, .24 and .52.
15 With Tukey HSD and a Bonferroni correction as post hoc tests.
Table 7: Mean comparison between cynics and kynics on emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Optimists”</th>
<th>“Pessimists”</th>
<th>Cynics</th>
<th>Kynics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger**</td>
<td>2.2190a</td>
<td>2.1951ab</td>
<td>2.8958c</td>
<td>2.7112bc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear*</td>
<td>2.0155abc</td>
<td>1.8089ab</td>
<td>2.2500abc</td>
<td>2.4486ac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride***</td>
<td>2.9845a</td>
<td>1.3313b</td>
<td>1.0903b</td>
<td>2.9795a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom**</td>
<td>3.3624a</td>
<td>3.6687ab</td>
<td>3.8125ab</td>
<td>4.0468b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: scores are means, item runs from 0-10. Higher means indicate higher levels of the emotion. Different letters indicate significant differences, *p< .05 level, **p< .01 level, ***p< .001 level.

Cynics and kynics also show differences between them regarding pride. As table 7 shows us, there is no significant difference between cynics and kynics for the emotions anger, fear and boredom, but there is a significant difference between them for pride. Moreover, I can conclude that the difference in pride between cynics and kynics is caused by their differences in their level of hope; hopeful citizens (cynical or not) do not differ significantly in their level of pride, and not hopeful citizens (cynical or not do not differ) do not differ significantly in their level of pride. The difference can be found between hopeful and not hopeful citizens whether they are cynical or not. These findings are in line with the expectations that cynical and kynical persons do differ in their level of hope towards politics while remain equal concerning other important political emotions.

Analyses

A central aim of this paper is to examine whether cynical and kynical have different political behaviour. In this section I will test each of my hypotheses and present the results in subsections.

According to the first expectation, cynicism is related to political participation. To test this, I performed mean comparison among cynics and kynics on the political participation items and another on the political involvement items to indicate whether the relation is in the expected direction.

The expectation that kynics are more likely to vote than cynics is not met; kynics and cynics had the same participation rate at the election of 2006, \( F(3, 665) = 0.55, p > .05. \) Another measurement of participation was participating by means other than voting. Out of seven items a political activities scale was created (cronbach’s \( \alpha = \)
The exact items are: calling in radio, TV or a newspaper; calling in a political party or organization; participating in a meeting organized by the government to initiate citizen involvement and participation; contacting a politician or a civil servant; participating in an action or pressure group; participating in a protest action, a protest march, or a demonstration; participating in a political discussion or action via internet, email of SMS; something else. A mean comparison among the four types of citizens showed that there is no significant difference, $F(3, 146) = 0.24, p > .05$.

Three other variables on political participation also showed no significant differences. Kynics and cynics (and not cynical citizens) do not have different levels of involvement $F(3, 409) = 2.15, p > .05$, nor do they discuss politics with their friends and family more or less frequent from each other $F(3, 140) = 0.28, p > .05$. They join conversations about politics equally frequent $F(3, 140) = 0.29, p > .05$ and if the government suggests a law that very injustice, none of the type is more passionate to act against the law, $F(3, 140) = 0.13, p > .05$.

In table 8 the results of an ANOVA\textsuperscript{16} of some items are shown; these were the only items that indicated a significant result in the mean comparison. There is a significant effect for party support $F(3, 652) = 5.39, p < .01$ and for the strength of that party support $F(3, 265) = 3.67, p < .05$. The only difference is that the not cynical hopeful is more like to be a party supporter than cynics or kynics.

And if they are party supporter, only the cynics is more often a moderate supporter instead of a strong supporter.

| Do you consider yourself as a follower of a political party? If so, are you a moderate or a strong supporter? |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| “Optimists” | “Pessimists” | Cynics | Kynics |
| Party support** | .52ab | .42ab | .33b | .37b |
| Strength* | .39ab | .35ab | .17b | .22ab |

Note: the scores are means, item runs from 0-1 (no, yes) (moderate, strong). Different letters indicate significant differences, *p< .05 level, **p< .01 level, ***p< .001 level.

\textsuperscript{16} With Tukey HSD and a Bonferroni correction as post hoc tests.
As stated in the second hypothesis I expect that kynics are more interested in politics than cynics are. With a mean comparison, I will test this hypothesis with a mean comparison. Respondents were asked how interested they are in politics, with four answering options starting with not interested at all up to very interested. The four types and specifically cynics and kynic do not show significant different levels of political interest, $F(3, 140)= 0,34, p>.05$.

**Additional tests**

Further analyses pointed in the direction of a distinction among cynics and kynics regarding vote choice. The variables in my dataset are unfortunately not suited for testing explanations for vote choice as such. However, a measurement of ideological self placement in the political spectrum is included.

According to Van Wijnen: ‘Citizens have a tendency to develop positive evaluations of the person who is perceived to be “in charge of the country”,’ (Wijnen, van, 2000, p. 439). Following this theory, citizens should have a more positive judgement about incumbents. On the other hand, Aarts and Bélanger (2004, p. 13) argue that ‘Lack of confidence toward government and politics is fertile ground for challenging party movements. Suggesting that disaffection from politics is also a significant motivation to support these non-established parties.’ Therefore a cynical citizen can be expected to have a more appraisal for politicians in the opposition.

Exploratory analyses on the differences among cynics and kynics concerning their ideological preference presented interesting results.

**Table 9: Mean comparison between cynics and kynics on ideological self placement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Optimists”</th>
<th>“Pessimists”</th>
<th>Cynics</th>
<th>Kynics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology*</td>
<td>4.72ab</td>
<td>4.83ab</td>
<td>5.09a</td>
<td>4.49b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the scores are means, item runs from 0-10, a higher score means more rightwing placement. Different letters indicate significant differences, *p< .05 level, **p< .01 level, ***p< .001 level.
Table 10: Mean comparison between cynics and kynics on ideological self placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideology*</th>
<th>Cynic</th>
<th>Kynic</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the scores are means, item runs from 0-10, a higher score means more rightwing placement. Different letters indicate significant differences, *p< .05 level, **p< .01 level, ***p< .001 level.

A mean comparison between all four types of citizens gave an almost significant result, \(F(3, 665)= 2.27, p> .05\) and further analysis showed that with a \(p\) value of .05 cynics and kynics do differ in their self placement on the ideological left-right dimension. I ran another mean comparison but now I compared only the cynics and kynics with each other. Although both types place themselves more or less in the middle of the political spectrum, cynics tend to be more right wing than kynics are, \(F(1, 356)=6.61, p< .05\). All results are presented in table 9 and 10.

The difference between cynics and kynics on the ideological left-right continuum is an interesting starting point for further research. One could argue that kynics by nature are more leftward oriented but it might also be likely that the difference is due to the political situation at the time of the survey. As kynics are distinguished from cynics based on their high hope score, and critical citizens tend to have more hope towards leaders and parties that are in the opposition, could it be that these kynic are only kynical since the greatest left wing party (PvdA) was opposition?

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we see that scholars are struggling with the concept of political cynicism. There is no real consensus about the definition of cynicism, although most scholars agree that it is more than just political distrust; it includes a core belief that politics, politicians and political institutions are untrustworthy, unreliable, immoral and incompetent.

The lack of agreement about the classification of cynicism leads to poor measurements and inconclusive results, but also to new theories. One of the remaining questions is why there is no consistency in the political behaviour of cynical citizens. It seems that there might be multiple kinds of cynicism; a critical kind, which stays informed and involved, and an alienated kind, which has given up on politics. The
fear is that the second kind of cynic forms a real threat for democracy, or in Chaloupka’s (1999) words: As citizens become passive and disengaged, we are in danger of becoming a world of spectators. Because scholars cannot provide evidence for the existence of this thread, the changes that the effects of cynicism are underestimated is present. On the other hand, it might be the case that concern is not needed.

Peter Sloterdijk (2005⁶) poses an antidote for modern cynicism; kynicism which has an enlightened consciousness that is cheerful, life-affirming and full of vitality, whereas the cynic is miserable because he sticks to something he doesn’t believe in. Kynicism has an enlightened consciousness that is cheerful, life-affirming and full of vitality. According to Sloterdijk is cynicism enlightened false consciousness (Sloterdijk, 2005⁶, p. 5). Although cynicism and kynicism share their cynical, distrusting view towards politics, they differ in emotional characteristics. As a philosopher, Sloterdijk can use the most beautiful descriptions of kynicism to stress the differences with cynicism. However, to transform this in a measurable attitude is quite difficult.

To address this particularity of cynicism and kynicism, I focussed solely on the differentiation in their levels of political hope. From the most important political emotions that are indicated by Marcus and McKuen (1993), only hope is expected to set them apart. For measuring political hope, I used hope scores towards four most prominent political leaders of the Netherlands. As cynicism measurement I asked respondent to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with three statements concerning the morality, integrity and competence of politicians. Cynicism and hope scores above average are indicators for kynicism. Cynics attain below average scores on the hope scale. Half of the population could be indicated being cynical of which almost six out of ten was specified as kynical.

Analyses on the other important political emotions resulted in a confirmation of the expectation that cynical citizens (cynics and kynics) are angrier, more afraid and more bored with politics than non cynical citizens. In addition, the cynical citizens showed lower levels of pride than those of the non cynical citizens. Remarkably, cynical citizens are not more distrusting towards others and do not show less optimism in comparison to non cynical citizens. Indeed one can say that cynical citizens are slightly less satisfied in general, but the core of the cynical character, a negative mindset does not show its face.
Furthermore we see that the difference between cynics and kynics cannot be found in their political behaviour. Although the claim that kynicism is the antidote for the detached and lost cynic can not be supported with this data, we can not assume that it is not true. While this paper focussed on kynicism, I do not want to state that my measurement of kynicism is necessarily the best.

However, we still don’t know exactly what lies in the hearts of the cynics, and if being a cynic is ‘bad’ for democracy. Theoretically cynicism can contain various categories of politically cynical citizens. Cynics, kynics and for instance critical or realistic cynics might all be out there. Empirically they are hard to disentangle. Regarding my results, I can’t conclude that cynicism is bad for democracy when being bad means alienated and detached. Cynics as well as kynics did not show a significantly lower participation and involvement rate than non cynical citizens did.

So why are there no results? It could be due to my sample; a snowball sample is most of the time biased. Since the survey was handed out to students of Leiden University, it is quite likely to have an overrepresentation of young, high educated and critical respondents. Frequencies show indeed that over fifty percent of the respondents is younger than thirty years and also more than half of the population has a bachelor’s or master’s degree. Another explanation for the lack of results can be the measurement of on the one hand the independent variables, cynicism and hope and on the other hand my dependent variables. As already discussed above, the hope scale was created out of levels of hope towards several political leaders. No distinction between these leaders had been made, so scores for incumbents as well as for opposition leaders were added together. Moreover, only hope towards politicians might be too one-sided to capture the emotion hope towards politics.

The cynicism items are questioned by several scholars more than once. The problem here is that none of them provide a solution for the measurement problem. The cynicism scale of Dekker and Schyns (2006) might provide a reliable cynicism scale but is unfortunately only tested with adolescent respondents and besides that, it consists of 26 items which is simply too long for most questionnaires.

Another explanation for the lack of results might be theory; pointing to the theory of multiple kinds of cynicism and to the theory that cynicism leads to detraction of politics and political participation. If the theory of multiple kinds of cynicism is indeed right, it might be very well due to other dependent variables than
solely hope. The characterization of the different kinds of cynicism should be more precise and more discriminating. Further research is therefore highly recommended.

The contribution of this paper is threefold; first, it explores the theory of multiple kinds of cynicism especially the one of Sloterdijk regarding cynicism and kynicism and its relation with the emotion hope. Second, it pays attention to the interaction of emotions and political behaviour. Third, it offers the first empirical analyses for a philosophical theory on political cynicism.

I’d like to conclude this paper with a discussion and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

For sure this study is just the fist step in exploring the impact of cynicism and kynicism in Dutch politics. More research needs to be done, with more measurable characteristics to distinguish the cynics from the kynics, and larger, nationwide samples. When I found out that there were no items on hope inserted into the Dutch National Election Studies (despite our request), the disappointment was great. The development of inserting some emotions in nationwide questionnaires is a step towards the right direction, but still a lot has to be done. The same still counts for the measurement of political cynicism.

It would be great to include other democratic systems in the research, for instance the United States, where political hope is situated in a different political context. Or countries where there are very low levels of political cynicism to discover whether this is due to an overrepresentation of hopeful, participating kynics or to the inviting political environment.

I would suggest making use of in depth interviews so that a possible vital, cheeky and life affirming consciousness can be detected. By doing so, the kynical characteristic can be also examined outside of the political realm. A distinction between socially active and passive citizens could bring an interesting addition to the analyses.

A last thing I’d like to discuss here is the discovered distinction between cynics and kynics on their ideological self placement on the left right dimension. Can we argue that being kynical brings a person to the left? Or are we observing masked party identification effects? In a way the link between kynicism and left wing ideology seems plausible or might my view on right wing politics be cynical? If the political
situation has a big influence on some one’s kynicism, does this then mean that a when the preferred party of a cynic comes in the position of opposition, he as a result turns into a kynic?

All these questions are very interesting and hereby I would like to make a stand to keep on exploring the nature, varieties and effects of political cynicism; I stay optimistic or to speak with the words of Winston Churchill: The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.

References


Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.


### Table 2: Frequencies of trust items and score on cynicism scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Trust 1</th>
<th>Trust 2</th>
<th>Trust 3</th>
<th>Cynicism Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.1 (23)</td>
<td>.3 (2)</td>
<td>1.0 (7)</td>
<td>.1 (1)</td>
</tr>
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N     | 733      | 732      | 733      | 732          |

Mean  | 4.74     |

SD    | 1.66     |

Note: scores are percentages, exact numbers in parentheses, scales run from 0-10, where 0 means not cynical at all and 10 very cynical.

Trust 1: In general you can trust people who work for the government

Trust 2: If we don’t keep a close eye on them, many of our elected politicians would give more attention to specific interests than those of all

Trust 3: When our leaders speak to the people on television or in newspapers, they usually tell the truth
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| N       | 671                      | 364                      |
| Mean    | 3.27                     | 3.08                     |
| SD      | 1.54                     | 1.55                     |

Note: scores are percentages, exact numbers in parentheses, scale runs from 0-10, where 0 means no hope at all and 10 for very hopeful.
Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Political Distrust

Please indicate on what level you agree or disagree with the following statements where -5 stands for strongly disagree and +5 stands for strongly agree. Of course you can pick any number in between these scores.

“In general you can trust people who work for the government”

“If we don’t keep a close eye on them, many of our elected politicians would give more attention to specific interests then those of all”

“When our leaders speak to the people on television or in newspapers, they usually tell the truth”

Interpersonal trust

Do you think that in general most people can be trusted, or do you think that one cannot be careful enough in their contact with other people?

* Most people can be trusted,
* One cannot be careful enough in their contact with other people.

Emotional Responses to Parties, Candidates and Institutions

When we think at political leaders we experience different emotions. Some of the politicians make us feel comfortable, others make us feel proud and again others make us enthusiastic, hopeful, nervous, confident, safe, bored, upset, ashamed, irritated, worried and so on.

How much would you say Jan Peter Balkenende makes you feel PROUD?

How much would you say Jan Peter Balkenende makes you feel HOPEFUL?

How much would you say Jan Peter Balkenende makes you feel AFRAID?

How much would you say Jan Peter Balkenende makes you feel ANGRY?

How much would you say Jan Peter Balkenende makes you feel BORED?

* A great deal, * Some, * Not very, * Not at all

The same for Wouter Bos, Mark Rutte and Marijnissen.
Optimism
Some people are very optimistic while others are more pessimistic. Can you please indicate in general how optimistic you are?
* Very optimistic, * Optimistic, * Not very optimistic, * Not optimistic at all

Life satisfaction
Can you please indicate in general how satisfied you are with your life?

Political Participation
Did you vote at the last elections for the Second-Chamber? (2006)?

Did you vote in the previous national election?

Involvement
Do you consider yourself as a supporter of a particular political party?
And are you a strong or a moderate supporter?

On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all involved and 5 is average involved and 10 is very involved, how involved are you feeling with politics?

If in company people talk about politics, do you usually participate, do you usually listen, do you usually not listen, or do you usually have no interest at all?
* Usually participate, * Listen, * Don’t listen, * Have no interest

How often do you discuss politics with friends and family?
* Often, * Fairly often, * Not often, * Not at all

If the Second Chamber is taking care of a bill that you find extremely injustice or wrong. How are the odds that you would try to do something against that, is that odd:
* Very large, * Large, * Small, * Very small
There are different ways to raise a political matter or have influence on politician or the government. Please look at the following possibilities and tell me of which you made use in the past 5 years.

* Calling in radio, tv or a newspaper
* Calling in a political party or organization
* Participating in a meeting organized by the government to initiate citizen involvement and participation
* Contacting a politician or a civil servant
* Participating in an action or pressure group
* Participating in a protest action, a protest march, or a demonstration
* Participating in a political discussion or action via internet, email or sms
* Something else
* None of the above

Political Interest
Some people are very interested in Dutch politics, where other are not interested at all. How interested are you in Dutch politics?

Ideological Self Placement
When you think of your own political ideas, where would your place yourself when 0 is left and 10 is right

Gender
What is your gender?
* Male
* Female

Age
In what year were you born?
Recode and grouped into:
* 18-25
* 26-35
* 36-45
* 46-55
* 56-65
* 66-75
* 76-85
* 86-92

**Educational level**

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

* None
* Elementary School
* High School
* MBO
* HBO
* WO
* PhD
* Don’t know/ no answer

**Income**

In which of these categories lays the income before taxes of all your family members together?

* < 17000
* 17000 - 21000
* 21000 - 24000
* 24000 - 28000
* 28000 - 31000
* 31000 - 35000
* 35000 - 38000
* 38000 - 45000
* 45000 - 52000
* 52000 - 59000
* 59000 - 73000
* 73000 >
* Don’t know/ No answer
Family status
What is your marital status?
* Married
* Widow
* Divorced
* Split up (however still married)
* Living with partner
* Single

Religion
Do you consider yourself religious? If yes, what religion?
* “Rooms Katholiek”
* “Nederlands Hervormd”
* “Gereformeerd”
* “Islamitisch”
* “Joods”
* “Hindu”
* Not religious
* Other