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To cite this article: Leo Huberts, Muel Kaptein & Bart de Koning (2022) Integrity Scandals of Politicians: A Political Integrity Index, *Public Integrity*, 24:3, 329-341, DOI: [10.1080/10999922.2021.1940778](https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2021.1940778)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2021.1940778>



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Published online: 16 Jul 2021.



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Integrity Scandals of Politicians: A Political Integrity Index

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ABSTRACT

How often are politicians confronted with public allegations of integrity violations? Which types of violations, government levels, and parties do these scandals involve? The Political Integrity Index developed in The Netherlands offers information about the number and types of political integrity scandals in the country since 2013. This article presents a brief overview of the relevant literature on integrity and corruption and on political scandals, with a summary of the conceptual framework and methodology used in our research, as well as some of the results. In the years 2013–2019, 355 political integrity scandals were documented, primarily at the local level of government (79%), involving almost all political parties but with the liberal-conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie [VVD]) most prominent (90 scandals), and containing all types of integrity violations, with as the most prominent type “misconduct in the private sphere” (30%). The topic of integrity scandals involving politicians is relevant but nearly absent in research on public integrity and corruption. This is a challenge and an invitation to researchers in other countries to do comparable research, which might result in a theoretically and practically useful international political integrity index. For that research, the framework of the Political Integrity Index seems useful.

KEYWORDS

corruption, integrity index, integrity scandals, integrity violations, political integrity, political scandals

Our Political Integrity Index (PI-Index) concerns the issue of the integrity of politicians. The Index gives an annual overview of how often politicians are confronted with public allegations of violating integrity in (social) media and characterizes those integrity accusations or scandals. To clarify the fundamental idea of the PI-Index, an analysis of the central concepts is necessary: What is integrity? What is integrity of politicians? What are the various types of integrity violations?

Although “integrity” has become a prominent concept and topic in research on government and governance and in actual policymaking at all levels, there are different views and interpretations of this concept. The next section briefly summarizes these different views, including the view of integrity as action in accordance with the relevant moral values and norms, which is the starting point for the development of the PI-index. The section also discusses the various forms of violations of integrity—such as corruption and fraud, misuse of information and power, discrimination and intimidation at work, and misconduct in the private (outside work) sphere—as drawn from the literature and research on the topic.

A related but different topic concerns the actual accusations made in public that politicians have committed integrity violations. This issue is relevant but absent in research on public

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integrity and corruption. The literature on political scandals offers relevant insights that should be considered. When do accusations in public, made in decision-making processes and in the (social) media, justify the conclusion that they are a matter of political scandal? The section on political and integrity scandals deals with this question to explain the criteria that were taken into account in composing the PI-Index.

The subsequent section discusses the introduction of the PI-Index in The Netherlands. This includes a description of the methodology for measuring the integrity scandals, an overview of the characteristics of the PI-Index, and a presentation of some results. The latter are about the frequency that politicians at different government levels were confronted with accusations of violating integrity, the political parties that were confronted with breaches of integrity by their politicians, the types of integrity violations involved, and the sort of overall picture that emerged from comparing the PI-Index over the investigated period. We conclude with some reflections on the findings and suggestions for future research. A promising research direction is to create a similar PI-Index in other countries to make possible all kinds of comparative research.

Integrity, integrity violations, scandals, and affairs

Integrity and Integrity Violations

Integrity

What characterizes the integrity of a person, a functionary, and a politician? Extant literature provides at least eight different views on integrity (Huberts, 2014, 2018), four of which can be considered “mainstream.” Many see integrity as wholeness or consistency: Do what you say, and say what you think. Others see integrity as synonymous with specific values such as honesty, reliability, or incorruptibility. The third view emphasizes lawfulness: acting in accordance with the rules and norms of the law. The fourth view—integrity as “acting in accordance with the relevant moral and legal values and norms”—has become more prominent in recent research (Huberts & Van Montfort, 2020) and is important in the development of the Political Integrity Index.

Integrity is a quality or characteristic of a behavior that is in accordance with relevant moral values, norms, and rules (Huberts, 2018). Values such as wholeness and incorruptibility are included in those values when the relevant community (the community governed or represented by the politician) sees them as the valid, important *moral* values. The term “moral” refers to values and norms about right or wrong and good or bad about which people feel rather strongly because they involve serious interests affecting the community of which they are a part (Kaptein & Wempe, 2002). In short, these are values that really matter and are shared by the relevant public.

Integrity is important. Everybody desires to be seen as a person with integrity, and it matters and hurts when one’s integrity is questioned (Kaptein, 2014). Numerous mistakes are made; there are many bureaupathologies (Caiden, 1991); and there are other values that are also important for the quality of governance (Paanakker et al., 2020). A functionary can do something wrong and make a mistake, even a stupid mistake, without committing an integrity violation. Therefore, it is important that institutions clearly identify their central moral values and norms, clarify what type of value or norm violation is considered serious enough to warrant questioning someone’s integrity and launching an investigation into their integrity. Oversimplification or overgeneralization (or “integritism” Huberts, 2014) should be prevented.

Integrity Violations

What types of behavior are in conflict with the relevant moral values and norms? What types of integrity violations can be distinguished? Different bodies of knowledge point to various types of unethical or immoral behavior (Huberts & Lasthuizen, 2020). Corruption is the central concept

TABLE 1 Typology of Integrity Violations

1. Corruption: bribery	Misuse of (public) power for private gain: soliciting, offering, or accepting bribes.
2. Corruption: favoritism (nepotism, cronyism, patronage)	Misuse of authority or position to favor family (nepotism), friends (cronyism), or party (patronage).
3. Fraud and theft of resources	Improper private gain acquired from the organization or from colleagues and citizens, without the involvement of an external actor.
4. Conflict of (private and public) interests through "gifts"	Interference (or potential interference) of personal interest with public/organizational interest because of gifts, services, or assets accepted or promises made.
5. Conflict of (private and public) interests through side-line activities	Interference (or potential interference) of personal interest with public/organizational interest because of jobs or activities practiced outside the organization.
6. Improper use of authority	Use of illegal/improper means or methods (possibly for "noble causes").
7. Misuse and manipulation of information	Intended or unintended abuse of (access to) information, such as cheating, violation of secrecy rules, breaching confidentiality of information, or concealing information.
8. Waste and abuse of organizational resources	Failure to comply with organizational standards (dereliction of duty) and/or improper performance or dysfunctional internal behavior (laziness, absence, waste of resources).
9. Inappropriate behavior/indecent treatment of colleagues or citizens and customers	Unacceptable treatment that includes discrimination (based on gender, race, or sexual orientation), intimidation, and sexual harassment, but also improper behavior like bullying, nagging, and gossiping.
10. Misconduct in the private sphere (outside work)	Integrity violation in the private sphere, outside work, relevant for the people's trust in the (integrity of) the function(ary)/organization.

Sources: Huberts, 2018; Huberts & Lasthuizen, 2020; Lasthuizen, 2008.

in the literature on what goes or is wrong in politics and government (Graycar, 2020; Heywood, 2015; Jurkiewicz, 2020). There are various definitions of corruption (Rose, 2020); the most popular is Transparency International's: "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain" (<https://www.transparency.org/what-is-corruption>). Private gain refers to inappropriate private interests that conflict with the public or organizational interest. This includes bribing and favoritism, fraud and theft, and conflict of (public and/or private) interests (e.g., gifts and sideline activities). Additional interesting research often uses other concepts for immoral or inappropriate behavior (Huberts & Lasthuizen, 2020), such as deviance and misconduct (Punch, 1985), organizational misbehavior (Vardi & Weitz, 2004), white-collar crime (Kolthoff, 2016), state crime (Peoples & Sutton, 2017; Ross, 2000), and administrative evil (Adams & Balfour, 2004; Berndsen, 2015).

This variety of types of undesirable behavior led researchers at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam to construct a broad typology of categories of integrity violations, one that is relevant for all public organizational contexts. The resulting typology has been discussed and tested many times by using available quantitative and qualitative data on integrity violations (with operationalizations in specific behaviors depending on context). The typology has also been empirically validated in survey research (Huberts et al., 2006; Lasthuizen, 2008), and adopted and adapted in numerous studies of integrity violations (Huberts & Lasthuizen, 2020).

Instead of discussing further the developed typology of integrity violations, it is more important to clarify the typology that we used in the development of the PI-Index, which is summarized in Table 1. Ten types of integrity violations are distinguished and briefly described.

Political Scandals, Integrity Breaches, and Integrity Scandals

The concept of integrity violations here refers to behaviors of politicians that conflict with the relevant moral values and norms. The literature and research on integrity violations also pays attention to the prominence of the unethical behavior (how much, how often?). Some research focuses on the perception of businesspersons or citizens about the seriousness of corruption (Transparency International's CPI: Rose, 2018). There is also research on the number of investigations of corruption (and other violations); for example, on the investigations of members of

Congress in the United States for ethical misconduct, with Thompson (1995) on individual and institutional corruption and Rosenson (2014) with a typology for classifying the 163 ethics investigations in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1798 to 2011.

Other research concerns the number of reports made at the reporting desk or to confidential advisors about unethical behavior and integrity violations (Graycar & Smith, 2011; Huberts & Lasthuizen, 2020; Nelen & Kolthoff, 2018), as well as anonymous survey research on how often individuals are confronted with integrity violations in their work (De Graaf et al., 2018; Kolthoff, 2016).

However, it does not seem to be a significant topic among corruption and integrity researchers, with some exception, whether the investigations and reports have led to *public* attention for those (possible) integrity breaches by politicians, or whether and how they resulted in a “public scandal” and with what consequences. Entman’s study (2012) is interesting with a model to explain the amount of media attention for bad political behavior. Sometimes that behavior leads to big scandals, with extensive publicity and consequences for politicians. However, in other cases, equally shoddy behavior receives little notice.

Historical corruption research offers information about the development of norms and what corruption accusations entail (Kerkhoff et al., 2020). In addition, data collection on more recent Dutch scandals contributes to interesting qualitative analysis of the characteristics of scandals (including the “fluidity of integrity”) and the lessons to be learned from them (Kerkhoff & Overeem, 2018, 2021).

Another body of knowledge, the literature on (political) scandals, connects with the integrity and corruption literature. When do accusations made in public and in (social) media about the decision-making processes justify concluding that they concern a political or integrity scandal? What characterizes a political scandal, how often do they occur, what types of scandals are there, who is involved, and what are the consequences? A brief impression of that literature follows.

In his seminal book, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*, Cambridge sociologist J. B. Thompson states that a scandal “refers to actions or events involving certain kinds transgression which become known to others and are sufficiently serious to elicit a public response” (Thompson, 2000, p. 13). These actions, events, or circumstances are characterized by the “transgression of certain values, norms or moral codes,” “some non-participants express their disapproval by publicly denouncing the actions or events,” and “the disclosure and condemnation of the actions or events may damage the reputation of the individuals responsible for them” (2000, pp. 13–14). Thompson stresses that there are clear differences between corruption and bribery cases and a scandal, with corruption (or integrity violations) not always known, disclosed, nor leading to vigorous expression of disapproval and public articulation of opprobrious discourse as conditions for a scandal (2000, pp. 28–30). He discusses three basic forms of political scandal based on the types of norms that are more scandal-sensitive than are others: sex scandals (transgression of sexual codes, also in private life), financial scandals (allegations about the misuse of money or other financial irregularities), and power scandals (misuse or abuse of power as such (Thompson, 2000, pp. 120, 159, 196)).

In the political scandal literature, researchers—mostly from the field of communication science—also reflect on the functioning and significance of the media in scandals. For instance, there are fifty related contributions in Tumber and Waisbord’s (2019) *Companion to Media and Scandal*.

Scandals are predominantly seen as wrong and bad (Haller et al., 2018; Brenton, 2012), however, sees scandals as a positive feature of liberal democratic politics. Political scandals are an indicator of freedom of speech, of an open and aggressive media, and of strong political competition. Scandals enable questioning of the collective moral code, and public opinion is used to punish the deviant behavior of politicians who are seen as symbols of moral authority.

There is also research on the consequences of political scandals. The negative consequences for the reputation of the politician seem self-evident (Doig, 1989; Maesschalck, 2005). Bowler and Karp (2004) add to these negative consequences the erosion of political institutions. Their data from the United States and the United Kingdom show that scandals involving legislators can have a negative influence on their constituents' attitudes toward institutions and the political process. In the 78 studies on the effects of political scandals reviewed by Von Sikorski (2018), two outcome variables were analyzed frequently: consequences for the politicians and for the electors. Overall, the studies revealed negative evaluative effects for politicians. However, five central moderators—candidate characteristics, behaviors, prior attitudes, context, and scandal type—significantly influenced the effects of scandals. Von Sikorski concludes that research on the effects of scandals have not accurately conceptualized its major independent variable: news coverage and its intensity.

This brief overview of the scandal literature learns that the literature provides limited information on the actual number and characteristics of scandals involving integrity violations by politicians. Regarding the actual number of scandals, a Wikipedia entry is worth mentioning. Wikipedia defines political scandal “an action or event regarded as morally or legally wrong and causing general public outrage. Politicians, government officials, party officials, and lobbyists can be accused of various illegal, corrupt, or unethical practices” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_scandal). The site refers to an interesting although rather selective list of political scandals in 22 countries (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_scandal#Lists_of_political_scandals_by_country). The Netherlands is not in the list. Otherwise, it would have been interesting to compare the Wikipedia list with the research presented in this article.

In general, since the 1960s, political scandals have become a prevalent feature of political life in countries of dissimilar political cultures, economic standards, media systems, and levels of corruption (Kumlin & Esaiasson, 2012; Thompson, 2000; Tumber & Waisbord, 2004). However, actual research on the number and characteristics of political scandals is scarce. An important exception is research on political scandals in Nordic counties (Allern et al., 2012; Pollack et al., 2018).

It is important to note the empirical research by Pollack et al. (2018) on 101 political scandals in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden from 2010 to 2016 and on political scandals in the wake of the #MeToo movement in 2017–2018. They showed and concluded that “mediated scandals have become a standard feature of political life in Nordic countries,” with “an exponential rise in the number of scandals” (Pollack et al., 2018, p. 3087) compared to earlier decades, and at the same time, the rate of resignations and dismissals following such scandals was lower than before.

Political scandals were defined as violations of accepted values and social norms, which are exposed through the media, arouse public criticism and anger, and threaten politicians' reputations. The research focuses on national political scandals, with broad national media coverage (which was operationalized as attention in at least two leading national media organizations for five days or more). Their main source of registration of scandals was electronic media text archives, particularly the largest Nordic media archive. Each scandal was registered once (i.e., the year the media coverage began). The researchers discussed doubtful cases until they reached agreement. Sweden topped the list with 35 scandals, with fewer incidents reported in Denmark, Finland, and Norway (21, 22, and 23 scandals, respectively). The number of scandals varied considerably from year to year in all countries (between 8 and 22). Of the 32 parliamentary parties, 22 experienced a scandal involving at least one of the party's national politicians during the seven-year period. This shows a new normality in scandals. Pollack et al. (2018) distinguished six types of political scandals. The most prominent ones concern: (1) offenses related to economic affairs, including corruption (34%), and (2) unacceptable personal behavior, such as accusations of sexual harassment and misuse of alcohol or drugs (19%). Other categories refer to (3) abuse of

political power positions (14%); (4) offenses concerning (other) laws and regulation (9%); (5) talk scandals or unacceptable utterances that create headlines and commentary and arouse public anger (13%); and (6) other types not covered by the above categories (9%). There were some important variations among the countries. Economic scandal is the most prominent category of political scandals in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden; but in Finland, such scandal is only second to talk scandals. Personal behavior scandals were especially commonplace in Norway but less so in the other countries.

To conclude, research on political integrity and integrity violations has much to take into account from the political scandal literature, but there has been rather limited empirical research on the prominence and characteristics of political integrity scandals: The PI-Index focuses on that by measuring the number of integrity scandals involving politicians.

The next section summarizes the characteristics of the PI-Index research. A preliminary point to consider, particularly in interdisciplinary comparative research, is the importance of clear meanings and interpretations of the concepts used to address the phenomenon studied. Language is very important. In the PI-Index research, in Dutch the central concept is “integriteitsaffaires.” The meaning of this term is clear in Dutch: it refers to serious accusations in public about possible integrity violations. However, its literal translation in English, “integrity affairs,” leads to misunderstanding because the word “affairs” connotes sexual behavior in common parlance. Other concepts like integrity incidents, integrity matters, and integrity breaches also seemed inappropriate because they were too general and very uncommon in the literature. Therefore, we decided to use the English language concept of scandal to refer to incidents involving serious accusations in public about possible integrity violations. In this way, we also introduced the concept of “integrity scandal.”

Integrity scandals in The Netherlands: An annual political integrity index

Characteristics of the PI-Index

The PI-Index project started in 2012 in The Netherlands. Reliable figures on public integrity incidents and scandals involving Dutch politicians were lacking and the project was meant to shed light on the number and characteristics of such scandals.

The PI-Index contains data from 2013 onward based on an explicit and consistent search strategy in the media so that developments and trends can be analyzed and compared over the years. The researchers followed the media and exchanged information on possible scandals during the year. The data collection was primarily based on searching the media on LexisNexis (data base including national, regional, and local newspapers) and Google using relevant keywords. The framework for the search used a combination of political functions (e.g., Member of Parliament) and various keywords relating to possible integrity violations (Integrity, Integrity Violation, Corruption, Conflict of Interest, Fraud, Theft, Abuse, Misdemeanor, Waste) and to the societal debate and the possible consequences (Disapproval, Allegation, Report to the Police, Resignation, Excuses). For several years, Twitter data were also part of the research, but we removed this source later because it did not bring additional information or new scandals. In addition, it is important for the reliability and validity of the resulting overview of integrity scandals that the annual publication of the results seldom led to corrections of the presented data.

The resulting data on the annual political integrity scandals in The Netherlands are summarized as the PI-Index for that year. It is an index, a summary of data over a period on integrity scandals involving politicians. These data are relevant for the state of political integrity.

What criteria lead to inclusion in the PI-Index? The sketched research and data collection on political integrity scandals in The Netherlands brought about interesting discussions among us as researchers and decisions we had to take about the criteria that are relevant for including a case

in the overview in the PI-Index. These concerned manifold aspects including what “politicians” at what government levels to include, a clarification on what “integrity” is about, and what type and content of media attention with accusations on violating integrity is necessary to conclude that it is a “scandal.”

The resulting framework has the following characteristics:

1. It concerns elected or appointed Dutch politicians who have or had a position (or were candidates for it) at the municipal/local, provincial, national, or international institution level, or a relevant administrative function within a political party.
2. Integrity scandals concern violations of prevailing moral values, norms, and rules. The integrity of the politician is at stake and called into question: there is (possible) involvement in an integrity violation. Other political failures and scandals, such as budget overruns or broken election promises, are not included because these do not necessarily reflect one’s integrity and therefore are not part of the typology of possible integrity violations.
3. The violation led to public attention, in the press or media. The year in which the possible alleged violation became public is the year in which the incident is registered in the index (and not the year in which the incident took place).
4. The media attention shows that the integrity of the politician is at stake. Formal or informal sanctions make that more credible (e.g., admission of guilt, apologies, repayment, resignation). If a politician denies all accusations, the case can still be included in the Index, when serious questions have arisen in public or media about the politician’s integrity, by credible sources and concerning serious misbehavior. Therefore, inclusion in the list does not necessarily mean that there was an actual breach of integrity by the politician (later investigations may conclude the politician did not commit an integrity violation).
5. Ten types of integrity violations are distinguished following the typology of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam: corruption (bribery, favoritism), fraud or theft, dubious gifts, incompatible functions, abuse of powers, misuse of information, unwanted conduct and treatment (in function), failure and waste, and misconduct in the private sphere.

The results of the PI-Index have been published annually in national Dutch media, starting in 2013 in *Vrij Nederland* and since 2019 in *de Volkskrant* (De Koning, 2019b). These publications resulted in a great deal of public attention in other media, including national television. This has also led to relevant input in public debates about political integrity and in initiatives of political parties, reflecting on their presence in the index and what might help to improve on the integrity of their representatives (Huberts et al., 2018). So far, there have been no scientific publications about the project itself and the data. This article is the beginning.

Some results of the PI-Index in The Netherlands

The PI-Index research in The Netherlands gives an annual overview of the political integrity scandals in the country: number of scandals in the year, the politicians and political parties involved, and the type of integrity violations of which politicians are accused. These results are summarized below, followed by some reflections and interpretations about them in the conclusion.

Number of scandals

The PI-Index includes an inventory of the integrity scandals of Dutch politicians since 2013. For the seven years from 2013 and 2019, a total of 355 integrity scandals were documented. The number of integrity scandals differed over the years: from 38 in 2017 to 64 in 2015. The index

TABLE 2. Number of Integrity Scandals in The Netherlands at Different Government Levels.

Level of government	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total	%
International level	1	0	2	1	1	0	1	6	1.7
National level	6	2	6	3	6	8	11	42	11.8
Provincial level	5	2	8	1	3	1	5	25	7.0
Local level	46	50	48	42	28	43	25	282	79.4
Total number at all levels	58	54	64	47	38	52	42	355	100

shows an average of 51 scandals over the 7-year period, approximately one scandal a week. These scandals involved Dutch politicians from various government levels (Table 2).

The frequency of one scandal a week generates different interpretations about the seriousness of political integrity problems in The Netherlands. One interpretation is that the country is doing well, which is in line with its scores in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index and the World Bank's Control of Corruption indicator (Hamilton & Hammer, 2018). In both indices, The Netherlands is among the top 10 of least corrupt countries in the world. Another interpretation of the one-scandal-a-week frequency is that it emphasizes the limitations of perception indexes (Rose, 2018, 2020) and that "once a week a scandal" shows that the problem should be taken seriously, given the negative consequences for the trust in politics and government (and because it is obvious that what is discovered is only a part of what really goes wrong).

The information about the level of government in which the involved politician belongs offers additional food for thought. Current research and indexes often focus on incidents at the national level. However, our data show that most integrity scandals occur at the local level: 282 of the 355 scandals in 2013–2019 (with 174 representatives from national parties and 108 representatives from the local parties).

It is clear that the number of political integrity scandals in The Netherlands varies per year, but it is difficult to discover a pattern that would potentially explain the variance. There seems to be a slow reduction of the total number of scandals annually, although the coming years will show whether this trend is structural. More data are needed to conclude what the necessary conditions are to explain the numbers. Among many possible factors (conditions) are upcoming elections (with new inexperienced candidates, critical attention by media and competitors, screening procedures in parties), the strength of independent media at the local level (investigative journalism), changes in values and norms that matter for integrity (public–private), the presence and significance of social media in revealing possible inappropriate behavior (both in public and private time), and more.

Involvement of political parties

The Dutch political party system is rather complex and fragmented, thus making it difficult to interpret the development of parties involved in the scandals for an international audience.

Almost all political parties that are active at the national level (Parliament) were confronted with scandals. In addition, there are the local/municipal parties that are not connected with the national parties. The liberal–conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie [VVD]) is at the forefront during the aforementioned 7-year period with a total of 90 integrity scandals, with the center-right Christian Democratic Appeal (Christen–Democratisch Appèl [CDA]) coming in as far second with 39, and the social–democratic Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid [PvdA]) with 35 scandals. The number of scandals involving local politicians with no connection to national parties is substantial: 108 scandals (out of the 282 scandals at the local level; see Table 2).

How should we interpret these figures? First, it is important to take into account the actual number of politicians who are active at different governmental levels: at the national-level

parliament, 150 (house) and 75 (senate) members, and 25 members of the national cabinet/governments; at the provincial level, there are 570 elected council members and 72 provincial cabinet members; at the municipal level, there are 8,931 elected council members, and 1,449 aldermen (elected by the council) and 390 mayors (appointed). Accordingly, the total number of politicians differs across levels: 250 national, 642 provincial, and 10,770 local politicians. Therefore, given that 92% of politicians are active in local politics and government, it is not surprising that 43 of the 52 scandals in 2018 were at the local level (83%).

In addition, a similar line of reasoning is relevant for understanding the involvement of political parties in integrity scandals. The parties VVD, CDA, and PvdA were mentioned as “frontrunners” but this is also due to the number of their politicians who are active, particularly in local politics. Together, they are the biggest among the national parties represented at the local government level. For example, the distribution in the 2016 elected local councils was: 35% local parties, 18% CDA, 12% VVD, and 10% PvdA (followed by Democrats ‘66 [Democraten 66 (D66)] with 9%, the Socialist Party [Socialistische Partij (SP)] 5%, and the other parties less than 5%). On the one hand, this clarifies the involvement of all parties in integrity scandals. That 31% of the scandals involve local parties is in line with the number of local party politicians. The involvement of the national parties in scandals is also related to their presence at all levels, but this only partly explains their involvement in the total number of scandals. The liberal-conservative VVD is involved with most of the scandals each year during the aforementioned period; this is more than the number of politicians could justify. This leads to some interesting questions about the explanation (Huberts et al., 2018). Frank de Grave formulated lessons, based on his long political career with the VVD, and mentioned three possible factors (Tromp & de Grave, 2018): the combination of power and self-confidence, the strong ties with business, and extra involvement in portfolios that are prone to conflicts of interest.

Types of integrity violations

This section documents the various types of integrity violations Dutch politicians are publicly and seriously accused of during the aforementioned period. Table 3 presents a summary.

The most common type of integrity scandals is misconduct in the private sphere, outside work (Kaptein, 2019). Thirty percent, or 106, of the scandals concern immoral behavior outside work, during private/personal time; for example, domestic violence, sexual intimidation, drunken driving, tax fraud, stealing from family or neighbors, intimidating tweets, stalking, and the like. Blauw (1991) summarized the temptations (for police officers) as the five Ds: dames, dimes, drugs, discounts, and dice. These types of behavior done in private time are publicized in the media—with social media playing an important role nowadays—thus making people doubt the politician’s integrity and credibility.

Another most frequently documented types of integrity violations concern “misuse and manipulation of information” (60 scandals) and conflict of interest through sideline activities (59

TABLE 3. Types of Integrity Violations in Political Integrity Scandals 2013–2019.

Type of violation	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
1 Corruption: bribery	2	1	1	1				5
2 Corruption: favoritism	3	2	2	1	1	1	4	14
3 Fraud and theft of resources	7	5	7	1	3	1	6	30
4 Conflict of interest through “gifts”	1				1	2	1	5
5 Conflict of interest through side-line activities	14	8	10	5	9	8	5	59
6 Improper use of authority	1	6	1					8
7 Misuse and manipulation of information	7	15	15	7	3	5	8	60
8 Waste and abuse of organizational resources	6	3	6	2	3	3	3	26
9 Inappropriate behavior; indecent treatment (work-related)	3	6	11	6	5	9	2	42
10 Misconduct in the private sphere (outside work)	14	8	11	24	13	23	13	106
Total	58	54	64	47	38	52	42	355

scandals). For example: violating the confidentiality in appointment procedures (say, a new mayor) by leaking the information to one's favorite candidate or leaking to the media information about the candidates. Instances of sideline activities and conflicts of interest are: Being a Member of Parliament and failing to register one's involvement in a company that could possibly give rise to conflict of interests in decision making; local council members participating in decision making about a company or social organization in which they are involved, etc.

Another prominent integrity violation (in 42 scandals) concerns work-related inappropriate behavior, indecent treatment, including discrimination and intimidation. Less common is corruption involving bribery (5 cases) and favoritism (14). The overall picture makes clear that all types of integrity violations can lead to public outrage and to an integrity scandal.

Based on the data collected, it is clear that all types of integrity violations are present in the political scandals documented in The Netherlands. Misbehavior in the private sphere is most common. This implies that the relationship between the private and the public is an important topic concerning integrity, especially of politicians. The kinds of scandals also show the importance of social media in increasing the publicity of private behavior, which are often about (sexual) intimidation and discrimination. These are also the types of inappropriate behavior at work that lead to a scandal. The prominence of these types of scandals is also signaled by other research (Pollack et al., 2018).

The overview also shows though that inappropriate interests in political decision making are also a cause of political scandal, with 19 corruption and 64 conflict-of-interests cases (wherein private or other interests conflicted with the public interest).

Agenda for research and policy

What is the perspective of the research on political integrity scandals in The Netherlands, presented in this article? What are the qualities, the limitations, of this new type of research in the field of political integrity and integrity violations (including corruption) studies? Further, what can we conclude about its potential? This last section also discusses the important and challenging international perspective of doing comparable research in other countries.

The basics of the PI-Index research are clear. First, clarity and consistency of the basic concepts (integrity, integrity violations, and integrity scandals) are important. The PI-Index research builds on the extensive literature on integrity and integrity violations) with additional reflection on the presence of integrity and integrity violations in public and societal debate and when they lead to a public political integrity scandal.

Second, the research methodology is crucial, particularly for an index, which also had the additional purpose to make comparisons over different time periods. For this, we developed an explicit and consistent research strategy on how to find political integrity scandals (e.g., deciding on which media, how to access them, using well-defined set of keywords for searching). In addition, we formulated clear criteria for incorporating cases in the PI-Index (e.g., which politicians, types of violations, credibility of media sources, types of accusations).

Third, the resulting data are unique with both quantitative data on the number of integrity scandals over time and many characteristics (e.g., government level, type of violation, gender, etc.), and qualitative data (for each scandal, a file is composed with background information from the media).

Finally, the information and insights obtained are highly relevant. That political scandals are an understudied phenomenon is problematic for our theory on political integrity and for our understanding of social perceptions of the integrity of politicians and trust in politics and government.

At the same time, the limitations of this kind of research are also clear. First of all, the need for clear concepts necessitates making choices about which concepts to use, and the choices made

could possibly reflect what is called in the literature “western bias.” Comparable research in other contexts and countries often focuses more specifically on “corruption.” However, the presented methodology for research on what are then deemed “corruption scandals” seems equally challenging.

Second, the data are underused and not completely analyzed. The data presented are clear but further analysis is necessary and challenging. For instance, the number of political integrity scandals in The Netherlands varies per year; what causes this variation is unclear, several possible explanations were mentioned. Other relevant questions result from the findings on the involvement of political parties (relation with ideology, internal integrity system?), the type of integrity violation leading to public arousal and scandal (what matters concerning the integrity of politicians, including on private behavior and public responsibilities). Overall interesting and intriguing data, but also leading to many new questions, relating the data to other data, variables, and bodies of knowledge (e.g., communication science). When and how does an integrity violation lead to public debate and attention, for example (election period, type of media)? Do men and women get involved in different types of scandal (and are the consequences, too, different)? What are the effects of scandals on the support that the politician and the party gets from the public or their members (De Vries & Solaz, 2017; Rienks, 2019)?

Applying PI-Index research in other countries that utilizes the conceptual framework established and employs the same methodology remains a challenge. Lessons might be learned from other initiatives toward international comparative indexes (Coppedge et al., 2011). Allied research will offer important perspectives for many questions on our research agendas but also for the improvement of the integrity of politics.

Acknowledgments

This article builds on our previous work, the PI-Index (until now, only in Dutch; De Koning, 2019a, 2019b), and on books and articles about integrity and the integrity of governance (Huberts, 2014, 2018; Huberts & Van Montfort, 2020; Kaptein, 2014). The original work has been summarized and revised, taking into account recent literature. We acknowledge and very much appreciate the involvement of research assistant Lotte Eising in the presentation of the data for the PI-Index. In addition, we are grateful for the ideas and contributions from many colleagues: participants in the sessions of the Network on Good Governance in The Netherlands, Kay Caldwell, Lex Huberts, and Martha Johnson for their help with the terminology and, of course, the reviewers and editor of this journal.

Data availability statement

The research protocol and template of the PI-Index are publicly available and can be obtained by contacting one of the authors.

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