Bayesians caught smuggling priors into Rotterdam harbor

Rogier A. Kievit

Amsterdam, 2-2-2011. A group of international Bayesians was arrested today in the Rotterdam harbor. According to Dutch customs, they were attempting to smuggle over 1.5 million priors into the country, hidden between electronic equipment. The arrest represents the largest capture of priors in history.

'This is our biggest catch yet. Uniform priors, Gaussian priors, Dirichlet priors, even informative priors, it's all here," says customs officers Benjamin Roosken, responsible for the arrest. "There are priors for memory experiments, intelligence tests, flanker tasks, meta-analyses, political preference, everything! God only knows what would have happened if this had gotten through. We're pretty lucky to catch them too. The chance of being in the right place, given the right time, if you take into account the number of arrests, divided by the number of successful arrests every year, it's pretty slim. We're very glad indeed. "

Sources suggest that the shipment of priors was going to be introduced into the Dutch scientific community by 'white-washing' them. "They are getting very good at it. They found ghost-journals with fake articles, refer to the papers where the priors are allegedly based on empirical data, and before you know it, they're out in the open. Of course, when you look up the reference, everything is long gone."

Until recently, the Dutch government adopted a lenient, pragmatic approach towards priors. "It was quite simple. Scientists were allowed to *use* priors, but not to create them at home. It may sound a bit counterintuitive, but it worked quite well, for a while at least". However, according to critics this policy created an uncontrollable backdoor industry.

The discovery of international smuggling rings have caused the government to revise their strategy and crack down hard on illegal trade. The capture of the smuggling ring symbolizes a new, tough stance on priors. "We will not stand for this unjustified and illegal use of priors any longer.". If found guilty, the defendants may face 12 years in prison (95% CI [10.2, 13.8], $p<0.01$).