



The Netherlands Institute  
for Social Research

# Summary

## Gloomy about society?

A study of differences in societal unease  
in the Netherlands



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Bram Geurkink and Emily Miltenburg

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research

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## Reflection, conclusions and recommendations

### **An era of unease?**

Many Dutch people are satisfied with their own lives, but dissatisfied with society (Dekker et al. 2018). This negative feeling that citizens have about the Netherlands is often discussed in newspapers, on talk shows and in the political arena. Commentators and politicians refer to them as ‘concerned’ or ‘angry’ citizens. And they see protests – whether about nitrogen, COVID or refugee shelters – as confirmation of that negative feeling.

The concept of ‘societal unease’ frequently comes up in these discussions. Since 2000, this term seems to have become increasingly prevalent in public and political debate (RMO 2013). This unease refers to a negative sentiment about society. Although protest and societal unease are often mentioned in the same breath, they are not the same thing. Protesting is a behaviour, while societal unease is an attitude towards society. It is a broad concern that often does not relate to one specific societal problem (Steenvoorden 2016). Societal unease refers to pessimism about the direction in which society is heading, a perceived decline and a collective powerlessness to stop that decline (Steur et al. 2017a).

Societal unease has been a phenomenon throughout history and is part of every society (Van den Berg and Kok 2021: 13; Steur et al. 2017a). However, it has become the focus of increased attention in recent decades (Mellink et al. 2014). Researchers attribute this to a fading belief in progress in Western, liberal democracies, where part of the population has lost hope for a better future (e.g. Elchardus 2015; Steenvoorden 2016). Some also argue that the sentiment of societal unease has been stronger and more visible since the turn of the century (Steur et al. 2017a; Van den Berg and Kok 2021; Schnabel 2011). It is difficult to investigate whether societal unease has indeed increased. There is limited empirical material available to monitor this development over the course of decades (Dekker et al. 2013; Van den Berg and Kok 2021: 13). But with more and more talk of unease in the political arena and the media, some have labelled the last 20 years as the era of unease (Van Vulpen et al. 2016).

### **Consequences for society and the democratic rule of law**

Societal unease often has a negative connotation. However, this concern can also be a useful indicator and have a constructive democratic function. People feel that the Netherlands is heading in the wrong direction and believe that certain political and social issues should receive more attention (Koenis 2012; RMO 2013). A certain level of unease therefore serves as a ‘fuel that keeps the political and social machinery running’ (Tiemeijer and Keizer 2023: 47).

Despite this indicative role of societal unease, policymakers tend to focus primarily on its potential negative consequences. Societal unease can cause tensions in society and lead to unrest or anger among part of the population (Steur et al. 2017a; RMO 2013: 10). Policymakers also fear that unease could put pressure on the functioning of public administration (Steur et al. 2017b).

Differences between groups and regions in the Netherlands represent a particular area of concern. This was also expressed by the Dutch Government Committee on the Parliamentary System, which issued advice on making that system future-proof. Heightened societal unease among certain groups in society can put a strain on the legitimacy of the democratic rule of law (Remkes et al. 2018: 80). Groups with a high level of societal unease may feel that the government is no longer able to meet their expectations. This can be because the government is not focusing on the issues that are important to them, for example. As a result, these groups do not feel seen and understood. Citizens may also think that the government is not solving problems effectively enough. This can in turn cause groups of citizens to withdraw from society and isolate themselves in their own circles. When this happens, it indicates diminished legitimacy of public administration and can put an even greater strain on the functioning thereof (Andeweg 2014).

There are a number of other insights about the behavioural implications of societal unease. People with more societal unease are more likely to vote for radical right-wing parties (Steenvoorden and Hartevelde 2018). However, this is not necessarily cause for concern for democracy. After all, dissatisfaction with policy and the established parties is expressed within the democratic legal system. This ensures the legitimacy of the system (Steenvoorden 2018). Not voting, on the other hand, could suggest reduced legitimacy. But there is no clear indication that unease causes people to abstain from voting. In short, the relationship between unease and voting behaviour does not directly give rise to concerns about the functioning of democracy (Steenvoorden 2018: 66).

We also know that people with more societal unease are over-represented in protest participation, but less involved in institutional political participation (such as membership and involvement in a political party) and civic participation (such as volunteer work) (Steenvoorden 2016). Protesting is a fundamental right, a basic condition of our democracy, a means for groups to express their interests and a way of communicating society's concerns to politicians (see also Box 5.1).

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### **Box 5.1 Relationship between societal unease and protesting unclear**

People with more societal unease participate less in general, but they are more likely to be active in protest types of participation (such as demonstrations, boycotts and signing petitions) (Steenvoorden 2016). The circumstances under which societal unease turns into protest are relatively unpredictable (Van Stekelenburg 2018). Whether and when people will demonstrate is based on a range of personal characteristics and depends on the circumstances as well, such as a clear cause or an engaging, mobilising person (Den Ridder et al. 2019). People who take part in protests therefore have different motives. Some demonstrations have a broad focus, such as the climate, while other demonstrations have a very specific policy goal (such as higher wages) (Den Ridder et al. 2019: 33). There are also people with low societal unease who take part in protests. The extent of protest and participation therefore cannot be predicted based on concern about or dissatisfaction with society and politics. In other words, societal unease can be a breeding ground for protest, but the actual act of protesting depends on the organisation and mobilisation of certain groups. The same applies to recent climate demonstrations and protests against nitrogen measures. Looking only at protests, demonstrations and incidents therefore does not do justice to the concerns that exist within society as a whole, and does not help to find solutions.

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In addition to differences between groups of Dutch citizens, policymakers must be alert to concentrations of societal unease in certain areas, and to the feeling of being 'forgotten' by national politics among those in regions outside the Randstad.<sup>1</sup> If societal unease in certain areas also gradually undermines the legitimacy that people attribute to government action, this can reduce the willingness to collaborate on governmental tasks that require interventions in the spatial environment (e.g. the energy transition and the nitrogen issue) (Van den Berg and Kok 2021: 35 and 40). It can even decrease the willingness to submit to authority. This occurs at the expense of policy effectiveness, which affects the stability of the democratic rule of law (Van Noije 2019).

In short, some degree of unease in a society is neither undesirable nor unusual – the phenomenon has always existed and is part of every society – but too much is not good, especially if this societal unease is concentrated in specific groups and in specific regions.

### **Pay more attention to underlying problems than to sentiment**

Researchers and commentators point out that since the rise of Pim Fortuyn in 2001, political debates have increasingly been approached from an emotional frame. These debates focus heavily on ‘concerned’, ‘angry’ and ‘forgotten’ citizens (Van den Berg and Kok 2021: 13). Over the past 20 years, politicians have given ‘ample space to feelings and sentiments’ (Van den Berg and Kok 2021: 76). If politicians mainly focus on such sentiments and aim to reduce them, but in doing so give less priority to certain policy objectives, this fails to solve the actual underlying problems. According to Van den Berg and Kok (2021: 76), dealing with societal unease in this way has ‘triggered a downward spiral of unease. As a result, this may further amplify the discontent: if we talk about societal unease often enough, people will also start to notice it more due to this constant confirmation (Dekker 2021).<sup>2</sup>

Solely focusing on and acting in response to the sentiment of societal unease can therefore be counter-productive. It is more constructive to look at citizens’ underlying concerns, problems and preferences (Dekker 2016). This is in line with previous SCP publications in which we noted that it is not a lack of trust in the political system that is problematic, but the lack of reliability of the government (Van Gool et al. 2022; Den Ridder et al. 2022). While lower trust in the political system is an important indicator, it is not the problem itself (Schakel 2021).

It is therefore important to view societal unease ‘not as the end of a societal debate, but as the beginning’ (RMO 2013: 51). We must look for the underlying explanations for differences in societal unease. In this study, we do that by examining political views, individual resources, perceptions on one’s position in society and where people live. Dissecting unease gives us a picture of the diversity and distribution of societal unease in the Netherlands. If it turns out that differences in unease are related to structural inequalities between social groups and areas in the Netherlands, policy decisions can be weighed more effectively and attention can be focused more specifically on these inequalities. This will not eliminate societal unease completely, as it is part of every society and has many sources (see also Dekker and Den Ridder 2011; Den Ridder et al. 2022). Nevertheless, this study does provide guidelines for policymakers to reduce societal unease among groups and starting points for engaging in dialogue with citizens.

### **Conclusions**

This study focuses on the questions of what characterises societal unease, who feels it more, where in the Netherlands it occurs most often and why. We regard societal unease as a broad concern about the direction and state of the Netherlands. Our study shows that who someone is, whom they know and what they think are often more important determinants of societal unease than where someone lives. We conclude that societal unease is primarily related to the resources people have and their personal views on society and politics, and has less to do with the characteristics of their place of residence. More economic resources, such as education, having a job and a higher income, are generally associated with less societal unease. But non-economic resources such as better health, good communication skills, access to and support from certain social networks, and culturally elitist preferences and behaviours are also linked to less societal unease. One’s perceived position in society is related to unease as well: people who feel more included in Dutch society and place themselves higher on the social ladder experience less societal unease.

In addition, the societal concerns and political viewpoints underlying this unease are diverse. Most societal unease is found in groups with more culturally conservative views, but groups with other political views also experience societal unease. These different groups often have different political viewpoints. For example, some who experience strong societal unease think that the Netherlands is doing too much to fight climate change, while others believe too little is being done. Societal unease therefore has different meanings for different groups in the Netherlands. People with less social and political trust also have more societal unease, as do people who experience less responsiveness in politics and people who experience more friction in society.

Although societal unease is, on average, slightly higher among residents of rural municipalities outside the Randstad, the differences in unease between residents within municipalities are always greater than the differences between municipalities. Furthermore, there are also many people in the Randstad who have a high level of societal unease. The regional differences are mainly explained by the fact that people living in these areas have different individual resources and different views on society and politics. Characteristics of the area (such as an ageing population and the local economy) have only a modest influence on societal unease. On average, however, residents of rural areas outside the Randstad have a stronger sentiment that their region does not receive enough attention in national politics; this is a key component of societal unease in these areas.

### **Possible courses of action for policymakers**

We conclude that societal unease is primarily related to individual resources and personal views on society and politics. We have identified three possible courses of action for policymakers:

#### **1 Provide space for diverse perspectives: look at democratic innovations**

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Look at democratic innovations which could ensure that citizens feel **more heard** and have a **better understanding** of the decisions made. Many political decisions affect citizens' personal lives, and if they are involved in these decisions, this could lead to a better understanding of the outcomes. **Transparency** (has the process taken place openly?) and **inclusion** (have all interests been considered?) are crucial in this regard. Potential innovations include citizens' assemblies and referendums. It is also important to define **clear expectations** in advance and ensure **adequate representation**.

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The perception that politicians do not do enough for or care enough about citizens is related to a stronger sense of societal unease. Beneath the feeling of societal unease lies a multitude of concerns and political beliefs held by citizens, about which they often have opposing views. If decisions are not made carefully regarding issues on which citizens' opinions strongly differ, such as climate change measures, immigration and the European Union, we foresee a so-called waterbed effect. A policy decision may decrease societal unease for one group, but increase it for another. The stances on climate change measures are a clear example of this: some groups feel the measures are too drastic and are being implemented too fast, while others believe the process cannot happen fast enough (see also De Kluizenaar and Van der Torre 2023).

Due to the differing views in a diverse society, consensus on decisions is not realistic. The ability to deal with and represent this diversity of wishes, interests and norms among citizens is therefore the core of our democracy. In the decision-making process, it is especially important that citizens feel they are being heard and kept adequately informed. A key concept in this regard is perceived procedural justice (Van Noije 2019). Has the process of considering interests taken place openly (was it transparent?) and have all relevant interests been considered (was it inclusive?)? The idea behind procedural justice is that even if citizens' preferences are not reflected in policy, they are more likely to accept outcomes if they feel that the policy has been developed fairly. This can reduce a waterbed effect and safeguard the legitimacy of decisions.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in involving citizens in decision-making. From the above legitimacy perspective, such involvement can increase citizens' influence and make the process of balancing interests more transparent. If the preferences and interests of certain groups in society are not fully heard and consistently fail to receive adequate consideration, the substantive representation of these groups is out of balance. A determining factor of legitimacy is that citizens have the chance to voice their opinions and that this input is handled with due care. Two democratic innovations that receive a great deal of attention in this regard are the citizens' assembly and the binding corrective referendum.

In a citizens' assembly, a small group of citizens led by an expert engage in dialogue with other citizens to explore a specific societal problem. An example is the citizens' assembly on climate policy initiated by the minister for Climate and Energy. People who are more dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy and people who are dissatisfied with the current climate policy are more supportive of a citizens' climate forum (De Koning et al. 2023). A citizens' assembly could bring to the fore the dissatisfaction of these groups of citizens. Ideally, the citizens' assembly reveals the plurality of perspectives and provides a visible platform for weighing the various interests and facts. It is also important that scope of the citizens' assembly is not too narrow, that expectations are clearly aligned and that basic conditions for representativeness and inclusivity are guaranteed (see De Koning et al. 2023 for a detailed explanation of these focal points; Den Ridder et al. 2021a).

In a binding corrective referendum, all eligible voters can express their opinion on laws that have already been passed. The introduction of a referendum has broad support among the population, and precisely those groups with a relatively higher degree of societal unease (people who have only completed primary education or prevocational secondary education, people who have low trust in the political system, and people who place themselves lower on the social ladder) are in favour in the referendum as a democratic tool (Houwelingen and Dekker 2018; Bowler and Donovan 2019). For these groups specifically, the referendum could be an important tool to boost their involvement in the political system (Remkes et al. 2018). It can increase the government's responsiveness because it can increase the willingness to explicitly take into account the wishes of the population (Remkes et al. 2018). Furthermore, citizens vote for a particular party during elections because they agree with certain viewpoints. In a multi-party system like that in the Netherlands, the question is whether these points will also result in policy, even if a party enters the government. A corrective referendum gives citizens a greater influence over the decision-making process (Michels 2009) and thus contributes to the legitimacy of this process.

However, some caution is in order. Adequate representation must be ensured in both the citizens' assembly and in referendums. It is also wise to think about the embedding of this democratic tool rather than simply viewing it as an experiment. We know from the national referendum that disappointment about the tool and its abolition has increased political dissatisfaction (De Koning et al. 2023). If the groups with the most societal unease also lose out in citizen participation or become disillusioned with it, this will only fuel their discontent.

## 2 *Look beyond economic resources and recognise the importance of perceived inclusion*

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In addition to **economic resources** (such as employment and income), **non-economic resources** (such as social networks, health and digital skills) and shortages thereof also contribute to societal unease. Alongside economic policy decisions, this requires consideration of policies aimed at tackling **disadvantages and inequalities** in these other resources. Shortages should be supplemented based on **life course considerations** and **need**, and it must be clear what citizens can expect from the government. The feeling of belonging and being able to fully participate in society is important to reduce societal unease as well. **Combating exclusion** and ensuring **equal treatment** therefore require attention from policymakers.

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Inequality is about more than just differences in income and education. Access to social networks and the support and help these can provide, perceived health, communication skills and cultural preferences are also related to the opinions people have about Dutch society, including societal unease. Other SCP research shows that there are significant differences between capital groups (combinations of economic, social, cultural and person capital) and the extent to which people think the Netherlands is heading in the wrong direction. Groups with few resources are more likely to be societally pessimistic (Vrooman et al. 2023). Structural inequalities and resource shortages require policy attention because, in addition to impacting citizens' quality of life, they can also have negative consequences for society and the legitimacy of democracy and government policy. This study includes an in-depth discussion of several courses of action to combat these inequalities (Vrooman et al. 2023). We will limit ourselves to a few key points here.

Policymakers are less likely to focus on non-economic resources, such as social relationships and cultural preferences. These are difficult to regulate and can easily infringe on people's privacy, and interventions in this regard can also be stigmatising for certain groups. The wish and expectation of policymakers is that successful policy on economic capital (such as equal opportunities in education and on the labour market) will automatically lead to more capital in other domains. However, an economic approach will probably not be sufficient to address inequalities (Vrooman et al. 2023). Resolving disadvantages in education and on the labour market is challenging enough for many groups. And even if this is accomplished, it will not simply translate to other resources and social opportunities (Geppert and Muns 2023).

A broad view of other, non-economic resources is therefore needed. For example, perceived health and support from social networks are also related to societal unease. The same is true for digital skills and mastery of the English language: resources that will also become increasingly important because our modern society is demanding more and more of its citizens. A separate focus on these other resources is therefore key, especially among groups with an accumulation of disadvantages.

For groups with a lower social position, investing in these resources on their own is complicated due to the shortage of many of these resources. Placing the responsibility for increasing resources entirely on citizens themselves is therefore not a solution. This will only exacerbate inequalities, as people with more resources are also able to invest more in themselves. Furthermore, a focus on personal investment reduces structural inequality to an individual problem, while there are many complex causes behind it (Vrooman et al. 2023).

A more promising option is a more prominent role for the government, in which resource shortages are supplemented based on life course considerations and need. For people without paid work who are close to pensionable age, for instance, a strict activating labour market policy could be replaced by support in finding another daytime activity from which they could derive fulfilment and appreciation. Other examples including building support networks, improving digital skills and combating loneliness. Focusing on problems in implementation processes at government agencies, which are more likely to negatively affect people with fewer resources, could also reduce structural inequalities (Vrooman et al. 2023: 9-12). It is important that citizens have clarity regarding what they can expect from the government and which public services and facilities they can count on (SCP 2021).

How people rate their own social position and whether they feel part of Dutch society are related to societal unease as well. The structure of our society should invite citizens to participate fully and make them feel like they belong. Different groups experience barriers and exclusion in Dutch society for different reasons (e.g. the elderly, people with low literacy skills, people who have only completed primary education or prevocational secondary education, people with a migrant background, people with a physical disability and people who feel culturally distanced from Dutch politics). Prior research into topics like discrimination (Andriessen et al. 2020) and inclusion of people with a physical disability (Vermeij and Hamelink 2021) shows that there is still a lot of work to be done to create a more inclusive society. Developing policy measures to prevent the exclusion of groups and putting the theme of equal treatment on the agenda are therefore essential. It can also help to make politicians and public officials aware of the cultural differences that contribute to people's perceived distance from the political system (Van der Waal et al. 2017).



### 3 Focus on region-specific challenges and perceived distance from national politics

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The view that the national political system does not pay enough attention to the region where people live ('place-based resentment') is an important component of the societal unease felt in rural municipalities outside the Randstad. A greater focus on regions can be achieved by **preventing** a feeling of **political distance** and **insufficient representation**, and by paying attention to the **distribution of economic resources** across regions. Ensure that national policy is structured in such a way that **region-specific challenges** can be tackled as part of it. Formulate solutions in close consultation with regional partners and ensure proper consideration of regional interests at the national level. However, it is important not to lose sight of the **various inequalities** that exist **throughout the Netherlands**.

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Societal unease is relatively low in cities, both within and outside the Randstad, and relatively high in rural municipalities outside the Randstad. It is important to note that differences between residents within areas are always greater than differences *between* areas. In addition, the regional differences in societal unease can largely be explained by the fact that people living in these areas have different individual resources and different views on society and politics.

On average, however, residents of rural areas outside the Randstad experience a larger distance to national politics in the sense that they are more likely to believe that the Dutch government does not pay enough attention to the region in which they live. This is a key component of societal unease in these areas. The literature approaches this place-based resentment in broader terms than just the 'political focus' on certain regions (Huijsmans 2023). The feeling of how other Dutch people view the region in which someone lives is also part of that resentment. Residents of the Randstad provinces experience greater appreciation for their region from other Dutch people, while those living in Friesland, Drenthe, Zeeland and Limburg experience less appreciation (Vermeij and Schyns 2019).

The perception that other Dutch people look down on their region is strongest among residents of the province of Groningen (Vermeij and Schyns 2019: 20). This sentiment is currently most evident in the gas extraction dossier. The fact that gas revenues were considered more important than the fate of Groningen's residents has taken a heavy toll.

It is important to explore what can be done about the underlying causes of the feeling that not enough attention is paid to the region in which people live. For the gas extraction dossier specifically, the parliamentary committee of enquiry into gas extraction in Groningen has called for residents to be prioritised over gas revenues. The recommendations include implementing a more generous and accessible claims handling process, providing clarity and prospects to residents and for the region, paying more attention to the public interest and listening more closely to stakeholders' concerns (Parliamentary committee of enquiry into gas extraction in Groningen 2023).

The question of what the national government can do to focus more on the region in which people live also exists outside Groningen, and this question requires an answer in a broader context than just the gas extraction dossier. Research points to the local economic structure and perceived cultural and political distance as relevant explanations for place-based resentment (Huijsmans 2023). With regard to the local economic structure, there are recurring discussions about the distribution of government investments in high-quality facilities and activities, and the distribution models for regular government funding across municipalities and provinces (from the municipal fund as well as in the social domain and for infrastructure) (Remie 2021; Bock 2022; Molema 2022). These discussions reinforce the impression in certain regions outside the Randstad that when it comes to matters of distribution, they often 'get the short end of the stick'. The Council for the Environment and Infrastructure, Council for Public Health and Society and Council for Public Administration note that many of the national programmes aimed at regional areas lead to competition between regions and place the national government in an evaluative position. They advise that more attention should be paid to regions on a continual basis and that investments should be long-term rather than incidental (Rli et al. 2023: 54). It is important to seek solutions in close consultation between the national government and regional

partners and to structure national policy in such a way that region-specific challenges can be tackled as part of it.

Furthermore, a greater perceived distance and less ‘descriptive representation’ (numerical presence) of political leaders from different regions in Dutch Parliament are related to a strong sense that national politics does not pay attention to the region in which people live (Huijsmans 2023; see also Noordzij et al. 2021). Proposals for changing the electoral system could be relevant to address this perceived political distance. The Dutch Government Committee on the Parliamentary System has recommended improving the current electoral system (Remkes et al. 2018). This has led to a bill from the cabinet for an electoral system in which voters can vote for either a party or a specific person on the list of candidates (Rijksoverheid 2021). Because preferential votes carry more weight within this new electoral system, it could strengthen the regional representation of voters and thus reduce the perceived political and cultural distance from the national government and the Randstad.<sup>3</sup>

Although place-based resentment is more prevalent outside the Randstad, it is important not to lose sight of the various inequalities that exist throughout the Netherlands. If we look through a different lens and focus on indicators of broad prosperity, we see a different geographical picture: in parts of the Randstad there is actually a decrease in ‘broad prosperity later’, i.e. resources that subsequent generations will need to maintain the level of prosperity. And in large cities across the Netherlands, the quality of life is generally lower, which includes indicators such as lower average disposable income, poorer health and less social cohesion (CBS 2022). Broad prosperity ‘here and now’ (including wealth, employment, well-being, safety and the environment) is also relatively low in municipalities in Groningen as well as in Limburg, Drenthe and Flevoland.

In short, the geographical distribution of broad prosperity is not uniform. There may be certain region-specific challenges associated with increasing broad prosperity. But in addition to the distribution of broad prosperity *between* areas, attention should also be paid to the differences in resources and prosperity *within* areas. Comparing areas in the Netherlands to each other does not contribute to an understanding of the underlying problems faced by groups of people who lag behind in broad prosperity. Policy attention should be devoted specifically to this.

### **In conclusion: towards a responsive government with a vision**

Societal unease has been around for ages, is part of every society and exists among many Dutch citizens. However, this unease is unevenly distributed between groups and areas, and that can be a problem. Due to discussions about the climate and nitrogen, we have recently also seen increasing discussions about the supposed gap between the Randstad (and other cities) and rural areas. A high degree of societal unease among certain groups or in certain areas can (further) escalate social tensions and the political gap.

Many advisory and research reports and studies on societal unease have preceded this publication (e.g. Dekker and Den Ridder 2011; RMO 2013; Steenvoorden 2016; Steur et al. 2017a; Van den Berg and Kok 2021). The SCP Citizens’ Outlook Barometer also focuses on the nature of and developments in societal unease. These contributions have already taught us that we should not focus on the sentiment of societal unease and that it is especially important to examine the underlying sources of unease. To do so, a strong empirical basis is needed regarding the actual individual differences in societal unease between Dutch people, both within and between areas.

This study provides that knowledge. We argue that the political attitudes and resources people have are often more important determinants of their societal unease than where they live. While the view that the national political system does not pay enough attention to regions is an important component of the societal unease felt in rural municipalities outside the Randstad, specific characteristics of the area only have a modest influence. In addition, for all Dutch people, the extent to which they believe that politicians care about what they think and are doing enough for them is linked to societal unease. In the possible courses of action mentioned above, we highlight the importance of representing diverse political perspectives, offering social security and ensuring that everyone in society can participate.

Societal unease is explicitly a future-oriented issue; after all, it refers to feelings about the state and direction of society in the near future and beyond. As such, it is also important to determine and communicate to citizens what the prospects are for the social challenges both now and in the future (SCP 2021). A broad perspective on prosperity can be helpful in this regard. Within that perspective, other aspects besides financial-economic factors should be considered. This perspective also includes the distribution of wealth (and maintaining this broad prosperity) for future generations. That broad perspective on prosperity therefore provides an important conceptual framework for policy to take into account current and future generations alike. It requires a clear link between short-term and long-term choices across various policy domains, as well as transparency and a clear vision on current and future choices from politicians and policymakers (Hardus and Schellingerhout 2022).

Many political decisions affect citizens' personal lives. And if policy plans regularly change course and are considered separately from other domains and without a clear vision, this can lead to a perception of unreliability. It ultimately comes down to having a reliable and committed government, both in the decision-making process and in social services and schemes. A long-term perspective serves as an 'anchor for predictable and effective policies' (SCP 2021). It remains as important as ever for politicians to achieve results and demonstrate decisiveness, listen carefully, engage in dialogue, be open about the interests that have been considered and be accountable (Den Ridder et al. 2022; Van Noije et al. 2023). Concrete and inclusive potential solutions that reflect a vision for the future and involve citizens can help to combat the feeling of an societal deterioration that we as a society cannot control.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Randstad refers to a metropolitan conurbation occupying an area in west-central Netherlands. This 'Randstad' area is being regarded as the economic, cultural and political centre.
- <sup>2</sup> A similar pattern can be seen with political dissatisfaction. For example, Rooduijn et al. (2016) show that populist radical right-wing parties not only respond to existing political dissatisfaction, but partly fuel this dissatisfaction: people become even more dissatisfied with politics after they vote for populist radical right-wing parties.
- <sup>3</sup> According to the Council of State, the assumption here is that people who are dissatisfied with their regional representation will make use of the option to cast preferential votes, something that has yet to be proven in practice (RVS 2022).

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Social Research  
Postbus 16164  
2500 BD The Hague  
[www.scp.nl](http://www.scp.nl)  
[info@scp.nl](mailto:info@scp.nl)

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