

# **Antecedents of Governmental Trust in The Netherlands**

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## **Abstract**

### **Purpose**

Governmental trust is an essential aspect of the democratic governmental system, as it is essential for social cohesion and the effective functioning of political institutions. Currently, trust in the government has been decreasing for a while in the entire world, with this trend also impacting The Netherlands. However, very little is known about what specifics cause this downwards spiral in the specific context of the nation. This research paper examines many possible predictors of governmental trust in The Netherlands to find whether previous proven antecedents uphold in this specific context.

### **Method**

An online survey based on a theoretical framework on possible antecedents of political and cabinet trust was dispersed among Dutch citizens. The survey responses were then analyzed with the use of correlation analyses and linear regressions.

### **Results**

The mean trust was found to be slightly negative. Multiple factors contribute to this trend, however most antecedents cannot be proven as significant. Still, a large number of correlations between the antecedents was found. Furthermore, the fashion in which trust is assessed seems to have a tendency.

### **Conclusion**

A lot needs to be taken into consideration when attempting to tackle the current distrust situation. Transparent, more effective communication seems to be the most straightforward way to bridge the gap of trust in The Netherlands. Engaging with citizens, addressing critical government cases, prioritizing people's needs are vital steps toward building trust. Still, more research is needed to actively argue what exact measures are needed to be taken to improve the situation.

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## 1. Introduction

Governmental trust is an essential aspect of the democratic governmental system, as it is essential for social cohesion and the effective functioning of political institutions (Stolle & Hooghe, 2005). Concerns about the decline in trust in the governments all over the world have been growing in recent years (Norris, 2011). This decline in trust can have drastic consequences, such as decreased political participation, decreased legitimacy of governmental institutions, and reduced social capital.

In the Netherlands, the level of trust in the government has been unstable over the years, with it declining almost every year since the year 2000. According to the Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2020, only 45% of Dutch citizens reported having trust in the national government, which is a decrease from the score of 60% in 2016 (Eurobarometer, 2020). The ability of the government to implement policies and maintain the social order is at risk due to this decline in trust, which is a reason to be concerned (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015).

Understanding and being able to tackle this problem can enable Dutch policy makers and other stakeholders to gain insights into how to address the decline in trust and its consequences. To achieve this it is crucial to understand the determinants of governmental trust in the Netherlands. This research will contribute to the theoretical landscape by focusing on only the Dutch decline in trust, shedding light on the unique dynamics and challenges that are faced in The Netherlands. Several factors may contribute to this decline, from demographic change within the population to the influence of governmental policies. It is essential to identify these factors and understand how they interact to influence citizens' trust in the government. Furthermore, the findings of this research have the potential to inform communication strategies and contribute to the development of effective measures to restore trust, encourage political participation, and enhance the legitimacy of governmental institutions.

Therefore, in this research paper the main question that will be addressed is *What are antecedents of governmental trust in The Netherlands?* An important sub-question that this report will aim to answer is *What are differences between political trust and trust in the cabinet in proportion to the other and in terms of antecedents?* Understanding the differences between political trust and trust in the cabinet can provide insights into specific areas that require attention

and potential strategies for improving public confidence in governance. To answer the research questions a theoretical framework inventorying what determinants have been found as significant in previous studies was conducted. Based on this framework, an online survey was conducted among Dutch citizens.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Defining trust

Most people have a clear understanding of what trust means, however defining it is difficult. Finding an all-accepted explanation of trust might be infeasible, as the concept is bound to the context it is used in. In this section the relevant ideas of trust will be discussed, ending with a clear definition that will be followed throughout the paper.

According to Simpson (2012) trust is mostly invisible, or in the least not talked about when it is present all that often. They conclude that only when a problematic situation occurs trust becomes noticeable, as only then people start talking about it. Furthermore, they explain that the mentioning of trust is an indication of a lack of trust (Simpson, 2012).

How does one decide whether to trust? Two strings of approaches exist to answer this question. Either, trust is built on a collection of experiences and social interactions, which can have their positive or negative impacts (Paxton & Glanville, 2015), or trust exists based on the norms, values, and beliefs of someone's culture (Inglehart, 1988; Robbins, 2016). As these 'definitions' of trust are conflicting, both sides of the discussion should be taken into consideration while designing a research model for governmental trust.

In literature discussing trust in the governmental sense, some interesting divisions are made. When talking about 'governmental trust' the term 'political trust' seems to be intertwined and very close in definition. This being the belief and confidence that citizens have in the political system, institutions, and actors (Norris, 1999). Political trust involves the expectations of citizens that the political institutions and actors will act in the population's best interests, and make sound decisions, and adhere to democratic principles. This form of trust is essential for the functioning of a democratic state. Warren (2008) adds to this definition that political trust also entails the belief that the institutions possess the competence (ability) and integrity necessary to fulfill its responsibilities effectively.

Within the political system the main actors sit within the cabinet, which is responsible for making decisions on policies and implementation. The cabinet is not a process or huge ambiguous institution. However, it is a group of relatively well-known actors that the public can 'interact'

with. Trust in the cabinet can therefore be defined slightly differently. Marsh and Rhodes (1992) define trust in the cabinet as the belief that the cabinet members have competence, expertise, and honesty, and that they will act in the best interests of the country.

Conceptualizations of both trust in the cabinet and political trust reveal the main beliefs, or perceptions, that are essential for defining and explaining trust. These are the perceptions of **ability, benevolence, integrity**, and **'aim to achieve the general will'** of the actors and/or institutions. Respectively meaning the perceptions of the citizens on 'how able the government is at handling its responsibilities', 'how well-meaning the government is', 'how honest and incorruptible the government is', and 'whether the government strives to achieve the expectations of the citizens' (Tomankova, 2019; Canovan, 1999; Levi & Stoker, 2000; (Oliver and Rahn, 2016; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). Whether the government institutions aim to achieve the general will can be linked to **attention division** and **putting the people first**.

Further context within governmental trust literature reveals different contexts. The first regards trust as a multifaceted concept that involves careful **evaluation** of various factors, which suggests a more tact and calculated approach to trusting. In the case of the government, this often means that institutions are held accountable for policy outcomes, more or less as a mechanism of punishment and reward (De Blok et al., 2020). The other context is an alternative that regards trust as a more **spontaneous** response. This links back to the definition given before, which mentioned cultural beliefs as the main driver of trust.

Table 1 summarizes the main concepts of trust discussed in this section.

Table 1

*The theory-based facets that political and cabinet trust consist of*

Antecedents	Description	Mentioned in sources
<i>Perception of benevolence</i>	Whether people believe the government is well-meaning	(Tomankova, 2019; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Oliver and Rahn, 2016)
<i>Perception of ability</i>	Whether people believe the government is able to handle her responsibilities.	(Tomankova, 2019; Canovan, 1999; Oliver and Rahn, 2016)
<i>Perception of integrity</i>	Whether people believe the government is honest and morally incorruptible.	(Tomankova, 2019; Oliver and Rahn, 2016)
<i>Perception of attempt to achieve the general will</i>	Whether people believe the government is trying their absolute best to represent the general will through politics.	(Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Oliver and Rahn, 2016)
<b><i>Urban vs rural attention</i></b>	Whether the attention between urban and rural areas is perceived as equal. A negative perception will lead to less trust.	(Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Oliver and Rahn, 2016)
<b><i>People priority</i></b>	Whether the people feel like they are the main priority of the government. A negative perception will lead to less trust.	(Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Oliver and Rahn, 2016)
<b><i>Evaluative trust vs spontaneous trust</i></b>	Whether trust is measured in a spontaneous or evaluative setting.	(De Blok et al., 2020)

*Note.* **Bold** constructs will be used as an antecedent or group of antecedents in the final model.

To conclude, trust is to be defined in the context it will be used in. Generally, people base their own ideas of trust on either their experiences in their personal lives or/and their cultural background. This can lead to an either well-evaluated form of trust, or a more spontaneous form. Trust in the cabinet will be defined as *someone's beliefs about the ability, benevolence, integrity, and 'aim to achieve the general will' of the actors within the cabinet*. Political trust will be defined as *someone's beliefs about the ability, benevolence, integrity, and 'aim to achieve the general will' of politics*.



## 2.2 Antecedents of governmental trust

To be able to accurately predict trust in politics or the cabinet many antecedents of trust must be considered. With previous scientific research on the subject of governmental trust as the base, a model can be created to find major antecedents of governmental distrust in The Netherlands.

### *Demographic factors*

Demographic variables have been found to influence trust in previous research on trust in the context of politics or governments. **Age** for that matter has been found to have a very small significant effect in the study of Ruelens et al. (2018), implying that older people tend to trust the national government a tad bit less. In the same study, **gender** shows to have an impact as well, with female respondents trusting the cabinet significantly less than male participants.

For the demographic of **employment status**, Ruelens et al. (2018) found that most have less trust, in the cabinet specifically, than people employed in an office job. A higher unemployment rate throughout the whole national state therefore impacts trust negatively, with a significant impact on the trust in European governance (Foster & Frieden, 2017). The involvement of **cultural background** in trust towards the government is used by populist parties to generate distrust and dissatisfaction, suggesting that feeling unrepresented because of culture is an antecedent of political trust. Culture is something that is endangered by the government, as people with distinct cultures might feel like the ‘others’ in society because of government actions (DeHanas and Shterin, 2018). Ruelens et al. (2018) finds that people who see themselves as cultural minorities tend to trust the government more. This is most likely due to immigrants evaluating their current government more highly than their country of origin’s government (Ruelens et al., 2018; Michelson, 2003). This suggests that not only cultural background is an antecedent of governmental trust, however also **country of heritage**.

**Level of education** has been found to correlate positively with trust in the government. Higher education and a better **socio-economic situation** have been linked with more trust in the government (Van Der Meer, 2010). However, another study that researched this effect in Turkey shows exactly the opposite (Kayaoglu, 2017), indicating that the effect of this variable might be dependent on the context (eg. type of government).

Lastly, the tendency someone has to trust, also sometimes called **propensity to trust**, has been found to be significant in studies researching antecedents of trust (Frazier et al., 2013). While it is more often linked in studies investigating trust in interpersonal situations, it is likely to also have influence in authoritarian trust. Therefore, this personal variable cannot be left out of a study researching trust in the government.

It is important to consider demographic variables as these can bring forth groups that show tendencies towards trusting the government less. This will enable this research to find groups that need extra and specific attention to increase governmental trust. All demographic constructs that are expected to have an influence on governmental trust are summarized in table 2.

Table 2

*All theory-based demographic antecedents for political and cabinet trust*

Antecedents	Description	Mentioned in sources
<b>Demographics: Age</b>	Older people tend to trust the government a bit less.	(Ruelens et al., 2018)
<b>Demographics: Gender</b>	Females tend to trust the cabinet less than males.	(Ruelens et al., 2018)
<b>Demographics: Employment status</b>	People with office jobs tend to trust the cabinet more.	(Foster & Frieden, 2017; Ruelens et al., 2018)
<b>Demographics: Cultural background/ county of heritage</b>	Cultural minorities trust the government less. While immigrants tend to trust the government more.	(Ruelens et al., 2018; DeHanas and Shterin, 2018)
<b>Demographics: Level of education</b>	Level of education correlates positively with trust.	(Kayaoglu, 2017, Van Der Meer, 2010)
<b>Socio-economic status</b>	A person's economic access to resources and position compared to others. A better assessment of someone's own socio-economic status increases trust.	(Ruelens et al., 2018)
<b>Propensity to trust</b>	How likely is the person to trust others also effects how likely they are to trust the government.	(Frazier et al., 2013)

*Note.* **Bold** constructs will be used as an antecedent or group of antecedents in the final model.

### *Assessment of domains of policies*

Governments can influence the trust in themselves significantly by their own actions. A study by Fitzgerald & Wolak (2016) suggests that the **outcomes of governmental decision-making** being favorable for individuals increases trust (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016; Schafheitle et al., 2020). The impact of a policy differs based on a person's own experience with the topic. First hand experience with difficult situations, like Covid-19, can decrease trust significantly if expectations are not met, as this damages the perception of the government's ability to solve the issue (Devine et al., 2021). **Assessments of policies** are highly influential in trusting the government.

Furthermore, the outcomes of the government are very often linked with the **economy**, as this is seen by many as the most influential factor of governmental trust. Once citizens find the economy as not sufficient, or they expect the economy to drop with the current course of events, trust is low. Therefore, if people believe that the government is unable to handle the economy, their trust decreases both in the cabinet and politics (Devine et al., 2021; Tomankova, 2019; Dassonneville & McAllister, 2021; Kołczyńska, 2022; Foster & Frieden, 2017; Ruelens et al., 2018).

Not only the direct effect of government decisions is observed by the citizens, also the actions of the government during processes, like decision-making. Whether the people feel like the government is transparent or not impacts trust significantly (Levi & Stoker, 2000). Especially populist parties, who come up when trust in the government is low, make use of high **transparency** to win over people who feel 'alienated' by the lack of understanding of governmental decision-making. Therefore, **simplicity and directness of communication** from the government is essential for a model wherein the government can be understood and trusted by everyone (Canovan, 1999; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). To achieve this, populist parties tend to opt for more simple and straightforward solutions that can be explained and argued in a simple and direct manner (Canovan, 1999).

Specific policies instituted by the government can have a significant impact on one's trust in the government. Therefore, specific cases where governmental decision-making was involved should be included in the model to predict trust in the cabinet and politics. All policy-based constructs that are expected to have an influence on governmental trust are summarized in table 3.

Table 3

*All theory-based **policy-based** antecedents for political and cabinet trust*

Antecedents	Description	Mentioned in sources
<b><i>Assessments of domains of policies</i></b>	The outcomes of political organs should be representative of the people and of the party's promises to invoke trust.	(Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016; Dassonneville & McAllister, 2021; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018; Schafheitle et al., 2020; Kayaoglu, 2017; Oliver and Rahn, 2016)
<b><i>Communication: Clarity, simplicity, transparency and directness of government messaging</i></b>	Using messages that can be understood by most and are immediately clear benefits trust in the government. Also opting for simpler solutions helps keep the communication simple as well.	(Devine et al., 2021; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Canovan, 1999; DeHanas and Shterin, 2018; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014)
<b><i>Economic evaluation</i></b>	Whether people notice economic growth or are content with the current economic status of the country influences trust.	(Devine et al., 2021; Tomankova, 2019; Dassonneville & McAllister, 2021; Kołczyńska, 2022; Foster & Frieden, 2017; Ruelens et al., 2018)

*Note.* **Bold** constructs will be used as an antecedent or group of antecedents in the final model.

### ***Representation***

Preferences of the people who are in charge in the governmental institutions tend to influence the trust of those who voted. The relationship between who someone votes for and who ends up in charge can dictate someone's trust towards politics and democracy. The further the party the respondent voted for is, based on a political compass, from the thereafter chosen to be **leading party**, the less trust the person tends to have in the cabinet (Dassonneville & McAllister, 2021; Kołczyńska, 2022; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018; Levi & Stoker, 2000). Previous research suggests that whether the voted for party is included in the coalition contributes to trust as well, wherein the smaller the **role of the party** the person voted for, the less trust typically remains (Kołczyńska, 2022; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018). Though, often these two interact predictably, as parties that are most different from the leading party are less likely to be involved in the coalition, as the leading party is allowed to assemble the coalition. Voters of parties that are not included in the coalition, which will then be called opposition parties, tend to have the lowest trust according to this variable (Kołczyńska, 2022; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018).

To conclude, it is hard to measure exactly how far someone's preferred politics are from the actual chosen politics. However, finding whether a person voted for a party which made it into the coalition could be valuable in predicting trust. All representation constructs that are expected to have an influence on governmental trust are summarized in table 4.

Table 4

*All theory-based **representation** antecedents for political and cabinet trust*

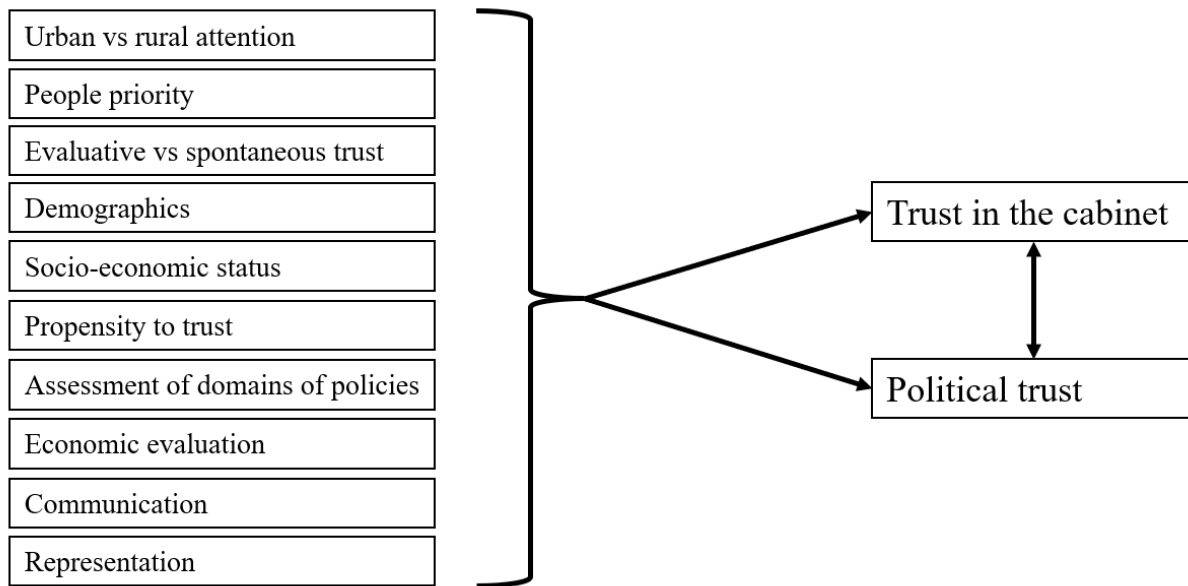
Antecedents	Description	Mentioned in sources
<b>Representation:</b> <i>Political leadership</i>	Trust is often lower with people who voted for a party which is politically further away from the party in charge.	(Dassonneville & McAllister, 2021; Kołczyńska, 2022; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018; Levi & Stoker, 2000)
<b>Representation:</b> <i>Voted party role</i>	Whether the party people vote for is the leading party, a member of the coalition, or an opposition party tends to influence trust significantly.	(Kołczyńska, 2022; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018)

### 2.3 Trust models

From the literature it is clear that a significantly large number of antecedents are likely to exist for measuring governmental trust. To test whether these factors are upheld in The Netherlands a model needs to be created on which a questionnaire can be based. Firstly, the following figure shows the simplified model that will be tested in this study

Figure 1

*Model for predicting political trust and trust in the cabinet*



This model includes ten independent (groups of) antecedents which have been derived from the theory. Furthermore, it is expected that the trust in the cabinet and political trust correlate to one another. The order of antecedents has been derived from the theoretical framework and will stay consistent throughout the study.

### **3. Methods**

This section will bring together the information of the Theoretical Framework and an explanation of the data collection methods and measures used in this study. The measures will be in the form of questions in a survey, which will be dispersed and filled in online. Furthermore, the sampling method will be discussed as well as some general decisions that were made in the data collection process.

#### **3.1 Design**

To answer the research questions a survey has been conducted among Dutch citizens. The survey was dispersed online with the use of many social media and other communication platforms to reach a significant audience. Furthermore, the questionnaire is in Dutch as the target population will be only Dutch citizens, and with a wide age range English questions could be misunderstood among the people with lower English proficiency. The questionnaire and the research design were approved by the BMS Ethics Committee of the University of Twente.

In the survey the participants were faced with a short explanation of the research, excluding the actual purpose of finding a relationship between determinants and governmental trust to avoid participant's bias towards helping the researcher. Then the respondent answered the full 10-15-minute-long questionnaire which includes questions on various topics. What these topics are, and how participants were sampled will be discussed below.

### 3.2 Measurements

In this paragraph all included variables and how those are measured in the study will be discussed. Structure is based on the structure of the *theoretical framework*. The entire questionnaire can be found in appendix a.

#### *Political and cabinet trust*

This section describes the measurement that is going to be used to find the trust in the government of the participants. This measure includes four dependent variables, being perception of *benevolence*, *ability*, *integrity*, and *the attempt to achieve the general will through politics*. This scale is adapted from the understandings of what governmental trust entails from different sources (Canovan, 1999; Tomankova, 2019; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Oliver and Rahn, 2016). As these four variables have been discussed separately, they have been turned into a separate question for each variable.

Furthermore, governmental trust is split up in two segments, the *politics* and the *cabinet*. The difference between the two is purposefully not explained to the participants, as the aim is to let them fill in based on their feelings while seeing or hearing these terms.

To continue, as there are six statements within this model of measuring trust, they will be explained as part of their variable. To create a question that measures the variable, a more simplified version of the construct was created language wise. **Benevolence** is measured by asking to what degree politics or the cabinet is guided by good intentions. **Ability** is measured by asking how well politics or the cabinet handles its responsibilities. **Integrity** is measured by asking to what degree the current politics or cabinet is honest and integer. The **attempt to achieve the general will** is measured by asking how much politics or the cabinet takes into account the interests of the population. General trustingness measures were also added to find the perceived trust the participants have in politics or the cabinet.

#### *Demographics*

For the variables of **age**, **gender**, and **level of education** are simply asked as factual variables of the participant. For *gender* and *level of education* the most common options are given as choices, finished with an option to choose 'other' and fill in their answers manually. To fit the type of analysis, the lower three forms of education that are given will be grouped, as well as the higher two options. Other is then included as a higher education. For the variable of gender, the



response ‘other’ is grouped with the male answer option to find the effect of the female gender on trust. Since the ‘other’ group is so small it cannot be analyzed separately. Furthermore, exclusion of this small group would create a possible bias.

**Employment status** is measured with two questions asked for this determinant, being *Do you have a paid job?* and *Are you a student?*, answered with a simple yes or no. With these two questions it is possible to distinguish between students with a side job and non-students with a full-time job, while avoiding the need for some people to fill in the words ‘out of work’ or ‘unemployed’, as these can have a negative load on them in the Dutch language.

The variables of **cultural background** and **country of heritage** are measured by only asking the following questions: *What country were you born in?* and *What country were your parents born in?* The answer options for these two questions are ‘The Netherlands’ and ‘Other, namely’ where the participant can type their answer. These questions not only find the birthplace of the respondent but also of their parents, resulting in a two-level measure.

The variable **socio-economic situation** was chosen to measure with two questions, namely *How well are you doing financially?* and *How well do you think you will be doing financially in the near future?*, both being answered in the form of a slider that ranges from *very bad* to *very well*. The inclusion of the ‘future’ question it to fully integrate the ‘access to resources and position’, as this also entails the perceived possibility to improve the situation.

To measure the tendency or **propensity to trust** of the participants, a tested model on measuring this variable was used, created by Frazier et al. (2013). This model resulted in a set of questions that survived multiple tests. These questions have been translated and are included in the questionnaire.

### ***Assessment of domains of policies***

To measure the **assessment of domains of policies** of the Dutch government, major domains have been chosen to be assessed by the participants. These domains are: *the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate, the childcare benefits case, the housing shortage, refugees, and taxes.*

The measure is built on four statements: 1. *The government pays/paid enough attention to this problem*, 2. *Regarding this problem the government knows/knew what they are doing/were doing*, 3. *Regarding this problem the government does/did the right thing*, and 4. *The government communicates/communicated well about this problem*. Per statement the respondent is asked how

much they agree with it, based on a seven-point Likert scale. This measure should find how well the respondent thinks the government handled a specific situation.

To predict the *attempt to achieve the general will* of the population two more measures are included in the survey. The first measures the perceived equality in emphasis from the government between **urban and rural areas**. Including a Dutch context specific question involving the Randstad (the most urban area of The Netherlands, also where the House of Representatives is located). The second measure asks for an opinion on the selflessness of politics and the cabinet. This will be referred to as the variable of **people priority**. An example statement is *the government is more occupied with thinking about themselves than about the people*.

### ***Communication***

A **overall assessment of the communication** is still missing. Therefore, another measurement is added to find only the participants' opinions on the government's communication. This measurement is constructed based on theory surrounding populist communication strategies (Canovan, 1999; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). This includes statements stating that communication is *always easy to understand, always clear, resembles what the participant wants to know*, and the statement *The government often prevaricates about problems*. Participants will fill in how much they agree or disagree on a seven-point Likert scale.

### ***Representation***

The antecedents discussed under the title *representation* are **political leadership** and **preferred-party role**. The variables that need to be measured for these two antecedents are: whether their voted party is represented in the *House of Representatives* (Tweede Kamer) and whether they are represented in the *coalition*. Furthermore, whether the party *improved in contrast to last election* and how high the *perceived influence* was of the voted for party are also measured.

To measure if the participant thinks the voted for party is a good representation of themselves, measures on the perceived *difficulty of voting* and whether the participant *regrets their vote* are included. Furthermore, difficulty of voting can be caused by a lack of appealing politicians. Therefore, the *appeal of current politicians* is also measured by asking about the appeal directly and by asking about how well the point of view of the participant is represented in the available politicians.

### 3.3 Scale construction

The trust constructs, as well as the government policy domains, have the possibility to overlap in its measurements. Therefore, factor analyses were performed to test whether the assumes separateness of the constructs is correct. The analyses show that the two trust constructs are indeed separate measures. The government cases also show this. The full factor analyses results can be found in appendix B.

A number of the constructs in this research are scales, meaning these consist of multiple questions/statements that intend to measure the same thing in addition. To test whether or not these items measure the same concept the Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each scale construct, which is shown in table 5.

Table 5  
*Reliability test results of all scale constructs*

Construct	Cronbach's alpha
Trust in politics	.93
Trust in the cabinet	.93
Urban vs rural	.90
People priority	.79
Propensity to trust	.91
Domain of Covid-19	.81
Domain of climate	.88
Domain of childcare benefits	.87
Domain of housing	.90
Domain of refugees	.85
Domain of taxes	.88
Communication	.75
Appeal of politicians	.68

The Cronbach's alphas of all scale constructs are acceptable or better, *appeal of politicians* has the lowest alpha, which still is a marginally acceptable result.

### 3.4 Procedure

Only participants over the age of 18 were allowed to participate in this study, as it is essential that respondents have had the opportunity to look into politics past the age where they are legally allowed to vote. Participants need to be fluent in the Dutch language, as the survey is completely in Dutch and that the topics discussed are difficult to follow for non-Dutch speakers as these are typically communicated in Dutch and towards Dutch people. Other than that, there are no constrictions to participating in the study. Participants were selected based on opportunity sampling and were encouraged to spread the link of the survey to others. Furthermore, participants were gathered via survey forums where surveys are being swapped to ensure respondents for everyone involved.

The participant will fill in a questionnaire of about 10-15 minutes. It starts with an informed consent, which directs the participant to the end when not agreed with. From the theoretical background it was found that trust can be spontaneous or evaluative (De Blok et al., 2020). Therefore, the actual measure about the trust in politics and the cabinet are placed either right after the informed consent to encourage a spontaneous trust assessment, or after all opinion-based questions to encourage a more evaluated and well-constructed trust assessment. To achieve this, participants were randomly and evenly assigned to a group that decides where in the survey they would encounter the block about trust.

The rest of the survey has a standardized order. After the informed consent, and perhaps a block about trust, questions about the National assessment follow, whereafter the participant answers some questions about different government cases. Then beliefs on the functioning of the political system are asked, also in terms of communication and other governmental levels. After which the other possible block of trust measurements comes in. And to end, demographic questions are asked, finalized with questions about voting behavior.

### 3.5 Sample

The final sample of 180 participants, from which only 144 filled in the entire survey, includes a good variety of people in terms of gender, age, and education level. Table 6 shows an overview of the sample of this study.

Table 6

*Demographics of the study sample*

Factor	Number	Percentage
<b>Total</b>	144	100%
<b>Age*</b>		
18-30	84	58%
31-50	20	14%
51-70	33	23%
71+	7	5%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	61	42%
Female	81	56%
Other	2	1%
<b>Level of education</b>		
Primary school	0	0%
Secondary school	76	53%
MBO	24	17%
HBO	32	22%
University	49	34%
Other	1	1%
<b>Employment status</b>		
Paid job	106	74%
Student	74	51%
<b>Country of heritage (parents)</b>		
The Netherlands	134	93%
Other	10	7%

\*The mean age of the sample is 35.9.

The demographic variable of *country of heritage* alone does not exhibit sufficient variability to enable a meaningful analysis of its impact as a factor. For the other variables the

*other* group is only underrepresented to the degree that it will be excluded from an analysis on that factor.

## 4. Results

This section will discuss the descriptive findings, the results of a correlation analysis, and the results of multiple linear regression analyses. The results will be presented in tables with an explanation of the values to follow.

### 4.1 Descriptive findings

To start, this paragraph will outline some of the values that were found for some of the important constructs. This includes an explanation of the constructs of trust and some other determinants will be discussed as well. To start, table 7 shows the descriptive findings on all trust constructs.

Table 7

*Descriptive findings on trust constructs in the sample*

Construct	Mean	95% confidence intervals
Trust in politics	3.53	3.35, 3.70
Trust in the cabinet	3.33	3.15, 3.50
Propensity to trust	4.89	4.72, 5.06

*Note.* A value of 1 indicates very low trust, or propensity to trust. 7 indicates very high trust, or propensity to trust. 4 is the neutral score.

A score of 4 resembles a neutral assessment of trust, and since even the entirety of the 95% confidence intervals remain under the neutral score, it is safe to say that the people from the sample slightly distrust politics and the cabinet. However, political trust is slightly higher than trust in the cabinet. The people's propensity to trust is positive, with its entire confidence interval above the threshold of 4.

Table 9 shows the average scores of the national assessment constructs from the sample.

Table 9

*Descriptive findings on national assessments in the sample*

Construct	Mean	95% confidence intervals
Current national assessment	63.22	60.85, 65.58
Future national assessment	57.85	55.35, 60.35

*Note.* A value of 1 indicates very negative assessment. 100 indicates very positive assessment.

Both the current national assessment and the future national assessment of The Netherlands was scored above the possible middle point of 50. However, the future assessment is lower than the current one, suggesting that the people are unhappy with the current development in The Netherlands.

In table 10 the findings on policy domain assessments can be found.

Table 10

*Descriptive findings on government policy domain assessments in the sample*

Construct	Mean	95% confidence intervals
Childcare benefits	2.65	2.46, 2.84
Housing	3.09	2.92, 3.27
Climate	3.39	3.22, 3.56
Refugees	3.61	3.44, 3.78
Taxes	4.06	3.90, 4.22
Covid-19	4.29	4.12, 4.46

*Note.* A value of 1 indicates very negative assessment. 7 indicates very positive assessment. 4 is the neutral score.

The government cases are not rated very positively. Especially the childcare benefits case scores very low, with a score that resembles a disagreement on the fact that the government did a good job. Furthermore, the assessment of housing, climate, and refugees have their confidence intervals entirely below the neutral score of 4. However, taxes were rated very close to neutral,



with the confidence interval hovering around it. The assessment of the Covid-19 case was rated above neutral for the entire confidence interval.

Table 11 shows the descriptive results on uncategorized constructs.

Table 11

*Descriptive findings on remaining interesting constructs in the sample*

Construct	Mean	95% confidence intervals
Communication	3.33	3.18, 3.47
People priority	4.35	4.15, 4.55
Appeal of politicians	4.43	4.27, 4.60
Urban vs rural	5.01	4.84, 5.18

*Note.* A value of 1 indicates very negative assessment. 7 indicates very positive assessment. 4 is the neutral score.

These four antecedents did not fit under any umbrella term and are therefore put together. Communication of the government scores low with its confidence interval entirely under the neutral threshold of 4. However, the rest of the antecedents are more positive. The people priority variable and appeal of politicians have been scored slightly above neutral, including the confidence intervals. The attention between urban and rural areas has been scored positively with a confidence interval that fits around the score of 5, which represents a slight agreement with the government handling.

To see if aforementioned values have something to do with one another, a correlation analysis has been conducted. After which a multiple linear regression is performed with the aim of answering whether the hypotheses based on previous research still uphold.

## 4.2 Correlation analysis

To check whether other correlations between independent variables exist, a correlation matrix is generated with all values. The higher correlations are shown in table 12.

Table 12

*Correlation matrix for the highest correlations*

	Cabinet trust	Political trust	People priority	Domain of Covid-19	Domain of climate	Domain of housing	Domain of childcare benefits	Domain of refugees	Domain of taxes	Curr. national assess.	Fut. national assess.	Communication
Cabinet Trust	0.8	0.67	0.38	0.44	0.51	0.53	0.46	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.54	0.58
Political Trust		0.67	0.32	0.3	0.5	0.45	0.43	0.42	0.42	0.47	0.58	0.58
People priority			0.26	0.25	0.39	0.32	0.26	0.31	0.31	0.39	0.46	-0.52
Domain of Covid-19				0.26	0.21	0.28	0.3	0.31	0.31	0.24	0.34	0.3
Domain of climate					0.45	0.42	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.24	0.31	0.3
Domain of housing						0.38	0.26	0.28	0.3	0.39	0.39	0.39
Domain of childcare benefits							0.5	0.46	0.29	0.35	0.44	0.44
Domain of refugees								0.42	0.36	0.37	0.37	0.37
Domain of taxes									0.39	0.47	0.47	0.47
Curr. national assess.										0.83	0.4	0.4
Fut. national assess.											0.49	0.49

*Note.* All correlations in this matrix have been found to be significant based on a p-value lower than 0.05.

Table 12 shows a high positive correlation between political and cabinet trust. Furthermore, the trust constructs have very high positive correlations with the people priority variable, which shows that the government putting the people first is a great predictor of trust. Communication also correlates positively with the trust constructs highly. All the other included antecedents correlate relatively strongly with the trust constructs as well; however, all these correlations will be discussed in more detail after the linear regression analyses.

The current and future national assessments correlate strongly with each other. Also, the government cases (from Covid-19 to Taxes) correlate with each other, which suggests that there is an overarching construct that ties these assessments together. The correlation between the people priority variable and communication stands out because of its high negative value. This could suggest that a higher assessment of one of these two tends to leave a lower assessment of the other.

### 4.3 Predicting trust

To get as close to a trustworthy predictor for governmental trust, a model has been designed with the most suitable variables in it. For this model it was attempted to include as many variables as statistically possible. However, some had to be excluded for various reasons. First of all, as not all participants had voted in the election of 2021, voting behavior variables are excluded from the most complete model, apart from the variable that measures if the participant voted or not. Furthermore, gender was excluded as the variable included 4 options, while not being an interval and the 'other' and 'rather not say' category are underrepresented. Lastly, the variables detecting the participants' opinion about Dutch government interaction with the EU are excluded based on the low Cronbach's alpha as discussed in the methodology section.

This still leaves many variables that can be included in one model that in this research will be referred to as the 'most complete model'. This model is designed for both the cabinet trust and political trust constructs as the dependent variable, where both models include the other form of trust as an independent variable. First the most complete model for cabinet trust will be given.

Table 13  
*Most complete model for cabinet trust*

Variable	$\beta$	Std. error	T-value	p-value
Intercept	0.070	0.80	0.09	0.930
Political trust	0.580	0.08	7.41	<0.001***
Spontaneous vs evaluative trust	-0.065	0.11	-0.63	0.532
Equal attention between urban and rural	0.149	0.05	2.78	0.006**
People priority	0.028	0.06	0.46	0.647
<b><i>Demographics</i></b>				
Age	0.002	0.01	0.48	0.631
Student	0.050	0.17	0.29	0.770
Work	0.163	0.13	1.23	0.223
Education level	0.143	0.10	1.37	0.173
Tendency to trust	-0.063	0.05	-1.22	0.227
Current personal financial situation	0.007	0.01	1.61	0.110
Future personal financial situation	-0.005	0.01	-1.09	0.277
<b><i>Assessment of government policy domains</i></b>				
Covid-19 pandemic	0.090	0.05	1.69	0.093
Climate	0.098	0.06	1.59	0.114
Housing	0.028	0.06	0.49	0.627
Childcare benefits	0.097	0.06	1.74	0.084
Refugees	0.062	0.06	0.98	0.329
Taxes	0.045	0.06	0.69	0.494
<b><i>Other assessments of government actions</i></b>				
Current national situation	-0.002	0.01	-0.31	0.759
Future national situation	0.002	0.01	0.36	0.718
Appeal of politicians	0.020	0.06	0.35	0.728
Communication	0.019	0.08	0.23	0.818
Voted	0.061	0.18	0.35	0.727

*Residual standard error is 0.56 on 119 degrees of freedom, adjusted R-squared is 0.72 p-value: < 0.001.*

In table 13 it can be seen that only two of the independent variables have a significant effect on cabinet trust. The variables are *political trust* and *equal attention between urban and rural*. This implies that a higher political trust tends to lead to a higher trust in the cabinet. Furthermore, a more positive perception of the aim of the government to provide equal attention between urban and rural areas relates to a higher trust in the cabinet. Moreover the model, with an overall significant p-value and a high adjusted R-squared, is significant and explains 72% of trust in the cabinet.

Table 14  
*Most complete model for political trust*

Variable	$\beta$	Std. error	T-value	p-value
Intercept	1.329	0.76	1.75	0.083
Cabinet trust	0.544	0.073	7.41	<0.001***
Spontaneous vs evaluative trust	-0.178	0.10	-1.78	0.078
Equal attention between urban and rural	-0.112	0.05	-2.14	0.035*
People priority	0.216	0.05	4.09	<0.001***
<b><i>Demographics</i></b>				
Age	-0.004	0.005	-0.83	0.408
Student	-0.156	0.17	-0.94	0.352
Work	-0.138	0.13	-1.07	0.289
Education level	-0.060	0.10	-0.59	0.556
Tendency to trust	0.046	0.05	0.92	0.358
Current personal financial situation	0.002	0.004	0.49	0.627
Future personal financial situation	0.001	0.004	0.32	0.748
<b><i>Assessment of government policy domains</i></b>				
Covid-19 pandemic	-0.018	0.05	-0.34	0.734
Climate	-0.093	0.06	-1.55	0.123
Housing	0.0873	0.06	1.57	0.120
Childcare benefits	-0.017	0.05	-0.32	0.750
Refugees	0.0611	0.06	1.01	0.317
Taxes	-0.017	0.06	-0.28	0.784
<b><i>Other assessments of government actions</i></b>				
Current national situation	-0.0003	0.01	-0.04	0.968
Future national situation	0.0099	0.01	1.51	0.133
Appeal of politicians	0.036	0.06	0.66	0.514
Communication	0.075	0.08	0.99	0.325
Voted	0.061	0.17	0.36	0.720

*Residual standard error is 0.55 on 119 degrees of freedom, adjusted R-squared is 0.73. p-value: < 0.001.*

Table 14 shows three variables that are significant in relation to political trust. These are *cabinet trust*, *people priority*, and *equal attention between urban and rural*. This implies that a higher trust in the cabinet tends to lead to a higher political trust. Furthermore, a positive look on the subject of equal attention between urban and rural areas tends to decrease trust in politics. And lastly, a negative perception of the aim of the government to put the people's will first increases the trust in politics.

Not many variables were found to be significant in either model, however there are differences and similarities between the two models that are worth mentioning. Firstly, the variable of *aim for equal attention between urban and rural* is significant in both models, but suggests a positive relationship with political trust and a negative one with trust in the cabinet. Also, the significance of this effect was notably higher in the model for cabinet trust. Secondly, the two trust constructs influence each other positively and significantly. Thirdly, the variable *people priority* was very significant in the model for political trust, and not nearly significant in the model for cabinet trust.

The most interesting variables that are excluded in the most complete model are the voting behavior variables. For that reason, models were created to find the impact of these variables. These models do not have the goal of finding the most predictive model for the trust constructs, but rather aim to find the effect of the voting variables. In table 15 it is shown what the effects of voting behavior variables are on trust in the cabinet.



Table 15

*Model for predicting cabinet trust with voting behavior variables*

Variable	$\beta$	Std. error	T-value	p-value
Intercept	3.680	0.52	7.09	9.70e-11***
In parliament	0.070	0.34	0.21	0.838
In coalition	-0.529	0.24	-2.25	0.026*
Party influence	0.011	0.01	2.37	0.019*
Voting difficulty	0.003	0.003	0.89	0.373
Regret vote	-0.013	0.003	-4.20	5.12e-05***

*Residual standard error is 0.97 on 121 degrees of freedom, adjusted R-squared is 0.15. p-value: < 0.001.*

In this model three variables are significant. First is whether the voted party is in the Dutch *coalition*, which shows a negative relationship. Second is the variable of *party influence*, which shows a positive influence. Third and last is whether the respondent *regretted* their vote in 2021, which shows a negative relationship. This variable seems to have a little effect, however this variable ranges in values from 1 to 100. The curious result for the *coalition* variable can be influenced by the fact that the people regretted their vote, and therefore were no longer trusting of the party they voted for.

Table 16 shows the same variables but then for the dependent variable of political trust.

Table 16

*Model for predicting political trust with voting behavior variables*

Variable	$\beta$	Std. error	T-value	p-value
Intercept	3.876	0.54	7.20	5.55e-11***
In parliament	0.051	0.35	0.15	0.885
In coalition	-0.334	0.24	-1.37	0.173
Party influence	0.009	0.005	1.81	0.072
Voting difficulty	0.001	0.003	0.27	0.788
Regret vote	-0.013	0.003	-4.07	8.38e-05***

*Residual standard error is 1.007 on 121 degrees of freedom, adjusted R-squared is 0.11. p-value: < 0.001.*

In this model only one variable is found to be significant, which is the variable of *regret vote*, that shows a negative relationship.

Some interesting differences and similarities to point out between the two aforementioned models are: *party influence* and whether the voted party ended up in the *coalition* are only significant in the model for trust in cabinet. Which is explainable as the voted for party directly influences the ongoings of the cabinet, not so necessarily that of politics in general. Whether the participant regrets their vote has approximately the same influence on trust in cabinet as on political trust.

#### 4.4 Type of trust assessment

Whether trust is assessed spontaneously or evaluatively can impact the assessment. Therefore, a small analysis of the differences between trust assessments on both political trust and trust in the cabinet is performed. Values of this analysis are given in table 8.

Table 8

*T-test findings on difference between spontaneous trust and evaluated trust assessment*

Construct	Spontaneous mean (sd)	Evaluated mean (sd)	t-statistic	p-value
Trust in the cabinet	3.44 (1.09)	3.22 (1.03)	1.23	0.221
Trust in politics	3.66 (1.07)	3.42 (1.04)	1.32	0.189
Domain of Covid-19	4.25 (1.15)	4.33 (0.87)	-0.44	0.664
Domain of climate	3.41 (1.00)	3.39 (1.05)	0.13	0.896
Domain of housing	3.10 (1.11)	3.10 (1.03)	0.05	0.960
Domain of childcare benefits	2.73 (1.23)	2.58 (1.08)	0.78	0.435
Domain of refugees	3.64 (1.11)	3.57 (0.93)	0.42	0.675
Domain of taxes	4.01 (0.99)	4.11 (0.97)	-0.60	0.547

*Note.* A value of 1 indicates very low trust. 7 indicates very high trust. 4 is the neutral score.

While the results on trust findings in table 8 are not significant, there is a trend to be seen. An evaluated trust assessment shows a tendency to be lower than a spontaneous assessment, for both trust constructs. Through this observed tendency it can be argued that a more evaluated trust assessment is even lower than the already low assessment when given spontaneously. This shows that thinking more in depth about this assessment ends up lowering the trust conclusion. The results of the domains in this t-test show that the differences in the trust constructs are likely not by chance, as the differences in the domains are significantly smaller and more random.

## 5. Discussion

In the results section all the findings were presented. With that as the base, this section will discuss the meaning of these results in relation to the theoretical framework and with that the hypotheses. Furthermore, the theoretical contribution and practical implications of the results will be discussed, followed by an analysis of possible implications and a comment on future research.

### 5.1 Main findings

Trust in politics and trust in the cabinet are both slightly below the neutral, indicating a slight distrust in the government among the sampled population. However, trust in politics is slightly higher than trust in the cabinet. Trust assessments given spontaneously are generally higher than trust assessments that received possible deeper analysis and evaluation.

Current development of The Netherlands is not to the satisfaction of the sample population. The current national assessment was given a score above the neutral point; however, the assessment of the future national situation is slightly below this point. Most discussed government policy domains scored a lower than neutral score. The childcare benefits case scored very low, and taxes and Covid-19 were scored neutral or even slightly positive respectively.

Overall communication of the government is not up to the expected standard. However, the sample did find the government to put the people as the priority sufficiently. Furthermore, the appeal of politicians in the country was rated slightly above neutral. The attention division between urban and rural areas was rated positively.

For cabinet trust, the most significant variables were political trust (positive effect) and equal attention between urban and rural (positive effect). For political trust, significant variables were cabinet trust (positive effect), people priority (positive effect), and equal attention between urban and rural (negative effect).

Overall, the results suggest a slight level of distrust in the government, with variations in trust levels for different constructs and issues. Putting the people first and the government's attention to urban and rural areas emerged as important predictors of trust. Additionally, the findings highlight the impact of evaluated trust assessments and the correlation between different assessments and trust constructs.

## 5.2 Theoretical implications

The study reaffirms the significance of trust as a crucial element in political legitimacy. Lower levels of trust in politics and the cabinet indicate a potential decline of confidence in the government's ability to represent the interests of the people. This finding aligns with the theoretical understanding that trust plays an important role in establishing legitimacy of political institutions (Stolle & Hooghe, 2005).

The study highlights the importance of considering citizens' perception of future development when assessing public satisfaction. The lower future national assessment suggests a level of dissatisfaction with the current direction of the country. This finding indicates that perceptions of future development significantly influence public opinion and can serve as a predictor of public satisfaction.

The variation in government case assessments shows the diverse nature of public concerns and priorities. Different government cases receive varying levels of attention and influence public perception differently. This finding supports the notion that public opinion is shaped by a range of specific issues rather than a generalized sentiment, emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing specific policy challenges to maintain public trust. A strong correlation between communication and various government cases suggests that communications strategies can be beneficial in taking on policy challenges.

Moreover, the low scores for general government communication highlight the crucial role of effective communication in building trust between the government and the public. This finding aligns with the theoretical understanding that transparent and understandable communication practices contribute to enhancing trust in political institutions (Devine et al., 2021; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Canovan, 1999; DeHanas and Shterin, 2018; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). It underscores the need for policymakers to invest in communication strategies to bridge the gap between the government's actions and public perception.

The positive correlation between trust constructs and the people priority variable suggests that prioritizing the needs and interests of citizens contributes to higher levels of trust in the government. This finding supports the theoretical perspective that a people-centric approach to governance is crucial for building public trust and legitimacy (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Oliver and Rahn, 2016).

The positive correlation between trust constructs and equal attention between urban and rural areas sheds light on the importance of region-based attention. This finding emphasizes the theoretical understanding that regional differences can significantly impact trust in the government. It emphasizes the need for policymakers to consider the diverse needs of different regions and promote equal attention between separate areas.

### **5.3 Practical implications**

Given the slightly lower levels of trust in politics and the cabinet, it is crucial for policymakers to prioritize trust-building initiatives. Improving transparency, accountability, and responsiveness can help foster trust among the population. Clear and open communication about government policies and decisions is essential to increase trust (Devine et al., 2021; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Canovan, 1999; DeHanas and Shterin, 2018; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014).

The lower future national assessment indicates a level of dissatisfaction with the current development in the Netherlands. Policymakers should pay attention to this sentiment and take proactive measures to address concerns and shape a positive future image. Engaging with citizens and incorporating their feedback into policymaking processes can help build confidence in the government's ability to navigate future challenges (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016; Schafheitle et al., 2020).

The low scores for general government communication indicate a need for improvement in this area. Policymakers should invest in clear and concise communication channels to spread information, and be able to engage with citizens and their concerns. Utilizing various communication platforms, such as social media, public forums, and meetings, can facilitate a more open and inclusive dialogue between the government and the public (Devine et al., 2021; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Canovan, 1999; DeHanas and Shterin, 2018).

The positive correlation between trust constructs and the people priority variable highlights the importance of placing citizens' needs at the forefront of policy decisions. Policymakers should consistently demonstrate a commitment to serving the interests of the people and ensuring that their concerns are adequately addressed. By prioritizing people-centric policies and initiatives, and clearly communicating this effort (Devine et al., 2021; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Canovan, 1999; DeHanas and Shterin, 2018), the government can build trust and reinforce its commitment to the well-being of the population (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Oliver and Rahn, 2016).

The positive correlation between trust constructs and equal attention between urban and rural areas indicates the significance of equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. Policymakers should strive to ensure that both urban and rural areas receive fair and balanced attention in terms of infrastructure development, social programs, and economic opportunities.

In conclusion, the practical implications derived from the findings emphasize the importance of trust-building, effective communication, citizen engagement, and prioritizing people's needs. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers can work towards strengthening trust in the government.

#### **5.4 Limitations**

Due to the solely quantitative properties of this nature, and the methodology used for sampling, this research has some limitations in what it can explain and what it cannot. The sampling of the study introduces a few limitations. Firstly, most participants are bound to be from the east of The Netherlands, because that is the main location the survey was spread. While some participants from other parts of the country are likely included, the majority is likely from the same area. This can mean that the results would have looked different if the research was set in the entire country or another part of it. To continue, the number of participants is also not ideal. While the number of participants was originally 180, only 143 of those participants filled in all of the survey. This number is on the low side of things, and with a higher number of participants the study could have been different altogether. However, there is no way to tell right now. Lastly, since the survey was shared through online survey-sharing forums, chances are that some participants filled in the questionnaire with the main goal to finish it quickly to get themselves another respondent. This could mean that some results of these participants are not entirely accurate. Still, there is no way to tell the difference between a quickly filled in survey and one that received all the attention of the participant.

Furthermore, this study primarily focused on exploring relationships between variables using correlational analyses and regression models. However, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits our ability to establish causality or determine the direction of the relationships. It is possible that reverse causality or other confounding factors may be influencing the observed associations. Furthermore, the data has shown to be decently predictive for the trust models, however unknown variables could still completely change the interactions and interpretations of these measurements.

Therefore, this model does not predict trust as well as hoped, however it brought insights in what is needed in practice and future research.

Time also plays a role in the limitations of the study. As societal and political circumstances can evolve over time, the findings may reflect the opinions and attitudes of participants at a specific moment and may not fully capture the dynamics and changes that occur beyond the data collection period.

Furthermore, despite efforts to encourage participation, there is a possibility of non-response bias, where individuals who choose not to participate in the survey may have different opinions or attitudes compared to those who do participate. This may affect the representativeness of the sample and introduce bias into the findings.

## **5.5 Future research**

Communication seems to be one of the most important factor in increasing trust in the government at different levels. However, what communication needs to be improved and how is a question that can simply not be proven by the results of this paper.

Specific research on what the relationship is between communication of parties and the later regret of voting for them can show how communication needs to be changed to fit the political landscape of parties. This can hugely benefit parties themselves, and citizens who feel let down by the parties they vote for.

Another research continuation could include an in-depth analysis of the government image within the country and how that can be improved, if necessary. The low rating of government cases in this paper shows that citizens feel the government does not always know what they are doing, or does not know what is best for the population. A campaign on improving that sentiment could be very beneficial for government trust. However, what specific parts of communication are lacking, or whether the problem lies somewhere else, cannot be told in this paper. Therefore, studying trust repair strategies would be a great way of finding the ideal course of action.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies can be interesting to get insights into the dynamics of trust in the government instead of a specific timeslot. This way factors that influence the shift in governmental trust can be observed, which can in turn be beneficial to understand for policy-makers.



## **5.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study underlines the importance of trust-building initiatives, transparency, and effective communication in governance. By prioritizing these efforts, policymakers can bridge the trust gap, address dissatisfaction, and foster a positive future image for the Netherlands. Engaging with citizens, addressing critical government cases, and prioritizing people's needs are vital steps toward building trust and reinforcing the government's commitment to the well-being of the population. Furthermore, ensuring equitable attention between urban and rural areas is crucial for promoting inclusion. Ultimately, by prioritizing trust, accountability, and responsive decision-making, policymakers can strengthen the bond between the government and its citizens, fostering a society that can again depend on its government with confidence.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

*The entire survey as seen by the participants.*

#### **Informed consent**

In this survey you will answer questions about ‘How well The Netherlands is doing, and how the government contributes to that’. This will help to give a clearer view on the contentment of people in The Netherlands with regard to the governmental organs. You will be asked to fill in some questions about The Netherlands, the government, and about yourself. This will all take about 10-15 minutes.

The research is conducted by Luuk Krikke, a communication science bachelor student at the University of Twente.

You can stop answering the survey at any time for any reason. If you decide to do so, all data collected from you will be deleted and not used in the research.

For any questions or remarks, or a request to delete your data, you can contact Luuk via email: [l.krikke@student.utwente.nl](mailto:l.krikke@student.utwente.nl).

I have read and understood the purpose of the study. **(Yes/No)**

I understand that I can contact the researcher at any time for questions and the deletion of my data. **(Yes/No)**

I consent to participate voluntarily, and I understand that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason. **(Yes/No)**

#### **Trust in the government (Option 1)**

*Will appear for the participant here or at the place of Option 2 depending on a random variable.*

*Trust in the cabinet (Likert scale, 7 point)*

- I trust the current Dutch cabinet a lot.

- The current Dutch cabinet is guided by good intentions.
- The current Dutch cabinet can handle its responsibilities.
- The current Dutch cabinet is honest and integer.
- I believe that the current Dutch cabinet sufficiently takes into account the interests of the population.
- The current Dutch cabinet is trustworthy.

*Trust in politics (Likert scale, 7 point)*

- I trust Dutch politics a lot.
- Dutch politics are guided by good intentions.
- Dutch politics can handle its responsibilities.
- Dutch politics are honest and integer.
- I believe that Dutch politics sufficiently take into account the interests of the population.
- Dutch politics are trustworthy.

**Current national assessment**

\*How well is the Netherlands doing?

*National situation*

- How well is The Netherlands doing? **(Slider, from very bad to very good)**
- How well will The Netherlands be doing in the near future? **(Slider, from very bad to very good)**

**Government performance in specific cases**

*Questions that will be asked for every case. (Likert scale, 7 point)*

*'This problem' will be replaced with the title of the problem that is asked about at that point.*

*Cases that will be discussed are: The Covid-19 pandemic, The climate, The childcare benefits case, The Housing shortage, Refugees, and Tax.*

- The government pays/paid enough attention to *this problem*.
- Regarding *this problem* the government knows/knew what they are doing/were doing.

- Regarding *this problem* the government does/did the right thing.
- The government communicates/communicated well about *this problem*.

### **Beliefs on functioning of the political system**

#### *Elite vs. the people (Likert scale, 7-point)*

- The government does not take into account the population enough.
- The government is more occupied with thinking about themselves than about the people.

#### *Division of attention between rural and urban areas (Likert scale, 7-point)*

- The government pays more attention to the urban areas than to the rural areas.
- The government pays more attention to the Randstad than to the rural areas.

#### *Appeal of leading politicians (Likert scale, 7-point)*

- There are politicians in The Netherlands who appeal to me.
- There are politicians in The Netherlands who have a similar point of view as me.

### **Communication**

#### *Clarity of government messages (Likert scale, 7-point)*

- Information I receive from the government is always easy to understand.
- Information I receive from the government always clear
- Information I receive from the government resembles what I want to know.
- The government often prevaricates about problems.

### **Other government levels**

#### *European influence (Likert scale, 7-point)*

- The government does not have enough of a say in what is decided in the European Parliament.
- More topics should be decided on a European level.



### **Trust in the government (Option 2)**

*Will appear for the participant here or at the place of Option 1 depending on a random variable.*

#### *Trust in the cabinet (Likert scale, 7 point)*

- I trust the current Dutch cabinet a lot.
- The current Dutch cabinet is guided by good intentions.
- The current Dutch cabinet can handle its responsibilities.
- The current Dutch cabinet is honest and integer.
- I believe that the current Dutch cabinet sufficiently takes into account the interests of the population.
- The current Dutch cabinet is trustworthy.

#### *Trust in politics (Likert scale, 7 point)*

- I trust Dutch politics a lot.
- Dutch politics are guided by good intentions.
- Dutch politics can handle its responsibilities.
- Dutch politics are honest and integer.
- I believe that Dutch politics sufficiently take into account the interests of the population.
- Dutch politics are trustworthy.

### **Demographics**

#### *Employment status*

- Do you have a paid job? **(Yes/No)**
- Are you a student? **(Yes/No)**

#### *Age*

- What is your age?

**(Fill in number)**

#### *Gender*

- What is your gender?  
**(Man, woman, other, rather not say)**

#### *Cultural background*

- What country were you born in? **(The Netherlands, other (type other country))**
- What country were your parents born in? **(The Netherlands, other (type other country))**

#### *Level of education*

- What is your highest finished level of education?  
**(Basisschool, middelbare school, MBO, HBO, Universiteit, other)**

#### *General trustingness / propensity to trust (Likert scale, 7-point)*

\*How likely is the person to trust others

- I usually trust people until they give me a reason not to trust them.
- Trusting another person is not difficult for me.
- My typical approach is to trust new acquaintances until they prove I should not trust them.
- My tendency to trust others is high.

#### **Current personal assessment**

\*How well is the respondent doing?

#### *Personal perception of own socio-economic status*

\*A person's perception of economic access to resources and position compared to others.

- How well are you doing financially? **(Slider, from very bad to very well)**
- How well do you think you will be doing financially in the near future? **(Slider, from very bad to very well)**

#### **Past voting behavior (Part of demographics)**

#### *Voted or not*

- Did you vote in the national election of The Netherlands in 2021? **(Yes/No)**

*Representation of voted party in the House of Representatives (Tweede Kamer)*

- In 2021, did you vote for a party who is now represented in the Tweede Kamer?  
**(Yes/No)**

*Success of voted party compared to last vote*

- In 2021, did you vote for a party who won, or lost seats? Or did their number of seats not change? **(Won, lost, stayed the same, I don't know)**

*Representation of voted party in the current coalition*

- Is the party you voted for in 2021 currently represented in the coalition? **(Yes/No)**

*Influence of voted party on national policy*

- How strong is the influence of the party you voted for in 2021 on national policy? Give an estimation. **(Slider, from very little to a lot)**

*The perceived difficulty for choosing a party*

\* Can also be explained as: The amount of struggle the person had while deciding which party to vote for.

- How much difficulty did you have while choosing which party to vote for in 2021?  
**(Slider, from very little to a lot)**

*Regret on last voting behavior*

- How much do you regret your vote from 2021? **(Slider, from very little to a lot)**

**Closing statement**

During the past few years trust in the government in The Netherlands has been decreasing. This research is designed to form a better understanding of what factors contribute to this negative development.

Thank you very much for filling out this questionnaire.

**Appendix B**  
*Factor analyses*

*Factor analysis between cabinet and politics trust constructs*

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Cabinet Trust 1	0.816	0.389
Cabinet Trust 2	0.621	0.463
Cabinet Trust 3	0.735	0.376
Cabinet Trust 4	0.721	0.365
Cabinet Trust 5	0.712	0.421
Cabinet Trust 6	0.678	0.483
Political Trust 1	0.421	0.706
Political Trust 2	0.262	0.727
Political Trust 3	0.492	0.696
Political Trust 4	0.494	0.697
Political Trust 5	0.431	0.692
Political Trust 6	0.466	0.781

*Cumulative variance is 0.70, p-value < 0.001, 43 degrees of freedom.*

*Factor analysis between six cases of government actions constructs*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
Covid 1	-0.121	0.194	0.281	0.134		0.483
Covid 2	0.219		0.146		0.195	0.817
Covid 3	0.107				0.107	0.870
Covid 4		0.170		0.152		0.630
Climate 1	0.129	0.286	0.187	0.599	0.128	0.119
Climate 2	0.356	0.102	0.137	0.681	0.216	0.134
Climate 3	0.178		0.165	0.865		0.108
Climate 4	0.172	0.202		0.791	0.134	
Housing 1	0.834	0.124		0.108	0.127	
Housing 2	0.812			0.214	0.133	
Housing 3	0.867	0.119	0.108	0.135	0.182	
Housing 4	0.609	0.198		0.238		
Benefits 1	0.123	0.132	0.123	0.125	0.869	0.113
Benefits 2	0.175	0.294	0.243	0.156	0.426	
Benefits 3	0.191	0.207	0.219	0.102	0.709	0.173
Benefits 4	0.179	0.149	0.230	0.176	0.775	0.123
Refugee 1	0.111	0.100	0.633	0.141	0.289	
Refugee 2	0.109	0.198	0.818	0.118	0.177	
Refugee 3	0.163		0.790		0.110	0.224
Refugee 4		0.294	0.645	0.149	0.136	
Tax 1	0.190	0.684	0.229	0.110		
Tax 2	0.185	0.734		0.211	0.134	0.209
Tax 3	0.182	0.747	0.243	0.174	0.185	0.190
Tax 4		0.809			0.215	

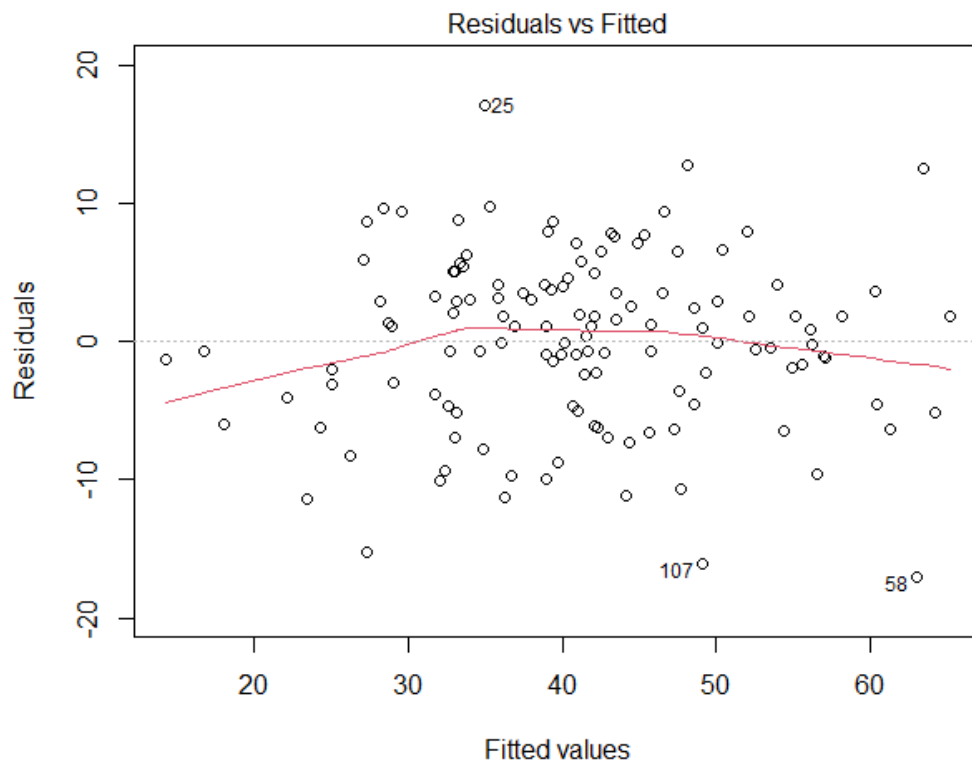
*Cumulative variance is 0.66, p-value < 0.001, 147 degrees of freedom. Rotation = none.*

*Note.* Empty cells indicate a value lower than 0.1.

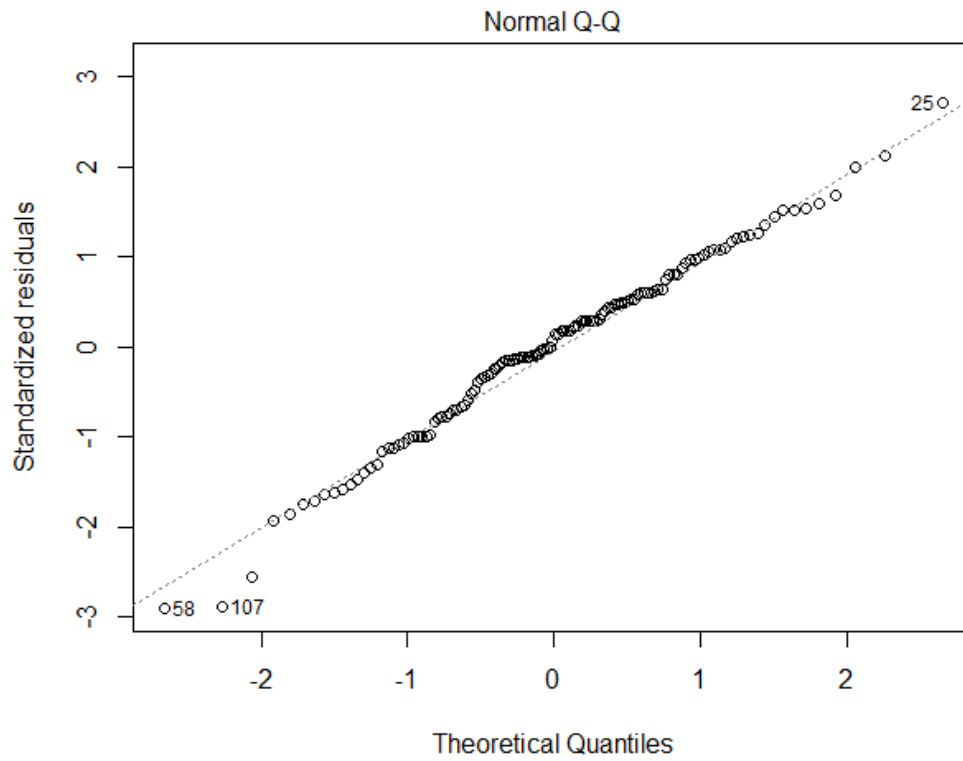
## Appendix C

### Assumptions checks

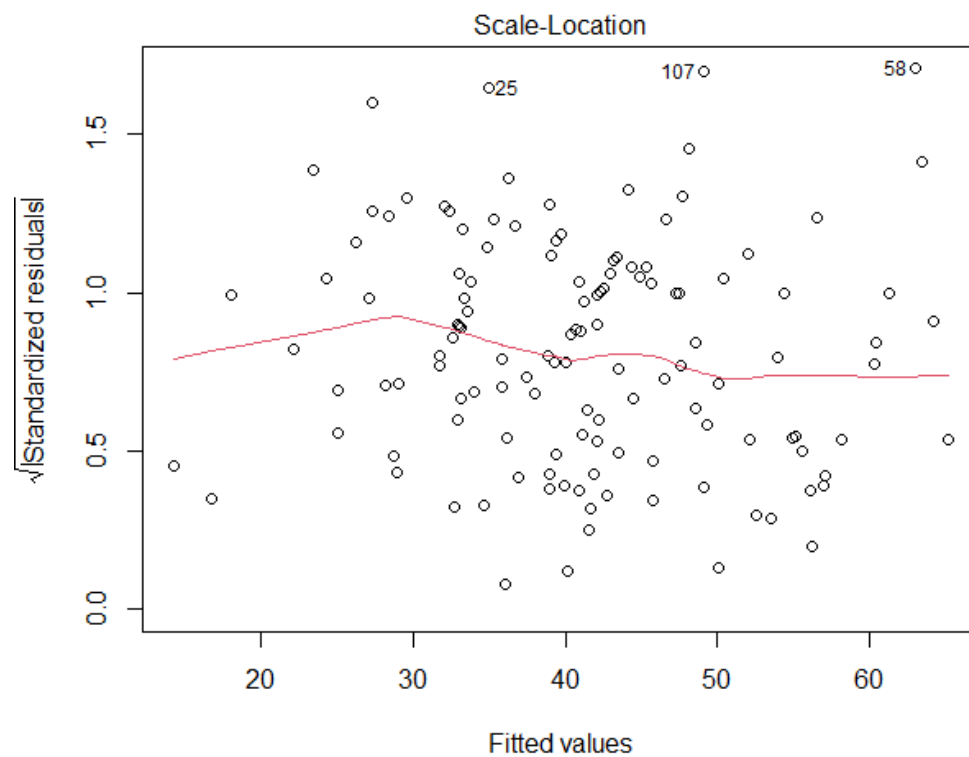
#### Assumption of linearity



The red line does seem approximately horizontal at 0, which shows that the assumption of linearity is not violated.

*Assumption of normality*

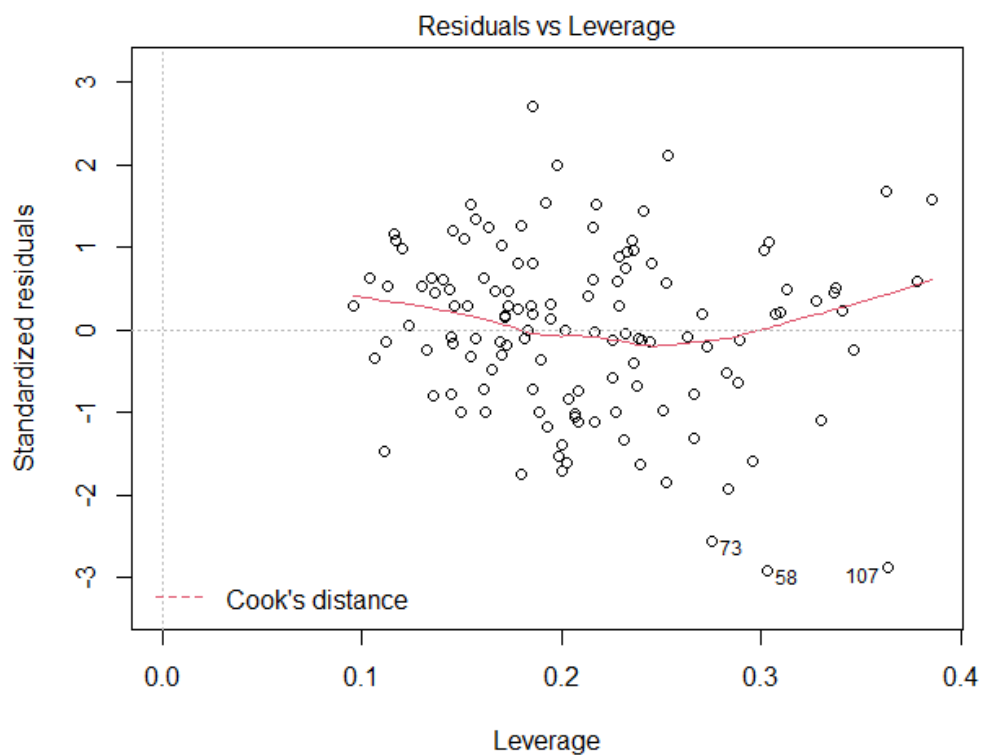
The points look to be all approximately on the line, which suggests a normal distribution.

*Assumption of homogeneity*

The red line is approximately horizontal and points seem to be spread decently equally, which suggests homogeneity of the model.



*Check for high leverage points*



The three most extreme outliers of the model are highlighted (being 58, 73, and 107). These points come close to, but do not surpass -3 standardized residuals. This suggests that there are no points that have too much leverage in the model.