Societal pessimism: A study of its conceptualization, causes, correlates and consequences

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1.1   A study of a neglected phenomenon

There seems to be a consensus in many Western countries that things are changing for the worse. In intellectual debates, the West is called "the continent of fear" (Moïsi, 2009) or "pessimism" (Mahbubani, 2008). Moïsi describes the West, by which he means the USA and Europe, as feeling out of control of its own destiny (2009). Similarly, Mahbubani notes that "When many Western eyes peer into the twenty-first century, they see only dark images, not a new dawn in the history of human civilization" (2008: 3). Such concerns about the state of society may not be new. Ian McEwan's novel *Sweet Tooth* addresses the negative expectations about the future of society that predominated in the UK in the 1970s. To prevent Communism from gaining a foothold, the MI5 secretly sponsors authors to write novels that could upbeat the public and inspire optimism. In McEwan's novel, the sentiment that the best is not yet to come but is already in the past, and that the country is a lonely ship on a wild ocean, is enough to make the British authorities eager to arrange propaganda, in order to change that public opinion.

The existence of a concern about the state of society among citizens is not just the product of intellectual analysis or artistic imagination, but is very real and current. Pessimism about society is prevalent among citizens in both the USA (Gallup, 2014) and Europe. Figure 1.1 uses Eurobarometer data from 2006 to 2014 to show that a substantial portion of EU-citizens believe that their country is heading in the wrong direction. In the Western European media, concerns about problematic societal developments are characterized using local terms to describe the same phenomenon, like 'malaise' in France, 'unease' in the UK, 'Unbehagen' in Germany and 'maatschappelijk onbehagen' in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Figure 1.1   Perception of Europeans on the direction their country is heading (%)
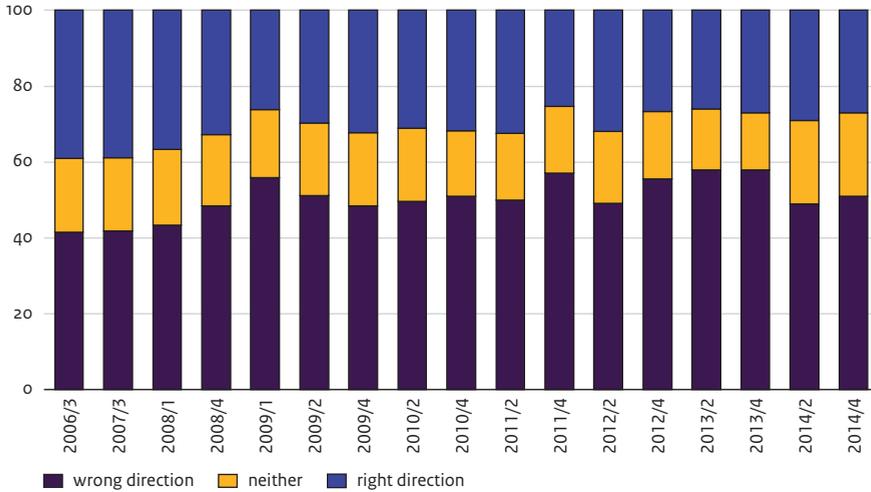
Moreover, both in the public and in the intellectual debate, the negative consequences of this attitude are discussed. French President François Hollande warned that the French should not be devoured by pessimism and fear, because that climate poses a threat to the country (The Times, 2015). The Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte called upon the Dutch to be less pessimistic, to stop being people who see the glass as half empty because the economy needs optimistic citizens who spend their money (RTL Nieuws, 2013). In his 2014 address of the European Parliament, Pope Francis urged Europe to leave its tired pessimism behind and regain its previous vigor to prevent societal, cultural, political and economic stagnation or even deterioration (Vatican Network, 2014). Technology investor Peter Thiel points to a pervasive pessimism in Europe that hampers innovative thinking (Fleisher & Barker, 2014).

In the intellectual debate, the effects of such pessimism are also pointed out by Moïsi, who predicts that Europe will become an irrelevant museum in disarray if it continues to follow the path of fear (2009). Mahbubani warns about a 'Retreat into fortresses' in which European countries protect their own, short-term self-interest, harming both the world and themselves (2008). Furedi warns that lower levels of innovation (Furedi, 2002 [1997]) result when we allow ourselves to be led by fear. At the individual level, pessimism about society has been related to rising levels of depression (Bennett, 2001) or a lack of faith in governmental and non-governmental institutions (Mazarr, 1998; Whitman, 1998). Many scholars theorize – but do not test – that societal developments negatively affect our society and result in anxiety or insecurity, from

risks resulting from technological advancement, the liquidity of social structures or the individualization of collective risks (e.g. Taylor, 1991; Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2000).

However, the nature of this phenomenon remains unclear, both theoretically and empirically. Its very existence, nature and dissemination are shrouded in mystery. Although entire bookshelves have been written about societal changes in recent decades, most accounts study very specific attitudes and do not make claims about the general societal outlook. Political scientists are troubled by decreasing levels of political trust and engagement (e.g. Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2004) and the rise of populism and Populist Radical Right parties (Mudde, 2007). Sociologists investigate the supposed loss of social capital (Etzioni, 1993; Putnam, 2000), xenophobia and the multicultural society (Tillie, 2008), whereas criminologists focus on the perception of ever-increasing levels of criminality (Boutellier, 2002). Some studies do offer a comprehensive, overarching perspective on troubling societal developments; those studies include *The Risk Society* (Beck, 1992), *The Malaise of Modernity* (Taylor, 1991), *Liquid Modernity* (Bauman, 2000), and *Culture of Fear* (Furedi, 2002 [1997]). These influential contributions are insightful diagnoses that identify detrimental processes in society that lead to various problems for either individuals or society overall. However, those studies do not discuss how those processes affect concerns about society, who hold those concerns, or which processes are particularly distressing. In other words, they make no concrete arguments how these processes affect individual wellbeing, public opinion or individual behavior.

Various authors explicitly call for scientific attention to public pessimism (Eckersley, 2000; Eckersley, 2013; Kroll & Delhey, 2013). In studying perceived quality of life, these authors point to the discrepancy between high levels of personal wellbeing and low levels of social (i.e., societal) wellbeing. They argue that more research on that low satisfaction with society is needed, along with a measure that captures that concern.

1.2 The individual concern about the state of society: three main questions

The point of departure here is the notion that in Western countries there is an apparently widespread concern about problematic developments in society, despite those countries' relatively high standards of living. To examine this phenomenon, we first need to understand what it is. Is the phenomenon a characteristic of a nation, of groups, or of individual people? Is it an attitude or should we focus on certain types of behavior or problems, such as levels of depression, 'new disorders' such as ADHD, or anxiety about new risks such as resistant bacteria or nuclear power plants?

There is no structured stream of literature on this phenomenon. Research relating to discontent, pessimism, or anxiety about society is at best highly fragmented, lacking a shared object (what is the discontent about), subject (where can the discontent be found), definition and measurement. Taking a broad view of the literature that touches on this subject, I suggest to distinguish four approaches to studying (a concern about) the state of society.

A first set of authors theorizes about societal developments themselves that are problematic or at least disturbing on a macro level, a micro level or both. Bauman (1997; 2000; 2007) speaks of the 'liquidity' of our times, which deprives us, among other things, of anchors on which to hold, and of the 'individualization of risks' that once were collective in nature, which means that in all areas of life, the individual exists in a place of uncertainty. Similarly, Taylor (1991) discusses the malaise of modernity that results from a loss of moral standards, increased instrumentality and a loss of freedom. Beck (1992) introduces the term 'risk society,' in which there is a prevalence of new types of risks that result from technological advances and are not geographically bounded (e.g. risks accompanying nuclear power plants). Moreover, the political system is not equipped to address these risks, according to Beck. These risks create a common ground of anxiety and fear, but Beck stresses that it remains unclear whether this anxiety leads to solidarity, and how people will react more generally to these risks. Contemporary fears of these types of risks, which create more anxiety than much more dangerous but less exotic risks, such as traffic accidents, are also argued to be typical of our era (Glassner, 1999; Furedi, 2002 [1997]). In summary, this category of authors offers great insight into societal processes that might affect how we view society, but they do not explicitly discuss such views. Nor do they offer clear expectations about the consequences of such negative views, with the exception of Furedi, who states that the culture of fear prohibits exploration and experimentalism in all spheres, from interpersonal relations to politics.

A second set of studies points to specific, individual problems as typical of our current, allegedly problematic, era. Han (2012) states that our society is centered on achievement and causes the following neural conditions: depression, ADHD, borderline personality syndrome and burnout syndrome. These conditions are caused, he argues, by an overload of impressions. In a similar vein, Ehrenberg (2010) sees psychological conditions as a consequence and a measure of the state of contemporary French society, which he sees as a 'society of discontent'. Wilkinson investigates anxiety in contemporary Western society, namely, "the extent to which 'neurotic' symptoms or excessive states of anxiety may be explained in terms of a social and cultural determination" (2001: 17). He argues that this anxiety does not reflect personality but should instead be seen as a

sociological phenomenon, created by social predicaments and cultural contradictions. Here too, the problems themselves – not the perceptions of those problems – are the object of study.

A third category of studies argues that pessimism about the state of society is inflated, due to the media (McKenzie, 1997; Mazarr, 1998; Whitman, 1998). This literature does not discuss the nature of such pessimism but instead focuses on (the causes of) the gap between private contentment and public pessimism. In *The Paradox of Progress,* pessimism about society's future is argued to be unjustified and based on overly negative media reports (McKenzie, 1997). According to Whitman, people are not only too negative about society but also (and simultaneously) too positive about their own situations. This discrepancy is described by Whitman in *The Optimism Gap. The I'm OK – They're Not Syndrome and the Myth of American Decline* (1998). This book studies the paradox that "people are feeling better about their own lives but feel that "other" Americans in society at large are doing poorly" (ibid: 10). This gap is explained by both a psychological mechanism and a media effect, i.e., the general tendency in human nature to expect better things for oneself than average, and the media's large influence on evaluations of the state of society but not one's personal situation.[1]

A fourth and smaller group of authors pays attention to the individual concern about the state of society. However, there is no such thing as a literature stream on individuals' perceptions of the state of society. Instead, these are sporadic, isolated studies that look at this phenomenon in a specific and different way. Bennett introduces the term cultural pessimism to describe theoretically the pessimistic narratives that dominate current society, which can be summarized as "a feeling of a generalized negative certainty" (Bennett, 2001: 181). He argues that such pessimism and feelings of powerlessness have been accompanied by high levels of depression and anxiety since the second half of the twentieth century and posits that cultural pessimism not only is produced by our current society but is also itself a form of minor depression. Elchardus and Smits refer to individuals' lack of well-being [about being part of] society among individuals

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[1]   Both causes have been investigated in the literature. The first is called 'unrealistic optimism' or 'optimistic bias': a tendency to think that one's own risk of any type of danger is lower than average (Weinstein, 1980). From health-related risks to expectations about one's personal future, if one is mentally healthy, they are likely to be overly optimistic about their personal vulnerability and chances for happiness and success (for an overview see Taylor & Brown, 1988; Chapin, 2000). The media effect is called the 'impersonal impact hypothesis' or 'media malaise'. These theories state that personal and societal risk judgments are two separate things and that mass media primarily affect one's perception of societal problems, whereas personal experiences determine the perception of one's personal situation (Tyler & Cook, 1984; Culbertson & Stempel, 1985). Some studies confirm this media effect (Tyler, 1980; Mutz, 1992), but others do not (Park, Scherer, & Glynn, 2001; Shrum & Bischak, 2001).

(2007: 104) and study the empirical interrelatedness among various attitudes on issues about aspects of Flemish society (Elchardus & Smits, 2002; 2007), as do Dekker et al. (2013) for the Netherlands. These contributions on the individual perception of the state of society provide insight into discontent about society. However, they lack either empirical testing (Bennett, 2001) or a theoretical embedding (Elchardus & Smits, 2002; 2007; Dekker, Van Noije, & Den Ridder, 2013). Another concept, social actualization, the sense that society has potential, is one of five dimensions of social wellbeing and is introduced by Keyes (Keyes, 1998; Keyes & Shapiro, 2004). This is also a small stream of research (Keyes, 1998; Keyes & Shapiro, 2004; Gallagher, Lopez, & Preacher, 2009; Huppert et al., 2009), and therefore, little is known about the cross-national distribution, causes or consequences of social actualization. This concept, i.e., societal optimism, can be considered the opposite of what is studied here.

This dissertation builds primarily on the fourth category of studies. It conceptualizes the phenomenon of unease, malaise, Unbehagen or maatschappelijk onbehagen as an *attitude about the state of society among individuals*. Hereby, my approach differs from the first three categories in that I focus on how individuals perceive society; that is, public opinion. In contrast, the other three categories of studies describe the causes of a pessimistic outlook on society: the first category theorizes about problematic developments that are typical of our era; the second discusses the individual problems and psychological conditions of our time; and the third studies the gap between public pessimism, private optimism and the causes thereof, but it does not investigate the nature of public pessimism, the consequences of public pessimism, what public pessimism is about, or who is particularly pessimistic. My research also deviates from that of scholars who aim to show that public pessimism is unwarranted by providing numbers that indicate social or economic prosperity (McKenzie, 1997; Whitman, 1998). Instead, I adopt the Thomas Theorem, "If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences", as point of departure. It is important to understand individuals' concern about the state of society, even if this concern is unsupported by factual data.

The investigation of this concern about the state of society evolves around *three overarching questions*: what is this concern, what causes it, and what are its correlates and consequences? Chapter 2 sets out the conceptual and theoretical foundation of the book. It disentangles the concern about the state of society into two concepts that are well suited for further theoretical and empirical elaboration: societal pessimism and societal unease. *Societal pessimism* is a universal concept that can exist at all times and in all parts of the world. *Societal unease* is a specification of societal pessimism, namely, the conceptualization of the negative view of society in contemporary, economically developed, liberal democracies, which are predominantly Western

countries. This means that societal unease is the embodiment of societal pessimism in such countries.

These two concepts, societal pessimism and societal unease, are the subjects of this book. Part I addresses the first research question and consists of three chapters in which societal pessimism and societal unease are defined, conceptualized, measured, and explored. Because the data on societal unease are very limited, in Parts II and III of the book, I focus on societal pessimism. Part II addresses the second research question and consists of one chapter, which focuses on the political and economic causes of societal pessimism. Part III consists of three chapters, which study correlates and consequences of societal pessimism that are central to the functioning of democracy: voting behavior, political and civic participation and identification with political-geographical groups. The three main research questions and the specified sub-questions are as follows (with related chapters between brackets):

1:   How can the concern about the state of society be defined, conceptualized and measured?
  1.1   What is societal unease and how can it be conceptualized and measured? (2,3)
  1.2   What is societal pessimism and how can it be measured? (2,3)
  1.3   How are societal unease and societal pessimism expressed? (4)

2:   What are the causes of the concern about the state of society?
  2.1   To what extent do the political and economic contexts affect societal pessimism? (5)

3:   What are the correlates and consequences of the concern about the state of society?
  3.1   To what extent does societal pessimism stimulate voting for Populist Radical Right parties? (6)
  3.2   How do societal pessimism, political trust and social trust differentiate between types of voluntary civic engagement? (7)
  3.3   To what extent do societal pessimism and other types of sociotropic uncertainty mitigate multiple identification with the city, the nation and the EU? (8)

1.3   Scientific and societal relevance

As discussed above, research into the concern about the state of society is very scarce to non-existent. However, for several reasons, it seems very relevant to study this attitude. From a societal perspective, such research offers a mirror to citizens, opinion leaders,

and society at large. Accordingly, it provides a scientific answer to the public debate in which notions or even allegations of pessimism thrive but are neither specified nor based on thorough analyses. Furthermore, if there is a concern about the state of society, a study of its nature, causes, correlates and consequences provides knowledge to address this concern for actors both in politics and policymaking.

From a scientific perspective, three reasons for this research predominate. First, theoretical contributions about a decline, a deterioration or otherwise negative developments in specific domains of society at large have received a great deal of scholarly attention (e.g. Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2000). Many studies have investigated how specific terrains, such as the allegedly critical state of politics or the economy, are perceived by individual citizens. However, if there are indeed troublesome societal processes taking place, it seems very important to determine whether such processes also lead to a concern about society among the public. But to date, research has paid little attention to this phenomenon. Second, in public opinion research, we have measures for the relationship between individual citizens and all aspects of their lives, both personally (from happiness and satisfaction with life in general to social contacts, job satisfaction, financial situation, neighborhood, and fear of crime) and socially (from measures of social trust, political trust, and satisfaction with democracy, to national identification and economic expectations), to name just a few. All of an individual's dyads or relationships with other people or societal institutions or domains are considered by scholars in specific research fields. The perception of society at large however, is not an established subject of public opinion research. This is strange because, third, a concern about society is supposed to affect various other attitudes and behaviors according to the range of political and economic arguments discussed above. Therefore, we need a clear definition, conceptualization and measure of this attitude.

This dissertation aims to take some first steps toward filling this gap. It is the first comprehensive theoretical and empirical study of citizens' concern about the state of society. It contributes to the literature in multiple ways. First, it offers an interdisciplinary overview of the literature on societal processes that distress citizens. Second, it offers new definitions and a conceptual model of this phenomenon by distinguishing two concepts, namely, societal pessimism and societal unease. These concepts are embedded in the literature and are disentangled from other attitudes such as anomie, anomia, alienation, fear, resentment and insecurity of status (a concept also proposed in Chapter 2). Third, I empirically test the conceptualization of societal unease and its validity and provide a scale of societal unease and a operationalization of societal pessimism. Fourth, this is the first study to examine the causes, correlates and consequences of societal pessimism.

1.4   Methods, data and cases

Because research on the concern about the state of society is very scarce, the literature does not provide theories to employ or hypotheses to test. This book's theoretical chapter (Chapter 2) addresses this gap in the literature by adopting an inductive strategy. I integrate a large range of interdisciplinary studies, which argue that for some reason, society is in decline. This yields a conceptual model of the concern about society in developed liberal democracies of today.

Next, I choose a deductive strategy for most of the empirical chapters. It is easy to think of an attitude about the state of society as vague and broad. For this reason, I allow theoretical expectations to guide the analyses to avoid either creating a concept that is the sum of everything, or telling a tautological story in which there is common ground in what people are most concerned about. Because societal unease and societal pessimism are not established concepts with a clear scientific or social meaning, I do not conceptualize these concepts by a qualitative study that asks respondents what those concepts are or what they think about them. Instead, I use survey data in Chapter 3 to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis that examines the presence of a theoretically grounded latent attitude. The use of international survey data in Chapters 5-8 enables me to increase the external validity of my research, and Chapter 5 also offers a comparative perspective from which I examine the causes of societal pessimism. Chapter 5 uses multinomial multilevel regression, and in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, either multinomial regression, logistic regression, or both are used, with country dummies (and wave dummies in Chapter 8) employed to eliminate cross-national variation. The exception to this deductive design is found in Chapter 4, in which I explore how people express their concerns about society in their own words to obtain more insight into the nature of those concerns. To this end, I perform a partly deductive and partly inductive content analysis of open-ended survey questions.

I conceptualize societal unease as a characteristic of contemporary, economically developed, liberal democracies (see Chapter 2), which are the primary focus of (the empirical analyses in) this book. Although I define societal pessimism as universal and context-free, I do not study the similarities and differences in societal pessimism beyond the current Western context. The extent to which societal unease and societal pessimism can be found in contemporary, less economically developed liberal democracies, in other types of regimes, or in previous times is beyond the scope of this study. The focus on liberal democracies (rather than the more generic term 'countries') is relevant because conceptually speaking, the functioning of national politics and political actors in the democratic system are an inherent part of societal unease.

Although the aim is to study developed liberal democracies in general, because of data limitations, my empirical focus is on a sample of those democracies. Surprisingly, only a few data sources include societal pessimism, and cross-national measures of societal unease are absent.

The empirical analyses in Part I of this book therefore focus on the Netherlands. Because Chapter 3 examines the validity of the proposed conceptualization of societal unease, very specific and extended data are required. I use a Dutch survey from 2012 (Citizens' Outlooks Barometer), which includes questions designed for this purpose. This survey includes an open-ended question about Dutch society, which is explored in Chapter 4 to offer more insight into expressions of societal unease and societal pessimism.

For various reasons, the Netherlands is an interesting case for this purpose. The concern about the state of society has received attention both in the public and in academic debates (Beker, 2003; Verbrugge, 2004; Dekker et al., 2009; Dekker & Den Ridder, 2011; Koenis, 2012; Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, 2013), illustrated by the characterization of the Dutch mood as "Met mij gaat het goed, met ons gaat het slecht", "I am doing fine, we are doing bad" (Schnabel, 2004: 49). This suggests concern about the state of society to be present here. Furthermore, societal pessimism is relatively low from an international perspective (European Commission, 2013b), and objectively, the country is doing well: it is 9th in the IMF ranking of GDP per capita[2] and 7th on the Human Development Index of the UN[3]; it is 14th on the world database of happiness[4]; and public opinion research shows the Dutch are very content with their private lives, e.g., their health, neighborhood, job and financial situation (Steenvoorden, 2009). Therefore, the Netherlands can be seen as a least-likely case: if a general negative attitude on the state of society is revealed in the Netherlands, it is likely to be present in other Western countries as well. Moreover, the Netherlands' high levels of happiness enable me to distinguish between contentment with personal life and public pessimism.

The empirical analyses in Parts II and III of this book are based on a broader selection of cases, covering a substantial number of European countries. In Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, respondents from 23, 9, 19 and 25 European countries, respectively, are included. The specific survey data in these chapters are from the Eurobarometer (13 waves from

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2   World Economic Outlook database URL: www.imf.org
3   This ranking is based on life expectancy, literacy rate, educational level and standard of living. URL: hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/
4   URL: worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/index.html

2006-2012 in Chapter 5 and both 2007 and 2012 in Chapter 8) and the European Social Survey (from either 2006 (Chapter 7) or 2012 (Chapter 6)).

In Parts II and III, the theoretical framework more explicitly addresses causal directions. In Part II, 'Causes' (Chapter 5), I examine macro-level causes of societal pessimism. In Part III, 'Consequences and Correlates', I study three types of behavior and attitudes that I expect are related to societal pessimism or a consequence thereof: Populist Radical Right voting, political and civic participation, and multiple identification with geographical groups.

Table 1.1   Overview of chapter, data, cases, and methods per research question

Research Question	Sub-question	Chapter	Data and Cases	Method
What is it?	1.1 and 1.2 What are societal unease and societal pessimism and how can they be conceptualized and measured?	2,3	Citizens' Outlooks Barometer 2012/1 (The Netherlands)	Confirmatory factor analysis, OLS regression analysis
	1.3 How are societal unease and societal pessimism expressed?	4		Content analysis
What causes it?	2.1. To what extent do the political and economic contexts affect societal pessimism?	5	13 Eurobarometer waves 2006-2012 (23 European countries)	Multinomial multilevel regression analysis
What are its correlates and consequences?	3.1 How does societal pessimism affect voting for Radical Right parties?	6	European Social Survey 2012 (9 European countries)	Multinomial regression analysis
	3.2 How does societal pessimism relate to types of civic engagement?	7	European Social Survey 2006 (19 European countries)	Logistic regression analysis
	3.3 How does societal pessimism affect patterns of identification?	8	Eurobarometer 2007 and 2012 (25 European countries)	Multinomial regression analysis

1.5   Overview of the book

Part I focuses on the *conceptualization* of the concern about the state of society. Chapter 2 offers a framework to study this concern, defining it with two concepts, societal unease and societal pessimism, and offering an elaborate conceptualization of societal unease that consists of five elements: distrust in human capability, loss of ideology, decline of political power, decline of community and socioeconomic vulnerability. Furthermore,

Chapter 2 differentiates societal unease and societal pessimism from two concepts about perceptions of one's personal position in society: resentment and insecurity of status (the latter being a new concept as well). At the end of Chapter 2, I present a theoretical model that shows all of the studied concepts and their interrelatedness. Finally, I reflect on the similarities and differences between societal unease and societal pessimism versus the following established social concepts: anomie, anomia, alienation and fear.

In Chapter 3, I test the theoretical assumptions of Chapter 2 with Dutch survey data. It examines the conceptual model of societal unease by empirically testing whether the five theorized elements comprise this concept empirically. Therefore, I analyze whether the five elements of societal unease contribute to one latent attitude and form one factor, and check whether attitudes about issues other than the five theorized elements fit into this factor. To validate the measures of societal unease and societal pessimism, I review the relationship between these two concepts, their relationship with anomia and happiness, and whether the conceptual model of unease holds among educational subgroups. Finally, I explore the demographic, attitudinal and behavioral characteristics of the societally uneasy citizens.

In Chapter 4, I explore the nature of the concern about society by analyzing open-ended survey questions posed to Dutch respondents. Through partly deductive and partly inductive content analysis, I explore how the concern about society takes shapes in citizens' expressions. I investigate the issues that respondents raise when asked to argue why they think their country is heading in the wrong direction, and how they make that argument. I compare societal pessimists, who believe that their country is heading in the wrong direction, with a subgroup of those pessimists, the most societally uneasy (based on the scale of societal unease produced in Chapter 3), to examine how their greater concern is expressed. Third, I deductively analyze how and the extent to which the five elements of societal unease are present in the reasoning about why the country is heading in the wrong direction. Are these elements top-of-mind, salient issues, or are they relatively latent? My fourth aim is to examine the arguments of societal optimists. Why do they think things are heading the right way, and do they use inverse or merely different arguments in comparison to those of the societal pessimists? Finally, I reflect on what the results tell us about the nature of social pessimism and societal unease.

Part II (Chapter 5) focuses on the *causes* of societal pessimism. Focusing on two sets of explanations, I examine the influence of political and economic conditions on societal pessimism. In terms of political factors, I focus on the degree of Europeanization, degree of political stability, and degree of corruption. On the economic side, I explore

the effect of welfare-state retrenchment and economic development (namely, economic growth, unemployment and inflation). I analyze the influence of the political and economic factors in 23 countries not only cross-nationally but also within these countries over time, comparing 13 points in time between 2006 and 2012.

In Part III, the *correlates and consequences* of societal pessimism are investigated. Chapter 6 examines the extent to which societal pessimism offers a new explanation of Populist Radical Right (PRR) voting, next to established theories. PRR ideology is characterized in the literature as nostalgic, and I argue that societal pessimism among voters is congruent with this nostalgia. To study the effect of societal pessimism on PRR support, I compare voters of PRR parties to those of Radical Left, Mainstream Left and Mainstream Right parties, while controlling for established factors (such as socioeconomic characteristics, satisfaction with democracy, opposition to immigration, European integration and authoritarianism).

Chapter 7 aims to distinguish types of participants in voluntary civic engagement from each other in terms of three attitudes: societal pessimism, political trust, and social trust. Many studies investigate why people participate, but the extent to which participants differ from each other is less clear. This chapter proposes that people are likely to join others who share their societal outlook, in line with the matching hypothesis. It suggests that to differentiate among people engaged in institutional political, non-institutional political and civic participation, we should consider their societal outlook. Societal pessimism, political trust, and social trust should enable the differentiation of these participants, because they indicate whether it is possible to achieve change through formal participation versus protest participation (societal pessimism) or within or outside the political domain (indicated by political and societal trust). By controlling for the established factors in participation studies such as resources, political efficacy, and political interest, I examine the societal outlook of those three types of participants.

In Chapter 8, I investigate whether societal pessimism and other types of sociotropic uncertainty, namely, political distrust and negative economic expectations, mitigate multiple identification with political-geographical collective groups. Chapter 8 theorizes that these types of uncertainty encourage selectivity in the number of political-geographical group identities, because a simple identity offers security in the form of clear direction and meaning. So far, the uncertainty-identify and need-for-closure literature have focused on the relationship between personal uncertainty and identification, but this has not yet been broadened to sociotropic uncertainty or applied to multiple identification. I examine identity complexity with respect to three political-geographical groups – the city, the country and the EU – in 25 EU countries.

With these identification measures, I construct four groups (i.e., low, single, dual and multiple identifiers) and examine whether sociotropic uncertainty mitigates multiple identification.

Chapter 9 concludes this book by summarizing its results, offering overall conclusions, pointing to this study's limitations and discussing the implications in terms of contributions to the literature, future research and social policy.