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

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CHAPTER 3

The empirical validity of societal unease and societal pessimism¹

3.1 Theoretical considerations put to the test

In the previous chapter, I proposed definitions of societal unease and societal pessimism, a conceptual model of societal unease, and a theoretical model that shows the relationships among societal unease, societal pessimism, resentment, and a third proposed concept, insecurity of status. In this chapter, I will seek to validate these theoretical propositions. First, I examine the empirical validity of the conceptual model of societal unease. Is it indeed the case that concerns about the distrust of human capability, the loss of ideology, the decline of political power, the decline of community, and increasing socioeconomic vulnerability contribute to a latent attitude that can be labeled societal unease? And is it the case that concerns about other aspects of society not fit into this scale?

Second, it is important to examine the measurement validity of societal unease and societal pessimism (Adcock, 2001). As a first step, I investigate whether the theoretical model of Figure 2.2 holds empirically, that is, whether we can distinguish societal unease and societal pessimism from resentment and insecurity of status. And to what extent are these concepts interrelated? Societal unease and societal pessimism should show a high association, because they are two conceptual variants of the same phenomenon. This would result in convergent validity. Resentment and insecurity of status are also likely to be considerably correlated, because they are individually oriented sentiments that relate to the same problematic processes in contemporary Western society.

Next, I examine how societal unease and societal pessimism are related to happiness and anomia. Research suggests that concerns about the state of society are empirically different from happiness or life satisfaction (Eckersley, 2000; Elchardus & Smits, 2002;

¹ A summary of this chapter and Chapter 2 has been published in the following article: Steenvoorden, E.H. (2015) A General Discontent Disentangled: A Conceptual and Empirical Framework for Societal Unease, *Social Indicators Research*, 124(1): 85-110.

Elchardus & Smits, 2007; Steenvoorden, 2009; Eckersley, 2013). Therefore, I expect a weak relationship between both societal unease and societal pessimism, and happiness, which would establish discriminant validity. Furthermore, in section 2.6, I theorized that societal unease and societal pessimism are conceptually different from anomia. However, these are similar concepts, and I therefore expect them to be related. Given that Keyes (1998) found a moderate correlation (.50) between anomia and societal actualization (which can be described as the opposite of societal pessimism, see section 2.2), societal unease and societal pessimism also should be moderately related to anomia.

Fourth, as another check of measurement validity, I examine whether there is empirical support for the operationalization of societal unease in subgroups of society. To this end, I focus on educational groups. Education has a considerable effect on a wide range of attitudes (e.g. Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Catterberg & Moreno, 2006; Dekker & Van der Meer, 2009); moreover, some even argue that educational level has become a central cleavage in Western countries (Stubager, 2010; Bovens & Wille, 2011). Therefore, to compose the same scale of societal unease with a good fit in different educational groups, can be seen as a least likely case.

Finally, I seek to answer the question of who is uneasy about society by examining demographic, attitudinal and behavioral characteristics of societally uneasy citizens. To this end, I present regression analyses to reveal which characteristics are related to societal unease.

Below, I start by describing the data and operationalizations of the concepts of Chapter 2, after which I discuss the method used. The first result section, Results I, presents the analyses that examine the measurement validity of societal unease and societal pessimism. Results II shows the characteristics that relate to societal unease, followed by a concluding section.

3.2 Data and operationalizations

Data

To test all of the concepts and their interrelations, along with their relations to other established concepts, I need a very rich data set. All international surveys tend to focus on specific themes, and as far as I know, none of them include attitudes related to all aspects of social unease – let alone the other concepts – in a satisfactory manner. Therefore, several items were developed and added to the Citizens' Outlooks Barometer (COB), a Dutch survey covering a wide range of social and political attitudes. In addition, items on all other concepts of relevance here are included in this survey, which has been conducted on a quarterly basis in the Netherlands since 2008 among

a sample of a representative panel generated by random-digit dialing. Respondents do not receive payment for filling in the questionnaire nor for being on the panel. Each quarter, a random sample of panel members is telephoned and invited to participate, resulting in approximately 1,000 respondents for each survey (people who stay in the panel can be approached again only after two years). Potential respondents can choose between an Internet and a postal questionnaire. The new questions were added to the January 2012 COB survey, which was completed by 1,137 respondents.

Operationalizations

The operationalizations of the five elements of societal unease and all of the other central concepts are shown in Table 3.1. For societal unease, five of the eight items are new and developed specifically for its measurement. *Distrust in human capability*, which is conceptualized as declining confidence in the human ability to improve our conditions, is measured with two items: one on the human ability to solve problems and one on the risks of technological innovation. *Loss of ideology*, which refers to the loss of a perspective on a world significantly better than the current one and a way to reach that different world, is operationalized as an absence of vision among political parties. *Decline of political power*, or the national government's diminishing ability to change things for the better, is measured by asking whether Dutch politicians have handed over too much power to Europe and whether Dutch politicians have leverage in matters important to citizens. *Decline of community*, or the perceived decline of cohesion and shared norms and values within the nation, is measured using two existing items. One item measures solidarity, namely, to what extent it is 'every man for himself'. A second indicator reflects the perception of interpersonal respect. *Increasing socioeconomic vulnerability*, the instability of people's socioeconomic position, is operationalized with one existing item about attention to people who are less affluent. This is mainly a measure of the consequential idea that society should protect those in a weak socioeconomic position, instead of an increasing likelihood of people ending up in that position. However, this element relates to one of the central reasons for increasing vulnerability, namely, the retrenchment of the welfare state. Therefore, it is considered a useful operationalization.

From the operationalization of the five elements of societal unease follows that only three are measured with two items, whereas two are measured with one item. The correlations of these sets of items on distrust in human capability, decline of political power and decline of community, are .134, .595 and .586, respectively.² This means that

2 All of the correlations mentioned in this section are polychoric correlations, because the items are scaled from 1 to 3.

the two items on distrust in human capability do not measure one concept and will therefore be included in the analyses as separate items. The other correlations between the eight items on societal unease range from .179 (item 2 and 8) to .385 (item 6 and 8).

Societal pessimism is operationalized with three items: one about the direction in which the country is heading, one about the future of the world, and one about whether for most people, life is getting worse instead of better. The first two items are more general in nature, whereas the third primarily relates to the fifth item of societal unease: the socioeconomic vulnerability of the general population. The last item is very similar to measures used by scholars who study concepts which I labeled societal optimism in Chapter 2 (section 2.3). Uslaner measures (a lack of) optimism with an item 'the lot of the average person is getting worse' (Uslaner, 2002; Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Keyes measures social actualization with items such as 'the world is becoming a better place for everyone' (Keyes, 1998; Keyes & Shapiro, 2004). The correlations between these items are .664 (items 9 and 10), .514 (items 9 and 11), and .544 (items 10 and 11).

Resentment is measured with items about not getting from the government what you deserve and thinking that other groups get more than they should at your expense (new item) ($r=.530$). *Insecurity of status* is constituted by the extent to which people feel they should be careful to be respected (new item) and the perception of not having a grip on one's own future ($r=.528$). *Happiness* is measured with an item on how happy people consider themselves. *Anomia* is operationalized with an item about how insecure people are about what is right and what is wrong.

All indicators used are Likert-scale statements with which respondents can agree on a scale from 1 (fully disagree) to 5 (fully agree). Although the option 'I don't know' is available, such answers are treated as missing values. In this chapter, all of the analyses are performed with listwise deletion. Except for happiness and anomia and item 11, all of the items have been coded in the same direction and on a 1-3 scale, where 1 reflects a low and 3 reflects a high level of discontent or concern.³ There are many other variables considered in the explorative analyses, of which the exact item wordings and scales can be found in Table A1 of Appendix A. Items are recoded to 1-3 as described above when examining the fit of alternative attitudes in the societal unease scale in Table 3.4. All of the items in the regression analyses are recoded in dummy variables (Table 3.10).

3 This scale reduction is important because the 1 category represents only a very small percentage of the respondents in most items and cannot be analyzed as such. Merging categories 1 and 2 is therefore necessary. To secure symmetry, categories 4 and 5 are also merged.

Table 3.1 Variables in the analyses by concept^a

Concept	Operationalization (with variable no.)	Missing	Mean	SD
Societal unease				
Distrust in human capability	1 As a society we are improving our ability to solve big problems (rev.)	69	2.16	0.72
	2 The risks of technological innovation are underestimated	87	2.28	0.76
Loss of ideology	3 Dutch politics lacks a vision of where the country should be heading	62	2.47	0.70
Decline of political power	4 Dutch politicians have given too much power to Europe	86	2.29	0.77
	5 Dutch politicians have a decreasing say in matters important to citizens	114	2.11	0.79
Decline of community	6 The respect with which people in our country treat each other is decreasing	14	2.67	0.60
	7 The 'every man for himself' mentality is growing	22	2.77	0.52
Increased socioeconomic vulnerability	8 In our country there is not enough attention to people who are less affluent	23	2.39	0.79
Societal pessimism	9 Considering the state of things, it is difficult to be hopeful about the future of the world	27	2.31	0.79
	10 For most people in the Netherlands, life is getting worse rather than better	24	2.59	0.67
	11 Do you consider the Netherlands to be heading in the wrong or in the right direction? (rev.) ^b	138	2.95	0.68
Resentment	12 The government does not do enough for people like me	39	2.12	0.76
	13 I feel some groups are favored at the expense of people like me	47	1.99	0.85
Insecurity of status	14 I feel I have little grip on my own future	19	1.90	0.84
	15 I feel I have to be careful to receive the respect I deserve	22	1.61	0.77
Anomia	17 There are so many opinions on right and wrong that sometimes one does not know where one stands ^c	44	2.37	0.77
Happiness	16 To what extent do you consider yourself a happy person? ^c	13	3.82	0.71

Source: Citizens' Outlooks Barometer (COB) 2012-1.

a Items are recoded to 1-3 scale

b This item is measured on a 1-4 scale from clearly the wrong direction to clearly the right direction, without a middle position. Therefore, this item is used with its original scale.

c Item is measured on a 1-5 scale

3.3 Method and measurement model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) can be used to examine whether the selected indicators measure a single latent concept, which is a suitable method to examine the presence of societal unease. It is also the best method to establish whether the theoretical model holds empirically, because one can prescribe items to load on certain factors and not on others. The analyses are performed using Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). Unlike principal component analysis (PCA) and EFA (exploratory factor analysis), with CFA, the indicators do not necessarily load on all indicators, resulting in more parsimonious and deductive modeling (Brown, 2006). Furthermore, with CFA, one can distinguish between first- and second-order dimensions. Alternative types of analysis are unsuitable for various reasons. Reliability analysis is sensitive to the number of items included, and both reliability analysis and PCA assume items are parallel, i.e., that they have the same frequency distribution and variances (Van Schuur 2003), which is not the case here. Mokken analysis is unsuitable because it assumes a theoretical hierarchy between the attitudes. The CFA analyses are performed with the WLSMV estimator, which is developed for CFA with categorical data and a special feature of Mplus. All of the presented models (Figure 3.1 to Figure 3.3 and Table 3.5) are overidentified and assume that measurement errors are unrelated. In the presentation, standardized loadings are shown (when unstandardized loadings are significant at $p < 0.001$).

Because the modeling of societal unease is more complex than the other models, I take some room here to describe the procedure followed. A latent factor underlying the items on the five elements of societal unease can take shape in two ways empirically. If the 8 items that correspond to the five elements of societal unease all load on a single factor, this would indicate that to some extent, all of the items measure the same concept. If instead, the items of the five elements relate to five different factors, but these factors load on a single factor, societal unease is a latent factor shared by the five elements. In the former scenario, there would be a first-order model of societal unease, in the second scenario, there would be a second-order model. These two scenarios result in the two possible measurement models shown in Figure 3.1a and 3.1b.

To measure societal unease as a second-order factor, I would ideally measure all of the elements of societal unease as factors (latent concepts) and measure societal unease as a second-order factor underlying them. This turns out to be possible for only two elements, decline of political power and decline of community, for which we have two items each with sufficiently high correlations as discussed above. Because the correlation between the two items on distrust in human capability is only .134, these

items are included in the model as two single indicators (Figure 3.1b). The elements that are measured with only one item are not modeled as latent concepts, which leaves us with two elements of societal unease measured as latents. This means that the resulting measurement model is a partly second-order model.

Figure 3.1a 1st order measurement model of societal unease

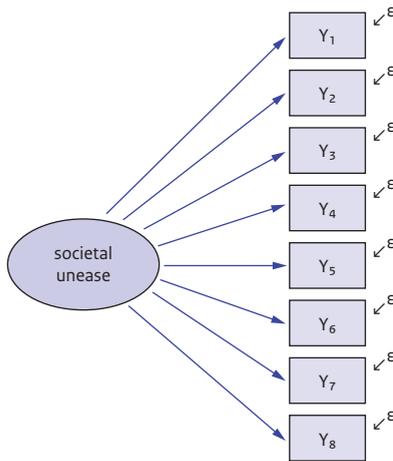
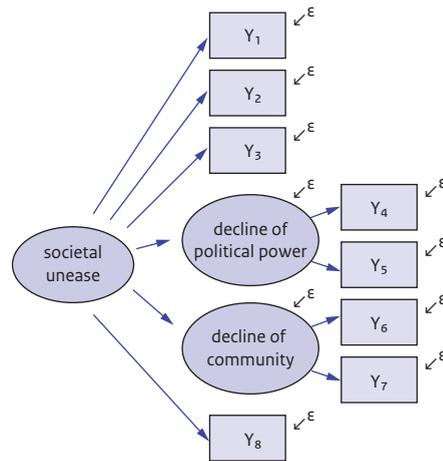


Figure 3.1b 2nd order measurement model of societal unease



3.4 Results I

Testing the theoretical model of societal unease

Figure 3.2 presents the results of the first-order CFA model. The fit of a CFA model is primarily examined by the χ^2 -test, which should not achieve significance when the data closely fit the model. However, because this is a very strict test, the literature advises that one first considers goodness-of-fit indices such as the RMSEA, CFI and TLI, which all weight both model fit and parsimony in their own way. Generally, a RMSEA of < 0.05 is regarded a good fit and < 0.08 as a mediocre fit, whereas both the CFI and TLI should reach 0.95 (Brown, 2006; Kline, 2010; Byrne, 2012). If we look at Figure 3.2, we see that the first-order model of societal unease shows a poor fit, because the RMSEA is 0.101 and the CFI and TLI are far below the critical 0.95. It can be concluded that the first-order model of societal unease does not fit the data and indicates that there is no first-order factor of societal unease.

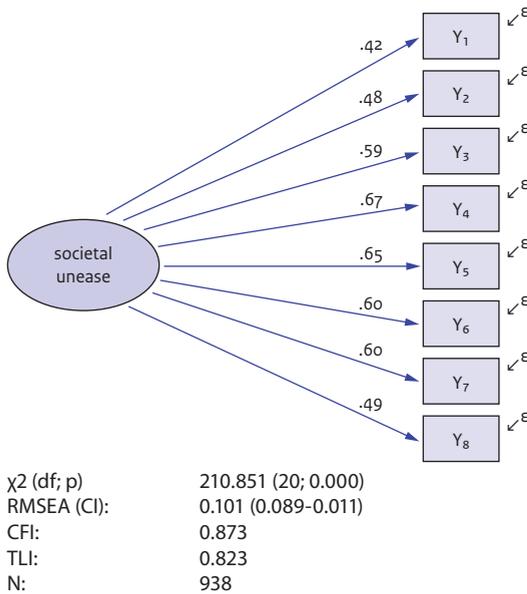
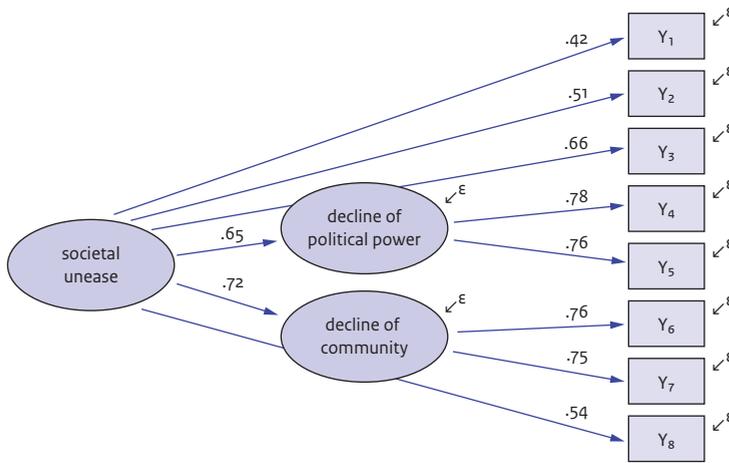
Figure 3.2 First-order CFA model of societal unease

Figure 3.3 presents the results of the second-order CFA, which performs well in contrast to the first-order model. The RMSEA is below 0.05 and the CFI and TLI also pass the cutoff value of 0.95.⁴ Both factors, i.e., decline of political power and decline of community, along with indicators 1, 2, 3 and 8, prove to have reasonable loadings that range from .45 to .72. Therefore, the second-order model supports the conceptualization of societal unease. We can say that attitudes on all five elements that I proposed in Chapter 2 to constitute societal unease indeed load on a single factor, which can be labeled societal unease. The only loading below 0.5 belongs to item 1 (society's ability to solve problems). Without this item, the model further improves to an RMSEA of 0.033 and a CFI and TLI of 0.991 and 0.984, respectively. However, because omitting item 1 means a violation of the theoretical model, and considering that the second-order model of Figure 3.3 works well, retaining the item is preferable.

4 There are two modification indices above 10, namely 10.5 and 11.4, but because they are both theoretically meaningless and low (Byrne, 2012: 87), this also indicates a good model.

Figure 3.3 Second-order CFA model of societal unease

χ^2 (df; p)	56.847 (18; 0.000)
RMSEA (CI):	0.048 (0.034-0.062)
CFI:	0.974
TLI:	0.960
N:	938

I assume societal unease to be a latent attitude about five fundamental aspects of society, which all share a sense of unmanageable deterioration and collective powerlessness. Furthermore, I argue that other, more concrete attitudes do not fit into this concept. This assumption should be rejected if indicators about other public issues fit into the scale of societal unease. Therefore, the second-order model (from Figure 3.2) has been extended with various items consecutively, covering a diverse range of attitudes: anomia, immigration, sentences, government responsibilities, income differences, EU membership and the character of the country. The results are presented in Table 3.2. The RMSEA increases compared to the one in Figure 3.3 (0.048) to a minimum 0.069 and a maximum of 0.096. This means that all of the indicators weaken the model of societal unease from a good fit (below 0.05) to a weak (0.05 - 0.08) or a bad fit (>0.08). This strengthens the conceptualization of societal unease because it proves not to be a general view about society, incorporating all aspects of society, but a latent attitude consisting of the five theorized aspects of society.

Table 3.2 Possible model extensions of societal unease^a

Indicator	RSMEA
There are so many opinions on right and wrong that sometimes one does not know where one stands (anomia)	0.069
People in our country should show more responsibility and rely less on social security	0.070
The difference between the poor and the rich in the Netherlands has become too big	0.075 ^b
Sentences in the Netherlands are generally too lenient	0.079
The Netherlands would be a more appealing country if it had fewer immigrants	0.087
The replacement of the gulden by the euro is a bad thing	0.088
The Netherlands is losing too much of its character through immigration and open borders	0.094
Dutch membership in the EU is a good thing (rev.)	0.096

a All items have the same original scale (1-5) as the societal unease items and are rescaled here to 1-3.

b Including this item in the model in a factor with item 8 lowers the RMSEA to 0.050, i.e., a well-functioning model. However, the meaning of the latent increasing socioeconomic vulnerability would change to growing increasing socioeconomic inequality, and this operationalization does not fit the conceptual model.

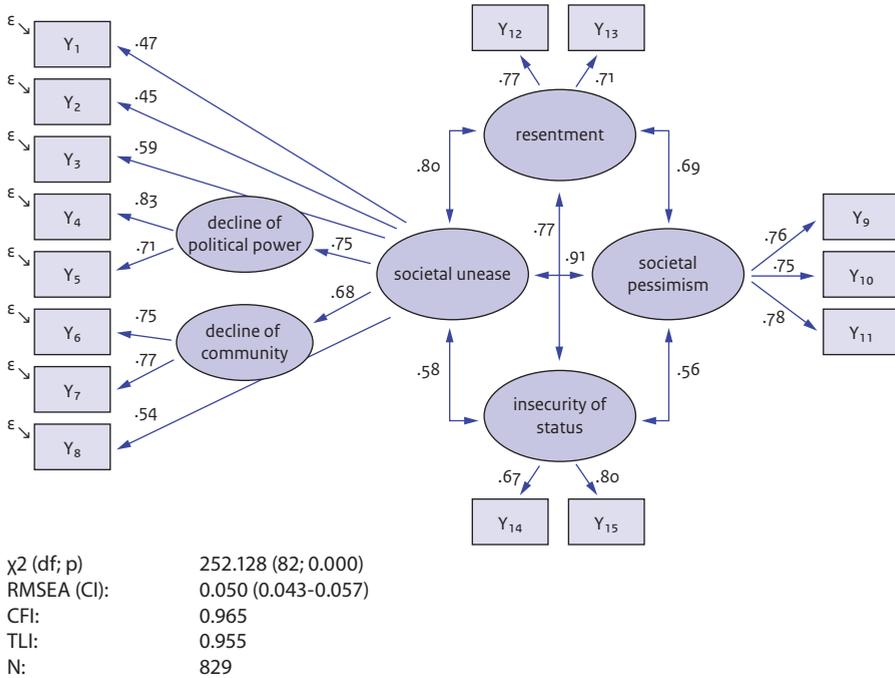
Model fit theoretical model

Chapter 2 also proposes societal pessimism and argues that resentment and insecurity of status are attitudes about one's personal situation that result from the same social issues as societal unease and social pessimism. Thus, I argue that these four are related but different concepts. To conduct a CFA analysis, one needs at least 4 items to reach an overidentified model, which is needed to examine model fit. Because I only have three (societal pessimism) or two items (resentment and insecurity of status), I cannot test the empirical validity of these concepts as I did for societal unease. Instead, I tested CFA models with resentment, insecurity of status and societal pessimism in sets of 2. In all variants, this yields well-working models, with RSMEAs of 0.027 (insecurity of status and societal pessimism), 0.045 (insecurity of status and resentment) and 0.050 (resentment and societal pessimism). As mentioned above, the items of these three factors also correlate with $r > .5$, which supports the operationalization of these concepts.

To assess the theoretical model of Chapter 2, societal unease, societal pessimism, resentment and insecurity of status are all included in a CFA model, which is shown in Figure 3.4. It shows good fit, with an RMSEA of 0.050 and a CFI and TLI above 0.95. This validates the theoretical model and means that similar sentiments can be separated in the four concepts as suggested. There are fourteen modification indices (M.I.'s) above 10 (ranging from 10.122 to 32.782) that present alternative BY statements, i.e., not modeled factor loadings. This is not surprising because these are all theoretically

related concepts and therefore, it can be expected that operationalizations of one factor have an association with another factor. Many of these M.I.'s involve items of societal unease which also relate to societal pessimism and vice versa.

Figure 3.4 CFA of theoretical model



In addition to the model fit, Figure 3.4 shows the correlations between factors. First, the correlation between societal unease and societal pessimism is very high ($r=.91$). I presented them in Chapter 2 as a Western and a universal conceptualization of the concern about society. One would expect two variants of the same phenomenon to be closely related, which indeed is supported by this correlation. It can be concluded that to a very large extent, these two factors measure the same phenomenon. This validates both concepts.

Table 3.3 Correlations between societal unease and operationalizations of societal pessimism (chapters)

Societal pessimism	<i>r</i>
1) 3 items (3): Hard to be hopeful about the future of the world For most people life is getting worse Society heading in right or wrong direction	.91
2) 2 items (7,8): Hard to be hopeful about the future of the world For most people life is getting worse	.79
3) 1 item (5,6): Society is heading in right or wrong direction	.77
4) 2 items (-) Hard to be hopeful about the future of the world Society heading in right or wrong direction	.99

Because subsequent chapters use various operationalizations of societal pessimism, it is useful to examine how these various operationalizations differ from one another. Table 3.3 shows the correlation between societal unease and societal pessimism for various operationalizations of the latter. The chapters that use these operationalizations are placed in brackets. Each operationalization of societal pessimism correlates strongly with societal unease. Operationalization no. 1 (with three items) correlates with .91, as we already know from Figure 3.3. If 2 items are used, ‘hard to be hopeful about the future of the world’ and ‘for most people life is getting worse’, the correlation is lower but still high, at .79. Taking only one item, on the direction the country is heading, still leaves us with a correlation of .78. Finally, operationalization no. 4, with ‘hard to be hopeful about the future of the world’ and ‘wrong direction’, yields a stunning correlation with societal unease of .99. This means that leaving out the item ‘for most people life is getting worse’ increases the correlation, which is not surprising because that item is clearly socioeconomically driven and therefore is less broad than the other two. Apparently, societal pessimism measured as such is empirically the *same* as societal unease. This is remarkable, because societal unease is a multifaceted attitude, measured with eight quite distinct items, whereas the operationalization of societal pessimism consists of two very general items about the direction of society and the world. This indicates that the five aspects that constitute societal unease also constitute societal pessimism measured as a broad concern about society, and that there are no other important aspects of society that contribute to societal pessimism beyond those five, at least, in the Netherlands in January 2012. It is safe to conclude that notwithstanding the differences between these operationalizations of societal pessimism, they are all

(very) highly correlated to societal unease. This justifies the use of these different operationalizations of societal pessimism as good proxies for the same phenomenon.

Moving to the other correlations in Figure 3.4, insecurity of status shows a high (.58) and resentment a very high (.80) correlation with societal unease. This pattern also holds for societal pessimism, although the gap between insecurity of status (.56) and resentment (.69) is smaller here. This latter finding indicates that the societal unease scale is more distinctive than the societal pessimism one, which is not surprising, because the former is measured with more items. The high correlations between the four concepts, combined with the good model fit, underline the theoretical assumptions of Chapter 2. The manner in which one views society is highly related to resentment and insecurity of status, which reflect evaluations of one's own position in society. However, it is theoretically useful and empirically valid to treat these concepts separately.

Correlations with happiness and anomia

To examine the relationship of societal unease and societal pessimism with happiness and anomia, I calculated bivariate correlations, as shown in Table 3.4. For reasons of completeness, insecurity of status and resentment are included. The correlations show small deviances from those in Figure 3.4 because of differences in N. The correlation between happiness and societal unease is $-.23$, and the correlation between societal pessimism and happiness is similar at $-.33$. This weak and negative correlation is in line with earlier studies. Indeed, concern about society is not strongly related to happiness. This underlines the fact that private and public contentment are two distinct phenomena.

Table 3.4 Correlations between concepts^a

	societal unease	societal pessimism	insecurity of status	resentment	happiness
societal pessimism	.90				
insecurity of status	.58	.58			
resentment	.80	.68	.72		
happiness	-.23	-.31	-.47	-.29	
anomia	.54	.41	.37	.41	-.11

a Polychoric correlations with happiness and anomia

Anomia shows a correlation of .54 and .41 with societal unease and societal pessimism respectively, which is both considerable and similar to the finding of Keyes (1998) who looked at social actualization. This implies that societal unease and anomia share

a common ground, people who are uneasy about society are also more likely to be anomic. However, this finding also shows a clear empirical difference between those two concepts, which underlines the theoretical assumptions made.

Happiness correlates highest with insecurity of status, namely, $-.47$. This seems logical because the latter seems the closest to personal well-being. Interestingly, resentment shows only weak correlation with happiness ($.29$), which underlines that resentment is quite publicly oriented and should not be equalized to personality or personal well-being. Anomia is related to resentment and insecurity of status, with $r = .41$ and $r = .37$. Interestingly, happiness and anomia have the lowest correlation of all: $-.11$. This is striking, because anomia conceptually refers to the individual mental state, and I would have expected anomia and happiness to show more of an association.

Societal unease and societal pessimism in separate educational groups

To further validate the conceptualization of societal unease, I investigate whether the factor of societal unease also exists among subgroups in society, namely, educational groups (as mentioned above, because societal pessimism is operationalized with only 3 items, model fit can neither be measured nor compared between groups). To this end, the second-order CFA model of Figure 3.3 is performed for low-, medium- and high-educated groups separately. If the models per group show similar model fit and loading patterns, this indicates that the same scale of societal unease can be found in the attitudes of the three educational groups. This is the first step in examining invariance of measurement models (Brown 2006; Byrne 2011).

From Table 3.5 it follows that although there is model fit in all groups, it ranges from weak among the low educated to high among the medium and high educated. The RMSEA is similar for the high (0.041) and the medium educated (0.049), but is considerably lower in the low-educated group (0.075). The CFI and TLI do not cross the cut off value of 0.95 in the low-educated group, whereas they do in the other two groups. Moreover, the χ^2 -test is not significant in the high-educated group (which only rarely happens in CFA and indicates a very good model fit), and its p-value is relatively high ($p = 0.0255$) in the medium-educated group. However, the model of the low-educated group shows a χ^2 -test significant at $p < 0.0001$. All of these results indicate that the model of societal unease fits the attitudes of the medium and high educated better than those of the low educated; the commonality between the five aspects of societal unease is present to a larger extent among the higher educated.

However, two aspects of the models contradict this conclusion. First, the factor loadings are not lower in the low-educated group, in many cases, they are even a bit higher. Generally, higher factor loadings are accompanied by better fit indices. An explanation for this contradictory finding can be that the variances of the items used are considerably smaller in the low-educated group. Small variances leave less

possibility for modeling the patterns of the variances, which is what CFA does. Second, the correlations between items are higher among the low educated. There are warnings in the literature that all things being equal, higher correlations give higher power to reject a model (Sarlis, Satorra, & Van der Veld, William M., 2009). Overall, definitive conclusions about differences in model fit cannot be drawn. The model of societal unease shows good fit among the medium and high educated. For the low educated this seems less likely to be the case, but the results are ambiguous.

Table 3.5 CFA model of societal unease for educational groups

	Educational level		
	low	medium	high
χ^2 (df)	51.478 (18)	31.453 (18)	27.065 (18)
P	0.0000	0.0255	0.0778
RMSEA	0.075	0.049	0.041
CI RMSEA	0.051-0.100	0.017-0.078	0.000-0.071
CFI	0.935	0.974	0.971
TLI	0.899	0.959	0.955
Loadings ^b			
Decline of political power			
4 (Power to EU)	0.808	0.790	0.618
5 (No power over important matters)	0.684	0.708	0.902
Decline of community			
6 (Decreasing respect)	0.828	0.715	0.705
7 (Every man for himself)	0.731	0.826	0.720
Societal unease			
1 (Society can solve problems)	0.408	0.522	0.514
2 (Risks of technology)	0.523	0.584	0.345
3 (Vision of political parties)	0.589	0.740	0.679
Decline of political power	0.907	0.580	0.691
Decline of community	0.734	0.731	0.407
8 (Support for disadvantaged)	0.593	0.463	0.487
N	330	306	302

If we look at the factor loadings, they are in all groups at least .3 (which is seen as the minimum for factor loadings (Kline, 2010; Liu, Chua, & Stahl, 2010)) and therefore, all of the items fit into a scale of societal unease in all groups, which means that the same items form a (partly) second-order factor of societal unease in all groups. However,

clear differences do appear when we compare the factor-loadings patterns between the groups. The indicator of political power to the EU (item 4) is more important than the other indicator of the decline of political power (indicator 5 on the extent to which politicians have a say in important matters) among the low educated, whereas in the high-educated group it is the other way around. Indicator 1 (society's ability to solve problems) is less important for the scale of societal unease in the low-educated group (.408) than in the other two groups, whereas the opposite is true for indicator 2 (risks of technological innovations are underestimated), which loads relatively low in the high-educated group. These differences in factor loading patterns mean that the factor of societal unease differs between educational groups in terms of which aspects have the most influence. This means that the factor of societal unease has a different meaning across groups.

The differences in model fit, factor loading size and patterns among educational groups contraindicate further invariance evaluation (Brown 2006).⁵ However, a clear conclusion about whether societal unease can be validated among educational groups cannot easily be drawn, because the findings leave an ambiguous picture. The differences in the factor loading patterns show a difference in the meaning of the factor across groups. However, if we consider the large differences among educational groups in social attitudes, it is remarkable not only that the scale works in all groups, albeit with some ambiguous model fit results in the low-educated group, but also that all of the items have reasonable loadings. Another question is whether the level of societal unease is different across educational groups, and other types of groups, for that matter. It is to this question that I now turn.

3.5 Results II

Having established a scale of societal unease enables me to explore which citizens are most likely to be societally uneasy. With OLS regression analyses on the factor of societal unease (of Figure 3.2), in Table 3.6 I investigate which characteristics describe societally uneasy citizens. These regressions are solely explorative and do not make any causal assumptions because obviously many characteristics, such as attitudes, media usage, and voting, cannot be seen as (exogenous) causes of societal unease. To simplify

5 To be sure, configural invariance was tested by comparing a model with all parameters freely estimated and a model with factor loadings constraint equal. This test is performed with freely estimated thresholds across groups and scale and factor means constraint to 1 respectively 0, as demanded for testing configural invariance with ordinal data. The difference test between the model with no constraints and the model with loadings assumed to be equal shows a χ^2 difference of 28.105 (df=12), significant at 0.01, which proves that factor loadings are significantly different across groups.

comparisons between independent variables, all of the variables are dichotomized, and only significant coefficients are presented. Appendix Table A1 shows the item wordings and their original scales.

Model 1 includes the standard demographic characteristics: educational level, gender, age and income level. It shows that educational level has a negative effect on societal unease: the low educated are significantly more likely, and the higher education are less likely, than the medium group to be uneasy. Young people (aged 18-34) are less likely to be uneasy than older groups and people with a low income level have a higher chance on uneasiness about society, while the opposite goes for the high income group. There is no significant difference between men and women. In model 2, three items on personal situation are included, namely, satisfaction with financial situation, health, and daily activity, along with three items on Table 3.6: Multiple OLS regression analyses of societal unease with demographic, attitudinal and behavioral characteristics^a psychological well-being (happiness, self-esteem and external locus of control). Only satisfaction with financial situation and an external locus of control, i.e., thinking you have little control over what happens to you, are significant, with similar coefficient sizes (-0.34 and 0.29). Model 3 shows that those who volunteer are significantly less likely to be societally uneasy, whereas supporting people outside your household is not related to societal unease. Model 4 focuses on media usage and shows that whereas Internet use is not related to societal unease, reading tabloids is positively and a quality newspaper is negatively related to being uneasy about society.

Model 5 includes insecurity of status, resentment, anomia, and seven items on policy issues. The coefficients of resentment and differences between poor and rich being too large are twice the size of the other attitudes (on welfare, the euro, the character of the country and the EU). Insecurity of status is not significant when controlling for the other variables. Further analysis (not presented) shows that the effect of insecurity of status already fails to reach significance when it is modeled with resentment only. Apparently, all of the shared variance of insecurity of status and societal unease overlaps with resentment. The other attitudes in model 5 are all significant except for the attitudes on immigrants and the one on sentences. Further analyses show that these two attitudes are significant and of equal size when resentment, the introduction of the euro or the changing character of the country are omitted from the regression. Theoretically, it is likely that mediation is taking place between resentment and attitudes of nostalgia (longing back to pre-euro and pre immigration times, when 'our country was still our country'), and attitudes on immigration and sentences. Chapter 6, which studies the effect of societal pessimism on Populist Radical Right voting, further disentangles this mediation.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8		
	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)	
Social attitudes																	
insecurity of status																	
resentment									0.42	(.12)					0.53	(.14)	
anomia									0.19	(.05)					0.18	(.05)	
people should rely less on welfare									-0.14	(.04)							
difference between rich and poor									0.39	(.06)					0.34	(.07)	
sentences too lenient																	
less immigrants would be appealing																	
introducing the euro a bad thing									0.26	(.06)					0.22	(.06)	
country is losing its character									0.22	(.06)					0.27	(.06)	
membership EU good thing									-0.21	(.05)					-0.14	(.06)	
Political and economic attitudes																	
satisfaction with national economy															-0.13	(.06)	
trust in parliament															-0.25	(.06)	
politics too complicated for me																	
people like me have no influence																	
Vote intention																	
SP (ref= vote PvdA)															0.17	(.09)	
D66/GL															-0.21	(.09)	
CU/SGP																	
CDA															-0.45	(.12)	
VVD															-0.30	(.09)	
PVV															0.28	(.11)	
don't know																	
not vote																	
adjusted R ² (N)			0.14 (938)		0.27 (907)		0.15 (938)		0.17 (902)		0.67 (852)		0.46 (908)		0.25 (938)		0.72 (853)

a All presented unstandardized regression coefficients are significant at minimal $p < 0.05$ (two sided), ns means 'not significant'.

b Telegraaf

c NRC Handelsblad, de Volkskrant, Trouw

Model 6 shows a significant relationship between societal unease and both political trust and external political efficacy (no influence on politics), whereas internal political efficacy (politics too complicated to understand) is not significant. Satisfaction with the national economy is also significantly related to societal unease. In model 7, groups of voters are included, with the PvdA voters as a reference category because they are closest to the mean score of all voters. SP and PVV voters are significantly more likely to be uneasy, whereas the opposite is true for CDA, D66/GL and VVD voters. Apparently, societal unease does not fit into the political left-right dimension, with a higher likelihood of unease on both the far left and the far right of the political spectrum. This is consistent with the political mobilization axis of Azmanova (2011), who posits risks-oriented, Radical voters, in opposition to the opportunity-oriented voters of Liberal and Green parties. I elaborate on this pattern in Chapter 6.

In model 8, including all significant variables of models 1 to 7, many indicators remain significant, such as not having control over one's life, most social attitudes, of which resentment and differences between rich and poor have the largest effects, showing low confidence in the economy and trust in parliament, and a low level of external political efficacy, along with voting CDA and VDD.

3.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I tested the empirical validity of the theoretical propositions of Chapter 2. The results support these propositions and point to many interesting findings that ask for further inquiry.

First, the conceptual model of societal unease is supported by CFA analyses. As proposed in Chapter 2, concerns about five aspects of society (distrust of human capability, loss of ideology, decline of political power, decline of community, and increasing socioeconomic vulnerability) share a commonality that we can label societal unease. Furthermore, societal unease is not an umbrella concept that covers all societal concerns. Consecutive analyses with a broad range of items show that no social attitudes except for those on the five elements theorized in Chapter 2 fit into the societal unease factor.

Second, societal unease is indeed the embodiment of societal pessimism, at least in the Netherlands in 2012. There is a high correlation of .91, which further increases to .99 if the two most general items are used instead of three for societal pessimism (dropping the socioeconomic item). This means that societal unease and societal pessimism are empirically the same, which validates both measures: the societal pessimism scale measures pessimistic concerns about society and not a personal pessimism (glass half

empty-sentiments), and the factor of societal unease (i.e., the latent concern behind the five elements proposed) measures a general concern about the state of society, or as I typified in Chapter 2, a concern about unmanageable deterioration of society. The various operationalizations of societal pessimism all correlate highly with societal unease, which justifies the use of these different measures later in this book to measure the concern about society.

The theoretical model of Chapter 2 is also supported by the data, which confirms that we can indeed distinguish the sociotropic and egotropic sentiments that relate to the same problematic societal processes. The relationship of societal unease and societal pessimism with both anomia and happiness is in line with what could be expected based on previous studies (Keyes, 1998; Eckersley, 2000; Elchardus & Smits, 2002; Elchardus & Smits, 2007; Steenvoorden, 2009; Eckersley, 2013). This also validates the measurements of societal unease and societal pessimism. The low correlation with happiness underlines that personal well-being and public concern are two distinct phenomena. A further validation is sought through the separate CFA's of societal unease for educational groups. This yields ambiguous results, which does not confirm that the same scale of societal unease exists in the attitudes of the educated groups; however, the results require more research before this proposition is rejected altogether.

There are several points that should be made about the operationalizations and external validity of the analyses in this chapter. First, societal unease is operationalized with only eight items. In future research, it would be a substantial improvement to test whether a similar scale exists using more items and a full second-order model. Moreover, future research is needed to test whether this chapter's findings can be generalized to other contemporary developed liberal democracies, as I assume to be the case. In addition, the relationship between societal unease and societal pessimism should be investigated in other countries and other points in time to determine whether these results can be repeated.

With the developed scale of societal unease, I explored who are uneasy about society. The results show that uneasiness increases with age and decreases with educational level and income. Concern about one's financial situation relates to societal unease, as does an external locus of control. Many social and political attitudes are related to societal unease, most importantly, resentment and thinking that the differences between poor and rich are too large. However, attitudes on welfare, the EU, the euro and the country's character are also significant, along with trust in the national parliament, external political efficacy and satisfaction with the national economy. Several types of behavior are related to societal unease: people who volunteer are significantly less likely to be uneasy, as are those who read quality newspapers and those who vote VDD, GL/D66 or

CDA. Reading a tabloid newspaper and voting SP or PVV increase societal unease. In later chapters of this book, some of these results are explored further. The influence of societal pessimism on Populist Radical Right voting is examined in Chapter 6. Societal unease and other social attitudes are used to differentiate among groups of volunteers, namely, political and civic participants, in Chapter 7.

This chapter provides tests of the conceptualizations of Chapter 2 and shows that the proposed definitions of societal unease and societal pessimism are empirically valid and useful tools that relate to many demographic, social and political characteristics. However, such highly quantitative analyses do not offer insight into how societal unease and societal pessimism take shape in the reflections and expressions of citizens, neither whether they are salient, top-of-mind issues. For those purposes, I explore qualitative data in the next chapter.