Exploring the unexplained:

A study of political discontent among higher educated Dutch citizens

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Abstract:

While political discontent among lower-educated voters has been widely explored, the same cannot be said for higher educated citizens. This thesis aims to fill that research gap through the analysis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten higher educated citizens in the Netherlands. Hereby, the focus lies on right-wing voters due to their dominance in the Dutch political field and the growth of anti-establishment radical right parties.

Previous theories of political discontent have failed to paint a full picture of the phenomenon, because of a focus on lower-educated citizens. By looking at these explanations in a new light, and inductively exploring possible new explanations, novel findings are uncovered about discontent among higher educated citizens. Most generally, higher educated citizens experience their discontent largely through rational and ideological reasons. Once these become strong enough, they also express anti-establishment sentiments and feelings of cultural distance from politicians. This suggests that despite their high levels of representation in Dutch politics, some higher educated citizens still do not feel heard. This holds even more true for those with strong ideological discontent on cultural topics: these interviewees perceive, at least to a certain extent, a group conflict, not just in politics but society-wide.

Keywords: *anti-establishment, higher educated, political discontent, radical-right, right*

Across the Dutch population, political content has fallen in the last year (Ipsos, 2021). While negative feelings towards politics are often associated with extreme, radical, or anti-establishment parties, this trend is visible all over the political spectrum. For example, Kester (2022) writes that a relevant part of the ruling party VVD's electorate is distrusting towards prime minister Rutte, and a significant part of the party's voters is unhappy about the current coalition agreement. Similar attitudes are found among supporters of CDA, another ruling party, who express little satisfaction with party leader Hoekstra (Kester, 2022). The two parties have also come out as losers of the most recent municipal elections, having the biggest decrease in votes in comparison to years before ("CDA, VVD, SP en PVV", 2022). Considering that a substantial part of CDA and VVD voters is highly educated, and that CDA and VVD are both ruling parties, such outcomes suggest that political discontent is not limited to lower educated citizens or to (radical) anti-establishment voters (Ipsos-Nieuwsuur, 2021).

Political discontent among lower educated citizens is a well-researched topic (see Holmes & Manning, 2013; Margalit, 2012; Noordzij, De Koster & Van der Waal, 2021; Noordzij, Van der Waal & De Koster, 2019). The concept is flexibly defined, but can be summarised as dissatisfaction with politics in the broadest sense (Jennings, Stoker & Twyman, 2016; Kemmers et al., 2015; Noordzij, De Koster & Van der Waal, 2020; Torcal & Montero, 2006). Previously established explanations about discontent among the lower educated include arguments based on rational motivations, economic considerations, ideology, and cultural distance. Rational motivations for discontent arise when the voter perceives the government to perform poorly, while economic considerations are based on financial detriment. Moreover, ideological motivations for discontent emerge when voters strongly disagree with government policy. Lastly, cultural reasons for discontent refer to feelings of distance between the citizen and the politician. Based on these existent explanations, it would be logical to expect higher educated citizens to be politically contented, since the Netherlands is a well-functioning democracy where higher educated citizens are strongly represented and economically comfortable (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022; Schakel & Hakhverdian, 2018; Wille & Bovens, 2011). However, as illustrated above, this is not always the case.

These pre-established theories of political discontent have been formed based on the experiences of lower educated citizens, which makes the application to higher educated citizens limited in explanatory power (Holmes & Manning, 2013; Margalit, 2012; Noordzij et al., 2021; Noordzij et al., 2019). However, this does not mean that they are of no use. While the relevance of these theories is not clear-cut for higher educated voters, this study explores how they may nevertheless play a role, even when these ideas need to be re-interpreted. For example, while the rationalist approach assumes that higher educated citizens generally display less discontent in well-functioning democracies, having more knowledge of politics could also make one more critical of it when it is perceived to function somewhat poorly.

Alternatively, literature on anti-establishment sentiments hints towards a possible explanatory power of such ideas in shaping political discontent among social groups. Authors like Schmalz, Singe and Hasenohr (2021), as well as Jennings, Stoker and Twyman (2016), illustrate how the popularity of radical right parties can be explained through their positioning against established politics. Considering that Dutch far-right parties like FvD or JA21 have a relatively high educated voter base compared to parties like PVV, such anti-establishment sentiments are not limited to lower educated citizens: research by Schouten and Custers (2022) suggests that higher educated citizens, too, voice their discontent through voting for anti-establishment parties as a sign of opposition towards the political establishment (Ipsos-Nieuwsuur, 2021; Spierings, Lubbers & Sipma, 2021). Hereby, antagonism towards political or societal elites – or anti-establishment sentiments - are considered by Uschinski et al (2021) as vital in shaping political attitudes, entirely separately from left-right dimensions. Such works suggest a potential explanatory power of anti-establishment attitudes in understanding how citizens experience political discontent. They thereby provide a salient starting point for the topic of this thesis.

Using pre-established theories, as well a possible novel explanation based on anti-establishment sentiments, as an inspiration point from where new motivations and findings may emerge, this thesis is indispensably explorative in nature. With that in mind, this thesis asks: "How can political discontent among higher educated citizens be understood?". To effectively answer this research question, in-depth, semi-structured interviews are conducted to uncover how individuals experience political discontent. A lack of previous research on higher educated voters makes qualitative research a must, while a wish to understand voting behaviour makes it vital to speak *to* the voter, not just *about* them: understanding political changes in society starts with understanding the individual experiences behind them. To ensure the feasibility of the research, I will focus specifically on right-wing voters. Thereby, this research includes governing parties VVD (liberal) and CDA (Christian-democratic), as well as opposition parties JA21 (conservative), FvD (conservative nationalist), and BBB (agrarian conservative). By focussing on a broad, but defined group, it remains possible to uncover relevant patterns and outliers in research (Bryman, 2016). Hereby, the right is a highly relevant electorate to research because context-wise, the Netherlands knows a trend of right-wing voting among the general public: VVD has been in government for twelve years now, and the (culturally) far-right PVV has long been the second most popular party. Furthermore, the Dutch far-right has grown in recent years, with both more voters and more parties appearing (Sterkenburg, 2021). Though discontent is thus most dominantly visible among radical-right and anti-establishment parties, this does not mean that establishment voters are by definition contented voters, as shown by authors such as Kester (2022) (Spierings et al., 2021). This means that it is relevant to include both establishment party voters and radical-right[1], anti-establishment party voters in this research. Including supporters of different types of parties makes it possible to be sensitive towards

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[1] Given Mudde's (2016) definition of the radical right as a combination of nativism and authoritarianism, this research considers PVV, JA21, FvD and BBB as radical right parties.

eventual differences and similarities in the experience of political discontent among citizens with different political and ideological viewpoints.

The academic relevance of this thesis is strong. First and foremost, political dissatisfaction among higher educated citizens is a widely under-researched topic. This thesis is relevant because it will provide a useful starting point in bridging that research gap, as well as an onset for further research. It does so by exploring the relevance of prior studies of political content, as well as inductively establishing whether novel approaches come to light. Hereby, its qualitative approach is necessary to uncover the role of previously established motivations and to explore these in new ways, while staying open to completely new mechanisms (Bryman, 2016). Hereby, the attention paid to the potential role of anti-establishment sentiments in shaping political discontent makes this research increasingly relevant, because it allows us to come to the root of political discontented sentiments for different types of voters within the right-wing electoral block. Considering that higher educated citizens are increasingly voting for anti-establishment parties, the role of such sentiments is relevant to regard when trying to understand political discontent among higher educated citizens (Jennings et al., 2016; Schmalz et al, 2021; Spierings et al., 2021).

The topic of this thesis is societally relevant because the political (far-)right has been growing across various countries in Europe (Mudde, 2016). This considerable and remarkable growth may be better understood when the underlying motivations are uncovered. Understanding political discontent among this group sheds more light on their political motivations and behaviour. With that, the Netherlands especially are a relevant case considering the voter's preference for right-wing parties (Ipsos-Nieuwsuur, 2021). Right-wing voters are, through their dominance in the Dutch political field and the group's growth in international contexts, both in a global and national context politically salient and therefore a useful topic to research. Furthermore, research about higher educated voters is relevant because this group is vastly overrepresented in the Dutch Second Chamber (Schakel & Hahkverdian, 2018; Wille & Bovens, 2011). Their influence on Dutch politics is thus strong, especially compared to lower educated citizens, which makes a thorough understanding of their underlying motifs salient in reflecting upon, understanding, and predicting political and societal trends. Moreover, higher educated citizens are generally assumed to be more politically content through their strong socio-economic position, substantial knowledge, and abundance of descriptive (and often also substantive) representation (Aaldering, 2017; Walter, 2010; Wille & Bovens, 2011). Seeing as recent trends and research suggest that this is not, in fact, always the case, discussing this group's political discontent can help uncover where (establishment) politics fall short for the higher educated citizen. Another way in which this thesis is societally relevant is the fact that research on political dissatisfaction in general is highly significant because dissatisfaction and distrust can sharply alter one's political actions, as shown by various authors already (Kemmers, 2017; Kemmers., Van der Waal & Aupers, 2016; Rooduijn. Van der Brug & De Lange, 2016). Research on discontented higher educated citizens with a right-wing orientation helps us understand what is shaping their political decisions. Uncovering political motivations, and thereby creating room for understanding, is vital in any well-functioning democracy, and is especially important

in cases where fundamental issues are at stake: far-right parties have significantly helped to shape contemporary political and societal debates on cultural issues like norms, values and rights (Mudde, 2016; Rydgren, 2007).

The following section of this thesis will first explore previous research on political discontent, thereby discussing the relevance of these approaches and exploring ways to understand the topic. Following this, the methodology will be explained, whereafter the results of the described analysis are discussed. The conclusion summarises the most relevant findings, whereby the discussion leaves room for limitations and suggestions for future research.

<u>Theoretical framework</u>

Previous work on political discontent has established four main motivations that inspire political discontent among the public: rational motivations, economic motivations, ideological motivations, and cultural motivations. As explained by Mishler & Rose (2001), rational motivations for discontent are based on evaluations of procedural fairness. If citizens have enough tools and knowledge for evaluation, they can identify government mismanagement, leading to a decrease in satisfaction (Hahkverdian & Mayne, 2012). This mechanism works differently based on the group or person in question, as well as the country of focus. Laurison (2015) explains that, for example, a lack of knowledge about the topic can make politics feel opaque and impossible to understand, leading to frustration (Laurison, 2015). Furthermore, while informed citizens are likely more discontented in countries with high levels of corruption, they are generally more satisfied in well-functioning democracies (Hahkverdian & Mayne, 2012).

Moving on, economic motivations for dissatisfaction refer to the idea that citizens feel frustrated with politics because of their unfavourable economic position. If they live in (relative) poverty or see a general decline in wealth, this can cause discouragement, especially when compared to other people or places (Margalit, 2012; McKay, 2018; Walter, 2010). Schmalz et al. (2021) illustrate how a decline in wealth and working conditions lead can lead to deep political distrust and malcontent. Another possible motivation for discontent is ideological: citizens may be dissatisfied with government policy. Stecker & Tausendpfund (2016) and Noordzij, de Koster & van der Waal (2021) illustrate how citizens have higher levels of political satisfaction and trust when their own ideology aligns with that of the government. This explanation for discontent concerns substantive representation and looks at whether citizens' preferences are reflected in political decisions (Aaldering, 2017).

A fourth motivation for dissatisfaction is provided by Noordzij, de Koster and Van der Waal (2020), who explain that some citizens feel frustrated due to perceived cultural distance. Rather than substantive representation, this form of discontent arises out of a lack of descriptive representation. These citizens do not recognise themselves in the political elite: they view politicians as "culturally distant others" (p.1) who signal superiority, lack integrity and are insensitive to the reality of the 'common man'.

These four explanations for political dissatisfaction have predominantly been used to explain political discontent among lower educated citizens in North-Western democracies. Rational approaches are relevant for lower educated citizens, but mostly in the sense that a lack of knowledge can lead to frustration (Laurison, 2015). Furthermore, it has been argued that economic motivations are highly relevant for lower educated citizens, because this group generally holds a less favourable monetary position (Blaug, 1972; Gregorio & Lee, 2002). Moreover, ideological motivations for discontent are likely more significant for lower educated voters, whose interests are less strongly represented in Dutch politics (Schakel & Hahkverdian, 2018; Wille & Bovens, 2011). Lastly, most relevant here are probably culture-based inspirations for dissatisfaction: as suggested by Noordzij, de Koster and Van der Waal

(2020), lower educated citizens perceive distance between themselves and politics. This explanation could be especially relevant in the Netherlands, where descriptive representation of lower educated citizens is poor and lower educated citizens are often reported to feel like they do not feel like they belong in politics (Wille & Bovens, 2011; Laurison, 2015; Noordzij, De Koster & Van der Waal, 2021).

Zooming in on the context of the Netherlands, the country's political field has seen relevant changes in the past years. Dutch politics have been restless, with a continuous governing crisis, as well as an array of problems and scandals (Verbrugge, Baardewijk & Slingerland, 2021). Most notably, the entire cabinet stepped down in 2021 due to the childcare benefits scandal, where parents were falsely blamed for fraud as a consequence of institutional racism in the Dutch tax and customs administration. Furthermore, 'Omtzigt function elsewhere' shook Dutch politics to its core, revealing coalition plans to offer popular CDA member Omtzigt a different function, presumably to get him out of the way. Though these are just recent examples, they illustrate potential sources of discontent – even among groups that are often considered to be the most content and trusting, namely higher educated citizens (Hahkverdian & Mayne, 2012 Noordzij, de Koster & van der Waal, 2021).

Along with such complications, Dutch politics have seen a rise of radical parties on the right end of the spectrum, like in many other European countries. (Jennings et al. 2016; Mudde, 2016, Schmalz et al., 2021; Spierings et al., 2021; Sterkenburg, 2021). These parties - JA21, PVV, BBB and, most radically, FvD - have grown significantly in popularity. They are characterised by the adoption of anti-establishment sentiments in their political rhetoric, voicing animosity towards established politics. Hereby, they differ significantly from long-term governing parties like VVD and CDA, as well as from each other (Kemmers et al., 2016; Mudde, 2004): while PVV attracts mostly voters with lower levels of education, the voter bases of parties such as JA21, and to a certain extent FvD, have higher levels of education (Ipsos-Nieuwsuur, 2021). This suggests that the anti-establishment sentiments that characterise these parties are not only present among lower educated voters, but also exist among higher educated right-wing voters.

Taking this political context of the Netherlands in mind, how can political discontent among higher educated voters in the country be understood? Given the previously discussed motivations for discontent among higher educated voters, it is clear that there is a need for further exploration, most significantly because these explanations have been designed to interpret political discontent among lower educated citizens, rather than higher educated citizens. Hereby, mere reverse reasoning does not fill the existing research gap, since these motivations seem to be differently relevant for higher educated citizens. First of all, rational motivations can be relevant in explaining political discontent among higher educated citizens since their (more) extensive levels of knowledge makes that this group can more easily recognise when things go wrong in the political field (Hahkverdian & Mayne, 2012). On the other hand, economic motivations are likely less relevant for this group, since higher educated citizens are, in general, more wealthy and financially stable (Gregorio & Lee, 2002). Alternatively, higher educated citizens may feel ideologically discontented, depending on their own orientations. However, since higher educated citizens

are substantively overrepresented in Dutch politics, this explanation may take a different shape among this group than among lower educated citizens, who are less well represented (Aaldering, 2017; Schakel & Hahkverdian, 2018; Wille & Bovens, 2011). This ideological explanation for discontent may be particularly relevant for supporters of parties towards the far ends of the political spectrum, whose policy preferences deviate strongly from those of governing parties. Lastly, feelings of cultural distance to motivate discontent are not likely to be found among higher educated citizens, at least not in the manner described by Noordzij, de Koster and Van der Waal (2020). High levels of descriptive representation in the Dutch government, as well as understanding and entitlement, decrease the probability that higher educated citizens experience a sense of distance between themselves and politicians (Schakel & Hahkverdian, 2018; Wille & Bovens, 2011).

Thus, the value of pre-existing literature on understanding political discontent among higher educated citizens is hardly clear-cut. While these works may provide some clarity, there is still a need for additional inductive research to fully comprehend discontent among this group: in recent work, Kemmers (2022) illustrates that political discontent in the Netherlands – particularly among radical-right voters – is yet to be fully understood. Despite a lack of information on how to explain it, various authors point towards growing discontent among the political right, and not only among lower educated citizens (Jennings et al., 2016; Kemmers, 2022; Schmalz et al., 2021; Sterkenburg, 2021). The growth of support for parties that exhaust anti-establishment sentiments in the Netherlands, but also internationally, suggests the presence of a widespread hostility towards governing elites, which may play a role in the public's experience of political discontent (Droste, 2021).

Anti-establishment sentiments are defined by Barr (2009) as a "view of society where 'the people' are pitted against the power elite" (p. 32). Droste (2021) adds that such antagonistic sentiments can extend to different kinds of elites such as political, economic, or cultural. He explains that an important aspect of anti-establishment sentiments is a feeling of deprivation and marginalisation: people who express such views feel unheard and unrepresented. According to Bakker, Jolly & Polk (2020) as well as Rooduijn, Van der Brug and De Lange (2016), political discontent is linked to voting for anti-establishment parties and to holding anti-establishment sentiments. Hereby, Droste (2011) and Roodijn et al., (2016) suggest that anti-establishment sentiments can shape feelings of political discontent (Droste, 2021). Taking this into account, it can be relevant to focus on the potential explanatory power of anti-establishment sentiments on people's experiences of political discontent. Since it is beyond the scope of this research, this thesis will not assess any possible relations in the reverse direction.

Taking this discourse into account, as well as the lack of explanatory power of pre-existing theories on political discontent among higher educated citizens, it is entirely possible that a novel explanation for political discontent among this group arises that is connected to anti-establishment sentiments, as illustrated by Kemmers (2022), Droste (2021) and Rooduijn et al. (2016). Considering previous work on cultural distance, it is conceivable that anti-establishment sentiments among dissatisfied right-wing voters in the Netherlands are indicators of a conflict of cultural distance, just in a

different way than explained by Noordzij, De Koster, and Van der Waal (2020), as well as Holmes and Manning (2013) and Noordzij, Van der Waal and De Koster (2019). As argued by Schouten and Custers (2022), a significant group of higher educated voters perceive politics to be far removed from the people, or see politicians as lacking integrity. For lower educated citizens, such sentiments are largely explained through a lack of representation and understanding of politics, but this is hardly applicable to higher educated citizens in the Netherlands, given their high levels of descriptive representation and knowledge (Noordzij, De Koster & Van der Waal, 2020; Holmes & Manning, 2013; Noordzij, Van der Waal & De Koster, 2019). Still, higher educated supporters of radical-right, anti-establishment parties may feel far removed from mainstream politics, and perhaps also from society in general. However, in contrast to their lower educated counterparts, these higher educated voters *do* believe they belong within politics: they have the knowledge and power after all (Hooghe, Daseoneville & Marien, 2015). As a result of a perceived lack of voice, these voters may feel deprived as a group. As Hochschield (2019) pointed out, this can shape into a status-based issue based on group entitlement, whereby resentment towards the 'elite' shapes political experiences. Thus, a combination of anti-establishment sentiments, ideological disagreement and perception of group exclusion could harness a strong feeling of cultural distance among higher educated citizens.

In sum, previously established motivations for discontent have largely been developed to explain the phenomenon among lower educated citizens. This makes these explanations differently applicable to higher educated voters. This research uncovers if and how these motivations play a role, thereby inductively exploring the possibility of a novel, status-based conflict through feelings of anti-elitism among higher educated discontented citizens, as well as any explanations not previously discussed. Considering the exploratory nature of this research, it is vital to take a qualitative approach, especially when focussing on the role of perceptions of status, distance and values. This makes it necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of individual experiences.

Methodology

In conducting good research, the methods chosen must align with the aim of the project (Bryman, 2016). Since this research is exploratory in nature, and the topic concerns personal perceptions of politics, I chose to speak to participants about their views on Dutch politics. The initial intention was to conduct small focus groups. By giving participants the option to bring someone along, I aimed to make them feel more comfortable sharing their views. However, interviewees unanimously chose to participate individually. This is largely in line with previous research that indicates that higher educated citizens are relatively comfortable in sharing their political opinions (Hooghe et al., 2015). The vast majority of the interviews was conducted in person, with one exception where the participant was only available for an online conversation.

As mentioned previously, the interviewees were dissatisfied, higher educated right-wing voters. Hereby, the ten respondents were asked to participate on the grounds of their voting behaviour and educational level. Voters for establishment parties VVD[2] and CDA[3] were welcome, as well as supporters of anti-establishment parties JA21[4], FvD [5], BBB[6], and PVV[7]. In the end, no interviews were conducted with voters for the latter party due to a lack of available participants with that party preference. This was not surprising, since the voter base of PVV consists largely of lower-educated citizens (Ipsos-Nieuwsuur, 2021). A more detailed overview of the can be found in Appendix A.

Feelings of discontent were only reflected upon during and not before the interview, so as not to prime interviewees' answers and to preserve the exploratory nature of the research. In other words, I did not recruit interviewees based on whether they felt political discontent, but rather on being higher educated and right-wing oriented. This aided variation among participants concerning their experience of political dissatisfaction. In terms of pinpointing the boundaries of higher education, I took a similar approach as Van der Waal, De Koster and Van Noord (2018) did. Respondents fit the requirements if they (almost) had a university diploma (wo) or a university of applied sciences diploma (hbo). Including both graduates and undergraduates was useful because it allowed me to speak to older as well as younger participants. This was beneficial because age groups can affect political views (Foner, 2000). Hereby, I was attentive to similarities within the group of higher educated, right-wing voters on aspects like gender, age, occupation and residence. Though I did not expect these background characteristics to play a very significant role in the analysis, this allowed me to be receptive in the case that they would.

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[2] Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie [People's Party for Freedom and Democracy]. Right wing liberal party. 34 seats in the Second chamber, governing party. Party leader Mark Rutte is the Dutch prime minister.
[3] Christen-Democratisch Appèl [Christian-Democratic Appeal], Christian centre-right party. Governing party with 15 seats.
[4] Juiste Antwoord 21 [Right Answer 21]. Conservative right-wing party. Established in 2020. Opposition party with 3 seats.
[5] Forum voor Democratie [Forum for Democracy]. Conservative nationalist party. Opposition party with 8 seats.
[6] Boeren Burger Beweging [Farmer-Citizen Movement]. Agrarian conservative party. Opposition party with 1 seat.
[7] Partij voor de Vrijheid [Party for freedom]. Ethnonationalist conservative party. Opposition party with 17 seats.

I found interviewees via various outlets. In the first place, I made use of word-of-mouth and snowball sampling. By utilising my personal network, I found several participants. Secondly, I made use of my social media accounts, where I was also able to find some interviewees. Moreover, I spread flyers in various locations; on the Erasmus University campus and in supermarkets in rich rural areas. I expected this to be quite effective, especially since there are many VVD and PVV voters in wealthy provincial regions (Ipsos-Nieuwsuur, 2021; Van Dijke & Bunskoek, 2021), and logically Erasmus University is a useful place to find higher educated voters. Unfortunately, no responses were received via the flyers. Similarly, contacting youth political organisations (JOVD, JongerenFvd, CDJA) was also ineffective. On the other hand, word-of-mouth and social media were much more effective methods, since participants via this sampling technique already knew me to a certain extent. Having somewhat of a connection, however shallow, made people more likely to participate in my research project, since they could empathise with the research or had had positive contact with me in the past. One of the participants even acknowledged that they shared information they might not have shared with a stranger, meaning that their personal connection with me made them more willing to participate elaborately and truthfully. This indicates that having a connection with interviewees is not inherently negative, but rather provides ground for building rapport and can thereby help improve the richness of the data (Rioha & Iikkanen, 2021).

With regard to interview style, I conducted semi-structured interviews, meaning that some structure was provided while keeping room for unplanned discussions with participants. This allowed for topics and motivations to come to light naturally (Bryman, 2016). Interviewees were invited to bring any item they would like that represents their feelings towards politics. This was for both instrumental and exploratory reasons, since the item allowed for an inductive approach to the participant's discontent, and simultaneously sparked conversation (Barton, 2015). Unfortunately, participants were reluctant to do so due to the extra effort it took. In terms of structure, the interviews started broad and then narrowed down as I learned more about the participant. I started with an open question about their feelings towards Dutch politics, which allowed participants to start thinking about the topic without me steering their answers. This also avoided overwhelming the participants with discussion points that were too specific (Bryman, 2016). Thereupon, interviewees were asked to try to indicate to what or whom their feelings of discontent are mostly directed, which shed light on the source of their discontent. Interviewees were also asked to reflect on their feeling of togetherness, which clarified their perception of the size and scope of the issue. Furthermore, to uncover which aspects the participants *do* value in politics, interviewees were asked whether they feel like there is anyone in the Dutch political field who they consider to be different – somewhat trustworthy or good at their profession. Similarly, I inquired whether there is anything that could happen that could make them feel more contented with the political field. This allowed me to uncover what participants felt was lacking in Dutch politics. This also clarified their motivations for discontent and whether it specifically aimed at politics, or possibly extends to society as a whole.

Each of the questions was posed with the aim to explore the possible roles of previously established motivations for political discontent, as well as the potential explanatory power of a novel approach based on anti-establishment sentiments. Moreover, through the semi-structured, inductive approach of the interview, I was attentive to any other, not previously discussed explanations that participants described. Recognising the various motivations in the interviewees' arguments was done through observing what they mentioned and emphasised. For example, if they explained disappointment with failing policy or frustration about scandals, I saw this as an indication of the rational approach, while complaints about the content of certain policies were seen as ideological discontent (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016). If participants spoke about feeling distance between politics and people, I saw this as a potential cultural status-based conflict (Noordzij, De Koster, & Van der Waal, 2020; Holmes & Manning, 2013; Noordzij, Van der Waal & De Koster, 2019). Hereby, antagonism towards governing actors was seen as anti-establishment sentiments (Barr, 2009; Droste, 2021).

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and analysed. The transcription process was done by hand, while the analysis was done through Atlas.ti. Here, the first round of coding was rather detailed, including many different codes. The second round divided codes into groups, which allowed for patterns and anomalies to arise in the data (Bryman, 2016). Codes were divided into groups based on indications of a specific motivation for political discontent, but also based on references to specific issues and based on general sentiments the interviewees held. For example, rational motivations were in the motivations group, while I coded a perceived lack of transparency as a sentiment, and the childcare benefits scandal as a specific issue. This allowed me to distinguish between different arguments made by interviewees and to see which issues were perceived as particularly salient by the interviewee group. Hereby, it became possible to link certain sentiments to events and issues, uncovering the specific reasoning behind particular motivations for discontent.

In conducting and analysing these interviews, it was vital that participants were treated respectfully. An important prerequisite to good research is ensuring privacy and ethics considerations are strictly adhered to (Bryman, 2016; Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2020). First of all, by creating a safe space for conversation, I aimed to prevent any emotional harm to respondents. I emphasised that the aim of this research is *not* to judge, but to understand. Furthermore, I ensured to be as transparent as possible in informing respondents about their role in research, without influencing their viewpoints. Interviewees held the right to withdraw from the research at any time and were allowed to ask as many questions as they pleased. All this information was also provided in the informed consent form that was given to participants. By taking these steps, I aimed to make participants feel safe and aware of what they were participating in. This also helped them feel comfortable to share their views. To achieve confidentiality, I changed the participants' names in the final research report and interview transcripts. Furthermore, I removed or altered any details that could uncover one's identity like references to specific places,

companies, or names. Any more details about privacy and ethics considerations can be found in the ethics checklist.

<u>Results</u>

After conducting ten interviews and analysing their contents, it has become clear that interviewees were discontented for different reasons and in different ways. However, relevant overlap could be found between different participants' narratives. What almost all interviewees had in common was their ability to distinguish between political discontent and personal satisfaction. Oftentimes, participants explained that though they are politically discontented, they are still happy with their personal lives. Interestingly, some participants even denied strong discontent until discussing their political views made them realise they are not so satisfied after all. This reflects conclusions made by Sølvberg & Jarness (2019), who find that participants may give seemingly contradictory answers in interviews, which reflects the complex nature of everyday life and the people's understanding of it. Once the interviewees came to this realisation of discontent, they explained it through many different topics and motivations, though economic motivations for discontent were not mentioned.

Differences arose between interviewees, most notably that supporters of government parties were generally less strongly discontented and often expressed discontent through a rational lens. Other interviewees, often those who supported opposition parties, tended to display more ideological discontent. Hereby, the strength of discontent was connected with their expression of anti-elitist sentiments and their experience of cultural distance from politics, as well as the perception of a status-based conflict. Those with the strongest discontent considered politics to be too far removed from the 'common man', which is somewhat surprising considering the high levels of substantive and descriptive representation of higher educated citizens in the Netherlands (Schakel & Hakhverdian, 2018; Wille & Bovens, 2011). Furthermore, interviewees with strong ideological discontent about cultural issues were critical towards political elites as well as societal institutions such as education or media, hereby perceiving a group-wide status-based conflict.

Rational motivations for moderate discontent

Rational motivations for discontent were most often expressed by interviewees who did not show strong anti-establishment sentiments. Nonetheless, for some, perceived mismanagement of the Dutch government had left a mark on their trust in and satisfaction with politics. In line with Hakhverdian and Mayne (2012) and Mishler and Rose (2001), these citizens became discontented due to mismanagement and scandals. This concerned mainly evaluations of procedural performance, or the capacity of the government to adhere to a promise of democratic fairness (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012). An issue that came up regularly that broke this promise in the eyes of many interviewees was the childcare benefits scandal. Jan[8], among others, expressed strong disappointment about this:

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[8] Participants' names have been changed due to privacy considerations.

What really made me angry is the childcare benefits scandal. That the taxation authority […] can create […] a computer programme to identify people based on colour, on last name, on heritage, and let's check those people thoroughly. […] And *still* it's not fixed. Still*,* these people haven't been compensated. Isn't that ridiculous? Whole families ripped apart.

Next to complaints about specific issues, various interviewees expressed rational motivations for discontent through doubts about the political system as a whole. Many individuals, especially middle-aged voters, explained how they thought there are "way too many parties" (Cornelis) in the Dutch Second Chamber, which they viewed to slow down government processes and make the political field fragmented and complex. An often-cited problem, as explained by Monique, was the extremely long formation progress that formed the current Dutch government:

...take for example the last elections. You thought well, that will be finished within three weeks […] Well I don't know how long it took before we had a formation in the end. Yes, you know, after a while I don't even take it seriously anymore, with all those fragmented parties.

Generally, supporters of governing parties such as VVD or CDA who expressed rational discontent were quite pragmatic in their assessment of Dutch politics, despite ongoing frustration. These participants expressed disappointment over current issues, but largely refrained from blaming this on malintent. They voiced understanding for politicians, emphasising the human nature of politics as well as the complexity of the system, hereby acknowledging that politics can never be perfect. This empathy towards political figures among coalition party voters is not surprising, since hostility towards political figures is more regularly associated with populist or anti-establishment parties (Droste, 2021; Mudde, 2004; Uscinski et al, 2021). A relevant example of such pragmatic attitudes is the following quote from VVD supporter Thomas. In discussing the affair 'Omtzigt function elsewhere', he emphasises the human aspect, as well as the systematic aspect of the scandal:

I think that, you know, it's a good example for me too of a kind of lack of professionality in the Second Chamber. Because-if you look at that scandal in my opinion, it wasn't necessarily from some sort of corrupt deep state or anything […] I think it comes from a certain amount of complacency but also from a certain amount of unprofessionalism and amateurism from a democracy of our size and a state of our size.

Such nuanced expressions of rational discontent were particularly present among, but not limited to, interviewees with considerably strong expressions of knowledge of politics, as explained through their educational and professional backgrounds. These participants studied politics or had professional

experience in the field, which they believed allowed them a better understanding of the processes that go on behind closed doors. They could clearly explain the root of their discontent, whereby their knowledge played a role in how they experienced it, as explained by Daan:

> When you have a very idealistic image of something and you're really standing outside of politics […] then you kind of dwell in your own ignorance, in a way. You think […], why do politics not do this, it's such a good idea, it's really going to work, I've read 30 books where the theory is explained […]. Why don't we all just do this? It's probably because it doesn't work. And that's how I gained more understanding for choices I find suboptimal. Because I just think, yeah, it's probably the realistic choice and not the idealistic choice.

Such quotes contradict Hahkverdian and Mayne's (2012) findings that political discontent among knowledgeable voters increases when faced with government scandals and mismanagement. Rather, these interviewees express that their knowledge allows them to understand the complexities of politics, which makes them more forgiving. Instead, these findings align with work by Laurison (2015), who suggests that a lack of perceived knowledge of politics can make the field seem opaque, which increases discontent. Interviewees such as Thomas, Daan, and Lisa suggest that this also works the other way around, where knowledge increases sympathy.

Ideological motivations for moderate discontent

Eight out of ten interviewees expressed ideological motivations for discontent. These expressions varied strongly based on the party alignment of the participant, as well as their other motivations for discontent. Ideological motivations were never the sole explanation for frustration among the interviewees, rather they were often discussed along with rational motivations, especially among interviewees with moderate expressions of discontent. This more moderate ideological discontent was present for the majority (six) of the interviewees. These interviewees preferred VVD and CDA, and to a lesser extent JA21.

In terms of moderate ideological discontent, interviewees tended to express disagreement with government policy, which they did not perceive to be in alignment with the will of the public. What often arose during conversations with voters was the sense that they felt poorly represented. Multiple participants expressed a wish for a party somewhere between the middle and the radical right, or as expressed by Marco as the "decent right". Discontent was present among different interviewees over the fact that they perceived there to be no sensible alternative to VVD: PVV and FvD were considered too radical, while VVD was seen as too moderate. Oftentimes, interviewees like Max, who expressed this worry, hoped JA21 to be a "reasonable right-wing party" (Marco):

I think PVV is much too extreme. VVD is too weak in some aspects, so I really want something in between. Something that's a civilised alternative, that's also willing to cooperate with other parties and does not become kind of well, something radical.

More specifically, interviewees often referred to issues such as migration, climate, energy, the EU, or housing. The dominance of such topics is in line with findings by Stecker & Tausendpfund (2016), who write that issues like European integration, migration, social lifestyle and environment are particularly important for voters in establishing political (dis)content. Participants largely agreed on these issues: there was general agreement that migration should be "more honest" (Marco) and "stricter" (Monique), the EU should be perceived with caution, and the housing problem is urgent. However, climate change was a less uniform topic, with interviewees expressing the need for more action on the one hand, while others cast doubt on the necessity of this. It seems that climate is a topic that is not always easily characterised by 'left' or 'right' for voters, as expressed by Kevin:

I don't know why, but indeed, the right is immediately linked to not being for the climate. I don't know what's the thought behind that, but climate is certainly a problem I think. And money needs to be spent, because it's not just for green hippies who hug trees in Amsterdam and stuff. No, it's for all of us.

Interestingly, Kevin voted for FvD, who are known for expressing that "there is no climate crisis" (Forum voor Democratie, n.d., p.1). As Forchtner (2019) writes, understanding of right-wing support for climate change action is still opaque. Replies like Kevin's suggest that right-wing voters have conflicting views on this issue.

Generally, when referring to ideological motivations for discontent, interviewees expressed frustration towards policy and laws, rather than towards specific people. Especially those with moderate feelings of discontent described their frustration as being aimed towards a topic rather than a party or person. This was particularly true for supporters of governing parties. Again, this is not strange considering that strong personal antagonism is most prevalent among (supporters of) anti-establishment parties (Droste, 2021; Mudde, 2004; Uscinski et al, 2021). Nonetheless, cultural issues seemed to spark quite strong ideological discontent among voters, especially among supporters of opposition parties. When expressing discontent on this topic, interviewees tended to refer to politics as a block that is "just too powerful" (Kevin). For these interviewees, strong ideological discontent was also present on topics that extended outside of politics. Hereby, they sometimes expressed anti-establishment sentiments and brought across the idea that there was no place for people like them, suggesting a conflict based on ideology, culture, and status. In contrast to government supporters, interviewees with anti-establishment sentiments did participate in resentment towards specific actors.

Strong discontent: anti-establishment sentiments, cultural distance and a status-based conflict

About a third of the interviewee group, notably those who supported anti-establishment parties BBB, FvD, or JA21, harnessed severe discontent, which was most often based on a combination of ideological and rational reasons. Overarchingly, interviewees who were strongly discontented expressed anti-establishment sentiments to at least a certain extent, hereby sometimes sensing cultural distance between themselves and political actors. Interviewees with anti-establishment sentiments viewed politics and their discontent about it through a distinct lens, thereby being less forgiving and more antagonistic towards specific actors and parties.

Interviewees who expressed severe discontent from a rational source tended to hold anti-establishment views through strong disappointment in government functioning over recent years. As a result, these interviewees expressed that they have started to feel like politicians are not interested in the general public, articulating feelings of cultural distance between themselves and political decisionmakers, similarly as described by Noordzij et al. (2020). Despite high levels of education – and thus representation in and understanding of politics - a number of interviewees voiced the concern that politicians are far removed from the public. These expressions of distance were firmly rooted in a sense of deprivation and lack of representation, signalling anti-establishment sentiments just as described by Droste (2021). For example, talking about 'Omtzigt function elsewhere', participants expressed severe disappointment, suggesting that established politicians were immoral or corrupt, as explained by Jan:

> That's when I thought, [they're] such bastards […] For me, there was the turning point, like, guys, you're all profiteers. And you don't care in the slightest what the Netherlands look like. That's a shame.

More generally, interviewees referred to frustration with the entire political system due to a lack of action, vision and representation. In line with work by Schouten & Custers (2022), interviewees like Macro expressed the sense that political figures no longer know the lived realities of the people:

> I don't recognise myself anymore, there aren't many people left in politics in whom I recognise parts of myself. […] Yes, I certainly think they are far removed from society. I certainly think that the people in The Hague no longer know […] well enough […] what happens in the neighbourhoods.

In a different sense, interviewees with strong ideological discontent also expressed anti-establishment sentiments. Hereby, they spoke about their experience of distance from dominant political and societal ideas. In line with recent work by Schouten and Custers (2022), these interviewees supported

opposition parties JA21 and FvD. Particularly the latter party functioned as an exhaust valve for anti-establishment sentiments, as explained by Kevin:

> What's decided now in The Hague is not at all the opinion of the public. […] So now I have voted for Forum voor Democratie. It's more right-wing and that's because I'm so against the current system, of the current parties […] I don't believe in it anymore.

For interviewees like this, strong ideological discontent was present about politics, but also about topics that extended outside of the field, in line with Droste (2021). As aforementioned, cultural topics sparked strong feelings of resentment among certain interviewees. This is in line with work by Bakker, Jolly and Polk (2020), who argue that issues beyond traditional left-right dimensions are particularly salient in shaping political contentment. These interviewees expressed substantial frustration with a society-wide dominance of progressive sentiments, which they found within politics but also at university, in the media, or in public spaces. Hereby, interviewees referred to a dominance of leftist "woke ideology" (Max), or an overabundance of political correctness, arguing that "we are increasingly pushed within certain lines" (Kevin). Participants often expressed how they felt like they could do and say less nowadays, hereby expressing feelings of distance between themselves, established politics, and society-wide norms. Marco argued that right-wing opinions are "truly demonised", while Max even expressed the feeling that he could not share his opinion in class:

> To think like, to give my concrete opinion on politics at university, I didn't really dare to do that, or I didn't do it, because I thought it would ruin my grade. […] It's better if I write something that the teacher thinks too, so I can get a higher grade. And can I concretely prove it? No, but I think that when I did that, I was able to get more points.

These interviewees expressed a perceived necessity to accommodate to progressive norms to which they felt no urge to conform. This sentiment, they argued, is shared among other people with similar views. Hereby, antagonism between themselves and people who support such progressive ideals was tactile, suggesting a feeling of exclusion, as explained by Max and Marco:

> There are people who […] think the same as I do, but don't dare to say it. Because they know that certain teachers think differently about it, but also some other students […]. They can easily blow the whistle. Well, maybe [it's] exclusion maybe.

> And I know that there are other people who think just like me, who would not easily say so. I too sometimes hold myself back, though, I think […] well, I've just learned it through trial and error. It just isn't always appreciated.

These quotes show that strongly ideologically discontented citizens with anti-establishment sentiments do not feel alone, but rather part of a substantial group battling the same issue. There is clear frustration about not being heard or free in the expression of opinion: there is a sense of group deprivation and status-based conflict (Droste, 2021; Schouten & Custers, 2022). These responses suggest that higher educated citizens, too, experience significant feelings of distance between themselves and politicians, meaning that such a perceived divide is not limited to lower educated citizens, as explored in work by Noordzij et al. (2021). In a different manner, higher educated citizens feel separation and conflict, but rather through strong disappointment in government performance or vivid disagreement with certain policies and ideologies.

Conclusion and discussion

In sum, this research has shown that higher educated right-wing voters experience political discontent in different ways based on type and severity, as well as on political orientation. Citizens who were moderately discontented generally supported government parties more often. Here, interviewees expressed mostly rational discontent, ideological discontent, or a combination of both, to a temperate degree. Moderate rational discontent was most prevalent among supporters of governing parties, who tended to be relatively pragmatic in their judgments. Often cited issues were the childcare benefits scandal or 'Omtzigt function elsewhere'. Here, especially interviewees who expressed a high perception of knowledge about politics were relatively understanding towards politicians. Thus, rational motivations for discontent were differently expressed among higher educated citizens than expected based on work by Hakhverdian & Mayne (2012), who suggest that increased political knowledge decreases political trust in settings where mismanagement and scandal are present. Rather, interviewees expressed that their perceived high levels of knowledge made them more forgiving in judging politics. Laurison (2015) proves to be more relevant in her suggestion that a lack of knowledge can increase political discontent – this also seems to work the opposite way.

In terms of ideological discontent, those who expressed this to a moderate extent generally referred to specific issues such as migration, climate change, housing, or the EU. Ideological motivations for discontent were prevalent among both voters for government and opposition parties. However, considering that their ideology is further removed from that of the Dutch government, supporters of opposition parties expressed stronger ideological frustration overall. Ideological motivations for discontent are similarly relevant for higher educated citizens as outlined in previous literature (Steccker & Tausendpfund, 2016; Noordzij, de Koster & van der Waal, 2021). This was not especially foreseeable, since higher educated citizens in the Netherlands are better represented than lower educated citizens, both descriptively and substantively, which would predict limited effects of ideological disagreement among the higher educated (Schakel & Hahkverdian, 2018; Wille & Bovens, 2011).

Stronger discontent was most present among supporters of anti-establishment parties such as JA21 or FvD. Here, a combination of rational and ideological discontent was often present. Rationally, discontent originated from similar themes as mentioned above. Hereby, interviewees expressed a lack of trust and a sense of distance between themselves and politicians, giving rise to anti-establishment sentiments. On ideological grounds, these interviewees expressed most discontent about cultural issues, which extended out of traditional left-right positions, as suggested by Bakker, Jolly & Polk (2020). Often-cited issues concerned a prevalence of leftist viewpoints across politics and wider society, which they disagreed with. This strong ideological discontentment, combined with severe rational-based disappointment in government, makes that these interviewees sensed a group-wide, cultural division between themselves and their like-minded peers on one side, and the political elite and their supporters on the other. Hereby, they harnessed anti-establishment sentiments towards politicians and sometimes

also towards dominant institutions like 'the media'. Connecting this to the discussed literature, a status-based conflict, as described by Noordzij et al. (2021) is perceived to be present by discontented interviewees with anti-establishment sentiments. However, rather than division based on a sense of inferiority, or perceived virtue signalling by politicians, higher educated right-wing voters feel discontented through intense disagreement and disappointment in the functioning of the Dutch parliament. These voters feel deprived of their voice despite high descriptive representation (Schakel & Hakhverdian, 2018; Wille & Bovens, 2011). Thus, in a different way than presented, Noordzij et al. (2021) remain relevant for research on discontent among higher educated citizens.

Though the finding that voters for anti-establishment parties are strongly discontented is not surprising considering such parties' positionings relative to the coalition, it does beg the question where the underlying stark ideological disagreement originates from, certainly among a group that is traditionally associated with progressive voting patterns through their high cultural and economic capital (Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015; Weakliem, 2002). Despite this, there is a wish for more conservative policies among some higher educated citizens, which is cause for strong discontent. Van Iperen (2022) suggests that this may reflect a larger trend of a declining middle class: economic and social hardship can be causes for more self-centred policy choices, whereby a sense to protect one's own social status causes a drive to more conservative policy preferences.

Considering the points made above, this thesis succeeded to expand upon available literature by using pre-existing works on political discontent among lower educated citizens and exploring their relevance for higher educated citizens. For example, while work by Hahkverdian & Mayne (2012) is not very applicable here, work by Noordzij et al. (2021) remains useful by re-interpreting it. Hereby, this thesis helps to bridge a large gap in academic research, since there is a substantial lack of work on political discontent among higher educated citizens. With this thesis, a starting point is provided for future research by highlighting shortcomings in existing literature which highlights where novel approaches should be developed. By speaking to supporters of both government and opposition parties, this research was able to pinpoint differences in motivations among various voters with right-wing affiliations. Thereby, it was possible to examine the role of anti-establishment sentiments and perceptions of distance and conflict, as explored by Noordzij et al. (2021).

Beyond the academic field, the relevance of this thesis society-wide begins with the importance of understanding how citizens experience political discontent. Political dissatisfaction can strongly affect voting behaviour and other forms of political participation (Kemmers, 2017; Kemmers et al., 2016; Rooduijn et al., 2016). Therefore, understanding political discontent is vital in grasping the ways in which the public navigates politics. More specifically, a focus on the political right is highly salient considering that this forms a large proportion of the electorate in the Netherlands. Hereby, the growth in number and political relevance of anti-establishment parties at the right end of the political spectrum begs the question why such parties prove to be attractive for a group that is generally more inclined to vote progressively (Van der Waal, De Koster & Van Noord, 2017). The surge in popularity of such parties

also among higher educated citizens has shown that discontent towards established politics is not limited towards citizens with a lower level of education. The anti-establishment sentiments that these parties harness likely play an important role in this attraction, considering that higher-educated citizens, too, evidently experience a sense of antagonism towards the political elite. Understanding these sentiments, the voters that hold them and the parties that harness them is societally relevant considering the large influence this political stream has had on contemporary societal debates (Mudde, 2016).

Though this analysis is valuable in its expansion upon available knowledge, it also has certain limitations given the time, experience and resources available for the research. Firstly, while this research was open to any newly emerging explanatory factors, its focus on pre-existing literature alongside this may have made it more difficult for the researcher to notice emerging patterns that stand completely outside of any contemporary frameworks in literature. Second, this research would have improved in quality if more people were interviewed. A limited network in combination with a short timespan made it inconceivable to find more interviewees, especially when considering travel time and costs, as well as time needed for transcribing and analysing. Furthermore, given that there was no budget for this research, interviewees could not be monetarily incentivised to participate, which slowed the recruiting process. Moreover, given the necessity to use personal networks in finding participants, the interviewee group in this research is not a representative reflection of society. Thus, the generalisability of this research is not strong, though this is a general trait of qualitative research (Babbie, 2016). There was especially an imbalance concerning gender in the interviewee group: it was much easier to find male participants than female participants, though this also reflects a larger societal pattern of gendered political participation (Conway, 2001; Hochstenbach & Brons, 2020; Lowndes, 2004). More generally, this group of people all came from the same area in the Netherlands, which may have influenced their experience with politics. Though an unfortunate shortcoming, the imbalance in the interviewee group was a logical result of the aforementioned lack of time and resources.

Another issue that arose due to the use of personal networks for the recruitment of interviewees is the fact that most participants had at least some connection with me as the interviewer. This was not ideal: the most objective and representative groups are those with mixed backgrounds and people the researcher does not know (Babbie, 2017). However, considering the timeframe and scope of this research, interviewing people I knew on a shallow level, in addition to unknown participants, was unavoidable to achieve enough responses. Furthermore, there was also an advantage to this: since many participants knew me to at least a limited extent, they generally felt comfortable sharing their views during the interview. Multiple participants expressed, after the interview, that they found it to be enjoyable to speak to me about politics. In terms of interview structure, there was unfortunately merely one participant who brought an item to explain their political discontent. I expect this had to do with the extra preparation work this added to the already rather time-consuming interview. Another issue that I, perhaps foolishly, oversaw was the difficulty of finding and speaking to extremely discontented people. Individuals who hold extremely deviant societal and political views are hard to recruit, since they are

sometimes untrustful towards institutions like universities. As Laurison (2015) pointed out, people with socially undesirable opinions often refrain from sharing these with others, which can deter participation in research.

Thus, this thesis has room for improvement, yet thereby leads the way to further research on this topic. There is a strong need for more work on political discontent among higher educated citizens, since one work can never paint a nationally or globally realistic picture. Especially perceptions and experiences of cultural distance, anti-establishment sentiments and a status-based conflict should be further researched, since such motivations for and understandings of political discontent have only rarely been applied to higher educated citizens. For example, future research could focus on the explanatory power of the desire to protect one's own social status, as suggested by Van Iperen (2022). It would be beneficial to conduct both more qualitative and quantitative research on political discontent, since additional qualitative research could allow for contextualisation, for example across different nations, and can give a deeper understanding of political discontent, while quantitative research could help to understand the scope and size of political discontent throughout different voter groups and motivations for discontent. Hereby, this thesis can provide the basis for developing new, more accurate measurements of political discontent, based on the experiences of higher educated citizens. This work could provide a solid base for future research on the topic.

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Appendix A: overview of participants

Due to privacy concerns, participant names have been altered. Furthermore, no details are provided about their exact age, occupation, or living area.

Name	Gender	Age indication	Occupation	Living area
Kevin	Male	18-26	Student (engineering)	City
Jan	Male	67+	PR manager	Village
Max	Male	18-26	Student (international relations)	Town
Daan	Male	18-26	Student (psychology)	Town
Cornelis	Male	50-66	Technical consultant	City
Monique	Female	50-66	Medic	Village
Marco	Male	50-66	Teacher (history)	Town
Lisa	Female	27-35	Policy officer, councilman	City
Thomas	Male	18-26	Student (international studies)	Town
Ronald	Male	50-66	Manager in industry	Village

CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Studentscan complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploadedalong with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Exploring the unexplained:A study of political discontent among higher-educated Dutch citizens

Name, email of student: Myrthe Fransen, 495185mf@student.eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Kjell Noordzij, k.noordzij@essb.eur.nlStart date and

duration: April 1 – June 19 (about 2,5 months)

Is the research study conducted within DPAS   **YES** - NO

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1.   Does your research involve human participants.   **YES** - NO

       If 'NO': skip to part V.

       If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research?   YES - **NO**

       Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited](#) [medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2.   Does your research involve field observations without manipulations
       that will not involve identification of participants.   YES - **NO**

       If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3.   Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary
       data that has been anonymized by someone else).   YES - **NO**

       If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1.   Will information about the nature of the study and about what
participants can expect during the study be withheld from them?   **YES** - NO

2.   Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written
'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study?   YES - **NO**

3.   Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation
at any time be withheld from participants?   YES - **NO**

4.   Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants?   YES - **NO**
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types
of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants,
giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).

5.   Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative
emotions beyond those normally encountered by
participants?   YES - **NO**

6.   Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR
(e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade
union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying
a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's
sex life or sexual orientation)?   **YES** - NO

7.   Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or
other groups that cannot give consent?   YES - **NO**

8.   Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study?   YES - **NO**

9.   Can participants be identified by the study results or can the
confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured?   YES - **NO**

10.   Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study?   YES - **NO**

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is
unavoidable in this study.
- A large part of the aim of this research will be told to participants beforehand, but some
only afterwards. More specifically, I will be telling participants that I am conducting a
study on political discontent among higher educated right-wing voters, but I will not be
disclosing beforehand that I will also focus on the role of anti-establishment sentiments in
exploring political discontent. This is because I do not want to influence respondent's
answers and I want to leave them as free as possible in discussing their opinions.
- This research concerns political dissatisfaction and will therefore require participants to
share their opinions about politics.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants
about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).
- Participants will be aware of the set-up and aim of the research, as well as their roles within in. After
the interviews have been conducted, participants will be updated about the research if they please and

contacted once it is finished. They are also free to ask me questions during any point in the research, and they have my contact details.
- Since the topic of this research is somewhat sensitive, I will leave the setting of the research largely up to the participants to make them feel comfortable. Furthermore, I will emphasise that I am not present to judge them, but to understand them. Hereby, I will be asking participants to bring anybody they like with a similar viewpoint, so the participant will feel more comfortable in sharing their opinion.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or havenegative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.
- I do not expect any unintended circumstances that can cause harm or havenegative consequences to the participants.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.Continue to part

IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?
- One-on-one interviews.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

- In total I interviewed 10 people, who all participated in an interview of approximately an hour.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

- The number of higher educated citizens who have voted either for VVD, CDA, PVV,FvD (including JA21, which was formed after the elections when a member split off from the party), and JA21 is approximately 1,791,130.
- Sources:

  Verkiezingen in cijfers: hoge opkomst onder jongeren en zorg belangrijkste thema[Elections in numbers: high turnout among young people and healthcare most important theme]. (2021, March 18). *NOS. https://nos.nl/collectie/13860/artikel/2373083-verkiezingen-in-cijfers-hoge- opkomst-onder-jongeren-en-zorg-belangrijkste-thema*

  Kiesraad (n.d.). *Tweede Kamer 17 maart 2021 [Second Chamber 17 March 2021].*

  Retrieved March 18, 2022 from *https://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/verkiezingen/detail/TK20210317*

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

- I will store the data on my personal computer, as well as one Erasmus OneDrive.
  This way I have back-up in case anything goes wrong with my laptop. Furthermore, I expect to be recording the interviews on my phone, though I aimto move these files to my laptop as fast as possible to save on space. I also expect to write down some notes during the interview, which I will keep in an appointed binder. Data will be deleted as soon as is that is possible.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup ofthe data arising from your research?
- I am responsible for this.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

- At least after every new interview, and thereafter about weekly or biweekly.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?
- As indicated below, I will be keeping personal details as separate as possible and Iaim to change any information that could identify a person. For example, I will be changing names and places, as well as erasing or altering any references to specific times, places or events that could help someone uncover the identity of my participants.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personaldetails are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Myrthe Fransen   Name (EUR) supervisor: Kjell Noordzij

Date: 18-03-2022   Date: 19-03-2022

<u>Informatiebrochure</u>

Naam hoofdonderzoeker*:	Myrthe Fransen
Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam/ specifieke faculteit*:	Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences (ESSB)
Naam financierende organisatie*:	n.v.t.
Projectnaam en versie*:	An exploration of political discontent among higher-educated Dutch citizens

Introductie
Ik ben Myrthe Fransen en ik schrijf mijn scriptie voor de master Sociologie aan de Erasmus Universiteit in Rotterdam. Ik doe onderzoek naar politiek ongenoegen bij hogeropgeleiden in Nederland. Ik zal u zo goed mogelijk informeren over mijn onderzoek en nodig u graag uit om hier aan deel te nemen. Dit toestemmingsformulier is daarbij noodzakelijk. Mocht u vragen hebben over dit formulier of mochten er zaken onduidelijk zijn, dan kunt u mij altijd om uitleg vragen.

Het doel van het onderzoek
Binnen de Nederlandse politiek is vaak sprake van ongenoegen bij stemmers. Hoewel dit vaak is onderzocht bij mensen met een lager opleidingsniveau, is dit nog niet echt gebeurd bij hogeropgeleiden. Het doel van dit onderzoek is erachter te komen waarom sommige hoogopgeleide Nederlanders ontevreden zijn met de politiek. Daarbij ligt de focus op rechtse stemmers, omdat met name aan de rechterflank van het politieke spectrum veel onvrede zichtbaar is.

Type onderzoeksinterventie
Mijn onderzoek neemt in totaal zo'n 2,5 maand in beslag. Gedurende deze tijd zal ik één keer met u een interview afnemen. Het interview zal ongeveer 1,5 uur duren.

Deelnameselectie
U bent uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek omdat ik het belangrijk vind om met ontevreden kiezers te praten om ze zo beter te kunnen begrijpen. Ook voldoet u aan de criteria voor dit onderzoek: u bent ontevreden met de politiek en heeft gestemd of zou stemmen voor een van de volgende partijen: VVD, CDA, JA21, BVNL, FvD, PVV.

Vrijwillige deelname
Deelname aan dit onderzoek is geheel vrijwillig. U beslist zelf of u deelneemt. U kunt elk moment tijdens het onderzoek van gedachten veranderen en uw deelname stopzetten, ook als u al eerder toestemming heeft gegeven.

Recht om toestemming in te trekken
U kunt uw toestemming voor het gebruik van de gegevens die u heeft verstrekt intrekken, met uitzondering van gegevens die zijn geanonimiseerd. Als u besluit niet meer mee te doen aan dit onderzoek, hoeft u dit niet uit te leggen en heeft dit voor u verder geen gevolgen.
U mag uw toestemming voor het gebruik van de gegevens die u heeft verstrekt intrekken met uitzondering van toestemming voor gegevens die zijn geanonimiseerd. Als u besluit niet meer mee te doen aan dit onderzoek, hoeft u dit niet uit te leggen en heeft dit voor u verder geen gevolgen.

Procedures
Indien u besluit deel te nemen aan dit onderzoeksproject, zal dit als volgt gaan:
- U zal deelnemen aan een individueel interview met mij, of aan een kleine focus groep. Dit ligt eraan of u liever alleen deelneemt, of dat u het prettiger vindt om iemand mee te nemen. Dit kan een vriend,

familielid, collega, of andere bekende zijn die met u enigszins op één lijn ligt als het gaat om uw mening over de politiek.

- Als u tijdens het interview een vraag niet wil beantwoorden, dan hoeft dat ook niet. Ik ga dan door naar een andere vraag. Van het hele interview wordt een opname gemaakt.
- Mocht u daar behoefte aan hebben, kunt u aan het einde van het interview de vragen nog eens doornemen of u achter uw antwoorden staat of van gedachten veranderd bent. In dat geval kunnen uw antwoorden worden aangepast.

Potentiële risico's en ongemakken

Het interview gaat over uw meningen over de politiek. Dit kan soms een ongemakkelijk of controversieel onderwerp zijn. Om ervoor te zorgen dat u zich op uw gemak voelt kunt u tijdens dit interview iemand meenemen die uw mening (in grote lijnen) deelt. Verder kan het interview afgenomen worden op een plek die voor u veilig en comfortabel aanvoelt. Het doel van dit interview is *niet* om u of uw meningen te beoordelen, maar om u en uw mening te leren kennen en te begrijpen.

Mocht u zich hier ongemakkelijk bij voelen, dan kunt u zich te allen tijde terugtrekken uit het onderzoek.

Potentiële voordelen

Hoewel er voor u geen direct voordeel is, kan uw deelname aan dit onderzoek zorgen voor meer begrip over politieke ontevredenheid bij hoogopgeleide Nederlanders.

Vergoedingen

Aangezien ik geen budget heb voor dit onderzoek, kan ik u niet meer vergoeding aanbieden dan mijn dankbaarheid en eventueel een drankje op mijn kosten.

Privacy

Tijdens dit onderzoek vragen wij u persoonsgegevens te verstrekken. Met persoonsgegevens wordt bedoeld informatie waarmee u direct (naam) indirect (woonplaats]) als persoon kunt worden geïdentificeerd. Persoonlijke informatie zoals woonplaats, leeftijd, opleiding, werk of studie zal worden gebruikt om uw informatie op basis van deze factoren te vergelijken met andere deelnemers.

Het interview wordt, zoals hierboven aangegeven, opgenomen. De geluidsopnamen worden in tekst omgezet. Dit wordt gedaan zodat deze teruggeluisterd kunnen worden om uw antwoorden zo accuraat mogelijk te transcriberen. Na het transcriberen zal alle data worden gecodeerd en geanalyseerd. Stukjes tekst kunnen worden gebruikt in gepubliceerde vorm (zoals in tijdschriftartikelen en in boeken). De gebruikte tekst zal nooit direct of indirect naar u herleidbaar zijn, de gebruikte tekst is anoniem.

Vertrouwelijkheid

Uiteraard wordt deze informatie niet gepubliceerd, maar zo onduidelijk gemaakt dat uw identiteit er niet op afte lezen is. Woonplaats zal bijvoorbeeld veranderen naar 'dorp' of 'stad', leeftijd zal ingedeeld worden in categorie, opleiding zal alleen met niveau en onderwerp worden aangeduid, en eventuele loopbaan in algemene functie. Om vertrouwelijkheid van uw gegevens te garanderen, zal het volgende gedaan worden:

- Uw directe persoonsgegevens worden alleen gezien door de onderzoeker en de onderzoeksbegeleider
- Informatie waardoor u direct kan worden geïdentificeerd (naam, adres, leeftijd, beroep, opleiding) wordt zo snel mogelijk aangepast naar minder specifieke informatie. In het eindproduct zal u niet geïdentificeerd kunnen worden. Bijvoorbeeld, woonplaats zal veranderen naar slechts een indicatie of u woont in een dorp of in een stad. Leeftijd zal worden gerapporteerd gebaseerd op een categorie (zoals 18-30), opleiding zal alleen met niveau en onderwerp worden aangeduid, en eventuele loopbaan in algemene functie.
- De vragen zijn zo opgesteld dat uw antwoorden geen informatie bevatten die u direct of indirect kunnen identificeren. Mocht er onverwacht wel iets ter sprake komen waaraan uw identiteit te herleiden zou kunnen zijn (bijvoorbeeld een referentie naar een specifieke plek) zal dit in het eindwerk worden weggelaten.

Het bewaren en delen van uw gegevens

Uw persoonsgegevens (zoals geluids- of beeldopnamen, formulieren en andere documenten die in het kader van dit onderzoek werden gecreëerd of verzameld) zullen gedurende een beperkte periode worden opgeslagen na de inleveringsdatum van de scriptie. Dat geeft andere onderzoekers de mogelijkheid om te controleren of het onderzoek juist is uitgevoerd.

Het delen van de resultaten

De resultaten van dit onderzoek zullen worden gepubliceerd in de vorm van een masterscriptie. Mocht u geïnteresseerd zijn in de uitkomsten van dit onderzoek, kan ik deze natuurlijk naar u opsturen.

Toestemmingsverklaring

Ik heb het informatie- en toestemmingsformulier gelezen en ik begrijp wat het doel van het onderzoek is en dater gegevens van mij zullen worden verzameld. Het onderzoek is duidelijk aan mij uitgelegd en ik kreeg de gelegenheid vragen te stellen.

Door dit formulier te ondertekenen

1. geef ik toestemming voor deelname aan dit onderzoek;
2. bevestig ik dat ik ten minste 18 jaar oud ben;
3. geef ik aan dat ik begrijp dat deelname aan dit onderzoek geheel vrijwillig is; en
4. geef ik aan dat ik begrijp dat mijn gegevens zullen worden geanonimiseerd met het oog op publicatie, voor onderwijs en verder onderzoek, tenzij ik toestemming geef voor het citeren van mijn woorden (Citaten), het vermelden van mijn werkelijke naam (Werkelijke naam) en/of het gebruik van mijn persoonsgegevens voor onderwijs en voor verder onderzoek.

Neem de noodzakelijke elementen op:

Toestemming

Bijzondere persoonsgegevens
Ik geef toestemming voor het verzamelen, verwerken, gebruiken en opslaan van mijn persoonsgegevens ten behoeve van de doelen van dit onderzoek, namelijk politieke opvattingen

Geluid
Hierbij geef ik toestemming voor het maken van geluidsopnamen tijdens het onderzoek en voor het omzetten van mijn antwoorden in geschreven tekst.

Citaten
Hierbij geef ik toestemming voor het citeren van mijn antwoorden in onderzoekspublicaties. Bij citaten worden uw (echte) naam en andere directe persoonsgegevens niet vermeld.

Werkelijke naam
Hierbij geef ik toestemming voor het vermelden van mijn werkelijke naam in de bovengenoemde citaten.

Onderwijs en verder onderzoek
Hierbij geef ik toestemming voor het opslaan en het gebruik van mijn persoonsgegevens, namelijk politieke opvattingen, voor onderwijs en voor toekomstig onderzoek, ook op andere onderzoeksterreinen dan dit onderzoek.

Naam van de deelnemer:

Handtekening van de deelnemer: **Datum:**

Uw privacyrechten en contactgegevens

U mag vragen om uw persoonsgegevens in te zien, te wijzigen als ze niet kloppen of deze te verwijderen.

Als u zich wilt beroepen op uw rechten of als u een vraag heeft over privacy in verband met dit onderzoek, kuntu via fg@eur.nl contact opnemen met de functionaris voor gegevensbescherming (FG) van de Erasmus Universiteit.

Als u een klacht wilt indienen in verband met privacy, kunt u dit doen bij de nationale toezichthoudende instantie inzake persoonsgegevens in Nederland (Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens).

Met wie contact opnemen*
Als u vragen heeft, kunt u deze nu stellen of er later op terugkomen. Als u later vragen wilt stellen, kunt ucontact met mijn opnemen via mijn e-mailadres: 495185mf@student.eur.nl