

**A decline of social cohesion in the Netherlands?
Participation and trust, 1997-2010.**

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Abstract

In the Netherlands, topics related to social capital and cohesion are high on the political agenda. Issues such as cultural assimilation, the role of the Islam and its impact on public life, the impact of ethnic diversity on social cohesion in neighbourhoods, and concerns about the lack of solidarity are everyday news. Consequently, there is a demand for more statistical information on the assumed decline of social cohesion. In line with this development, Statistics Netherlands (SN) started a research programme on social cohesion in 2008, and introduced a framework including three dimensions: (a) Participation; (b) Trust; and (c) Integration.

Overall, contrary to expectation, participation and trust levels increased (slightly). However, there are significant differences between subpopulations. People with higher education levels show higher levels of participation (social, in organisations, in politics) and trust (social and in institutions) than people with lower education levels. In addition, higher scores on various aspects of social cohesion are found among religious than non-religious groups. This is particularly true for the two protestant denominations, PKN and Calvinist, followed by the Dutch Reformed, Catholics and the Muslim population. Also age, gender and country of origin are correlated with various aspects of social cohesion.

Furthermore, at the municipal level, there is a clear regional divide in the Netherlands in participation and trust levels, which correlates with religious involvement (density of churchgoers, Protestants, Catholics, Muslims) as well as various socio-economic characteristics. High concentrations of Muslims, non-western ethnic minorities, non-religious people, less educated people, people on low incomes, rented houses, people living on social benefits are negatively correlated with social cohesion. Similarly, positive correlations are found between high concentrations of Protestants and various aspects of social cohesion.

1. Introduction: framework of social cohesion

In the Netherlands, there is a growing interest in social cohesion and the impact of Islam and non-western ethnic minorities on society. In the last decade, 9/11, the murders of party leader Fortuyn in 2002 and film-maker and columnist Van Gogh in 2004, and ideas on the role of Islam of former liberal party member Hirsi Ali were much discussed in the media and in the political and public debate. This is reflected in the political realm by the support gained by new parties and political movements, such as the Party for Freedom (PVV, led by Wilders) and Proud of the Netherlands (TON, led by Verdonk). In 2006 the PVV gained nine out of the 150 seats in parliament. By 2010, the support for the PVV as well as the political impact of the PVV had increased drastically: the PVV was the absolute winner of the elections with 24 seats and could demonstrate its power by tolerating a minority coalition of the liberal party (VVD) and Christian-Democrats (CDA) to ensure a very slight majority of 76 out of 150 seats in parliament.

The political shift in Dutch society has been widely discussed. One viewpoint is that the native Dutch population is dissatisfied with the policy of previous coalitions formed by at least two out of the three main political parties: PvdA (Labour), CDA and VVD. The bottom line is a widespread feeling that social cohesion in Dutch society is eroding, which is also reflected in a perception of declining social and institutional trust (SER, 2009). Meurs (2008) states that the Netherlands has changed from a *high trust* into a *low trust* society in a short period. A decline in trust is also a concern in politics. In a letter from the government to the Social Economical Council (SER) of 8 December 2009 an advice is asked for: '...How can the business community contribute to the preservation, c.q. re-establishment, of the traditionally high levels of institutional and social trust and social capital?' (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2009).

By then, social cohesion had already become a major issue in politics. Actually, social cohesion was one of the six pillars of the policy of the previous coalition government of the two Christian parties (CDA and CU) and Labour (PvdA) formed in 2007. A substantial effort was made to enhance social cohesion in Dutch society, such as promoting specific neighbourhoods into 'prachtwijken' (magnificent neighbourhoods). Likewise, social cohesion was prominently placed on the international agenda. Within the EU, social inclusion has become a major research topic in several national statistical institutes. Other international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Bank, also underline the importance of research on social cohesion, and social capital in particular.¹ In line with this development, Statistics Netherlands (SN) aims to disseminate more statistical information on social cohesion. In SN's statistical programme for 2009-2013, research on social cohesion is one of the eight spearheads.

Increased social cohesion is important for wellbeing and prosperity in society (Coté en Healy, 2001; Council of Europe, 2000; 2004; De Hart et al., 2002; Knack and Keefer,

¹ The Council of Europe aims to foster research on social cohesion. A Social Cohesion Development Division was set up in 1998 by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to undertake, in close cooperation with the member states, conceptual and methodological analysis (see: www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/default_en.asp). See the website of the World Bank (<http://web.worldbank.org>).

1997; Putnam et al., 1993; Ritzen et al., 2000; Ruiter, 2008; Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009; Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003). However, from a theoretical perspective, the concept of social cohesion is broad and includes various levels of participation that generate community: social (informal social relations), civic (in organisations) and political participation (in the sphere of the state). Social cohesion also touches on the concept of social capital, which is defined as social networks and trust.² Bonding social capital refers to the relations within homogeneous groups. These are strong ties that connect family members, close friends and colleagues. In contrast, bridging social capital looks at heterogeneous relations that exist between groups (e.g. between the indigenous and ethnic minority groups). Bonding networks describe closely-knit groups of people who are very similar to one another, whereas bridging refers to networking among different kinds of people or groups (e.g.: in terms of education, income, country of origin). The concepts, however, are vague and consequently there is no clear definition of social cohesion or social capital.

The description adopted by the OECD “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups” has been widely approved by various National Statistical Institutes (NSI’s). The NSI’s of New Zealand, the UK, Australia, Canada and Finland developed specific statistics on social cohesion or social capital (e.g. ABS, 2004; Beauvais and Jenson, 2002; Berger-Schmitt, 2002; Bernard, 1999; Coutts, et al., 2007; Harper and Kelly, 2003; Iisakka, 2006; Jeannotte, 2000; PRI, 2005; Spellerberg, 2001).

In 2008, Statistics Netherlands (SN) started with an overview of international statistics about social cohesion and developed a framework (Schmeets, 2008a;b; 2009; Schmeets and Te Riele, 2009; Te Riele and Schmeets, 2009; Te Riele and Roest, 2009). Elaborating on the conceptual frameworks used by other NSI’s, the following three dimensions of social cohesion are distinguished: (1) Participation; (2) Trust; and (3) Integration.

Framework social cohesion: participation, trust and integration

Integration	
Participation	Trust
Social (social contacts)	Social (in others)
Civic (in organisations)	Institutional
Political	Political

In line with Eliasoph (1998) and Van der Meer (2008), three levels of participation were distinguished: ‘social’, ‘civic’ and ‘political’. Social participation refers to social contacts of people, including supporting and helping each other. Civic participation includes participation in organisations, including membership, volunteering and participation in the labour market. Political participation includes activities to influence politics. The second dimension is trust and refers to trust in other people and trust in (political) institutions. In accordance with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2004), trust is considered a measure of the quality of networks and relationships between people and

² The definition and operationalization of the concept of social capital itself has been widely discussed, often referring to the work of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988; 1990) and Putnam (1995; 2000).

with institutions. In line with the three levels of participation, three levels of trust are distinguished: (a) social trust; (b) trust in institutions; and (c) trust in politics.

The third dimension concerns integration and refers to the participation and trust of all people in society. Not only the participation and trust within specific groups in society is relevant, but also between groups. Social cohesion will increase if various groups – e.g.: lower and higher educated people, lower and higher income groups, natives and ethnic minorities, religious and non-religious people – have contacts and trust each other. In terms of social capital: not only bonding social capital (within groups) is a prerequisite for social cohesion, but also bridging social capital (between groups).

In this paper we will focus on the developments of social cohesion in the period 1997-2010. The main research question reads: Has social cohesion in the Netherlands declined in the past 15 years?

Furthermore, trust and participation levels differ across subpopulations in society. Apart from the socio-demographic characteristics gender, age and education, we will focus on ethnicity (native and ethnic minority groups) and religion (denomination and church participation).³ In doing so, we investigate to what extent various groups in Dutch society differ in aspects of participation and trust. In addition, we outline various indicators of social cohesion regionally at the municipal level.

2. Data and methods

As Statistics Netherlands (SN) did not develop specific statistics on social cohesion or social capital until 2009, no detailed information on social cohesion within a specific survey module is available. However, SN has a long-standing tradition of gathering information linked to the concept of social cohesion, like volunteer work, contacts with friends, family and neighbours, and informal help.⁴ In addition, information on political participation and trust is available in the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies of 2006 and 2010. Another source we used is the European Social Survey, conducted bi-annually during 2002-2008 which includes information on social and institutionalised trust.

Moreover, in recent years SN has developed the Social Statistical Database ('SSB') as the main data-source for the production of social statistics. The SSB includes data on all Dutch citizens based on longitudinal register information as well as cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys. This database, unique in the world, makes an integrated approach in the broad field of social cohesion possible. The SSB includes information on the whole population pertaining to gender, age, country of origin, marital status enriched by other register information such as income and regional characteristics – as well as information on social cohesion based on large scale surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS),

³ A wide range of literature details the relations between ethnicity, religion and social cohesion, often referring to the classical work of Durkheim (1912); e.g.: Wilson and Janoski 1995; Greeley 1997; Putnam 2000; Becker and Dhingra 2001; Lam 2002; Alesina and Ferrara, 2002; Uslaner 2002; Hudson, 2006;. Lam 2006; Ruiter and de Graaf 2006; Bekkers and Schuyt, 2008; De Hart, 2008; Botterman and Hooghe, 2010; Schmeets and Te Riele, 2009; Schmeets, 2010a;b;c.

⁴ On the other hand, hardly any information is available on networks.

the Permanent Survey on Living Conditions (POLS), the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES), the European Social Survey (ESS) and various other surveys.

Survey data-sources are (see table 1):

- Labour Force Survey (LFS): 2000-2009 (N = 800,000);
- Permanent Survey on Living Conditions (POLS): 1997-2009 (N = 300,000);
- Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES) in 2006 and 2010 (N=5,300);
- European Social Survey: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 (N=7,500);

Table 1. Statistical sources: data collection years, respondents and interview-mode

Survey	Abbreviation	Data collection years	Number of respondents (total)	Data-collection mode
Permanent Survey on Living Conditions	POLS	1997-2009	300,000	CAPI
Labour Force Survey	LFS	2000-2009	800,000	CAPI/CATI
Dutch Parliamentary Election Study	DPES	2006, 2010	5,000	CAPI/CATI/Mail
European Social Survey (fieldwork conducted by GfK)	ESS	2002, 2004, 2006, 2008	7,800	CAPI

Following variables are included in the sources:

- LFS: volunteer work in 6 different organisations;
- POLS: contacts with family and friends; volunteer work in 13 different organisations; providing informal help; and participating in activities of clubs and associations, social trust and trust in institutions;
- ESS: social trust and trust in 8 institutions, social and political participation;
- DPES: social trust and trust in 10 institutions, social and political participation.

In the Permanent Survey on Living Conditions (POLS) information is included on social contacts and volunteer work. Social contacts includes contacts with family, friends and neighbours, varying from (a) seldom or never; (b) less than once a month; (c) once a month; (d) 2-3 times a month and (e) at least once a week. In POLS volunteer work has been defined as activities in the past year, whereas in the Labour Force Survey the question refers to being a volunteer 'at present'. Social and institutional trust is included in POLS 2009 and the ESS (2002-2008). The answer categories differ: in POLS the 'YES/NO' option is included, whereas the ESS uses a scale from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust). For reasons of comparison, we aggregated the positions 6 to 10 into the YES-option.

It is obviously possible to link the variables included in the outlined data sources. Moreover, due to the number of cases even more variables can be linked on an aggregate level. For example, by combining the data on religion in POLS of 1997-2009 it is possible to produce results based at the level of the 443 municipalities in the Netherlands. Similarly, the Labour Force Survey contains data on volunteer work of some 800,000 people, aged 16 years and older, in the period 2000-2009. This creates new possibilities in defining correlations between religious involvement and social cohesion on a higher level.

Likewise, based on the aggregated POLS data we included religious involvement. POLS has the following question: 'Of which religious denomination or organisation do you consider yourself a part: (1) no denomination; (2) Roman-Catholic; (3) Dutch Reformed; (4) Calvinists; (5) Protestant Church in the Netherlands; (6) Islam; (7) Other?'. Except for the respondents without a denomination, a follow-up question is included on the attendance of religious services: 'In the last twelve months, how often did you go to a church, mosque, or another religious meeting: (1) seldom or never; (2) less than once a month; (3) once a month; (4) 2-3 times a month; (5) at least once a week?'. Obviously, register data are available at the municipal level as well. We included the share of people living on social benefits because they are unemployed, unable to work due to their physical or mental condition, or have to rely on social benefits for other reasons. Additionally, we included voting behaviour during the parliamentary elections in 2010: using the turnout rate as an indicator for political participation.

3. Social cohesion in municipalities

The starting point of our overview on social cohesion is based on municipalities in the Netherlands. This includes the concentrations of social contacts (at least weekly with family, friend and neighbours), volunteer work, church attendance, and involvement in various religious denominations based on the aforementioned surveys. In addition, we included register data: voter turnout during the last parliamentary elections, various socio-demographic (such as the concentration of percentage non-western ethnic minorities), and socio-economic characteristics (such as the concentrations of people living on social benefits, people with low incomes, low education, and rented houses). Unfortunately, we do not have enough information on social and institutionalised trust to produce findings at the municipal level.

The aggregation of the POLS data in the period 1997/2009 results in the share of weekly contact rates across municipalities. The variation is substantial. In Winsum and Stede Broec 79 percent has a weekly contact with relatives, in Urk 97 percent. Likewise, 63 percent of the inhabitants of Alblasterdam have frequent contacts with friends, in Maasdonk 91 percent. In addition, in Den Bosch the contact rate with neighbours is 58 percent, in Boxmeer and Pijnacker-Nootdorp 85 percent.

In the period 2000-2009, roughly one fifth of the population opted for volunteering in one or more of following organisations: Youth/school; Care; Sport/Hobby; Church; Trade Union; and Other. Participation as a volunteer in organisations varies substantially between the municipalities. The participation in volunteer activities varies from 12 percent in Kerkrade to 43 in Nijefurd. Other municipalities with rather low levels of volunteers are Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Almere, Spijkenisse and – rather surprisingly – many municipalities in the predominantly Catholic south-east, which includes Heerlen, Landgraaf and Maastricht. High levels of volunteering are found among municipalities in the province of Friesland, such as Bolsward and Leewarden.

The sixth variable is the voter turnout rate, serving as an indicator for political participation. On 9 June 2010 a total of 75.4 percent went to the polls. Low turnout

results, below 67 percent, were found in Kerkrade, Heerlen, Rotterdam and Rucphen. A rather high turnout was found in Veere (89.8%) and Rozendaal (92.2%).

We linked the five variables to religious involvement, the concentration of non-western ethnic minorities, people living on social benefits, the shares of low incomes, rented houses and low education (see table 2). In the period 1997/2009 a majority of 59 percent belonged to a denomination or affiliates with a religious organisation. However, only one in five of the population over 18 went to a church or mosque on a regular base. Furthermore, the religious landscape shows 30 percent Catholics and 20 percent Protestants. The Muslims formed 4 percent in Dutch society, indicating that roughly half of the 10 percent non-western ethnic minorities are Muslim, and some 5 percent belong to 'other' denominations. There is a wide variation of religious involvement across municipalities. For example, approximately 12 percent is Muslim in Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague, whereas less than one percent is Muslim in more than half of all municipalities. Also the concentration of Catholics (high in the south-east), Protestants (high in the north; north-east and south-west), and non-religious people (high in the north-east and north-west) vary substantially across municipalities. In Menterwolde 20 percent belongs to a denomination, in Urk 95 percent. In addition, church attendance is higher in some parts than in others. Only 4 percent of the inhabitants of Landsmeer attend church or mosque services on a regular base, in Urk this is 86 percent. Similarly, the share of non-western ethnic minorities, social benefits, low education level, low income and rented houses varies significantly between the municipalities.

Table 2 shows the correlations between the concentrations of the various characteristics within the 443 municipalities. Clear patterns emerge. In municipalities where many people attend a church or mosque on a regular basis, people have significantly more contacts with relatives, do more volunteer work, and a higher voter turnout during the parliamentary elections in 2010. In addition, municipalities with higher concentrations of people without a religious denomination or affiliation are characterised by fewer social contacts with relatives and friends, and fewer volunteers. On the other hand, there is a weak positive correlation with contacts with neighbours and no correlation with voter turnout. For Catholics, results are also mixed: positive correlations with contact rates with relatives and friends, but negative correlations with contacts with neighbours, volunteering and voter turnout. This picture is drastically different for Protestants. More protestants in a municipality implies the contact rate with friends is a rather low, but high with neighbours, many volunteers and also many voters at the polls in June 2010. More Muslims in municipalities relates to low levels of social cohesion: this is particularly true for volunteer work (see graph below) and voter turnout, but also for contacts with relatives and neighbours. These results mirror largely the negative correlations with the concentration of non-western ethnic minorities. However, the negative correlations with volunteer work and contacts with relatives are substantially higher.

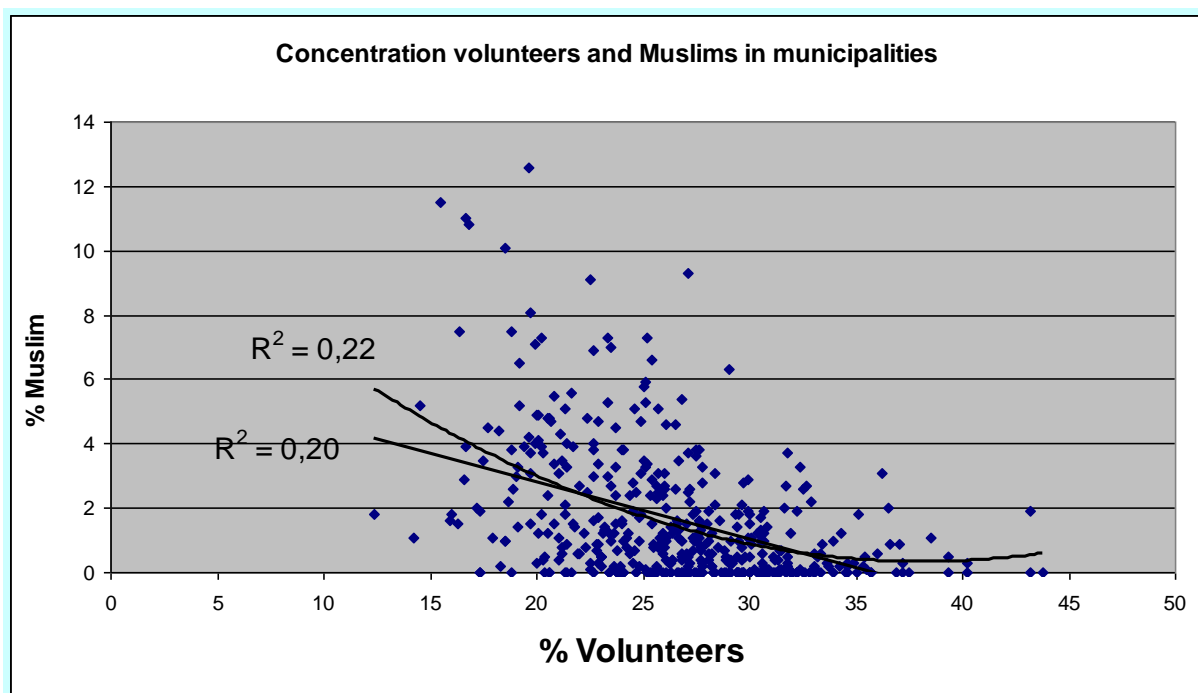


Table 2. Correlations (Pearsons' R): Concentrations of religious involvement (1997/2009) and social-economic characteristics (based on registers) by concentration contact rates (1997/2009), volunteers (2000/2009), and turnout rate (2010) in municipalities (n = 443)

	Contacts with relatives	Contacts with friends	Contacts with neighbours	Volunteers	Turnout rate
Concentration of:					
Church attendance (at least once a month)	0.35**	-0.08	0.09	0.41**	0.36**
No religious denomination or affiliation	-0.40**	-0.23**	0.13**	-0.15**	0.00
Catholics	0.23**	0.37**	-0.24**	-0.17**	-0.27**
Protestants	0.06	-0.32**	0.25**	0.42**	0.43**
Muslims	-0.25**	-0.03	-0.19**	-0.44**	-0.41**
non-western ethnic minorities	-0.36**	0.02	-0.20**	-0.53**	-0.42**
social benefits	-0.22**	0.02	-0.08	-0.51**	-0.71**
low incomes	-0.11*	-0.08	-0.03	-0.22**	-0.59**
rented houses	-0.33**	-0.02	-0.10	-0.49**	-0.43**
low education	0.23**	-0.15**	0.06	-0.14**	-0.45**

* p < 0.05

** p < 0.01

Social benefits are negatively correlated with volunteers, voter turnout and contacts with relatives. The same applies to the concentration of low incomes and rented houses in municipalities. Moreover, the table shows that the share of rented houses in particular is linked to the concentration of volunteers (R = -0.49), whereas social benefits and low incomes are strongly related to the voter turnout rate (R = -0.71 and -0.59). Finally, many inhabitants with low education levels implies more contacts with relatives but fewer contacts with friends. It also indicates fewer volunteers and in particular a low voter turnout.

This is just a first indication that aspects of social cohesion are linked to religion and socio-economic characteristics. However, we should be aware that correlations at a higher level do not necessarily imply that also correlations on lower levels will be found due to contextual fallacy (Snijders and Bosker, 1999).

4. Participation: 1997-2010

A vast majority of the Dutch population has weekly contacts with relatives, friends and neighbours (Coumans, 2010). Moreover, the share of such contacts increased. In 1997, 82 percent of the population aged over 12 had contact by meeting, by telephone or by (e)-mail with relatives, in 2009 this percentage went up to 86 percent. Similarly, contacts with friends increased from 77 percent in 1997 to 80 percent in 2009. Contacts with neighbours, however, stabilised around 66 percent in that period.

Informal help refers to helping other people, such as friends, relatives and neighbours, outside organisations and not within the own household. Three in ten people provide such help within one month before the survey. From 1997 onwards, this share of people helping others did not change (Van der Houwen, 2010).

POLS includes 13 questions about volunteering within organisations related to education (schools), church, health care, youth, culture, politics, trade unions and action groups. In total 42 percent did volunteer work at least once a year for one or more organisations. Most volunteers are found in sport clubs, followed by religious, schools and health care organisations. This picture did not change substantially in the period 1997-2008.⁵ However, the LFS findings show a 3 percent increase in volunteering – defined as ‘at present’ – particularly in sport/hobby, between 2001 and 2006 to 21 percent. These results stabilized in subsequent years (Arts and Te Riele, 2010).

Political participation is the third level of participation. The voter turnout rates in the European, national, regional and local elections did not change substantially from 1997 onwards. However, between 1970 and 1997 voter turnout saw a sharp decline in all four kinds of elections, in particular in the regional elections and elections for the European parliament (from 1979 on). On the other hand, historically the turnout rate for the national elections was high: between 80 and 90 percent went to the polls until 1989, and then turnout dropped only slightly to between 74 and 80 percent. Moreover, the 5 percent decline between the two previous elections – from 80.4 to 75.4 percent – was probably caused by the stricter rules about voting by a proxy (Schmeets, 2010). Apart from turnout, the DPES asked about political activities in the past five years, such as participating in an action group, political meetings, and demonstrations, via internet or contacting media. Some 37 percent participated in at least one political action in 2006; this figure had not changed in 2010.

⁵ In 2009 questions on volunteering were not included in POLS.

5. Trust: 2002-2010

Social and institutional trust was included in the ESS in 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008. The ESS uses a scale from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust). For reasons of comparison, we aggregate the positions 0 to 4 in the NO-option and 6 to 10 into the YES-option, and the position 5 is treated as the neutral-option. Although the questions on trust have been severely criticized, they were included in many surveys: see Reeskens and Hooghe (2009) for an overview.

The aggregated findings of the four consecutive years show that a majority of 61 percent trusts other people. Moreover, the share that opts for position 6 to 10 has increased from 58 percent in 2002 to 64 percent in 2008. Also, if we look at the share that opts for a NO-position, there is a 4 percent decrease.

In line with social trust, the ESS findings demonstrate a clear increase of trust in institutions (Kloosterman and Schmeets, 2010a). In particular the legal system and police gained more support as the trust levels increased by 11 percent between 2002 and 2008, from 52 to 63 percent, and from 61 to 72 percent respectively. Interestingly, after a small dip below 40 percent of trust in parliament between 2002 and 2004, trust reached 60 percent in 2008. Also other political trust indicators show a clear rise. Trust in politicians and political parties rose from about 40 to over 50 percent. This upward trend is also reflected in the trust in the European parliament and NATO. Moreover, the DPES findings confirm this trend of growing trust levels for 2006-2010 (Te Riele and Schmeets, 2010a).⁶ This is true for trust in the army, NATO, European Union, civil servants and major companies. The trust in some other institutions remained stable in this period: press, police, lawyers and parliament. Support declined drastically for one institution: the trust in churches fell from 42 to 33 percent.

6. Integration: positions of various groups on aspects of social cohesion

In the previous chapters we demonstrated that social cohesion has been increasing from 1997 onwards. This applies to contact rates, volunteering, and trust levels. We will follow up by looking at participation and trust levels for various subpopulations. Is there a gap in participation and trust levels between prevailing groups in Dutch society, indicating a lower level of integration, and consequently a lower level of social cohesion? We will start by providing an overview of differences in gender, ages and education: men versus women, younger versus older and lower versus higher educated people. The information is then detailed for the native and ethnic minority groups, religious denomination and church attendance.⁷

⁶ The institutions included in the ESS and DPES differ. The ESS includes more political institutions, such as 'parliament', 'European parliament', 'political parties' and 'politicians'. The DPES focuses more on general institutions in society, such as 'church', 'army', 'press', 'police', and 'big companies'.

⁷ Results are based on several chapters in Schmeets (ed.) (2010). *Sociale Samenhang: Participatie, Vertrouwen en Integratie* (CBS, Den Haag/Heerlen). The bivariate tables are also controlled for gender, age and education. The corrected figures are not substantially different from the uncorrected figures.

Gender, age and education

Women have more contacts with relatives and provide more often informal help than men. On the other hand, men participate more often in politics than women. When it comes to volunteering and trust, there are hardly any gender differences.

Younger age groups have more contacts with friends, while older age groups have more contacts with neighbours. Also older people – except for the age group over 75 – are more engaged in informal help than young people. The same is true for volunteering ‘at present’. However, when asking for volunteer activities during the past year, the middle aged groups are more often involved. In addition, older people show lower levels of social trust and trust in several institutions.

Education is an important discriminating factor in the description of almost all aspects of social cohesion. Highly educated people have slightly more contact with relatives and friends than less educated people, although there are no differences in contacts with neighbours. Among the highly educated 54 percent was active as a volunteer in the past year, versus 23 percent among the lower educated. The shares for ‘volunteering at present’ are 29 versus 11 percent. Likewise, 90 percent of the highly and 64 percent of the lower educated group went to the polls in 2010. In addition, the highly educated were clearly more politically active in the past five years than the lower educated, which is true for all activities we distinguished such as joining an action group, demonstrating, contacting politicians, and participating in political discussions via email, internet or sms. Also a clear divide in education groups turns up in trust levels. Only 32 percent of the least educated group trust other people, and then it gradually rises – via 41, 54 and 60 – to 78 percent among the highest educated group. Apart from trust in churches, the trust levels in all other institutions increase for the higher educated.

Ethnic minorities

When it comes to social contacts, there are hardly any differences between the native population and ethnic minority groups. However, in almost all other aspects of social cohesion, ethnic minority groups show lower rates than natives. This is particularly true for participating in providing informal help, volunteering and political activities, and in social trust. But also the different ethnic minority groups show differences in participation and trust. Of the four dominant non-western ethnic minority groups in Dutch society, people who came or one of whose parents came from Suriname or the Dutch Antilles scored higher on many aspects than people from Turkey or Morocco. For example, only 30 percent of the Turks and Moroccans trust other people, while for the whole group of non-western ethnic minorities the percentage is 35, for western ethnic minorities 57, and for native Dutch people 61. However, the picture is less clear when it comes to trust in institutions. The trust in several institutions is even higher among non-western ethnic minorities than among the native Dutch, such as trust in churches, civil servants, and the EU.

Religion

In 2009 a majority of 56 percent belongs to a denomination or affiliates with a religious organisation. However, only one in five of the population over 18 goes to a church or mosque on a regular base. Furthermore, the religious landscape shows 28 percent Catholics and 18 percent Protestants, divided into 9 percent Dutch Reformed, 3 percent Calvinists and 6 percent Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN). Apparently, only 6 percent are aware or explicitly want to belong to the PKN, a new church formed in 2004, integrating the Dutch Reformed, Calvinists and Lutheran churches.

Muslims have above average contacts with friends and neighbours (see table 3). The contact rate with friends is lowest among the Dutch Reformed, while the non-religious have lower than average contact rates with relatives and neighbours. The differences between Catholics, Calvinists and PKN are small. Overall, more frequent church or mosque goers have higher contact rates with neighbours than people who attend less often. The same is true for contacts with relatives when comparing the seldom or never group with all groups that go to church or mosque more frequently.

There is a clear pattern in the levels of informal help, volunteering and voter turnout across the various religious groups. People belonging to the PKN and, to a lesser extent the Calvinists, are more involved in Dutch society than others, the Muslim population in particular. The PKN members provide more informal help and are more active as volunteers; moreover protestants went to the polling stations more often than other denominations. Furthermore, more frequent church or mosque goers are volunteers: the share of volunteers gradually increases from 34 – via 47 and 55 – to 62 percent. Similarly, voter turnout increases from 72, via 81 and 85 to 90 percent. The pattern for informal help is slightly different: 28, 32, 37 and 35 percent, indicating that the peak is already reached by the group that attends a church/mosque service 1 to 3 times a month.

In the ESS the aggregated findings of 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008 show that a majority of 61 percent trusts other people. This percentage is slightly higher among Protestants and substantially lower among Muslims (see table 3). Moreover, social trust gradually increases to 68 percent among those who regularly (at least once a month) go to church or mosque, and drops to 63 percent among the most frequent churchgoers.

In POLS 2009 the three Protestant denominations are included separately. The highest social trust level is found among the PKN and Calvinists (close to 70 percent), whereas the trust level of the Dutch Reformed (50 percent) and Roman Catholics (53 percent) are significantly lower.⁸ Also findings based upon POLS 2009 show substantially lower trust levels among Muslims (34 percent). On the other hand, the group without a denomination shows an above average social trust level. In line with the ESS findings, the regular churchgoers have the highest social trust level, although the differences compared to the population who (almost) never visit a church or mosque are less pronounced.

⁸ Another source, the DPES 2006, shows the highest social trust rates among the PKN (72 percent), followed by the non-religious group (63 percent), Calvinists (61 percent), Dutch Reformed (60 percent) and Roman Catholics (57 percent) (Schmeets and Coumans, 2009).

The institutions included in the ESS and POLS differ. The ESS includes more political institutions such as the national parliament, European parliament, political parties and politicians. In POLS the focus is more on general institutions such as church, army, press, police, EU, NATO and major companies. The ESS results indicate that substantially higher numbers of Protestants trust most institutions. The European parliament is the only exception. Muslims show rather low trust levels on political parties, politicians and the UN. There are only minor other differences in trust levels between the religious groups. Furthermore, more frequent church- or mosque goers have more trust in these merely political institutions. However, for some institutions – the legal system, police, the EP, the UN and political parties – the peak is reached among the regular (at least once a month) visitors.

Table 3 Social contacts (2009), informal help and volunteering (2008), voter turnout (2010) and social and institutional trust (2002/2008) by denomination and church/mosque visits

	Relatives	Friends	Neighbours	Informal help	Volunteering	Voter turnout	Social Trust	Parliament	Legal system	Police	Politicians	European Parliament	United Nations	Political parties
	%													
Religious denomination														
No denomination	83	82	63	28	39	71	62	47	58	66	42	39	54	45
Catholics	90	80	66	32	42	72	60	51	55	69	46	43	58	45
Dutch Reformed	88	70	69	31	42	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Calvinists	89	81	64	28	51	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PKN / Protestants **	88	82	67	35	63	87	65	60	61	75	54	41	59	55
Islam	88	84	72	26	26	-	39	53	56	63	38	44	38	40
Other	83	83	63	32	48	81	64	55	59	68	46	46	52	52
Church/Mosque visits *														
At least once a week	90	79	72	35	62	90	63	60	59	74	55	42	56	53
1 to 3 times a month	89	82	71	37	55	85	68	58	66	77	53	48	61	54
Less than once a month	90	82	67	32	47	81	62	54	59	68	46	45	57	51
Seldom or never	84	80	63	28	34	72	60	44	56	65	40	37	53	42

* concerns the group with denomination

** for trust no further differentiation among protestants

Roughly the same pattern emerges for other trust items, based on POLS 2009. Except for the press, civil servants and major companies, the PKN and Calvinists show the highest trust rates. The trust among the Dutch Reformed is significantly lower, but still (slightly) higher than among the Roman Catholics and the non-religious group. Interestingly, in contrast to the very low level of social trust, Muslims have above average trust rates in lawyers, civil servants and the European Union. On the other hand, trust in the army and NATO is rather low. In line with the ESS items, the frequency of visiting a church or mosque is positively related to most of the trust levels: church, army, police, parliament, and civil servants in particular.

7. Conclusions and discussion

In this paper, we discussed the developments in social cohesion by introducing a framework of social cohesion. Participation and trust are two dimensions of this framework, and integration has been added as a third dimension. Integration refers to the various subgroups in the population, including higher versus lower educated, higher versus lower income groups, ethnic minorities versus the native Dutch, and religious versus non-religious. We investigated the positions of these groups on various aspects of participation and trust.

First, we presented correlations at the municipal level. Clear patterns in the Dutch landscape emerged. In particular, volunteering and voter turnout are strongly related to various characteristics, including religion. The presence of Protestants and Muslims was revealed to be important. More Protestants in a municipality reflects in higher and more Muslims in lower shares of volunteers and voter turnout. Furthermore, municipalities with higher concentrations of Roman Catholics or people without a religious denomination are characterised by low levels of volunteers. In addition, more regular church or mosque goers in municipalities indicate a higher number of volunteers in municipalities. Unfortunately, we were unable to disentangle concentrations of church and mosque goers. Apart from religious involvement, other characteristics may serve as a guide for social cohesion levels. In municipalities with high concentrations of rented houses, low incomes, people living on social benefits, and non-western ethnic minorities, the average scores on various aspects of social cohesion are substantially lower. This is particularly true for the share of volunteers and voter turnout.

Against the background of a strong feeling of the erosion of social cohesion in Dutch society, an overview was presented of the shifts in social cohesion from 1997 onwards. However, we found no empirical evidence in the statistics on participation and trust. Results based on POLS show that rates in social contacts and in informal help have been stable since 1997. The data based on POLS (since 1997) and LFS (since 2000) show that volunteering has not declined, nor do we have any indication of a downward trend in political participation (e.g. voter turnout) or political activities (DPES). In addition, there are indications that social and institutional trust did not decline but increased in the period 2002-2008 (Kloosterman and Schmeets, 2010).

In this paper we also addressed the third dimension of the introduced framework of social cohesion: integration. Gaps in participation and trust levels between prevailing groups in Dutch society would indicate less integration, and consequently a lower level of social cohesion. We found many discrepancies, in particular between lower and higher educated people, religious groups and country of origin. This concerns in particular volunteer work, voter turnout and social trust. Although the Netherlands shows high levels of social cohesion based on single indicators in Europe (Linszen and Schmeets, 2010), enhancing social cohesion for specific groups in society still seems to have a long way to go.

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