



The Netherlands Institute
for Social Research

In association with the Protestant Theological University

Summary

Between sustainable thinking and sustainable doing

Attitude, behaviour and willingness to change among religious and non-religious Dutch citizens in relation to climate change



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original title

Tussen duurzaam denken en duurzaam doen

Houding, gedrag en veranderbereidheid van religieuze en niet-religieuze Nederlanders als het gaat om klimaat

Maroesjka Versantvoort (SCP/PThU)

Mirella Klomp (PThU)

Millie Elsen (Centerdata)

Thijs Tromp (PThU)

Natalia Kieruj (Centerdata)

Yvonne de Kluizenaar (SCP)

Jurjen Iedema (SCP)

Lieke Heil (Centerdata)

Isabel van den Heuvel (Centerdata)



The Netherlands Institute
for Social Research



Protestant Theological **University**

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and Protestant Theological University (PThU)

The Hague and Amsterdam, July 2024

Key insights and perspectives for action

Reasons for this study

Climate policy: the importance of citizen engagement

Addressing environmental problems is one of the biggest challenges of our time. According to the United Nations, there are three planetary crises: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, including air, water and soil pollution (Abumoghli 2023). Our research mainly focuses on climate change – the most pressing environmental problem, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2022). This panel argues that it will only be possible to limit the rise in global temperature to 2 °C if we give it our absolute all. This means the Paris Agreement targets will no longer be met, but the consequences will remain somewhat manageable. The EU Member States signed the Paris Agreement in 2016. The aim was to limit global warming to well below the 2 °C mentioned by the IPCC. To achieve this, the EU Member States agreed to a minimum 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The European Union aims for complete climate neutrality by 2050. This means there will be no net emissions of greenhouse gases. For the Netherlands, the translation of these ambitions is laid down in the national Climate Act, the Climate Plan and the Policy Document on Climate Change (Central Government (Rijksoverheid) 2024).

Clearly, we still have a long way to go on the road to climate neutrality (PBL 2023). It is also clear that realising those ambitions will only succeed with the commitment and cooperation of citizens. Environmental problems are largely caused by people's behaviour (Steg and Vlek 2009). Besides the necessary efforts of the business world in tackling climate change, the actions of citizens also matter. Citizens' lifestyles have a climate footprint, resulting from their food consumption, purchasing behaviour, car use or energy use. Apart from all the technological innovations to reduce that climate footprint, achieving climate neutrality requires reflection on (and adjustment of) behaviour and lifestyle. Effective climate policy requires support and embedding in people's lives. In order to develop such policy, it is therefore important to have a good picture of citizens' attitudes towards climate issues, their behaviour and their willingness to adapt their actions and lifestyles. This can provide relevant insights into ways to encourage them to contribute to countering (further) human-induced climate change. This study focuses on citizens' attitudes towards climate change and climate policy, their motives, their lifestyle and their willingness to change. This involves questions such as: to what extent do intentions match behaviour? Are citizens willing to make sacrifices for the climate? What do citizens think is fair climate policy? What role do religion, personal motivations, political orientation, income, age and other personal characteristics play?

The answers to these questions help embed the citizen perspective more deeply in climate policy. The government has high expectations of citizens but has also indicated that policies do not yet sufficiently take into account the motives, motivations and differences in perspectives for action of different groups (TK 2021/2022, 2022/2023). This study aims to contribute to increasing this understanding.

Emphasis on willingness to change and attention to religion

In 2019, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) conducted research into citizens' attitudes towards climate change and climate policy (see De Kluizenaar and Flore 2021). This study is an update of that research (Chapter 3). It also adds two new perspectives. First, the perspective of willingness to change one's *lifestyle* (see Section 4). To what extent and under what circumstances are citizens willing to adjust their energy use, consumption patterns, eating habits, car use, flight habits, and immediate green and other living environment for the climate? For the first time, the question of whether the attitudes and intentions of people in our society also lead to more sustainable behaviour has been considered. Second, the perspective of religion has been added (Sections 5 and 6). To what extent do religious

people's beliefs shape their views, behaviour and willingness to change in relation to the climate challenge? This is the first time that the influence of religion and philosophical beliefs on Dutch citizens' attitudes and willingness to change in relation to climate change and sustainability has been addressed.

In the Netherlands, 36% of citizens considered themselves religious by mid-2023, ranging from somewhat to very religious. Of these citizens, 26% see themselves as Christian, 4% as Muslim, 6% as religious with no connection to any particular religion, and 1% as belonging to another religion (Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism).¹ This makes it relevant to zoom in on the views and attitudes of people of faith in the study of how citizens view the sustainability challenge and to compare them with those who consider themselves non-religious. Does religion matter in the Netherlands on this issue, and if so, how? How do the views of people from different philosophical backgrounds converge, and how do they differ? Insights into the role of religion can help to understand certain attitudes and behaviours better. They can also offer religious communities tools for when they want to talk about how faith and climate issues are connected. In general, they can provide a better overview of perspectives for action and also give insight into how religious communities can or cannot be partners in climate change mitigation.

These insights are consistent with the focus on broad prosperity that is increasingly important for the government in making policy trade-offs. The lens of broad prosperity ensures that we look at people's well-being in a more comprehensive way. In addition to economic prosperity, this also includes subjective well-being, health, a pleasant living environment, meaningful work and a clean environment are also part of this. It also helps create awareness about which choices are important and what should or could be sacrificed, if necessary. Applying this to climate policy requires accounting for the things that people value for ideological and/or religious reasons. From a broad prosperity perspective, attention to ecological and economic considerations and consideration of personal drivers and beliefs are therefore important when making climate policy trade-offs.

Partnership

This study is the result of a partnership between the SCP, the Protestant Theological University (PThU) and Centerdata.² Several methodologies were used for this study. Literature research was employed to construct a theoretical framework to understand behaviour and willingness to change one's lifestyle for climate change mitigation in relation to social and personal norms, beliefs and values – whether inspired by religion or otherwise. Longitudinal survey research was used to capture the attitudes and changes in the attitudes of people in the Netherlands towards climate change and climate policy. Experimental vignette research provided insight into people's willingness to change in terms of their lifestyle, and the influence of policy and the social environment in this regard. Using various statistical techniques (including multilevel regressions and latent class analyses), an attempt was made to gain insight into the relationship between religious and other convictions on the one hand, and attitudes, behaviour and willingness to change in relation to climate change on the other. The study ran from spring 2023 to spring 2024. The data was collected in July and August through the LISS panel.³

¹ This adds up to 37% after rounding. See Table A.2.3 in the annexes to this report for the sample description.

² This research is an initiative of the SCP and PThU and falls under their responsibility. Centerdata took care of analysis and reporting.

³ The LISS panel (Longitudinal Internet studies for the Social Sciences) forms a representation of the Dutch population. The panel is based on a true probability sample of households, drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands. It consists of 5,000 households, comprising approximately 7,500 individuals of 16 years and older. Self-registration is not possible; participation is invite-based only.

What kinds of attitudes and behaviour towards climate change are there?

Dutch citizens are convinced of and concerned about reality of climate change

The vast majority (95%) of Dutch people think that the climate has changed over the past hundred years. A smaller majority (65%) also believe that this change is more likely to be attributable to human action than to natural change. Three quarters of Dutch citizens are concerned about this, not necessarily regarding the impact on their own lives but, more importantly, regarding the impact on future generations, on nature and the environment, and on the lives of all people worldwide.

Climate problem seen as more urgent, sustainable behaviour as more normal

Compared to 2019, the sense of urgency has increased. More people feel that humanity needs to take action to combat climate change (74% in 2023 vs 65% in 2019), and almost three quarters of the population think that people should live differently. A possible factor here is that many people feel that the impact of climate change is now noticeable in the weather. The increase in the sense of urgency is accompanied by shifts in social norms in relation to sustainable behaviour: more citizens feel that people around them are trying to behave sustainably. At the same time, the proportion of people who think that a small group of Dutch citizens are forcing climate change measures on the rest has increased slightly (from 42% to 45%).

Wide differences between groups, discrepancy between climate beliefs and sustainable behaviour

There are significant differences between various groups, especially between elderly people, women, graduates of research universities and universities of applied sciences, and people living in more urban areas show greater commitment to combating climate change in various ways. For example, they are more likely to recognise the climate problem and the urgency thereof, are more likely to feel that their social environment is trying to behave more sustainably, and/or they feel more strongly that they can and should contribute to solving the climate problem.

However, this sense of urgency and responsibility does not lead to more sustainable behaviour across the board. Such behaviour is visible among the elderly, women and people living in urban areas. Among these groups, sustainable behaviour and views on climate are often more closely linked. Among graduates of research universities or universities of applied sciences, however, we see a different picture. They hold similar views on climate change as the aforementioned groups, but according to this group's own assertions, this barely translates into more sustainable behaviour, if at all. Notably, the opposite is true for people with relatively low incomes or those who for some other reason find it harder to make ends meet – people on a narrow budget behave significantly more sustainably than the average Dutch citizen, even though they actually hold less sustainable views. This is partly explained by the fact that the sustainable options that were the focus of this study were also, for the most part, the least expensive options. When disposable income is lower, people are also more likely to choose less expensive options. This makes the outcome that people with higher incomes, who have more options to choose from, are more likely to choose the more expensive but less sustainable behaviours – even though their intentions are more inclined towards sustainable behaviours – all the more striking. The large differences between groups mean that, applied to society as a whole, we are only able to establish a weak correlation between climate beliefs and sustainable behaviour. This is the difference between saying what you believe and acting on it.

Explanations for the discrepancy among those who have completed theoretical education: standard of living, status and compensation

Numerous theoretical explanations have been put forward to explain the discrepancy between having knowledge about climate change and exhibiting climate-friendly behaviour, but a unifying answer is still lacking (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2022). One explanation for the striking discrepancy between intentions and behaviour among people with a relatively high income and/or theoretical education (having attended research universities or university of applied sciences) is that this group also has, on average, a higher standard of living, resulting in higher consumption and accordingly a larger ecological footprint. Moreover, this group can be associated with an above-average pursuit of individual success and status acquisition, partly through consumption patterns (Belk 1988). This pursuit may lead to certain less

sustainable consumption patterns. A third explanation for the discrepancy between climate-related attitudes and sustainable behaviour within this group is that graduates of research universities and universities of applied sciences are more likely to do specialised work for which, for example, they are more likely to work at a greater distance from their place of residence and may have to make more business trips abroad. A fourth explanation is that this group of people with a theoretical education is making efforts to make behavioural adjustments with a smaller impact than the ones this study focuses on. This could include buying organic meat instead of cutting down on meat consumption or no longer eating meat entirely, or buying more sustainably produced new clothes instead of buying less new clothing. A final possible explanation for the discrepancy between the intentions of people with a theoretical education and their lower willingness to make greater lifestyle adjustments may be a perceived lack of knowledge: climate issues are complex, and what may appear to be a sustainable choice may actually not be. Putting aside the low-hanging fruit, when it comes to making sustainable choices and protecting the environment in a broad sense, it is sometimes difficult to understand which behavioural adjustments are most impactful: how do you know you are doing the right thing?

Explanations for the discrepancy among young people: life stage, sensitivity to social pressure

Young people, like older people, are concerned about the effects of climate change and see the need for human action to combat climate change. However, compared to older people, they feel less personally responsible for helping to counter climate change. It may be that they hold older generations or companies responsible for environmental problems and therefore for countering them. In line with their lower perceived self-efficacy, young people behave less sustainably on average (across all life domains). They are also slightly less willing than older people to modify their behaviour in the future. Zooming in on specific life domains, we see that the difference in sustainable behaviour between older and younger people is mostly explained by the fact that younger people travel by plane more often, pay less attention to energy consumption and buy new clothes more often. When it comes to travelling by car and eating meat, they behave equally sustainably. The differences in sustainable behaviour between younger and older people could also be explained by considerations other than those relating to sustainability. For instance, the fact that elderly people travel by plane relatively little may also be because some elderly people's health no longer allows them to make long trips. Alternatively, it may be related to their life stage: young people are at the beginning of their adult lives and may therefore be more focused on goals and needs with a different time frame, such as education, work and social activities (Steenjtes et al. 2018). On average, young people are also more sensitive to social influences and peer pressure. If sustainable behaviour is not the norm within their social group or peer culture, this may deter them from behaving in a climate-friendly way (Devine-Wright 2013).

Intention-behaviour gap: a sense of concern rather than a sense of responsibility

The climate problem seems to have become less abstract for many citizens in recent years. For instance, many people feel that the weather in the Netherlands has changed noticeably. While concerns about climate change have also increased, this does not go hand in hand with feelings of personal responsibility for combating climate change. At least 78% of people are concerned, while 53% feel that they have some responsibility for solving this. This share is declining (down 3% from 2019). Similarly, beliefs that human-induced or other climate change exists do not translate into feelings of concern and urgency, and the belief that people can do something about climate change does not necessarily translate into more sustainable behaviour. There is an intention-behaviour gap, also called the green gap, in the context of sustainability. Climate change is everyone's problem, and with it comes shared responsibility. This seems to lead to a bystander effect: we see something bad happening, but everyone looks at each other expecting someone else to do something (Darley and Latané 1968). In terms of climate change: we know the earth is warming and notice that the weather is becoming more extreme, but we do not take action, waiting for others to solve the problem. This can also be interpreted as a form of free-riding behaviour⁴

⁴ A free rider is someone who does not pay for a public good, but still enjoys the proceeds. Essentially, when it comes to collective actions where everyone involved benefits from the outcome, certain individuals tend not to contribute and still reap the benefits. This phenomenon is known as free riding. A classic example is the financing of a dyke: if one person chooses not to contribute to its construction, the dyke is still built because of the collective interest.

or the classic prisoner's dilemma:⁵ because the expected benefits do not have an immediate personal impact and it is unclear what other stakeholders are doing, it is more difficult to make investments or sacrifices of one's own.

Little willingness to change lifestyle

In almost half of the situations examined in this study – where there is room for sustainability – people appear to be unwilling to change. In general, when it comes to making lifestyle changes, Dutch citizens do not seem to be very aware of what is happening in nature, social environment or policy. In cases where people are aware, they are most willing to eat less meat and least willing to use their car less. Instances of willingness to travel less by plane, start using less energy, buy fewer new clothes and add more plants to their gardens fall somewhere in between.

Sustainable behaviours strongly driven by financial considerations

However, the results do not mean that citizens are completely unwilling to change their behaviour. People seem most willing to change when the relative costs of unsustainable behaviour become higher than those of sustainable behaviour. In this study, we even found that information about such price increases had a stronger influence on sustainable behaviour than future scenarios about natural disasters did. This suggests that people consider saving money more important than preventing natural disasters. Because the future scenarios presented were very general, we should use this interpretation with caution. It is likely that people would react differently when actually facing natural disasters or impending natural disasters in their own lives. Nevertheless, the outcome does show that financial considerations are a stronger determinant of behaviour than sustainability considerations or social norms.

How do citizens feel about climate policy?

Current policy measures relating to the climate problem

Government policies are aimed at achieving a sustainable and climate-neutral society. They revolve around international commitments (such as the UN Climate Accords and the European Green Deal) to limit global warming and counter threats to biodiversity. The national climate target is set in the Climate Act and the Climate Agreement: a 95% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 compared to 1990. Specifically, policy measures are aimed at making the built environment more sustainable, including making homes natural gas-free, encouraging zero-emission mobility and greater use of public transport, generating renewable energy locally using regional cooperative energy generation, and training enough professionals to make the transition technically possible. Emphasis is placed on increasing citizen involvement in climate action and policy, in close cooperation with governments, civil-society organisations and businesses (TK 2022/2023). Financial incentives such as subsidies, tax breaks and pricing have been the main tools for this so far. In order to take greater account of different motivations, drives and the difference in operational perspectives of different groups, the government wants to establish a citizens' forum on climate change (TK 2021/2022).

Current climate policy experienced as a threat to living standards and not perceived as fair

Overall, the Dutch are not particularly positive about climate policy. A fair proportion of Dutch citizens (59%) fear that climate measures will cause them to have to live differently and/or be unable to pay their bills (68%). A majority of Dutch citizens (61%) also believe that the costs of current climate policy are not shared fairly between rich and poor Dutch citizens, and some 70% feel the same when it comes to sharing the burden between citizens and the business world. Fairness is an important issue when it comes to climate policy. If the distribution of climate costs is not perceived as fair, support for climate policy comes under pressure, as does its effectiveness (WRR 2023). 'The polluter pays' should be the guiding principle of a fair climate policy. A large majority (82%) think that those people and businesses

⁵ The prisoner's dilemma stems from game theory and deals with the inability of rational actors who do not communicate with each other to decide on mutual cooperation, because they do not know what advantage the other has in whether or not to cooperate. Not knowing makes it extremely difficult to choose mutual cooperation. For both of them, not choosing to cooperate with each other will have at least the same chance of leaving them worse off as choosing cooperation, especially in the short term.

that cause the most pollution should contribute the most to fighting climate change. This is followed by the ability-to-pay principle: those with the highest incomes should contribute the most (according to 65%). The latter contrasts sharply with the current situation: people on high incomes and those who already seem to behave least sustainably show the least willingness to change lifestyles.

Dissatisfaction with focus on climate among growing group of Dutch citizens

There is a sense of dissatisfaction among a substantial group of Dutch citizens that goes beyond doubts about climate policy. For example, 3 in 10 Dutch citizens are angry about the focus on climate change. These Dutch citizens feel there are more urgent issues to address. This dissatisfaction has been increasing slightly: compared to 2019, not only do more people feel that a small group of Dutch citizens are forcing climate measures on the rest, but more people also feel that they are not allowed to enjoy anything anymore.

Does religion play a role in attitudes and behaviour towards climate change?

Little difference between religious communities in terms of views and sustainable behaviour

There appear to be few differences between religious and non-religious communities in how people view climate change. Roman Catholics, members of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) and Muslims do not have different views on climate change or have different views from people who are non-religious. They are more or less similar in terms of believing in the existence of human-induced climate change, their concern about it and the extent to which they feel personally responsible for contributing to climate change mitigation. In terms of sustainable behaviour, there are some differences. The behaviour reported by those belonging to orthodox Reformed and pietist Reformed groups, as well as religious communities who do not follow an institutionalised religion, is slightly more sustainable in general than the average Dutch citizen. Roman Catholics and Muslims actually appear to be slightly more concerned about possible negative effects of climate measures on their own lives than Protestants (this applies especially to the orthodox Reformed group) and people with no religious affiliation.

Beliefs matter more than specific religion or denomination

The views and behaviour of Dutch citizens regarding climate change and the environment do not seem to be strongly determined by the religion they do or do not adhere to, or by the religious community they belong to. However, specific beliefs do play a role. People with stronger (vs weaker) beliefs about humans as stewards of the earth (stewardship) are more convinced of the existence of climate change, are more concerned about its consequences and see it as a more urgent problem. They have a stronger belief that humans can combat climate change and feel a higher degree of personal responsibility for it. They are more inclined to behave more sustainably and support climate policies. For people with a stronger view of humans as rulers of nature (dominion), the exact opposite is true: they show less commitment to mitigating climate change, less inclination towards sustainable behaviour and less support for climate policies. These conceptions of stewardship and dominion both assume a special position of mankind in relation to nature. Both views can be distinguished from the belief that humans are intrinsically part of nature and thus do not have a special position in relation to nature. This belief appears to be positively related to the extent to which people recognise and perceive climate change as a problem (urgent or otherwise) and feel responsible for mitigating it.

These three findings are in line with our expectations based on the theoretical literature. However, this does not apply to our expectation that the belief that climate change fits in with what the holy books say about the End Times would correlate with lower engagement with climate issues, with less sustainable behaviour and with less support for climate policies. Contrary to this hypothesis, we find that religious people who make a link between climate change and the prophesied end of the world are actually more concerned about climate change and also more likely to think that they themselves can contribute to its mitigation. This was particularly prevalent among Muslims in the survey.

Beliefs about humans and nature vary as much within as between religious communities

It would not be accurate to link entire religious communities or denominations to beliefs about being the rulers or stewards of nature; these beliefs vary between religious communities, but just as much within them. We do see that Muslims resemble certain groups of Protestant Christians⁶ in their beliefs about ‘stewardship’ and ‘dominion over nature’. They share both beliefs relatively strongly – more strongly than the other groups. Both groups also make above-average connections between climate change and the coming end times, although Muslims do so even more often than Protestant Christians. Roman Catholic Christians, on the other hand, hold these views less strongly. The belief that humans are intrinsically part of nature is strongest among people who see themselves as religious but not belonging to a religious community.

Beliefs about humans, nature and God are related to climate beliefs and sustainable behaviour in different ways. ‘Stewardship’ thus entails a predominantly positive correlation, while ‘dominion’ entails a predominantly negative correlation. A high score on ‘stewardship’ is generally associated with greater problem awareness, a greater sense of urgency and more sustainable behaviour. The opposite is true for a high score on ‘dominion’. What is striking is that, at the same time, it appears that these beliefs often go hand in hand, both within religious communities and among people themselves. Those who strongly hold the conviction of mankind as steward also generally hold relatively strong convictions of mankind as holding dominion over nature. This means they are not necessarily opposed to each other but should be seen as a continuum, with the emphasis on ‘stewardship’ at one end and ‘dominion’ at the other. Their climate beliefs and behaviour depend on which of these two beliefs is stronger. This helps explain why we see few differences between people of different religions in their views on climate change and levels of sustainable behaviour. For example, within the Christian religion, *both* beliefs are shared to a relatively limited (Roman Catholics), moderate (members of the PKN) or strong extent (orthodox Reformed, pietist Reformed and evangelical communities). Muslims also share both beliefs to a moderate extent.

Where do we find perspectives for action?

First necessary condition appears to have been met: widespread problem awareness

People first need to be aware of the problem before they will consider their own responsibility and whether they can and/or want to contribute to reducing climate problems. This is not only a premise of value belief norm theory and the norm activation model (see Chapter 2) but also emerges from previous empirical research (Steg and De Groot 2010). The current survey shows that problem awareness is high in Dutch society: an overwhelming majority is convinced of the existence of climate change, is concerned about it and perceives countering climate change (or further climate change) as urgent. In that respect, this does not seem to be a bottleneck for individual behavioural change or support for climate policy. It is therefore not recommended to focus policy interventions on emphasising the climate problem and the urgency thereof. Doing so might even backfire: a significant group of Dutch citizens already feel that too much attention is being paid to this issue.

Knowledge about bystander effect can help

Converting intentions into actual sustainable behaviour is proving difficult, although problem awareness is widespread and many people have the intention to behave sustainably. To break the pattern of ‘waiting to see if others will adopt more sustainable behaviour first’, knowledge about the bystander effect helps. This psychological phenomenon describes situations where people are less likely to help if they know other people are around. People expect that another person will help and that others will be better able to help. The most common explanation is a low sense of responsibility because the sense of responsibility is carried by the group. The bigger the group, the more anonymous people feel. After all, if we interpret people’s reaction to the climate problem as a bystander effect, we can draw ideas for policy interventions from existing knowledge about this effect. For example, it is useful to know that people are more likely to help solve a problem if the other bystanders are acquaintances or are people who belong

⁶ This particularly concerns the orthodox Reformed, pietist Reformed and evangelical communities.

to the same social group (Levine and Crowther 2008). It is also important to note that the bystander effect can be partly counteracted by making people feel more self-aware and making them feel that helpful behaviour has a positive impact on their reputation (Van Bommel et al. 2012).

Pricing strongly influences sustainable behaviour and willingness to change

Money matters. This study shows that making climate-unfriendly behaviour more expensive and making climate-friendly behaviour cheaper both affect people's lifestyle choices. In fact, the effect is so strong that the significance of possible climate disasters and the significance of the social environment on the lifestyle choices people make change whether or not a particular lifestyle is additionally priced. This applies to energy use and mobility as well as food and clothing. No matter how great the threat of climate catastrophe, the enticing effect of making a particular lifestyle cheaper will outweigh the effect of the threat (and making a particular lifestyle more expensive is similarly effective). This makes pricing an effective tool to curb unsustainable behaviour and encourage sustainable behaviour. However, at the same time, its implementation may be at odds with principles of fairness. Pricing for unsustainable behaviour may also increase the sense of dissatisfaction with the 'imposition' of climate measures by a small group of Dutch citizens on the rest. Based on suspicions that climate policies will be received negatively for this reason, communication comes down to showing understanding for the views of this group of people as well.

Legitimacy and fairness as prerequisites for effective climate policy

When climate policies are seen as legitimate, people are more likely to adhere to their regulations and goals, which can increase their effectiveness (Tyler 2006). Perceptions of fairness and integrity play an important role in this (Bernauer and McGrath 2016). If people feel that the burden of climate policies is fairly shared and that their interests and needs are taken into account, they are more likely to support and comply with policies. Fair climate policy, according to citizens in the Netherlands, relies mainly on the principle that the people (and companies) who pollute the most should bear the heaviest burden of climate policy. The principle that higher incomes should contribute more is also widely supported. A fair climate policy should relate to this reality. When people show that fairness matters, this increases support for climate action, and it is also expected to increase its effectiveness.

Awareness and reflection: thinking is not the same as doing

A striking finding of this study is that people who graduated from research universities or universities of applied sciences and those with a relatively high income were particularly likely to express a lot of problem awareness, concern about the climate and support for climate policies, but this does not necessarily correlate with sustainable behaviour or willingness to change lifestyles. Among people who are more practically educated or have lower incomes, this is exactly the opposite: they exhibit more sustainable behaviour even though they are more sceptical about the state of nature and climate policy. In this context, becoming aware of and reflecting on the premise of 'knowing a lot is not the same as doing a lot' is important. This will help create an honest and open debate about everyone's and our common responsibility, break through customary preconceptions and thus help nurture the necessary unity in tackling the climate challenge.

Promote dialogue and focus on unity and broad connections

Despite shared problem awareness, the opinions of the Dutch on how to tackle the sustainability challenge lie far apart. Moreover, some Dutch citizens are angry about the large amount of attention that climate change and climate policy are receiving, given the state of society and the problems this country faces. This is a core theme when it comes to social unease (Geurkink and Miltenburg 2023). At the same time, meeting the climate challenges requires the commitment of society as a whole and the search for connection, not only between people who agree with each other, but also between people who differ in opinion and in how concerned they are. After all, climate change affects everyone; it does not discriminate between different groups of people. Dialogue, openness towards each other, empathy for everyone's position and awareness of joint responsibility, as indicated in the previous perspective for action, may also help create broader connections. Emphasising shared values, common goals and investing in community building may help as well.

Role of religious communities as partners in climate policy

Today's society no longer has many places where people of different ages, with very different ideas, education, levels of income and so on, meet and talk to each other about what is of value or even 'sacred' to them. Due to the disappearance of collective structures, increased individualisation and an emphasis on making choices and finding meaning at a personal level, individuals and groups of people no longer know where others stand. Religious communities – alongside, for example, trade unions, sports clubs and hobby clubs – are places where such dialogue can still take place. In religious communities, people have not chosen each other, but they belong together. In the context of climate change and sustainability, creativity and sustainability are needed to bridge the gap between different attitudes, lifestyles and degrees of willingness to change. Religious communities are pre-eminently places where people do not always agree with each other but where they do have the intention to search for what is true and what is good together, and to engage in dialogue with each other about it. Pastors and ministers, imams, rabbis, pandits and others who lead local religious communities, as well as religious leaders of national religious organisations, are often experienced in shaping dialogues, creating connections and shared values, and community building. In today's society, religious communities, which include people of different backgrounds and ages, can be testing grounds for bridging differences and creating unity in addressing climate challenges. Dialogue between people with different opinions still needs to be properly facilitated in this context.

Challenge for religious communities

This study shows that there are many differences within religious communities. Across all religious communities surveyed, a minority are satisfied with the amount of attention paid to climate within their religious community. In addition, although opinions are divided, a significant proportion of religious Dutch citizens indicate that they would like to see a greater focus on climate issues in their churches, mosques and synagogues than is currently the case. Beliefs appear to be more important than religious communities or denominations: the religious community you belong to matters less than what beliefs you hold. This may also explain why the conversation on faith, climate change and sustainability has not yet taken off. There may be some reticence as to how, with all these diverse views, that conversation can be had in a constructive way. In all religious communities, a majority of the members appear to be *undecided*, rather than satisfied or dissatisfied, while religious traditions usually include deeply held beliefs about how humans relate to nature. This suggests that many believers have not yet made a start with thinking and talking about the relationship between religious beliefs and climate. This is a warning sign, especially when combined with a growing awareness, increased concerns about climate change among Dutch citizens (including religious Dutch citizens) and the challenge of starting the conversation about this in relation to religion. Herein lies a challenge for religious communities, and perhaps especially for religious leaders. Religious institutions occupy a unique position in that they have places and communities where people from different backgrounds and views can come together and exchange views. The question is how they can make use of that unique position.

In conclusion

There is a discrepancy between sustainable thinking and sustainable doing, for religious people as much as for non-religious people. This presents a major challenge for Dutch society. Perspectives for action to address this challenge are characterised by a variety of different pathways and conditions to change individual behaviour and increase social acceptance of climate policies. The government can promote the operation of climate policies by focusing on financial incentives and a fair policy framework. However, that alone will be insufficient. We will also have to have an open conversation with each other in our country about different norms and values that influence our attitudes and behaviour towards climate change and sustainability. That conversation needs to take everyone's input into account – only then can that conversation have real impact. Religious and other communities have a role to play in this. By working together and embracing diversity, they can bridge gaps and jointly strive for climate solutions.

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This is a publication of:

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research
Postbus 16164
2500 BD The Hague
www.scp.nl
info@scp.nl

Protestant Theological University
De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam
www.pthu.nl
communicatie@pthu.nl

Cover photo: ANP | David Rozing
Translation: Metamorfose Vertalingen, Utrecht