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## **Protesting Like a Farmer with a Toothache: Revealing the Drivers Behind the Dutch Farmers' Resistance**

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### **Citation**

Josten, S. (2025). *Protesting Like a Farmer with a Toothache: Revealing the Drivers Behind the Dutch Farmers' Resistance*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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# **Protesting Like a Farmer with a Toothache: Revealing the Drivers Behind the Dutch Farmers' Resistance**

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Date: 3 January 2025

Word count: 27.251

## Abstract

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, the first large-scale farmers' protests in The Netherlands took place, opposing nitrogen policies. These protests inspired a variety of actions in the years that followed. This thesis examines the factors driving farmers' resistance and how these factors erupted in different forms of resistance. Additionally, it examines the conditions under which the resistance could develop and analyzes the government's response. Understanding the motivations and conditions behind specific forms of resistance can help the government recognize and address these issues in an early stage, ultimately enhancing policy efficiency.

This research draws on data from news articles, podcasts, documents, letters and interviews with farmers to conduct the analysis, learn about motivations and concrete resistance actions, while comparing various sources. Looking forward to the results, this thesis found that the factors 'disciplinary state power' and 'dominant discourses and knowledge' separately fueled both reverse discourse and spatial resistance practices. Additionally, it found that the perception of a failing government, connected to discontent with other societal issues, similarly fueled forms of resistance, though, often with a more violent character. Public support, group identification, visibility and social media were identified as conditions that enabled the farmers' resistance to develop. Lastly, this research offers recommendations to improve the government's response and strategy, by focusing on enhancing co-production and addressing the underlying discontent.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

“The State of the Netherlands is at war with the Boer Republic!” is a statement made by a leader of farmer organization Agractie in 2022, illustrating the intensity of the discontent that fueled the farmers’ protests in the Netherlands (Agractie, n.d.).

First some background information on the regulations driving this societal unrest, namely nature restoration and nitrogen regulations. The Netherlands, like other European Union member states, must comply with European regulations aimed at protecting nature and reducing nitrogen emissions, as part of the European Green Deal (NOS, 2022; European Commission, n.d.). Specifically, the EU Birds and Habitats Directive requires the Netherlands to prioritize the conservation and restoration of Natura 2000 areas. In response, the Dutch government has developed policies and programs to fulfill its obligations regarding Natura 2000 areas, with a particular emphasis on reducing nitrogen emissions and deposition within these areas (Ministerie van Landbouw, Visserij, Voedselzekerheid & Natuur, n.d.).

Since 2019, the Dutch government has actively worked on developing policies to protect nature and reduce nitrogen deposition, following a directive from the Council of State to take stronger action on the matter (Ministerie van Landbouw, Visserij, Voedselzekerheid & Natuur, n.d.). Efforts to drastically cut nitrogen emissions and deposition, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and intensive livestock farming, have led to significant social uncertainty, unrest and resistance, issues that form the central inquiry of this Masters’ thesis. These sectors account for 40% of nitrogen deposition in Natura 2000 areas, making them important targets of policy measures (NOS, 2022).

Although policies and measures aimed at reducing nitrogen emissions and deposition have far-reaching consequences for various sectors, such as housing construction, the impact is particularly significant for livestock farming. In this industry, the government perceives significant profit potential in emission reductions, and severe measures, such as buying out farmers, have been proposed to achieve this goal (NOS, 2021). Not surprisingly, restricting and disciplining measures have led to significant uncertainty, resistance and concerns about the survival of agricultural businesses. Widespread resistance from farmers erupted through various actions, such as blocking roads and threatening politicians, as well as engaging in more subtle forms of everyday protest. At the beginning of the protests in October 2019, farmers received support from 70 to 75 percent of the surveyed population (RTL, 2019).

The farmers’ movement developed over several years, during which both the scope and the character of the actions fluctuated significantly. At the first large-scale protest on October 1, 2019, at the Malieveld in The Hague, 2.200 tractors were present (NOS, 2024). Though, in response to revised nitrogen measures proposed by Van Der Wal in June 2022, the largest farmers’ protest in Dutch history took place in Stroe, where 60.000 people participated and 20.000 tractors were brought to the action (Luesink, Boin, Berger, Wijkhuijs & van Duin, 2022). While these large-scale, organized actions were often a direct response to the announcement of disciplining state measures, they were alternated with small-scale, local, bottom-up actions, ranging from publicly dumping garbage and manure to peacefully drawing attention to the farmers’ cause, such as placing upside-down flags (Luesink et al., 2022). Although the nitrogen policies are highly technical and primarily impose restrictions and insecurities on farmers, the movement has a diverse character, extending beyond the farming

community. The involvement and participation of other groups, such as anti-government protesters, along with societal support driven by a shared distrust and discontent, enabled the protests to reach such a widespread scale (Luesink et al., 2022).

It is evident that policies aimed at conserving and restoring Nature 2000 areas by reducing nitrogen emissions and deposition have a significant impact on farmers in agriculture and livestock farming. Existing literature on resistance acknowledges various forms of resistance. How do the farmers' actions relate to this? How exactly did they respond, and what drove their widespread actions, starting in October 2019?

## 1.2 Research question and purpose of the study

This thesis focuses on the emergence and development of farmers' resistance to nitrogen policy in the Netherlands, examining the factors that drove various forms of resistance and the conditions under which they occurred. Additionally, the government's response to this resistance is examined, with the aim of drawing lessons for potential improvements.

The Dutch farmers' protests against nitrogen measures, which began in 2019 and intensified over the years, serve as a case study for analyzing the drivers of resistance practices and the subsequent government responses. To examine the variables that drive, condition, and potentially shape various forms of resistance, this thesis aims to answer the following question:

***What factors drove different forms of farmers' resistance to the agricultural nitrogen policy in the Netherlands and how did the government respond?***

In answering this research question, sub-questions provide structural support and are divided into theoretical and empirical categories. The first (1) theoretical sub-question focuses on conceptualizing the different forms resistance can take and understanding how these forms emerge and relate to one another. The second (2) sub-question explores the driving factors behind resistance and the conditions under which it develops. The third (3) sub-question examines the theoretical connections between various drivers and the corresponding forms of resistance. Finally, the fourth (4) theoretical sub-question examines how government responses aim to eliminate the breeding ground for resistance and, in doing so, reduce it. Each theoretical sub-question forms the basis of a section of the theoretical framework, while the corresponding empirical sub-questions guide the analysis. Together, these sets of questions bridge theoretical insights, and the empirical case explored in the following chapters.

This research includes an explanatory research question, examining the influence of independent variables (to be identified) on a dependent variable, resistance.

The aim of this thesis research is twofold. First, through an empirical application of theories, it aims to examine the variables driving different forms of Dutch farmers' resistance and the conditions under which these forms emerged. Second, it investigates how government actions and responses have influenced the protests, and what improvements could be made. This approach aims to provide a deeper understanding of the factors underlying the development of resistance, offering valuable insights to the government on how similar situations and forms of resistance can be prevented, addressed or resolved in the future.

## 1.3 Academic relevance

In existing literature, there is considerable focus on resistance theories and theories regarding potential drivers to resistance separately, but an overarching theoretical connection between the two remains limited.

However, various scholars devoted their research to the connection between a specific driver or condition of resistance and the resulting resistance practices. For instance, regarding the driver state power, Bradley (2019) developed a framework that systematically connects different forms of state power to concrete strategies for challenging and transforming this. Similarly, Foucault (1975) focused on the exercise of disciplinary power and how it drives individuals to resist. Additionally, various other scholars in resistance studies explored how specific drivers result in certain forms of resistance, although not as explicitly as Bradley's (2019) framework. Lilja (2022) explains how authoritarian, disciplinary and knowledge-based power relate to different resistance practices, while Lilja & Vinthagen (2018) focus on how a specific form of resistance, notably productive resistance, relates to disciplinary power. These scholars also explore how dominant discourses and knowledge, as drivers, prompt individuals to engage in specific forms of action. While this provides valuable insights into individual mechanisms, an overarching framework that connects multiple drivers and practices, would be valuable for integrating all dynamics.

While the literature provides extensive knowledge, it does not explicitly distinguish between drivers and conditions under which resistance can develop, nor does it examine the relationship between these factors. For instance, the literature identifies group identification and social media mobilization as both potential drivers of resistance and factors that shape how other drivers lead to resistance, thereby acting as conditions. However, a systematic examination of both drivers and conditions in relation to resistance practices has not yet been conducted. This thesis aims to address this gap through the farmers' case.

Concluding, although existing literature is extensive, it lacks a comprehensive framework and systematic understanding of how different drivers, conditions, and forms of resistance are interconnected and influence one another. This thesis aims to address this gap by developing such an overarching framework, while also considering government reactions to resistance. Such a framework is important, as understanding the interplay between multiple drivers and conditions, rather than focusing on just one, offers a more cohesive understanding of the dynamics that lead to resistance.

#### 1.4 Societal relevance

The Netherlands, as an active member state of the European Union, must regularly transform binding regulations into national policies on issues that are sensitive within society and can lead to significant social unrest and resistance. An example hereof, in addition to nitrogen and environmental policies, are policies related to immigration (NOS, 2022).

Governments often need to impose policies and measures that significantly impact individuals or groups within society, yet are necessary to address social issues, tackle so-called wicked problems, and comply with EU regulations (Head & Alford, 2015). However, there are various methods and strategies governments can employ to achieve these goals and design policy processes. In practice, policies that address sensitive and impactful issues can incite social unrest and resistance, which in turn may affect their effectiveness. Consequently, recognizing and understanding the factors that fuel and condition specific forms of resistance is essential for governments as they develop future strategies. Early identification and awareness of these

factors can be crucial for addressing them, reducing opposition and improving policy effectiveness. Incorporating these factors into policy strategies could help diminish the breeding grounds for resistance. Understanding how different resistance practices emerge from various motivations and conditions plays a vital role in this process.

Concluding, this thesis aims to deepen the understanding of drivers and conditions that incite various resistance practices, including the impact of government responses. While the insights are grounded in the Dutch farmers' case, they can also be applied to other complex social challenges, such as the ongoing immigration issue. Understanding the drivers, conditions, and effectiveness of government responses could play an important role in addressing these. Since effective policy benefits both the government and society, this thesis holds significant societal relevance.

### 1.5 Reading guide

This reading guide outlines the structure of this thesis. Chapter 2 presents a literature review and theoretical framework, including an overview of relevant findings on the case, identification of a gap in the literature, and a focus on concepts and theories that are particularly relevant to addressing this gap. Chapter 3 justifies the research design, provides an overview of the data and methods used, and offers further insights into the research process. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the research results. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the results and a discussion of the implications for the literature, the limitations of the research, possibilities for further studies, and recommendations.

This thesis presents evidence on several causal mechanisms between drivers and different forms of resistance. Disciplinary state power, along with dominant discourses and knowledge, separately fuel resistance and incite both spatial resistance and reverse discourse practices. While this thesis provides evidence on how these drivers separately lead to the resistance concepts, the possibility of mutual influence between them cannot be ruled out, which limits the causal inference. Furthermore, the perception of a failing government as a driver sparks similar forms of resistance but introduces a more radical and violent dimension to the actions.

Additionally, evidence was found regarding the following conditions - social media, group identification, visibility, public support - as factors influencing how drivers incite resistance. However, this research found only evidence on their general impact, not on how they independently influence the different causal mechanisms. Finally, regarding the government's response, co-production was employed as a tactic to involve farmers in the process and potentially reduce resistance. However, this approach proved insufficient, leading to the following recommendations: (1) restructure the policy process to be more bottom-up, (2) provide a long-term vision to secure investments and innovation, and (3) reconsider the underlying value conflict in nitrogen measures.

## Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

### 2.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to determine which variables, under which conditions, drove specific forms of farmers' resistance to the nitrogen policy in the Netherlands and how the government responded. In addressing the research question, the initial focus will be on reviewing the literature relevant to the case and the theoretical sub-questions. First, a literature review will provide an overview of existing findings on the case. Second, the theoretical framework will draw on concepts from existing theories, and expectations about potential outcomes will be outlined.

Regarding the theoretical framework: First, multiple resistance theories will be discussed and evaluated, focusing on different forms of resistance and how they emerge. Next, potential drivers and conditions will be examined, such as disciplinary state power, and dominant discourses and knowledge. The third section builds on the first two theoretical sub-questions by linking these drivers to various forms of resistance. Finally, potential government responses to resistance will be explored.

### 2.2 Literature review

This literature review aims to provide an overview of findings on resistance, its drivers and conditions related to the farmers' case, nitrogen policies, and, more broadly, environmental policies, drawing primarily on literature stemming from Dutch and Indian farmers' protests.

First, a report from the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations offers a first glimpse into the factors driving farmers' resistance. It acknowledges the impact of negative framing on farmers, highlighting their feelings of being marginalized, underappreciated and overwhelmed by ever-increasing regulations and uncertainties. Additionally, polarization, particularly between urban and rural areas, along with a sense of being left behind, makes farmers feel disadvantaged, further fueling their discontent (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2021). Noya (2021) confirms these factors as important motivations for farmers' resistance and adds that the perception of inaccurate measurements of nitrogen emissions contributes to discontent over the policies and their perceived accuracy. These findings provide a first glimpse into relevant drivers to the farmers' case.

Negative framing, polarization, and consequently, discontent and a feeling of group identification as drivers of resistance, are discussed not only by the Dutch ministry (2021) and Noya (2021), but also by several other scholars, including Stevens, Aarts & Dewulf (2020). Stevens et al. (2020) particularly focus on how these mechanisms operate on social media and contribute to both conflict and resistance. They discuss how online framing of issues and identities, through the discursive use of emotions, further fuels polarization. Issue framing occurs when "disputants cast the issues in incompatible ways and fail to create an acceptable joint framing", while identity framing arises when groups create distinctions between an 'in-group' and an 'out-group', fostering group identification and reinforcing stereotypes about other groups (Stevens et al., 2020). Building on this, social media contributes to issue and identity framing, providing a platform that further fosters group identification, negative framing and polarization, which fuels the breeding grounds of resistance.

While the previous section addressed the role of social media in framing, fostering group identification, fueling polarization, and thereby resistance, other scholars, such as Kumari &

Pradhan (2022), discuss a related mechanism. They address how social media functions as a platform to publicly voice discontent and shape public debates. Although these scholars focus on how Indian farmers used social media to place their discontent and issues on the public agenda, drawing attention to their cause and fueling widespread resistance, their findings may also offer relevant clues for the Dutch case. In the absence of mainstream media dominance, societal groups can influence the public debate and act as agenda-setters. Social media has the power to deliver first-hand information directly to the public and shape deliberations, compelling mainstream media, politics and the public to engage with and address pressing issues. In the context of protests in India, social media enabled farmers to raise awareness and place their issue on the public and political agenda (Kumari & Pradhan, 2022). These findings highlight the potential influence of social media as a catalyst for resistance, given its ability to generate widespread attention to perceived discontent, by amplifying public voices.

While research widely agrees on the impact of framing and polarization in driving farmers' resistance, as well as on the role of social media herein and in shaping public deliberations, other studies draw attention to social media's specific function in mobilizing farmers. Noya (2021) found that the majority of respondents in her study on the Dutch farmers' protests were mobilized through social media, a trend confirmed by findings of Bainiwal (2022). Noya (2021) further elaborates on the role of social media in informing about and coordinating protests, as well as encouraging participation, positioning it as both a catalyst and condition for mobilization. Bainiwal (2022) confirms this mobilizing impact, applying it to the Indian case. He describes how social media can be used to challenge dominant media narratives, as well as to organize and mobilize individuals around a cause. In this regard, mobilization through social media becomes a condition for development of resistance, as it unites people driven by various motivations into collective action. This condition will be revisited in the theoretical framework.

While substantial research has focused on the impact of framing, polarization and social media mobilization, De Weerd & Klandermans (1999) discuss how group identification among farmers fosters their action preparedness. They found that Dutch farmers primarily identify with one another on the regional and national level, fostering action preparedness and, through this mechanism, participation in protests. De Weerd & Klandermans (1999) distinguish between the effects of ingroup identification and outgroup differentiation on protest participation; a distinction also made by Stevens et al. (2020). They found that only ingroup identification influences protest participation, while the protests are primarily directed against the government, rather than other social groups. Group identification as a driving factor, or condition, of resistance will be further explored in the theoretical framework.

This literature review aimed to provide an overview of relevant findings on farmers' resistance, uncovering substantial research. It offers an initial glimpse into the factors driving resistance and the conditions. However, existing literature on farmers lacks a clear distinction between drivers that independently lead to resistance and the conditions that enable it to emerge. Furthermore, findings do not systematically link specific drivers to distinct forms of resistance. This is a gap in current literature, that this thesis aims to address.

In addition to the findings specific to this case, a general conceptual framework will be developed in the following section. This framework will be used to examine whether other mechanisms drive different forms of farmer resistance and to assess the impact of government responses.

## 2.3 Theoretical framework

### 2.3.1. Understanding resistance

This section of the theoretical framework aims to provide an overview of relevant literature that relates to the theoretical sub-question: *what are different forms of resistance?* In conceptualizing these different forms, this thesis borrows a conceptual framework from Lilja (2022).

First, it is important to provide a clear definition of resistance and what its goal is. Research of Lilja, Baaz, Schulz & Vinthagen (2017, p. 40) describes the concept of resistance as “a tool for critically exploring subaltern practices in relation to power”, where these practices can be aimed at challenging, negotiating or undermining existing power structures. Similar definitions are recurring in many studies. Various scholars, however, evaluate concrete resistance strategies, practices and goals differently depending on the social and political context. Some even go further, arguing that resistance is omnipresent in daily live and that a discourse of resisting has even become the norm today (Žižek, 2002).

In the definition mentioned above, ‘subalternity’ and ‘power’ are important concepts in relation to resistance. Subalternity refers to a position where “subjects are constantly in the process of being produced and are repeatedly constituted in subjection”, with their identities perceived as inferior to dominant ones (Lilja, 2022, p. 316). However, some scholars, like Lilja (2022), argue for removal of subalternity from the definition, as resistance can also emerge from individuals or groups that do not occupy such a position. Nevertheless, in most studies, the relationship between subalternity and power remains important in examining resistance.

Although numerous scholars address establishing social change as the overarching goal of resistance, they emphasize that different forms of resistance and the specific goals depend on context. Lilja & Vinthagen (2018) stress that some expressions of resistance focus on meaning-making, while others aim to avoid or undermine dominant power, or simply strive for a dignified life (Scott, 1989). Although resistance ultimately aims to bring about change, the methods employed to achieve that change are highly dependent on context, influenced by historical, cultural and political factors (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018).

Given that resistance can have various goals, scholars agree that it can take multiple forms, including hybrid forms that arise from the interconnection between individual and collective resistance (Lilja et al., 2017; Lilja, 2022). In addition to hybrid forms, it is important to briefly discuss how resistance itself can encourage further resistance, manifesting in various ways. Scott (1989) explored how dispersed, individual acts of resistance can inspire others or lead to collective resistance. Other scholars, such as Lilja et al. (2017), focused on a different dynamic, namely how organized resistance can stimulate individual, everyday forms of resistance, an aspect that will be discussed later.

So far, this section has aimed to provide a definition of resistance by specifically focusing on the concepts of subalternity and power. Now it is important to shift focus to the different forms resistance can take.

In reviewing the literature, a noticeable shift emerges from a focus on collective, mass organized, confrontational resistance to more subtle (or sometimes loud) forms of small-scale, everyday resistance, such as counter-conduct. Nevertheless, some scholars note that “still, individual forms of resistance in these cases seem to matter primarily as indicators, beginnings

or evolving processes of collective action” (Lilja, 2022, p. 310). Baaz et al. (2021) add to this by noting that individuals only make sense when they organize themselves within collectives. While the first statement might be true, everyday resistance is, following multiple studies, widespread. Despite the notion that forms of resistance heavily depend on power structures and the broader societal context, this paragraph aims to provide a basic overview of different forms.

Lilja et al. (2017), drawing on the work of other leading scholars, offer an initial categorization of resistance, making a key distinction between public and disguised resistance. Public resistance is generally organized, visible and confrontational. On the contrary, disguised or everyday resistance is generally unorganized, subtle and less confrontational. Everyday resistance, as a concept developed by Scott (1989), illustrates that certain behaviors, such as foot-dragging and sarcasm, serve as dispersed and disguised forms of small-scale resistance, providing an initial categorization.

*Figure 1*

<b>Public resistance (organized)</b>	<b>Disguised resistance (unorganized)</b>
Open revolts, petitions, demonstrations, land invasions	Hidden transcripts, disguised discourses, dissident cultures

In reviewing resistance studies, the main distinction is between public and disguised resistance. Further narrowing the latter down, individual small-scale resistance can also take different forms. Dispersed resistance conceptualizes this. Literature by Lilja & Vinthagen (2018) classifies dispersed resistance into two categories: everyday and subtle, as already briefly discussed, and non-everyday and loud and extraordinary. Non-everyday small-scale resistance cannot be easily put into the previously discussed categories, as it does not involve collective, organized action and is neither subtle nor quiet. An example of this is individuals setting themselves on fire as an act of resistance. Though, this glaring resistance aligns with Scott’s (1989) ideas on small-scale resistance, as he acknowledges the possibilities for more open, public and direct resistance alongside subtle forms (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018).

Furthermore, this classification distinguishes between two generalizable forms of dispersed resistance with societal implications: productive and counter-repressive resistance. Productive resistance relates to disguised and subtle resistance, where there is no ‘creation of ‘alternative’ ways of life or complete ‘subcultures’ or ‘counter cultures’ that break with existing domination in any full sense. Rather, this dispersed resistance is a matter of created ongoing small-scale differences that might look trivial, but sometimes might become significant’’, such as counter-conduct as specific practice (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p. 212). On the contrary, counter-repressive resistance is less subtle and more overt, directly opposing dominant power structures through practices such as foot-dragging or public disobedience (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018).

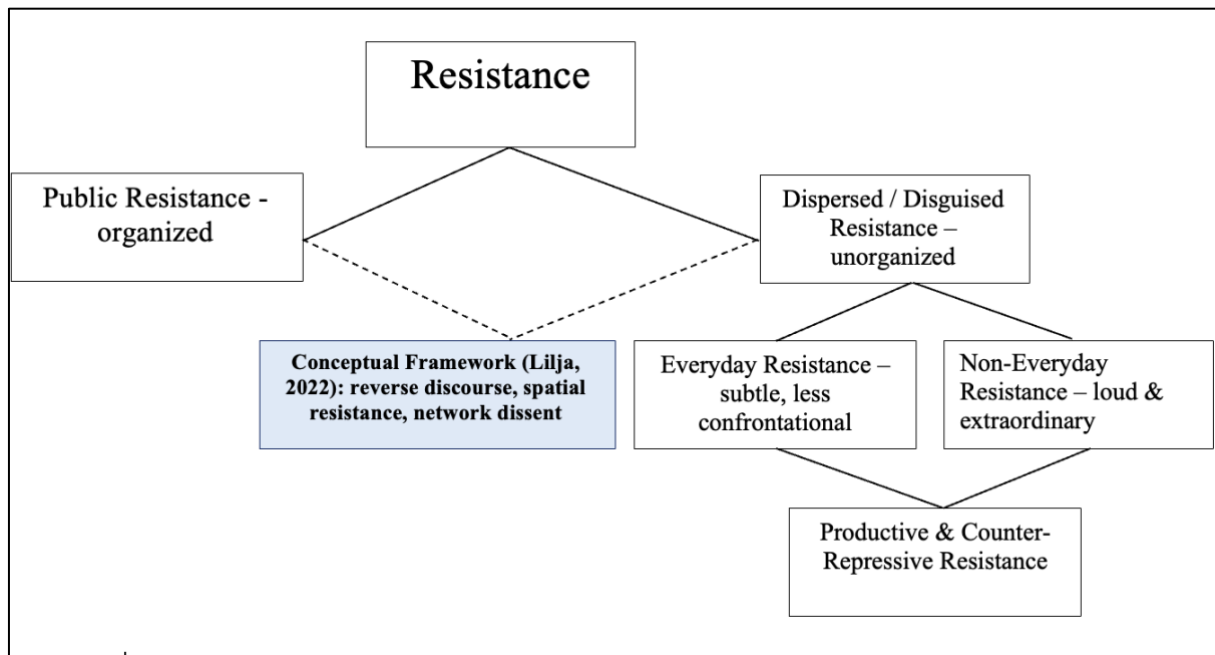
As described earlier, scholars have predominantly focused on collective resistance, though there is a growing attention to small-scale actions. Some scholars, such as Lilja (2022), offer a conceptual framework for analyzing forms of resistance that encompass both collective and individual elements, which will be applied in this thesis. In Lilja’s (2022) framework, symbolic concepts such as reverse discourses, spatial resistance and networked dissent are presented as ideal types, with their particular materialization depending on the context.

Reverse discourses involve resistance practices that challenge, reinterpret and re-signify dominant structures, norms and language. Spatial resistance refers to practices specifically tied to geographic space, while networked dissent entails mobilizing around issues through online

networks (Lilja, 2022). However, the latter form will not be included in the conceptual framework for analysis, as this thesis focuses on online networks as a condition for the development of resistance, rather than as a form of resistance.

Although this section has outlined various categorizations of resistance (Figure 2), highlighting distinctions in organization, scale and visibility, this thesis borrows Lilja's (2022) conceptual framework to analyze the dynamic nature of farmers' resistance. This framework highlights hybrid forms of resistance, combining collective actions with everyday practices that evolve around specific issues or subject positions.

Figure 2: Conceptual diagram resistance



In conclusion, when theoretically examining different forms of resistance, multiple categorizations and conceptual frameworks can be applied. Scholars broadly agree on the distinction between public, organized and disguised, unorganized resistance. Various frameworks refine these distinctions in different ways. Scott (1989) categorizes small-scale resistance into everyday and non-everyday resistance, with productive and counter-repressive actions as expressions. Lilja (2022) conceptualizes resistance as encompassing both collective and individual actions, introducing the contrasting ideal types of reverse discourses, spatial resistance and networked dissent, which conceptualization will be the focus of this research.

### 2.3.2. Drivers of resistance

This section of the theoretical framework aims to overview relevant literature and gather divergent theories to answer the sub-question: *What are potential drivers of resistance?* The identified drivers are disciplinary state power and dominant discourses and knowledge, with group identification and social media functioning as catalysts and conditions that influence these drivers, as well as resistance practices.

#### Disciplinary state power

As already briefly discussed in the previous section, scholars broadly agree that power structures play an important role in the emergence and shaping of resistance practices. They

agree that resistance is closely related to the exercise of power and cannot be understood without this connection. Lilja (2022, p. 314) describes this mechanism as a ‘noticeable correspondence between how power is applied and the resistance that is performed’, although this direct link may not always hold true in exactly the same manner.

Literature extensively explores how different exercises of state power drive various forms of resistance, a topic that will be discussed later in this section. However, several scholars note that power-resistance relations between the powerful and the subaltern are not limited to state power; resistance can challenge all sorts of power relations, as noted by Lilja & Vinthagen (2018).

Although other factors are important, state power plays a significant role in the emergence and expression of resistance. Herein, Scott (1989) emphasizes that the exercise of state power shapes the form that resistance takes, arguing that ‘those who claim “real resistance” is organized, principled, and has revolutionary implications ... overlook entirely the vital role of power relations in constraining forms of resistance. If we only care for “real resistance” then all that is being measured may be the level of repression that structures the available options’ (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p. 213). Following Scott (1989), the degree of power domination influences the expression of resistance.

Focusing on the concrete exercises of state power, Foucault is a leading scholar in this field. While Foucault distinguishes between various practices of state power, disciplinary power is particularly relevant for this thesis. Disciplinary power refers to the mechanisms used to create obedient and productive individuals who conform to prevailing norms, achieved through ‘a series of techniques by which the body’s operations can be controlled’ (Foucault, 1975, p. 1). Elements through which this power is exercised on individuals include ‘hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and examination’ (Foucault, 1975, p.1). According to widespread literature, these practices, which aim to discipline individual behavior, drive resistance.

In line with Foucault, Gaventa (2021) discusses that the exercise of state power structurally leads to individuals or collectives challenging or confronting it, which constitutes resistance. Both Foucault (1975) and Gaventa (2021) emphasize state power as inextricably linked and inherent to resistance, with possibilities for resistance existing within every power relationship.

While these scholars identify power as a driver of resistance, Gaventa (2021), and others, specifically focus on the mechanisms of ‘power-over’ and ‘power-to’ in relation to resistance. Power-over refers to the ability to dominate and control others, while power-to refers to the capacity to achieve emancipation from such dominance. Scholars note that these mechanisms are interconnected: resistance to power-over can generate power-to when individuals or collectives successfully influence or transform power structures. As Pansardi (2012) suggests ‘power to, just like power over, should be understood as consisting in social relations, and, moreover, that the social relations on which power to is necessarily based are specifically relations of power over’, providing insights into how power-over can lead to resistance and, eventually, to power-to or emancipation (Gaventa, 2021).

Literature of Lukes (1974) conceptualizes three forms of power; visible power (the making and enforcing of rules), hidden power (agenda-setting), and invisible power (shaping values, meanings and conceptions) as driving resistance (Bradley, 2019). Visible and invisible power mechanisms align with Foucault’s (1975) elements of disciplinary power, where rules are

imposed on individuals and enforced through hierarchical observation and examination (visible power), while the creation of dominant values and meanings fosters the socialization of subjects through normalizing judgements (invisible power). Following from the literature review, these mechanisms play a role in driving farmers' resistance, with disciplinary power identified as an important driver herein.

Building on this, other scholars, such as Bradley (2019), developed a conceptual framework illustrating how these forms of power distinctly lead to forms of resistance (Gaventa, 2021), which will be revisited in the following section.

### Dominant discourses and knowledge

Literature on the existence and exercise of dominant discourses and knowledge offers valuable insights into how these mechanisms drive resistance. In analyzing this interplay, it is important to first explain how these can exert dominance over individuals.

A leading scholar in this field is Foucault. According to Foucault, dominant discourses, like prevailing ways of thinking that shape values, meanings and desirable behaviors, determine the production and preservation of knowledge. Discourses not only determine knowledge but also exert significant power over individuals who follow or conform to them, where "knowledge is perceived as being hardly ever value-neutral", thereby imposing societal consequences (PoReSo, 2020, p. 170; Van Dijk, 2011). Van Dijk (2011) adds to this dynamic by emphasizing the power of knowledge. He describes knowledge as an expression of underlying dominant discourses and explains that it can be used to influence or manipulate individuals. For instance, the dissemination of biased knowledge can be employed for political purposes.

Accordingly, Foucault not only addresses the interplay between discourses and the production and legitimization of knowledge, but also discusses the relationship between knowledge and power. His studies describe that knowledge is intricately linked to power structures, as knowledge is produced and legitimized within specific power relations and vice versa. Or as Foucault notes: "power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations" (Foucault, 1977).

Following this reasoning, there is broad consensus among scholars that, since knowledge is constructed through dominant discourses and power dynamics, certain individuals, subaltern groups or communities will always be disadvantaged and have an interest in resisting these dominant structures (PoReSo, 2020). Within dominant discourses, not all voices, behaviors or interests are equally recognized or legitimized, which can result in the oppression of certain individuals. Disputes over, with as a consequence, contestation of dominant discourses and knowledge can therefore be seen as a driver of resistance.

Studies of PoReSo (2020) developed the concepts of 'knowledge as power' and 'knowledge as resistance'. Knowledge can be regarded as a form of power, as just discussed, but also as a means of resistance, when used as "speaking back to power; identifying the cracks and fissures in dominant epistemologies and narratives; producing knowledge from epistemological loci other than the ones embraced by power; and allowing 'knowledge otherwise' to imagine and forge 'worlds otherwise'" (PoReSo, 2020, p. 169). Lilja & Vinthagen (2018) introduce another concept related to knowledge as resistance, namely: the capacity or agency of individuals to resist through processes of self-reflection. This concept emphasizes the ability of individuals to

be aware of, question and challenge dominant discourses and knowledge that shape their behavior and beliefs, being crucial for their capacity to resist. The following subsection will revisit these concepts to connect them to resistance practices against the exercise of dominant knowledge and discourses.

Findings from the literature review confirm the importance of knowledge contestation as a driver in the farmers' protests, particularly regarding disputes over the measurements of nitrogen emissions, which sparked widespread unrest (Noya, 2021). Furthermore, the review highlighted how negative framing and perceptions of farmers, shaped by dominant discourses, have contributed to their dissatisfaction (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2021). These theoretical concepts will be further examined and applied to the farmers' case in the analysis.

### Group identification

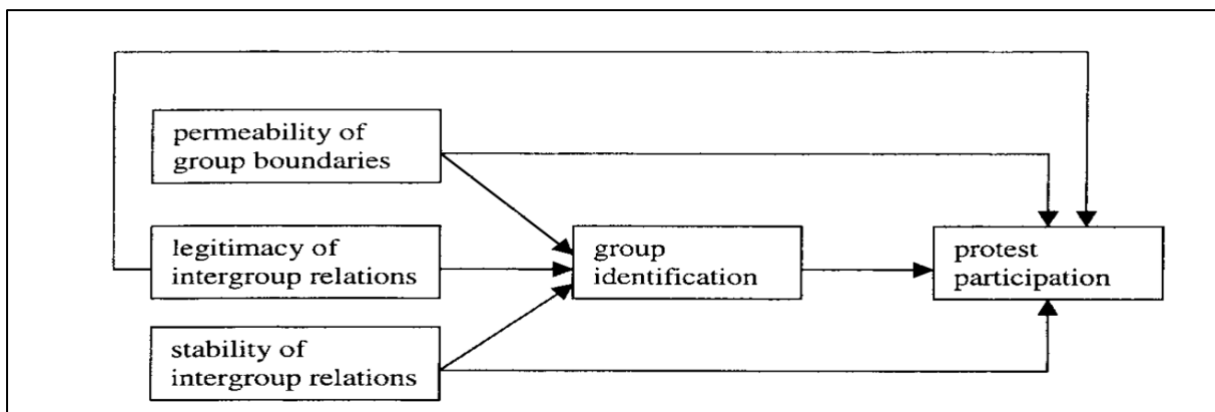
Literature on group identification theories offers insights into how this relates to resistance. Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodriquez & De Weerd (2002, p. 239) describe widespread academic support for the statement that "a strong identification with a group makes participation in political protests on behalf of that group more likely," making group identification an important accelerator of resistance. In this reasoning, group identification is seen as a component of collective identity. In addition, scholars, such as Simon et al. (1998), broadly agree that identification with members of the organization is more important to action preparedness and one's self-image than identification with the issue in general.

Klandermans et al. (2002, p. 247) specifically devoted their research to farmers' action preparedness and found that "both identification with other farmers and participation in a farmers' organization stimulate action preparedness, which in turn stimulates action participation", identifying group identification as both a driver and a condition of resistance.

De Weerd & Klandermans (1999) provide a conceptual framework underlying this mechanism (see Figure 3). This framework conceptualizes how the characteristics: stability of intergroup relations, legitimacy of intergroup relations and permeability of group boundaries, influence both group identification and protest participation. These characteristics determine the level of ingroup identification, which can serve as a moderator for protest participation. Alternatively, these characteristics can directly influence preparedness for protest participation, depending on the contextual situation. What is evident, is that, through these mechanisms, group identification drives resistance, as is also established for the Dutch farmers' protests in the literature review.

Figure 3

Source: De Weerd & Klandermans (1999)



Group identification on itself has the power to drive resistance; however, without a specific cause or reason to resist, this does probably not occur. Thus, while group identification is theoretically a driver, it can also be understood as a condition that facilitates resistance in connection to other drivers. Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt & Spears (2001) describe that group identification, and potentially action preparedness, can result from perceived discrimination against that group, leading to a differentiation between the in-group and others. According to Jetten et al. (2001, p. 1205), perceived discrimination particularly occurs when the mainstream devalues membership of a particular group. In response, ‘members frequently react to threats to their group identity with increased group identification and cohesion’, making discrimination, potentially stemming from dominant discourses, norms and values, a driver of resistance, with group identification acting as a mechanism that influences and accelerates this effect. Discrimination, as described by Jetten et al. (2001), links to the driver of dominant discourses, with group identification shaping this mechanism. In this regard, group identification functions not only as a driver but also as a factor that potentially moderates how other drivers lead to resistance.

This connection between group identification and other drivers of resistance, such as dominant discourses or discrimination, is also evident in the farmers’ protests. Findings from the literature review point to the impact of negative framing, as dominant discourses and frames negatively affected farmers, fueling their dissatisfaction and motivation to resist. Farmers, as a social group, felt marginalized, underappreciated and disadvantaged by these dominant narratives, which intensified their sense of group identification and polarization, partly amplified by social media (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2021; Noya 2021). This interplay played an important role in driving resistance and will be discussed further in the analysis.

### Social media

Findings from the literature review direct to social media platforms as being of importance in the framing of issues and in organizing and mobilizing resistance. Following from this, and supported by various scholars and theories, mobilization through online platforms is identified as both a condition and catalyst for organizing people around issues and discontent related to other drivers, ultimately leading to resistance. As also proved to be true for the farmers’ protests (Noya, 2021).

Breuer, Landman & Farquhar (2014) explore the impact of social media on the emergence and organization of resistance and find that these platforms play an important role in various ways. Individuals or groups can use these platforms to voice discontent, highlight issues and share information they consider important, aiming to raise awareness and shape perceptions. Additionally, Breuer et al. (2014) elaborate on the power of social media in targeting, encouraging and mobilizing individuals for collective action. A related mechanism is the spill-over effect, where messages are amplified across networks, reaching diverse audiences and spreading awareness beyond the groups primarily advocating for the cause. This process helps to rally support and mobilize collective action by broadening the reach of the movement.

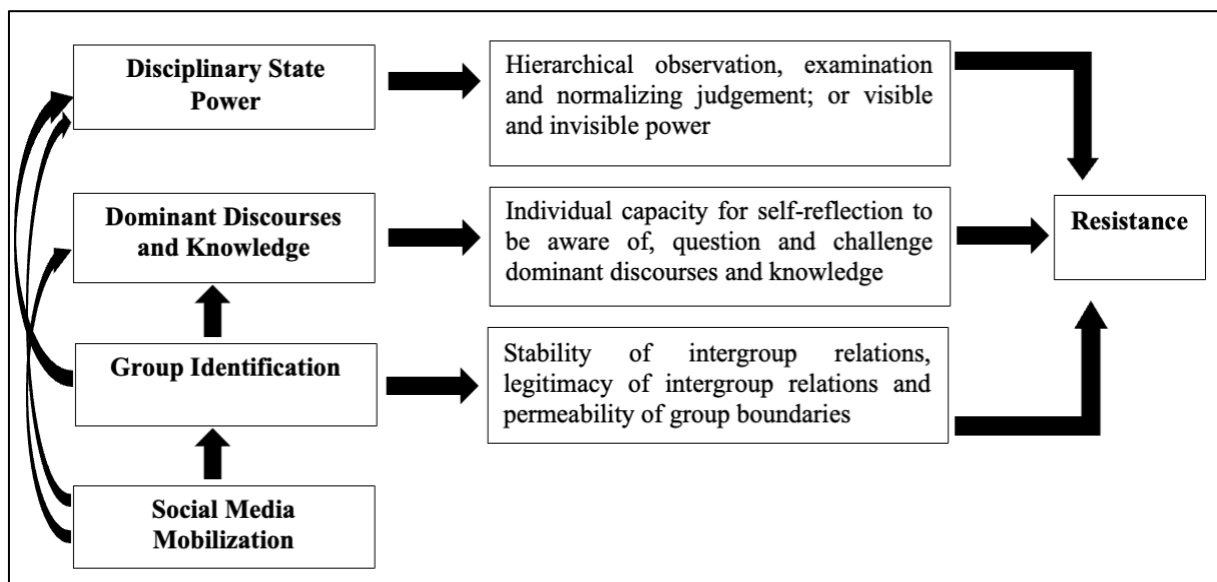
Other scholars, like McKeon & Gitomer (2019, p. 2), add to this by stating that ‘social media has changed traditional mobilization structures, including how members of movements are recruited and how communication takes place’, while distinguishing between tactical and emotional tools. Social media can function as a tactical tool for sharing information, coordinating actions and mobilizing people. Additionally, it serves as an emotional tool by

fostering a sense of togetherness, creating collectivity and shaping shared identities. Through this emotional function, social media enhances group identification, as discussed in the previous section.

So, the function of social media platforms is twofold. On the one hand, social media can foster resistance by framing issues, further fueling polarization, and influencing deliberations and the political agenda. On the other hand, in an increasingly digital society, social media serves as a condition for coordinating, organizing and mobilizing resistance, driven by discontent related to other factors, such as dominant state power, prevailing discourses and knowledge. Findings from the literature review support this, highlighting social media as an important tool for raising awareness, sharing information and mobilizing participation in the Dutch farmers' protests (Noya, 2021). Therefore, social media cannot be considered as a driver on its own, but rather as a condition that fuels and enables other drivers to effectively lead to resistance.

As already mentioned, social media platforms can foster group identification (McKeon & Gitomer, 2019). This can be seen as unconditional condition, where these platforms play an important role; however group identification can also develop through other means.

Figure 4: Conceptual diagram on drivers and condition



Regarding a theoretical expectation: this section of the theoretical framework, grounded in extensive literature, identifies the exercise of disciplinary state power, alongside dominant discourses and knowledge, as key drivers of resistance. Furthermore, group identification functions both as a driver and a condition, while social media mobilization serves as a condition that fuels and enables other drivers to effectively incite resistance. Figure 4 summarizes this.

### 2.3.3. Relation drivers & forms of resistance

This section aims to theoretically connect the drivers of resistance to different forms of resistance, addressing the question: *How do different drivers and resistance forms relate to each other?*

Although the ultimate form of resistance and its connection to drivers cannot be fully generalized due to the context-dependent nature and flexibility, a general framework will be developed to provide guidance.

## Disciplinary state power – resistance

Numerous studies have focused on connecting different forms of power to resistance practices; particularly relevant to this case is disciplinary power. According to Lilja (2022, p. 314), when power is exercised through ‘disciplinary training, detailed surveillance and examination, resistance will be about refusing difference, avoiding surveillance or assuming a non-disciplinary wildness’ as concrete practices. Where disciplinary power aims to shape the behavior of individuals through hierarchical surveillance, normalizing judgements and examination, resistance tries to circumvent this dominance (Foucault, 1975). Elements of disciplinary power relate to both visible and invisible power aspects, as defined by Lukes (1974). Based on this distinction, Bradley (2019) developed a framework, the power matrix, that connects the exercise of power to concrete resistance practices. Figure 5 presents an integrated diagram that illustrates the elements of disciplinary power in relation to visible and invisible power, connecting them to concrete resistance practices and conceptualizations. Visible power exercise, including disciplining through surveillance and examination, leads to spatial resistance, while invisible power, through shaping discourses and normalizing judgements, fosters reverse discourse practices.

Figure 5: Power Matrix by Bradley (2019)

<b>Mechanisms</b>  <i>How power over operates to exclude and privilege</i>	<b>Responses and Strategies</b>  <i>Challenge and resist power over</i>	<b>Conceptualization Resistance Lilja (2022)</b>
<b>Visible:</b> making and enforcing laws, hierarchical surveillance, examination	Demand accountability to existing laws and agreements using advocacy lawsuits, direct action, petitions etc., challenge inequitable policies and practices	Spatial resistance
<b>Invisible:</b> shaping meanings, values and what’s normal, normalizing judgements	Challenge and disrupt repressive social norms and traditions, question taboos and use of shame / guilt to control, name and expose underlying interests and values driving political narratives, draw attention to contradictions and impacts of invisible power	Reverse discourses

In illustrating a concrete example of a resistance practice, Lilja & Vinthagen (2018, p. 212) explain productive resistance as the process that ‘negotiates discursive regimes and various claims to ‘the real’, as well as resistance that – through counter conduct and techniques of the self – undermines production of particular ways of life, desires, subjectivities and institutions via biopower and disciplinary regimes’. This form of resistance, which primarily targets invisible power, dominant discourses, and the disciplining effects of normalizing judgements, focuses on subtly altering behavior and stereotypes by making small changes in actions and addressing discourses in a nuanced manner within everyday contexts (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018).

Regarding the characteristics of resistance practices against both visible and invisible elements of disciplinary power, and in relation to Lilja's (2022) conceptualization of forms of resistance, invisible power is particularly associated with reverse discourses practices, as illustrated by the previous example. Invisible power creates dominant discourses that form the basis for normalizing judgements that discipline individuals; to resist these disciplining judgements, actions must target the underlying discourses, which is achieved through reverse discourses practices.

However, visible elements of disciplinary power, such as the enforcement of measures through hierarchical surveillance and examination, can drive practices that directly resist these forms of control. One example of this is direct action that opposes either the disciplining regulations or their enforcement (Bradley, 2019). Direct actions that strategically use or occur within physical space, or are linked to specific spatial issues, are considered forms of spatial resistance. Spatial resistance encompasses a wide variety of practices, all of which are "embedded in a collectiveness and linked to the same conflicts" or spatial issues (Lilja, 2022, p. 319). This is particularly evident when regulations or issues target a specific area or population, leading to space-bounded resistance. For instance, in the case of the farmers, various resistance practices are linked to the same spatial issue: policies that disproportionately impact farmers in rural areas.

#### Dominant discourses and knowledge – resistance

In examining dominant discourses and knowledge as drivers of resistance, literature primarily focuses on the concepts self-reflexivity and techniques of the self as means to contest this dominance. These concepts involve various tactics to create awareness, challenge dominant discourses and knowledge and introduce alternative norms and perspectives.

Dominant discourses and knowledge come from somewhere; they are shaped by invisible power structures. Lukes (1974) explains invisible power as a process of shaping meanings, values and what is perceived as normal, resulting in dominant discourses. Dominant discourses and knowledge not only drive resistance themselves but also form the basis for normalizing judgements, as discussed in the previous section, linked to disciplinary power exercise.

Self-reflexivity was identified in the previous section as a condition for individuals to resist and engage in techniques of the self, particularly in terms of their awareness of dominance and capacity to challenge it (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018). Concrete practices that emerge from focusing on challenging dominant narratives and introducing alternatives involve subtle behavioral changes, such as counter-conduct, negotiating knowledge and hierarchies, and organizing people around alternative narratives (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018; Lilja, 2022).

Resistance practices arising from dominant discourses and knowledge fall within the scope of reverse discourses of Lilja's (2022) conceptualization. In the farmers' case, resistance manifests through contesting discourses, negative frames, and knowledge, particularly concerning the measurement of nitrogen emissions, through various practices that will be further explored in the analysis.

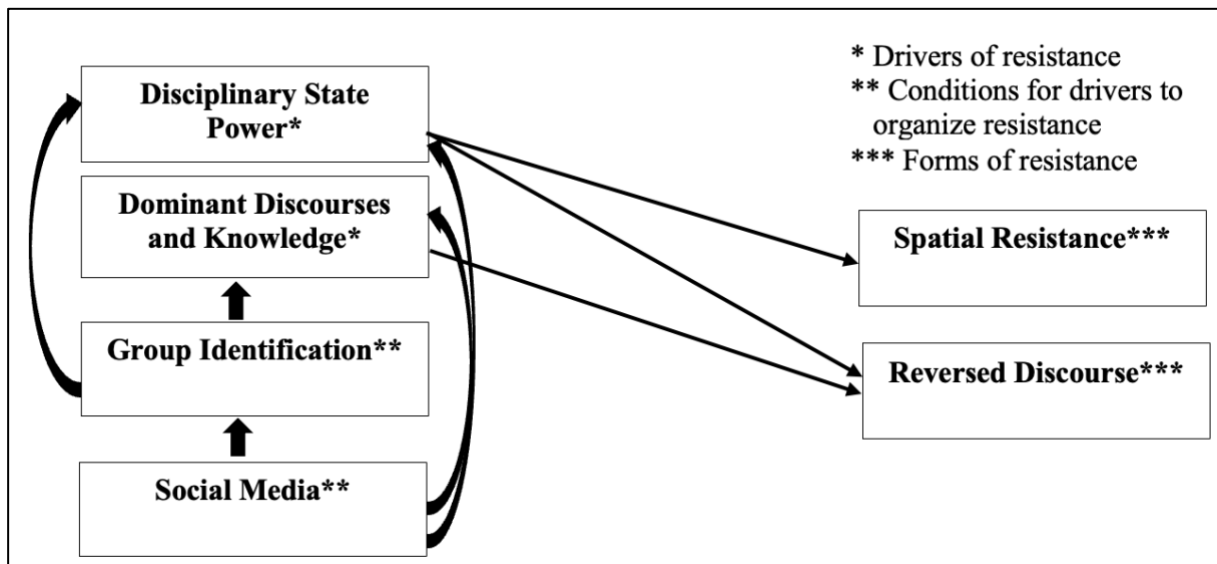
#### Conditions: group identification and social media

In reviewing literature on group identification and social media mobilization, these factors are identified as influencing how other drivers incite resistance, rather than causing resistance independently, as illustrated in Figure 6.

According to the framework of De Weerd & Klandermans (1999), group identification can independently foster action preparedness and protest participation. However, without a specific issue to rally around, this is unlikely to happen. Therefore, group identification closely links to other drivers, influencing how these lead to resistance practices. For example, Jetten et al. (2001) discuss how perceived discrimination relates to and increases group identification, illustrating how these mechanisms influence one another and incite resistance. This theoretical framework posits that group identification serves as a factors that, in interplay with state power and dominant discourses and knowledge, fosters resistance.

Furthermore, social media platforms have been previously discussed as both tactical and emotional tools (McKeon & Gitomer, 2019). The tactical aspect emphasizes the power to organize, coordinate and mobilize collective action, while the emotional aspect fosters collective feelings and enhances group identification through online networks. In this regard, social media platforms serve as a condition that enables drivers to incite resistance, partly due to their mobilizing power. Additionally, these online networks foster the factor group identification, thereby having a dual effect.

Figure 6: Diagram on drivers, conditions and resistance



Regarding a theoretical expectation: this section connects different drivers to specific resistance practices, based on established theories. Disciplinary state power, encompassing both visible and invisible dimensions, is expected to incite various practices, including reverse discourses and spatial resistance, depending on the context. Conversely, dominant discourses and knowledge are expected to only incite reverse discourse practices. Group identification and social media mobilization are regarded as conditions that influence how the drivers result in resistance, rather than producing specific resistance practices themselves.

#### 2.3.4. Government actions and reactions

This section aims to theoretically answer the sub-question: *How can government actions direct or influence resistance?* Where the previous sections focused on drivers, conditions and concrete practices of resistance, this section aims to elaborate on how governments can affect resistance.

Previous sections discussed how disciplinary state power, dominant discourses and knowledge fuel resistance, driven by discontent among those affected by this situation. How can governments affect this discontent driving resistance? In this context, literature on citizen involvement in decision-making discusses the positive effects of inclusive policymaking on societal support. When citizens are actively involved in decision-making, their concerns and discontent can be addressed within the process, fostering greater support and potentially eliminating the breeding grounds of resistance. Irvin & Stansbury (2004) examine the advantages and disadvantages of citizen participation in decision-making, as well as the conditions under which it can succeed. They note that “with citizen participation, formulated policies might be more realistically grounded in citizen preferences, the public might become more sympathetic evaluators of the tough decisions that government administrators have to take”, potentially increasing support and limiting resistance (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004, p.55). In addition to involving citizens as a response to discontent, it is more effective to include them early in the process to anticipate and identify potential issues that could lead to public backlash (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

Accordingly, Callahan (2007) emphasizes the importance of open dialogue and deliberation with citizens, rather than allowing bureaucrats and politicians to dominate the process and promote dominant discourses, as a means to foster successful co-production.

Furthermore, incorporating citizens’ knowledge of specific issues is seen as positively influencing realistic and effective decision-making, which is especially important when addressing complex issues such as nitrogen policy. This approach involves not only incorporating technical expertise but also insights into group-specific positions and policy preferences. As Irvin & Stansbury (2004, p. 56) note, “through regular contact with citizens who might otherwise not be engaged in the policy process, learn which policies are likely to be explosively unpopular and how to avoid such policy failures” (Irvin & Stansbury, p. 56). This involves considering all perspectives and knowledge, addressing the dominance of certain discourses, and using this to reduce resistance.

Conditions under which citizen participation is considered highly beneficial and important include situations where: “(1) the issue is gridlocked and a citizen mandate is needed to break the gridlock, (2) hostility toward government entities is high, and the agency seeks validation from community members to successfully implement policy, (3) community representatives with particularly strong influence are willing to serve as representatives, and (...) (5) the issue is of high interest to stakeholders and may even be considered at ‘crisis stage’ if actions are not changed” (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004, p.62). When these conditions arise, citizen participation is considered beneficial and should be actively encouraged. This is particularly relevant in the context of the farmers’ case, which seems to align with these conditions.

In conclusion, involving citizens in the decision-making process can be an effective government response to address resistance, provided the situation meets the specified criteria. Co-production can be employed as a tactic to reduce the factors that fuel resistance and foster realistic, effective policymaking grounded in citizens’ preferences (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

## Chapter 3: Research Design

Previous subsections described the research question, sub-questions, and theories that guide the direction of this thesis. However, while conducting the research, some important methodological choices were made, which this chapter explains and justifies.

### 3.1 Research design

This chapter begins with explaining the choices made within the research design. This study has as research question: *What factors drove different forms of farmers' resistance to the agricultural nitrogen policy in the Netherlands and how did the government respond?* inciting the use of an explanatory, deductive and qualitative research design involving a single-case study, namely the Dutch farmers' case.

#### Design

This thesis employs a single-case design, allowing for an in-depth analysis of one specific case to examine how the theoretical causal conjunctions unfold empirically and how multiple variables, or 'pieces of evidence' potentially affect the outcome. Single-case designs, distinct from other designs, focus on one empirical case and multiple pieces of evidence within that case. There is no comparison across units or cases, but instead, focus is on exploring 'alternative predictions and mechanisms of competing theories/ explanations about a multitude of observable aspects related to a single case' (Toshkov, 2016, p. 285). In explanatory single-case designs, such as used in this study, the congruence or divergence among multiple pieces of evidence is evaluated to determine the extent to which they account for the outcome (Toshkov, 2016).

While single-case designs, including within-case analyses, can be used for various research objectives, this thesis focuses primarily on theory testing. Single-case designs allow for the empirical examination of theoretically expected causal effects of variables on outcomes, or causal mechanisms in order to test theories. For instance, this thesis aims to investigate how theoretical causal conjunctions regarding the effects of drivers and the influence of conditions on specific resistance practices manifest in the empirical case of Dutch farmers (Research Design, 1:25). In this single-case study design, existing theories will be tested, and potentially new theories will emerge (Toshkov, 2016, p. 190-191). Single-case designs can also be used to explain the outcomes of individual cases through logical abduction; through comparing various hypotheses and underlying theories with data until the best explanation is identified. Another possibility is using this design for theory generation (Toshkov, 2016). This thesis study will primarily focus on theory testing but might also generate new theories as a byproduct.

In short, this thesis employs a single-case design to conduct an in-depth analysis of an empirical case, aiming to gain a better understanding of this case, test well-established theories in practice to assess their relevance, and potentially generate new theories (Toshkov, 2016).

In addition to a single-case design, this research also employs a qualitative design, as this best aligns with the research objective. This thesis aims to deepen understanding of the drivers and motivations behind resistance to government policies, making it important to explore people's concerns, uncertainties and motivations to resist; specifically those of farmers. Qualitative designs, especially when combined with within-case analysis, are particularly well-suited for uncovering underlying insights and deeper understandings, justifying the choice of this design for the research (Willems & van Zwieten, 2004).

## Process tracing

This thesis employs process tracing as the method of analysis, as this is the preferred approach for explanatory within-case analysis (Toshkov, 2016). Process tracing focuses on revealing a sequence of interconnected events, like links in a chain. However, the most important aspect is identifying causal mechanisms, or, in this case, likely causal conjunctions, that underlie and explain the sequence of events. These causal mechanisms are not directly observable; only the chain of events is. However, they are derived from the theoretical framework, where causal relationships between variables have been established (Toshkov, 2016). Or as Toshkov (2016, p. 298) states, ‘‘prior research establishes what the building blocks of causal explanations are and how they can be linked together, and process tracing uses and combines these building blocks to account for individual cases and events.’’

When conducting a within-case analysis using the process tracing method, chains of events within the case must be connected to theoretical propositions to evaluate the accuracy of these causal mechanisms and explain the case events (Toshkov, 2016). Process tracing can serve two purposes. First, to learn about and understand motivations and information of actors. Second, to reconstruct the institutional context and chain of events that led to specific outcomes (Toshkov, 2016). Both of these aspects are of interest for this study.

Loyens (2014, p. 27) describes three forms of process tracing: ‘theory testing PT’, ‘theory generating PT’ and ‘explaining outcome PT’. The latter focuses specifically on explaining a case, while the first two are primarily theory-oriented, linking case events to theoretical mechanisms. This study adopts the theory-oriented approach. In the following sections, the implementation of this method will be discussed in more detail.

### 3.2 Case selection

This thesis examines one case: the Dutch farmers’ protests against the government’s nitrogen policies, which began in October 2019 and are analyzed through the end of 2024. This case enables both the answering of the research question and the testing of whether the theoretical causality, or causal conjunctions, hold true in practice. The main consideration for selecting this case, accordingly, is that it entails widespread resistance in various forms, extensively documented and recorded in primary and secondary sources. Due to its high public attention, impact, and coverage by the media and other forms of reporting, this case is suitable for tracing and, thereby, testing expected causality between drivers, conditions and forms of resistance.

The goal of process tracing in this thesis is to test the theoretically established causal mechanisms, or conjunctions, concerning how drivers, influenced by various conditions, lead to specific forms of resistance. This case, characterized as the largest public resistance in the Netherlands in recent times, allows for such testing, as extensive data is available, including information on various resistance practices and underlying mechanisms (NOS, 2022). Various data sources provide an overview of the development of resistance practices, indicating that actions appear to harden over time (Luesink et al., 2022).

Dutch farmers are well-known for employing a variety of resistance practices, ranging from threatening politicians to blocking highways and using more conventional means (Luesink et al., 2022). This makes the case interesting for exploring the specific drivers behind these practices, how these actions evolved over time, and what measures the government took to influence them.

### 3.3 Data collection methods

This thesis focuses its data collection on indicators established for the variables to gather information on forms of resistance, as well as on the motivations and conditions behind them. Data has been collected from primary and secondary sources, through the evaluation of documents, articles, letters, and podcasts, in addition to conducting interviews. This diverse range of sources, encompassing multiple perspectives, is intended to enable data triangulation and verification.

Within-case analysis focuses on alternative explanations for an outcome variable, in this case resistance, and examines which explanations are supported by the evidence. Data, or ‘pieces of evidence’, on variables help make some hypotheses or causal mechanisms more likely, while rendering others less plausible (Toshkov, 2016). Toshkov (2016) explains how information gathered from data collection is used in process tracing to examine motivations, beliefs, and other variables within the causal mechanism. This approach is also valuable for reconstructing contexts, chains of events and causal conjunctions that lead to an outcome. Data collection seeks ‘information about particular variables previously identified by theories but also pursues promising leads suggested by the case evidence itself’, while focusing on various data sources (Toshkov, 2016, p. 292).

The documents analyzed, listed in Appendix 1, include reports from ministries and public organizations. Appendix 2 lists the reviewed articles and letters written by farmers, offering insights into their perspectives. Both of these sources offer information on concrete resistance practices, their evaluation and the factors and conditions driving the associated discontent. Appendix 3 lists the analyzed podcasts, which feature interviews with key figures and initiators of the protests, providing first-hand insights into the motivations behind these actions.

When selecting sources, they must provide insights into at least one of the variables within the causal mechanisms. Finding evidence on the relationship between concrete resistance practices and the motivations and conditions driving them, is the primary focus of data. In analyzing this data, thematic coding through NVivo is used to identify patterns across sources. Appendix 5 contains a code tree of these patterns, which serves as the basis for the analysis.

After reviewing these documents, articles and podcasts, interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ motivations and the context surrounding the actions. Appendix 4 lists the interviewees, who were selected to represent diverse perspectives within the farming community. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing to focus on both indicators representing dependent and independent variables, as well as on mechanisms derived from the other sources. The analysis extensively uses quotes from all sources to ensure transparency in the data, which have been translated from Dutch to English.

While this thesis relies on qualitative data that primarily focuses on motivations, which may be subjective, caution is warranted when making causal claims based on a single source. Triangulation, which involves considering different types of evidence to confirm causal claims, is important (Ulriksen & Dadalauri, 2016). Therefore, this thesis focuses on multiple sources, including documents, articles, podcasts and interviews.

Evidence aims to establish the likelihood that certain causal mechanisms or conjunctions are true for a specific case. When examining the value of qualitative evidence, it is important to

assess this likelihood, based on its certitude and uniqueness (Toshkov, 2016). This thesis focuses on finding pieces with a high certitude and uniqueness.

### 3.4 Operationalization of variables

In this section, the dependent and independent variable(s) will be operationalized and assigned measurable indicators.

In examining the relationship between different forms of resistance and specific driving factors, two causal mechanisms, or conjunctions, are formulated. First (1): the theoretical expectation is that disciplinary state power, influenced by group identification and social media mobilization as conditions, drives spatial resistance and reverse discourses. Second (2): the theoretical expectation is that dominant discourses and knowledge, also influenced by group identification and social media mobilization, drive reverse discourse resistance. This causal conjunction posits that two or more actors, in this case, driver and conditions, interact to produce a specific outcome (Research Design, 1:25).

Table 1 provides an operationalization of variables, as well as the corresponding indicators italicized. Data collection will focus on identifying these indicators as evidence to potentially demonstrate their effect on the outcome and the causal mechanisms.

*Table 1: Operationalization*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<b>Independent Variables</b>	
<i>Disciplinary State Power: the exercise of hierarchical observation, normative judgement and examination to create obedient and productive individuals who conform to prevailing norms.</i>	Elements of disciplinary power: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hierarchical observation <i>Document or interview data that indicates... surveillance practices, monitoring, disproportional observation of certain groups</i></li> <li>- Examination <i>... controls, nitrogen measurement, nitrogen calculation models, permit issuance, reports on emissions or violations</i></li> </ul> → Relates to visible power: making and enforcing laws <i>... legislation, law enforcement actions, legal interventions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Normative judgement <i>... policies, frames or norms that reflect dominant societal discourses and knowledge</i></li> </ul> → Relates to invisible power: shaping meanings, values and what's 'normal' <i>... production of dominant discourses, knowledge and frames, strategic shaping of (social) media content</i>
<i>Dominant Discourses and Knowledge: general ways of thinking that shape values and behaviors, and determine the production and preservation of knowledge, imposing significant</i>	<i>Document or interview data that indicates...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (negative) framing of issues and groups in society or mainstream media</li> <li>- including (negative) framing of issues and groups in government documents or policies</li> </ul>

power over individuals who follow, or behave according to this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>prioritization or marginalization of issues or groups in policies, regulations, media or culture</i></li> <li>- <i>dominant knowledge use, without contestation</i></li> </ul> <p>→ Relates to invisible power: shaping meanings, values and what's 'normal'</p>
<b>Conditions</b>	
<i>Group Identification</i> : a component of collective identity that involves identification with members of an organization or social group.	<p><i>Document or interview data that indicates...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>shared values and beliefs</i></li> <li>- <i>in-group versus out-group distinction</i></li> <li>- <i>participation in group activities, efforts and actions</i></li> <li>- <i>emotional attachment</i></li> </ul>
<i>Social media</i> : offers a platform for sharing information and bringing issues into the public debate or agenda, while also possessing the power to target, encourage and mobilize individuals for collective action and foster group identification.	<p><i>Document or interview data that indicates...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>information reach</i></li> <li>- <i>calls to action</i></li> <li>- <i>events organization</i></li> <li>- <i>hashtag use / engagement</i></li> <li>- <i>issue framing activities</i></li> </ul>
<b>Dependent Variables</b>	
<i>Spatial Resistance</i> : encompasses a wide variety of space-bound practices, all of which are 'embedded in a collectiveness and linked to the same conflicts' or specific spatial issues (Lilja, 2022, p. 319).	<p><i>Document or interview data that indicates...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Physical protests, such as (highway) blockades, that direct at a specific spatial issue</i></li> <li>- <i>Legal actions</i></li> <li>- <i>Lobbying efforts</i></li> </ul>
<i>Reverse Discourses</i> : a practice of (re)signification that engages with various subaltern subject positions and involves transforming these positions by assigning them new status and significance, thereby challenging dominant discourses and values.	<p><i>Document or interview data that indicates...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>shift in language use and behavior to challenge dominant norms and traditions: emphasize and attach new meanings to subaltern positions and identities</i></li> <li>- <i>everyday acts of defiance: counter-conduct, techniques of the self</i></li> <li>- <i>efforts to change framing and narratives around subaltern groups; offer alternative frames</i></li> <li>- <i>constant repetition of this alternative use of language, behavior and framing</i></li> <li>- <i>name and expose the underlying values and interests that drive policies and knowledge (Bradley, 2019).</i></li> </ul>

### 3.5 Quality criteria

This paragraph discusses and applies quality criteria for evaluating the quality and limitations of this qualitative research. These criteria, derived from the literature of Toshkov (2016) and Symon & Cassell (2012), encompass validity and reliability in single-case studies.

## Validity

First, concerning external validity, single-case studies have notable limitations. While this design focusses on the empirical testing of theoretical causality within a specific case, it restricts generalization beyond the examined case study. Each case is unique and analyzed for specific reasons, meaning that finding cannot be necessarily generalized. It cannot be assumed that other cases are homogenous or that the mechanisms will function identically across different contexts (Toshkov, 2016). This limits external validity of this thesis. However, this is not necessarily problematic as long as it is acknowledged. Single-case studies, which may involve testing, refining or generating theories, contribute to existing knowledge, even when applied to a specific case. These findings can still be utilized in the analysis and explanation of other cases, leading to indirect generalization (Toshkov, 2016).

Second, internal validity, encompasses the quality of the causal relationship established within a case. It assesses whether the observed effects can accurately be attributed to the independent variables rather than other, unaccounted-for variables. Single-case designs pose limitations to internal validity, as tracing causal mechanisms can make it difficult to be certain that the outcome variable is not influenced by other factors. Therefore, it is important to find ‘smoking gun’ evidence, that clearly links the independent variables to the observed outcomes. An additional limitation is that single-case studies are heavily dependent on existing literature to identify potential causal mechanisms upon which the case is based. However, when certain causal theories are missing, it becomes difficult to identify or understand empirical causality (Toshkov, 2016).

## Reliability

Regarding the reliability of this thesis, limitations particularly arise from the availability and reliability of the data. In single-case studies, research relies on qualitative data to identify causality. However, ensuring availability of and objectivity in this data is challenging, especially since many cases focus on contemporary issues. And as Toshkov (2016, p. 306) notes, this ‘does not make matters easier, as many potentially crucial pieces of data about actors’ motivations, available information and actions – exactly the evidence case studies target – would still be classified’, which limits accessibility and reliability of the data and findings in this research. Regarding the farmers’ case, the relevance and sensitivity of the case can make it a challenge to uncover objective motivations, drivers, and actions, which is important to be aware of.

As previously discussed, triangulation through comparing evidence from various sources on specific indicators is important for increasing the value of evidence in establishing causality (Ulriksen & Dadalauri, 2016).

## Chapter 4: Analysis

In this chapter, the results from the data will be analyzed to ultimately answer the research question: *What factors drove different forms of farmers' resistance to the agricultural nitrogen policy in the Netherlands and how did the government respond?*

### 4.1 Forms of farmers' resistance

This section aims to empirically address the sub-question: *What forms of resistance do the farmers' protests take?* Data analysis presents an overview of various actions and evaluates whether they align with spatial resistance, reverse discourse, or neither, based on the operationalization indicators.

#### 4.1.1. Reverse discourses

Findings reveal that, in addition to more organized, space-related resistance, various dispersed actions occurred, each taking different forms. Findings derived from indicators of reverse discourse actions are discussed in this section, while the driving factors behind these actions will be addressed in the next section.

First, several actions challenged dominant norms, values and negative frames, while offering alternative frames for the subaltern group, in this case farmers. These dispersed actions primarily began in October 2019, when the movement started to take shape, and continued throughout its progression, alongside spatial actions tied to specific events, which will be discussed later. However, a farm occupation by animal activists in May 2019 in Boxtel had already fueled discontent with the portrayal of farmers as animal abusers, an underlying frustration that would come to the forefront later that same year (doc 7).

Since 2019, farmers have actively prompted their identity, lifestyle, and societal contributions through various small-scale, dispersed actions, aiming to counter the negative framing directed at them. Social media, in particular, provided farmers with a platform to showcase farm life and their authenticity, presenting a positive and realistic image to counter stereotypes, such as being labeled as animal abusers and polluters. One farmer shared an example: "Recently, someone asked through one of the social media channels if we would make a video of the birth of a calf. For us, it's a fairly normal event, but for people from outside, it's not. It shows that they are also interested and involved in this part of our business", providing an opportunity to present an alternative image to the stereotype of farmers as animal abusers (art. 8). Another farmer launched the hashtag #ProudOfTheFarmer to emphasize the indispensability of farmers in food production and security, addressing the neglect of these values in the current framing (doc 2). Social media posts related to this hashtag often featured images of farm animals and farmers participating in protest actions, frequently holding signs with messages like 'No farmers, No food', reinforcing the alternative framing of farmers as guardians of the food supply and caretakers of their livestock (doc 7).

Social media actions are not only aimed at creating alternative frames and influencing public perception but also at advancing an offensive agenda by raising awareness and drawing attention to important issues (art. 5). For instance, one respondent explained how farmers must constantly deal with the paradoxes within agriculture. Farmers must incur higher costs for sustainable production yet still receive low prices for their products. They are being forced to downsize, while scaling up is actually necessary to secure their income. These issues need more

attention, and farmers attempt to address them publicly, such as by participating in podcasts to explain the matter (R3; podcast 7; podcast 8).

“In the winter of 2019/2020, it marked 75 years since the hunger winter. During that time, the farmer was the most valued citizen, sharing from the little food they had, often sourced from illegal slaughtering of livestock and the part of the harvest and dairy they managed to save. (...). How much can one forget in 75 years, is clear from the current attitude towards farmers. Thinking out loud, I wonder if the memory needs to be refreshed.” - art. 25

Other actions to frame narratives differently, include the organization of public conversations, as a respondent explained, “there are many organizations, such as the Agricultural Youth Contact, that give lectures and visit people. (...). These organizations try to present it in a positive way (...). The question, however, is whether you want to see it, and whether you make the effort to see it...” (R1). Conversations, along with farmers actively appearing in podcasts and on television to explain their role in food production and landscape management, while countering negative images and addressing pressing issues, represents a form of dispersed resistance (podcast 7; podcast 8). Another effort to foster a realistic image of farmers is the distribution of educational material in schools, initiated by interest organization Agractie, to teach children about the importance of farming life (R2; art. 35). The quote below illustrates one such effort to counter negative images.

“Farmwomen present themselves as caring mothers and use the slogan ‘calf love’ to emphasize that they take very good care of the animals.” - art 5

Second, farmers use symbols as a form of dispersed protest. Upside-down Dutch flags have become a widely recognized symbol of resistance, frequently used to express distrust in the government (art. 33). While this symbol is extensively employed by farmers, it simultaneously serves as a national symbol of emergency, resistance and disobedience, signaling that a nation is in a state of crisis. This expression, also seen in movements like the covid protests, makes this flag a widespread and well-recognized statement, linking the discontent of these various movements (art. 36). These flags are used both individually, as an expression of discontent, and collectively, as a symbol of resistance. One farmer explains: “One can demonstrate alone or with just one other person. In principle, you don’t need anyone else” (art. 4), although sometimes the flag actions are coordinated (art. 33). Farmers also mention placing handkerchiefs with messages like ‘Give Farmers a Future’ in their yards as another form of individual resistance (R4).

Furthermore, naming and exposing the governments’ underlying values and interests, as well as contesting the knowledge and measurements upon which policies are based, is another form of resistance. Farmers consistently address that policies heavily prioritize values as nature conservation, biodiversity and environmental protection, while disregarding farming interests and portraying them as the culprits undermining these values. One respondent explains: “We are always portrayed as bad and polluting. Anything that goes wrong, is blamed on the farmers” (R2). As acts of resistance, farmers publicly address the discrepancy in values within government policies, where the focus is on fostering sustainability and innovation, yet the importance of food security, low pricing, and the leading status of Dutch agriculture in the world are overlooked. These actions of public challenge and awareness-raising take place on social media, podcast and other platforms (R3; podcast 6; podcast 7).

‘‘Because the Dutch citizen is molded and shaped with a daily dose of politically motivated nonsense from a growing group of followers. In addition to the lie about livestock emissions, Dutch farmers are now also blamed for ‘declining biodiversity,’ ‘a lack of sustainability,’ and ‘soil depletion’’ - art. 11

Meanwhile, farmers openly contest the knowledge and measurements that underpin nitrogen policies as a form of resistance against their influence. They frequently claim that these sources are one-sided, biased, and false and are used solely to reinforce existing policies and to ‘‘push through their [politicians’] own dubious agenda and unfounded worldview’’ (art. 11). In this way, farmers publicly argue that only studies that disregard them are considered, while dissenting studies are ignored (art. 10; art. 27; R2; R3). Farmers argue that prevailing discourses shape the preservation and production of nitrogen knowledge, which underpin policies and exert power over them. This aligns with Foucault’s (1975) theory. Farmers seek to counter this dominance by exposing and promoting alternatives. While publicly expressing these concerns already serves as a form of dispersed resistance, farmers also actively promote alternative knowledge through reports and by suggesting alternative measurements methods, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Promoting alternative knowledge is a form of resistance alongside public contestation, where the use of language plays a crucial role, as it does in promoting alternative frames. Language itself is a form of action and plays a key role in framing, as words carry meaning and convey messages. Words like ‘fake news’, ‘disinformation’, ‘climate salafism’, and ‘tractors as weapons’, are frequently used by farmers to express their dissatisfaction (art. 10; art. 13; podcast 3). ‘Tractors as weapons’ refers to their role as power means, functioning as tools of disruption and visibility, a topic that will be discussed later (doc 2). While words can also be used to create positive images, in the following example, they are employed to critique policies negatively and positively explain the role of farming: ‘‘Every politically motivated intervention in Dutch agriculture leads to global environmental damage, because nowhere else in the world is food produced as efficiently and ecologically responsibly as in the Netherlands. Every hectare of land taken out of agriculture in the Netherlands costs more than one hectare abroad; it costs pristine nature’’ (art. 11).

Additionally, farmers mention deviation from the rules and norms as a form of resistance, expressing various motivations for non-compliance. However, this only applies to some farmers, as others do comply (R1). While research shows that not all farmers follow the rules, some explicitly choose not to (art. 3). This is primarily due to uncertainty surrounding the regulations and investments. As the situation is constantly changing, some farmers are unwilling to take the risk of implementing unnecessary measures. One respondent explains: ‘‘I keep picking things up because it’s necessary. Because it’s what we expect from each other. With every step I take, I see that the government is falling behind. And the rules keep changing. I’m done with it’’ (R3). Other farmers, however, express a willingness to adhere to the regulations but simply do not know how, given the uncertainty regarding the actual impact of investments and whether they will contribute to the desired reduction in emissions (R4). These dispersed, individual acts of resistance also relate to reverse discourse.

‘‘But I think that, as in every sector, there will be people who try to slip through the gaps in the legislation.’’ - R1

Lastly, other individual, dispersed actions of resistance include placing banners reading ‘Send Politicians to Jail’ along roadways and creating alternative businesses on farms, such as

campsites, to offset financial uncertainties (art. 2; R2). One respondent explains: ‘‘They also displayed names of people who should be prosecuted on very large banners, like Rutte. And of course, we never see anything about that in the media’’, as an individual expression of discontent (R2).

Concluding, due to the dispersed nature of these reverse discourse practices, they occurred in various locations and at different times, though consistently, throughout the duration of the movement since 2019.

#### 4.1.2. Spatial resistance

In addition to reverse discourse practices, the data also provides an overview of forms of resistance that are tied to the strategic use of physical space. Findings derived from the indicators of spatial resistance are discussed in this section.

First, many actions in the farmers’ resistance are strategically linked to the use of physical space. These actions are often, though not always, coordinated and strategically take place at symbolic locations in response to specific events, amplifying the resonance of the dissatisfaction. This section focuses on expressions of spatial actions, while the next section focuses on underlying motivations.

Farmers explain to resist both the methods and measures of the nitrogen policy and, consequently, use symbolic locations to oppose them (doc 1). Different motivations lead to different spatial actions. Regarding the measurement methods, the responsibility primarily lies with the RIVM, prompting actions at the RIVM building, such as a manifestation in 2019 (art. 37). Although this manifestation near the building was organized and led by FDF, some farmers simultaneously organized individual ‘slow actions’ on highways to disrupt traffic and draw further attention to their claims. Regarding policy measures, the responsibility rests primarily with The Hague and at the provincial level, leading to numerous actions at the Malieveld, the Binnenhof and (provincial) government buildings. These actions began in October 2019 as a direct response to a proposal to halve the livestock population and have occurred multiple times since then, often in reaction to specific events (doc 1; doc 2). Resistance to policies from the dairy industry and supermarkets led to actions and occupations at locations such as FrieslandCampina and distribution centers, occurring over multiple years since 2019. Furthermore, opposition to perceived media bias resulted in protests at the NOS headquarters (doc 1; doc 2).

Regarding spatial resistance, most actions were organized and involved large groups of farmers. However, individual spatial actions also took place. One respondent explains: ‘‘I went with a friend of mine (...), we drove the tractor to the New Year’s reception at our municipality, at the town hall. (...). Everyone was really shocked and wondered, ‘what’s going on now?’’, we just wanted to make a small statement.’’ (R3). The townhall serves as a strategic location, chosen for its symbolic significance as the place where decisions are made. Another respondent notes that, in addition to large-scale actions, local protests were organized using tractors at strategic locations, targeting local decision-makers to ensure that farming interests were considered (R4).

In addition to the symbolic use of space, some spatial actions also served a disruptive purpose. Some actions not only aim to raise awareness by protesting at specific locations but also seek to create disruption. Highway blockades and ‘slow actions’, for example, are frequently used by farmers to draw attention to their cause due to their disruptive impact. The first national tractor protest, on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, had an enormous effect, causing the largest morning rush

hour in history with a traffic jam of 1.136 kilometers (doc 2). Over the years, various similar actions have been organized, such as when more than 20.000 tractors took the road in Stroe in 2022 (doc 1). This disruptive use of space became a frequent occurrence, as one farmer described the experience “the entire journey, you keep hearing about it. Traffic jams here, traffic jams there, a massive traffic jam. Then it starts to feel more real” (podcast 3).

Another form of resistance that strategically uses space, occurring roughly one year after the emergence of the movement, involves the threatening and intimidation of politicians at their homes. This choice of location adds both a symbolic and intimidating dimension to the actions. An organizer of such an action described its disruptive impact, in this case, on MP Rob Jetten in 2020: “He stated that he felt uncomfortable being surprised at his home address with a healthy food package and the message, ‘FDF knows where I live’” (art. 32). Through such actions, farmers use space to intimidate and amplify their message, with multiple instances occurring over the years since 2020.

“In Harderwijk, protesters gathered outside the home of Minister Van der Wal. Despite the presence of police stationed in front of the minister's house, the farmers managed to breach the police line. (...). Additionally, some farmers went to the home of CDA Member of Parliament Boswijk. Although Boswijk was not at home at the time, his children were present (Geurts, 2022).” - doc 1

## 4.2 Drivers of farmers’ resistance

This section focuses on the empirical sub question: *What factors drive resistance in the farmers’ protests and how do these connect to various forms of resistance?* Three main drivers emerge from the analysis, namely: disciplinary state power, dominant discourses and knowledge, and the perception of a failing government.

### 4.2.1 Disciplinary state power

Disciplinary state power, empowered through hierarchical observations, examination and normalizing judgement (Foucault, 1975), is an important driver for farmers to resist. Both the disciplining effects of regulations and their enforcement harm farmers, as does the ambiguity in the rules and the uncertainty they create regarding livelihood security, which triggers resistance.

Farmers address that they face increasing regulatory pressure as a consequence of the European Green Deal and Farm2Fork strategy, which threatens the profitability and survival of their businesses (art. 11; R3). One respondent (R3) explains that, on the business side, farmers are pressured to maintain low prices and produce large quantities to secure their income, while simultaneously facing increasing regulations, higher costs and limits on production capacity. These demands are inherently contradictory. While cooperatives, supermarkets, and the market enforce low prices, many farmers argue that measures aimed at reducing nitrogen deposition are costly, unjust and disproportionately harmful to them. Reduction of the livestock capacity and the need to make costly investments cannot be passed on to consumers, threatening the survival of farmers’ businesses (R3; R4; podcast 7; podcast 8).

Although these nitrogen measures (are meant to) discipline farmers’ behavior and their business operations, they also push some to exit, as the regulatory burdens lead them to give up their farms (R1). Disciplining state power, as described by Foucault (1975), serves to guide individual behavior. The reasoning just outlined shows that this disciplining leads to resistance, as it creates difficulties for farmers, as illustrated by the following quote.

“Unfortunately, I experienced this firsthand with my brother, whose dairy farm was bought out because a circle was drawn around a Natura 2000 area. As a result, he lost his job, his home, and essentially everything he had worked for over the past nine years.” - R1

R2 explains that “it has almost become unworkable for us to continue farming. The entire policy seems to be designed to demotivate and phase out farmers”, while someone else addresses that farmers are “sick of the regulatory pressure, sick of the lack of understanding, and above all, sick of the unreasonable portrayal and piling up of regulations stemming from the Randstad perspective” (letter 5).

Farmers feel that unachievable obligations and targets, along with the argument that they are not the primary source of nitrogen deposition, are designed to push them out of farming and make survival impossible. They describe this situation as “voluntary departure instead of forced buyout”, since the government seeks to voluntarily reduce the number of farms (art. 19). Although this practice does not involve the exercise of sovereign power, the government aims to achieve its goal by imposing disciplining measures that promote certain desirable behaviors, such as normalizing judgements about whether to continue farming, with the aim of voluntary phasing out farmers.

One farmer articulates on the desired reduction: “If you’re talking about nitrogen targets for a nature reserve that still aren’t achievable even if you clear out the entire surrounding area, then you’re dealing with a fictional reality”, indicating the perceived unachievability of the government’s goals (podcast 6). This combination of pressured income on one hand and production restrictions on the other fuels resistance to the disciplining regulations and their enforcement. As one farmer explains: “all those unnecessary laws and regulations, all that paperwork. And then we don’t even get paid enough. It’s all just too much” (art. 34).

“Those same KDWs (critical deposition values) that are set so impossibly low that, even if no one lived in the Netherlands anymore and all economic activities were halted, they still wouldn’t be met.” - art. 25

Additionally, farmers feel subject to disproportionate and stricter regulations compared to other polluting industries, as a consequence of the negative judgements about them. Farmers do not claim that normalizing judgements directly discipline their behavior, as these do not specifically motivate their compliance with regulations. Instead, they emphasize that certain judgements are embedded in dominant discourses and subsequently seep into regulations and power structures, disproportionately harming them. A respondent explains this disproportionality: “Now, the ball is in the industry’s court, because they continue to receive free nitrogen permits. For instance, Schiphol Airport can just keep expanding. Lelystad Airport can do as it pleases. Everything is being expanded, and it’s all at the expense of farmers’ livelihoods” (R2). Farmers perceive the government and mainstream media as prioritizing nature and environmental protection, while portraying them as villains and the primary source of pollution, disregarding the share of others (art. 33; doc 2; R1). This unequal treatment might stem from a lack of recognition of the farmers’ (added) value compared to other industries. Farmers feel this normative judgement is reflected in nitrogen measures, which disproportionately threaten their livelihoods.

“On page 8, point c explicitly makes an exception for industrial peak emitters, allowing them to transition to more sustainable practices, while the responsibility for reducing nitrogen emissions is placed solely on farmers.” - art 33

“Diligent civil servants are currently instilling in her, among other things, their absurd claim that it is the agricultural businesses whose harmful impact is destroying nature in the Natura 2000 areas. It’s not the heavy industry with its massive emissions that cause cancer among local residents, nor the emissions from traffic or aviation, which expand every year, nor the petrochemical industry in Moerdijk (...). No, agriculture is to blame, and therefore the ‘biggest polluters’” - art 29

These factors lead to both deep dissatisfaction with government policies and a sense of uncertainty. Farmers explain that “the government is rapidly pushing forward with shrinking our sector, eliminating agriculture as we know it. Through laws and regulations, they are sacrificing the agricultural sector to make way for housing, heavy industry, and the aviation sector - the ‘dirty’ industries” (art. 30). Meanwhile, regulations are constantly changing, causing uncertainty and forcing farmers to make investments, only for them to be potentially canceled later (R3). This uncertainty, combined with the unachievability and disproportionality of the regulations, drives resistance.

Furthermore, the disciplining elements of power exercise specifically fuel protest. Regulations are not only imposed on farmers, but also enforced through monitoring and examination, controlling whether businesses adhere to the rules, and disciplining farmers. Farmers are required, among other things, to monitor their emissions and submit this data to the RVO, a government institution (art. 25). In addition to this indirect control, the RIVM conducts its own measurements to monitor emissions, while provinces inspect farms individually to supervise compliance with nature protection permits (art. 25; art. 28). As a new control mechanism, R3 mentions that the government is even starting to use Artificial Intelligence in monitoring. In addition to disciplining farmers through monitoring and inspections, the government enforces compliance through mechanisms as fines and the issuance or withdrawal of permits (art. 24). One farmer explains: “Then came the phosphate rights. Yes, you have to comply with them, otherwise you’ll run into problems. If you don’t have phosphate rights, you’ll get fines” (R2).

Whether these elements have a disciplinary effect depends on whom you ask: most farmers argue that they do, citing a fear of inspections, fines, and the withdrawal of permits, while others claim that farmers often ignore the rules, and that provincial control is weak (R2; R3). This weak control is partly due to the fact that farmers can choose whether to submit their permit application to the municipality or the province, resulting in fragmented monitoring between these. A study shows that of the 58 farms examined, one third were in violation. This suggests that the disciplining effect of conforming to permits does not apply to all farmers (art. 24).

“We have done everything here in recent years to meet the expectations placed upon us, always following the rules to the best of our ability. Whenever another annoying measure was added, there would be some grumbling, it was swallowed once, and we moved on. Only to fall back into line once again. Inspectors have never been able to catch us on a single wrongdoing, simply because there was nothing to find.” - letter 6

Although the regulations and their enforcement have a disciplining effect, though not on all farmers, as shown by data indicating violations in one third of the examined cases (art. 24). This disciplining effect is evident when farmers proactively propose plans to “further reduce emissions by 40% by 2030”, but, in turn, fuels resistance (art. 14). Both the regulations themselves, as the discourses and judgements on which they are based, along with the enforcement mechanisms, motivate resistance to these disciplining practices.

## Relation to resistance practices

Data identifies how disciplinary state power drives different resistance practices, which will now be analyzed.

First, findings reveal that visible power exercise, coupled with ambiguous regulations and enforcement through examination and observation, primarily drives spatial resistance practices. Spatial symbolic actions in The Hague, at the Malieveld and Dutch parliament, were often organized as direct response to concrete disciplining proposals or regulations. For instance, the first large-scale national protest in The Hague in 2019 was a direct response to MP Tjeerd de Groot's proposal to halve the livestock population in order to reduce nitrogen deposition, which led to widespread outrage among farmers (art. 3; doc 1; podcast 1). Similarly, other policy proposals, such as those by the Remkes Commission in 2019, further threatened farmers' livelihood security and also motivated actions in The Hague (doc 1; doc 2).

“Politician Tjeerd de Groot proposed halving the Dutch livestock population to reduce emissions and protect the environment. It was this proposal, in particular, that drove farmers to the heart of Dutch politics.” - art. 2

Additionally, farmers expressed their dissatisfaction with measures by protesting at personal symbolic locations, such as the homes of politicians, in an effort to strengthen their message, intimidate and create disruption (art. 32; doc 2). For instance, “the National Program, and particularly the map illustrating nitrogen emission reductions, sparked immediate outrage. The farmers' action group Voll Gass organized a protest at the home of Minister Van der Wal that very same day” (doc 1). Similarly, frustration with the regulations drove spatial resistance actions on highways, further causing disruption in traffic and drawing attention to farmers' discontent.

“The reason for this was the presentation of the nitrogen plans by Minister Van der Wal on June 10 [2022], which have significant consequences for farmers. To protest against these plans, various actions were organized, such as demonstrations, highway blockades, and blockades at distribution centers.” - doc 1

In addition to spatial resistance targeting national policymakers, farmers explain that actions driven by frustration with provincial or corporate policies were directed at symbolic locations at these levels, such as provincial government buildings or distribution centers, depending on who created or enforced the measures (doc 1; doc 2). An example hereof is: “On October 25, farmers primarily from North Brabant protested at the North Brabant Provincial House against the provincial nitrogen policy. Despite the protests, the province ultimately decided to implement the measures”, while actions at a dairy cooperative's headquarter were aimed at opposing their policies, including the low margins they offer farmers for products (doc 2; R3).

Regulations and their enforcement not only triggered spatial actions but also inspired more subtle, dispersed forms of resistance. For instance, some farmers engaged in non-compliance, disregarding regulations as an act of reverse discourse. As previously discussed, this partly arises from uncertainty stemming from constantly changing regulations. Such uncertainty leads farmers to hesitate in making investments, due to doubts about their potential returns and the efficacy of these investments (R3; R4). Furthermore, the nitrogen measures motivated people to display upside-down flags as a symbol of discontent, signaling that the country is in distress as a result of the regulations (art. 35).

A mechanism underpinning regulations and their enforcement is knowledge. As discussed in the theory section, knowledge is closely tied to power and is strategically used to reinforce it through policy (Foucault, 1975). While evidence reveals that dissatisfaction with disciplining rules and their enforcement primarily drives spatial resistance, the contestation of the knowledge behind these rules and measurements also plays an important role. Although knowledge will be discussed later as a separate driver, it is closely linked to and fuels the dissatisfaction that leads to spatial resistance. One farmer explains that “no scientific measurements, but assumptions, bias, and the omission of inconvenient facts from reports, shape nature policy in the Netherlands”, referring to the importance of knowledge in enforcing regulations (art. 29).

Evidence shows that normalizing judgements about farmers do not directly have a disciplinary effect on their behavior and do not directly lead to resistance. However, farmers often argue that these judgements, based on dominant discourses, underpin and are integrated into regulations and power structures, indirectly contributing to resistance (doc 2; art. 11; art. 29). Normalizing judgements will be further analyzed in the following section in relation to dominant discourses and practices resisting these.

The theoretical expectation was that disciplinary state power would drive both spatial resistance and reverse discourse practices. This expectation aligns with the findings. Disciplining measures and their enforcement led to spatial resistance, while simultaneously driving reverse discourse practices, such as counter-conduct and the employment of symbols. However, normalizing judgements, as an element of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1975), do not have a direct disciplining effect on farmers nor do they directly drive resistance. Instead, they are tied to dominant discourses and underpin regulations and their enforcement, along with dominant knowledge, thereby indirectly driving resistance.

#### 4.2.2. Dominant discourses and knowledge

Second, data analysis reveals dominant discourses, including the negative framing of farmers, and prevailing knowledge as additional drivers of the farmers’ protests.

##### Discourses and negative framing farmers

Farmers and other sources explain that the perceived dominant political and societal discourse prioritizes values as nature conservation and environmental protection, portraying farming practices as harmful to these values and of subordinate importance (art. 2; art. 11; art. 14). The discrepancy between these dominant values and the taken-for-grantedness of food security and affordable pricing is not addressed, and farmers are not acknowledged for providing the latter (R3; podcast 6). Farmers perceive that this discourse dominates policymaking and reporting in the mainstream media, often relying on one-sided narratives that overlook, for example, the care farmers provide for their animals and the environment, and sometimes even spread false information, while undervaluing the role of farmers (doc 2; art. 14). As a result, farmers express that “the number of studies, reports, and analyses that are being piled onto the agricultural sector, all delivering the same message: ‘the agricultural sector is harming...’, is starting to seriously get on our nerves. They all turn out to be one-sided and incomplete” thus reinforcing the dominant discourse and fueling resistance against this (art. 10). This perception, that dominant discourses shape the production and preservation of knowledge and thus exert power over individuals, aligns with Foucault’s theory (1975) as previously discussed. The empirical case of the farmers reinforces the perception that knowledge is rarely value-neutral; rather, it is embedded within discourses that consolidate power.

“I think that for a long time, farmers were discussed in The Hague as a low-educated group. However, many people forget that the food we buy in the supermarket comes from the farmer, and food is a basic human need. Yet, this is often taken for granted.” - R1

Farmers express that this perceived discourse is accompanied by negative framing, which ‘has always been a major annoyance’ (art. 9). They feel that their agricultural work is portrayed as being in conflict with dominant values, leading them to ‘sometimes feel like animal abusers, criminals or nitrogen polluters, because that’s how they are portrayed by some in society’ (art. 2). Furthermore, they feel their contribution to (inter)national food security is undervalued, as their work is often dismissed as low-skilled and, therefore, less worthy. This negative framing amplifies their sense of injustice and dissatisfaction, particularly since farmers are not solely responsible for environmental damage, yet are treated like they are (doc 2; letter 3; letter 5).

“That sense of injustice stems from the fact that farmers are portrayed by some as major polluters, as a profession that stands in direct opposition to nature. This image is simply not true. First of all, individual farmers are not the biggest contributors to nitrogen emissions. It’s the industry. Moreover, farmers actually work in partnership with nature to produce the food that consumers demand.” - art. 14

Since Foucault (1975) describes discourses as time-specific, it is likely that the current dominance of valuing nature and environmental protection is similarly tied to time. However, farmers address that their interests and values should not be overlooked within this discourse. While discourses are time-specific and evolve over time, the knowledge they produce, which influences policies and measures, can be perceived as unneutral and false by some. Values themselves are neither true nor false, but when they result in one-sided and inaccurate knowledge production, claims of false knowledge emerge. This is also relevant to the farmers’ experience.

“Dear Prime Minister Rutte, can you imagine that our children are suffering from enormous stress due to the ongoing uncertainty and feeling that they are being portrayed as undesirable environmental criminals while they are doing their utmost every day for a healthy dairy product and taking care of their animals and the beautiful Frisian landscape?” - letter 7

Concluding, the results reveal that farmers feel underappreciated, marginalized and overlooked (doc 2; podcast 6). Although they view themselves as indispensable to both national and international food supply, farmers believe they are predominantly labeled as polluters (art 2; art. 14; art. 29). This perception is coupled with a growing sense of polarization and a belief that the Randstad disregards their interests and contributions. As an initiator of the first protest explains: “(...) then I noticed how large the gap had become between farmers and the public, actually between the public administration and the farmyard. It escalated further, due to statements made in politics and the media. So I thought: we’re going to tell our side of the story” (podcast 1).

In an effort to bridge this divide and directly appeal to politicians for greater connection, some farmers address the former prime minister personally, as illustrated in the letter above. Within this context, the protests can be seen as a call for attention, or as one respondent puts it: “Hello people from the Randstad! We are still here too!” (R1).

“With the ‘Blokkeerfriezen’ and the farmers’ protest, the forgotten regions are striking back. They say: this far and no further. Our way of life matters too.” - doc 2

## Knowledge contestation

As already briefly touched upon, in addition to dominant discourses, farmers also criticize prevailing knowledge that supports them: two mechanisms that reinforce each other. Farmers criticize both established knowledge and measurements, which they perceive as incomplete and biased, as well as the selective use or omission of these by the government and mainstream media.

“As farmers, we deal with the effects of lies every day. The Dutch public is shaped and molded with a daily dose of politically motivated, harmful nonsense from a growing group of followers. In addition to the lie about livestock emissions, Dutch farmers are now also being blamed for ‘declining biodiversity,’ ‘a lack of sustainability,’ and ‘soil depletion.’” - art. 11

Regarding scientific knowledge, farmers express two concerns. First, they feel that only studies, reports, or sources that align with dominant discourses and support existing policies are acknowledged, while alternative or contesting knowledge and perspectives are largely disregarded (art. 10; art. 25). For example, sources from an interest group highlight a study suggesting that ammonia emissions in agriculture are much lower than previously thought. However, they describe how this finding is ignored, stating “the silence from the RIVM and the caretaker cabinet – which, with the buyout schemes and the peak polluter scheme, continues to focus solely on ‘framing’ and ‘blaming’ the livestock farming industry – is scandalous! Add to that the silence of the always noisy media, which is quick to report anything negative about the livestock sector, and you can only draw one conclusion: disinformation!” (art. 27). Selective acknowledgment of knowledge, farmers argue, contributes to incomplete and biased decision-making and reinforces power structures (art. 10; art. 20).

“Scientific isotope research proves: other sources besides agriculture emit ammonia! The government, RIVM, and media kept this quiet. In the series of ‘fake news and/or misinformation,’ this time the selective way in which ‘scientific’ institutions such as the RIVM, the government, and the media pick and choose the scientific reports they want to share with us, the Dutch people.” - art. 27

“The narrative that a significant portion of the media then attaches to it is, in short, fake news and disinformation. And it is precisely these incomplete, one-sided, and simply incorrect studies that are used to make the nitrogen issue appear non-controversial.” - art. 10

Second, farmers express contestation of knowledge on nitrogen in general. They question whether nitrogen deposition truly constitutes a genuine problem, asking, “Don’t conservationists cling to an unrealistic ideal in our ever-developing society? Yes, rare plants disappear, but others take their place” (letter 6). Interest group Agractie further adds, “It cannot be proven that the nitrogen compounds actually settle on the ground in rural areas”, thereby conveying a broad sentiment among farmers that questions the foundation of nitrogen policies and deposition in Natura 2000 areas (art. 13).

In addition to the settlement of nitrogen compounds, farmers also challenge the spreading of particles (art 13; art 14). R1 expresses the widespread concern that most nitrogen is absorbed into the air, making it difficult to determine where the remaining part eventually settles, let alone trace it back to individual farmers. R2 elaborates that there are two types of nitrogen: NH<sub>3</sub> from agriculture and NO<sub>x</sub> from industry. NH<sub>3</sub> settles within 600 meters, while NO<sub>x</sub> does not, which is a significant difference. However, measurements fail to distinguish between the two. Farmers are also held accountable for NO<sub>x</sub> emissions in the calculations, which travel a

greater distance, and they consider this unfair, fostering distrust in the data underpinning policies (R3). Consequently, farmers broadly express distrust in the RIVM's measurement of emissions and deposition, which, according to FDF, involves "obscure and non-transparent methods" that form the basis for policies (art. 11). This contestation of knowledge, measurements, and, consequently, policies, fuels resistance. The following quotes illustrate some of the criticism regarding the measurement methods that underpin measures.

"The nitrogen measurements by the RIVM cannot be accurate. That's what thousands of angry farmers, who once again demonstrated in various locations across the country today, are saying. They question the methods the RIVM uses to monitor nitrogen deposition. These figures form the basis for the government's nitrogen policy." - art. 12

"Agractie has more criticism of the RIVM. For example, only six monitoring stations are being used, two of which are located near a poultry farm and a pig farm. According to Agractie, these measurements are therefore too high and not representative" - art. 11

Concluding, farmers feel that the government and mainstream media use misleading information that aligns with dominant discourses and supports policies and power, fueling dissatisfaction. Farmers do not only distrust knowledge, methods and measurements but also feel that mainstream media deliberately repeat this to frame them negatively.

"According to us, there is now a blanket of bias and deception surrounding the NOS coverage of everything related to nitrogen, water quality, nature, and climate reporting." - art. 25

### Relation to resistance practices

Data identifies how dominant discourses and knowledge separately drive different resistance practices, relationships that will now be analyzed.

Dissatisfaction surrounding dominant discourses drives resistance against them. Farmers publicly expose and challenge these discourses and their reflection within the government and mainstream media. Their efforts aim to raise awareness and stress values that are often overlooked, such as ensuring food security at affordable prices. This resistance takes concrete forms, such as addressing these issues in podcasts and on television (podcast 6; podcast 7). Additionally, in response to perceived negative framing, farmers also aim to reshape these narratives by presenting alternatives. They leverage social media and, for instance, organize talks to foster a broader understanding of the agricultural chain. Another example is the initiative 'Farmer in the Classroom', which aims to reshape perceptions of farmers and food production, which is necessary because "fewer citizens know the true story of Dutch food, resulting in an increasing lack of balance in the societal debate" (art. 35). These actions, motivated by dominant discourses, align with reverse discourse practices, challenging and reframing prevailing narratives. Herein, farmers often strategically use language to foster alternative framing. Rather than focusing on the portrayal of farmers as, for instance, 'polluters', they emphasize their positive contributions, using terms like 'efficiency' and 'ecological innovation' (art. 11).

As discussed previously, dominant discourses are closely linked to normalizing judgements, which farmers perceive as underpinning both knowledge and policies, in line with Foucault's (1975) ideas. In this context, dominant discourses not only drive reverse discourse actions but also indirectly fuel spatial resistance, as they contribute to discontent with the regulations and their enforcement.

Furthermore, as discussed, prevailing knowledge acts as a driver of resistance. This has led to various practices. First, farmers distrust established knowledge and measurement methods, and as an act of resistance, publicly express criticism. For instance, farmers openly criticize “the selective way in which ‘scientific’ government institutes such as RIVM, the government, and the media cherry-pick the scientific reports they choose to share with us, the Dutch public”, to raise awareness on the ‘misleading’, one-sided foundations of policies (art. 27). The quote below publicly challenges the implementation of nitrogen measures by addressing the lack of scientifically substantiated data underlying them.

“While it is clear to everyone that there is no scientific basis for the current standards and goals, the province of Brabant continues to push forward. The very fact that there is a lack of scientifically substantiated data should, for the province of Brabant, be a reason to wait until that foundation is established, rather than wasting taxpayers’ money.” - art. 20

Some actions go beyond openly contesting dominant knowledge and involve promoting alternative knowledge and measurement methods, an effort actively pursued by interest groups. For instance, a report on alternative ammonia emission calculations has been promoted by FDF. As an actor involved explains: “Interestingly, there was no response when a groundbreaking study was published in Nature Communications in December last year, in which researchers concluded that combustion processes release much more ammonia than previously thought. As a result, nitrogen deposition is unjustly attributed to agriculture in current nitrogen models, according to the researchers. In the Netherlands, more than three-quarters of ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>) is attributed to livestock farming – which is incorrect, as this research demonstrates!” (art. 27). The promotion of alternative knowledge can be seen as an attempt to influence policies.

In addition to these reverse discourse practices, the contestation of dominant knowledge also fueled actions involving the symbolic use of physical space. As discussed earlier, farmers distrust the measurement methods used by the RIVM. This distrust motivated physical manifestations at the RIVM building in 2019, where farmers symbolically targeted this location to contest the nitrogen disposition measurement methods (art. 12; doc 2). Similarly, farmers have voiced discontent with what they perceive as biased media coverage, driven by dominant discourses that reinforce contested knowledge. One actor involved stated, “It appears that the NOS systematically and structurally, deliberately reports in an unbalanced way on several important societal issues” such as nitrogen deposition. This perception has led to physical protest at the NOS building in 2019 (doc 2; art 25).

The theoretical expectation was that dominant discourses and knowledge would drive reverse discourse practices. However, this research found that they have fueled both reverse discourse and spatial actions. Dominant discourses have driven reverse discourse by exposing and challenging established norms and values, while promoting alternative perspectives. Additionally, these discourses underpin regulations and their enforcement, which, in turn, indirectly fueled spatial resistance actions, as outlined in the previous section. Similarly, dominant knowledge has driven reverse discourse actions through the public contestation of knowledge and the promotion of alternatives. Furthermore, it led to spatial resistance directed at institutions responsible for producing knowledge or conducting measurements.

#### 4.2.3. Perception of a failing government

Findings reveal an unexpected driver behind the farmers’ protests: the perception of a general failure of the government. Some farmers, along with analyses of the protests, explain that dissatisfaction with the nitrogen crisis mirrors broader societal discontent. Multiple issues,

especially the preceding and simultaneously developing covid pandemic since 2020, fueled anti-government sentiments and created a breeding ground for further protests. While the nitrogen measures and associated discourses and knowledge served as a last straw for some farmers to protest, their frustration is deeply rooted in broader distrust of the government, feelings of marginalization and perceived threats to livelihood security (art. 6; art. 17; R2).

Data reveals that, for some farmers, a deeper discontent with the government served as a motivation to resist, though not for all. Other farmers explained that their resistance was primarily driven by concerns over the security of their livelihoods, alongside the other drivers discussed, which were unrelated to a general distrust in the government. As one respondent explains: ‘‘I think that the farmers who drove their tractors to The Hague weren’t thinking, ‘the government is a big corrupt mess.’ No, they came driven by a genuine concern for the future and the survival of farming life’’ (R1). Conversely, the perception of a failing government does emerge as a motivation among some farmers, making it relevant to discuss in this thesis. As a farmers explains this concern: ‘‘I think everyone is starting to feel it: we have a very unreliable government. Just look at what happened during the coronavirus crisis. Many citizens have realized that things just don’t add up, especially with the farmers. I believe farmers are the first, but after them, it’s the citizens’ turn.’’ (R2).

‘‘Trust in politics is low. The Rutte cabinets have ‘piled mistake upon mistake,’ and the governance of the Netherlands under him ‘has simply failed.’ Just look at the housing crisis, the childcare benefits scandal, and the flawed COVID policy, says Van Hove. ‘That’s why I’m joining the farmers’ protests: the government keeps making mistakes.’’- art. 4

In addition to farmers being driven by a general distrust in the government, likely influenced, albeit implicitly, by dominant discourses that disregard them and the disciplining power of the state on other issues, such as the covid crisis. It is evident that growing societal distrust contributed to the escalation of the farmers’ protests, extending beyond the nitrogen issue. Over time, alongside the farmers, a growing number of anti-government protesters joined the resistance. While distrust towards the government had always motivated some farmers, the resistance intensified, when unrelated anti-government groups became involved, fueling violence and disruption (art. 6; art. 17).

‘‘The ‘farmers’ protests’ have now evolved into anti-government demonstrations. We are now also seeing professional protesters who want only one thing: to attack and disrupt the government.’’ - art. 6

Regarding an analysis on how the perception of a failing government has led to specific forms of resistance, this thesis interprets several elements from the data analysis.

As discussed, this perception appears to logically stem from discontent over various issues, implicitly tied to dissatisfaction with dominant discourses and disciplining state power, as particularly seen during the covid crisis. These mechanisms appear to underpin the broader perception of government failure, with the nitrogen crisis ultimately acting as the spark in the powder keg. This aligns the resulting forms of resistance with those discussed in the previous two sections.

‘‘Anti-government demonstrators joined the protests and incited intimidation and violence (Visser, 2022a). The protests escalated, exemplified by the dumping of debris (such as wood, sand, manure, hay bales, and car tires) on various highways (Moeliker, 2022). Contractors

tasked by Rijkswaterstaat with clearing the debris received threatening phone calls and, as a result, decided not to proceed with the work or to halt already started operations.” - doc 1

However, as the quote above illustrates, one significant difference in the character of resistance actions emerged: data indicates that anti-government protesters, drawn to this perception of government failure and resistance, contributed to escalating violence and disruption. This began in July 2020, less than a year after the first protests in October 2019, with the first reported threats. While the perception of a failing government motivates both farmers and anti-government groups, the latter introduce a violent and radical dimension to the resistance described earlier. This does not take away from the fact that some farmers are drawn to this extremism as well and actively contribute to it (art. 3; art. 6). Examples of the radicalization of resistance practices include hostile and xenophobic expressions, symbolism such as coffins, intimidation and violent actions (doc 1; doc 2; art. 6; art. 17). A source elaborates on the violent elements emerging from the perception of a failing government and their connection to the covid protests, contributing to the resistance practices: ‘‘Van Stekelenburg provides further evidence of farmers merging with other anti-government groups. ‘For instance, I heard that fireworks were launched in the direction of the police. That’s something I hadn’t associated with farmers before, but we did see it during the anti-COVID protests’’ (art. 6).

#### 4.3 Conditions of farmers’ resistance

This section focuses on the empirical sub question: *What are the conditions under which the farmers’ protests developed?* Data reveals four conditions, namely: social media, group identification, public support and visibility, which will be further analyzed.

##### 4.3.1. Social media

Social media follow from the findings as important in the development of the protests in multiple respects. Evidence reveals that farmers intensively use social media to organize and mobilize for action, while serving as both an information channel and organization tool.

Regarding information, studies and farmers explain that social media provides a platform for sharing information and contesting dominant knowledge, where alternative (mis)information is spread to sow doubt about policies, measurements and the mainstream media (art. 12; R2). A respondent provides an example of how mainstream media articles are debunked in online groups: ‘‘There was a group chat that could include up to 180 people, and it included those who had different ideas and relied on alternative news sources compared to mainstream media. Yes, that definitely came up. But the most important aspect was that many reports from NOS or NU.nl, which were partially true but often written from a certain left-wing perspective, were quickly debunked in these group chats using actual scientific reports and figures - experts from these reports were used to debunk them. I found that really effective. That said, there were also quite a few conspiracy theories that circulated there’’ (R5).

This quote illustrates the ongoing discursive conflict on social media over what is considered true, fought through sharing and debunking of (alternative) information with the aim of influencing public perception and shaping the debate. This conflict over what information and issues matter, and how these are determined, was discussed in the theory section as issue framing (Stevens et al., 2020). Farmers, alongside others such as the media, actively participate in this online conflict, shaping these determinations and discursively using emotions to frame them. Linking back to the theory by Kumari & Pradhan (2022), farmers also use social media platforms and information tools, partly through issue framing, to voice discontent about the current situation, such as by debunking information, to steer the debate in alternative directions.

Farmers actively share information online, often becoming trapped in online bubbles where only information from farmers' organizations or farmer-friendly websites circulates, further fueling collective anger (art. 7). Analysis indicates that this is particularly true for radical farmers, as they are particularly receptive to alternative information and "risk becoming entrenched in their own media ecosystem, where distrust towards mainstream media is strong and appears to be growing (...), where climate scientists are often overshadowed by 'experts' whose perspectives align more closely with the commercial interests of farmers" (art. 7). By sharing alternative information on social media, farmers amplify collective discontent, with them emphasizing the crucial role this played in the emergence of the resistance.

"A major role in this is played by the ease of organizing through social media (especially the Facebook group and WhatsApp groups, which are frequently mentioned), allowing farmers to easily connect with each other and quickly organize an action." - doc 2

Additionally, social media played a key role in organizing and mobilizing resistance, with the peak in online activities occurring around the time of actions (art. 7). A scholar on the issue explains, "They have learned to organize themselves quickly and more effectively through social media, (...), they can make protest arrangements and stir up anger in closed Facebook groups and on WhatsApp, allowing them to express themselves collectively in no time" (art. 5; art 6). This is further supported by other case evidence, highlighting the speed and ease of online organizing. Analysis of the lead-up to the first protests in 2019 reveals that the organization began through Facebook and WhatsApp groups. One initiator describes the importance of social media: "We had nothing. There was no organization. There was no bank account. Just that Facebook page full of noise. That's how we started" (podcast 1). After a proposal to halve the livestock herd in 2019, the Facebook group exploded, with farmers coming together to collectively express their dissatisfaction and organize (podcast 1). Another initiator began mobilizing via WhatsApp, sending a message that received widespread response: "Good day, we are more than fed up. (...) We are tired of all the problems of this country being dumped on our plates. We are going to make this known in The Hague, with hundreds of tractors, cars, and other vehicles on a date before the end of September. Will you support us and join us? Sign up via WhatsApp. (...). Share this message with your trusted contacts" (podcast 1). Social media proved not only crucial for the initial organization of the protests but continued to play a pivotal role, partly due to its ability to quickly adapt, making it a key condition for the success of the actions, as illustrated by the quotes below (R2).

"In the country, app groups are being formed among farmers in preparation for future actions, such as when a new barn occupation is planned. These app groups later evolve into tractor groups, with farmers from all over the country driving to The Hague." - podcast 1

"A brief round through various public Telegram channels shows that the riots of the past few days are openly discussed in these chats. Anonymous users arrange meeting places, give instructions ('leave small business owners alone'), and discuss strategies to overpower the police." - art. 17

R2 confirms the importance of organizing on social media and elaborates on the snowball effect that amplifies this: "We could share information very quickly. The lines were very easy through WhatsApp. In just a few weeks, we managed to organize such a large demonstration. Yes, with volunteers. It was like a snowball effect, everyone started contributing. And just sharing in groups, that's how those WhatsApp and Facebook groups kept growing, and larger and larger groups were able to mobilize. We were the core, but we also had subgroups" (R2).

Social media is not only a condition that enables drivers to develop into resistance but also fosters another condition: group identification. Farmers explain how interactions on social media cultivate a sense of collectiveness among them, contributing to group identification, which will be discussed in the subsequent section. A respondent elaborates on how online connections unite farmers, fostering their sense of community: ‘‘They were really local groups where everyone could freely share information, and many great initiatives emerged, like a food bank afternoon in Zutphen. That was very local; the idea emerged within such a group, and every agricultural entrepreneur contributed to it. So yes, that was really good for the collective, for the sense of community’’ (R5).

#### 4.3.2. Group identification

Group identification is another condition for the development of resistance. According to the evidence, this works in two ways. First, farmers experience strong polarization, an us-versus-them sentiment, and feel marginalized and victimized as a forgotten group (art 22; art 32; doc 2). This feeling fosters identification with other farmers who share similar values, interests and a sense of marginalization. One respondent explains ‘‘In 2009 [during the first large-scale national protest], I was also at the Malieveld. And there, I actually saw that there were a lot of people with the same reasons as I had when I went there’’ (R3). An initiator of the action further elaborates on this sense of collectiveness: ‘‘The fact that so many people had come to represent that collective voice. You stand there together. Side by side. Each with their own accents, but still roughly one voice. That was really a moment when I got emotional’’ (podcast 4). Other farmers mention that when they saw so many farmers taking action, it fueled their sense of collectiveness and motivated them to join as well (podcast 3). A respondent further describes: ‘‘I think that when you saw those images with the kilometers-long columns of tractors, it definitely brings a sense of community with it, (...) like, ‘Guys, look at how many people also think what we think’’ (R1).

Group identification, in this case fostered through a collective sense of being victimized, leads to increased action preparedness, which is seen as a condition for resistance. Linking back to the theory section, Klandermans et al. (2002), discussed that not only does group identification among farmers foster participation, but specifically participation in a farmers’ organization. Case evidence predominantly comes from farmers who have established, are part of, or are affiliated with farmers’ organizations, aligning with the findings from the theory. Therefore, in addition to a general sense of collectiveness, being part of an interest organization further fosters this sense of unity.

‘‘Through WhatsApp, Twitter, everything, pictures came in from the boat from Texel that was completely full. That was already in the evening, the night before. And that was actually an extra motivation for those who were still hesitant, like ‘Come on, I’ll get in the tractor and go too.’’’ - podcast 4

Second, group identification is strategically leveraged in organizing resistance, as initiators explain that collectivity is a condition for the success of their actions. Despite varying interests and opinions among farmers, those involved emphasize the importance of presenting a unified collective narrative to encourage action preparedness (podcast 2). Initiators describe the process leading up to the first actions, where differing opinions were initially set aside in the interest of unity: ‘‘We have always said: keep it together. And that remains a point of attention in the agricultural sector with its various interests – livestock farming, arable farming, in between sectors – it is crucial that you present one unified story to the outside world. We’ve always said: to make this story a success, stay united. Because if you have two stages at the Malieveld, the

power is halved, so make sure you stay together” (podcast 2). Likewise, initiators leveraged group identification to tell a unified narrative and foster collective action, where collectively blowing of steam led to a sense of togetherness and identification (podcast 5).

Where farmers share similar values and interests, they were initially able to unite behind a common sense of victimhood (doc 2; art 30). To officially align their interest and negotiate collectively with the government, various farmers’ groups formed the Agricultural Collective, which was “unanimous in the opinion that agriculture is not the cause of the current nitrogen crisis, but it can be part of the solution” (podcast 5). However, over time, internal disagreement made it impossible to prioritize collective interest and group identification over individual ones. As a result, the initial unity and homogeneity that had been key to the success began to collapse, leading to actions that became more scattered, less united and less successful (doc 2; podcast 5).

“The homogeneity of the protesting farmers has also fragmented, both in terms of organization and the underlying motives for protest. Furthermore, the faction that continued with the protests has become increasingly ‘radicalized,’ which has led to growing discontent among the general public.” - doc 2

#### 4.3.3. Public support

Public support was initially an important condition for the resistance to develop. Farmers broadly express feeling strengthened by the positive reactions to their actions. One farmer explains: “The reactions from our surroundings, but also from strangers we met on our way to The Hague, were heartwarming!” (letter 3). Many farmers explain that the support they received stemmed from a shared anger towards the government and a recognition of their frustrations, as an initiator explains: “I was sure they didn’t know what we were going to do, but they were all standing there with their thumbs up. I think that feeling was quickly picked up, that we’re all being screwed over, and now there’s finally a group doing something about it” (podcast 3). This public support motivated farmers to continue with their actions, where they initially faced little resistance.

“Interviewer: Do you feel that public support really gave a boost to the protests, especially in the beginning, or helped fuel them further?

Respondent: Yes, definitely. And you know, especially in rural areas, it plays a much bigger role than in the cities. And we also felt that we were supported, because everyone feels the pain that the government, in one way or another, causes.” (R2)

Initially, both politicians, the media and society were largely supportive of the protests, despite them being sometimes illegal and disruptive (art. 3; doc 2). An analysis in art. 3 describes that extreme and illegal protests, such as those led by the farmers, rely on public support for their success. Without such support, the protest would not have been as effective or widespread. The initiators were aware of the importance of public backing, as one explains: “When the sentiment shifts, we have a positive sentiment, but when protests cause the sentiment to change, the risk is very real that your position to negotiate worsens. So, that’s... that’s very difficult to assess. That’s what we were mainly afraid of” (podcast 2).

The actual impact of public support on this movement is supported by evidence, as the effectiveness of farmers’ actions and their legitimacy to secure a seat at the table diminished with declining public support (podcast 6). As their actions became more extreme, public opinion turned against them. People felt the actions were no longer proportional to the goal, and public support dropped from 89% in October 2019 till 49% in February 2020 (doc 2).

Specifically the aggressive discourses and actions of interest group FDF were poorly received by society, the government and other farmers, leading to a decline in support and the scattering of actions (doc 2; podcast 5).

Concluding, public support was a factor that strengthened farmers in their cause and enabled the protests to develop successfully and effectively. However, as the protests became more extreme and scattered, and were overshadowed by internal disputes, public support quickly declined, undermining the effectiveness of actions (doc 2; podcast 2; podcast 5).

#### 4.3.4. Visibility

Findings highlight visibility and the use of power means in the farmers' protests as key conditions that made them particularly effective. Many of the actions involved using agricultural machinery to block roadways, government buildings and other key locations, causing significant social disruption, as the authorities were unable to act against the large number of machines. Doc 2 describes the importance of visibility, as 'an aspect not to be underestimated is the use of hundreds of agricultural machines. This makes them extra visible, audible, and tangible. The farmers are literally wielding a means of power to partially bring the country to a standstill', enhancing the protests' effectiveness.

A respondent explains how the tractor evolved into the national symbol of farmers' resistance, serving as a powerful and intimidating tool to disrupt society, create visibility and draw attention to the farmers' cause (podcast 3). On the one hand, the machinery proved necessary to practically organize the first large-scale protest at the Malieveld. An initiator of the protest recalls that the police had blocked the path for tractors to the Malieveld with traffic cones. The farmers disagreed and used their tractors to push the cones aside, continuing on their way to the Malieveld to hold the first major protest there (podcast 3). The tractor, with its disruptive power, played a similar central role in many subsequent actions, enhancing visibility.

As discussed in the theory, Foucault (1975) explained the exercise of disciplinary power as an attempt to subtly to secure the compliance of docile bodies. The placement of traffic cones serves as an example, aiming to steer individuals in a certain direction or toward a desired behavior. However, in this example, farmers proved unreceptive to these disciplining efforts, circumventing the cones and not behaving docile.

On the other hand, findings suggest that the effectiveness of resistance depends on the amount of noise generated (doc 2). Visibility, in this case primarily achieved through the use of machinery, proves important to the development and success of the actions. While visibility cannot be considered a direct driver of resistance, it played a significant role in sustaining the protests.

#### 4.4 Government reactions

This section of the analysis focuses on the following empirical sub-question: *How did the government respond to the farmers' resistance?*

As discussed in the theory section, involving citizens in the decision-making process is both beneficial and important for the government in gaining support, reducing resistance, and creating effective policies, provided certain conditions are met. Table 2 illustrate how these conditions apply to the farmers' case. This case meets the conditions, making co-production particularly relevant, if applied and received correctly. In response to the farmers' resistance,

the Dutch government acknowledged the importance of citizen involvement in policymaking and adopted this strategy (doc 1; doc 2; R5).

*Table 2: Conditions for co-production to be beneficial*      *Source: Irvin & Stansbury, 2004*

<b>Conditions</b>	<b>Relevance to empirical case</b>
(1) The issue is gridlocked, and a citizen mandate is needed to break the gridlock	Issue gridlocked: farmers are indispensable in achieving the nitrogen goals; they must make efforts to meet these targets
(2) Hostility toward government entities is high, and the agency seeks validation from community members to successfully implement policy	Hostility towards government: there is widespread resistance against the government and its regulations and measurements
(3) Community representatives with particularly strong influence are willing to serve as representatives	Establishment of Agricultural Collective: representatives from various farmer interest organizations come together to represent their mandates (podcast 5)
(4) The issue is of high interest to stakeholders and may even be considered at 'crisis stage' if actions are not changed	High interest: the nitrogen issue threatens the livelihood security of farmers, raising concerns about the survival of their businesses

As a response to the resistance, the government subsequently made efforts to engage farmers in the decision-making process. A respondent who participated in the initial protests in 2019 explains how their actions led to securing a seat at the table: "We just went to the ministry. Then we were allowed at the table, even with the Director-General. And eventually, we even sat in the Blue Room a few times. With the minister. With the entire delegation of the agricultural collective back then. So yes, we definitely achieved something with that. Yes, really a seat at the table" (R5).

The farmers' protest that began in 2019 structurally secured the sector a seat at the table, albeit in different configurations. Initially, several farmers' organizations united to form the Agricultural Collective, which negotiated with the government to design measures that incorporated the farming perspective. However, this collective eventually disbanded due to internal disagreements. Despite this, farmers' interest groups were subsequently structurally included in the decision-making process through other formations. This approach aimed to better address their concerns, reduce discontent and achieve more effective outcomes (doc 2; podcast 5). In addition to farmers, the government invited a range of other stakeholders, including banks, environmental organizations, and corporations, to participate in the nitrogen deliberations, in order to incorporate diverse perspectives, ensuring that no one was left out (doc 1). By involving all actors impacted by the nitrogen measures, the government aimed to identify potentially unpopular measures early in the process, allowing for adjustments that would enhance both their effectiveness and implementation.

"A strategy to defuse the conflict and prevent further escalation is to engage in one-on-one conversations. On December 16, 2019, Prime Minister Rutte and Minister Schouten invited several farmer leaders to the Catshuis for a breakfast meeting to discuss their concerns. The goal was to clear the air and prevent new actions from taking place" - doc 2

It is evident that the government increasingly involved farmers in the policy design as a response to societal unrest and an attempt to counter this. However, this approach proved

inadequate for several reasons. Farmers criticize, and some even distrust, the interest organizations currently engaging in dialogue with the government on their behalf. According to farmers, two concerns stand out. First, some argue that the organizations representing them, particularly the LTO, are composed of individuals who focus predominantly on policymaking, lacking first-hand expertise in running successful agricultural businesses themselves, and ‘do not have their feet in the clay’ (R5). When these organizations fail to remain closely connected to their support bases and to leverage their expertise, they lose the necessary support and insights to contribute effectively to the process, thereby weakening the positive impact of co-production (podcast 6; R2). The quotes below illustrates this concern.

“The importance of advocacy that is close to the farmers themselves. No administrators in advocacy who are not farmers; they don’t feel the farmers’ cause. This needs to resonate in The Hague to keep the issue on track.” - podcast 6

Second, some farmers express distrust not only regarding whether their views are adequately heard and considered, but also due to concerns that the organizations involved are being dominated by the government. One farmer explains this criticism: “One would be a leader in LTO or NAIJK, yet allow oneself to be used like this? It’s disrespectful. You’re nothing but the humble pawn of political schemers in The Hague. It’s so derogatory. And the worst part is both organizations know this! And apparently accept it. (...). And they don’t need to fool themselves into thinking they’re there for any other reason. We aren’t fooled. Everyone knows they’re there ‘because of their willingness to cooperate with measures and accept them’” (art. 22). However, this perception of domination and inadequate representation is primarily emphasized by extremist farmers’ groups. Meanwhile, many other farmers primarily argue that the support base should be consulted and more actively involved, including by the government, to enhance the effectiveness of co-production (R4; R5; R6; podcast 6).

“There is already a crucial role for the ministry here: simply talking to the grassroots, to the sector, to the people for whom you are making the laws. This happens far too little.” - R5

## Recommendations

Although farmers broadly acknowledge the importance of co-production in reducing their resistance, this alone is not sufficient and does not function effectively. Following from the data, several recommendations can be made to enhance co-production, alongside other measures that must be taken to reduce discontent and, thereby, resistance.

First, as discussed, farmers feel that their individual circumstances and practical experiences are not adequately considered in the process or by their representatives. This calls for an alternative organization of the policy process; one in which the perspectives of individual farmers are better heard, and a more bottom-up approach is adopted. The starting point should be a tailored approach, reasoning from the farmers’ expertise, and working towards the policy goals from there.

Farmers broadly express that they should not only be more involved but also stress the importance of setting clear goals, allowing tailored solutions and considering individual circumstances, including where each farmers’ strengths and opportunities lie. One farmer explains this: “You need to focus on the goal, but you also need to provide tailored solutions and try to stand alongside the entrepreneur, looking through their perspective. Of course, we must consider the environment, sustainability, and every entrepreneur is on board with that as

well. However, this needs to be properly facilitated. You need to assess each entrepreneur individually, instead of applying a top-down approach, which happens very often” (R5). Another farmer confirms this: “Ultimately, the goal of politics is to set a course, to give direction, outlining the objectives. And then, I believe, it is up to the individual entrepreneurs to figure out the best way to translate that into a concrete setup. (...). There is too little consideration given to individual circumstances. And by doing so, you also prevent the resistance that has been so strong in the past. Because then you’re building a future together, rather than imposing one” (R4).

Farmers broadly express that, to address the current shortcomings of co-production, a bottom-up approach is needed, one that gives more attention to individual circumstances. For example, the controversial nitrogen map, stemming from 2022, which top-down determined which farmers would have to shut down their farms, is an approach that caused significant discontent and resistance (R1; R4; R6). Farmers believe that a bottom-up approach presents an opportunity, as it allows for better consultation and a meaningful involvement in the process.

“You shouldn’t tell a farmer what to do, but make the goal known to him, so he can think along about a solution. Involve the farmer and take his perspective into account, that’s my message. (...). And if politicians can understand that a farmer cannot just adjust his barn because it involves funding, then they’ll come to more joint and sustainable long-term solutions. The government needs to have more trust in the expertise and knowledge of farmers to achieve more sustainable agriculture.” - (art. 2)

Second, to address a motivation for resistance, uncertainty, farmers stress the importance of increasing certainty in regulations and policy goals, thereby, in the investment they make. Currently, the nitrogen policy lacks a long-term vision, making it risky and unattractive for farmers to invest in meeting these goals and their obligations. Farmers express deep dissatisfaction with the ambiguity in rules, noting that some investments they made have become worthless due to changes in the rules. This erodes their willingness to invest and innovate (R2; R3). To address this discontent and encourage future investments and innovations in the sector, farmers urge the government to develop a long-term vision, provide certainty and offer support to help them make these investments.

“From a political perspective, a long-term vision is needed. Farmers need to know where the goal is on the horizon, so they can take steps toward it and invest accordingly. If they invest now, and after four years the course changes again and the investment turns out to be wasted, farmers will be left in a difficult position. I believe they need clarity and certainty.” - R6

Additionally, farmers urge the government to focus on developing new techniques, such as ammonia capture in closed barns (R5) as part of this long-term vision, while certain innovations are important for breaking the deadlock.

Third, farmers widely agree that a reconsideration of the value conflict in current policies is crucial to address pressing issues and reduce discontent. As discussed in the analysis, farmers feel certain dominant values are being regarded as more important than their own, a consideration that, according to them, should be approached differently. Current nitrogen policies prioritize values such as environmental protection, where farmers are expected to innovate and produce at higher costs, all while being tasked with providing abundant and inexpensive food. However, farmers argue that the societal value of affordable food is not adequately acknowledged, and they are unable to pass on their increased costs to consumers

(R2; R3; R5; 56). This creates a significant discrepancy in the current value consideration; where farmers are under pressure to become more sustainable yet are unable to offset these costs through economies of scale or higher prices (R3).

Currently, the value consideration is based on a 'cycling' approach, which focuses explicitly on one value while neglecting other values until the consequences of these neglects become too significant (Thacher & Rein, 2004). According to farmers, this point has been reached. Values such as food security and affordable pricing can no longer be ignored and should be integrated into the policies, before food production no longer becomes profitable. Therefore, the recommendation is to adopt an alternative strategy to resolve the value conflict, known as the 'firewall'. This approach calls for the creation of separate institutions that defend both values simultaneously, ensuring a balanced consideration that underpins nitrogen measures (Thacher & Rein, 2004). This strategy should aim to better recognize, integrate and protect farmers' values, potentially reducing their motivations to resist.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion & Discussion

### 5.1 Summary of the results

As previously discussed, this thesis aimed to examine how different motivations for farmers to resist led to varying resistance practices and the conditions under which this occurred. Furthermore, this thesis sought to explore the government's response to the resistance, including an analysis of potential improvements to effectively reduce the discontent.

This section focuses on answering the research question: *What factors drove different forms of farmers' resistance to the agricultural nitrogen policy in the Netherlands and how did the government respond?* In answering this question, the four empirical sub-questions will be implicitly used and synthesized.

First, the various resistance practices were analyzed and categorized. The Dutch farmers' resistance manifested in various forms, which can be divided into two core categories. One category includes practices aimed at exposing, challenging and reinterpreting dominant structures and values, aligning with the concept of reverse discourse. Indicators of practices within this category include efforts to expose and contest dominant structures and values, reframe and offer alternatives, challenge dominant knowledge, and strategically use language, symbols and deviant behavior, such as counter-conduct. Concrete examples of farmers' actions within this category include promoting alternative frames and images through social media campaigns, providing educational materials about farming in schools, and organizing conversations to facilitate dialogue and reduce misunderstandings. Additional examples include the open contestation of dominant knowledge in podcasts, newspapers articles and so on, while simultaneously promoting alternative perspectives.

Additionally, a second category includes practices related to the symbolic use of physical space, aligning with the concept of spatial resistance. Practices related to this concept employ physical space to underscore a cause, often linking it symbolically to underlying motivations. Concrete farmers' actions included blocking and occupying government buildings, distributions centers, and media buildings, symbolically targeting institutions linked to the discontent. Another example is the occupation of roadways, strategically leveraging space to disrupt and amplify attention to the cause. In conclusion, farmers' actions took various forms but can be broadly categorized into practices related to reverse discourse and spatial resistance.

In addition to forms of resistance, this thesis examined the drivers behind this resistance. Disciplinary state power, dominant discourses and knowledge, and the perception of a failing government were identified as key drivers. Disciplinary state power aims to discipline individual behavior through visible exercises of power, such as hierarchical surveillance and examination, as well as through invisible power mechanisms that operate via normalizing judgements rooted in dominant discourses. While regulations and their enforcement through these mechanisms exerted a disciplining effect on farmers, they also fueled resistance, as is evident in the farmers' case. Nitrogen regulations not only disciplined farmers to comply through enforcement but also pushed businesses out of farming if they failed to meet the required expectations.

Meanwhile, dominant discourses and knowledge, rooted in invisible power dynamics, disproportionately disadvantage subaltern groups that do not align with or benefit from these prevailing narratives. Dominant discourses, prioritizing environmental values while

disregarding farmers' values, interests and perspectives, led to negative framing of farmers. They were unjustly portrayed as animal abusers and polluters. This fostered feelings of marginalization, underappreciation and victimhood. Farmers felt disproportionately harmed and targeted by the dominant discourses that underpin policies and media coverage, which fueled their discontent and motivated them to resist these narratives. Simultaneously, dominant knowledge embedded within these discourses further fueled resistance. Farmers contest the knowledge underpinning nitrogen policies, measures and measurements. They argue that only studies and reports reinforcing dominant discourses and policies are considered, while alternative perspectives are disregarded. Herein, farmers question whether nitrogen deposition is a problem at all, while also disputing the spread of nitrogen particles and the sectors' contribution to deposition in Nature 2000 areas. Furthermore, they express distrust in the measurement models and methods, specifically criticizing the RIVM's AEIRUS model. This knowledge contestation and criticism regarding one-sidedness, served as driver of resistance.

Lastly, the findings pointed to the perception of a failing government as unexpected driver of resistance. For some farmers, this perception served as a motivation to resist, fueled by general discontent with the government, rooted in various issues, including the covid measures that unfolded concurrently. This frustration was also linked to dissatisfaction with dominant discourses and disciplinary state power on these other issues. While the nitrogen measures served as the catalyst for their resistance, a deeper dissatisfaction with broader government actions underlies this sentiment. Resistance stemming from this was further amplified by anti-government demonstrators, not directly linked to the farmers' cause, who joined the protests, driven by similar frustration and anger.

Furthermore, this thesis found evidence of four conditions that influence how drivers evolve into resistance practices: group identification, social media, public support and visibility. Findings revealed the general impact of these factors in enabling drivers to develop into resistance. However, the specific impact of these conditions on causal mechanisms could not be fully examined in this thesis; this limitation will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Group identification played an important role as condition for resistance to develop. Farmers experienced strong polarization and an us-versus-them sentiment, feeling collectively marginalized and victimized. These shared feelings fostered a sense of unity among farmers and fueled their collective action preparedness to resist their societal position and perceived collective harm. Additionally, this group identification was strategically emphasized and leveraged in the organization of resistance. By presenting a unified collective narrative, organizers aimed to strengthen collectivity and solidarity and motivate preparedness for action.

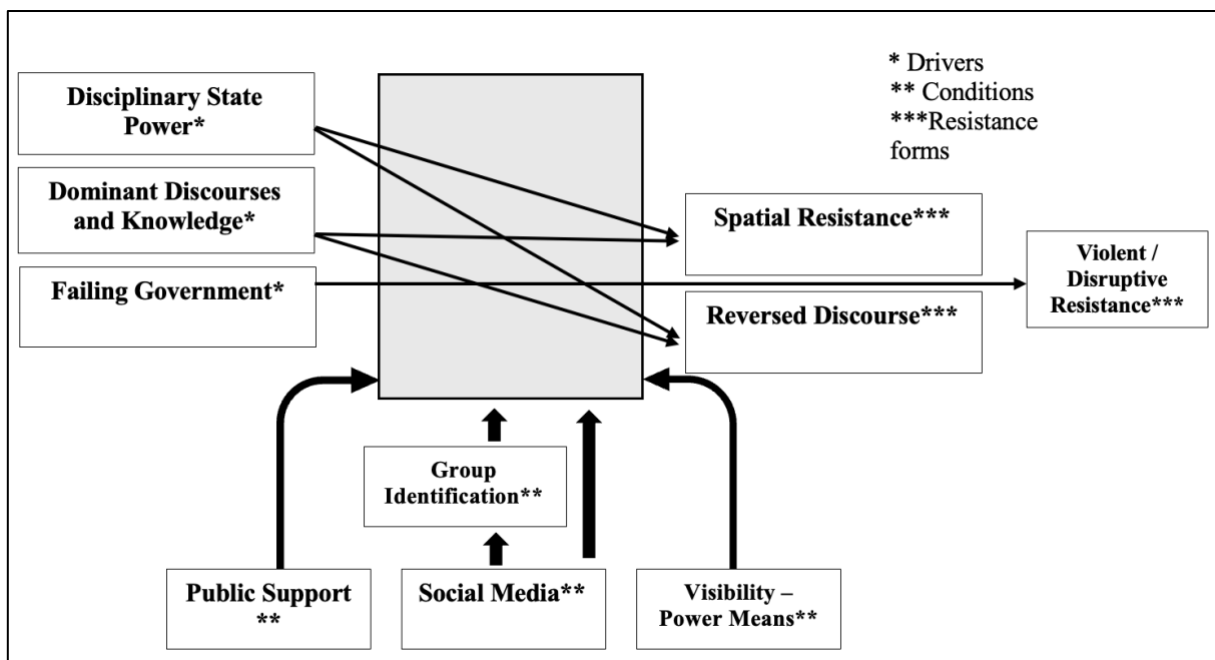
Simultaneously, social media served as another condition enabling resistance to develop. It functioned both as an organizational tool for coordinating and communicating actions, and as an informational channel for contesting dominant perspectives and policies while promoting alternative narratives. Farmers explained that sharing and debunking information, policies and mainstream media articles fostered collective anger, amplifying a shared sense of discontent. Additionally, social media facilitated organization and mobilization efforts, with actions gaining widespread attention through an online snowball effect.

Lastly, public support and visibility, facilitated by power means, acted as conditions enabling resistance to develop. Farmers explained that public support bolstered their legitimacy, reinforcing their cause and actions. Findings also revealed that a decline in public support diminished the effectiveness and success of resistance efforts, underscoring its importance.

Regarding power means, the use of agricultural machinery created a disruptive effect that drew attention to the farmers' resistance, increasing its visibility. This proved important, as the level of disruption and noise generated influenced the impact of the actions. Therefore, the disruptive power of the machinery, along with the visibility it provided, became a condition for the development of the resistance.

Building on the previous subsections and addressing the first part of the research question, this thesis found evidence of two causal mechanisms. First, it empirically demonstrated how disciplinary state power has driven both reverse discourse and spatial resistance practices as forms of resistance, influenced by the four conditions. Second, this thesis found that dominant discourses and knowledge have also driven both reverse discourse and spatial resistance practices. Additionally, this thesis uncovered an unexpected finding: the general perception of a failing government, partly stemming from discontent related to other societal issues and drivers, led to similar resistance practices, though more radical and violent in nature. The participation of anti-government demonstrators escalated actions motivated by this driver, making them more violent and disruptive. The specific manifestations of these resistance concepts are detailed in the analysis. Figure 7 summarizes this conclusion, outlining the revealed mechanisms between drivers, conditions and resistance practices.

Figure 7: Diagram on findings



In addressing the second part of the research question, the government employed co-production, meaning the involvement of farmers in decision-making processes, as a tactic to include all perspectives targeted by the nitrogen measures, identify and address their discontent, and ultimately achieve more effective policies while reducing resistance. In response to the protests, farmers secured a structural seat at the table, albeit in different configurations. Farmers acknowledged the importance of their involvement in the process to reduce discontent but emphasized that the government still needs to do more. These recommendations are summarized in the final section.

Since the research question of this thesis has been answered and the findings summarized, it is worthwhile to briefly elaborate on the societal implications. This thesis found evidence on

mechanisms linking specific resistance practices, the motivations driving them, and the conditions under which these developed. Understanding these mechanisms is valuable for recognizing the origins of resistance, enabling the government to identify and address these motivations more effectively, with the aim of reducing resistance. Consequently, the recommendations derived from the findings offer guidance on how to effectively address certain drivers. For instance, the findings highlighted dominant discourses as a motivation, and the recommendation to reevaluate the value conflict serves as a measure to address this driver. In this regard, all findings should be evaluated in interplay.

## 5.2 Implications for the literature

The empirical findings of this thesis contribute to academic literature by testing and, where necessary, refining existing theories. First, the expected causal mechanisms derived from the theoretical framework will be reviewed in light of the case findings, providing a basis for contributing to existing knowledge.

*(1) Hypothesis 1: Disciplinary state power, influenced by group identification and social media mobilization as conditions, drives spatial resistance and reverse discourses.*

Regarding the first hypothesis, the analysis confirms the expected causal mechanism between disciplinary state power and both reverse discourses and spatial resistance. However, minor refinements to the framework can be made in terms of its functioning. First, the analysis confirms that visible power exercise, such as surveillance and examination of regulations, led to spatial resistance. However, this thesis interprets the concept spatial resistance more broadly than Lilja's (2022) theory, suggesting that the concept should be slightly refined. Lilja (2022) describes spatial resistance as resistance that emerges within specific spaces and around space-bound issues, with actions taking place within these spatial boundaries. This thesis expands on this interpretation by examining not only actions tied to specific space-bound issues, such as the nitrogen issue impacting farmers near Natura 2000 areas, but also those that strategically use physical space in alignment with the factors driving them. This broadens Lilja's (2022) conceptualization, applying it more expansively to the farmers' case.

Furthermore, normalizing judgements, rooted in invisible power, do not directly discipline farmers' behavior nor lead to resistance through their disciplining effect. Instead, these judgements, shaped by invisible power and dominant discourses, underpin the regulations and their enforcement, thereby indirectly contributing to spatial resistance. This indirect influence on spatial resistance should be incorporated into the theoretical framework. On the other hand, normalizing judgements based on dominant discourses disadvantage certain groups, fueling resistance to this dominance. This expected mechanism is supported by case evidence and aligns with the theoretical expectation of how disciplinary state power leads to reverse discourses.

*(2) Hypothesis 2: Dominant discourses and knowledge, influenced by group identification and social media mobilization, drive reverse discourse resistance.*

Regarding the second hypothesis, the analysis reveals three things. First, in alignment with the hypothesis, it confirms that dominant discourses and knowledge drive various reverse discourse practices, thereby inferring causality. In doing so, it advances the mechanism by providing deeper insights into its concrete functioning. Second, the analysis confirms the influence of conditions on this mechanism, as proposed in the hypothesis. However, it is difficult to

determine the specific and potentially varying impacts of conditions on the relationship between dominant discourses and knowledge and the different forms of reverse discourses.

Third, the analysis refines the hypothesis and the underlying framework in two ways. First, it demonstrates that dominant knowledge not only drives reverse discourse practices but also contributes to spatial resistance, with actions strategically involving physical space to contest dominant knowledge, such as protest at the RIVM building. Second, dominant discourses also contribute to spatial resistance by interacting with the elements of state power, underpinning regulations, their enforcement and power structures, and thereby indirectly driving spatial resistance. This relationship between dominant discourses, knowledge and spatial resistance was not initially included in the hypothesis and should now be incorporated into the theoretical framework, based on the findings from this case (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018; Lilja, 2022).

Findings on the conditions confirm established theories and provide opportunities for developing new theoretical insights. Breuer et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of social media in sharing information, organizing, and mobilizing people around shared discontent. In the farmers' case, online organization and mobilization proved crucial to the emergence and evolution of resistance, with the spill-over effect amplifying this impact. Similarly, Klandermans et al. (2002) pointed to group identification as a key condition for action preparedness and participation, while Jetten et al. (2001) added that a perceived need for resistance, such as feeling of discrimination, strengthens group identification. In the farmers' case, group identification was strengthened by a shared sense of victimhood, marginalization and common values, collectively motivating resistance against perceived injustice.

While the conditions outlined in the theoretical framework were tested and confirmed, this thesis also highlighted the importance of public support and visibility, facilitated by power means, as conditions for the development of farmers' resistance. These findings enhance the understanding of relevant conditions, contributing to a more comprehensive overview, while these conditions require further examination to evolve into theories.

### 5.3 Limits of the research

Although the empirical findings have provided valuable insights into the motivations behind different forms of farmers' resistance and the conditions under which these develop, there are limitations to the results and data collection.

First, it is difficult to assess whether the drivers had an isolated effect on specific resistance practices. While this thesis aimed to establish a cause-and-effect relationship and infer causality between drivers and specific forms of resistance, it is challenging to isolate which driver is primarily responsible for each resistance practice, as multiple factors often drive resistance simultaneously. There is a risk of interplay between motivations, where multiple factors potentially interact to shape resistance practices. In the analysis, the findings already acknowledge this interplay of drivers, demonstrating how dominant discourses, by shaping normative judgements and knowledge, underpin regulations and simultaneously influence resistance practices. This highlights the connection between dominant discourses and disciplinary state power. These interactions complicate the analysis and might weaken conclusions about causality. However, this does not detract from the fact that this thesis has identified drivers that lead to certain forms of resistance not expected by the theory, while also confirming theoretically expected effects between drivers and resistance.

Additionally, unexpected or unmeasured factors or conditions may also influence the established causal mechanisms, limiting the reliability of the results. On a positive note, this thesis aimed to uncover ‘smoking gun evidence’, wherein individuals involved explicitly describe how specific actions were motivated. While this type of evidence was frequently found, it may still be circumstantial, specific to certain farmers or actions. Such evidence could be subjective and does not negate the influence of unconscious factors that may also have contributed.

Additionally, this thesis tried to examine the conditions that enable resistance to develop and how these influence the causal mechanisms. While the results provide a clear overview of four conditions crucial for the emergence of resistance, isolating their specific conditional influence on resistance practices proved difficult. Although this thesis identified their importance and conditionality for the emergence of the case, the available data does not permit the isolation of their precise effects on the causal mechanisms. This highlights a direction for further research.

Regarding the data collection, there are limitations concerning the representativity and reliability of the data. This thesis partially relies on sources from interest groups and interviews with farmers actively involved in the resistance and interest representation. Although these sources provided valuable insights into farmers’ perspectives on the nitrogen issue and the underlying mechanisms driving their resistance, this group may not fully represent the broader farming population due to their active participation and involvement. The perspectives of less active and less organized farmers are possibly more moderate, but are less represented in this thesis, which could introduce slight bias in the results. However, the letters and some farmers featured in the podcasts and articles provide an exception, ensuring that these perspectives are not entirely overlooked.

Specifically, the reliance on sources from Farmers Defence Force may introduce some guidance in the results. Although they extensively expressed what drove their discontent, this group is often perceived as radical, which could lead to biased results. Though, where 65% percent of the farmers embraces FDF, this is considered sufficient to justify reliance on these sources in the analysis (Directie COM, 2021). Meanwhile, this thesis employed triangulation, or the comparison of multiple sources, to mitigate the influence of potential bias from any source.

Lastly, it must be acknowledged that the findings of this thesis are not directly generalizable to other cases, due to the unique character and context. While this thesis tested and refined theories, contributing to existing literature, the findings are more indirectly generalizable than directly. They can provide inspiration for other cases but cannot be applied one-to-one.

#### 5.4 Directions of further research

This thesis has made relevant contributions to the literature by testing a conceptual framework that connects drivers, conditions and forms of resistance. However, some aspects remain unanswered and require further research.

As discussed, this thesis is primarily deductive in nature, testing expected causal mechanisms between drivers and specific forms of resistance. However, it also aimed to generate insights into how conditions specifically influence these mechanisms. While the research results found evidence on general conditions, it remains unclear how these conditions independently influence the relationship between drivers and the emergence of various forms of resistance. Although this thesis provides an initial step, future research should delve deeper into understanding how specific conditions shape the connection between drivers and resistance

forms. Which conditions are necessary for a driver to evolve into a particular resistance practice? To develop theory on this subject, future studies should explore cases beyond the farmers' context. While this thesis found evidence on the existence of such conditions within the farmers' case, developing a robust theory requires analyzing their effects across multiple cases to enhance generalizability and practical relevance.

Developing a generalizable theory on the influence of conditions on various drivers and resistance forms is important, as it enables governments to anticipate the emergence of resistance. By identifying the conditions necessary for a driver to evolve into resistance, such a theory would provide insights into whether resistance is likely to occur depending on the presence or absence of these conditions. This knowledge would be valuable for predicting resistance and, consequently, allowing government to address it proactively.

Additionally, as discussed, this thesis found evidence on four conditions important for the evolution of resistance. While two conditions were already anticipated based on established theories, the other two, visibility facilitated by power means and public support, were not. Future research should focus on developing theories regarding the influence of these conditions on the relationship between drivers and resistance. When developing theories on visibility and public support as conditions, it is important to examine cases beyond the farmers' case, as these conditions may be context dependent. Analyzing multiple cases will help to determine whether causality can be inferred and enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, this thesis examined the government's response to farmers' resistance and made recommendations on how it could be improved. However, the detailed elaboration and concrete implications of these recommendations were not the central focus; a gap that future studies could address. This thesis found evidence on these recommendations as important for resolving the nitrogen deadlock and reducing farmers' resistance, making them valuable insights for the government. Therefore, it would be important for future research to explore this aspect further.

## 5.5 Recommendations

Building on the analysis of the government's response to the resistance, several recommendations for the government emerged as potential ways out of the nitrogen crisis.

### *Recommendation 1: Restructure the policy process to be more bottom-up*

In addressing the current weaknesses in co-production, the process should be structured more bottom-up. It is important to ensure clear goals are set, while considering the individual circumstances of farmers to identify their strengths, knowledge, and opportunities.

### *Recommendation 2: Provide a long-term vision to secure investments and innovation*

In ensuring investments and innovations to meet policy goals, the government should provide farmers with more certainty in the regulations and the investments they make, as the current lack of this leads to great dissatisfaction and a standstill.

### *Recommendation 3: Reconsider the underlying value conflict in the nitrogen policy*

In addressing the discontent among farmers regarding the dominance of certain values in nitrogen measures and the neglect of others, the strategy to resolve the value conflict should shift from 'cycling' to 'firewall'.

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## Research Design

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Documents

Document	Organization / Author	Title	Year
Document 1	Nederlands Instituut Publieke Veiligheid	Boerenprotesten in de zomer van 2022; een analyse van operationele en bestuurlijke dilemma's	2022
Document 2	Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties	Media-analyse Boerenprotesten	2021
Document 4	Noya, S.	The relationship between the Dutch farmers protest on October 1 <sup>st</sup> 2019, and the social media attention that the protest received	2021
Document 6	RIVM	Monitoring, advies en onderzoek	-
Document 7	Bosma, A.; Peeren, E.	#Proudofthefarmer	2022

### Appendix 2: Articles

Article	Organization	Title	URL
Art. 1		Boze boeren: protesten of terreur? Het verschil in berichtgeving over de boerenprotesten tussen landelijke media en regionale media in de provincie	<a href="https://studenttheses.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12932/1181/HerkansingDekker6605060.pdf?sequence=1">https://studenttheses.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12932/1181/HerkansingDekker6605060.pdf?sequence=1</a>
Art. 2	Landbouw Leven	De motivatie achter boerenprotesten onderzocht: 'Familie is iets om voor te strijden'	<a href="https://www.landbouwleven.be/12261/article/2021-11-13/de-motivatie-achter-boerenprotesten-onderzocht-familie-iets-om-voor-te-strijden">https://www.landbouwleven.be/12261/article/2021-11-13/de-motivatie-achter-boerenprotesten-onderzocht-familie-iets-om-voor-te-strijden</a>
Art. 3	De Correspondent	Wat de boze boer en de klimaatactivist met elkaar gemeen hebben	<a href="https://decorrespondent.nl/10802/wat-de-boze-boer-en-de-klimaatactivist-met-elkaar-gemeen-hebben/1c0a0fd9-4359-0dc6-0ac5-37a014153266">https://decorrespondent.nl/10802/wat-de-boze-boer-en-de-klimaatactivist-met-elkaar-gemeen-hebben/1c0a0fd9-4359-0dc6-0ac5-37a014153266</a>
Art. 4	RTL Nieuws	Op Telegram weten ontevreden burgers en boeren elkaar te vinden	<a href="https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/binnenland/artikel/5318600/op-telegram-weten-ontevreden-burgers-en-boeren-elkaar-te-vinden">https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/binnenland/artikel/5318600/op-telegram-weten-ontevreden-burgers-en-boeren-elkaar-te-vinden</a>
Art. 5	Resource Online	Hoe de boeren grip kregen op de sociale media	<a href="https://www.resource-online.nl/index.php/2020/02/27/hoe-de-boeren-grip-kregen-op-de-sociale-media/">https://www.resource-online.nl/index.php/2020/02/27/hoe-de-boeren-grip-kregen-op-de-sociale-media/</a>
Art. 6	NOS	Beroepsdemonstranten tegen overheid sluiten	<a href="https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2434612-beroepsdemonstranten-">https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2434612-beroepsdemonstranten-</a>

		zich aan bij boerenprotesten	<a href="#">tegen-overheid-sluiten-zich-aan-bij-boerenprotesten</a>
Art. 7	De Groene Amsterdammer	Verantwoording bij het onderzoek naar boerengroepen op Facebook en Telegram	<a href="https://www.groene.nl/artikel/verantwoording-bij-het-onderzoek-naar-boerengroepen-op-facebook-en-telegram">https://www.groene.nl/artikel/verantwoording-bij-het-onderzoek-naar-boerengroepen-op-facebook-en-telegram</a>
Art. 8	Nieuwe Oogst	Sociale media als verbinder tussen boer en burger	<a href="https://www.nieuweoogst.nl/nieuws/2024/07/24/sociale-media-als-verbinder-tussen-boer-en-burger">https://www.nieuweoogst.nl/nieuws/2024/07/24/sociale-media-als-verbinder-tussen-boer-en-burger</a>
Art. 9	Nieuwe Oogst	Stop het negatieve framen	<a href="https://www.nieuweoogst.nl/nieuws/2019/11/30/stop-het-negatieve-framen">https://www.nieuweoogst.nl/nieuws/2019/11/30/stop-het-negatieve-framen</a>
Art. 10	Farmers Defence Force (FDF)	Nepnieuws en desinformatie bepalen ‘controversieel verklaren’ – of niet	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/nepnieuws-en-desinformatie-bepalen-controversieel-verklaren-of-niet/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/nepnieuws-en-desinformatie-bepalen-controversieel-verklaren-of-niet/</a>
Art. 11	FDF	Anti-veehouderij sekte rukt op, trappen we erin? Of rekenen we ermee af, 17 maart?	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/anti-veehouderij-sekte-rukt-op-trappen-we-er-in-of-rekenen-we-er-mee-af-17-maart/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/anti-veehouderij-sekte-rukt-op-trappen-we-er-in-of-rekenen-we-er-mee-af-17-maart/</a>
Art. 12	Universiteit Utrecht (UU)	‘Stikstofscepsis’ bij boze boeren: onderdeel van een bredere trend	<a href="https://www.uu.nl/nieuws/stikstofscepsis-bij-boze-boeren-onderdeel-van-een-bredere-trend">https://www.uu.nl/nieuws/stikstofscepsis-bij-boze-boeren-onderdeel-van-een-bredere-trend</a>
Art. 13	NU.nl	Waarom de boeren bij het RIVM protesteerden (en wat daarvan klopt)	<a href="https://www.nu.nl/binnenland/6004350/waarom-de-boeren-bij-het-rivm-protesteerden-en-wat-daarvan-klopt.html?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F">https://www.nu.nl/binnenland/6004350/waarom-de-boeren-bij-het-rivm-protesteerden-en-wat-daarvan-klopt.html?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F</a>
Art. 14	ZLTO	De stikstofcrisis: dit is waarom de boeren zo boos zijn	<a href="https://www.zlto.nl/actueel/stikstof-boeren">https://www.zlto.nl/actueel/stikstof-boeren</a>
Art. 15	Agractie	Wetenschap: stop gegoochel met cijfers rondom gewasbescherming	<a href="https://agractie.nl/wetenschap-stop-gegoochel-met-cijfers-rondom-gewasbescherming/">https://agractie.nl/wetenschap-stop-gegoochel-met-cijfers-rondom-gewasbescherming/</a>
Art. 16	NOS	Meer steun voor boerenprotesten dan voor klimaatacties	<a href="https://nos.nl/artikel/2509873-meer-steun-voor-boerenprotesten-dan-voor-klimaatacties">https://nos.nl/artikel/2509873-meer-steun-voor-boerenprotesten-dan-voor-klimaatacties</a>
Art. 17	UU	Hoe sociale media-conversaties protesten op straat mobiliseren	<a href="https://www.uu.nl/opinie/hoe-sociale-media-conversaties-protest-op-straat-mobiliseren">https://www.uu.nl/opinie/hoe-sociale-media-conversaties-protest-op-straat-mobiliseren</a>
Art. 18	Nationale Ombudsman	‘Boeren hebben vaak te maken met tegenstrijdige regelgeving’	<a href="https://www.nationaleombudsman.nl/nieuws/interview/2019/boeren-hebben-vaak-te-maken-met-tegenstrijdige-wetgeving">https://www.nationaleombudsman.nl/nieuws/interview/2019/boeren-hebben-vaak-te-maken-met-tegenstrijdige-wetgeving</a>

Art. 19	FDF	Collectieve bewustzijnsvernauwing Den Haag	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/wegvallen-nplg-positieve-stap-nieuw-kabinet/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/wegvallen-nplg-positieve-stap-nieuw-kabinet/</a>
Art. 20	FDF	Wegvallen NPLG positieve stap nieuw kabinet	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/wegvallen-nplg-positieve-stap-nieuw-kabinet/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/wegvallen-nplg-positieve-stap-nieuw-kabinet/</a>
Art. 21	FDF	FDF: hier komt de opfrisser!	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/fdf-hier-komt-de-opfrisser/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/fdf-hier-komt-de-opfrisser/</a>
Art. 22	FDF	Hij, hij mag dit jaar de ezel zijn, hij mag de ezel zijn!	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/hij-hij-mag-dit-jaar-de-ezel-zijn-hij-mag-de-ezel-zijn/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/hij-hij-mag-dit-jaar-de-ezel-zijn-hij-mag-de-ezel-zijn/</a>
Art. 23	FDF	De judaskus – het grote verraad ‘voor alle wiepie’s en roelie’s’	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/de-judaskus-het-grote-verraad-voor-alle-wiepies-en-roelies/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/de-judaskus-het-grote-verraad-voor-alle-wiepies-en-roelies/</a>
Art. 24	Binnenlands Bestuur	Toezicht op veehouderij rammelt	<a href="https://www.binnenlandsbestuur.nl/ruimte-en-milieu/toezicht-op-veehouderij-rammelt">https://www.binnenlandsbestuur.nl/ruimte-en-milieu/toezicht-op-veehouderij-rammelt</a>
Art. 25	FDF	NOS kiest opnieuw voor eenzijdige, vooringenomen verslaggeving over stikstofnormen!	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/nos-kiest-opnieuw-voor-eezijdige-vooringenomen-verslaggeving-over-stikstofnormen/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/nos-kiest-opnieuw-voor-eezijdige-vooringenomen-verslaggeving-over-stikstofnormen/</a>
Art. 26	FDF	De boer als speelbal van de minister, zijn bedrijf als experiment	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/de-boer-als-speelbal-van-de-minister-zijn-bedrijf-als-experiment/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/de-boer-als-speelbal-van-de-minister-zijn-bedrijf-als-experiment/</a>
Art. 27	FDF	Wetenschappelijk isotopenonderzoek bewijst: andere bronnen dan landbouw stoten ammoniak uit!	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/wetenschappelijk-isotopenonderzoek-bewijst-andere-bronnen-dan-landbouw-stoten-ammoniak-uit/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/wetenschappelijk-isotopenonderzoek-bewijst-andere-bronnen-dan-landbouw-stoten-ammoniak-uit/</a>
Art. 28	FDF	Kom in actie of wordt opgekocht – op naar de 17e!	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/kom-in-actie-of-wordt-opgekocht-op-naar-de-17e/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/kom-in-actie-of-wordt-opgekocht-op-naar-de-17e/</a>
Art. 29	FDF	Alice in Wonderland	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/alice-in-wonderland/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/alice-in-wonderland/</a>
Art. 30	FDF	Farmers Defence Force – Visie en Doelstelling	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/farmers-defence-force-visie-en-doelstelling/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/farmers-defence-force-visie-en-doelstelling/</a>
Art. 31	NOS	Voorzitter stikstofcommissie: ‘metingen zijn geen meningen’	<a href="https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/collectie/13910/artikel/2432837-voorzitter-stikstofcommissie-metingen-zijn-geen-meningen">https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/collectie/13910/artikel/2432837-voorzitter-stikstofcommissie-metingen-zijn-geen-meningen</a>
Art. 32	FDF	Gezond pakket voor Jetten in een ongezond politiek-klimaat	<a href="https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/gezond-pakket-voor-jetten-in-een-ongezond-politiek-klimaat/">https://farmersdefenceforce.nl/gezond-pakket-voor-jetten-in-een-ongezond-politiek-klimaat/</a>
Art. 33	NOS	Vlag ondersteboven als steun voor boeren: ‘Beter dan snelwegen bezetten’	<a href="https://nos.nl/artikel/2436442-vlag-ondersteboven-als-steun-voor-boeren-beter-dan-snelwegen-bezetten">https://nos.nl/artikel/2436442-vlag-ondersteboven-als-steun-voor-boeren-beter-dan-snelwegen-bezetten</a>

Art. 34	RTL Nieuws	Veel EU-geld naar boeren, maar die zijn klaar met ‘verstikkende bureaucratie’	<a href="https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/artikel/5432468/boerenprotest-europese-unie-eu-brussel-trekkers-frankrijk-duitsland-belgie">https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/artikel/5432468/boerenprotest-europese-unie-eu-brussel-trekkers-frankrijk-duitsland-belgie</a>
Art. 35	Agractie	Agractie Nederland lanceert educatieprogramma ‘Boer in de klas!’	<a href="https://agractie.nl/persbericht-agractie-27-augustus-2020/">https://agractie.nl/persbericht-agractie-27-augustus-2020/</a>
Art. 36	Parool	Waarom de omgekeerde vlag oprukt	<a href="https://www.parool.nl/nederland/waarom-de-omgekeerde-vlag-oprukt~beb37e27/?referrer=https://www.google.com/">https://www.parool.nl/nederland/waarom-de-omgekeerde-vlag-oprukt~beb37e27/?referrer=https://www.google.com/</a>
Art. 37	NOS	Enkele duizenden boeren bij protest tegen RIVM in de Bilt	<a href="https://nos.nl/artikel/2341481-enkele-duizenden-boeren-bij-protest-tegen-rivm-in-de-bilt">https://nos.nl/artikel/2341481-enkele-duizenden-boeren-bij-protest-tegen-rivm-in-de-bilt</a>
<b>Public Letters Farmers</b>			
Letter 1	Meike	Agractie	<a href="https://agractie.nl/brief-van-meike/">https://agractie.nl/brief-van-meike/</a>
Letter 2	Monique	Agractie	<a href="https://agractie.nl/brief-van-monique/">https://agractie.nl/brief-van-monique/</a>
Letter 3	Carolien	Agractie	<a href="https://agractie.nl/brief-van-carolien/">https://agractie.nl/brief-van-carolien/</a>
Letter 4	Lucinda	Agractie	<a href="https://agractie.nl/brief-van-lucinda/">https://agractie.nl/brief-van-lucinda/</a>
Letter 5	Jeroen	Agractie	<a href="https://agractie.nl/brief-van-jeroen/">https://agractie.nl/brief-van-jeroen/</a>
Letter 6	Irene	Agractie	<a href="https://agractie.nl/brief-van-irene/">https://agractie.nl/brief-van-irene/</a>
Letter 7	Anne-Marie	Agractie	<a href="https://agractie.nl/brief-van-anne-marie/">https://agractie.nl/brief-van-anne-marie/</a>

## Appendix 3: Podcasts

Podcast	Organization	Title	URL
Podcast 1	Nieuwe Oogst	Het ontstaan van het eerste protest	<a href="https://open.spotify.com/show/03euGxlZJrpANpLBo9x6zQ#:~:text=Podcast%20College%20Boer%20met%20voorzitter,%20toekomst%20van%20de%20landbouw">https://open.spotify.com/show/03euGxlZJrpANpLBo9x6zQ#:~:text=Podcast%20College%20Boer%20met%20voorzitter,%20toekomst%20van%20de%20landbouw</a>
Podcast 2	Nieuwe Oogst	De spanning loopt op	“
Podcast 3	Nieuwe Oogst	Trekkers op de weg	“
Podcast 4	Nieuwe Oogst	Gedoe achter het podium	“
Podcast 5	Nieuwe Oogst	Het Landbouw Collectief	“
Podcast 6	Nieuwe Oogst	Waar staan we nu?	“
Podcast 7	Boerenverstand	Gerard van der Hulst: Moet de complexiteit	<a href="https://open.spotify.com/episode/1IDGsDQ23YAEk3xKzhrHcD">https://open.spotify.com/episode/1IDGsDQ23YAEk3xKzhrHcD</a>

		van het voedselsysteem op de schouders liggen van de (jonge) boer?	
Podcast 8	De Nieuwe Wereld	Het landbouwbeleid is onhoudbaar	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzzZ3lKsC7s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzzZ3lKsC7s</a>

#### Appendix 4: Interviews

Respondent	Organization	Function
Respondent 1: Jurre Boers	BBB Jong	Former chair
Respondent 2: Gerard van der Hulst	Boerenberaad	Farmer & board member 'Boerenberaad'
Respondent 3: Danielle Bergman	Farmers Defence Force	Former board member
Respondent 4: Marije van Velthoven	BBB Jong	Chair
Respondent 5: Rens-Willem Bloemendaal	Agractie	Former board member
Respondent 5: Marjolein van Woerkom	Freelance	Agricultural journalist

#### Appendix 5: Code Tree

##### 1. Different Forms of Farmers' Resistance

- **Reverse discourse**
  - Efforts to create opposing / alternative frames
    - Social media actions
    - Organizing conversations
    - Providing educational materials in schools
  - Promote farmers' identity and lifestyle
  - Expose underlying values and interests of policies, government and mainstream media
  - Contest dominant knowledge and measurements: expose biases, underlying interests and values
  - Promote alternative knowledge and measurements
  - Strategic use of language as form of resistance
    - Used in framing and contesting / promoting knowledge
  - Counter-conduct: breaking the emission-rules
  - Symbols
    - Upside-down flags
    - Farmers' handkerchiefs
  - Other actions
    - Banners along roadways
    - Alternative businesses; campsites
- **Spatial resistance**
  - Physical actions that relate to space: blocking, possessing Malieveld, RIVM, (provincial) government buildings, distribution centers, cooperations, media buildings
  - Threatening
- **Other forms of resistance**
  - Legal actions
  - Lobbying

## 2. Drivers of Farmers' Resistance

- **Dominant discourses and knowledge**

- Dominant discourses
  - Nature and environmental protection dominant discourse; the interest of the farmer subordinate
  - Dominant environmental discourse in mainstream media
  - Dominant environmental discourse within government and political parties
  - Collective narrowing of consciousness; no longer being open to a different perspective than the one you already hold
  - ‘‘Climate Salafism’’
- Negative framing farmers
  - Framing farmers as harmful to nature / environmental polluters/ animal abusers
  - Framing farmers by spreading misinformation
    - Misinformation socially internalized and contributes to negative framing
  - Framing farmers for political gains
- Underappreciation farmers
  - Feelings of being marginalized and undervalued: due to the rise of anti-agricultural sentiments (negative framing) and the new political reality
    - Farmers face unfair prices
    - Farmers provide high-quality food
  - Unequal treatment of farmers and other polluters: farmers disproportionately targeted/harmed
  - Polarization
    - Dominance of the Randstad: farmers feel overlooked, marginalized
    - Protests are an expression of not being heard, a call for attention
    - Media fosters polarization
- Knowledge contestation
  - Distrust in politics and science among farmers
  - Scientific knowledge contestation
    - Distrust in scientific knowledge: reports often incomplete, one-sided
    - Skepticism about the harmful effects of nitrogen
    - Believe in manipulation of calculation models and nitrogen measurements
    - Distrust towards the nitrogen measurements by the RIVM: these cannot be true
    - Uncertainties in multiple aspects of the measurement process
    - Policies based on inaccurate scientific measurements, assumptions and goals
    - Critical deposition values (KWS's) are unreliable and lack a scientific basis
    - On social media, alternative facts can spread quickly
    - Broader societal trend of knowledge contestation
- Mainstream media contestation
  - Mainstream media bias: spreading fake-news and misinformation
  - Deliberately elevating misinformation to general truths
  - Deliberately misleading the public by providing one-sided information
    - Only emphasizing negative information and reports about farmers, not the positive (both media, RIVM and government)

- **Disciplinary state power**

- Regulations
  - Increasing regulatory pressure
  - Uncertainty in regulations
- Hierarchical observation
  - Supervision
  - Monitoring emissions
  - Farmers required to report emissions and data to government authorities
- Examination
  - Nitrogen measurement
    - AERIUS Calculator
    - RIVM measurements
  - Permit issuance
  - Controls
    - Weak control over farms
    - Province are responsible, differences per province
    - AI as controlling measure
  - Commitment to regulations
- Normative judgement
  - Relates to dominant discourses*
- **Failing Government**
  - Uncertainty
    - Uncertainty about the future
    - Uncertainty in changing rules, goals
  - General sense of dissatisfaction: mismanagement by the government
    - Farmer unrest synchronizes with societal unrest
    - Dissatisfaction with governance and policies – for example on covid
    - Farmers' discontent is not just about nitrogen; it also concerns other regulations affecting farmers
    - Anti-establishment sentiments
    - Growing dissatisfaction and distrust breeding ground for extremist ideologies
    - Anti-government groups join the farmers' protests
- 3. Conditions
  - **Social media**
    - Organizing
      - Stirring up collective anger
      - Making protest arrangements
      - Peak activities around actions
      - Information and organization channel
      - Easy for farmer to find each other and unite
      - Telegram, Facebook, WhatsApp
    - Online topic communities
      - Attempt to cooperate between various groups
      - Influence of anti-establishment sentiment
    - Framing public opinion
      - Active and strategic framing
      - Farmers try to frame public opinion positively
      - Framing through emotional arguments

- #ProudOfTheFarmer
  - Fostering group identification
  - (Mis)information
    - Spreading alternative/ misinformation through social media: sow doubt
    - Farmers risk getting trapped in their own media system: only receiving information from other farmers on social media or farmer-friendly websites
    - Knowledge contestation / politization of knowledge
    - Algorithmic bubble
  - Telegram
    - Particularly important in mobilizing protests
    - Lack of monitoring: space for extreme expressions
  - **Visibility**
    - Actions with agricultural machinery attract social attention and visibility
    - Socially disruptive actions
    - Use of agricultural machinery serves as a means of power
  - **Public support**
    - Farmers receive more support in rural areas than cities
  - **Group identification**
    - We-versus-them mentality strengthens group identification
    - Victim frame of farmer strengthens group identification
    - Action preparedness due to homogeneity farmers
    - Ease to unite through social media
    - Farmer identity + importance of family foster group identification
    - Declining group identification: crumbling collectiveness farmers in actions and motivations since 2020
4. Relation drivers, conditions, resistance practices
- **Relation disciplinary state power – resistance**
  - **Relation dominant discourses and knowledge – resistance**
  - **Relation perception of a failing government – resistance**
5. Government reactions
- Co-production
    - Farmers securing a seat at the table
    - Farmers and other actors involved actively in the process
    - Problems with functioning of co-production
  - Landbouw Collective
6. Recommendations
- Bottom-up approach, involving a tailored approach towards farmers
    - Low trust in government’s capability to provide a tailored approach
  - Ongoing importance of working together with farmers and their representatives
  - New value assessment underpinning the agricultural sector: re-evaluate fundamental principles and priorities that should guide agriculture and policies
    - Consequences food-security, pricing
  - Long-term vision